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Christina Marie Frank
Cleveland State University

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EDITED TITLE FOR THE THESIS OF
CHRISTINA MARIE FRANK

FAIRY TALES AND RESCUE
IN CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: FAIRY TALES AND RESCUE
IN SANDRA CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*

CHRISTINA MARIE FRANK

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Ohio University

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For the Department of ENGLISH
and the College of Graduate Studies by

Thesis Chairperson, Dr. Jeff Karem

Department & Date

Graduate Director, Dr. Jennifer Jeffers

Department & Date

Dr. Rachel Carnell

Department & Date

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: FAIRY TALES AND RESCUE
IN SANDRA CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*

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ABSTRACT

Within *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros weaves several subtle literary allusions, mostly from fairy tales, into many of her vignettes. These subtle allusions help Cisneros create a portrait of expected feminine roles, mostly women as victims, within the patriarchal community, which, when juxtaposed with Esperanza's ideals for herself and her inner strength and drive, help distinguish her as different from those around her. Because she is different and stronger than the other women in her community, Esperanza will be able to reject the other female role models presented by both the women in her community and the women in the fairy tales she has been inundated with her entire life. She includes allusions to the tales to teach Esperanza how not to be. The rejection of the models that have been presented to her will allow her to instead create her own story where she will be able to "live happily ever after" on her own terms and not to rely on waiting for someone else to save her. Her rejection of the fairy tale messages will allow her to take the traditional story model and subvert it, thereby making herself, as the main character of her life story, into an empowered character, rather than a victim like her neighborhood counterparts. Her escape will allow her to finally escape the poverty and oppression of her community, but will also give her the strength to return to save the other women from similar trappings, thereby becoming their figurative Prince Charming.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1: Background Information

Almost immediately after publication in 1984, people started to take notice of Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. The collection of vignettes in *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros's most prominent work, focuses on Esperanza's view of herself within the community where she resides, in addition to an examination of her neighbors. Cisneros paints a picture of an oppressive Latino patriarchal community where women are expected to conform to traditional female roles; however, Esperanza rejects those roles and forges her own path, thereby inventing her own definition of what it means to come of age as a Chicana. It is also through these short literary sketches that Cisneros explores the struggles of the women in her neighborhood. The work, in fact, is dedicated to "A las Mujeres," translated as "To the Women." The collection of vignettes explores many topics including sexism, racism, classism, domestic violence, power of language, hope, pride, poverty, coming of age, empowerment, independence, identity, and sexuality. The examination of these topics demonstrates to the reader that Esperanza develops into an empowered character who cannot be held back by her oppressive community.

Many of the past critical articles use feminist and cultural lenses to focus on the topic of women as second-class citizens. Through these explorations, they show how Esperanza's forced position as a second-class citizen within her community relates to her development and self-identity when compared to others in the neighborhood. Additionally, several critics draw a comparison to a bildungsroman, but assert that Cisneros takes this traditional writing form and alters it because of the community relationship and that relationship's influence on Esperanza. I will use later critical works to create a trajectory of criticism on which to build. Moreover, when expanding on the other critics' findings, I plan to examine Cisneros's use of allusion to further illustrate her themes, especially in regard to a feminist reading of the text. Within *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros weaves several subtle literary allusions, mostly from fairy tales, into many of her vignettes. These subtle allusions help Cisneros create a portrait of expected feminine roles within the patriarchal community, which, when juxtaposed with Esperanza's ideals for herself, help distinguish her as different from those around her. Because she is different and stronger than the other women in her community, Esperanza will be able to reject the other female role models presented by both the women in her community and the women in the fairy tales she has been inundated with her entire life. She includes allusions to the tales to teach Esperanza how not to be. The rejection of the models that have been presented to her will allow her to instead create her own story where she will be able to "live happily ever after" on her own terms and not to rely on waiting for someone else to save her. Her escape will allow her to finally escape the poverty and oppression of her community, but will also give her the strength to return to

save the other women from similar trappings, thereby becoming their figurative Prince Charming.

1.2 Previous Criticism

Many of the critics mentioned Cisneros's status as a groundbreaking author. The reason that many of them gave for such a reputation is that Cisneros provided a new voice on the literary scene in the late 80's early 90's as a Mexican-American female with *The House on Mango Street*, a semi-autobiographical work. The critics said that she was part of a small group including Julia Alvarez, who wrote *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and Ana Castillo, who wrote *Sapogonia*. Along with Cisneros, these authors are credited with giving a voice to the Chicana for the first time. Although works by Chicanos had made it onto the literary scene before this time, the female voice within that culture was overlooked. While *The House on Mango Street* does provide a fresh voice and experience, I am hesitant to look at the situation that simplistically. The critics say she is the voice of the Chicana experience, but to limit her to that diminishes her talent and tokenizes her. What she really contributes to the literary world is the way she takes her experiences as Chicana and frames them within a larger cultural context. She is not a token voice, but rather, gives voice to the person who is going to challenge the dominant culture. As Chicana, Sandra Cisneros has a cultural position that goes back and forth between her American cultural influence and her Mexican influence. She exists in this liminal space and in order to find her true identity, she must negotiate the blending of these two cultures. Jayne Marek agrees in her article "Difference, Identity, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," where she examines Esperanza's relationship to

her cultural values and position. Marek argues that, when reading literary works that are considered minority offerings to the canon, it is best not to try to force all works to fit the same labels and expectations, but rather to approach them with “eyes open to variety and individual achievement” (178). Within her article, she examines how difference and identity are explored in *The House on Mango Street* through the close examination of Esperanza and her attitudes about both her own Mexican-American cultural values and the Anglo-American cultural values that dominate society. Marek asserts that these attitudes are not binary in their presentation but, rather, are complicated in the way that they affect Esperanza’s life both positively and negatively.

Simona Marino agrees with Marek that cultural values and identity are not clear cut and simple; however, Marino focuses on Esperanza as a new Chicana voice and ignores her larger cultural contributions. In Marino’s article “Sandra Cisneros’s Bilingual House of Fiction: Open Doors and Closed Borders,” she examines Cisneros presentation of Esperanza as Chicana. Marino argues that Cisneros “represent[s] and problematize[s] the doubleness implied in the notion of Chicana-American ‘identity.’” She asserts that Cisneros’s motive is to open a discussion between the two sides, not to embrace the culture of the “Other.” However, Marino also suggests that Cisneros’s narrator, Esperanza, is ultimately unable to cross over any cultural borders and that her “escape” occurs only in her imagination. Esperanza is not freed by her writing, but Cisneros’s structure does “legitimize Chicana creativity and identity” (237). Although Marino raises an interesting point, her view of Esperanza minimizes Esperanza’s importance to a more universal theme about female empowerment developed in the book. Esperanza develops into a character who will gain power and control over her

surroundings, which will allow her to literally escape and then return for the others. Because her character evolves so much and begins to understand the trappings of her community, it would be impossible for Esperanza to remain locked in the cultural expectations set up by her patriarchal society. Marino tokenizes and generalizes Esperanza by diminishing her contribution to the world to nothing more than a Chicana experience. Esperanza is more than that: she shows how all women can also become empowered and not rely on a man to take them to their happy ending. She reframes cultural fairy tale heritage and, through her writing, shows young women how to rescue themselves.

Darlene Pagan also disagrees with Marino and sees a message of hope for Esperanza. In her article “Girls and Women in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” Pagan explores Cisneros’s presentation of gender roles within the book. She asserts that these gender distinctions separate the men and the women into two different worlds. For the women, their role within society is often filled with pain and submission due to their limited freedoms. These freedoms are limited because women are expected to become only wives and mothers, who are then controlled by their possessive husbands. Ultimately, however, Pagan suggests that these vignettes serve as a message for hope where women are able to achieve empowerment and overcome oppressiveness by breaking free of their expected roles. Like Pagan, Rose Marie Cutting explores gender roles through names in her article “Power and Powerlessness: Names in the Fiction of Sandra Cisneros.” Cutting argues that Cisneros explores a common Chicano theme of “quien soy” (“Who am I”), but from a female, Chicana experience. Cutting’s main focus is the vignette titled “My Name.” Here she looks at Esperanza’s desire to rename herself

something outside of the patriarchy, Zeze the X, thereby pushing herself away from the rigid roles of her female ancestors, including her great-grandmother who shares Esperanza's name. By having an androgynous name, Esperanza is no longer tied down to the expectations of what a woman should be but, instead, can reinvent herself to be whatever she would like. Both Cutting and Pagan establish an important realization for Esperanza. Without her understanding of the trappings of gender roles, Esperanza would not be able to recognize the pitfalls of the fairy tale heroines and those of her neighbors. Without her empowerment, Esperanza would continue the cycle of gender trappings and be unable to escape only to come back and help the others.

In his article "Self-Baptizing the Wicked Esperanza: Chicana Feminism and Cultural Contact in *The House on Mango Street*," Juan Daniel Busch also takes on the idea of identity, but through a postmodern perspective. Busch engages *The House on Mango Street* by exploring ideas of postmodern identity as being in a constant state of flux. He uses other critics' viewpoints to discuss how identity can be in flux, including Maria Lugones, who believes that identity differences are tied to key personal relationships, and Satya Mohanty, who argues that cultural and political identity have a relationship to location and interest. Ultimately, Busch asserts that "Esperanza balances past and present where she negotiates history and culture; her relationship to both is a fluid and progressive notion of Chicana identity" (123). He also addresses the idea of allusions in the text and argues that these allusions are nothing more than "one of the reader's experiences intersecting with the speaker's. . . . Rather than allusions, which trivialize the references as Cisneros's attempt to make a statement, the references are another component in Esperanza's identity and process of empowerment" (126). They

help define her identity. According to Busch, it is through this process that Esperanza is able to understand her relationship to social and cultural meanings, not to enable non-Chicana(o)s easier access her experiences, but that these “allusions” are part of her culture as well as the culture of non-Chicana(o)s.

Busch’s point is interesting, but like Marino, he does not fully acknowledge the scope of Esperanza’s development. While the allusions may not be in place to make the access of the Chicana experience accessible to non-Chicana(o)s, they are there to create an important statement about the culture everyone lives in. The allusions, particularly the fairy tale ones, establish that all people of current society have a common cultural bond. One important reason people read literature is to find some universal understanding about humanity. Cisneros includes these allusions to show that the lessons the tales teach are part of an overall societal subconscious; however, she does not have Esperanza just blindly accept the cultural expectations that are taught via the tales. Instead, Esperanza examines their messages and motives and concludes that there is something wrong with the lesson, especially in regards to roles for women. By recognizing the flaws in their messages, Esperanza has the opportunity to reframe their cultural influence. She does not attempt to throw the tales out themselves, for it would be impossible to extract them from society, but instead she does reject their lessons and reshapes them to show that women can be strong by empowering themselves. Redefining her world and culture will allow women to rescue themselves, rather than waiting for man to come and do it. Not only is the expectation of Prince Charming riding up on his white horse unrealistic, it is undesirable to Esperanza because the “prince” would surely expect to have some control

over her. Esperanza wants to be the only one determining the direction of her life, so her only option is to draw on her inner resources and save herself.

CHAPTER II

INTERTEXTUALITY, FOLK TALES AND FEMINISM

A range of critics have looked at *The House on Mango Street* by examining Esperanza's voice, self-identity, and cultural values in her development into womanhood. A crucial component in this journey, which has been neglected by critics, is the role that fairy tales play within the work. Because folk tales are such an important part of culture, it would be natural that many works of literature would draw from these well known tales. Story telling reflects the ideals, experiences, and values of a culture. Many stories have common themes or motifs, despite a variety of story tellers and cultures. D.L. Ashliman, an expert in European folk and fairy tales, has explored such themes and motifs in his book, *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook*. The first important distinction to understand is the difference between folk and fairy tales. According to Ashliman, folk tales have their origin in legends and myths; the difference is that the story tellers believe that folk tales are fictitious, whereas legends and myths are believed to have a grain of truth. Within the folk tale category, there are several subcategories, one of which is fairy tales, or magic tales. The use of magic, as a natural and expected part of everyday life for

the characters, separates fairy tales from other types of folk tales. Other categories of folk tales, including myths and legends, will not contain elements of magic.

Overall, fairy tales serve an important function in society. Ashliman suggests that they “provide a mechanism for fantasy wish fulfillment. The problems of fairy tale heroes and heroines are real: poverty, sibling rivalry, unjust persecution, finding an appropriate mate, and many more. The fairy-tale solutions to these real-life problems are literally and figuratively out of this world” (2). Fairy tales also serve to allay fears or to teach lessons to children. According to Bruno Bettelheim, author of *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, fairy tales play an important role in the psychological development of a child. He writes, “Through simple and direct images the fairy story helps the child sort out his complex and ambivalent feelings, so that these begin to fall each one into a separate place, rather than being all one big muddle. As he listens to the fairy tale, the child gets ideas about how he may create order out of the chaos which is his inner life” (74-75). Because children lack the sophistication to fully make sense of the world, they attempt to create patterns of behavior and of justice based on the allegorical and fantastical stories they hear in order to bring them comfort.

Cisneros allows Esperanza to make sense of the abuse she sees all around her by establishing fairy tale allusions within *The House on Mango Street*. Esperanza comes from a difficult neighborhood where women are abused and trapped by their circumstances. Rather than feel overwhelmed by the harsh realities of what is happening around her, she likens these situations to fairy tale events where everything works out in the end, thereby allowing her to remain in blissful, childish ignorance. Similarities can also be drawn between the story arc of the characters in *The House on Mango Street* and

the elements of fairy tales. The complex struggles Esperanza faces often stem from the fact that she is poor, female, and Chicana. Like the characters in fairy tales, Esperanza wishes to escape her oppression. Unfortunately, her solutions are a bit more pragmatic, or there is no solution at all. Although Esperanza's experiences do not involve magic, she does view the world through a child's perspective, which can sometimes take on a whimsy of its own because of her need to make sense of the difficult trappings of life in the barrio.

Furthermore, Ashliman also suggests that traditional fairy tales have a fairly consistent structure, although there are, of course, exceptions. Overall, he argues that large number of tales consist of the following plot structure: separation, initiation, and return. Ashliman states that the separation phase is when a character is removed from familiar surroundings. He writes, "With few exceptions, the leading characters of fairy tales must find their way by themselves, independent of traditional social structures. Neither family, government, nor church offers aid" (41). The initiation phase is when the character must complete some task. Ashliman likens it to "the coming-of-age rituals of primitive cultures" (41). He writes that it is often a task of isolation that moves the character into adulthood. The return phase is for the character to return to his or her society. However, the character has evolved since leaving home. Ashliman writes, "The path is not circular. The norm for fairy tales is not a return to one's original home, but rather the integration into a new community, and nearly always in a much more powerful and prestigious role. Upward mobility knows no limits in fairy tales" (42). Esperanza's coming of age can be compared to this consistent story structure. Again, although Esperanza does not have actual magic in her life, she will follow a similar path as she

moves away from her oppressive existence on Mango Street. She will be separated from her community when she leaves for college so that she may pursue her dreams of writing. She will not follow traditional Chicano societal structures in following her dreams because the dreams of writing and independence are not options for most Chicanas in her neighborhood. Her task of initiation is becoming a writer and finding her voice to help tell the story of those “who cannot out” (110). She will be isolated in her task from the community in which she grew up, but it will help her in self-discovery. Additionally, she will also return to her community changed. She will no longer be stuck by the limitations of her society. She will be an independent and empowered woman who lives in her own house. She will be elevated from her poverty and in a position to help others.

Although Esperanza is a strong girl in the context of fairy tales, there are many characters who passively wait for their happily ever after. Feminist critics of fairy tales have condemned many female characters as weak and male characters as strong. In *Woman Hating*, Andrea Dworkin’s argues that fairy tales “shape our cultural values and understanding of gender roles by invariably depicting women as wicked, beautiful, and passive, while portraying men, in absolute contrast, as good, active, and heroic” (qtd. in Haas 3). This gives women the wrong idea that the only way to behave or be accepted is to fall into these roles. Those who do not are quickly punished. The ugly step-sister is always the one left behind at home to rot because she lacks the beauty of the heroine. She is unable to make her own happiness, or if she dare try, the consequences will be harsh, thereby, leaving her worse off than before. Those that passively wait to be rescued and for fate to bring them their true love will be rewarded by living “happily ever after,” provided that they have beauty on their sides. Elizabeth Wanning Harries expands on

this idea of rescue in her article “Women’s Autobiography and Fairy Tales.” She writes, “Rather than design a life for themselves, the women ‘in thrall’ to fairy-tale patterns wait for male rescue, or at least for something to happen. They half-consciously submit to being male property, handed from father to suitor or husband without complaint or volition. And it is the gender economy of the often-repeated fairy tales that has betrayed them” (100). Yet it is impossible to escape these messages. These stories are the stories that are often told to children at bedtime; they become ingrained in a child’s subconscious and become part of the fabric of culture.

Each of the women of the barrio becomes a victim of the societal expectation of fairy tales because she believes the lie that fairy tales promise of a happy ending. For this reason, Cisneros establishes the primary appearances of fairy tale allusions in the description of the women of Mango Street; however, for a moment, Esperanza also tries out the role of fairy tale damsel to see if it is a good fit, but ultimately does reject it. Cisneros wants to show that these women are very different from Esperanza, and they will continue to be trapped in the patriarchal roles for women, while Esperanza will become strong. That does not mean she is immune from the propaganda of fairy tales; Esperanza uses the fantasies to deal with harsh realities of life in her neighborhood. Early on in the book, these fantasies give her the first hope she has for a “happily ever after.” Although Chicana, Esperanza’s “happily ever after” is based on European tales because, as a child, the Anglo ideals of life are what she subconsciously longs for. As an American child, she would have been exposed to these types of tales by just existing in the culture. Just as Esperanza longs for the houses she sees on TV, a *Leave It To Beaver* sort of Anglo existence, she longs for a life free of poverty where the scullery maid

becomes a princess. However, the women Esperanza describes will not have the same positive results as the fairy tale heroines; ultimately she learns that they will not live happily ever after and will continue the cycle of oppression because their existence is rooted in reality.

Moreover, the key function of these allusions is to show Esperanza's liminal position between childhood and womanhood. Madsen writes, "The juxtaposition of the vignettes in *The House on Mango Street* dramatizes the attempts of the adolescent Esperanza to reconcile her childish naïveté with the realities of adult Chicana life" (114). She tries to understand these situations in terms of fantasy, but all the time she is faced with the harsh realities of the oppression these Latina women face. In the end, it will not be until she can move beyond childhood and understand her larger purpose that she will be able to reject the female roles established by fairy tales and face the truth. However, the truth will be liberating because it will give her power to create her own story by subverting the fairy tales' message.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The power of *The House on Mango Street* comes from the narrative structure that allows the reader to experience the events of the book through the eyes of Esperanza as a child, but also to have the full understanding of the ramifications of the events she witnesses. To accomplish both levels of understanding, Cisneros utilizes a naïve narrator within her narrative structure to show the difference between the influences of the dominant culture and the revised societal expectations Esperanza ultimately comes to understand. There are actually two voices present within this text. First, there is the naïve narrator, Esperanza as a 12-year-old girl. This naïve narrator is well versed in the values of the dominant culture, which is represented in the presentation of the fairy tale allusions and references to the American dream. The fairy tales she uses are European in origin, rather than Chicano, to show the strong hold the ethnocentric dominant white culture has over society. The naïve narrator illustrates the way Esperanza sees the dominant culture from her vantage point. Esperanza sees those stories differently because Cisneros recognizes that a Chicana voice is not going to perceive the world the same way as dominant culture would. For Esperanza and Cisneros, the experiences outlined in fairy

tales and the American dream do not apply in the same way to their lives. Cisneros talks about her unique perspective in her journey to find her voice while in graduate school. In an autobiographical piece, Cisneros discusses a writing workshop where she was asked to discuss the “house of the imagination: the attics, stairways and cellars of childhood [where] Cisneros felt foreign and out of place” (Las Mujeres). She says,

Everyone seemed to have some communal knowledge which I did not have—and then I realized that the metaphor of house was totally wrong for me. Suddenly I was homeless. There were no attics and cellars and crannies. I had no such house in my memories. As a child I had read of such things in books, and my family had promised such a house, but the best they could do was offer the miserable bungalow I was embarrassed with all my life. This caused me to question myself, to become defensive. What did I, Sandra Cisneros, know? What could I know? My classmates were from the best schools in the country. They had been bred as fine hothouse flowers. I was a yellow weed among the city’s cracks. . . . It was not until this moment when I separated myself, when I considered myself truly distinct, that my writing acquired a voice. (Qtd. in Las Mujeres)

This distinct voice is the second voice present in HOMS. The narrative construct, in addition to having 12-year-old Esperanza as the naïve narrator, also has a more mature Esperanza who is also telling the reader the story. The mature narrator is able to come into being because of the experiences and observations of the naïve narrator. At the beginning of the book, the naïve narrator fully embraces the dominant culture, i.e. the American dream, through her desire to live in a house “like the houses on TV” (4). The

mature narrator reflects Cisneros's attitude once the American dream archetype is deconstructed. This mature narrator has the full understanding of the lessons learned from the naïve narrator's experiences. The mature Esperanza realizes, like Cisneros during her graduate school seminar, that the house metaphor does not apply in the same way to her. By the end, she realizes that the dream and happily ever after are not what they appear. The way she voices fairy tales through Esperanza is the way Esperanza can make them her own. Subverting the patriarchal stories gives voice to a different reading than the archetypal reading. She changes the traditional fairy tale structure by not allowing Esperanza to passively sit by and wait for her happily ever after. She sees the danger and the uselessness of that tactic. Instead, she alters what happily ever after and the American dream mean to her based on her perspective in order to make them into a reality. She comes to realize that her dream is not in obtaining possessions, but in understanding that she has power within herself. In many ways, this new dream is more mature and powerful than the traditional American dream. Although always present in the background, this second voice comes out in full force in the final vignette, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes." This mature narrator has the insight that the naïve narrator lacks. Cisneros writes,

I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong.

We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to.

I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. (109-110)

This final vignette echoes the first vignette, bringing the story full circle. The mature narrator is the one who is able to see the larger picture and her role within. The strength of the book comes from the fact that we experience it from the perspective of a child, all the time understanding the true meaning via the mature narrator. The little girl who tells the story does not know that she is subverting the dominant culture, but the mature narrator knows that she is. The complexity of voicing here is the Chicana girl who sees things differently, but does not understand why. We, as readers older than Esperanza is, can see implications in her story that she is not aware of yet. Through the two narrators, Cisneros is able to show growth and understanding that allows Esperanza not only to reject both the expectations of culture and society, but also to reject the naivety that holds her back in her oppressive community. The mature narrator is able to look beyond the stereotypes established by the dominant culture through fairy tales because she realizes, as a Chicana, she does not see them in the same way. She has not had the same experiences or grown up with them like her dominant culture counterparts, just as Cisneros “had no such house in [her] memories.” This allows her to take the structure and subvert it.

CHAPTER IV

FAIRY TALE ALLUSIONS

4.1 Rapunzel

One way Cisneros subverts the fairy tale is through the structural relationship of the timing of the allusions. She presents these allusions in the center section of the book, when Esperanza is in the liminal period between naïve childhood and maturity. At this point in her development, she is examining the possibilities for her future through her neighbors. Cisneros makes these allusions to show that Esperanza is not yet able to see past the ideal views of childhood. She also intentionally selects fairy tales that feature the heroine in a passive role within her own life like Rapunzel, The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe, and Cinderella. These women ultimately have no control over their fates. Cisneros selects these tales to illuminate the victimization of the women of her neighborhood. These tales are being parodied through a naïve narrator.

One example of this is “Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesday.” Clearly, Cisneros is establishing a connection to Rapunzel. In the Rapunzel tale, Rapunzel is taken from her parents by an evil witch as punishment because her parents stole rapunzel, a lettuce-like vegetable, from the witch’s garden. Rapunzel

becomes very beautiful, so the witch locks her in a tall tower with no doors. When the witch wants to visit, she calls for Rapunzel to let down her long braided hair, then she climbs up. One day, a prince hears Rapunzel singing, so he waits to see from where it is coming. He sees the witch call for the braid to be let down, and he later decides to try it himself. He climbs up, falls in love, and has sex with Rapunzel. The witch finds out, cuts off Rapunzel's braid, and banishes her to the forest where she suffers. The prince comes to see Rapunzel, but finds the witch in the tower instead. She blinds him as he falls from the tower. He wanders around for years in agony from the loss of Rapunzel, unable to see, but one day finds Rapunzel and their twins to whom she has given birth. Her tears of joy fall into his eyes and he is able to see again. They live happily ever after.

In "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays," Rafaela faces similar circumstances to Rapunzel; Rafaela is locked in a "tower" because she is also too beautiful. Cisneros even has Rafaela let down a bucket on a rope as Rapunzel would let down her hair to communicate with the outside world. The naïve narrator sees the situation as entertaining and does not understand the trap Rafaela is stuck in and will continue to be stuck in as she waits for her prince. The parody is actually done by the mature narrator because the mature narrator understands that the archetypal fairy tale is not being used in the way the naïve narrator thinks it is. The naïve narrator does not know she does not see the truth of the situation, but we, as readers, understand that the mature narrator is showing us the on going cycle of victimization of the women in this community and the futility of waiting for rescue. Cisneros writes,

Rafaela who drinks and drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesdays
and wishes there were sweeter drinks, not bitter like an empty room, but

sweet sweet like the island, like the dance hall down the street where women much older than her throw green eyes easily like dice and open homes with keys. And always there is someone offering sweeter drinks, someone promising to keep them on a silver string. (80)

Although the naïve narrator does not understand Rafaela's trap, her situation is really quite dire because she lacks freedom and choice. Cisneros writes, "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. Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow and dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's" (79). The reference to the window is an echo of an earlier vignette in the book, "My Name," where Esperanza tells the reader about her great-grandmother who was forced into marriage. Cisneros writes, "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. . . . Was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (11). The window represents a liminal space between the inside and the outside. Rafaela is forced to remain inside because that is the space of domestic work, the only acceptable role for a woman on Mango Street. The women who are outside women are not seen as fit to marry and become something unrespectable. Her husband wants to keep her all to himself by locking her inside; therefore, he will not allow her to be anything more than his possession. The outside world is the world of men, where independence exists. Kuribayashi writes, "Society demands that the female body not go out into the literal 'space outside.' If it did, the 'inside' would become the 'outside,' and the social order would collapse. True, some

female bodies are allowed outside domestic space—or excluded from it—to satisfy certain kinds of male sexual desires, but these women are ‘public women,’ deemed unfit for the home and subject to violation and exploitation without limits. Except for these women, the female body must be kept indoors so that the status quo of the public/private division is maintained with men in public space and women in private space” (169).

Both Esperanza’s grandmother and Rafaela lean “their sadness on an elbow” because they dream of being more than what their society limits them to become. They want freedom to do the things they desire. Furthermore, Rapunzel is in the exact same position as Esperanza’s grandmother and Rafaela. She yearns to have more than her limited experience inside the tower. When her virginity is taken away by the prince, the witch casts her aside like rubbish. She becomes a “public” woman, disgraced until her prince comes to save her.

For Rafaela, no one will come to save her, so she remains locked in her tower. On Tuesdays, she feels brave enough to call down from her window to Esperanza and her friends to get her some sweet juice from the corner store because her controlling husband is away playing dominoes. She lets down a rope, like Rapunzel lets down her hair, to interact with the children below. It is the only thing she can do to have contact with the outside world. She is forever trapped by the dictates of her patriarchal society because she lacks the strength to break free. All she can do is wish someone like the prince will wander by, “someone offering sweeter drinks, someone promising to keep [her] on a silver string” (80). Even in her dreams, she desires someone who will keep her. She will always be the damsel in distress waiting for her prince to come.

4.2 The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

The vignette, “There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn’t Know What to Do,” is clearly a reference to the “Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe” and her children:

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.

She had so many children, she didn't know what to do.

She gave them some broth without any bread,

Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

Like the Old Woman, one of Esperanza’s neighbors has an out of control family.

Cisneros writes, “Rosa Vargas’ kids are too many and too much. . . They are without respect for all things living, including themselves” (29). In this vignette, Cisneros tells the tale of Mrs. Vargas who was abandoned by her husband without any means to support their many children. Because Mrs. Vargas is so weary from her motherly duties, she neglects her children and leaves them without supervision as they reek havoc on the neighborhood by putting themselves into dangerous situations. The vignette ends with one of the Vargas children falling to his death during one of their games.

With this vignette, Cisneros is again establishing the oppressed position in which the women of Mango Street find themselves. Mrs. Vargas relied on her husband to support the large family. Clearly, Mr. Vargas did not feel obligated to the children he fathered, otherwise he would have remained to help care for them. When the family became too overwhelming for him, he decided to leave rather than deal with his responsibility. It can be assumed then that Mr. Vargas did not value his wife as a person since he abandoned her with no child support, but rather he only used her for the physical

value he placed on her in order to create so many children. He uses Mrs. Vargas and then casts her aside. Overall, both the Old Woman and Mrs. Vargas are overwhelmed by their obligations as mother. Each of them cannot figure out how to get the means to feed their children properly. However, the Old Woman was able to instill some discipline, albeit corporal punishment, to her family, while Mrs. Vargas just cannot cope, resulting in the death of her son.

While being a single mother would be difficult for anyone, it is especially difficult for the women of Mango Street. Because they are only able to be mothers and wives, they have no real means of earning a living to support themselves and their children. They are trapped by societal expectations, which force them to forever be dependent on men: When the men fail them, they will forever be helpless victims. If they were no longer under the control of this patriarchal society, they could perhaps educate themselves and make better lives for their children.

4.3 Wishing Star

There is an old superstition that if a wish is made upon a falling star, the wish will come true. This has been popularized in many aspects of culture, including Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* from 1940 with the song "When You Wish Upon A Star" written by Leigh Harline and Ned Washington. In this fairy tale movie, one of the characters, Jiminy Cricket, sings:

When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires

Will come to you

If your heart is in your dream

No request is too extreme

When you wish upon a star

As dreamers do

Fate is kind

She brings to those who love

The sweet fulfillment of

Their secret longing

Like a bolt out of the blue

Fate steps in and sees you through

When you wish upon a star

Your dreams come true

This fantasy wish fulfillment leads those who believe in the power of the magic to think that all of their dreams will come true if they are desired enough. This wishing can save someone vicariously from a situation he or she wants to escape. It is fate that will help him or her, allowing no action to be taken other than to desire and wish. Obviously, the reality of life is a bit more grim. By waiting for fate or magic to intervene rather than taking action, a person will continue to be a victim of the situation, as a savior will never come.

The allusion to a wishing star appears in the vignette, "Marin." In this vignette, Esperanza tells the reader about an older teenaged girl from Puerto Rico named Marin. Marin is staying with her aunt and uncle on Mango Street so that she can provide baby-sitting services for her younger cousins. Esperanza expresses a curiosity about the things Marin says about boys and life; she seems "already older than us in many ways" (27). Marin tells Esperanza and her friends that she plans to get a job downtown "because that's where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away" (26). However, Marin will not get to do that because Esperanza tells the reader that she is being sent back to P.R., which the reader can infer is because she is too promiscuous. Esperanza explains that Marin is never allowed outside except at night when her aunt returns from work. It is then that Marin stands outside to flirt with all the passing men as she listens to the radio. Cisneros writes at the end, "Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (27). Here, Cisneros places Marin under the streetlight to show the dangerous outcome of the women giving themselves over to the men so freely. While it is unclear if Cisneros is stating that Marin is literally a prostitute, the connotation is there. She is a "public woman." Marin is willing to sell herself, either figuratively or literally, for the chance to have someone marry her and take her away. This is Marin's dream. Marin can see no other way out of her oppressive trap of caring for her cousins and being trapped in domestic work than to be married. The irony of her escape is that she will only be going from one domestic trap to another. Nonetheless, Marin feels that this is her only option because of the way she was

raised and the expectations of her society. She is waiting for “a star to fall” so she can wish for her Prince Charming to come and “change her life.” However, due to the dictates of her society, Marin will no longer be respectable enough to actually be desirable enough to become married. By flaunting her sexuality outside, under the streetlight, she has become unworthy of being in a domestic space inside the home. Clearly this is a double standard, but because of the limited choices available to women they accept it. However, Esperanza sees that there are other options. She seems to recognize that this is not the way to escape from Mango Street, and Marin will continue the cycle in which she is trapped.

Furthermore, the language of this section is also interesting because it seems to imply that Marin’s streetlight is no longer on Mango Street. The early part of the description is Esperanza telling the reader her experiences with Marin; however, the final section seems to imply that she is continuing to do the same activities that Esperanza observed. It is as if Esperanza is imagining that this will be Marin’s fate.

4.4 Cinderella

Cinderella is the story of a girl who is forced to work as a servant for her step-mother. One day Cinderella wants to go to a ball, so a fairy godmother appears and grants her wish by transforming her into a beautiful princess, but at the stroke of midnight she will change back to a scullery maid. She goes to the ball, falls in love with the prince, and as she is leaving, loses a shoe. The prince finds the shoe and finds Cinderella because she fits into the shoe. They marry and live happily ever after.

In the vignette, “The Family of Little Feet,” Cisneros uses language that echoes the style of a bedtime story, and, like Cinderella, has the key component of shoes that transform the wearer. She begins the vignette with “There was a family.” She then describes each family member with a special focus on their feet. The language she uses is very reminiscent of the tale *The Three Bears* in the way that she uses parallel structure to describe each member’s traits, which fall in line with stereotypical gender expectations. The men are rough and masculine, while the women are lovely and dainty. This family gives Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel, Esperanza’s neighborhood friends, a bag of women’s high heeled shoes. Like Cinderella, the girls are transformed by putting the shoes on. Just as Cinderella moves from being a scullery maid to a princess, the girls move from being just little girls on Mango Street to objects of sexual desire. Cisneros writes, “Do you like these shoes? But the truth is it is scary to look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see attached a long long leg” (40). Moreover, the shoes represent a movement from childhood to adulthood and all the attention that comes with it, just as Cinderella becomes the belle of the ball upon her fairy tale arrival.

While the girls run down the street in their shoes, they get a response that is much different from their usual reception in the neighborhood. Cisneros writes, “Down to the corner where the men can’t take their eyes off us. We must be Christmas” (40). The men now see them as objects of sexual desire and pursue them with cat calls, just as the prince chases Cinderella as she flees from the ball at midnight. Although the girls seem to like it at first, the new response they are getting scares them a bit, so they do not stay in one place for very long. Like Cinderella, the girls also continue to run because they are also not ready to face the reality of the transformation the shoes bring about. By the end, they

are transformed back into the little girls of Mango Street. Cisneros writes, “We are tired of being beautiful. Lucy hides the . . . shoes. . . until one Tuesday her mother, who is very clean, throws them away. But no one complains” (42). Similarly, just as Cinderella transforms back into her old self at the stroke of midnight, the girls return to their former state.

However, unlike Cinderella they realize that they are not disappointed. By the girls rejecting the shoes, they are rejecting the acceptance of the role that comes with them within their society. They are not ready to become sexual objects. If they accepted the shoes and the transformation they bring about, they would become just another Chicana woman who is stuck in the role of girlfriend, wife, or mother. Madsen writes, “It is in terms of feminine usefulness to men—as entertainment (dancing), bearing and raising children, cooking, appearing sexually attractive—that the female body derives its usefulness, not as the representation of individual or feminine subjectivity. So the feminine is defined in objective terms, as women appear to men, rather than the subjective terms of feminine experience” (117-18). Esperanza experiences the role of fairy tale damsel and decides that this road is not the road for her. She does not want to be defined only in terms of her body, but rather of who she is with her talents and gifts. While she will probably be interested in being sexual when she is older, at this point in her development she knows that if she gives into being only a sexual object that is all she will ever be. She needs time to mature into a multi-dimensional woman. This denial of the patriarchal trap proves that she is empowered and can and will save herself, unlike Cinderella, and many of the other women on Mango Street, who will wait passively for the prince to come with her lost slipper to carry her away to a “better” life.

CHAPTER V
A HOUSE OF HER OWN

In order to fully understand the fairy tale allusions in *The House on Mango Street*, it is essential to briefly analyze Esperanza's desires and dreams which make her into an empowered character; this analysis gives a background to her struggles, which allows the reader see how the allusions enhance the overall message. In the "The House on Mango Street," Esperanza recounts how her family came to live on Mango Street. She tells the reader about the slum lord who rented them a run down apartment on Loomis with broken pipes and the need to carry water to the apartment in empty milk jugs from the communal bathroom next door. This is not the kind of place that many people would be satisfied to call home. While living there, Esperanza has an incident with a nun from her school. Cisneros writes:

Where do you live? she asked.

There. I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

There. . . . The way she said it made me feel like nothing. . . . I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this

isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go. (5)

In that moment Esperanza realizes that she needs a place that will make her proud to live there. While some readers may see the dream house she desires as a status symbol, it is more than that for Esperanza. For her, it is a form of identity, a place where she can belong and be proud of herself. She wants to feel like more than “nothing.”

Moreover, it is within this space that she can also develop as a person and as a writer. Towards the end of the book in the vignette “A House of My Own,” Esperanza describes what her house will be like. Cisneros writes, “A house all my own. . . . Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (108). By describing her house in terms of writing poetry, she associates this ideal place with the development of her talents. It is a clean, pure space that is waiting for someone to come and define it. It is a fresh start for her to decide who she will be as a writer and as a woman. It is a quiet space that will allow her time to think and create as a writer, away from all of the responsibilities of children and housework that plague the other women of Mango Street. She is responsible only to herself and to her craft. The possibilities are endless and open. Clearly, Cisneros alludes to Virginia Woolf's “A Room of One's Own” from the title. Here, Woolf suggests that, for a woman to be able to write, she needs a space all her own and £500. Woolf encourages women to write anything they can about any subject, but to get their voices out there and be heard. By having her own space, Esperanza can become one of the empowered women that Woolf is encouraging to pursue the writing field, a mostly male profession during her time. Although Esperanza's story takes place decades after Woolf's famous essay was written, many men in

Esperanza's community still consider writing a profession for a man. By pursuing her own dreams and not just accepting the status quo as mother and homemaker, Esperanza can have the key to her independence. She can have ownership of herself and cannot be forced into the gender roles prescribed by her society. She can be free to move about just as freely as her brothers, Carlos and Kiki, and the other men do.

Although she is too young to have the house of her dreams, the reader can safely assume, due to the development of the character who values education and independence, that Esperanza will one day have her house. In the meantime, she relies on her inner strength. Leslie Gutierrez-Jones writes in her article "Different Voices: The Re-Bildung of the Barrio in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," "Acutely aware of the disempowerment that results from lacking 'a home of one's own,' she yearns to stake out an architectural space—one which she implicitly assumes will provide her with the 'space' to develop a sense of identity and an artistic voice. But when architecture will not cooperate, she must look instead to her imagination in order to create a sense of place—one which can, in turn, provide a place for her writing" (296). This place is something she does not understand at first but comes to appreciate as she matures with the help of her community. One person who helps her is a local fortuneteller, Elenita, who tells Esperanza that she has "a home in the heart" (64). Elenita helps Esperanza realize that, although she thinks she needs a physical structure to give her strength, this power has really been inside her all along. She needs only herself.

When Esperanza realizes that she has inner strength, she starts to understand her role in the neighborhood. Before her maturation, Esperanza feels as if she does not belong anywhere. She feels as if she lacks a place of origin because she has moved

around so much in her childhood; she has no clear sense of national identity. Esperanza was born in the United States to a Mexican-American mother and a Mexican-born father. She sees herself as an American, who still holds onto the Mexican traditions that surround her everyday life through her family and Latino community; however, the outside world sees her as “Other,” which makes it difficult for her to feel as if she is truly “American.” Furthermore, she has rigid expectations of what it means to be Chicana within her own culture. Cisneros says,

“To adopt models of femininity that are thought of as Anglo is . . . to be told you’re a traitor to your culture. And it’s a horrible life to live. We’re always straddling two countries, and we’re always living in that kind of schizophrenia that I call being a Mexican woman living in an American society, but not belonging to either culture. In some sense we’re not Mexican and in some sense we’re not American.” (qtd. in Madsen 108)

She also rejects the ties to Mango Street because she is ashamed of its poverty. She does not know where she fits in, resulting in her desire to create a space of her own where she can define herself.

However, her world view changes one day when sitting on a neighbor’s front stoop talking to Alicia, one of the few people on Mango Street pursuing a University degree. In the vignette titled “Alicia & I Talking on Edna’s Steps,” Cisneros writes:

I like Alicia because one she gave me a little leather purse with the word GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back there. But today she is listening to my sadness because I don’t have a house.

You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of.

No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph. . . only one I dream of.

No, Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too.

Not me. Not until somebody makes it better.

Who's going to do it? The mayor?

And the thought of the mayor coming to Mango Street make me laugh out loud.

Who's going to do it? Not the mayor. (106-07)

Alicia helps Esperanza to understand that the neighborhood has helped make Esperanza into the person she is and the person she will become. Her experiences there have helped shape the way she views everything and have given her strength to realize that she wants more in her life than what she sees in the women around her. She has become the empowered woman who can stand on her own in Virginia Woolf's essay. Esperanza realizes that she does not need an outside influence to achieve her dreams; she is empowered because of herself and nothing else.

However, Esperanza also realizes that, because she is stronger, it is her duty to help make things better for the other women. She realizes that, if the empowered people

completely turn their backs on Mango Street, it will never improve. Since Mango Street is part of her, she must be the one to help the others. In the final vignette, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Cisneros writes, "One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. . . . They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (110). Although Esperanza will physically leave Mango Street, she will come back for the others by giving the silent, powerless women a voice. Cisneros writes, "I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong. . . . I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much" (109-10). Esperanza helps the women who are too often overlooked because she tells their story and her own to the world and serves as a role model so that others may follow in her path to escape the poverty stricken and patriarchal society in which she grew up.

By telling her story, she is also creating her own fairy tale. In her fairy tale, she does not wait for a prince to come to rescue her. Instead she allows herself to be empowered, strong and the true version of herself, rather than what society tells her she should be. In the vignette, "My Name," Cisneros writes, "I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (11). By renaming herself, she is creating a character to star in the unconventional fairy tale she will write for herself. Zeze the X, an androgynous and unknown name, is not held down by the gender expectations that Esperanza is expected to follow. She will, instead, go in another direction entirely. She does not blame the fairy tales for trapping women in situations of oppression or even reject the tales themselves, but she will not follow the

rules that they establish. Esperanza has examined the possibilities available to her by observing the women around her and listening to the fairy tales that outline expected behavior for women. Bettelheim suggests that when a child is exposed to fairy tales, he or she begins to identify with characters that seem attractive to him or her, thereby imprinting a baseline of morality and identity. He further explains that this gives the child “a basis for understanding that there are great differences between people, and that therefore one has to make choices about who one wants to be” (9). None of these fairy tales or real life examples fit who she thinks she is. She knows that by allowing herself to become like the examples around her, she would just become trapped like they are. She learns from them that there has to be a better way to find happiness than to put all her hopes and dreams into a man that might let her down; furthermore, there are few men on Mango Street that could handle that kind of role. She wants more out of her life: a house of her own that will allow her to feel proud of who she will become and independence to live her life on her own terms.

Instead of succumbing to the path of least resistance by following in the footsteps of previous generations, she rejects those ideas and decides instead to become her own rescuer who is in control of her own story. *The House on Mango Street* is not a narrative of disempowerment with Esperanza as the central character; however, by juxtaposing oppressed women with Esperanza, her unique position in society becomes dramatically clear. Cisneros writes,

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 quite war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. (89)

She knows that in order to be happy and free she must define who she is to become, free of societal expectations. In her own story she will become powerful just like the men do and without any apologies. She is special and different, which allows her to break free from oppression. She will find the strength to escape from Mango Street and to see what else the world has to offer her. Bettelheim writes, “Only by going out into the world can the fairy-tale hero (child) find himself there” (11). By having new experiences, she will discover her full potential without the aid of anyone else. Her escape will be the way that she truly saves herself, which will, in turn, allow her to save all the women trapped on Mango Street by showing them that they do not need to wait for the prince who will never come. She will give them a new tale to tell their daughters about Esperanza who left Mango Street and found her dreams. She has not rejected fairy tales, but rather the negative message to women. Her tale serves as an example for all those who come after her as to what “happily ever after” really means. She has claimed the fairy tale medium as her own when she ends her tale with “I’m going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (109). Her tale gives hope to the others. In the final vignette, Esperanza echoes the first vignette with a description of where she comes from. Cisneros writes,

We didn’t always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was

Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to. (109-10)

The echo shows that the ending is really a beginning. Esperanza has come full circle in her understanding that she does need to escape into the real world to find herself, but her tale also shows that she will remember the others who need to hear the tale to know that hope is possible. The other women also have the potential deep inside to create their own story, free of past societal expectations.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a child, Esperanza used fairy tales to create sense and meaning out of her chaotic world with the hope that everything would turn out for the best. She sees her female neighbors in the context of fairy tales because she is trying to make sense of why they would be treated so cruelly. Good triumphs over evil and every one lives happily ever after in fairy tales. However, when Esperanza realizes that good does not always win because her neighbors continue to be trapped, the fairy tales fail her as a way to make sense of her world. She then decides that she cannot rely on the fairy tale promise of a happy ending and must create her own happy ending by claiming ownership of her own story. With her writing, she takes control of her fate and escapes her circumstances on her own. She creates her own tale that stars a heroine that is “more like the real me” (Cisneros 11).

Feminist critics of fairy tales do not often view the passive heroines of the tales kindly. They reject fairy tales where women are encouraged to aspire to be no more than beautiful helpless dolls waiting for men to come and save the day. With Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, she rejects the idea that a heroine should be limited to only those ideals. In *Esperanza*, she creates a girl trying to navigate the mine field of adolescence, while still finding her identity and dreams. Because Esperanza is the star of her own fairy tale which she creates, she is not limited by the constraints of her oppression: poverty, Chicana, female. She has the power to move up in education, society, and her

standing because she decides how her life will be outside of the demands of the patriarchal community. It is this initiative to decide her own fate that allows her to be empowered. She will leave Mango Street and become a writer, thereby escaping the poverty and oppression the other women have come to accept as the status quo. As a strong woman, she is quite different when juxtaposed with the other women on Mango Street. Those women wait passively for someone else or something to change their lives. They do not know how to make life better for themselves, nor do they have the strength needed to pull it off. They will forever wait like a damsel in distress for the prince who never comes.

However, Esperanza realizes that she is a part of Mango Street despite the fact that she wants to escape. It has helped shape her into the girl she is and the woman and writer she will become. She knows that she must return to help “the ones [she] left behind. For the ones who cannot out” (110). In a way, it is Esperanza who will come to save these women. It is she who will show them a better way of life and give them a voice. She will help them see that they do not need a prince to ride up on a white horse and carry them into a happily ever after. Instead, she will be their hero who will allow them to realize that they can break free of all that holds them back by making a life of their own on their own terms. Then they can live happily ever after.

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