

Ellen Mc Cracken,
*NEW LATINA NARRATIVE: THE FEMININE SPACE OF
POSTMODERN ETHNICITY.*

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233 pp.

In the 1960's many Latino writers fought to establish a channel for the voicing of their particular ethnic realities within the United States. However, most of these voices were male voices and it was not until a decade later that Latina writers, particularly poets such as Gloria Anzaldúa or playwrights such as Cherrie Moraga, began to be heard. Latina narrative took off as of the 1980's with a great upsurge of production and impact on American letters. Ellen McCracken analyzes this body of work in her book *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*. This study looks at the work of twenty-four novelists or short story writers of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto-Rican, or Dominican descent and it focuses primarily on the process of commodification of exotic images of minority women within American literary and popular culture. Mc Cracken argues that many of these works are examples of post-modern ethnic narrative which struggle against the containment imposed from without, and finally succeed in defending a feminine space of their own within multiculturalism. The author applies interesting ideas of postmodern commodification to the narratives analyzed, including not only the interpretation of the novels or short stories in themselves, but also the marketing strategies involved in their mainstreaming, such as advertising, cover designs, illustrations, publication of articles and excerpts in the media, bestseller listings, and book reviews. The marketable exoticism of these authors, foregrounded by the publishers, who want to give an external appearance of multiculturalism within the safe boundaries of a controlled image, contrasts with the transgressive elements which each of them introduces into their work.

The introduction gives a very brief overview of the Latino situation in the United States between the 60's and the 80's and the social changes which arose in those decades in order to present the female authors that will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on four of the best-known and most successful Latina novelists: Sandra Cisneros, Cristina García, Julia Álvarez, and Ana Castillo. There is an in-depth analysis of *Woman Hollering Creek and other Stories*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*, and *So Far From God*, discussing how these

four authors contest the closure imposed by mainstream editors and publishers who attempt to make them into postmodern ethnic commodities. Diversity is celebrated in order to silence disturbing social contradictions which these writers manage to point out. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss how master texts are decentered in order to question received notions of history and a gendered ethnic identity. Chapter 2 focuses in particular on how writers engage with the politics of signification in the construction of identity discussing the texts of Graciela Limón, Mickey Fernández, Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales (mother and daughter as co-authors), Helena María Viramontes, Nicholasa Mohr, Luchi Corpi, Roberta Fernández, and Demetria Martínez. Chapter 3 deals first with Latina narratives that stress the role of community and its creation and then goes on to link these ideas with questions of individualism within the novels and short stories of Denise Chavez, Aurora Levins-Morales and Rosario Morales, Sylvia López-Medina, and Sandra Benítez. Chapter 4 deals with orthodox and non-orthodox religious practices of U.S. Latinos illustrated by discussion of texts by Roberta Fernández, Sandra Cisneros, Lucha Corpi, Demetria Martínez, Julia Álvarez, Cristina García, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Mary Helen Ponce, and Denise Chavez. Chapter 5 points out the breaking of sexual taboos, and the subcultural transgression of norms through the linking of sexuality to religiosity in texts written by Alma Luz Villanueva, Ana Castillo, Nicholasa Mohr, Cristina García, Pat Mora, Julia Álvarez, Mary Helen Ponce, Denise Chávez, Sandra Cisneros, Aurora Levins Morales, Rosario Morales, and Helen María Viramontes. Finally, Chapter 6 looks at gender, ethnicity, and politics, and whether they are viewed as integrated elements of the fiction by Sandra Cisneros, Helen María Viramontes, Carmen de Monteflores, Graciela Limón, Cherrie Moraga, Julia Álvarez, Roberta Fernández, Himilce Novas, and Margarita Engle. Throughout all of the chapters the two dozen Latina authors mentioned are used as illustrations of the points made about the self, religion, politics, ethnicity, and subculture and transgression.

Mc Cracken warns of the dangers of creating a "monolithic conception of the Latina narrativist" arising from the grouping of these women of different descent into one single category. The author is in fact conscious that even her own decision to bring all these authors together may in some way contribute to their homogenization and commodification. The constant tension between the foregrounding of difference and the pull of assimilation through containment of the elements that make them different from one another and from traditional American culture, is not only analyzed in the pages of the study but it is also a danger and an issue that lies within the study itself. However, the diversity of examples provided by McCracken and

the many possible implications of the narratives analyzed provide the reader who wishes an overview of the fiction written by women of Latina Descent within the United States with a very extensive picture of the possibilities of this "feminine space of postmodern ethnicity".

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