Counter-Storytelling as Resistance in Chicana Feminist *Bildungsromans*

Amany Abdessabour Khalfallah M. (*)

The present study proposes that the selected novels; *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros, *Call Me María* (2004) by Judith Ortiz Cofer and *Tequila Worm* (2005) by Viola Canales are considered Chicana feminist *Bildungsroman* novels. These novels depict the life stories of three Latina teenagers who are struggling to achieve their educational prospects in defiance to the male-dominated, *macho*, Latino community and the mainstream Anglo-American negative stereotypical images. Therefore, they are doubly oppressed by Latino *macho* culture and mainstream Anglo-American culture as well. In response to these obstacles, the female protagonists, Esperanza, María and Sofia have chosen to venture off their journeys of maturation and self-exploration through education. They have managed to challenge and defy Latino cultural norms and the negative stereotypical images of Latina women. Through their stories, the authors have succeeded to present a counter narrative of Latina young-adults who seek to pursue their educational ambitions and achieve their life goals despite disappointing surroundings. Therefore, this study is going to define *Bildungsroman* as a genre in the first place, and how these novels fit the defined genre and in which variation they lie. The present research also depicts the emergence of the

(*) This paper is part of a Ph.D. thesis entitled *"Counter-Storytelling as Resistance in Selected Novels by Sandra Cisneros, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Viola Canales"*, supervised by Prof. Muhammad Muhammad Shaa'ban, Professor of English Literature, English Department, Minia University, and Prof. Ismail Abdel-Ghany Ahmad, Assistant Professor of English Literature, English Department, Sohag University.

Chicana Feminist Movement and its relation to the original Chicano Movement and the etymology of the term "Chicano."

1. <u>Bildungsroman, Chicana, and Feminism: Connecting the Dots</u>:

a) *Conceptualizing "Bildungsroman" as a Genre*

The *Bildungsroman* novel as a genre has first appeared in the intellectual and social milieu of eighteenth-century Germany, and has traditionally been defined as the novel of formation or education as it consists of two German words, "Bildungs" which means "Formation" or "Education" and "Roman" which means "Novel." The German term for the hero or the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman* is "bildungsheld." The *Bildungsroman* is also regarded as a pedagogical narrative and this didactic characteristic was highlighted by Karl Morgenstern, who originated the term "*Bildungsroman*" as a concept within literary discourse in 1819 while Wilhelm Dilthey popularized it. (Morgenstern 647). Amy Cummins and Myra Sheridan argue that Morgenstern regarded the *Bildungsroman* as "a subcategory of the modern novel" and he pointed out that its form can impact the developmental trajectory of its reader, for the *Bildungsroman* not only looks "inward" at its protagonist's development, "but outward, into the real world and toward the development of its audience" (19). The prominent prototype of the genre which originated the paradigm of the *Bildungsroman* was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) or *Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship*.

M. H. Abrams also defines the *Bildungsroman* as a German term signifying the "novel of formation" or the "novel of education," and that the subject of these novels "is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world" (132). More than a

coming of age, a *Bildungsroman* shows a character's formation and shaping, or *bildung*. A standard glossary for literary terms, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines the *Bildungsroman* as "a novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood or adolescence to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place and role in the world. Also called an *apprenticeship novel* or *novel of formation*" (Murfin 39). *Bildungsroman* then is supposed to trace the minute development of the protagonist throughout his/her journey of self-exploration and maturation. Kathleen Kuiper also defines the novel of formation in *Prose*: *Literary Terms and Concepts*, *as* "a class of novel that deals with the maturation process, with how and why the protagonist develops, both morally and psychologically" (29).

The *Bildungsroman* genre pays peculiar attention to the growth and development of the protagonist and this is the unifying concept of *Bildungsroman* and its very defining characteristic. Annie O. Eysturoy in her book, *Daughters of Self-Creation*: *The Contemporary Chicana Novel*, supports this view and proposes that "the general intention behind the traditional *Bildungsroman* is to render a realistic depiction of human self-development" (29). This development is thought to be achieved on several levels whether psychological, moral, spiritual, emotional, intellectual or ideological. That development results from the interaction and even the conflict between the protagonist and the surrounding world as the protagonist's community is thought to be "the locus for the experience and to some extent the antagonist of the *Bildungsheld*" (6). Eysturoy contends that "it is the protagonist's response to his or her particular environment, the interplay between social and psychological forces, that determines the direction of each individual process of self-development" (5).

b) *Three Chicana* "*Künstlerromans*":

There are several other specific terms (all originating from the German language) have been used to subcategorize works written under the *Bildungsroman* genre. These terms emphasize the significance of the themes of formation and growth at the core of every *Bildungsroman,* even if they are not as often used as they formerly were. Allison Bugler argues that the terms that come under the *Bildungsroman* genre's umbrella include, *Entwicklungsroman* which is a novel of development yet it differs from *Bildungsroman* in that "it does not necessarily involve the process of growing up." *Erziehungsroman* which means a "novel of education" that focuses on "schooling and knowledge, whether academic or otherwise." In the same vein, Manfred Engel proposes that *Bildungsroman* is "a subgenre of the *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of development) — just as the *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education, e.g. Rousseau's *Emile*, 1762)" (265). Other variants include, *Künstlerroman,* which is the story of the development of an artist, and finally *Zeitroman,* a novel that depicts the evolution of the protagonist's socio-cultural atmosphere and era along with his own personal development" (Bulger).

In the three studied *bildungsromans*, Esperanza, Sofia and María are aspiring artists who depict their lives and prospected futures through creative imagination. Esperanza and María write poetry while Sofia is a budding writer. This budding creativity of the protagonists turn the novels into an offshoot of the *Bildungsroman* genre, that is *Künstlerroman,* or the portrayal of an artist or an individual in the process of becoming an artist. Sofia in *Tequila Worm* is like Esperanza in *House of Mango Street* in which both of them "tell and write stories about their neighborhoods, honoring and preserving memories" (Cummins 33). All three girls here, Esperanza, Sofia and María aim to "create their own identities and defy geographic constraints without losing connection with the barrio" (33).

Lacking exemplary figures or role models, the female protagonists have to imagine their own future of self-realization and independence through creativity which is an act of imagination. For Esperanza, María and Sofia, writing fiction or composing poetry has become a process of creative self-formation that allowed them a redefinition of their Mexican/ Chicana identity. Sofia parallels Esperanza who seeks her self-empowerment through writing about her community which gives her a feeling of contentment and security. Each of them finds her relief in composing poems or telling and writing stories about herself and her community. Their distinct abilities in writing poetry and nonfiction have without controversy qualified these novels as *Künstlerromans*, the life stories of artists. Kuiper defines it as "a novel dealing with the formative years of an artist" where the female protagonist "has to contend with not only confining social and cultural definitions of her role as a woman, but also with the very concept of herself as an artist" (30, 21). Consequently, "resisting old roles while imagining new ones is thus essential to an autonomous female self-definition" (Eysturoy 88).

Elena Muiño in *Creative Muse*: *The Young Female Artist and the Role of Arts in Women's Künstlerromans*, contends that "the artist-heroine" has begun in the twentieth century literature with the development of the first-wave of feminism, and that many Modernist female authors were engaged with the "figure of the woman artist" like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, to name but a few. (Muiño 10). This led to a change in the genre from the classic female *Bildungsroman* storyline, which typically ends in marriage, to the *künstlerroman*, where female protagonists are portrayed as dedicated "vocational artists." Their works now address topics related to gender and artistry and where creativity and self-development intersects. M. H. Abrams claims that ***künstlerroman*** is a significant subtype of the

Bildungsroman which "represents the growth of a novelist or other artist into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft" (133). Eysuroy claims that *Künstlerroman* "portrays the development of an individual who becomes or is on the threshold of becoming an artist of some kind" (4). The *Bildungsroman* as a novel per se is a product of imagination and "the imagination of the protagonist plays a crucial role in this process as this faculty enables him or her to transcend the limitations of social reality" (6).

The most essential theme of many female *Künstlerromans*, in Eysturoy's view is "the intimate connection between the quest for self-development, a sine qua non of the female *Bildungsroman* and the concept of creativity as a catalyst for self-discovery" (21). She argues that "down through the ages creativity has been defined into exclusively male terms," and that the "male primacy in the creative realm has been reinforced in religion and myths where the creator is always male" (21). She maintains that even Wordsworth in his definition of the poet as a man speaking to men, testifies why almost the majority of literary men, critics and writers have concurred upon this definition and that creativity is solely restricted to men. In the same context, Susan Gubar in "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," argues that "if the creator is a man, the creation itself is the female, who, like Pygmalion's ivory girl, has no name or identity or voice of her own" (250). She goes further and contends that if the ivory girl is a product of a male's imagination, then it is an object created for the use of man. Likewise, the depiction of men as creators and women as the objects of creation is but a recurrent pattern in myths throughout history and this justifies the objectification and exclusion of women from the creative sphere, as "women have been barred from art schools as students yet have always been acceptable as

models" (250). Therefore, women were reified as objects of creativity, virgin sheets or blank papers which creative males convert into great creations. This model of the pen writing on a virgin page is but "a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation—a secondary object lacking autonomy" (253). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, claim that "women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to *mere* properties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts because generated solely… by male expectations and designs" (81). Consequently, women were excluded from the creation of culture and were only used as culture artifacts, and this may "explain the centuries-long silence of so many women who must have had talents," and it also justifies the problematic situation when women aspire to be authors or creators as this deconstructs the commonly known traditions and myths. (84)

Therefore, through the selected novels, the female authors endeavor to subvert the received legacy of the exclusive creativity of men by featuring female artist heroines who defy the conventions of their communities and those of the *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* genres as well. All the protagonists of the *künstlerromans* examined in this study aspire to create and make art, particularly in moments when they experience loneliness, misunderstanding, or rejection, demonstrating that art-making is closely linked to the human need to be understood and to connect with others who share their experiences. Muiño accentuates the "value of the creative process" and the fact that it is "crucial to a woman's right to express herself in oppressive situations, whether personal or social" (7). This "vocation of artistic creativity" is thought to be, in Muiño's words, the "fulcrum for self-definition and social change" as art

is “not mere words, sounds or paintings, but as an expression of our inner being” (7). Thus, through their creative texts, the female-artist protagonists have managed to express themselves and achieve self-empowerment for “the inability to communicate makes people powerless” (Hölber 73). In the same vein Cummins also pinpoints that “this use of creativity gives liberatory power to the formation experience of bildung” (34). Moreover, the barriers of gender roles and ethnic bias are eradicated when “the Chicana protagonist/writer claims the right to articulate her own experiences from her own perspective, to name and create her own image of herself” (Eysteroy 137). Consequently, the experience of maturation or the *Bildungs* process of the female protagonists could not only be achieved bur reach its apex as well.

In *Mango Street*, Esperanza recounts how much she is in love of telling stories: “I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. I tell them after the mailman says, Here's your mail. Here's your mail he said. I make a story for my life, for each step my brown shoe takes” (Cisneros 67). She writes down everything that aches her and once written it is released and she is relieved. She “put[s] it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much” (67). Esperanza’s aunt Lupe was the one who encouraged her to write and keep writing. She fostered this gift in Esperanza from the very beginning. Speaking of Aunt Lupe (Guadalupe)—whose name also bestows on her some sort of sacredness reminiscent of the Virgin of Guadalupe —Esperanza relates:

> She listened to every book, every poem I read her. One day I read her one of my own. I came very close. I whispered it into the pillow: I want to be like the waves on the sea, like the clouds in the wind, but I'm me. One day I'll jump out of my skin. I'll shake the sky like a hundred violins. That's nice. That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing,

Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free." (Cisneros 39)

In *Call me María*, María's talent is quite obvious for the reader since the very outset of the story where the first two chapters are introduced in poem form. The first chapter-poem or vignette entitled "Call me María," carrying the same title of the novel, María composes a poem introducing herself to the reader. In an extract of it she says:

It is a beautiful day
even in this barrio, and today
I am almost not unhappy.
I am a different María,
no longer the María Alegre
who was born on a tropical island,
and who lived with two parents
in a house near the sea
until a few months ago,
nor like the María Triste, the lonely
barrio girl of my new American life.
I am fifteen years old.
Call me María. (Cofer 9, 10)

The second vignette, entry, or chapter-poem is entitled, "Like the First Flower," in which María describes to the reader her new cave-like apartment at the barrio after immigrating to the States with her father;

There is one window at sidewalk level
from where I can see people's legs up to their knees.
It is where I have my desk, even though
it is supposed to be the living room.
Since my mother has not joined us yet,

I am the decision maker when it comes to our home,
the furniture, the meals we eat, even the household budget.
I keep our place in twilight when Papi is away.
I like its cavelike atmosphere. I feel safe
from the crazy street. From my underground
home I will watch the world go by until
I am ready to surface, *una flor en la primavera*. (Cofer 11)

In another chapter, María feels contented when her teacher bestows upon her the title of a "poet," although her gift is crystal clear for the reader. She proudly recounts:

Mr. Golden hands us a list. "Make declarative sentences from these words,"
Mr. Golden declares.
1. contains a universe
2. sand, concrete, horizon
3. I dream
4. blue, clear
My brain contains a universe.
I dream in Spanish of white sand beaches.
The ground I walk on is hard concrete,
but between the tall buildings, on a clear day,
I can still see the blue horizon.
"María, you are a poet," declares Mr. Golden. (Cofer 48, 49)

In *Tequila* Worm, Sofia started to write stories at boarding school in the notebook that Tía Petra gave her to help her become a good *comadre*. It all started as letters that she intended to send to her family at home, yet later on, it turned into a notebook or a storybook she used to jot

down any idea that came into her mind when she feels homesick. Sofia finds that "[m]y stories were helping me feel less homesick" (Canales 157). She recounts:

> I leaped out of bed and took Tía Petra's plastic-covered notebook from my desk drawer. I grabbed a pen and my secret flashlight. Brooke was fast asleep. I got back into bed, pulled the sheet over my head, and clicked the flashlight on. I started writing. It started as a letter to Papa, but it turned into a story about the image of my family all waltzing around the kitchen table. I made my characters talk. (Canales 135)

Sofia tells Brooke, her roommate, compelling stories about her family and barrio. Storytelling and writing help Sofia feel contented and relaxed by imagining her whole family around, "I finished my story at two in the morning, with Papa kissing me goodnight. I smiled, turned off the flashlight, and went happily to sleep. I felt they were all in the room with me" (135). Storytelling makes Sofia the successor of Doña Clara, who is presented as the storyteller of the barrio who used to visit multiple neighborhoods to keep their memories alive among many families. *The Tequila Worm* as a text is thought to be Sofia's narrative as *The House of Mango Street* is represented as Esperanza's.

Through their stories, Esperanza, María, and Sofia seem to provide concrete models of young girls who make art against limiting conditions in order to retain their independence, pursue their ambitions, and cultivate their sources of creativity. The protagonists' artistic creativity helps them express their inner beings. The value of their creative texts lies on the very fact that it gives them liberatory power to trigger self-definition and achieve self-empowerment.

2. Chicana Feminism

In examining the evolution of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre the reader would encounter many changes that have taken place ranging from a male-centered, eighteenth-century notion of personal development and education to female perspectives on identity and self-determination. The present research's main argument is the counter-narratives presented by the selected Latina-American novelists as resistance to the mainstream stereotypes of Latino community in general and Latina women in particular. Consequently, the three selected novels are but evident manifestations of Chicana feminist *Bildungsromans* or *Künstlerromans* to be more accurate. As a way of resistance and opposition to the traditional Anglo, male-dominated *Bildungsromans*, Cisneros, Cofer, and Canales offer the readers counter-stories featuring Chicana feminist protagonists with a dominance of female characters searching for their self-fulfillment and venturing into a journey of self-exploration and education. In order to demonstrate this argument, Chicana Feminism as a term should be clarified in the first place.

a) *Origin of the word* "*Chicana*":

The term "Chicana" refers to a Mexican American woman with social and political awareness. Using the term Chicana denotes more than Mexican American heritage. To be Chicana indicates that "a person holds a political commitment to understanding and working to redress injustices based on ethnicity, race, gender, or identity" (Cummins 22). It was until the sixties that the term Chicano was used by Mexican Americans pejoratively to identify newly arrived Mexican immigrants and Mexicans from rural areas. However, the term held a positive connotation in the sixties during the Chicano Student Movement. Sonia Saldívar contends that "Chicano" was "a politicized term used to identify an ethnic, nationalist individual or position, one opposed to accommodation and

assimilation with United States' culture and society" (13). The derivation of the term actually comes from "Mexicana," which was pronounced "me-chi-cana" and it was used to refer to somebody with a mix of Spanish, Indian, and Anglo descent. (Hölber 8). Also, the term is thought to be used to "describe Mexicans who moved to North America and gradually lost their Mexican identity and adapted more and more to the Anglo way of life" (8). Concerning the etymology of the term "Chicana," Gloria E. Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist writer and activist, points out:

> In the late 1960s, one theory arose that this term was invented in the Mexican city of Chihuahua when the Chi was added to cano of Mexicano and created the term Chicano/a. Another theory claims the term is based on an indigenous term from the Mexicas-tribe where the x was pronounced as sh and therefore the tribe was called Meshicas. Mexican became Meshican and the "me" was eventually dropped. Another theory says that during the migration of Anglo Americans they preferred to call the Mexicans chicos, which also stands for the derogatory term "boy". Later chico changed into Chicano when the ano of Mexicano was added. (qtd. in Hölber 8, 9)

The 1960s marked a significant period for Mexicans in America. It was during this decade that Chicano literature was first introduced, alongside efforts by Mexicans to reclaim territories lost during the US-Mexican war of 1846 to 1848. The concept of "*Chicanismo*" served as the foundation for the establishment of political groups like *La Raza Unida,* (National United Peoples Party) and MECHA (*El Movimiento Estudiatil Chicano de Aztlán*), the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán and the Chicano/a Movement. These variant movements are considered the core of the societal turmoil of the sixties and early seventies and they serve as the backdrop that triggered the development of a revolutionary Chicana

ethnic and class epistemology. Works focusing on *Chicanismo* primarily emphasized traits such as individualism, spirituality, integrity, dedication to life, and the celebration of Chicano culture and identity. The term "*Chicanismo*" signifies the pride that individuals of Mexican descent possess in their indigenous and Spanish heritage, encapsulating the duality of mestizo/a origins. Mexican Americans employ this term to articulate their profound pride in their cultural identity, ethnicity, and language.

b) *The Chicano/a Movement*:

was essentially a breakaway faction of the original Chicano Movement which was "a resistance movement to the cultural hegemony of dominant Anglo-American society and a critique to the assimilationist, consensual American ideological hegemony" (Saldívar-Hull 92). Chicana women participated fervently in Student Movement of Aztlán (MEChA) and played a pivotal role in the Chicano Movement until their fellow Chicano men began to ignite dissension and division after "promoting the idea that Chicano cultural preservation required women's deference to male leadership and support of the traditional family" while the movement's organization and leadership were solely assigned to men. When Chicana women began to question their positions in the movement, they were accused of being "traitors" and "sell-outs to white feminism" as they rejected this gendered marginalization. As a result, they united and formed their autonomous feminist movement.

Feminism in general claims to give women of any color or ethnic background a place in society and politics. In former days, women of color were excluded from civil rights organizations which were mainly dominated by males, as well as from movements which were organized by white females. That is why "women of color remain at the margin of society and are seen as the obvious 'other' " (Hölber 5). Consequently, the

Chicana movement adopted a newborn offshoot of feminism that is concerned with Chicanas' tribulations and oppressions. It aims to redress their grievances and eliminate prejudices of any kind to which they are subjected. Chicana feminism differs from mainstream white feminism by its focus on issues and topics that concern individuals of Chicana descent, which are not experienced by their White female counterparts. Cindy Peña et al define Chicana feminism as "a theory that was born in the late 1960s as a political movement by women of Latin descent to resist hegemonic discourses by Chicano men during the Chicano movement and to distinguish themselves from mainstream White feminism," and it aspires to demolish "systems of oppression based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and other structures that sustain domination over women, particularly those of Latin descent" (66). Therefore, Chicana feminism is not only a theory but rather a "consciousness for Latinas to explore their different intersectionalities (i.e., ethnicity, race, immigrant status, language, or sexuality) and validate their ways of knowing Chicana feminist epistemology" (Peña et al 66).

Chicana feminism builds on recognizing that "the Chicana's experience as a woman is inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture" (Yarbro-Bejarano 213, 214). In addition, Chicana feminist works raise consciousness of mainstream hegemony and domination, and Latinas' resistance and identity formation. Chicana feminism sheds much light on "the intersectional aspects of oppression due to gender, ethnicity, and economic standing" (Cummins 22). It entails a resistance against the social injustices and oppressions of racism and sexism and it involves an imperative for societal transformation. Chicanas suffered from patriarchy or "*machismo*" within their own Chicano community and discrimination and racism from the dominant American

society. Therefore, the Chicana movement "found itself in a double bind, caught between the Chicano movement, which rebelled against assimilation into the dominant US culture, and their feminist aspirations" (Velasquez 2).

c) *Countering the traditional Anglo (male-dominated)* "*Bildungsroman*":

There is a stark difference between the Chicana female *Bildungsroman* and its Anglo male-dominated counterpart. Amy Cummins argues that there are some specific features or attributes that must be present for a young adult novel in order to be categorized as a Chicana feminist *Bildungsroman*. These features or characteristics include, "narrating the coming of age of a Chicana protagonist over an extended time, portraying her developing and understanding of a dual identity as a Mexican American, and connecting the protagonist's development with valuing of family, community, and collectivity" (19). Eysturoy posits that what distinguishes the Chicana *Bildungsroman* from its Anglo counterpart is "the consciousness of difference, which goes far beyond mere gender consciousness" (134). In the same vein, Martin Japtok suggests that the *Bildungsroman* is a tempting genre to ethnic American writers because it gives them a sense of uniqueness and individuality and this "assertion of individuality makes sense in the face of a denial of individuality, or even of humanity" (24). *Bildungsroman* as a genre has become popular among ethnic women writers according to Hoover Braendlin, as its "objectivity" offers them "distancing devices, such as irony and retrospective point of view, which convey the complexity for selfhood and confirms its universality" (77). *Bildungsroman* also encourages female writers to condemn and disclose the established patriarchal social norms and values. It has become an attractive genre for authors to express the development

of their female protagonists and their fight for self-realization and self-identification.

Hoover Braendlin proposes that the *Bildungsroman* of those "disenfranchised Americans— women, blacks, Mexican-Americans, Native-Americans, homosexuals— portrays the particular identity and adjustment problems of people whose sex or color renders them unacceptable to the dominant society; it expresses their struggle for individuation" (75). The "double discrimination" that minority women are subject to affects them in their process of self-definition and development. Avendaño also maintains that "the Chicana [woman] being twice a minority, has been silenced both by the larger American hegemonic culture and within her own Chicano culture" (39). Thus, minority Chicana women often have to contend with prejudice and sexism not only from their own culture but also from the dominant culture as well. Therefore, they must struggle on different levels in order to attain their self-realization and maturity because they are "devalued both for being women and for their ethnicity." (Avendaño 36). Thus, *Bildungsroman* is an apt genre for Latina and Chicana women writers in particular as it allows them to delve into the complexity of the female identity. Eysturoy proposes that women's *Bildungsroman* "represents the process of unlearning the art of silence" (24), and this justifies why it has become an apt genre for Latina and Chicana women writers in particular as it allows them to unleash their repressed voices and speak up to express the complexities of their Chicana identity.

Barbra Hölber maintains that Chicana or Mexican Americans' works have been flourishing ever since the era of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, showcasing a renaissance of female ethnic writers who managed to create "a distinct and feminist ethnic voice within literature, full of imagery and stylistic features, and aimed to express a

feminist tone by using elements of the traditional culture of their heritage" (5). Labovitz posits that the entrance of the female protagonist into the genre has subverted the traditional structure of the historical male model of the *Bildungsroman*. (246). Labovitz' study, *The Myth of the Heroine: the Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*, specifies the recurring thematic pattern of the twentieth-century female novel of development**,** such as self- realization, sex roles, education, career-determination, attitudes towards love and marriage, philosophical questions and autobiographical elements. (8)

Eysturoy contends that the Chicana *Bildungsroman* diverges from the conventional practice of structuring the female quest story based on the established male-defined framework of personal accommodation to societal and cultural norms, as well as gender-related anticipations. Instead, it illustrates the *Bildungs* of a Chicana as an exploration of self-realization that entails a deliberate pursuit of genuine female identity. (85) Therefore, the thematic features of the female *Bildungsroman* differ significantly from those of its Anglo male counterpart. If the Anglo male *Bildungsroman* is characterized by "the confrontation of the hero with his environment" (Eysturoy 19) then, this confrontation in the case of a female *Bildungsroman* heroine becomes an act of rebellion or defiance against social and cultural gender norms which is essential and inevitable. Wilhem Dilthey argues that "while the male quest for identity is socially and culturally sanctioned", the social norms work as obstacles to women's growth and demand women to 'grow down rather than up'" (qtd. in Eysturoy 16). This justifies "why women's quest for identity can only take place within a context of rebellion" (16).

In application of Amy Cummins' features of a Chicana feminist *Bildungsroman* to the selected novels, which include, "narrating the coming of age of a Chicana protagonist over an extended time, portraying

her developing and understanding of a dual identity as a Mexican American, and connecting the protagonist's development with valuing of family, community, and collectivity" (19), the reader finds that they are clearly achieved in the *bildungsromans* of Esperanza, María and Sofia in which they narrate their stories from their own first-person point of view over an extended time from childhood to maturity portraying their development and maturation experience without being separated or isolated from their families or communities. On the contrary, they have a resolved, unwavering commitment to their community, incessant valuing of their families and staunch belonging to their culture. The three female heroines (*bildungshelds*) understand their dual identities and belonging and are committed to both. Avendaño contends that the "ethnic and class-consciousness" is what distinguishes the Chicana *Bildungsroman* from its Anglo-American counterpart. Another difference from the Anglo-American parallel is that the Chicana female protagonist "doesn't always strive for the autonomy and individuality which Anglo-American feminism has posited as sine qua non of female development, rather, it is a self who is rooted in the ethnic experience, who defines herself in relation to family, community, and traditions" (Avendaño 40). Diane Klein states that since the time immemorial, "the canon of United States literature has included predominantly the coming-of-age stories of white, heterosexual males" (21), and this testifies the importance of countering the predominant white, heterosexual male coming-of-age stories by anti-stereotypical, Chicana feminist *Bildungsromans*.

In the late twentieth-century the *Bildungsroman* genre is thought to have undergone considerable transformations, "not by males of the dominant culture of the United States but by Subaltern groups, thus functioning as the most salient genre for the literature of social outsiders, primarily women and minority groups" (Avendaño 28). According to

Lutes; "the feminist version of this genre [*Bildungsroman*] must create female protagonists that are sufficiently strong to transform society, like their masculine counterparts" (qtd. in Avendaño 29). The Chicana *bildungshelds* are not in favor of either Anglo-American or Chicano definitions of themselves as females. Thus, if it had not been for the strength of will of the female heroines, they would have never been able to achieve their success and their self-attainment.

A recurring topic in Latina or Chicana literary works is patriarchy. The male dominance within the family and also in everyday life plays an important role in their works. However, the major male characters depicted in the novels, namely the fathers of the protagonists are not portrayed as *machos*, namely aggressive and domineering, but caring and hardworking like Esperanza's father, encouraging and supporting like Sofia's father or peaceful and independent like María's. Moreover, the negative stereotyping of Chicana females is an issue that bothers Latina writers. And this testifies why the protagonists have new expectations and aspirations that defy the negative stereotypical images of Latina women which are propagated through mainstream media. So, they claim their right to depict their own experiences from their own perspectives and to create their own image of themselves. Out of their ambitions and aspirations, they manage to challenge the deep-seated conventions of the patriarchal society.

This role, namely challenging social norms and achieving their aspirations and independence, does not necessitate isolation from their families who care for them because the self they create is not the one who fights for autonomy and self-fulfillment that Anglo-American feminism has asserted as an indispensable condition for the advancement of women. On the contrary, the conclusion of *The House on Mango Street*, shows how Esperanza intends to come back to Mango Street and help people

who are still in the barrio; In the vignette, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Esperanza dreams of leaving the place where she grew up: "One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango" (Cisneros 101), but the last lines indicate that she will return one day: "I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (102). Similarly, *The Tequila Worm* underscores Sofia's commitment and belonging to the place where she has grown up. She travelled hundred miles away to achieve her educational prospects at St. Luke, while at the same time she kept her connection to her home and extended family at the barrio. She ventured on her journey far away from home in order to achieve her father's wish for her to join Harvard university, the same university from which president J. Kennedy graduated. Eventually, Sofia's construction of the plaza, a replica of the place where Latino families used to gather in the happy old days, accentuates her belonging to her community and her perseverance and contentment to achieve their simple and modest dreams. In juxtaposition, Esperanza lacks defined strategies for her assistance to her community as *The House on Mango Street* presents an ambiguous narrative regarding Esperanza's actions, however, it is suggested that the text per se serves as Esperanza's contribution through the documentation of communal narratives about her community. In *Call Me María*, María's difficult decision, to leave her hometown in Puerto Rico, and her mother and move to the U.S. with her father, shows her strong-willed and independent character that managed to make such a harsh decision. Speaking of the absolute commitment and belonging to Latino culture, Gloria Anzaldúa ratifies this and confirms that "to separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own. Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch

with my origins because lo mexicano is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back" (21).

d) *Countering the Traditional "Bildungsroman" Form*:

Concerning the pattern of the female *Bildungsroman,* Elizabeth Abel sets forth two narrative patterns in the female versions of the *Bildungsroman*. The first pattern is similar to the classic *Bildungsroman* in being told chronologically, with "a continuous development from childhood to maturity," which is the basic pattern in Youth literature, "the circular journey," in which "the plot follows the trajectory of home, a departure from home, adventure, return, then home" (79). The second pattern is characterized by an awakening or by epiphanies or a sudden striking understanding of something, often has a pattern of "deferred maturation" in which development occurs in adulthood (Abel et al. 71). The reader could easily notice that the selected novels use the first pattern that narrates the story of development chronologically from childhood to maturity in the life stories of Esperanza, María and Sofia, however, the traditional linear chronological order of events is not crystal clear in the selected novels.

Esperanza's story for instance, is recounted in vignettes, lazy poems, or loosely associated fragments in a series of short stories where the events are interconnected but not necessarily consecutive. Barbra Hölber regards *Mango Street* as a "mestiza text" that could be "both lyrical and realist" as "it has the rhythms of poetry and the narrative power of fiction" (68). Nicole Garcia also argues that "there is no singular genre that applies to Cisneros's text but several, and none completely fits the characteristics of the text," and she proposes to read *Mango Street* as a generic limit case whose reading results in deconstructing the system of genre altogether (71). Cisneros once explained that in writing *Mango Street* she purposefully intended to write a book that is different from the

mainstream, and that she searched for the most “un-poetic slang” that she has never read before. Cisneros used a childish voice narrator of interrelated detached vignettes and the outcome was like a diary or a memoir of a young female protagonist who is trying to find herself and achieve her dreams. Cisneros declares that her writing of *Mango Street* was a "quiet revolution, perhaps a reaction taken to extremes, but it was out of this negative experience that I found something positive: my own voice" (Cisneros 8). Hence, Cisneros’ iconoclastic style of writing *Mango Street* is a real incarnation of a Counter-story that defies literary conventions of the mainstream or patriarchal social norms of Latino community.

Concerning format, *Tequila Worm* is unquestionably in the novel format and it is narrated from Sofia’s first-person viewpoint in a chronological order telling her story from her childhood memories until her becoming a university student. María’s story is also narrated from her own point of view in a chronological order narrating her life and journey from Puerto Rico to the United States, and is divided into forty-eight miscellaneous entries varying from letters to poems to snapshots of her daily life whether back in the island or recently at the barrio. *Call me María*'s frequent use of chapter-poems makes it like a verse novel that is reminiscent of *Mango Street*'s vignettes. The very fact that *Mango Street* and *Call Me María* require determination concerning the classification of genre signifies a departure from and a countering of conventional paradigms. Nicole Garcia contends that the “indeterminacy and nonconformity with regard to genre sheds light on the entire genre system and its influence on our reading and interpretive strategies” (73).

The use of the “First-person point of view” in the three novels under study is not used fortuitously as it is the most suitable perspective in a *Bildungsroman* narrative. Eysturoy contends that the distanced

omniscient narrator cannot present "the oppositional nature of the interaction between the female self and socio-cultural values and gender role expectations" (86). Therefore, the first-person perspective used in the three novels helps the protagonist to "become the conscious subject of her own *Bildungs* story," as intrinsically, "when the female 'I' takes on the narrative authority, she gains authority over her own life and her own story" (86). Through this narrative point-of -view, the protagonist can actively participate in the process of her self-formation and self-definition. Thus, when the protagonist becomes the narrator of her own story, "the subversion of the traditional female *Bildungs* story is made possible" (Eysturoy 86).

Using the first-person narrative viewpoint in the Chicana *Bildungsroman* is in itself an act of rebellion to the socio-cultural confinements to the female self. The "I" of the protagonist becomes, as Eysturoy puts it, "the consciousness of a *Bildungsroman,* the rendering of the female *Bildungs* process" that is based upon the female experiential perspective. In *Mango Street, Call Me María*, and *Tequila Worm* the Chicana protagonists become the narrators of their own *Bildungs* experiences. In each of these *Bildungsromans*, the Chicana narrator is an active agent of her own female quest story. She is the central consciousness of the text who takes full authority over the story and over her own life and experiences as a Chicana-American in her *Bildungs* process. Through the process of self-discovery within a socio-cultural context, the narrator has "a conscious exploration of the contradictions between the internal perception of self and the external definitions of womanhood" (Eysturoy 87).

Through her own voice, the protagonist/ narrator has the authority to interpret the contradictions between her internal quest for self-definition and the external socio-cultural definitions of womanhood and

femininity. She has the full authority to present the socio-cultural confinements and also to subvert these confinements to defend her own cultural and gender identity. In those Chicana *Bildungsromans*, not only the first-person narrative perspective consciously and openly becomes active in the *Bildungs* process of the protagonist, but also the narrative strategy that defies the traditional and conventional chapter-narrative form of *Bildungsroman*. Each novel consists of a collection of short episodes or vignettes or lazy poems as in *Mango Street* and full poems in *Call me María*, that defy the conventional form of a novel. The chapters or the episodes do not follow the confinements of the traditional linear plot. They are interrelated and interconnected but can be detached or read separately. In adopting this narrative strategy, the authors underscore the, non-linear fragmented nature of the female *Bildungs* process.

The narrative voices of Cisneros, Cofer and Canales are striking, positive and active. The use of the "first-person point-of-view" gives their works the certain "autobiographic" style and makes the reader assume that the protagonist or the author tries to confess the double oppressions that are imposed upon them by mainstream Anglo-American culture and their Latino culture as well. The selected works of the authors are considered a kind of storytelling. They create stories that are both distinctive and varied, reflecting the richness of their cultural background. The Chicana authors managed to step out of their culture trap and make their voice heard through their writings. They are striving to recreate and redefine the Chicana's life and be role-models for their fellow Latinas who could not free themselves from cultural shackles. They use the genre of *Künstlerroman* to reflect the experience of growing up as an artist in the barrios of the United States. Through their writings they urge Chicanas to fight against male dominance and persist on their quest for personal identity. Eysturoy accentuates that "[*b*]*ildungsroman* is generally

perceived to contain some degree of autobiography," and she defines it as "the somewhat autobiographical novel of formation portraying a young *man*'s development from innocence and ignorance to maturity and knowledge" (Eysturoy 4, 8).

Actually, the authors rely on their childhood memories and experiences and thus they use autobiographical features in their novels. When the reader examines the life stories of the authors under study, he/she could realize a great deal of symmetry between their lives and those of their protagonists. The readers often ask whether Esperanza is Cisneros herself and she answered in her introduction to the novel: "Am I Esperanza? Yes. And no. And then again, perhaps maybe. One thing I know for certain, you, the reader, are Esperanza" (Cisneros 8). She elaborates:

> When I began *The House on Mango Street*, I thought I was writing a memoir. By the time I finished it, my memoir was no longer memoir, no longer autobiographical. It had evolved into a collective story peopled with several lives from my past and present, placed in one fictional time and neighborhood—Mango Street. A story is like a Giacometti sculpture. The farther away it is from you, the clearer you can see it. (5)

Cisneros frankly declares that her novel was intended to be a memoir at first, yet afterwards "*Mango Street* ceased to be my story," she contends. In her introduction to *Mango Street*, Cisneros recounts how the novel came into being:

> I arranged and diminished events on *Mango Street* to speak a message, to take from different parts of other people's lives and create a story like a collage. I merged characters from my twenties with characters from my teens and childhood. I edited, changed, shifted the past to fit the present. I asked questions I didn't know

> to ask when I was an adolescent. But best of all, writing in a younger voice allowed me to name that thing without a name, that shame of being poor, of being female, of being not quite good enough, and examine where it had come from and why, so I could exchange shame for celebration. (6)

The "semi-autobiographical" element is also noticed in *Call me María*, as the protagonist María is a Puerto Rican girl like Cofer, who was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to the United States when she was two years old. Also, Cofer's mother felt nostalgic and uprooted when she left her homeland like María's mother who refused to leave Puerto Rico to stay in the United States. Likewise, Canales was born in McAllen, Texas like her protagonist, Sofia in *Tequila Warm*. In addition, Canales, like Sofia, has received a scholarship to an Episcopal boarding school in Austin. In *Tequila Warm*, Sofia was graduated from Harvard college like her creator, and also studied in Harvard Law School and became a lawyer. Hence, Sofia's story parallels her creator's life story. Therefore, the three novels are "somewhat autobiographical novel[s] of formation portraying" a young girl's "development from innocence and ignorance to maturity and knowledge" (Eysturoy 8).

e) *Countering the Bildungsroman Content*: *The "Fairytale Plot"*:

The traditional female story of the collective mind that is used to be told to young girls since the time immemorial is the romantic love story in which the protagonist falls in love and then lives happily ever after with her beloved prince or cavalier knight. Literary plot conventions such as J. Fry's "femininity text," or Langland's "Social Romance," or Russ' "Love Story Plot" are conventional and traditional plots that confine women protagonists or characters to a pre-determined role that corresponds to the patriarchal socio-cultural context. These traditional plots "invariably confine women characters to either passive domesticity,

that is, marriage and maternity, or madness and death" (Eysturoy 30). In the selected novels, the reader would encounter a resistance to this "narrative entrapment" to use J. Fre's term (qtd. in Eysturoy 6). A defiant resistance to the deep-seated socio-cultural norms of womanhood and patriarchal society. The three novels manifest a rejection to the traditional trajectories of the female *Bildungsroman*. They demonstrate a divergence from the traditional conventions of the genre. The three protagonists' *bildungs* process leads to their awakening to seek their authentic selves and their development beyond the social confines of patriarchal structures.

The three protagonists are not even interested in feminine issues related to wearing make-up or dressing like a lady, that is why the female heroines are not obsessed with the fairytale love stories or the Prince Charming with whom they will achieve their dreams and live happily ever after. What preoccupies the minds of the artist heroines is their self-realization, educational prospects and career determination. Esperanza, in effect, rejects the American tradition of fairytales, which like the Mexican binary codes of la Virgen and la Malinche, insists that women be passive and wait for men to save them. In "Fairy Tales and Opera, the Fate of the Heroine in the Work of Sandra Cisneros," Laura Gutierrez-Spencer writes of the significance of Cisneros's use of fairytale imagery and the hold these myths have on the young women that surround Esperanza, asserting, "Cisneros's first book [*Mango Street*] includes a feminist analysis of the social and personal consequences for women who believe in fairy tales and wait for Prince Charming to fulfill their existence" (279). In fairytales, the focus is often on the saving of the woman, with little attention to the aftermath of this "salvation" and what is lost by the woman who waits around for it. (26, 27 Valentina).

Unlike her female neighbors who are reflected as desperate housewives or girls waiting for a Prince Charming to save them and to lead with him a happy love story that ends in marriage, Esperanza is presented as strong, independent young girl who knows her path towards success. She declares the beginning of war:

> But I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away. I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. (Cisneros 55)

Esperanza's decision to be strong enough to lead her own future outside the barrio did not happen out of the blue. She has witnessed Rafaela's helplessness in waiting for her husband all day at the window while she is not allowed to go out because of her beauty: "Rafaela, who is still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much, gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (Cisneros 50). Her husband locks her in as she is pretty and he lacks self-confidence. She "dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's" in the fairytale so that she could flee from his imprisonment. (50).

Esperanza notices the victims of a patriarchal society that denies its females their freedom or their right to choose their lives. Esperanza understands that her friends Marin and Sally, though technically older than her, cannot escape their current lives because they have accepted the roles imposed upon them by a sexist misogynist society. They could not

save themselves, but instead could conceive of a man, a super hero to save them as they couldn't save themselves.

The virgin/ whore dichotomy or the binary codes of a sinner or saint confine Sally, Esperanza's neighbor, who is a beautiful young girl used to be beaten by her oppressive father in fear of bringing shame to the family because of her beauty; Sally explains to Esperanza, "[h]e thinks I'm going to run away like his sisters who made the family ashamed. Just because I'm a daughter, and then she doesn't say" (57). Sally's submission to her father's tyranny provokes Esperanza; "But who believes her. A girl that big, a girl who comes in with her pretty face all beaten and black can't be falling off the stairs" (57). She wonders how Sally could bear to live that inhumane life, "he hit her with his hands just like a dog, she said, like if I was an animal." She said her mother "rubs lard on all the places where it hurts. Then at school she'd say she fell. That's where all the blue places come from. That's why her skin is always scarred" (57). Sally's toxic relationship with her father who ought to be her haven of security and source of power is but one simple example of the deteriorated familial relations within Esperanza's neighborhood.

Being surrounded with these negative models is unbearable for a young girl like Esperanza. Yet these desperate images allowed her to gain a precocious experience that would then enable her to make sagacious decisions for her future. She would never think to be like Minerva who "has many troubles, but the big one is her husband who left and keeps leaving" (53). Minerva who is "only a little bit older than me but already she has two kids and a husband who left." However, she is gifted in writing poems like Esperanza who competes with her and "when the kids are asleep after she's fed them their pancake dinner, she writes poems on little pieces of paper that she folds over and over and holds in her hands a long time, little pieces of paper that smell like a dime. She lets me read

her poems. I let her read mine." Nonetheless, she is unhappy "because her luck is unlucky. Every night and every day. And prays." Always sad and desperate, "like a house on fire—always something wrong" (53). In addition, when it comes to marriage, Esperanza will never be preoccupied with procuring a man's attention like Marin for instance, who "is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (27).

Furthermore, Esperanza is discreet enough to refuse to flee from a father's tyranny to a husband's prison like Sally, the child-bride, who marries a "marshmallow salesman at a school bazaar, and she married him in another state where it's legal to get married before eighth grade" (62). A young beautiful girl who used to be beaten by her oppressive father because once he caught her talking to a boy, "he just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt. You're not my daughter, you're not my daughter" (57). Out of terror, she opted for a marriage of escape. She claims to be happy as a new-wife, for she thinks she has become independent and has "her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates. She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape" (62). This childish thinking proves the very falsity of her decision and not to mention her father's oppression or her mother's passivity. The reader could recognize how a naïve girl Sally is when Esperanza enumerates her fake reasons of happiness;

> She likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he is okay. Except he won't let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the

> things they own: the towels and the toaster, the alarm clock and the drapes. She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake. (62)

Among these gloomy female-life models around Esperanza, the reader could notice the only promising model of Alicia, "who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university." In spite of the daily backbreaking home chores, besides her responsibility to take care of her little siblings, she has a dream to follow and to rigorously fight for. She has to take "two trains and a bus," to reach her university, "because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin" (23).

In *Call Me María*, the reader could observe María's reticent nature and deliberate decisions compared to her friends Uma and Whoopee. Unlike her friend and Indian neighbor, Uma, for instance, María is not infatuated with Ricardo, the *papi lindo*, who is the barrio's Casanova or the stereotypical Latin lover. Speaking of the "Latin Lover", María explains to her friends:

> You've heard of the Latin Lover. Men with eyes like tractor beams, like
>
> the kind they use on the starship *Enterprise* to pull in stuff from outer space.
>
> This is what I said when Whoopee, Uma, and I were watching *Star Trek:*
>
> *TNG* and Uma kept breaking into tears because Ricky Moreno had promised to call her after he talked her into going up to the roof with him. (Cofer 53)

On the contrary she plays the role of the wise friend who fights for Uma against Ricky's whimsical whims. She tells the reader about her deep

concern for Uma: "*Uma,* I had warned my friend, *he will break your heart*. The papi-lindo cannot love anyone but himself, and all his conquests are little mirrors he puts up in his room so he can see himself through each girl's eyes. But when he made a song of her name *Uma, mi bonita Uma, ven, ven, ven,* she went to him like an arrow to the target, up the stairs into his arms she raced" (Cofer 70).

María is reflected as prudent and cautious when it comes to romantic relationships. She has no confidence in men and thinks that most of them are perverting and deceitful like Ricardo. Speaking about men, she tells her friend: "But when they saw a girl coming (pink high heels, skirt so short we could not see the hem from the half-view we had of her), they would stop so the papi-lindo could go into his Romeo act. '*Mamacita,* you are a work of art. *Mi amor,* slow down, *por favor*'" (Cofer 54). María is shown to be very circumspect in her view about men. This is clear in her talk with Whoopee;

> "I have heard that there are some Latino men who can make women do
> anything they want."
> "Whaddaya mean, they use voodoo or something?"
> "No, I think it is a talent they develop. They have to learn to be Latin
> Lovers, I think."
> "What kind of talents?"
> "How to look at a girl like she is the most beautiful woman in the world.
> How to say the right thing. I think it helps if they can sing and play the
> guitar." (Cofer 54)

Despite María's constant warnings, Uma never responds and she continues in her infatuation with Ricardo. María desperately recounts;

> Afterward, she brought me
> the words he had spoken in her ear: mi amor, mi vida, Mamacita.
> Words spiced with adobo, with sofrito, and cooked over an open fire.
> I am his life, is this not what it means, María? No, Uma,
> to him you are only a new taste on his tongue, the flavor
> of new spices — el sabor del día. (Cofer 70)

María and her friend Whoopee used to hear the sound of a sobbing. They "both know it is Uma, who watches the street all the time for a glimpse of her love" (54). María is daring enough to confront this reckless irresponsible boy. She declares; "I decide it is now or never. I will tell Ricky that he has to tell Uma that he does not love her and release her from his papi-lindo spell. Or else. Or else?" (Cofer 55). She reprimands him; "Ricardo. I just have one thing to say to you. Stop hurting Uma. Tell her you do not really love her … stop." (56).

Dedicated to her target and educational prospects, María was not distracted by romantic relationships and the fairytale Prince Charming. She has self-confidence and independence that she is not in need for a man to save her or achieve her dreams. She says it clearly: "My goal is to get into college and move into an apartment above ground where I can see the sky through my windows instead of the legs of people on the sidewalk" (Cofer 27). Therefore, María's target of conquering English and joining a good university, was clearly pinpointed and she was quite enthusiastic to achieve it form the very beginning of her story.

In a similar manner, throughout her adolescence, Sofia in *Tequila Worm* ignores and even challenges gender conventions through independence and disinterest in romance and gaudy clothing. She states, "According to Mama and Berta, I'd been so focused on my books that I had missed some of the best movies ever" (Canales 69). Sofia pays minimal attention to her appearance and continues to wear worn-out

sneakers and jeans at age fourteen when her cousin Berta begins to dress up and wear makeup. Sofia recounts: "Berta looked older, pretty, and somehow her teeth didn't even look big anymore. They went perfectly with her face now. Her curly, light brown hair was neatly tied back with a red ribbon, and she had on a bright blue dress with glass buttons in front. She was even wearing makeup. *When did all this happen?*" (Canales 71). On the other hand, Sofia "looked down at my torn jeans, my white T-shirt, my old white sneakers. My hair still looked like Apache hair, as Papa liked to call it—long, dark, and wild" (71).

Sofia is not eager to dress up for dinner at St. Luke's. She follows the rules there just because it is a requirement. Berta scolds her; "You're such a tomboy, and look here," she said, pointing to the dinner picture: "All the girls are in nice dresses. You can't even bother to comb that crazy Indian hair of yours" (76). Even when it comes to dancing, she is not in favor of the convention that boys lead. Sofia has no interest in romance or love stories, contrasting to her double Berta, her cousin and best friend, who marries her childhood sweetheart immediately after high school. Sofia focuses on her study and dreams of becoming a lawyer. She vouchsafes her secret dream to Berta who does not even recognize it; "A lawyer? Women aren't lawyers, Sofia. And especially not Mexican women. They're wives, mothers, and if they're lucky, teachers or nurses. But you can try marrying a lawyer, if you only start dressing better" (Canales 46). Here, the presence of Berta as Sofia's foil makes Sofia's feminist choices even clearer. Sofia grows into a satisfied adult, with no mention of romantic relationships, marriage, or having children.

The three selected novels share one common denominator which is the development of a female protagonist who is in search of self-definition and autonomy and who attempts to escape the traditional plot of the female *Bildungsroman*. Those novels do not fit into the classical, traditional male-oriented *Bildungsroman*. They represent a feminist version which came into being in the seventies. In the novels examined, the Chicana writers attempt to challenge patriarchal authority and power in an effort to free the suppressed protagonists and subvert and

deconstruct the traditional female plot of the *Bildungsroman*. The three fictive female teenagers; Esperanza, Sofia, and María are all involved in the crisis of self-fulfillment. The three girls have had roles assigned to them because of their gender and they had to reject these prescribed roles in their communities and transgress the social codes and norms in order to achieve any degree of personal fulfillment. The three characters are from different countries but are considered different categories of Latino ethnicity. In the selected novels, the authors have attempted to subvert and deconstruct patriarchal powers, constructed female myths and social codes. They tried to liberate the repressed *bildungshelds* by depicting the imposed gender codes and simultaneously creating a substantial definition of female identity. Esperanza, Sofia and María were able to grow up and acquire agency. Unlike the traditional *Kűnstlerroman* where "the protagonist often ends up either single or divorced, usually childless; as if a man or a family prevented her from devoting herself solely to art" (Studenta 18), the female protagonists defied social conventions and rebelled against hegemonic social norms and rejected a culturally imposed female identity. They went through a process of self-awareness that triggered their self-empowerment, and have managed to devote themselves to art and self-attainment without planning to become single, divorced or childless.

3. <u>Dominance of Female Figures</u>:

a) *Inspiring Maternal Female Figures*:

Through Esperanza's story, Sandra Cisneros portrays the Chicanas' situation, namely their oppressions and lost rights "through the eyes of a child" (Hölber 70). In spite of the depressing surroundings and the frustrated desperate housewives in her neighborhood, Esperanza showed a daring and defying personality. "The tattered lives" of the women in Esperanza's neighborhood "are the impetus for Esperanza's desire to transcend her present reality and essential to her realization of how she wants to live" (Valentina 13). Speaking about her great-grand mother whom she inherited her name, Esperanza contemplates:

> In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting … It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse --- which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female--- but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong. (Cisneros 13)

Because of her rebellious and strong nature that she takes from her grandmother, the horse woman as a symbol of strength and beauty, Esperanza criticizes the genderized thinking of the Chinese and Mexican people who do not want their women to be strong and independent. She inherits her great-grandmother's hope, so to speak, for Esperanza's literal meaning is hope, and strong will to challenge the depressing cultural conventions. Her great-grand mother was "a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him" (13). Out of admiration and appreciation to her great-great grandmother, Esperanza wishes that she "would've liked to have known her," and wonders if she "made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be" (13). Esperanza inherited her grandmother's name, nonetheless, she does not want to "inherit her place by the window" for she, Esperanza's grandmother, "looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (13).

In *Call me María*, the reader is confronted with two paragons of strong independent women who are María's mother and grandmother. María's mother is an English teacher in the island and is very dedicated to her vocation. She is also very committed to her homeland for she refuses to leave it and immigrate to the States with her husband who feels homesick for the barrio where he was born. She prefers getting divorced and staying alone at home rather than leaving her motherland, students and family. She has dauntless bravery to face life without a husband who

proved to be incompatible with her. She is daring enough to find another partner who shares her aspirations and interests, a teacher of History at her school. María venerates the image of her mother as she does not even blame her for leaving them but she respects her mother's decision; María contends, "I saw my mother growing stronger as she planted herself more and more firmly in her native soil, opening up like a hibiscus flower, feeding on sand and sun" (Cofer 19). According to this strong mother figure, María grows a sense of independence and strong will to fight for her own dreams. She says; "I will go with Papi. I will explore a new world, conquer English, become strong, grow through the concrete like a flower that has taken root under the sidewalk. I will grow strong, with or without the sun." (Cofer 20). She is quite sure of her target and of her ability to achieve it, even if she has to leave her mother and the sand and sun of her native soil. She patently pinpointed her goal "to get into college and move into an apartment above ground where I can see the sky through my windows instead of the legs of people on the sidewalk," (27).

María is also infatuated by the image of Latina women whom she sees daily at the barrio. She describes their strength, and also wonders if she could be as strong and adamant. She is determined to be strong and steady and to choose her own battles. In reverence she speaks:

> Barrio women with the strong, muscular legs I watch pass by through the grille at the top of my basement window march themselves like warriors to the front lines, to their jobs in factories all day, then return to their tiny, cold apartments to work some more, taking care of children and their mostly absent husbands — many of the younger men of the barrio are the mercenary troops in this war — making their brief appearances, leaving a swollen belly here and there. They also party as hard as they work. On weekends, the ceiling of our basement apartment trembles above me. Bits of plaster sometimes rain on my head from the feet pounding out their *cumbias, pachangas,* and mambos, as they work *"la lucha"* out of their systems. Will I become as strong as the barrio women? *Creo que sí.* Will I dance my troubles away

> after a week of hard work? *Claro que sí.* But I want my *luchas* to be the ones *I* choose. (Cofer 101)

Another inspiring model for María is her *abuela*. Her grandmother is an independent educated woman who is interested in literature and attending theatrical plays. She encourages María to read and is keen to teach her lessons about life in general. She visits María and her father at the barrio to check up on María as María's mother and father were not on good terms. However, she felt homesickness and used to say, "[t]he sun shines every day on my island" (Cofer 65). She indirectly taught María lessons about her belonging to her homeland and used to tell her about the island and how everyone treated each other nicely like family, how they shared what they had. She told her that "*La familia, los amigos, el amor;* that's what mattered" (65). When María's abuela went home, she left a black notebook to María in which she wrote her *pensamientos*, or thoughts each night before going to bed. When María offered to mail it to her she refused and asked her to keep it and translate it to practice her Spanish. And this was her grandmother's way of letting people "know who she really is, and what she thinks is important" (70). In the last page of María's grandmother's notebook there was a quote from *Don Quixote* that she had translated into English to María: "I know who I am and who I may be if I choose" (72), and this was her way to urge her granddaughter to read and also to find meaning and value in life.

In the same context, Sofia's journey to St. Luke's Episcopal school allowed her to discover who she is and to reach a heightened sense of self-worth and awareness. She has experienced her freedom and become able to chart her own future and be the architect of her own destiny. Sofia's idols are her great-grandmother María and her teacher, Coach Clarke who encouraged her to be proud of her culture and to kick with her head or her brain when Sofia told her that she "had inherited [her] great-great grandmother's gift for kicking like a mule" (Canales 41). She urged her to follow her passion for success in her study and in soccer as well.

The glorification of female figures, especially the mother and grandmother images, could not be ignored. The reader could observe how the grandmothers of the three protagonists are inspiring and impressive examples of strong adamant women who are worthy of their granddaughters' love, respect and idolization. The protagonists' crossing and transgressing the borders of gender ratify the efforts of Cisneros, Cofer, and Canales to create a defying, contestatory female voices which reflect the newly-established female consciousness. The importance of the three examined *Bildungsromans* lies on the fact that they are not propagating or depicting the conventions of Chicano patriarchal society; but rather they subvert and undermine these conventions and create on the other hand alternatives for Latina women. Avendaño contends that throughout the history of the novel "the paradigmatic plots have confined women in domesticity and apparent passivity" (8). These paradigmatic plots that are mainly based on "the qualities of strength, autonomy, and aspiration, seem reserved for male protagonists" (8). The novels thus highlight the female protagonists' development and their quest for a non-patriarchal conscribed identities coupled with a real search for their ultimate emancipation. The authors try to affirm the right of female voices to redefine their identity, development and self-definition in a male-dominant culture. Esperanza, Sofia, and María are experiencing a process of character development. They begin their journeys in search for their identities and they struggle to step out of their cultural conventions and self-imposed restrictions. The girls' efforts to gain control and autonomy over their lives is the common trait that characterize their life stories.

Avendaño contends that the Latin-American novel written by women before the sixties has portrayed the female protagonists as being "confined to the domestic sphere and to the search for love as their only possibility for personal realization". Their lives are "centered exclusively on love, had the home as their domain, which was generally presented as a prison" that drowned all of the protagonist's sensitivity and imagination (13). However, in the contemporary version of *Bildungsroman*, the

protagonist is supposed to go through a process of developing her identity and is thought to succeed in achieving her freedom, autonomy, and independence. The female protagonists also have broken away from the established social norms that are imposed upon them and have managed to rebel against social codes that impede their development within society.

Due to their marginalized position within the prevailing cultural context, the female protagonists face serious challenges in achieving the conventional denouement of the *Bildungsroman* narrative, namely, the attainment of self-discovery. In order to attain the self-realization outlined in the *Bildungsroman*, the Chicana/ Latina woman must resist the socially imposed roles that prevent her from achieving agency and self-awareness. Thus she "operates in the world as a self-divided with a 'multiple consciousness' living in her own ethnic culture, which complicates her ability to clearly define herself" (Valentina 3). In *Mango Street*, *Tequila Worm* and *Call me María*, the female protagonists Esperanza, Sofia and María openly resist and defy socio-cultural norms of womanhood by daring to voice what had been unspoken relating to the process of growing up as a Chicana. In order to portray an authentic female *Bildungs* process, the protagonists must be daring to subvert patriarchal traditions and gender-role confinements. In their portrayal of the female Chicana *Bildungs* process, Cisneros, Cofer, and Canales deconstruct the traditional expectations and confinements of the genre both in form and content. They subvert the traditional linear plot and the socio-cultural confinements of the female quest story.

Societal requirements are irreconcilable with the true *Bildung* of the female protagonists, therefore, the constant discrepancy of the developing self and the societal expectations placed on women forms the persistent conflict that permeates much of women's literature. Thus, "the clash between the evolving self and the expected female role in the patriarchal community sets up the recurring leitmotif in the Chicana *Bildungsroman*" **(**Studená 17). Rejecting the submissive helpless Latina women, Hölber accentuates:

> Women should celebrate their womanhood, be powerful and to see their sexuality as normal and not dependent on male desires and wishes. Women should be in control of their own wishes, desire and sexual needs and that they should be in control of their body. Females are not on this earth to just cook, clean, deliver babies and serve their families but should be taken care of and should not be seen as sexual objects of men who look at women as their entertainers, dancers and bearer of children. Females should take the opportunity to step away from seeing their bodies as useful tools but as their own and thus make their own decisions as far as sexuality is concerned" (52)

Social constraints have been a serious impediment to any development for female protagonist. In patriarchal conventional Latino community, unlike males, females have no chance to seek formal education or venture from home to the city in pursuit of independence. Although male heroes have the liberty to set out on their journey of self-exploration, the female heroines have to "struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing [themselves] from marital subordination and dependence" (Brändström 8). Thus, when it comes to education, the boy's formal schooling may be deemed inadequate, prompting his departure from home at a young age to pursue an independent life in the city, but this right is denied for females.

The education or formation process that the protagonist is prone to in the *Bildungsroman* is a recurrent theme in Mexican-American and Chicana YAL literature, and this justifies why many Chicana narratives belong to the *Bildungsroman* genre. In addition, education as a priority for Mexican-American families is used to portray the process of self-development and fulfillment. Sofia's journey to St. Luke's Episcopal school suggests the value of leaving home in order to appreciate it better and of retaining family ties, unlike the conventional, European *bildungsheld* who leaves the provinces behind and never looks back. This theme is of paramount importance within the United States, where the public education system is characterized by an Anglo-centric curriculum and promotes indicators of cultural assimilation.

Sofia contemplates her father's message to her in the graveyard on *Día de los Muertos* many years before, that "our side of town had its own wealth and warmth" (Canales 135). She climbs the stairs to her room, "wondering if this strange world would somehow help me understand better not only the other side but my side as well" (135). At Thanksgiving, Sofia reflects: "I feel like I'm here for my family, too, not just for myself. I love so much about my family, my barrio. Saint Luke's makes me appreciate them more" (160) Here, Sofia's growth includes developing confidence in her own identity. Her self-assurance develops from discomfort at being called "Taco Head" in middle school to telling off Terry, her racist classmate at St. Luke's: "My family didn't cross the border; it crossed us. We've been here for over three hundred years, before the U.S. drew those lines" (Canales 37, 147). This slogan is often reiterated throughout Chicana/o literature. Sofia is sustained by family memories and traditions that provide her the foundation to thrive in the world. Canales describes culturally specific practices that weave a central message of this novel is that Sofia preserves her intellectual identity and uniqueness while also honoring her cultural traditions and maintaining a close connection with her family.

b) *Famous Latina Figures*: *La Virgen de Guadalupe versus La Malinche*:

As feminist Latina authors, Cisneros, Cofer and Canales have managed through the novels under study to present paradigms of Chicana feminist *Bildungsromans* that are replete with female characters who are struggling for identification in their communities. The authors highlight the extended female's family, namely mothers, aunts, God-mothers, *comadres*, cousins, grandmother and great-grandmothers. The Female protagonists are trying to lead their own lives and make fateful decisions. They are struggling to evade their being subjects to oppressive males in an attempt to break the perpetual vicious circle of oppression in their communities. Although "[m]en play an important role in these novels, not as male muses, however, but rather as impediments in their artistic strivings" (Eysturoy 23), there are other examples of men who are

supportive and caring like María's and Sofia's fathers. The female characters vary from the protagonists or the surrounding female friends and family members or references to prominent female icons of the Mexican culture and history like the esteemed Lady of Guadalupe and the disreputable La Malinche.

The Lady of Guadalupe is one of the strongest religious public figures in Mexican-American history who is omnipresent in contemporary Chicana literature. She, in Studená's words, is "a Latino version of the Virgin Mary" (39), and a significant symbol for Mexican community that represents their history, belief and pride. Her image and statue are ubiquitous in Mexican American households. For Mexican American women, the image of the Lady of Guadalupe represents "the values of being a female, a mother, a woman with darker complexion, a mestiza" (Hölber 21). Her significance lies in "her support for women who lack self-esteem, passion and compassion" (22). In accordance with the virgin/whore dichotomy of the Mexican American culture, Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), complains that a Chicana used to have "only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (17). She goes further and argues that: "If a woman rebels, she is a mujer mala [bad woman]. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of a male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a virgin until she marries, she is a good woman" (17). Accordingly, there is a rich legacy in the Latino community of the sacredness of women's submission and purity represented in the iconic Virgin of Guadalupe on the one hand, while, on the other hand, rebellion or defiance of the norms even with good intentions and for positive aims is denounced and condemned as in the case of La Malinche.

In the home culture of the protagonists, "the presence of the Mexican archetype of La Virgen de Gudalupe" which acts as a symbol of purity and chastity is considered "an imposition on their attempt to form completed selves" (Valentina 7). Luis Leal in his essay, "Female Archetypes in Mexican Literature," posits that the image of women

throughout Mexican literature "has been profoundly influenced by two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: that of the woman who has kept her virginity [La Virgen de Guadalupe] and that of the one who lost it [La Malinche]" (Leal 227). Maxwell E. Johnson pinpoints that "the Virgin of Guadalupe is a narrative, an image and a devotion firmly embedded in the religious and cultural consciousness of, at least, Mexican and Mexican-American people" (19). La Malinche is the infamous double of La Virgen de Guadalupe and is "a source of shame to the Mexican male consciousness because of her dual status of being both the violated mother and the betrayer" (Valentina 11). Studená claims that "if La Virgen de Guadalupe represents the cardinal desirable female virtues such as virginity, submissiveness and motherhood, then La Malinche personifies the evil and feared female sexuality" (39). In a conversation with Sandra Cisneros and Rodriguez-Aranda, Cisneros contends: "Certainly that black-white issue, good-bad, it's very prevalent to my work and in other Latinas… We're raised with the Mexican culture that has two role models: La Malinche y La Virgen de Guadalupe. And you know it's a hard route to go, one or the other, there's no in-betweens" (Rodriguez 65).

Therefore, when it comes to women's freedom and independence, women are portrayed as either sinners or saints and no in-betweens, and hence, a Chicana "is conditioned to resist her natural impulses of sexuality and agency in order to maintain her image as a good woman and remain acceptable" in the Mexican community (Valentina 12). Pavlína Studená maintains that Chicana women are "burdened with the deeply embedded virgin/whore dichotomy based on ancient Mexican female archetypes and strengthened by the Catholic Church doctrine" and thus their role in society is deemed to be marginal as they are not expected to play a pivotal one, and if they try to free themselves from the social conventions they are strongly condemned. She maintains that "while La Virgen de Guadalupe is, despite her motherhood, worshipped because of her virginity, La Malinche and La Llorona are both demonized, used as evidence of women's betrayal, vice, and weakness" (Studená 39).

Through their ambitious dedicated protagonists, Cisneros, Cofer, and Canales have managed to deconstruct the one-dimensional stereotype of Chicanas as subordinate, passive and submissive housewives. They have demonstrated that their protagonists have a story to tell of their search for a self-constructed identity. Through these contemporary *Bildungsromans,* the authors have managed to subvert the traditional female images as those protagonists did not abstain from their development. They also have toppled the binary opposition of virtue versus vice, or La Virgin/ La Malinche dichotomy, as the protagonists have managed to pursue their academic aspirations and self-fulfillment without becoming villains or vicious sinners. They succeeded in achieving their goals and constructing their own identities. Through their success to attain their ambitions and to construct their independent potent identities, these novels present a third alternative, an in-between destiny for Latina-American/ Chicana protagonists apart from the virgin/ whore dichotomy. The common denominator among these novels is the female protagonist's impassioned desire for development and her acute quest for a non-patriarchal conscribed role in society and her ultimate emancipation from the deep-seated social norms and codes. For Esperanza, María and Sofia, their budding creativity in writing or poetry has become a process of creative self-formation that allowed them a redefinition of their Mexican/ Chicana identity. Their distinct abilities in writing poetry and fiction have qualified these novels, the life stories of artists or Chicana feminist *Künstlerromans*.

The female protagonists had to break away from the established social norms that are imposed upon them. They rebelled against social codes that impede their development within society. When Sofia's recognized that she has her great-great-grandmother María's ability to "kick like a mule," then she learns to "kick with her head" by accomplishing academic goals, and finally she learns to "kick with her soul" when she becomes the Christmas *madrina* (Canales 3, 169). The recurrent emphasis on "kicking" in *Tequila Worm*, illustrates the urgency for dynamic defiance and self-empowerment. Sofia is accepted within

Mexican American culture without taking part in the stereotypical roles of subservient housewives and submissive girls. Consequently, the *Bildungsroman* is not exclusively a pursuit of identity in itself that captivates Chicana writers, but instead it serves as an examination and expression of the protagonists' journey culminating in their deliberate awakening or epiphany. Hence, the endeavor for genuine female self-development constitutes the primary concern addressed in contemporary Chicana literature. Thus, the female protagonists are compelled to envision their prospective futures. They had to struggle and work in factories like Esperanza, or a packing shed like Sofia, or be her father's assistant like María in order to achieve their aspirations while at the same time being committed to and even proud of their culture and families. Each one of the three female heroines has a dream to lead a different life and to venture into a journey of education through which she can gain her self-empowerment. Each one of them envisions a "house" of her own where she can live independently. The recurrent mention of the "house" is also a symbol of independence, security, and belonging. The three girls dream of a new safe house in which they would live with their family or independently, happily and safely without having to lean to the "window," which signifies imprisonment and oppression, waiting for forbidden freedom and unknown future.

WORKS CITED

Abel, Elizabeth, et al. *The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development*. New England UP, 1983.

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1969.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/ La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*. Spinster, 1987.

Avendaño, Nadia Dolores. *The Contemporary Feminist Bildungsroman in Ángeles Mastretta, Isabel Allende, and Lucha Carpi*. 2003, University of Arizona, PhD Dissertation.

Brändström, Camila. "'Gender and Genre': A Feminist Exploration of the Bildungsroman in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Matha Quest.*" University of Gävle, 2009.

Bulger, Allison. "Bildungsroman." LitCharts LLC,. 5 May 2017. Web. 25 Jun 2024.

Canales, Viola. *The Tequila Worm*, Wendy Lamb Books, 2005.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Random House, 1992.

Cofer, Judith Ortiz. *Call Me María*, Scholastic Inc., 2004.

Cummins, Amy and Myra Infante-Sheridan. "Establishing a Chicana Feminist Bildungsroman for Young Adults." *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*. vol. 24, 2018, pp. 18 - 39.

Engel, Manfred. "Variants of the Romantic Bildungsroman." *Romantic Prose Fiction*, edited by Gerlad Gillespie, Manfred Engel and Bernard Dieterle, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008, pp. 263-295.

Eysturoy, Annie O. *Daughters of Self-Creation*: *The Contemporary Chicana Novel*. University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Garcia, Shelly Nicole. *Genre Matters: Transgression, Innovation, and Transformation in the Writings of Gloria Anzaldua, Sandra Cisneros, and Cherrie Moraga*. 2018, University of California, PhD Dissertation, *ProQuest Dissertation and Theses*.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2000.

Gubar, Susan. "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity." *Critical Inquiry* vol. 8, no.2, 1981, pp. 243-63.

Gutierrez-Spencer, Laura. "Fairytales and Opera: The Fate of Heroine in the Work of Sandra Cisneros." *Speaking the Other Self*: *American Women Writers*, edited by Jeanne Cambell Reesman, Athens: U of Georgia P, 1997, pp. 278- 287.

Hölber, Barbra. *Life, Works, and Identity of Chicana Authors in America*: *An Analysis of Texts by Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and Gloria Anzaldúa*. 2010, Karl-Franzens University, Thesis.

Hoover Braendlin, Bonnie. "Bildung in Ethnic Women Writers." *Denver Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1983, pp. 74-87.

Japtok, Martin. *Growing up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction*. UP of Iowa, 2005.

Johnson. Maxwell E. *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist.* Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Klein, Dianne. "Coming of Age in Novels by Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros." *The English Journal*, vol. 81, no.5, 1992, pp. 21-26.

Kuiper, Kathleen, Ed. *Prose Literary Terms and Elements.* The Britannica Guide to Literary Elements. Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012.

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. *The Myth of the Heroine: The New Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York, 1986.

Leal, Luis. "Female Archetypes in Mexican Literature" *Women in Hispanic Literature*: *Icons and Fallen Idols*. Edited by Beth Miller, University of California Press, 1983, pp. 97-114.

Morgenstern, Karl. "On the Nature of the Bildungsroman." Trans. Tobias Boes. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124.2 (2009): 647–649. Web.

Muiño, Elena Canido. *Creative Muse*: *The Young Female Artist and the Role of Arts in Women's Künstleromans*.

Murfin, Ross, and Supryia Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 4th ed., Bedford St. Martin's, 2018.

Parsegova, Gayana. *Defining the Bildungsroman Genre in Youth Literature: Utilizing Young Adult Texts to Bridge the Gap of Cultural Duality with* "*The House On Mango Street*", "*The Absolutely True Diary Of A Part-Time Indian*", *and "Breaking Stalin's Nose.*" MA Thesis, San Diego State University, 2020.

Peña, Cindy, et al. "Chicana/Latina feminism: What is it and How does it Define Us?." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2023, 2023, pp. 65-75.

Rodríguez-Aranda, Pilar E. "On the Solitary Fate of Being Mexican, Female, Wicked and Thirty-Three: An Interview with Writer Sandra Cisneros." *The Americas Review*, vol.18, no.1, 1990, pp. 64- 80.

Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. *Feminism on the Border*: *Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*. Univ. of California Press, 2000.

Studená, Bc Pavlína. *The Daughters of Borderlands: Female Self-Development in Selected Works of Denise Chávez and Sandra Cisneros*. Bach. d. Thesis. Masaryk University, 2019.

Valentina, Silva. *Completing the Divided Self: Chicana Revisions of the Bildungsroman*. 2005, California State University, MA Thesis.

Velasquez, Jessica, Alejandra Pérez, and Elizabeth Huffaker. "Chicana Feminism." *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 2016, pp. 1-3.

Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. "Chicana Literature from a Chicana Feminist Perspective." *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature*, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes, 2nd ed., U of New Mexico P, 1996, pp. 213–19.