The Litany of the Mundane: Material Narratology and the Poetics of the Catalogue in Sandra Cisneros's Late and Early Fiction

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Abstract

This paper examines the inventory as a primary structural catalyst in the works of Sandra Cisneros, specifically contrasting the fable *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012) with the short story "Anguiano Religious Articles Rosaries Statues Medals Incense Candles Talismans Perfumes Oils Herbs" (1991). Applying a postclassical narratological framework, the study argues that Cisneros employs the list, or the litany, as a sophisticated rhetorical structure to navigate the complex junctures of grief, identity, and the sacred. While classical narratology frequently views description as a static pause in sequential plot, this study demonstrates how these catalogues work as accretive sites of meaning. The community-based search of a runaway pet becomes a material mapping of a San Antonio neighbourhood, where healing is negotiated by means of externalized, tangible experiences instead of introspective thoughts. The paper explores these votive narratives, and concludes that Cisneros is validating both the mundane and the kitschy as sites of significant narrative potential. Ultimately, it posits how the physical world creates an

anchor for the Chicana experience by shifting the focus of the narrative away from what is lost toward what is gained.

Keywords: Postclassical narratology, Material culture, The catalogue, Spatiality, Chicana literature

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Introduction

The evolution of postclassical narratology has necessitated a critical reevaluation of the relationship between narrative structure and the physical world; rather than treating setting as a static backdrop, contemporary analysis increasingly views the environment as an active constituent of the storyworld. In the fiction of Sandra Cisneros, this engagement with the tangible takes the form of a "material narratology" where the exhaustive listing and arrangement of objects serves as a primary mechanic for characterization and thematic development. By utilising the catalogue as a structural device, Cisneros transforms domestic inventories and neighbourhood geographies into sophisticated maps of the human psyche, allowing the narrative to navigate the complex intersections of cultural identity and personal trauma through a precise focus on spatiality. This method, referred to herein as "The Litany of the Mundane," is key to understanding how bereaved individuals who are experiencing displacement can recapture aspects of themselves after they lose familiarity with the everyday worlds surrounding them.

Methodology:

This research takes place in the domain of postclassical narratology, moving beyond classical structuralist models to examine narrative as a dynamic, contextual, and cognitively situated process. To analyse how Sandra Cisneros transforms domestic inventories and neighbourhood geographies into complex representations of the human psyche, the paper employs a two-pronged analytical strategy based on material space. First, the study applies David Herman's cognitive-narratological concept of "situatedness"—defined as a "mode of representation that is situated in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling" (*Basic Elements* 37)—to explain how the protagonists' affective recovery from trauma is essentially dependent upon their physically navigating a local storyworld. Second, this spatial reading is combined with a material narratology informed by Betsy Winakur

Tontiplaphol's theories on the structural efficacy of the literary catalogue. Through a comparative analysis of the repetitive, liturgical questioning in the fable and the dense, unpunctuated listing of the short fiction, the paper scrutinises how both texts deploy an accretive design. Such an approach treats the comprehensive inventory of physical objects as an active constituent of worldmaking and a vital material anchor for identity, rather than a passive, decorative backdrop. Therefore, this method connects close textual analysis with the study of literary space. It demonstrates how a character rebuilds their identity through the accumulation of tangible elements within a collective environment.

The Living Votive and the Architecture of Loss

Grief is rarely a linear progression; more often, it is a "spatial disorientation" that renders even the most intimate domestic landscapes unrecognisable to the bereaved. In Sandra Cisneros's *Have You Seen Marie?*, the protagonist – a fifty-three-year-old "orphan" mourning the recent death of her mother – finds herself adrift in a San Antonio city that feels simultaneously visceral in its heat and spectral in its emotional resonance. This condition is emblematic of the "postmodern ethnicity" Ellen McCracken identifies in contemporary Latina writing, where identity is not an inherited essence but a fluid negotiation of cultural memory and material space (McCracken, *New Latina Narrative* 12). This negotiation is facilitated by what Réka M. Cristian describes as the construction of a "hybrid physical and mental space," where the domestic arena is paired with an interiority that allows the character to inhabit the "Nepantla" or of a bicultural reality (Cristian 22). Within this framework, the environment is not merely a setting but a participant in the work of mourning; the "Tejanised" architecture of the King William District – where rigid Victorian gables are softened by the communal presence of Virgen de Guadalupe nichos – serves as a material archive for the narrator's fragmented identity. While these landmarks constitute a cultural map, the protagonist initially finds herself unmoored, existing in a vacuum where the official history of the neighbourhood has lost its semiotic weight, "like a glove left behind at the bus station" (Cisneros, *Marie* 5). Her recovery, therefore, depends on her ability to analyse and reclaim these hybrid spaces through the physical act of the search.

The narrative engine is not derived from a grand moment of revelation or a heroic journey as in most traditional plots, but rather by the humble, desperate quest for a missing creature: Marie, a black-and-white cat which belonged to her friend Rosalind (affectionately called Roz). The

beloved animal's disappearance is an interruption of a commonly known "script" – a concept David Herman defines as the "knowledge representations that store these finite groupings of causally and chronologically ordered actions" required to accomplish specific tasks (Herman, *Scripts* 1048). In ordinary circumstances, a typical "pet script" would involve an expectable pattern: feeding, sleeping, roaming within local boundaries, and returning; Marie's sudden disappearance is a distinct break in this stereotyped routine (Herman, *Scripts* 1048-51). The departure from this anticipated script that the missing cat represents causes a mechanical shock to the household sequence and thus creates sufficient duress to cause the protagonist to depart from her stagnant home environment and enter into the earthy, sun-filled world of the King William District.

The transformation of grief within the framework of postclassical narratology demands that the inner experience of despair be replaced by an intentional and sensory interaction with the physical aspects of the storyworld. The unrelenting, sunny and vibrant reality of the San Antonio sidewalks represents a move from the darkened shadows of internalised mourning to what Herman describes as the "situatedness" of narrative, where the protagonist must navigate the tactile, often harsh coordinates of a specific environment to reconstruct her own sense of self (Herman, *Basic Elements* 37-38). This "situatedness" implies that the narrator will recover not just cognitively but also physically from her loss and reclaim her position as a being in a spatially defined environment. By linking the narrator's cognitive and affective state to a set of geographically defined locations, Cisneros creates a force that requires the narrator to define herself as a bodily entity existing in a localized space rather than an isolated, disassociated consciousness lost in the abyss of memory. By forcing the character to move through the heat and the dust, Cisneros uses the material world to interrupt the stasis of loss. It is a forced migration from the sanctuary of one's own shadow into the unforgiving glare of a world that refuses to stop turning simply because a heart has been broken.

The search for Marie is a worldmaking exercise in the fable's narrative, because the story doesn't merely depict a setting; it builds a storyworld by dynamically interacting with its physical location (the Texas streets) through character interactions (Herman, *Basic Elements* 105). For the narrator, this corporeal environment is a collective repository of cultural artefacts and history. Each colourfully painted porch that the narrator climbs up to, each house she walks

past and every stray animal she sees are all important nodes on a community's social map. The neighborhood is depicted by Cisneros, not as a backdrop, but as a living catalogue of survival:

> I followed Roz up and down the streets of my neighborhood and along both banks of the San Antonio River […] Down the block where Stieren meets Guenther (Cisneros, *Marie* 8,17).
>
> We walked past the wedding-cake mansions on King William Street and over to the O. Henry foot bridge […] At a lacy Victorian on Barrera Street, we stopped to chat with a woman… (22, 42)
>
> [We walked from] a wooden house off Refugio and Matagorda [and] a tiny house on Claudia Street [to] the corner house on Crofton, the one with the five palm trees (45-54).

This sequencing illustrates how worldmaking in the text occurs through an accretive way. The narrator does not enter into a generalized urban space; instead, she navigates a world made up of various individualized, eccentric stories – the backfiring truck of Dave the cowboy, the teardrop etched at neighbour Luli's eye, and the house of the Cat Lady with her eleven cats. It isn't as if these elements are included simply for their aesthetic or contextual value; they function as "material anchors," drawing the narrator out of her internal stasis into the life experiences of those around her. In doing this, Cisneros constructs a "situated" reality where the search for a cat becomes a process for the protagonist to re-map her own existence within a communal milieu.

In interviews, Cisneros explains that the search allowed her to "gradually transform a wound into a pearl [a]nd survive" (Olivas), a sentiment echoed in the book's afterword where she describes the necessity to **"**wade through an emotion" to reach the "other shore" of rebirth (*Marie* 90). This inventory is far from a passive list; it is a cumulative process of identity construction where the narrator gathers the fragments of others' lives to begin the work of repairing her own. Betsy Winakur Tontiplaphol suggests that Cisneros employs the catalogue specifically to bridge the gap between individual loss and a collective, material reality (19). This "internal inventory" mirrors the fragmented way experiences are recounted in oral cultures, where identity is reconstructed through the act of telling (19). The use of the repetitive, almost liturgical central question "Have you seen Marie?" to elicit a multitude of stories and recollections creates an overall cadence for the tale. As she talks to people, such as the widow

Helen, who sits on her front porch affixed by the familiar weight of a Big Red soda, or Carolina, whose Yorkie named Coco has become another way for the lonely woman to have tender companionship, the narrator is not merely asking a question. She is actively accumulating votive offerings which is the concrete evidence of how life continues even after a significant tragedy.

In order to analyse the development of this technique, one must go back to Cisneros's earlier experiments with the litany in her short fiction. In "Anguiano Religious Articles," the list is even more concentrated than before; it is without the fable-like meandering of *Marie* and configured as a dense, commercial, and religious ledger. The narrator in that story states:

> I was thinking about those framed holy pictures with glitter in the window. But then I saw some Virgen de Guadalupe statues with real hair eyelashes […] I looked at all the Virgen de Guadalupes he had. The statues, the framed pictures, the holy cards, and candles. Because I only got $10. (Cisneros, "Anguiano" 115)

The comparison between the two different modes of inventory reveals a shift in Cisneros's material narratology. While the botanica story uses the catalogue to analyse the socio-economic pressures of the barrio, *Have You Seen Marie?* uses it to navigate the metaphysical terrain of mourning. Both, however, rely on the "situatedness" of the subject within a community of objects. As noted by Lindsay M. Vreeland, this communal search for Marie denotes a particular feminist approach to recovering from trauma, wherein the "madness" of grieving in seclusion is lessened through an externalized and tangible serenity (22-23). This form of peace is physically manifested in the narrator's journey along the "river that is more creek than river," that expands instantly into a global, spiritual cartography (Cisneros, *Marie* 89-90). The river then speaks to her, promising to carry her "salty tears" through an extensive, interconnected network:

> [T]o the Texas coast where they'll mix with the salty tears of the Gulf of Mexico [...] swirl with the waters of the Caribbean [and] the water roads of the Atlantic [...] through the strait of the Dardanelles along the muddy Mekong and the sleepy Ganges [...] mixing with everything, everything, everything, everything (*Marie* 72-73).

The rhythmically exhaustive list changes the local catalogue to a universal one, where the protagonist's private sadness can now move out of itself and be part of a collective worldmaking. The sorrow that was once an isolated and inert weight inside her can now blend with the "sandy

Yangtze" and the "dancing Danube" (73). In this way, she becomes a participant in a community based on making sense of the world beyond the borders of the King William District. The waterway has become a small boundary to manage until it dissolves into a global flow; transforming the amorphous void of loss into a structured, rhythmic path. By systematically cataloguing and connecting to the world at large, the orphan is drawn back into the world of the living, proving that survival is possible not in solitude, but in recognizing one's place within the "everything" of a turning world.

The Material Votive: The Botanica as a Narrative Site

The horizontal mapping of grief from block to block in *Have You Seen Marie?*, can be seen to have a corresponding vertical mapping of materiality in Chicano theological belief in the story "Anguiano Religious Articles Rosaries Statues Medals Incense Candles Talismans Perfumes Oils Herbs." The title itself provides a graphic representation of the collapse of the reader's expectations of a structured narrative. It reads as one long, accumulation of nouns without commas or pauses between them, which creates a breathless reading experience that mirrors the physical disarray of the botanica. This unpunctuated inventory reflects the way that Cisneros destabilises the expected configuring of space. All items – whether herbs or statues – hold equal placement within the story, thus illustrating how there is no hierarchy of narrative space. The accretion of objects rather than the typical conflict-resolution structure of a story allows the botanica to be seen as a sanctuary of specificity where the sacred and profane coexist on a singular, crowded plane. The cramped, aromatic confines of the botanica serve as a backdrop for elevating these mere commodities to complex narrative intertexts that give voice to a community caught at the precarious juncture of economic despair and spiritual aspiration.

Cisneros presents the shop not just as a background, but as the principal agent of worldmaking, a process David Herman explicates as the fundamental requirement for narrative sense-making (*Basic Elements* 105). Within this theoretical purview, the narrative functions as a rigorous blueprint for world-creation, where the uninterrupted inventory of the title causes a radical "de-automatization" of the readers' usual interpretive pace. By removing syntactic pauses from the text, Cisneros forces the readers to deliberately decelerate the reading process, requiring them to perform the essential mapping operation of translating these dense semiotic cues (the rosary beads, statues, candles etc.) into a coherent, sensory story world. This intensive construction

guarantees that the shop will not simply be a setting, but rather a representation of community efforts to navigate an underlying "disequilibrium" through the concentrated power of material objects (105–106). The items are meticulously placed on shelves, yet they breathe with the weight of the lives they are intended to heal:

> [T]hose pretty 3-D pictures, the ones made from strips of cardboard that you look at sideways and you see the Santo Nino de Atocha, and you look at it straight and it's La Virgen […] those framed pictures with a silver strip of aluminum foil on the bottom and top, the wooden frame painted a happy pink or turquoise [or] some Virgen de Guadalupe statues [with stiff black brush lashes]…I didn't like how La Virgen looked with furry eyelashes—*bien* mean, like *los amores de la calle*. That's not right. (Cisneros, "Anguiano" 114-115)

These listed items are not passive props. As Ellen McCracken argues, they work as a "public religious display" that recuperate the street and the shop as sacred sites (McCracken, "Contemporary Chicano Narrative" 163). In "Anguiano", Cisneros maps a topography in which the sacred must express itself amidst the vicinity of the profane by locating the botanica directly across from Sanitary Tortillas and adjacent to the El Divorcio Lounge. This positioning suggests a semiotic struggle where the narrator's search is a way to reclaim an urban space that is otherwise hostile or commercialised. Her refusal of the Preciado Sisters' merchandise while noting that their statuettes appeared "as if someone made it with their feet" (114), shows the "recuperation" McCracken speaks of. It is a demand for a material quality that will provide for the gravity of her intended devotion. When the narrator critiques the "furry eyelashes" of the Virgen as appearing **"***bien* mean, like *los amores de la calle*," she is performing a nuanced interpretation of the material artefact; she is insisting that it needs to be "right" to serve as a spiritual intertext (115).

The figurative presence of San Martin Caballero, who is portrayed as cutting his Roman cape in half and giving it to a beggar signifies the themes of sacrifice and communal charity even before the protagonist says anything. The use of these items also reflects an extremely traditional syncretic practice; one that blends Catholic iconography with local folk worship, thereby addressing the spiritual needs of the community through the recovery of this space. Each object characterizes a compressed story. For instance, the image of Saint Lucy with her eyes on a plate

or the Santo Niño de Atocha in a 3-D frame indicates historical martyrdom and protection, respectively, without requiring a single line of dialogue to establish the fact. The narrative is encoded into the "happy pink" wood, the silver foil, and the "stiff black" eyelashes of the statues, thus requiring a specific "cultural competence" to fully understand their import (McCracken, "Contemporary Chicano Narrative" 177).

Solimar Otero describes this type of area as a "conceptual sacred space" where the "botanica aesthetic" transforms the kitsch value of mass-produced items into active agents of spiritual and cultural survival (174-176). These "layered semiotics" are the ways in which religious icons function as "signposts" to a shared cultural history, in which multiple meanings – sacred, historical, and aesthetic – are packed into a single, portable object (175). Such items operate as mnemonic anchors, enabling the narrator to reconstruct a coherent sense of spiritual belonging and cultural continuity within a fragmented urban environment. The purpose of these mnemonics is to add enough content (semiotic density) so that the narrator can validate her $10 investment. Rather than simply purchasing a product she deciphers each layer of symbolism to make sure that what she has bought fits into her particular religious needs. She rejects the "mean" statue for one reason only: there is a symbolic mismatch where its appearance fails to honour the sacred history it is supposed to embody.

The shop operates in a manner consistent with the previously established analysis of material layering, while providing an additional dimension to understanding how the narrator navigates the social and economic obstacles existing throughout the inventory. The shop can be seen as providing a conduit through which the narrator's dealings with the environment take place. It is not just an outlet of purchase and sale, but rather a site in which she interacts with an array of other individuals who are attempting to acquire their own material remedies from the vast assortment of items available at the store. This dynamic represents David Herman's "socionarratology," a postclassical framework that approaches narrative as a "situated" practice embedded in specific social contexts and the broader historical condition – the material, social, and economic factors that govern the storyworld (Eiranen et al. 8). By utilising the various material "cues" to mediate the tension between the protagonist and her environment, the narrative effectively unburdens the conflict of her internal struggles onto her physical surroundings, allowing the objects themselves to navigate the complexities of her social reality

(4, 8). This theoretical convergence indicates that when the narrator purchases something from the shop, she is actively engaging in a process of historical and cultural sense-making. Through this process, she is using the material object as a means through which she negotiates her agency within a commercialised society.

The owner's status as a "crab ass" creates a narratological shortcut; his gatekeeping – sitting in the dark and "looking [the narrator] up and down", as if he were considering her a potential thief – represents the socio-economic friction inherent in the street (115). Rather than requiring a backstory for informing his character, the owner is reduced to a register of items that he guards and customers he serves, making him a functional extension of the shop's inventory. In this vertical descent, narrative momentum is generated not through the movement or arc of characters, but through the material tension associated with the $10 transaction. When the narrator successfully obtains the "stiff black" eyelashes from such an environment, she performs one final act of material reclamation. She ensures that the statue will be more than just a mass-produced, commercialised article of trade; it will be a personalized vessel for collective devotion.

Comparing this to the search in *Have You Seen Marie?*, the narrative transits from a commercial to a communal inventory. The landscape changes to the King William District, a locality historically defined by Victorian architecture and German immigration, which is "Tejanized" through a prose style that recovers "stories the Alamo forgets to remember" (92). Cisneros removes some of the layers of an area formerly known as "Sauerkraut Bend," later renamed "Pershing Avenue," (due to the anti-German attitudes of U.S. citizens during WWI) revealing a physical environment in which votive elements can be viewed through a shared sense of history of its inhabitants rather than seen at a local "dark shop" ("King William and Lavaca"). In this environment, the search for the lost cat serves as a catalyst for mapping a communal topography populated by "folks with blond hair, a German last name, and a Spanish first name" (92). The search transforms the environment into an inventory of *rasquache* interventions – a sensibility of "offbeat beauty" (93) that aligns with a Chicano philosophy of subaltern defiance and resourceful subversion, finding creative potential in the improvisational and the everyday:

> Roz and I wedged flyers on doorknobs, tucked them inside the curlicues of gates, clamped them beneath the mousetraps of wind shield wipers, stapled them on telephone poles and fences (36).

The tactile connection to the "curlicues of gates" and "the shadow of the Hemisfair tower," (36, 45), illustrates an aesthetic of "making do" (93). It is a bridge that ties the grandiose Victorian mansions to the more modest abodes and saltbox homes of the neighbouring Lavaca district, in which many of the craftsmen and stonemasons resided ("King William and Lavaca"). By moving past the historic thoroughfares to the "nicho[s] in the front yard" (50) and navigating the linguistic play of the Ozuna family at their Sunday gathering, the narrative demonstrates that the search is not merely for a pet, but for a sense of belonging in a world that is "more creek than river" (89). This communal search functions as a form of spiritual reconstruction, where the creative labor, manifested in both the material flyers and the overarching narrative, provides the necessary sustenance for a psyche navigating the heavy aftermath of loss.

Whether navigating the commercial shelves of the botanica or the communal streets of San Antonio, both texts rely on the inventory to analyse the human condition. As Mary Pollock notes, Cisneros's narrator often has "one foot in this world and one foot in that," operating from a bilingual and bicultural perspective that sees the spiritual in the mundane (Pollock 53). The inventory acts as a rhetorical structure of endurance; for Cisneros, to catalogue is the most effective and efficient way to comprehend a reality that is simultaneously common and varied (Tontiplaphol 19). The litany of rosaries, statues, and talismans provides a stable structure in a world that is often economically and socially unstable.

The narrative resolution in "Anguiano Religious Articles" is found not in a change of state, but in the "completeness" of the inventory. By the end of the list, the storyworld is fully populated; the desires of the community have been materialised and shelved. This material narratology validates the small and the kitsch as sites of profound narrative power. The catalogue is not just a list of things; it is a litany of survival that anchors the Chicana experience to the earth.

Comparative Synthesis: Finding through Things

The connection made from an individual's experience of losing a pet to a store selling religious items is built on the principle of "situatedness." In both narratives, Cisneros rejects the traditional interiority of the psychological novel, opting instead to define her characters through their relationship to external matters. Mary Pollock argues that for the bicultural subject, the boundary between the self and the world is porous, where objects act as metonymic anchors for

an identity that is often fragmented by displacement (Pollock 60). In the "Anguiano" story, the owner's identity is not revealed through a stream of consciousness, but through the record of sacred goods he curates – an assemblage of rosaries, medals, and the various statues of Virgen de Guadalupe – which mirrors the specific, desperate needs of the community. These items function as "identity tags," material markers that perform the work of "border thinking" by bridging the secular and the sacred through the creative exchange and tactile presence of the catalogue (Cristian 20-24). Similarly, the neighbours in *Marie* are identified not by their personal histories, but by the artefacts that anchor them to their porches, creating a material shorthand for their presence in the district. As narrative nodes, these objects provide connections among separate people to form a unified whole of struggle.

Cisneros utilises "spatiality," understood as the narrative focus on the deliberate arrangement of objects and environments, to ground the emotional arc within a framework where the storyworld operates as an active, characterological force rather than a decorative backdrop; this spatial dimension allows the physical coordinates of the neighborhood to operate as a material enactment of the character's internal transformation (Herman et al., "Space in Narrative"). In *Have You Seen Marie?*, the "spatiality" of the search is defined by a "village, of sorts, with big houses and little houses" where the socio-economic distance between "trust-fund babies" and "folks who have to take the bus" is bridged by the physical act of looking for the same lost cat (93). The movement toward the back of the house, where the river "transforms itself into a wildlife refuge" and remains "more creek than river" with its "natural sandy bottom" (89-90), becomes a measure of psychological progress. The world is not just a place where the story happens, but the primary medium through which the character's transformation is materialised, allowing the reader to analyse the intersections of private mourning and public space. If the search for Marie maps grief horizontally across the district, the botanica offers a contrasting spatial register, a vertical one. The tightly packed, tiered nature of the shelves stocked with talismans and devotional icons represents a form of spiritual hope compressed into a small, economically constricted space. In addition, the environment itself functions as a text denoting the community's unexpressed desires.

The transition in narrative scale, moving from the minute, tactile detail of a black-and-white cat to the expansive, global litany of the world's great rivers, marks a significant evolution

in her material narratology. In *Have You Seen Marie?*, the narrator eventually moves beyond the local streets of San Antonio to invoke the ancient, rhythmic flow of the Amazon, the Nile, and the Yangtze; this movement represents a shift from what is "local" to a broader "experientiality," which Herman identifies as the evocation of an experiencing consciousness upon which storyworld events are represented as "impinging" (Herman, *Basic Elements* 139). Linking the search for a pet to these global currents suggests that while grief is intensely personal, it is also a part of a larger cycle of loss and renewal, where the materials found along the way act as the physical coordinates that allow the orphan to navigate this vast, emotional terrain without becoming lost in the abstraction of her own pain.

Ultimately, the resolution in both works is not found in a sudden change of mental state or a dramatic plot twist; instead, it is found in the physical act of finding the self within a community of objects. For the woman in the botanica, the resolution lies in the votive object she identifies among the crowded shelves; for the orphan in the King William District, it is the cat that returns to the porch. These are exteriorised peaces. They are built item by item, name by name, until the character is no longer an isolated "orphan" but a situated member of a material and social world. The catalogue, therefore, is the tool of survival—the rhetorical structure that enables the Chicana subject to claim space in a world which often seeks to render her invisible.

Conclusion

Across these different levels of loss, Cisneros's usage of the inventory as an organisational vehicle legitimates both the margins and minutia as valid areas for critical inquiry. The elevation of holy objects, missing animals, and domestic clutter to the position of narrative actants, effectively disrupts the classical structures that frequently devalue material culture to its secondary or background role. The above analysis demonstrates how the "Litany of the Mundane" serves as a methodical approach to mediate the intersections of grief and communal identity. Whether through the spatial topography of loss in her in late-career fables or the spiritual assemblages of her earlier work, Cisneros remains a material narratologist whose prose continues to expand the boundaries of what constitutes the storyworld. Her writing indicates that the way forward from overwhelming loss is not through abstraction; rather, it is found within the context of one's tangible surroundings – the rosaries, pictures, and figurines of saints, as well as the cats, dogs, and trees that tether the subject to a real, living world.

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