

2016 ELM Conference Proposal:

Title: Transgressing Borders in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

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Summary:

It has been over thirty years since Sandra Cisneros, who has published novels, poetry, creative nonfiction, and essays, first published what was then a radically innovative novel from an unknown author, *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Since then, this book has sold millions of copies and has been translated into twenty languages. With this publication, Cisneros immediately gained the attention and appreciation not only of inhabitants of the literary world, but also of those concerned with social and cultural issues, culminating in September with her being awarded a National Medal in Arts by President Obama for her literary and cultural contributions.

The House on Mango Street is a series of vignettes presented by Esperanza, a Chicana from Chicago who articulates her reality, her perceptions, her dreams, her sense of self. In this analysis I employ what is essentially a socio-cultural, historicist approach to examine the multiple linguistic, social, ethnic, and cultural borders and barriers in Esperanza's story, which closely resemble the personal, political, and cultural issues in Cisneros's own life. These borders and barriers are first intuited, then acknowledged, then questioned by Esperanza, who ultimately transgresses them, at times even surpassing them, through her descriptions, insights, memories, confessions, and (in)discretions. These vignettes reveal the social and cultural forces, influences and issues at work in the lives of the inhabitants of this part of Chicago at that time, which correspond to those of marginalized groups everywhere. Esperanza's stories are building blocks for a sense of self and for mapping her place in her world.

The House on Mango Street has been on high school and college reading lists for decades, and thus has been analyzed from many different angles. However, since migration, marginalization, displacement, and identity issues have been elevated to the international forefront in recent months, it is productive to examine this text from said perspective. Cisneros's text has not only maintained its relevance and perspicacity over the decades, but also proven to be a uniquely valuable instrument for provoking awareness and contemplation of predominant social issues of our times.

Working Bibliography

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Sandra Cisneros. www.sandracisneros.com. 20 June 2016.

Kari Meyers is a full professor of literature, now retired from the University of Costa Rica, where she obtained *licenciatura* and master's degrees in English Literature. Originally from Minnesota, U.S.A., she has experienced biculturalism in Costa Rica for nearly fifty years.