Preface

There is a book on Black women's studies whose beautifully ironic title expresses a challenge: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Hull, Scott, and Smith). The challenge is addressed to anyone whose use of categories of race or gender continues to exclude the particular experience of Black women. The authors aim their critique not only at racism and sexism, but also at their companions in critique, at those who are engaged in rewriting what it means to be women or what it means to be African American. These critical efforts, *All the Women Are White* reveals, will only reproduce the logic of exclusion as long as they are formulated in the language of "all."

The authors conjugate the experience of race and gender to assert a collective voice: "but some of us are brave." They must be brave because they will have to confront oppression both as Black people and as women. And they will be confronted by demands for allegiance that may conflict; they may be told sometimes that to speak as women is to be disloyal to men of their community; at other times they will experience alienation or racism in their relations with other women, including feminists.

I am addressed by this observation as well. As a White woman I cannot speak from the position claimed in this instance for "some of us," but I see our common task as the construction of political identities that are both critical and enabling. I am inspired in this effort by the dialogues of bell hooks and Cornel West and their reflections on the tasks facing Black intellectuals, both men and women. Bell hooks speaks to me as well when she proposes these dialogues as a sharing by people of a wider "community of faith . . . a community of comrades who are seeking to deepen our spiritual experience and our political solidarity" (2). And as a White, middle-class intellectual working in the United States in solidarity with the struggles of people in Central America as well as at home, I see that task as inseparable from the

liberation struggles of people throughout the hemisphere. Speaking from a similar position, Sharon D. Welch describes this task as the intellectual and moral challenge to "develop a liberating mode . . . within my own situation, where I am both oppressor and oppressed" (13).

This is the challenge that Rosario Castellanos meets in her prose as she confronts formations of social inequality, including the situation of women in a sexist society and that of indigenous peoples in Mexico whose oppression is rooted in the persistence of colonial relations. Castellanos wrote about her contradictory social position as a woman privileged by "race," class origins, and education. Yet beginning with an exploration of her own situation and the naming of her own experiences, she laid the groundwork for the process of shifting allegiances, of constructing a social critique that was radical in its implications if not always without contradictions.

I am fascinated with the trajectory of Rosario Castellanos' writing as it moves through an exploration of this moral challenge. Locating herself deliberately in her contradictory situation as an intellectual Mexican woman, she teaches us about the ways that individuals are called on to identify with or resist competing claims for identity and allegiance. In this book, I read Castellanos' fiction and essays as lessons in how to read with integrity.

Chapter 1 presents a consideration of the Tempest analogy so often used to figure the relations of colonizer and colonized. I reread this tradition by focusing on Prospero's daughter Miranda as figure for the "(ambiguously) non-hegemonic" situation of women writers who are interpellated through their class and racial positioning as owing allegiance to the colonizer, but who, as women, are also positioned in crucial ways as subordinate.[1]
Chapter 2 considers Castellanos as "resisting reader" (in Judith Fetterly's terms) of the generally accepted discourse about women and culture in her essay *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950) while Chapter 3 situates Castellanos' narrative in relation to Mexican *indigenismo* considered as ideology, social practice, and aesthetic practice.

In the following chapters, I read Castellanos' *indigenista* fiction as it explores the use of language as an instrument of domination and as a means of resistance, and the ways that different practices of interpretation shape social conflict. Chapter 7 considers the two volumes of short stories that center primarily on women's lives, and in Chapter 8 I examine Castellanos' journalism as a practice of exemplary writing, that is, as the strategic use of the newspaper forum to perform her social critique, and the enactment in a public space of feminist practices of reading.

In her fiction and essays Rosario Castellanos explores Miranda's position as she tries to write her way out of it. I read her prose as a practice of "dangerous memory" (as Welch uses this idea in her feminist thinking about lib-

eration theology) through its naming of the memory of women's suffering and resistances, and also as an enactment of commitment to the struggles of indigenous peoples against dominant forms of knowledge. In her representations of the struggle of indigenous people in Mexico and her attempts to understand her own relation to that struggle, Rosario Castellanos encountered both the failures and the successes of this tremendously difficult task. In this respect I see her writing as an act of faith.

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