

**FEMALE KITCHEN NARRATIVES: THE ELEMENTS OF THE
LATINA BILDUNGSROMAN THROUGH SELF-
EXPLORATION AND PROTEST**

by

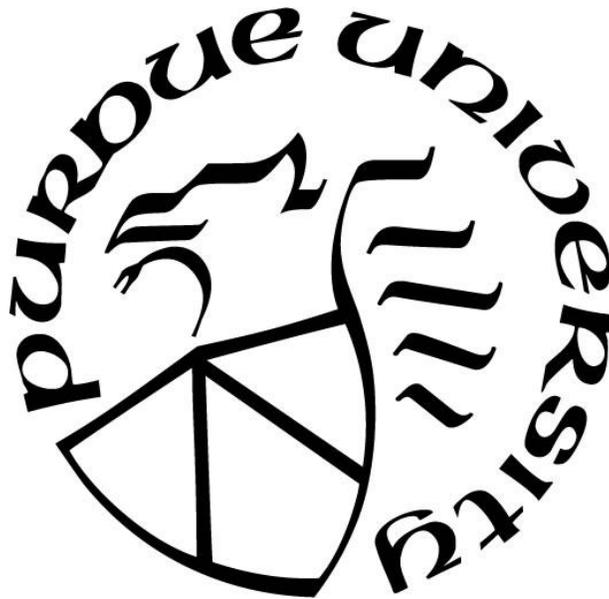
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To my family, without whom this would, literally, never have been completed.

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Female Kitchen Narratives: The Elements of the Latina Bildungsroman Through
Self-Exploration and Protest

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The following chapters access kitchen narratives through the lens of the Bildungsroman to help bridge an important gap in the reception and criticism of the theme. In particular, I examine the trope of food and the kitchen space in texts that also deal with coming of age, and how the criticism surrounding these texts has helped or hindered critical understanding of female experiences.

In my Introduction I conduct a survey of the way literary criticism has approached culinary texts and women's writing about kitchen spaces. I propose that viewing kitchen narratives in Latina authors' texts as a form of female Bildungsroman serves as a platform for women to communicate their own stories in a way that highlights their contribution to a literary genre through their own personal experiences. In parts 1 and 2 of Chapter 2 I investigate further into the history of culinary writing in Latin America as well as how the Bildungsroman and the kitchen intersect in women's writing respectively. In Chapter 3 I conduct a critical analysis of one of the most widely studied culinary fictions, Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (1989), and examine how this text and its scholarship have set the stage for food narrative criticism for women across Latina texts. Chapter 4 focuses on kitchen narratives in texts and how they can be viewed through the lens of the Bildungsroman utilizing Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1991).

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: A SURVEY OF FEMALE KITCHEN NARRATIVES AND THE HISTORY OF SELF-EXPLORATION AND PROTEST WITHIN THE TEXTS

The intersection of food, cooking, and *la cocina*¹ has been a significant part of women's writing for centuries. There are themes that have been treated, through time, as means for expression for women on themes that had been deemed masculine, and therefore been somewhat inaccessible to them in literature. Authors such as Rosario Ferré, Isabel Allende and Rosario Castellanos have investigated these tropes in their own literature and critiqued the evolution of the culinary discussion in Latina literature. I would like to pause here for a moment and address some of the terminology I use throughout this study, acknowledging there are some larger debates surrounding the terms. The one I would like to address here is my use of the term "Latina." As I push through this study, I will be discussing texts by female authors from Central and South America as well as the Caribbean, who all have different relationships to their nationality as well as the context in which they write. My use of this word to reference them throughout this text is in no way an attempt to invalidate those differences; rather my intention is to highlight a common core of themes being explored by them. My use of the term is a way to recognize and acknowledge the national differences between all these authors and the contexts they describe in their writing. I defer to the term Latina to be able to refer to these authors and celebrate the fact that they all work within their own specific national contexts and relationships to international border crossing. Finally, the term Latina provides a connotation that these authors all communicate diverse personal

¹ As I pursue these topics, I will use the Spanish word *cocina* in order to harness a sense of everything included in the trope. From the physical space, to the preparation of ingredients, the recipes and the act of cooking itself, the Spanish word allows for a more-encompassing view of the subject matter in consideration with the context of this study. Using the Spanish word is useful to appeal to the international aspect of the Spanish American Bildungsroman by traversing literary language borders many of these authors interact with their texts.

stories and cultural contexts, and my suggestion is that the Latina Bildungsroman can be effective in building female community rooted in aspects of personal story-telling and an oral narrative style, which I will discuss in this introduction and throughout this dissertation. These authors have been advocates of women's right to participate in what have historically been deemed "masculine" topics when it comes to writing and story-telling, and they have all found *la cocina* to be a useful vehicle to make this claim. In the article "Unchained Tales: Women Prose Writers from the Hispanic Caribbean in the 1990s," Lizabeth Paravasini-Gebert notes that since the late 20th century, women's topics have moved away from discussing feminism as a theme, and that instead there has been a shift towards masculine gendered discussions in their literature. In her introduction she states, "After a brief survey of literary production by women in the Hispanic Caribbean from roughly 1988-2001, this article looks at the four principal areas into which women's writings have moved: religion (particularly African-derived religious systems), the erotic, popular culture, and the environment" (445). It is worth noting that the authors that I mention above all treat many of the areas that Paravasini-Gebert marks as being appropriated into women's discourse, and they all happen to use the imagery of *la cocina* to convey their message. The position of power that women have taken regarding the act of cooking and in the space is intentional and turns on its head the notion that they are suited to speak mainly in the domestic sphere. Nancy LaGreca's interpretation of the concept of the "angel of the house" is a helpful way to demonstrate this issue in Hispanic culture. LaGreca explains that, "The Angel of the House was the domestic ideal for women of the mid nineteenth century in the Hispanic world and in Europe... It portrayed the perfect woman as the Christian, chaste, maternal guardian of the happiness and success of her children, husband, and other family member" (5). It is this domestic ideal that coalesces with the space, considering its position in the innermost part of the home. I suggest that exploration of culinary narratives is one

of the ways female authors have managed to move through the inner social sphere (the home), to highlight women's perspectives as part of the existing literary corpus.

In addition to serving as an avenue to explore the interior of the home, women have also used culinary topics to explore and share their personal stories. One of the elements that is often linked with food is the exploration of sexual or erotic aspects of women's stories. A significant example of this trend, though certainly not the only one, is Sonia Vilma Migliore de Helfer's project titled "La sensualidad de la mujer y el alimento: una dialéctica feminista de perquisición." In her text, Migliore de Helfer discusses the works of Laura Esquivel, Isabel Allende and Denise Chávez, to identify the relationship between food and women's sexual expression. Migliore de Helfer sees a link between food and female eroticism in which the exploration of sensuality results in a textual concoction which women are able to use in order to express personal desires and speak those desires and stories to themselves as well as others to guide their own narratives from their perspective. The critic investigates the relationship between sex and food in detail when she zeroes in on Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (1989) and studies the relationship of Tita's food preparation with her own physical reactions to passion. "En *Chocolate* la condimentación es un agente activo que precipita en la acción de los personajes una implicada actividad. Esquivel paralela el calor de la cocina con el calor sensual que Tita aprende a reconocer" (12). Later on, she moves to inspect Allende's *Afrodita* (1997), a much more explicitly sensual text, which Allende herself deems as an exploration of sexuality (13). About Allende's text, Migliore de Helfer writes "Allende se transporta a sí misma y a su lector/a en un viaje donde la relación de la sensualidad y de la comida están profundamente entremezcladas, en dónde la mujer es el sujeto que expresa su deseo en vez de ser el objeto deseado" (14). While the connection between sensuality and food in women's writing has a place and a function in a feminist context, I propose they also serve as a

bridge for women to access their own personal histories and highlight those experiences in a field where it has been historically more appropriate for men to write about them.

In Allende's case I want to specifically point out that her text utilizes *la cocina* to present a more gender-inclusive understanding of sexuality. She dedicates her book in the following way: "Dedico estas divagaciones eróticas a los amantes juguetones y, ¿por qué no? también a los hombres asustados y a las mujeres melancólicas." This book is meant as a treatise towards the different approaches to pleasure for couples, and then both men and women. Allende does in fact pay more attention to women's pleasure and acknowledges that her book is a deviation from the theme of sexuality and the way that women generally write about it. She dismisses the previous expectations centering on desire and fertility that come with women discussing sexuality in literature, to focus instead on female pleasure, "Por tiempos inmemoriales la humanidad ha recurrido a sustancias, trucos, actos de magia y juegos, que la gente seria y virtuosa se apresura en clasificar como perversiones, para estimular el deseo amoroso y la fertilidad. Esto último no nos interesa aquí, ya hay demasiados niños ajenos en el mundo, vamos a concentrarnos en el placer" (7). Allende's wording suggests that her text will diverge from talking about sexuality in terms of its reproductive purposes, which had been for a long time the only socially acceptable way for women to openly discuss sex, and then brushes it off entirely and states that it will purposefully not form part of her text. Additionally, her text involves a very personal look at her own life and experiences, and how she was able to reach a point in her life where it was possible for her to write this kind of text. In this way, she individualizes the text, and it becomes something of a story of personal discovery, where she focuses on telling her story from her perspective as a young girl growing up and observing how the women in her family interacted with *la cocina*.

In this introduction I will examine several texts by female authors that intersect with *la cocina* and female story-sharing. More specifically, for the rest of the study I will focus on two texts, Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing: a Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1991). These two authors present stories and protagonists that focus on a female coming-of-age story, and I suggest that the way they utilize *la cocina* and the interior of the home to showcase female development is similar to a structure for the traditional male Bildungsroman genre. In conjunction with other authors who also approach culinary topics in their writing, I will examine these two texts to see how the intersection of kitchen narratives and the Bildungsroman open a path for women's writing to highlight a more gender and socially inclusive version of coming of age stories.

Before moving forward with the discussion on the Bildungsroman genre, I want to acknowledge the fact that the history of the genre is surrounded by larger debates concerning its inclusivity and flexibility. I would like to address a commonly accepted understanding of the traditional conception of the genre, to which I will be referring when contrasting the texts selected for this dissertation. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* describes the Bildungsroman as,

A kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity. The term ('formation-novel') comes from Germany, where Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjare* (1795-6) set the pattern for later Bildungsromane. Many outstanding novels of the 19th and early 20th centuries follow this pattern of personal growth. (7)

Goethe's outline for the conception of the Bildungsroman became a stylized format or model that determined the content and direction of the genre. The composition of the Bildungsroman has been both concretely described and identified as well as debated and dissected. As seen in the literary definition above, there are certain areas of the genre that were agreed upon as pivotal, such as the transition of a subject from childhood into maturity, as well as a form of journey that is undertaken

to achieve success in this feat. As we can see in the above quote, one other thing that several sources affirm is the origin of the understanding of the genre in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*. Marc Redfield also affirms this in his text *Phantom Formations* which debates the nuances of the genre and the complexity in its definition. In his chapter on "The Phantom Bildungsroman," he argues,

One would be hard-pressed to find another instance of a genre in which particularity and generality appear to mesh so thoroughly. For since the Bildungsroman narrates the acculturation of a self—the integration of a particular "I" in to the general subjectivity of humanity—the genre can be said to repeat, as its identity or content, its own synthesis of particular instance and general form. (38)

Redfield not only affirms Goethe's seminal contribution to the genre, but also builds upon the idea that it is a genre that has transcended its origins and become an international form of pluralistic story-telling. The Bildungsroman achieves this by describing a manner of "acculturation or integration," which I will examine throughout this study, is the factor that unifies the literary experiences of the protagonists in my chosen texts. Tobias Boes echoes these ideas, and even goes beyond the notion of individual integration, observing the Bildungsroman on a national scale. He reinforces Goethe's importance to the conception of the genre, but also addresses the issue that it does not truly access the collective experience that the texts hope to achieve (2-3). He suggests that the authors who would create a national collective imagination through their protagonists were unable to successfully grasp or describe the sense of community. I want to propose utilizing the Bildungsroman structure as a possibility for women to express their own path of self-examination and share it from intersecting socio-cultural perspectives. More importantly for this study, the idea that this genre was conceptualized upon the experiences of predominantly male protagonists, and in a time when women had very little defined influence on education or literary criticism, is very significant. The Bildungsroman was imagined in this way due to circumstance, and over the centuries, its definition has changed and expanded so that it can intersect with race, gender and

nationality in different ways and for different outcomes. Later in this study I will discuss the ability of the Bildungsroman to evolve due to the idea that it is not a concrete genre, but that it has always been a form meant to change and grow.

In an example of some of the research done concerning the importance of a flexible Bildungsroman Amy Cummins and Myra Infante-Sheridan approach the genre through a *chicana* feminist lens. The authors appear to suggest that the importance of the evolution of the genre comes from the need to universalize it and have it be accessible across literary, physical and cultural boundaries. Cummins and Infante-Sheridan open their article by stating the need for cross-cultural story-telling by citing different sources that emphasize the benefits of seeing oneself, and others like similar to you, in literature as a way of promoting a collective empathy for one another (129). Based on their assessment there are two important issues being addressed. The first is the relevance of a genre that can be adapted and accessed by different people to tell stories, and secondly the importance of telling their stories in the first place. I suggest this is the most relevant connection of the Bildungsroman genre to the texts I have chosen for this dissertation. There is an important link between telling and recording personal histories and the collectivization of that experience in order to create communities. This is how I suggest women's culinary narratives are helpful in connecting Latina's personal stories. Cummins and Infante-Sheridan pose their arguments for an interpretation of a *chicana* adolescent Bildungsroman; which they propose as a "new version" of the Bildungsroman, and thus suggest the potential for this genre to be a truly cross-cultural, accessible, tool. Their idea for a "new version" of the Bildungsroman that follows an internal journey for young *chicanas* differs from the traditional view of the genre and would help legitimize formative texts that look inwards into a protagonist's journey by presenting a subject that deviates from the traditional male story. They argue that the use of a minority female viewpoint as the

central agent of the plot can broaden the perspective of the genre and enable a larger demographic to access and connect to the story more directly. By utilizing the Bildungsroman genre, they are able to present a shared experience in a personal way (37). This is exactly the connection I focus on throughout the following chapters. I will examine the way that the main texts by Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer interact with the Bildungsroman through the exploration of the interior of the home.

In this project I propose that food and kitchen spaces are useful as tools to provide a context with direct connections to women's experiences as well as an avenue for self-expression. The authors I have previously mentioned provide some of the most open examples of the way that *la cocina* has been adapted to feminist ideology, they have turned the topic inside out and used culinary literature to free women's minds and bodies through their writings. *La cocina* is a space that women have addressed in positive and negative perspectives, and it even serves as a place to express frustration and a sense of discontent with the treatment of women's writing with regards to sexuality and the ability to tell their own stories. This emphasis on women's writing and community construction through the Bildungsroman genre is significant in both Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer's approaches to their protagonists' stories.

The theme of *la cocina* has had a controversial effect in terms of how women writers have used it to achieve different means as well as in showcasing their relationship to the space. This is evident especially in Esquivel's text, as Tita's narrative highlights the tensions that exist in female narratives about self-exploration with regards to how to represent female formation. Due to the conflicted relationship Tita has with *la cocina* and her home we are able to view Esquivel's text and characters in a polarized way. Tita is both successful and unsuccessful at crafting a narrative based on her desires and developing a sense of agency as a result of the power that other characters have over her actions, such as Pedro and Mama Elena. In this dissertation I will explore how these

tensions occur in different female-oriented texts that intersect with food and suggest that contextualizing these narratives within a contemporary version of the Bildungsroman permits an interpretation of kitchen narratives that aids inclusivity and more open expression of personal stories. Both Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer's texts present their protagonists stories and how they interact with their own internal narratives as means of showcasing both successful and failed feminist progress, and by making them coming-of-age stories thus provide a sense of collectivity across woman-centered communities.

Utilizing *la cocina* and the interior of the home as a jumping-off point provides a central trope around which to examine how texts like Esquivel's and Ortiz Cofer's serve as examples of the different perspectives of Latina women in their cultural contexts. As a counterpoint to Esquivel's text I will examine Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing* to identify a form of female Bildungsroman that purposefully combines memory and fiction to create a specific narrative for their readership. We follow the main character's story throughout her life and the central point in the story is learning the early experiences of navigating Hispanic culture as a woman in the space of her grandmother's kitchen. These two novels function as examples of how kitchen narratives can be perceived and utilized in different ways, and how it can be possible for them to impel or hinder the creation of woman-focused communities by the way that they present and teach womanhood in the society they depict. Even though both protagonist's stories develop from different origins and in different Latin American and North American contexts, there is a commonality in the way that the authors chose to present and organize the narratives. There is a focus on the internal narrative, presenting their desires and exposing the elements of their formative process, as well as a use of the interior of the home to present this journey. In addition

to the ambit of where the stories take place, there is also the how, which in both cases makes use of oral narration to communicate personal stories.

In the culture of *la cocina*, as far as it relates to women's stories, there are many different recorded cases of an oral narrative style. This is one of the elements that are highlighted in the Latina bildungsroman, as it provides an opportunity for a personalized look at formational texts. An oral narrative style allows the writer to "speak" to the reader, many times from a first-person perspective. Some of these examples include texts that I discuss in conjunction to my main texts, for instance Gorriti's *Cocina ecléctica* (1890) and Allende's *Arodita*. Despite the varied formats of these texts, I propose that each author tells a personal story that explores her connection to *la cocina* as well as the influence of the space, whether positive or negative, to her own personal development. This element of orality enables the writer to personalize the process of writing a Bildungs narrative for the reader in the sense that the narration seems more like a conversation between the reader and writer. Additionally, I suggest the oral quality in these texts helps personalize the experience of cultural integration and assimilation. All the authors I consider in this dissertation deal with personal cultural experiences, and some like Ortiz Cofer, Anzaldúa and Gorriti address international border crossing directly. My proposal considers how these authors integrate *la cocina* as a theme or platform for their explorations into personal and cultural storytelling. I suggest in this project that this aspect of kitchen culture in Latin American women's writing is what locates it in an ideal position to function as a contribution to the discussion of storytelling and the telling of women's lives. This is very clear in both Esquivel and Ortiz-Cofer's texts. To demonstrate this part further I will call upon Rosario Ferré's works as a theoretical framework of how literary and oral genres are interwoven with women's formational texts. Women, having been relegated to the care of family, thus claimed kitchen culture as their own and

it is from this context that they have then shared their life stories and their desire to contribute to society.

La cocina and everything that it encompasses can also be utilized to create a place for intimate story telling by women. It is a space and a theme that has been directed to tell women's history and cultural contribution, encompassing self-exploration, failures and frustrations as well as successful examples of community building and self-understanding. In terms of what defines a Bildungs text, Julia Kushigian points out the following in her book *Reconstructed Childhood* (2003). "It is important to note that the Bildungsroman is written for the sake of the process, the Bildung process, which illuminates the hero's all-around self-development. Self-development may include uncertainties, inconclusive endings, or possibly the death of the hero (77)". *La cocina* creates a space for women to live out their lives and share them with others, a space of their own to be simply individual, or a medium for a Bildungsroman that creates an imagined community as well as tells a story within the context of Latin American and Caribbean culture, despite whether or not the subject is successful of achieving a happy ending or showing decisive feminist freedom at the end of her story. In the process of the Latina stories I explore in this dissertation, there is a pattern that emerges where the authors I discuss place a greater importance on the process of their development than on the end result of their own lives. There are several texts that I will refer to in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of *la cocina* as part of the formational process for female identity within the Latina Bildungsroman. Esquivel's text is one of the most important, if not the most widely known example of culinary texts in Latin-American literature. Her novel also functions as a form of model for the way that food and sexuality interact in women's story telling in Hispanic cultures. This creates an ideal comparison for a different approximation to *la cocina* as demonstrated in a text like Ortiz Cofer's. Finally, it is not only Hispanic Latin countries with

texts that discuss the interior of the home as a formative space for women, but I would also like to include an example from Brazil with Nélida Piñon's short story, "Colheita" (1973) as a theoretical outline for the necessity of diverse inclusion of women within the Bildungsroman genre.

CHAPTER 2. CONSIDERING THE EVOLUTION OF KITCHEN NARRATIVES IN LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN’S WRITING: SOR JUANA, GORRITI, CASTELLANOS, FERRÉ, AND ALLENDE

There are examples of women who have taken to their pens and drawn the connection between food and writing in different ways and for different ends throughout history. In this chapter, I will trace the scholarship that ties these women together and examine what the map of culinary literary studies looks like in our setting today. I will begin with the authors who put *la cocina* on the literary map, and I will conclude with the way academic critics have responded to the themes of kitchen literature.

To begin a discourse on the place of food in women’s literature, I believe it is appropriate to cite one of the founding mothers of Latin American women’s erudition, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. I deem Sor Juana’s words on cooking as a particularly important vehicle for arguing in favor of education for women. We could certainly delve into her other works and find examples of the way that she tended to use a double meaning, false modesty or subversive rhetoric to challenge the way that women were held back from academic learning or confined to convents, however, her *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz* (1700) is an ideal example that elucidates the thematic relationship of *la cocina* and female education. In this letter, she enumerates the reasons why it is crucial that women receive formal education, but she frames it within the social expectations of women set forth by the society in which she lived, and she does so using the language of the kitchen. For example, in her own life, the nun listed the theological reasons that a formal education deepened her understanding of the Christian faith.

Con esto proseguí, dirigiendo siempre, como he dicho, los pasos de mi estudio a la cumbre de la Sagrada Teología; pareciéndome preciso, para llegar a ella, subir por los escalones de la ciencias y artes humanas... ¿Cómo sin la Lógica sabría yo los métodos generales y particulares con que está escrita la Sagrada Escritura? ...

¿Cómo sin Física, tantas cuestiones naturales de las naturalezas de los animales de los sacrificios donde se simbolizan tantas cosas ya declaradas, y otras muchas que hay? (80)

In this quotation Sor Juana argues in favor of the education of women with her use of biblical principles. If the convent is one of two acceptable choices for women who wanted to continue educating themselves, the choices being motherhood or entering the church as a nun, then she argues it is impossible, or at the very least impractical, that they would be expected to fully comprehend the relevance of the scriptures without first being taught basic life skills such as math and science. She then places the focus of her criticism on the options that are offered to women, and how unlikely it is to expect women to thrive as individuals or grow intellectually on these alone. “Teniendo yo después como seis o siete años, y sabiendo ya leer y escribir, con todas las otras habilidades de labores y costuras que dependen las mujeres, oí decir que había Universidad y Escuelas en que se estudiaban las ciencias, en Méjico” (78). By virtue of great personal sacrifice and dedication, she had achieved an understanding of Latin, physics, chemistry, and math. A working knowledge of the type of skills expected of women in cleaning and mending clothes by the age of six or seven. Not to mention, that by this point she already knew how to read, which was extremely out of character for women in that time period. She does not state directly that there is anything wrong with learning home care and family care as practical skills, but her discontent with the limited opportunities for women is apparent in her specification of being barely a child in age when she understood the expectations of women in Mexican society, and already had a desire to learn skills beyond those expected of her. In particular, to develop intellectual qualities more in tune with traditional education accessible mainly to men, in a space outside the home.

In this letter, Sor Juana critiques the established roles and how harmful they are, not only to the interpretation of gender, but to the development of society, since they inhibit the growth of essentially half the population by not allowing women to freely access a general education. The

relevance of this letter to this project goes further when she utilizes a kitchen analogy to accomplish two goals. The first is, I would argue, to demonstrate the knowledge of chemical and transformation processes that are observable during cooking, but the second is to elevate the space of *la cocina*, which in her mind belongs to women, to a space of knowledge and learning to equal any masculine activity.

Pues ¿qué os pudiera contar, Señora, de los secretos naturales que he descubierto estando guisando? Veo que un huevo se une y fríe en la manteca o aceite y, por contrario, se despedaza en el almíbar; ver que para que el azúcar se conserve fluida basta echarle una muy mínima parte de agua en que haya estado membrillo u otra fruta agria; ver que la yema y clara de un mismo huevo son tan contrarias, que en los unos, que sirven para el azúcar, sirve cada una de por sí y juntos no. Por no cansaros con tales frialdades, que sólo refiero por daros entera noticia de mi natural y creo que os causará risa; pero, señora, ¿qué podemos saber las mujeres sino filosofías de cocina?...Y yo suelo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito...y las dejo por no cansaros, pues basta lo dicho para que vuestra discreción y trascendencia penetre y se entere perfectamente en todo mi natural y del principio, medios y estado de mis estudios. (92)

The first part of the paragraph she dedicates to a display of her knowledge of the different properties of cooking an egg under different conditions. She alludes to the fact that there is skill and study required in the understanding of properly performing these tasks. She also highlights the fact that male authors generally don't touch on topics like food preparation or the education of the family, essentially pointing out that this space is reserved predominantly for women. "Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito..." (92). In this quote I would go as far as to suggest that she is calling not only for the inclusion of women in the male-dominated context of education, but for men to venture into knowledge that is allotted to women. If women are limited because they are kept from education, there is also a set of knowledge that is kept from men, thus rendering them limited as well. This attitude about *la cocina* serve as a form of vehicle for her larger arguments in this letter and the rest of her scholarship, and I suggest that it is a valid jumping off point for her intellectual descendants across the Americas and the Caribbean. Women continue

to use kitchen rhetoric to get different messages across, a few of which I will focus on in this study. Sor Juana made use of a theme that could resonate with women as well. There is great value in her words about the importance of *la cocina* as a space where women could begin to develop their own narrative of self-discovery and resistance to the established norms. In her letter she addresses both the fact that the options for women have been limited, but that there is also an opportunity for women to come together and share their stories. From here on, we begin to see how the themes she discusses in her *Respuesta* appear in other texts written by women for the development of their own female centered literary communities as well as the development of their own writing and self-expression. After Sor Juana's exploration of *la cocina* we see other women writers take this idea and contribute it by making it their own. One of the most notable next steps in the progression of literature that deals with women and *la cocina* is Juana Manuela Gorriti and her *Cocina ecléctica* (1890). Gorriti creates a text that includes personal anecdotes interspersed with recipes which makes a commentary on the influence that women have in the cultural development of their society, all of which, I argue, resonates with Sor Juana's text.

The inclusion of Gorriti in this discussion is, I would argue, essential if we consider the fact that her work stands out as being exemplary for its use of *cocina* in new ways. Gorriti herself was not perhaps the embodiment of an ideal woman archetype for late nineteenth century society in Latin America. To discuss what this type of woman looked like at that point in time, it may be helpful to refer to Nancy LaGreca's text *Rewriting Womanhood* (2009). As the title suggests, LaGreca focuses her investigation on the model of the angel of the house which, as I explain above, presented the image of a semi-perfect woman whose main qualities were abnegation and caring for everyone in her family at the expense of herself, many times. The ideal woman or angel was expected to be proficient in the kitchen and other homemaking tasks. She was a public figure and

very invested in countering the image of the angel of the house with something more practical for women.

Gorriti was born in 1818 to an influential family that opposed the Rosas regime in Argentina. She married Isidoro Belzú who was also a political figure in Bolivia, and, consequently she participated in intellectual circles which continued to place her in a public setting both physically and intellectually. Urraca describes the unhappy state of Gorriti's marriage with two children and how she eventually left for Lima with her daughters. From there, Gorriti worked on journals, organized literary salons and continued her writing.

The notion of 'separate' spheres has been dismissed as a presupposition informing Western culture that obscures the contributions of women in the public arena and the interpenetration of the spaces in which men and women commonly operate...As a woman in an unusual public role, she (Gorriti) demonstrated a commitment to women's issues, which easily found their way into her literary gatherings in Lima, and sparked the interest of both men and women. (Urraca 153-54)

Gorriti used her prominent position, then, to be outspoken about what seemed to her disparate opportunities offered to men and women in terms of access to education and employment options. She was not passive in her discussions of this discrepancy, her hosting of *veladas* was an excellent indicator of that. Additionally, her writing also pushed against some of the social boundaries of the gender roles in her society, regarding what women were expected to be discussing in their writing, including political themes. Much of her bibliography consists of articles, fictions and other types of texts that address the political climate around her. For instance, her stories "El guante negro" and "La hija del mazhorquero" were both a violent reaction to the Rosas dictatorial regime and a heavy criticism of the state of politics in Argentina. Urraca discusses Gorriti's treatment of male and female characters and the way that she used her writing to digress metaphorically from the image of the angel of the house. Gorriti uses her literature mainly as a platform to discuss socio-cultural topics and dissent from the ideals expected of women that was persistent throughout

Latin American societies. Urraca explains that even though there was a push for cultural and educational gender equality, there were certain social constraints placed on women that did not give them direct access to political action, thus widening the interest in advocating for equality (154). Therefore, despite the prolific influence of a writer as distinguished as Gorriti in a society that allowed a certain amount of intellectual freedom for women, they were still relegated to certain sections of the intellectual community due to limitations faced by women eager to contribute to political debates in the public sphere. These concerns then bring us to her text *Cocina ecléctica*, which had a very different structure than the previous works that she had published².

In this work, Gorriti compiles a collection of recipes on behalf of a widespread community of female friends that she calls upon and creates a text that relies on the perspective of different women to describe how they perceive gender roles in their society. Despite the polyphony in the text, Gorriti does not share any recipes of her own. In fact, the only moment where the reader can truly “hear” the author’s “voice” is in the prologue, where she tells us the reasons she understands that this undertaking is important. I will include the prologue here as I understand it has a profound

² Many of the women who write entries for Gorriti’s text don’t include just the cooking process or instructions. Several of them make what I suggest are nods towards Sor Juana’s words in her *Respuesta*, concerning women’s abilities in the kitchen, and others include personal anecdotes, giving a picture of their daily life in their own specific countries or societies. This aspect of the cookbook provides the reader an opportunity to learn more about the women who contributed to Gorriti’s project, how they feel and think about certain aspects of their contexts.

Two of the entries that I propose reference Sor Juana’s style of writing about cooking describe *la cocina* as an art; something to be cultivated and studied, as well as an activity that intersects with cultural engagement. On page 62, Carmen Gorriti de Montes begins her recipe “Olla o puchero limeño” by highlighting the complexity of the dish she describes and how it varies in different countries, but it forms a common base for the cuisine, calling it “el patriarca de la mesa de familia. En Lima, las mujeres, tan entendidas en el arte de guisar, dan a este plato un sabor exquisito.” The second place the words are found are on page 77 “Bocadillos a la princesa,” where Eulogia T. de Tedin begins her recipe by saying: “Aquella a quien suelen ir a besar la mano, hasta a la misma cocina, para honrar su grande habilidad en el arte de guisar, envía esta receta, que pienso, no haría mala figura entre esa crema de cosas buenas.” Other women write their recipes and include conversations with friends and family that discuss aspects of cooking, the reception to the food, its cultural importance in certain regions as well as the enjoyment of the food itself. Some of these include “Pastelitos de huevo a la nena,” where the mother/writer speaks to her daughter about getting one of their favorite recipes from another woman who knows it. This is an example of women from different social classes interacting in the space of the kitchen and sharing knowledge with one another (35). The book is not structured as a fictional story nor an expository story with a political tilt. Rather we see the personalization of *la cocina* across several cultural/national boundaries through the writing and stories of different women.

importance in setting up what will become a foundational stone for kitchen culture and literary food criticism from this point forward.

El hogar es el santuario doméstico; su ara es el fogón; su sacerdotisa y guardián natural, la mujer. Ella, sólo ella, sabe inventar esas cosas exquisitas, que hacen de la mesa un encanto, y que dictaron a Brantôme el consejo dado a la princesa, que le preguntaba cómo haría para sujetar a su esposo al lado suyo: -Asílo por la boca. Yo, ¡ay! nunca pensé en tamaña verdad. Avida de otras regiones, arrojéme a los libros, y viví en Homero, en Plutarco, en Virgilio, y en toda esa pléyade de la antigüedad, y después en Corneille, Racine; y más tarde, aún, en Châteaubriand, Hugo, Lamartine; sin pensar que esos ínclitos genios fueron tales, porque - excepción hecha del primero tuvieron todos, a su lado, mujeres hacendosas y abnegadas que los mimaron, y fortificaron su mente con succulentos bocados, fruto de la ciencia más conveniente a la mujer. Mis amigas, a quienes, arrepentida, me confesaba, no admitieron mi mea culpa, sino a condición de hacerlo público en un libro. Y, tan buenas y misericordiosas, como bellas, hanme dado para ello preciosos materiales, enriqueciéndolos más, todavía, con la gracia encantadora de su palabra. -- Juana Manuela Gorriti (2)

Gorriti's tone in this prologue seems more geared towards calling attention to a problem without calling it by name or denouncing it outright. Here she begins by examining her space, *la cocina*, as central in the discussion of female empowerment. She begins by breaking down the essential aspects of the space and determining why it is the perfect space to collect female voices. She elevates women to the status of priestesses of their home, with the domestic sanctuary of the kitchen as a haven to speak freely, create, learn and teach. She pulls this further by saying that not only women are using this space to grow, despite the confining imagery of *la cocina*, but that they are also responsible for the formation of any important men in literature, philosophy, etc., thus making women responsible for the cultivation of a certain culture. She even includes a wink at Sor Juana's comments on cooking by calling it "la ciencia más conveniente a la mujer."

This prologue may seem to be simply lauding the power of cooking, but her inclusion of so many different authors and philosophers implies a desire to show the extent of her knowledge and her ability to contend with contemporary scholars. Gorriti's prologue and subsequent recipe book, however, I argue have an aim that goes beyond simply contesting women's right to belong

to the public sphere of social and intellectual gender collaboration. *Cocina ecléctica* will open the door for a culinary-gearred investigation into the way that women have re-appropriated *la cocina* and food topics that have been provided as part of structures like the angel of the house, which are meant to be “appropriate” for women. In this text we see that Gorriti would like to, if not allowed to join the “masculine” world of intellectualism, then create a space for women, by women, where they can highlight women’s substantial contribution to culture creation. Additionally, it is a reaction to being forced into certain social roles and expectations that are continually unattainable and undervalued, so in this attempt the women seem to exclude men’s contributions instead of being excluded.

I propose that Gorriti’s project offers a platform for women to communicate their stories and knowledge through the space of *la cocina*. The result of her attempts fosters an international community of women who engage in the oral tradition of *la cocina* and encourage each other to highlight their experiences as significant elements of cultural constructions. The topic of food in women’s writing is associated with the activity of story-telling, and from there is introduced into the structure of a Bildungsroman that can convey women’s experiences of social formation.

Gorriti is the true starting point for this project as she intentionally uses *la cocina* and food writing to call to light certain injustices that plagued women from different social classes throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. Following in Gorriti’s footsteps, several women writers stand out for their use of kitchen literature and feminist ideology. The next ones I want to highlight will be Rosario Castellanos and Rosario Ferré. I propose that their texts are similar in both form and content and serve as a useful continuation of Gorriti’s example. Where Gorriti was more symbolic and somewhat veiled in her attempts to call attention to women’s issues, Castellanos and Ferré were much more direct.

I draw on Castellanos' "Lección de cocina" which is part of her larger work, *Album de familia*. In this text, Castellanos explicitly utilizes the metaphor of a lesson in more than just cooking to highlight the difficulty of placing women into a mold befitting the construct that LaGreca discusses in her own text, the angel of the house. Others have highlighted her contributions to the collective of women's experiences. For example, we find works like "Con su propia voz: un estudio de cinco mujeres mexicanas" by Matthew Wilkinson, where he explores the fight for self and freedom by different female authors, including Rosario Castellanos, who's work "Lección de cocina" he dissects in conjunction with Judith Butler's theory on female voice and agency. He states that, "Aunque el texto esté abarrotado de ironía y denuncios sutiles, el mensaje socio-crítico no está escondido: incluso la narradora, una mujer que profesa no entender 'nada de nada' (8), a veces le habla directamente al lector para cuestionar las reglas culturales que les obligan a las mujeres mexicanas como ella a llevar cadenas sociales" (56). In this fragment, Wilkinson evaluates Castellanos' commentary on the oppressive circumstance of women in a post-revolution Mexico, which incidentally mirrors the way Gorriti expresses herself about women's place in Latin American societies. Another example comes from "Las huellas de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz en la obra de Rosario Castellanos" by Julia Cuervo Hewitt, where she states,

Las mujeres y los indígenas en los textos de Castellanos, tal y como se representa en el personaje de una recién casada en "Lección de cocina", son casi siempre seres atrapados en una disyuntiva sin resolución, dentro de una estructura de poder que no ofrece ninguna salida, ni para aquéllos que tienen conciencia de su condición. No obstante, en la narrativa y el teatro de Castellanos, la mujer, como en el caso de Sor Juana y de la recién casada en "Lección de cocina", llegan de un modo u otro a la liberación de la conciencia a través del conocimiento. (137)

These brief examples serve to expose a common line of reasoning that has been explored by academics with regards to texts like the ones I am investigating, the idea behind it being that in a variety of ways, *la cocina* and food studies in Latin America have served women primarily as a way of talking about topics that were considered taboo for them, such as sexuality and accessing

the public sphere through education and employment. To a certain degree, this does accomplish these authors' mission, but I would suggest that their texts also provide a space that women are able to discuss their lives, frustrations, successes and advice with each other through food writing. Latinas in different social, national and racial contexts have diverse experiences and approaches to life, but when they discuss *la cocina* in their texts they can find a commonality that provides a certain level of comfort which allows for a type of integration of woman-centered communities. For example, in Castellanos' text, we can see beyond the feminist ideology that challenges the place of women in kitchen contexts to a somewhat frustrated or truncated attempt at belonging and an acceptance of the role imposed on her. She pushes beyond stating outright the frustration she feels by showing it in a failed attempt at cooking dinner for her husband. *La cocina*, as a metaphor for reclaiming the space as her own and being the "priestess" of Gorriti's prologue, does not work for her because she feels she has never owned it in the first place. The liberating aspect that culinary topics can afford women if they choose to express themselves from that platform is not practical for her.

She begins her story in a similar manner to Gorriti's prologue, by excusing her lack of knowledge in the kitchen by proposing other things that filled her time, in her opinion, seemingly more fruitfully, "Yo anduve extraviada en aulas, en calles, en oficinas, en cafés; desperdiciada en destrezas que ahora he de olvidar para adquirir otras" (7). Much like the Argentine writer, Castellanos affirms that she has felt pushed to forget pursuits that to her seem much more practical, such as working outside the home and education, to assimilate to a new life, where she feels lost. Her use of "extraviada," meaning lost, thus injects a note of irony at not having been at her post of useful woman within her society, or certainly at least before the masculine vision of the perfect woman. Her assertions about *la cocina*, rather than feeling empowered by writing about it, seem

to make her feel out of sorts, and even angry at being relegated to it. Her resentment is clear throughout the piece in statements like the following, during which she is cooking the piece of meat around which the narrative is framed.

¿Cuánto tiempo se tomará para estar lista? Bueno, no debería de importarme demasiado. porque hay que ponerla al fuego a última hora. Tarda muy poco, dicen los manuales. ¿Cuánto es poco? ¿Quince minutos? ¿Diez? ¿Cinco? Naturalmente, el texto no especifica. Me supone una intuición que, según mi sexo, debo poseer pero no poseo, un sentido sin el que nací que me permitiría advertir el momento preciso en que la carne está a punto. (13)

In this segment the author employs a strong sense of irony to indicate the fact that women have had the role of homemaker placed on them, but it's not something for which women are innately born. Furthermore, the way she is using the space of *la cocina* gives more of a feel of a confessional than the altar which Gorriti intends to use to reach out to women. Here in Castellanos' text we can practically see the closed-in space from which she is revealing her innermost thoughts, which we can understand as being highly personal because of their raw and emotional content.

Both Gorriti and Castellanos attack the problem of the place of women in the home *and la cocina* through means of culinary narratives, and in their own way they highlight the issues that come with assuming women should feel belonging in *la cocina*. Gorriti, in a globalizing attempt, brings other women into her narrative through recipes to affirm the fact that women have indeed been relegated to that private space, but poses the idea that they are responsible also for a form of preservation of culture in their societies as the "priestesses" of *la cocina*. Gorriti's text utilizes this idea that food and food preparation are forms of cultural identification, each person from different countries and regions having unique ways of doing something. However, her text considers these differences and uses them to create a space of community, despite cultural differences. Conversely, while Castellanos' text agrees with Gorriti's premise that women have been entrusted to the kitchen, she also demonstrates that it is not possible or effective for all women to find a successful

liberated identity narrative. Castellano's treatment of *la cocina* provides a contrast to Gorriti's view of it by providing some perspective on how it can also serve as a space of frustration. This tension in the different ways that women writers approach *la cocina* is an indicator of the ambivalent feelings towards the space itself and the narrative that already surrounds it. From Sor Juana to Gorriti to Castellanos the writing of *la cocina* has changed from a space of calling out specific issues around the limited opportunities available to women to a narrative space of creativity, where writers like Castellanos have combined it with fiction to express not only her own frustrations, but address subjects like marriage and gender roles directly through a fictional narrator. This literary progression leads into the a type of text that plays more liberally with fiction and memory and transforms the recipe of writing of *la cocina* into a product that can successfully traverse with a coming-to-self story.

Following this idea of the intersection of memory and fiction, the next author that I will discuss here is Rosario Ferré and her text *Cocina de la escritura* (1985) as well as her short story titled "El cuento envenenado" (1985). *Cocina de la escritura* is an important link between the culinary narratives in the first part of this study and the second. The reason for this is that it combines several aspects that manage to move the conversation forward in terms of content, however she engages the topic in a way that openly discusses the relevance of *la cocina* when considering the coming-to-self stories of latina writers. Ferré's text utilizes kitchen metaphors to divide her topics. For example: "I. De cómo dejarse caer de la sartén al fuego, II. De cómo salvar algunas cosas en medio del fuego." She seems to be writing about cooking a specific dish as a parallel to constructing a written text. However, her writing style is openly conscious of the fact that she is using these metaphors and not speaking strictly about food, but rather constructing a recipe for writing. She explores the importance of the writing process for her as a woman and using

kitchen language to express her ideas. One curious aspect of Ferré's text is that she does not explicitly explain why she uses culinary language to address her ideas in her piece. She leaves that interpretation open to the reader, but the initial section does include some clues as to why she has chosen to do it this way, starting with the quote by Sor Juana before the essay even begins. "Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito" (92). Then in the first paragraph, she outlines a map of women who have written and their reasons for doing so, which presumably form within her a conviction to do the same.

A lo largo del tiempo, las mujeres narradoras han escrito por múltiples razones: Emily Bronte escribió para demostrar la naturaleza revolucionaria de la pasión; Virginia Woolf para exorcizar su terror a la locura y a la muerte; Joan Didion escribe para descubrir lo que piensa y cómo piensa; Clarice Lispector descubre en su escritura una razón para amar y ser amada. En mi caso, escribir es una voluntad a la vez constructiva y destructiva; una posibilidad de crecimiento y cambio. (136)

The quick study she does about the motivations behind writing for these women can indicate to the reader that she has her own reasons to do it, as do the women who have inspired her to pursue it. Most of them revolve around a desire to understand or know themselves better, as well as sharing themselves with others. Each of the writers I have cited thus far has been a form of genealogical stepping stone in the literary history of the writing of *la cocina*, each one paving the way for the next generation to be able to explore further into how the topic can be best utilized.

It is, however, her citation of Sor Juana that interests me at this point, as she is given a place of honor in the text. The epigraph with Sor Juana's quote shows that Ferré perhaps elevates her as a kind of "mother" to the intellectual discussion of *la cocina* and implies its importance of as a vehicle for women's writing. Even though Ferré doesn't explicitly comment, as Gorriti or Castellanos, on the importance of the metaphor of the space in writing for women, she does include these examples of different women who have written in the attempt to know themselves, and in

her own words “grow and change”, both in literature’s understanding of feminism and their own as well.

Following this introduction, she continues the first segment with an explanation of precisely what it is that has moved her to write this piece. “Escribo porque soy una disgustada de la realidad; porque son, en el fondo, mis profundas decepciones las que han hecho brotar en mí la necesidad de recrear la vida, de sustituirla por una realidad más compasiva y habitable, por ese mundo y por esa persona utópicos que también llevo dentro” (138). Very clearly expressing a disgust with the reality of the world where she lives, she continues her essay with a blend of introspection and external critique of the circumstances that plague feminist writers, particularly in Latin America.

The feelings that Ferré expresses in her essay appear in her fiction writing. This is evidenced in her short story titled “El cuento envenenado.” In this story the main character, Rosaura, goes through a series of changes in her family at the death of her mother and subsequent marriage of her father to her mother’s stylist. Rosa is a cruel and jealously domineering woman who stifles Rosaura’s relationship with her father and denies her any form of pleasure or enjoyment, save one, which is reading the books that her father buys for her each birthday. Ferré creates a somewhat meta-literary text, where Rosaura cooks a desert made with guava for her father, and later in the story there is a text written in ink the exact same color as that guava paste. After the death of her husband, Rosaura’s father, Rosa is sitting at his funeral looking through the last book he gave his daughter, when she finds the story written in the guava colored ink, which also happens to be the opening paragraph of the story Ferré herself wrote. As she reads the text, the ink bleeds out of the tome and poisons the stepmother, and we are led to understand that she dies from this. “Del estupor pasó al asombro, del asombro pasó al pasmo y del pasmo pasó al terror, pero, a pesar

del creciente malestar que sentía, la curiosidad no le permitió dejar de leerlas. El relato comenzaba: ‘Rosaura vivía en una casa de balcones sombreados por enredaderas tupidas...’, pero Rosa jamás llegó a enterarse de cómo terminaba” (150). In this story, the author implies a direct bond between *la cocina* and literature. The reader can understand that the act of writing for the protagonist is what frees her from Rosa’s cruel influence. She does not frame her heroine’s narrative in *la cocina* or with culinary topics, rather all Rosaura does is tell her own story using a method that connected her to her own mother; an indication that *la cocina* is, in her view at least, a place of learning and power. She writes about her misfortune at the hands of her stepmother, and *la cocina* happens to be a tool that she uses to extricate herself from her metaphorical claws. In this sense, I would contend that both texts by Ferré are instrumental in understanding the way that *la cocina* and culinary narratives provide a view of the internal journeys of the women and protagonists that are presented in them. Rosaura may have used her abilities in *la cocina* to concoct a poison, but she uses that poison to write about her life and bring about justice or closure for herself. Her pen, laced with poison in this case, was used to infect someone else, communicate her personal journey and educate others about the way she used her space and writing to take control of her narrative. In a way, we get her life’s story, her coming of age, the culminating point being when she decides to write down her story and share her specific context with the reader. This story is also significant because it implies that writing about her own story had a physical effect in the “real” world.

With her two texts, Ferré attempts to breach the gap between the predecessors of culinary texts and ones like hers. She unites the physical act of writing and cooking with a desire to be able to tackle taboo topics, as she expresses in her “Cocina de la escritura,” but she adds a little more, which will change the way that kitchen narratives will take shape from then on. She interjects an element of the personal history which is shared in *la cocina*. Beyond male female-centered

communities through women's liberation, she looks to build community through the sharing of oral stories about her own life and writing process. This kind of writing pushes outwards the boundaries of what has come before in terms of culinary narratives and food topics.

An integral part of building a community is sharing common goals with the members that make it up. In the next chapter(s), I will outline the ways in which women writers across Latin America have crafted their coming-to-self stories and pay attention to how *la cocina* and food have a place in those stories. There are similarities in their structures and themes that function to push towards the composition of a Latina Bildungsroman genre which allows for a more inclusive view cross-culturally, which will comprise the second part of this chapter.

2.1 A Feminist Conception of the Bildungsroman: Finding Food and *la cocina* in Women's Coming-to-Self Narratives.

Following this discussion about women writers and their use of kitchen narratives, it stands to reason that *la cocina*, at the very least in Latin American literature if not literature in general, is a gendered space. Regardless of the way the topic is approached, culinary discourse is present in different ways throughout the context of women's stories. Previously I have provided examples of the way that women have questioned their figurative and literal placement in the kitchen and the way they have been represented in literature in a domestic framework. I started with the protestations of Sor Juana who challenged the notion that women were placed in the private sphere of the home or in her case the convent, due to what was deemed appropriate for men and women as well as the social class they belonged to. I then moved on through the centuries to Gorriti, Castellanos and Ferré, seeing these questions begin to evolve into less of an accusation and seeming to pose an open question to other women who write about how to approach the space and narrative of *la cocina*. Gorriti's prologue in *Cocina ecléctica* is a prime example of this question, and I assert

that from that text onward, there is a decided alteration in women's writing about *la cocina*. As we study these texts, we can notice a pattern of using this type of narrative to encourage women to take control of their stories, and especially to write them and make them accessible. This progression of kitchen literature offers a way to look at female coming-to-self texts in a feminist context, allowing women writers to tell stories for the sake of posterity, as well as to contribute to a literary canon.

Nearly all the women who are cited in this project have been considered, in one way or another, important figures in feminist writing. The challenge that stems from this understanding, however, is that there are more than a few conceptions of what women's writing is and how it functions. This issue has been examined many times over decades and it has resulted on the identification of multiple branches of feminism each with its own function and impact. In her book *Radical Feminism Today* (2001), Denise Thompson acknowledges these variants and proposes to work from a definition of feminism that can be applied to a variety of context across women's writing, including but not limited to the telling of coming of age stories. Thompson argues that feminism in its most basic form is, "its identification of and opposition to male domination, and its concomitant struggle for a human status for women in connection with other women, which is at no one's expense, and which is outside male definition and control" (1). This definition of feminism is a useful grid through which to examine texts like the ones discussed in this dissertation. I propose that texts like Esquivel's and Ortiz Cofer's are useful examples of how this definition of feminism helps women share their stories for each other as well as themselves, even if there is some debate as to whether or not both protagonists achieve what could be considered a successful form of feminist freedom. The protagonists in both Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer's texts reflects an ongoing struggle to be humanized by the people around them, who constantly seem to interpret

women as object, rather than human entity with agency. By venturing into *la cocina* with their texts, female writers are able to mix together elements of feminism and the Bildungs genre and provide a finished product that can be accessible to women in a variety of contexts.

To begin to investigate how Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer's texts perform as female Bildungsromane, I will briefly discuss the way that the genre is presented and the expectations that are set upon it. I propose that it is important to discuss the exclusivity between the female and the male iterations of the genre due to the different expectations expounded by male and female gender roles in society. My proposal is that there should be an outline or "recipe" for a female Bildungsroman, composed of elements present in several women's texts that are written and provided as formative or provide a platform for the examination of the self or of protest. The traditional Bildungsroman has followed a specific model in which it seeks the ultimate goal of the protagonist's integration to mainstream society. In order to define more closely what format of the Bildungsroman I work from, I refer to Stella Bolaki's book *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction* (2011). In her book, Bolaki examines the evolution of the Bildungsroman throughout the development of literature, and she extends its relevance to a context in which it has not traditionally served. The context is first and foremost that of the female population, and secondly of minority women in mainstream society, in the context of this project, Western society. Bolaki's text examines from the very beginning two significant questions regarding the usefulness of the Bildungsroman as a genre. The first question is in regard to its relevance to literature in general. This is an understandable concern, as the term originally surfaced in its context in the early 19th century to describe predominantly male coming-of-age stories and has served that role fairly closely ever since. The critic reasons that the Bildungsroman is complex in its construction because there is a strong tradition in place that

surrounds it, giving the reader an idea of what to expect from it. At the same time, she suggests that its endurance across cultural and historical boundaries makes it possible to extrapolate and direct to create inclusiveness and be useful in the examination of more marginal perspectives (9).

Bolaki subscribes to the idea that the genre, much like a recipe in *la cocina*, can be molded and modified from its original conception to accommodate temporal shifts in social movements and accessibility to its structure throughout time. The second question she addresses is the capacity of the Bildungsroman to accommodate gender discrepancies, and I suggest it is a metaphor of assimilation that can be extrapolated to include ethnic minorities.

By enhancing the contact zones between genres, “new wine” is poured into the Bildungsroman making “old bottles explode,” ... Through such a process of mixture and transfiguration, the genre acquires an extended flexibility and capacity for signification... Much of the pressure exercised upon “the old bottle” of the Bildungsroman comes from a consideration of gender issues, and this is one of the reasons why I have chosen to focus on female novels of development. The interaction of gender with genre has always been central to feminist literary criticism (13-14)

Particularly her words on contact zones imply that while she is gearing her analysis towards a feminist investigation, this “explosion” of the old genre can suggest different formats of the Bildungsroman being explored in order to expand the genre, including contributions by minority groups. By dissecting the writing of female writers in and out of an Ibero and North American context, it is possible to identify the exchange and intertwining between gender and genre that Bolaki situates as the tenuous crossroads between feminism and the Bildungsroman. Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer’s texts that I will examine for this project illustrate examples of Latina stories, and the way that women’s writing functions in a contemporary context as well as how the trope of *la cocina* helps to compose a form of Bildungsroman. My focus on *la cocina*, as I will discuss in a moment, is due to my argument that it is one of the elements that recurs or is present in many texts

that can be deemed as novels of formation, and thus provide an outlet to the genre that can be accessed mainly by women and be used for women, in contrast to male versions of similar texts.

In my estimation, the greater issue to overcome in the contemporary utilization of the Bildungsroman is not its genre but the conflict of ethnicity and gender to which Bolaki refers. The division of gender between man and woman is particularly polarized when it comes to mainstream literature which references the process of integration into society of a subject within the framework of self-realization. One prominent example of a critic who discusses the nuances of this distinction is Simone de Beauvoir, in her 1953 treatise on gender, *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir begins her investigation into the relationships between the genders much like Thompson does in her book on feminism; by taking a closer look at the initial reasoning to create a substantial division in men and women's intellectual production, namely, the biological argument. In terms of the theory surrounding the development of male and female stories, the schism in male/female stories has not shifted much from its conception during the time separating Beauvoir's text and Thompson's. Beauvoir does not agree with the polarity between male and female roles, and while she acknowledges sexual difference between men and women, she defends this idea that gendered roles are constituted socially, "[T]he differentiation of individuals into males and females thus occurs as an irreducible and contingent fact...Opinions about the respective roles of the two sexes have varied greatly; they were initially devoid of any scientific basis and only reflected social myths" (23-24)³. My approach to understanding the expression of female coming-of-age stories will look more specifically at the spaces in literature across the Americas and the Caribbean which

³ I would like to pause here and acknowledge that there exists a larger debate, both within and out of the literary context surrounding the topic of the relationship between sex and gender. My intention with this study is to recognize women's perspectives about their own selves and how they perceive their own writing, with the understanding that many of the roles they have traditionally served, such as that of the "angel of the house" or the keepers of *la cocina*, are the products of a society that has designated roles in this way.

have been traditionally associated with female development, I will discuss these considerations more in depth in the following chapters. At the very least, I seek to explore how women themselves are conceptualizing their own views and experiences about their positions in society, and how these texts explored in these chapters come together to provide a common format of self-exploration that is more geared towards female development narratives.

The idea of gender and sex differentiation and whether it is valid or even necessary has been debated within and without academic circles. This study acknowledges this debate, but focuses on identifying the characteristics which help to situate themes explored by women in their coming-to-self texts, such as the act of writing in order to know themselves and what the space of *la cocina* has contributed to their own development as women, individuals with agency and members of a community. This argumentation is the reason why Bolaki's text is so critical when it states that the Bildungsroman is not a tired or outdated mode of literary communication, but rather an adaptable and changing one. In her book, Bolaki works from the premise that there exists at the very least a definite distinction between male and female Bildungs, and from there, an ethnic perspective that allows for the intersection of different social and cultural groups.

In the twentieth century there has been a resurgence of interest in the form, especially by marginalised subjects, which can be explained in part by alluding to phenomena such as women's and civil rights movement, multiculturalism, decolonisation, and various experiences and histories of diaspora...One of the questions addressed in the subsequent chapters is how the coming-of-age narratives I explore fit the generic box that has been known as the *Bildungsroman* and what happens when ethnic American texts are read in that context. It is of little importance whether the four authors examined in this study consciously set out to revise the *Bildungsroman*...most of them are more than familiar with texts that fit the category. (10-11)

As Bolaki claims, the “generic box” of the Bildungsroman genre has served a literary space to tell a very specific narrative. Much of the traditional Bildungsroman texts present European, educated male protagonists, who travel from home, experience trials and adventures, and subsequently

return home and are reintegrated successfully into society. Interpreting the genre from the perspective of different ethnic groups allows for modifications, not only to the type of protagonist and story, but to the style and narration. This experimentation with the elements of the classic form allows for a portrayal of stories that would not have perhaps formed part of a more mainstream literary tradition. By recognizing the marked contemporary changes to the previously accepted conceptions of the Bildungsroman genre, it is possible to create a more nuanced conversation around the way that it is created and interpreted with regards to women and ethnic groups.

To determine the elements of the Bildungsroman that tie together the authors examined in this project and the feminism of the narrative of *la cocina*, I will first investigate further what separates the version of the male Bildungsroman from the iteration of the female one I propose in this chapter. The female Bildungsroman, as I and other critics have mentioned, has garnered a great amount of interest and controversy, beginning with the very question to its existence. I have proposed already that for the purposes of this research, I will acknowledge the distinction between male and female version of the genre, and dissect it even further. Another such critic to support this view is Elaine Hoffman Baruch, who discusses precisely this matter in an article titled “The Feminine Bildungsroman: Education Through Marriage.” Her proposal in this article is to focus on one main aspect of the female Bildungsroman that diverges from the male experience, which is where and how life knowledge is acquired by men and women. One main difference between the experiences is the internal/external perspective. The premise from which Hoffman begins her investigation seems firmly rooted in the apparent pursuit of the internal exploration of human lives and souls. She describes the reasons for the relegation of women to the home, i.e. motherhood, household chores, family, etc. Many of these which critics like Nancy LaGreca have deemed the “angel of the house” and which have been discussed in a previous chapter, were almost exclusively

women's tasks whilst men participated in the ritual discovery of the outside world and their sense of self away from home. Hoffman continues by making the following statements for the surging movement that moved women away from the roles they had inhabited for most of literary history,

In the great, if not the popular, novels of the nineteenth century, it is the search for self rather than selflessness that takes place, in contrast to the prevailing educational theory and in contrast also to literary genres other than the novel, where woman is child, animal, housemaid, angel, femme fatale—almost everything on the great chain of being except the human...once the outside world is no longer seen as the ground upon which the hero tests himself, the woman's soul becomes worthy of examination.

Once Sophocles revealed an interest in men's souls, it was only a matter of time before women's souls compelled interest as well. It seems possible, however, that among moderns, emphasis on the interiorization of women came first. Such, at least, is Madame de Stael's theory. It was women, says the baroness, who created an interest in private life, for they were allowed to explore it without limits. (337-38)

This progression towards humanizing woman is reminiscent of much feminist literature, including Thompson and de Beauvoir who have been referenced in this project in their attempts to describe a strand of feminism that focuses on the humanization of women across different media including literature. The coming of age story and the narratives that deal with the actualization of an individual and human self then pertain easily to a feminist branch of reasoning which aims to expose the nature of self-proclamation. In this statement, Hoffman also makes an important connection to the application of femininity to the Bildungsroman as a genre, and that is that the process of telling women's stories has had to happen from the inside out, whereas the masculine has come from the outside, as the hero searches for himself in the world and eventually returns home. This premise is one that holds consistently through exploration of different women's Bildungsromane across national literatures and time periods.

Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland compiled a volume aptly titled *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, taking a critical approach to Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. It is comprised of different authors who investigate more deeply the nature of the

female Bildungsroman. This volume expounds upon the idea that I discuss from Hoffman's text; that women have forged a place for themselves in the coming-of-age story with a format that intertwines their story with a narrative of coming-to-self. The editors of the volume chart the unlikely and turbulent path of women who go through a personal journey, be it metaphorical or literal, with the end of learning something that will make them understand their own being apart from the external perception. While Hoffman's article proposed that marriage was the way that women were able to learn and increase their knowledge of the world or any other subjects by way of being taught through their husbands, the essays in *The Voyage In* present other options for understanding what it looks like for women to explore the self in the context of a journey of self-actualization, including but not limited to the experiences of marriage and motherhood.

In the introduction to the volume, the editors present the gendered difference in the genre by subscribing to the,

Goethian model for organic growth: cumulative, gradual, total. Originating in the Idealist tradition of the Enlightenment, with its belief in human perfectibility and historical progress, this understanding of human growth assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration. The goal of Goethe's prototypical hero, Wilhelm Meister, is to 'develop myself just as I am,' to realize the physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual capacities inherent in his personality. (5)

This conception of the Bildungsroman contains elements that were simply not accessible to women during the emergence of the genre. The editors continue on with this idea and claim, "Even the broadest definitions of the Bildungsroman presuppose a range of social options available only to men. Only male development is marked by a determined exploration of a social milieu, so that when a critic identifies the 'principal characteristics' of a 'typical Bildungsroman plot,' he inevitably describes 'human development in exclusively male terms'" (7). If we accept this premise that the organic development of a Bildungsroman and how it must develop at every stage of a

person's life, it is evident that in each of the areas for development, men and women's journeys look infinitely different.

What we can glean from the different approaches to the genre is that the female Bildungsroman is a real and established form, and it also does not follow the same structure as the traditional conception of the male version, or even remain the same between different female contexts. The element these stories seem to have in common, however, is the desire the authors manifest in their protagonists to become a complete, developed person, apart from the expectations and control of male or society influence. One of my arguments in this project is to identify the ways that kitchen narratives in female texts display all these characteristics in order to accommodate a particular form of coming-to-self genre. I propose there is a way to link feminism in the Bildungsroman in Latin America through the exploration of culinary writing, serving as the bridge which connects women of diverse demographics in an attempt to consolidate their history.

Some early examples of this connection are present in the writings of authors discussed in the previous chapter, such as Sor Juana and Juana Manuela Gorriti. In their texts, they clearly advocate for the intellectual and external development of women, particularly their ability to perform and contribute to spaces that were significantly ascribed to male development, such as science, education and professions such as writing. Their contributions, which I discuss in a previous chapter, open the door for women to question their prescribed position in society, but further than that, they open the door to a particular kind of narrative that will serve as a main vehicle for a female journey. In the words of Hoffman Baruch, this was a form of entryway for women into a genre like the coming-of-age story that functioned in order to, "get women into the ivory tower by way of the kitchen door" (336-37). After Gorriti's text, there are a slew of examples of women who treat *la cocina* as a space of self-recognition-- authors such as Ferré, Castellanos,

Allende, Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer. The two main texts I will discuss in further chapters will be those of Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer, as I propose they form good points of comparison to the way that narratives of *la cocina* function as more than simply feminist texts or autobiographical narratives, but instead, form part of a larger collective movement of women's expression.

One final aspect of the Bildungsroman that becomes a decisive point when speaking of this kind of text is that of female sexuality. The way that sex and sensuality is portrayed by authors in their texts is one of the most distinctive elements of the female Bildungs story, in particular because it forms a counterpoint to the way that male authors have utilized female sexuality, and how the reception differs from a female author's use of women's sexuality. Women discussing their own bodies and exploring their own sensuality from a personal perspective has the potential to appeal to a female readership who is then encouraged to try writing for themselves. Two specific authors who approach this topic openly are Rosario Ferré and Isabel Allende. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Ferré's *Cocina de la escritura* is an exposition of the way that the author has felt a disconnect between women and the way that they have been permitted to address topics that pertain to them in literature. She utilizes the cooking metaphor in what functions as a statement on the reception women in literature receive when they approach themes like female pleasure and sexuality. She recounts a story when she was approached by a critic who mentioned having heard that she wrote "pornographic" stories, and insinuated that he would like to read in a manner that was meant to be, if not intimidating, then certainly to make the author feel uneasy about her choice of writing:

Con una sonrisa maliciosa, y guiñándome un ojo que pretendía ser cómplice, me preguntó, en un tono titilante y cargado de insinuación, si era cierto que yo escribía cuentos pornográficos y que, de ser así, se los enviara, porque quería leerlos...pasada la primera impresión desagradable, me dije que aquel asunto de la obscenidad en la literatura femenina merecía ser examinado más de cerca...Comencé entonces a leer todo lo que caía en mis manos sobre el tema de la obscenidad en la narrativa femenina...Si la obscenidad había sido tradicionalmente

empleada para degradar y humillar a la mujer, me dije, ésta debería de ser doblemente efectiva para redimirla. (146-48)

The incident Ferré describes here serves a double purpose, to address the reception of what she refers to as “obscene” language in women’s writing as well as impact that takes place when women take it upon themselves to write about female sexuality. Her desire is to displace the sense of unseemliness or indecency that surrounds women when they read or write literature that references female sexuality as more than a means to an end, such as marriage, motherhood, etc. Her choice of the word “obscenity” implies that the aspect of sexuality that she refers to goes beyond that of the function that women have been expected to serve in society. Ferré also addresses this view of female sexuality in literature by including the following anecdote.

Cuando el insigne crítico me abordó en aquel banquete señalando mi fama como militante de la literatura pornográfica, nunca me había preguntado cuál era la meta que me proponía al emplear un lenguaje obsceno en mis cuentos...Mi propósito había sido precisamente el de volver esa arma, la del insulto sexualmente humillante, y bochornoso, blandida durante tantos siglos contra nosotras, contra esa misma sociedad, contra sus prejuicios ya caducos e inaceptables. (147-48)

For Ferré, then, sexualizing the female became part of an attempt to humanize her. This is also in line with the iterations of feminist thought we see in Thompson’s book about how incumbent it was that true feminism came from being a separate entity outside of masculine control, and this must also include control over the perception and dissemination of female sexuality. Ferré connects her desire in writing with an impulse to know herself better as well as encourage other women in the literary field to contribute to her attempt to de-stigmatize women’s accessibility to their own bodies.

Isabel Allende approaches this topic as well and seems to be in favor of this shift towards a more expressive possibility for women in literature. In the previous chapter, I cite her *Afrodita*, in which Allende makes a public argument that sexuality, and especially female sexuality, should not and does not serve only one purpose. It does not serve to be exploited nor simply for

reproductive purposes. Rather, she argues, it is a way of self-knowledge, essential to a relationship with oneself as well as with others.

Both Ferré and Allende are clear examples of a link between the act of writing for women and the expression of the self. Both of their texts serve as visual representations of the way that kitchen literature has served as a vehicle for self-actualization as well as a platform for feminist ideology to take shape in the way that I have discussed earlier in this chapter. This project does not aim to separate or distance sexual agency from the process of coming-to-self in women's literature, but rather to provide an approach that makes them inherently necessary to one another. In women's writing about coming-of-age narratives or narratives that recount a woman's journey to self, particularly in a contemporary literary setting, the sexual aspects are oftentimes present and sometimes explicit. In Karen Rowe's contribution to *The Voyage In*, titled "Fairy-Born and Human-Bred: Jane Eyre's Education in Romance," she not only situates her Romantic heroine in a context where she is undergoing a process to become a self-actualized person, Rowe goes further than that. She attributes the following to Jane's ability to develop completely as a person. That is, she alludes that Jane's education comes from a sense of internal understanding of her own development and growth, and her own encounter with male sexuality that will push her to adjust and change. Rowe differentiates here from the traditional male Bildungsroman in which self-exploration and the understanding of love and self-sacrifice do not serve as catalysts for the protagonists' journey to self-actualization (70).

In this passage, Rowe seems to support the need for a separation between the male and female iterations of the Bildungsroman that I discuss earlier in this chapter, but also imbues Jane's anagnorisis, the moment of her departure from her previous self, onto her encounter with a form of sexuality other than her own limited experience with human sexuality. In this way, it is not just

male sexuality being addressed, but the reader is meant to also understand that Jane enters into a state of self-awareness at this point, and that a confrontation with sexuality must be the cause of it, thus separating her story from the male protagonist and his own character development, while also acknowledging the importance of addressing female sexuality.

Both Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer write female protagonists who the reader follows from a young age. There are similarities and differences between the texts that complicate their analysis as part of the Bildungs genre. However, there are a series of elements that place them in an ideal place to be evaluated as such. One of the important things that they both share is a young female protagonist who is at or will reach a pivotal point in her emotional development, both stories have a strong emphasis on the internalization of women's coming-to-self process and they very clearly approach female sexuality overtly. I will discuss each of these texts in the following chapters and discuss their significance in the genre of women coming-of-age narratives in Latin America.

CHAPTER 3. COMO AGUA PARA CHOCOLATE: FOOD, LA COCINA AND A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN

The focus of this chapter will be on Laura Esquivel's iconic novel *Como agua para chocolate* (1989), which serves as a contemporary culmination of the progress of kitchen narratives in Latina literature. I have centered on Esquivel's novel for this portion of the analysis mainly because it is a text that has sparked debate in feminist circles and provides a complicated view of liberation in both its sensuality and the metaphorical empowerment displayed by Tita's story. One of the more well-known interpretations of this novel is its evaluation as a feminist text due to its recurring theme of female rebellion⁴. In an article titled "Hispanic American Women Writer's Novel Recipes and Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*," Janice Jaffe examines the events of Tita's family story and the consequences of her involvement in food preparation.

Jaffe follows a similar literary trajectory of authors, from Sor Juana to Rosario Castellanos to Rosario Ferré, as I have presented in this project. "Specifically, I see in Esquivel's narrative a particularly liberating revival of Sor Juana's analogy, whose timeliness today is evident in a veritable buffet of recipes for writing by Latin American and Latina women" (218). The critic traces a direct example between Sor Juana's argument for female empowerment and presumably Tita's exploration of the kitchen. In her article Jaffe claims that Tita falls under the archetype of a woman who is placed in her circumstances and attempts to find ways around them. In their respective texts, Castellanos and Ferré present views of women who follow similar patterns of

⁴ There is a significant corpus of academic and critical research done to establish Esquivel's text as a feminist narrative. I cite some of this research in this chapter. I want to further acknowledge that there have also been a significant number of articles arguing this claim. My position in this debate is to present that there is a third option to interpret this text as a form of model for a Latina Bildungsroman that provides women an avenue to express personal stories and share both feminist successes as well as failures. My proposal suggests that feminist expression is not only measured by the success of the protagonist to live up to a specific definition of feminism, but rather to be able to take control of their own story and tell it for themselves and others.

self-discovery. They are pushed into the home, in the interior of *la cocina* in a model of society where women are kept confined physically and socially. Jaffe begins the analysis of the story by describing how Tita is “born” into *la cocina*. “Similarly, from beginning to end, *Como agua para chocolate* foregrounds parallels between culinary and literary creation. This liaison is implicit on the novel’s first page when the protagonist, Tita de la Garza, is born prematurely onto the table amid the ingredients of her art” (220). In this way, what Jaffe suggests from Esquivel’s text is that it is a natural outcome from the centuries of feminist combination of women’s writing and culinary topics. Tita was “born” to a place that has been made natural for women, by women, and therefore they should have command and agency in it. Distinguishing the “ingredients” as “art,” Jaffe also elevates Tita’s calling to *la cocina*. Jaffe, then, is arguably localizing *Como agua para chocolate* as a theoretical contemporary cornerstone to the autonomy that Latina writers have worked to glean from reclaiming the space for themselves as a mode of expressive liberality.

There are other critics who also follow this train of critical literary interpretation. For example, in her article “Women, Alterity and Mexican Identity in *Como agua para chocolate*,” Tina Escaja examines Esquivel’s novel from the specific perspective of Mexican women’s identity, beginning her investigation with a reflection on Octavio Paz’s words on women. Escaja describes the word choices Paz utilizes to highlight the idea that from his perspective, women’s lives and experiences represented a mystery and a significant tension existed in the comparison between men and women’s stories (3). Escaja’s examination of Paz’s words on the disparity between the genders helps to affirm, in her interpretation, the argument for the distinction of men and women’s views of life and different experiences, therefore the need for an establishment of a more individualized female space in Mexican culture and literature. In her analysis of *Como agua para chocolate*, Escaja designates *la cocina* as the nexus of that establishment. “The new center

presented by *Como agua para chocolate* consists of the traditional universe of women, usually considered secondary and marginal. The fundamental spatial pole—the kitchen—within which the novel develops is symptomatic. *La cocina* represents the new center of interpretation where the reality of such marginality is created and re-constructed; it represents in some ways the identity of Mexican women” (4). Escaja’s conception of the kitchen as a “fundamental space” follows Jaffe’s same line of argumentation for the liberationist aspects of Tita’s kitchen domain. Escaja acknowledged the placement of women as the “other,” and then elevates that distinction in order to carve out a physical and literary space of power.

Jaffe and Escaja take different approaches towards similar conclusions. While Jaffe focuses on the connection between Esquivel’s written text and female physical and metaphorical expression, Escaja directs her analysis towards the contents and stylistic elements of Esquivel’s novel that facilitate an autonomous identity creation for the female characters, which in her estimation, is meant to resonate with contemporary female identity in Mexico. As readers, we could potentially extrapolate these elements from the Mexican context to a broader, Latin American women’s backdrop. One more example of an interpretation of Esquivel’s text in a feminist context is Jenison Alisson Santos and Ana Cristina Marinho Lúcio’s article “Oppression and Resistance in the Kitchen in Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate*.” In this article, the Brazilian authors focus on a spatial examination of Esquivel’s treatment of women in *la cocina* and the culinary messages that Tita is able to convey through her cooking.

Muito mais do que reificar às mulheres como naturalmente confinadas ao âmbito do privado, mais precisamente ao espaço da cozinha, Esquivel produz uma reinvenção subjetiva que implode com a noção de identidade tradicional atribuída à mulher por uma tradição patriarcal e falocêntrica, trabalhando o feminino a partir das várias maneiras em que as identidades são formadas e transformadas em relações as formas pelas quais são representadas e/ou interpeladas pela cultura e pela história. (141)

Santos and Lúcio determine, similarly to Jaffe and Escaja, that the space that Esquivel manipulates in her text functions as a place that women were given and have subsequently taken and transformed to obtain control over their narratives. This approach certainly coalesces with authors that I have cited in this project such as Sor Juana, Castellanos and Ferré, who have sought to connect women's writing and food with women's liberation in different ways. Santos and Lúcio go even further in their conclusions and assert,

Apesar da escolha singular de utilizar a comida, sua preparação e o espaço da cozinha-- uma atividade que perpetua alguns dos estereótipos nocivos à imagem da mulher--, é através da capacidade inventiva e da potencialidade estética da escrita de Laura Esquivel que a autora transcreve esse espaço de confinamento, de opressão, mas também de potencia, de libertação, de emancipação e, acima de tudo, de transformação e de prazer. (149)

Santos and Lucio's conclusions provide a strong affirmation for the sensual, physical and intellectual liberation argument in favor of Esquivel's novel. The critics in these articles, as well as many others agree upon an interpretation of Esquivel's text that presents a successful feminist end for the characters in the text. There are certainly arguments to be made for a successful image of liberation in Tita and some of her sisters. However, despite the literal and metaphorical "power" that Tita seems to derive from the ingredients in her cooking as well as the physical space, her activities there seem to isolate her from relating to the rest of her family not to mention other people. Furthermore, when Tita expresses herself through her cooking, it is mostly done, seemingly inadvertently or in a passive manner.

My interest in *Como agua para chocolate* stems from its use of *la cocina* as a driving force for female action. Esquivel's characters interact with each other, but also with food and *la cocina* in ways that change them or develop them in different ways. It is precisely this development aspect of the kitchen that interests me for the purpose of this study. Stella Bolaki determines that the Bildungsroman is an ever changing and adaptive genre, and that throughout time it is possible to

see how it intersects with various aspects of literature that at its conception it did not; for instance the inclusion of ethnic groups and female perspectives of coming-of-age journeys. She proposes that the Bildungsroman text has evolved and can continuously evolve to include a variety of experiences across class, race, gender, sexual identity as well as many other forms of narratives. In short, she suggests that the ability of the genre to be accessed by so many groups or communities exemplifies the idea that rigid literary structures are not able to contain nor express the variety of themes being currently explored by ethnic authors in contemporary literature (13).

The authors I have cited over the course of my research; and who have approached the kitchen critically, support a platform of openness, self-exploration, protest and oral narratives with their texts. This space has allowed women from different backgrounds to access their own stories and have an avenue for story-telling through the use of kitchen tropes and explorations of their own interiority. Over the next pages I will demonstrate how this text connects with various tropes of the Bildungsroman genre as well as how it interacts with the earlier scholarship about *la cocina* from authors I have mentioned previously, such as Castellanos and Ferré. Additionally, I propose, there are ways to extrapolate these literary tropes to non-Hispanic Latin countries, such as Brazil. Authors like Nérida Piñon and Jorge Amado, author of *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela* (1961), situate females in their texts in a kitchen context as well and contribute to the development of a kitchen Bildungsroman genre.

As I have demonstrated in the beginning of this chapter, Esquivel's text, *Como agua para chocolate*, has served over time as a sort of bastion to connect feminism and in particular feminist freedom with *la cocina*. Various critics have utilized the formula of this novel in order to discuss the way that kitchen narratives have evolved into a tool of liberation for women. No doubt given the history of the culinary text as represented by other female authors, this is the desire, to reclaim

and own a space to which women were sequestered physically and in literature. However, there is one point that stands out in the novel in terms of whether real, feminist freedom is indeed possible for the main character. If we return to Denise Thompson's definition of feminism which she understands as the inherent meaning of feminism at the bedrock of all the different variants of the movement, Esquivel's text and the interpretation of her intents by literary critics become problematic. Thompson states that:

Because the male monopoly of the 'human' is still too little recognized, because it is still veiled by hegemonic meanings and values which authenticate maleness and depreciate femaleness, the creation of human status for women requires that women seek recognition from each other, that women live in connection with women and recognize each other in ways which are outside male control and definition. (13)

Based on this understanding, it is possible to see at least two major ways in which Tita's character does not achieve freedom for herself. The first is that she does not truly live in communion nor community with the other women around her. She learns from Nacha and engages with Chenchá, but still as a station above. Tita is not truly engaged with her sisters either, and even beyond that, she is practically estranged from her sister, Rosaura and her mother Mamá Elena. Tita's cooking becomes a way to express her own emotions about the decisions made around her and about her. Even if the outcome of her expressions has physiological ramifications for the people who eat her food, she still is not claiming her own voice or a real perspective of herself. As I will outline in the following pages of this chapter, Tita is a stranger to her own emotions and thoughts, and they seem to seep out of her cooking as if by accident. If anything, *la cocina* becomes for her little more than a refuge to escape the painful living situation in which she finds herself. The second difficulty is Tita's inherent character definition, which revolves mainly around her relationship with Pedro,

who in turn is not a character that demonstrates integrity or honesty, which makes her desire for recognition or validation from him problematic⁵.

I recommend that the text can be studied individually as a coming-of-age or coming-to-self narrative for the main character, but furthermore, that it can successfully form a part of a different literary corpus beyond the feminist liberation movement to which I believe it has been identified because of the connections it draws between women, sensuality and food. As I understand it, Tita fights more for the freedom of choice of the following generation than for herself, by this I refer to her niece, aptly named Esperanza. This act of championing the freedom of other women is truly the first time where, I reason, Tita does something in the service of fostering the community of women around her out of something other than obligation or duty. This connection to promoting the education of the next generation of women in her family is more reminiscent of the writing of female authors I have cited throughout the text who believed that the power of the women in *la cocina* lay in writing about it, communicating with other women and educating one another in the power of discovering the self. For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa explores the importance of doing precisely this.

In her construction of “The New Mestiza Consciousness”, Anzaldúa stresses a powerful need for women to write and communicate their experiences to one another, but also to themselves. While Anzaldúa writes her text mainly referring to the Chicana movement and the conscious need for a hybrid identity, both Mexican and Anglo American, her proposal for female visibility is accessible to all women who identify with the need for a hybrid ethnic or cultural identity, which includes many, if not all, the writers cited in this study who discuss themes of *la cocina*. According

⁵ Mainly it becomes problematic if we examine the text from the feminist standpoint of the critics I have cited up to this point. Tita has been presented as a female feminist model, but if we examine her actions from the perspective of Thompson’s definition of feminism, then Tita’s story does not achieve the success necessary to serve as the type of protagonist the critics are proposing.

to Anzaldúa, women should write their stories, to reveal their reality to others and to themselves. In the act of writing, women can find a common ground with one another that transcends the space of ethnicity. In an essay titled “A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” Anzaldúa explains, “[w]hy am I compelled to write[...]Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me [...] I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you [...]to discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself to achieve autonomy” (83-84). The act of writing down stories and histories for Anzaldúa serves the purpose, then, to right wrongs and reveal lies. Thus, Tita’s recipe text that she leaves for her niece is a useful illustration of what *la cocina* could be for the female Bildungsroman. The act of writing her recipes served to help her understand herself as well as express her hopes for the future of the women in her family, in particular for her niece. Therefore, the act of writing becomes a revolutionary step for her. After she attempts to accept her circumstances and struggles to find her own place in her society, she decides to share her story as a cautionary tale or a form of manual for Esperanza to have a different life and different options than the ones she and her sisters had.

Tita’s story of discovering herself follows a familiar pattern visible in a variety of women’s texts dealing with coming-of-age narratives. I have found that studying this text from the perspective of a Bildungsroman is useful because it can lend itself to deal with telling different women’s stories as well as showcasing successes and frustrations that they deal with in their narratives from an objective standpoint. Tita and her sister’s stories are displayed for the reader, demonstrating the different options presented to them by their society, and how the consequences of their decisions shaped the society around them as well as how much women were able to direct their own narratives or not. To develop this idea further, I will turn to Nélida Piñón’s short story

“Colheita” (1973) which serves two main purposes in my analysis of how these texts work as interpretations of Bildungsromane. The first one is the usefulness of the genre of the short story, which serves almost like a blueprint of a female Bildungsroman in its brevity. As a short story, it provides a snapshot of the different tropes of the traditional novel of formation. The length of the text makes plot and genre central by not providing names for the protagonists or the town where they live, thus forcing the reader to focus only on the events of the story and their meaning. The second purpose is that discussing Piñón’s short story in the context of the contemporary female Bildungsroman genre serves to illustrate Bolaki’s premise that this model is applicable both cross-culturally and can negotiate gender roles. To begin this analysis, I will briefly look to the structural similarities between the classical Bildungsroman model and Piñón’s text.

“Colheita” is the story of a man and a woman who fall in love. However, in order to accept his role in the relationship, the man decides that he must first take a journey to know the world, and thus know himself, and in the process leaves the woman alone. This format is reminiscent of the story of Odysseus and Penelope from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. This parallel is significant because despite Odysseus being understood as the active party in his travels and adventures, Penelope also undergoes a journey of her own. The nameless man and woman in Piñón’s story each settle into what their societies have indicated for the roles of husband and wife. Odysseus/Man leaves home to engage in battles, make discoveries and have adventures, while Penelope/Woman stays in the home and goes through a period of mourning/waiting for her husband’s return. This parallel seems most significant when we evaluate the more contemporary scholarship that has focused on the character of Penelope and her own form of journey when she remains behind in Ithaca. In his book *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope & the Plot of Homer’s Odyssey* (2005), Richard Heitman addresses the interest in Penelope on behalf of many scholars. He discusses Penelope’s character

and her accepted status as the perfect wife and model for women, even going as far as citing her as a “saint of faithfulness.” Furthermore, he claims there have been more contemporary attempts to investigate her place in *The Odessey*, and the impact she had as a significant agent of the plot of the story as opposed to a passive character. From this conception, Heitman seeks to assert Penelope as a character with agency and control over her own recollections, motivations and intents (2). Heitman’s assertion that Penelope is an active agent in her own story is paralleled in Pinon’s depiction of her own female character. Both authors identify how central the domestic sphere inhabited by the women is to the construction of family and society, but to the empowerment of female characters as well. The structure of Piñon’s short story also shows the woman in a situation of being left by her husband and she then has to wait on his return and be that paragon of the “perfect” wife that Heitman describes for Penelope’s situation.

In this study, I focus particularly on one section of Piñon’s story; the point of the man’s return and his attempts to share with the woman the incredible adventures he found himself on when he left home. This is the moment where the story’s structure is somewhat turned on itself, and when the reader is meant to marvel at all the man has seen and learned, instead we are provided with the structure of an internal “adventure” of self-discovery on behalf of the woman. The significant part of this moment is that it begins with her leading the man into the kitchen.

Ela o trouxe pela mão até a cozinha. Ele não se queria deixar ir. Então, o que queres fazer aqui? Ele respondeu: quero a mulher. Ela consentiu. Depois, porém ela falou: agora me siga até a cozinha.

— O que há na cozinha?

Deixou-o sentado na cadeira. Fez a comida, se alimentaram em silêncio. Depois limpou o chão, lavou os pratos, fez a cama recém-desarrumada, tirou o pó da casa, abriu todas as janelas quase sempre fechadas naqueles anos de sua ausência. Procedia como se ele ainda não tivesse chegado, ou como se jamais houvesse abandonado a casa, mas se faziam preparativos sim de festa. Vamos nos falar ao menos agora que eu preciso? ele disse.

— Tenho tanto a lhe contar. Percorri o mundo, a terra, sabe, e além do mais...

Eu sei, ela foi dizendo depressa, não consentindo que ele dissertasse sobre a variedade da fauna, ou assegurasse a ela que os rincões distantes ainda que apresentem certas particularidades de algum modo são próximos a nossa terra... (138)

She leads him into her space that she has inhabited while he has been gone, and refuses to be told about the world outside of her own. Presumably, the woman is aware already of the things of which he wants to educate her, and instead she asserts this moment as a time where she will educate him instead. Piñon's choice in the word "dissertasse," here making it clear that this exchange takes on the format of a lecture, bringing to mind a form of education. Where, in an Odyssean, fashion it would have been natural to see the reverse of the man educating the woman who did not leave and go abroad, here Piñon opts to show the woman teaching the man what she has learned from her own journey, which is predominantly interior. Piñon's short story serves as a model for this connection between the stories of women's inner journey and the use of the inner domestic space to express coming-to-self stories externally. In the scene stated above, the reader can see clearly when the switch takes place, as the woman takes the lead into the kitchen and then detains the conversation, the action that interrupts any kind of communication is the preparation of dinner and then eating in silence. Then there is a marked changeover after the meal, where the woman is the one who then directs the conversation, and she tells her story like a journey, the same way the man would have explained his. Presumably telling him things that he would not have thought of or understood before she told them out loud.

Piñon's female character uses *la cocina* to instruct her husband about daily life in the home, her daily routine, and the different rituals of preparing certain foods and how each action carried meaning for her person. Reminiscent, I propose, of Penelope doing and undoing her tapestry each night in her wait for Odysseus.

Nada fizera senão andar e pensar que aprendeu verdades diante das quais a mulher haveria de capitular. No entanto, ela confessando a jornada dos legumes, a confecção misteriosa de uma sopa, selava sobre ele um penoso silêncio. A vergonha de ter composto uma falsa história o abatia. Sem dúvida estivera ali com a mulher todo o tempo, jamais abandonara a casa, a aldeia, o torpor a que o destinaram desde o nascimento, e cujos limites ele altivo pensou ter rompido (141).

This pivotal moment in the story insinuates a journey through the different preparations of food--vegetables and soup. The preparation as a synonym of a confession from the woman, as if she were speaking herself into being before his eyes. Neither of them necessarily breaking free from the domesticity of the home life, but rather embracing it and understanding it within its value in the woman's journey of her own. The namelessness of the characters in the story provides a universality to each gender, so it is easy to make a small leap and extrapolate the roles each play into male and female interactions within and without literatures cross-culturally. Esquivel utilizes the rituality of *la cocina*, at the very least, as a method of personal affirmation for Tita even if she is not able to express herself to others very vocally or openly. Beyond this idea of speaking women into being through her stories and instructions in *la cocina*, Piñon's story implies also how this internal journey can be beneficial to the man and his understanding of himself. He who was so sure of himself and "altivo," soon realized he knew barely anything about himself after spending some time in the privacy of his home. Piñon's story is different from many narratives where *la cocina* is explored in conjunction with women's stories in the sense that there is truly not much of an internal exploration of the woman's sensuality. Nor is there an inherent connection between food and sex that we see in many of the other examples of women's culinary texts. While I cannot speak to the author's intention in this short story, I advise that it demonstrates a relationship between the woman's internal coming-to-self journey and *la cocina*. As in the examples I have provided in this dissertation, Latina texts that deal with this space in one form or another also tend to explore the subject or protagonists' internal struggles, success and events that led her to

understand herself. My suggestion is that while an exploration of sensuality forms part of some but not all of them, making it a personal decision that individualizes the text and the story it contains, but does not define it or correlate directly with culinary writing.

This understanding of culinary texts as platforms for women's stories of self-expression can be associated also with the texts by authors like Ferré, Castellanos and Anzaldúa that I have discussed previously in this study. One of the main examples I have focused on is Esquivel's novel, and with particular emphasis on, the relationship between Tita and her main love interest Pedro. The portion that captures my attention about the relationship between the two isn't necessarily how Tita's cooking influences him physically, because as we see in the novel she is able to affect many people with her food, not just Pedro. The ending of the novel is what I feel is most telling about the function of this novel, and why I struggle to accept liberal feminist interpretations of it as opposed to a reading that highlights the Bildungs aspects of it. Tita harbors a deep love for Pedro through the entirety of this novel, despite the fact that he does not really show any moments of true strength that would suggest he deserves her devotion. In his estimation, the most romantic thing he could do was to marry her sister in order to be closer to her. At the very end, even after his wife has already died, Pedro does not seem brave enough to attempt getting close to her until he is battered by jealousy of seeing John Brown treating Tita with tenderness on the eve of Esperanza's wedding.

En cambio Pedro no podía conciliar el sueño. Unos celos infernales le corroían las entrañas. No le agradaba nada tener que asistir a la boda y soportar ver la imagen de Tita junto a John...De seguro se creía muy civilizado, pero él le iba a enseñar lo que un hombre hace cuando de verdad quiere a una mujer. Tocando su saco se dispuso a ir a buscar a John para romperle la cara. En la puerta se detuvo. Se podría prestar a habladurías que el cuñado de Tita se peleara con John un día antes de la ceremonia. Tita no se lo perdonaría. (231-32)

This passage, I believe, is extremely indicative of Pedro's personality throughout the entirety of the text. He fears, to some degree, people's opinion and gossip even more than Tita does, and he

constantly finds excuses not to do something or take action in order to achieve his heart's motives. To the reader, I suggest this demonstrates that Pedro is still more afraid of social convention than of losing Tita, and provides the excuse that she would not forgive him for it in order to once again not act on his intentions. Furthermore, if the rest of the novel is any indication, it seems clear that Tita would most likely have forgiven him for it, if she was able to forgive him for marrying her sister, and perhaps Pedro knows this and understands that he does not need to fight for Tita, metaphorically speaking. He has already won the heroine's affection by doing exactly as he does now, nothing. This exchange is problematic as I believe it undervalues the main female character and throws into question her ability to achieve a place of respect for herself, even after she has managed to free herself from her oppressive family life and gain some form of agency through her domain.

Even beyond this episode of Pedro's jealousy, the reader then has to reckon with the scenes at Esperanza's wedding and afterwards when Pedro and Tita consummate their love for each other physically. At the wedding, Pedro dances with Tita and finally proposes to marry her in the following exchange:

--Ya que estemos casados, quiero tener un hijo contigo. Aún estamos a tiempo, ¿no crees? Ahora que Esperanza nos deja, vamos a necesitar compañía.

Tita no pudo responderle a Pedro. Un nudo en la garganta se lo impidió. Unas lágrimas rodaron lentamente por sus mejillas. Sus primeras lágrimas de felicidad.
(237)

This being the sole objective in Tita's life, to be with Pedro, her happiness is understandable even if a bit troubling. Pedro has waited and not acted throughout most of this story, and the actions he did take in order to come closer to Tita are questionable at best. Then, shortly after this scene, the two retire to the family's ranch and proceed to be intimate together in a passionate scene. Pedro dies shortly after sleeping with Tita. "Seguramente Pedro había muerto en el momento del éxtasis

al penetrar en el túnel luminoso. Se arrepintió de no haberlo hecho ella también. Ahora le sería imposible ver nuevamente esa luz, pues ya no era capaz de sentir nada. Quedaría vagando errante por las tinieblas toda la eternidad, sola, muy sola” (246). Whether it’s in his control or not, he is not able to deliver on the promises he had made to Tita which had brought her so much joy just hours earlier. From the phrasing of the scene, it seems he made a conscious decision to die from ecstasy where she chose to live. Her reaction to his death is an intense feeling of loneliness, as though her life apart from him truly had no meaning. She does not find meaning in herself or her relationship with Esperanza, whom she had educated about life and love. The connection between Tita and other women was almost invalidated in the moment that she chose to also die in order to follow Pedro one more time. In particular, her relationship with Esperanza can be damaged in the estimation of readers. Tita throws everything away in pursuit of this relationship with a man who was never really willing to risk anything for her. She even loses her life when her desire had always been to live, and live fully. Therefore, regardless of the valuable lessons she was able to teach Esperanza about independence and self-knowledge in womanhood, Tita is not able to understand or fulfill them herself, which throws into question whether she truly believes it.

Even if we focus in on just the relationship between Tita and Pedro, without considering the issues in the relationship between the women in Tita’s family or her relationship with John Brown, Pedro’s overbearing influence as a main love interest and eventual partner for Tita is problematic in the face of the definition of feminism previously outlined for this study, particularly because he is the only thing that Tita has ever openly desired. She values this relationship over all others, male or female, which complicates a reading of her story that showcases her as a strong liberated female character. Many of her decisions and motivations are tied to his presence in her life. In addition to that, juxtaposing the culinary aspects of this novel with other examples of recipe

texts which I discuss in chapter one, such as Gorriti's project, there is not a clear attempt to foster a community of women nor does it even really become a mode of intentional self-expression for Tita. When Tita expresses her inner thoughts or feelings, she rarely does so directly, or even on purpose. One such example is the scene where Tita cooks the recipe of quails with rose petals from the roses that Pedro had given her to celebrate her first year as the official cook of the household. She had been told by her mother to destroy the roses, as Pedro was married to her sister Rosaura. Tita wanted to keep them so she held them close to her chest and tightly in her hands to the point of bleeding on them before she used the petals in her cooking. The text explains that Tita did not "remember" the effects of mixing blood into the cooking, after the reader is given the warning that it may produce dangerous chemical reactions. "Pero Tita era incapaz de recordar este pequeño detalle ante la intensa emoción que experimentaba al recibir un ramo de rosa, de manos de Pedro" (46). While giving herself over to her feelings for Pedro is not really something that she can be faulted for, Esquivel's choice to make her forget an essential part of her culinary craft somewhat invalidates the effect that it produces in the people who eat it. Her expression of passion in her cooking, which affects her sister Gertrudis in such a strong, physical way that she escapes her home to become a sex worker, is essentially an accident that she did not mean to unleash. This becomes kind of the "recipe" for Tita's expression of her own self-knowledge. Even previously on the day of her sister's marriage to Pedro, when Tita is forced to make the wedding cake and she spends the day crying into the fondant she is preparing.

Nacha cubrió de besos a Tita y la empujó fuera de la cocina. No se explicaba de dónde había sacado nuevas lágrimas, pero las había sacado y alterado con ellas la textura del turrón... Cuando terminó, se le ocurrió darle un pedazo al fondant, para ver si las lágrimas de Tita no habían alterado el sabor. Y no, aparentemente, no habían alterado el sabor, pero sin saber por qué, a Nacha le entró de golpe una gran nostalgia. Recordó uno a uno todos los banquetes de boda que había preparado para la familia De la Garza con ilusión de que el próximo fuera el suyo. (34)

This pattern crops up throughout the text where Tita utilizes her cooking to express herself, but she really only expresses to herself, not intentionally to anyone else. She influences others with her cooking, but the text suggests that it is unconsciously or accidentally done. Considering that Tita does not really speak about her personal journey to other women, not her sisters nor her kitchen companions, Nacha and Chenchu, it can hardly be said that the feminist tradition of teaching other women or fostering female community is achieved through Tita's culinary expression. What is achieved, however, is Tita's ability to understand her own emotions through watching how her recipes affect others. There is growth in her character within *la cocina*, and this allows her to understand that her cooking can be a mode of self-understanding.

Perhaps this idea is best explored in contrast to another recipe text that centers on the importance of the physical and emotional effects of cooking. While Isabel Allende's *Afrodita* (1997) is considered non-fiction and published some eleven years after *Como agua para chocolate*, there is a clear thematic connection that allows for an intersection in scholarship between the two. In the introduction to this project, I cite Allende's main purpose in producing her text which means to focus on the physical influence of cooking on sensuality and pleasure. "Por tiempos inmemoriales la humanidad ha recurrido a sustancias, trucos, actos de magia y juegos, que la gente seria y virtuosa se apresura en clasificar como perversiones, para estimular el deseo amoroso y la fertilidad. Esto último no nos interesa aquí, ya hay demasiados niños ajenos en el mundo, vamos a concentrarnos en el placer" (7). In terms of discussing sensuality, Allende is much more open and direct as to the intention of her text. Allende manages to merge her intentions in the text and produces something that serves as a mode of self-expression as well as self-discovery for women. As she sets out to discuss food and its intersection with sexuality, she gives a background of how she began to be interested in the space and context of the kitchen. In Allende's text as in Esquivel's

novel, *la cocina* is not something that is suited for every woman to naturally understand or feel comfortable in, which is a sentiment reminiscent of Castellanos' text that I discuss in the previous chapter. It does not serve to examine kitchen narratives and cooking as inherent modes of freedom of expression for women if there is no clear evidence of it bringing female communities together or even serving as a place that women have reclaimed for themselves as a mode of feminist expression. In fact, one thing that both Esquivel and Allende's text do have in common is the explanation that not all women find a form of solace in cooking or in the kitchen, but it is a place that most if not all women do go through at one point or another, both physically and emotionally.

Esquivel's characters all do spend some amount of time exploring *la cocina*, even though only a few of them truly feel it is a place of comfort for them. I speak mainly about Rosaura's interaction with the space, and her rejection of it and it of her. Esquivel establishes this uncomfortable relationship early on in the first chapter of the novel, when Tita tries to bring her sisters into *la cocina* with her in an attempt to bring them into her world. Esquivel introduces something interesting about the interaction with *la cocina* in the reactions of both Gertrudis and Rosaura. One particular game that Tita wanted to play was to sing and dance while throwing water droplets into a hot skillet and watching them sizzle and "dance." Gertrudis is the only of the two sisters who begins to understand the rhythm and movement necessary to succeed in *la cocina*. "En cambio, Gertrudis, como todo aquello donde interviniera el ritmo, el movimiento o la música, se vio fuertemente atraída hacia el juego y se integró con entusiasmo" (6). Later, Gertrudis will be seduced by the quail dish that Tita prepares with rose petals and her own blood and from the intense physical and sexual reaction her body experiences to the food will run away from home in order to become a sex worker. There is an implication here that had she been allowed to explore it, Gertrudis would have also understood *la cocina* as a formative space, like Tita. Perhaps she could

have even understood her own sensuality and sense of self without leaving home. The reader is not able to see this development, however, because after the incident with Rosaura's reaction to the game, they are banned from the kitchen and Tita is the only one allowed by their mother to explore the space.

Rosaura permanecía en un rincón, pasmada por lo que observaba...No le quedó otra que tratar de hacer lo propio, pero como casi no se mojó las manos y lo hacía con tanto miedo, no logró el efecto deseado. Tita entonces trató de ayudarla acercándole las manos al comal. Rosaura se resistió y esta lucha no paró hasta que Tita, muy enojada, le soltó las manos y éstas, por inercia, cayeron sobre el ardiente comal. (6)

Rosaura resisted her sister's attempts to include her. She did not understand the point of the game nor Gertrudis' reaction to it. She had a clear discomfort and distrust of the space which became indicative of her character. If *la cocina* acts as an ambit of self-knowledge for Hispanic women, then Rosaura's fear of it indicates a fear to explore herself, which could stem from her character's willingness to marry her sister's love for her own gain. Even as she makes that decision and lives with it, there is an inability to be introspective and know herself truly, which could come from an innate sense of guilt or fear from what that study may reveal. Clearly for Tita, the culinary acted as both a method of freedom from her mother's rule and as a space of self-actualization, but it does not work that way for all examples of women in the novel. Even Gertrudis, who actively understood the freedom in accepting *la cocina*, was not able to free herself in it inherently. In Gertrudis' character, however, even if not in Tita's, there is a constant reminder of the sensuality and sexualizing of kitchen rituals and of the sexual power of food, which Allende is adamant about in her own book. It is significant, however, that Tita is not able to experience these effects, and what powers she seems to glean from her cooking are often "accidental" or unknown to her until the consequences like its effects on Gertrudis are revealed.

Another contrast between Allende and Esquivel's text is in the story that Allende tells discussing her own growing interest in *la cocina*. While Tita is essentially born into it on a wave of tears, Allende is gradually introduced to it by several generations of women who interacted and reacted to it in different ways. While Tita's interaction with food separates her from others in order to learn about herself, Allende's story creates a more direct connection to the others around her and her history. The Chilean author's introduction to *la cocina* had less to do with a capable and experienced cook and more to do with the necessity of eating and cooking for survival. Allende describes the evolution of her family through the generations in terms of their relationship to cooking. "Vengo de una familia donde el desprecio por los placeres terrenales era una virtud y el ascetismo en las costumbres se consideraba bueno para la salud. Los únicos valores aceptables eran los de la mente y, en ciertos casos, los del espíritu" (32). This somewhat ascetic approach to daily life is reminiscent of the way that Mamá Elena raised her daughters in Esquivel's novel. There was no real attempt to create community or break the mold set forth from family or gender, rather a desire to survive daily life and to abstain from any form of physical or sensorial pleasure. Allende's thesis for her text connects food with sensual pleasure directly, and she approaches pleasure in a way that leaves little doubt as to the purpose of her writing. Conversely, even though Esquivel's novel has been critically discussed in a way that focuses greatly on the sensuality and physical effects of Tita's cooking as I discussed earlier in this chapter, I suggest that comparing both her text and Allende's allows the reader to see the difference between them and their different emphases on female sexuality. While the texts do address sexuality differently, they also share a common ground for women to understand themselves, and not so coincidentally, *la cocina* is largely the place where cultural development happens for women in the texts discussed in this study, despite the struggles that Tita encounters herself in this space.

Allende refers to her own upbringing in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother. Her grandmother's approach to *la cocina* as I mention in the previous paragraph, was a very sparse and grudging interaction. She did not believe in experimenting or improving the craft, nor is there any indication from Allende that she connected it with any kind of individual freedom. There is, however, a strong connection to her family and her way of preserving the lifestyle she has grown accustomed to. Allende describes her as a practical woman who was not concerned with specifics about homemaking, and that her true passions lay outside the home.

Era una mujer legendaria, de quien se cuentan anécdotas improbables, que pasó su existencia en un plano intermedio entre la realidad y el ensueño, más preocupada de fenómenos extrasensoriales y obras de caridad que de las groseras realidades de este mundo. Las labores domésticas o los afanes de la maternidad le interesaban poco, delegaba esas responsabilidades en las numerosas "nanas", que nunca faltaron a su servicio. Tal como mi abuela se ponía cualquier prenda que tuviera a mano, indiferente a la moda o al clima, igual comía lo que le pusieran delante. El tema de los alimentos, como tantos otros concernientes al cuerpo y sus funciones, le resultaba de mal gusto, por lo tanto, no se mencionaba en su presencia. (33)

In this passage we see, how Allende's grandmother's rejection of the traditional presence of women in the kitchen became the way that she portrayed her own identity, even how she understood herself and what was important to her. After the grandmother passed away, however, Allende's mother took over *la cocina* and then Allende herself began to find herself drawn to culinary pursuits for her own reasons.

Allende traces the lineage of women and although not all of them find freedom or escape within the confines of the kitchen, she does point out two things that are significant to this project. The first is that generations of women of different socio-economic strata interact and react to *la cocina* in very different ways. There is no pattern, rhyme or reason to whether one feels comfortable in it or rejects it; it becomes a deeply personal connection to the space, whether it is a positive connection or not. The second is that *la cocina* is linked to women, in literature and other spaces. If we refer to chapter one to Thompson's definition of successful radical feminism, we

have a complete power detachment from male influence and a stronger focus on female emancipation. The writers I mention in the previous chapter such as LaGreca, Ferré and Castellanos, who discuss women's relegation to *la cocina*, each assign an important place to how a patriarchal system transferred woman into the space. Women have accepted the transfer into *la cocina* and used it as a space of individual and personal development, a platform to tell their stories, and a place to discuss their frustrations and failures surrounding their ability to communicate effectively outside the home. The texts I discuss in this dissertation all contain these elements of women's coming-to-self stories, including but not limited to their experience with their own sensuality. Although Allende's text is much more directly devoted to sexuality than Esquivel's novel, Allende discusses sensuality in conjunction with the other themes in a way that directs the reader to understand how women writers have used this literary niche to achieve development for themselves as well as educate others and contribute to their societies. After drawing the female line through the culinary history of her home, Allende moves on to place men and women on equal footing with regards to how each interacts with food and sexuality.

A su lado aprendí el valor de una pizca de especias, un chorrito de licor, un pin de sal, una nada de mostaza, un puñado de hierbas, una nube de azúcar flor y otras subjetivas medidas del arte culinario. Sin embargo, pasarían muchos años antes que la cocina dejara de ser un espectáculo concertado por mi madre y me interesara en un plano personal. Eso ocurrió cuando me di cuenta que una de las pocas cosas que hombres y mujeres tenemos en común es el sexo y la comida. (36-37)

While she does recognize the gendered history of the space, she argues that it doesn't necessarily separate the genders but if it were explored by the individual would instead provide for a better understanding of the self and commonalities between men and women.

In the end, Esquivel and Allende's interpretations of *la cocina* have marked differences but one thing in common. Whether consciously or not, *la cocina* serves as a place for women's self-expression, education and exploration. Tita's interactions with it largely revolve around herself

and her own understanding of her personhood. It is not a space that she has in common with many other people besides Nacha and Chenchá, and even they have their own interactions with it that are private and unique to themselves. It does not serve explicitly as a form of connection between her and other women until Esperanza comes along, and even then, Esperanza has her own understanding of the space while Tita remains rooted in her own experience and continues to be very much under Pedro's power and influence. The sensual aspect of the novel serves as a form of accidental self-expression for Tita, since she is not truly open with anyone about her journey to self-actualization, and the effects of her cooking seem to be uncontrollable and almost apart from herself. On the other hand, while Allende focuses greatly on the sensual effects of *la cocina*, she is open about the ability of the space of the kitchen to serve as a locus of self-knowledge for women, and a place to gain equal footing and coexist with masculinity.

I propose that Esquivel's text serves as a good example of a novel of development and can go as far as to view it as a blueprint for this kind of text. Tita's story is presented from the moment of her birth, and we see her struggle with her identity using the interior of the home as a setting for her development. Eventually we do see her leave her home and return having achieved some perspective of how she wants her life to look, despite the challenges she faced. In the end she does seem to achieve some form of peace in her circumstances, integrating her within the context of her home, which is where the bulk of the text develops. In the next chapter, I will examine another text, this time a memoir titled *Silent Dancing: Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1991), by Judith Ortiz Cofer. This memoir is similar to Esquivel's novel in the sense that it too focuses around the story of a coming of age story and deals with aspects of identity and sensuality in women's self-discovery, and once again *la cocina* serves a specific function. This text is an interesting contrast to Esquivel's novel, because it is more open about the importance of the

culinary space in women's writing and provides very clear examples of the relevance of *la cocina* in the Hispanic female Bildungs genre.

CHAPTER 4. JUDITH ORTIZ COFER AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE LATINA FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN

I selected Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (1989) as an example of the intersection of female story-telling with kitchen narratives due to several factors, not least of which being the international renown that the text has accrued due to its numerous translations into other languages, including English, as well as being turned into a movie in 1992 titled "Like Water for Chocolate." I feel it is necessary at this point to point out that although this study proposes an alternative to this style of reading of Esquivel's novel it is not my purpose to discredit nor undermine this understanding of the text. The purpose of this study is to assess the existing corpus of information that references women and *la cocina* and respond with an option that allows for an inclusive examination of culinary narratives as a mode of expressing female coming of age stories. In the previous chapters I address the common format of evaluating culinary narratives and the proclivity amongst literary critics to ascribe agency to the female characters because of the sensual freedom expressed in these texts.

One of the main issues I identify with this reading of culinary narratives is the focus on sexuality that generally comes with the study of women in *la cocina* and the tendency to designate sexual discourse as female empowerment. I suggest that the discussion on female sexual expression, while certainly part of a coming-of-age story like Tita's in Esquivel's novel, should not be understood as the sole driving factor behind the plot or the most identifiable aspect when examining the female characters. There are other examples, such as Allende's *Afrodita* (1997), which are decidedly dedicated to the examination of sexuality within a coming of age journey. However, sexuality is not the central focus of all coming of age stories and therefore I suggest that sexual expression as a part of the story would allow other parts of the narrative to form a more

cohesive view of the subject's trajectory. In particular, I want to point out the protagonists' relationships to other women, the amount of introspection and self-discovery being done and its relationship to the inside of the home, and finally what they are discussing with regards to their own place in their family and society. These elements, which can certainly include women's understanding of themselves and their sexuality, provide a helpful platform of Latina Bildungs stories to be understood by readers in general. This study follows the contributions from several female authors who explore the dynamic of *la cocina* and how it has intersected with women's writing. Esquivel's novel embodies precisely the trajectory of analysis which I suggest could create a problem for women's community formation. Going forward in this chapter, I will focus on a text written by Puerto Rican author Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1991). I suggest this text as an accompaniment to the way female coming-of-age stories are understood, adding my own understanding of how *la cocina* can be central to the formation of a female Bildungs story.

I would like to begin the analysis of Ortiz Cofer's text by addressing the fact that she composed this text as a form of memoir⁶; therefore, the events pertain directly to the author's perception of them and are understood to be largely non-fictional. Although I chose Esquivel's novel as the comparative text, I propose that they can be studied on largely common ground based on the content and narrative style. Some commonalities that the texts share include the oral

⁶ In her book, Kushigian states: "Testimonial narratives and foundational fictions should also be read as Bildungsromane, because they convey the development of identity, be it self or collective, from within the social structure. Rhetorically they are grounded in processes of self-definition and growth that inform larger issues of justice, social change, identity and ethical choice. They also appeal to a representational quality through their protagonists who recreate the larger, historical struggles of a nation at birth, or who move from subject to object in the voicing/creation of their own story (146)". This consideration is representative of why the texts I selected as examples of Latina Bildungsromane have a strong personal connection to the author's story and even have autobiographical elements that relay personal events. Most of the advocacy that happens in these texts is for the visibility of women in male dominated areas of literature and the positive cultural effects that an acknowledgement of women's contributions to cultural progression can have on Spanish American society.

narrative style that engages readers in a personal way, faithfulness to *écriture féminine*, and the disjointed and individual-focused structure of the narratives in each text. In the following paragraphs I will address these similarities between the texts and then move into an analysis of how Ortiz Cofer's text can be understood as a next step in the direction of a female Bildungsroman.

Ortiz Cofer approaches the subject of memory by means of a re-creation of the past in her story-telling. Her style resembles oral narration, which personalizes her text and makes it approachable to the reader. This also allows her to create, as well as add or subtract from her memories in order to challenge established borders, be it physical or metaphorical. Ortiz Cofer's text manipulates certain events or episodes in order to convey a specific outcome. She plays on the subjectivity of memory in order to tailor some of her experiences and appeal to women across various social and class barriers. Much like Esquivel's main character Tita, Ortiz Cofer's narrator constantly thinks of the next generation and the importance of certain things like education and having options. Ortiz Cofer makes it clear that she shares her story to teach other women about the validity of their experiences. She includes a form of disclaimer or note to the reader in her introduction about her purpose in writing *Silent Dancing*,

I am not interested in merely “canning” memories...Its intention is not to chronicle my life—which in my case is still very much “in-progress,” nor are there any extraordinary accomplishments to showcase; neither is it meant to be a record of public events and personal histories (in fact, since most of the characters in these essays are based on actual, living persons and real places, whenever I felt that it was necessary to protect their identities, I changed names, locations, etc.). Then, what is the purpose of calling this collection non-fiction or a memoir? Why not just call it fiction? Once again, I must turn to my literary mentor for this project, Virginia Woolf, for an answer: like her, I wanted to try to connect myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood. (13)

Based on this admission in her introduction, I determine that in a similar way to Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of writing, which I introduced in the previous chapter, Ortiz Cofer defies the notion of historical memory by altering the idea of a memoir and creating a text that allows for subjective

reading of the past. She defies the male-centered telling of history by proposing that it is mainly women who have the job to create culture through education and showing society roles. This is an idea that I have discussed earlier in this study, in particular with authors like Juana Manuela Gorriti and Sor Juana. The format Ortiz Cofer selects for her text displays different ways that she as a woman has gained education about different aspects of life, both in a formal and informal educational setting. She creates a distinction between what she has learned from her grandmother, a central figure in her family, and from her nuclear family's experience of fluctuating between Puerto Rico and the US. She transitions between learning culture through the matriarchal figure and incorporating into her own identity, aspects of the immigrant/colonial experience that her generation exemplifies.

In her text, *Silent Dancing*, Ortiz Cofer challenges the idea of historical memory as the only accepted social narrative and construct of identity. In order to approach Ortiz Cofer's memoir from an academic perspective, the idea of using memory as a historical tool can be problematic. As Ortiz Cofer herself admits, memory can sometimes be subjective or change over time, nor is it a narrative that is easily verifiable. However, Ortiz Cofer is aware of this subjectivity, and her project is constructed inherently as a partial remembrance, indicating that her purpose goes beyond telling her story and is geared more towards investigating something else. Therefore, it can be argued that some parts may be viewed as fictional, and thus much more comparable to a novel like Esquivel's.

Duncan Koerber conducted a study precisely to identify whether it is possible to gain a purely objective view of history or an event in history. He had his students respond to a survey to tell their own personal histories and document the challenges they faced in the areas of memory, selectivity and truth. In his findings, he concluded that, "Personal narrative can thus accomplish

goals of both expressivist and social constructivist pedagogies for the beginning history student: engaging students in writing—and writing history—while exposing them to the discursive production of knowledge” (65). Koerber subscribes to the idea that historians, or people who tell history, can never be truly objective, and that there is true inquisitive value in constructing a more social view of history. Ortiz Cofer’s personal story is closely woven with the historical relationship of Puerto Rico and the United States. Therefore, her memoir is a way of teaching history in a more personal way to Latino/a and American communities. In order to examine Latino/a history more accurately in a modern setting, texts like Anzaldúa’s and Ortiz Cofer’s function as tools to reevaluate the need to address Latina immigrant women’s histories in the U.S, and thus redefine their visibility and interaction in contemporary culture. In another study geared towards understanding the importance of modifying the way history is taught, Cinthia Salinas investigates the relevance of personal narratives in the effectiveness of historical transmission in the classroom in Latino/a communities. She argues, “In order for Latina/o teacher education candidates to recognize other ways of knowing, we advance critical historical inquiry as a pedagogical practice that pays overt attention to issues such as race, immigration, language, culture, phenotype, surname, and others” (266). I have discussed in previous chapters the works of other Latina authors who concern themselves with the importance of women’s education of other women and of the relevance of women’s writing, in particular their writing about their own experiences. As a result of the previous research in this study, I suggest that Ortiz Cofer’s text, with its experimentation in historical and personal memory, can be seen as an evolution in the direction of a Latina Bildungsroman. Also, that it shows how many if not all of the texts I have previously discussed come together to create the requirements for this genre, in particular how the narrative of *la cocina* has become central to it.

Another significant element of Ortiz Cofer's ⁷text that I want to briefly address is the relevance of *écriture féminine*, especially because I perceive it as an element of the female Bildungsroman and is a commonality among texts like the ones discussed in this dissertation. In the *Hélène Cixous Reader*, Jacques Derrida denotes this type of writing as the one "most often associated with Cixous' name," and notes that Cixous "sees in women's writing the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing structures through the inclusion of other experience" (xxix). Cixous herself addresses her meaning of *écriture féminine* when she discusses the way that women use writing to discover and examine themselves as female and individual. She examines the duality in the way that women view in terms of possessing an "other" within their identity, which allows them to write themselves and debate social roles and gender structures.

I will say: today, writing is woman's. That is not a provocation, it means that woman admits there is an other. In her becoming-woman, she has not erased the bisexuality latent in the girl as in the boy... Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? (85)

Many of the authors I consider in this study, for instance Ferré and Anzaldúa, construct similar arguments about the importance for women to write their stories down for their own self-knowledge and accessibility. Cixous shows a writing style that challenges the norms of traditional story telling can enable an approachable discussion of female experiences with readers. In her writing, she advocates a stream-of-consciousness style which allows the reader to have a personal or first-hand view of her experiences. Ortiz Cofer uses this approach in *Silent Dancing* in a direct

⁷ While addressing the issue of memory as a reliable source of non-fiction writing, the author cites Virginia Woolf as a primary inspiration for her style of writing. Ortiz Cofer explains that she wrote her text taking direction from Woolf's literature, not only in terms of Woolf's approach to the interpretation of memory, but that she also sought to channel her with the emotive content of the writing. Ortiz Cofer praises the way that Woolf seems to track memories internally in order to construct the external perceptions of the truth about self-identity. Woolf herself asserts, "I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start" (67).

way by expressing in her introduction how important memory and the use of memory to tell history is in order to understand subjectivities surrounding the process of becoming a woman in a Latina context. She writes in the first person, directly sharing her story with the reader, and openly telling the stories that taught her things about becoming a woman. Esquivel's narrator does the same to a certain degree when she talks about the recipes written for Esperanza as a form of legacy for her to explore herself through cooking. The themes that these authors explore in their texts all converge on certain key points and follow a similar contextual trajectory that intends to place focus on experiences that don't normally take a central stage in a traditional Bildungsroman story, such as daily life in the home within a familiar context, and how women specifically teach other women about certain expectations as part of a subject's shaping process. This continuing emphasis on aspects of women's lives that they are choosing to share in these texts along with the specific writing style that presents a more personal view of their stories contribute to the interpretation of the female Bildungsroman that I discuss in this study.

In her text, author of *Writing in the Feminine* Karen Gould studies a collection of female writers, who according to her research, follow a pattern similar to Helene Cixous' emphasis on *écriture féminine*. One of the authors is Louky Bersianik, on whose scholarship Gould focuses, asking what the purpose of *écriture féminine* is and what goal it serves beyond writing literature itself.

Bersianik's work draws attention to the inescapable effects of patriarchal socialization that, over time, have left their traces on virtually every aspect of female identity, including the kinds of images women have presumably constructed of themselves...It is these images from the past in particular that Bersianik urges women to seize upon, expose, and reconstruct in order to reflect more closely their lived experience—past and present—if history is to mean anything to them today. Insisting that the very existence of women's collective future is at stake in the current feminist moves to repossess history. (152-53)

Gould highlights Bersianik's view of the importance of women writing their stories, which coalesces with the stylistic elements of *écriture féminine* to create a literary niche for "other" forms of expression. In terms of intentionality, Ortiz Cofer's text is certainly reminiscent of Bersianik's urging for women to re-present their own experiences in the creation of histories. This literary approach on behalf of both Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer seems to be a result of the previous scholarship of women like Gorriti, Sor Juana, Ferré and Castellanos, who discuss similar topics, including but not limited to women's lives, kitchen narratives and gender roles in Hispanic society. While the texts I have studied from these authors have been largely essays or non-fictional works, the consciousness of the importance of women writing for and about themselves is addressed also in a fictional space with texts like those of Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer, giving the authors some flexibility to direct the way they would like to approach these topics.

The final thematic element I would like to point out, prior to the content analysis of Ortiz Cofer's text, is the actual format of the texts themselves. Both novels are structured in an episodic way, which can serve to showcase specific elements that the authors choose to highlight over others. Esquivel's novel's full title is actually *Como agua para chocolate: novela de entregas mensuales con recetas, amores y remedios caseros* (1989), which makes reference to a serial style of publication, while Ortiz Cofer refers to her chapters as essays or *ensayos*. This disjointedness in the flow of narration allows for the writer/narrator to direct the narrative in a way that points the reader to focus on elements of women's stories that perhaps are not normally considered part of a traditional coming-to-self story. In Esquivel's novel the chapters or sections correspond with recipes, which in turn indicate the events of the chapter and the corresponding emotional involvement with the food being prepared in that particular section. Ortiz Cofer actually addresses the structure of her text in her introduction and explains why she chose to build it the way she did.

She specifically separates each section into an *ensayo*, or essay which allows each chapter to have an introduction, body and conclusion along with their own thesis statements. I have already discussed her attempt at a re-construction of her memories to achieve the specific goal of communicating her experience in a particular light to her readership, with special emphasis on the female readership. She exposes her story in a specific way, in order to present a specific side of it to her readers. “It was this winding path of memory, marked by strong emotions that I followed in my *ensayos* of a life” (13). She presents her writing as a form of rehearsal (*ensayo*), or a series of attempts in communication and expression, but acknowledging that there is always a margin of error. I propose that this highlights her interest in a collective effort on behalf of women to record and disseminate their experiences, which is an attempt that echoes Bersianik’s goal for women authors. Both authors have crafted texts that follow a pattern of women’s writing when it comes to telling stories, at the very least. In the previous chapter, I examined the way that certain contextual elements such as *la cocina* play a central role in texts like the ones discussed in this study. Moving forward in this chapter, I discuss the ways in which Ortiz Cofer’s text treats similar topics in ways that permit more flexibility for story-telling. The author places a particular importance on inner spaces, as far as they played a role in being the safeguards for the stories that women lived out and told between the walls. Story-telling is perhaps the most central aspect of this text, which I will refer to as a novel for the remainder of this study.

In a manner reminiscent of Nancy LaGreca’s discussion of the *Angel of the House*, Ortiz Cofer’s narration begins with her main character/narrator describing an important foundational scene that quite literally sets the stage for her trajectory. She begins describing her life at 12 years old. Moving forward from this first essay the journey is chronological, although the author does make some jumps ahead in time and leaves some gaps in the story, presumably on purpose in to

address specific events in the life of the protagonist. The first two essays are titled “Casa” and “More Room,” and in each of these, the space where the story begins is inside the home in the presence of family, for the most part among the women of the family. The main people present around her were her grandmother, commonly referred to as *Mamá* for her central role as the matriarch of the family, the narrator’s mother, her aunt and cousins. Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer’s texts both include a main character surrounded by a core of women who interact with each other on a daily basis. Thus, the reader is exposed to the daily flow of women’s lives in an unfiltered way following the trajectory of the main character as she develops and navigates the different aspects of being a woman.

In the *ensayo* “Casa” the narrator describes a setting that will be relevant throughout the rest of the text. The author places her main character at the center of a group of older women inside of a very private space. The narrator then describes how *Mamá* carefully planned the layout of the home for her own particular use. The way that she designed it, each room represented one of her children and her husband had a room for his own use. The reasoning behind this distribution is to create a space where women can feel safe and free to teach and learn from each other, in particular in the common spaces of the kitchen and the living room. In this way, I propose that this introductory chapter of Ortiz Cofer’s novel shares a direct connection with the message of Gorriti’s prologue in *Cocina ecléctica* (1890). In that project, Gorriti reached out to a collection of women in an attempt to gather their stories and recipes and begin a dialogue around how female development occurs in society from within a private space. In previous chapters I have argued that Gorriti proposes to reclaim the private space after women had been placed within it in society’s organizational construct. In Ortiz Cofer’s text, she creates an environment where the women have not only accepted this interior space as a place of development but have also turned it out from the

inside and claimed it as a space where women could cultivate their own culture, and their stories are allowed to thrive and be discussed there from their own perspectives. The narrator describes the scene with her aunts, mother and grandmother, all sitting together and listening to parables told by *Mamá* in order to teach the younger girls lessons in how to protect themselves outside of the walls of home.

We loved best the quiet hours in the afternoon when the men were still at work and the boys had gone to play serious baseball at the park. Then *Mamá's* house belonged only to us women. The aroma of coffee perking in the kitchen, the mesmerizing creaks and groans of the rockers, and the women telling their lives in *cuentos* are forever woven into the fabric of my imagination, braided like my hair that day I felt my grandmother's hands teaching me about strength, her voice convincing me of the power of story-telling. (19)

The reader can see the designation of the space, but also the differences between the different generations in the way that they have perceived and performed roles traditionally associated with women and how they are then able to teach the next generations of women. In a way “Casa” serves as background for the rest of the novel, creating a foundation and contrast of what women's roles in society have been expected of women and how the narrator will encounter and subsequently challenge them. Memory and story-telling are used to create an idea of the cultural space in which Latina women have developed cross-generationally.

In the following chapter titled “More Room,” the author describes the relationship between women's personal development and the importance of the physical space where this process unfolds. As a backdrop, the reader is given the physical layout of *Mamá's* house as a central location to the formative years of the protagonist. *La cocina* is not presented as the main focus of the interactions, but it is present among the collection of other relevant spaces within the home that are reclaimed by the women. The inside of the house has already been established as the place where the women are able to speak freely to one another, and in this chapter the reader is able to get a sense of how, through her interaction with her husband, she was actually able to achieve the

things that she desired. The physical house served as a chronology of the family's genealogy, because *Mamá* requested of her husband to build a room for each of her eight children when she learned of each new pregnancy. In the end, she also requested he build a room which she later designated for him. "And so, after my youngest uncle was born, she asked *Papá* to build a large room at the back of the house...*Mamá's* belly did not grow, yet she seemed in a frenzy of activity over the house. Finally, an anxious *Papá* approached his wife to tell her that the new room was finished and ready to be occupied. And *Mamá*, they say, replied: 'Good, it's for you'" (27-28). This is significant for two reasons: first because we learn of her desire to give each person a space of their own, including herself. Second, also learn about her relationship with her husband and are given an image of the importance of individuality and a tangible respect for the space of the other.

The narrator's description of her grandparents' marriage makes clear that the intention behind this separation was not out of spite or anger.

When one of the daughters, my mother or one of her sisters, tells the *cuento* of how *Mamá* came to own her nights, it is usually preceded by the qualifications that *Papá's* exile from his wife's room was not a result of animosity between the couple, but that the act had been *Mamá's* famous bloodless coup for her personal freedom...Before the telling, we had to agree that the old man was not to blame.
(26)

Throughout this anecdote Ortiz Cofer is insistent on framing it as a story being told by others. This strategy highlights the way that women would tell each other relevant anecdotes to outline the important elements of the story. This use of a story within a story is a useful example of how Ortiz Cofer identifies women teaching each other, and she references it as the form in which she herself was taught the expectations set on her by other women. If we recall what the author highlights in the introduction about combining memory and fiction to create a pointed message, this passage becomes relevant to the role of men and women and what she perceives as the most important elements of creating a space for women. It helps to designate the home as an area where women

are able to make decisions for their own body and lives. The narrator focuses on the way her mother and aunts tell the story about how *Mamá* always related her history to others, creating a literal example of the way that women share histories in order to teach the next generation about societal roles and expectations within their culture. In this way, “More room” becomes a chapter of exposition. “My mother remembers these occasions as a time when the women sat in la cocina and lamented their burdens, while the men feasted out in the patio, their rum-thickened voices rising in song and praise for each other, *compañeros* all” (26-27). Ortiz Cofer’s narrator designates the kitchen, the inner space, as the place where women will need to band together and learn or be left in a space where their story is told for them.

The action of Ortiz Cofer’s text takes place in several locales, but the narrator always provides a spatial anchor with the inside of the homes inhabited by her family in both the United States and Puerto Rico. Ortiz Cofer moves beyond the metaphor of *la cocina* to imply that women’s development happens within the home at the hands of other women. The narrator in *Silent Dancing* travels back and forth between Puerto Rico and the mainland, having to reestablish herself in different homes over and over again. This physical journey is directly reminiscent of the aspect of the male Bildungsroman that requires the young man leave home in order to face a series of difficulties, so he may become a man upon his return. Reminiscent of Odysseus’ travels in Homer’s epic poem which I discuss previously, there is an aspect of Ortiz Cofer’s text that involves the physical displacement of the main subject in the text, who then has to negotiate her own space as an individual. This is a task that becomes complicated by gender and ethnic factors, especially when she attempts to reconcile memory and the written word. In particular, the factor that concerns my interests in this dissertation is her exploration with the concept of womanhood or becoming a

woman and how that particular transformation takes place in the intersection of gender and national identity. Nancy Chick describes this as an effort in redefinition of a specified genre.

An *ensayo* dismantles the value-coding of the conventional essay with Ortiz Cofer's own cultural and personal associations of movement and border crossing so that it is no longer formed only by a Euro-American ideology, but a Puerto Rican ideology as well.... Ultimately the *cuentos* told by her grandmother establish this subversion as a proud tradition of her female ancestors. Within this cultural space of her *ensayos* and their embedded *cuentos*, Ortiz Cofer catachrestically deconstructs the feminine archetype of the flower, negotiating traditional female definitions and the spaces they inscribe. (37)

While Chick gives her own interpretation for what kind of text Ortiz Cofer develops with *Silent Dancing*, the idea that this text could also be interpreted as a multicultural gendered variation of the Bildungsroman becomes a plausible option given the flexibility being sought by the author within the genre.

To illustrate how the narrator finds a way to reconcile her situation of physical fluctuation and a desire for a solid understanding of female identity, the reader is given several examples where she confronts physical and metaphorical limitations set on her to decide how she will interpret herself in her surroundings. The protagonist in this story serves as an example of a Latina subject that finds herself at a crux for female identity because she is challenged with gender expectations from two different societies, and she constantly struggles for definition in order to find her own voice. Beginning with the titular *ensayo* of the book, "Silent Dancing," we see the family in Paterson, New Jersey during one of their sojourns in the U.S. In this chapter, the narrator tries to explain the difficulty of navigating a foreign culture and her mother's attempts to find familiar spaces in the unfamiliar city. One such example is their frequenting of Hispanic grocery stores, and the inevitable return to the safe space of the grandmother's kitchen.

It became my father's obsession to get out of the barrio, and thus we were never permitted to form bonds with the place or with people who lived there. Yet the building was a comfort to my mother... Women seemed to cook rice and beans perpetually—the strong aroma of red kidney beans boiling permeated the

hallways...We would linger at La Bodega, for it was there that mother breathed best, taking in the familiar aromas of the foods she knew from *Mamá's* kitchen, and it was also there that she got to speak to the other women of El Building without violating our Father's dictates against fraternizing with our neighbors. (90-91)

At this point in the text, the narrator is a young girl and the strength of this memory touches on some very specific points about women's relationships. The first of these is the firm gender roles that she perceives between her parents and the way that they both dealt with aspects of cultural assimilation in the context of their relationship to each other. She uses the words "permitted" and "dictates" to describe the language associated with her father, who clearly seems to direct her mother's actions and by extension, the family's. The second point works in contrast to the first, where we see a somewhat subversive spirit on behalf of the narrator's mother. She circumvents her husband's wishes that she not form any kind of relationship with the other Hispanics in their building by finding Hispanic people to socialize with outside of the building. The narrator goes as far as to point this out specifically to acknowledge the fact that her mother is doing this in order to directly obey a "dictate" from her husband, but also acknowledging her own need for community and closeness with other Hispanic women. This anecdote about her mother's attempt to gain control of her private life is reminiscent of the conspiratorial spirit shared by the female authors I have previously discussed, in their attempts to designate the interior of the home as an exclusively female space. Additionally, the narrator continues to experience this throughout her life, and to present examples of women reclaiming their home and their own space, as we saw in the first two *ensayos* where *Mamá* reclaims both her space and body for herself. The third significant point in this passage is the presence of food as a comfort, but also as a specific agent for the women in the narrator's life. It is in the bodega that her mother will talk to other women and in the building, it is the women who cook the rice and beans every day. Every space that she and her mother inhabit or frequent seems to have an intention of fostering a culinary narrative environment, and even as

a young child, the narrator's memory fixated on the smells and sounds of female companionship. Even later on in the story when the narrator begins to struggle with her displacement in the United States due to the constant shifting back and forth, the presence of food remains in the narrative as a way to represent the interior of home. In the *ensayo* titled "The Looking-Glass Shame" the narrator laments the fact that she is not able to fully belong in either the island nor the mainland due to their frequent jaunts and her mother's refusal to abandon her traditions and customs. "In our apartment we spoke Spanish, we ate rice and beans with meats prepared in *adobo*, that mouthwatering mixture of spices" (127). The nostalgic implications in this quote indicate an ambivalence, a struggled to conceive of her identity in the U.S. with her Puerto Rican half, the foods and smells represented a familiar and safe space for her mother and to some degree to her as well.

Kitchens, cooking and food are referenced exclusively as female spaces in Ortiz Cofer's text, asserting over and over that it is pivotal to learning and teaching other women that they spend time there. In many ways, the space of *la cocina* serves as a platform to express frustration as well as purpose for different female authors. This can be seen in each text that I have mentioned in this project and it holds as a stable comparison with Esquivel's text as well. In *Silent Dancing* the narrator provides several examples of how women were taught by other women to behave, think and feel in specific ways in order to be considered "good." Given the way that her grandmother described other women and used their stories as cautionary tales, as I discussed earlier in this project, it is possible to understand that the meaning of "good" assumed by the narrator is equivalent to a woman who behaves in the way of Nancy LaGreca's interpretation of the "angel of the house." Furthermore, there are other stories of women that the narrator observed throughout her life where it is understood that certain women were excluded from camaraderie. For instance,

there is a woman named Providencia who lived in the same building as her family who had many children with unknown fathers. “My memory of Providencia is strictly visual. I never spoke to her. My mother would not have allowed it. Providencia was the whispered joke told by women in their kitchens, she was the social worker’s nightmare and a walking threat to the ideals of marriage and fidelity” (111). In this tongue-in-cheek assessment by the narrator, the reader begins to understand how the dynamic of *la cocina* functioned. If you followed the rules and wanted to learn how to behave correctly and live in harmony, you could access it, if not, you became a part of the conversation and a cautionary story told within the space. In *Como agua para chocolate* we saw how the kitchen served as both a place of power and isolation for Tita simultaneously. She did, however, deem it important to preserve the knowledge of recipes and education for her niece. Her act of writing down her story does show a concern for the welfare of the next generation as well as highlighting her contribution to a corpus of literature that makes it a point to tell women’s stories. I suggest that it is in this way that narratives surrounding *la cocina* and culinary anecdotes are helpful means of observing Latina Bildungsroman development. by composing a volume of recipes to leave behind with advice for her niece, she provides more knowledge and resources for the next generation to be able to develop agency and community more effectively, even though her own story was not what she had hoped for herself.

This tradition of telling other women about the world, educating each other through the spoken and written word is part of a tradition that belongs to the larger corpus of Hispanics in and out of the United States. In the introduction to an anthology organized by Nicolas Kanellos titled *Short Fiction Hispanic Writers of the United States* (1990), he expounds on the importance of this oral tradition to the contribution of Hispanic culture and literature in the Americas.

In Spanish America, in particular, a blending of European, African and Amerindian cultures produced one of the most broadly embracing literary and artistic traditions

known to man. Through time, both an oral and a written literature have prospered and survived in the descendants of that encounter of peoples that began in the late fifteenth century...Primarily a working—class people to this day, Hispanics in the United States have produced a living corpus of oral lore that reflects their history, religion, language and, most importantly, their alternate or outsider status to “official” culture and society in the United States. Their ballads, songs, prayers, proverbs, legends, stories and personal experience narratives provide not only an ongoing narrative history and political perspective but also a school for storytelling, for communicating efficiently and eloquently through the spoken word (7).

Kanellos likens oral storytelling techniques to a larger tradition of education, and within that assessment, he includes the short story as an extension of the oral tradition. One of the authors in his anthology is Ortiz Cofer, and the particular text he includes is the selection I include in this study; a segment of *Silent Dancing*. This component of the text is significant to understanding its relevance beyond racial or ethnic boundaries, but also to a discussion on gender. My proposal is that Ortiz Cofer, like other Latina writers has adopted this oral narrative style and used it to verbalize a tradition of resistance by focusing women’s efforts to educate other women in the home. Readers can experience this in two different ways in Ortiz Cofer’s text. We can see it happen from generation to generation in Mamá’s stories and how the women all talk around the kitchen table, constantly sharing grief or joy with each other in order to provide guidance or encouragement as needed. The other is the text itself, composed of short stories, essays, legends and even poems, serving as a mixed media instrument of instruction for the men or women who read its pages.

What happens, then, is the continuous sharing of wisdom, from one woman or generation to another. This, I suggest, is the point or the goal of texts that deal with female stories that share the facts of a woman’s life or journey into adulthood. This example of Ortiz Cofer’s Puerto Rican remembrance allows the reader to understand the progress of women’s writing from the interior outwards. She follows a precise pattern, painting a picture of her self-discovery and self-consciousness as it pertains to the female experience and from a decidedly female point of view. In Carmen Rivera’s *Kissing the Mango Tree*, we are provided with several examples from

Puerto Rican women's texts and their intent to share and expose the interiority of their experiences with a readership. Ortiz Cofer is included in this collection of women along with authors like Nicholasa Mohr and Esmeralda Santiago. Each of these women construct texts that discuss similar themes to those explored in formation novels. Rivera pays attention to Ortiz Cofer's style with relation to the way that she used her writing, not only to tell her story, but more like she is aware of the power that her writing has and the importance of the purpose behind words. "Judith Ortiz Cofer seems to be keenly aware of this process of creation through writing. She speaks of writing and the art of storytelling in many of her own works, including an autobiography and an essay. As she examines her own craft and that of others, she begins to realize its sacredness. Visions of a temple appear before her where she recognizes her 'comadres,' high priestesses of storytelling that have opened and shown her the mystical road" (150-51). Thus story-telling becomes the main focus of the Latina Bildungsroman as it is conceived by the authors that represent the first conscious attempts to define the genre for themselves and for the use of other women. Ortiz Cofer places a great importance in the intentionality of telling and writing a story, as well as the creation of meanings and community. When we investigate how and where these lessons and messages are being transmitted, Ortiz Cofer and Esquivel are prime examples of how *la cocina* has come to represent this interiority or inner sanctum for women. As a private space where men were not allowed or were not interested in inhabiting, women took charge and began to decipher and decode its significance for their gendered development. Space, comfort and freedom all granted in the inner-most areas of the home were crafted into the stage for writers like Ortiz Cofer to take action and begin to shape and change meanings and traditional values placed on specific genders. Ortiz Cofer went beyond this understanding, and in a meta-literary way she utilized her text itself in order to propose these appropriations.

Ultimately, the craft of storytelling has empowered the grandmother to conjure up yearnings, dreams, and arguments that have allowed her to claim her body, her space, her life. It has also given her the power to pronounce spells and incantations that carry lessons of survival for all the women in her family...As a medium, she possesses the secrets, the stories, the dreams of others and it is up to her to negotiate, to translate, to interpret, and ultimately to transform, like her grandmother did, the lives of those around her (166-67).

Perhaps Ortiz Cofer's awareness of the importance of words and meanings in her own text is a step in a direction where women can tell their stories according to their own understanding, and beyond that, be able to live their lives in their own right, separate from external influence.

4.1 Where Does That Leave Latina Bildung?

After much of the research done in this study, the question becomes how does this freedom and liberation look for women at the other side of their writing? What do their lives then look like to them if they move forward from the feminist definition of Thompson's book *Radical Feminism*, which I discuss in a previous chapter? And finally, where does this research leave male/female interaction in terms of self-expression and self-understanding in literature? I will consider and discuss these questions in this next segment of this study. For this project, I focused on the writing style that explores the interior of the home as well as the introspection into identity formation, and furthermore the use of food and *la cocina* as a zone of conflict. After suggesting that *la cocina* is a trope in women's development stories, I then postulated that some of the criticism surrounding texts where women explore their sensuality tended to highlight this aspect more than others. I proposed that the female authors themselves were suggesting that this type of exploration be considered as part, but not central or definitive, of their personal narratives, as well as important to their own development and that of a female community.

The authors I cite in this study all discuss the interior of the home, and comment on the kitchen space in some way, and while they certainly do address sensuality, I suggest that this is

simply a natural part of telling a coming of age story for either men or women. Sexuality and sensual expression are, usually, an important part of a person's self-understanding. My argument is then more geared towards this challenge of the interior of the home as a place where women had been forced into and had attempted to reclaim it and tell their stories from within, with the possibility of being corrupted by external influences. That is, the male dominated vision of female gender roles began to get mixed into the way that readers were able to access women's stories. From Sor Juana's words on the subject, to Nancy LaGreca's explanation of women and their visibility in society, to the first attempts to use *la cocina* as a space of learning in Gorriti's text we can see the initial struggle to reclaim and repurpose an area for women's specific use. As a result, I propose that Esquivel's text was the natural next step in a progression of women's texts where writing about the interior became mysterious and synonymous with women's sexual energy and exploration. The aim of this study was to examine this progression and the use of these tropes in order to understand how they contribute to the modification of the Bildungs genre for Latinas. By considering the narrative elements the writers use to convey their stories and their protests, we can see how the space of *la cocina* has been adopted, molded and used by women for the development of women.

Considering the progression of the genre, along with the evolution of the structure, Ortiz Cofer's text develops into a hybrid form of communication for women's stories. It is not fully a fiction but not fully a historical document either, so she is able achieve several objectives. The first is to tell her history according to her own words and understanding; the second is to comment directly on her recollections and direct the reader along the path she sets out in her introduction for her writing to be understood, and the third is to address the issues facing the exposure of women's stories in the literary world as well as the ability to interpret them in a way that would

allow better community building and communication. The last *ensayo* of *Silent Dancing*, is perhaps the most telling and relevant to the last of these objectives, in that the author chose to include a story that reflects most accurately the description in Rivera's book of the "temple and high priestesses" (150). In this *ensayo* titled "Marina," the narrator, years after her father's death, is an educated, married, working woman and she is returning to Puerto Rico to visit her mother, with whom she is constantly at odds about their individual understanding of the meaning and responsibility of being a woman. The narrator tells her story in these memoirs, as I have described in this chapter, in an attempt to re-define and re-structure female story-telling and community construction. This places her at a crossroads with her mother, who as I explained previously has been raised with much more normative understanding about gender roles by the women around her. The two women then have the opportunity to discuss the evolution and progression of women's stories and self-understanding in different Latina contexts.

I propose that Ortiz Cofer provides an answer in the second part of this *ensayo*, where her mother tells her the story about a woman in their town who had a son but had wished in her heart for a daughter and thus decided to raise him as a girl without telling anyone, and named him Marina. This episode is one of *Mamá's* stories from her childhood that she passed down to her daughters and granddaughters. *Mamá* describes a setting of a river where the young, unmarried girls of the town would bathe together, talk, and be completely free from male intervention: "This was a female place, a pastoral setting where no true *macho* would want to be caught swimming or fishing" (154-55). She describes the river as "crystalline, bordered by thick woods where the most fragrant flowers and herbs could be found" (154). She relates the story in a place outside of the home, still secluded but in the freedom of nature. The truly unique thing about this is that even though it was external to the home, it still brings to mind the women sitting around the *fogón* in

Gorriti's *Cocina Ecléctica*, where the purpose was to have an environment in which to teach, talk and learn with other women. It was in this place where Marina would join her other female friends, but *Mamá* made the point to mention that she was shy and modest and never became completely naked amongst the other girls, and they all speculated with pity that she was meant for convent life due to her melancholy and modesty. Everything changed when the mayor's daughter, Kiki, was allowed to join the other girls at the river. Her youthful exuberance was drawn to Marina's shy demeanor, and the two soon inspired envy amongst the other girls in their closeness. Eventually, they ran away together. Everyone was under the impression they had been kidnapped, until it was revealed in a letter left to Marina's maid that Marina was in fact a man, and he and Kiki had fallen in love and eloped to be married.

Back in the present, the narrator and her mother have just seen Marino in town with his granddaughter, which prompted her mother to remind her of his story. After observing him and his granddaughter interacting, the narrator asks her mother if she believed he had made a good husband, to which her mother replies:

“He would know what it takes to make a woman happy”...As I watched the gentle old man and the little girl, I imagined Marina sitting alone on the banks of a river, his heart breaking with pain and wild yearnings, listening to the girls asking questions he could have answered; remaining silent; learning patience, until love would give him the right to reclaim his original body and destiny. Yet he would never forget the lessons she learned at the *río*—or how to handle fragile things. I looked at my mother and she smiled at me; we now had a new place to begin our search for the meaning of the word woman. (160)

The answer to the previous questions seems to be not exclusion but inclusion. Marino had not been excluded, however unconsciously by the girls, from their most secret and precious moments of vulnerability and candor. Up to this point in *Silent Dancing* the reader has been provided with many examples of similar settings within the home, where women have been able to share their stories freely with each other and from where, presumably, we have obtained their versions of the

Bildungs novel. In this segment, the author makes a point of not only acknowledging the difference between female and male experience but suggesting that in order to bridge the gap between the gender roles and achieve a true change in the direction of female physical, emotional, and sexual liberation, men have to be also allowed to learn from women. Women have been mostly in charge of teaching each other, as has been proposed by many of the authors in this study, but it is largely understood and agreed upon that if they were to claim the inside of the home as a space of development and exploration, men were not willing or allowed to influence what happened there with their presence. Ortiz Cofer's text is an example of a response to that decision of inclusion. Perhaps it was necessary for women to write the home and write *la cocina* as their own to claim it, but she suggests that it is not wise to keep the space inaccessible.

This same claim is voiced in a slightly different way by Allende in *Afrodita*, when she describes how important it is for men to understand the environment of the kitchen. She gives this example of a friend who invited a man over on a blind date, and upon being initially disappointed when he showed up, he managed to impress her with his care in preparing a meal for them.

Las mujeres nos impresionamos con los hombres entendidos en

comida, cosa que no ocurre al revés. Un hombre que cocina es sexy, la mujer no, tal vez porque recuerda demasiado el arquetipo domestico....

El hombre la siguió manso, sin dar muestras de desencanto...pero una vez en la cocina algo cambió en su actitud, respiró hondo, inflando el pecho, se le enderezó el esqueleto y sus ojillos de liebre recorrieron todo, tomando posesión del terreno, conquistándolo. Permítame, dijo, y sin darle oportunidad a Hannah de contradecirlo, le quitó suavemente el delantal de las manos, se lo amarró en la propia cintura y la instaló a ella en una silla. Veremos qué hay por aquí, anunció, mientras rescataba de la nevera los ingredientes. Van Gogh echó mano de ollas y sartenes como si hubiera nacido entre esas cuatro paredes. Con gracia y destreza inesperadas hizo bailar los cuchillos partiendo verduras y mariscos

para dorarlos con mano liviana en aceite de oliva, lanzó los

tallarines al agua hirviendo y preparó en un abrir y cerrar de ojos una salsa translúcida de cilantro y limón, mientras le contaba a mi amiga sus aventuras en Centroamérica. En pocos minutos aquel hombrecillo patético se transformó: sus pelos de payaso adquirieron la fuerza viril de una melena de león y su aire de náufrago se convirtió en serena concentración, mezcla irresistible para una mujer como Hannah. El aroma que surgía de la sartén y el borboriteo de la olla empezaron a producir en ella una creciente anticipación. (37-40)

This example from Allende's text highlights two important elements of this study. First, the ability of women to have complete control of their bodies and sexual desires and express them, and secondly the importance of including men in the places where women tell their stories in order to successfully bridge a gender gap. In Allende's text the purpose is obviously sexual, but for the purpose of this study the meaning I focus on is the importance and respect that the man placed on *la cocina* and understanding it. He was able to navigate and converse and develop a relationship by relating to Allende's friend reverently in a space that was her own, without making her feel powerless or other in it. It echoes Ortiz Cofer's assessment that gender roles could be made less rigid by providing more inclusivity in the education that happens inside the home.

These arguments should help develop a female novel of formation that achieves both the purpose of providing a venue for women to claim their own experiences and perspectives as well as proposing a mode of communicating those experiences to a broader audience. The inclusive format proposed by authors like Ortiz Cofer and Allende are not necessarily unique in their motivation, even if their delivery does break the established mold of the Latina Bildungsroman. In a very similar fashion, their claim that women create, perpetuate and define the culture around them is the message that all of the authors cited in this project aim to communicate. One of the most vocal proponents of that tenet is Gloria Anzaldúa in her text *Borderlands* (1987), which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. About culture, Anzaldúa claims that the pressure of cultural formation falls largely on women from the perspective that they have most of the responsibility of raising children in a family. However, she also places on women for transmitting the negative aspects of culture

that are put in place by the men in her society, who she identifies as the dominant agents. She vehemently criticizes women for berating each other for digressing from the expectations placed on them by men or varying from the established gender roles that dictate the only options for women are motherhood or prostitution (16-17). In this way, the reader can understand that women also have the responsibility and the ability to change these expectations and push on the borders surrounding them. Anzaldúa's suggestion that women's place in the home puts them in a place of power over the way that culture is manifested coalesces with the suggestion that *la cocina* can be a space for literary female *Bildungs*. From there, it is possible that *la cocina* can be a space for women to question not only society's expectations of them, but the physical boundaries placed on Latinas who write their own perspectives and identities in order to create community through story-telling.

In a similar manner Ortiz Cofer highlights similar concerns about the inequality between gender roles. She communicates throughout her account the way that men, actually, have the marginal roles in cultural formation at least within Latina/o contexts, but they still seem to have the control over decisions like when a marriage would take place, or how their children should be raised. These things were true despite the fact that they are absent from the home environment where most of those activities take place. Carmen Rivera describes this phenomenon, how "[e]ven her father exerts his influence in absentia by constantly sending letters...with detailed instructions for the care and education of his children" (153). This focus on the responsibility placed on women is the culminating factor of my project, and how examining certain spaces and activities within the home, as well as how women have connected them to writing create an ideal mix of elements to interpret them as part of the Latina *Bildungs* tradition. This identification provides an avenue for women to successfully express their frustrations, assert their individuality, tell their stories and

even safely access and understand their own sexuality. *La cocina* and the culinary text come together to provide an avenue for an interpretation of women's experience that can be specific and meaningful to themselves and other women, and from there open the floor to write themselves in and out of *la cocina*.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

The ambiguity surrounding the origins, purpose and development of the Bildungsroman genre have assisted the creation of an unintentionally open literary format. There have been attempts to define the parameters of the Bildungsroman based on the existing examples that pioneered the genre. In the first essay of *Kissing the Mango Tree*, “Esmeralda Santiago and the Bildungsroman of El Barrio,” Carmen Rivera explores many examples of critics who have studied Bildungsroman tropes in attempts to identify the issues with the Bildungs genre. From the existing research she concludes that,

At best, these critics seem to acknowledge the problematic complexity and ambiguity of defining the Bildungsroman. At worst, they betray a regionalist, elitist, sexist mentality that can only conceive a literary form in eighteenth-century Germany depicting a German male hero in a process of acculturation and integration into a bourgeois society. In discussing the historical development of the meaning of the word *bildung*, James Hardin points to two important considerations: ‘first, *Bildung*, as a developmental process and, second, as a collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch’ (xi-xii). Notice that no specification of gender or historical period is given. To exclude female voices from *bildungsroman* is to insist on excluding women from a life experience that is not limited to Germans and/or to men. (2)

Throughout this project, I cited similar findings in the problematic composition of the genre as voiced by female literary cohorts across Latin America and the Caribbean. The purpose of my project was to draw attention to the genre, with emphasis on how the female Bildungsroman has developed within Latina communities. To do this, I have isolated the trope of *la cocina*/interior space as an important component of women’s novels of formation and the way that the space has been interpreted academically as well as in literature in general. This fixation on cooking, *la cocina* and the interior has been explored from different angles. My proposal is that it is a helpful way to access women’s stories from their own perspectives as well as a common core for female development stories. In the chapters of this study I have examined the effects of the contemporary

perception of the *Bildungsroman* genre as well as its evolution and how it encompasses different elements than many of its definitions would suggest.

The Latina *Bildungsroman* opens the door for the genre to become a vehicle for intersectionality, and for women to approach subjects such as immigration, politics, sex, work, race and gender, and a way to develop their own definitions for femininity and womanhood. It is a way for women to represent themselves as opposed to having their stories told. First however, they had to identify and protest the marginality women's stories in Latin culture and literature, and then they were able to approach the other elements of marginality that make up coming of age stories for members of society of either gender. It is a way to differentiate, highlight, but also bridge and reconcile experiences. As with any genre, there are authors who test the limits and attempt to redefine concepts, but in general, given the research performed in this study, the goal is more than anything, as always, visibility. For the purposes of this project, Laura Esquivel's and Judith Ortiz Cofer's provide specific examples of coming of age stories approached from different perspectives and highlighting specific aspects of femininity and liberation for women.

This investigation has also led to some other questions about interpretation of the *Bildungsroman*. After my examination of the two main novels for this paper as well as the supplementary texts by so many other Latina authors, there is a question of what else is able to comprise the female novel of formation in different ethnic, racial and national context as well as how are these texts being used not only within Latina communities but to help foster and create them? What are some other aspects of the genre that are identifiable and relevant and how are they being represented critically, socially and academically? Carmen Rivera is just one scholar of many that have attempted to isolate the components of the genre, and in the same chapter mentioned earlier she theorizes,

It is precisely because of Hardin's emphasis on 'process' and 'collectiveness' and because of Amrine's underlining characteristics of 'hybridity' and 'revolution,' that the literary form of the *bildungsroman* has become the ideal locus for the discourse of socially, politically, economically, racially, ethnically, and sexually disenfranchised groups. In fact, Blacks, Chicanos, Jewish-Americans, homosexuals, and others have co-opted this genre to depict their growing-up experiences as 'a series of disillusionments or clashes with an inimical milieu' (Abel et al. 6) ...In recent years, though the *bildungsromans* of minority groups have begun to explore alternative notions of self and cultural identity as the construct of a discourse of resistance towards any 'harmonious' assimilation into the dominant culture. They seem to relish 'hybridity,' 'métissage,' 'fragmentation,' 'ambiguity,' and 'fluidity.' (3)

Many of these are elements that have generated the centuries of literary protest with regards to the inclusiveness or accessibility of the genre. I would like to point out two things about this description of Bildungsroman scholarship. The first being that this progression towards a more hybrid and segmented version of the genre is precisely the progress I discuss in the distinction between Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer's texts. Rivera's claim that more groups consisting of historically 'othered' individuals are turning to the ambiguity of the genre in search of innovative self-expression is precisely what drew me to those texts in the first place. In the case of Esquivel and Ortiz Cofer, the specificity of the female focus of their texts creates an ideal space for investigation into how the gender aspect of the Bildungsroman has evolved in Latina communities. The second item is Rivera's assertion that these 'disenfranchised' groups are not only moving beyond the structural constraints of the genre, but they are also breaching the format contextually by discussing not only 'notions of the self' but making cultural identity an important part of self-development.

The contemporary Latina Bildungsroman is being modified to investigate how much of personal identity is comprised as cultural identity. Even as far as the investigation for this paper there have been various examples from the texts where women have tied their self-exploration and development to their sense of belonging in general. Both of the main texts used in this project, for

instance, place a great emphasis on the cultural values imposed on their main characters as women and the way that these values or roles define the different ways in which they fail or succeed in achieving self-actualization. For instance, although *Como agua para chocolate* is meant to be Tita's history, all the women in the De La Garza family are bound by Mexican tradition as well as greatly affected by the war. Including the catalyst for the story, the tradition that the youngest daughter would stay unmarried to care for the mother, is founded in deep family traditions and cultural values. In Ortiz Cofer's text the main character is constantly torn from her home and having to re-accustom herself to life in either Puerto Rico or the U.S. She constantly speaks of her struggle to understand which social conventions applied to her concept of "woman," in the face of ever shifting cultural values and standards. Even Carmen Rivera's first example to understand a Latina Bildungsroman comes from Esmeralda Santiago's text *When I was Puerto Rican*, which focuses on a young Puerto Rican girl and her struggle to reconcile her personal identity to her cultural identity. This understanding propels me to question then how much of a personal female identity is connected to cultural identity, as well as how do female *Bildungsromane* function differently in this aspect from the "traditional" male counterparts.

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