

ment the layering of metaphor in the story, with their blend of surrealism, suggestive design, and folk-art style.

All four picture books are highly recommended both for their vital subject matter and striking artistry which has created beautifully realized stories and illustrations.

Sheila O'Hearn is a fiction writer and poet. She lives in Fergus.

The Anglo-American Face of Malinche; or All Mothers Are Bad Mothers

Esteban. Gilberto Flores Patiño. Trans. Linda Gaboriau. Cormorant Books, 1995. 96 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-920953-92-1.

Esteban is the eight-year-old protagonist and first-person narrator of this short novel. He has moved to the small Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende, a well-known artists' colony, with his American mother who is a painter. While he knows nothing about his father except that he lives somewhere in the United States, the reader starts to assume that he must be of Mexican origin, given that Esteban is vehemently Mexican and, more significantly, because the ideological representation of culture and gender is absolutely manichaean. Esteban's mother is the archetypal bad mother and whore, a demonized representative of Anglo-Saxon language and North American culture. Her own son refers to her as a gringo (meaning "foreigner") throughout the novel. The divine realm is dominated by the benign Mexican patriarch, Marcela's father, and all things Mexican and Spanish. Unfortunately, the oppressive binary structure underlying Esteban's narrative destroys the illusion of the child's point of view, since the prejudiced and the manipulative propagandist erupts at every turn in the story to expose the author's own fixations and fears.

Ironically, Flores Patiño is very good at representing the child's point of view whenever the issues of culture and gender are absent. His observations on imaginative and imitative play are convincing and well expressed in Esteban's affectionate monologues with his little wooden horse. A fine example of the author's understanding of the child's desire for continuity and meaning occurs when Esteban watches an equestrian competition on television. He does not accept the limits of reality imposed by the frame of the TV screen and constantly wonders about what happens off-screen. His thoughts on the difference between the child's and the adult's experience of time, and how they value objects for emotional or pragmatic reasons, also ring true.

In sharp contrast to these lyrical insights, most of the novel deals with Esteban's mother and the pain and worry that she causes him by her extreme negligence. She abandons him each weekend to go drinking, after which she brings strange men home to spend the night. He therefore depends a lot on Marcela, his best friend and schoolmate, and her family. While both Marcela's parents are Mexican, the ideologically biased representation of gender difference continues to be the operative structure. The father is the embodiment of

understanding and tolerance, while the mother is neurotic, demanding and unforgiving. The prime example of this dichotomy occurs when the children pretend to make a chocolate cake and cover her kitchen table and oven in mud: "Marcela's mama got mad and she was going to spank her, but her papa came when he heard all the yelling and told her, calm down, woman, calm down, smiling as if nothing had happened, and it's true that nothing had happened, but Marcela's mama thought something awful had happened, calm down, what's the fuss, we'll clean the stove, period, they're children, he said, they're children and they don't know what they're doing" (12-13).

The resonance of Christ's words "for they know not what they do" inflates this character to mythic proportions and sets him up as the divine adversary of Esteban's mother, for despite the characterization of Marcela's mother as the short-sighted hysterical housewife, she does tuck the children in at night and tells them bedtime stories. Esteban contrasts her with his own mother by saying "But my mother isn't like that, she's different. She reads me stories I don't really understand" (12). There is much emphasis on the fact that Esteban's mother does not speak Spanish and while we assume that her son must, at least, understand everything that she says to him in English, it is not clear whether the barrier to communication is linguistic or psychological and, in the final analysis, the boundaries are blurred because her difference is represented as a tightly-sealed package containing the loathed characteristics of being a gringa, an immoral and promiscuous woman who is agnostic and maybe even atheist, of speaking only English and single-mindedly pursuing the fulfilment of her sexual desires and her career as an artist.

Saturdays are marked by the way her mouth smells (presumably due to her habitual Friday night debauchery) and how she yells at Esteban as if he were her worst enemy when he inadvertently wakes her up too early, after which she characteristically complains about the splitting headaches that prevent her from spending much time with her son. The good/bad dichotomy is also played out at school where Esteban favours Señorita Estela over the principle "Señora Green:" "But it has nothing to do with her [Señora Green], it's just that I like Spanish better. And I like Señorita Estela better too, I don't know why, but I like her better" (31) Esteban may not know why, but Flores Patiño and, by now, the reader know only too well that aside from any essential personality traits, gringos are bad, Mexicans are good. The fact that Esteban lives with a single mother who has always spoken English to him and yet he does not accept that language as "natural" is unconvincing, given that children are so linguistically adaptable, and the increasingly cynical reader may wonder whether Flores Patiño has been less linguistically adaptable and feels displaced as a Spanish writer in Montreal.

The hierarchy of values attributed to gender is blatant in what Esteban says to his little wooden horse concerning the fundamental role of parents: "your mama was the wood of the tree. But who was your papa? And who was mine?" (32). The mother as raw material implies that the father is the informing spirit, an analogy that also applies to Esteban whose Mexican loyalties suggest that despite the fact that his father is incognito, he has inherited his love of Mexico, spicy food, the Virgin, and Spanish.

Half-way through the novel, Esteban's mother disappears during one of her Friday night sprees and the rest of the novel deals with Esteban's vigil and search for her. On Monday, her body is found and Esteban describes his grief at seeing her black coffin lowered into the grave, and his understandable horror at knowing that she has been tortured and murdered. After the overwhelmingly negative representation of this character, the reader cannot help but interpret this senseless crime as the subconscious expression of the author's senseless desire to punish her. Esteban consoles himself with the idea that hell does exist (contrary to his mother's anti-Catholic scepticism) and that its torments await his mother's killer.

The uncanny duplication of the desire to punish the male killer consciously and to punish the bad mother/whore unconsciously is echoed in the last paragraph by Esteban, who by now has been reduced to a ventriloquist's dummy for the author's repressed discourse: "So it was something like that, as if I had been dreaming something really awful, that awful thing that happened to my mama, and at the same time I couldn't remember it, and all that was left was the fear of something I couldn't explain" (96). These telling last words sum up the greatest flaw in Flores Patiño's writing. Despite his evident talent at representing a child's point of view, the author's overbearing fears and desire for revenge thwart the protagonist's unfolding and replace his discourse with harangues that come from elsewhere and lead nowhere.

According to one of the most prominent Mexican newspapers "El Excelsior" "*Esteban el centauro* [Spanish title] is one of those books which will hence forth become a part of our daily life and our dialogue, in the same way that de Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* never leaves us." This ludicrous comparison overlooks the fact that no insight is gleaned for the protagonist or the reader by the senseless slaying, and that besides being completely unsuitable as children's literature, *Esteban* expresses little more than raw resentment against the maternal figure which in Mexican terms corresponds to the maligned figure of Malinche, the Mexican Indian mother (traitor) and whore of Hernán Cortés, whose conquest of Mexico was facilitated by Malinche's talent as translator and interpreter. By displacing the indigenous mother with the Anglo-American mother, Flores Patiño has only shifted this culturally entrenched hatred from one alienated feminine figure to another. Woman as difference remains the enemy, the something that Esteban (Flores Patiño) fears and can't explain.

Latin American Perspectives in Children's Literature: Mythical and Contemporary Struggles in the Work of Luis Garay.

Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures. Patricia Aldana (ed.). Illus. Luis Garay. Trans. Hugh Hazelton.. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 64 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-256-4. *Pedrito's Day.* Luis Garay. Stoddart Kids, 1997. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29992. *The Long Road.* Luis Garay. Illus. author. Tundra, 1997. 32 pp. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-408-8.

Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures is a collection of indigenous legends and folk-tales, each retold by a different contemporary writer with