



Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories

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The Work

Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories by Sandra Cisneros is a widely admired collection of short stories. Most of the stories are set in Texas, some in Mexico. Most deal with the pressures upon Chicanas to conform to traditional ideas of femininity.

The title story is about Cleo, a naïve Mexican girl who marries a Mexican American. She soon finds herself pregnant with her second child, isolated in a foreign land where she cannot even speak with most people. Her frustrated husband beats her, destroying the dreams of happiness in marriage she learned from Mexican soap operas. When she flees, she gets help from a woman who hollers joyfully as they cross the Woman Hollering Creek bridge, teaching Cleo a new meaning for the creek's name and another way to be a woman.

Two stories explore the problem of being “the other woman”: “Never Marry a Mexican” and “Eyes of Zapata.” This role may seem to be a form of rebellion against conventional women's roles, but a mistress's role can be as restrictive as a wife's, and the price of what freedom it offers proves high. The narrator of “Bien Pretty” more successfully breaks free of traditional forms, living an artist's life, taking lovers as she is inclined, learning that she can be in control, even after losing lovers. She becomes determined to change the image of women in love she sees in soap operas; she wants to re-create them as people who make things happen.

Cisneros described writing this collection as a community project. She met friends at a San Antonio diner on weekends, drew on the unbelievable things they discussed, and then shared her drafts while revising them. This approach accounts in part for the variety of voices and forms. Two especially witty pieces are “Little Miracles, Kept Promises” and “Los Boxers.” The first consists of notes left at saints' shrines, many requests for divine intervention in amusing problems. The final long note recounts the writer's discovery that the Virgin Mary is a multifaceted goddess who has helped her begin to escape the restrictive traditional woman's role. “Los Boxers” is the monologue of a widower who has learned to do his own laundry; he explains to a young mother the economies he has discovered by applying masculine intelligence to “woman's work.” Using many voices, this collection explores themes of gender and identity in twentieth century Latino and general American culture.

Suggested Readings

Cisneros, Sandra. “A Deluge of Voices: Interview with Sandra Cisneros.” Interview by Rosemary Bray. *The New York Times Book Review*, May 26, 1991, 6.

Sagel, Jim. “Sandra Cisneros: Conveying the Riches of the Latin American Culture Is the Author's Literary Goal.” *Publishers Weekly* 238, no. 15 (March 29, 1991): 74.

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