

La Malinche: from gift to sexual contract

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In his essay, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, published in 1950 when post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism was at its height, Octavio Paz commented on the "strange persistence" of Cortés and his mistress and interpreter, La Malinche, in the imagination and sensibility of Mexicans, arguing that the persistence of such myths revealed a still unresolved identity conflict.¹⁾ In the decades since the publication of the essay, the concept of national identity has come to seem anachronistic and the *pachuco* (Mexican immigrants to the U.S.) whom Paz took as a grotesque hybrids, neither authentically Mexican nor North American, are now increasingly seen as the vanguard of a new transnational culture while La Malinche, no longer victim or traitress, has become the transfigured symbol of fragmented identity and multiculturalism.²⁾

Nowhere is this re-evaluation of La Malinche more striking than in certain revisionary accounts of the discovery and conquest, especially Tzvetan Todorov's *La Conquête d'Amérique* and Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*.³⁾ Both these books reflect the contemporary preoccupation with alterity, representation and hybridity. They thus highlight an aspect of the conquest that nineteenth and twentieth century heroic narratives had tended to dismiss. Although the positivist Justo Sierra once described La Malinche as "*el verbo de la conquista*",⁴⁾ generally speaking her representation in the heroic narrative is a less flattering one. William Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* published in the 1840s attributes La Malinche's linguistic ability to the fact that Castillian "*was to her the language of love*".⁵⁾ In the 1920s, when William Carlos Williams wrote *In the American Grain*, a classic statement of pan-American identity, his account of the tragic fall of Tenochtitlan centered on a confrontation between Moctezuma and Cortés in which the crucial role of the *lengua* or interpreter is altogether ignored.⁶⁾ As Teresa de Lauretis points out,⁷⁾ in heroic narratives, woman is a helper or land to be conquered. In the dramatic narrative in which rivals war to the death, woman is simply irrelevant. But there is something obtrusive in the figuration of La

Malinche especially in Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account of the history of the conquest, which lends credence to both Todorov and Greenblatt's foregrounding of the 'go-between', translator and interpreter.

For contemporary critics the conquest and discovery are paradigmatic events whose repercussions extend into the present. For Todorov, "*C'est bien la conquête de l'Amérique qui annonce et fonde notre identité présente*". (It is the conquest of America that presages and founds our present identity.) (p. 14) For both of them, La Malinche occupies a crucial position as interpreter and intermediary. Without her, Todorov believes, the conquest of Mexico would have been impossible. Echoing generations of Mexican historians, he states that "*she is the first example and for the same reason the symbol of the mixing of cultures: she announced therefore the modern State of Mexico and beyond that, our present state because although we are not all bilingual, we are bi- or tri-cultural.*" (p. 107 my translation.) The slippage in this passage is from 'she' to some universal 'we', and thus it elides both discontinuities and the unique nature of Spanish colonialism. To cite La Malinche as the 'first example' and the 'symbol' of the merging of cultures (and modern multiculturalism) is to glide too rapidly over the epistemic and real violence that this symbolization implies.

Although Greenblatt's account of the discovery and conquest is somewhat different from Todorov's,⁸⁾ he too places an emphasis on interpreters and go-betweens. Cannibalism and idolotry, he argues, constituted a blockage for Spaniards in their dealings with the Aztecs and made necessary the the exclusion of the Aztecs from civilized intercourse. "*Nonetheless communication had to take place so that some human bridge was needed for information to pass between the invaders and the defenders and it was Doña Marina who fulfilled this role.*" She is, according to Greenblatt, "*object of exchange, model of conversion, the only figure who appears to understand the two cultures, the only person in whom they meet.*" (p. 143) And he further notes that "*For virtually everyone in Bernal Díaz's history - Indians and Spaniards alike - the site of the strategic symbolic oscillation between self and other is the body of this woman.*" (p. 143) Noting that "*in 1492, in the introduction to his Gramatica, the first grammar of a modern European tongue, Antonio de Nebrija wrote that language has always been the partner (compañera) of empire, he claims that Cortés had found in Doña Marina his compañera.*" (p. 145) This slippage between metaphor and metonymy is a significant one for it conceals a crucial element, the fact that there could be no bridge,

encounter or *compañera* without a prior act of violence which symbolic appropriation conveniently veils. Both Todorov and Greenblatt essentially overlook the significance of the sleight of hand by which conquest becomes *mestizaje*, a sleight of hand that effectively displaces attention from the mode of reproduction of colonial society to symbolic woman as (and as always) helper, intermediary, intercessor and eventually (in nationalist discourse) traitor.

It is generally believed that La Malinche's indigenous name was Malinalli, the name of a day in the Aztec calendar which was represented by a twisted reed. Malinalli is the sign not only of a day but also refers to the helicoid symbol that binds the two opposing forces of the cosmos in constant movement which makes the forces of the lower world rise and those of the heavens descend. The indigenous referred to her as Malintzín.⁹⁾ To the Christians, she was known by her baptismal name of Doña Marina.

Cortés first encountered her when she was given to him by one of the chiefs of Tabasco, as a gift along with nineteen other women, and miscellaneous items that included lizards, diadems and dogs. Cortés who had initially passed her on to his captain Puertocarrero quickly discovered that she was bilingual. Because Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spaniard who had been held captive in Cozumel knew the Maya language, he was able to translate from Spanish to Maya and Marina from Maya to Nahuatl. As Bernal Díaz del Castillo noted, Doña Marina knew the language of Guatzacualco "which is that of Mexico and knew that of Tabasco; as Jerónimo de Aguilar knew that of Yucatan and Tabasco which is all one, they understood each other very well; and Aguilar declared it in Castellano to Cortés."¹⁰⁾ The two of them very quickly formed an efficient team, certainly efficient enough to enable Cortés to grasp the complex political intrigues and unrest among the various tribes who were subject to Aztec domination. Cortés's encounter with the enslaved and bilingual Marina was thus both fortuitous and fortunate especially as she was also good-looking and apparently happy to become his mistress and native informant.¹¹⁾ Of course she didn't have to be a woman to serve as *lengua* and informant but it was precisely gender, as I shall argue, that accounts for her overdetermined position in the 'encounter'.

Since Cortés refers to her only briefly in the *Cartas de relación* what we know of Doña Marina comes primarily from the historians and chroniclers of the conquest, particularly Francisco López de Gomara's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* and Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *True History*, and from the 'probanza' or testimony drawn up to provide proof of her

service to the Spanish crown. There are also the indigenous chronicles and codices in which she is represented in her role of interpreter, as well as some popular traditions some of them extant to the present, which associate La Malinche with the Virgin and with the mythical Llorona.¹²⁾ López de Gomara's history though written by a man who had never set a foot in New Spain almost certainly reflects the view of Cortés himself and those of the conquistadores from whom he was able to gather eyewitness accounts. Not surprisingly he makes Cortés the central protagonist, the creator of strategy and the intellectual as well as the practical author of the conquest. López de Gomara describes La Malinche as a slave who was offered freedom by Cortés in exchange for becoming his *faraute* (derived from the French, herault or herald) and secretary. Cortés's official historian thus insists on the fact that she was a slave, in contrast, as we shall see to Bernal Díaz del Castillo's insistence on her noble origins. And although López de Gomara cannot avoid mentioning Cortés's carnal relationship with her, he does so almost as an aside when he reports that Cortés was criticized for marrying her off to Juan Jaramillo who was drunk at the time, because he himself had offspring by her. (p. 270) At the end of the history, listing Cortés's children, López de Gomara says only that there was a Martín Cortés (in addition to Cortés's son, Martín, by his Spanish wife, Juana de Zuñiga) "*who was born of an Indian.*" (p. 374) Here Doña Marina is simply the *unnamed* mother of one of the first mestizos, the bastard son whom Cortés legitimized by Papal decree. It is important to emphasize this silence around Marina's role in reproduction. The fact that Marina bore a son some time during the arduous fighting of the conquest, was married by Cortés to one of his lieutenants Juan Jaramillo, and then, once again pregnant (this time by Jaramillo) accompanied Cortés on the even more arduous march south to Honduras, giving birth to a daughter, María, on board the boat that brought the expedition back to Veracruz is, of course, too much the natural state of things to merit the historians attention.¹³⁾

In contrast, Bernal Díaz del Castillo elevates Doña Marina to a position that was in many ways, almost equal to that of Cortés and certainly in his view she was the most powerful member of the indigenous population after Moctezuma. Writing in order to correct López de Gomara's account and to show that the conquest was not simply the work of one man but of many, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, had every reason to stress that the conquest was a team effort and one in which a woman played a major role. Doña Marina, he records, "*had virile strength even though every day she heard that they might kill and eat our flesh and even though she had*

seen besieged in past battles and though now all of us were wounded and suffering we never saw any weakness in her but only a strength greater than that of woman." (I, p. 242)

Though in this passage, Bernal Díaz del Castillo raises Doña Marina to the status of honorary male, he also implies that she was far more than a ventriloquist, for she inflects Cortés's speech with emotions of friendship or anger. For example:

When Cortés spoke to them amicably through Doña Marina, they brought much maize and poultry and pointed out the road we had to follow ... (II: 268)

Cortés asked Doña Marina and Jerónimo de Aguilar, our lenguas, why the chiefs were so agitated after the arrival of those Indians (i.e. Moctezuma's tribute collectors) and who were these people. And Doña Marina, who understood very well told him what was happening. (I: 185)

Moctezuma bade him welcome and our Cortés replied through Doña Marina wishing him very good health. And it seems to me that Cortés, through Doña Marina offered him his right hand. (I: 314)

Then Cortés embraced Montezuma twice and Montezuma also embraced Cortés and Doña Marina who was very sagacious, said to him artfully that he was pretending sadness at our departure. (I: 410)

The coquetry she practises in this last interchange suggests that she felt that she had a certain amount of freedom to perform within the permitted code. More than this, her skill in the art of persuasion was an essential element in winning over the indigenous population. Violence, it is true, preceded hegemony but hegemony could not be established without securing some willing allies and participants as Cortés well knew.¹⁴⁾ The indigenous historian, Alva Ixtlilxochitl writing long after the conquest would even acknowledge that *"the lengua Marina was charged with preaching the Christian faith and at the same time speaking of the King of Spain. In a few days she learned the Spanish tongue which saved Cortés a great deal of work and seems to have been almost miraculous and very important for the conversion of the indigenous and the foundation of our holy Catholic faith."*¹⁵⁾ In the probanza of her services to the conquest, one witness, Gonzalo Rodríguez de Ocaña stated that *"because of Doña Marina's work, many Indians became Christians and submitted to the rule*

of your Majesty."¹⁶) Here we clearly see the identification of the feminine with the constitution of hegemony, a hegemony that after the violence will be secured by loving words (*palabras amorosas*). Marina is not only interpreter and translator but the paradigm figure in the conversion of conquest into empire.

The episode for which she is best known is also the one which would later turn the translator into *tradditora*, that is her denunciation of the Cholulan conspiracy. It was in Cholula that Moctezuma made his most determined effort to stop the Spanish advance by ambushing the invaders at night. The conspiracy was revealed to Doña Marina by an old woman who "*seeing her young and wealthy*" wished to save her life and marry her off to her son. In Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account, it also happens to be the one episode in which she speaks in her own voice¹⁷ "*Oh mother*", she replies, "*how grateful I am for what you have told me. I would leave now if it wasn't for the fact that I have no-one to bring me my clothes and jewels which are plentiful. On your life, mother, only wait with your son for a little while and tonight we will depart; for now those lords are awake and will hear us.*" (I: 290-4) By means of this ruse, Marina learns all the details of the plot and promptly warns Cortés. With Marina at his side as interpreter, Cortés surrounds the Indians and warns them of the cost of treason after which, according to Bernal Díaz del Castillo, "*we killed many of them and others were burned alive*". It is in this episode that Marina proved the strength of her loyalty to Cortés. It seems deplorable to many modern readers that the quite extraordinary political intelligence and calculation that Marina displayed in this episode should only have benefitted the Spaniards. However, her situation neatly illustrates the thoroughly gendered inflection of terms such as 'loyalty' and 'treachery'. The conquerors were constantly demanding loyalty to their 'just' cause and though they were apparently bonded by common religion and nationality in reality their loyalties were generally temporary and opportunistic especially as the justification for their mission was invented and mythologized as they went along.¹⁸) On the other hand, it is difficult for women in patriarchal societies to bond with other women since their loyalty is transferred on marriage or concubinage from the natural family to the new owner.

What is more difficult to understand is the fact that this exogamous system operated so efficiently despite the cultural gap between Spaniards and the indigenous. As far as the exchange of women was concerned, the 'otherness' of the indigenous seems to have been unimportant. Women were passed around freely between the indigenous and the Spaniards and

between Spaniards and Spaniards though of course no Spanish women were presented to indigenous allies.

It is in this context that Bernal Díaz's account of Marina's early life is particularly significant, especially as it occurs as a lengthy digression that precedes the account of the conquest itself and includes information which he could only have acquired at a much later date when the conquest was almost complete. It is an artful narrative device whose purpose is both to emphasize La Malinche's status as a princess and to account for her loyalty to the Spanish cause.

She was, he writes:

the daughter of the chief or Principal of Painala, a powerful lord who had several districts subject to him, eight leagues from Guazacoalcos. He dying while this lady was an infant, his widow married another chief, a young man, by whom they had a son whom they determined to place in succession after them. They therefore gave to girl to certain Indians of Xicalango, to carry off secretly and caused it to be rumoured that she was dead: which report was corroborated by taking advantage of the death of a child of her age, the daughter of a slave. The people of Xicalango gave her to those of Tabasco, and the latter to Cortés, by whom she was presented to a cavalier named Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero. When he went to Old Castille, Cortés took her to himself, and had by her a son who was named Don Martín Cortés and who was a commander of the order of San Tiago. She afterwards on an expedition to Higueras married a cavalier named Juan Jaramillo.

Doña Marina had by her birth an universal influence and consequence through these countries; she was of a fine figure, frank manners, prompt genius and intrepid spirit; and an excellent linguist, and of most essential service to Cortés whom she always accompanied. I was acquainted with her mother and half brother who was at the time I knew him grown up; they governed their territory conjointly, the second husband also being dead. They were afterwards baptised, the mother by the name of Marta, the son by the name of Lazarus; this I know, for in the expedition to Higueras when Cortés passed through Guatzacoalacos, he summoned all the neighboring chiefs to meet him in that settlement; and amongst many others came the mother, half brother of the lady. She had told me before that she was of that province, and in truth she most much resembled her mother who immediately recognized her. Both the old lady and her son were terrified, thinking that they were sent for to be put to death, and cried bitterly, but Doña Marina dried their tears, saying that she forgave them, that at the time they sent her from them

they were ignorant of what they did; and then she thanked God who had taken her from the worship of idols to the true church and was happier in having a son by her lord and master Cortés and in being married to a cavalier like her husband than if she had been sovereign of all the provinces of new Spain. This story brings to my mind that of Joseph in Egypt when his brothers were in power. (p. 155-6)¹⁹⁾

Bernal Díaz del Castillo finishes this account by swearing to its accuracy, an indication that he was concerned that it should be accepted as a true history.

But was it? The story itself could only have come from Doña Marina and not only does it conflict with López de Gomara's suggestion that she was sold into slavery²⁰⁾ but it has suspicious parallels with other popular narratives. Bernal Díaz himself is struck by its similarity to the story of Joseph. Other critics have pointed out that resembles the chivalresque romance, *Amadís de Gaula*. It is a theme that is also found in the Mixtec story of the insulted princess.²¹⁾ There are also, as I shall point out later, significant similarities to the Oedipus myth. Did Doña Marina mistranslate her own story or simply skillfully adapt it to the requirements of the conquest narrative?

There is no way of ascertaining the truth but what we do know is that the account of the girl's violent separation from a cruel mother fits very neatly into the story of the conquest for it confirmed both the cruelty of the indigenous and Marina's extraordinary fairy tale elevation from slave to princess.

But though the story 'fits in', she herself stands out partly because of the enthusiasm with which she fulfilled her role as interpreter, an enthusiasm that could be attributed to female mimicry. Indeed, Luce Irigaray has asserted that mimicry is the 'only path' available to women within patriarchal discourse.

To play with mimesis is ... for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself to ... 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make visible by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible; the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.²²⁾

In the context of conquest, however, this 'playfulness' simply serves the master plot more effectively. Thus the irony of the fact that when in

Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicle, she acquires her own voice it is to enable the conquest and the march towards Tenochtitlán to go on. For the indigenous who represented her in their painted books she was clearly 'alone of all her sex' often depicted in the meetings between Cortés and Moctezuma standing between the two men or actively gesturing as if to emphasize that she as much as Cortés is in charge.²³⁾ She often stands in a position of power occupying the same plane as Cortés and Moctezuma from whom she does not avert her eyes. Indeed, the curious metonymy by which Cortés was known as Malinche and addressed as such by the Aztecs suggests that they regarded her as the incorporation of conquest. Yet, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, she was "*the same but not quite*".²⁴⁾ The fact that Doña Marina wears indigenous dress in these codices emphasizes her racial difference from the Spaniards and her gender difference from the men who surrounded her even while she is metonymically associated with the conquerors. But might not this suggest that the place of the conquered was that of the 'feminine'? Homi Bhabha's colonial mimicry, in the Latin American case, is feminized. For the integration of the indigenous into a system that was both pluralistic and hierarchical, they had to become like women or children (in - fans - without speech).

Ironically, therefore, the 'gift' of Doña Marina to the Spaniards was the beginning of the end of the gift economy. That is why it is important to note the transition from gift exchange to contract exchange. In her comprehensive book on La Malinche in Mexican literature, Sandra Messinger Cypess seems to conflate the two, observing that, "*The practice of exchange of women was common among the Indians and acceptable, too, among the Spaniards; neither side saw the transfer of women as an unusual custom. It would be expected, then, that Marina would already have been conditioned by her socialization as a slave among the Amerindians to obey the commands of her new masters.*"²⁵⁾ Although this is one way to make sense of La Malinche's loyalty to Cortés, the explanation does not indicate the extent of real and epistemic violence that this exchange involved. The problem is the word 'socialization' which like its mirror word 'internalization' rests on a clumsy separation of 'inner' from 'outer' and does nothing to account for the formation of subjects in specific social formations.

Furthermore 'exchange' is itself an inexact word. Marina was either given or sold by her mother into slavery, a condition which, though not permanent for the Aztecs had physical as well as psychological consequences. Because the slave was no longer a member of the social body or

capulli, he or she became a kind of commodity, that could be given away, sold for sacrifice or other purposes. This change in status was thought to bring about a change in the very physical makeup of the person since for the Aztecs the body was inseparable from society and the world.²⁶⁾ Doña Marina's elevation from slave to *faraute* was thus more than a liberation for it implied a radical transformation of her person. Not surprisingly she would vehemently assert on her return to Coatzacoalcos that she would rather be the mother of Cortés's son and wife of Jaramillo than a princess of the Aztec empire.

Cortés behavior in this deal was perfectly pragmatic although it went right against any ideology of *limpieza de sangre*, which the Spaniards evoked in their dealings with Jews and Moors. The reconquest of Spain and the expulsion of foreign elements runs counter to the deliberate policy of *mestizaje* which was encouraged by the Spanish crown and by Cortés himself. The traffic in women was not only accepted by the Spaniards as natural but provided them with necessary services both sexual and practical. Cortés knew the importance of peopling the New World with a new kind of inhabitant one who had ties of blood with both conqueror and the indigenous for he had his son by Marina legitimized by the Papacy. Thus while Cortés would lecture Moctezuma on monogamy, the traffic and exchange of women of which Marina was simply the best known example was used by Cortés to great effect in sealing alliances and creating a mestizo population. Not only in Tabasco but along the route into the interior, Cortés received presents of Indian women some of whom were distributed among his men. The prettiest of the eight girls given to Cortés by the fat chief of Cempoala was baptised Doña Francisca and like Marina handed over to Puertocarrero; the Tlaxcalans gave Cortés three hundred women who were baptised and handed over to the soldiers. Bernal Díaz del Castillo mentions at one point that he had four *naborías* who presumably helped carry his kit, cook and serve him in other ways. The names of most of these women who gave birth to the new population of *mestizos* were unrecorded.

Roger Bartra notes, however, that when Malintzín and the nineteen other women were offered to Cortés, he gave an image of the Virgin to the Tabascans in exchange.²⁷⁾ "No doubt the women given as gifts quickly lost their virginity, but the same could be said of the image which the indigenous peoples received."

But let us not be deceived as to the nature of this exchange in which real women were given in return for a symbolic woman - the gift is not exchanged for real women but for an imaginary ideal in comparison to

which all women would feel their lack and inadequacy, an essential condition for their acceptance of a sexual contract.

Earlier I observed that the story of La Malinche resembled that of Oedipus. Both Oedipus and La Malinche were abandoned by a parent in the expectation that they would die or disappear, both return with devastating consequences to their mothers. In the Oedipus myth, this involves the violation of the taboo against marrying the mother. In La Malinche it involves a rather different change of fortunes - she returns not to become a social outcast but to demonstrate the superiority of the voluntary sexual contract that now replaces the exchange of women as gifts. The story of a woman's brutal separation from her mother, her enslavement and salvation by a stranger is not simply to be explained in the same terms as 'traffic in women' in tribal societies but is a qualitatively different narrative in which the *gift* has been transformed into the *contract*. Thus in La Malinche we have the exemplary history of a transition from exogamy and gift to sexual contract, a contract that is, however pacted on the prior condition of violence. Cortés had, after all, defeated the Tabascan chief who presented him with Doña Marina.²⁸⁾ In the Freudian system, male adulthood is achieved through suppression and sublimation, the assumption of the name of the father. But Freud's preoccupation with the European family prevented him from seeing that the 'dark continent' was not only woman but conquered populations who would either be excluded from civilized intercourse or would become involved in a vaster game of colonial mimicry.

The importance of this *mestizaje* can scarcely be overestimated. It is *mestizaje* that separates Latin America from all other colonial ventures. It helps to explain why theories of postcolonialism never seem to approximate to the reality of the continent and why the politics of race has always been so blatantly based on constructed rather than essential categories.

It is this which perhaps helps to explain La Malinche's fall from grace during the national period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The premium on originality, the tendency to offer racial explanations for economic underdevelopment and 'backwardness' obviously made *mestizaje* a delicate problem and turned La Malinche into a scapegoat, the "*most detested woman of the Americas*" according to Georges Baudot.²⁹⁾ The literature on Mexican nationalist ideology is too vast to review in brief, but two particular aspects of La Malinche's incorporation into the national narrative are too important to be over-

looked. The Cholula incident made it easy for her to be transformed into the treacherous origins of the Mexican nation but how did she become La Chingada, the violated woman of Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*? Paz was writing at a time when *malinchismo* had passed into popular journalistic language. Four decades after this classic essay was published it is not easy to reconstruct the now forgotten texts to which it was a response. If we understand *malinchismo* to be a code word for the Communist left then we read Paz's essay as an attempt to sublimate the very specific ideological struggle into a national psychodrama of masculine aggression and the victimization not only of woman but of the feminine in all of us.

Paz would associate la Malinche with La Chingada, *chingar* being the unutterable taboo word, 'fuck'. She is the raped woman, the raped land, the wound that was opened with the conquest ... In these terms, the Mexican nation is itself, as Paz would point out, the product of "violation, seizure and mockery" Paz acknowledges that the historical Doña Marina, "gives herself of her own free will to the Conqueror but he, as soon as her usefulness has been exhausted, forgets her. Doña Marina has become a figure that represents Indian women, fascinated, raped or seduced by Spaniards. And just as a child cannot forgive the mother who abandons him to look for the father, the Mexican nation cannot forgive the treachery of La Malinche."³⁰

Although Paz is critical of *malinchismo*, which he interprets as fear of the feminine, his notion of the feminine is more closely linked to Modernist aesthetics than to colonial oppression, marking what Andreas Huyssens has termed "*imaginary male femininity*".³¹ To refer to La Malinche as La Chingada restores the violence of the conquest which seems to fade into the background for Todorov and Greenblatt whilst at the same time reaffirming the identification of woman with territory, or with passive victimization. By transforming her into La Chingada, Paz hides the fact that she collaborated. It is not oppression that has to be accounted for but la Malinche's passage from the oppression of slavery to the apparent free acceptance of the sexual contract which, of course, also excluded women from true citizenship.

It is this difficult problem of *malinchismo* that has special significance for both Mexican and Mexican American women writers. Although this is too large a subject to enter into at this point, it is worth emphasizing this continued 'persistence' of La Malinche within contemporary writing by women. In her essay, *Daughters of La Malinche*, Margo Glantz observes the extent to which modern Mexican authors such as Rosario

Castellanos, Elena Garro and Elena Poniatowska have been haunted by the ghost of La Malinche.³²⁾ It is not only their position in the national narrative that is at stake, however but the imperative to conquer by seduction which results in women's self hatred and serialization. In Rosario Castellano's poem, *La Malinche*, for example, their mother contemplates her image in her daughter, and hates her, and then destroys the mirror and with it any possibility of female solidarity. According to Margo Glantz, many women feel themselves to be aliens within the nation and attempt to become incorporated into the indigenous *madre patria* which is personified in the nana of Rosario Castellanos's novels, in the maids of Poniatowska's autobiography and the peasants of Elena Garro's fiction.³³⁾ At the end of her autobiographical novel, *La 'Flor de Lis'* (1988) which relates a child's intense relationship with an upper-class mother who keeps herself aloof from the society in which she lives, Elena Poniatowka describes the painful and precarious separation from the mother and her discovery of a new family - the heterogeneous population she meets on the streets and buses. Thus the modern writer relives the Malinche story of separation from natural parents this time in order to empower herself as a writer.

It is perhaps not surprising that it is among the Mexican American population of the United States that La Malinche has become a major focus of contention. The Chicano movement of the nineteen sixties was an assertion of nationalism in the face of discrimination, an assertion of self-worth like the black power movement. It was a moment of male self definition. La Malinche who had betrayed the Indian cause with which the Chicano movement identified itself was thus once again the symbol of shame. Cherrié Moraga wrote forcibly that "*Upon her shoulders rests the full blame for the 'bastardization' of the indigenous people of Mexico to put it in its most base terms; Malintizín, also called Malinche, fucked the white man who conquered the Indian peoples of Mexico and destroyed their culture. Ever since, brown men have been accusing her of betraying her race, and over the centuries continue to blame her entire sex for this 'transgression'.*" Moraga saw the Malinche myth as inhibiting the sexuality of the Chicana, not to mention eliminating lesbianism as a possibility.³⁴⁾ On the other hand, for Adelaida R. del Castillo she is seen as an exemplary humanistic mediator.³⁵⁾ In a survey of the corpus of literature by Chicanas that refers directly or indirectly to the their identification with La Malinche, the critic, Norma Alarcón describes her as just as problematic when she becomes exemplary token as when she becomes the symbol of self-loathing.³⁶⁾

Although it would seem that the figuration of La Malinche is confined to colonialist or nationalist discourse, there are signs that she has 'persisted' in postmodernity. In a witty performance, Jesusa Rodríguez has her literally turn into 'media'. As anchorwoman for the new global communication network in the great city of Tecnoctratitlán, La Malinche presides over an Americanized consumer society. But by now she no longer even needs to be imagined as a real person for everyone knows she is only a simulation.³⁷⁾ And this, of course, is the final irony.



La Malinche

Notes

1. Paz, Octavio 1967^s. 'Los hijos de la Malinche'. In *El laberinto de la soledad*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico. p. 59-80, especially p. 78.
2. For a discussion of these reinterpretations, see Alarcón, Norma 1983. 'Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision through Malintzín/or Malintizín: Putting Flesh Back on the Object'. In Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrié Moraga (eds.) *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Kitchen Table Press, New York. p. 182-190. For La Malinche and modern Mexican literature by women, see Glantz, Margo 1991. 'Las hijas de la Malinche'. In Karl Kohut (ed.) *Literatura mexicana hoy. Del 68 al ocaso de la revolución*. Verfuert Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. p. 121-129.
3. Todorov, Tzvetan 1982. *La conquête de l'Amérique. La Conquête de l'Autre*. Le Seuil, Paris. Gleenblatt, Stephen, 1991. *Marvellous Possessions. The Wonder of the New World*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
4. Sierra, Justo, 1977. 'Evolución Política del Pueblo Mexicano'. In *Obras completas xii*. UNAM, Mexico. p. 49. There is an exhaustive discussion of the literature on La Malinche in Messinger Cypess, Sandra 1991. *La Malinche in Mexican Literature. From History to Myth*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
5. Prescott, William 1863. *The Conquest of Mexico*. Lippincott and Co., Philadelphia. Vol 1. p. 295.
6. Williams, William Carlos 1956. 'The Destruction of Tenochtitlan'. In *In the American Grain*. New Directions, New York. p. 27-38. For a discussion of the 'lenguas' and in particular of La Malinche, see Glantz, Margo. 'Lengua y conquista'. In *Revista de la Universidad de Mexico*. Doña Marina's skill as a translator seems to have been in stark contrast to Cortes's inability to pronounce or transcribe names in nahuatl. See Baudot, George 1977. *Utopie et histoire au Mexique. Les premiers chroniqueurs de la civilisation mexicaine (1520-1569)*. Privat, Toulouse.
7. Lauretis, Teresa de 1984. *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Indiana University Press.
8. Greenblatt stresses what he calls mimetic exchange and particularly the rhetoric employment of the 'marvellous' to justify possession.
9. For a discussion of the names of Doña Marina, see Cortés, Hernán 1986. *Letters from Mexico*. Tr. Anthony Pagden. Yale University Press. p. 464 n. 26.
10. Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. Miguel León Portilla (ed.) 1984. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Two vols. Madrid. p. 159. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

11. The main contemporary and near contemporary sources, apart from Bernal Díaz del Castillo are López de Gomara, Francisco 1979. *Historia de la conquista de México*. Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas. Vol. 65. Cortés, Hernán 1986. *Letters from Mexico*. Translated and edited by Anthony Pagden, with an introduction by J.H. Elliott. Yale University Press, New Haven/London. See also Elliott, John H. 1967. 'The Mental World of Hernán Cortés'. In *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. Fifth Series, 17. And Elliot, John H. 1984. 'The Spanish Conquest and Settlement of America'. In Leslie Bethell (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Latin America*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. I. Cortés, Hernán 1871. *Escritos sueltos de Hernán Cortés*. Biblioteca Historica de la Iberia, Mexico. Vol. 12.
12. There is as yet no thorough study of either the popular image of La Malinche nor of her portrayal in the codices. Although these clearly indicate her importance and suggest why Cortés and others associated with her should have been addressed as Malinche, a detailed study of the significance of her dress and gestures has yet to be made. In 'A la Chingada' in *La Jaula de la Melancolía. Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano* (Grijalbo, Mexico, 1987), Roger Bartra sees La Malinche as the mirror image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In a biography, *Doña Marina, 'La Malinche'* (Somonte, Mexico, 1969), p. 159-163 Mariano G. Somonte describes how La Llorona myth (the myth of a woman lamenting her lost child) derives from the lament of the sacrificed goddess, 'Cihuacoatl', but is the basis of modern 'superstitions' which link La Malinche and la Llorona.
13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion and translation of Mahasweta Devi's 'The Breast-Giver' is exemplary in its emphasis on the subaltern body as productive and not simply reproductive. Her essay also shows the trap of 'interpreting' such instances in terms of first-world feminism. See Chakravorty Spivak, Gayatri 1987. 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern'. In *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York/Methuen/London. p. 241-268.
14. "Cortés always attracted the chiefs with good words" according to Bernal Díaz del Castillo in *Historia verdadera*. Vol. I. p. 155.
15. My translation. The quotation is included in the appendix to Somonte, op.cit.
16. My translation. *Probanza de buenos servicios y fidelidad con que sirvió en la conquista de Nueva España la famosa Doña Marina*. Patronato 56, No. 3, Ramo 4. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, España.
17. This key incident is given prominence in many of the chronicles and is included in the record of services of Doña Marina used by her grandson, don Fernando Cortés in his appeal for a pension. See Somonte, p. 174. There is also a vivid version in Solís, Antonio de 1798. *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*. Cano, Madrid.

18. Pastor, Beatriz 1983. *Discursos narrativos de la conquista: mitificación y emergencia*. Ediciones del Norte, Hanover.
19. This quotation is taken from a translation by Maurice Keating (London, 1800).
20. Several versions of the conquest prefer that Doña Marina be born of slaves. For instance Cervantes de Salazar, Francisco 1985. *Crónica de la Nueva España*. Porrúa, Mexico. p. 134 gives two versions of her birth, one of which records her as having been born of slaves and the other 'truer version' that she was the daughter of a lord and a slave woman.
21. See for instance, 'La princesa guerrillera' from the *Mixtec codice*, Selden I. Bodleyan Library, Oxford. The story is summarized in Sten, Maria 1972. *Las extraordinarias historias de los códices mexicanos*. Joaquín Mortiz, Mexico. According to this tale, a princess whose brothers have been killed decides to avenge their death. On the journey she undertakes for this purpose, she meets and marries a prince but when she is taken to her husband's country, she is insulted and takes revenge on her enemies, thereafter living happily ever after with her husband. In her article, 'Bernal Díaz del Castillo frente al otro: Doña Marina, espejo de princesas y damas', included in Augustin Redondo (ed.) *Les représentations de l'Autre dans l'espace ibérique et ibero-américain* (Presses de La Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, 1991. p. 77-85) Sonia Rose-Fuggle emphasizes the Biblical parallels in this life story.
22. Irigaray, Luce 1977. *This Sex which is not One*. Tr. Catherine Porter. Cornell University Press, Ithaca. p. 76.
23. See Somonte, op.cit., for reproductions of the lienzos in which Marina is shown interpreting for Cortés. He also includes reproductions of a coat of arms of Tabasco on which dona Marina's portrait appears and reproductions of the Codice de Cuautlancingo in one of which she is portrayed without the Spaniards, accompanied by another Indian woman and followed by a group of musicians.
24. Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry is, of course, extremely suggestive for a study of Doña Marina. See 'Of Mimicry and Man; The ambivalence of Colonial Discourse'. October 28, 1984. p. 125-33. The 'ambivalence' consists of the fact that the colonizer wants to create a colonized in his own image only to produce someone who is 'not quite/not white'. Doña Marina is not only 'not white' but not male.
25. Cypess, Sandra. *La Malinche*. p. 33.
26. López Austin, Alfredo 1984. *Cuerpo humano e ideología. Las concepciones de los antiguos nahuas*. UN, Mexico. 2 vols. See especially vol. I: 226-251. This point about the relationship of the body to 'self' is also made by Gruzinski, Serge 1989 in *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands. Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520-1800*. Tr. Eileen Corrigan. Stanford University Press. p. 20.

27. Bartra, op.cit., p. 207. Bartra is referring to the transformation of the Virgin into the 'dark-skinned' Virgin of Guadalupe.
28. Pateman, Carole 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
29. Baudot, George 1986. 'Malintzín, L'Irrégulière'. In Claire Paillet (ed.) *Femmes d'Amérique*. Le Mirail, University de Toulouse. The term 'malinchismo' became current in the twentieth century but the equivalence between La Malinche and the nation was already made explicit by Ignacio Ramírez in the nineteenth century. For nineteenth century literature featuring La Malinche see Sandra Messenger Cypess, op.cit. In the late forties and fifties, there is an abundant literature defending her, much of it imaginative rather than scholarly. See, for example, Gómez de Orozco, Federico 1942. *Doña Marina. La dama de la conquista*. Ediciones Xochitl, Mexico. Somonte, Mariano G., op.cit., and Figueroa Torres, J. Jesus 1975. *Doña Marina. Una india ejemplar*. Costa-Amic, Mexico.
30. Paz, Octavio, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. p. 77-78.
31. Huyssens, Andreas 1986. 'Mass Culture as Woman.' In *Beyond the Great Divide*. Indiana University Press.
32. Glantz, Margo. 'Las hijas de la Malinche'.
33. Glantz, Margo. 'Las hijas de la Malinche'. See also Franco, Jean 1989. *Plotting Women. Gender and Representation in Mexico*. Columbia University Press, New York.
34. Moraga, Cherrié 1985. 'From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism'. In Teresa de Lauretis (ed.) *Feminist Studies. Critical Studies*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison. p. 173-190.
35. Castillo, Adelaida R. del. 'Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective'. In Rosaura Sánchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz (eds.) *Essays on la mujer*. University of California Chicano Studies Center Publications, Los Angeles. p. 124-149.
36. Alarcón, Norma, op.cit.
37. Rodríguez, Jesusa 1991. 'La Malinche en Dios T.V.'. In *Debate feminista*, Num. 3. Mexico. p. 308-11.