



Malinche's Conquest

By Anna Lanyon

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Malinche was the Amerindian translator for Hernán Cortés—from her lips came the words that triggered the downfall of the great Aztec Emperor Moctezuma in the Spanish Conquest of 1521. In Mexico, Malinche's name is synonymous with “traitor,” yet folklore and legend still celebrate her mystique. The author traverses Mexico and delves into the country's extraordinary past to excavate the mythologies of this exceptional woman's life. Malinche—abandoned to strangers as a slave when just a girl—was taken by Cortés to become interpreter, concubine, witness to his campaigns, mother to his son, yet married to another. She survived unimaginably precarious times relying on her intelligence, courage, and gift for language. Though Malinche's words changed history, her own story remained untold, until now.

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Editorial Review

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To the Spanish conquistadores on the Cortes expedition, she was the honored "Dona Marina," who served as both interpreter for and mistress of Cortes. To the Aztecs and other Amerindians who viewed the Spanish as ravenous plunderers, she was "Malinche," a pejorative slur roughly translated as "betrayal." Although it is known that she bore a son by Cortes, little else is known of her life before or after the conquest. Lanyon is an Australian who teaches Spanish. Her interest in Malinche was stoked during her visits to Mexico. The result is a highly speculative but enjoyable "biography" of one of the more intriguing subjects of the Age of Exploration. Of course, Lanyon cannot reveal the "true" Malinche, but her suggestions and ruminations upon the history and culture of Mexico are both provocative and engrossing. For Lanyon, Malinche is a symbol for a somewhat schizophrenic culture that has yet to fully synthesize its dual European and Amerindian heritages. Readers will gain valuable insight into the Mexican national character. *Jay Freeman*

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From Kirkus Reviews

An imaginative, vivid reconstruction of a Mexican Indian woman who profoundly shaped New World history--and then was reviled for four centuries. La Malinche, as she is known in Mexico, was probably 18 or 19 when Spanish soldiers first landed near Veracruz in 1519. A Mayan speaker who also knew Nahuatl, and who was thus conversant with various peoples of central Mexico, Malinche (whom the Spanish called Marina) guided the conquistadors to Tenochtitlan and negotiated their entrance into the capital of the people erroneously known to us as Aztecs. (One of the many contributions of Lanyon's study is that it restores the name Culua-Mexica to Moctezuma's people; Azteca, she writes, was an archaic and obsolete term that crept into a Spanish report and was repeated uncritically ever since.) After Cortes and his soldiers overthrew the regal government of Moctezuma and Cuahtemoc and established Spanish rule over Mexico, Malinche was put to other uses than as an interpreter; in fact, she bore a child to Cortes, one of the first mestizos born (that child, named Martin, has since been apotheosized as the founder of the cosmic race of Mexicans). She died around March 1528, probably in one of the great and horrifying plagues that were sweeping Mexico at the time, and was buried in an unmarked grave. Australian historian Lanyon has done her homework well to resurrect Malinche from the ashes of history and to restore her reputation, for she has been viewed for nearly 500 years as a traitor who delivered Mexico into enemy hands. Lanyon also defends Malinche from the ridiculous charge, propounded in Gary Jennings's novel *Aztec* and many other books, that she was a promiscuous vixen in beads and buckskin, something that contemporary Spanish reporters such as Bernal Diaz, who was an ardent gossip, would certainly have noted. Lanyon's well-written life of Malinche will be of much interest to historians and general readers alike. -- *Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

"Mesmerizing . . . to be relished. Anyone who loves Mexico, old tales or fine prose should read this book."
—Inga Clendinnen, author, *Aztecs and Ambivalent Conquests*

Users Review

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