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Audrey Nathalie Romero

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GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND ALANIS MORISSETTE:  
THE UNTANGLED FLAVORS OF CONOCIMIENTO

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition:  
English Literature

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by  
Audrey Nathalie Romero

March 2011

GLORIA ANZALDÚA AND ALANIS MORISSETTE:  
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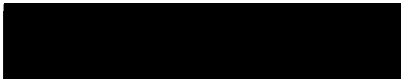
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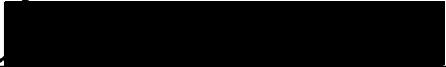
by  
Audrey Nathalie Romero

March 2011

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Brenda Glascott, Ph.D., Chair, English

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Julie Paegle, Ph.D.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DeShea Rushing, M.A.

3/10/11  
Date

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the notion that the human body plays a predominant role in the act of writing, and examines how Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of writing from the body, which she calls *conocimiento* (Spanish term for consciousness), is manifested in Alanis Morissette's lyrics. I address Morissette's expression of meaning in this form of her writing using Anzaldúa's definition, which is from a primarily feminist perspective. *Conocimiento* is a theory of composition that encompasses all dimensions of life, both internal (self) and external (society). Anzaldúa proposes *conocimiento* as an explanation of identity construction, the ways in which art is essentially composed, and demonstrates the functions of *conocimiento* as an analytical framework for the writer. My study expands this idea, focusing on the development of Morissette's lyrics over a thirteen-year time span (from her debut album to present), in terms of how these organic lyrics (authentic and truthful) reflect *conocimiento*. As a prominent lyricist of the third-wave feminist generation, Morissette typifies the "new" female voice, which critics labeled angry and aggressive. Thus, my analysis highlights how Morissette's personal *conocimiento* is not relegated to

limiting labels of emotion, but rather illustrates ways in which *conocimiento* may be explained in our society, and introduces the notion that feminist music creates spaces for women's voices. In addition, this study sheds light on the significance of the writer's many selves, incarnated by a single body, as conditions of what Anzaldúa refers to as organic writing. This study reveals how Anzaldúa's philosophy might emerge throughout different stages of composition.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### FEMINIST LYRICAL EXPRESSIONS OF CONOCIMIENTO

What is the relationship between academic feminist theory and contemporary musical lyrics, i.e., compositions by female singer/songwriters? Or more importantly, is it possible that academic feminist theory can be woven into lyrical compositions as a form of activism for social change? But, before we can look at these issues, it is first important to answer what feminism is anyway. The term "feminism" can be quite confusing and slippery, and there has been much debate about this term and its meaning. Feminism is often represented in a variety of ways, and it does not hold the same meaning for everyone. Nonetheless, this term is becoming increasingly debated and discussed in social, political, and academic settings. Lecture rooms are filled with students determined to understand the nature of "feminism." Because the term "feminism," in part, conjures up images of burly women slapping the hand of any male attempting to open a door for her, and because academic language can make it difficult for students to understand the nature of feminism, I propose that students may be more receptive to feminist theory if it were taught



through popular culture. And by popular culture, in this thesis, I will specifically address lyrical compositions of singer/songwriter, Alanis Morissette.

In this thesis, I will approach the ways in which students in English studies are better able to connect feminist theory with musical lyrics - more specifically, with the ways in which to expressly draw from Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of *conocimiento*; and, in turn, directly apply these notions to the very organic (authentic and personal) writing of Alanis Morissette. It appears that many students find it difficult to connect to feminist theory because of the established connotations, but their understanding of popular culture may well be the key to ascertaining its meaning. For example, the term "girl power" is highly accepted among female audiences and consumers of popular music, and it is a term associated with the "underground riot grrrl" movement from the late 1980's (Karlyn 57). Interestingly, while the term "girl power" is seen as a positive movement among young adults, the word "feminism" is not. In fact, "feminism" is often met with ambivalence, apathy, or categorical disregard. This attitude of feminism is evidenced in the classroom, according to Kathleen Karlyn, Associate Professor at the

University of Oregon. She notes that while the feminist movement continues to grow and achieve greater success, the connotations connected to it remain indifferent and/or negative (Karlyn 57). Equally, many well-known female singer/songwriters, much like Morissette, who wish to propel the feminist movement forward, are viewed by some music critics as "male-bashers," or "angry rock fems" - labels that convey the stereotypical "feminist." That being said, I believe this study is relevant and useful in helping English studies students to develop — see through a theoretical lens — ways in which to understand and apply aspects of feminist theory, in a way that is meaningful in today's very "pop-cultural" society.

In addition to establishing connections between feminism and popular culture, I will address the undertheorized spiritual aspects of Anzaldúa's philosophies and suggest reasons for this unexplored territory. I will focus more fully on the meaning of Anzaldúa's "spiritual activism" in chapter two; however, it is suffice here to provide a very brief overview of this term, as I understand it. Anzaldúa's notions of "spirituality," as presented in her theory of *conocimiento*, establishes an individual's soul knowledge, a type of knowing as opposed to the study

of any given idea, that is to say, a learned knowledge. Therefore, combining the spiritual self (or the other world self) with the logical self (the reasoning self) provides greater opportunities to achieve awareness (whether it be political, social, academic, personal, etc.).

Thus, I hope to explain how an analysis of Morissette's lyrics convey the powerful messages of feminism through Anzaldúa's analytical approaches of *conocimiento*, while at the same time, offer a reasonable and very salient move toward establishing a conflation of the two. That is to say, I wish to make clear, how *conocimiento* can be better understood when applied to Morissette's lyrics. It is my hope, then, that in this thesis research project, students in English studies will be better able to create connections with the spiritual self and, in turn, achieve greater levels of awareness about their own writing as well as develop ways in which to evaluate and interpret theoretical approaches as they apply this knowledge to the study of contemporary feminist lyrical compositions.

Alanis Morissette, an immensely popular feminist, singer, songwriter, and musician, demonstrates how an individual deeply immersed in *conocimiento* is able to

utilize her personal experience in an effort to act as a medium through which members of society are able to create their own meaning, awareness, and knowledge. With regard to Morissette's lyrical compositions, she states, "I'm offering up my own personal story. I'm offering up my personal opinion for people to define the selves in accordance to me, so that they can use me for their own evolution" (Morissette "Authentic Power"). Because of Morissette's public position in the media, she is keenly aware of the large influence she has among her followers, and thus takes a responsible stance within the industry to become actively involved in creating an environment where feminist/spiritual activism can be more accessible, despite critical receptions. That is to say, Morissette's lyrical compositions have come under scrutiny and mislabeled by music critics as "hate letters to former boyfriends" (LeBlanc 50). In response to these critics, I would have to disagree. In fact, in many of Morissette's lyrics, I am better able to understand Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* in direct application to lyrical compositions as well as keenly observe current feminist and spiritual activism at work. I suggest, then, that Morissette's voice is important because her personal narratives use lyrics to

expose multiple messages of feminism, awareness, and spirituality.

Awareness and acceptance of the multiple selves that exist within each of us is a major tenet in Anzaldúan theory; and, according to feminist scholar Andrea A Lundsford, Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the most prominent Feminist theorists from 20<sup>th</sup> century America, "learned early on that she was different, an 'alien from another planet' who didn't quite fit in with the norms and expectations of her family and community" (Lundsford 43). Thus, Anzaldúa's sense of disconnect from society, which manifested during her childhood and continued to deepen throughout her adulthood, led her to seek her "own voice" (Lundsford 43); this, in Anzaldúa's summation, allowed her own true "multiplicity of the self" to be enacted (Lundsford 44). This notion of "multiplicity" stems from the need to negotiate multiple identities of the self. Anzaldúa further explains the actual synthesis between her multiplicity and society as a whole in her theory of *conocimiento*:

Conocimiento es otro modo de conectar across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses

and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together. Conocimiento shares a sense of affinity with all things and advocates mobilizing, organizing, sharing information, knowledge, insights, and resources with other groups. (Keating Entremundos 8)

Thus, conocimiento represents a "nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking" (Keating Entremundos 8) which ultimately transforms thought into action, both individual and social. Anzaldúa's explanation also further develops her assertions on the nature of consciousness: conocimiento is not only an understanding of how individuals connect their own sense of self to other people, but also an understanding of how individuals connect this consciousness to others, both socially and spiritually (Keating Entremundos 155). In this vein, as Anzaldúa states:

I see conocimiento as a consciousness-raising tool, one that promotes self-awareness and self-reflectivity. It encourages folks to empathize and sympathize with others, to walk in the other's shoes, whether the other is a member of the same group or belongs to a different culture. (Keating Entremundos 178)

Conocimiento, then, is a "call to action, a path for social transformation" (Keating Entremundos 155); as such, it broadens consciousness to include a person's complex cognitive and spiritual relationships with her own identities, collective awareness, the legacies of her predecessors, and ultimately her relationships with other people and the external world. For Anzaldúa, theorizing the privileged site for acquiring—or recovering—this deeper form of knowledge is the result of her discovery and conception of nepantla, "the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 548).

According to E. J. McCaughan, author and educator, "Nepantla is a word used by the Nahuatl-speaking indigenous population of Mexico in the 16th century, apparently to describe the liminal or 'in-between two worlds/times' state of their post-Conquest social condition" (McCaughan 155). Nonetheless, Anzaldúa adopts this Nahuatl word to reflect one of the most important stages of conocimiento. Interestingly, the word cognoscera is a Latin word meaning "to know" and is also a form of the Spanish word conocer,

which comes from the same English root word "cognition" or "recognize" — interchangeable words expressing the idea "to be familiar with." For Anzaldúa, *conocimiento* is that aspect of consciousness "urging you to act on the knowledge gained" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 577). However, Anzaldúa posits that *conocimiento* is not merely the function of linking primary intellectual knowledge with action, but rather it is a deeply embedded connection to the spiritual self as well. I mention this here because the salient feature I will address in chapter two of this thesis will be to draw the connections between Morissette's spiritual and organic lyrics with principles of *conocimiento*, thereby attempting to transform negative critical receptions of Morissette's feminist activism.

Before going further, however, it must be mentioned here that there are seven stages in Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento*, but each stage is not independent of the other, nor does the graduation from one stage to the next represent a break-away from any given stage. Author Chris Bobel puts it this way:

Although Anzaldúa uses the language of 'stages,' it is clear that this is not a linear model, where one passes through each stage sequentially and 'achieves'



conocimiento. It is instead a continuous and iterative process, where the last space of 'shifting realities' is in many ways a return to and re-creating (and re-meaning making) of nepantla and continuous arrebatos. (Bobel et al. 335)

In other words, it is possible to exist in multiple stages for longer or shorter periods of time or shift between stages — thus, revisiting stages is common in this theory of identity transformation.

#### The Seven Stages of Conocimiento: An Overview

In an interview with author Irene Laura, Anzaldúa defines conocimiento, as "just knowing," or more specifically, the term envelopes a unique understanding of one's experiences of life and the processes of creating meaning out of those experiences in an effort to accept all aspects of oneself and thereby connect with our multiple selves—those binary opposites that frequently cause agitation if not met with certain approval from society or in some cases ones inner self. For Anzaldúa, the seven stages of conocimiento is a matter of survival. She states:

Conocimiento is just a good old-fashioned word that means knowledge, or learning, or lo que conoces [what you know]. When you're about to change, when something in your life is transforming itself, you get this 'Ahá!' So this to me is conocimiento. (Keating Entremundos 44)

Realizations that come about in these particular Ahá moments impact our identity in ways that create certain aspects of awareness and in turn cause inspirational movements toward a reconstruction of personal and individual identities. Moreover, the reality of identity transformation is, in many ways, a confrontation with the self, i.e., a reflection of past experiences enmeshed with new awareness and knowledge—keeping what is relevant and useful in the process of development.

Anzaldúa gives an example of this type of transformation; she states:

Maybe you get divorced, maybe you lose your job, maybe you get sick, maybe your dad dies. You realize certain things: that you're getting older, that you're going to die soon, or that this person you're married to is not your forever true love. It's quite a shock,

but it gives you insights if you're attentive to it.

(Keating Entremundos 44)

The same is true for Morissette; these same "shocks" throughout her life have been the conduit for moments of transformation and personal reflection, which create the need to pen the lyrics she has shared with the world — this is Morissette's form of feminist activism, not only because her lyrics establish a different medium by which to draw attention to the strength and value of women, but also because her lyrics cross cultural borders/boundaries and social and/or political classes. This type of activism is a goal that Morissette has set for herself (Morissette "Authentic Power").

Because of its encompassing nature, *conocimiento* inevitably includes personal and social periods of instability and harmony as well as identity separation and synthesis. In distinguishing these multiple changes which underlie *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa outlines seven stages — "not prescriptive; they are descriptive, offering a way of imagining" (Keating Entremundos 155) — which outline an odyssey of how one "emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually" (Keating Entremundos 155) emerges from everything that "enables or drives us to

challenge or change our ways of thinking (Keating Entremundos 155). Again, according to Anzaldúa, these phases represent cyclical, equally valuable mental states or experiences that are not linear but qualitatively different, disparate mental structures, from which individual and collective consciousness surfaces. Furthermore, Anzaldúa notes that, as opposed to "mastering the mental achievements" (Keating Entremundos 155) of one cycle before entering the next, individuals repeatedly continue to rotate into each phase throughout the duration of their lives. Each stage, in turn, is marked by the internalization of knowledge from different lifeworlds "through socialization in an array of different cultures as part of the ongoing processes of identity formation" (Barvosa 90). Furthermore, the eclectic diversity of cultural membership, identities, and social position that comprises each stage signifies the interconnectedness of all beings.

Of course theories evaluating and constructing identity transformation is nothing new; Anzaldúa's concept and stages of *conocimiento* share basic similarities along the theoretical circuit with those of Victor Turner's liminality. Indeed, *conocimiento* includes important

innovations that encompasses "periods of stability and change, and differentiation and integration (of identity): two characteristics of constructive developmental theory" (Keating Entremundos 155). The spiritual characteristics of Anzaldúa's theory suggests a more interconnectedness with the universe, Anzaldúa states:

You could say that *conocimiento* is basically awareness, the awareness of *facultad* that sees through all human acts whether of the individual mind and spirit or of the collective, social body. The work of *conocimiento* — consciousness work — connects the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer worlds of action. In the struggle for social change I call this particular aspect of *conocimiento* spiritual activism...It means to place oneself in a state of resonance with the other's feelings and situations, and to give the other an opportunity to express their needs and points of view. To relate to others by recognizing commonalities. (Keating Interviews 178)

This then is the defining factor of *conocimiento* — that is, that the spiritual aspects are seemingly interwoven throughout each stage and that activism, according to Keating, "includes acknowledging paradox, ambiguity, and

partiality as well as the recognition that we are always in the process, always open to further change" (Keating Entremundos 252). I agree with Keating's reading of Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento*, and I would like to extrapolate further meaning from Keating's observations as it relates to Morissette and the nature of her lyrics. In each stage of *conocimiento*, there is an awareness of contradictions within each of us, i.e., an "ambiguity" of identity that is continually in a state of process. Morissette defines herself as "deeply spiritual, profoundly philosophical, and the flakiest person you're gonna meet" (Spence "Interview"). This recognition of self allows Morissette to be "open to further change" because she is in a state of evolution. Many of Morissette's lyrics represent stressful stages of her life; she states, "a lot of times when you're immersed in something painful, you don't realize there's any lesson. A lot of what I wrote about was difficult times from which I walked away a better person" (Wild, Ockenfels). Through the process of writing, Morissette's evolutionary process created a form of transformation and ultimately built a bridge for spiritual activism for herself and with others.

Thus, it is through this understanding that as we approach the stages of conocimiento our awareness of transformation is enlightened via our unique spiritual connections with, not only the universe, but with each other. Knowledge that the process to reformation and transformation begins and ends in a cyclical pattern, whereby failures and ruptures as well as births and rebirths contain the measure of successes, but are not the determining factors of our overall worth, is worthy of such scholarly examination.

#### El Arrebato: The First Stage

El Arrebato is defined as a "rupture, fragmentation... an ending, a beginning" (Bobel et al. 335). Anzaldúa maintains that it signifies an unanticipated upheaval that leads to actual alienation of others, "a deeply emotional and spiritual moment of dissonance...from one's established worldview and one's established self-view" (Bobel et al. 335). Anzaldúa likens the stage of el arrebato to an earthquake; the shock of the moment may initially disable an individual's reflexive ability to react, but as the turbulence momentarily subsides, she may readily avoid acknowledging the impending turmoil. However, when a new

tremor overwhelms, "an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you've built around yourself" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 544). Thus, el arretrato effectively forces an individual to deal with a sudden or recurring issue, event, or circumstance that causes considerable anguish in her life. If she refuses to address the problematic situation — "if you don't work through your fear" — the result may be deadly, as "playing it safe could bury you" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 544).

El Arretrato is emotionally — and oftentimes, physically — distressing. It is the catalyst that initiates the process of conocimiento, effectively "jolting us into new awareness" (Keating Entremundos 177). Anzaldúa asserts that, after having personally experienced states of pain and distress, the individual can no longer remain in her old state of being after experiencing el arretrato. Her awakened mentality struggles to come to terms with "the traumatic shock" that leaves her "cracked open by the experience" (Steele 81). In an attempt to conceptualize this theory, i.e., to better make sense of it's meaning, I draw from Morisette's writing's and lyrical compositions in Chapter Two, where I discuss the emerging nature of el



arretrato. Briefly, however, Morissette's lyrics represent periods of her life in which a very real need for growth has presented itself. Thus, her work reveals a journal of experiences and of life; and as a student of English Studies; I find this to be insightful when applying a theoretical lens to the nature of writing.

In addition, the fresh memory of traumatic shock further intensifies an instance of el arretrato: traumatic memories are not merely images of a painful past, instead, as Anzaldúa states, "tears," "thrusts," "pain," "suffering" and a reminder of the advent of death (Steele 47). The constant memory of traumatic memories supersedes repression of that which is unacknowledged, overpowering the fear of being overwhelmed by confronting grief or sorrow. Thus, the beginning of transforming instances of el arretrato and its memories into a solution lies in recognizing them and accepting them as psychological, spiritual, and physical pains that must be attended to. If they are, instead, denied and ignored, conocimiento is rendered impossible. For Morissette, the writing process is a form of self-transformation. By penning her sorrow, fear, angst, etc, she is better able to understand the "traumatic event" occurring in her life at a particular time, and, she is

better able to negotiate an identity for herself. In turn, by introducing her art to the world, she becomes an activist for the feminist cause.

Thus, it is only by attending to and dealing with the inevitable fallout of el arrebató — from “the physical manifestations of the trauma” to the “dreams and illnesses” that it perpetuates, — that the individual is able to convert them into “allies for healing” (Steele 82). Alternately, if the emotional response to such trauma is suppressed, no healing will take place: “The one who speaks without emotion...[has] an ‘external’ memory — socially constructed, skating along the surface of words, and engaging the intellect — not the body’s reexperience” (Steele 82).

#### Nepantla: The Second Stage

The word “nepantla” comes from the Aztec language and references the space between or in the middle, Anzaldúa’s “borderlands.” In the journey to *conocimiento*, nepantla is the space of seeing multiple, frequently contradictory perspectives, having been torn from a comfortable, single, stable story by el arrebató (Bobel et al. 335). For Anzaldúa, even in an individual’s identity construction,

there exist borderlands that need to be transgressed. In my understanding, the philosophy behind the idea of Nepantla is a representation of the intervening space or passageway in the characteristics of the self that contain the potential for self-transformation. In other words, identity transformation must take place from a space of what seemingly is a state of transgression or rebellion. I imagine this space as a reflection — a limbo state — a moment of decision-making. For Morissette, it would seem, lyrical compositions in this stage are penned in illumination. That is to say, in an analysis of Morissette's lyrics, I surmise a constantly morphing individual ready to engage in whatever experience that leads to spiritual and enlightened growth.

Equally, along this stage in the development of self-transformation, Anzaldúa creates a parallel between "Nepantla" and what she calls:

[a] birthing stage where you feel like you're reconfiguring your identity and don't know where you are. You used to be this person but now you're different in some way. You're changing worlds and cultures and maybe classes, sexual preferences. So you go through this birthing of Nepantla. When you're

in the midst of the Coatlicue state — the cave, the dark — you're hibernating or hiding, you're gestating and giving birth to yourself. You're in a womb state. When you come out of that womb state you pass through the birth canal, the passageway I call Nepantla.

(Keating Interviews 225)

It seems obvious, then, that nepantla would be the most important stage in Anzaldúa's process of self-transformation because it is the process of developing various forms of belief systems, i.e., political, cultural and/or psychological consciousnesses as the means toward one's own survival. For populations that have been impacted by the historical traumas of colonialism and what many have labeled spiritual conquest, one approach toward cultural survival, or decolonization is the process of transculturation, which in many ways is resisting the mainstream while reinterpreting and redefining cultural difference as a place of power (Chicanoart.org). Thus, nepantla indicates liminal space where transformation can occur; and like her theory of the coatlicue state, nepantla indicates space/times of great confusion, anxiety, and loss of control. With nepantla, Anzaldúa underscores and

expands the "spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous" dimensions:

With the nepantla paradigm I try to theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined. (Keating Interviews 268)

Nepantla is a time of self-reflection, choice, and potential growth—what Anzaldúa describes as opportunities to "see through" restrictive cultural and personal scripts. It includes both radical dis-identification and transformation. The individual dis-identifies with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, they are able to transform these existing conditions. Individuals who experience the nepantla stages become what Anzaldúa calls "nepantleras": "in-betweeners," "those who facilitate passages between worlds" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 1) Like Anzaldúa herself, nepantleras are threshold people; they live within and among multiple worlds, and they develop what Anzaldúa describes as a "perspective from the cracks" (Keating "From

Borderlands" 6). Nepantleras use their views from these cracks-between-worlds to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics, enabling them to reconceive or, in other ways, transform the various worlds in which they exist.

### Coatlicue: The Third Stage

In this third stage, the exploration of multiple perspectives is imbued, not only with conflict about these perspectives, but also with a process of self-awareness that can be deeply disturbing; as the individual encounters aspects of oneself one does not want to see, acknowledge, or integrate (Bobel et al. 337). Depression, fear, anxiety, despair, and anger can be overwhelming, and there is temptation to turn away and deny possibilities and new realities or to descend into the negative emotions. Coatlicue is a symbol of ancestral and local knowledge deployed by Anzaldúa to register not only her identification with Aztec culture, but also her divided self within mestiza reality. Importantly, it is also a state of mind, something that allows those affected to take stock, to understand the situation they are in. Anzaldúa explains that "We need Coatlicue to slow us up so that the

psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes. If we don't take the time, she'll lay us low with illness, forcing us to rest" (Anzaldúa Borderlands 68).

Coatlicue is a mark of psychological paralysis, a kind of mental stasis that shakes one out of the torpor of acquiescence to the pain of everyday or normalized. What Anzaldúa calls the "Coatlicue State" is this prelude to heightened awareness in which her identity will either fragment or disintegrate in the face of adversity or reform with those fragments into a more resilient, conscious, and more profound sense of self.

Applying the stage of coatlicue to the lyrics of Morissette is discussed further in Chapter Two; however, it is necessary to mention here that Morissette's ability and willingness to identify her demons creates these dramatic shifts in her writing. For the listener or reader of Morissette's lyrics, it becomes apparent that Morissette negotiates her identity over the stages of *conocimiento*. We, as the audience, are better able to understand the ways in which her writing takes shape as she moves through these stages of feeling broken, lost, empowered, or whole. In fact, if an individual does not answer to coatlicue, she will remain a stone frozen in the roles apportioned her.

On this level, the imaginary state is a state of trenchant awareness:

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a travesia, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape knowing, I won't be mov'ing. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. 'Knowing' is painful because after 'it' happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (Anzaldúa Borderlands 70)

#### El Compromiso: The Fourth Stage

In the fourth stage, the individual begins a process of rebirth. One sees the possibilities of change, of re-creation, of realizing the promise of nepantla, of being, not what others want the individual to be, but what she chooses to create. In order to create (to put images and ideas together in new ways, in combinations that would be considered "new" or original in the dominant culture), the writer enters a "trance" state as she engages, sifts, sorts, and permits particular wishes/images to emerge and be manipulated by her conscious mind. In this re-entry



stage, "nothing is fixed," but rather everything is converging—fluidity, creativity, and the ever-changing elements of identity become more rooted in the discovery of the self. Knowledge prompts the spirit to shift into new perceptions, emerging from within the conscious self to transform aspects toward a new identity.

This stage of *conocimiento* for Morissette can be seen in her later albums, reflecting lyrics that express a more mature artist with a better understanding and self-acceptance. I will give examples of Morissette's lyrics in further detail in chapter two and three of this thesis with regard to the ways in which *el compromiso* can be seen in Morissette's work. It is suffice to say here, however, that in Morissette's line of work, it is necessary to consciously employ this stage of *conocimiento* in an effort to lessen the grip of stagnation.

Awareness becomes the focal element in this fourth stage of *conocimiento*; however, *el compromiso* exists to alert the individual toward another "puerta" (door), enabling passage to cross from one stage of *conocimiento* to the next, although not in any particular order. Anzaldúa posits that the shifts between stages cause one's experiences to be seen in a new arrangement inasmuch as the

psyche can handle the new and developing changes. "The cells in your brain shift and, in turn, create new pathways, rewiring your brain" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 556). Naturally, change is difficult, and *conocimiento* hurts, but not as much as *desconocimiento*. Fear and anxiety coupled with a loss of identity plummets awareness, dashing hopes of an altogether newly — emerging self.

In this fourth stage, there is certain death of outmoded beliefs and past experiences, "you'll have to leave parts of yourself behind" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 557). Stepping into the invitational pull of *el compromiso* allows the spirit to draw upon the processes of "letting go" in an effort to move toward a new identity — one that reflects a much stronger inner authority. Trust, therefore, is an essential element in this stage of *conocimiento* in view of the fact that this action requires forms of separation from the known to allow for future growth and movements in and around the various stages.

#### Coyolxauhqui: The Fifth Stage

The fifth space, Coyolxauhqui, is one of active transformation, resistance, re-creation — both personal and social. The fifth space is a space of analysis where

one examines and reflects upon the many "should's" and imposed stories that are received. Intellectual, emotional, and spiritual awareness come together in this reflexive process that critically examines and deconstructs these imposed stories. Awareness and analysis unfold, not only from the stance of personal well-being, but also from an understanding of the structural and systemic power imbalances that support and maintain these imposed stories. New narratives become possible as one disentangles oneself from these impositions. The work in the fifth space is an engagement with nepantla, a rejection of the boundaries and barriers imposed upon the self and between self and others.

I find this stage to be the most compelling as I listen to and read Morissette's lyrics because through this stage the evaluation and analysis is clearly defined. From her earlier work, Morissette's critics pegged her as "angry;" and with subsequent work, critics labeled her "soft" - perhaps she is both, perhaps she is neither, perhaps she is in the fifth state of *conocimiento* where she is making these very real changes and negotiating a space for herself where she is empowered. Compositionally she is equipped to manage her transformation and finds an avenue to share her journey; and it unfolds with the listener, the

interpreter, and the evaluator. By connecting this theory to Morissette's work, writing then becomes a process of self-discovery and empowerment.

The Blow UP...A Clash of Realities:  
The Sixth Stage

In the sixth space, Anzaldúa describes the process of bringing new stories into contexts that have not yet been transformed. In this space, *conocimiento* means being oneself, the bridge between perspectives that seem to be at odds and that create divisions. The clash of realities is between multiple others (individuals or groups) as well as between one's new understandings and old realities. In many ways, this process of bringing one's new stories out into the world embodies all the other spaces all over again, as an *el arrebató* is experienced from this clash of realities and the resulting difficult emotions create temptations to withdraw. But again, there is a call to action and a recognition of the possibilities for transformation:

What takes a bashing is not so much you but the idea/picture of who you think you are, an illusion you're hell-bent on protecting and preserving at all costs. You overlook the fact that your self-image and

history (autohistoria) are not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to the winds. A threat to your identifications and interpretations of reality enrages your shadow-beast, who views the new knowledge as an attack to your bodily integrity. And it is a deaththreat — to the belief that posits the self as local and limited to a physical body, a body perceived as a container separating the self from other people and other forms of knowledge. New conocimientos (insights) threaten your sense of what's 'real' when it's up against what's 'real' to the other. But it's precisely this threat that triggers transformation.

(Anzaldúa This Bridge 566)

It is in this testimonial stage that prompts sudden awareness, compelling the artist to construct new ways of resolving the tensions of inner-conflict, bringing about social change with new determination and to meet resistance while at the peak of uncertainty. Chaos resulting from the "clash of realities" imposes its muscles thick into the sides of the artist, composer, and feminist, causing her to take a stance in activism and thereby enabling her story to become the bridge or place of refuge for others along the same journey of transformation. For Morissette, the

resulting expansion and directional motivations toward a journey of self-discovery arrived at the end of a pen as she composed her saga of difficulties for an entire listening audience. Her narrative is rich with contrasting identities. Despite driving arguments from record producers admonishing her to compose lyrical content that would "ensure a consistent demand base perpetuation" (Morissette "Authentic Power"), Morissette protected her deep connections to her spirit and preserved an authenticated self, she states, "I couldn't dumb down" (Morissette "Authentic Power"), meaning she would not write what would necessarily sell, but rather that which represented Morissette's voice as well as created spaces for other women to identify.

Each trigger toward activism is individual and thus personal — sharing one's narrative with the world requires a tantamount willingness to expose the core of self — the nakedness of identity — revelation can be the most refreshing aspect of stage six in that a "full-frontal" backlash is merely fodder in further transformation and expression. Anzaldúa states:

You think you've made progress, gained a new awareness, found a new version of reality, created a

workable story, fulfilled an obligation, and followed your own conscience. But when you cast to the world what you've created and put your ideals into action, the contradictions explode in your face. Your story fails the reality test. But is the failure due to flaws in your story—based on the tenuous nature of relationship between you and the whole—or is it due to all-too-human and therefore imperfect members of the community? (Anzaldúa This Bridge 567)

As the above passage indicates, the failure is not in whether the story fails, but rather, whether society fails in its interpretation of the individual. Central to this line of reasoning is in the illustration of the acceptance/non acceptance of Morissette's lyrics. One music critic, Spence D., claims that Morissette is "the woman heralded as bringing in the new, post-modern, liberated, aggressive and angry woman movement" (Spence "Interview"); and yet by another music critic, David Wild, labels Morissette as "brilliant to naïve, with stops at most points in between" (Spence "Interview"). Ultimately, there are contradictions and critical receptions are inevitable. What remains, is a true sense of oneself in

the face of an imperfect world and an acceptance of one's amorphous and ever-changing self along the conocimiento continuum.

Transformation and Spiritual Activism:  
The Seventh Stage

In the seventh space, the path of conocimiento brings one to merging the outside and the inside, the other and the self/us, living in a space of connectionism. This space includes embracing the complexity of feeling multiple ways and empathizing with multiple views. Through this type of embracing and acceptance of the self, the release of investment in one's own view becomes possible and transformation unfolds through balance and neutral perception. This is both an internal process as described above and an interpersonal process where one enacts the lessons of the journey in social and structural spaces:

Orienting yourself to the environment and your relationship to it enables you to read and garner insight from whatever situation you find yourself in. This conocimiento gives you the flexibility to swing from your intense feelings to those of the other without being hijacked by either. (Anzaldúa This Bridge 569)



In one's activism, one "honors people's otherness," deconstructing barriers from that otherness and opening possibilities for the creation of allies and further connection. In this state, the reborn artist's writing process, for Anzaldúa, produces an anxiety similar to that experienced by an in-between identity: there is

a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen. (Anzaldúa Borderlands 94)

The anxiety is traumatic for the aware writer; the writing process engages or creates a psychological border territory, a liminal space for the passage of repressed or stored images and wishes to present themselves to the conscious mind. Inasmuch as the creative process is, in this way, a negotiation of ideology, the writer, as an artist, necessarily must negotiate her identity.

In "Writing: A Way of Life," Anzaldúa states, "writing is not really a search for identity because we haven't really lost an identity. Instead we're figuring out how to arrange, composer, all these facets of identity" (Keating Interviews 237). Constructing this certain identity from

the bottom up or from the middle out is essentially a matter of choice insofar as the limits and expectations remain borderless. Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* best encapsulates the fundamental perspectives and beliefs to which she demonstrates the growth of consciousness and in turn points others toward their own multiple individual/collective visions. Anzaldúa describes *conocimiento* in part as:

a theory of composition, of how a work of art gets composed...of how identity is constructed. When you watch yourself and observe your mind at work, you find that behind your acts and your temporary senses of self (identities) is a state of awareness that, if you allow it, keeps you from getting completely caught up in that particular identity or emotional state. (Keating Entremundos 153)

The goal then is to create the types of meanings and spaces in which to project and distribute individual narratives for the perusal of the whole, and to lessen the grip of stagnation within particular realities, co-creating new and multiple identities from platforms of awareness. In doing so, these formative stages of *conocimiento* become

passageways, re-entries, transformations for individuals to compose and articulate the broadening views of an ever-expanding universe. Toward a more collective outreach, Anzaldúa insists on a connectedness with others — where “every cell in our body has spirit in it” (Keating Entremundos 153). Thus, at every stage of *conocimiento*, the spiritual component is at hand, working to ratify our individual narratives, but only at the point to which the individual is able and ready to receive the message intended for her at that stage.

In Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento*, spirituality is the cornerstone of self-transformation, the conduit of interconnectedness that seems to suggest that our journeys become a part of the whole. Thus, in sharing our individual experiences with others, we have transformed ourselves and thereby grown in a reshaping and transformative re-birthing process in which our individual narratives become tools for connections with others along this same passage. Involving the spiritual is risky in an academic environment, yet Anzaldúa forged ahead with determination, but was met with resistance as conversations centered on the spiritual aspects of the stages of *conocimiento*. In fact, one scholar accused her of “self-

indulgence" because her theories were not mainstream enough (Keating Entremundos 48). At this juncture, the tides have changed, and the conversation of spirituality along the path of identity transformation exists within the stages of Anzaldúa's theory of consciousness and self-discovery.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORGANIC LYRICS FOR SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

Here, I would like to call attention to a major component of Anzaldúa's philosophy — the spiritual — and the seemingly overwrought neglect within the academy to examine its facets within the sphere of writing as a means to convey the inner self. Given Anzaldúa's stance and assertions regarding the "soul" or "spirit" as a position of feminist action, I would expect this key feature of her work to be thoroughly explored by feminist scholars. However, this is not the case. In fact, this spiritual aspect of her work seems to be largely effaced within the university, although instructors bring attention to many of the other areas of her work, i.e., Queer theory and Chicano studies. In her eulogy for Anzaldúa, Linda Martin Alcoff asserts that Anzaldúa "remains undertheorized in literary studies and political philosophy" (Lioi 73). During many of her interviews with AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa discusses concepts of the spiritual and expresses frustration with the secularized appropriations of her work. I suggest that perhaps the notion of the spirit within an educational institution is, in many ways,

eradicated on the premise that the spiritual is associated with the irrational or illogical, and for that reason the spirit is tacitly believed to be ahistorical, apolitical, and non-material.

Because Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* is largely one of soul/spirit, and because this project underscores the principles of *conocimiento* within Morissette's lyrical compositions, I suggest that perhaps writing from a spiritual sense of self creates a unique space for the writer to renegotiate one's self-identity and transformation which, in turn, generates a call toward action and/or activism. The term "spiritual activism" presents quite a complex negotiation of thought. The word "spiritual" represents the non-tangible world — the unseen. The word "activism" represents the need for social change. The combination of these words in "spiritual activism" joins the two worlds, creating a marriage of the two. Therefore, my understanding of Anzaldúa's notion of "spiritual activism," is a yoking together of the tangible and the intangible in such a way as to make sense of the world around and in each of us. To further clarify my point here, I believe that Anzaldúa's meaning of "spiritual activism" is defined by the level to which we become

connected to our inner selves and, in turn, the manner in which we bridge those connections with others. An awareness of the connections between these two worlds, i.e., the material and non-material, is, ultimately, the key to gaining multiple levels of perceptions, understandings, and meanings; and it is in Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* that one is better able to understand these levels and connections.

If Anzaldúa is right, then students in English Studies benefit from Anzaldúan theory far beyond the academic setting; and as such the spiritual connections to writing would, perhaps, cause a deeper level of understand to one's own writing. For Morissette, the process of writing lyrical compositions becomes the tool by which she is better able to deal with painful experiences in her life. She states:

My journal is filled with hundreds and hundreds of pages of inner dialogue work, where I'm literally talking with different parts of myself, so, if I'm attempting to do something, and I'm scared, I'll literally have a written dialogue with that terrified part of myself until it feels soothed, or at least acknowledged (Morissette "Authentic Power");

and as Anzaldúa states, "Often our stories, ideas, and art enact psychological healing, healing that's much like that performed by traditional shamans" (Keating, Entremundos 251).

According to Ana Louise Keating, *conocimiento* is a form of spiritual inquiry, one that is "reached via creative acts — writing, art making, dancing, healing, teaching, mediation, and spiritual activism" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 542). Through creative engagement, the individual embeds her experiences in a larger frame of reference, "connecting personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 542). Keating further states that in order to grasp the significance of the reality that stems from personal experience the individual must "view these struggles as spiritual undertakings" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 542). In Morissette's writings, the personal struggles, resistances, and rebellions can be seen as she shifts in and out and in-between the stages of *conocimiento*. Knowledge gained from personal experience can be subjective, dualistically constructed by personal core beliefs in addition to prevailing social notions. *Conocimiento* is multi-level; and it includes personal surroundings, intuitive responses, the self's emotional



reaction to others and their reactions to the individual, and finally that which the imagination generates: a conceptualization of the connection between all tiers of information and their data. This results in a profoundly altered personal perspective:

Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision — the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness — with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges. These *conocimientos* challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those benefitting from such constructions (Anzaldúa This Bridge 542).

Individual *conocimiento* is relayed through increasingly eclectic modes of mass media, which appeal to all senses. What I am suggesting here is that Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* is not merely contained in the four walls of the academy, but rather a very useful tool to read and interpret the ways in which we might be better able to understand each other. Audiences can experience postmodern notions through lyrical representations. Helene Shugart,

communications professor at the University of Utah, notes that, in the case of lyrical representations:

audiences are active subjects crafting their own meanings from their pastiche of images and texts...those artifacts serve to insure a limitless range of information in which audiences may steep themselves (Shugart 197).

I use this statement to underscore the connections Anzaldúa discusses in her theory of *conocimiento*. Take for example the ways in which fans/listeners of Morissette's works "steep" themselves in the messages of her lyrics. Similar experiences provide the connections between the lyrics and the pull toward those lyrics. Thus, each member of any given audience may negotiate his/her identity by reflecting Morissette's anger, fear, drama, empowerment, etc.; and in doing so, audience members begin to, as Shugart suggests, "craft their own meaning" (Shugart 197).

In many ways, I see this theory of *conocimiento* as a means of creating a clearer vision of self-awareness, as well as a deeper form of understanding ways in which to free oneself of social confinements and unnecessary mislabeling. According to scholar Geneva Murray, "feminist music opens up a space for women's voices and women's

general concerns...opens a form of fluidity that constructs a female voice and language" (Carson 93). I align myself with Murray, and posit that in this creative space of writing, Morissette creates her own space, through her lyrics, by making a liberatory move to claim her independence, and create an acceptable self-reliance. This liberation comes from a deep connection with her spirit. Morissette states:

The biggest feat is to stay connected to ourselves... I know a lot of artists that repeat what they've done and are terrified to evidence their evolution in their lyrics or content because they fear, legitimately, loss of audience or loss of money, loss of status, loss of praise, so, I had this moment, after Jagged Little Pill where I realized that I could go back in the studio and repeat what I've done, and freak out and not be very happy, or I could write a record that I loved that evidenced my evolution and write songs like "Thank You" and "I Would Be Good" and risk that there may be a profound loss, in the worldly term, in so doing, but there was really no other choice for me. I couldn't dumb down, and Lord knows I had people from the record company and even people much closer than

that to me professionally who were literally admonishing me for not writing a record that would ensure a consistent demand base perpetuation.

(Morissette "Authentic Power")

This decision to write problematic lyrics or personalized pros is not just a form of independence, but rather a conscious choice to write from a basis of connection with the self — a liberatory move despite the potential roadblocks within the industry.

However, as a prominent lyricist of the third-wave feminist generation, Morissette typifies the "new" female voice. According to Helene Shugart:

being empowered in the third-wave sense is about feeling good about oneself and having the power to make choices...vigorous assertion of one's individuality, then, is highly prized by third wavers, such that an 'in your face,' confrontational attitude also can be described as a hallmark of the third wave.

(Shugart 195)

This assertion defines the nature of Morissette's first album Jagged Little Pill (1995), which critics labeled "aggressive and angry." According to Shugart, Morissette is described as "abrasive" (Morris 98) and "that angry

chick" (Sheffield 119). In addition, however, Morissette is credited as the founder of a genre of "frankly sexual, girl-empowering songs" (Dougherty 41). Gender is highly conspicuous in Jagged Little Pill, and, indeed, the CD drew a great deal of public attention precisely on that point. Morissette's music quickly came to be seen as emblematic of the heretofore suppressed rage of women scorned, and it resonated with scores of young women. What I find keenly interesting here is that while Morissette refused to succumb to the pressures of a grand "sell-out," her album reached top-selling charts, despite admonishers in the recording industry. This speaks to the fundamental tenets of Anzaldúa's theory of awareness and spiritual connectedness in the act of writing.

The perception that Morissette's lyrics reflect an "overdose of female rage" (Havrilesky) is perpetuated by numerous critics such as Heather Havrilesky who states that Morissette's lyrics are overwrought with self-indulgence and thus manifest as overly personal. Because of this, Havrilesky argues that Morissette's lyrics are largely irrelevant and rendered insignificant for the general public. Additionally, critic Jim Farber states that Morissette "does the trite thing...she plays an angry young

woman with lame confessionals" (Farber). According to Farber, the sense of anger that manifests in Morissette's lyrics translates as "pretentious...a desperate bid for edge and attention from awkward words. They're filled with psychobabble, and they couldn't be more literal minded with actressy overstatement. It's a simulated version of frustration" (Farber). Certainly, audiences familiar with Morissette's work understand the essence and meaning within her compositions. Given that the principle motivations behind Morissette's lyrical compositions are to further engage in the self-transformative process, and to activate those same types of awareness's in others, establishes the fundamental notions of conocimiento. To put it plainly, Morissette's compositions typify many of the everyday struggles women are facing, making many of Morissette's lyrics easily accessible and, in turn, more readily able to identify with a form of feminism — empowerment. Critics, seemingly, are too quick to adhere a jacket label on that which they may not understand.

The salient message I want to convey is that some of these critics dismiss the essential meaning behind Morissette's lyrics, and at the same time these critics equally discredit women's writing altogether. They do so

by slapping a label that they themselves devise. Following the release of her first album, 1995's Jagged Little Pill, this widespread initial perception of Morissette's work quickly led to her labeling as an "angry feminist" rocker, a stereotypical description that would prove to be somewhat permanent. "Anger," according to Morissette is not a negative characteristic; in fact, she states:

I think anger, and joy, and fierce life forces can create any art, so if there is one belief that I would love to blow out of the water is that we have to be suicidal as artists to continue creating. It's just not true (Morissette "Authentic Power").

I believe this statement evocates Anzaldúa's sense of the spiritual.

Many of Morissette's very personal lyrics are connections to the spiritual. She states, "I manage to write from the center of myself, my spirit; it is the vehicle by which I connect to my *raison d'état*, my serviceness" (Morissette "Authentic Power"). Dismissing the spiritual side of Morissette's lyrics delineates her work as something other — the demarcation creates unnecessary labels not wholly represented by Morissette as a female artist and writer. When Anzaldúa states:

the 'spiritual' part of myself as a writer is also concerned with traveling to other realities, with change, with transformation of consciousness, with exploring reality, with other possibilities and experiences, and with recreating other experiences (Keating Entremundos 251),

I begin to see the connections between the writings of Morissette and Anzaldúa. That is to say, I am more aware of the stages of *conocimiento* as it relates to the writing process. I hesitate, however, to align my own reactions of Morissette's work with those of music critics.

The fundamentals of *conocimiento* directly challenge this conventional perception of Morissette as an "angry feminist" rocker. One of Morissette's compositions from Jagged Little Pill, "Hand in My Pocket," is about "not letting eventual failure steal the joy from transient successes," according to critic Nik Kershaw (Kershaw). The opening line from "Hand in My Pocket" illustrates the *nepantla* stage of *conocimiento* from which Morissette pens this particular lyrical composition. "I'm broke but I'm happy" shows a concurrent state of being both void (broke) and filled (happy) at the same time. Anzaldúa's premise is that, in the *nepantla* stage, individual's senses become



sharpened, thus becoming more keenly aware of the overlaps between states of being as well as the multiplicities of identity. She states, "You're in both places simultaneously — compelling us to find new ways to define ourselves" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 549). Morissette's constant lyrical overlap suggests how she creates aspects of her identity: "I'm free but I'm focused / I'm green but I'm wise" ("Hand In My Pocket" 25-26).

The sense of "freedom" that Morissette refers to is one devoid of borders; but in the process of becoming "focused," it allows a much higher form of being. Naïveté, or rather a sense of ones own state of being "green," is not an all encompassing factor of identity; and Morissette shows, clearly, the two sides of her ever shifting self: to be on both sides of the spectrum — foolish and yet intelligent, and both accepting of the other. In other words, existing inside as well as outside any existent borders/boundaries becomes a malleable construction of identity, or as Anzaldúa states, "identity is very much a fictive construction: you compose it from what's out there, what the culture gives you, and what you resist in the culture" (Keating Interviews 269). Morissette's lyrical overlap illustrates her own contentment within a

borderless, reshaping form of identity, as well as applauding the somewhat muddling and shifting processes of becoming.

Thus, some of Morissette's critics create a misleading "angry feminist rocker" label, as a static position from which there is no room for growth. Morissette's first appearance on the rock scene propelled her forward with accusations from such critics as Independent Music News' Glyn Brown, as being a "man-hater" and "angry-girl-guitarist;" and essentially these critics locked the doors behind Morissette without seeming hope for change. However, in the words of Anzaldúa, "this identity also has a type of projection into future identity. You reshape yourself. First you get that self-image in your head and then you project that out into the world" (Keating Interviews 269). Accordingly, Morissette illustrates the spaces between these lyrics: "I'm hard but I'm friendly baby / I'm sad but I'm laughing / I'm brave but I'm chickenshit" ("Hand In My Pocket" 27-29). It is in these lyrics that Morissette defines the levels of fluctuations and shifts within her own conocimiento. Morissette's declaration of a "sad" state of being, along with the simultaneous "laughing" mode, indicates particular levels

of awareness of the self as well as her constant shift through the stages of *conocimiento*. Thus, Morissette allows herself to feel both bravery and cowardice in this moment of lyrical expression. According to Anzaldúa, "Nepantla experiences involve not only learning how to access different kinds of knowledges — feelings, events in one's life, images in-between or alongside consensual reality, but they also involve creating your own meaning or *conocimientos*" (Keating Interviews 267). Morissette continues to create meaning through her very personal lyrics which she, in turn, gives to the world as her narrative, despite what may appear to be unfavorable critical reception.

Morissette's critics have suggested that she is nothing more than a "contrived creation of the studio" (Wild). But according to Glen Ballard, a successful songwriter and pop producer, "Morissette is for real - I just connected with her as a person" (Wild). Upon meeting Morissette, Ballard states:

She was so intelligent and ready to take a chance on doing something that might have no commercial application. Although there was some question about what she wanted to do musically, she knew what she

didn't want to do, which was anything that wasn't authentic and from her heart. (Wild)

To complete a project in an inorganic fashion for Morissette, then, would be to disconnect from her personal self. Because I believe we all experience *conocimiento* at different levels, I would like to suggest, here, that Morissette's unwillingness to "sell-out" stems from existing within the 4<sup>th</sup> stage — *el compromiso*. For instance Morissette's first two album attempts proved to be unsuccessful because, as Morissette puts it,

There was an element of me not being who I really was at the time — It was because I wasn't prepared to open up that way. The focus for me then was entertaining people as opposed to sharing any revelations I had at the time. I had them, but I wasn't prepared to share. (Wild)

Hence, I have adopted the belief that the stages of *conocimiento* completely impact the ways in which our narratives get represented. Awareness of one's unique identity is a cyclical process of discovery; and as Morissette states, "And what it all boils down to / Is that no one's really got it figured out just yet" ("Hand In My Pocket" 7-8).

This is the in-between state — nepantla — the stage in which the benefits of development and discovery are heightened, unfolding, emerging, and transforming. It is the stage where, as Morissette puts it, “no one’s really got it figured out just yet;” and, as Anzaldúa suggests, this stage of conocimiento is “the point of contact where the ‘mundane’ and the ‘numinous’ converge, where you’re in full awareness of the present moment” (Anzaldúa This Bridge 549). Morissette clearly displays this awareness, “I’ve got one hand in my pocket / And the other one is playing the piano” (“Hand In My Pocket” 33-34).

The in-between point of these lyrics suggests Morissette’s level of awareness. As one hand remains close to the self, Morissette’s other hand produces activism with a conscious decision to relay her personal narrative as a means of self-extension and expression, thus creating a relatable story for others to heed and, in turn, create spaces and meaningful identities for themselves. Morissette’s audience and fans are able to connect with her in a way that — when viewed without fashionable cynicism — appears to be quite moving. “And what it all comes down to my friends / Is that everything’s just fine fine fine” (“Hand In My Pocket” 35-36). The perspective from an “in-

betweener," such as Morissette at the point of this lyrical composition, suggests that in the turmoil of life she equally maintains a level of fulfillment; resistance to negativity propels the nepantlera to cycle through the seven stages of conocimiento with certain reflection, hence Morissette's ability to boast that "everything's gonna be fine, fine, fine" as though it were a mantra of sorts until the individual enters the next stage of conocimiento.

Jagged Little Pill is based on Morissette's numerous relationships; and despite her youth at the time of its recording, she created a monolith from which future female feminist rockers carved their niche in the music industry. To put it plainly, Morissette made it possible, and perhaps even a little bit easier, for others to compose and create personal narratives of their own, such as Amy Lee, lead singer of Evanescence, who credits Morissette as being "the first lady of rage." Katherine Woodward Thomas, co-creator of "Feminine Power: Women on the Edge of Evolution Teleseries," states that Morissette "didn't have a lot of modeling for [her] craft either; [she was] kind of creating it" (Morissette "Authentic Power"). That is to say, she emerged as a woman with compelling lyrics to create change. And as Morissette states, "A lot of times when you're

immersed in something painful, you don't realize there's any lesson. A lot of what I wrote about was difficult from which I walked away a better person" (Wild). Thus, for Morissette, it is experience that is the conduit towards growth.

From the 1995 album Jagged Little Pill, the lyrics of "You Learn" illustrate that every experience has the potential to be a learning opportunity. In "You Learn," Morissette accepts both the negative and positive factors of her experiences in an effort to gain a more valued understanding of the ways in which learning occurs. Central to that point is the various ways in which all experiences contribute to higher levels of awareness, as well as impact the stages of consciousness. The lyrics of "You Learn" underscore the value of what Anzaldúa calls "doble saber," which holds the position that "perceiving something from two different angles creates a split in awareness. This split engenders the ability to control perception" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 549). Boldly, the lyrics of "You Learn" fissure the psyche: "I recommend getting your heart trampled on to anyone / I recommend walking around naked in your living room" ("You Learn" 1-2). Interestingly, Morissette's lyrics reflect the poem, In

Memoriam, written in 1851 by Alfred Lord Tennyson: "I hold it true, whate'er befall; / I feel it, when I sorrow most; / 'Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all" (27.4.13-16). Tennyson's poem illustrates the empowering aspects of sorrowfulness, as does Morissette's lyrics of, "You Learn," with recommendations to have "your heart trampled on" than "never to have loved at all." Morissette's mirrored reflection of Tennyson's poem exemplifies the realities of taking hold of one's destiny by changing the perceptions of any given experience. It is this conscious desire to subject oneself to anything that is negative or undesirable which changes its interpretation. In other words, the acceptance and willingness to walk "around naked in your living room," suggests the ability to be completely free of the outer world. The shift between these two worlds must be more than intellectual. According to Anzaldúa, "the bodymind/soul is the hermetic vessel where transformation takes place" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 554). I understand Anzaldúa's enmeshment of "body," "mind," and "soul" to be a connective means of self-awareness and acceptance. Perhaps, Morissette's lyrics of going "naked" may be symbolic — as if to suggest the acceptance of one's own



physical body: "Swallow it down (what a jagged little pill)  
/ It feels so good (swimming in your stomach) /Wait until  
the dust settles" ("You Learn" 3-5).

Digesting the goodness of both worlds allows the transformation of new ideas to emerge with empowering perspectives and promotes the ability to transition between the stages of *conocimiento*. According to Anzaldúa,

it is in the cracks between worlds and realities where changes in consciousness can occur. In this shifting place of transitions, we morph, adapt to new cultural realities. As time goes by, things start to solidify again, and we erect new walls. They stay in place until the next generation kicks holes in them. When the dust settles, who knows what the new structures will look like? (Keating Interviews 280).

The paradox is, as Anzaldúa puts it, "the knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 553). The chaos of life in Morissette's lyrics of "You Learn" is the educational process: "You live you learn / You love you learn / You cry you learn / You lose you learn / You bleed you learn / You scream you learn" (6-11). I suggest, here, that it is in these multiple perspectives that Morissette engages in a heightened awareness in which

her conscious self-awareness surfaces in the coatlicue state. The detour of this stage is what Anzaldúa calls "el oscuro" (the darkness). She states, "when you woe el oscuro, digging into it, sooner or later you pay the consequences — the pain of personal growth" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 553). Thus, Morissette's recommendation to live and learn from all states of being, such as pain, anger, despair, depression, etc., is the catalyst toward transformation. Knowledge and awareness of these realities help to, as Anzaldúa states, "move [you] to the other side, where you can use your energy to heal" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 553). Shifts between the stages of conocimiento occur simultaneously and are so sudden that, according to Anzaldúa, "your perceptions shift, your emotions shift—you gain a new understanding of your feelings, but transforming habitual feelings is the hardest thing you've ever attempted" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 552). For Morissette:

There is a small percentage of people that are open to the cosmic and consciousness and astral and a lot of concepts that may scare those who are not entertaining it yet — that which scares people may often be the impetus for them to attack on behalf of that fear, so it's a valid concern for those of us who want to

express it in whatever ways we do, subtle or otherwise — it's terrifying because that could be the end of us — in theory. So in the face of that, rather than contracting, I expand (Morissette "Authentic Power"). Seemingly, Morissette values the validity and usefulness of entertaining difficult philosophies and principles, despite the harsh realities of fearfulness, because the lasting effects promote personal growth and fulfillment.

In an interview with Katherine Woodward Thomas, Morissette states:

I think it's very important for me to begin with the songs or the two minutes of me allowing myself to really experience my victimhood, to really feel all the way through the oppression and the pain of having been subject to the very violent, rude, and life denying patriarchy, whether as an artist, as a business woman, as a human being, as a sister, as a daughter, as a niece, there's all these multiples, so I need to give myself that step one of allowing myself to grieve and feel victimized, because if I don't and I try to skip over it, and jump right into it, equally, I know a lot of tendencies in my own self to want to stay in that victim place. Staying in the

victim place can be very juicy and righteous, but it disallows the unfoldment of what may be a very enjoyable destiny (Morissette "Authentic Power"). Embracing the coatlicue stage, she then begins balancing along the outer edges of stage four "El Comprimiso." Morissette begins to "accept the self uncovered by the trauma" (Anzaldúa, This Bridge 552) and prompts herself to shift into a new perception of the world around her. While in stage four of conocimiento, she accepts change and rebirth. In this discovery phase, she must confront her "demons" by loosening the grip on the known in order to seek la lucha (the light) by stretching "beyond self- and culturally-imposed limits" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 556), causing any residual anger to manifest in productive transformation.

Jagged Little Pill also contains another smash Billboard hit, "Ironic," which follows a more empático, yet edgy "anger-ish" tone. Morissette claims to be a fan of anger; she states, "I think [anger] is such a stunning life force, and it has enough power to move worlds" (Morissette "Ironic MP3"). When writing "Ironic," Morissette states that she and Glen Ballard were not being too "precious" about its meaning; however, it was during a devastating

moment in her life that she captured the moment within the lyrics. The message of the song reveals not irony necessarily, but ways in which vulnerability seems less of an option than does anger: "An old man turned ninety-eight / He won the lottery and died the next day" (1-2).

Of course, these lyrics lack the very meaning of irony, but if Morissette "purposely wrote a song called 'Ironic' that contained no irony at all, is that ironic?" (Harris). Journalist and music critic for Spin Magazine, Sean Landers, argues that,

the only thing ironic about the '90's is that crappy Alanis Morissette song that spawned the most superfluous use of the word in the history of our language. If there is any justice, we would revoke Alanis's green card and send her and her pathetic, whiny, jilted schoolgirl lyrics back to the barren frozen wasteland from which she crawled. (Landers)

I suggest that what these critics may have missed, within these lyrics, is Morissette's fundamental belief that true and purposeful living happens in the moments of life at each stage of living, not in the saving of them over time. The transformation happens in that defining moment that allows you to identify "yourself in terms of who you are

becoming" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 556) and shakes the foundation at your core so that "el compromiso" activates the learning processes. "Ironic" is not a lyrical composition of irony, but rather, a position in which Morissette asserts the fundamental belief of existing in the moment: "Mr. Play It Safe was afraid to fly / He packed his suitcase and kissed his kids goodbye / He waited his whole damn life to take that flight / And as the plane crashed down he thought / Well, isn't this nice" (11-15). I believe the lyrics of "Ironic" to be a message to its listeners to become active participants in their own lives. "Mr. Play It Safe" is a man frozen in fear and waits his "whole damn life to take that flight," when at last he decides to fly and the "plane crashed down," his fear is what kills him. The lack of living is, in fact, the disconnect from the spiritual that ultimately undoes him.

Interestingly, Morissette's "anger," from the infamous lyrics of "You Oughta Know," is seemingly subdued in "Ironic" as well:

Well life has a funny way of sneaking up on you / When  
you think everything's okay / And everything's going  
right / And life has a funny way of helping you out

when / You think everything's gone wrong / And  
everything blows up in your face. (22-27)

The challenge of perspective is at stake within these lines; Morissette reveals that the circumstances and obstacles in life can either create change or cause stagnation. Anzaldúa notes that the directions in which we choose to move in activism are dependent upon our ability to understand and utilize the need for building bridges—it is the challenges that call us to action or cause us to withdraw (Anzaldúa This Bridge 556-557). Morissette insists on activating the personal and exposing her narrative along her journey with the world. In fact, she does not resist any aspect from victimhood to empowerment in her effort to create connections with her audience, consequently the message of her lyrics become the collective story for those whose lives parallel her shared experience.

I question why initial critical receptions of Morissette's work on her debut album Jagged Little Pill created such a stir among music critics of the time, labeling her the "angry chick," despite its success in record selling charts. Perhaps the raw intensity of

Morissette's lyrics created the need for such a stir.

According to Debra Baker Beck:

There are no shades of gray in this black-and-white world. For feminists, being cast as outsiders, troublemakers, even evil women, is inevitable since they challenge the very basis of a patriarchal society. (Beck 140)

In response to Beck's assertion, I believe Morissette's lyrics challenge the status quo because her lyrical compositions contain uneasy and difficult situations that perhaps are difficult to deal with for some individuals. Nonetheless, Morissette's labeling from the media seems unavoidable and certainly attests to Morissette's lyric "life has a funny way of helping you out." The question becomes, then, a matter of whether the media's labeling of "angry rock maiden" acts as an inadvertent aid for Morissette in promulgating her narrative.

Though the labyrinth-like elements of *conocimiento* do not follow any particular order, it seems natural, then, that Morissette's shifting perspectives conflate the stages throughout most of Jagged Little Pill. Invariably, Morissette's ever shifting consciousness reveals her desire to become whole and, thus, translucent in the nature of her



lyrics, revealing more and more strengths and weaknesses within the constructs of her identity, in spite of any negative critical receptions she may incur. Aside from the fact that Morissette's lyrical compositions detail accounts of her life as though each personal moment were lifted directly from her private journal, she makes clear that the transparency and exposure of self is necessary for her purposes. Therefore, one cannot discuss Morissette's lyrics without equally delving into the inherent nature of the composer herself. Her biography becomes relevant, not only because she dominated Billboard charts with smash hits and pop-snapping tunes, but also because it can help illuminate the essence and meanings in which her lyrics represent an overall identity that is shaped and reshaped over time.

According to Moraga, identity is a relational construction that helps individuals make sense of the world; and, as such, it has an important epistemic component (Moya 13). Still, individuals are largely influenced by society, politics, and even environment; nonetheless, identity is a construction made up of self-knowledge which is subject to alteration, modification, and transformation. Consequently, each stage of *conocimiento*

provides these particular pathways to formulate such efforts in the act of self-discovery. In the process of transformation, many women privilege one identity construction over another to maintain certain levels of acceptance; however, with conscious-raising women, such as Morissette, the strategic purpose of multiple identities has a superior epistemic value. In other words, the knowledge of existing in many stages becomes a tool that helps her to better understand and tackle troublesome or life-altering events in her life.

Morissette states, "My main impetus and my main sort of drive was to continue to chronicle what was happening in my life at every juncture of writing a record" (Morissette "Authentic Power"). Anzaldúa instructs her readers/followers/students to "put your shit on paper" (Anzaldúa "Speaking" 173) because it is the life force of an organic self. She states:

Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared. (Anzaldúa "Speaking" 171)

For music critic, David Browne Morissette is "spiteful and seething;" and in her songs, "men take her for granted and mentally abuse her." Thus she has no other alternative but to "retaliate by threatening to leave one of her exes' names off her album credits;" he goes on to say that "Morissette needs to make new friends" (Browne). I disagree with Browne and believe that Morissette is a powerful woman whose lyrical compositions perhaps make some people afraid of such truth-telling stories.

Morissette's lyrics uncover her life story along the stages of *conocimiento*, and the interesting point here is that I, (as an English Studies student in this space of time) am able to apply academic theory (*conocimiento*) to a mainstream singer/songwriter in an effort to understand and make meaning out of components and aspects of Anzaldúan scholarship. It is all too often that what is taught in the classroom remains within the confines of those four walls, never taking shape in the outside world, with no hope of connection and real application. Keating states, "these connections influence one's way of thinking; how that thinking changes over time, and how one interacts with the world" (153). Consequently, Morissette's lyrics are

examples of the ways in which students can better evaluate and determine the important facets of Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FREE TO WRITE: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As I have discussed in chapter one and throughout chapter two, Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* can be a tool utilized in self-discovery and toward an understanding of life's journey. However, it is not simply enough to look at Anzaldúa's theory in isolation without studying their influence on, or close connection to, popular culture. I have attempted to illustrate how Morissette, an artist who is part of our current popular culture, is a clear example of how Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* is expressed, and the ways in which these illustrations may provide alternate methods in achieving a greater understanding for students of English Studies. In this chapter, I want to concentrate on two key strands and significantly important elements in Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* with regard to critical thinking and the benefits of organic writing for students in English Studies in an effort to make full use of this theory for academics and students alike. And by organic writing, I mean, writing that is achieved from a sense of self or, in other words, writing which has no apparent structure or destiny,

but rather, prose filled with the authentic self. I like to call organic writing, soul-writing. I believe that there is much to be learned and explored about the usefulness of organic writing. It is an important element and useful tool for English Studies students to better understand theoretical material with a deeper level of connection and utilization beyond the confines of an academic setting.

In addition, this chapter will focus on Morissette's lyrics from the albums, Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie (1998), Under Rug Swept (2002), So Called Chaos (2004), and Flavors of Entanglement (2009) in an effort to illustrate the various ways in which to apply academic theory to popular culture. Furthermore, by addressing the various stages of *conocimiento* as found in current popular culture, i.e., Morissette's lyrics, we, as academics, might then be better able to connect to younger generations of students, because the theory in and of itself provides a certain freedom from more conventional teaching.

Notions of *conocimiento* allow individuals to be more wholly a) accepted and b) free. That being said, I posit that these two significant characteristics, allow for a state of transeance and fluidity leading to organic forms

of writing, close reading, as well as analyzation. I find the two most pronounced and underlying features of Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* to be the above-mentioned characteristics: a) acceptance and, b) freedom, by which I mean a transformation that allows for ambiguity. In my research of Morissette's lyrics, I have discovered Morissette's journey along the stages of *conocimiento* and have learned that these fundamental states of existence represent pathways toward enlightenment, or a sense of knowing and self-fulfillment. In addition, theoretical application of a prominent scholar's work (Anzaldúa's *conocimiento*) applied to Morissette's modern day lyrics demonstrates a more current modern day application, and it creates an accessibility for students to more readily engaged in deeper levels of understanding of Anzaldúa's work as it relates to aspects of their own lives.

For Morissette, her work exemplifies these very fundamental strands of *conocimiento* - acceptance and freedom, and I have attempted to illustrate the ways in which to make connections to this theory by close readings of Morissette's work. Thus, I posit that Anzaldúa's notions of *conocimiento*, and a full understanding of its elements, may indeed, lead writers to develop new forms of

writing as well as provide means of analyzation and interpretation of various narratives. I make this claim only after closely analyzing Morissette's work with a full backdrop of *conocimiento*. Ultimately, I have come to the realization that my first readings of Anzaldúa's theory paled in comparison to when I applied those same ideas to Morissette's lyrics. With each stage of *conocimiento* running through the lines of many of Morissette's lyrics, my understanding of the theory deepened, and my awareness solidified its meaning. *Conocimiento*, then, I have discovered, is also a process for becoming an organic writer and accepting the ambiguity of those various states of being. This means that making these types of connections may reveal ways in which to make further correlations to academic theories using popular culture. Thus, we can see how Morissette illustrates these stages in her compositions and, in turn, academics may make full use of popular culture in practical applications that allows students to make meaning of academic language in an altogether different genre. Therefore, a practical application in addressing Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* may involve examining Morissette's lyrics, as I have endeavored to do within this thesis.



One of the many connections I have discovered between Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* and Morissette's lyrics lie in understanding the multiplicities of Morissette. For example, at the release of Morissette's fifth studio album in 2002, Under Rug Swept, she notes that during this time, [her] aspirations changed from wanting to be perfect to being whole. That means accepting that I'm strong but weak and stupid and smart — I'm all different parts. If I pride myself in being generous all the time, there's a part of me that's greedy, too. If I can love both those parts, I can be comfortable in my own skin. (Stas)

It is my interpretation of this statement to mean that Morissette's willingness to accept her own faults and shortcomings creates a space of freedom from which to develop introspective and negotiating lyrics. Note Morissette's comfort in her lyrics from "Surrendering" in the album, Under Rug Swept: "And so you fell and you're intact / So you dove in and you're still breathing / So you jumped and you're still flying if not shocked" (17-19). In this discovery stage of self, Morissette continues to develop through the stages of *conocimiento* more fully. In this frame, Morissette's writing, then, is free and

unaltered; it is the ultimate form of organic writing because she is in connection with her spirit and consciousness, and she is borderless and unobstructed. Thus, lyrics such as those offered by Morissette provide pathways for others to negotiate and define themselves by, which allows more spaces of acceptances and freedoms from which to write. In other words, writing does not have to take on inhibitions — there is no “right” or “wrong” — there is only discovery. In writing this thesis, I have developed a hopeful outlook in terms of application of relevant theoretical approaches and ways in which to apply these theories as a future academic. In fact, I have discovered that Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento* is applicable across boundaries and other disciplines such as psychology, communication, social sciences, etc., which is, in my estimation, exactly Anzaldúa’s overall intent — to go beyond the borders.

Equally, Morissette’s desire to become a voice of service to others is what drives her so freely to compose with such intent in an effort to get her message out into the world. She states:

If you’re intention is to serve someone, there’s a tuning in to where they’re at on their path and

supporting them on their particular next place, which is a profound service. Evolution comes at ones own pace. (Morissette "Authentic Power")

Accordingly, Morissette's more hopeful disposition is present in many of the songs she wrote for her succeeding 2004 album So-Called Chaos. The album revealed her to be in a more contented and relaxed state than in prior albums, and her songs were markedly more exultant than her more volatile previous works such as "You Oughta Know" and "Uninvited." Two of Morissette's compositions in particular from this album — among others — "Out is Through" and "Not all Me" — directly address multiple aspects of Anzaldúa's conocimiento, and they illustrate Morissette's continued cyclical rotation through its stages.

As Morissette's biographer, Paul Cantin, states, the lyrics of "Not All Me" are "involving" and convey "some sadness" (Cantin 225). The song is about an individual who is frustrated with her forced role as a scapegoat — a role that originates from personal circumstances, and then gradually extends to become her position within mainstream society. The opening line represents the individual's personal acknowledgement of her own lack of identity, a

result of oppression: "I wear their face on top of my face / I am the perfect target screen for your blindly fueled rage" (1-2). The face that an individual "wears" is not her own, but that of others who she has become subservient to. According to Anzaldúa, this forced compliance — which entails forced assimilation — includes obeying without question, keeping silent, and essentially stifling one's very being (Borderlands 39). Once the individual is subject to domination, as Anzaldúa further describes, she becomes a victim; in Morissette's lyrical summation, the individual is now a "target" for blind rage and the wrath of her oppressor; she becomes an object and not a possessor of her own emotions. Morissette's next line then illustrates the result of desconocimiento, the opposite of conocimiento: "I bear the brunt of your long buried pain / I don't mind helping you out / But I want you to remember my name" (4-6). The "long buried pain" that emanates from the oppressor, and then in turn manifests as suffering in the oppressed, ultimately leads to el arrebató — the unsettling first stage of conocimiento that is marked by disarray and turmoil. The shock of the moment initially disables the individual in Morissette's depiction, disabling her of her reflexive ability to react in a

productive sense. Instead, she readily avoids confronting any further potential turmoil by bearing the "brunt" of her dominators' displaced fury. As Anzaldúa posits, this dismissive behavior is ultimately self-destructive: if the individual refuses to address the problematic situation — "if you don't work through your fear" — the result may be deadly, as "playing it safe could bury you" (This Bridge 544). In Morissette's particular composition, it is the individual's final realization that she has unjustly become a means for which others focus and release fury that enables her to finally emerge from the fissures of *el arrebato*, the earthquake, and finally progress. This, as Anzaldúa states, is the precise point where "an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you've built around yourself" (This Bridge 544).

Accordingly, in the case of Morissette's depiction, *el arrebato* — no longer ignored — now effectively forces the individual to deal with a sudden or recurring issue, event, or circumstance that causes considerable anguish in her life. This, then, leads to her subsequent realization, which parallels her progress through the next stage of

conocimiento: "It's not all me / It's not all my fault / I may remind you / But I won't take it all on" (7-10).

The individual now clearly comprehends the extent of her oppression and boldly asserts that all the rage she has been so continuously subjected to is unwarranted; it is "not all my fault." This realization relates to the second stage of conocimiento: *nepantla*. Now that the individual is actively rejecting her forced role as a vehicle that is abusively used by her dominators, she is able to consciously reflect on her own state of mind and being; she not only becomes aware of the unmerited harm that she has been constantly subjected to, but she also resolves to emerge from the final trauma of *el arrebató*. This is the space of acceptance and freedom. The sudden shift from the repression of *desconocimiento*, as Anzaldúa observes, is marked by this state of *nepantla*: it is the first step in the individual's process of rebuilding her own identity. In Morissette's example, it is only after the person declares the degeneracy of her previous *desconocimiento* — facing her oppressors by protesting against their actions; that she is then able to realize that she is not to blame for all that is corrupt, not only with her own situation, but also with regard to the ills of the external world,

which ultimately affect her well-being as well. According to Anzaldúa, this sort of reflectivity within the state of nepantla is one of the most significant and powerful aspects of conocimiento because it is the point when the individual decides to effectively examine her own state of being which, in turn, leads to decisive action. Thus, as Morisette illustrates in "Not All Me," it is this newly conscious self — within this space of nepantla, unhesitatingly declaring to her oppressors, in addition to the world that, "It's not all my fault." This declaration grants the real potential for self-transformation and allows Morisette to break free of the negative, limiting victimization that had once restrained her. Thus, acceptance and freedom become the underlying tenets of conocimiento.

The embodiment of conocimiento in "Not All Me" also extends to the level of coatlicue. As Anzaldúa notes, during this stage, the individual's transformation continues: "At first I feel exposed and opened to the depth of my dissatisfaction. Then I feel myself closing, hiding, holding myself together rather than allowing myself to fall apart" (Borderlands 70). The lyrics from "Not All Me" denote this catalytic aspect of coatlicue, during which the

individual becomes increasingly emboldened: "I'm here to help mend and reseed / All I trigger unknowingly / A job I hold in high esteem" (22-24). This underscores Anzaldúa's explanation of coatlicue as a point when the individual steps into self-preservation mode in order to "mend and reseed." It is also at this moment, according to Anzaldúa, that immediately precedes the next instance within the coatlicue state: when the individual decides she must "face her fear and go forward" (Keating Entremundos 222). Morissette's acceptance of these fears enables her to compose in organic form, she states,

Writing is very stream of consciousness — I just write whatever is percolating at the time. It is a very uncensored, uncontrolled process and I love it being that way. So, whatever I'm dwelling in at any given time will show up in the song, so it's not something I think about. If I think about it, it isn't real — it isn't free." (Morissette "Authentic Power")

Morissette's "stream of consciousness" style of writing indicates those underlying aspects of acceptance and freedom within the frame of *conocimiento*. I believe stream of consciousness writing is an essential principle in



understanding Anzaldúa's overall theory; without this relevant knowledge, the processes of writing become static and the overarching dilemma is subsequent fear of not being "real."

"Out Is Through," another composition from Morissette's album So-Called Chaos, additionally typifies several different aspects of Anzaldúa's *conocimiento*. Morissette's deep and meaningful lyrics of "Out Is Through" carry a powerful message of how to triumph after a fall. This corresponds to the fourth stage of *conocimiento*, *el compromiso*: the "crossing and the conversion" (Keating Entremundos 24). In the opening verses, the individual is clearly coming to a life-altering realization of her own: "Every time you raise your voice, I see the greener grass / Every time you run for cover, I see this pasture / Every time we're in a funk, I picture a different choice" (1-3). The individual is in the presence of enlightenment and a realization that the choice for "greener grass" is a matter of perspective. In these lyrics, Morissette is addressing the fundamental need to journey into the unknown and through one's own fears and ultimately to acceptance and freedom: "The only way out is through / The faster we're in the better / The only way out is through ultimately" (11-

13). By going through the process of any given situation, the individual gains a better and more knowledgeable understanding of her space and is then better equipped to negotiate her position. Anzaldúa's statement "we can't transcend the dangers, can't rise above them. We must go through them and hope we won't have to repeat the performance" (Anzaldúa "Speaking in Tongues" 165) ties closely to Morissette's composition of "Out is Through." In many ways Morissette's composition illustrates Anzaldúa's statement in lyrical format.

Morissette released Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie in 1998, six years before So Called Chaos; lyrics from the single track "Thank You" suggest Morissette's continued "crossing and conversion" processes. Morissette attributes the lyrical composition of "Thank You" to a journey to India that "evidenced [her] evolution" (Morissette "Authentic Power"). In these lyrics Morissette is appreciative of both the negative and positive forces entering her path: "Thank you providence / Thank you disillusionment / Thank you nothingness / Thank you clarity / Thank you thank you silence" (30-34).

Based on the notion that "out is through," it becomes clear, then, that Morissette's exists within the stages of

conocimiento that allow for both acceptance and freedom:

"The moment I let go of it was the moment / I got more than I could handle" (21-22).

The moment Morissette "let go" is the moment of el arrebató — effectively, Morissette makes the choice to surrender, which in turn creates "the earthquake" or el arrebató.

This stage of conocimiento signifies a turning point: "The moment I jumped off of it / Was the moment I touched down" (23-24). Interestingly, it is in process of letting go that creates the necessary footing for stabilization. I would like to suggest that the same principle can be utilized to affect change in terms of the nature of academic writing for the following reasons: 1) the process approach of writing can often be more effective for students who struggle with academic language; 2) educators who emphasize process rather than product encourage students to engage in more than the conventional ways of writing; and 3) the process approach of writing signals an open space from which to write from one's soul, which in turn, aids in the development of writing over time.

Anzaldúa's statement is quite logical, "the act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy" ("Speaking in Tongues" 169). Morissette's lyrics offer "alchemy," not only to the

writer, but also to those who listen to and/or read her lyrics.

Furthermore, the combination of Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* with Morissette's lyrics is another form of "making soul" as the theory begins to take shape along the lines of popular culture. In 2009 Morissette completed her seventh album and, most recent to date, Flavors of Entanglement; Morissette's vision in releasing her most current work was to "raise the level of human consciousness on the earth" ("Elevate Film Festival"). According to Anzaldúa, activism is "a holistic worldview that synthesizes social activism with spiritual vision, creating a unique form of spiritual activism" (Keating Entremundos 242). For Morissette, this "unique form" is found within the lyrics of Flavors of Entanglement; many of these lyrics represent a melding and a coming to terms with the self; in many ways this album demonstrates the fragility and yet abounding strength of an individual during moments of crisis. Flavors of Entanglement, written by Morissette during a personal relationship struggle, illustrates Morissette's continued need to compose; it is the avenue by which Morissette finds release. She states:

When something was scary, I moved toward it, and that has served me as an artist, and someone who is willing to be in the public eye. It really lays the foundation for what my particular role will be in this consciousness/evolution. My particular role is one of being terrified, having my heart palpitating, but I'll always show up and I'll always say yes. (Morissette "Authentic Power")

Moving toward that which is terrifying is not the popular mode of operandi for most students experiencing shortcomings in the act of writing. Therefore, I believe it is imperative to allow students to build their writing skills by allowing the student to write in more organic forms of writing. In this way, writing becomes a "unique form" and ultimately produces better writers. The stages of *conocimiento* are processes and steps, just as ones unique style of writing.

I am continually fascinated by the ways in which Morissette's perspectives align so closely with Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento*. The final track of Morissette's Flavors of Entanglement album, "Incomplete," provides certain clarity of the fifth stage of *conocimiento* - Coyolxauhqui: "I have been running so sweaty my whole life

/ Urgent for a finish line / And I have been missing the rapture this whole time / Of being forever incomplete" (10-13). In the Coyolxauhqui stage, the individual "arrange[s] experiences into a pattern and story that speak to reality" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 560). Morissette's reality then is the acknowledgment of "being forever incomplete," in the realization that the need to run "sweaty" is unnecessary; for it is within the inner knowledge of not being "urgent for a finish line" that creates the "rapture" or delight. In other words, Morissette, in a position of sorrow, accepts the fragility of the moment, i.e., accepts her own shortcomings, and experiences the resulting freedom. As Anzaldúa states, "[By] putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story" (This Bridge 545). It is clear in this most recent album that Morissette's lyrics describe a woman who is "putting the pieces together" and "reenvisioning" a new narrative as she engages in "a new description of reality."

One of the most compelling songs from the album Flavors of Entanglement that illustrates more clearly the ways in which one experiences the stages of *conocimiento* is found in the song, "Limbo No More." In the opening lines,

Morissette speaks of a nebulous and what appears to be an opaque sense of self: "My house, my role / My friends, my man / My devotion to God / All amorphous, indefinite" (1-4). This is indicative of the fourth stage of *conocimiento* — *el compromiso* — in this stage, "nothing is fixed" (Anzaldúa This Bridge 556). As the lyrics continue, Morissette defines her indeterminate state more clearly by indicating: "Nothing's been clear / Nothing's been in / Nothing's felt true / And I've never had both feet in" (5-8). Without a doubt the lyrics represent an individual in a state of limbo or liminal point which further indicates the presence of the second stage of *conocimiento* — *el arrebatado*. The point I want to make here is a striking shift in perspective as the succeeding lines produce an altogether connected self and again a shift in stages: "Sense of myself / My purpose is clear / My roots in the ground / Something at last I can feel a part of" (36-39). Notably, Morissette's lyrics, in just this one composition, illustrate the various stages of *conocimiento*. Here, Morissette's "purpose is clear" it is a critical turning point, and what Anzaldúa calls the seventh stage, "Transformational and Spiritual Activism" (This Bridge 545). In this seventh space, there is a renegotiation

taking place, and Morissette's transformation is clarity of self that provides her stability and/or "roots in the ground." These final lines in "Limbo No More" exemplify Morissette's significant metamorphosis through the stages of *conocimiento*: "Something aligned / To finally commit / Somewhere I belong / 'Cause I'm ready to be limbo no more" (40-43). I am excited about the possibility of the ways in which these lyrics immediately address the importance of Anzaldúa's theory and, more importantly, of the ways in which students in English Studies may be better able to apply academic theory to mainstream musical compositions as well as other genres. Practical applications includes a twofold process: 1) develop a course on Anzaldúan theory that focuses on the seven stages of *conocimiento*, and 2) provide current popular cultural lyrics, such as Morissette's, to engage students in the application of academic theory in meaningful ways. From experience in a graduate studies seminar class on Anzaldúa, I learned quite quickly that Anzaldúa's theories require more than a collegiate quarter to comprehend. Therefore, I believe, English Studies students would benefit from a course designed on Anzaldúan theory, not only because the theory



is self-transformative, but because this particular theory provides a better understanding of the writing process.

As I have addressed in chapter two of this thesis, Anzaldúa's spiritual activism is one of the key elements in her theory of *conocimiento*. Equally, Morissette's spiritual connections help her to achieve her greatest accomplishments; she states:

The biggest feat is to stay connected to ourselves. No matter what I've been going through the degree to which I can remain connected with my own self and listen to my voice is the greatest spiritual connectedness...so the biggest challenge for me has been, how can I create an environment for myself that will allow me to hear the voice, whether it's God's voice or intuition or messages. (Morissette "Authentic Power")

In locating her voice, Morissette's activism is established in the release of her work; she is heard and others are engaged. Thus, the messages of her work whether it is creating an awareness for others in listening to the inner voice, standing up for oneself, acceptance and freedom, or simply acknowledging being on the planet, indicates Morissette's activism in the public sphere.

According to Morissette's current collaborator, British electronica producer, Guy Sigsworth,

There isn't another artist — male or female — who can take you on the kind of emotional journey that Alanis can...she can be raging and hostile, distraught and desolately heartbroken, glowingly nostalgic, sensual, breezy and self deprecating — all in one album. (Moses)

What this means to me is that Morissette is in tune with her spiritual journey — her interconnectedness with the planet.

Interestingly, Anzaldúa states, "I'm a citizen of the universe" (Keating Interviews 118), and Morissette states, "I am a citizen of the planet" (Flavors of Entanglement). Both women note their citizenship within the world - they each have a story - a significant narrative that compels them to make their voices heard. These powerful voices may be read or listened to via the multiple genres - academic, poetic, and lyrical. The central focus, here, is to shed light on the enabling factor contributing to the call for activism. Anzaldúa's spiritual activism facilitated the need to understand and make meaning out of the seemingly hollow events of her life, particularly those stages of her

life in which she felt the most desolate, and which created most of her pain. This endeavor to establish a unique awareness and to make meaning of the events surrounding her life presented difficulty and was met with tremendous struggle. Thoughts of despair tempted Anzaldúa to give up in defeat; however, Anzaldúa drew on her inner voice — a holistic worldview — insisting on freedom from outer influences; ultimately, her ability to learn from even the most negative life events generated the call to action and the genesis of the theory of *conocimiento*. From the act of writing, Anzaldúa composed what is now studied and explored in many universities around the world. Those painful and difficult times in her life led her to a discovery of the meaning of acceptance and freedom as well as a breakthrough in academic theory.

In much the same way, singer/songwriter Alanis Morissette's lyrical compositions provide an outlet for her to examine some of life's most challenging moments. The very organic style of her writing comes from listening to her inner voice. It is through those difficult moments where Morissette's work becomes more of a collective voice — the voice that reaches out long after the song is heard; this is Morissette's activism. Morissette's struggles and

many of the obstacles she endured as an entertainer produced some of her most significant work. Hardships, then, should be welcomed and befriended, and penned or journaled; in doing so, the act of writing creates an awareness of the circumstances at hand and provides ways in which to deal with or come to an understanding of the current state/stage one finds herself. Again, I mention this here to note that in the course of *conocimiento* and throughout the stages of this theory there are certain disruptive and difficult stages that lead toward clarity and focus. With this realization of differing stages, it is important as academics to make note of meeting students where they are along the continuum of writers.

Some students struggle with critical thinking skills and are often ill prepared to meet the challenges in an academic setting; therefore, one of my goals in this thesis is to make clear alternate ways in which to explore various methods and strategies in the utilization of academic theory, as well as to illustrate the ways in which this type of analyzation is achieved. Because Anzaldúa is respected among her colleagues and her theory of *conocimiento* is taught in English Studies, I feel it is necessary to engage in a discussion that may, in fact,

bring about noteworthy applications of this theory in an altogether different way — that of lyrical compositions. Critical thinking requires inquiry, evaluation, understanding, and the ability to formulate a position based on reasoning. Music can be an instrument to create change, and many people create connections between themselves and the lyrics. That being said, teachers who utilize popular culture and academic theory to activate critical thinking skills among their students create an environment for learning.

I want to close with the application of the theory of *conocimiento* as it relates to the writing of this thesis. I have discovered that the shape of this thesis has equally represented the stages of *conocimiento* in and of itself. What I mean to say here is that, in the process of my research and in the action of writing, I have experienced the various stages of *conocimiento* myself. At the onset, in the preparation, and to its final conclusion I, here, note the seven stages of *conocimiento* as they relate to the writing of this thesis. Beginning with *el arrebatado*, the distress to begin the thesis felt tantamount; *nepantla*, the stage in which my writing existed in a liminal or in-between state; *coatlicue*, in which the words began to make

sense, and the development of the thesis took shape; *el compromiso*, the stage in which the organization of the thesis and the coming together of ideas melded. Also, this stage brought about an awareness of the ever-shifting stages of *conocimiento* within the work itself; *Coyolxauhqui*, the examination of ideas on paper solidifying the essential arguments of the thesis; *The Blow UP...A Clash of Realities*, the point at which the realization that the research had changed my initial arguments of the thesis itself; and finally the stage of Transformation and Spiritual Activism in which I became aware of my own forms of organic writing which, in turn, created an awareness in the hope of becoming a skilled academic. Hence, the seven stages of *conocimiento*, in my estimation, provides acceptance and freedom, not only in terms of the organic forms of writing, but also towards a better understanding of our own unique self-transformative processes, and the ability to create those spaces for others as well.

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