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"Nobody told me": Chicana Women's Madness and Mourning in Sandra Cisneros's *Have You Seen Marie?*

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Abstract: "'Nobody told me': Chicana Women's Madness and Mourning in Sandra Cisneros's *Have You Seen Marie?"* employs interdisciplinary research to understand Sandra Cisneros' tale of women's mental illness in Have You Seen Marie?. Building on Marta Caminero-Santangelo's critique of the inequitable treatment of mental illness in literary criticism of women's writing, I argue that Cisneros draws awareness to the distinct challenges that Chicanas face while struggling with mental illness. Contextualizing Cisneros' representation of the grief a Catholic Chicana woman experiences after losing her mother, I draw on the work of scholars from theology, psychology, sociology, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and disability studies to further understand the impact of colonization on familial gender roles, the importance of la Virgen de Guadalupe, and representations of mental illness.

In their now-classic work of feminist literary study, *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar demonstrate how works of literature by white women in the nineteenth century thematize madness. Gilbert and Gubar analyze literature wherein women are confined to a space, such as an attic or asylum, and labeled as mad because they do not fulfill their gender role properly within the patriarchal society in which the story is set. Literary scholars have since drawn attention to Gilbert and Gubar's essentialist and imperialist readings. Mental illness in such literature typically features white women in hospitals or institutions and overlooks individuals with other mental health issues or without access to professional care; moreover, women of Color with

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mental illnesses who are still functioning are perceived not to be genuinely ill (Brooks 106). In this romanticized treatment, madness is not necessarily violent, harmful, or reckless. It may simply be a shift in mental health and priorities wherein women are no longer subservient to the men of their lives. Whether women are trapped in an asylum, controlled by a marriage, or unable to express themselves due to societal norms, according to this account, such women must find a way to break free and discover their agency.

According to Shoshana Felman, women experience sustained mental illness at higher rates than men. Because patriarchal cultures force women to continually rein themselves in and submit to oppression by men, women undergo greater mental duress (Felman 7-9). However, Yvette G. Flores-Ortiz argues that psychology has focused on the needs of upper-class white people, instead of the disenfranchised who need it most (102). Gender, culture, and history matter when it comes to mental health, as people of Color experience depression at higher rates than white people. Most research explaining the gender gap in diagnosed cases of depression examine biological, psychological, social, and cultural variables but ignore the role race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status play in the treatment of women's mental health issues. Treatment for mental illnesses often ignore the cultural beliefs and behaviors patterned after cultural traditions within the Chicana community (Espín and Gawelek).

Historically, feminist scholars have argued that madness in women's characters is either a subversive liberation for women writers or an expression of rage (Caminero-Santangelo 2). More recently, scholars who focus on critical race theory and disability studies have argued that madness traps women in a patriarchal society by silencing and discrediting them, as opposed to liberating them (Donaldson 93-94; Caminero-Santangelo 4; Flores-Ortiz 102). While no attic or asylum confines the unnamed narrator in *Have You Seen Marie?*, her mental illness restricts her ability to

participate in society; she, thereby, fulfills the stereotype of the madwoman, even as she exceeds and challenges it. This chapter argues that Cisneros's protagonist seeks healing through connections with community, nature, and feminist retellings of the Chicanx oral tradition of *La Llorona*. *Have You Seen Marie?* fits within Sandra Cisneros' literary work, from the writer's debut in 1983 onwards, as a continuation and evolution of the perspective from her previous works on identity, culture, womanhood, and folklore, particularly her 1991 short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories,* which directly refers to *La Llorona* as well. In Cisneros's work, women explore and acknowledge their emotions at bodies of water, but in *Have You Seen Marie?* the relationship between women, healing, and water is finally fully explored.

The story, based on Cisneros's real-life experience of losing her mother, takes place in King Williams—a community within San Antonio, Texas, along the banks of the San Antonio River. Because the protagonist deals with mental illness due to the loss of her mother, she finds herself unable to leave her house or practice basic self-care: "I'd been hiding in my house since. Most days I didn't comb my hair, and most days I didn't care. The thought of talking to people made me woozy" (6). The protagonist receives support from her friend, Rosalind, who—bringing her cat, Marie—has driven three days to visit the protagonist and help her while she grieves. However, when Marie runs away, it is the protagonist who must help Rosalind. The loss of Marie forces the protagonist to leave her house and return to the community, talking to her neighbors and meeting new people while inquiring about Marie's whereabouts. While she has suffered the loss of her mother alone, she gains a community who is sympathetic for and empathetic with Rosalind's loss of Marie and is willing to help. Rosalind's suffering is not in competition with the protagonist's. They both feel their losses without comparing them. The loss of Marie is felt by Rosalind mostly, but the protagonist does not hesitate to help her. While initially the protagonist

hides her mental illness—retreating to her house, where she is not responsible for anyone and may sink deeper into depression, avoiding people and not practicing self-care—upon seeing how the community helps Rosalind reconnect with Marie, the protagonist then seeks outside help to mourn her mother, returning to nature and reconnecting to her culture's folkloric traditions.

Have You Seen Marie? presents a communal feminist Chicana method of healing from trauma by returning to the folk traditions, histories, and lands of Chicana women; overlooking misogynist and ableist views of women's mental illness; recognizing the silence surrounding women's mental health; and embracing the need for their expressions of grief. However, the healing method depicted does not reinforce traditional gender roles within the Chicanx community; instead, the protagonist reconnects with empowered and powerful versions of women from folklore, revising them in ways that enable women to draw upon their strength, experience, and knowledge without accepting the binary labels of *virgen* or *puta*, sane or mad. Chicana feminist scholars such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Sheila Marie Contreras have reclaimed the identities of *la Mala Mujer* (the Bad Woman) and *la Loca Mujer* (the Crazy Woman), revisiting the histories and folktales of their culture and recontextualizing the women who appear in these stories. In *Have You Seen Marie?*, Cisneros builds on such Chicana feminist reclamations to create a story that combines lyrical writing, beautiful images, whimsical figurative language, and a return to archetypal fable imagery. Incorporating a broad history (and mythology) of mad women who used their madness for the greater good—such as Joan of Arc or the Virgin Mary—Cisneros draws her unnamed protagonist into a large circle of archetypal suffering women who have been reinscribed by patriarchy despite their challenges to it (Chesler 26-27). In this way, Cisneros creates a feminist Chicana fable focused on women's mental illness and healing from trauma that is both personal and political.

Cisneros employs a hybrid of genres, which creates a signature storytelling style that applies intersectional feminist revisionary techniques to traditional cultural materials (Daniels 124). Personal experiences, oral histories, as well as "myths and legends with either or both Mexican and classical origins" are blended into her work (Daniels 126), which allows them to deal with the "psychological struggle to heal from past personal and political traumas" (Fahey xii). Chicana writers are influenced by their oral traditions, which encourage them to share stories of other Chicanas as oppressed and torn between identities and cultures (Daniels 124). And this move fits within the purpose of Latina feminisms, which is to create spaces for Latina testimonies, where the personal may be identified and inform a larger political movement (The Latina Feminist Group 2-3). This process empowers and validates women and their experiences (1). Through storytelling, patterns of violence may be identified, friendships may be developed, and self-care techniques can be taught (12). Chicanas break silence through storytelling and retellings through which they demonstrate respect for the foremothers of their culture (Blend 68). Chicanas retell stories of their folk and religious traditions to include women as agents in culture, history, and community and to encourage healing spaces (Blend 67; Steele 96). This "testimonia" brings to light the experiences and histories of those erased from history and literature (Blend 67). Indeed, Chicanas must rewrite their history, acknowledging their experiences; "because Chicanas' experiences may not conform to traditional forms, they must rewrite or reinvent traditional male genres" (Sandoval 22). Traditional stories of Chicanas reinforce women's subservience to men; however, women must bear "witness to [their] own pain" through storytelling in order to begin the healing process (The Latina Feminist Group 263).

Despite its importance, Cisneros's use of her gendered cultural experiences and heritage, especially in connection to overcoming loss, has been received with mixed reviews. Ilan Stavans

claims that Cisneros overemphasizes her heritage, sensibility, and message, creating declarations rather than movements in her writing (82). According to Stavans, this heavy-handed approach to writing puts the focus on marginalization instead of allowing the art to communicate messages subtly. However, labeling sexual violence as passé, Stavans discounts stories of trauma and normalizes the dismissal of women's art that discusses gendered violence. In contrast, Mirriam-Goldberg asserts that Cisneros creates strong women in commonly unfortunate situations to demonstrate how Latinx communities normalize gendered issues (79). Victims of trauma are often powerless before they find their voice, which is why gendered trauma is important to depict. Indeed, contemporary Chicana writers such as Cisneros emphasize the strength and autonomy of Chicana mothers who face both gendered and racial subjugation, effectively countering stereotypes of these women as marginalized or helpless victims. Cisneros alongside Ana Castillo, Pat Mora, Angela de Hoyos, Bernice Zamora, and Gloria Anzaldúa have created a literary tradition of Chicanas and Latinas who challenge gender roles and traditions in folktales and mythology. For these writers and their community of readers, an awareness of traditions and relationships with nature may help Chicanas heal the wounds of gendered trauma (Blend 56).

Before she can heal herself, the protagonist in *Have You Seen Marie?* must discover how much others in her community have lost, a process she begins as she enquires about Marie. She finds that there are giving and kind community members who understand grief and recognize it in the protagonist because they have "witnessed too much grief for one lifetime" (38-39). Their mental illnesses create roadblocks, which allow them to send only non-verbal signs of their grief through their eyes and creative expressions.

"Isn't it a shame to lose the one you love?" Luli asked.

"Yes, it is," I agreed, and when I said it, my heart felt as if someone squeezed it (38-39).

There are members of the protagonist's community, like Luli, who are experiencing their own grief like women in traditional folktales. Luli's tattoo of a teardrop under her eye labels her as a woman who mourns, which the protagonist views as normalizing the feeling of grief, as opposed to demonizing it. Other members of the community connect with nature through residential gardening and landscaping, which the protagonist recognizes as a method of healing: "We didn't say much to each other, but that said everything" (48). However, this domesticated form of connecting to nature is not enough for the protagonist to heal herself.

While Rosalind's trip does not center on taking care of the grieving protagonist as planned, her arrival creates a sense of unity with the protagonist. When Rosalind's cat disappears, the protagonist feels the loss as well, not hesitating to go search. Their experiences of loss, while not the same, are met with empathy and compassion. When Rosalind needs help searching for her missing cat, Marie, the protagonist can reconnect with nature and Chicana tradition, which, in turn, allows her to continue to grieve her mother as she returns to society. Drawing parallels between the loss of the cat and the mother, Cisneros represents the ways in which grief may go unexpressed until a loss is shared with one's cultural community, allowing its members to participate in the grief as well. Cisneros's work normalizes these feelings of loss and depression by creating a protagonist who shares her story instead of suffering in silence. By returning to the traditions of her culture, the protagonist begins to heal from and manage her loss in a healthy manner.

One Chicanx tradition that foregrounds Chicana women's centrality as spiritual leaders and caregivers in their community is the celebration of *Virgen de Guadalupe,* a figure Cisneros uses to bond women in the story. The protagonist begins to feel the benefits of healing with members of her community when she is greeted by two women who have a *Guadalupe nicho* in their front

yard: “May La Virgen look over you, honey bunnies, and your kitty cat, too.” This makes the protagonist “better for a little while” (50-51), which is more than any other neighbors’ reactions make her feel. When the Spanish imposed their patriarchal religious beliefs on Indigenous peoples, they presented Catholic Christianity as the source of healing. Exemplifying the ways in which traditional Indigenous rituals converge with Euro-American influences, *Guadalupe* symbolizes the perfect woman as a meeting of cultures and the subsequent tensions, especially surrounding the roles of women. By merging traditional, Indigenous practices with Catholic concepts, Chicanx peoples may practice spirituality and religion on their own terms while still being able to practice within the Catholic Church (Aponte 93). Cisneros’s subtle inclusion of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* signals the Virgen’s symbolic power as a connective force in Chicanx communities and for Chicanas in particular.

Through their connection to *Guadalupe*, Chicana women share their culture and share a common language, knowledge source, and heritage (Cantú 21). Since the mid-twentieth century, Chicana culture has sought to embrace pre-colonial cultural traditions and has developed self-awareness of the historical trauma that has plagued Chicanas for centuries. As women from colonized communities have a different relationship to their heritage than do women from non-colonized communities, they should be understood within their sociohistorical context (Mirandé and Enríquez 2). While mothers are considered the “most sacred Mexican archetype,” these figures of womanhood have been cobbled together, mixing influences of Catholic traditions from the Spanish Conquistadors and oral traditions from Indigenous peoples (León 8). However, the patriarchal nature of Spanish colonialism resulted in the women figures of Catholicism eclipsing those of Native oral histories. Amid the colonization of Latin America, the Spanish purposefully misrepresented the folktales and fables about important Indigenous women figures while

perpetuating a Christian mythos. Women deities were overthrown by the patriarchal colonized Azteca-Mexica culture who gave them "monstrous attributes" and split "the female Self and the female deities" when they substituted the men deities for women (Anzaldúa 27). Favoring binaries instead of the complex Indigenous religious and folk figures, fifteenth-century Catholicism depicted women as flat representations of light or dark. Chicana women are often compared to the mothers of post-colonial folklore and religion, with two of the most important mothers being: *la Virgen de Guadalupe* and *la Llorona*.

The iconography of *Guadalupe* is particular to Indigenous Mexican and Mexican-American peoples, while those of Spanish-only descent do not celebrate *Guadalupe* in a similar way (Montull 231-32). *Guadalupe* appeared to an Indigenous convert named Juan Diego in the sixteenth century (Anzaldúa 27-28). Consequently, her iconography as a Saint had been ingrained into Chicanx spirituality and religion while it is absent from Spanish heritage (Montull 234). Essentially, *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who does not abandon her child even when he is dead, stands for purity, piety, and ideal womanhood. Depictions of *Guadalupe* can be found throughout Ester Hernández's illustrations in Cisneros's book, which mirrors Chicanx culture where, as Carla Trujillo explains, *Guadalupe*'s image can be found all over because she functions as a cultural, religious, regional, and historical icon (215). In *Have You Seen Marie?*, in addition to the *nicho* mentioned in the narrative (50), there are two *Guadalupe*-inspired tattoos on the arms of women characters—one on a community member and another on the arm of the protagonist (58, 87)—an icon on a world map marking the Texas/Mexico border (74), and an image of her on a tote bag (43). In addition to being depicted as sacred and spiritual, *Guadalupe* is also found among the mundane, secular, and corporeal.

In addition to these nods to *Guadalupe*, Cisneros makes greater use of another significant Chicana folklore character, *La Llorona.* The retellings of the story of *La Llorona* connect Chicana traditions to nature, reinforcing the relationship between women's bodies and bodies of water. *La Llorona's* tale dates to around 1550 in Mexico City, according to Luis González Obregón, where she was seen dressed in white and heard wailing in the streets before disappearing into a lake (Leddy 10). Michael Kearney claims that the period of the story "cannot be determined, but it is evident from early Colonial texts that the theme is pre-Hispanic in the central highlands. It apparently existed in two forms: *La Llorona* crying for her children and *La Llorona* as a seducer of men. The most common contemporary version is a fusion of these two prototypes" (199). *Llorona* is often recognized for more than just having lost her children, she is depicted as having murdered her child (or children) or acting as a femme fatale who lures men into compromising positions so that she may murder them. *La Llorona*—the mentally ill, *loca,* monstrous, bad mother who has lost her children and is forced to search for them by the water—wails to anyone who will listen. While the stories of *Llorona* may vary, there are a few elements which are almost always present: a woman, water, and wailing (Pérez 103). Additionally, most stories depict *Llorona* as suffering from loneliness (100). Regardless of her reasoning or personal feelings, *Llorona*'s madness is never forgiven in traditional tales. Most traditional tales hold no place of sympathy for *La Llorona's* seemingly unforgivable misdeeds, as she drowns her children after she is left by her husband to be a single mother.

Chicana feminists have done considerable work to reclaim both *Guadalupe* and *Llorona*. Because she still typifies the standards of ideal womanhood, *la Virgen de Guadalupe* represents oppressive gender role standards for many; however, Chicana feminists have reclaimed *Guadalupe* to represent the liberation of women. "Mother" has become a synonym for a woman in our

contemporary society and *Guadalupe* is the most important mother and woman in Chicanx culture (Castillo 183-84; Martínez 142). Essentially, *Guadalupe* became an example of chaste virgins, while controversial figures like *Llorona* were an example of a *puta*; consequently, a dichotomy developed of the *virgen* and the *puta*, the sane and the mad (Anzaldúa 27-28; León 8). From childhood, Chicanas are told to live as *Guadalupe*, chaste and devoted to their families, whereas the folktales of *Llorona* function as a warning to women not to misbehave (Candelaria 93-94). Any type of motherhood or womanhood that does not align with the standards of *Guadalupe* is considered selfish, dangerous, and unholy. However, contemporary feminist Chicanas rediscovered traditional women, such as *Llorona*, revising the limited "cursed" image and encouraging sympathy for women whose tragedies have been used as symbols to control women's behavior (Ruiz 106-07). The story of *Llorona* is an allegory; she pays for the offenses against the culture in which she lives. These offenses depend upon the region, class, and time period in which *Llorona* is constructed as the bad woman who has gone *loca*; there is no one wrong she has done in her life according to the stories of *Llorona* (Pérez 101-2).

The stories of *Guadalupe* and *Llorona* are important to Chicana feminists as these iconic women's tales are specifically told to Chicana women to reinforce traditional Chicanx gender roles and familial practices. Chicana feminists call for the empowerment of all oppressed and disenfranchised women, as opposed to reinforcing or reestablishing a hierarchy (Ruiz 100). Despite tensions of early Chicana feminism, Chicana feminists have developed a balance between concepts of "family first" and women's independence, finding that strong women strengthen Chicanx families and improve the overall status of the Chicanx community (102). *Llorona* is a cultural heroine for Chicanas, reclaiming spaces for women and bringing attention to the women who have been marginalized and silenced by men (Pérez 105-7). While *Llorona* has been

repositioned and reclaimed, she still signifies physical and communal loss and is often reduced to being only a bad woman or a bad mother, erasing all other aspects of her identity (101, 104-5). However, Chicana feminists focus on the intersectional identities of Chicana women, critiquing the ways in which Chicanas are subordinated to Chicano men and oppressed by Anglo society. Chicana feminism requires the familial structure of the Chicanx household to be scrutinized, as patriarchal gender norms perpetuate men's dominance and women's subordinance for the family's greater good (Hurtado xv-xvi). Consequently, Chicana feminism supports Chicana women's empowerment within the home, as well as in larger communities and institutions of systemic oppression.

While madness is something Chicanas are taught to fear—or, at the very least, avoid—the protagonist embraces her grief, and becomes part of the history of women, like *Llorona*, who cry by the water, expressing their emotions. In this story Cisneros recognizes emotions not as dangerous for women, but natural. In Chicanx folklore, mad women such as *Llorona*, are depicted as dangerous, deceitful, and impure. In contrast, Cisneros recognizes emotions to be natural, not dangerous, for women. The protagonist's mental illness does not make her dangerous to herself or others, nor does the individuality associated with her madness liberate her from the societal standards for Chicana women. Instead, the protagonist's illness prevents her from connecting to her community after her mother's death. Her mental illness functions not as a metaphor, but as a real impediment in the protagonist's life. Cisneros's narrative empowers and validates women and their experiences, creating a space where Chicana women's mental illnesses are not only recognized as a serious issue, but where learning to cope with and heal from mental illnesses are made a priority.

In the story, women's systems of communication falter when their feelings become so overwhelming that they can no longer use language to express themselves. The protagonist acknowledges this lack of communication, demonstrating her lack of connection to the world in which she has no example of how her mother's death will impact her mental health. Her mother's death results in mental health issues: "I felt like crying and taking off too . . . I *was* an orphan . . . I didn't know I would feel this way. Nobody told me" (5). This suggests that she expected women's communication to work in a way in which she could anticipate the pain and health issues she would both physically and mentally experience as a woman. In fact, *Llorona*'s wails also exist outside of understandable language, creating a separation between her and those who do not mourn as she does (Thomas 97). Just like *Llorona*, the protagonist searches for those she has lost—both her mother and Marie—to no avail. *Llorona*'s reputation as a mother of ill-repute is transformed to that of an unfortunate woman.

When the protagonist loses her mother, she loses her connection to *Guadalupe*, the mother. Her search for Marie not only encourages grief but enables her to embody *Llorona*, crying for those she has lost by the San Antonio river. This mourning calls upon the traditional wailing or mourning rites performed by Indigenous, Mexican, and Chicana women that could last anywhere from days to months; however, these mourning rites are not commonly practiced in contemporary Chicanx households (Anzaldúa 33). In this way, Cisneros rewrites and reinterprets folklore to have more autonomy, complexity, and empathy, creating new myths with familiar figures. Encouraged by the rebellious and resistant spirits of their foremothers, Chicana feminists work to "modify an environment hostile to women's self-actualization," changing the status-quo through questioning and reviving family dynamics, gender roles, and cultural traditions (Fox 20). *Llorona* has become a "vehicle for women to narrate the order of the world" (León 8). No longer an "omen of doom,"

Llorona’s wailing becomes a demonstration of bodily autonomy when it comes to expressing grief (Fox 21).

The familiar elements of nature in the story call upon and revise the traditions of Chicanx folktales. As Linda C. Fox explains, the bad mother/*puta* women such as *Llorona* are undergoing a process of revision and reclamation in contemporary Chicana writing (Fox 21). “La Llorona has thus been demythologized; a positive lesson results from a negative example;” thus, contemporary revisions of *Llorona* rarely see her as a woman to be feared (Fox 22). As Susan Sellers explains, there are plural meanings for the text and because the story of *Llorona* is so popular; she has become an intertextual character. Sellers analyzes the use of myth in women’s fiction, arguing that feminist revisions of these stories allow silenced and marginalized women to create new meaning out of traditional myths (24-28).

A “strong association of woman with nature is seen in most La Llorona versions—she is explicitly related to water” (Thomas 97). If the kindness of strangers helps the protagonist reconnect to the world at large, it is the spirits she encounters in nature that teach her healthy ways to grieve and remember her mother. The anthropomorphic River, as well as the wind, a Tejas Cypress Tree which has been alongside the river “since before Texas was Texas” (80), and stars become animated by the protagonist’s mother who blankets, shushes, and musses the hair of her daughter while letting her know she is still with her, even after death: “‘Here I am, *mija*. . . Here I am, I’ve been here all along, *mijita*’” (82-83). Thus, it is through nature, talking, crying, and wailing to the wind that the protagonist can reconnect to the spirit of her mother, as well as spirits of her foremothers who help her through her grief, who blanket her with stars and fill her body with starlight, erasing any feeling of being alone (83).

While the protagonist fails to express her emotions with people, she can express her grief when she is in nature, especially when she is on the banks of the San Antonio River. The river, which Cisneros personifies, is itself a character, and it speaks to the protagonist.

> "I asked the river, '*Have you seen Marie?*' River said, '*Mamita,* you name it, I've seen it.' 'Do you mean you've seen her?'
>
> 'I've seen everything, *corazón de melón*. Everything, everything, everything, everything, everything...,' River continued" (68).

Not only is River able to respond to the protagonist, but it is also bilingual, aligning the histories of the cross-cultural Tejano people of San Antonio.

While the protagonist repeatedly remembers her mother and how much she misses her, she does not share her feelings verbally with the other characters. Cisneros writes: "I thought about my mother and how she used to knit ugly scarves no one would wear. Now I wish I had one of those ugly scarves, and my nose started to tingle" (42). Instead of sharing her feelings, she internalizes her feelings, holding them back: "'Marie, Marie,' we shouted. But, inside, my heart wheezed, '*Mama, Mama*'" (53). Because of the way women grieve the loss of their mothers, the loss of communication regarding mourning is particularly poignant. There is no amount of time to overcome the grief of a mother's death (Robbins 242). Because a mother's death causes a woman to become critical of herself, the process of mourning is also a process of reinventing and reestablishing her role in the world. Cisneros explores a woman reconnecting with her tradition and nature as a means of finding her role as a Chicana woman in San Antonio. Additionally, women make meaning in their own lives based on their understanding of their mothers' lives,

linking the way that they explain their identities to their relationship with their own mother (Robbins 153). The protagonist becomes *Llorona*-like, calling for a cat that will not come back, wailing into the wind, and crying into the water; the faults and flaws of *Llorona* are revisited and explained, just as the San Antonio River explains away the madness of women of the water before and after the lore of *Llorona*.

Crying for her lost ones, the protagonist finds herself at the San Antonio River, wailing to the wind, speaking to the stars, and crying into the river, desperate for an outlet for her emotions. River, who has experienced this emotional divulgence by madwomen before, comforts the protagonist. River references the waters which change the mental health of Bertha from *Jane Eyre* (wide Sargasso Sea), Penelope from *The Odyssey* (the Aegean), and other literary and legendary women.

> River said, 'I will take your tears and carry them to the Texas coast where they'll mix with the salty tears of the Gulf of Mexico, where they will swirl with the waters of the Caribbean, with the wide sea called Sargasso, the water roads of the Atlantic, with the whorls and eddies around the Cape of Good Hope, around that hat called the Patagonia, the blue waters of the Black Sea and the pearl-filled waters around the islands of Japan, the coral currents of Java, the rivers of several continents, the Aegean of Homer's legend, the mighty Amazon, and the wise Nile, the grandmother and grandfather rivers the Tigris and Euphrates, the great mother river the sandy Yangtze, the dancing Danube, and through the strait of the Dardanelles, along the muddy Mekong and the sleepy Ganges, waters warm as soup and waters cold to the teeth, waters carrying away whole villages, waters washing

> away the dead, waters bringing new life, the salty and the sweet, mixing with everything, everything, everything, everything.' (71-72)

As River speaks, she helps the protagonist to connect her individual story of loss to a global story of water's healing capacity; her tears will mix with those of women and waters worldwide. Madwomen such as Bertha and Penelope exist outside normative gender roles and behaviors of their cultures. These women spoke to trees, spirits, and water, hearing voices which guide their actions, religion, and reasoning. Like *Llorona*, these women, labeled witches, madwomen, and saints among their own people, share a position as outsiders in their communities, families, and cultures. The women whom River references bring attention to the patriarchal societies in which women live.

River carries the dual image of drowning and rebirth. Baptizing herself by dunking her head in River, the protagonist is reborn as a woman who is not restrained by cultural gender roles or familial expectations. When the protagonist dunks her head in River, crying into the water, she becomes a referent to both Chicanx folklore—*Llorona*—and Catholic baptism. Embodying two contradictory concepts—the doomed and the saved—the protagonist becomes a revision of both, as her expression of grief does not guarantee her success or failure in healing. Instead, she is reassured by River's mention of the tradition of women mourning and expressing sadness into water, as well as the presence of her friend, Rosalind. The protagonist's baptism is not specifically focused on Catholic traditions; there is no Latin, talk of God, or mention of sins. Instead, the protagonist dunks her head to release her feelings, letting go of the negativity and the darkness which has been growing inside of her. She does not need baptizing because she has sinned or gone against any religious deity; instead, she needs a place where she can experience her grief and accept her mental health issues without fear of an outsider's perspective. After she ceremonially

submerges her head in water and cries, the protagonist reconnects with the feminine; nature, animals, and women of folklore return to her.

Letting herself cry to River, the protagonist realizes and expresses her grief in a healthy way. Instead of holding in her emotions, blocking her feelings with silence, she lets go and discovers a sense of peace within the natural world when she allows herself to express the loss of her mother. The freedom to express her grief lets her be part of something greater than herself, giving the protagonist validation as well as strength. This, however, is different from the traditional depiction of *Llorona's* expression of grief: whereas *Llorona's* wailing is a sign of her failure as a woman to take care of her children, the protagonist's wailing is a sign of her lack of success processing her grief and accepting the loss of her mother on her own.

The healing which takes place in the story merges Chicana feminism and ecofeminism as it encourages Chicanas to view mourning as a communal experience with other women and by restoring Chicanas' traditional relationship to nature. The protagonist must leave her home and reconnect with the trees and river of her ancestors in order to begin her healing process. Additionally, Cisneros describes species of animals that are common to fables and often considered pests—such as skunks, possums, turtles, fire ants, and snails—when she describes the protagonist's process of rooting herself in nature. Cisneros's representation of nature exists on the borderlands between spaces of the colonizers and the colonized, traditional beliefs and Christian conversion, whiteness and ethnicity, patriarchy and matriarchy (Blend 58). Spaces of nature become places of historical memory, where trauma and loss may be healed. There is a "unification of the past, present, and future" (Blend 62). Women's writing about nature creates a resistance to "the erasure of women from wilderness" and the natural world (McFarland 42).

The journey to healing is interior and a geographical journey, which is essential to the process of healing. The protagonist's healing is geographic in that her physical journey takes her from a residential community to nature. She meets people in her neighborhood who heal by cooking, painting, knitting, and gardening; but those actions, while linked to women's history of self-expression—the domestic arts are, after all, the forgotten histories of women—are not enough for the protagonist because she needs to return to her Chicana roots—River, the Tejana Cypress tree, the night sky, and the spirits of her foremothers that reside within these natural reminders of her culture. The feeling of having "swallowed a spoon" disappears, allowing her to fully express herself (70). Thus, the protagonist returns physically and emotionally to her Chicana roots, where the stories of the women of her culture and folk tales take place. Torn between cultures, the protagonist witnesses other women in her community trying to heal and working through the process, but these women are not part of her Chicana background and cannot help her reach her roots: "There is no facile resolution to personal trauma . . . healing the past and moving forward is difficult and laborious, yet a necessary element of personal, social, and cultural change" (Fahey xx). Chicana writers use experimental writing techniques to create a space that "exhibits new geographical maps, myths, and alliances that challenge oppressive national discourses" (Fahey xi). The space for healing is both a geographical location and a memory—a feeling of belonging to and within the space linked to the culture of the protagonist's foremothers. In legends and folktales, neither *la Virgen* nor *la Llorona* are limited to one site of importance for Chicana culture. These women's stories and sightings follow sacred waterways and towns, where their importance shifts from community to community. Nevertheless, these women are powerful examples of Chicanas who challenge patriarchal gender norms, as well as create spaces for women to congregate, celebrate, and heal within their Chicana culture.

The protagonist does not encounter a space which feels empowering to her until she meets the San Antonio River, the Tejana Cypress tree, and the sky full of her foremothers reaching to her through waves of water, wind in branches, and starlight shining, to tell her she is not alone in her process. River's help, especially, allows the protagonist to learn how to heal herself and help other Chicanas in need. The protagonist can return home with her knowledge to help Rosalind heal. While Marie returns to Rosalind, the mutual healing process has already begun for the women.

Cisneros's revised *Llorona* does not demonize the protagonist for losing her family (her mother and Marie) because it is clearly beyond her control. She can cry, wail, call to her lost loved ones, without the criticism of her people. She can keep the dignity of her personhood despite her mental health issues and begin to express her feelings and work through them in a meaningful and productive manner. Like *Llorona* before her, the protagonist's unnamed identity allows her to be a Chicana everywoman. In this way, she becomes part of lore, not a specific, individual woman. The protagonist takes on this lore, bringing humanity back to the story again. Moreover, as an unmarried and childless woman, Cisneros's protagonist breaks with tradition, validating this non-reproductive gender role.

The representation of healing by women of Color in *Have You Seen Marie?* is communal. The text specifically depicts Chicana women overcoming the tradition of silence and isolation that post-colonial gender roles have reinforced through the specific example of the protagonist's isolation following the loss of her mother. Cisneros portrays a new type of Chicana feminist healing through the loss of the cat, Marie, which fosters healing among everyone involved, not just those who know Marie personally. In cultures where women are encouraged to remain silent about mental health issues, breaking the silence should be encouraged. Cisneros's work explicitly builds a spirit of empathy around these issues.

Mental illness works as an active agent to silence Chicanas. As an internal silencer, mental illness causes the protagonist to question herself every time she wishes to share her feelings on the loss of her mother. The internal dialogue the protagonist has with herself about her mother only becomes voiced and external when River is also given a voice to express the losses which cause women to be silenced within Chicana culture. River encourages the protagonist to voice her feelings like Llorona does, crying freely about her loss. Through her reconnection to nature and her culture, the protagonist moves from confusion and silence to controlling her voice and understanding her own feelings. The protagonist's understanding of the experience of parental loss moves from objective knowledge (observed, or indirectly acquired information) to subjective knowledge (experienced or directly acquired information).

The protagonist's grief is rectified by identifying with *Llorona,* whose emblematic expression of grief is directly in opposition to the traditional depiction of *Guadalupe*. Both Rosalind and the protagonist end up embodying *Llorona* by expressing their losses loudly and openly. Initially, the protagonist is unable to call for her mother, but Rosalind can voice her emotions—"Oh, Marie. . . I miss you" (53)—which inspires the protagonist to work on finding her own voice. Furthermore, when Chicana feminists displace *Guadalupe* as the most important and idyllic mother figure, Chicanx gender roles and expectations are questioned and women's tales are revised, making mad, monstrous women appear human. Patriarchal belief systems take power and autonomy away from women, while feminist women's presentation of healing through personal, natural, and communal methods allows women agency in their process, separate from the Eurocentric and patriarchal belief systems of Christianity.

Cisneros's examination of trauma remains vital for Chicana women to address. Not only is it essential for women of Color to learn to speak about the grief that they experience, but it is

also imperative that women are given space to explore their feelings and heal. Cisneros creates space for women to acknowledge the significance of their relationships with their mothers; but most notably, Cisneros creates a narrative in which Chicana women experience the support of other Chicana women, so they no longer need to suffer alone. Rosalind's initial role as the supportive friend may seem underwhelming, but it is important that she does not fear or avoid the protagonist during her grief. In acting as a supportive friend, Rosalind demonstrates that mourning and mentally ill Chicana women are still approachable and still in need of support. She normalizes the protagonist's behavior and acts as her grounding connection to society.

Cisneros revises the *Llorona* archetype by having her protagonist embody *Llorona*. A daughter, not a mother, she is still lost, both geographically and spiritually; and, like *Llorona*, she must return to the river of her people to cry and heal. *Llorona,* like *Guadalupe*, transcends time, geography, and regional cultural beliefs, serving as an archetype for women's relationships. Sometimes these mythic figures function as binaries; however, they always depict aspects of women's lives, whether traditional or contemporary. Connections to these women remind Chicanas of their matrilineal lineage, as well as the many roles women must perform in contemporary Chicanx society.

While grief is validated as being related to mental illness in the story, Cisneros's revision of the wailing woman does not demonize or criticize women whose mental health suffers due to grief. Cisneros also does not depict mental illness as a way that the protagonist escapes the bonds of the patriarchal society in which she lives. Instead, the protagonist's struggles are presented as being significant by calling on the traditions and folktales of Chicana women. The protagonist shares her *testimonia* with River—acknowledging the loss of her mother, as well as her loss of purpose. The protagonist can reconnect to her community and nature at the end of the book because

when she is forced to venture outside of her home to search for Marie she finds that her mental health is not under scrutiny as a woman. She is met by women who also grieve—just as she does for her mother and Rosalind does for Marie—and is encouraged by River to acknowledge her feelings and express her grief, as other women have done in Texas and beyond. In the end, because of River, Rosalind, and the community, the protagonist is not alone in her grief.

Revising the story of *Llorona*, Cisneros brings to light the silences surrounding women who experience loss, telling the stories and truths which "nobody" told her. By acknowledging the lack of discussion and storytelling surrounding the issue of women's mental health and grief, she challenges the idea that women must suffer in silence. Cisneros's work normalizes these feelings of loss and depression by sharing her story and creating a space where women no longer suffer alone. In the book, neither *Llorona* nor *Guadalupe's* womanhood is discounted, dismissed, romanticized, or demonized. In Cisneros's text, *Llorona* and *Guadalupe,* paired with community and nature, offer Chicana individuals a path to balance and healing.

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