Introduction

by Margarita Vargas

Despite societal pressures, no longer are women uncritically telling themselves the same story men have told them, and told about them, for centuries, no longer is exploitation by colonial powers the sole measure of oppression.

—Debra Castillo 31

Those not familiar with Spanish-American letters may find the notion of Spanish-American feminism contradictory; yet, feminist ideals can be traced more than three hundred years back to the Mexican writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648/51–1695). To those conversant in the field, however, Sor Juana is a household name, singled out whenever women writers are discussed. Nevertheless, because Sor Juana’s contribution to feminism is significant, forming a link that needs to be articulated within the context of a general introduction to Spanish American women’s writing for an English audience, we must trace and retrace the long line—albeit discontinuous—that ties her to contemporary women writers.

Like Sor Juana, most of the writers in the anthology are involved in the desedimentation and denunciation of male-constructed roles for women. They have abandoned the direct, didactic tone adopted by Sor Juana in her redondilla “Hombres necios” (Foolish men), where she admonishes men for erecting idyllic representations of womanhood. Instead, they have pursued the general mode of her “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” (Response to Sister Filotea) in which Sor Juana promotes, though circuitously, the right of women to think out loud, to participate in the making of culture, and to excel intellectually. The following remark by Jean Franco indirectly points to other connections between Sor Juana and the playwrights: “her empowerment by writing led her to understand gender difference as a social construction . . .” (xv). The consciousness of both the power of writing and the constructedness of gender difference are central issues in most of the plays.

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The 1700s—in part because of the dearth of literature—interrupt the feminist efforts initiated by Sor Juana. To our knowledge, no archival research has confirmed the existence of a literary corpus published during this period. Recent studies, such as Asunción Lavrin’s *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives* and Emilie Bergmann et al.’s *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America*, however, do remark on the important roles women played in society through their active participation in the church, in the education of the children, and, if widowed, the administration of property.

Literary histories regard José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi as the next eminent Spanish-American writer to emerge after Sor Juana. In addition to his famous *El periquillo sarniento* (1816), he authored *La Quijotita y su prima* (1818), which is considered “the first pedagogical novel written in Mexico on the education of women” (Lavrin 29). With its two female characters, “the good and obedient Prudenciana and the evil ‘Little Miss Quixote’” (Franco 83), the novel can also be credited with prefiguring the two female paradigms common to Spanish-American Romantic literature: angel and demon.

While the 1700s interrupt the dissemination of feminist thought, most male writings of the 1800s openly thwart the possibility of equality between the sexes. During the Romantic period—as many Spanish-American countries were in the process of freeing themselves from colonial rule and involved in the production of a new nation—the political leaders had to figure out a way to quietly suppress half of the population; thus, the angel/demon dichotomy becomes the reigning form of female characterization in the literature. If the readers of the period were to identify with the characters, they had to choose either between the shrewd, dark *femme fatale* or the fragile, blond “good” woman; no middle term existed.

Mexican Romantic literature, for one, captures the ideal feminine by means of the establishment of two religious symbols: the Virgin of Guadalupe and Eve, the first woman. Frequently, though, the Malinche (also known as Malintzin and Doña Marina, who served as translator, guide, and mistress to the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortez) is substituted for Eve, as Elizabeth Ordóñez points out in her essay “Sexual Politics and the Theme of Sexuality in Chicana Poetry” (318 n. 4). Luis Leal corroborates Ordóñez’s findings and explains that in *Jicotencal*, an anonymous historical novel published in Philadelphia in 1826, Doña Marina “represents the forces of evil and is characterized as wily, perfidious, deceitful, and treacherous” (228). She is also associated with the serpent, “which placed her under the light of two feminine archetypes, one European and the other Mexican; that is, Eve and Coatlicue, an Aztec goddess” (228). The negative portrayal of these two para-
digs makes it difficult for female readers to identify with either, though they may both symbolize the original mother. Instead, as Judith Fetterley has remarked, readers tend to associate with the stronger, more likeable male characters.6

These female literary archetypes complemented and extended the limited and sexist education imparted to women. Silvia Arrom cites a paper published in 1852, entitled “Discourse on the Influence of Public Instruction on the Happiness of Nations,” which outlines that schooling for girls was “strictly designed to make women ‘good daughters, excellent mothers, and the best and most solid support of the goals of Society’” (23). That this essay calls for the repression of women, that it was published in a monthly journal interested in improving society (Revista Mensual de la Sociedad Promovedora de Mejoras Materiales), and that it promotes “the happiness of nations” clearly outlines whose interest was at stake. In a continued effort to demarcate a specific place for women, one which excluded them from social decision making, men scorned and labeled women who deviated from the norm. The intellectual woman, “who spent her day reading to the neglect of her personal appearance and home,” became a literata, and the talentacia, “who made a fool of herself with her pedantry (bachiellyas), was a stock comic character in newspaper satires by the 1840s” (Arrom 24).

Similar negative representations of women during the Romantic period can be found in the literatures of other Spanish-American countries. One has but to glance at any of the major novels of the period, such as the docile character in Jorge Isaacs’ María. Like most Romantic female “heroines,” María—whose life project consists of patiently awaiting her childhood sweetheart—suffers from poor health and predictably dies just before her lover returns.

Spanish-American literary histories, however, can claim (though for a long time they did not) at least two feminist writers: Clorinda Matto de Turner (Perú, 1852–1909) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba, 1814–1873). Even though they do form part of the canon, their feminism, like Sor Juana’s, was ignored for over a century. Criticism of their works has focused mainly on their personal lives or on their defense of the disenfranchised—either the Indians in Peru or the slaves in Cuba.

Unlike their male contemporaries, though, Gómez de Avellaneda and Matto de Turner avoided reproducing the angel/demon dichotomy when delineating their characters. In Sab (1841), Gómez de Avellaneda endows her male protagonist with traditionally feminine characteristics, and according to Mildred V. Boyer, he “encompasses the author’s sentimental experiences” (Torres-Pou, “ambigüedad” 57). The
advice that female characters give each other also deviates from that which appears in masculinist Romantic works. While the latter generally suggest that women drown their sorrows in church activities, in 
Sub the female protagonist is told to look for solace in literature (Torres-Pou, “ambigüedad” 60). In another novel, Dos mujeres (Two Women, 1842), Gómez de Avellaneda characterizes her male protagonist as “innocent, sentimental and passive”; and in addition to subverting the Romantic dichotomy of good and evil, she also undermines the traditional adjudication of “intelligence and action” to men and “sentimentalism and passivity” to women (Guerra 721).

Joan Torres-Pou shows how in her most popular novel—Aves sin nido (Birds Without a Nest, 1889)—Matto de Turner, besides denouncing the perils of the Indians, also creates a female character in search of her subjectivity (Clorinda 4). Even though she constructs her novel well within the confines of Romantic expectations, Torres-Pou asserts that the author “realizes a demolishing criticism of the patriarchy” (“Clorinda” 5).

Alongside these two canonized women writers, the period spawned others who—though they may have not been included in the canon—also produced counterimages of woman. Mary Louise Pratt contends with respect to Argentinean Juana Manuela Gorriti’s story “El guante negro” (circa 1850) and José Mármol’s Amalia (1844) that “at least in some sectors of Spanish American society this postrevolutionary period marked a historical aperture for women . . .” (57). She also sees the period as an experimental moment in which women “could be imaged as players in the drama of nation building” (57). Pratt, nevertheless, neglects to comment on Esteban Echeverría’s heavily anthologized “El matadero” (The Slaughter House, 1837–1840), which fails to integrate women in the making of a new nation.

The modernista period, traditionally marked by the publication of Rubén Darío’s book of poetry Azul (1888), reveals an ideological stance similar to that expounded by Romanticism. Sylvia Molloy maintains that this literary period produced “artfully elaborated and culturally convincing clichés—woman as virgin, as child, as toy; woman as demon, as temptress, as witch”—that “were to channel the perception of woman in Latin America and the cultural attitudes toward her for years to come” (109). Some of the most anthologized, and, therefore, most memorable female characters in the poetry of the modernistas include Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera’s duquesa Job (in “La duquesa Job”—Duchess Job), José Martí’s niña de Guatemala (in “Verso Sencillo IX”—Simple Verse IX), and the various lovers in Darío’s “Canción de otoño en primavera” (Autumn Song in Spring). These “women” are either beautiful objects to be exhibited, lifeless adolescents who die from
unrequited love, or simpletons who are happy with the morsels of love
men might throw their way. Ultimately, they either function as sup-
porting actresses or as the modernista version of the Romantics’ muse.

The early twentieth century produced two major literary
moments: the regionalist novel and avant-garde literature. According
to Pratt, both movements “operated to the complete, and often aggres-
sive, exclusion of women” (57). And when they were included, as Fran-
cine Masiello has noted, the female characters in the novels “were
depicted as uncontrollable and often evil, inclined to wanton aggres-
sion or irrational, perilous endeavors” (Women 36). Like the women of
the Romantic period, the female characters in the regionalist novel had
but two choices: they either “accepted the domestic calling and
resigned themselves to a life of subservience or they found themselves
eliminated from the scene of narration” (Masiello, Women 36). In
avant-garde literature women do not fare any better: the writers
(mostly poets) either posit an innocuous image of woman or else—as is
the case with Vicente Huidobro—“express an extravagant violence
against women” (Masiello, Women 36). In general, Masiello finds overt
hostility toward women during this period, but especially in the
Argentinean poet Oliverio Girondo, who “describes women’s bodies
as fragmented limbs or objects to be contemplated by the tourist-poet”
(Women 36).

An example of the hollow representation of women can be found
in Mexican writer Xavier Villaurrutia. His play Invitación a la muerte
surrounds the anguished male protagonist with three stock female
characters: the adulteress mother, the self-sacrificing wife, and the
insipid girlfriend. Pablo Neruda’s love poem number 15 also displays
an antifeminist viewpoint as it promotes the silencing of women in
order to maintain the male’s dominant linguistic position. The poem
emphasizes the speaker’s delight in the woman’s silence, her absent
presence, by strategically repeating at the beginning, the middle, and
the end, “Me gusta cuando callas” (I like it when you are quiet). Thus,
these masculinist writers bring female characters on stage merely for
aesthetic effect, realistic illustration, or occasionally to help advance
the plot.

Fortunately, male avant-garde literature and the regionalist novel
make up only part of the canvas. Even though this canonized literature
does not reflect it, both political unrest and social reform marked the
early twentieth century. As was true elsewhere, in Latin America
women were fighting for civil rights, anarchist movements flourished,
and workers demanded labor rights (Greenberg 141). Thus, at the same
time that men were busily creating disparaging images of woman,
women’s groups were proliferating all over Latin America and gather-
ing at annual international meetings to discuss women’s issues. Moreover, women were writing and publishing their literature in larger numbers than ever before. This historical period witnessed the appearance of four major poets: Delmira Agustini (1886–1914), Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957), Alfonsina Storni (1892–1938), and Juana de Ibarbourou (1895–1979). Though “they were not accepted in avant-garde circles” (Pratt 57), these writers counteracted the female images created by their male cohorts and depicted women’s problems from a female perspective.

While all four writers contemplate feminist concerns, Storni’s poetry is unequivocally the most committed. Her poem “Hombre pequeñito” (Little Man) alone qualifies her as a radical feminist since it “addresses the question of ‘female aesthetic’ as well as the desirability of a separate female culture” (Austin 5). Even though Storni denied that she was a militant feminist, she participated in feminist activities, labor rights meetings, and was one of the leaders of the “Asociación pro Derechos de la Mujer” (Association for the Rights of Women) (Kirkpatrick 115). She also wrote and directed feminist columns for La Nación and La nota, both important dailies in Buenos Aires, that supported many “proposed legal and social changes regarding women” (Kirkpatrick 118).

Perhaps because these poets expressed an aesthetic foreign to masculinist critics, they continue to be “benignly classified in literary typologies as posmodernistas distinct from the avant-garde” (Pratt 57). Marking them as other, then, in a way indicates their unequal status among the male writers. Also, unlike male writings, their poetry has been discussed not in terms of its literary quality but in terms of the writers’ personal life. Mistral, for example, has always been portrayed as a forlorn school teacher who could never recuperate from the loss of her first love and who spent her entire life exalting in her poetry a motherhood she never enjoyed. Sylvia Molloy reports that Mistral endorsed “this pathetic compensatory image” of herself and, therefore, successfully wrote “her lesbianism out of existence” (116). At present, however, the work begun by critics such as Kirkpatrick, Molloy, Pratt, Castillo, and Castro-Klarén promises the advent of a revisionist literary and cultural history that will not only recognize the experimentalism in their writings but will validate their position within avant-garde literature.

The emergence of the “Boom” writers (which includes, among others, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa) in the 1960s, with all their innovative narrative techniques, did little to change the image of woman created by their predecessors. With regard to the portrayal of la Malinche, Elizabeth Ordóñez remarks that “Octavio Paz shapes her into a symbol of the
violated native woman, 'la chingada' or the passive woman open to sexual violence," while for Carlos Fuentes, "Malinche generates betrayal and corruption in woman" (318 n. 4). Even though the writers of this period did not go so far as to replicate the female portraits painted by previous generations, the female characters depicted by most of them play secondary roles.\textsuperscript{9}

Remarkably, although publishing houses had begun in the 1960s to recognize the significance of women writers, none of them were integrated into the so-called Boom. Glaring omissions include María Luisa Bombal, Rosario Castellanos, and Elena Garro. Despite the oversight or, perhaps, intentional exclusion of women from the canon, the number of women writing has increased significantly in the last twenty-five years. The last eighteen years have witnessed the publication of numerous anthologies dedicated exclusively to Latin American and Latina women.\textsuperscript{10}

From within this historical literary context—both as involuntary consumers of a masculinist tradition and as legitimate inheritors of Sor Juana's feminist legacy—the playwrights in this anthology emerge to pursue the task of dismantling what Molloy terms the "persuasive icons of femininity" produced by modernismo (109), as well as to resume the work done by feminists in the mid 1800s and early 1900s. For the most part, these writers are not interested in re-evaluating or recuperating the language of spaces traditionally considered female. Diana Raznovich's Dial-a-Mom approximates this interest; its Spanish title, Casa matriz, refers simultaneously to the womb and the headquarters of a business. According to Debra Castillo, texts with such titles "mark the public, philosophical call for legitimation of a space traditionally associated with and denigrated as female" (35).\textsuperscript{11} By situating a female icon within a historically male space, however, Raznovich joins the rest of the playwrights in the enterprise of either demarcating new spaces or erasing spatial boundaries based on gender difference.

While each of the playwrights has a specific agenda, they all share the desire to deconstruct existing structures that limit and confine women and they all question the basic gender assumptions grounding their particular cultures. The three main areas that we will highlight are the search for a self-created female identity that includes education, the reappropriation of language, and a capacity for writing; the affirmation of feminine subjectivity; and the denouncing of senseless acts of violence committed in and by society.

The most common topic addressed by the dramatic texts is the search for identity; yet each playwright approaches the issue from different positions. Diana Raznovich, for one, examines the daughter/mother phenomenon in Dial-a-Mom from a psychological perspective,
while Myrna Casas takes on a more philosophical/cultural approach as a means of confronting self with other in *The Great USkrainian Circus*. In both plays, the characters have reached a crossroads in their lives and are drawn into a self-analytic process. In *Dial-a-Mom* the juncture reached by the protagonist, a literature professor, is related to age. She has turned thirty and has not resolved her identity vis-a-vis her mother. In order to come to terms with herself, she hires an actress from an agency that specializes in training “substitute mothers” to play out several possible mothers. The play begins with the arrival of the substitute mother at the protagonist’s home and what ensues is a simultaneous, three-dimensional relationship: mother/daughter, consumer/provider, and director/actress.

The first instance recalls the adolescent stage in which the child vies for her own identity, the second speculates on the rights of the consumer and the integrity of professionals providing a service, and the third stages the negotiations between a director, who shapes the entire play, and an actress, who expects to display her histrionic abilities. The play ends in a stalemate, suggesting that “Subjectivity is never a fixed entity, but rather a constant process of constitution in specific historical and symbolic networks” (Kristeva in Castro-Klarén, Situations 29), or that identity is never stable but, rather, comprises multiple and shifting relations of power. Nevertheless, the play also hints at the possibility of creating oneself through acting, writing, and directing.

The characters in *The Great USkrainian Circus* are all professional actors searching for their identity through role playing. They constitute a vaudeville-type theater group—owned by a woman—that travels from town to town with the supposed purpose of functioning as a mirror to society. To carry out their mission, they gather information about the town and then proceed to re-enact the various local events and recent occurrences. In the process of lifting a mirror to the audience, the performers end up seeing their own reflections and thus have to confront their identities. Unlike the protagonist in *Dial-a-Mom*, the characters have reached the crux of their lives not primarily through age (though it is significant), but because they are in a town they had visited before. The return to a place from the past and the representation of current events summon old memories and force the thespians to examine themselves. The owner of the theater group, for one, confesses that she was forced to abandon her son to pursue her career. But since the process of self-analysis occurs while they are acting a specific role, and the information provided when they are out-of-character contradicts what the role has revealed, their “true” identities remain enigmas. Thus, the inability to discern between truth and fiction evokes once again the impossibility of ever knowing who we, and much less others, are.
In *7 Times Eve* the search for identity is gender specific. Beatriz Seibel conducts a historical survey to map the experience of the Argentinean woman from the 1600s to the 1970s and defines her identity in terms of the duality mind/body and the burden of the male tradition. Seibel shows that woman develops as she questions and modifies the roles imposed on her. The development occurs as the female characters move from a sense of self directly tied to the social function of their bodies to a self that has integrated body and mind via the acquisition of voice.

As a person dependent on her body for an identity, woman is relegated to the position of object, useful only for men's sexual pleasure or as a receptacle charged with reproduction. Also, her voiceless body ties her identity to her lineage, whether by blood or by trade. Thus, in order to avoid the mistakes of her ancestors—the convictions that a woman can only aspire to an inferior position within the public sphere or that she is at her best when procreating or serving and caring for others—a woman must interrupt the line and acquire a voice. The narrator is the first one who succeeds in breaking the line of tradition by modifying the profession that had been in her family for several generations. The last character, an actress who reaches stardom through unconventional means, exemplifies the acquisition of voice. Once she surmounts the hurdles imposed on women in the theatrical field, the next step is to overcome stage fright (a metaphor for losing the fear of being in charge). She shows how to acquire voice (subjectivity) through an erotic (bodily), though completely mental (linguistic), experience that occurs during the performance. However, the unity of self, accomplished through the confluence of body and language, creates another dilemma that remains unresolved: like the colonial woman who awaits the return of her husband until she dies, the modern woman finds herself alone, albeit on center stage.

The break with tradition exemplified in *7 Times Eve* is even more radical in *Evening Walk*. Teresa Marichal, determined to topple masculine hierarchical structures in order to begin with a clean slate in the search for identity, defies Otto Rank, who said to Anais Nin: "to create it is necessary to destroy. Woman cannot destroy ..." (Russ 14). Marichal's play is entirely about destruction, from the obliteration of the female figure as object of desire to the rewriting of the canon and the eradication of society’s construction of feminine roles. The play initially provides a conventional representation of two typical figures: the mother and the writer who are, nonetheless, problematically located in front of a stage backdrop depicting a woman in a sudsy bathtub who has slashed her wrists. The two characters set out to bring about social change either through physical or intellectual dissension. The mother
challenges her socially imposed role by killing her son, and the writer defies the category “female writer” by rewriting the children’s canon and appropriating what has been considered a male genre, the adventure story. The play, then, summons women to participate in the act of creation, which goes beyond procreation, in order to guarantee the construction of a self-identity, one not hegemonically determined or decided beforehand by masculinist writers.

Though in more recent works, Sabina Berman displays a search for identity similar to the one exhibited by the plays already outlined, the female character in Yankee is in the initial stages of recognizing her culturally constructed position. Blinded by tradition and social expectations, the protagonist appears never to have questioned her role as housewife and mother, and never to have thought about her husband’s language, except to remark on its beauty within the context of his poetry. However, the loneliness experienced at the beach—where her husband has taken her so he can write—and the presence of a North American man, eventually encourage her to contemplate her social position and analyze herself. The moment of recognition comes after the third time she hears her husband pronounce the words puta madre (literally, mother whore). When she asks him to repeat what he has said, he dismisses the importance of his words by calling them a mere expression. She retorts with silence; but towards the end of the play she consciously rejects the virgin mother image with which the “intruder” had imbued her and embraces, in order to redefine, her husband’s “puta madre” (53). The ability to murmur “puta madre, sí” (mother whore, yes) is, according to Monique Wittig, an affirmation of the self because “when one says ‘I’ and, in so doing reappropriates language as a whole, . . . it is then and there, . . . that there occurs the supreme act of subjectivity” (66).

What the protagonist will do with her newly acquired subjectivity remains unresolved; but within the context of Berman’s oeuvre, it marks the beginning of a continuous search for identity and the initial step toward an ongoing exploration of feminist and lesbian issues.

Unlike the female characters in the above texts, Mariela Romero’s women are for the most part beyond the search of identity; in fact, they seem to have an answer to Freud’s dilemma concerning women’s desires. The women in Waiting for the Italian know exactly what they want. They are four women in their mid-fifties who have complied with society’s demands (most of them have married, had children, and grandchildren), and now they want to fulfill their own needs. They refuse to succumb to the traditional roles assigned to women their age by trading their white hair, sagging breasts, rockers, and grandchildren for more gratifying bodily pleasures. To accomplish their goal they
have formed a co-op to hire a young Italian who will satisfy their sexual desires and not compromise their social position.

By affirming what they want, as opposed to what society expects from them, they have destroyed long-held myths advanced in masculinist literature. This literature, intent on preserving the image of the lady-in-waiting, has been entirely self-serving for it has guaranteed the preservation of the public/private dichotomy: women enclosed at home and men free to assume positions of power out in the "real" world. While Judith Butler, for one, maintains that "the search for woman is still an on going enterprise" (Castro-Klarén, "Situations" 29), Romero shows that the experience acquired with age does potentially provide women with a better understanding of who they are and what they want.

In Altarpiece of Yumbel Isidora Aguirre depicts the story of a group of actors who arrive in the town of Yumbel to re-enact the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. Since St. Sebastian's predicament parallels their own, the actors take the opportunity to relate indirectly their personal story. Aguirre, then, uses both accounts to honor those who have suffered political retribution throughout South America, but particularly in Chile.

Even though Aguirre is predominantly interested in denouncing acts of political injustice committed upon both men and women, she, nevertheless, grants women key positions in her play. One of the female characters performs the role of narrator, and thus guides our reading as she provides historical information about either St. Sebastian or the political prisoners. One of the actresses relates how she was abducted and tortured during Argentina's Dirty War. Her recounting is a cathartic experience, a questioning of gender difference, and a criticism of her society. That the government made no distinction between the magnitude of torture imposed on and suffered by either men or women shows how society is willing to grant equal status only at those moments when there is no regard for human life whatsoever. Torturers made no sexual distinction when they treated both women and men with equal brutality and gave both the opportunity to reveal their fears, physical endurance, and psychological strength. Aguirre ends her play with the presence of five women who take to the streets—in a fashion that recalls the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina—demanding information about the disappeared. By having them confront the authorities, despite the possibility of reprisal, Aguirre underscores the power potential in women.

For her part, Maruxa Vilalta, in A Woman, Two Men, and a Gunshot, participates in the destruction of male forms by satirizing subgenres such as melodrama, surrealism, the theater of the absurd, and the musical. She writes a play in which three actors and two actresses rehearse...
four mini-dramas that ridicule these subgenres and subvert social stereotypes, including traditional views of the feminine, of homosexuality, and even the theater. By resorting to metatheatrical devices, especially the play within the play, Vilalta also exposes the tenuous relationship between the director, the actors, and their financial supporters.

Though neither Casas, Vilalta, nor Aguirre outlines female concerns specifically, they are involved in challenging current discursive forms, whether literary, theatrical, or political, which continue to be dominated by men.

Because all the plays included in the anthology were written in the same decade (the 1980s) by women born on the same continent, one might presume a homogeneous corpus, but that is far from true. The conflicts and concerns, as well as the theatrical techniques, evident in the works are as diverse as the society each of the playwrights scrutinizes. However, a similar historical background—encompassing conquest, colonization, independence, and the prevailing cultural imperialism—and their need to further women’s issues, provides their theater with continental cohesiveness. Their countries appear unified by their negative reaction against foreign influence and the positive embrace of a common Spanish American culture disseminated through the arts, sports, cinema, radio, and television. Thus, the final mural composed by this collage of writers offers a symbiotic Spanish America whose theater constitutes an integral part of contemporary world drama.

Notes

1. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote mystical and cloak-and-dagger plays, short dramatic panegyrics, and farces. Her two most famous plays are Los empeños de una casa (a cloak-and-dagger play) and El divino narciso (a mystical play). Her poetry, especially her sonnets, has appeared in every major anthology of Spanish American literature.

2. See for example, Emilie Bergmann et al., Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America; Sabina Berman, “La mujer como dramaturga”; Jean Franco’s Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico; Magdalena García Pinto, Women Writers of Latin America; and Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, among others.

3. A redondilla is an octosyllabic quatrain rhyming abba. In this poem Sor Juana reprimands men for defiling women and then
demanding virginal spouses. She advises them: “Quereldas cual las hacéis, / o hacedlas cual las buscáis” (Love them as you’ve made them / or make them as you’d like them).

4. As we all know, literary histories have neglected the contribution of women writers; thus, the prevailing images of women in literature have been those advanced by men. Except for the recognition accorded Clorinda Matto de Turner (Perú, 1852–1909) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba, 1814–1873), little is known about female writers of the period. The works of playwrights such as Carmen Pérez de Rodríguez (1828–1898) and Mercedes González de Moscoso (1860–1911) from Ecuador; Vicenta Laparra de Cerda (1834–1905) from Guatemala; María Bibiana Benítez (1783–1875), Carmen Bozello (1850?–1882) and Carmen Hernández de Araujo (1832–1877) from Puerto Rico have received marginal attention.

5. The section on the representation of woman during the Romantic period in Mexico comes from Margarita Vargas’s essay in David William Foster’s Mexican Literature: A History.

6. The lack of positive female roles is neither site specific nor exclusive to a literary period. In “Palpable Designs: An American Dream: ‘Rip Van Winkle,’” Judith Fetterley points out that in early nineteenth-century American literature the female characters could be so inane that women readers had to side with the male protagonist and consequently against themselves (Warhol 507).

7. The two canonized regionalist novels are Rómulo Gallegos, Doña Bárbara (1929) and Ricardo Güiraldes, Don Segundo Sombra (1926). The avant-garde literature produced mainly poets, among them the renowned Pablo Neruda.

8. The First International Feminine Conference was held on 10 May 1910 in Buenos Aires. Over two hundred women from Perú, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina attended (Francesca Miller 12). Some of the groups active during this period were the Consejo Feminista Mexicano, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the Federação Brasileria pelo Progresso Feminino, the National Woman’s Party of the United States, the Ligue Feminine Haitienne, the Club de Madres of Buenos Aires, etc. (Francesca Miller 15).

9. García Márquez’s Ursula Buendía is an exception.

10. We mention anthologies because of the crucial role they play in the canonization process. Thus far, in drama at least two have


11. Castillo alludes directly to Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega’s *La sartén por el mango* (The Pan by Its Handle, 1985), but one could also include in this definition Laura Esquivel’s novel *Como agua para chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate, 1989), Dolores Prida’s play *Coser y cantar* (As Easy as Sewing and Singing, 1991), and even Castillo’s own text, since she incorporates cooking terminology in her study, though her title does not reveal it.

12. It is important to note that the actress’s rebellion as well as the variety of mother roles she plays—from the most submissive to the ultra sophisticated and worldly mother—help to dismiss the conventional image of woman as subservient being.

13. For a thorough description of the theory of power relations see Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, especially volume I. On Foucault, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*.

14. Bill, the “intruder,” claims, “Cuando la vi en el mercado, el bebé en brazos . . . me pareció una madona . . . usted era una aparición . . . La virgen de Guadalupe” (When I saw you at the market, with the baby in your arms . . . you looked like a Madonna, . . . You were a vision . . . The Virgin of Guadalupe,” 15).