Virgilian Elements in Laura Esquivel's *Malinche*[1]

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Abstract: Esquivel's *Malinche* (2006) shares similarities with Virgil's *Aeneid*: these similarities not only challenge Western perceptions of the inferiority of Mexicans but also male perceptions of the inferiority of Mexican and Chicana women. While Cortés is Aeneas's antithesis, the similarities between Malinalli and Virgil's women establish Malinalli's nobility and her crucial role as the mother of the Mestizos. Esquivel rewrites the traditional view of the Mexican "Eve" while challenging Hispanic stereotypes and subjugations of women.

Keywords: Chicana – *Aeneid* – Mestizos – Cortés – Aeneas

In *Malinche* (2006), Laura Esquivel employs many common elements of the traditional novel. She includes, for example, a title figure whose character evolves from that of an orphan abandoned by her mother to that of a mother who finds happiness in a loving husband and two children. Esquivel's novel, moreover, also abounds with thematic implications: not only is it concerned with a woman's quest for freedom, but it is also concerned with her relationship to nature and the crucial role she plays in the events of her nation's history. Her children—fathered respectively by two Spaniards—represent the origins of the Mexican people, a people the novelist suggests as the products of the once powerful Spanish empire and of the indigenous natives of Mexico. In this essay, I will show that Esquivel's *Malinche* includes various elements from the *Aeneid*, Virgil's epic about the origins of the great Roman Empire, and that these epic qualities of her novel serve to raise her narrative to the level of classical myth and legend.

Although Esquivel begins her novel with her rendition of the story of the birth of the protagonist Malinalli, her narrator's account of Hernán Cortés's early adventures in the New World shares a number of important elements with the initial adventure that

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Aeneas experiences in Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Not long after his arrival in Hispaniola, Cortés, having been bitten by a scorpion, struggles to survive for three days, while a "fuerte temporal azotó la isla y no paró de llover día y noche." In his delirium, moreover, Cortés imagines that "una gran serpiente . . . lo había mordido, una serpiente que se elevaba por los aires y que volaba frente a sus ojos" (10). In the *Aeneid*, when we first see Aeneas, he is with his fleet off the North African coast, but he too is enduring a powerful storm, one sent by the wind-god Aeolus at the bidding of Juno, the Latin hero's chief enemy:

> Flinging cries
> as a screaming gust of the Northwind pounds against his sail,
> raising waves sky-high. The oars shatter, prow twists round,
> taking the breakers broadside on and over Aeneas' decks
> a mountain of water towers, massive, steep.
> Some men hang on billowing crests, some as the sea
> gapes, glimpse through the waves the bottom waiting,
> a surge aswirl with sand. (1.121-28)

Much as Cortés may lose his life to the poison of his scorpion/snake, Aeneas is aware that the worst may befall himself and his fellow Trojans, and at one point "cries out" that "Three, four times blest, my comrades / lucky to die beneath the soaring walls of Troy / before their parents' eyes! (1.113-15). While in his delirium, Cortés also "Habló en latín y en lenguas extrañas" (10), an act which may be linked to Aeneas—because the latter is, of course, the most famous hero of Latin verse, and whose own ancestry, according to Virgil, included an Italian named Dardanus (Galinsky 346). Although in medias res is a literary device that is commonly featured in epic narrations, it is nevertheless worth noting that another similarity between the initial episodes of Virgil's epic and Esquivel's novel is each author's employment of this device. Virgil's narrative does not unfold chronologically; rather, he begins his story after Aeneas has already undergone a good portion of his journey from Troy in Asia Minor to Latium on the western coast of Italy, where the hero is destined to establish his new kingdom. Esquivel likewise does not begin her account of Cortés's adventure in Spain, nor does she provide extensive details about the Spanish explorer's voyage across the Atlantic; instead, she begins her account of Cortés following his arrival in the New World. Ancient authors such as Virgil could employ in medias res because they knew their readers were familiar with the story, and Esquivel may have felt that many modern readers would be familiar enough with Cortés's adventures in North America so that she would not have to initially provide a large amount of biographical information about the great Spanish explorer.

Although Esquivel's European adventurer does indeed share some character traits with Aeneas, a good portion of Cortés's character is antithetical to that of Virgil's

hero, a fact which serves to emphasize Cortés's selfish ambition. Virgil characterizes Aeneas as a near-perfect hero, a characterization that is consonant with the ancient writer's apparent intention of composing an epic in order to glorify the empire of his ruler-friend Augustus Caesar. Aeneas, for example, according to Bernard Knox, is a devoted family man (13), a dimension of his character that is suggested as the hero informs Dido that after his escape from Troy with his son and father, he had returned to the burning city in order to find his lost beloved wife, Creusa:

> and back I go to Troy [. . .]
> my mind steeled to relive the whole disaster,
> retrace my route through the whole city now
> and put my life in danger one more time. (2.930-33)

Referring to Aeneas's dramatic experiences as Troy burns, W. R. Johnson observes that "Aeneas is less an epic warrior than a baffled, anguished, and compassionate human being, a man whose concerns as a son, a father and, more ambiguously, as a husband shape his identity" (52).

In terms of family, Cortés, on the other hand, is quite the opposite of Virgil's devoted Aeneas: it's almost as if Virgil's hero has been turned inside out, for, while the Spanish colonist is indeed a complicated individual, his greed and profound ambition take precedence over his relationships with his Indian lover Malinalli (aka Malinche) and their son. And although Cortés's relationship with Malinalli is a complex one, the Spanish conqueror consistently assumes the dominant role in their relationship, a role which is clearly demonstrated in the rape scene at the river, wherein, according to Esquivel's narrator, he treats the slave like the treasures he has sought in the New World: "Cortés comprendió que Malinalli era, su verdadera conquista, que ahí, en medio del abismo de los ojos negros de esa mujer, se encontraban las joyas que tanto buscaba" (74). Even though we may argue over whether Cortés's actions in this episode constitute rape, it is clear that Esquivel's hero—as he engages in sexual intercourse with this innocent native girl—is concerned solely with satisfying his own lascivious desires: "No le importaba que su pasión y fuerza lastimaran a Malinalli. . . . No le importaba nada, más que entrar y salir de ese cuerpo" (76). Cortés, moreover, never does learn the value of family and devotion. Years after his initial seduction of Malinalli, the latter realizes that this man for whom she had been working and with whom she had been living—this man who was "el padre de mi hijo" —would never satisfy his various passions: "'Este hombre es insaciable,' se dijo a sí misma. 'Parece que lo único que lo despierta a la vida es la muerte. Lo único que lo hace gozar es la sangre. El deseo de destruir, de romper, de rasgar, de transformar'" (147). In fact, in order to promote his career ambitions, Cortés relinquishes whatever affection he may have felt for his attractive translator-lover by handing her over to his good friend, Jaramillo, and does so, as the narrator explains, "para atar a Jaramillo a su voluntad y para tratar a Malinalli

desde una distancia más racional, menos emotiva. De tal manera podría sacar el mejor provecho de aquella mujer sorprendentemente inteligente e imprescindible para sus planes" (155). It matters not, then, that Malinalli is the mother of his son or that she has worked as a devoted translator for him; it only matters to him that she continue as his translator in order that she may help him further his own selfish ambitions.

Aeneas, as opposed to Cortés, is not only a devoted husband, father, and son, but he also comes to represent the importance of exercising self-effacement and following the destiny one is assigned by the gods, attitudes which often mean sacrificing one's own personal desires and ambitions for the good of one's country. Since, as Michael C. J. Putnam explains, the "essence of the poem is the glorification of the Roman empire, and therefore of imperial power in general," Virgil's hero "must stoically bear whatever burdens fate puts in his way during this progress towards a grand destiny and then practice restraint once that authority has been won" (456). Virgil, in fact, with his invocation to the Muse, establishes the significance of destiny's role in the lives of great heroes such as Aeneas at the very beginning of the epic with the line, "Wars and a man I sing—an exile driven on by Fate" (1.1). The importance of Aeneas's fate is also expressed by Anchises in Hades when the latter's ghost presents his son with a grand vision of future great Roman leaders:

> the glory that will follow the sons of Troy through time,
> your children born of Italian stock who wait for life,
> bright souls, future heirs of our name and our renown:
> I will reveal them all and tell you of your fate. (6.875-78)

The most significant indication regarding the importance of Aeneas's destiny, however, occurs when Mercury orders the future founder of Rome to leave Carthage and his beloved Dido and reinitiate his quest. One day, as Aeneas supervises the construction of the city, the messenger god tells the hero that "The King of the Gods" (4.334) has sent him "down from brilliant Olympus" to inform Aeneas that he has been "Blind to your own realm, oblivious to your fate!" (4.333) and that the malingerer should "remember" that he owes his son, Ascanius, "Italy's realm, the land of Rome!" (4.341-43). Not surprisingly, the ever-dutiful Aeneas will obey Jupiter's messenger and immediately leave North Africa, explaining to the distraught Dido that he must abandon her and their plans to build and rule the expanded kingdom of Carthage. Virgil, moreover, will dramatically underscore the profundity of Aeneas's great love for Dido—and thereby the enormity of what his hero must sacrifice in order to obey the gods and fulfill his destiny—when Aeneas encounters his former lover's shade in the Underworld. This encounter, related by Virgil's narrator, recalls Aeneas's desperation following his tragic loss of Creusa:

> that moment Aeneas wept and approached the ghost
> *with tender words of love*: "Tragic Dido,
> so, was the story true that came my way?
> I heard that you were dead [. . .]
> you took the final measure with the sword.
> Oh, dear god, was it I who caused your death?
> I swear by the stars, by the Powers on high, whatever
> faith one swears by here in the depths of the earth,
> *I left your shores, my Queen, against my will.* (my emphasis, 6.527-35)

Virgil's hero, therefore, sacrifices his own true love as well as his plans to rule a great kingdom with a woman who is not only beautiful but who is also very similar to himself in terms of her devotion and career pursuits—in favor of complying with the destiny assigned to him by the gods, that of voyaging to Latium and establishing what will become the great Roman Empire.

Cortés too is interested in establishing a kingdom, albeit in the New World, but, as I have shown, Esquivel's hero is obsessed primarily with acquiring power and wealth for himself.His profound self-will thus can be juxtaposed to the self-sacrificing nature of Aeneas. It can be argued, moreover, that Cortés suffered from a severe inferiority complex, for, as the narrator explains, "Los constants mimos de su madre lo ahogaban, lo convertían en un niño débil y enfermizo," and that "él sentía en su corazón que a sus padres les decepcionaba su corta estatura" (7). To compensate psychologically then, this shy weakling becomes obsessed with the acquisition of power and wealth, such that, "Él deseaba ser rico, los nobles eran ricos y los ricos hacían lo que querían"; instead of enjoying the success he had attained in Hispaniola, "Su mente ambiciosa no estaba satisfecha. Él necesitaba oro. Todo el oro que hubiera a su alcance" (8). Cortés's characterization here, in fact, is a good example of the colonialist conqueror who is not concerned with Spain's posterity or that of its colonies—he is only concerned with satisfying his ambitions. Unlike Aeneas, who sacrifices personal needs in order to realize his great destiny, Cortés sacrifices nothing as he takes whatever he can for himself. It is not surprising, for example, that he rejects Malinalli's suit for him to give up his desire to conquer Hibueras in favor of remaining with her in order that they may become a happy family (152-53). Thus, unlike Aeneas, who sacrifices his lover in favor of following his destiny, Cortés gives up his lover and son in order to pursue his own selfish goals.

What is assumed by Malinalli to be Cortés's murder of his first wife, Catalina, in fact, is not only significant because it underscores for Malinalli the nature of her overseer's misogyny, but his malicious act also constitutes a reversal of the scene in the *Aeneid* involving Aeneas's loss of his first wife, Creusa, wherein the Latin hero, as I have shown, flees with his father and son from the burning city of Troy. Cortés, it seems, kills Catalina because she caused him a great deal of trouble not long after her arrival in

Mexico when his infertile wife became very jealous of Cortés and Malinalli's son. Catalina, for example, crashes the feast Cortés had organized, pursuing her husband everywhere, "pero no para gozar de su compañía, sino para seguir discutiendo" (146). Aeneas's Creusa, on the other hand, far from being a jealous wife, appears as a spirit to her husband as he flees Troy, informing him that, in Hesperia, "There great joy and a kingdom / are yours to claim, and *a queen to make your wife*" (my emphasis, 2.971-72). It is also obvious that infertility was not a problem for Creusa, as she had given birth to Ascanius, "the son we share," and, as she reminds her husband, the child "we love together" (2.979-80). Unlike Cortés, who apparently murders his wife in a drunken frenzy, with "Esa sensación de venganza y de ira" (154), Aeneas expresses the desperation he felt the moment he realized Creusa's disappearance: "Oh dear god, my wife, Creusa— / torn from me by a brutal fate!" (2.915-16). Aeneas nevertheless searches frantically for her through the burning city, at one point retreating back to his house where he thinks she may have gone. Then, discovering that "the Greeks have flooded in, seized the entire place" (2.939), he reinitiates his search through the city, and as "Devouring fire whipped by the winds / goes churning into the rooftops, flames surging / over them, scorching blasts raging up the sky" (2.940-42), he "dared fling / my voice through the dark, my shouts filled the streets / as time and again, overcome with grief I called out / 'Creusa! Nothing, no reply, and again 'Creusa!'" (2.952-55). Soon, Creusa's ghost suddenly appears before him, and after it informs Aeneas of his fate, the desperate hero indicates his love for his departed wife, that he "longed to say so much— / dissolving into the empty air she left me now. / Three times I tried to fling my arms around her neck, / three times I embraced—nothing" (2.981-84). Therefore, the intensity of what is alleged to be Cortés's murderous desire to eliminate his infertile wife, is matched emotionally by Aeneas's desperate search through a dangerous city for his beloved wife and the mother of his beloved son.

Cortés's friend, Jaramillo, upon whom the Spanish conqueror bestows Malinalli, however, shares with Aeneas a number of character traits, and the association of these two characters underscores the benign nature of Malinalli's new husband. When Jaramillo, who had always longed to have Malinalli as his own, becomes drunk on their wedding night, it is significant that the young man "se sumergió" in his bride, "vació en Malinalli todo su ser y se quedó dormido," for the language here is suggestive—despite his intoxication and his apparent insensitivity—of Jaramillo's willingness to establish a relationship with his new wife based on mutuality (156). Malinalli subsequently will experience much joy through her relationship with this young man whose love for her transforms him from a warrior into a sculptor who carves for her an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe (180-81). This willingness to establish mutuality is not dissimilar to the nature of Aeneas's relationship with both Creusa and Dido. The Latin hero's desperate search for his first wife through the burning city of Troy demonstrates not only his devotion to his first wife but also at least some degree of his emotional dependence. Although he sacrifices his love for Dido by obeying the gods and departing Carthage, he

nevertheless had achieved a mutuality with the queen through the submergence of his identity, a submergence which is suggested when Mercury arrives at Dido's city and sees Aeneas "founding the city's fortifications, / building homes in Carthage" (4.324-25) while wearing "a cloak / of glowing Tyrian purple drapes his shoulders, / a gift that the wealthy queen had made herself, / weaving into the weft a glinting mesh of gold" (4.326-29).

According to Esquivel's narrator, moreover, Jaramillo, like Aeneas, is also "un buen hombre. Respetuoso, amable, valiente, leal" (159). Aeneas is, after all, essentially good, respectful and loving—he is devoted to his father and son, grieves over the deaths of Anchises, Creusa, as well as over the death of the youthful Pallas during battle, is obedient to the gods and to his father, and, most significantly, is dedicated to following the destiny which the gods and the Fates have assigned him. His bravery, moreover, is profound. During the wars against the Latins, Aeneas slaughters many enemy warriors and near the end of the war, duels the Latins' most terrible foe, the legendary Turnus, whom Aeneas—acting as the agent for his beloved young Pallas whom Turnus had killed—defeats by running the Latin warrior through with his sword: "blazing with wrath he plants / his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy's heart" (12.1109-10). Jaramillo's bravery is likewise demonstrated during the Spanish retreat from the overpowering forces of the Tenochans who had staged an insurrection against Monctezuma, when the young man rescues Malinalli—who is distracted by her mercy killing of her wounded horse--from a gruesome death:

> Juan Jaramillo fue el que se dio cuenta de que un tenochca tomaba a Malinalli por el cabello con la intención de degollarla. Jaramillo disparó su arcabuz contra él y lo mató, luego corrió, tomó a Malinalli . . . y la arrastró a la fuerza hasta las afueras de la ciudad. . . . *Había mostrado gran fuerza y valentía esa noche.* (138, my emphasis)

Both Jaramillo and Aeneas, therefore, share the capacity to not only establish a truly loving, mutual relationship with their respective lovers, but they also display great courage in the defense of those who may not have had the capacity to successfully defend themselves.

The Tenochans' rebellion against Monctezuma and his accommodation of the Spanish forces is strikingly similar to the Latins' rejection of King Latinus's expressions of peace to Aeneas and the Trojan forces when they land at Latium. Latinus, moreover, offers the hand of his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas because the Latin king had been informed by the oracle of Faunus to "never seek to marry your daughter to a Latin" (7.106), for "Strangers will come, and come to be your sons / and their lifeblood will lift our name to the stars" (7.108-09). Thus, when Aeneas's envoy proffers gifts to Latinus, the king becomes aware that Aeneas is one of the strangers mentioned by Faunus:

> "So this,"
> he thinks, "is the man foretold by Fate. That son-in-law
> from a foreign home, and he's called to share my throne
> with equal power! His heirs will blaze in courage,
> their might will sway the world." (7.294-98)

Much as Latinus learns of his nation's future greatness through the oracle of Faunus, Monctezuma is given eight omens, each of which "pronosticaban la caída del Imperio" (20) and thereby promotes the emperor's associating Cortés with Quetzalcóatl, the great Aztec god, whose return, as Malinalli explains to Cortés, was feared because the Aztecs' establishment of human sacrifices betrayed "los principios de Quetzalcóatl" (84). In this way, Monctezuma came to believe that "la llegada de los españoles se debía a que Quetzalcóatl estaba de regreso y venía a pedirle cuentas" (35). So, while Latinus initially establishes peace between Latins and Trojans, Monctezuma, out of a profound fear of Quetzalcóatl's retribution, effects the peace between the Aztecs and the Spanish through his own disempowerment.

Additionally, both Latinus and the Aztec emperor must deal with—as I have noted in the case of Monctezuma—those who challenge their respective accommodations with the foreign invaders. Turnus, who had always assumed that he would marry Lavinia, and having been instilled with revenge against Aeneas, his rival for her hand, by the Fury, Allecto, commands his officers to "March on King Latinus—gear up for war! / Defend Italy! Hurl the enemy from the borders! / Turnus comes, a match for Trojans and Latins both!" (7.549-51). Later, as his war with the Trojans is unfolding, moreover, the Rutulian king will be "fired the more for combat" (12.91) even while listening to Queen Amata's pleas for him to refrain from battle and upon his noticing "the hues that lit the young girl's [Lavinia's] face," the king is "struck with love" (12.89-90). Turnus, of course, never has the chance to reestablish his marital engagement with the Latin princess, as his forces are defeated and his archenemy kills him during their duel. Likewise, we have also seen the way Monctezuma's peace with the Spanish is violated through the rebellion of the Tenochans, but it is also relevant that a Turnus-like character—Monctezuma's cousin, Cuauhtémoc—usurps the emperor's throne following the Tenochan uprising, an act which is not dissimilar to Turnus employing Latinus's armies against the Trojans over the Latin king's calls for peace. Much as Turnus usurps Latinus's authority, so too does Cuauhtémoc usurp Monctezuma's authority, executing "seis hijos de Moctezuma que intentaban someterse a los españoles" (138) and subsequently confronting "la llegada atacando a los españoles cuando transitaban por las calles desde las azoteas de las casas" (139). Unfortunately for Cuauhtémoc, Cortés manages to capture the young usurper after defeating his Tenochans, but instead of complying with Cuauhtémoc's request that he be executed with a knife, the Spanish conquerer has the young native's "quemó los pies para que confesara en dónde estaba oculto el oro. Tanto el que suponía que escondían, como el

que había perdido la tropa en la huída de la Noche Triste". However, after one native "acusó a Cuauhtemoc de estar planeando una sublevación en contra de Cortés," the Spanish leader "los mandó colgar de una ceiba, el árbol sagrado de los mayas" (140). Thus, the violent deaths of the usurper characters of both epics and the defeat of the usurpers' rebel forces by foreign invaders consequently enables the invaders' acquisition of power in their respective colonized nations.

Dido, literally as well as metaphorically, embraces the invaders of her beloved Carthage, a city which is ruled by a woman whose character is essentially antithetical to that of Esquivel's heroine, and our awareness of the striking differences between these two characters serves to underscore the benign nature of Malinalli's character. Unlike Malinalli, who does not permit her emotions to endanger her personal quest for freedom and fulfillment, Dido, as Christine Perkell observes, "the victim of passion contrived by goddesses conspiring at cross purposes and with obscure relation (in the case of Venus) to the announced will of Jupiter, is represented as the victim of powerful irrational forces" ("*Aeneid*" 47). After Aeneas has related to Dido his account of Troy and his subsequent journey from Troy to Carthage, Virgil's narrator explains that already the queen "too long she has suffered the pain of love, / hour by hour nursing the wound with her lifeblood, / consumed by the fire buried in her heart" (4.1-3). It is, therefore, not especially difficult for Venus and Juno to manipulate Aeneas and Dido into solidifying their relationship—in effect, to place the two leaders together in a situation which will promote the consummation of their relationship—by manufacturing a great storm during their hunt, a tempest that will compel them to retreat into a cave where, as Juno explains to Venus, "I'll bind them in lasting marriage, make them one. / Their wedding it will be!" (4.155-56).

Thus, a year later, after Aeneas has been ordered by Jupiter to leave Carthage, Dido, who has been unable to control the passion that has fired her blood since her lover's arrival, dramatically confronts the Trojan leader over his proposed leave-taking:

> Can nothing hold you back?
> Not our love? Not the pledge once sealed with our right hands?
> Not even the thought of Dido doomed to a cruel death?
> . . . . . .
> Oh, I pray you
> by these tears, by the faith in your right hand--
> what else have I left myself in all my pain?--
> by our wedding vows, the marriage we began,
> if I deserve some decency from you now,
> if anything mine has ever won your heart,
> pity a great house about to fall, I pray you,
> if prayers have any place--reject this scheme of yours!
> (4.381 83, 390-97)

Once she is convinced that her lover will not remain with her, however, Dido instructs Anna, her sister, to build a pyre, and then the desperate queen requests that the gods curse Aeneas and his fellow Trojans, so that Aeneas will "die / before his day, unburied on some desolate beach!" (4.773), and—in anticipation of the Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome—she asks that the Trojans and their descendants be forced to endure "war between all / our peoples, all their children, endless war!" (4.783-84). The final evidence of Dido's great passion for her departed lover, moreover, is witnessed by Dido's attendants after their queen falls against her Trojan sword and they see "the blood / foaming over the blade, her hands spattered red" (4.824-25). And, as Anna attempts to save her sister by "stanching the dark blood with her own gown" (4.855), Juno sends down the messenger goddess, Iris, to cut a lock of the queen's hair to effect her death, a young woman "not fated or deserved, / no, tormented, before her day, in a blaze of passion" (4.866-67).

We certainly would not expect Malanalli to commit suicide, especially over the likes of a man such as Cortés, whose selfishness and passions are so great that it is difficult for his native translator to maintain whatever love she may have acquired for him. Esquivel appears to be much more interested in developing a character whose maturity and discipline will enable her to attain her goals of freedom and fulfillment than one who allows herself to be controlled by her passions for her lover. Malinalli had always known that her job as translator was directly related to her attainment of her own personal freedom, that by maintaining her relationship with Cortés and by promoting the interests of the Spanish in Mexico, she was, in turn, promoting her own freedom. In the "A Conversation with Laura Esquivel" afterward of *Malinche*, the author explains:

> [a Mallinali] la movía un anhelo de libertad, algo muy distinto de la ambición que animaba a Cortés. Si una persona es regalada tres veces en calidad de esclava y hubiera tenido que "conquistar" a sus amos para recibir un buen trato, habría anidado en su interior un deseo de ser especial. . . . Cuando Cortés le ofrece su libertad a cambio de su trabajo como traductora, eso automáticamente le da poder. (204)

The narrator, moreover, explains that the native girl was aware that, if the Spanish were defeated by Monctezuma, her life would be in jeopardy, so "para asegurar su triunfo tenía que mantener viva la idea de que eran dioses venidos del mar" (66). Given her slave status, Malinalli, in other words, understandably must be ever-vigilant in order to win what is desired by all people: she cannot allow her relationship with Cortés or her relationship with the Aztecs interfere with the attainment of her own freedom. Furthermore, Cortés's initial seduction-rape of Malinalli exemplifies the latter's ability to maintain control of her emotions in what is, of course, for her, a potentially emotionally-charged, passionate scene. While Cortés is succumbing to the passion to which he is consumed in this scene, Malinalli becomes aware of the Spanish conqueror's

spiritual aspect: "en los labios de Cortés y en su saliva había un trozo líquido de dios, un pedazo de eternidad" (74). And before Cortés has his way with her, Malinalli tells him about the workings of one of her gods who "se evapora, hace dibujos en el cielo, se mueve caprichosamente en las nubes" (75). After her rapist succumbs fully to his lust and penetrates her, Malinalli's mastery of her emotions is in evidence as she "permaneció muda y sus ojos negros, más hermosos que nunca, fueron acuosos, tuvieron lágrimas contenidas," and then the native girl remembers the words her grandmother had spoken to her not long before the latter's death: "Hay lágrimas que son sanación y bendición del señor del cerca y del junto." Although Malinalli feels that "sentía cómo el torso desnudo y velludo de Cortés rozaba sus pechos y le producía placer" and "sintió alivio de recuperar su condición de sometimiento," she—unlike her rapist—does not attain orgasm, for she temporarily had become "una simple mujer, callada, sin voz" (76).

Malinalli, however, can be more easily compared and contrasted with the future queen of the Latins, Lavinia, even though the latter (unlike Malinalli) is a secondary character in her story. Each of these two characters—albeit in markedly different ways—suffers the loss of her respective mother, each plays a crucial role as the pivotal figure between their respective native people and foreign invaders, and each—through union with her respective foreign invader leader—bears children who will establish a great new race. As a young girl, Malinalli suffers the loss of her mother when the latter decides to repudiate her past and begin a new family. Although her mother informs Malinalli's grandmother that the girl "será entregada a una nueva familia" as she herself has acquired "un nuevo señor" (26), her mother soon concedes to the grandmother's request that Malinalli remain with her (27). Malinalli, who, unfortunately, will suffer the loss of her grandmother, the matron who teaches the young girl a great deal about her heritage as she comes of age, Malinalli will nevertheless reconcile with her mother years later when the latter begs her for forgiveness (149-51).

Though Lavinia loses her mother, Queen Amata, to the suicide the latter commits after she assumes the death in battle of Turnus, her proposed son-in-law, in terms of loss, Lavinia's experiences with her mother are similar to those of Malinalli's with her mother. Amata, who is driven mad by Juno's servant, Allecto, pleads in vain with Latinus to pity his wife and daughter and keep his pledge to wed Lavinia to Turnus, but her "Desperate appeals" are of "no use," for her husband, as I have noted, was determined to comply with the oracle of Faunus (7.436). The queen subsequently begs her beloved Turnus not to return to the fighting, explaining to the young warrior that he has become "my only hope, now, you the one relief / to my wretched old age" (12.75-76), and that if he falls, "With you I will forsake / the light of this life I hate—never in shackles / live to see Aeneas as my son!" (12.82-84). Later, Amata, as "flames [are] surging up to the roofs" of Latium (12.693), having convinced herself that Turnus must have been killed in battle and that she was responsible for his death, the queen, with Antigone-like determination and method, "shrilling wild words in her crazed,

grieving fit and / bent on death, ripping her purple gown for a noose, / she knots it high to a rafter, dies a gruesome death" (12.698-700). Lavinia's reaction to the news of her mother's suicide is also very dramatic, for "As soon as the wretched Latin women hear the worst, / the queen's daughter Lavinia is the first to tear / her golden hair and score her lustrous cheeks" (12.701-03). Thus, the mothers of both stories cause their respective daughters a great deal of suffering. Malinalli's mother abandons her daughter in favor of beginning a new life with a new husband, and Amata commits suicide over what she misperceives as the loss of Turnus, the young man for whom she had come to love perhaps as much, if not more, than her own husband. Yet, as we have seen, Malinalli's relationship with her mother concludes with their profound reconciliation, while Lavinia's relationship with her mother ends tragically.

Although Lavinia's passive role is antithetical to the active one played by Esquivel's heroine, Lavinia and Malinalli are also similar in that each plays a pivotal role in the relationship between the powerful political forces represented by their respective male counterparts. Malinalli, in her role as translator for Cortés, plays an important role in determining the relationship between Monctezuma and the forces of Spain. Malinalli, who comes to be known as "la Lengua" (60), discovers that she could help herself as well as her own Náhuatl people through her employment of the political power that she had acquired through her position as translator. Nevertheless, Malinalli comes to feel increasingly guilty over her complicity with Cortés and the Spanish so that, by the end, she manages to repudiate her position as translator as well as her relationship with Cortés, the man who had brought her "la guerra, el destierro, el odio" (173). On the other hand, although Lavinia has no political power, nevertheless, the Latin princess's role is similar to that of Malinalli's, in that the war between Turnus and Aeneas is fought at least in part in order to determine which side's leader will propagate a new race with the princess. Additionally, Lavinia and Malinalli, as the original matriarchs of their respective peoples, are similar, in that each plays a crucial role in the unification of their own native blood with that of their respective foreign invaders. Malinalli establishes the Mexican race through her bearing of Cortés's and Jaramillo's children, while the Latin princess too will—according to a prophecy—bear Aeneas a son, who, along with Ascanius presumably, will initiate the Roman race. After Malinalli gives birth to a daughter conceived by Jaramillo, Malinalli reconciles with Martín, the son she had abandoned, and together with her new husband she is able to acquire true happiness, for "La casa que juntos diseñaron y construyeron era un pequeño edén" (170). Indeed, the benign nature of Malinalli's new family suggests the nature of what will become a good portion of the Mexican race, a race (at least in Esquivel's version) consisting of both Spanish and Náhuatl native blood:

> Sus hijos eran producto de diferentes sangres, de diferentes olores, de diferentes aromas, de diferentes colores. Así como la tierra daba maíz de color azul, blanco, rojo y amarillo—pero permitía la mezcla entre ellos—, era posible la

> creación de una nueva raza sobre la tierra. De una raza que contuviera a todas. (171)

Esquivel, moreover, celebrates the Mexican people and their culture as Malinalli prays to the goddess Tonantzin for her children's future: "Ellos, que no pertenecen ni a mi mundo ni al de los españoles. Ellos, que son la mezcla de todas las sangres—la ibérica, la africana, la romana, la goda, la sangre indígena y la sangre del medio oriente" (179). Malinalli also prays for the goddess to strengthen "el espíritu de la nueva raza que con nuevos ojos se mira en el espejo de la luna, para que sepa que su presencia en la tierra es una promesa cumplida del universo. Una promesa de plenitud, de vida, de redención y de amor" (180).

Likewise, Virgil suggests that, through Lavinia's union with Aeneas, the mixed bloods of Latins and Trojans will produce the great Roman race, a race whose future is envisioned for Aeneas by Anchises during the young hero's journey through the Underworld. At that time, Aeneas's father presents his son with a gallery of future great Romans, historical figures who, as Anchises explains, will descend from the loins of Aeneas's sons. Included in this vision, moreover, is the son whom Lavinia will bear Rome's founder:

> There,
> You see that youth who leans on a tipless spear of honor?
> Assigned the nearest place to the world of light,
> the first to rise to the air above, his blood
> mixed with Italian blood, he bears an Alban name.
> Silvius, your son, your last-born, when late
> in your old age your wife Lavinia brings him up,
> deep in the woods—a king who fathers kings in turn,
> he founds our race that rules in Alba Longa. (6.878-86)

Therefore, through our association of the epic elements of Virgil's *Aeneid* with Esquivel's *Malinche*, her novel's narrative is elevated to the level of classical myth. The contrast between Cortés and Aeneas enhances our sense of the evil nature of the patriarchy with which the oppressed Malinalli was forced to negotiate. However, the similarities that the good Jaramillo shares with Aeneas serve to underscore the success that Esquivel's heroine was able to enjoy as a result of her own goodness. Malinalli's benign character is also enhanced if we contrast her with Dido, the Carthaginian queen who, unlike Esquivel's heroine, was tragically unable to control her emotions. On the other hand, by comparing Malinalli with Lavinia, the Latin princess who will wed the new leader of the Latins, Malinalli's relationship with her mother is further defined and so is the crucial role that Malinalli as the mother of the first Mestizos played in the establishment of the Mexican peoples.

In effect, Esquivel's novel challenges traditional Mexican and Chicano assumptions about the role that the historical Malinche native girl—and by implication, all women—played in the early history of Mexico and its integration with the Spanish conquerors. The author joins other modern feminist writers and scholars in their attempts to dismantle the otherwise iron-clad, centuries-old association of Mexican/Chicana women with that of La Malinche, "the traitor to national goals; the one who conforms to her paradigm is labeled *malinchista*, the individual who sells out to the foreigner, who devalues national identity in favor of imported benefits" (Cypess 7). According to Elu de Lenero, La Malinche's traditional pejorative interpretation which derived from the nature of her relationship with Cortés, has justified "the way a Mexican man enjoys dominating a woman, wants service from her, and expects to impose his will and body on her and then dispose of her, [as] he repeats the pattern Cortés established with La Malinche" (qtd. in Cypess 8). So even though attempting to overturn these traditional connotations of La Malinche in particular and of Mexican/Chicana women in general—ideologies entrenched in the patriarchal cultures of the U. S. and Mexico—is most certainly not an easy endeavor, authors such as Esquivel whose narratives elevate native Mexican women's history to the level of classical myth are able to mount effective challenges against these ingrained sexist attitudes.

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