CHAPTER EIGHT

Re/formation of the Tradition by Chicana Writers

THE MEXICAN WRITERS discussed in chapter 7, who have contributed to the contemporary re/vision of the Malinche paradigm, were cognizant that the transformations that occurred in the image of the historical figure were due to the influence of a patriarchal society's image of women. Their focus was not so much on the betrayal by La Malinche of the Aztec patria but on her role as a victim in an uncomprehending patriarchal system. Castellanos, Lopez, and Berman reveal that the historical experience of oppression related to discourse is rooted in the polemical role of La Malinche, which has continued to influence contemporary behavior patterns. It is not unexpected, then, that the descendants of the historical Malinche, who are found both in Mexico and in the United States, as Chicanas, today identify with La Malinche's role or are made to identify with her. Chicanas in particular are likened to her by males who see them consorting with Anglos or accepting Anglo cultural patterns. Instead of responding passively to this potentially detrimental identification, Chicana writers have been invigorated and often transformed by the encounter with the Malinche paradigm, from both theoretical and thematic perspectives. Since these writers connected to Mexican culture share with my study a common goal—to analyze the contributions of a historical woman and to evaluate her literary image—their work can be considered as part of the ongoing reevaluation of Mexican official discourse in its broadest sense.

That the response of Chicana writers to the sign of La Malinche is rooted in a broad Mexican cultural heritage can be seen when their work is compared with that of Mexican writers. Because the themes and forms introduced by Rosario Castellanos provide both a context and a conceptual springboard from which to study the Chicanas' re/formation of the Malinche paradigm, I shall first explore Castellanos's poem "Malinche" as it gives voice to a silent woman:
Malinche
From the throne of command my mother declared: "He is dead."
And threw herself
into another's arms: the usurper and the stepfather
who did not sustain her with the respect
a servant renders to the majesty of a queen
but groveled in their mutual shame of lovers and accomplices.

From the Plaza of Exchange
my mother announced: "She is dead."

The scale balanced for an instant,
the chocolate bean lay motionless in the bin,
the sun remained at midpoint in the sky
awaiting the sign
which shot like an arrow,
became the sharp wail of the mourners.

"The bloom of many petals was deflowered,
perfume evaporated,
torch flame burned out.

A girl returns to scratch up the earth
in the place
where the midwife buried her umbilicus.

She returns to the Place of Those Who Once Lived.

She recognizes her father, assassinated,
ah, by poison, a dagger,
a snare before his feet, a noose.

They take each other by the hand and walk,
disappearing into the fog."

Thus the wailing and lamentation
over an anonymous body: a corpse
that was not mine because I was sold
to the merchants, on my way as a slave,
a nobody, into exile.

Cast out, expelled
from the kingdom, the palace, and the warm belly
of the woman who bore me in legitimate marriage bed
who hated me because I was her equal
in stature and rank,
who saw herself in me and hating her image
dashed the mirror against the ground.
I advance toward destiny in chains
leaving behind all that I can still hear,
the funereal murmurs with which I am buried.

And the voice of my mother in tears—in tears!
She who decrees my death! 1

While Castellanos in *El eterno femenino* added other Mexican women to her critique of the patriarchal tradition that has been perpetrated upon its people, in "Malinche" she focuses on the paradigmatic characteristics of betrayal and victimization associated with La Malinche. She deconstructs the paradigm, however, so that La Malinche is shown to be the one who is betrayed and victimized instead of the perpetrator. The form of the poem, a first-person monolog, suggests that by telling her story herself, the woman not only initiates discourse but also initiates the process of self-definition that leads to a challenge of the dominant patriarchal system. As Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano has pointed out, the process of self-definition involves moving from the margin to the center, an assumption not readily belonging to the Mexican woman or the Chicana who is her descendent. The Chicana writer, says Yarbro-Bejarano, "finds that the self she seeks to define and love is not merely an individual self, but a collective one. In other words, the power, the permission, the authority to tell stories about herself and other Chicanas comes from her cultural, racial/ethnic and linguistic community. The community includes the historical experience of oppression as well as literary tradition."3 Although Yarbro-Bejarano is primarily concerned with the role of Chicanas as subjects of their own stories as a way of challenging the dominant culture's definition of women, her comments are also germane to the problem of the Mexican woman's role in the literary world. The "urgent need to dominate the written word in order to smash stereotypes and rewrite history from the perspective of the oppressed"3 that Yarbro-Bejarano finds in the poetry of Chicana writers begins in the history of La Malinche, the Tongue, who experienced one of the greatest forms of betrayal and victimization when her own words were used against her.

A re/vision of La Malinche is generated in "Malinche" by having her initiate discourse about the first crucial event of her life, the circumstances leading to her exile. Castellanos gives voice to La Malinche in the guise of a young child who has suffered the deepest deception of all when her own mother abandoned her by sending her away from home to become a slave in a strange land. La Malinche expresses a double deception, for the body of another—"an anony-
mous body”—was substituted for her own at the same time that she was deprived of her identity: “I was ... on my way as a slave, a nobody.” She lost both her father, through his assassination, and her mother, through the subterfuge involved in her feigned death. Her mother not only replaced the father figure with another [the usurper and stepfather] but substituted another child’s body for her own, over which tears were shed and lamentations wailed. It should be noted that one of the subtexts recalled is the motif of the crying mother—La Llorona—a well-known figure in Mexican folklore who is associated with the Malinche paradigm; La Malinche is said to be crying for her children subjugated by the Spaniards. Castellanos’s text ironizes the figure of the crying mother, for La Malinche’s mother acts falsely in her lament for the death of her child, while La Malinche cries here for the lost child that is herself. Castellanos indicates to the reader that La Malinche herself begins her trek on the path of history as a victim of persecution.

Despite the poem’s narrow angle of vision—one scene in the early life of young Malinche—inevitable in this initial scene are the essential elements of her life story of continual cultural replacements and substitutions, of perfidy and hatred, of loves lost and gained and lost again. Her solitary state as a slave unwillingly cut off from her people is captured in the line “I advance toward destiny in chains”; it is a line that also encapsulates the destiny of La Malinche in Mexican history as the woman captive to a foreign, estranged vision, be it European or patriarchal. The fact that her mother, a member of her own gender, initiated the betrayal proves that neither superficial gender nor class associations are as important as shared ideology, a theme in Garro’s “La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas,” which will be treated in chapter 9. Castellanos’s Malinche attributes to her mother a hatred of her because of their equal status:

[She] who hated me because I was her equal
in stature and rank,
who saw herself in me and hating her image
dashed the mirror against the ground.

Castellanos offers a perceptive observation concerning self-hatred among women and the results of that hatred, she identifies two detrimental behavior patterns—they may either eliminate other women or encourage their sisters to follow the same debilitating pattern of behavior. Those who accept this hatred of La Malinche repeat the pattern of
her mother. In contrast to the established pattern, Chicana writers have shown that they resist this negative tradition. They do not hate her image but attempt to give voice to the malign daughter as she faces the other cultures into which she was thrust.

Just as Mexican women must deal with the presence of the Malinche paradigm, Chicanas view themselves as symbolic daughters of La Malinche. In the words of Cherrie Moraga, "As a Chicana and a feminist, I must, like other Chicanas before me, examine the effects this myth has on my/our racial/sexual identity and my relationship with other Chicanas. There is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does not suffer under her name even if she never hears directly of the one-time Aztec princess." The revisionist works of Chicana writers are significant on two counts. They began to react to the negative presentations of La Malinche as a direct defamation of themselves as women who bridge two cultures in their role as a hyphenated peoples—Mexican and American. La Raza and the gringo culture of North America are the two opposing forces that influence the Chicanas' perspective. Their approach to the sign of La Malinche as part of their cultural heritage has been multifaceted. They have analyzed and evaluated the contributions of the historical Malinche in essays, and they have incorporated the figure into their creative works as another way to make her their own, to transform her into their own image instead of accepting the image of La Malinche constructed by patriarchal cultural forces. Culture and gender shape experience, these Chicana writers remind us, the actions of La Malinche were influenced by those two key factors, just as our readings of her actions are affected by our own culture and gender.

For many of the Chicana writers, their own political and social concerns and their questions regarding ethnicity are derived from La Malinche's experiences. Her body becomes the locus of origin of the contemporary Chicana. Her participation in the deeds of the conquest as an active and vital figure needs to be understood as a way of rejecting the destructive implications of previous interpretations and recovering the ambiguities and possibilities inherent in the figure that a changing feminist perspective brings forth. Her contribution to history within a sociopolitical context corrected for distortions is the goal of many feminist writers, whose representations of La Malinche have radically altered the configuration of the image.

Representative of the revisionist attitude is Adelaida Del Castillo's essay "Malintzin Tenépal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective." Her position is one that most Chicana writers would support: that any attack on La Malinche also defames the character of Mexican and Chicana women. Although Del Castillo follows the
data concerning La Malinche's life story as related by Bernal Diaz, she continues the perspective offered in Castellanos's poem in the way she conveys a personal reaction to the human aspect of Doña Marina's life story. She refers to the fact that the young girl called Malinal went from being a princess to a slave among merchants: "It is now that we can begin to understand that La Malinche, the young Aztec princess, was, in fact, betrayed, dethroned, and sold into slavery by her own mother—it all had the simplicity of an evil fairy tale. . . . To be sure, it must have been a very painful, traumatic and confusing experience to have undergone the drastic transition of Aztec princess to Mayan slave." In contrast to Bernal Diaz's tone, she adds that in all La Malinche's endeavors, she acted as a real woman, "not as a goddess in some mythology, but as an actual force in the making of history."

Del Castillo also attempts to temper the negative attitude toward La Malinche by noting that she was in a position to help the Indians through her direct influence on Cortés: "She resourcefully mitigated possible violence between indio and Spaniard through her own persuasion—effective use of her precocious intelligence and role as a bridge figure. She alone . . . could determine and give validity to the negotiations and treaties which went on between the Spanish aggressors and her indio world." Del Castillo also counters the accusation that Doña Marina was a traitor to the nation: "One wrongly assumes that there was a 'patria' similar to the patrias of today. The fact is, there were many Indian nations within the Aztec Empire and these nations were always attempting, through one rebellion or another, to regain their former independence." The major contribution of her perspective, however, is her portrayal of Doña Marina as a religious activist. She quotes both Fray Cristóbal de Alameda, who writes of Marina's easy grasp of the Christian faith, and Bernal Diaz, whose description of Marina's reunion with her family stressed the importance to her of her new religious faith and the rejection of the bloody Aztec rites. While I have considered the possibility that the citation attributed to Doña Marina may be more the Spanish interpretation of her beliefs than those of the woman herself, Del Castillo accepts her expression of feelings as valid and elaborates on this point to the extent of considering La Malinche a religious martyr who has been either ignored or defamed. Del Castillo says that it was religious faith that motivated the actions of Doña Marina: "A careful look at what is known about her and her times seems to indicate the immense probability that Doña Marina's participation in the conquest of Mexico was a manifestation of her faith in a godly force— the prophecies of Quetzalcoatl. It is because of this faith that
she sees the destruction of the Aztec empire, the conquest of Mexico, and as such, the termination of her indigenous world as inevitable." Del Castillo rejects the romantic idea of love for Cortés as the motivation for Marina's actions and stresses belief in a godly force, which gave her the physical and spiritual stamina to withstand the hardships and atrocities of the conquest. Just as the Spaniards were motivated by a divine imperative, so, too, was Doña Marina according to Del Castillo's version. Del Castillo attributes her death to that other scourge of the Indians at the time, smallpox, and places her age at twenty-two, which is a supposition, since we have no conclusive documents.

Del Castillo also explores the reasons for the misinterpretation of La Malinche's role in the conquest and her transformation into the embodiment of female negativity for Mexican culture. She suggests that it is related to "an unconscious, if not intentional misogynistic attitude toward women in general, especially toward self-assertive women, on the part of western society as a whole." This Chicana writer brings out the interesting point that popular Mexican heroines—the revolutionary war's Adelita, Juana Gallo, and La Valentina—are admired not as feminine activists "but because their behavior is interpreted as being imitative of masculine behavior... [they] became 'machas' which Doña Marina never did." According to Bernal Díaz, however, Doña Marina did possess so-called masculine attributes when it came to her ability to participate in the rigors of battle, a characteristic, I have suggested, that anticipates the soldaderas (see chapter 2). Del Castillo's point, nevertheless, is well taken—that women who are viewed both as feminine and as activists are not acceptable; she quotes Carlos Fuentes in Tiempo mexicano, who helps condemn La Malinche by stating that she "generates betrayal and corruption in Woman." Del Castillo castigates the assumptions of Fuentes: "Fuentes implies that if women are rotten creatures, it's not their fault; we're not even acknowledged as creatures responsible for our own actions. Blame Malinche. She generates the evil. In the end, only a woman could be responsible for others' faults. Carlos Fuentes' rationale is not atypical of the kind of misogynistic reasoning which portrays women as being 'innately' evil and, thereby, justifiably in need of male domination." She also takes to task the American novelist Margaret Shedl for depicting the woman in her novel Malinche and Cortés as a "rampant nymphomaniac" and referring to her frequently as a whore.

Del Castillo's contribution to the paradigm is her portrayal of the actions of La Malinche within a religious context, picking up on the aspect of Bernal Díaz's presentation that stressed the importance of
Christianity. More important, she reminds her contemporary readers that the woman underwent many traumatic experiences in her own life before being transferred as a slave to the new group, but that her intelligence and beauty made her a valuable asset to the Spaniards.

In "The Concept of Cultural Identity in Chicana Poetry," Elizabeth Ordóñez highlights the importance of the Malinche figure for Chicana poets: "As the symbolic progenitor of the mestizo people, La Malinche has either been officially reviled or compassionately respected, but always as object, as receptacle of the seeds of La Raza. It was left to the Chicana writer to assume the function of historian and myth-maker, to wrest the figure of La Malinche from her captivity within the confines of patriarchy's historical and mythical discourse; and to restore to La Malinche her integrity and her voice." Ordóñez illustrates her comments with references to specific works by Chicana poets who began to publish in the early seventies. Some of the writers who make use of the Malinche figure include Lorna Dee Cervantes, Lorenza Calvillo Schmidt, Inés Hernandez, and Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, who succinctly summarizes the burden in her phrase "Damn! How it hurts to be Malinche!" Like Berman's Malinche in the play *Aguila o sol*, both poets move freely between the world of La Raza and the other world, although for the Chicanas it is a decidedly gringo world. They face their personal problem of acculturation or divided loyalties by making La Malinche a symbol for the problem.

Despite having borne the brunt of negativity for so long, La Malinche is now being considered as a remarkable woman with strong personal character and positive attributes. The move to resurrect her as a model of inspiration rather than condemnation continues. The new readings have modified the preexisting works, allowing us to view them anew, readjust the given's of the old interpretations, and create a new cultural inheritance.

Among the poets who feel compelled to reassess the Malinche figure, Lucha Corpi has written a series of poems entitled *Martina*. Born in the state of Veracruz, she writes in Spanish although she now lives in the United States; thus she reverses in a way the situation of La Malinche, who used the language of the invader in her own country. Corpi comments that her discovery of Marina came as she learned to explore the uses of poetry, so that her "image, both tragic and glorious, has walked ever since through the corridors of my life." It is noteworthy that Corpi refers to the figure as Marina, using the Hispanic form of the name; perhaps she avoids the sign Malinche because of its obvious association with *malinchismo*. 


The first poem of the series is entitled "Marina Madre" [Marina Mother] and in some ways offers a gloss on the portrait offered in Castellanos's poem in its references to the early scenes in the life of the Amerindian woman. In addition, it contradicts the entire negative tradition that equates her birth with evil omens and anticipations of betrayal. Corpi writes, "With the blood of a tender lamb / her name was written by the elders / on the bark of that tree / as old as they." The poet substitutes for the image of scapegoat that of the sacrificial lamb that La Malinche becomes, replacing the negative signs with more culturally positive associations. To replace the motif of vendepattias, "traitor," Corpi shows that La Malinche was acted upon first when she was sold: "... she was sold... from hand to hand, night to night, / denied and desecrated, waiting for the dawn." The passive form and the series of suspension points that continue the verbal idea, as well as the metaphorical phrases that follow, succinctly capitate the history of La Malinche from the time of her first betrayal until now, in which she is still awaiting the dawn of deliverance from her negative reputation. Corpi's Marina, however, does not address the reader directly in the first person, in the manner of Castellanos, but is described by a narrator, which lends an air of objectivity to the presentation. Nevertheless, like Castellanos, Corpi shows that the subsequent events in which Marina was enmeshed had their origin in the initial act. In addition, Corpi goes beyond the chronology of the conquest and the limits of the single character in the way she forms allegorical phrases referring to the lives of Mexican women in general. "Her womb sacked of its fruit" ["Su vientre robado de su fruto"] stands as a solitary line in the poem and recalls Usigli's synecdochic presentation of her as a reproductive unit, yet suggests the tragedy of her condition by the way the words "vientre" and "robado" are juxtaposed without the conjugated verb—without action on her part. In this one line Corpi verbalizes another of the tragedies inherent in the Malinche paradigm, the way she represents the Indian women whose reproductive labor was appropriated by the patriarchy with no regard for their own benefit or consent.

The last stanza is another fine example of Corpi's synthesis of the paradigm. She manipulates the deixis of the poem—especially its subject pronouns—to convey the allegorical nature of the relationships involved in the paradigm: "You no longer loved her and he denied her, / and that one who as a child cried out to her 'mamá' / grew up and called her 'chingada.'" Although "that one" [the demonstrative pronoun "aquél" in the Spanish is a clear reference to the "child" of La Malinche, the subject pronouns "you" and "he" are
more open to interpretation. "You" would be the addressee of the poem, the one who rejects La Malinche. Is the person addressed who no longer loved or wanted her a sign for her mother and the Indian culture from whose context she was wrested? Or could it be Cortés, who stands for Hispanic culture and who also rejected her when her help was no longer necessary? It is also possible that if "you" is her mother, "he" refers to Cortés, for he negated the importance of her presence in his letters just as he denied her emotional significance when he married her off to Juan Jaramillo. Historically "he" as the Mexican nation also negated her contributions. Rodríguez-Nieto translates "he" as "the elders," a phrase that recalls the Indian hierarchy. The interchangeability of the identity of "you" and "he" points out that each group acted in a similar way. Both the Indians and the Europeans have repudiated La Malinche. The "aquél," the third party, is the mestizo child, who accepts her role as his mother; but after she has contributed to his formation he rejects her as well by identifying her as the passive, sacrificial figure who is a sexual object, "la madre violentada" [the violated mother], as well as "la madre primera de nuestra nacionalidad" [the first mother of our nationality], as Alfonso León de Garay expressed it and as it was dramatized by Willebaldo López's Martín Cortés in Malinche Show (see chapter 7)." 

No realistic motifs are included in this poem that initiates the Marina cycle; except for the title and the last word—the former a clue to her specific identity, the latter to her role as a symbol of woman betrayed and victimized. The three remaining poems follow the same pattern of suggesting the subtext by including "Marina" in the title and using only pronouns instead of proper names to refer to the various characters in her life story. By this technique Corpi succeeds in showing that the Malinche figure is indeed the subtext for the life of most Mexican/Chicana women.

In "Marina Virgen" ["Marina Virgin"], the second poem, Corpi deconstructs the negative images incorporated in the paradigm by juxtaposing "la chingada," the name with which she ended the first poem, with that of the virgin. As we have seen, La Malinche is generally considered the polar opposite of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but in the title Corpi brings these conflicting images together. The poem elaborates on the image of Marina emphasized by Adelaida Del Castillo, her role as a Christian. In the first stanza "she"—the reader assumes that all references to Marina—is depicted as willingly accepting the Christian religion and relating the new religious practices to her love for the "you" to whom the poem is addressed. Again, the reader assumes that "you" is Cortés or, through synecdoche, the
Hispanic culture to which he introduced her. Corpi associates these two characteristics, the acceptance of the new faith and the submission to the new love, as signs of her "sin," which is mentioned in stanza 2: "Then [she] covered her body / with a long, thick cloth / so you would never know / her brown skin had been damned." Her acceptance of the foreign tradition as the dominant force is also seen as part of her sin, for in trying to cover her "brown skin" she tries to assume a new identity. The dichotomous nature of Marina's submission to the new religion is thus expressed, for her acceptance also meant the rejection of another religion. The revalorization of Indian culture after Mexican independence from Spain strengthened the diatribe against La Malinche and her sin of malinchismo, of acculturation. Corpi not only releases the image of Marina from the sin of sexual promiscuity by calling her "virgin" in this poem, she also associates her true nature with the land in the final stanza: "Once, you stopped to wonder / where her soul was hidden / not knowing she had planted it / in the entrails of that earth / her hands had cultivated — / the moist, black earth of your life." In a reversal of androcentric tradition, the cultivated land is now identified not with the body of the woman but with the man, "the moist, black earth of your life." She is the active figure who "worked the land." The symbolism of the poem also deconstructs the image of the Indian woman whose "fruit" is stolen from her ("her womb sacked of its fruit" from the first poem, which expresses her victimization in traditional imagery). In this poem, which begins with the phrase "of her own accord," she plants of her own volition. While a sacrificial tone is also part of the poem, nevertheless the victim's role is mitigated here because it was on her own accord and with love for the addressee that she acted the way she did. She acts not as the Mexican Eve, selfish and rejecting, but more in accordance with the positive pattern of the Virgin, who embodies the most virtuous feminine attributes: forgiveness, succor, piety, and virginity, as well as saintly submissiveness, as Mirandé and Enríquez remind us. Marina does not take on all these traits, for she is not passive or submissive in a saintly manner. However, to shift the image from the paradigm of Eve to that of the Virgin is to purge the figure of her traitor's role. Marina's transfer of interest—the meaningful "change of organization" that Ireneo Paz employed to convey the transfer of emotion/power from the Indian to the Spanish system—is recast here not as disloyalty to "patria," the fatherland, but as a reconfiguration of patria and "pater," in the way Celestino Gorostiza suggested in his play La Malinche. Her love, like the unselfish love of the Virgin, led her to plant her soul in the earth of his body, a metaphoric expression
of her sacrifice, so that her union with him changes from an act of "submission" to a deed that would bear fruit—the mestizo nation.

This positive view of Marina's actions is not part of popular culture, as Corpi recognizes in the third poem, "La hija del diablo" ("The Devil's Daughter"). The title stands in contrast to the previous "Marina Virgen"; agricultural and religious imagery previously combined for a positive interpretation is here used to show the negative reactions to her role.

When she died, lightning struck in the north, and on the new stone altar the incense burned all night long. Her mystic pulsing silenced, the ancient idol shattered, her name devoured by the wind in one deep growl (her name so like the salt depths of the sea)— little remained. Only a half-germinated seed.¹¹

This brief poem captures the effects of time that transformed her life—symbolized by Corpi as "mystic pulsing"—into the work of the devil. By focusing the denunciations of La Malinche on the events that followed her death, Corpi acknowledges that during her lifetime both the Indians and the Spaniards thought highly of her and respected her words and deeds. At first her death caused mourning—lightning struck and incense burned, but in time her name was denounced and cursed by all (the "one deep growl"). Corpi shows that the signifier "Marina" was given many significeds, loaded with as many meanings as the profundity of the sea to which the sign is also related. Yet by ending the poem with the image of a half-germinated seed, Corpi suggests the very revisions that her own poem instantiates. The seed that was left to grow may be a reference to the mestizo progeny of La Malinche, who are still waiting to assume their role in Mexican society, and also, in accordance with the polysemous nature of the sign, a reference to the Chicanas who would be the future generation to evolve from her inheritance, too. The adjectival phrase "half-germinated" is placed alone in the original Spanish, with a space after it, to be filled when the seed completes its development. Corpi's poem represents the advanced stage of the germination process that will end the silence surrounding Marina's "mystic pulsing."

Corpi identifies the Marina of her poems in the series of metaphors that comprise "Ella [Marina ausente]" ("She [Marina Distant]"): 
She. A flower perhaps, a pool of fresh water... a tropical night, or a sorrowful child, enclosed in a prison of the softest clay, mourning shadow of an ancestral memory, crossing the bridge at daybreak, her hands full of earth and sun.21

Although Corpi entitles the poem as if Marina were absent—either temporally or, as the English title implies, physically distant—yet in fact this and the previous poems bring to the present—both temporally and in terms of our consciousness—the identity of “she.” As I have suggested, the texts function as a recollection of a majority of the images and metaphors included in the palimpsest of the Malinche paradigm: from love to betrayal, the religious and the sexual, reproduction to repatriation. The dichotomy of her image as either the beautiful tropical flower or a sad child imprisoned in an earthbound cell points to the polarity inherent in the sign.

Corpi, like Fuentes and Berman, presents her as a bridge figure. Although the Indian past that she embodies is a mournful memory, Corpi sees Marina’s contribution as one of promise and future, for she walks across the bridge from the past to the future, mañana, her hands filled with earth and sun—the benefits of nature. The sorrowful child in the clay relates her to the seed about to germinate, the mestizo/Chicano child of her lineage to whom the future belongs. The image of a perfidious Malinche is distant, absent from this poem which looks to the future not as a repetition of the past but as the dawn of a new day, a new way: a new identity for “ella.”

We should note that the narrative voice of Corpi’s poems is not that of Marina but of another, perhaps her spiritual daughter. In contrast, Carmen Tafolla gives the burden of discourse to her Malinche in the poem “La Malinche,” in which the “I” is a proud and self-assured self-conscious narrator. Her use of English and Spanish in the poem, not uncommon among Chicana writers, reminds us here of the language skills of La Malinche. Mastery of the language of the oppressor need not signify being mastered, however, for Tafolla’s Malinche interprets her acculturation as a positive and visionary act, daring and decisive. Whereas previous poets recalled the pain of being labelled malinchistas for their love of men outside La Raza, Tafolla’s perspective recognizes that La Malinche’s role makes her the spiritual mother of the Chicana.

While it is not my purpose to comment on all the poems in which
Chicana poets refer to La Malinche, it is essential to note that for the new generation of writers the Malinche figure has become important in a positive and active manner. As a fitting end to this overview, Carmen Tafolla's "La Malinche" may best express the revolutionary voice of the reincarnated figure; we note not only the powerful ideas but their presentation in a poem whose form is indicative of the regenerated, remodeled, future-oriented woman:

For I was not traitor to myself . . .
  I saw a dream
    and I reached it.
    Another world . . .
    la raza.
    la raaaaaaa-zaaaaaa . . .

Like Corpi's line of open space, Tafolla's use of suspension points and open vowels opens the poem and gives voice to the idea of a future that is new, not the ever-repeating pattern that was considered to be eternally the self-inscribed reality of La Malinche as Mexican woman.

Just as Chicano males would want to see their machismo in a positive light, as a source of ethnic pride and endurance in the face of discrimination, so, too, would Chicanas want to reinvent malinchismo as the way to bridge two cultures, not a selling out but a giving, a sharing of positive values with two cultures.

By appropriating her name for the concept of acculturation—malinchismo is after all a term to describe the submissive deliverance of nationhood—Mexicans and Chicanos emphasize the cyclical nature of the phenomenon, as well as relating the idea to the belief in the crucial role of women in the betrayal of one's culture. Other Chicana writers offer different perspectives, but the unifying theme is their attempt to valorize the active aspect of La Malinche while putting into historical perspective and context her support of the enemy Spaniards. The problem for feminists in part has been how to balance the idea of La Malinche as slave on the one hand, obeying the wishes of her master, and as independent, active translator on the other, who searched for the right words to bridge the gap between two cultures, who served as a link for two cultures, becoming the mother of the new race of mestizos. Despite having borne the cultural brunt of negativity for so long, La Malinche, the historical figure, was a remarkable woman with personal strength of character, intelligence, and beauty. As a literary image she has suffered in her
representation according to the needs of the national agenda. The move to resurrect her as a model of inspiration rather than condemnation reflects a transformation in the consciousness of contemporary readers/writers. Their new readings have modified the preexisting works, allowing us to view them anew, to readjust the givens of the old interpretations and create an enriched cultural inheritance that allows for positive female images.