

**External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of
Mgr. Tereza Jiroutová-Kynčlová**

Chicana Literature:

A Feminist Perspective of Gloria Anzaldúa's Identity Politics

Submitted in 2017, Department of Philology, English and American Literature

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The dissertation persuasively argues that Chicana/o literature, specifically the foundational work of Gloria Anzaldúa, plays a key role in redefining the purpose, practice, and goals of the Chicana/o movement by emphasizing the intrinsically intersectional nature of Chicana/o identities, and by offering as a systematic critique of racist, sexist, homophobic, and nationalist bias inherent in US-American as well as Chicano nationalist ideologies. By reading Anzaldúa's work *as* theory, the author joins influential Latina/o scholars in their important efforts to expand and explode limitations of genre, gender roles, and identity politics, and promote an understanding of Chicana/o literature as inherently political and aesthetic. In addition, the author reclaims the oft-contested term "identity politics" as necessary and productive in protecting and developing civil and human rights for immigrants as well as for American citizens of Latin American descent.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is timely and original in its focus on Anzaldúa's critique of US-American imperialism and white privilege as well as the gender-bias at the root of the Chicana/o movement. The candidate does not only display her intimate familiarity with the foundational texts of the Chicana/o movement and Second and Third Wave feminism, but also productively connects a feminist critique of the movement with solid literary and cultural analyses of the political impact of Anzaldúa's "new mestiza consciousness" on Chicana/o practices of resistance and rearticulations of the border as a potentially highly productive "contact zone" in the neoliberal era of NAFTA. The author's careful analyses of the larger impact of three icons for Chicana femininity – La Virgen, La Llorona, and La Malinche – adds depth and specificity to her focus on the larger cultural significance of intersections between feminist reappropriations, cultural representations, identity politics and political activism. While this focus is not new, but rather part of a longstanding tradition of analysis, the author does make her own contribution by reassessing these three symbols as embodiments of Anzaldúa's "new mestiza consciousness." The candidate thus offers both a solid foundation for her critique and an original, creative intervention in existing interdisciplinary discourses on identity, border, and immigrant politics and policies in the years leading up to the Trump administration, making an invaluable contribution to the academic disciplines

of American, specifically Chicana/o, literature, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

The argument is clearly laid out from the very onset of the dissertation; the candidate expertly guides her readers through the evolution of Chicana feminist thought from its historical origins to its productive conflict with a patriarchally-dominated movement to the rearticulation of Chicana identities in the post 9/11 era as inherently intersectional, and to Anzaldúa's crucial contributions to a more complex understanding of borders as a cultural manifestation of limiting binaries and fear beyond nationalism. The author succeeds in conveying her ideas in a logical and persuasive manner throughout, and works with sophisticated, yet accessible, prose to articulate her complex argument. The table of contents gives readers a very clear sense of the origins and evolution of the author's thesis, is exemplary in its clarity and logical setup, and could be very well-used as a guide for a graduate level course on Chicana feminism and border studies, or taken as a starting point for developing a book-length publication with a prestigious university press.

2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

The language of the dissertation generally meets the highest standards of idiomatic and formal accuracy and showcases the candidate's fluency not only in the language itself, but also with the specific discourse of her field. One minor terminology issue the candidate may still want to address, perhaps in a footnote, is the recent discussion about the gender-neutral term "Chicanx" instead of "Chicana/o," which, according to some, continues to reinscribe the very binaries Anzaldúa sought to challenge. Overall, this dissertation is not only verbally but also visually very well-presented, clearly and accurately formatted, and a pleasure to read.

3. Use of sources and/or material

The candidate's use of secondary sources and critical theory in the dissertation is impeccable; she offers a carefully and smartly chosen selection of canonical as well as recently published sources, and addresses complex ideas in a professional, responsible, clearly organized, and ethically sound manner. One suggestion I would like to offer for the continuation of this important project is to include contemporary critiques of Anzaldúa's approach from within the Chicana/o community, and Chicana/o writers and activists who feel less represented by Anzaldúa's approach; I am specifically thinking about scholar-activists from indigenous communities, who take issue with some of Anzaldúa's sweeping generalizations about, for example, indigenous gender norms. To further strengthen her argument, I suggest the author engages even more with critiques of Anzaldúa's use of identity politics from within, for example in the work of the controversial conservative author Richard Rodriguez. I believe that by engaging such

dissenting voices, and by dismantling their critique of Anzaldúa's identity politics as paralyzing, prescriptive and anti-democratic, the author's argument would gain even more depth, especially in view of the ongoing relevance of Anzaldúan thought in 2017. A more thorough engagement with Anzaldúa's later, and much-less known, work could be productive for further enriching the author's project, in view of Anzaldúa's ongoing self-assessment and evolution as a scholar enormously aware of the challenges to applying her theory to a globalising world.

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

The candidate does an exemplary job of integrating her intimate knowledge of existing scholarship with her own critical analysis, and succeeds in developing and effectively articulating an original contribution to the field— the sign of a very promising young scholar. The author's sensitive attention to her own politics of location is obvious from the very beginning of her work, when she places herself firmly as an Eastern European scholar of Chicana/o literature and gender studies within a larger context of white privilege and the expansion of neoliberal practices that victimize in particular working class women of color in the United States. The author successfully reclaims the ongoing importance of the oft-contested term “identity politics” as productive and necessary for staging and organizing resistance in an effort to protect and expand civil and human rights for Americans of Latin American descent, regardless of their immigration status, gender, and/or sexual orientation. After revealing the inherently nationalist aesthetics of the Chicano movement as modelled after patriarchal models inspired by colonial powers, the author then effectively contrasts such canonical work with literature by feminist Chicana authors such as Cherrie Moraga, Alma Villanueva, and Sandra Cisneros. As a resident of the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez borderlands for the last ten years, I especially appreciate the author's careful attention to and sensitive treatment of the literary and cultural representation of femicidios in Ciudad Juarez in the larger framework of a neoliberal critique. By emphasizing the foundational role of Anzaldúa as a theorist of internationally relevant border studies, transnational feminism, and queer theory, the author conveys a powerful and intriguing argument about the ongoing relevance of Anzaldúa's work for our contemporary historical moment, in which identity politics is all-too often and prematurely dismissed as obsolete.

5. *Questions for the author*

1. One of the questions that emerged for me after reading your dissertation is: “what next?” Thirteen years after her premature passing, who can (and does) take over Gloria Anzaldúa's central place in the battle against the triad of racism, sexism, and homophobia aimed at the Chicana/o community, especially at a time of heightened hostility against both recent immigrants from the Southern hemisphere as well as American citizens of Latin American, especially Mexican and Central-American descent?

Do you anticipate a new movement, perhaps akin to #BlackLivesMatter, do you see intersectional and “glocal” movements on the horizon, or do you detect a withdrawal into the private sphere, which tends to, yet again, privilege binary principles?

2. I was very moved by your beautifully written personal account in the introduction – an experience that mirrors mine every time I travel from EL Paso to Albuquerque, Tucson, or Big Bend, and have to move through a border checkpoint. Your keen observations of the structural (and internalized) racism at work in the Border Patrol, and your critical self-assessment as the beneficiary of white privilege mimics, in productive ways, Gloria Anzaldúa’s own interweaving of critical analysis and personal testimony. In which way did Anzaldúa’s (oft-criticized, because difficult to categorize) interdisciplinary and intimate way of writing and thinking influence your own work, and which challenges did you come across while working within the disciplinary structures (and perhaps confines) of a university setting? I am thinking here of Gloria Anzaldúa’s own struggles with the university as a graduate student. How did you address, negotiate, and overcome these challenges, and which Anzaldúan tools did you find most productive in this process?
3. In analysing Anzaldúa’s alternative program to Eurocentric system of thought that privileges Manichaeian binaries, you focus on a potentially feminist “trinity”, the Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona, each of whom has historically been used as a limiting role model for women; and yet, each of these icons has been recuperated, reinvented, and reappropriated by Chicana feminist artists, both writers, visual as well as performance artists such as Alma Lopez and Delilah Montoya. This reappropriation, especially of la Virgen has, however, much resistance, especially among conservative Catholics in the Mexican American community, including members of my own student body, who largely identify as Hispanic or Mexican, never as Chicana/o, which they tend to associate with a “leftist” agenda that is hostile to “American” values of individualism and capitalist success and “makes trouble” for those who wish to assimilate into a capitalist-driven machine you correctly reveal as the American nightmare for many Mexican and Central American immigrants. What do you make of these inter-ethnic tensions within and between the immigrant and resident communities who share cultural origins in Mexico, but are divided by ideological differences and cultural amnesia (especially with regards to anti-indigenous and homophobic sentiments among Mexican American communities), and how can Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories be used in productive liberal education, especially today, to counter such internalized racisms?

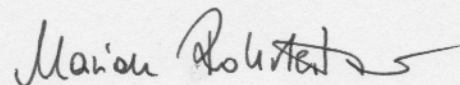
V. Conclusion

Mgr. Tereza Jiroutová-Kynčlová's brilliant dissertation makes a crucial and original contribution to the field and I am honoured to have had the privilege to read and assess her fantastic work. I therefore enthusiastically and without reservations recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of PASS.

Respectfully,

Vienna, August 18, 2017

Marion Christina Rohrleitner, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marion Rohrleitner", with a stylized flourish at the end.