



“My *Reputación Precedes Me*”: La Malinche and Palimpsests of Sacrifice, Scapegoating, and *Mestizaje* In *Xicoténcatl* and *Los mártires del Anáhuac*

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Toda la angustiada tensión que nos habita se expresa en una frase que nos viene a la boca cuando la cólera, la alegría o el entusiasmo nos llevan a exaltar nuestra condición de mexicanos: ¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada!

Octavio Paz, “*Los hijos de la Malinche*” (El laberinto de la soledad, 1950)

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*I hear your sticks-and-stones:
whore, traidora, slut.
What happened to mother?
My reputación
precedes me.*

Pat Mora, “*Malinche’s Tips: Pique from Mexico’s Mother*”
(Agua santa/Holy Water, 1995)

The treachery of a woman, the violence of conquest, and the birth of the mestizo—these form the beginnings of Mexico’s history. Octavio Paz vocalizes the *grito* unique to Mexico, *¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada!*, and in so doing takes his place among the individuals salivating to blame La Malinche, also known as Marina or Malintzín, for her betrayal of her people by giving birth to Hernán Cortés’ child, the “first” mestizo and the ancestor of the modern Mexican.¹ Examining the novels *Xicoténcatl* (1826), published anonymously, and *Los mártires del Anáhuac* (1870), by Eligio Ancona, facilitates a glimpse into fictional revisions of La Malinche and the Conquest of Mexico.² In each author’s reinterpretation of the Conquest, he inserts female figures, respectively Teutila and Geliztli, whose efforts to repel the colonizing forces meet with repeated failure and whose fertility male characters curtail; ultimately, he provides a scapegoat in place of La Malinche. In *Xicoténcatl* the author offers an account of the title hero of Tlaxcala during the conquest of Mexico in the earliest historical novel by a Latin American, and Ancona also delves into

the past to resurrect his nation's earliest colonial experience in *Los mártires del Anáhuac*. The conflicted dynamics between colonizer/colonized and male/female underscore these texts; when viewed together Teutila and Geliztli no longer appear as stock characters that add dramatic moments of female distress. They instead mitigate the extreme emotions of author, reader, and nation through sacrifice. Moving chronologically through these variations of the Conquest of Mexico, the texts span different epochs of Mexican history, independence (*Xicoténcatl*) and reform (*Los mártires del Anáhuac*), that intersect through images of the woman and of sacrifice, and raise larger issues relating to independence in nineteenth-century Latin America and the role of fiction in these projects.

Finally, the turn to the past serves to stabilize the present specifically for the Mexican, both of the Nineteenth Century and the Twenty-First, who wrestles with the intertwining of European and indigenous in the Conquest. Hernán Cortés first set foot on mainland Mexican soil in March of 1519, now the state of Tabasco, and, with the fall of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán on August 13, 1521, claimed New Spain. While Ancona's novel encompasses the entirety of these two and a half years, the author of *Xicoténcatl* focuses on Cortés' battle and ensuing alliance with Tlaxcala in the fall of 1519. For the Mexican reader, (re)claiming his/her indigenous ancestor enables his/her self-creation of national history. In rewriting the colonial past, authors select the moments and individuals they want to preserve, "namely those moments in colonial time that foreshadow the future ideals of the young republics—ideals such as republicanism and the search for liberty and equality which also support the process of self-definition" (Buchenau 387). In this search for self-definition and nationhood, these authors reconceptualize the past "[and by] projecting these ideals onto those members of the colonial population which are appropriated as forefathers of the young nations, a nationalization of the past is achieved" (Buchenau 387).

In addition to the sociopolitical parallels existing in the texts, one can turn to these two novels and their rewritings of the Conquest to begin to excavate the stereotyped role of the Mexican woman, in particular the "traitorous" La Malinche. In her study on La Malinche, Sandra Messinger Cypess states that "[B]ecause La Malinche, as an archetypal female figure in Latin America, plays such a vital role in Mexican and Latin American myths, it is imperative that the role she is traditionally assigned be evaluated and reevaluated" (6). Along with La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche serves as a national archetype, frequently paired and contrasted with La Virgen, in Mexican fiction of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.³

Furthermore, Cypess terms La Malinche a "root paradigm," borrowing the term from Victor Turner, since she stands as a "cultural model that is continually reinvested with vitality within the social drama" (7). In a psychoanalytic framework, the phallic mother, La Malinche, threatens the male Mexican and forces him to turn to the white colonizer father and reject the mother, who he terms "la chingada" (Pérez 107). The post-independence Mexican males, then, find themselves "shamed by her rape (conquest) and thus forced to reject the feminine in themselves as the devalued, the passive, the mauled and battered, as *la chingada*, the violated, the one who has been screwed over, fucked, and yet is herself the betrayer" (Franco xix). La Malinche converts to a symbol for Mexico as a whole, a land violated.

Studies like Cypess' seek to redeem La Malinche from her role as scapegoat. Blamed by Mexicans as the agent of their *mestizaje*, especially for critics like Edmundo O'Gorman, La Malinche became the scapegoat for the sociopolitical difficulties plaguing the newly independent Mexico at the turn of the nineteenth century (Cypess 43). In her study of Mexican female writers, Jean Franco discusses the pivotal role of La Malinche in the formation of the Mexican national consciousness: "a mythic scapegoat was found for Mexico's dependent status within the modern world in the person of La Malinche... [T]he story of female treachery is particularly necessary in the nationalist epic, especially the epic which has its origin in a conquest and a defeat" (xiii).

Investigating this scapegoating borrows from René Girard's model; most scholars consider Girard to be the preeminent theorist of sacrifice, but examining his work in the context of feminist theory and postcolonial studies speaks more directly to these texts. Traditionally, patriarchal society marginalizes the woman and child, and the man fears finding himself on that same periphery. In psychoanalytic theory, the male experiences a "marginal dread" in his self/self-object period, when he strives to differentiate himself from the mother and seeks to place himself in a non-marginal position (Beers 138-9). In *The Scapegoat* (1982), Girard employs biblical history to posit that sacrifice originates out of mimetic desire, with violence at its core and the sacred as an outcropping of violence. The modern origins of sacrifice theory, though, truly lie in Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1926), but that text captures Girard's attention not so much for what it says, but for what it does not say; Girard locates in Freud's discussion of interfamilial violence a touchstone for mimetic desire and the origin of social violence in the males' competition over one object/person desired by both but which her/himself does not desire (Reineke 77).

The role of woman emerges as a gap in Girard's theory of sacrifice, but Martha Reineke's study on Julia Kristeva offers insight into a potential reading of the woman in sacrifice that augments both theorists' works.⁴ Reineke's application of Kristeva's theories on matricide and abjection to the Girardean scapegoat allows an avenue to address the sacrifices, or scapegoating, of women in *Xicoténcatl* and *Los mártires del Anáhuac*. Like Girard, Kristeva does not endorse Freud's hypothetical exchange of the patriarch for the totem animal, and rather focuses on incest's origins in the destructing/creating maternal body, in this case Teutila, Geliztli, and La Malinche. A trio of actions occurs here in Kristeva's theory, moving from abjection (rejecting the Mother) to defilement (equating the Mother with the profane) to sacrifice (attempting to "outdo" the violence enacted by the Mother) (Reineke 95-7).

With the addition of Kristevan theory to the "witch hunt" of the Mother, one can continue by following Girard's reasoning. The object of persecution or scapegoating serves as such not because she is different, but because she is not different enough and because of that resemblance is sacrificed (22). This scenario invites a framing in terms of gender, a step Girard does not take. Once again, Kristeva follows Girard insofar as she adheres to a notion of the mimetic conflict as the origin of violence. In spite of these shared perceptions of the primal origins of sacrifice, Kristeva and Girard part ways on the role of sexuality. Kristeva opines that violence and mimetic conflict originate from the

maternal body, not the paternal and law-giving figure, and “[A]s a consequence, nascent human subjects received from the abject their first lessons in violence” (Reineke 86). Thus, the Mother threatens and matricide occurs. In this application of scapegoating to these two novels, it becomes clear that these authors employ a scapegoat other than La Malinche with ensuing repercussions for studies of the nineteenth-century historical novel and thereby tread the fine line between fiction and history.

Turning to the history of these novels, positioning both *Xicoténcatl* and *Los mártires del Anáhuac* against the tapestry of history is of paramount importance. *Xicoténcatl* emerged against the backdrop of a Mexico struggling to gain independence, which began with Padre Miguel Hidalgo’s *grito* on September 16, 1810. Nineteenth-century Mexico found itself presided over intermittently by several nations and several presidents, and *Xicoténcatl* was published in 1826 during General Antonio López de Santa Anna’s first presidency. Ancona wrote and published *Los mártires del Anáhuac* when Mexico re-established its nationhood in the late 1860s following the War of the French Intervention, which commenced in 1862 and ended with President Benito Juárez’s re-establishment of the Republic in 1867; the thirty-four year *Porfiriato*, Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship, followed shortly, beginning in 1876.

In its earliest years, the new Mexican nation saw a high level of production in pamphlets and newspapers as different political groups tried to steer the burgeoning government, and in accordance with Benedict Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities” and “reversed ventriloquism” one can locate the stirrings of nationalist language and ideology here in the printed, circulated word. Alongside Anderson’s model of reversal one can turn to Carlos J. Alonso’s emphasis on “positionality” or the Mexican’s anxiety not only about his status as a colonial, but also about the colony’s “cultural production,” and the concerns of forever seeing the colony and its inhabitants and “culture” in direct relation to the mother country (101). Mexicans did gravitate to the newly arrived European Romantic literatures. According to early twentieth century critic Lloyd John Read, Romanticism appealed to Mexican writers because “it represented in general the same basic spirit of rebellion and renovation in letters that had been the motivation of the liberals in political and social fields...the intimate sentimentalism, the emotive procedure, the lyricism of ideas and the sublimation of life’s deeper experiences, all characteristics of romanticism, were in consonance with basic Mexican racial characteristics” (47-8).

Although Read’s identification of “basic Mexican racial characteristics” forces one to take umbrage, his emphasis on the Mexican writer’s affinity with the spiritual tenets of Romanticism seems apt. As well, Read’s terminology suggests the connection between Romanticism and racism, and the rabid interest in national character and nation building sweeping Latin America. The impassioned political leanings of Romantic European writers were in accordance with the emphasis on “justice and right, nobility and loyalty” of the politically active early Mexican Romantics such as Fernando Calderón, Ignacio Rodríguez Galván, Guillermo Prieto, and Ignacio Ramírez, as well as the later Ancona and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, among others (Read 57).

The Mexican writer can meld tales of his native traditions and customs into the format of the European novel, an approach advocated by critics and authors like Altamirano

(Gerassi-Navarro 136). Read stresses the Mexican historical novel's role in assisting the new nation "to adapt itself to the ideas of the nineteenth-century world" and calls attention to their enduring popularity in Mexico, if not outside of that nation (x-xi). Read further claims that "Mexican historical novelists who dealt with the distant past attempted to interpret that past in terms of their own nineteenth-century thought" (58). These texts, both focused on Read's "distant past," share a perhaps unconscious attempt to salvage a national mother figure in order to promulgate a stronger sense of Mexican national identity and, ultimately, self-esteem, that stretches across nearly a century, beginning with *Xicoténcatl*.

Xicoténcatl first appeared in 1826, published anonymously in Philadelphia by William Staveley. Long considered the first historic novel in Latin America, *Xicoténcatl* shared its publication date with Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*, the preeminent historical novel of the French Romantics. For years critics assumed that a Mexican authored *Xicoténcatl* considering the themes of the text, still others suggesting a Spaniard. Yet hints detected as soon as 1828 indicate that the author of *Xicoténcatl* was not Mexican; not only do the terrain and topographical details not agree with the actual Mexican locations as the playwright José María Mangino noted, but the author repeatedly uses "j" where a Mexican writer would use "x" (Leal 14-15). For example, the author writes "México" as "Méjico" and converts the traditional "Xicoténcatl" to a more Castilian "Xicoténcatl." Luis Leal's groundbreaking study ascertains that, of the exiled Latin American writers active in the United States, especially in New York and Philadelphia, that the Cuban Catholic priest and political activist Félix Varela is the most likely candidate.⁵

To its initial audience, the novel did not need the benefit of an author; attesting to the enthusiasm of its reception, *Xicoténcatl* spawned several plays that appeared in Mexico beginning almost immediately. Leal cites two tragedies, *Teutila* (1828) by Ignacio Torres Arroyo and *Xicohténcatl* (1828) by José María Moreno, and a comedy, *Xicoténcatl* (1829) by José María Mangino, all arising from a drama contest held in Puebla (12). Another version by Salvador García Brahamonte appeared in Spain in 1831 entitled *Xicoténcatl, príncipe americano*.⁶

The novel concerns itself with Amerindian-Spanish tensions; the Spaniards and the Aztecs threaten the state of Tlaxcala and the author emphasizes the romance between the doomed but heroic Xicoténcatl and his beloved, the former slave Teutila. Cortés and La Malinche emerge as foils to these characters and thus the intricacies of miscegenation and fertility unfold. The text echoes Jean-Jacques Rousseau in its praise for the natural state of man and the corruptive influence of civilization (Read 84-5). In fact, the omniscient narrator emphasizes that the indigenous seem blessed with a quasi-Christian faith that accordingly dictates not only their degree of enlightenment but also their non-barbarism (Buchenau 384). The non-Catholic Teutila, for instance, insists that she believes in one Creator. She tells Fray Olmedo, "Confieso que sabéis más que nosotros en las cosas que inventan los hombres, porque veo que traéis máquinas y que hacéis cosas a cuyo conocimiento no hemos llegado todavía; mas para conocer la existencia de un Ser que ha ordenado el sol y las estrellas y que preside a toda la naturaleza, basta no cerrar los ojos a lo que ésta nos dice continuamente" (96).

In keeping with these open-minded sentiments, the author describes Tlaxcala as a utopia, “incontaminado, cerrado al comercio del oro y de la plata, famoso por la rectitud de sus gentes, por la justicia de su senado” (Benso 146). As with other idealized pre-colonial cultures situated in nineteenth-century Mexican novels, Tlaxcala becomes comparable to the regressive idealization of Europe’s classical age, or even the idealized medieval era for the Romantics, a time of heroes (Buchenau 388). The presentation of the utopia Tlaxcala serves as “a synonym for self-determination, liberty, and democracy,” and this revolutionary agenda is in accordance with the inclination towards national independence taking place throughout Mexico, as well as Latin America, at this time (Buchenau 382).

Furthermore, the “noble savage” appears in the text. Promulgated by Rousseau and other French *philosophes*, the “noble savage” remained an elusive construct that the traveler could find theoretically in any location; nationality or ethnicity did not emerge in the equation with the exception of a guaranteed non-white skin. Rey Chow argues that “Rousseau’s savage is, then, not simply a cultural ‘other,’ but, in Lacanian language, the Other (big Other) that exists before ‘separation,’ before the emergence of the *objet petit a*, the name for those subjectivized, privatized, and missing parts of the whole” (143). In tandem with this primal linkage with the Other, the colonizer, in perceiving the native or “noble savage,” presents him/herself to the native’s gaze. In Chow’s reading, the native possesses a power that is not concerned with physical or economic control, but instead reminds the colonizer that the Other is him/her. Because of this uncanny fear of the Other, the colonizer feels the need to “turn this gaze around,” to see himself reflected in the native, and gain a position of power, hence the direct comparison and/or description of the native with the European (Chow 144). The reader sees these slippages in the text, as in the above scene, and this further builds Teutila as a character who doubly threatens because she closely resembles the Spaniards in the matter of religion.

The extolling of the “noble savage” not only targets rebelling Mexicans’ affinity for their indigenous past, but also situates them as on par with, if not above, the Spaniards. Race does not denote moral values, for the despots Moctezuma and Cortés both wield evil influences. The author of *Xicoténcatl* clearly had on his mind “those [the political battles] between liberalism and authoritarianism of his own day” (Read 93). This ideological focus accounts for the utter lack of detail not only about the Mexican landscape, but also about the indigenous life; the reader does not learn of dress, food, or any detail of daily life. These characters could indeed exist anywhere. The author intertwines a romance between Teutila and Xicoténcatl, termed “arreatadas e imposibles” by Silvia Benso, between excerpts from Solís’ chronicle and the narrator’s description of the political maneuvering between and among the Spaniards and Tlaxcaltecas (145). In Read’s words, “*Xicoténcatl* is a work meant to be a vehicle for the expression of ideals of abstract justice, truth and right, and not for the painting of prosaic minutiae of life among the Indians,” emphasizing the overall moral tone of the novel (96). A vehicle it may be, but one Brushwood describes as “an excruciatingly logical argument for the respect of man for man” (2).

The novel emphasizes the model of the Tlaxcalteca senate which “sugiere la potencialidad del Cabildo” for a localized government (Benso 147). Empire, in other words, cannot compare to self-government. The fate of the republic, though, ultimately

proves no match for the forces of empire, and the novel serves as a plea for others to recognize and assist the budding national government(s). Although noble and brave, the Tlaxcaltecas cannot defeat the Spaniards. This lack of military strength leads to a marked deviation from the chronicles of the Conquest: The author permits the Tlaxcaltecas to die (Buchenau 381). Notwithstanding the political messages in the novel, the female figures, Teutila and La Malinche, and the concern about fertility, add a different dimension to the text.

The title male protagonist, though, finds himself caught in a comparable situation to his nineteenth-century descendants fighting to shake off foreign powers. Xicoténcatl's beloved, Teutila, oftentimes seems merely to fill out the "sentimental" plot (Buchenau 385). A non-historic figure, Teutila resembles Chateaubriand's *Atala*, from *Atala* (1801), and like *Atala* poisons herself. From Zocotlan, Teutila was enslaved and presented to Xicoténcatl, thus possessing a background similar to that of La Malinche.⁷ Considering her technical status as a slave in the first part of the novel, Teutila's non-passivity seems remarkable: "Varela's native heroine turns active and single-handedly attempts to revenge the death of her husband. Her failure and her death symbolically mark the decline of a free American world" (Buchenau 385). Teutila only remains a two-dimensional character until her dramatic death. Occurring as it does at the end of the novel, it doubly ruptures the conclusion of the saga and unsettles the sense of native moral rectitude in the text.

Throughout the novel, Teutila emerges as a stark contrast to La Malinche, appearing as the good to La Malinche's bad and, since miraculously Aztec and Spaniard can communicate without problems as discussed earlier, removes La Malinche's contribution as a translator (Cypess 45). Note, for instance, the first meeting of Teutila with Fray Olmedo and Diego de Ordaz in Book I when she cordially invites them to take shelter from a thunderstorm in a cave and none of the party finds it odd that indigenous and Spaniard can so easily understand the other's language. Bereft of her linguistic contribution, the sexually knowledgeable La Malinche seduces the kind-hearted Spaniard Diego de Ordaz and serves as Cortés' mistress, whereas Teutila repels Cortés' advances. The two women, then, serve as opposite ends of the Mexican female spectrum, La Malinche and La Virgen, yet unite in the sickroom when Teutila tends to the suffering new mother of the first mestizo.

As the spouse of the slain Xicoténcatl and a firm believer in the Tlaxcalteca—and colonial—right to self-government, Teutila hatches a plan to rid her nation of its invader but commits a grave error in her execution of it. Teutila's initial plan requires her to obtain an audience with Cortés, the orchestrator of her husband's death, and stabbing him. Before entering Cortés' room, however, she will swallow a poison and, speaking to the memory of her husband, in order that "[L]a compañera de tu lecho no será víctima de tus asesinos" (183). Having ingested the poison, Teutila awaits Cortés who, contrary to her plan, is delayed. Once he appears, she attempts to make her speech of vengeance, failing twice before mustering her strength:

Escucha, malvado. La esposa de Xicoténcatl...la viuda del valiente y heroico general de Tlaxcala había jurado vengar con tu muerte el más vil

asesinato que cometió jamás la más detestable tiranía. Pero, ¡ah!, su pobre juicio no alcanza a conocer que tu negra e infame sangre derramada por mi mano era un castigo demasiado débil para tan atroces crímenes. El cielo ha tomado a su cargo la venganza, y este torcedor cruel que te atormenta en mi presencia te dice, ¡inucuo vil asesino!, cuál es la suerte que te espera en esta vida y te da una idea de la que te prepara en la otra. Sí, monstruo; en este accidente que ha parado mi golpe veo la justicia divina, celosa de que le estorben que su reo sufra su merecida sentencia. Toma ese instrumento que mi ignorancia destinaba a oponerse al brazo terrible de un Dios vengador. (184)

Teutila, throwing the dagger to Cortés, swiftly expires murmuring “¡Maldito seas, vil asesino de mi Xicoténcatl!...¡Xicoténcatl!...¡Xicoténcatl!...” (184).

In this last episode in the novel, Teutila’s words fail her as the poison seeps into her body and La Malinche becomes the woman’s mouthpiece, taking the fallen Teutila’s hand and pleading with Cortés. The doubled native women unite in their begging of Cortés to desist his advances upon the Aztecs but to no end. Teutila’s suicide closes the text. Cortés temporarily feels a new sensitivity upon seeing the dead Teutila at his feet but after the accompanying Catholic priest advises him to take Teutila’s words and actions to heart, Cortés announces the regiment’s departure for Tenochtitlán—and *la noche triste* or the fall of the Aztec city. The novel ends with the reader’s knowledge that Teutila fails to affect the outcome of history.

The Mexican reader of *Xicoténcatl* would have realized at the outset of Teutila’s plan that only failure could result. In a positive reading, Teutila embodies native dignity, pride, and courage as she opts for suicide like Atala. Simultaneously, though, Teutila also appears as a scared woman who dies ignominiously and with her failed act takes on the burden of blame for failing to thwart the Spaniards. Depicted as an active and cruel betrayer of her people, La Malinche could receive condemnation in the novel. However, in her failure to kill Cortés, Teutila becomes the expiatory victim whose death temporarily sways the Spaniard and nearly saves Tlaxcala and the Aztecs, thereby relieving La Malinche of the role of scapegoat. With Cortés’ decision to continue his advances into Mexico, the self-sacrifice fails to exorcise the evils plaguing the community and Teutila becomes the one blamed for “betraying” her people by her error in committing her attempted murder.

Teutila’s action seems to cement La Malinche’s fate as well, trapping that woman into the role of Cortés’ concubine and mother of the first mestizo and now, with the advance to Tenochtitlán, her historical role of her people’s betrayer. However, La Malinche now has a counterpart who can be “blamed” for the colonization of Mexico: Teutila. This potential savior of the Aztecs remains unburied and unmourned at the conclusion of the novel, a testament to the failure of her sacrifice. Given the paucity of Aztec material about the Conquest, Teutila “could have” existed but the victors fail to mention her, and the author takes up the challenge of adding to the chronicles. The mestizo cannot acknowledge Teutila as an ancestress, though, because without a grave no proof of her existence exists and, without giving birth, Teutila has no direct blood tie to the Mexican.

Teutila fails to leave “proof” of her life insofar as she does not produce a child for Xicoténcatl or Cortés. In so doing she does not leave a future hero or ancestor for her people and, in a text marked by La Malinche’s birth of Martín and Teutila’s presence in the birthing room, Teutila’s lack of offspring leaves a gap. The widow who housed Xicoténcatl repeats for Teutila, just before her attempted murder of Cortés, his grief at childlessness. In effect, Xicoténcatl expresses his concern for Teutila’s lack of companionship and memory of him after his death: “En esta misma casa, acariciando a mis dos niños, le oíamos sin cesar hablar de su Teutila. ‘¡Si a lo menos ella tuviera un hijo nos decía —su soledad no sería tan espantosa. ¡Pero, ¡ay!’” (179).

The widow continues her comment by explaining repeatedly that she herself can survive because of her two children. “Sí, amiga, estos dos hijos de mis entrañas han conservado la vida de esta desdichada mujer...este amor me ha hecho sobrevivir a su virtuoso y desgraciado padre” (179). She explains that she cannot abandon them to wage her own vengeance against the Spaniards: “[e]llos [los designios para venganza] han estado aquí en mi pensamiento, pero tengo dos hijos y mi corazón no ha podido resolverse a abandonarlos” (179). Unlike the widow, Teutila’s lack of a child allows her to sacrifice herself and her fertility for the good of the state. Not only does she function as a non-mother but she has “unnaturally” denied chances at fertility and offspring, at least with Cortés. In so doing, she has rejected the mestizo as her “child,” thereby positioning La Malinche as a truly mothering figure. In a sense, Teutila is monstrous for subverting her womb and motherly inclinations for murder.

The “moral” of the story is that indigenous women must die to preserve their honor or turn traitor. This step comes at the cost, however, of denying motherhood. The female body serves as a metaphor for the country and the woman—Teutila—sublimates her desire for life for the nation. By inserting this dynamic of slavery, motherhood, and republicanism into this narrative of the Conquest, the roles of colonizer-colonized become still more complicated. One does not become entirely colonized until one utterly submits, which Teutila does not do. Neither does La Malinche; the reader sees her too pleading with Cortés for mercy. Furthermore, La Malinche claims the role of mother and cements her bond with the contemporary Mexican, a step Teutila cannot or will not take.

In committing the premeditated act of murder Teutila would become “bad” on a certain level; now, Teutila can resemble the Mexicans’ Virgin Mary as the saintly indigenous woman who refuses to bear Cortés’ child. Her suicide, a step roundly condemned by Catholic doctrine, converts to a martyrdom. The responsibility of motherhood does not burden this seemingly selfless act and this undercuts Teutila’s martyrdom with a darker overtone. Teutila’s assassination attempt, doomed by history to failure, really accomplishes two aims: It allows the reader to feel some sympathy for La Malinche because Teutila sublimates her own maternal desire unlike her indigenous counterpart, and in so doing, she serves as a scapegoat for the ills of her people by not providing an indigenous child and failing in her action against Cortés.

The repeated mention of the female victim, the one who suffers, who the males do not allow to colonize actively, and whose attempts to oust the colonizer collapse, also serves to legitimate the Amerindian and, later, the Mexican. Although Teutila tried desperately to

save her nation, she could do so only because she refuses to bear a mestizo child and even opts for suicide rather than submission to the European father. By scapegoating the double, the non-Malinche, the Mexican reader displaces his/her rage but also retains that very necessary tinge of pity so that s/he does not feel overwhelmed at the violence of his/her emotion. Teutila merits the reader's sympathy for her brave and doomed actions, and the sight of her unburied body sprawled in front of Cortés, about to depart to destroy Tenochtitlán, ends the text on a note of profound sorrow. The future Mexican's mourning for a lost nation parallels the grief for Teutila, and this bereavement tempers a lingering hatred for Teutila for refusing to bear the mestizo. Simultaneously, La Malinche emerges at least as a mother who carries the mestizo into the future and who does not bear the onus of scapegoat. In Ancona's novel, these churning emotions ripen into a more ambitious text and one where the above themes play out even more dramatically.

Mexicans remember Eligio Ancona not only as a novelist but also as a prominent politician, active in issues surrounding his native Mérida in Yucatán.⁸ He authored several historical novels in addition to *Los mártires del Anáhuac*, including *La cruz y la espada* (1866), *El filibustero* (1866), *El Conde de Peñalva* (1879), *La Mestiza* (1891), and *Memorias de un alférez* (1904, posthumous) plus *Historia de Yucatán desde los tiempos más remotos hasta nuestros días* (1878-81). John Read claims that *El filibustero* is “the first full length novel after [Justo] Sierra O'Reilly [*La hija del judío*, 1848-50] to deal with the pre-independence period (147). Ancona composed the first Mexican novel on the Conquest; Ireneo Paz and his *Amor y suplicio* (1873) and *Doña Marina* (1883) soon followed, novels that at times sympathize with or justify the conquistadors' actions (Meléndez 109).

In *Los mártires del Anáhuac* the author communicates his anti-Spanish sentiments and with this novel, in contrast to his earlier work, the plot—and its pro-indigenous angle—seems more “logical” (Read 148). Read writes “In no other Mexican historical novel is the reader made to sympathize with both the contending forces so much as in this one” (150). Although Ancona may not have read *Xicoténcatl*, given its much earlier publication date, he almost certainly knew Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's popular tale of the Conquest, *Guatimozín* (Madrid 1846, Mexico 1853) (Read 154-5). Like the work of La Avellaneda and Paz, Ancona's novel contains decided overtones of Realism. Concha Meléndez considers *Los mártires del Anáhuac* to be “la novela más indianista del grupo romántico mexicano. Naturalmente, es la más antiespañola” (106). The title, she continues, “es síntesis de la actitud de Ancona ante los aztecas, a quienes considera nobles mártires” (106).

Los mártires del Anáhuac encompasses a broader span of time than *Xicoténcatl* as it relates the Spaniards' arrival in Tenochtitlán and the destruction of the city. Even though the reader, of the Nineteenth Century or today, surely knows the outcome of this saga, Ancona tries to build suspense by inserting both an ingenuous narrator and chapter titles that purport to heighten the reader's interest in the events about to succeed (Ianes Vera 148-9). Ancona adds several fictional personages, and the familiar figures of Cortés and La Malinche emerge as more multidimensional than in *Xicoténcatl*. The emperor Moctezuma comes across as a weak, vacillating man overwhelmed and confused by the Spanish arrival. Both La Malinche and Cortés possess tortured pasts, sharing similar

childhoods as orphans, although she bears the additional burden of being sold into slavery. Overall, the La Malinche of *Los mártires del Anáhuac* retains an aura of victimization and expresses passion and caring, a stark departure from the more cold-hearted, albeit incongruously motherly, La Malinche of *Xicoténcatl*. Ancona surrounds the characters, then, with pasts of their own and gives them multi-dimensional qualities lacking in *Xicoténcatl*.

Among the plethora of fictional characters and subplots, some more fleshed out than others, the most enthralling focuses on Geliztli, favorite daughter of the Aztec emperor Moctezuma. Sheltered all her life amid the luxuries of the palace, Geliztli is enamored with Tizoc, a young Aztec acolyte who himself is descended from noble Aztec sacrificial victims. Tizoc doubles Geliztli in his almost feminine youthfulness and lack of machismo, a parallel consistent with other Romantic Latin American novels, for “[A]lmost Werther-like, without losing reason to passion, idealized young men shared enough delicate looks and sublime feelings with idealized young women to create intimate bonds with them” (Sommer 16). The arrival of Cortés and his insistence on detaining the noble Aztec family in their palace thwarts the Tizoc-Geliztli union, and the young Aztec man takes up arms against the Spaniards.

The actions of Geliztli, Tizoc, and La Malinche share a motivation by love. *Los mártires del Anáhuac* does not end with the production of children between Tizoc and Geliztli. The two lovers certainly challenge social forces and political events that keep them separate, but the novel’s plot ends with a double bind. The production of children occurs with the birth of the child of Cortés and La Malinche, Martín, and the reader knows that the mestizo will eventually become the Mexican. In this sense, the novel does conclude with fecundity. This reproduction does not arise out of a national stability in the context of the novel, for it ends with the burial of the lovers and the destruction of Tenochtitlán. Cypess suggests that “[T]hrough his superimposition of this romantic outlook on the characters of the Amerindians, Ancona contributes details not found in the chronicles that reflect the needs of his own time period” (60). The novel at times verges on the condemnation of reproduction, particularly when it involves miscegenation, but this absence of children reminds the Mexican reader of the 1870s that *now* the nation has found stability. To establish and cement the nation children must result, and one can point to the fall of the Aztecs and the decimation of their numbers as a stark example of the painful origins of Mexico. Instead, Mexicans invested in the future should now produce children because at last the nation has shaken off colonial restraints.

Any children who appear in the novel do so out of violent circumstances, including Martín to a certain extent and, in Ancona’s historical revision, the child of Geliztli and Cortés. This child, however, results from a rape. Geliztli, following the instructions of the Aztec priest Tayatzin, who serves as an additional father figure to the girl, doubling and compensating for the pusillanimous Moctezuma, endeavors to drug Cortés, intending to leave his demise to her fellow Aztecs. Her actions miscarry, however, and she imbibes the sleeping potion and Cortés subsequently rapes her:

Entonces quiso gritar..., pedir socorro. Pero el narcótico de Tayatzin le había quitado hasta la facultad de hablar. Lanzó la última mirada, una

mirada opaca sobre el español. La misma sonrisa infernal se dibujaba en sus labios. La princesa se agitó con un movimiento convulsivo y apartó los ojos de aquella visión diabólica. Entonces le pareció que se apagaban las luces y que la habitación quedaba sumergida en la más completa oscuridad. Después..., nada...; aquel sueño pesado y profundo que el gran sacerdote del Anáhuac había preparado para su mayor enemigo. (548)

The title of this chapter, “La Judit del Anáhuac,” serves as an irony for, unlike Judith, Geliztli does not successfully evict the invader from her nation, let alone from her room (Cypess 64). Raúl Ianes Vera deems this chapter even comic, notwithstanding the reversal of the novel’s usual step of the heroine’s retention of her virginity (162). Like Teutila, Geliztli cannot kill Cortés, for that would gravely err against her textual role as innocent and “good” woman. Geliztli’s ensuing pregnancy and the increasingly violent Spanish-Aztec encounters, as well as the death of Moctezuma, lead to her removal to a distant quarter of Tenochtitlán and the birth of her male mestizo child.

Her first glimpse of the boy inspires “un sentimiento inexplicable [que] oprimió su corazón” (605). Geliztli’s repugnance increases when she notes that the infant is “el retrato vivo de Malinche (el enemigo de la patria, el ladrón de su honra, el asesino de su padre), iba a prolongar indefinidamente su tortura” (605). Geliztli is an innocent woman who does not deserve her punishment, and the new mother is torn about what to do with the infant and worries too about her own fate. An apparent answer arrives with a visit by Tayatzin who offers to take the boy to the temple where, he tells her, the child will receive training in the priesthood. Despite some doubts on her part, Geliztli consents and soon thereafter feels “una gran tranquilidad a su espíritu” (611).

The pivotal chapter in the concluding pages of the novel, directly following the removal of Geliztli’s nameless son, addresses the sacrifice of the infant by Tayatzin. Desiring to appease the Aztec gods by the sacrifice of the mestizo boy, Tayatzin performs the act at the Templo Mayor, now the Plaza Mayor, in front of the gathered Aztec masses. The narrator lingers on the buildup to this event with an intricate description of the sacrificial altar and the mounting tension in the crowd before continuing to the act itself, which Geliztli arrives at moments too late:

Uno de ellos [los sacerdotes] tomó al niño de las andas y lo echó boca arriba sobre la piedra de los sacrificios. Entonces cuatro de aquellos infames ministros de Satanás sujetaron al niño por los brazos y las piernas; el quinto apretó su garganta con el círculo sagrado, y Tayatzin, el inmundo pontífice, levantó en alto su cuchilla de obsidiana...[C]uando el débil eco de esta voz [la de Geliztli] llegó a los oídos del sumo sacerdote había abierto ya el pecho del niño y tenía en sus manos el corazón ensangrentado de la víctima. Su tierno cuerpo se retorció aún con las últimas convulsiones de la agonía en la inmunda piedra de los sacrificios. Geliztli, la infeliz madre que había llegado, únicamente para ver morir a su hijo, lanzó entonces un grito desgarrador y cayó desplomada sobre las losas de la plaza. (613)

The mother's arrival and protest ignite the crowd and they cry for her sacrifice as well, "¡Que muera..., que muera también como su hijo!" (613). The crowd's desire to sacrifice Geliztli may bespeak of vengeance and a frantic desire to rid themselves of the Spanish, but it does not follow a traditional sacrificial model since Geliztli and her son are not "pure" individuals offered to the gods. Instead, in this scene the crowd scapegoats Geliztli and her child in not only a hasty act of sacrifice but also a desire to exorcise the "evil" in their community. Both the narrator and Geliztli condemn the child's death; Geliztli is fraught with grief and the narrator uses descriptions that denote his disgust. For instance, he describes the altar as an "inmunda piedra" (Cypess 66).

The arrival of the Spaniards forestalls this act and the narrator observes that, despite the survival of Geliztli here, "[N]uestra pluma es impotente para describir el espanto y la confusión que reinó entre la muchedumbre en este momento de suprema angustia" (614). The fall of the Aztecs has arrived and the capture of Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, seals the nation's fate. Amid the confusion, Tizoc rushes to the rescue of Geliztli, but a stray bullet slays her and Tizoc subsequently meets death in battle with the Spaniards. Geliztli and Tizoc, and possibly La Malinche and Cortés, are "los mártires" of the title (Cypess 67).

The fast pace at the conclusion of the novel seems to diminish the impact of the concluding sacrifice. The mestizo child, killed at the hands of the native father figure, could actually have "saved" the city, perhaps even as a bargaining chip since Cortés remains unaware of his existence. His death sparks not only the furor of the crowd as they channel their rage towards Geliztli, but the clattering arrival of the Spaniards, and one of the final battles immediately follows. Geliztli's fate takes a similar cast as that of Teutila, similarly condemned to silence. Xiloxóchitl, Geliztli's loyal maid, buries the bodies of her mistress and Tizoc in a long-vanished grave, "la poética sepultura," that the narrator reminds us, "acababa de abrir" (622). Time "erases" Geliztli from Mexican memory.

With only the barest semblance of a funeral and a forgotten grave, Geliztli continues to haunt the father of her child, Cortés. In the epilogue, the reader learns that Cortés dies ignominiously, no longer the hero of Spain: "Las sombras de Geliztli...poblaron su lecho de muerte. La ingratitud proverbial de los reyes vengaba hasta cierto punto la sangre de tantos mártires sacrificados a su ambición y crueldad" (624). Ianes Vera points out the merging of history and romance here, and the punishment of the villain, as well as the "[restablecimiento] [d]el equilibrio primigenio en la página final" (166). The novel thus ends "safely" by returning the reader of this historical account back to a safe world where the good are avenged and the bad are punished.

Ancona also installs a similarly positive concluding aura around La Malinche. By endowing Geliztli with the dubious honor of being the first recognized mother of the mestizo, he saves La Malinche from her much-maligned fate as "la chingada madre" and the quixotically reviled and adored mother of the Mexican as explained by Octavio Paz. In accordance with Paz's reading, Joan Torres-Pou argues that indigenous mother figures, like Pocahontas or La Malinche, "[s]erán 'nobles' como los europeos y 'salvajes' como el ámbito americano" and, later, that she symbolizes the earth, "la americana

simboliza también el mestizaje y este rasgo subraya aún más su simbolismo americano, ya no sólo es la desconocida y salvaje tierra americana sino también la nueva América conquistada y colonizada” (16, 17).

Child sacrifice appeases the gathered Aztecs who take recourse to the ancient sacrificial means of ridding oneself of evil. Nevertheless, in sacrificing the mestizo child and attacking the mother, a self-sacrifice and quasi-Oedipal moment occurs. The ancestors of the Mexicans kill the “first” mestizo, channel their rage towards his mother, and scapegoat both of them for the Spanish invasion. Since this strategy utterly fails, Ancona may encourage the nineteenth-century Mexican to believe that the establishment of a nation requires this mestizaje. If the Aztecs cannot rout the Spaniards, they must preserve some trace of themselves in the hopes that someday—such as in the nineteenth century—they will finally evict their colonizers. Survival requires reproduction. Moreover, La Malinche, it turns out, proves the better candidate for it: She knows how to survive.

Geliztli, after all, gives her child to Tayatzin and finds herself powerless to stop his murder. Furthermore, she feels an innate revulsion at the sight of her child, the result of her rape by Cortés. Nevertheless, in a novel so concerned with propagation and miscegenation, the reader recognizes Geliztli’s rejection of her child as the turning point. Should she have kept the child, she would have been a positive mother figure, and one without La Malinche’s taint of deception. Unlike Teutila, Geliztli does not sacrifice her fertility for the nation and cannot bring herself to abort the child in an act of sublimation. Ancona does not take it upon himself to rewrite history but he injects a “what if” scenario with the presence of Geliztli’s child.

In doubling Cortés’ children, Martín and Geliztli’s unnamed child, Ancona presents the mestizo with a brother and the weaker offspring, the one without a strong mother, perishes. The presence of this child dramatically alters the psychology central to the Mexican hatred of La Malinche. Lee Skinner, for example, argues that “Ancona wants to condemn the actions of Malinche...but he cannot devise a plot in which Malinche is chastised for her misdeeds...[f]or this reason he created the fictional character of Geliztli, whose story is an imperfect reflection of Malinche’s own” (35-6). One can argue, though, that in contrast to Geliztli La Malinche the “good” mother saves her child and raises him; she does not hand him over to a murderous priest. In Ancona’s novel, the scapegoating of Geliztli and her child deflects the populace’s rage from La Malinche and provide them and the Mexicans of Ancona’s day with an alternate mother, one who makes La Malinche “good” by comparison.

In discussions of La Malinche and her culpability in mothering the first mestizo, both traditionalists like Octavio Paz and contemporary critics tend to ignore the father figure, Cortés. Paz and his supporters shift blame onto La Malinche for placing herself in the position she finds herself in, and the supporters of La Malinche argue that she actively chose her destiny and that she was not a victim. Ancona’s novel presents Cortés in a cruel light as he rapes Geliztli and, in her eyes, the child overly resembles its father. In killing that child, then, the crowd also displaces their rage at Cortés, murdering the offspring of his genes. Because of the first child, the Mexican can “kill” the first Cortés-

father and approach the second Cortés-father with less passion. Finally, the Mexican does not orphan himself and views Cortés as a split father figure, one half the raping conqueror the other the Adán to La Malinche's Eva.

If in this reading the family trio remains intact, the Oedipal conflict emerges, writ large on a cultural psyche. Having displaced the killing desire with the death of the first son and the rage of the crowd, the Mexican can express anger at Cortés, the appropriator of the mother, and approach the surviving mother with tenderness. Embracing the native parent facilitates a shift from Eurocentric colonizing thinking to that of the indigenous; the native mother becomes the phallic mother now empowered by her child's recognition. La Malinche, once viewed as an iconic mother under Spanish rule, transmogrifies into a reviled mother but, with the appropriate target of rage located in Cortés, she regains agency and her child's recognition and perhaps respect (Franco 131).

A scapegoating has indeed occurred, but on two levels. The child sacrifice is a scapegoating of Geliztli and her son but, like Teutila's death, does not succeed in ousting the Spaniards. With Ancona's rewriting of the mestizo origin, however, he allows the Mexican to scapegoat Cortés. The Mexican then, in an Oedipal move, displaces his confusion at his origins and mestizaje, substituting in for infantile confusion in Freud's reading, onto the father. By recognizing and blaming the father, the Mexican accepts the mother figure and saves La Malinche from her fate of despised mother. In this scenario, psychoanalytic trauma, merged with national sentiment and miscegenation, enables the child to break away from the oppressive, in this case European, parent and embrace the new order of the indigenous. Published during an era of nation building and healing, this positive rhetoric of the indigenous mother provides the Mexican with a role model that runs counter to the deep-rooted cultural perception of her. At the very least, in this novel a more positive reading of the national mother exists for the Mexican living in the 1870s. In this validation of the indigenous mother, Ancona offers a "new" account of the Conquest and allows the nineteenth-century Mexican woman to participate in the new nation without the taint of La Malinche *la traidora* (Franco 131-2).

For Ancona and the author of *Xicoténcatl* the turn to the past does not hearken to the Romantic turn to the Middle Ages and its beauty and chivalry. Instead, "Spanish American romanticists found their distant past saturated with tyranny, oppression, and corruption. Reconstructions differed, depending on how that past was explained and who was held responsible for generating a climate of distrust and fear" (Gerassi-Navarro 109-110). Today's Mexican writers struggle with that same past and its reinterpretation by nineteenth-century authors, Mexican and European, endeavoring to salvage a more positive figure of the indigenous parent. Vindicating La Malinche nobly approaches a reinterpretation of Mexican history and fiction, yet it also falters on the restrictive binary of good-bad. Recognizing La Malinche's complicity in abetting Cortés, Ancona and the author of *Xicoténcatl* provide instead an alternate scapegoat, and in so doing acknowledge the deeper uncertainties regarding motherhood at the root of the colonial mess.

For example, the vexed application of the term postcolonial to Mexico complicates that theoretical approach. A separate space exists outside of the binary colonial-postcolonial which Emma Pérez terms the "decolonial imaginary." This "intangible" space is "that time lag between the colonial and the postcolonial, that interstitial space where

differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (6). Mexico and Cuba more literally experience Pérez’s decolonial “time lag.” The female, a necessary aspect of the colonial project, must be contained, or, if she resists containment by expressing her own agency like La Malinche, an alternate mother figure must appear. Pérez posits that the mythic Aztlán exists as a pre-nascent space that symbolizes a regression to the womb and overtones of this utopia exist in any recreation of the Aztec past (122). The mother of this womb, she continues, cannot be the “evil” La Malinche but must be nonsexual like *La Virgen*. A different La Malinche emerges, though, one that may not be as pure as *La Virgen* but a “good” mother nonetheless.

Ancona and Varela create mothers, Geliztli and Teutila, who could carry a child but does not bear one or disposes of him. This mother really does “devour”/kill or refuse to create and La Malinche, in contrast, cannot be so bad since at least she mothers her own child. Cortés desires both Geliztli and Teutila, and finds himself the intended victim of their plots. For both women, possibilities exist for what could have been, either a failed conquest or a happy motherhood. Teutila becomes a scapegoat, and Geliztli and her son, in the latter’s case literally, serve as failed scapegoats for the desperate Aztecs.

In order for a nation to exist, and even at a future date to regain its independence, offspring must result. Survival requires the mestizo. With the addition of the “unnatural” mother Geliztli, La Malinche appears in a more positive light for she at least does not kill her child and, by extension, Teutila appears as a woman who detests the very concept of the Mexican. These fictional revisions of the Conquest underscore a deep concern about fertility in the colonial project. While they may desire a “pure” race, the reader realizes that the existence of the nation and the perpetuation of the indigenous require La Malinche. With the addition of Geliztli, however, and a changed perspective of Teutila from saint to sublimator, the burden of scapegoat shifts from La Malinche to another “failed” mother. In so doing it allows the nineteenth-century Mexican to honor his/her native mother and to begin the process of coming to terms with the European father. Pat Mora’s poem pleads for the Mexican to remember that “[C]hildren are/not bastards;/children are children.” They, and by extension other people with a colonial past, real or imagined, must desist in throwing stones at the indigenous mother and accept miscegenation as a reality of colonization. And for the Mexican, s/he must help salvage La Malinche’s *reputación*.

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Notes

- ¹ Martín, the child of Malinche and Cortés, is most frequently termed the first mestizo, but this is not historically accurate. Survivors of a Spanish shipwreck off the coast of Jamaica in 1511 drifted in a lifeboat, landing in the Yucatán, near Cozumel. In 1519 Cortés found the two remaining survivors: the priest Jerónimo de Aguilar, who later served as a translator for Cortés, and Gonzalo Guerrero, who married a Maya, fathered several children, and refused to depart with Cortés. Guerrero's children, then, are the first mestizos.
- ² The title of this novel and the name of its protagonist have been spelled various ways (Jicoténcatl, Xicoténcal, Xhicoténcal, etc.), but "Xicoténcatl" is the closest spelling to the *Náhuatl*.
- ³ These archetypes have been discussed at length by critics; for a brief overview of the archetypes and their appearances in novels, see Luis Leal's "Female Archetypes in Mexican Literature" (*Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols*. Ed. Beth Miller. Berkeley: University of California P, 1983).
- ⁴ Reineke's study ranges over the whole of Kristeva's writing, but with especial attention to *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) and *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987).
- ⁵ The following studies offer information on Varela and his political activities: Antonio Hernández Travieso, *El padre Varela: biografía del forjador de la conciencia cubana* (3rd edition. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1984); Joseph and Helen McCadden, *Father Varela: Torch Bearer from Cuba* (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1969); Juan P. Esteve, *Félix Varela y Morales: Análisis de sus ideas políticas* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1992); José M. Hernández, "¿Fue Varela el primer revolucionario de Cuba?" (*Cuban Studies* 28. Ed. Enrico Mario Santí. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh P, 1999); and the articles collected under the title "El Padre Varela y Cuba" in *Cuadernos americanos* (68 (1998): 19-76).
- ⁶ See also D.W. McPheeters' "Xicoténcatl, símbolo republicano y romántico." *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* (10): 1956: 403-11.
- ⁷ La Malinche's origins remain unclear, but scholars seem to concur that she was from the vicinity of the Yucatán and had been sold into slavery. She may have been of noble birth and could have been a war prize.
- ⁸ See Skinner for further detail on Ancona's political and personal lives.

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