

INTRODUCTION

ICONIC MEXICAN WOMEN AT THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW CENTURY

On April 17, 2015, after more than three decades of forensic anthropological research, Sor Juana's attributed remains returned to Mexico City's Convent of San Jerónimo, where the prodigy of New Spain lived and produced the vast majority of her literature over the course of twenty-six years. During the mournful ceremony marking the 320th anniversary of her death, her remains were carried in a wooden casket crowned with the nine-foot rosary found with her body to the church choir, where she will stay "until the Day of Judgment," as several reporters announced on national television, social media, and various online sites. Many visitors, faculty, and students carrying red roses filled the Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana (University of the Cloister of Sor Juana) to attend the solemn procession. Round tables featuring new publications on Sor Juana and readings by specialists on the nun's literary production took place over the course of two days. The jewel in the crown was a reading of the "Oración fúnebre" (Funeral oration) that Octavio Paz, winner of the 1990 Nobel Prize in Literature, wrote for the 300th anniversary of her death in 1995. The event, followed by a recital of Baroque music, included the presentation of an official Mexican postage stamp featuring a portrait of Sor Juana, painted a few years earlier by Carmen Beatriz López-Portillo Romano, rector of the university. The event was a total success. The ceremony was immediately covered by *La Jornada*, *Milenio*, *Excelsior*, *El Universal*, *Proceso*, and other important

papers throughout the country with impressive headlines and pictures of people in mourning around the coffin as if someone had just passed away.

Only an iconic figure like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz would have the power to do this three centuries after her death, even if there is a chance those remains are not hers. After all, icons behave in this way. They have the capacity to convey a relatively fixed meaning or value to a community that knows how to read their signs and symbols in situations that include veneration, admiration, and other complex emotional responses (O'Connor and Niebylski, "Reflections" 1). Icons re-create particular prototypes or models; they are regarded as cultural artifacts; and they are, indeed, the vehicles by which societies project themselves. Because of these intrinsic qualities, icons are able to communicate their encoded messages to a given community that, for better or worse, sees them as constant cultural companions (Onasch and Schnieper 17, 31, 209). In addition, they signify differently in multiple contexts; they may incorporate legend or myth but extend far beyond the limits of a single story. Ultimately, they stand the test of time because they are malleable, elastic, and adaptable to changing circumstances and historical contexts (Irwin xix).

Precisely because of their transformative power, the women that I study in this book—from Malinche and Sor Juana to Leona Vicario, the *soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution, and Frida Kahlo—have become, like other cultural icons, objects of consumerism (Miller, "Contesting" 62). Not coincidentally, all of them have appeared on Mexican currency: Malinche on a banknote from the Banco de Tabasco in 1901 (5 pesos); Sor Juana on the 1,000-peso bills of 1985, the 1,000-peso coins of 1988, and the 200-peso bills in circulation since 1994; Leona Vicario and the anonymous *soldaderas* on the 100-peso coins of 2010; and Frida Kahlo on the 500-peso bills of 2010. Even though some of them are "worth" more than others, these banknotes and coins, as well as the postage stamps in which Vicario, Kahlo, and Sor Juana have appeared in or outside Mexico, highlight their cultural significance and their overall monetary value. This market value, I would add, has increased in a globalized era that sells their images as autochthonous or genuine Mexican products in a great number of postcards, logos, T-shirts, hats, and posters.

As true objects of consumerism, these iconic women symbolize a set of historical values, cultural desires, social tensions, and specific gender confrontations, debates, and transgressions within Mexico's patriarchal society. Historically, Malinche has been considered a traitor to her

nation for helping the Spaniards during the Conquest of Mexico, even though we have many reasons to believe she was an astute messenger, diplomatic ambassador, and effective interpreter. As a lettered nun, Sor Juana has been depicted not only as Mexico's greatest intellectual of the Baroque era but also as an anomaly. Surrounded by her books and writing utensils, sitting at her desk instead of kneeling in front of a religious image, she is the highest expression of colonial knowledge, a *rara avis* who uses words as a weapon in a world made for men. Along with other female patriots of Mexico's independence, Leona Vicario is remembered for sacrificing her personal fortune and social status to help the insurgents. If Malinche is the mother that Mexicans reject, history and popular legend have turned Leona into the beloved mother of a new nation. The *soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution, regardless of their multiple roles as nurses, soldiers, messengers, and spies, have entered history as passive camp followers; they are commonly known as *Adelitas*, as if they all shared the same identity. Frida Kahlo is the tormented artist of the twentieth century whose disabled body defies normalcy and validates otherness and transgression. Her bizarre self in pain, mutilated and perpetually in disguise, represents a challenge to heteronormativity and a blow to calcified beauty ideals.

As icons, all of them have become symbols of national identity—associated with the Conquest of Mexico, the colonial era, the birth of the nation, the Mexican Revolution, and the postrevolutionary era.¹ What makes them unique is the fact that they have transcended their historical specificities to symbolize cultural values associated with certain female archetypes and signs that have been appropriated by high and low culture in countless ways. They exist because Mexican culture needs an indigenous woman to carry the heavy weight of the Conquest; a criolla prodigy whose intellect defies coloniality; an altruistic patriot who fights to free her nation from the Spanish Crown; a loyal *Adelita* who follows her *Juan*, unconditionally, to build a better Mexico; and a controversial artist whose difference, otherness, and disabilities fuel stories of empowerment and success. As mythical figures, these women communicate something, a particular message, a type of language; they signify and transmit specific concepts; they represent a system of signs and symbols (Barthes, *Mythologies* 217). Their iconic status allows them to adjust to new historical contexts, different cultural circumstances, political agendas, aesthetic demands, and ideological struggles.

Since the early twentieth century, several of these women have been reimagined in novels, essays, poems, and chronicles that reveal how history and gender politics, popular tradition, coloniality at large, nationalism, and religion have placed them on a reduced spectrum in which women are either good or bad and rarely occupy intermediate zones. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994—“the linchpin of Mexican neoliberalism in the 1990s” that promotes privatization, deregulation, and free trade to allow mostly middle-class people to “shop the world,” while the poor majority is left behind (Chasteen, *Born* 332–35)²—also affects literature production and the rearticulation of historical figures of the colonial era, national icons of Mexican independence, and revolutionary heroes. At the turn of the twenty-first century, as a growing number of social institutions embraced neoliberalism and increasingly became personalized and privatized, Mexican literature overtly explores the uniqueness of the individual, intimate emotions, personal experiences, and the world of the private. After all, in the context of neoliberalism, emotions—in art, in the self, or in other people—do not always challenge market-oriented thinking. Instead, feelings and emotions are acquired, invested, traded, or speculated on (Smith 6). Not coincidentally, the novels, plays, chronicles, short stories, and essays I analyze herein were produced and marketed at the same time that Mexico celebrated the 200th anniversary of its independence and the 100th anniversary of its revolution. Their content reveals neoliberal trends found in a number of sitcoms, TV series, films, soap operas, and talk shows of the same period: the overt exploration of privacy and explicit sexual confessions in tune with the experiences of a middle class trapped in a matrix of consumption and globalization (Monsiváis, *Aires* 237; Sánchez Prado 71).

I analyze the literary representation of these iconic women because I believe that literature is socially significant: it captures social ideals and tensions, cultural problems, and beliefs. Literature, as Beatriz Sarlo argues, is a high-impact discourse whose constant state of conflict between aesthetics and ideology “stays in the text and can be re-activated once the text has exhausted its other social functions” (29). Literature represents a plurality and multiplicity of knowledge. It transports the essence of human conscience, along with doubts, fears, hopes, and spiritual intensity. It reminds us especially that the world is full of contradictions, unresolved cultural conflicts, abject realities, and dissident voices that

reject simplification (Sontag, *Al mismo* 156–61). In the best scenarios, literature can also be subversive: it communicates personal opinions, social criticism, political postures, and hegemonic or counterhegemonic ideals that invite us to think critically of the world we inhabit (Vargas Llosa, *La tentación* 221). Even bestsellers produced for fast and easy consumption project the anxieties of a community at a given historical time, regardless of their literary quality, superficiality, ephemeral reception, and poor aesthetic value. The fact that many people buy them not for their literary quality but for their attractive covers—to decorate their homes, to give away as presents—expresses a contemporary reality: that societies do not always privilege reading but cannot live without certain icons and cultural products representing a set of values attached to fame and popularity (Zaid 58).

Inevitably, the literary works I analyze here raise controversial issues in regard to “high” and “low” culture, especially if we consider that some of them will stand the test of time and others will not. Although bestsellers certainly make profit for the publishing industry, the vast majority of them, in this neoliberal era, will not generate rereadings and rewritings, even though our world propitiates constant dialogues between “high” and “popular” culture (Gutiérrez Mouat 72–75). The issues at stake here are not the boundaries between high art and mass culture or the fact that they are becoming increasingly blurred and reveal new discursive configurations (Huyssen ix–x). Literature, after all, exists within the market industry. What we tend to see in contemporary times, however, is that the market influences certain literary products from their initial conception, as if they were only written in order to sell, or to entertain, and not necessarily to promote in-depth reflections (Rodríguez Freire 122–24). These new literary principles reflect numerous societal changes in a neoliberal era that promotes the massive consumption of “easy” and/or “light” literary works that will hardly survive their own time.

Thus, focusing on a wide range of men and women Mexican authors born throughout the twentieth century, over the course of four chapters and an epilogue I discuss the challenges involved in the representation of affect and emotions, authenticity, verisimilitude, and the logical or unbelievable creation of possible worlds. In view of this literature, I explore the central place of historical women and female archetypes in contemporary Mexican culture, as well as the innovative

or troublesome ways contemporary authors either contest or perpetuate a series of bad habits and tendencies attached to the historical and literary representation of a woman's life. Consequently, this book addresses the role of memory and discourse, the perpetuation of otherness, textual experimentation, and the long-lasting effects of gender violence, among other themes and topics.

In many ways, *Troubled Memories* creates a dialogue with the pioneering work of Seymour Menton (1993), Noé Jitrik (1995), Karl Kohut (1997), Juan José Barrientos (2001), and Fernando Aínsa (2003), whose critical and theoretical postulates are key to understanding Latin America's historical narratives produced in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Invaluable to the development of this book has been the work of critics Kimberle S. López (2002), Ute Seydel (2007), Magdalena Perkowska (2008), Elisabeth Guerrero (2008), and Brian L. Price (2012), whose studies highlight the political quality of numerous rewritings of history of the late twentieth century. Unlike these works, my book focuses exclusively on the representation of iconic Mexican women and mainly on the literary production of the twenty-first century. My approach to recent rewritings of Mexico's history, grounded in feminist and gender theory (produced in Latin America, Europe, and the United States) addresses Mexican writers who either transgress women's silence and misrepresentation or re-create misogynist perspectives, hegemonic gender constructions, and solidified gender archetypes.

Troubled Memories follows the line of research that Anna M. Nogar and I developed in the volume *Colonial Itineraries of Contemporary Mexico: Literary and Cultural Inquiries* (2014), in which fourteen critics reflect on several "rewritings" of the Mexican *colonia*, taking into account a representative sample of novels, films, poetry, and chronicles produced in and outside Mexico since 2000. I mention this book as a precedent because the contributions in it extend beyond the limits of the novel as a re-creative genre and produce innovative interpretations and alternative readings that challenge orthodox theorizations on the so-called new historical narratives of the 1980s and 1990s. Fine examples of this type of work focused on recent rearticulations of the Mexican colonial past are the volumes edited by Cecilia Eudave, Alberto Ortiz, and José Carlos Rovira, *Mujeres novohispanas en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea* (*New Spanish Women in Contemporary Mexican Narrative*) (2014), and *Personajes históricos y controversias en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea* (*Historical*

Characters and Controversies in Contemporary Mexican Narrative) (2014). *Troubled Memories*, however, extends beyond the colonial experience to analyze the vicissitudes of several iconic women representative of the independence period, the Mexican Revolution, and its aftermath. Furthermore, each chapter takes into account a wide range of literary genres, in constant dialogue with other cultural expressions, such as films, soap operas, theater productions, and popular *corridos* (ballads).

Even though some of the writers I discuss here raise universal questions that speak for the postmodern self and the creation of gendered subjectivities in a neoliberal era,³ some contemporary works insist on returning Mexico to its deterministic roots and cycles of oppression. To address both ends of this spectrum, I analyze how contemporary literature responds to the feminist denouncement of women's marginal state and historical invisibility. I explore how recent literary rearticulations of history combat or reproduce reductive representations of Mexican women and an entire Mexican society trapped in labyrinths of private and public conduct. Affect, after all, is deeply involved in the production and consumption of books and the commercialization of iconic figures, especially now that feelings and emotions previously relegated to private spheres have a material and symbolic value in the public space. The multiple manifestations of affect present in today's historical literature inevitably reflect ethical and political postures; their combined aesthetic impulse problematizes the production and propagation of certain knowledge, mirrors social conduct, and allows us to enter a simultaneous world of real and symbolic experiences (Moraña, "El afecto" 323).

Troubled Memories deals directly with the production of conflicted historical narratives in an age of globalization and neoliberalism. As we read through numerous texts that re-create the lives of iconic Mexican women from a contemporary perspective we analyze how recollections of the past are organized from a particular gendered perspective and how they are constructed—like historical monuments—with relentless omissions, calculated absences, and imposed amnesia (Achugar 156–57, 164). The hybrid nature of historical narratives, those that emerge from the fusion of history and literary creation, allows us to do this. Historical narratives, as Fernando Aínsa argues, revolve around Latin American identity, history's official and unofficial discourses, and national myths. The authors who dig into history for primary sources of inspiration articulate a retroactive agenda to understand the problems of the present with hints

and clues from the past (Aínsa, *Reescribir* 27–28, 77). The ultimate goal is to dynamite previously established values and restructure historical foundations within a coherent and sensible fictional world. Dealing with these collective memories is of course the major challenge inasmuch as they constitute the foundation of a particular society or social group; they represent not just the heart of a nation but the compass that allows their people to orient themselves in the present to imagine a possible future (Lienhard 13–16).

Memories, however, are not just copies of the past or mere representations of it. They are flexible and malleable. They can adapt to new historical circumstances precisely because they are built with a flash-forward attitude that makes them current and indispensable. They are inventive acts built and rebuilt from incongruent pieces, silence, oblivion, and constant discoveries (Portella 5). Fictionalizations of the past carried out in the last two decades of the twentieth century already show that historical characters tend to be portrayed behind the scenes, often from the perspective of a privileged witness, and with the explicit intention of revealing intimate details that would have never been included in official records. To a great extent, this tendency to craft the past from an intimate point of view is still present in numerous historical rewritings that work with history's rumors, ambivalences, untold subjectivities, and irreverent passages (Barrientos 15–19). The articulation of marginal voices to confront the legitimacy of hegemonic historical discourse, a persistent trait throughout the 1980s and 1990s, is still present in today's historical narratives (Perkowska 33). Most historical novels, plays, short stories, and chronicles of the twenty-first century, however, are less interested in rearticulating the past, resorting to the heteroglossic, carnivalesque, and polyphonic strategies that Menton observed in many historical fictions of the late twentieth century (24–25).

Ultimately, the literary texts that revise history today, particularly through famous historical characters, prove not only the vitality of such narratives in contemporary societies but, perhaps more important, the fact that present-day societies are anxious to disintegrate the conclusiveness of the past. Concurrently, the proliferation of so much historical literature commemorating 200 years of Mexican Independence and the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution has proven that only those texts that emerge from an in-depth process of historical documentation and research are able to properly and convincingly question, recontext-

tualize, and transgress history (Rivera Garza, *Los muertos* 114). Yet all of the iconic women discussed in this book, whether they come from the distant period of the conquest and the colonial era or from more recent times, such as the revolutionary and postrevolutionary years, present themselves as true “border crossers.” As genuine signs and symbols of Mexican culture, these women are simultaneously an intrinsic part of their own historical worlds and of contemporary Mexico. They act as mediators between the past, the present, and the future. They contribute substantially to the self-image and identity of individuals belonging to a particular culture, deal with a world of emotions, retain mystery, and are capable of being analyzed intellectually (Onasch and Schnieper 22).

Studying these memories through the lens of gender allows us to see that Mexican society continues to organize itself as a binary, because of the historical normalization of inequality between men and women and the unbalanced distribution of male and female roles, social practices, and behaviors (Castro Ricalde 112–13). If gender is culturally constructed through a set of regulatory practices, and if identity is indeed a normative ideal (Butler 9–23), my study traces how gender and identity are portrayed, problematized, or contested in contemporary literature. The gendered identities I discuss here are, as Marta Lamas would argue, cultural expressions of how the female body is interpreted as a physical and symbolic artifact capable of conveying an ample range of emotions under the limitations of society (159). The explicit gender divisions reproduce current patterns of domination and subordination, sexual discrimination, determinism, limited acts of empowerment, and prevalent inequality. Socially constructed, the female bodies I study reflect the impact of male privilege or, more precisely, the ways women are culturally converted into symbolic objects, almost always dependent on others, pulled by masculine expectations, and moved by supposedly feminine feelings and emotions (Bourdieu 83–86). Most of them are torn between their real and ideal(ized) bodies, opposing labels, complacency, and rebellion.

The literary analysis of Malinche, Sor Juana, Leona Vicario, the *soldaderas*, and Frida Kahlo, as they are depicted in Mexican literature today, reflects that sexism is a prevalent condition, an imperial practice that dominates at least half of humankind or an ideological system that continues to situate women in a subordinated position in relation to men. Sexism divides the world between men and women, masculine and

feminine, aggressive and passive, and it also denies people belonging to a particular gender the possibility of action, agency, and autonomy. Sexism in fact reveals why a considerable proportion of Mexican women—and female icons, of course—continue to be represented in the literary production of the twenty-first century as myths that follow previously designed patterns (Monsiváis, *Misógino* 22–28). A gendered reading of this literature seeks to unveil the discursive strategies used by Mexican culture to describe and constrain the female body; it also wants to highlight the ruptures and discontinuities of female subjectivities in a misogynous world that for the most part tends to reduce their multiple and contradictory experiences, their fragmentary nature, ambivalences, and variations (Richard, “La crítica” 77–80).

Several other historical, mythical, or iconic women could have been included in this book, such as Isabel Moctezuma, Catarina de San Juan (La China Poblana), Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (La Corregidora), or María Ignacia Rodríguez de Velasco y Osorio Barba (La Güera Rodríguez). I chose Malinche, Sor Juana, Vicario, and the anonymous *soldaderas* as representative icons of different historical periods because they have been depicted in numerous literary texts and mass media in the early twenty-first century. Each one is the main protagonist of at least three or four novels, a few soap operas, TV series, films, cartoons, children’s books, plays, songs, and graphic literature. They transport specific meanings in and outside literature, perhaps more than others. Malinche carries the heavy burden of *mestizaje* and therefore a fatal destiny. She represents the anonymous women of the conquest whose bodies were used by the Spanish conquistadors for sexual pleasure and were denied a discourse of their own (Glantz, “Doña Marina” 126). In perfect agreement with her colonial labels as the Tenth Muse and Phoenix of America, Sor Juana is idealized as an exceptional phenomenon of the Baroque era. She is a secular madonna who tends to be portrayed as a *rara avis*, cerebral and virginal, almost like a superhuman (Hind, “Official” 249). Leona Vicario symbolizes female patriotism at a historical moment when the country needs foundational heroes. She is the sign of altruistic ideals, unthinkable without her husband, Andrés Quintana Roo. Her iconic figure tells people throughout the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first that the heroine is the hero’s lover, regardless of her personal commitments and political engagements (Monsiváis, *Misógino* 107). The *soldaderas* are remembered as the self-sacrificing women of the Mexican Revolution who carry their children on their backs and follow their men

like loyal companions. As mythical figures, they are depicted with saintly sweetness and condemned to a destiny of invisibility (Leal, *Aztlán* 185; Monsiváis, *Mexican* 6). Frida Kahlo, studied in the epilogue, is seen as the icon of the twentieth century who uses her own body as an artistic object. Her popularized image evokes an aching body that presents itself as an artifact in the making, in a constant process of definition, evolution, and presentation (De Toro 67).

Regardless of their intrinsic differences as iconic figures, most of these women are trapped in puzzling, challenging, or thought-provoking literary representations that reveal the following characteristics:

1. The construction of a portrait that must be approached as a composite idea. Made up by blocks of meaning, in a Barthesian sense, the portrait is presented in the text not as a copy of the original but as a Cubist representation that seeks to supplement meaning.
2. The overt exploration of the icon's intimacy and sexuality. Insistently, they are depicted in private, in the midst of their sexual acts. Stripped of their clothes, these iconic women emphasize their physicality and highlight their humanity, paying a great deal of attention to their gender orientation and sexual desires. Thanks to this literary striptease, readers become accidental voyeurs.
3. The development of a love story. Several iconic women display a lover's discourse of their own, marked by anguish, longing, eroticism, and passion.
4. The articulation of the icon's religious and/or political beliefs.
5. A persistent tendency to depict these women as important agents of history, capable of carrying out transgressions, acts of empowerment, and heroic deeds. For the most part, they are portrayed as virtuous models of exemplary behavior.
6. The perpetuation of extremes or stereotypes historically attributed to women and femininity with recurrent fictionalizations of the domestic space, particularly the kitchen.

7. The successful or ineffective attribution of feminist ideals to a female icon trapped in gender struggles.
8. An alternative story of their lives, either written by the women, found in lost manuscripts or letters, or told by a female eyewitness. This characteristic places some of these iconic women at the center of a lettered culture.

Because of these traits, the women studied in this book are often tainted by exoticism or condemned to misrepresentation and invisibility. Yet some rearticulations undoubtedly craft metaphorical certificates of citizenship within convincing scenarios that validate a plurality of experiences and create gender incisions in the discourses of hegemony. The differences in the representation of these iconic women have more to do with each author's poetics and personal engagement with gender politics than with their gender identities. Misrepresentations and genuine acts of empowerment can be found in literary texts written by both women and men, who belong to different literary generations and have had various literary influences. Not all texts written by women promote gender equality, and not all texts written by men misrepresent women. While some texts, especially those crafted from an autobiographical perspective, challenge domination and represent acts of political and narrative resistance (Beard 2), not all of them work well as possible worlds of fiction.

Considering a wide range of historical interpretations, ideological rewritings, political rearticulations, and feminist reframings of Malinche, produced primarily over the course of the twentieth century, in the first chapter I analyze four literary works: the play *La Malinche* (2000) by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, and the novels *Amor y conquista: La novela de Malinalli mal llamada la Malinche* (*Love and Conquest: The Novel of Malinalli Mistakenly Called Malinche*) (1999) by Marisol Martín del Campo, *Malinche* (2006) by Laura Esquivel, and *La verdadera historia de Malinche* (*The True History of Malinche*) (2009) by Fanny del Río. Together, these works invite us to see Malinche behind the scenes of official history and understand her fears and desires, her inner self, her motivations for siding with the Spanish conquistadors or for staying true to her own culture. As we internalize her dilemmas as an interpreter, her religious beliefs, or her existential crisis and personal contradictions as a divided

and hybrid subject, we revisit her cultural heritage and the aftermath of a sexual, social, ethnic, and political conquest.

Although the Sor Juana archetype is a constant in recent works by Mexican women writers, in the second chapter I analyze four Mexican novels published between 2007 and 2010 that explicitly re-create Sor Juana's life: Héctor Zagal's *La venganza de Sor Juana* (*Sor Juana's Revenge*) (2007), José Luis Gómez's *El beso de la virreina* (*The Vicereine's Kiss*) (2008), Mónica Lavín's *Yo, la peor* (*I, the Worst*) (2009), and Kyra Galván's *Los indecibles pecados de Sor Juana* (*The Unspeakable Sins of Sor Juana*) (2010). In reaction to an orthodox Sor Juana, who is usually portrayed as a sexually inactive intellectual, these novels pluralize our conceptions of her. As we corroborate with these novels that historical truth is fragmented and dispersed, that memory elaborates its own palimpsests, and that our relationship with the past is never neutral, we face unresolved issues of gender construction and sexual differentiation that originate in the colonial era. The challenges of representing an iconic female intellectual who has been obscured by centuries of hagiographic accounts are counterbalanced by the present need to adjust a historical role model to Mexico's social, political, and cultural dilemmas.

The third chapter is devoted to the study of Leona Vicario, named by President Antonio López de Santa Anna in 1842 as the "Sweet Mother of the Fatherland." Taking into account her mythification, thanks in part to the biographical work of Genaro García (1910), I study how Leona Vicario is depicted in three contemporary novels published in celebration of the 200th anniversary of Mexico's independence from Spain. In Celia del Palacio's *Leona* (2010), Carlos Pascual's *La insurgenta* (*The Insurgent*) (2010), and Eugenio Aguirre's *Leona Vicario: La insurgente* (*Leona Vicario: The Insurgent*) (2010), this iconic woman is treated like a romantic heroine in love with Andrés Quintana Roo or as a model patriot who sacrifices her life to liberate her nation. Although Leona is simultaneously portrayed as a wife, lover, mother, and rebel, often her political participation is diminished and her domestic existence is highlighted. Therefore, I discuss the masculine gaze against a feminist perspective, the impossibility of alternative histories of female empowerment, and ongoing challenges of individualistic and intimate narratives that sacrifice a woman's intellect, her potential to subvert an established order, and her abilities to resignify a marginal space.

Trapped in a misogynist society, most of the women who participated in the Mexican Revolution, even those who were involved in important battles as soldiers or as their partner's assistants, have remained nameless and have been referred to as cockroaches, sloppy workers, gossips, sluts, robbers, and *Adelitas*. To analyze the mythification or disappearance of female corporality in the midst of the turbulent movement and in contemporary rewritings of history, in the fourth chapter I study several works that reinforce a long chain of female archetypes that, from Malinche onward, instead of representing a historical truth, personify an anxiety generated by the active participation of women in crucial moments of Mexican history. To highlight their current invisibility and mythification, I analyze several works that mention them in passing or without interior development, such as Rosa Helia Villa's biographical novel *Itinerario de una pasión: Los amores de mi general (Itinerary of Passion: My General's Lovers)* (1999) or Paco Ignacio Taibo's biography *Pancho Villa* (2006). To counterbalance some of these rearticulations, I also read Elena Poniatowska's chronicle *Las soldaderas* (1999), Estela Leñero's play *Soles en la sombra: Mujeres en la Revolución (Suns in the Dark: Women in the Revolution)* (2011), and Mónica Lavín's novel *Las rebeldes (The Rebels)* (2011), on the women of the Cruz Blanca Constitucionalista who played a vital role in the Mexican Revolution. The chapter concludes with a reading of Fernando Zamora's queer novel *Por debajo del agua (Under the Water)* (2001).

I end with an epilogue on Frida Kahlo to show that her iconization and contemporary rewriting in Mexican literature reflect similar cultural anxieties present in the representation of other legendary women. Taking into account several works by Carlos Fuentes, Elena Poniatowska and Margo Glantz, or Carlos Monsiváis, F. G. Hagenbeck, and Ana Clavel, I conclude that Frida Kahlo is depicted as an eccentric broken body because the world needs her as a symbol of Mexicanness and marginality. She suffers from the exoticism that affects the other women studied here and assures us that icons have afterlives, which does not necessarily mean we will find them within cohesive fictional worlds.

Several decades ago, in one of her poignant reflections on women and their image, Rosario Castellanos concluded that history has mythified them, placing them in a faraway kingdom where it is difficult to recognize their humanity and intellectual capacity (*Mujer 9*). The literature I discuss in this book attempts to shatter the monolithic composition of

some of Mexico's historical women. But working with history's icons is a challenging endeavor, as I will show, more so if they resist contemporary rearticulations and ideological projects that do not always capture their essence and historical context, ambivalence, multiplicity, and troubled memories.