

Deconstructing the Rose Metaphor and Cultivating Trees of Rebellion in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.

Morgan Keith Stewart
University of Kentucky

ABSTRACT: In Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, deciphering two key motifs—the rose and trees—is fundamental to unpacking the central tension of the book: the protagonist's desire to leave Mango Street and return in writing. While the tree motif is well-studied, that of the rose has eluded critical attention. This article shows how Cisneros unveils the centuries of patriarchal oppression distilled in the image of the rose and, in turn, offers new metaphors for women seeking to escape traditional constraints.

KEYWORDS: Chicana, feminism, rose, trees, writing

Rising out of the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s, the Chicana feminist consciousness was born out of a fight for equality with the men of the Chicano community. As these women began to assess the inherent misogyny within the Chicano movement itself, they began to question traditionally-held beliefs about gender, family, and sexuality while carving out their own socio-political/literary movement (García 218-19). Sandra Cisneros is one of the most readily identifiable names of the Chicana literary canon. Arriving on the scene in the early years of this nascent feminist movement, Cisneros wrote what would become her most popular and enduring work: *The House on Mango Street*. Published in 1984, *Mango Street* struck a chord with readers and critics alike. Presenting selections of her then newly-published book at the twelfth national conference of the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS) alongside the likes of Pat Mora and Ana Castillo, Cisneros made an impression due to her innovative use of prose and the way in which her work disrupted the hegemonic forces of the status quo (Cruz 911). Its continued relevance is evidenced not only by its impressive sales figures or its inclusion in many school curricula but also in the plethora of critical articles written about the book. While literary critics are keenly aware of the book's poignant social critique, unique style, endearing narrator, and prominent motifs, one essential element has escaped critical analysis almost entirely: the rose motif. Critics have discussed its obvious counterpart, narrator Esperanza's "four skinny trees," at length, but I propose that any analysis of this arboreal metaphor is incomplete without considering its place as a reaction to the text's marked presence of the rose as metaphor for female subjugation to male authority and patriarchal tradition.

The House on Mango Street consists of a series of forty-four vignettes containing the perceptive observations that a Chicana girl, Esperanza Cordero, makes about her daily experiences growing up on Mango Street in a poor neighborhood of a large American city (presumably, though never explicitly, Chicago, where Cisneros

herself grew up). Through the negative experiences she observes in other women's lives, Esperanza cultivates a fresh and contrasting perspective about her own future. She dreams of maintaining and nurturing her nascent individuality while using it in the service of those women whose futures seem to her to have already been determined by systemic forces of oppression. She accomplishes this by writing down the stories of the marginalized, granting voices to those who would otherwise have no voice. Woven into Esperanza's emerging poetic voice is Cisneros's pointed awareness of how certain structures and images, inherited from Western tradition, codify and limit both women and writing. In particular, Cisneros points to the rose and how it subsumes women under patriarchal ideals. In the book, Esperanza ultimately rejects the rose as a metaphor for the type of woman and writer she wants to become after having been witness to its deleterious effects. Instead, she cultivates the metaphor of the "four skinny trees" to define herself and her writing because within it is present her individualistic and communal ideals.

The House and Its Critics

The central tension in *The House on Mango Street* is certainly that which is created between Esperanza's desire to break away from the limiting conditions of her childhood and her need to revisit Mango Street through writing in order to tell the stories of those who cannot escape. The first and last vignettes of the book act as two bookends which serve to delineate this tension. The first vignette, entitled "The House on Mango Street," hints at the restraints that Esperanza wishes to overcome: her age, poverty, societal gender expectations, and discrimination due to her minority status. This vignette is where we first learn that Esperanza desires a house of her own, one which she can "point to" without being ashamed (5). The idea of a house of her own becomes a core image in the text, a place that is as much physical as it is a metaphorical, discursive space. In

the final vignette, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Esperanza's need to revisit the past is made manifest. She asserts that she is "too strong for [Mango Street] to keep [her there] forever" physically, yet writing is the only way that she can feel somewhat free mentally by keeping at bay the "ghost" that aches inside her (110)—the voices of those who have been silenced by the very oppressive conditions she seeks to leave. Ultimately, it is her goal to return to Mango Street through writing; it is her text that will become the desired house of her own.

In the intervening vignettes, we learn the details behind Esperanza's marginal status, and the principal tension apparent in the opening and closing is deepened and fleshed out. In "My Name" (10-11), Esperanza explains how she was born in the Chinese year of the horse just like her namesake, her great-grandmother, a once high-spirited, vibrant woman who was forced into marriage, carried off by her husband like one of the Sabine women, and broken like a horse. To the English speaker, Esperanza's name is too hard to pronounce, and, as a result of its marked Hispanic origins, every time an Anglo pronounces it, she is reminded of her own marginality. Present in Esperanza's name is both the desire to overcome her situation and the incessant urge to remember marginalized voices, her own included.

Esperanza has much to overcome, something that is made apparent repeatedly as she learns about the harsh realities of being raised in a poverty-stricken, urban neighborhood. In "Hips" (49-52), Esperanza's desire to grow up is complicated due to societal gender expectations about the domestic role of women. Getting hips is associated only with childbirth and motherhood. In "The First Job" (53-55), Esperanza lies about her age in order to get a job at a photo studio, but quickly learns first-hand the reality of patriarchal control when she is sexually assaulted in the back room by an older man who seemed trustworthy: his birthday kiss. Later, in "Red Clowns" (99-100), Esperanza learns that sex is not always how it is portrayed on TV: romantic, idealized, or even consensual. Ironically, these cruel and violent circumstances are what Esperanza must revisit in her writings in order to become free of them.

In other vignettes, we see the tension between leaving and returning reflected in the lives of other characters, some men but mostly women. Louie's cousin steals a Cadillac in what can be seen as a symbolic attempt at transcending the borders of poverty, an illusory goal that rapidly vanishes before he can even cross the limits of the neighborhood. He crashes the car and is promptly arrested (23-25). Marin, an older girl who sells Avon products and teaches Esperanza how to attract boys, is unsatisfied with her life in the barrio and wants someone to take her away. Esperanza watches Marin from her window as she waits "for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (27). Another girl, Alicia, desires a university education, but, after her mother's death, her father puts her in charge of domestic duties. The added complications make keeping up in school a difficult task (31-32). Geraldo is a Mexican migrant who is working in the United States to send money back to his fam-

ily. He is killed in a hit-and-run car accident and no one even knows his last name (65-66). A woman only known as *Mamacita* longs to return to her Spanish-speaking home country, but her husband is only frustrated by her constant insistence that they are not already home. She cries when her son starts speaking English (76-78). Rafaela is a beautiful woman, too beautiful, because her jealous husband will not let her leave the house. Her only wish is to go out and dance to the music she can hear from her apartment window (79-80). Sally is a teenage girl who has suffered physical beatings her whole life under the hands of her controlling father, who becomes enraged whenever he sees her hanging out with boys (92-93). She marries a marshmallow salesman before reaching eighth grade as a way out of her terrible life. She is now prisoner to her husband who also has a temper (101-102). Minerva, a teenage mother, kicks her good-for-nothing husband out of the house but cannot end the cycle of abuse. He apologizes, she lets him back in, and he beats her again and again (84-85). Esperanza's mother was a "smart cookie" but quit school because she was embarrassed by not having nice clothing (90-91). Within each of these characters, there is an internal tension between the oppressive circumstances of their lives on Mango Street that hold them back from escaping the cycle of poverty, violence, and marginality and their yearnings to break free of that cycle. There is also a conflict created by the abiding threat of forgetting these stories and Esperanza's insistence on remembering them. These are the people that Esperanza must come back for through her writing.

The stories that Esperanza collects help to shape her ideas about leaving and returning. The people on Mango Street offer her examples of the damning, cyclical nature of marginality, but they also provide her with ideas about how to escape in order to come back in her writing. Esperanza's aunt Lupe tells her that she must keep writing to stay free (61). A fortune-teller predicts that one day Esperanza will find "a new house, a house made of heart" (64). Esperanza's mother instructs her to study hard in school in order to avoid her own fate as someone who never followed her dreams (91). In "The Three Sisters" (103-105) the framework for Esperanza's literary return is laid out. The eponymous sisters of this vignette sense that Esperanza's desire is to leave Mango Street behind for good, but they tell her that she must not do this: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (105). Though Esperanza never sees them again, their words seem to have an enormous effect on her. Combining the advice of all these wise women, we can assume that Esperanza studies hard, never stops writing, and creates a "house made of heart"—a figurative space in which she can resolve the tension between leaving and staying by physically escaping the space while remembering those who cannot through her writings. This suggests that remembering and writing are powerful tools that cannot be overlooked. As the dominant narrative pushes to one side those who do not fit within its frame-

work, written remembrance can offer a sort of salvation for marginalized voices.

The House on Mango Street has received much critical attention. Hundreds of articles and book chapters have been written about the book, covering a wide variety of topics. Many of these articles hearken back to the tension between leaving and returning, overwhelmingly as a function of writing, as I have outlined above (Crawford-Garrett 2009, Haydée Rivera 2003,¹ Ricard 1991,² Sánchez 1995,³ Valdés 1992⁴). Katherine Crawford-Garrett, for instance, analyzes the stylistic transitions in the novel, using Britton's spectator stance theory as a framework to underscore Esperanza's struggle to leave Mango Street and the life it represents. According to Crawford-Garrett, Esperanza does not suddenly decide to leave; rather, she progresses from a naïve participant to a perceptive observer, learning to judiciously evaluate the roles available to women, discard negative gender roles, and eventually escape.

Similarly, many critics have also examined Esperanza's growth and desire to return for those she left behind as a Chicana adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman* (Bolaki 2005, Bubíková 2015,⁵ Dessús Colón 2002,⁶ Gutiérrez-Jones 1993,⁷ Karafilis 1998,⁸ Klein 1992,⁹ Perles Rochel 1998¹⁰). For example, Stella Bolaki discusses how the traditional *Bildungsroman* mold, which portrays the decidedly teleological, individualistic journey of a male protagonist from childhood to adulthood, does not fit female, ethnic American narratives. She describes *The House on Mango Street* as a different coming-of-age story, a Chicana *Bildungsroman* in which the borders of individual and community are blurred so as to reject the primacy of the individual while at the same time not losing the self completely in the community.

Others have focused on how Cisneros exploits space in the book (Careri 2013,¹¹ Heredia 1993,¹² Manzanás Calvo 2000,¹³ Martin 2008, Olivares 1987,¹⁴ Saber 2013¹⁵). For instance, Karen W. Martin notes that the spaces described in *The House on Mango Street* contrast sharply with French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's representation of the idyllic childhood home of protection. She describes how Bachelard's three-tiered home exemplifies the privacy, verticality, and wealth of the bourgeoisie—the single-family, idealized home commonly depicted as part of the "American Dream." According to her analysis, the urban spaces in *The House on Mango Street* express quite the opposite: borders between public and private are traversed, vertical mobility is impossible, and the people live in poverty. According to Martin, Esperanza's ideal home subverts both narratives by creating a transcendent space in which poverty and oppression are overcome through the shared experience of the community.

Still others have seen the book as a commentary about identity formation, that of the Chicana who must fight for recognition in both Anglo society and among Mexican-American men, as well as that of Esperanza's journey through adolescence (Beltrán-Vocal 1995, Busch 1994,¹⁶). María Beltrán-Vocal, for example, writes about how *The House on Mango Street* consists of stories which

highlight the recurrent obstacles that Chicanas must overcome in order to solidify their identity. She shows how Esperanza uses writing and literature to discover this identity and employ it in the service of others.

Finally, other critics have offered close readings of recurring symbols and motifs such as the home, women in windows, the virgin-prostitute dichotomy, shoes, names, and others (Atkins 2008,¹⁷ Brunk 2001,¹⁸ Cutting 1998,¹⁹ Petty 2000,²⁰ Romero Chumacero 2004,²¹ Scalise Sugiyama 1999). Michelle Scalise Sugiyama's article on the foot motif illustrates this type of analysis perfectly. She compares the manner in which women's feet are portrayed in Cisneros's book to Chinese footbinding techniques, a reminder of how men control female sexuality and hinder women's mobility both physically and figuratively. Additionally, many have examined the symbol of Esperanza's "four skinny trees" as part of their larger analyses (Careri 2013,²² Karafilis 1998, Roszak 2016,²³ Sanborn 2001,²⁴ Valdés 1992²⁵). One such exemplary analysis is Maria Karafilis's proposal that Esperanza identifies physically and emotionally with the trees as a way to express her growing sense of community (67).

These critics and others offer insightful examinations of the central issues present within *The House on Mango Street* and their readings have enhanced and informed my own. Nevertheless, the image of the rose has evaded their collective analysis in all but the most tangential of ways. Of the critics cited in this article, only Julián Olivares contributes any significant critical attention to this image, though only briefly as part of his larger thesis about the poetics of space.²⁶ Like Karen W. Martin would later do, Julián Olivares demonstrates how Cisneros's text challenges Bachelard's poetics of space. Unlike Martin, however, Olivares focuses on the here/there dichotomy. He shows how the word *here*, normally associated with integration and comfort, and *there*, seen as alienating and anxiety-provoking are complicated by Cisneros. Olivares uses the vignette "Linoleum Roses" as evidence of this complication, a symbol Cisneros employs to tease out the negative connotations of traditional domestic spaces. While insightful and thought-provoking, Olivares's treatment of the rose metaphor is ultimately incomplete.

This general critical omission is striking, given the textual prevalence of the motif, as well as the role that I argue it plays of distilling the text's central tension between the violent forces that conspire to keep women in their place and Esperanza's project to escape these circumstances physically and metaphorically. Bound up within the rose is not only hundreds of years of literary convention but also thousands of years of patriarchal oppression, both of which Esperanza learns to reject as she forms new literary conventions and builds a safe place for the oppressed. Thus, Cisneros turns this seemingly-innocuous cliché on its head by teasing out its negative associations. Throughout the book, roses appear in many places—a design on linoleum floors, a print on a slip, a needlework pattern, in descriptions—and always relate back to the captive women of Mango Street. Esperanza forgoes employing the rose as a metaphor for the person she desires to become, opting instead for that

of her “four skinny trees” because it allows her to progress beyond the confining limits of Mango Street as a new kind of writer while still remembering those she left behind (i.e. her roots) through the creation of a virtual, discursive community.

Roses Versus Skinny Trees: Rejecting the Ancient Trope and Defining a New Metaphor

The choice of the rose as a symbol for Cisneros's deconstructive project is an obvious one. The rose has long been associated with beauty, passion, love, poetry, and women. It has also been linked to male desire and female submissiveness. In Western literature, it is ubiquitous. *The Romance of the Rose* (Fr. *Roman de la rose*), for example, is one of the most fundamental texts that codifies women under the rose metaphor in the medieval European canon. The French author Guillaume de Lorris wrote the first 4,058 lines between 1225-30 AD. Lorris's untimely death before completing the text prompted a second author, Jean de Meun, to finish it toward the latter half of the 13th century, adding nearly 17,000 lines of controversial and often misogynistic commentary about the vicissitudes of his day (“Roman de la rose”). The text is an allegorical tale of courtly love in which the male protagonist goes on a quest to find an alluring woman, symbolized by a rose—a quest that ends with the lover “pluck[ing], with great delight, the flower from the leaves of the rosebush” and then remarking, “thus I have my red rose” (354).

The great Spanish poet Garcilaso de la Vega, credited with bringing the Italian Renaissance to Spain, also contributed to the conception of woman as rose, penning these immortal lines of rose imagery:

En tanto que de rosa y azucena
se muestra la color en vuestro gesto,
y que vuestro mirar ardiente, honesto,
enciende al corazón y lo refrena; (225)

Presenting the contrasting feminine qualities of passion and purity, respectively, as a rose and a lily, Garcilaso describes a woman who needs to take advantage of her youth before she withers like a rose in the cold winter wind. Crossing the Atlantic, the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío—who, perhaps not incidentally, imagined himself following in Garcilaso's lyrical footsteps—used the rose to create powerful images.²⁷ In “De invierno,” for instance, Darío paints a scene filled with many pleasing things—porcelain, silk, lace, etc. Sitting among these objects is a woman, whose lovely face he compares to a rose and a fleur de lis: “voy a besar su rostro, rosado y halagüeño / como una rosa roja que fuera flor de lis” (352).

A feminist interpretation of these works, of course, reveals the inherent misogyny in each. The allegorical woman in *The Romance of the Rose*, for instance, is collected and possessed by a man. According to Joan Kelly in her article about early feminist

thought, the *Romance* even inspired Christine de Pisan's proto-feminist poem *Epître au dieu d'amours*, helping to initiate the *querelle des femmes*, the centuries-long debate about the nature of women which Pisan herself sparked (5-10). According to Kelly, Pisan lamented the popularity of the *Romance*, the attitudes it advanced about women, and “its reduction of romance to sexual conquest—and abandonment” (10). The other two poets also propagate negative ideas toward the female sex. The male poetic voice of Garcilaso's poem advises a woman to give in to his wishes before her beauty runs out, and the woman of Darío's poem is nothing more than one of a collection of dozens of pretty objects on display in a room. The exhausted metaphor of the rose, omnipresent in Western literature—and specifically in the long history of Hispanic letters—attempts to label and categorize women, delineating their role in society, denying them their subjectivity, and casting them as nothing more than objects of poetic contemplation. It should not surprise us, then, that Cisneros problematizes the rose in *The House on Mango Street*, an image she associates with disillusionment, domestic imprisonment, and despair.

Underscoring Esperanza's reasoning behind choosing a different metaphor for herself, Cisneros frequently employs the rose motif as it relates directly to the young girl's sexual awakening and subsequent disillusionment when she realizes that becoming a woman is not at all what she expected. In “Chanclas,” for example, Esperanza's coming-of-age narrative is complicated by the psychologically burdensome effect of the male gaze. In this vignette, Esperanza gets new clothes to attend her baby cousin's baptism and the family gathering that follows. A rose appears on Esperanza's new slip, covered by her lovely “pink-and-white striped dress” (46). The metonymical association of underwear with sexuality is at play here: Esperanza's budding womanhood, reinforced by the rose motif, comes to the fore. Despite having new clothes, however, Esperanza feels anything but beautiful. She did not get new shoes with her outfit, and her old brown-and-white saddle shoes make her feel very self-conscious. This feeling of discomfort is heightened by the gaze of a “boy who is a man” (48) who watches her dance all evening. It is unclear from the text whether a part of her enjoys the attention or not. Be this as it may, it is clear that the man/boy who is looking at her is finding pleasure in watching her. He objectifies her with his gaze, projecting his “fantasy onto the female figure” (Mulvey 19). She is subjected to the voyeuristic glance of a male, becoming an object of aesthetic enjoyment. In this vignette, Esperanza tries out (or literally tries on) the rose, that pervasive metaphor of the Western literary tradition, but quickly comprehends that it is not only associated with beauty but also with centuries of patriarchal objectification and subjugation of women.

The next vignette, entitled “Hips,” likewise reveals the misogynist underpinning of the rose. Esperanza and her friends have a conversation about how hips relate to their womanhood. The curious thing about this vignette, however, is the conspicuous and explicit use of the rose to describe this part of the body. “They bloom like

roses," Esperanza states with poetic flair (50). Rachel, however, domesticates this lovely rose imagery, unwittingly uncovering its negative associations: "They're good for holding a baby when you're cooking," she says, speaking of the utility of hips (49). Rachel does not romanticize marriage or love. She is matter-of-fact in her association of womanhood with domesticity. Her thinking is trapped within traditional gender roles. In his study of *The House on Mango Street*, Tomoko Kuribayashi mentions how this constant insistence on the domestic containment of women upholds the social order: "[T]he female body must be kept indoors so that the status quo of the public/private dimension is maintained with men in public space and women in private" (169). Rachel's immediate association of hips with the role of the housewife, who, in the absence of her husband, must simultaneously take care of a baby and cook meals, is revealing because it shows how she perpetuates the ideals of patriarchal society. As Chicana writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa succinctly states: "Men make the rules...women transmit them" (38). It is also notable that after this discussion of blooming hips, in the very next vignette, Esperanza is sexually abused by an older man at her place of work who "grabs [her] face with both hands and kisses [her] hard on the mouth and doesn't let go" (55). Just as she begins to mature, a cold reality sets in: men will use the changes in her adolescent body for their own sexual pleasure.

"The Family of Little Feet," which appears just a few pages before, offers another example of how men quickly take advantage of Esperanza's budding womanhood. In this vignette, Esperanza and the neighborhood girls discover another part of their bodies—not hips, but still associated with sexuality: their incipient, adolescent legs. They first discover their new legs when a petite-footed neighbor lady gives them her old high-heeled shoes:

The mother's feet, plump and polite, descended like white pigeons from the sea of pillow, across the linoleum roses, down down the wooden stairs, over the chalk hopscotch squares, 5, 6, 7, blue sky.

Do you want this? And gave us a paper bag with one pair of lemon shoes and one red and one pair of dancing shoes that used to be white but were now pale blue. Here, and we said thank you and waited until she went upstairs. (40)

It is noteworthy that in order to give the girls her old shoes, the woman must cross the linoleum roses (a symbol for domestic drudgery which I will explore in greater depth later) and then over the hopscotch squares in a ludic but logic-infused play of movement that represents a transfer of the rose-as-metaphor from one generation to the next. This symbolic conveyance of oppressive cultural baggage, reminiscent of Anzaldúa's aforementioned transmission of gender rules, is what Esperanza will learn to regard with discomfort and begin to reject by the end of the vignette.

At first, Esperanza and her friends are excited by the prospect

of growing up inherent in the onset of adolescent legs: "We have legs. Skinny and spotted with satin scars where scabs were picked, but legs, all our own, good to look at, and long" (40). Notably, Esperanza's description of their legs highlights the girls' individual agency: their sprouting legs are "all [their] own." Hidden in this description we may also uncover a cloaked reference to Esperanza's preferred image: the slim, scabby legs that grow in spite of their conditions have much in common with the trees she will later describe, which are also skinny and rough. This new-found agency will soon be stripped of them as male desire codifies the emergence of legs with sexual maturity and availability. As Michelle Scalise Sugiyama notes, high heels work to "accentuate the 'female'—elongating the legs, elevating and making more prominent the buttocks, and causing the hips to sway pronouncedly" (10). These accentuations translate directly into the female power to arouse men sexually, a power which Scalise Sugiyama writes "is ultimately a trap for the women of *Mango Street*" (11) because men conflate the simple presence of legs with consent to pursue and dominate the woman who uncovers them. Mr. Benny, the local grocer in the story, is well-aware of the effect high heels have on women and even threatens to call the cops when he sees them wearing the alluring footwear, saying: "Them are dangerous...You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that. Take them shoes off" (41). They do not take them off at Mr. Benny's insistence, but they soon understand his cause for alarm. Like the hips that "bloom like roses," their legs—natural and good-looking parts of the body that symbolize growth—subjugate the girls to the male. At first, they are only watched and catcalled by a boy who calls out, "Ladies, lead me to heaven" (41). Later, however, things take a more serious turn when a drunken man with the smell of whiskey on his breath repeatedly calls Rachel "pretty" and offers her a dollar for a kiss. While at first the girls are just objects of visual pleasure, they soon realize that men also desire physical pleasure.

By the end of the vignette, the girls "are tired of being beautiful" (42) when they come in contact with what Ellen McCracken calls "the threatening nature of male sexual power that is frequently disguised as desirable male attention and positive validation of women, though what is, in fact, sexual reification" (67). They run home, take off the leg-revealing heels, and hide them. As Ramón Saldivar concludes: "In their short foray down *Mango Street*, Esperanza and her friends experience the various ways in which female sexuality is defined, constrained, [and] coerced by patriarchal society" (185). Esperanza and her friends unwittingly inherit the cultural encumbrance of heels which have, presumably, spent most of their days confined to the domestic sphere: the linoleum roses on the kitchen floor of the woman with tiny feet. Importantly, Esperanza ultimately decides to take off these shoes, removing simultaneously the connection between roses and the role of the submissive woman.

Other vignettes that contain rose imagery show the potential future of Esperanza, one of the domestic imprisonment she desires to avoid and the metaphors she hopes to elude: firstly, the example of Esperanza's own mother. In "Hairs," Esperanza mentions that her

mother's hair is "like little rosettes" (6). Notwithstanding this affectionate description, the perfect image is broken, however subtly, by another description of her mother's hair: "Mama's hair," Esperanza tells us, "smells like bread" (7). Although Esperanza fondly associates that smell with her mother's caring nature, the phrase also underscores the veiled thorn of domestic toil. Her hair smells like bread because she is trapped in the domestic sphere, baking bread for her family day in and day out. In a later vignette, Esperanza's mother associates this entirely domestic role with regret: "I could have been somebody" (90). Significantly, even as she laments her lot, she cannot avoid a baking metaphor: "I was a smart cookie then" (91). In spite of her intelligence and natural talent, she cannot even escape her captivity for a short moment of pleasure at a play or a ballet. Instead, "she draws with a needle and thread, little knotted rosebuds, tulips made of silk thread" (90). Day by day, and stitch by stitch, she sews decorative roses instead of fulfilling her dreams. In this way, she reproduces and reifies the rose metaphor despite her regret and opposition to culturally-codified gender norms. Notably, as Rita Bode posits, Esperanza's mother does attempt to surpass these limitations "if not for herself then at least for her daughter" (289) by counseling Esperanza to avoid her own fate. Ultimately, Esperanza must decide to do as her mother says and not as she does, ending the replication of roses and creating her own metaphor in its place.

Another example of Esperanza's potential future is found in "No Speak English." This vignette is replete with rose imagery, which serves to draw attention to the patriarchy's systematic suppression of women. "No Speak English" is about an enclosed woman whom Esperanza only knows as *Mamacita*. She arrives from an unspecified, Spanish-speaking country with her young son, brought by a man who worked two jobs to save up enough money to pay her way into the United States. *Mamacita*, perhaps more obviously than every other character, embodies the rose metaphor. Esperanza describes her arrival with the following descriptive image:

Then one day *Mamacita* and the baby boy arrived in a yellow taxi...Out stepped a tiny pink shoe, a foot soft as a rabbit's ear, then the thick ankle, a flutter of hips, fuchsia roses and green perfume. The man had to pull her, the taxicab driver had to push. Push, pull. Push, pull. Poof!

All at once she bloomed. Huge, enormous, beautiful to look at, from the salmon-pink feather on the tip of her hat down to the little rosebuds of her toes. (76-77)

Here the use of phrases such as "fuchsia roses," "bloomed" and "rosebuds of her toes" clearly link *Mamacita* to roses. She is described in vibrant detail, the bright colors of her outfit clearly related to life and growth, but these symbols of growth are quickly extinguished. Upon her arrival, she walks up the stairs to her new apartment and is rarely seen again. Esperanza and her friends try to figure out why she will not come out. Some think it is because

she is too fat to descend the stairs, but Esperanza believes that she does not leave her apartment because of her inability to speak English. With a dismal description of outright loneliness, Esperanza describes how *Mamacita* "sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull" (77). The juxtaposition of the open window with the images of isolation associated with her inability to speak English is powerful. *Mamacita* embodies both the exceptional vibrancy of the rose as well as its deeply-rooted, malicious effects. She is at once beautified by the metaphor and abused by its full implications, becoming, like the woman of Darío's poem, a static, domesticated object.

A third case of a woman who symbolizes Esperanza's possible fate is Alicia in the vignette "Alicia Who Sees Mice." Although somewhat less obvious, Alicia's relationship to roses and domestic imprisonment is of particular note, especially as it concerns the process by which patriarchal values are passed on from one generation of women to the next. However, unlike the previous examples, Alicia also endeavors to free herself from the constraints of patriarchal society in a way that foreshadows Esperanza's own journey. Alicia is a young woman who must take on the duties of homemaker due to the death of her mother. Stepping into the role of housewife, she inherits "her mama's rolling pin" and must "wake up early with the tortilla star" every day to prepare the tortillas for her family (31). The "tortilla star," as it is known in the text, is the morning star, or the planet Venus, named after the Roman goddess of love and beauty, who also happens to be associated with roses. In the vignette, however, this celestial being is not linked to a *flowering* rose but with the aurally homophonous *flour*, the flour with which Alicia must make tortillas every day. As Julián Olivares proposes:

To Alicia Venus, the morning star, does not mean wishing upon or waiting for a star to fall down...instead it means having to get up early, a rolling pin and tortillas. Here we do not see the tortilla as a symbol of cultural identity but as a symbol of a subjugating ideology of sexual domination, of the imposition of a role that the young woman must assume. Here Venus and the implication of sex and marriage as escape is deromanticized, is eclipsed by a cultural reality that points to the drudgery of the inside. (164)

Under the light of the "tortilla star," Alicia slaves away in her inherited domestic role, a role determined by society and forced upon her by her father. Nevertheless, in an attempt to subvert societal gender roles, Alicia forms a plan to escape. She attends university "because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin" (31-32). Although Alicia is expected to accept the ideas of the patriarchy that are being thrust upon her without question, Alicia dreams of another future, one laid out for the reader but which the reader never sees fulfilled.

To a greater or lesser extent, all three of these women are forced to embody ideals of the patriarchy inherent in the rose: attractiveness and desirability but also the underlying oppression and despair. Esperanza, however, rejects the rose and all of its repressive cultural weight, clearly articulating a different vision of the future in the vignette entitled "Four Skinny Trees." Here Esperanza describes four trees outside her window that seem to burst out of their urban surroundings. Like Esperanza, the trees refuse to conform to their environment where they "do not belong" (74). According to Maria Karafilis, choosing the number four "precludes anything other than a representation of community and its importance for ethnic Americans" by eliminating the possible interpretations bound up in other numbers: three for the Trinity, two for traditional marriage, and one for the "self-sufficient individual" (67). The secret to these trees' lasting success is their insistence on strengthening their roots while simultaneously reaching for the sky. The parallel to Esperanza's life is obvious, for she too opts for strengthening her roots (i.e. by telling the stories of her people through writing and helping those around her) while still aspiring to be something more: a subject, a writer, a creator. As Elisabetta Careri notes: "The four elm trees are teachers...whose teachings allow Esperanza to build an order for a different world, one that includes the tension toward the heavens—the future and her aspirations and possibilities—and the earth—the roots, memories, and cultural identity" (20). This view is also reflected in the last lines of the book where Esperanza makes it clear that although she plans to leave, she will only have "gone away to come back. For the ones [she] left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (110). This last phrase in itself speaks to her rebellion, defying prescriptive grammar with a poetic flourish. This could be seen as an example of the type of language that Esperanza/Cisneros employs to "[undercut]...alienating authority" by "[eschewing] the conventions of formal literary language" (Gutiérrez-Jones 308).

Esperanza recognizes that like these four skinny trees, women and other marginalized groups, must band together in mutual cooperation in order to survive. "Let one forget his reason for being," she says, "[and] they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other" (74-75). The image of a wilting tulip is very striking, and this is perhaps why Cisneros chose it here instead of a rose; at any rate, it contrasts perfectly with her four trees. When a rose wilts, it folds over gently at the top; even in the absence of external support, most of its hearty stem remains upright. When a tulip wilts, however, it folds over completely, its bending point entirely determined by the container in which it is placed. With a low bow of utter submission and hopelessness, the tulip inspires images of distress, pity, and sadness. Women, it seems, can forget their "reason for being" (74), submit to the ideologies and customs of the patriarchy, and end up like a glass of wilted tulips—together, but utterly miserable and powerless; or conversely, they can "grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth" (74) in a display of mutual cooperation, multiplied strength, and increasing subjectivity. Esperanza chooses the latter. She de-

clines to reject the roles typically associated with women, which are codified within the metaphor of the rose-cum-tulip, and she elects instead the metaphor of the four skinny trees, employing it in the content and form of her writing. *The House on Mango Street*, the very book itself, is Esperanza's ultimate production. It is no wonder that the book is often described as a work which defies classification (Haydée Rivera 109). It is an original creation, one formed by skinny vignettes, poetic prose, the deconstruction of worn-out literary tropes, and the introduction of new and vibrant metaphors. This new undertaking is tested immediately in Esperanza's relationship with an older girl named Sally.

Sally provides the greatest counterpoint to Esperanza's journey because through her interactions with this young woman, Esperanza begins to personally identify the flaws in the rose-tulip metaphor and solidify her own discourse of bold individuality and communal responsibility. Sally's character is developed over the course of five vignettes: "Sally," "What Sally Said," "The Monkey Garden," "Red Clowns," and finally "Linoleum Roses." Through the course of these vignettes, Esperanza, goes from a naïve, idealistic admirer of Sally's spunk and worldly knowledge to a courageous defender of the downtrodden. She begins with only a small notion of the person she wants to become and ends with a clear vision of the narrative she wants to tell and the pitfalls she must avoid. Sally, for her part, takes quite the opposite journey. At first, she is popular and seems sure of herself, but she ends up the perfect example of all the oppression and systemic violence condensed within the symbol of the rose.

In the first two vignettes, "Sally" and "What Sally Said," Esperanza describes the Sally she knew in school, a "girl with eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke" whom all of the boys think is beautiful (81). Sally appears confident in spite of her difficult circumstances. Her father becomes enraged when he sees her talking to boys and will not allow her to dance because of his "strict" religious observance (81). Sally's father carries the weight of rigid beliefs about gender roles and resorts to physical violence to uphold them. Esperanza empathizes with Sally when she sees her ostracized by her former friends after a falling out and worries about the bruises all over her body. In a poetic apostrophe, Esperanza questions Sally about her desires, partially projecting onto the older girl her own embryonic ideas about individualism and community:

Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn't have to go home? Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you far away from Mango Street, far away and maybe your feet would stop in front of a house, a nice one with flowers and big windows and steps for you to climb up two by two upstairs to where a room is waiting for you. And if you opened the little window latch and gave it a shove, the windows would swing open, all the sky would come in. There'd be no nosy neighbors watching, no motorcycles and cars, no sheets and towels and

laundry. Only trees and more trees and plenty of blue sky...You could close your eyes and you wouldn't have to worry what people said because you never belonged here anyway and nobody could make you sad and nobody would think you're strange because you like to dream and dream...[A]ll you wanted, all you wanted, Sally, was to love and to love and to love and to love, and no one could call that crazy (82-83).

Though Esperanza may be using all these descriptions to describe Sally's situation as someone who is afraid to go home because of her father, they more perfectly describe herself. Esperanza is the one who desires a home of her own, an individual space of freedom and growth. She is the one who feels like an outsider, like the trees she watches from her window which burst from the concrete and that "do not belong here but are here" (74). She is the one who ultimately decides that she must exercise her newfound subjectivity to love and rescue those around her. In this heartfelt description, the verticality of the house, the big windows, open skies, and lack of domestic duties (i.e. no laundry) become symbolic of a future without the physical, emotional, and social constraints normatively thrust upon women. The endless trees reaffirm Esperanza's newly-chosen metaphor. Within this description is Esperanza's nascent ideal. Her empathy for Sally is just the beginning of her writerly project.

In "The Monkey Garden," Esperanza is confronted with a turning point in her quest to help others, a decisive moment in which she must choose to defend women, even risking alienation. It is here that she begins to practice her ideal. The space, a once idyllic vision of a garden, has become a junkyard of sorts. Even still, it is overgrown, not only with weeds, but with an assortment of flowers: sunflowers, cockscombs, hollyhocks, and, of course, roses. However, there is something curiously different about the way these flowers conduct themselves. Esperanza describes them in a pose of defiant rebellion: "flowers stopped obeying the little bricks that kept them from growing beyond their paths" (95). The flowers have begun to break free, acting much more like Esperanza's trees than typical, submissive roses. They, like the trees which "grew despite concrete" (75), burst from their traditional constraints. Fittingly, it is in this very garden that Esperanza learns how to break free from her restrictive circumstances as well. While playing in the garden with the neighborhood children, Esperanza witnesses some of the neighborhood boys take Sally's keys and refuse to give them back to her until she kisses them. Sally "pretend[s] to be mad" at first (96) but really likes the attention. Esperanza, however, feels that "something [isn't] right" (97) and runs to get help from a mother of one of the boys who fails to see the seriousness of the matter. Taking things into her own hands, Esperanza runs back out to the garden, picks up "three big sticks and a brick" (97) and goes to defend Sally. Although her attempt at helping a woman in need ultimately fails, because Sally does not want to be saved, Esperanza's willingness and determination to defend other women, to fight against the pa-

triarchy, is revealing. As Moutushi Chakravartee expresses it, Esperanza's "refusal to fall into the conventional feminine pattern is born of psychological necessity of assertive selfhood. It is essentially a revolt against the patriarchal hegemony" (23). Similar to the tree-like flowers that "stopped obeying the little bricks that kept them from growing beyond their paths" (95), Esperanza defies the conventional restraints placed on women by the patriarchy, and in turn, becomes an active protector.

Interestingly, one of the tools Esperanza chooses to defend Sally in the Monkey Garden—the brick—is the very thing that once confined the flowers to their paths. This image forms a strong parallel with Esperanza's eventual plans to come back for those she must leave behind temporarily. Like the constraining force of the bricks, the rhetoric of the patriarchy, whether transmitted orally or in writing, is employed to subjugate women to the desires of men. Words and metaphors—like those used by Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, Garcilaso de la Vega, Rubén Darío, and others—become a vital tool in transmitting patriarchal values from one generation to the next. It is noteworthy, then, that Esperanza wants to become a writer and that she desires to use her writing as a way of setting herself and others free. Her new form of writing is different, however. It is not filled with the self-serving rhetoric and metaphors of the patriarchy. Instead it is constructed upon new metaphors and utilized in the service of those "who cannot out" (110). By using a tool traditionally associated with men to free herself and help others, Esperanza is able to subvert normative gender roles and give a voice to the women who had no voice. Just as Esperanza uses the brick that once forced flowers to follow a particular path as a tool to ward off attacking boys—turning a violent tool of gender normativity against itself—she later utilizes the power of writing to perform a similar task. Writing becomes a means by which she can compose her own future, a future not subjugated to the wishes of men. The next two vignettes involving Sally further solidify Esperanza's need to construct a future built on the metaphor of her trees and not the rose.

In "Red Clowns" Esperanza learns intimately what can happen when women do not support each other and how male desire silences female voices. In this vignette, Esperanza goes to the local carnival to meet up with Sally, but she promptly discovers that Sally has other plans. She leaves Esperanza alone by the tilt-o-whirl, running off with a "big boy" whom we know nothing else about (99). While waiting for Sally to come back, an unidentified male grabs Esperanza by the arm, saying "I love you, Spanish girl, I love you, and press[es] his sour mouth to [hers]" (100). The vague language and Esperanza's lack of words to describe the experience suggest rape. In her recounting of the event, she insistently calls out for Sally's help, but the older girl has abandoned her: "Sally Sally a hundred times. Why didn't you hear me when I called? Why didn't you tell them to leave me alone?...Why did you leave me all alone?" (100). Whether she cries out in the moment or only when writing the story is unclear, but the net result is the same: her cries fall on deaf ears.

Nevertheless, though her voice is silenced in the moment, her reconstruction of the experience through writing, though fragmentary, serves as a warning to all. All women must band together, listen to each other, and protect one another from the forces that conspire to subdue them. They must not let the patriarchy choose their metaphor for them, the decisive choice between rose and skinny tree being the vertebral metonym for writing itself.

Finally, "Linoleum Roses" shows the end result of patriarchal domination: the renewal of the destructive cycle that threatens to destroy the new generation as it has the former. Sally, as Esperanza's peer, becomes for her the ultimate example of how women are inducted into the system, subsumed under the traditional symbol of the rose, and forgotten. In the summer before eighth grade, Sally marries a marshmallow salesman in a state where it's legal to get married so young. Esperanza notes that "she says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape" (101). Her dreams of escape, however, are met with more imprisonment as she is fully codified under the symbol of the rose: domesticated, objectified, controlled, and silenced. Sally is locked in her house, her husband not letting her talk on the telephone, look out the window, or see her friends (102). Instead she passes the hours "looking...at the linoleum roses on the floor" and "the ceiling smooth as wedding cake" (102). This striking juxtaposition of linoleum roses and wedding cake is fitting as it directly connects roses with the ills of patriarchal tradition, especially the repressive gender roles that traditional marriage often embraces. Sally feels the utter burden of the rose metaphor as marriage forces her into the role of submissive housewife. Sally is confined to a static life of domestic incarceration, unable to escape the kitchen floor upon which she and the roses are trapped. As Julián Olivares states:

'Linoleum roses' is a trope for household confinement and drudgery, in which the semes of rose—beauty, femininity, garden (the outside)—and rose as a metaphor for woman are ironically treated. The roses decorate the linoleum floor that Sally will have to scrub. This is an image of her future. The image of the final line, the 'ceiling smooth as wedding cake,' resonates through the story in an ironical twist, a wedding picture of despair. (165)

Esperanza's friend has inherited the rose metaphor, including its prescriptions about female domesticity and subjugation, and she withers away physically and emotionally, trapped inside with no way of escaping. In this way, she becomes the perfect counter example for Esperanza's preferred literary motif and her writerly project. As Nicholas Sloboda asserts: "By realizing that her personal aspirations to be a writer and to have a home of her own carry a social duty, Esperanza also understands that she will become her real and true self only by fulfilling both her personal and communal responsibilities" (103-104). In other words, Esperanza is liberated from traditional constraints, but she still uses her newfound agency to help others, rejecting the metaphor of the rose and finding

constant inspiration in the four skinny trees on her street: "When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach" (75). Through her writing, Esperanza hopes to develop a tree-like resistance, transcending prescribed rules, breaking free of damaging metaphors, and supporting her community.

Given that the central problem of the book revolves around the tension between leaving and returning, it is unsurprising that Esperanza's literary project is contingent upon her ability to resolve this tension. She accomplishes this by escaping Mango Street—physically and figuratively—and by returning through writing. She leaves Mango Street physically by finding a home of her own and figuratively by circumventing the binding rules of writing prescribed by the patriarchy, including the marginalization of certain voices and the codification of women under overused, damaging metaphors—the rose chief among them. However, her flight also includes a discursive return to give voice to those who are encompassed by the figurative and physical oppression of patriarchal tradition: the home in the heart. Her project is thus at once literal and metaphorical, individual and communal. While thousands of years of patriarchal prescriptions attempt to define and restrict women under the weight of the symbol of the rose, Esperanza moves beyond this constraining metaphor. In so doing, she reveals the rose-as-metaphor's inherent misogynistic underpinning. She suggests trees as a new metaphor because it perfectly encapsulates the form, content, and message of her plan to leave and return "for the ones [she] left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (110). Esperanza's ultimate success is shared by Cisneros and evidenced by the book we hold in our hands, the book which defies classification and gives voice to the voiceless. In this way, Cisneros became the voice of a new generation of Chicana women who began to break free of the constraints of patriarchal oppression, both that within Anglo society and the larger Chicano movement. She established a new writerly example for women seeking a way to express their experiences outside of traditional constraints. By harvesting new metaphors and deconstructing old ones, Cisneros broke from the concrete of the patriarchy.

In the thirty-five years since its initial publication, *The House on Mango Street* continues to be not only one of the most frequently read texts of the Chicana canon but also the American literary canon in general as evidenced by its persistent inclusion in many secondary school curricula (Cummins 82). For her part, Cisneros is one of the most successful Mexican-American authors to date, notably receiving the National Medal of Arts in 2016 (Sánchez Díez). While she has forged a path for her own work, Cisneros admits that there remains much work to do. In a 2011 NPR interview on *Talk of the Nation*, she expressed pessimism about the current state of race relations in the United States. When asked what Esperanza's experience would be in the current socio-political climate, she responded:

"Oh, I think the situation's gotten worse for Esperanza, I'm sorry to say" and then continuing:

I say that because, you know, when I wrote that book, I wrote it from someplace, a very optimistic young women in her early 20s, hoping things would get better in the United States for people of Mexican descent. But, you know, I could never dream what would happen post-9/11 and with the community being under siege as it is right now with Mexican people really being vilified at this time of American history. (Cisneros, "New and Established")

Her youthful idealism, it seems, is tempered by what she considers a constant siege on people of color in a post-9/11 world. The Donald Trump presidency, of course, has not offered any sort of reprieve from this sort of vilification, something for which she has also expressed much disdain in recent years (Sanchez Díez). In the rest of the NPR interview, she voiced concern for the state of Chicano/a literature, noting that not enough young Mexican-Americans are becoming authors nowadays due to their difficult circumstances, publication barriers, lack of grants, and limited examples of success. While her work continues to inspire, Cisneros suggests that more torchbearers are needed to convince the youth that their story is

worthy of being told in their own unique way, to grant them "permission to tell it the way they talk it" (Cisneros, "New and Established"). The next generation must take inspiration from Esperanza and Cisneros in order to make real social progress.

Despite Cisneros's pessimism about the current state of Chicana literature, there are many seeking to make change for women in ways that Esperanza would likely support. Clearly, in a world recently rocked by sexual misconduct allegations brought to light by the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, as well as Ni Una Menos in Latin America (whose goal, explicit in the title, is to counter femi-cidal culture), the themes of *The House on Mango Street* are as relevant as ever.²⁸ Maybe unsurprisingly, as women and men banded together at the 2018 Grammy Awards in support of the Time's Up movement, the symbol they elected to protest gender inequality and sexual abuse in the music industry was a white rose, which for them symbolized "peace, hope, and resistance" (Romano par. 4)—an attempt, it seems, at reclaiming or reappropriating the symbol of the rose to raise awareness for gender inequality. Perhaps only time will tell if this choice served to overcome the rose's inherent connotations, or if as with Esperanza's trees, the moment has arrived to choose a new metaphor for resistance to the patriarchy, one which a new generation of women will create for the future.

NOTES

¹ Carmen Haydée Rivera posits that Esperanza adopts a new name in the vignette "My Name" in order to rid herself of oppressive cultural baggage but nevertheless honors her heritage and her original name by remembering and writing about the people who helped shape her.

² Serge Ricard explains how Esperanza constantly inhabits a space between binary oppositions—dreamed space/lived-in space, interiority/exteriority, childhood/adulthood, Anglos/Hispanics, etc.—which she must negotiate in order to move toward the future with hope instead of despair.

³ Reuben Sánchez highlights Cisneros's play on the restrictive conditions of Mango Street as a sort of homelessness which is countered by "the home in the heart" that she will construct in her future.

⁴ María Elena de Valdés discusses how Esperanza's desire of a house of her own and her aspirations to become a writer help resolve the turbulence she feels growing up on Mango Street.

⁵ Šárka Bubíková studies *The House on Mango Street* alongside other female ethnic *Bildungsromane*, pointing out the commonalities present between them in terms of the importance of the house and the street.

⁶ Virginia Dessús Colón analyzes Nicholasa Mohr's *Nilda* with *The House on Mango Street*, revealing how the female protagonists follow many conventions of the male *Bildungsroman* but must additionally deal with the complications of being female in a male-dominated world.

⁷ Leslie Gutiérrez-Jones sees this book as a way for Cisneros to renovate the genre of the patriarchal *Bildungsroman* by creating a space where the young female can thrive as a result of her individual and communal goals.

⁸ Maria Karafilis proposes that Cisneros as well as Antiguan-American novelist Jamaica Kincaid colonize the *Bildungsroman* genre, usurping the power to represent their respective cultures from the hands of the dominant elite.

⁹ Dianne Klein focuses on how Esperanza navigates growing up with an aim toward cultural responsibility.

¹⁰ Juan Antonio Perles Rochel rejects some prior interpretations of the book which describe Esperanza's journey as a materialistic quest for the "American Dream," suggesting that Cisneros's *Künstlerroman* disrupts patterns in mainstream Chicano literature.

¹¹ Elisabetta Careri, like Martin, describes the horizontality and verticality of the spaces in the book and how Esperanza transgresses borders in order to forge her identity.

¹² Juanita Heredia studies how the characters in Cisneros and Nicholasa Mohr traverse urban spaces and navigate cultural boundaries in order to find their place in society.

¹³ Ana María Manzanar Calvo discusses the process by which Esperanza deconstructs traditional bourgeois boundaries which segregate different ethnic groups through the creation of a "house of words" for herself and others.

¹⁴ Julián Olivares's contribution is discussed near the end of this section.

¹⁵ Yomna Saber proposes that Esperanza, as a "brown *flâneuse*" who roams about the barrio, reads the city and its inhabitants very differently from the traditional male *flâneur*, granting her a female gaze which combats the objectifying male gaze.

¹⁶ Juan Daniel Busch posits that Esperanza must engage in a complex process of negotiating the labels that society gives her and those she gives herself, discarding the former and identifying with the latter.

¹⁷ Adrienne Atkins performs a phonological analysis of "My Name" showing how the lyrical prose employed by Cisneros reflects the theme of how names relate to identity.

¹⁸ Beth Brunk analyzes the book in terms of Cisneros's focalization techniques, revealing the complex way the author switches between adolescent and mature versions of Esperanza to empower the narrator while simultaneously highlighting the distressing social reality around her.

¹⁹ Rose Marie Cutting speaks to Cisneros's reflections on the power of naming in bestowing or withholding power.

²⁰ Leslie Petty analyzes how the culture of Mango Street presents rigid binaries which classify women as good or bad, identifying them with the Virgen or Malinche, concluding that Esperanza refuses to accept either classification.

²¹ Leticia Romero Chumacero contrasts the motif of closed doors/windows with that of Esperanza's search for freedom.

²² Careri posits that the trees are Esperanza's teachers who help her resolve the tension between her cultural roots and her aspirations as an author.

²³ Suzanne Roszak asserts that the four trees are a token gesture by city officials to avoid taking any real action; Esperanza must use them as an example to remind herself of the injustices she is fighting.

²⁴ Geoffrey Sanborn sees reflections of Emily Dickinson's "Four Trees—upon a solitary Acre—," a source of writerly inspiration for Cisneros.

²⁵ Valdés conceives of the trees, with which Esperanza is compared directly, as the perfect metaphor for the girl's tenacity.

²⁶ Leslie Petty briefly mentions "Linoleum Roses" but relies heavily on Julián Olivares's insights on the topic.

²⁷ See, for example, Darío's poem "Los cisnes" in which he mentions Garcilaso by name.

²⁸ Case in point is Amy Cummins's 2018 article, in which she discusses at length the book's persistent incorporation in secondary school curricula as well as the potential ramifications of its inclusion in a post-MeToo climate. Cummins suggests that educators need to approach the book cautiously, pointing out that omitting the discussion of sexual assault or not dedicating enough time to unpacking how Cisneros treats the weighty topic may be inadvertently damaging. For Cummins, Cisneros's text is the perfect springboard for examining and critiquing the way rape and sexual assault are treated in society at large.

WORKS CITED

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Atkins, Adrienne. "Linguistic Artistry in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: A Phonological Analysis of 'My Name'." *Crítica Hispánica*, vol. 30, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 7-11.
- Beltrán-Vocal, María. "La problemática de la chicana en dos obras de Sandra Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street* y *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*." *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1995, pp. 139-51. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23021725. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Bode, Rita. "Mother to Daughter: Muted Maternal Feminism in the Fiction of Sandra Cisneros." *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, edited by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010, pp. 287-301.
- Bolaki, Stella. "'This Bridge We Call Home': Crossing and Bridging Spaces in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *eSharp*, vol. 5, 2005, pp. 1-14.
- Brunk, Beth L. "En Otras Voces: Multiple Voices in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Hispanófila*, vol. 133, 2001, pp. 137-50. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43807170. Accessed May 4 2018.
- Bubíková, Šárka. "'Everywhere Else Is America, But in This House It's China!': The Role of House and Street in American Female Ethnic Bildungsromane." *Growing Up a Woman: The Private/Public Divide in the Narratives of Female Development*, edited by Soňa Šnircová and Milena Kostić, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 178-201.
- Busch, Juan Daniel. "Self-Baptizing the Wicked Esperanza: Chicana Feminism and Cultural Contact in *The House on Mango Street*." *Mester*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1994, pp. 123-34.
- Careri, Elisabetta. "Home, Streets, Nature: Esperanza's Itineraries in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Landscapes of Writing in Chicano Literature*, edited by Imelda Martín-Junquera, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 13-22.
- Chakravartee, Moutushi. "Shock Therapy: Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Indian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1994, pp. 21-25.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Books, 2009.
- Cisneros, Sandra. "New and Established Writers Redefine Chicano Lit." *Talk of the Nation*, interviewed by Neal Conan, National Public Radio, 27 January 2011. Transcript, <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/27/133277380/new-and-established-writers-define-chicano-lit>. Accessed 5 June 2019.
- Crawford-Garrett, Katherine. "Leaving Mango Street: Speech, Action and the Construction of Narrative in Britton's Spectator Stance." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 40, 2009, pp. 95-108, doi.org/10.1007/s10583-008-9069-5.
- Cruz, Felicia J. "On the 'Simplicity' of Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2001, pp. 910-46. Project MUSE, doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2001.0078.
- Cummins, Amy. "Teaching the House on Mango Street in the #MeToo Era." *Teaching the Canon in 21st Century Classrooms: Challenging Genres*, edited by Michael Macaluso and Kati Macaluso, Brill, 2019, pp. 81-92, doi.org/10.1163/9789004389311.
- Cutting, Rose Marie. "Power and Powerlessness: Names in the Fiction of Sandra Cisneros." *Xavier Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1998, pp. 33-42.
- Darío, Rubén. "De invierno." *Azul...*, Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1988, p. 352.
- Dessús Colón, Virginia. "Vivencias de una minoría: El Bildungsroman femenino en *Nilda* y *La Casa en Mango Street*." *Morada de la palabra: homenaje a*

- Luce y Mercedes López-Baralt. Vol. 1. Edited by William Mejías López, Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2002, pp. 599-607.
- García, Alma M. "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980." *Gender and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1989, pp. 217-38. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/189983. Accessed 14 March 2020.
- Gutiérrez-Jones, Leslie S. "Different Voices: The Re-Bildung of the Barrio in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*, edited by Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, State U of New York P, 1993, pp. 295-312.
- Haydée Rivera, Carmen. "Breaking the Rules: Innovation and Narrative Strategies in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*." *Ethnic Studies Review*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, pp. 108-120.
- Heredia, Juanita. "Down These City Streets: Exploring Urban Space in *El Bronx Remembered* and *The House on Mango Street*." *Mester*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1993, pp. 93-105.
- Karafilis, María. "Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the Bildungsroman in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1998, pp. 63-78. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1315091. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Kelly, Joan. "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789." *Signs*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1982, pp. 4-28. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3173479. Accessed 6 February 2020.
- Klein, Dianne. "Coming of Age in Novels by Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros." *The English Journal*, vol. 81, no. 5, 1992, pp. 21-26. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/819980. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Kuribayashi, Tomoko. "The Chicana Girl Writes Her Way In and Out: Space and Bilingualism in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women's Writing*, edited by Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp, State U of New York P, 1998, pp. 165-77.
- La Vega, Garcilaso de. "Soneto XXIII." *Garcilaso: Obras*, Espasa-Calpe, 1963, p. 225.
- Lorris, Guillaume de, and Jean de Meun. *The Romance of the Rose*. Translated by Charles Dahlberg, Princeton UP, 1995.
- Manzanas Calvo, Ana María. "*The House on Mango Street* and Chicano Space." *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, vol. 7, 2000, pp. 17-26.
- Martin, Karen W. "The House (of Memory) on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Counter-Poetics of Space." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2008, pp. 50-67. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27784760. Accessed 6 February 2020.
- McCracken, Ellen. "Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: Community-Oriented Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence." *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, edited by Asunción Horno-Delgado et al., U of Massachusetts P, 1989, pp. 62-71.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures*, edited by Laura Mulvey, Indiana UP, 1989.
- Olivares, Julián. "Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, and the Poetics of Space." *The Americas Review*, vol. 15, no. 3-4, 1987, pp. 160-70.
- Perles Rochel, Juan Antonio. "Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* as a 'Bildungsroman.'" *Estudios de la mujer en el ámbito de los países de habla inglesa*, edited by Ana Antón-Pacheco et al., vol. 3, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1998, pp. 223-32.
- Petty, Leslie. "The 'Dual'-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *MELUS*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2000, pp. 119-32. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/468222. Accessed 6 February 2020.
- Ricard, Serge. "La Désespérance d'Espérance: Espace rêvé, espace vécu dans *The House on Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros." *L'Ici et l'ailleurs: Multilinguisme et multiculturalisme en Amérique du Nord*, edited by Jean Beranger et al., Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1991, pp. 175-87.
- "Roman de la rose." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 12 Mar. 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-de-la-rose. Accessed 1 May 2019.
- Romano, Aja. "Why Grammys Attendees Will Be Wearing White Roses: Hundreds of Women Have Mobilized to Tell the Grammys, 'Time's Up'." *Vox*, 28 Jan. 2018, https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/1/26/16936616/why-2018-grammys-white-roses. Accessed 1 May 2019.
- Romero Chumacero, Leticia. "Puertas y ventanas de *La casa en Mango Street*: escritura y memoria en una novela de Sandra Cisneros." *Confluencia: Revista Hispánica de Cultura y Literatura*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2004, pp. 175-86.
- Roszak, Suzanne. "Coming of Age in a Divided City: Cultural Hybridity and Ethnic Injustice in Sandra Cisneros and Veronica Roth." *Children's Literature*, vol. 44, 2016, pp. 61-77. Project MUSE, doi.org/10.1353/chl.2016.0022. Accessed 5 April 2018.
- Saber, Yomna. "The Charged Strolls of the Brown *Flâneuse* in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2013, pp. 69-87. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41932640. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Saldívar, Ramón. *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. U of Wisconsin P, 1990.
- Sanborn, Geoffrey. "Keeping Her Distance: Cisneros, Dickinson, and the Politics of Private Enjoyment." *PMLA*, vol. 116, no. 5, 2001, pp. 1334-48. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/463538. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- Sánchez, Reuben. "Remembering Always to Come Back: The Child's Wished-For Escape and the Adult's Self-Empowered Return in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *Children's Literature*, vol. 23, 1995, pp. 221-41. Project MUSE, doi.org/10.1353/chl.o.0455. Accessed 14 March 2020.
- Sánchez Díez, María. "La escritora Sandra Cisneros: 'Nunca creí que llegaríamos a un punto en que 'mexicano' sería un término peyorativo.'" *Univisión*, 20 Feb. 2017, https://www.univision.com/noticias/politica/la-escritora-sandra-cisneros-nunca-crei-que-llegariamos-a-un-punto-en-que-mexicano-seria-un-termino-peyorativo?cmpid=444222. Accessed 31 May 2019.
- Scalise Sugiyama, Michelle. "Of Woman Bondage: The Eroticism of Feet in *The House on Mango Street*." *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1999, pp. 9-20.
- Sloboda, Nicholas. "A Home in the Heart: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *Aztlán*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1997, pp. 89-106.
- Valdés, María Elena de. "In Search of Identity in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1992, pp. 55-72, doi.org/10.3138/CRAS-023-01-04.