

And the Gulf Did Not Devour Them:
The Site of Transformation in
Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and
Kingsolver's *The Lacuna*
by Christina Boyles

Though critics highly regard her earlier novels, Barbara Kingsolver's 2009 Orange Prize winning novel, *The Lacuna*, has received little critical attention. One reason for the absence of scholarly debate is that the narrative form of *The Lacuna* is highly fragmented. Comprised of autobiography, diary entries, letters, book reviews, archivist's notes, and court transcripts, the text describes the life and work of Harrison Shepherd, the novel's protagonist. Because the narrative is communicated in a variety of overlapping and functionally different forms, the text contains a number of gaps, or lacunas, that the reader must fill in using textual clues and deductive reasoning. While many reviewers cite this as a weakness in the text—*NPR*'s Maureen Corrigan states that the "lacuna" in the novel is the "unintentionally missing" main character, *The Los Angeles Times*' Kai Marsted notes that the novel has "no enigma," and *Entertainment Weekly*'s Tina Jordan says that "the book—told through newspaper clippings, letters, bits of memoirs, and the like—never quite comes together"—the gaps are, in actuality, the key to understanding the novel because they mark the places where Harrison experiences a crisis of identity as a homosexual, half-Mexican, half-Anglo man. Liesl Schillinger, author and literary critic for the

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New York Times, recognizes that “the value of Kingsolver’s novel lies in its call to conscience and connection,” and suggests that “Kingsolver gives voice to truths whose teller could express them only in silence.” In the novel, therefore, the gaps become a site of connection: they leave a space in which the disparate parts of Harrison’s identity can coexist. While interpreting the lacunas is crucial to understanding the text, their inherent lack makes them difficult to interpret. One way to inform the gaps, however, is through a comparison with Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which utilizes lacunas both to highlight the complication of possessing “non-normative” racial and sexual identities and to suggest the need to move through the liminal space created by physical and psychological gulfs. Doing so informs the lacunas within Kingsolver’s text while preserving their complexity and ambiguity.

Before comparing the texts, however, it is necessary to outline their source of internal conflict—the establishment of the border between the United States and Mexico. Since the arrival of Hernan Cortes in the early sixteenth century, the territory known as New Spain and Mexico has been effectively colonized. Its indigenous populations have experienced deculturization while also undergoing cultural domination by both Spanish and American powers. Alejandro Lugo, in his *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, argues that the basis for this cultural conquest can be found in the physical border itself. He states, “the name ‘Rio Grande’ speaks to power politics of land appropriation that allow geographical spaces to be invented in times when the conquerors (either Spanish or the Americans) can construct a world in their own image, whether it fits others’ reality or not” (36). Hence, the renaming of the Mexican landscape resulted in the creation of a New Mexico, one which subsumed the identities of its indigenous peoples in the prevailing cultures of the conquerors. Furthermore, the “Rio Grande” was already an established landmark demarcating the border between the regions of Nueva Galicia and Nueva Vizcaya; thus, by reappropriating the term, the Spanish conquerors actually renamed and reappropriated the landscape to suit their needs. The American conquest of Northern Mexico similarly utilized the power of naming to assert colonial power. In particular, Lugo continues, “the United States appropriated ‘Rio Grande’ as a strategy to differentiate themselves from the ‘Mexicans,’ who preferred ‘Rio Bravo’” (37). Thus, the border regions of Mexico have been both physically and linguistically dominated by colonial powers.

Moreover, by establishing a “dividing line” between the United States and Mexico, these conquerors essentially created a binary between Mexican and American identities. In reality, however, the two cultures cannot be so easily divided. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza*, highlights the fragmentation of identity undergone by citizens of the borderlands who have spent centuries having their language and land reappropriated by political entities. Her text, published in 1987, established a new theoretical framework for understanding literature of the border; in particular, she acknowledges the many dimensions of borderlands life affected by the political machinations — physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual. Most importantly, Anzaldúa labels the physical space around the Rio Grande/Bravo as representative of an internal identity struggle. She states:

Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian — our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 87)

Similarly, in *The Lacuna*, external landscapes reflect Harrison’s internal struggles. Notably, Harrison crosses the border between the United States and Mexico eight times during the novel. Each time, he attempts to establish a new identity that embodies his whole self. Sadly, each of these attempts ends in failure. One reason may be that Harrison, like the majority of the world, views the border as a binary; as a result, each time he crossed the border he assumes one cultural identity at the cost of the other. However, the Rio Grande/Bravo is not as distinct a border as it may appear. Since the waters of the Rio Grande/Bravo are neither American nor Mexican, but both simultaneously, they are a physical space where the two cultures coexist and, as such, they function as a lacuna, or gap, between the two nations. Furthermore, as the waters of the Rio Grande/Bravo flow into the Gulf of Mexico, they free themselves from the narrow confines created by the border and merge with a body that is unrestricted by physical or political boundaries. In this sense, the Gulf embodies and embraces both cultures.

The Lacuna relies on the Gulf to symbolize the metaphorical dissonance of Harrison's identities. Since Harrison grows up in Isla Pixol, a small island community east of Mexico City, the underwater cave he discovers as a child is situated within the waters of the Gulf. By moving through this cave, which functions as a liminal space between his Mexican and American selves, Harrison is able to begin the process of navigating his identities. When Harrison first discovers the underwater cave, however, it is simply an escape from the tensions of his daily existence. At this time, he discovers that the lacuna has an opening at the other end—one which opens to an unknown world. Though he cannot reach the opening, Harrison feels called to reach the other side—a place of belonging. He writes:

Today the lacuna appeared, a little below the surface. It's near the center of the cliff below a knob where a hummock of grass grows out. It should be easy to find again but best to look early, with sun just up and the tide low. Inside the tunnel it was very cold and dark again. But a blue light showed up faintly like a fogged window, farther back. It must be the other end, no devil back there but a place to come up on the other side, a passage. But too far to swim, and too frightening. . . . One day Pilzintecutli will say, Go ahead lucky boy. *Vete, rubio*, swim toward that light. Go find the other side of the world where you belong. (41)

Here, Pilzintecutli, or the Sun God, foreshadows the steps that Harrison must take to reconcile the disparate parts of his identity: he must swim through the lacuna and emerge on the other side transformed. While the text suggests that Harrison must complete this act before achieving a sense of “belonging,” Pilzintecutli is also very careful to place this event in the future. Harrison cannot swim through the lacuna as a child because he does not yet view himself as disjointed or conflicted. Only after Harrison both acknowledges and embraces his racial and sexual identities can he achieve transformation.

To understand this process more fully, we might describe Harrison's experiences through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa provides a language through which the transformation of the marginalized subject can be understood and described, and also shares with Harrison a very similar processes of transformation. As half-Mexican, half-American homosexuals, both Harrison and Anzaldúa have to navigate the multiple borders of race and sexuality. Because Anzaldúa herself asserts that

“lesbian and gay people [are] exemplars of the mestiza and mestizo” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 134), Harrison, by virtue of his sexuality, can be understood through the lens of Anzaldúa’s mestizo/a, which she defines as being “in between, overlapping spaces,” and possessing “that ability to travel through worlds, to jump from one locale to the other or one particular identity to the other.” One of the stages of this “*nepantla* state,” she explains, necessitates “hiding oneself in the dark cave, reaching the bottom. (Reuman 13)

Both Anzaldúa and Harrison exist “in between” races, a fact which pushes them into a “dark cave” of liminality. In Anzaldúa’s description, however, she defines a new term, *nepantla*, which, in *This Bridge We Call Home*, she describes as being used “to theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds, whom I’ve named *nepantleras*” (*This Bridge We Call Home* 1). Anzaldúa and Harrison, as *nepantleras*, must navigate the varied aspects of their identities until they reach the nadir of transformation—a metaphorical dark cave. In the cave, a *nepantlera* is given two choices: to retain his/her present identity or undergo a process of rebirth. Only at this point, where identity is ambiguous, is true transformation possible. Anzaldúa notes that this stage is marked by “struggle and all is chaos: you don’t know what you are, you’re a different person, you’re becoming a new person, a new identity.” Yet in the end, this process, if successful, results in the formation of a new identity that both embodies and embraces complexities (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 239)

Though many scholars have discussed this process, commonly referred to as border theory, in works discussing sociology, feminism, and identity politics, the distinctive narrative techniques used in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*—fragmentation of the text, appropriation of multiple genres, and code-switching—are key elements in depicting Anzaldúa’s marginalized existence and, since the publication of her work, have been appropriated by literary authors who similarly struggle to negotiate their fragmented identities. For example, Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, and Arturo Islas’ *The Rain God* all contain elements of fragmentation and code-switching. Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Lacuna* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, however, specifically locate the site of transformation in the “dark cave” of liminality, a place of symbolic death and rebirth that is situated in Gulf waters.

Since Anzaldúa and Harrison are both marginalized due to their mixed racial background and homosexuality, an analysis of these themes demonstrates

how the form of both *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza* and *The Lacuna* depicts the Chicano/a subject outside the highly structured, hierarchical, confines of the predominantly white world, and establishes a space for non-Anglo, non-heteronormative subjects to integrate their experience into the larger social narrative. Furthermore, these formal techniques reinforce the concept of *nepantla*, or the necessity of moving between worlds in order to embrace multiple facets of one's identity. As a result, both texts are fragmented, utilize code-switching, and employ multiple genres, techniques which create textual lacunas. These gaps sit at the core of each work's formal structure and, like the identity struggles of their protagonists, leave space for the possibility of transformation.

Perhaps the most prominent component of Anzaldúa and Harrison's identities is race. For Anzaldúa, the tension between Chicano and American culture establishes her as "a second-class member of a conquered people who are taught to believe they are inferior because they have indigenous blood, believe in the supernatural and speak a deficient language;" the rest of her identity is then derived from these factors (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 70). For example, Anzaldúa's membership in a culture that is both conquered and indigenous causes her to feel conflicted in terms of ethnic identity. At the same time, it supplies her with a rich history and mythology that influences the way she views the world, particularly through the cultural archetype of Coatlicue, a goddess who embodies the tension between good and evil (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 68). Through her understanding of Coatlicue, Anzaldúa is able to appreciate all aspects of her femininity, from sacred to profane. Furthermore, she is made aware of her own inner divinity, which is modeled after the multiple, contradictory images of Coatlicue that are presented in mythology. In other words, Anzaldúa's Chicana identity leads her to a cultural awareness of Coatlicue, who then informs Anzaldúa's understanding of the feminine within herself. Thus, Anzaldúa's participation within Chicano culture leads her to a particular feminine awareness: she is not simply feminine, she becomes part of the goddess Coatlicue.

Though Anzaldúa's identity is highly influenced by the larger cultural structures of history, politics, and mythology, she also realizes that there "are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in forms of images and emotions," and she goes on to explain how "food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland" (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 83). In

other words, the personal as well as the cultural are involved in identity formation. Anzaldúa's personal memories are connected to particular images from her life in Southern Texas: "Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, *spicy menudo*, *chile colorado*, making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top" (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 83). By naming these particular images as identity-shaping, Anzaldúa evokes smells, tastes, colors, and even family relationships that have influenced her formation.

In a similar way, Harrison Shepherd's identity is shaped by both the cultural and personal. Notably, he derives much of his Mexican cultural knowledge from his cook, Leandro. For example, Leandro gives Harrison the goggles that encourage him to explore the ocean which, in turn, leads to Harrison discovering the lacuna. Leandro also teaches Harrison about the moon and the tide, cares for Harrison when he's ill, and ultimately serves as a surrogate parent for the boy. Harrison's affection for Leandro is most evident, however, when the two are cooking together in the kitchen. In one diary entry, Harrison describes cooking *pan dulces*:

Leandro from heaven, angel of patience, paused to rinse his hands in the wash bucket and then dry them on his white trousers. Let me show you how to do this. Begin with two kilos of flour. Make a mountain on the counter. Into this mound, with your fingers, crumble the flakes of butter, the salt and soda. Then pull it out like a ring of volcanic mountains around a crater. Pour a lake of cold water in the center. Little by little, pull the mountains into the lake, water and shore together, into a marsh. Gradually. No islands. The paste swells until there are no mountains left, and no lake, only a great blob of lava. (21)

This passage not only demonstrates the care and patience that Leandro has with both Harrison and his work, but also invokes the physical landscape of Mexico. Harrison and Leandro are living in the small village of Isla Pixol, which is situated on the coast of Mexico near oil fields. Textual clues suggest that this fictional site of Isla Pixol lies to the east of Mexico City, in a region of Mexico marked by a number of volcanoes, including Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl, two physical landmarks which play a significant role in Aztec mythology. Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl themselves are tragic lovers separated on earth and reunited in death (Orozco). Their bodies are memorialized by two

volcanoes, and their spirits, often depicted in Aztec artwork, are shown ascending to heaven together. When Harrison shapes the dough into a volcanic ring, he recalls the chain of volcanoes containing Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl; by bringing the peaks of dough together into one mass, he evokes the two lovers' reunification in death.

Harrison's fond memories of Leandro and his cooking form one of Harrison's strongest ties to his own Mexican identity. Not surprisingly, the third section of the novel, which marks Harrison's return to Mexico after briefly attending high school in the United States, begins by giving a recipe for *empañadas dulces*. By relying on a recipe rather than a factual explanation of events, Kingsolver recalls both Harrison's time with Leandro and the significance of cooking within his cultural memory in order to place the narrative back in Mexico. She also evokes one other memory, the time when Harrison used the recipe for pan dulces to make plaster for Diego Rivera: "Spread a canvas on the floor, make a mountain of the powder. Pour water in the center, a lake in the volcano. Mix the lagoons with your fingers into marshes, making the paste thick. Gradually, or there will be lumps" (71). Childhood memories, cooking, culture, and working for Diego Rivera all congeal in this plaster recipe, embedding Harrison's experiences in Mexico and recalling his time with Leandro.

As he ages, however, Harrison begins to integrate other cultural memories into his psyche. In particular, he gets the opportunity to travel to Teotihuacan, which, according to the ancient peoples of Mexico, is the birthplace of modern civilization as well as the gods. Teotihuacan is also significant because it is home to the sun and moon pyramids built by the Aztecs. Recent archaeological discoveries suggest that the cave located under the Pyramid of the Sun was a holy place used for religious rituals (Miller and Taube 161–62). Harrison corroborates this evidence by finding a small carved figurine at this site. He writes in his diary: "Every detail of the little figure was perfect: his rounded belly with indented navel, his short legs and fierce face. A headdress that resembled a neat pile of biscuits. Eyes deeply indented under arched brows. And inside his rounded lips, a hole for a mouth, like a tunnel from another time, speaking. *I am looking for the door to another world. I've waited thousands of years. Take me*" (202).

Like the voice in the lacuna, the small figurine encourages Harrison to seek out "another world," one where he can find a sense of belonging. Both of these

voices are attributed to the same mythological being: the first directly attributed to Pilzenteculti, the Sun God, and the second spoken by a relic used to worship the Sun God at his holy site, the Sun Pyramid. Since the Sun God is the most revered god of Aztec tradition, the messages Harrison is receiving can be attributed to the highest divine power. The two combined messages echo each other, telling him that his physical movement through the lacuna will allow him to discover the place where he belongs (41). Harrison's conflicting identities will no longer exist as binaries; rather, they will coexist in all their complexity. As a result, his fragmented self will be transformed through the lacuna and its reconciliation of his internal tensions.

Harrison, however, does not comprehend Pilzenteculti's message until much later in the text. Before that moment, he leaves Mexico for two significant stretches of time—to attend the Potomac Military Academy in Washington D.C. and to move Asheville, North Carolina, where he writes novels. In both of these instances, Harrison's identity is determined by language, rather than cultural mythology and memory. When, for instance, Harrison first begins school at Potomac Academy, he has to learn a whole new language in order to fit in with his peers. In his diary, he makes the following notes:

1. Do not say "Pardon me." People in books say it constantly. Here, they ask who sent you to prison.
2. Shouting "Go fry asparagus!" won't make them leave you alone, as it would in Spanish.
3. "Beat it" means Go fry asparagus.
4. "Punk" means flutter. Also: chump, ratso, and "sure it ain't the YMCA."
5. "Mexico" is not a country, but a name. Hey Mexico, comeer. (90)

His notations outline differences social and linguistic practices associated with the United States and Mexico. In suggesting that Americans do not often need to apologize for their public behavior, Harrison uses a derivative of the Spanish *perdón* to address issues where he may be inconveniencing another (such as moving through a crowd of people, bumping into someone in the hallway). Not only is the word itself deemed inappropriate—note that the typical response

is a joke about prison — the act of “pardoning” himself is also regarded as unusual. The notes continue to show how Harrison lacks familiarity with cultural idioms, marking him as an outsider.

To break free of these social oppressions, Harrison reverses the discourse of his peers and utilizes it within his novels. Although his novels are a fictionalization of ancient Mexico, he refuses to write in any language but English. When questioned about this stance, he comments: “I had ghosts to leave behind. Mexicans struggle with their ghosts, I think. In general. Maybe it’s easier to say what you want in America, without those ancestral compromises weighing you down like stones” (400). Here, Harrison reveals that his separation from his Mexican identity is self-imposed. Rather than integrating the ghosts of his past into his American identity, Harrison runs from them. In doing so, he exacerbates the tension between his two cultural identities, a situation underscored by the increased fragmentation of Kingsolver’s own narrative. The sections of the novel located in Asheville, North Carolina, in particular, switch from diary entry to letter to newspaper clipping every few pages. Harrison’s confession occurs at the end of this section, only one page before he travels to Chichen Itzá, a Mayan city in Mexico that highly revered the Sun God.

At this moment, the narrative seems to suggest that there will be reconciliation between Harrison and his culture, symbolically represented by his renewed relationship with the Sun God. In actuality, the exact opposite occurs. Harrison’s dissatisfaction with his own cultural identity is displaced onto the Mayan city; instead of reveling in cultural history, Harrison notes that “the temples stood in the strange yellow light with rain darkening their stone pates, dissolving their limestone one particle at a time, carrying off the day’s measure of history” (406). His nihilistic attitude results in further disintegration of the self, shown by the even more frequent fragmentation of the narrative, and, ultimately, Harrison becomes so overwhelmed by tensions of identity that he no longer can function in mainstream society.

His tensions, however, are not merely cultural, but sexual as well. Notably, Harrison’s sexuality causes a great deal of discord throughout the novel. Not only do his three romantic relationships end in failure, they all threaten to expose Harrison as a homosexual. His sexuality causes him to live in a constant state of tension and fear. Even when he is exposed to the sexuality of others — his mother’s use of sex as a means to securing financial stability, Frida Kahlo’s affair with Lev Trotsky, and Diego Rivera’s multiple indiscretions — Harrison

is thrust into conflict. Yet these encounters with sexuality remain largely hidden throughout the novel and can only be pieced together from textual clues. Sexuality, like race, becomes a lacuna in Harrison's story. However, as with race, elements of his sexual identity can be clarified through a comparative reading with Anzaldúa's text.

Anzaldúa plays with the terms homosexuality and homophobia, suggesting that they evoke a fear of returning home and being rejected. She notes, "[Homosexuals] are afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection," she continues, we "push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear—that we will be found out" (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 42). To prevent this from happening, homosexuals (and all other individuals who live on the borderlands of society) hide their true identities behind a constructed sense of self, one which conforms to societal standards. Doing so creates a tension between the internal and external self that can only be reconciled by the lacuna.

This tension manifests itself in the form of the Shadow-Beast, or a personification of the internal oppressions that we push "into the shadows." For Anzaldúa, these oppressions come in many forms, but are most directly connected with her sexual identity because it, of all tensions, is the one that is most cast into the shadows. The Shadow-Beast emerges not so much as a benign being living in the recesses of the soul, but as an active and rebellious part of the self "that refuses to take orders from outside authorities." She explains: "It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts" (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 38). In other words, the Shadow-Beast aggressively pushes individuals to reveal their true identities, regardless of the result. Fearing the consequences of being "found out," people may often choose to quash the Shadow-Beast by conforming to societal standards. Yet in doing so, they allow a monster with "lidless serpent eyes, her cold clammy moist hand dragging us underground, fangs barred and hissing" to fester inside, causing internal discord (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 42).

Some, however, confront the Shadow-Beast. Anzaldúa, in particular, describes this process as both painful and self-revelatory: "Not many jump

at the chance to confront the Shadow-Beast in the mirror. . . . But a few of us have been lucky—on the face of the Shadow-Beast we have seen not lust but tenderness; on its face we have uncovered the lie” (*The Borderlands/La Frontera* 42). The Shadow-Beast emerges here not as a monster, but as the very source of overcoming monstrous repression. In turn, recognizing and accepting the self reveals the “monstrous” biases within society that, once acknowledged, lose their power. As a result, confronting the Shadow-Beast, an act of transformation associated with the lacuna, liberates the marginalized from binaries created by social constructs.

Though not named as such, the Shadow-Beast also plays an integral role in Kingsolver’s text. Harrison’s three significant sexual relationships all fail because either he or his partner is unwilling to confront societal oppressions and live an openly homosexual existence. The first of these relationships, beginning in high school, was with a boy named Billy Boorzai, fondly called Bull’s Eye. Both boys were outsiders at Potomac Academy, where they found acceptance and belonging in their shared sexual relationship. Though never stated explicitly in the text, the sexual nature of their relationship becomes evident in one of Harrison’s flashbacks: “Billy Boorzai’s huge hands, both of us suffocating with laughter, trying to keep still. An officer’s footsteps outside in the hall. Pounding hearts, scarlet shame” (348). Harrison and Billy’s fear of being outed is revealed by their attempt to hide their relationship from the officer in the hall. While this façade works for a time, the boys’ “irregular conduct” is ultimately discovered, and at this point, the boys are faced with a choice. Do they confront the Shadow-Beast and thereby cast off the societal oppressions concerning their sexuality? Or, do they conform to societal expectations and end their relationship? The text does not outline this decision in detail, but Harrison’s expulsion and subsequent move to Mexico suggests the latter.

Harrison continues to seek fulfillment in other romantic relationships. His pursuit of Van Heijenoort unfolds when Harrison serves as personal assistant to Diego Rivera and Van as personal assistant to Leon Trotsky. Amid their work for these two historic figures, Harrison and Van spend the entirety of their days together—their love story emerging in the language of Harrison’s love letter: “The times our teacups crossed by accident, the shock of tasting your licorice there. The brotherhood of small rooms in locked-up houses, the drift of quiet words while waiting for sleep, a restlessness we cast over blended boyhoods. . . . The sight of you, falling like rain into your own beatific slumber” (225). When

Harrison gives this letter to Van, he attempts to confront his own Shadow-Beast; he reveals the truth about his sexuality in spite of the rejection or disapproval he might experience. Van, however, quickly puts an end to this process by disposing of the letter. Van will ultimately play his part in reinforcing societal norms by marrying a woman, while Harrison is blocked yet again from entering the lacuna and confronting his Shadow-Beast.

When Harrison meets Tom Cuddy, however, it seems that such blockages and tensions finally will be resolved. Harrison muses: “[I]n his room, lying on our backs smoking his herd of Camels one after another, shirtless in the dark, it could have been the Potomac Academy, or the tiny barracks at Lev’s. But those places couldn’t have contained him. Tom Cuddy is a one-man band” (432). Here, Harrison alludes to all three of his significant romantic relationships: his relationship with Billy at Potomac Academy, his cohabitation with Van in the home of Lev Trotsky, and his budding union with Tom. By comparing these relationships, and noting that Tom could not be contained by “those places” that housed his previous romances, Harrison seems to have found his best partner. Both men are open, at least with one another, about their sexuality. In fact, they both spend their military service working for the National Gallery of Art, an assignment which they receive because of their “sexual deviance.” But eventually, both Harrison and Tom become subject to their own inner fears. Harrison, as a popular American novelist, fears being publicly gay because doing so may cause him to lose his publication contract and his readership. In a similar way, Tom struggles with societal expectations because he is “a boy who wants so madly to belong, and will not quite” (431). Both end up denying their true selves in order to maintain their good social standing. When Harrison is placed under national scrutiny for his connections to Diego Rivera and Lev Trotsky—two well-known Communists—everything in his and Tom’s relationship changes. Tom decides that his reputation is more important than his relationship, and tells Harrison: “Nice knowing you but things change. Best for both of us is we shove off and no more correspondence. No one in my present situ knows of our acquaintance” (474). With this quick dismissal, all of Harrison’s relationships fall apart and fail to provide him with a clear sense of identity or belonging. He must discover a different way to reconcile his internal tensions.

In the end, Harrison flees the United States and returns to his hometown of Isla Pixol. Here, he is ushered into “another world,” the underwater world of

the lacuna. Driven to desperation by his exile and rejection, Harrison can find no way of coping with the tensions of his identity except through reunification with the lacuna. Before diving in the water, he describes the ocean as heaven and all the fish as angels, a divine refuge from the troubles of humanity. Then, swimming into the lacuna, he becomes engulfed. He dies to his old life, crosses through heaven, and comes out the other side transformed. His stenographer, Violet Brown, records the event as follows:

I read all of it. The happy ending, as he called it. Because that is what he did, right under my nose while I sat reading on the beach. He swam in that cave, to rest with the bones or else come out the other side, and walk himself into life as some other man who is not dead. . . . Fight or die was his choice. I know which it was. Mrs. Kahlo would have hidden him when he got that far, and helped him make a new start. She thrived on that kind of thing. He had wired the money. 'Someone else is here,' she'd written plain as daylight, and also the name she used to call him, long forgotten. It was his idea to make her send a message, to put me at rest. I feel I know that too. (504)

At this moment, Harrison's story finally changes directions. Instead of running from his internal tensions, he decides to confront them in the "dark cave" of transformation. Here, he enters the *nepantla* state and is presented with two options: immanent death or internal rebirth. By choosing rebirth, Harrison does not magically eradicate all the conflicting aspects of his identity; rather, he embraces them in all their complexity. The outcome of Harrison's movement through the lacuna remains ambiguous in its potentially tragic and liberating implications. Yet in reading Kingsolver's novel in conjunction with Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the significance of moving through physical and psychological gulfs become understandable. These gulfs embody binaries of identity, particularly those related to race and sexuality, and, as such, provide space in which binaries can coexist and potentially dissolve. Anzaldúa's text may not "fill in" the many gaps in Kingsolver's narrative, but her writings flow into different sections of the story, informing some lacunas while leaving others untouched. Such engulfments maintain the complexity and ambiguity within Kingsolver's text while simultaneously inundating Harrison's experiences with meaning.

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