

Sandra Cisneros. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. (New York: Random House, 1991) 165 pp., \$17.50 paper.

This collection reveals Cisneros as a refreshing writer of a variety of fictional forms. Her work at times may remind readers of Chicana short fiction by Estella Portillo. Cisneros has the distinct ability of writing vividly and imaginatively in her pictorialization of Mexican American life. She creates sketches, short stories, vignettes, and descriptive "essays."

Her personae are as credible as they are various. This is true of the very young Chicana speaking about her chum in "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn," or the pre-teen in "Eleven," or the narrator of "Mexican Movies." Another story is related by the former lover of Zapata, the Mexican revolutionary. Her sad-glad feelings are told to an older Zapata who has stopped by to see her and has fallen asleep.

"Woman Hollering Creek" is the story which resembles Portillo's "Paris Grown." Both tell of women escaping an oppressive social situation. Her "Little Miracles . . ." is a *tour de force* listing of various letters left near various saints' statues expressing gratitude for what are labeled "Little Miracles."

Cisneros entertains and surprises. Her subject matter may be Chicano, but her writing about the human condition transcends a particular place and people.

— Cortland P. Auser
Yorktown Heights, New York

Judith Ortiz Cofer. *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1990) 158 pp., \$8.50 paper.

This is a rather loose collection of *cuentos*, or stories, by a person of two very different worlds. In the years of her youth, Judith Ortiz was shuttled between Paterson, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico. Her parents were immersed in the Spanish culture of the Caribbean tropics; but like so many other Puerto Ricans, her father left the island in the 1950s to secure a better life for his family. He joined the US Navy and spent six months of every year at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the rest of the time at sea. When he was stationed in Brooklyn, he would send for his wife and children to live with him in an apartment outside Paterson. Thus, young Judith spent her childhood years alternately living in a small town on a tropical island and in a large urban area in North America. Her father adjusted to the new culture, but her mother never did.

As would be expected, the author grew up with split loyalties regarding her parents and the different cultural groups in which she lived. These accounts of her exposure and reaction to her experiences make up the entire narrative of *Silent Dancing*. The book is a remembrance that abounds with fascinating tales told by Ortiz Cofer's grandmother whom everyone called Mamá.

In Mamá's casa were several mahogany rocking chairs, acquired at the births

of her children, where the members of the extended family passed down their wisdom to the younger generation. Ortiz Cofer describes the scene: "It was on these rockers that my mother, her sisters and my grandmother sat on these afternoons of my childhood to tell their stories, teaching each other and my cousin and me what it was like to be a woman, more specifically, a Puerto Rican woman." Many times what they recited to the young were *cuentos*, the "morality and cautionary tales told by the women in our family for generations: stories that became part of my subconscious as I grew up in two worlds, the tropical island and the cold city, and which would later surface in my dreams and in my poetry."

What Judith Ortiz Cofer gives us in this book then is not a chronicle of her life, but a reclamation of significant memories that, as she explains, "connect myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood." She weaves this tapestry with pieces of prose writing interspersed with poems that illustrate the experiences and tales she relates.

After reading Ortiz Cofer's remembrances, the reader quite clearly understands that her divided loyalties have been somewhat resolved. She has decided to live in a bicultural world—building her professional life in the modern North American city in which she now resides, but spending a great deal of time visiting her mother in the small Puerto Rican town where she has settled permanently. Here her mother has assumed the elderly Mamá's role of reciting tales in order to preserve the life she loves. However, her mother's world is doomed by the intrusions of "progress." The Pueblo now is surrounded by shopping malls, condominiums, and even a Burger King.

The book ends on this sad observation by the now mature Ortiz Cofer. However, she has helped us to remember and understand a rich and exciting culture that is fast disappearing, along with all the other "old" cultures in the world.

— Angelo Costanzo
Shippensburg University

Laura Coltelli. *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) ix, 211 pp., \$22.50.

Among the interviews in this volume, which were conducted in September 1985, some are quite important, all of them are extremely interesting, and together they form an aggregate that cannot be ignored by anyone currently working in the field, for collectively they raise a number of issues that are central to current discussions of (specifically) American Indian and (generally) "minority" literatures.

There is, above all, the question of the systemic origins of textual meaning, which ties in with the question of legitimate and illegitimate readings of a text. Coltelli begins her introduction with a programmatic flourish: "Before we can