

Preface

This book is a hermeneutic study of the literary representations of female identity in Mexico. Looking into questions of such identity in a nation so rich in differences, both regional and linguistic, would appear to be spurious if it were not for the unprecedented emergence of women writers in Mexico and the challenge they bring to the status quo. My inquiry begins in the second half of the seventeenth century with Juana Inés de la Cruz and then leaps ahead to concentrate on the last quarter of the twentieth century. This study is not a historical analysis of the documentation pertaining to the status of women; rather, I offer an interpretive analysis of selected texts as sources of identity. These texts can be considered primary clues for the larger undertaking.

I decided to write this book in English because I believe there is a manifest desire for knowledge and understanding of Mexican women among non-Spanish readers. All the writers included here are Mexican household names, yet all, save Fuentes and Paz, are not well known or are completely unknown outside of Mexico. Although in recent years communication and exchange with Mexico has broadened in an unprecedented way, mainly in the spheres of economics and politics, even basic information about its women, their identity, their representation, and their cultural creations, is still clouded behind stereotypes. Indeed, I believe that this encounter between an English language readership and Mexican women is long overdue and I hope that this book will help to explain the remaking of the contemporary Mexican woman. There are now, more than ever before, possibilities of active collaboration in North America and beyond, and if my work can help, I will consider my efforts worthwhile. Keeping in mind the introductory and exploratory aim of this book, I have

tried to examine texts which have published English translations. The only exceptions are Cristina Pacheco and María Luisa Puga.

I have organized this book into ten chapters. In the first chapter I outline my critical and ideological position; in the second and third chapters I take a brief look at some of the best examples of the subversion of sexism by two of Mexico's leading writers, Juan Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes. The fourth chapter considers the complex relationship between Mexico's most celebrated poets: Sor Juana and Octavio Paz. The fifth to the ninth chapters study key aspects of female identity as presented by contemporary women writers. The tenth chapter is my hermeneutic conclusion. A collective configuration of the contributions each writer gives to female identity is the main objective of my work. I do not engage in reductive definitions of the vast social phenomena that constitute the identity of a nation's women. My aim, rather, is to promote collective collaborative inquiry as well as self-inquiry into what it means to identify ourselves as Mexican women, and to do so through a body of texts that belong to all of us.

This book was written over a six-year span. It began from the welcome convergence in my life of time to develop my thinking on feminist criticism as it pertained to Mexico and my association with a number of colleagues and institutions who have supported my work. I want to thank my friends Simone and Paul Ricoeur and Marie Yvonne and Etienne Guyon, whose warm hospitality in France for so many years has helped me to dedicate myself to reading and writing. I also acknowledge the generous grant given me by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in 1990–91. I gratefully acknowledge the invitation of Elena Urrutia, Director of the Interdisciplinary Program of Women's Studies at El Colegio de Mexico, to participate in the program's seminars and colloquia, and thank Gloria Prado for her hospitality.

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chapters. Their support and editorial advice were of immense value as I shaped these materials into the present book. To all I express my most sincere gratitude; you have helped me say what I had to say, better.

The plan of the book took shape in 1990, when most of chapters 4 to 8 were written and I recognized the need to add chapters 2 and 3, on Rulfo and Fuentes. Chapter 1 had been in progress from the outset, mostly in the form of introductions to studies of individual Mexican women. It was at this time of reorganization that I recognized the logical simplicity and the importance of the tripartite organization: theory, the subversion of existing social codes, and the contribution of women writers. The conclusion was written in 1995, and although I only briefly touch on the work of Laura Esquivel, I want to salute her talent and strength as a woman. In the course of this project I have had the pleasure of meeting Sandra Cisneros, who stands out as one of the great promises for a recognition of Chicana literature in Mexico. Cristina Pacheco and Elena Poniatowska are generous friends whose work I have read for many years and who I consider to be major contributors to the making of a new Mexican woman and to the shattering of the mirror that we have been for so long forced to look into as our only identity.

The Shattered Mirror

