

The background of the entire cover is a light yellow-green color. It is decorated with several stylized, dark green leaf motifs. These motifs are arranged in a diagonal pattern, with some at the top left and others towards the bottom right. Each motif consists of a small stem with two leaves.

“SADDLING LA GRINGA”

**Gatekeeping in Literature By
Contemporary Latina Writers**

Phillipa Kafka

 **Greenwood**
PUBLISHING GROUP

“Saddling La Gringa”

**Recent Titles in
Contributions in Women's Studies**

Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Some Male Perspectives

Alexander G. Gonzalez

Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers

Mary E. Galvin

White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness

Renée R. Curry

The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders

Marilyn Demarest Button and Toni Reed, editors

Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse

Kerstin W. Shands

On Top of the World: Women's Political Leadership in Scandinavia and Beyond

Bruce O. Solheim

Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What She Did All Day

Yaffa Claire Draznin

Connecting Links: The British and American Woman Suffrage Movements, 1900–1914

Patricia Greenwood Harrison

Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women

Claire Marrone

Excluded from Suffrage History: Matilda Joslyn Gage, Nineteenth-Century American Feminist

Leila R. Brammer

The Artist as Outsider in the Novels of Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf

Lisa Williams

(Out)Classed Women: Contemporary Chicana Writers on Inequitable Gendered Power Relations

Phillipa Kafka

“Saddling La Gringa”

*Gatekeeping in Literature by
Contemporary Latina Writers*

Phillipa Kafka

Contributions in Women's Studies, Number 183



GREENWOOD PRESS

Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kafka, Phillipa, 1933–

“Saddling la gringa” : gatekeeping in literature by contemporary Latina writers /

Phillipa Kafka.

p. cm.—(Contributions in women’s studies, ISSN 0147–104X ; no. 183)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: Judith Ortiz Cofer—Cristina Garcia—Julia Alvarez—Rosario Ferre—

Magali Garcia Ramis.

ISBN 0–313–31122–6 (alk. paper)

1. American fiction—Hispanic American authors—History and criticism. 2. American fiction—Women authors—History and criticism. 3. Women and literature—United States—History—20th century. 4. Hispanic American women in literature. 5. Sex role in literature. 6. Ethnic identity in literature. 7. Women in literature. 8. Patriarchy in literature. I. Title. II. Series.

PS153.H56 K34 2000

813’.5099287’08968—dc21 00–023957

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2000 by Phillipa Kafka

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 00–023957

ISBN: 0–313–31122–6

ISSN: 0147–104X

First published in 2000

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To

Maria Del Carmen Rodriguez

Angela Lopez

Annette Lopez

Maria Obondo

Maria Perez

Myriam Quiñones

Jose Adames

For The Way We Were

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction: Major Elements in the Works of Latina Writers	xvii
1. Judith Ortiz Cofer, <i>Silent Dancing</i>	1
2. Cristina Garcia, <i>Dreaming in Cuban</i>	57
3. Julia Alvarez, <i>How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents</i>	95
4. Rosario Ferré, <i>The Youngest Doll</i> and Other Stories	113
5. Magali García Ramis, <i>Happy Days, Uncle Sergio</i>	121
Afterword	137
Bibliography	143
Index	151

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM LATINA

When I refer to Latinas, I apply the term to women whose cultural origins and histories are diverse, whose cultural diversity is obvious across nationalities, and to women who differ in their educational acquirements, their abilities to speak Spanish, and class rankings (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 8). All the same, their discourse is “distinguishable” because it is “culturally unified” (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 6, 11).

Asunción Horno-Delgado et al. expand the term Latinas to include women who served as “storytellers or as participants in oral histories, took part in the Civil Rights movement,” the Chicano La Raza movement, the Gay liberation movement, “or the progressive and revolutionary movements of Latin America.” Under their definition of Latinas, women whose “views have been informed by the Women’s Movements of the U.S. and Latin America” (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 8–9) were also included. Reaching out even further, the term Latina is expanded to include writers from other than Mexican and Puerto Rican cultures who “form alliances with, and draw on, traditions from those groups established with a longer history, that is, Chicanas and Puertorriqueñas. . . . [I]t is within that alliance that we can begin to speak of a Latina literature” (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 10). However, unlike Horno-Delgado and her colleagues, I do not expand the definition of Latina writing to include the work of Chicanas or of women “from other groups who identify with [Latinas] and their struggle” (1989a, 11). Further, Vicki Ruiz would have the term Latina also include “someone of Latin American birth or heritage.” Bernardo M. Ferdman and Angelica C. Cortes agree on the basis of commonalities “with the peoples and cultures of Latin America,” as well as a blending “of indigenous, African, and European influences” (1995, 273).

In this text I limit my discussion primarily to Latina authors from the Caribbean, with a focus on Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans. All the expansive definitions for the term Latina better fit, not that term so much as the blanket term that Ferdman and Cortes use—Hispanic. This term is used to define people from “a multiplicity of backgrounds and ethnic experiences, encompassing Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and Central and South Americans” (1995, 247). Nevertheless the term *Latinos/as* was and is still also generally used to define a separate group in a parallel grouping with Chicanos/as. In such a structure, both groups are considered separate and equal subcategories under the main category of “Hispanics,” and I have adhered to that separation in my work.

The reasons for Latinas’ departure from their native countries are varied, but they are primarily political and economic. As the Cubana playwright Dolores Prida writes:

Hispanics are here for many different reasons. Many have been born here. Many were here before parts of this land came to be called the United States of America. Some came a lifetime ago. Some came yesterday. Some are arriving this very minute. Some dream of returning to where they came from. Some will. Some have made this place their home for good and are here to stay. (1989, 187)

Cristina García’s profile and that of the characters in her novel *Dreaming in Cuban* match U.S. Bureau of the Census statistics for 1991, the year before this publication. Cubans are the richest, most successful, best-educated group of Latinos, with “the largest proportion of foreign-born elderly among the three major Latino groups.” The greatest numbers of Puerto Ricans and Cubans live in New York City, New Jersey, and Florida, and the largest Latino populations live in California, Texas, and Florida. “Some [or their parents] came seeking political asylum [as in the case of Cristina García]; others chose self-exile, as in the case of intellectuals linked to academia” (Heyck 1994, 24).

From different classes and origins, Latina writers are “predominantly from middle-and upper-middle-class backgrounds” (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 7), although like the Puertorriqueñas Esmeralda Santiago and Nicholasa Mohr, they can also emerge from the lower classes. But all have this in common, as Mohr testifies about her family: “I, as a Puerto Rican child, never existed in North American letters. Our struggles as displaced migrants, working-class descendants of the *tabaqueros* (tobacco workers) who began coming here in 1916, were invisible in North American literature” (1989, 113). “Invisibility,” or a “dearth of prominent women writers,” is by no means due to a lack of talent, but signals a reflection of “the economic condition of women.” Also and equally important, it signals their marginalization in social and literary circles” (López Springfield 1994, 702).

MY AIMS IN THIS TEXT

I will explore selected contemporary Latina writers from the Caribbean and Latin America both in terms of “a material analysis of macrostructures of

inequality" (Romany 1995, 389) and in terms of the three-fold alienation their texts reveal. This alienation, what I term "enforced psychic tourism" is the traumatic cultural displacement that occurs after enforced immigration into the second culture of the United States. These unwilling "tourists" see themselves as displaced outsiders forced to adapt to the culture of "Gringolandia" (Horno-Delgado, citing Luz Maria Umpierre-Herrera 1989b, 137) when they would rather be back home in their own culture.

Horno-Delgado et al. argue that it is necessary first to comprehend how Latina subjectivity is constructed by their culture before attempting to "decode" their "discourse" (1989a, 14). This is my task in this text, as well as to decode "the process of codification, not merely the code itself" (Kutzinski 1993, 206). This process impacts on these women's gender and race in terms of "the self" as a "diasporic self" (Rhadakrishnan 1993, 765).

Latina writers describe this process of codified subjectivity in women as both created and overseen by the culture's gatekeepers, primarily the characters' mothers and foremothers, as well as other senior relatives, neighbors, teachers, counselors, nuns. The writers also describe this constructed self, what I call "the enforced psychic tourist," as characterized by "multiple-rootedness" (Rhadakrishnan 1993, 762). The "enforced psychic tourist" engages in a quest "to re-territorialize" herself and find her "authentic identity" (Rhadakrishnan 1993, 765, 755). She has been acculturated into two discourses: in this case, Spanish, "the mothertongue" (Horno-Delgado 1989a, 14), and English, the language of the colonizing culture. For these reasons, women are situated like outsiders: cultural tourists who feel forever uncomfortable to some extent with both discourses as they exist. This is because both cultures are "defined by male paradigms" (Horno-Delgado et al. 1989a, 14) in which inequitable gendered power relations flourish.

Latinas are forced to immigrate spatially and psychically. They are silenced by inequitable gendered power relations in both cultures and the necessity of contending with the alien language of an alien culture either colonizing their birth culture or confronting them daily when they do emigrate to the U.S. mainland. Hélène Cixous offers a solution to the silencing of women, all women, I presume: "[B]y writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech, which has been governed by the phallus . . . women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence" (1983, 283).

As becomes evident in this text, Latina writers who depict characters who have emigrated to the United States also convey that they have been "denied the promised American dream of upward mobility." They now have to attempt to express themselves in a racist and sexist world that does not want to hear them on three counts—as Latinas, as women, and as women of color. Here I add one further dimension to Horno-Delgado et al.'s conclusions that Latinas are neither Anglo women, nor Latino men. They omit the issue of race. However, the editors of *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* do include race when they declare that "[c]lass,

race, and education . . . as it combines with sex, are much more critical in silencing the would-be Latina writers than discrimination on sex alone" (Gómez, Moraga, and Romo-Carmona 1983, viii). Vera M. Kutzinski, in her work on Cuban nationalism in terms of race and gender, takes a different tack. Although she agrees that class issues are important, nevertheless, she chooses not to focus on them (1993, 206). I, however, do so in my work. Even the more privileged writers such as Rosario Ferré and Julia Alvarez themselves focus on women by class, that is, on higher class women who are light-skinned and educated, although nevertheless silenced and constrained, as well as on women of the lower classes who are women of color and uneducated. Women may be silenced within gilded rather than straw cages, but silenced globally all the same. Emphasizing Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing*, I explore in the succeeding chapters the variety of ways in which gatekeepers are implicated in this "systemic function of silencing" (Kutzinski 1993, 16), despite the external paraphernalia of differing class attributions and rankings used in their characterizations.

I also analyze how contemporary Latina writers critique women's relationship to "the materiality of oppression and its operation in structural and institutional spaces" (Walters 1995, 86). I do this through an examination of their critiques of inequitable gendered power relations that have created and require the "suppression" (Ebert 1991, 889) of women. Latina writers critique "institutional practices"—the so-called privacy of the home and the family, as well, is also considered institutional—that strengthen and perpetuate "structures of inequality inherent in the capitalist system" (de la Torre and Pesquera 1993, 10). Susanna Danuta Walters, like many Latina and mainstream critics agrees with de la Torre and Pesquera that class rankings of women according to gender and race are characteristic of "patriarchal, capitalist, racist regimes" (1996, 865). I disagree whenever I find such frequently expressed charges of inequitable gendered power relations described as due entirely to capitalism. Patriarchy precedes and supercedes and controls all systems globally. Capitalism is only one system within patriarchy.

Latina writers expose three levels of psychic consciousness in their characters. First, they depict their characters as being indoctrinated into Latino cultures' "organization of human life" so that those ways come to seem "normative" (Levinson 1995, 125). In this text I am concerned primarily with Latino cultures' "normative" models for womanhood as reflected in the works of Latina writers. "Normative" or "naturalized" divisions of "social classes" become, then, "realities" or perceived as such by their characters, because they are commonly assumed as such by those individuals and forces that shape and control the environment around their characters, not least of which are their gatekeepers. These gatekeepers are primarily responsible for creating in the younger generations of women who are in their care a conviction of the reality of "a common and sensible world, the world of common sense." This is the "habitus . . . [that] allows the results of past relations of domination and

resistance to appear natural rather than social" (Leps 1995, 179–180, citing and translating Bourdieu 546).

These seemingly normal, natural commonsense models are designed to control and constrain women, to perpetuate their subordination as a "category" in status and class to their menfolk. Marjorie Levinson defines this model as "economies of subjectivization and of value, economies entailed by the qualitative and philosophically founding distinction between subjects and objects" (1995, 115). Walters defines this (as I do) as constructing women "in power relations" (1996, 851). Similarly, Judith Butler sees such constructions for women as "identity categories" used as "instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (1991, 13–14).

After having performed a study of Hispanics in the U.S. military in Latino cultures, Paul Rosenfeld and Amy Culbertson concluded that "[a] . . . culture-specific value that differentiates between Hispanics and non-Hispanic[s] is power distance. Cultures high on power distance place a great emphasis on power and status differences, show respect and deference for those in power, and tend to be conforming and obedient to authority" (1995, 221). These dominant personality characteristics of Hispanic men and women serving in the U.S. Navy are widely noted, and readers will observe in my analysis of *Silent Dancing* how these characteristics, shared by Judith's father, a career man in the navy, are instrumental in his tragic fate.

In another study that spanned "40 countries," Ferdman and Cortes found "four major dimensions along which national value systems could be arrayed." These four dimensions were "power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity." On the basis of this work, Hispanics in the United States, as well as in Latin American societies, have been found to be more collectivist than Anglos such that the group is emphasized over the individual, the need for consensus is greater, and interpersonal behavior is stressed over task achievements. Ferdman and Cortes call attention to the following as examples of collectivist conduct:

[There is a] prevalence among Hispanics to expect dignity and respect in interpersonal relations, and to emphasize positive and de-emphasize negative behaviors. Latin American societies also have been described as having high-context cultures which value communication based on personal trust and interpersonal relationships over formal, impersonal communication . . . Latin American managers [primarily male] relative to those in the United States [were found] to be high on both uncertainty avoidance and power distance, suggesting a preference for clear delineation of formal rules, and relatively autocratic paternalistic leadership styles. (1995, 248)

I also analyze the patriarchal system—what Jutta Brückner calls "the paternal as an abstraction" (in Kosta and McCormick 1996, 359)—that these Latina writers are confronting, primarily in the form of gatekeepers. I analyze how these authors "explain the roles of social power (gender, race, and class) in establishing and contesting state power and what they think of "the division of the world into public and private and the assignment of class to the world of

waged work, politics to the sphere of the military or elections, and gender to the home" (Brush 1996, 435, 443). I do this through an extensive exploration of the role of gatekeepers as mediators in the processes that fix these constraints in all these ways. I observe how inequitable gendered power relations in terms of class shapes the politics of Latino culture.

For me to focus only on external differences in interest and priorities and privileged situations between white mainstream feminists and women of color feminists could well be considered as limited in perspective. When Latina writers show or imply such differences between women, as for example, Julia Alvarez does in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, and Rosario Ferré in all her work, I do indeed take their positions into account. Nevertheless, my focus is on the key role that gatekeepers play in perpetuating inequitable gendered power relations, as depicted in the texts of selected contemporary Latina writers. After illustrating this topic in my first chapter as most completely developed by Judith Ortiz Cofer, I go on to illustrate its use in the works of Rosario Ferré and Magali García Ramis from Puerto Rico, Cristina Garcia from Cuba, and Julia Alvarez from the Dominican Republic, as well as other Latina authors.

As in my other works, another aim of mine in this work on contemporary Latina writers is to bring the literature and criticism of contemporary ethnic and women of color writers to the attention of my colleagues in academia. Although since 1976 I have been doing what she describes as only happening "today," still I concur with Prida when she argues that:

The academic community has a large role to play in bringing Hispanic American theatre and literature into the mainstream of this country's cultural life. Fortunately, today there are many college professors who have a deep interest in our work, are studying it, writing papers, and struggling to include it in their curricula. This is a must. Because they are not only trying to enrich the lives of their students by exposing them to the art and culture of the soon-to-be largest ethnic minority in this nation, but also building theatre audiences for the future.

Unfortunately, these few pioneers face many obstacles from within and without the walls of academia. From the outside, there is the problem of not enough published literary and theatrical works by U.S. Hispanics. From inside the walls, opposition, confusion, misunderstanding, why not say it?—plain, ugly racism from faculty and administrators.

Because, they ask, what is "Hispanic literature"? What is "Hispanic drama"? Is there such a thing? And if so, where is it? Where does it belong in the curriculum? They don't know, or don't want to know, what to do with the whole darned big enchilada.

This metaphorical enchilada, like the small real ones, is meant to be eaten and enjoyed! You can't worry about heartburn a priori! I say, what's wrong with bringing U.S. Hispanic literature and drama into the American Drama Department, along with black and Asian-American works? It also belongs in an interdisciplinary subject in Latin American departments. ¿Por qué no? (1989, 186-187)

In addition, I aim to expose mainstream white feminists to the work of ethnic and women of color feminists and feminist theorists. Familiarity with such work reveals "the intimate connections between political and national history

and the constitution of the subject" (Romany 1995, 396–397)—both the Latina subject and the white feminist subject. Both are products of those histories—patriarchal systems—that enact gendered and raced power relations globally. This is the case because "[g]ender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Romany citing Scott, 1995, 396–397). Similarly, I agree with Birgitte Soland when she asserts that it is possible to understand a culture's construction of power relations in all areas of its fabric, even if we only analyze its gender constructions (1996, 506). I do this through questioning Latino culture's discourse on gender, in relation primarily to their gatekeepers' discourse, as to "why women's realities are not represented as language, and why women in search of a language often consume themselves" (Brückner in Kosta and McCormick 1996, 358).

Kutzinski takes a courageous stance on behalf of Cuba's celebrated Mulatto poet of the nineteenth century, Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés) and his poem "La flor de la cana" [The sugarcane blossom]. She critiques certain powerful Afrocentric critics who claim his poetry is "depoliticized" and yet at the same time want to make him into "a martyr for national liberation." Instead, she reads his work as an effort to "reconfigure" the various discourses relative to sugar and the "ideological construction of a Cuban national identity from the viewpoint of a nonwhite writer" (1993, 11). In doing so, she consciously confronts a trend in Afrocentric and, more recently, in Afro-Hispanic criticism, to dismiss and devalue texts by white or non-white writers on the grounds that "their politics of representation do not conform to liberal late twentieth-century expectations" (1993, 11–12). She also critiques the anachronistic tendency by such critics to project a black aesthetic "onto Cuban, as well as onto other Hispanic-American literatures. They do this to make the history "of Afro-Hispanic American literature" fit into one narrative: "a journey toward a thematics of blackness that would compensate for prior elisions of racial issues." What really upsets Kutzinski is that once such a revision is made by the centrics, then other "concerns" that these Cuban authors may have are automatically ignored because those other "concerns" are not considered "correct." In fact she contends that Plácido and others like him were conscious of issues of race and gender. Although she is aware that such writing was intricately interwoven into the fabric of "hegemonic discourses, at times even complicitous with them," she still wishes to give them a fair reading based on the historic situations in which they lived and wrote. Responses such as Plácido's are always "complex" and not just "uncritical embraces of white values" (1993, 11–12).

Kutzinski critiques those who uncritically embrace "black" values and dismiss authors who do not do so, or dismiss authors whose embrace is deemed insufficient. She also deplores those who uncritically embrace the notion that once they have made that decision about certain authors (both white and of color), they feel that they need not bother to read those authors at all. It is these centrics' position that after they have judged certain writers as "oreos" they have

no other “redeeming” qualities to make them worth the bother. She finds the centric attitude “inappropriate” and “fruitless.” Ignoring both “poemas negros/mulatos” and “poesia negrita” (negroid or fake black poetry, poetry in blackface) by whites as inauthentic and racist,” they consider only “poesia negra” to be “‘real’ or authentic black poetry.” Instead, she calls on critics to concentrate on “the social constructedness of race” and to historicize “its discursive effects.” She reprimands centrics for “bringing indiscriminate charges of racism against all whites who write about African-American cultures” and, by extension, those whites who write about Afro-Hispanic and any other culture that is not white. Centrics should not “censor those writers whose texts, for whatever reason, stray from what are construed as politically correct thematic and acceptable modes of representation at any given time” (1993, 14).

Kutzinski views Cuba, as well as all of Hispanic America, including the Caribbean cultures, as having “particular masculine biases in the literary and critical discourses” of these cultures. She claims that nonfeminist Caribbean literature specialists considered gender issues less legitimate and appropriate a “topic for discussion” than class issues, not that they paid that much attention to class issues. Further, “theoretical approaches to the race/gender/sexuality nexus” were even less favored and less numerous (1993, 15). Readers will note later on how I apply Kutzinski’s arguments to traditional, mainstream critics and other ethnic critics who dismiss Latina writers on grounds that their values are political and not aesthetic and that therefore their cultural productions are inferior.

Introduction: Major Elements in the Works of Latina Writers

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Latina writers focus on what Juan Bruce-Novoa calls “profound links between the exile and/or immigrant experience and that of females in a patriarchal society in which they often exist as foreigners or disenfranchised residents” (1989, 81) and what I call “enforced psychic tourism.” Yamila Azize Vargas goes even further in her claims for the influence of the immigrant experience in her analysis of the poetry of Carmen Valle, Sandra M. Esteves, and Luz María Umpierre. She believes that their experience of emigration served as “the catalytic agent” for more than their “radicalism and originality,” their “feminine and feminist perspective” and “consciousness” (1989, 163). It may also have forced these Latina poets to experience and react to a racist and discriminatory culture with a literature that consciously defended their own culture, its traditions and history, and their “national identity” (1989, 163). For these reasons, how women characters are represented by Latinas in their works is more than the result of any individual Latina author’s abiding sense of “enforced psychic tourism”: being forced to be other in an alien culture and triply alien and alienated because of gender and race. Latina writers are also aware of being a part of a much larger “discursive setting” (Kutzinski 1993, 213), a system of inequitable power relations of all kinds as a source for multitudes of voluntary and enforced migrations globally.

THE HOME AND FAMILY

Once Latina feminist writers grow conscious of enforced alienation, they seek to upset the perpetuation of a traditional “feminine world,” both in their own native culture and in the colonizing culture. They begin to envision a different world “founded on a counterculture of feminist and Latin American

affirmation.” As becomes evident in the works I analyze in this text, some of the key elements of their writing follow from those visions of how it might be for women. These dream visions lead to their espousal of “nontraditional” forms of “love” for women, of the “necessity of a militant struggle” both against patriarchal Latino and Anglo cultures, of a “sacrilegious” attitude toward the Catholic religion, and of a feminist “reinvention of children’s tales” (Vargas 1989, 163). Through revisioning “the plots of patriarchal culture” in a variety of ways, Latina writers are making concerted efforts, not so much to recover their psychic “wholeness” (López Springfield 1994, 701), as in the hope of accelerating movement into new ways, into a new world.

Regardless of their own original class origins, Latina writers tend to depict oppressed working-class female characters, their experiences of daily life, and their realities “from the perspective of the oppressed classes: workers, peasants, women” (Vélez 1988, 4). Horno-Delgado et al. take this argument one step further. They advise readers to view Latina writers’ work from a working-class perspective in many ways: “racial, economic, ethnic, political, social, chronological, culinary, ideological, luminous, and stylistic,” as “a springboard” in terms of “cultural context” for any “analysis of Latin American literature” (1989a, 12) readers would hope to make.

Within this lower class context, Latina writers tend to focus on women’s lives, on how it is like to live “within a woman’s space.” They generally depict an all-female family, both to reflect reality and to accomplish this goal. Further, many Latinas are themselves from immigrant or exile families. Migration frequently wreaks havoc on the traditional family organization in Hispanic culture. Authors reflecting their own experience, displace the typical “central patriarchal figure” and, instead, depict “a woman-headed and woman-populated household” (Horno-Delgado et al., 1989a, 12), as in Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *Silent Dancing* and Magali García Ramis’s *Happy Days, Uncle Sergio*. They are not reflecting their visions for a new-world order, only reality as they know it, because they still show traditional patriarchal family models being followed. This is despite the weakness and/or absence of the patriarch, as readers will observe in my analysis of both texts. I analyze this phenomenon from the context of inequitable gendered power relations as perpetuated and mediated by the family’s female gatekeepers.

Horno-Delgado et al. also argue that inequitable gendered power relations as a topic for analysis is ignored and subsumed by traditional culture carriers such as gatekeepers whose perception of diversity is only racial or ethnic. Such a limited perspective perpetuates the “division, oppression, inequality, and internalized inferiority of women [of color], especially in contemporary capitalism” (1989a, 13). Again, it is my contention that although I agree that gatekeepers think and act in total obedience to women’s relationship to the “power structures” within Latino culture, they do so in all other cultures as well, regardless of whether the culture is capitalist, or fascist, or communist.

The family setup, as buttressed by religious and secular law, as well as social customs that evolve from them, is the single most critiqued institution in