

Review of *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* by Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Published posthumously and edited by AnaLouise Keating. Duke University Press, 2015. 308 pp. ISBN: 9780822360094. \$27.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Mary Antonia Wood, PhD

Imagine a theorist with the power to arrest, interrogate, revivify, and transform contemporary depth psychology. Now imagine that theorist emerging from outside of any academy or institute. Imagine that person as a self-described mestiza, queer, feminist, activist, and artist. Imagine your surprise to realize that, while her body of work has been deeply influential for decades within feminist, Chicana/o/x, and social justice circles, her name is rarely mentioned in Jungian/analytical and archetypal circles. This theorist, this protean shapeshifter, is Gloria E. Anzaldúa.

Published eleven years after Anzaldúa's untimely death in 2004, *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* offers a stunning immersion into Anzaldúa's mature intellectual, spiritual, and creative powers. AnaLouise Keating, a close friend and colleague of Anzaldúa's, has assembled six chapters of theory, poetry, drawing, and incantation that would have comprised the heart of Anzaldúa's long-awaited doctoral dissertation had she lived long enough to complete it. From the start of her influential career, she was resistant to formally align herself with any institution, discipline, or way of thinking, nonetheless Anzaldúa was deeply influenced by the work of C.G. Jung, and especially by that of James Hillman.

The ways in which depth psychological thought shaped Anzaldúa's work, beginning with her groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), have been noted by scholars (and by Anzaldúa herself) for over thirty years. What is missing, however, is a full recognition of Anzaldúa's *own power* to shape a contemporary and inclusive depth psychology for our inexorably interconnected, multicultural, and wounded twenty-first century. *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro* offers an extraordinary opportunity for the commencement of this task.

In her preface, Anzaldúa made clear her allegiance to imagination, the imaginal, and to the image itself:

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. My imagination and my naguala are connected—they are aspects of the same process, of creativity. . . . My text is about

imagination, the psyche's image-creating faculty, the power to make fictions or stories . . . about 'active imagining,' ensueños (dreaming while awake) and interacting consciously with them [fictions, stories, images]. (pp. 4-5)

She insisted that "there's a difference between talking *with* images/stories and talking *about* them" (p. 5). Her intent to do the former came at some risk within the confines of academic discourse—confines that she pushed against from her very first writings in the 1970s. One of her primary methods of challenging conventions is a knowledge-making practice that she called autohistoria-teoría (self-narrative-theory making). Sensitive readers will quickly realize that she accomplished what she set out to do in *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro*—talking *with* images/stories rather than about them. According to Anzaldúa, both writing and reading, along with artmaking, are "ensueños, willed interactions" with the imagination (p. 41). They are image-making practices that shape and transform what "we are able to imagine and perceive" (p. 44).

Shifting seamlessly from first to third person, from English to Spanish, from prose to poetry and visual image, Anzaldúa's chapters stand alone as individual essays or cuentos (stories). She lived and recounted these stories from a liminal space between worlds, a place that she called "nepantla." This world between worlds is "a point of contact between the worlds of nature and spirit, between humans and the numinous (divine). . . . Nepantla is a bridge between the material and the immaterial" (p. 28). Readers familiar with Jungian and archetypal theories will be reminded of Jung's transcendent or bridging/symbolizing function when considering Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla, as well as Henri Corbin's "mundus imaginalis."

Indeed, the end notes to Anzaldúa's second chapter, "Flights of the Imagination: Rereading/Rewriting Realities" trace her exploration of depth psychological ideas from Corbin, Jung, Hillman, Robert Bosnak, Thomas Moore, and Daniel C. Noel, as well as adjacent figures such as Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and Andreas Lommel. These flashes of recognition give way to an experience of Anzaldúa's own radical mezcla (mixture) of diverse cultural and ideological perspectives—an epistemological crossroads where "realities interact, and imaginative shifts happen" (p. 35). As inviting as this sounds, nepantla is not a utopia; it can be a place of insecurity, tension, and confusion as there is no solid ground to stand upon. Nevertheless, it is a generative place of possibility between polarities—a place of visioning, healing, transformation, and magic.

I want to highlight another Anzaldúan theory that is particularly suited for our time: her conception of *conocimiento* (knowledge), which brings together inner works and public acts via processes such as spiritual activism. *Conocimiento* is a type of knowledge and knowledge-making that is non-binary, connectionist, and radically inclusive. As a guiding force, *conocimiento* offers wisdom via dreams and meditation as well as insights gleaned from non-rational divinatory rituals/techniques such as Tarot, and the I Ching. The power of *conocimiento* comes from "being in touch with your body, soul, and spirit and letting their wisdom lead you" (p. 151). This empowerment must then be taken into the world. Visualize a tiny silver milagro, or healing charm, of a single left hand (*la mano zurda*) holding a heart in its palm. This is the image that Anzaldúa has offered to us as a reminder for daily implementation of ideas and visions in our communities, as opposed to merely theorizing about them in our minds (p. 153).

I would be remiss not to call attention to AnaLouise Keating's masterful assemblage of the writings that make up *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro*. After Anzaldúa's death, Keating combed through dozens of Anzaldúa's printed drafts, along with numerous digital files saved over the years, plus boxes of both typed and handwritten notas (notes) and drawings that were part of Anzaldúa's laborious writing process. Keating's fine introduction and chapter notes are indispensable, as are the various appendices—including Appendix 2 which deals with Anzaldúa's many health challenges during the last year of her life and Appendix 3 which gathers unfinished sections from Anzaldúa's remarkable Chapter 2, noted above. The glossary of signature Anzaldúan terms serves as a touchstone for anyone unfamiliar with these concepts or in need of a refresher. These include nepantla, conocimiento, nagualismo (sometimes referred to as chamanería/shamanism), autohistoria-teoría, the coyolxāuhqui imperative (a re-remembering inspired by the dismembered Aztec goddess Coyolxāuhqui), el cenote (a deep pool of universal images), and spiritual activism (inner works linked with public acts) among others.

Anzaldúa has been gone for 18 years, but her time is now. She has left us a repository, a cenote, a deep well of embodied “theory-actions” that can shift, empower, and propel an inclusive and transformative depth psychology for our time. Like Coyolxāuhqui, “let's put our dismembered psyches and patrias (homelands) together in new constructions. . . . Let us be the healing of the wound” (p. 22).

Contributor

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