

Light in the Dark Luz en lo Oscuro Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality, by Gloria Anzaldúa, edited by AnaLouise Keating, in the series "Latin America Otherwise," Duke University Press, 2015, Durham and London, 2015, paper, 312 pages www.dukeuniversitypress.com ISBN 978 -0-8223-6009-4, 25.95 also available in hardcover.

"I pick the ground from which to speak
a reality into existence.
I have chosen to struggle against unnatural boundaries."

For those of us who believe that Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts, first published in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* [1987], broke new ground, philosophically, spiritually, and linguistically, the publication of a new book of her writing provides a glorious new opportunity to revel in her brilliant mind. All the more miraculous (and miracles certainly suit Anzaldúa), the book appears twelve years after her death, thanks to her dedicated editor Ana Louise Keating.

Hardly the dull academic book its tiny typeface suggests, *Light in the Dark Luz en lo Oscuro* constantly shifts between original philosophical insights, Mexican mythology, and Anzaldúa's personal life/spirit. Impromptu image/text sketches periodically interrupt the intense text.

Gloria Anzaldúa's perceptions resonate with our world today, with contemporary realities, even with our nightmares. While her early writings focus on La Llorona, the weeping woman, a central reference point in *Light in the Dark* is Coyolxauhqui, the goddess of the moon, who was killed and dismembered into a thousand pieces by her brother (hummingbird god of war/change) Huitzilopochtli, after Coyolxauhqui, together with her four hundred brothers and sisters, tried to kill their mother Coatlicue (the earth goddess) because she was impregnated by a ball of feathers. We in Seattle have just been horrified by a contemporary dismemberment of a young woman in a resurrection of the Aztec myth.

The goddess prominently emerges in Anzaldúa's writing in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 bombings. She represents many ideas. In the first chapter of the book (written last), Anzaldúa emphasizes healing from the violent destruction with what she calls the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, which metaphorically stands for creativity itself, the act of creating wholeness from chaos.

In addition to the Coyolxauhqui Imperative ("Healing of the wound"), which she returns to in the last chapter, Anzaldúa writes of "flights of the imagination, (la curandera, shamanic journeys), "nepantla" (transition/transformation, the border), nos/otros, (geography of self, reimagining identity, the new tribalism), and "conocimiento"(consciousness, mapping the soul's journey). Conocimiento includes seven stages arrebató (earthquake), nepantla (transition), Coatlicue (the depths of despair), breaking free, ordering your life, telling your story, and finally "an ethical compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others." These stages recapitulate the sections of the book.

AnaLouise Keating painstakingly edited the book based on Anzaldúa's numerous drafts and notes, itself a vast nepantla between Anzaldúa's mind and *Light in the Dark*. She meticulously documents the basis of each chapter in dated drafts on Anzaldúa's computer and added appendixes of additional incomplete fragments.

With her intimate knowledge of Anzaldúa's entire career, Keating helpfully describes the arc of the book: "From the late 1980s, Anzaldúa aspired to write a book-length exploration of aesthetics and knowledge production as they are inflected through, and shaped by issues of social justice, identity (trans)formation, and healing. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* Gloria Anzaldúa excavates her creative process (her "gestures of the body") and uses this excavation to develop an aesthetics of transformation, grounded in her metaphysics of interconnectedness."

Thanks to Keating's careful work, Anzaldúa's voice clearly emerges: the book flows in a poetic river of multiple languages, invented words and concepts, repeated passages, and a rhythmic return to sacred places, such as the "arbol de la vida" on a beach near where she lives. In one chapter, she confronts the inner demons that prevent her from writing (one of which is illness). But we experience a slow expansion, like a spiral, accumulating ideas, feelings, spirits, realities, along the way. At the same time, philosophically, Anzaldúa explores ideas that occupy the mainstream of theoretical thinking today, the fluid borders of gender and identity, fact and fiction, myth and reality.

"I'm guided by the spirit of the image. My naguala (daimon or guiding spirit) is an inner sensibility that directs my life – an image, an action, or an internal experience. . . . Often my naguala draws to me things that are contrary to my will and purpose . . . resulting in an anguished impasse. Overcoming these impasses becomes part of the process."

Interweaving such rational analysis of her own writing process with intuition and the spiritual, Anzaldúa easily transitions through multiple visions and realities. Most important of all though, she calls for "spiritual activism." She asks us to move to a "metaphysics of interconnections." In our contemporary world of intense binary thinking and wall building, Gloria Anzaldúa's insights provide an inspiring way forward.