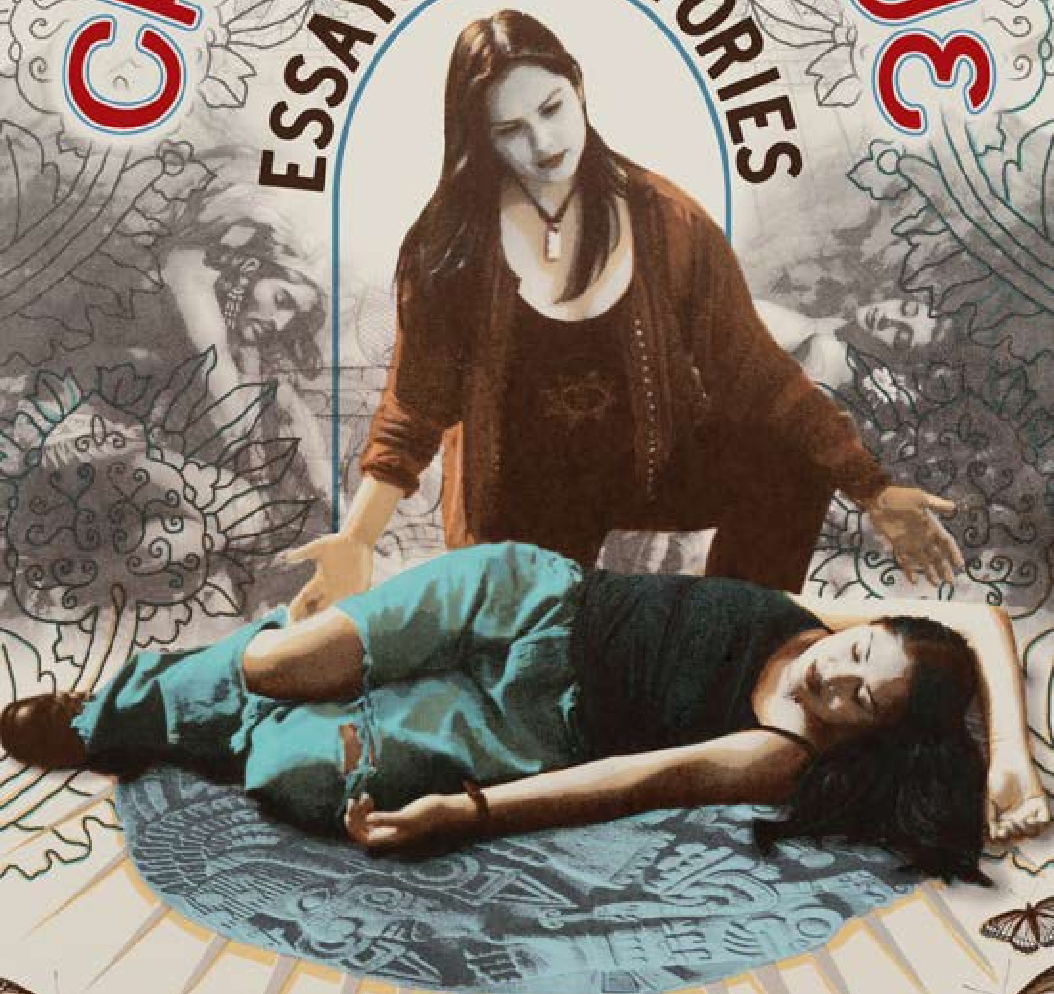
Crimes of the Tongue

Essays and Stories



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1

CRIMES OF THE TONGUE, OR, A MALINCHE TREE INSIDE ME

The first time I heard the word *malinchista*, I was in grade school in El Paso, Texas, circa 1968. My brother and I were not allowed to speak English at home, out of respect for my Spanish-only-speaking grandmother, but we often forgot the rule, and sometimes, we forgot the even bigger rule, never to mix the two languages.

"You two are turning into *pochos*," my grandmother groused.

"What's a *pocho*?" I wanted to know.

"A Mexican who betrays Mexico by forgetting their Spanish," one of my uncles interjected, "just like those *malinchistas* from El Segundo Barrio who feel like they're so American when they have a big *penca* stuck on their forehead."

From what I could tell, being a *malinchista* was a bad thing, although I had no idea what it meant or that it referred to La Malinche, whom I would not learn about until a decade later in college. I was more intrigued by the fact that being a *pocho* (or *pocha*, in my case) meant forgetting my Spanish, which apparently the folks living in the tenements of the Second Ward were doing, even though, according to my uncle, they had a "cactus *nopal en la frente*." Having a metaphorical cactus growing out of your skull means you are Mexican to the bone. With this logic, *pochos* like those who lived in El Segundo Barrio were Mexican

to the bone and yet they didn't speak Spanish and pretended to be gringos; hence, they were traitors to Mexico. Somewhere in my confused subconscious, I gathered that betrayal to Mexico meant betrayal to the family, and it was something I was always in peril of doing if I forgot my Spanish.

We didn't live in the tenements of El Segundo Barrio or Chihuahuita, but in a little corner house at the intersection of Barcelona and Edna Streets in the Clardy Fox neighborhood, a short drive from El Segundo Barrio and the Coliseum, and only a few blocks north of the Rio Grande itself. Our neighborhood was mostly Mexican or Mexican American and most of our neighbors, like my family, spoke only Spanish at home. All the Masses held at Lily of the Valley Church were in Spanish, even though the priest allowed us to confess in English, if we had no other recourse to cleansing our souls in the confessional.

I was the oldest grandchild, but since I was being raised by my dad's parents after my parents divorced, I was also the youngest kid. I was born in El Paso, unlike my dad or his brothers and sisters, or my grandparents, who were all born in Mexico, and yet, I was as Mexican as they were. At least, that's what I was taught: that we were Mexicans, that we spoke Spanish and respected our traditions, and that we would never eat TV dinners or meatloaf. Never mind that my grandfather's favorite restaurant was Luby's, his favorite breakfast Corn Flakes, his favorite dessert, Jell-O, and his favorite treat, shared only with me, his partner in late-night-binge-snacking crimes, Oreos dipped in cold milk.

The disdain my grandmother had for American food was as strong as her contempt for *pochos*. For my own good, my grandmother often warned me, I better never forget how to speak Spanish. To make sure I never succumbed to that *pocha* fate, an inevitability that she tried to stave off as long as I lived under her roof, she had me copy out a page of *La Santa Biblia* every day after I'd finished my homework. Somehow, forgetting my Spanish was not just a sign of extreme treachery, but also, and defi-

nitely much worse, disloyalty to the family, my grandmother in particular who knew no English. Little did I realize that, for as wrong and prejudicial as their logic was, my family was also teaching me to resist linguistic assimilation.

"Are you a *malinchista* if you were born in El Paso, Texas?" I asked.

"You can't be a *malinchista* if you're a Mexican and don't forget your Spanish," my grandfather clarified behind his newspaper.

So, it was possible for me to become a *malinchista* and betray Mexico by turning into a *pocha*. I remember looking up "malinchista" in my grandfather's Larousse Spanish dictionary, but the word wasn't there. I turned to the section on proper names, but all I found was Malinche, the name of a volcano between two states in Mexico. A second entry said, "see Marina." Under Marina o Malinche, it said (and I translate): *Mexican Indian, died around 1530. She was the interpreter, advisor, and lover of Hernán Cortés, with whom she had a son: Martín Cortés*. Having attended only Catholic English-only schools in El Paso, I knew nothing about the Spanish Conquest. What did any of this have to do with being a *pocha*? I had gone as far as my young mind could go in solving this ontological mystery.

It would not be until I took a Chicano Literature class as part of my English major in college, that I learned the lowdown on La Malinche, or rather, Malinal Tenepal, and the indigenous history of the Mexican nation that would provide me with the context I needed to understand the life and motivations of this historical icon of my culture. I learned that the Aztecs, who called themselves Mexica, were descendants of the great Toltec and the Olmec civilizations. That they were poets and artists, gardeners and cooks, that they had libraries and schools, armies and aviaries, temples, roads, aqueducts and ball games. That they were very much a patriarchal culture, ruled by Huitzilopochtli, the God of War, and they lorded over the neighboring tribes, exacting trib-

utes of food and flowers and human hearts. They were a class-stratified society (despite the fact that inheritance among the nobility was passed down matrilineally) and maintained a strict separation between the five social classes and the two sexes. Unless women were in the noble class, they were not allowed an education; their labor was physical and sexual. Malinal Tenepal was born into the noble class and was in line to inherit her mother's property and title, until her mother gave birth to her half-brother (not long after Malinal's father's death), and it was decided that the son rather than the daughter should be the rightful heir. Scholars estimate that Malinal Tenepal was between the ages of 8 and 12 when her half-brother was born and she was subsequently sold into slavery by her own mother, who later concocted a funeral for her "dead" daughter. The Mayan merchants who purchased her then sold the girl to the Tabascans and it was among the Tabascans that she learned the Mayan language of Chontal.

When Cortés made landfall in Yucatán in 1519 and promptly attacked the Mayan village of Potonchan, home of the Tabascans, the Tabascan cacique presented Cortés with a tribute of food, gold and women, and among the twenty female slaves gifted to the ruthless invader was the teenaged Malinal Tenepal, whom Cortés passed on to one of his captains. Upon landing in Mexica territory and finding his men surrounded by spear-wielding Mexica warriors far fiercer than any of the other tribes he had already vanquished, Cortés discovered that the slave girl Malinal Tenepal spoke two native languages and could translate between Chontal and Nahuatl. At first, there was another translator, a rescued priest named Gerónimo de Aguilar, who had been captured by the Maya years earlier; he spoke Chontal and Spanish. Malinche would translate for Aguilar from Nahuatl to Chontal, and Aguilar would translate for Cortés from Chontal to Spanish. But Malinche, with her innate skill for languages, learned Spanish in a short time, and Cortés had no more need of Aguilar as intermediary. Cortés had her baptized with the Christian name, Marina, and claimed

her as his own. Time after time, in one deadly skirmish after another, Marina was able to intercede for the Spaniards and prevent their imminent death. It was because of her translation skills and her diplomacy that Mexicans (and non-feminist Chicanos) continue to see La Malinche as a traitor to her own people.

I credit Theresa Meléndez-Hayes, the professor of that Chicano Literature class, the one and only Chicana professor on the faculty of the English department, I might add, teaching the one and only Chicano Literature class offered at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), with showing me my place in the genealogy of La Malinche and introducing me to my identity as a Chicana. This was 1979, so we did not yet have Cherríe Moraga or Gloria Anzaldúa on our syllabus, but we did have Antonia Castañeda, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Joseph Sommers's edited volume, *Literatura Chicana: texto y contexto*, which opened with a pre-Hispanic Nahuatl poem (translated into Spanish and English) as an epigraph commemorating the history, memory and renown of the ancient foremothers and forefathers whose stories would be told and retold to their progeny, those "who carry their blood and their color . . . the children of the Mexicas, the children of the Tenochcas . . ."[1] This epigraph connected me immediately with Chicano history, and with my mission as a writer, because, even though I wasn't or didn't yet consider myself a Chicana, I did call myself a writer, and I was one of those descendants of the ancient Mexican civilizations whose stories were my cultural legacy, which it was my responsibility to remember, record and communicate to future generations.

From *Literatura Chicana*, I learned that Mexicans were a product of the Spanish Conquest and that La Malinche was considered the symbolic foremother of the Mexican race, or rather, the mother of mestizaje. I learned about colonialism and *la raza cósmica* (the cosmic race), about *corridos* and the oral tradition, about the galvanizing power of the Chicano Movement and its solidarity with the farmworkers and the *braceros* of the United

States, with the revolutionary history of Mexico, and with the liberation movements taking place all over "Nuestra América" as José Martí called the continent of the Americas in 1891. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is in that book, as are Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Rubén Darío, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes—all of whose names my grandfather and my uncles dropped in casual conversation at our Sunday family reunions. And there were other names that I was meeting for the first time—Américo Paredes, Alurista, Corky Gonzales, John Rechy, José Montoya, raulsalinas, Tino Villanueva—some of whom would later become mentors, colleagues and friends

Toward the end of *Literatura Chicana*, the editors include a short excerpt from Carlos Fuentes' theatrical depiction of the Spanish Conquest, *Todos los gatos son pardos* (1970).[2] Written in Malinche's perspective at the moment of the birth of her mestizo son from her union with Hernán Cortes, Malinche summons her child from within her body, calling him, lovingly, "hijito de la chingada" (little son of a raped mother) who is the "única herencia" "de Malinche, la puta" (only legacy of Malinche the whore) (305). Embedded in the words "whore" and "mother" is the common Mexicano view of Malinche as a traitor to her people, for her giving herself to the conqueror, her birthing the conqueror's child, constitutes what Sandra Messigner Cypess calls "the paradigmatic behavior called malinchismo."[3] La Malinche's relationship with Cortés and the use of her linguistic skills in favor of the conquerors becomes the primordial symbol of cultural betrayal that led to the defeat and conquest of the indigenous people. Thus, La Malinche converts into the scapegoat, the "figure chosen to bear the burden of [colonial] guilt" for her supposed complicity with the "malignant foreign interference" of the Spanish invaders" (Messinger Cypess 43). By stigmatizing La Malinche as the Mexican Eve, Mexico could blame the downfall of the mighty Aztec/Mexica empire on one indigenous woman rather than on the political and military exploits of both brown and white male

supremacy. This scapegoating archetype has followed La Malinche since the birth of the Mexican nation in the 19th century—an interpretation shared by Mexicans and Chicanos until Chicana feminists started reinterpreting her life and revising her image in the 1970s.

The first Chicana revisionist history of Malinche is Adelaida Del Castillo's "Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective" (1974), which methodically, through a close analysis of the historical records of the Spanish Conquest, and perusal of the primary and secondary sources that document the history of the Mexica, the Maya and the many other Indigenous peoples who occupied the land we now call Mexico, debunks the myth that Malinche was the Mexican Eve.[4]

> In effect, when Doña Marina is accused of being "una traidora a la patria," one wrongly assumes that there was a "patria" (similar to the *patrias* [or nation-states] of today). The fact is, there were many Indian nations within the Aztec Empire, and these nations were always attempting, through one rebellion or another, to regain their former independence. . . . It is willful to forget that the concept of Mexican nationalism (*la patria*) was introduced long after the conquest of México and not before. (Del Castillo 131)

In his essay, "Sons of La Malinche," Octavio Paz (before he became a Nobel laureate) forever vilified La Malinche in the Mexican mind by labeling her "la Chingada," the open, violated and enslaved Indigenous woman who gives birth to the mestizo/Mexican race, thus making all Mexicans the progeny of Malinche, otherwise categorized by Paz as "hijos de la Chingada" (sons of the violated woman), or progeny of a raped mother.[5] For Paz this is the shame that plagues the Mexican son and that accounts for Mexican nihilism. Instead of seeing the rapes of Malinche and all the

other Native women as strategic maneuvers of the Conquest, Paz holds Malinche responsible, not only for her own dishonor, but also for the humiliation she passed on to her colonized offspring. Indeed, Paz's Malinche is a paradox: the passive "Fucked One" and the conspiratorial Traitor. On the one hand, Paz tells us, Malinche did not resist opening her legs to the foreigner, and instead gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador, like all the other "Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards" (Paz 86). On the other hand, he interprets Malinche as the agent of mass destruction who used her language skills to betray the tactical secrets of the Aztecs and facilitate the fall of the great Mexica Empire. Because of these crimes of the tongue, "the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal" (Paz 86), he concludes.

For all the abject inertia that Paz saw in Malinche, she is depicted in the post-Conquest codices, namely the Lienzo de Tlaxcala and the Florentine Codex as a central figure or mediator between the conqueror and the conquered, standing either close to or pointing at Hernán Cortés, almost always larger than any other figure in the story. In Book XII of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de la nueva España* (General History of the Things of New Spain), she is described as an important figure dressed in regal clothing but is also depicted holding a shield, like those given to young boys of the Nahua nation to signify their role as warriors and protectors of their people. This is a clue to the respect accorded to Malinche by the Native people.

In "La Malinche: Feminist Prototype" (1980), Cordelia Candelaria argues that Malinche's nobility was recognized by the Indigenous people not only because of the way she carried herself, and the way she assumed her place as translator and mediator, but also because she spoke the elevated imperial language of the Tlatoani, the Emperor Moctezuma.[6] Tlatoani is a Nahuatl word that means "he who Speaks," and only the Emperor was allowed to speak to the gods, that is, the invaders. Moctezuma's dreamers

and high priests had foretold of the return of Quetzalcoatl from the East on the same day the white strangers, traveling from the east on wind-drawn floating chariots (as the story was told), alighted in Mexico. The emperor fervently believed that Cortés and his company, in their armor and riding their majestic beasts, was indeed the god Quetzalcoatl fulfilling the prophecy. Since she not only spoke *to* the gods but also *for* them, Quetzalcoatl's human avatar, if you will, Malinche, became known as "The Tongue of the Gods" (La Lengua de los Dioses), and the Nahuas added the suffix *-tzin* to her name to signify her exalted position, making her Malintzin, for which Malinche is believed to be a Spanish mispronunciation.

The Spaniards, too, recognized Malintzin's greatness, not only as a translator but also as a diplomat who more than once had saved their lives, and so, they added Doña to her Spanish name. Cortés, of course, downplayed her importance in his letters to the King of Spain to apprise him of the progress of his colonizing mission, but Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who also accompanied Cortés, wrote admirably of her in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (The Real History of the Conquest of New Spain) and unequivocally attributed the success of the Conquest to Doña Marina's linguistic interventions, without which the Spaniards could never have been able to bridge the two cultures.

In the last five centuries, how did this remarkable woman change from being the Great Speaker for the Gods to the Abject Betrayer of Her People? How did her value in Mexican (and by extension Chicanx) history transform from La Lengua to la Chingada? How did she, alone, cause the conquest, occupation and 300-year colonization of the colossal Mexica/Aztec nation? Did the Totonacs and the Tlaxcalans who allied with Cortés because they hated living under Mexica dominion have nothing to do with the overthrow of the Aztec empire? What about the pandemic of smallpox and other virulent diseases brought by the Spaniards that the native people had no immunity to and therefore died in

droves because of their contact with the colonizer? Surely, these aspects weakened Aztec society and its ability to defend itself against the conquerors; Malinche herself died of smallpox within a decade of the conquest.

In that Chicano literature course I took in college, the early poetic interpretations we read by Lucha Corpi, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Angela de Hoyos, Inés Hernández-Ávila, Sylvia Gonzáles, Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, Carmen Tafolla, Alma Villanueva, Bernice Zamora humanized Malinche and spoke from her voice and perspective, as daughter, slave, lover and traitor's tongue.[7] They empathized with Malinche, I realized, because Chicanas, too, were given roles not of their own choosing and were expected to provide sexual and manual service to the revolution while the men running the revolution pushed aside their legitimate concerns as female bodies coming into their own empowered feminist consciousness. I marveled at how these writers braided their own prejudicial experiences within the Chicano Movement into their texts. As poets and activists invested in social justice, as daughters, wives and mothers who dared to question the limitations imposed on their female bodies by *la familia*—be that their biological families or *la familia* of El Movimiento, both led by the authority of El Gran Chingón, to invoke Octavio Paz—they embodied Malinche's struggle of resistance to enslavement and her subversive use of language to advocate for and reclaim their own rights. Here was a completely new interpretation of Malinche: the Chicana feminist Malinche, which I had to explore further in a research paper.

In 1981, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga published *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Aunt Lute), that included two radical revisions of La Malinche: Norma Alarcón's "Chicana Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision Through Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object" and Moraga's "A Long Line of Vendidas," which she would include the following year in her first memoir, *Loving in the War Years: lo*

que nunca pasó por sus labios (South End Press 1982). Anzaldúa, too, rewrote Malinche's story in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Press 1987), as did Ana Castillo in *Massacre of the Dreamers* (University of NM Press 1994). Alarcón wrote several pieces on Malinche, including her "Traddutora, Tradditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism"[8] in which she calls Malintzin the "monstrous double" of the Virgin of Guadalupe. While la Virgen symbolizes "transformative powers and sublime transcendence" and promises deliverance and liberation for every oppressed petitioner, Malinche "represents feminine subversion and treacherous victimization . . . and elicits a fascination entangled with loathing, suspicion, and sorrow" (61, 62). In the bulk of the essay, Alarcón performs a critical review of many of the Chicana feminist reinterpretations of La Malinche by the authors named above. Despite this revisionary work, Alarcón believes that as a "historical subject Malintzin remains shrouded in preternatural silence, and as object she continues to be on trial for speaking and bearing the enemy's children and continues to be a constant source of revision and appropriation—indeed, for articulating our modern and postmodern condition" (85).

All these Chicana feminist reframings of La Malinche destroyed the myth of the treacherous scapegoat for me and gave rise to my own inquiries and poetic reinterpretations of this complex historical figure. I wrote several poems about her that were included in my 1983 Master's Thesis, and, later, in *Beggar on the Córdoba Bridge*, my first full-length collection of poetry. "Malinchista, A Myth Revised," is a prose poem in five parts that summarizes the myth of Malinche's betrayal and her connection to La Llorona, the ghostly woman weeping for her lost children. The poem depicts several Malinches: as La Lengua/the Tongue of the white gods who could also speak the sacred language of the Tatloani Moctezuma; as the sexual slave of a bearded foreigner who raped her and penetrated her being with his conqueror's tongue; as the mother of the first mestizo son, who is born with

the black eyes of his Indigenous mother and the curly hair of his Spanish father whose own supposedly pure blood was likely mixed with Moorish blood, the boy's skin color a "café-con-leche" mixture of both races. In the last two sections of the poem, Malinche's story interpolates *mestizaje* with border crossing. While mother and newborn sleep under the night sky, the mother exhausted from her labor, the boy already haunted by furtive dreams, a coyote lurks near the river, referencing either the predatory animal itself or the people who prey on those who cross the border without papers into the [un]Promised Land. The poem closes with Malinche transformed into La Llorona wailing at the border's riverbanks for her murdered child, not because she is sorry for a crime she did not commit, as the downfall of Tenochtitlan had already been prophesied in the Aztec calendar, whether or not she served as the conqueror's Tongue. Malinche/Llorona is screaming for revenge against Cortés for sacrificing her land and her people to their white god.[9]

In another poem from that collection, "Letters from a Bruja," I imagine what Malinche's mother might have said to her daughter about her decision to sell her into slavery.

> . . . you are conceived, hija,
> from the worm of incest.
> Already your seed bears the gift of darkness.
> Already your name washes up
> on the salty foam
> between my thighs: Malinal, Malintzin,
> brown woman of tongues and trickery.
> Malinche, mother of the new breed. (*Beggar on the Córdoba Bridge,* 46)

The incest theme crops up again in my short story in Spanish, "Los derechos de La Malinche,"[10] a story within a story that parallels the first-person narrator's rape by her father and Malinche's

rape by Cortés. Unlike the outer frame story, in which the daughter has no control over the "daily bread" she gets from her "Papacito" (or as Paz would put it, being her father's "Chingada")—a secret that she has carried all her life and that has hardened in her throat like a tumor—Malinal Tenepal (the sold daughter who was dispossessed of her title and her inheritance) understands the inevitability of her fate as a slave and a woman. Summoning the strength of her goddesses, Tonantzín and Coatlicue,[11] Malintzin sets a trap for the conquistador with the thorny skin of a prickly pear. Doña Marina realizes that even at her most disgraced moment, she does, indeed, have some power to determine the outcome of her "baptism" into a colonized destiny.

In the frame story, the narrator's grandmother tries to justify the father's absence. It's not that he was a deadbeat, albeit handsome, alcoholic of a father; it's that he felt embittered by his daughter's abnormal choice of a life without a man. Hence, like Malinche who, according to Octavio Paz, "gave herself willingly to the conqueror," a sin that earned her the eternal blame of the Mexican people, the daughter gives herself willingly to another woman, and this act of lesbianism is the shameful betrayal that the father could never forgive and that drove him away from his daughter, away from all his obligations as a father; it was this indignity and unforgiveness that festered into alcoholism and led El Papacito to drink himself into an early grave at the age of fifty-two. *Mea culpa, mea culpa*.

Forty years later, I am still researching, teaching and writing about Malinche in my poetry and fiction, my classes and academic books. And I am far from alone. In fact, Malinal Tenepal continues to inspire a legion of reinterpretations. A quick perusal of Google Scholar or Academia.edu using the name Malinche in the search engine shows how many others in a variety of fields, publications and institutions both within and outside of the United States, in English, Spanish and other languages, are also rewriting Malinche or contextualizing her name and story in discourses

beyond the Conquest. Obviously, her story resonates as much today as it did in the early days of the Chicano Movement, and that resonance multiplies in concentric rings as more and more scholars see her not as the passive "Chingada" (Fucked one) and symbol of the Conquest that Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes immortalized, but rather as a rape survivor and multilingual diplomat with her own historical agency.

Pilar Godayol argues in "Malintzin, Malinche, Doña Marina: Re-reading the Myth of the Treacherous Translator," her review of the literature on Malinche as both historical figure and cultural trope, that there are as many Malinches as there are multiple interpretations and translations of her life and myth.[12] It is because of this plasticity that Malinche, like her co-symbolic sisters, La Llorona and la Virgen de Guadalupe, can metamorphose into so many different meanings depending on the translator/interpreter. Malinche can be read as 1) the treacherous translator who used her power of language to reveal the tactical secrets of her people to the conquering foreigners and so brought down the Mexica/Aztec empire; 2) the Mexica girl of noble birth who was sold by her own mother so that her brother from another father could inherit her title; 3) the willing mistress of Hernán Cortés, part of a harem given to the conquistador as tribute to whom the Mexica believed to be a reincarnated Quetzalcoatl; 4) the religious convert to Christianity who knew her survival and that of the Native people was tied to the faith of the conquerors; 5) La Chingada, the raped mother of the new mestizo race; or 6) as most Chicana feminists see her, the sexual slave of conquerors and soldiers, the betrayed daughter and reviled mother whose only treachery was rebelling against the patriarchal codes of her culture.

In *[Un]Framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels With a Cause* (UT Press 2014), I call Malinche one of the three primordial *mujeres malas*, or socially constructed "bad women," of our Mexican genealogy who show us, by example, what it means to decolonize our minds and

rebel against patriarchy for our own sake and that of our future generations. What it means to reject not only colonization but also patriarchal exploitation of our minds and bodies. To be a *malinchista* means you *are* a traitor, after all, but what you betray are the sexist, heterosexist, homophobic and transphobic gender codes of Chicanismo. In other words, you use your mind, your tongue and your body in any way that you desire. This new *malinchista* cultivates her intellectual skills and linguistic talents not only for her own survival, as Malinal Tenepal did, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for self-empowerment and pleasure. Because Chicana lesbians "have become the latter-day Malinches of Chicano culture,"[13] it is necessary to unframe *malinchismo* and reframe it as a new mirror of Chicana resistance and affirmation.

In my poem "The Roads Out of the Body," from which I have taken the main title of this essay, Malinche represents this other kind of betrayal, lesbian love or the climbing into "the arms of another woman,/ a Malinche tree/ inside me" (*Beggar on the Bridge* 48). Here is another crime of the tongue. The Malinche tree is a play on the Judas tree, evoking the same sense of betrayal as the legendary tree from which Judas Iscariot is said to have hung himself in shame for having betrayed Jesus Christ. The narrator's lesbianism is a manifestation of a Malinche tree inside her, not a Judas tree whose dangling seedpods and blood-red blossoms are reminiscent of the self-lynched body of Christianity's primordial traitor. This is a redemptive tree whose roots reach back to Malinche to branch off, or separate, the notion of "women/and sins" (49). Loving ourselves is not a sin, saving ourselves is not a sin, nor is passion between women a sin. The "arms" that "crawl out wings" are the arms of a liberated being, no longer trapped in the cultural expectation of women as inherently sinful or shameful, who is free to express desire in the form that she finds most satisfying. *La Lengua* of the gods becomes the lover's tongue, and the language of betrayal is transformed into an orgasm between women. "*Quiero gritar*, she says/*Give me your tongue./Make me scream*" (48).