

## = Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories =

Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories is a book of short stories published in 1991 by San Antonio @-@ based Mexican @-@ American writer Sandra Cisneros . The collection reflects Cisneros 's experience of being surrounded by American influences while still being familially bound to her Mexican heritage as she grew @-@ up north of the Mexico @-@ US border .

These tales focus on the social role of women , and their relationships with the men and other women in their lives . The majority of the characters are stereotypes : men embody machismo while women are naïve and generally weak . Cisneros focuses on three feminine clichés : the passive virgin , sinful seductress , and traitorous mother . Not properly belonging to either Mexico or America , the Chicana protagonists earnestly search for their identity , only to discover abuse and shattered dreams . Apart from focusing on these issues of struggling females , Cisneros simultaneously develops the readers ' sensitivity towards the lives of immigrants .

The vignettes are quite short on average ; the longest is 29 pages , while the shortest is fewer than five paragraphs . Despite such limited space , Cisneros experiments with daring poetic prose in her storytelling ; for example , each story presents a new character with a distinct literary voice and style . Such writing has earned her the title of an accomplished Chicana poet , with the added credentials of her published books of poetry *My Wicked Wicked Ways* ( 1987 ) and *Loose Woman* ( 1994 ) .

## = = Background = =

From early on , a bond ran throughout Cisneros 's family as a result of being separated from their homeland and having to live as Mexican @-@ Americans in Chicago . Cisneros was born into a family of seven children and was often singled out as she was the only daughter . Despite the abundance of sibling playmates , Cisneros always felt lonely as a child , thus prompting her to begin creating stories to vary her daily routine .

After many years of writing , Cisneros used *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* to explore the failed relationships of the female characters via their reactions to the men in their lives . This feminine focus in the stories may reflect Cisneros 's own views on relationships , as she does not appear to have a strong connection to any male figures in her life : " For her , men seem to be a utility that a woman turns on and off as required . " As the writing is from a Mexican @-@ American immigrant 's point of view , this feminism contends not only with the stereotype of gender , but of class and race as well . Cisneros " creates stories , not explanations or analyses or arguments " , which describe her feminist views with " more provisional , personal , emotional , and intuitive forms of narrative " .

An example of her feminine focus is found in the title story " *Woman Hollering Creek* " , which concentrates on a woman who is physically abused by her husband and feels drawn towards the nearby creek . She becomes depressed and sits beside the water with her new baby , contemplating how a woman could be driven crazy . Cisneros develops this tale , which has also been found slightly modified in Aztec , Greek , and Spanish cultures , from the legend of *La Llorona* ( Spanish for " weeping woman " ) , a ghost story found in Mexico and Texas . In the myth , " a beautiful young woman named Maria falls in love and marries a handsome , rich boy , and their union is blessed with two sons and a daughter " . Soon after , the man loses his affection for his wife . Maria , knowing that her husband no longer loves her , drowns their three children in the river and then herself . Upon reaching heaven , Maria is told that she cannot enter until she has found her children . She is sent back to Earth , where she wails sorrowfully for her children . According to legend , any child that happens upon her ghost is pulled into the river and drowned . The real *Woman Hollering Creek* , a body of water just off Interstate 10 in Texas , is the river which Cisneros mentions in her story . The protagonist in " *Woman Hollering Creek* " is rescued from her abusive husband by two strangers before she goes mad .

## = = Plot summaries = =

Cisneros 's collection of stories is divided into three sections . The first section , which focuses on the innocence of the characters during childhood , is called " My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn " . The following section , called " One Holy Night " , includes two short stories highlighting the troublesome adolescent years of its characters . The final section , called " There Was a Man , There Was a Woman " , concentrates on characters during their tumultuous adulthood . Most of the stories in the collection are between one and fifteen pages in length ; " Eyes of Zapata " , the longest story , is 29 pages long , while " Salvador Late or Early " and " There Was a Man , There Was a Woman " each occupies a single page .

The first and second plot of the story in this book shares the title , " My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn " , with its corresponding section and is a short narrative about an unnamed narrator and her best friend Lucy Anguiano , the " Texas girl who smells like corn " . This vignette offers a snapshot into life just north of the United States @-@ Mexico border for two girls who are presumably of Mexican descent . Lucy 's home is portrayed as a low @-@ income , Mexican @-@ American family . Her mother is overworked and busy with many children while her father is rarely around . However , the story focuses on the freedom that the girls have when no one of authority is watching ; for example , waving at strangers , jumping on mattresses , scratching mosquito bites , picking scabs , and somersaulting in dresses .

The book 's second segment , " One Holy Night " , contains two short narratives focusing on adolescent females and the way their self @-@ worth is affected by the tension of remaining loyal to Mexico while integrating into the American lifestyle . The title story " One Holy Night " introduces the reader to a young teenage girl , Ixchel , who , in her quest for true love , meets a 37 @-@ year @-@ old man named Chato . He lies to her about belonging to ancient Mayan royalty , seduces her , and then abandons her , only to return in an attempt to kill her . In her youth and naivety , Ixchel desires to be romanced by someone with alleged Mexican roots , only to be disappointed by the reality of having fallen in love with a Mexican @-@ American serial killer .

The final section , entitled " There Was A Man , There Was A Woman " , includes the title story " Women Hollering Creek " , " Eyes of Zapata " , and " Never Marry A Mexican " , these being three out of the thirteen stories contained in this portion of the book . The title story , " Woman Hollering Creek " , is about a Mexican woman , named Cleófilas , who marries Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez . After moving across the border to Seguin , Texas , her hopes of having a happy marriage , like the characters she watches in the telenovelas , are dashed . Throughout their marriage , Juan Pedro is unfaithful , abusive and often leaves her in isolation . As her depression increases , so does her interest in the legendary figure , la llorona , and the creek named after her that runs behind her house . However , unlike this " weeping woman " , who chooses death as a means to escape her unloving husband , Cleófilas , in a sense , chooses life . With the aid of two independent women , Felice and Graciela , she is able to leave her life of abuse and escape back to Mexico .

Clemencia is the Chicana protagonist of the story " Never Marry a Mexican " , who experiences rejection by her white lover . She takes revenge on this man by luring his naïve son into a lover ? s role , and makes it known that in due time , this young man will inevitably pay for his father ? s transgressions .

" Eyes of Zapata " is a story that looks into the life of female protagonist , Inés , who offers a reflection on her life in the context of her illegitimate relationship with Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata . She struggles with being constantly abandoned by her lover , who is off " revolutionizing the country " , and she describes her efforts to raise a family on her own despite hardships such as famine , disease , and poverty . In the end , she speaks about Zapata 's assassination , revealing his failure to the revolution and Inés makes it evident that essentially , Zapata , her unfaithful lover , has failed her and this protagonist is left clinging to dreams that can no longer exist .

= = Characters = =

As this book is a collection of short stories and contains many different protagonists , the following is a selection of the book 's main characters who most exemplify the qualities of the three sections of the book ( youth , adolescence , and adulthood ) , or who have the most impact on Cisneros 's

use of female archetypes :

Lucy Anguiano , the childhood friend of the narrator in " My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn " , is a dark skinned , Texas girl with eyes like knife slits . She is from a family with nine children , an exhausted mother and an absent father . She influences the narrator ' s desire to share in the unadulterated and simple pleasures that childhood can bring .

Ixchel , the self @-@ named protagonist of " One Holy Night " , is a thirteen @-@ year @-@ old girl who lives in Chicago with her uncle and grandmother who immigrated from Mexico . Employed by her uncle , every Saturday , this young teen sells produce from his pushcart . Ixchel being a foolish girl , ignorantly gives herself to one of her customers , a captivating , yet dangerous 37 @-@ year @-@ old man . Over time , she realises that she has been seduced by a mass murderer but remains unable to reconcile herself with the fact that she is still in love with him .

Chaq Uxmal Paloquín is another self @-@ named character in the story " One Holy Night " , nicknamed Boy Baby , but whose real name is Chato , which means fat @-@ face . He was born on the streets , along with numerous brothers and sisters , in a Mexican town called Miseria . In this story he has grown up and is now a 37 @-@ year @-@ old serial killer who seduces and then abandons the young , naïve protagonist by romanticizing her with a lie about being from an ancient line of Mayan kings .

Inés , the protagonist in " Eyes of Zapata " , whose mother was raped and murdered for living an illegitimate lifestyle , is the mistress of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata . Inés struggles with being defined by the different roles she must play in her relationship with her lover . She is frustrated with the power of the male patriarchy that pushes her to be not only Zapata ' s lover , but also the mother to two of his children and his " political sister " in their shared fight for freedom .

Cleófilas is the protagonist of the title story " Woman Hollering Creek " , who recreates the image of la llorona . She is a traditional Mexican woman who naïvely allows her father to give her in marriage to a man who would become her abusive , unfaithful husband . However , through the hardships of her marriage , she is empowered , to fight for her rights . This is solidified when she meets Felice and Graciela , two independent , wage @-@ earning women who act as new role models for Cleófilas . In the end , they help her escape this abusive lifestyle .

Clemencia is the Chicana protagonist of " Never Marry a Mexican " , whose life choices can be related to those of the historical figure La Malinche , an indigenous woman who befriended the Spanish Conquistadors in the 16th century . Both La Malinche and Clemencia were mistresses to men of a different ethnicity than their own , " doomed to exist within a racial and class @-@ cultural wasteland , unanchored by a sense of ever belonging either to [ their ] ethnic or [ their ] natal homeland " . Clemencia ' s final revenge in this vignette is not only a triumph in the memory of La Malinche , but also for the women who feel that their value depreciates if they do not have a husband .

Rosario ( Chayo ) De Leon is a character who writes the last prayer note in " Little Miracles , Kept Promises " ; a collection of letters in Cisneros ' s book , from Mexican @-@ Americans to the Virgin of Guadalupe , the patron saint of Mexico who symbolizes female virginity . Chayo ' s letter provides a contrast between the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche . She illustrates the difficulties of living as a modern Chicana with her beliefs on religion , race , and gender being constantly challenged . In attempts to free herself from being caught in between her modern day Chicana lifestyle and her Mexican heritage she begins to redefine who she is as a woman . In order to do this Chayo must accept that she is not quite malinche or virgin and she does this by acknowledging " the Virgin ' s pacifism and Malinche ' s sexuality through knowledge of her own Indian heritage " .

= = Themes = =

There are many themes found in this book ; some that are recurring are roles in society , religion , relationships , and also hybrid nature of American and Mexican ethnicities . Within these short stories Cisneros concentrates on the identities which women appropriate as a result of relationships , and how these are connected with their roles in society . Critic Mary Reichart observes that in Cisneros ' s previous work as well as " in Woman Hollering Creek ( 1991 ) , the female characters

break out of the molds assigned to them by the culture in search of new roles and new kinds of relationships . Cisneros portrays women who challenge stereotypes and break taboos , sometimes simply for the sake of shocking the establishment , but most often because the confining stereotypes prevent them from achieving their own identity . " An example of this is Cleófilas , who had hoped for a better life after leaving her home in Mexico to live in the United States . The soap operas she had seen had led her to believe that her life was going to be a fairy tale . Instead , with a failing marriage and another child on the way she sees that her life resembles only the saddest aspects of a soap opera . Another example of this is found in the final section of this book , entitled " There Was A Man , There Was A Woman " , where Cisneros illustrates how women can use their bodies as political instruments in their attempts to fight against male domination . The two female protagonists in " Never Marry a Mexican " and " Eyes of Zapata " use their bodies in attempts to gain recognition and acceptance from husband and lover . However , in doing so , they face the problems of objectification and oppression ; two issues which end up adversely shaping the characters ' identities . In the end , the illegitimate societal roles of these women influence their quest for female identity . For example , Inés , in " Eyes of Zapata " , talks about the role she plays as lover , not a wife : " You married her , that woman from Villa de Ayala , true . But see , you came back to me . You always come back . In between and beyond the others . That 's my magic . You come back to me . "

The protagonists are examined not only as individuals , but also by how they connect to people in their lives , such as in the conflicting love and failed relationships between man and woman ; mother and daughter . For example , critic Elizabeth Brown @-@ Guillory notes of the story " Never Marry a Mexican " : " Cisneros portrays the mother as a destructive emotional force , alienating and condemning her daughter to repeating her own mother ' s destructive powers . " This unsuccessful relationship between daughter and mother also affects the ways in which the women relate to men , as the mother is left at fault for any problematic situations with the daughter 's male companions . For example , the daughter Clemencia remembers : " Never marry a Mexican , my ma said once and always . She said this because of my father . ... I ? ll [ Clemencia ] never marry . Not any man . "

Cisneros also incorporates religion as she " pays tribute to the faith of simple people who express their petitions and gratitude . " This is especially apparent in her story " Little Miracles , Kept Promises " , where people make petitions to the Virgen Mary , such as : " Madrecita de Dios , Thank you . Our child is born healthy ! Rene y Janie Garza , Hondo , TX . "

From the experience of growing up within two cultures Cisneros was able to combine both ethnicities , and in her stories she develops a major theme of hybridity between the American and Mexican cultures . She draws upon her life experience as she " depicts the situation of the Mexican @-@ American woman : typically caught between two cultures , she resides in a cultural borderland . The topics of the stories range from the confusions of a bicultural and bilingual childhood to the struggles of a dark @-@ skinned woman to recognize her own beauty in the land of Barbie dolls and blond beauty queens . " Because these issues are complex , Cisneros does not try to resolve all of them . Instead , she attempts to find neutral ground where the characters can try to meld their Mexican heritage with an American lifestyle , without feeling homesick for a country which , in some cases , the women have not even experienced .

Although the book has recurring themes such as , ( Chicana ) feminism , Cisneros uses her power of observation so her stories and narrative are not overwhelmed by these themes . This feminism is portrayed as " women who establish identities for themselves , but also develop an independent , confident , even exultant sexuality " . Not only this , but they learn to " love ... [ men ] as they wish , and to establish sisterhood , mutually supportive relationships with other women . "

Cisneros displays an abundance of poetic prose which uses frankness to captivate an audience . Reviewer Susan Wood suggests the reader sees that " Cisneros is a writer of power and eloquence and great lyrical beauty " . Critic Deborah L. Madsen has said that " the narrative techniques of her fiction demonstrate daring technical innovations , especially in her bold experimentation with literary voice and her development of a hybrid form that weaves poetry into prose to create a dense and evocative linguistic texture of symbolism and imagery that is both technically and aesthetically

accomplished ". Madsen emphasizes Cisneros 's creative ability to combine both prose and poetry .

She also changes her narrative mode according to the demands of the story . For example , her narrative point of view almost continually changes , sometimes using first person , as we see in the story " Little Miracles , Kept Promises " , and sometimes third person , as in " La Fabulosa : a Texas Operetta " . Additionally , " Never Marry a Mexican " is characterized by the consistent use of interior monologue . Cisneros used this style in her previous novel *The House on Mango Street* where she mastered writing from the point of view of Esperanza ; however , " moving on meant experimenting with many voices " . She accomplished this in *Woman Hollering Creek* where she uses " a complex variety of voices and points of view . " Moore Campbell states that " [ it ] is this deluge of voices that Ms. Cisneros so faithfully taps in her work . "

Cisneros intertwines the American and Mexican cultures linguistically , as " [ her ] stories are full of Spanish words and phrases . She clearly loves her life in two worlds , and as a writer is grateful to have ' twice as many words to pick from ... two ways of looking at the world . ' A sometime poet , Cisneros uses those words so precisely that many of her images stick in a reader 's mind . Of two people kissing , for instance , she writes : ' It looked as if their bodies were ironing each other 's clothes . ' "

= = Reception = =

Cisneros has been honored with several awards as a result of *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* , including the PEN Center West Award for best fiction , the Lannan Foundation Literary Award , the Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award , and , in 1993 , the Anisfield @-@ Wolf Book Award . K. Prescott states that once the book was published , *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* was well @-@ received because women of many cultures could relate to the stories : " Cisneros surveys woman 's condition ? a condition that is both precisely Latina and general to women everywhere . Her characters include preadolescent girls , disappointed brides , religious women , consoling partners and deeply cynical women who enjoy devouring men . They are without exception strong girls , strong women . " Marcia Tager comments again on the characters , saying that Cisneros " writes with humour and love about people she knows intimately " . For critic Ilan Stavans , the stories are not just words , but " a mosaic of voices of Mexican @-@ Americans who joke , love , hate and comment on fame and sexuality ... They are verbal photographs , memorabilia , reminiscences of growing up in a Hispanic milieu . " The *American Library Journal* and *The New York Times* honoured *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* as a noteworthy book of the year . The *New York Times* reviewer Bebe Moore Campbell wrote in 1991 that " [ these ] stories about women struggling to take control of their lives traverse geographical , historical and emotional borders and invite us into the souls of characters as unforgettable as the first kiss " . Apart from much praise , one criticism is that Cisneros stereotypes Hispanic men and women in her stories . Stavans argues that the males " are always abusive , alcoholic and egotistical " , while the women are " naïve [ and ] doll @-@ like " .

Susan Wood comments on the publication of *Woman Hollering Creek* by Random House : " Despite the growing number and influence of Latinos in the USA , the only identifiably Latin 's names ? with a few exceptions like Oscar Hijuelos ? on books published by major houses are those translations of Latin American novels . "