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EXCESSIVE FEMININITY AS RESISTANCE IN TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY MEXICAN NARRATIVE AND VISUAL ART

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In this dissertation I study the different ways that women are represented as “feminine,” or the different ways of being a “woman” in Mexico. I situate this study in questions of how womanhood is depicted in contemporary Mexican fiction and art, how the female body is used in such fluid representations of womanhood, and how gendered performance through the body helps define a woman’s identity. The unifying thread is that of women who enact femininity that goes against the traditional archetype of passive motherhood found in *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada*: they avoid becoming mothers; seek sexual pleasure; avoid maternal, care-taking relationships with men; and enact alternative production rather than reproduction through their bodies. The corpus includes canonical and recent literature by female authors, fiction written by men, letters, *corridos*, poems, photographs, calendar *cromos*, paintings, drawings, letters, and lithographs, spanning materials from 1903 to 2004. The first two chapters explore the women of the Mexican Revolution in a female counter-archive in photographs and calendar *cromos* prints and *corrido* ballads and novels written by women, such as *Cartucho* by Nellie Campobello

and *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska. In the third chapter I deconstruct the submissive figure of the *mujer abnegada* through feminist re-readings of the novels *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* by Elena Poniatowska and *Demasiado amor* by Sara Sefchovich and the protagonists' journeys of resisting selflessness and motherhood. Beyond a rejection of the maternal *abnegada*, in the fourth chapter I look at women who enact sexuality without maternity through suffering and bleeding in the paintings of Frida Kahlo and the novels *Santa* by Federico Gamboa and *Duerme* by Carmen Boullosa. In contrast to sexuality without maternity, the final chapter examines beauty, body image, and female sexual desire in *Señorita México* by Enrique Serna and *Vapor* by Julieta García González and how the protagonists resist male desire directed at them and enact their own. The thesis creates a counter-archive of womanhood that moves women's bodies beyond the limits of traditional spaces for women, and contributes to constructions of womanhood in and outside of Mexico.

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Introduction.

In this dissertation I study the different ways that women are represented as “feminine” in twentieth- and twenty-first century Mexican literature and art, or the different ways of being a “woman” in Mexico. I situate this study in questions on how womanhood is depicted in contemporary Mexican fiction and art, how the female body is used in such representations of womanhood, and how gendered performance through the body helps define a woman’s identity. As Mexican culture is deeply-rooted in *machismo*, or a strong and aggressive masculine identity, women have historically been repressed and left with limited modes of representation or identity, referred to as *marianismo*. The traditional role for Mexican women is that of the mother, but what of the women who do not adhere to that prescribed identity? I therefore have chosen to examine representations of female figures who resist traditional categorizations and create new ways to be a “woman” in Mexico. I examine the sources I have gathered in a feminist analysis to reveal how womanhood is a spectrum and to compare the multiple versions of representing femininity through the female body. Beyond traditional categories for Mexican womanhood, how does femininity in excess manifest itself in these models? How do these examples offer new spaces for women to rework their gender identity and performance in the body?

My work in Mexican and Latin American literature, alongside gender, performative, and visual theory, focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first century representations of womanhood and the female body since the turn of the last century and the Mexican Revolution. These issues also engage with concerns of subjective, national, cultural, and sexual identities where the feminine figures rewrite histories, whether

national or their own, on or through their bodies. My scholarship demonstrates how women use bodily excesses of the feminine by way of their own re-imaginings to subvert masculinist cultural conceptions of womanhood as they fashion their own spectrum of what is “feminine.” The categories that I analyze in the chapters are that of women in the Mexican Revolution, the *mujer abnegada* or suffering and selfless woman, sexual women who are not mothers, and women who subvert body image and female desire. The sources for studying these groups of women include canonical and recent literature by female authors, fiction written by men, letters, *corridos*, poems, photographs, calendar *cromos*, paintings, drawings, letters, and lithographs, and cover a wide span of Mexican history, from 1903 to 2004. Authors I analyze such as Elena Poniatowska, Elena Garro, Carmen Boullosa, Sara Sefchovich, Laura Esquivel, and Julieta García González represent feminine voices in Mexican literature that came to the forefront during the 1960s and up through the year 2000 and challenged the dominantly male Mexican literary canon. The expanse of this thesis serves to highlight how the corpus problematizes Mexico’s social, political, and gendered systems in its representation of feminine models of womanhood. How and why do the women in these individual chapters dismantle and re-imagine masculine constructs through their bodies?

The thesis is divided into five chapters that cover the categories mentioned previously: the women of the Mexican Revolution, the *mujer abnegada*, women who do not become mothers, and women who enact female desire. I begin with an analysis of the developing roles of women during the Mexican Revolution, which influenced women’s roles throughout the twentieth century. The first study of the women of the Mexican Revolution is divided into two chapters that cover visual (photographs and *cromos*),

lyrical (*corridos*) and literary (novels) representations in two parts. I look at images of female Soldaderas and Adelitas, or of camp followers and love interests, as well as female soldiers, generals, and colonels to view the ways women participated in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and how femininity and womanhood were redefined to function within and after the Revolution in the early twentieth century. After this study of women who moved beyond private and passive femininity in the Revolution, in the third chapter I move to a study of women who also rejected *marinismo* and a selflessness in the shadow of men. The third chapter examines the novels *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978) by Elena Poniatowska and *Demasiado amor* (1990) by Sara Sefchovich to compare how the female protagonists define themselves through their male lovers in a downward spiral that becomes an Inferno they pass through to discover themselves. The women also come to reject the role of motherhood and what Judith Butler calls the heterosexual matrix (*Gender Trouble* 151 n6). After these characters's rejections of passivity and motherhood, in the fourth chapter I again look at figures who reject passivity and reproduction in their sexual relations. In the chapter I use the novels *Santa* (1903) by Federico Gamboa and *Duerme* (1994) by Carmen Boullosa and several works of art and writing by artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) to explore the female body through the womb and blood alongside suffering where they replace traditional female reproduction with alternative production through the body. The fifth chapter explores more deeply this rejection of traditional motherhood in a search for a female sexual identity. Here the novels *Señorita México* (1987) by Enrique Serna and *Vapor* (2004) by Julieta García González come together for a comparison of the protagonists's use of their bodies to enact beauty and sexual pleasure. In these chapters I do close readings of the

novels and the artwork to demonstrate how these female figures configure their female identities and bodies away from traditional Mexican models. Women's bodies in Mexico, as I will explain, are often limited to the roles of virgin, mother, or whore, and therefore my corpus reaches beyond these strict and restricting definitions of womanhood to create broader and more nuanced definitions of womanhood through the body. There are even examples where the women enact masculinity through their body alongside or rather than femininity for various reasons ranging from being a soldier to transgender identities.

The theory I employ for my thesis is centered around the deconstruction of Mexican cultural archetypes for women, on gender identity and performance through the body, and visual theory and culture. To discuss the place of women and sexuality in Mexico and the Americas, I find the research of John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman on North America to be useful, as a similar comparison can be made to this development of women's sexuality in Mexico. They explain that over the centuries sexuality has moved from being family-centered in reproduction to commercialized and focused toward individual happiness (xi-xii). While women were only considered for motherhood and child-raising in the home, changes such as birth control later allowed for them to leave the home, work, and not rely on a husband, and these changes resulted in shifts to American society and gender roles. These same trends also occurred in Mexico and Latin America despite the prevailing traditions such as Mexican *machismo* and *marianismo*, or extremely aggressive and exaggerated forms of macho masculinity and passive femininity. With *marianismo* there is a lack of consideration of female sexuality due to a focus exclusively on motherly reproduction and nurturing. The corpus I have gathered for my thesis from the start of the twentieth century includes materials from the 1960s and

1970s when feminist movements were set into motion across the world and these family-centered definitions of sexuality and womanhood were put into question. While the female figures I study transgress the masculine standards for femininity, the models that they transgress are several hundred years old.

The roles for women in Mexico are based on archetypes that were established from around the time of the Conquest and that still are pigeonholed into limiting categories. These representations of womanhood are divided into *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, *la Chingada*, and *la Malinche*. *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is a religious figure specific to Mexico from 1541 when Juan Diego encountered a Nahuatl-speaking, dark-skinned apparition of the Virgin Mary from Catholicism. After a series of miracles she became a religious, visual, and eventually cultural icon specific to Mexico: a dark-skinned Virgin mother. *La Guadalupe* represents religious morals and purity, as indicated in her title by “Virgin.” Elena María de Valdés explains how Mexican women are taught to view their role in society: “From birth, [women] have been tutored in the unquestioned truth that their primary function in life is motherhood, whether it be by physical birth and nurturing of children or within the religious orders” (47). Here motherhood is broadened to include the nurturing role of nuns, an acceptable way for women to remain pure virgins in society. Valdés acknowledges such women’s comparison to *la Guadalupe*, that Mexican women are impossibly connected to “the social symbol of the virgin mother, that is, maternity without sexuality” (54), an archetype for women that is devoid of sexuality.

Another archetype for Mexican women is that of *la Malinche*. Known as Malintzín, she was the famous slave, interpreter, and companion to Hernán Cortés during

the Conquest, and she is viewed historically in Mexico as a woman's betrayal of her race in helping the Spaniards take over the territories. She had a child by Cortés as well, and therefore is known as the Mother to the *mestizo*, or mixed, race that occurred in Latin America and Mexico with the mixing of Indigenous and European peoples. *La Malinche* represents national betrayal, sexual impurity, and violence upon women and her people. Her body is read as the site of her betrayal, in that her body betrayed her people in producing a *mestizo* child with Cortés. Out of the *la Malinche* figure arose *la Chingada*, or the Raped One, in a representation that points directly to the forced colonization and violence of the Conquest on both the nation and its people, again centered in Malintzín's violated body. Mexicans even refer to themselves as *hijos de la Chingada* or *hijos de la Malinche* in a demonstration of how she is the Mother of the Mexican people, in a negative connotation to their origins. There has been extensive scholarship on these female figures that explain the deep and complex nature of these archetypes for Mexican and Chicana women.¹ For example, I am inspired by Norma Alarcón's analysis of *la Guadalupe* and *Malintzín- la Chingada* as symbols of national violence now appropriated and re-imagined by Mexican and Chicana authors ("Traddutora Traditora").

These three female Mexican archetypes of *la Guadalupe*, *la Malinche*, and *la Chingada* create strict categories for Mexican womanhood, of a femininity that is either pure or violated and negative. Octavio Paz in his essay "Hijos de la Malinche" compares the images of *la Chingada* and *la Guadalupe* in contemporary Mexico:

Por contraposición a Guadalupe, que es la Madre virgen, la Chingada es la Madre violada. [...] Se trata de figuras pasivas. La Chingada es aún más pasiva [que

¹ For more bibliography on *la Guadalupe*, *la Malinche*, and *la Chingada* see works by Norma Alarcón, Néstor Medina, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Sandy Cypress, and Margo Glantz. The figures are prevalent in work by Chicana and Mexican-American artists as well.

Guadalupe]. Su pasividad es abyecta: no ofrece resistencia a la violencia, es un montón inerte de sangre. Huesos y polvo. Su mancha es constitucional y reside, según se ha dicho más arriba, en su sexo. Esta pasividad abierta al exterior la lleva a perder su identidad: es la Chingada. Pierde su nombre, no es nadie ya, se confunde con la nada, es la Nada. Y sin embargo, es la atroz encarnación de la condición femenina. (109-110)

[In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgin Mother, the *Chingada* is the violated Mother. [...] Both of them are passive figures. [...] The *Chingada* is even more passive [than Guadalupe]. Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides, as we said earlier, in her sex. This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the *Chingada*. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she *is* Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the female condition. (76-77)]²

I wish to first focus here on how, whether as the Virgin or *la Chingada*, both images of womanhood are presented as passive. They are subservient to masculine system of either patriarchy or the Church, and they lack autonomy. Paz's description of *la Chingada* is a frank imagining of what she represents in Mexican culture and of how women are situated, if not in line with virginal *Guadalupe*, then with the violated *Chingada*. The association of *la Chingada* with *la Malinche* again surrounds the image with negative connotations of betrayal, shame, and blame. *La Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* represent mothers of the nation, either spiritually or racially. This means that Mexican womanhood is bound to motherhood, for even Malintzín had a child with Cortés. The connection between *la Guadalupe* and motherhood uses the original figure of the Virgin Mary, which therefore refers to the Catholic contradiction of a virgin mother. Why do these models of Mexican womanhood continue to be prevalent in Mexican culture even into the twenty-first century? How do they resist dismantling?

² All translations into English are my own unless otherwise noted. Here the English comes from the translation by Kemp.

While Paz's analysis aligns with the masculinist Mexican patriarchal vision of women, Roger Bartra takes this model and further explains the impossible placement of women in the duality of *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* by coining the name "Chingadalupe." He writes that "Este arquetipo de la mujer mexicana es la dualidad Malintzin-Guadalupe. Es la chingadalupe, una imagen ideal que el macho mexicano debe formarse de su compañera, la cual debe fornicar con desenfreno gozoso y al mismo tiempo ser virginal y consoladora" (211) ["This archetype of the Mexican woman is the Malintzin-Guadalupe duality—the Chingadalupe, an ideal image that the Mexican male must form of his companion, who must fornicate with unbridled enjoyment and at the same time be virginal and comforting" (211; 160)].³ I place Bartra's model at the center of my vision of these archetypes as it is the epitome of the impossible duality by which Mexican women are obligated to live: both pure virgin and impure sexual object. Men do not experience this same restriction and passivity expected of women, and their outlets for desire, sexuality, and sexual pleasure are not shameful. This combined *Chingadalupe* also functions in serving men's sexual virility in *machismo*, with women only existing to serve male constructs and without autonomous subjectivity. In my thesis I want to look at several examples not only of women who deconstruct this virgin/whore binary but also enact these sexual desires and identities, which are allotted to men, in creating feminist embodiments of female sexuality. How and why do they enact modes of resistance through the body?

The Mexican woman is inextricably tied to models of purity, motherhood, and a non-sexual identity and faces being ostracized if she rejects these models. In her article "La sexualidad de la mexicana," Juana Armanda Alegría looks at female eroticism in

³ The English comes from the translation by Hall.

Mexico and the problems surrounding female identity and conduct in Mexico's *machismo* culture. She rejects the abnegated role of Mexican women and their fear to feel sexual pleasure because of the need to adhere to the models of pure and passive femininity of *la Guadalupe*. She refers to "el culto de la virginidad" ["the cult of virginity" (274)] and how it is used to determine women's value: as seen in the model of *la Chingada*, the penetrated woman has lost honor and respect in society. Not only are women punished for seeking pleasure, but that pleasure is presumed to be with a man whether in or out of wedlock. What is inescapable in analyzing these Mexican female archetypes is that both *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* only allow for heterosexual womanhood. This relates to Adrienne Rich's concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" wherein the lesbian is negated from women's experiences because there is only room to consider woman as wife to a heterosexual man and as mother (631). And therefore not only are women devoid of a healthy sexual identity as heterosexual, they are denied any LGBTQA identity, and the same remains true for Mexican men, who are bound to *machista* views of heterosexual masculinity. There is no space for the woman who does not become a mother, enacts sexual desire, is with another woman, or becomes masculine or a man; all of these options away from the archetypes are transgressive for Mexican culture. If the heterosexual man and woman are bound so tightly to the nation, what does that say about national Mexican structures of culture, society, and gender? Are national subjects restricted to reproduction and therefore heterosexual, productive pairings? While there is no Our Lady of LGBTQA in official channels, queer images of *la Guadalupe* have been created by artists such as Chicana artist Alma López, for example.⁴ In the same way,

⁴ In López's piece *Our Lady*, the artist re-imagines the traditional image of Guadalupe to represent "Chicana butch-femme desire" (Gutiérrez 53).

women can take these images of *la Guadalupe*, *la Malinche*, and *la Chingada* and work against them, rework them, or re-imagine them into something positive and transgressive and break from traditional limitations.

Another theoretical framework through which I view my corpus is that of gender and how it is configured through the body. In this feminist study of Mexican womanhood I examine how female bodies enact and embody different ranges of femininity and masculinity. Gender is fluid, and rather than a binary between male/female and masculine/feminine I propose it is a wide spectrum for representing the many ways to be a woman or be feminine in Mexico. In going beyond traditional examples of womanhood, such as those of *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada*, I view this spectrum as femininity in excess, in that they invoke gendered or sexual identities beyond the reserved and restricted limits allowed in Mexican society, as a strategy for undermining traditional, and masculine, constructs in feminine performance. I refer to Judith Butler's theory of gender and embodiment as a starting point for my framework of Mexican womanhood. Butler asserts that gender is not something that is exact but rather an infinite copy of a copy, "not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). If gender is a practice then there is no one original model of masculinity or femininity that people are to imitate. Gender itself is an imitation of an imitation, resulting in a lack of authenticity, with the body at the center. In discussing embodied gender, however, I also find the theory of Judith Halberstam to be beneficial. Within the spectrum of femininity that I propose, there exists the possibility of including masculinity. As Halberstam explains, masculinity can exist without the presence of men's bodies (1). Certain performances in my corpus take into account the

fluidity between femininity and masculinity in these performances of womanhood, such as in moments of cross-dressing.

My approach to the female figures in my corpus is to study how they perform gender, as femininity and womanhood, through the body, and therefore one must discuss the theories of performance and performativity. Diana Taylor defines performance as an act of transfer, practices and events, behaviors, embodied practices, and a lens through which one can analyze events as performance (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 2, 3). A performance has an origin, such as a script, however, and can be repeated and performed constantly and differently each time. Similarly, in her book *Performance and Cultural Politics* Elin Diamond begins by stating that “performance is always a doing and a thing done” (1), referring to the original script from the past and the act of the new performance. The concepts of performance and performativity differ, however, in terms of what is produced through language, referring to J.L.Austin’s “performative utterance,” which “enacts or produces that to which it refers” (qtd. In Diamond 4). Gender performativity involves the production of gender through the body and language, in producing femininity or masculinity by referring to it. It is then through performance and performativity that I view the Mexican archetypes for women. As Carl Jung views archetypes as unconscious content that manifest themselves both universally and through the individual (5), I similarly assert that they should be fluid like gender. Archetypes can also be read as cultural scripts that are to be followed, and therefore I propose a deconstruction of these archetypes. Rather than following them as a scripted performance, in my approach instead they would allow for a new creation of womanhood or femininity where the gender script becomes a performative resistance.

In this discussion of gender performativity, I find the theory of Laura Gutiérrez that considers women who perform as women to be useful to my approach on excess gender. In her book *Performing Mexicanidad* Gutiérrez studies Mexican and Chicana female artists and how they represent Mexican womanhood on the stage. For women that perform a feminine role on stage, or for a woman who plays a female role in a theatrical setting, Gutiérrez uses the term “same-sex masquerade” (71), related to theory on cabaret camp performances of gender that are considered empty (Robertson). Just as Diamond says that performance can act as a lens through which to view events, this female performance of a woman represents womanhood through the body and through language as performative. In the materials I study in this thesis I consider Gutiérrez’s theory of the same-sex masquerade of gender to be central in analyzing how women perform femininity or womanhood through their bodies. In a way, for example, the literary female characters masquerade as real-life women similar to their theatrical counterparts in plays and on the stage; the written page is the backdrop for this masquerade of women enacting womanhood. I find the “same-sex masquerade” in Gutiérrez’s Latina and Chicana context to be useful in analyzing my female figures in literature, in photographs, and in paintings in a Mexican context to interpret how women represent womanhood as I approach the performative aspects of these literary and artistic materials.⁵

My approach involves a consideration of excesses of gender and the body and looks at how meaning is inscribed onto women’s bodies. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz explores feminism and the body in the context of masculine societal and cultural restrictions, such as those also found in Mexico. She explains that as women’s bodies are

⁵ This performative gender theory also includes space for discussions of men performing as women on stage in drag or other scenarios in the theater, but I have not included such examples of male bodies in this study.

read as different from men's because of sexuality, reproduction, and bodily fluids, women therefore are considered weaker, uncontrolled, and unpredictable in a self-fulfilling societal oppression (13, 14). Grosz says that because they are restricted to their reproductive role, "women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" (14) and yet men try to contain them to their physical body. This concept of "more" is that of bodily excesses of femininity that outside, masculine influences attempt to control. Women's sexuality and these female bodily experiences such as menstruation and masturbation therefore must be theorized away from masculinist definitions and filtered through a feminist approach. In my fourth and fifth chapters when analyzing miscarriages, hysterectomies, and sexual secretions I also refer to Grosz's theories on bodily fluids. In my consideration of female bodies, as Butler discusses gender formation she situates gender as a cultural interpretation and the body as "a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself" (*Gender Trouble* 12). The female body therefore in Mexico is inscribed with the cultural roles of *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* and read according to those definitions of womanhood. In my thesis I look at how women inscribe their own feminist meanings and gender constructions onto themselves rather than passively accepting the ones imposed on them by masculinist societal models. How do the women or female figures move from being passive objects whose body are written upon by society or men and instead write their own histories on or through their own bodies? How do these bodily excesses break beyond the corporeal limits in how women construct their own expressions of gender to perform womanhood?

For this study I chose to incorporate several examples of visual art in order to expand the scope of examining women's bodies with visual images. Some of these include the paintings and diary drawings of Frida Kahlo, photographs from the Casasola archive from the Mexican Revolution, and the calendar *cromos* prints of the early- to mid-twentieth century. I chose these traditional pieces of art to examine how they tie the image of women's bodies and womanhood to the nation, society, and culture. In the artwork and literature of my corpus I also study the visuality of women's bodies. In the relationship between the active male gaze and the passive female recipient, women are trained to be viewed by men in what Laura Mulvey refers to as "to-be-looked-at-ness" (19), not unlike the passive female body receiving signification through male cultural inscriptions.. The positioning of female figures in art traditionally placed them as sexual objects for a male viewer to cater to male desire and power (Berger). However, in this discussion of gazes and value I also refer to what Diana Fuss calls the homospectatorial look from the world of women's fashion; it explains how women are trained by fashion magazines to not only desire to look like the image they see but to therefore desire that image. When analyzing the art in my thesis I discuss details such as the women's gazes, clothing and other gender markers, poses, and how they interact with male figures and the male viewer. In this way between the literary protagonists and the female figures represented in the paintings, photos, and prints I want to show how the figures embody visual representations of gender performativity.

My theoretical approach to analyzing the corpus of this interdisciplinary project involves a deconstruction of Mexican female archetypes through an examination of resistance in performative and visual embodiments of excessive gender. The approach I

use requires looking at the spectrum of gender through different angles, including same-sex masquerade, performativity, and excess. The span of this dissertation necessitates a complex perspective that will ultimately result in a rich conversation on embodied femininity that would otherwise remain one-dimensional without these varied perspectives. In each chapter I ask the question: how do female bodies resist traditional embodiments of Mexican womanhood? Based on either the pure motherhood of *la Guadalupe* or the impure sexual objectivity of *la Chingada*, how do they deconstruct these archetypes to allow for the creation of new and feminist re-imaginings of femininity in Mexico? I now outline in greater detail how each chapter addresses these issues through the literature and art assigned to each section.

My first two chapters are a study of women in the Mexican Revolution and how they are represented as participating in visual and literary archives and in representing womanhood during the Revolution. The Mexican Revolution is often viewed as a military conflict dominated by men, with famous figures like Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and many male presidents taking center stage in archives and images. The two prevalent female categories of women's involvement were Soldadera or Adelita. The term Soldadera referred to women who worked for male soldiers for pay in the campgrounds, and Adelita was used for a soldier's love interest (Salas xii). These women did not necessarily take up arms in the Revolution, but there are also examples of female soldiers, generals, and colonels. The Revolution often turned the background players, from the male soldiers to the women in the campgrounds, into anonymous and almost invisible entities in the shadow of the more famous figures such as Villa or Zapata. I therefore explore the different roles of women as seen through visual and written

documents, viewing women's participation as a counter-archive to the male-dominated version of the Revolution.

To study the women of the Revolution I have inverted the traditional path of studying the *novelas de la revolución* as the primary examples, instead beginning with other popular culture manifestations of these female figures. My approach to the study of these women is to begin with the photos, *cromos*, and *corridos* to situate the living, popular archive of women's participation and counter-act the traditional male archive. I conclude the section with literary examples to look at women's rewriting of the history, mostly in the second half of the twentieth century, in an attempt to view the literature through the visual lens of the preceding documents. I have divided my reflection on women in the Mexican Revolution into two separate studies, first of visual and then lyrical and narrative representations. In the first section I study examples from photography and *cromos* calendar art that depict women in the Revolution. I examine photos taken from the Casasola archive, composed of photos taken from roughly 1910 to 1920 by many different contracted photographers. From the archive I have taken several photos that include women to look at the way their different roles are portrayed, including their construction and performance of womanhood as archived during the Revolution. These roles ranged from camp follower or food vendor to soldier, with a wardrobe ranging from traditional women's clothing to men's uniforms. I include as well a photo of Amelio Robles, a transgender female-to-male colonel, to further discuss gender roles, power, and masculinity in female bodies during the Revolution.

I then turn to examples of famous Mexican calendar art, or *cromos*, that were painted several decades after the Revolution and which represent a wide variety of

regional, national, and commercial images. I again chose several images that depict women during the Mexican Revolution as sexualized Adelitas or soldiers by artists such as Gómez R., Humberto Limón, and Ángel Martín. How do these colorful illustrations alter the relationship between the women's bodies and the nation previously seen in the photographs? The women play to nationalist and folkloric imagery in their dress and positioning with flags and other national iconography, but they rarely represent scenes of realistic campgrounds or battlefields. As I compare the women in these photographic and *cromo* collections, how were women's bodies represented alongside the Revolution and how did these embodiments of femininity either advance women's subjectivity or keep it limited by definition through the male-centered archive?

The second chapter is a study of women in the Revolution as seen in *corridos* and literary re-writings to determine how the songs and texts wove these women into the national and historical imaginary in this female counter-archive. I mentioned that the Revolution is often depicted as masculine, and one such example of this is the countless *corridos*, or Mexican folk ballads, that sing the praises of famous men in battle. I therefore analyze several *corridos* that mention women such as the Adelita or female soldiers like "La Valentina" or Petra Herrera. These *corridos* sing of the presence and deeds of women in the campgrounds and on the battlefields. At times the *corridos* commend women's valor and bravery, acting as proof of their participation in the Revolution as they weave womanhood into the conflict. As seen in the analysis of the photographs and *cromos*, the women are often grouped together in a manner that prevents them from being realized as subjects in the Revolution. They become *Juanas*, or wives of

the soldier Juan, and these *Juanas* fade into the background, where the traditional masculinist archive silenced their voices into anonymity in the archives.

I conclude this chapter and section on the women of the Revolution with a study of several examples from *novelas de la revolución*. The traditional male and male-authored literary canon of the Mexican Revolution is not a space that represents women, either at all or as well-rounded characters, in the same way as the other examples in these two chapters. The literature of the period itself is often referred to as “virile” as part of a movement to make literature more masculine after the so-called “effeminate” literature of the previous generation (Díaz Arciniega 57). This clearly points to the *machista* national narrative of the time period and its literature; where were women positioned in such a masculinist national narrative? I therefore counter this virile traditional archive by bringing together novels written by women that depict women during the Revolution, whether they were written during or after the conflict. How do the female characters bring womanhood to the Revolution and use their bodies, albeit mostly fictitious literary bodies, to enact gendered and cultural performances? The characters represent how the Mexican Revolution changed the role of women in public and in society and allowed for new versions and embodiments of femininity. Of the authors, Nellie Campobello is the only woman who is credited as a female author of *novelas de la revolución*. Her texts *Cartucho* (1931) and *Las manos de mamá* (1938) are first-hand accounts of what she and her mother experienced at home close to the Revolutionary battlegrounds, and I study the Mother’s involvement with the soldiers and how hers became a social maternity in caring for the troops and her family. In Elena Garro’s *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963) I look at how the female characters have the power to alter the passage of time and how the

town creates its own counter-archive through a collective memory. I study this and Campobello's examples to show how women in the Revolution are charged with remembering the dead male soldiers and the events that took place, which connects their Revolutionary womanhood and bodies to both memory and death. Elena Poniatowska's novel *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1969) came from her interviews with a woman who participated in the Revolution. There was much controversy over an upper-class white woman voicing the struggle of an illiterate *mestiza*, and Poniatowska herself discusses the problematic narrative in transforming Jesusa's own words into a literary narrative.⁶ While the novel is known for its controversial testimony, I analyze it for how Jesusa negotiates gender representations and femininity; she cross-dresses to go with the troops, but not as a Soldadera, and renegotiates gender lines after the Revolution in a similar way. Laura Esquivel's novel *Como agua para chocolate* (1989) includes among its many female characters in the family Gertrudis, who becomes a *general* in the Revolution, and I examine how she enacts an assertive and sexual gender performance and identity as a woman on the battlefield. The different registers or constructions of gender found in these visual and literary examples in these two chapters were not in fact masculine but were rather new definitions of womanhood created in and for the context of the Revolution. How did the Revolution mark each of their experiences, memories, and bodies, and how do these representations that differ from their masculine counterparts offer a different perspective on the Revolution, women's involvement, and the nation? In the Revolution women's involvement was often homogenized and only seen as that of camp follower or

⁶ She admits in "Testimonios de una escritora" that she was charged with forming a book out of Jesusa's words and life, to which Jesusa even scolded her saying "Usted inventa todo, son puras mentiras, no entendió nada, las cosas no son así" ["You make up everything, they're pure lies, you didn't understand anything, things aren't like that" (160)]. I address the controversy further in the chapter.

of camp prostitute, which plays into the Mexican archetypes of mother and whore. How, then does this feminine counter-Revolution during the Revolution consider the more diverse and multi-dimensional registers of women and their embodiments of gender?

After the first two chapters set up my approach to new embodiments of femininity in the twentieth century after the Revolution, in my third chapter I continue to see how women alter women's roles surrounding passive objectivity and motherhood. My third chapter looks at the undoing of the archetype of the *mujer abnegada* in two novels and how the female protagonists break from abnegation, loss, and motherhood. Both female characters define themselves at first through their lovers, and it is through letter- and journal-writing that they are able to reassert their autonomy. The novel *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978) by Poniatowska is a compilation of fictionalized letters that Quiela writes to her lover, Diego; they are meant to be written by Diego Rivera's longtime Russian lover, Angelina Beloff, with whom he lived in France for a decade. Quiela's letters describe how, like using the art tools he left behind, she feels that without Diego she is to be erased, only existing for him even in his absence (16, 22). She continues throughout the letters to give Diego power over her while experiencing pain and silence in her loss. They also had a child together who had died, also named Diego, and therefore she experiences her loss of identity as a mother through this second lost Diego. Her relationship to Diego her lover was also very maternal, having acted as mother to both Diegos; how does she move away from a compulsory maternity? She had taken on Diego as her own identity, such as adopting his language and his domestic quirks in this erasure of herself. Through her unanswered letters spanning less than a year she is able to process her loss and reassert her identity without Diego, such as beginning to create art again. She

moves from submissive object to active subject once she is able to define herself outside of her relationship to Diego and her desire to be a mother.

Alongside *Querido Diego* the second novel I analyze is *Demasiado amor* (1999) by Sara Sefchovich. The protagonist, Beatriz, begins supplementing her office income by meeting men at night, and she also has a long-term lover she sees on weekends. The narration combines letters Beatriz writes to her sister, who is in Italy, and journal entries in which she writes about her experiences with the nameless weekend lover. With the lover she travels all over Mexico experiencing the country, buying souvenirs, eating, and making love, and on weeknights she sleeps with other men for money but does not consider herself to be a prostitute. In those situations she remains in control, obtaining both pleasure and money. Beatriz also makes an effort to avoid getting pregnant, avoiding motherhood to continue being with her lover and maintain her sex work. At the end of the novel she discovers she no longer finds as much fulfillment in her weekend lover as in her sex work, and she converts her apartment into a space to dedicate herself fully to her sex work and multiple clients. She stops defining herself through one monogamous relationship, one that was obsessive and unhealthy in its intensity, to develop her sexual identity. She does, however, have to travel through Mexico, her lover, and her letters and journals in order to find herself in the same way Quiela traveled through Diego and her letters. While both Quiela and Beatriz defined themselves through their lovers, Quiela moves from a fragmented sense of multiple selves into one unified self, but Beatriz instead moves to embrace a sense of multiple selves with her clients, finding satisfaction in performing as different women. Just as the women of the previous two chapters rejected maternal roles and passivity in the context of the Mexican Revolution, Quiela

and Beatriz deconstruct the mold of the selfless woman and create spaces for their own identities.

The next chapter builds off the negations of motherhood seen in Quiela and Beatriz by taking them further into sexual identities by not complying with the Mexican archetypes surrounding motherhood and sexuality. In the fourth chapter the female figures take what Valdés referred to as *la Guadalupe's* “maternity without sexuality” (54) and invert the figure into sexuality without maternity. I compare the novel *Santa* (1903) by Federico Gamboa, the visual and written work of artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), and the novel *Duerme* (1994) by Carmen Boullosa to emphasize how each features female bodies with pain and blood and offer alternatives to the reproductive expectation of the Mexican woman. How, through prostitution, miscarriages, abortions, and cross-dressing, do the female figures move beyond their suffering and bleeding wombs to enact productive modes of femininity without maternity?

While the novel *Santa* is a canonical text published a century ago, I want to compare the protagonist Santa to these other female figures in order to study other ways of reading the suffering prostitute's body. As Gamboa wrote the novel during the repressive Porfiriato, his narration about a “fallen woman” who becomes a prostitute and later dies demonstrates how she is punished for losing her virginity before marriage; she does not choose to be a prostitute in the same way Beatriz became a sex worker in the previous chapter. The body of the prostitute is offered to the clients as pieces of meat, where the woman is reduced to a fragmented object for men's pleasure (Glantz 42). As a prostitute she also enacts a false performance of pure femininity and virginity for her clients, embodying the impossible *Chingadalupe* proposed by Bartra through feminine

purity catering to male sexuality. At the end of the novel it is implied that she has contracted a disease, and during her hysterectomy she dies, a fitting social punishment for the prostitute of the Porfiriato. How do the scenes of her lost virginity, miscarriage, and hysterectomy situate her body outside of motherhood, especially with her womb as the site of blood and disease rather than reproductive birth?

In similar considerations of bleeding, unproductive female wombs, the art and writing of the famous Mexican artist Frida Kahlo is tied to discussions of motherhood, pain, and the body. I have included here a study of some of her paintings, lithographs, letters, and text and drawings in her published journal. How did Kahlo replace maternal reproduction with artistic production through her suffering body? In her personal life she had a debilitating accident and suffered subsequent miscarriages, abortions, and life-long pain, and she took these realities and transcribed them onto her painted portrait body in her art. For example, I analyze her painting *Henry Ford Hospital* and lithograph *Frida y el aborto* made after a miscarriage in 1932 with images of blood and tears. There are also documented letters to her doctor where they discuss the complications of carrying to full term in her pregnancies that resulted in miscarriages or a need for forced abortions. There are parallels to Quiela's connection to her Diego, as both Kahlo and Beloff were his lovers, and I show how both figures, in their art and letters, maneuver the models of heterosexual partner, lover, and mother. Images of her seemingly broken body are found in much of her art, including two drawings I analyze in her personal journal that represent the destruction and pain of her body. A more famous image that represents these topics is the painting *Columna rota* that shows suffering, both physical and psychological. Kahlo

replaced the cultural expectation to become a mother and instead represented her non-maternal, bleeding, and suffering body and femininity in her art.

The final example of sexuality without maternity in this chapter comes from the novel *Duerme* by Carmen Boullosa. The novel follows Claire, a European woman who dresses as a man to travel to New Spain in the 1700s and who is made immortal by an indigenous woman. Claire wishes to be a man but her female body betrays her throughout her life, such as when she is discovered to be a girl while working as a page and is raped by her employer. She also inverts Mexican motherhood by referring to herself as her own son when she cross-dresses; she gives birth, or life, to her own male identity. Her body is the site of gender-bending and of sexual violence when punished for transgressing the gender roles of the time period, not unlike Santa's social punishment for her lost virginity. Claire is also able to manipulate gender and racial lines through her use of clothing, which results in a manipulation of class divisions that allow her to gain social power. Her mother had been a prostitute, and Claire attempts to avoid a similar fate by performing a male identity, yet it is this transgression which results in men trying to enact violence on her female body in punishment. I compare Claire to the photograph of Amelio Robles from the first chapter to study their use of men's clothing and male identities as modes of resistance. While her womb does not produce a child, and in becoming immortal she no longer menstruates or bleeds when cut, Claire instead creates a different maternal body in one that gave life to her masculine identity and performance. How does Claire re-negotiate cultural and gender limits of the time period to create a new space for herself to flourish?

Beyond these bleeding images of non-maternal female bodies, in a last push into the limits of female sexual identities the fifth and final chapter of my thesis explores female bodies through body image, beauty, female pleasure, and sexuality. In the novels *Señorita México* by Enrique Serna (1987) and *Vapor* (2004) by Julieta García González, the protagonists, a former beauty pageant winner and an obese woman, renegotiate standards of female beauty in Mexico as well as assert their female desire. While in the last two chapters the female characters also explored sexuality as sex workers, prostitutes, and other embodiments without maternity, these two characters push the exploration of women's bodies and sexual pleasure and desire further, although in a similar pursuit as Beatriz accomplished at the end of *Demasiado amor*. The protagonists Selene and Gracia turn their attention from how men view and desire them, or the male gaze on their bodies that determines their worth, and focus on their own sexual pleasure both with others and through masturbation. How do the authors use the space of the beauty pageant and the health spa, respectively, to explore female and male desire and beauty standards as the protagonists focus on their pleasures and bodies?

In *Señorita México* the protagonist, Selene, is a former beauty pageant winner of the Miss Mexico competition, and the novel tells her story in reverse chronological order starting with her suicide and mapping her public fall from pageant glory after winning Miss Mexico of 1966 as she ages. The novel combines interview-style monologues by Selene with third-person narrations to tell the story of her tumultuous life. As a pageant contestant and winner her body is defined and valued through international, national, and regional standards as compared to the other contestants of varying shapes and sizes. As she ages she loses her looks and her figure, and without the desiring validation from a

large male audience she takes to becoming a burlesque dancer to make a living. In the novel I explore how, away from public knowledge, Selene was lovers with another female dancer and in her youth with her male cousin, and how it is these transgressive sexual relationships in which Selene finds satisfaction. There are also moments where Selene manipulates the desiring male gaze of her public and turns their desires into her own sexual pleasure through masturbation. In the end, what is the effect of losing the public's admiration and desiring gaze on her aging body?

In *Vapor* the protagonist is Gracia, a young obese woman living in Mexico City where she is forced by her parents to join a health spa and see a doctor in order to lose weight. However, rather than exercise, at the spa Gracia watches herself move in the mirror and only uses the sauna and showers to masturbate. The doctor she visits makes it his mission to help her lose her excess weight, but during one visit they have sex in his office. I compare the obese Gracia and the doctor's thin fiancée to uncover the desire the doctor feels for the two women. I show how Gracia's body is constantly described alongside an excess of sexual fluids when masturbating, which uses water, and sex with the doctor, and how this marks her body as excess in size and sexuality. Although she is meant to lose weight, Gracia only loses a few pounds because she is happy being obese; she finds beauty and pleasure in her bodily excess. In both novels I propose that the women seek out sexual pleasure and satisfaction, which is viewed as transgressive, to find happiness. They are both highly visual subjects as a pageant contestant and a social woman out in Mexico City; how do the female figures negotiate the male gaze on their bodies? The characters both use masturbation as protection from these outside

masculinist forces toward their bodies; they can produce their own bodily pleasure and subsequent happiness.

In this thesis I aspire to show how the female figures I have assembled in different mediums negotiate and rework their bodies in public and private spaces to redefine womanhood and femininity in Mexico through resistance and excess in literature and art. Throughout the chapters I will map these examples of resistance to masculinist gender structures from the Mexican Revolution to the early twenty-first century, examining rejections of compulsory heterosexuality, virginal maternity, and passive sexuality, where dressing as a man, being a sex worker, and asserting sexual pleasure are all transgressions of resistance. The gun-wielding female soldier of the Revolution and the self-portraits of Frida Kahlo are just some examples of how the figures deconstruct and move beyond traditional female Mexican archetypes like *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* and use their bodies to create new gendered embodiments of femininity away from the strict categories of pure mother or shameful sex object, as seen together in the impossible duality of Bartra's *Chingadalupe*. Instead, I proclaim that the female figures define themselves and assign meaning to their own bodies, as they refuse to adhere to such limiting models of Mexican womanhood. How do these female figures broaden this spectrum for definitions of Mexican womanhood? I aim to reveal in this interdisciplinary dissertation on Mexican narrative, visual, artistic, and performative expressions of gender how the female figures create feminist and feminine embodiments of womanhood as modes of resistance to classical, archetypal, and restricting definitions of "femininity."

Chapter 1. The Invisible and Sexualized Women of the Mexican Revolution in Photographs and *Cromos*

I begin this study of women's embodied resistance to Mexican female archetypes through excess femininity with the women of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican Revolution, started in 1910, lasted nearly a decade as an ideological and armed civil war between the state power of then President and Dictator General Porfirio Díaz and the agrarian forces of leaders such as Francisco Madero, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata. The Revolution was in essence a Civil War that was crucial to twentieth-century nation formation and effect on Mexican history, politics, and culture, not to mention its representation in countless literary and visual studies, from plays to paintings, from films to novels. Some of the most famous works based on the Revolution are: the films¹ *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*, *El prisionero 13* and *El compadre Mendoza* by director Fernando de Fuentes; the novels *Los de abajo* by Mariano Azuela, *El águila y la serpiente* and *La sombra del caudillo* by Martín Luis Guzmán and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes; the play *El gesticulador* by Rodolfo Usigli; and an endless number of *corridos*, or Mexican folk ballads that tell of the different Revolutionary heroes and battles. Despite its extreme violence, the Revolution is often bathed in a romanticized light and its repercussions for the construction of the nation are also intertwined with masculine heroism, such as how the prominent images of Mexican heroes like Villa and Zapata are immortalized in the *corridos*, fiction, and films mentioned above. However, these versions of the Revolution are often devoid of

¹ The film *Que Viva México* by Sergi Eisenstein in the 1930s was to include a final section on the Soldadera, but filming was stopped because the project ran out of funding. I have not included cinema as one of these sections, despite the many examples of the Revolution and Soldaderas, in order to limit this study to strictly literary and printed artistic examples in the *cromos* and photographs.

women's participation, their presence mostly ignored and undocumented. Here I want to show the different registers of participation and representation of women in the Mexican Revolution to demonstrate how they create a counter archive to the traditional, masculine narrative of the Revolution as well as new definitions for womanhood in Mexico.

Whether in the camps, as soldiers or as high-ranking officials, these women created their own, differing gendered identities that countered the masculine space of war. As I explore how women resist traditional representation through Mexican female archetypes, here I intend to show how a female counter-archive for the Mexican Revolution was created through women's bodies and memories and made a space for women in the Revolution and beyond.

I have organized this study of women in the Mexican Revolution in two sections in order to focus on two specific representations of the Soldadera: the one in printed images and the one in printed and sung text. I have chosen to invert traditional studies of the Revolution that focus primarily on its representation in literature, such as through *la novela de la Revolución*. Instead I begin my study with representations that are examples of visual archives and represent *lo popular*, or popular culture away from the high culture of literature. I defer my study of the literature of the Revolution in order to first analyze the photographs, *cromos*, and *corridos*, as these are often seen as secondary to the official narrative of the Revolution. These visual and lyrical examples depict the Revolution in ways that create a living archive that is to be read differently than the literary examples. I assert that this secondary archive should be read first and the literary archive, what I have gathered as a women's re-writing of the Revolution in literature, be read in relation to the visual and lyrical. I wish to explore the representation of women's involvement and

resistance to traditional femininity in the Revolution in the photographs, *cromos*, *corridos*, and novels written by women as a counter-archive against the official and traditional archive of a masculinist nation-building project.

The approach of my study of visuality in national representation can be situated alongside Doris Sommer's view of foundational narratives. She explains how heterosexual romance acts as allegory for representing the nation (6), and in this study this can be seen in the romantic figure of the Adelita, as I will analyze further on. While Sommer considers literary narratives as parallel to the nation, I assert that these narratives can also be visual. These national narratives can even contain the formulaic story-telling of the oral genre of the *corridos* as ballads recounting the Revolution or other structures of national identity. Additionally, my view of women's resistance removes women from not only from the restraint of archetype tradition but also the need to act out these heterosexual romances for the sake of nation, that is, to move beyond the role of lover and wife and develop independent roles in Mexican history. In considering these non-literary spaces for representing national foundations and archives, I also find it useful to adopt Walter Benjamin's consideration of mechanical reproducibility. Benjamin discusses how, when art is copied, the original aura of the image is lost in the act of reproduction (22). The photographs and *cromos* I analyze here are subject to this depletion of the aura through being reproduced, with the argument being that authenticity is lost through reproduction, and what results is an altered authenticity that creates something new. In thinking of authenticity and the plurality that reproduction creates, I argue that the circulation of these images not only enriches the archives for creating a counter-archive through visual narratives, but these visual narratives therefore eliminate a one-

dimensional archive or narrative based purely on the traditional literary or masculinist view of history. I propose that these images and lyrics of the photographs, *cromos*, and the *corridos* enhance the national archive, especially when considering their representation of women's experiences in history and the Mexican Revolution in particular. In this first section on the photographs and *cromos*, it is evident that while both are reproducible forms of art that represent these women of the Revolution, they do so differently, as I will explain below.

When one thinks of female involvement in the Revolution, one does not think of the battlefield itself; soldiers were men, and the battlefield was too dangerous a place for women. Elizabeth Salas writes that not only has the Soldadera become a mythical figure for the Revolution, but she is also trapped in Mexican gender roles: "the Mexican mass media transformed *soldaderas* into either self-sacrificing, heroic camp followers or prostitutes... The *soldadera* as prostitute conforms to the patriarchal ideology of the Mexican revolutionary state, which suggests a moral and sexual understanding of women within a 'good woman-bad woman' dichotomy" (102). Salas's statement on self-sacrifice or prostitution reiterates the limits of female archetypes and how women must be tied to *la Chingada* or *la Guadalupe*. At a glance, then, the prevalent images of the Soldadera seem to create only the categories of motherly or sexual caretaker for the male troops, categories that define the women solely through the men's involvement and which fit the Mexican cultural stereotypes for women as mothers or whores (Paz). Rather than the women who were involved in battles, I analyze how women are remembered for merely following their *Juan*, or husband, into battle; their own action and motivation is secondary to the men's because men are typically at the helm in war and revolution as

soldiers and generals. These images of self-sacrificing women, both stagnant in representation and in motion as they follow their soldier, are what also relegate the Soldadera to a secondary level of historical representation to the male soldiers.

It is necessary to begin this study with the reasons behind why women in the Revolution were called Soldaderas and Adelitas and how these two terms have different connotations. First, the term Soldadera is not simply a female version of the male soldier, or *soldado*, to become a “Soldada.” The word refers to how women sought steady employment during the Revolution by accompanying the men into battle. Salas explains the use of the word “Soldadera”² since the Spanish Conquest in terms of female servants: “Soldiers used their pay (*soldada*) to employ women as paid servants (*soldaderas*)... who as servants would purchase food and personal supplies” (xii). I view two issues at conflict within the Soldadera. On the one hand, I view the Soldadera as motherly in that she inhabits the role of caretaker, cooking and caring for the soldier(s), a devoted woman following the men into battle for the cause. On the other hand, these women were paid for their services, which turns their efforts from selfless mother figure to paid employee who could make a living in the campgrounds and support themselves through their wages. This conflicted view of paid mother is problematic when restricted to archetypal roles. Furthermore, as it was associated with women who lived with the troops to provide support and company for pay, the term Soldadera also became associated with prostitution, reducing women’s involvement historically to that of a sexual nature. The origin of the term “Adelita,” however, is a more mysterious one. It is said that a woman by that name followed her lover into battle, associating Adelitas with the soldiers not by

² Salas also points to the importance of the Soldadera figure in the 1960s Chicano/a movement.

pay but by romance. The woman, Adela Velarde Pérez, was supposedly the nurse for a sergeant who wrote the *corrido* in her honor which I analyze in detail in the second portion of this study (Herrera-Sobek 108). The figure of the Adelita, while associated with battle, is often that of the soldier's sweetheart and viewed more as a romantic love-object than as a soldier. The terms Soldadera and Adelita have come to be used interchangeably as well as to refer to women both working in the campgrounds and fighting in battles. In my consideration of the Mexican Revolution in this study I will refer to women in the camps and battlefields as Soldaderas, both for camp follower and female soldier, and use the term Adelita only when the women are seen as love objects by the male soldiers.

What is most noteworthy in these definitions of Soldadera and Adelita is that neither is actually associated with battle, despite the numerous women who did fight in the conflict alongside the male soldiers, even becoming famous *coronelas*, *generalas*, and *sargentas*. Beyond Soldadera and Adelita there were many other titles for women in the Revolution, and yet they tend to be excluded from the official narrative of the Revolution and Mexican history, overshadowed by the image of heroic male figures instead. Tabea Alexa Linhard provides an detailed image of the Soldadera that demonstrates how history has overlooked women in the Revolution, causing them to become one homogenized figure: "Adelita is the quintessential Soldadera; she is a camp follower, a love object, a picaresque character, a whore, a brave woman warrior, a nurse, and always the woman the revolution is worth fighting for" (127). Linhard's quote uses similar language for the *Chingadalupe* of Bartra: the Adelita represents an impossible grouping of characteristics that echoes the impossible duality of virgin mother. The figure of the all-encompassing

Revolutionary woman is just that: a flattened, one-dimensional character pushed to the background of history, a figure that is both silent and silenced. All of these definitions are forced into one body, and I focus on how the depiction of a warrior/nurse/love object/muse/whore is both everything and nothing, trapped in the anonymity and erasure of history.

The Mexican Revolution changed the traditional dynamic of the space and boundaries of the battlefield. The conflict renegotiated the space in terms of the public and the private, tradition and modernity, and the masculine and feminine (Byron 26). During the Revolution, the public and private became more difficult to differentiate because the soldiers's campgrounds became the home. As Elena Poniatowska points out in her text *Las soldaderas*, what distinguished the Revolution from other conflicts is that the troops did not return to their homes between battles (14). Poniatowska positions her text *Las soldaderas* alongside photos from the Casasolas archive, where most women's involvement in the conflict can be summarized by one woman's personal experience with which I want to begin this study. A husband tells his newly-wed and pregnant wife that they both will be going to war:

Sólo nos habíamos querido ocho meses, y el primer hijo no había nacido, y yo dije: "¿Por qué debo ir yo también?" Él contestó: "¿Entonces debo morirme de hambre? ¿Quién hará mis tortillas si no es mi mujer?" Tardamos tres meses en llegar al norte, y yo estaba enferma y el bebé nació en el desierto igual que aquí y murió porque no conseguimos agua. (14-15)

[We had only been together for eight months and our first son had not yet been born, and I said: "Why do I need to go, too?" He answered: "So should I starve to death? Who is going to make my tortillas if not my woman?" We took three months to get to the north. I was sick and the baby was born in a desert like this one here and died because we didn't have water. (18)]³

³ All translations into English are my own unless otherwise noted. For *Las soldaderas* the English translations come from the edition by Dorado Romo.

With this quote I wish to underscore the difficulty of survival as well as defining the level of involvement for women in the conflict: they were expected to continue to care for their husbands and children, or perform their maternal duties, in the campgrounds so that the soldier's home traveled with him and he would be able to fight more easily. In this case, as in many, it came down to cooking food for the troops, and therefore women were expected to fashion portable kitchens and houses as they moved across the countryside. Additionally, the Revolution provided a paid salary for women, as seen in their title as *Soldadera* according to Salas: "Working for soldiers became a way for poor, lower-class women to eke out a meager living for themselves and their children. Not bound by traditional marriage practices, they could travel the country with the armies (xii). The position therefore provided women with more economic mobility and power, yet still bound them to the soldiers. This change in the dynamic of the campgrounds in the Mexican Revolution added to the future complexity of women's roles, and therefore their identity and gender, in and after the Revolution. The issue with discussing women's involvement in the Revolution is that their role is often taken for granted and therefore excluded from the official histories, such as the *novelas de la Revolución*. For example, one way the women were negated by the state was through President Venustiano Carranza refusing to pay pensions to both widows and women who fought alongside the men (Poniatowska, *Las soldaderas* 13). The primary narrative of the Revolution remains one dominated by male figures, a masculine Revolution fought by, through, and across male bodies. I want to emphasize through my corpus, however, that women were not secondary players but rather part of the backbone and lifeline that allowed for the Revolution to develop and run its course.

I now turn to an in-depth study of examples of women in the Revolution, taken from photographs during the Revolution and *cromos* drawn decades later, in order to show how these artistic examples vary in their representation of these women alongside the Revolution, the nation, and gendered identity. The photographs and *cromos* that depict women in the Mexican Revolution differ in several ways. First, the photographs were taken during the Revolution, whether in the action of the battlefield, posed in a studio or recreating previous battlefield action. The *cromos*, however, are designs which were made several decades after the Revolution ended, and therefore the two types of images read differently. While the photographs serve as historical documents of women in that moment, the *cromos* are rather an attempt to return to that moment, whether to represent it or sell it as an image. The photographs show Soldaderas under its many definitions: women feeding the troops, the soldier's wives, and even female soldiers. The *cromos*, on the other hand, show a glorified and sexualized version of the female soldier who walks the line between Soldadera and Adelita. Apart from what role the women play, I wish to study the differing embodiments of gender in these photographs and *cromos* to show how they either represent or allow women to resist the Mexican female archetypes of *la Guadalupe* or *la Chingada* and make new embodiments of Mexican womanhood in the Revolution.

Rebozos and Cartridge Sashes: The Casasola Archive

The strongest example of how women were visible during the Revolution may be gleaned from the photographic archives from during the conflict. While there are many noted photojournalists from the period of the Revolution from both sides of the border, in this study I have chosen to focus exclusively on photos that are credited as belonging to

the Casasola archive. The archive contains thousands of photographs from multiple photographers commissioned by the Casasola brothers, Agustín Víctor and Miguel, taken approximately between the years 1910 and 1920, later published in the 1940s by Agustín Víctor's eldest son Gustavo (Mraz, *Looking for Mexico* 192).⁴ The subjects of the photos are varied, showing events during and after the Revolution, in towns and in campgrounds, on trains and on street corners. Of the tremendous number of photographs in the archive, however, women appear in only a fraction of the published photos, around two percent according to John Mraz (232). Most photos show individuals or groups of male soldiers, such as the troops of General Pancho Villa or Emilio Zapata, each of whom had their own personal photographers who followed them through the Revolution. The photos show heroic men holding or aiming firearms; they even show the wounded and the dead, yet there are very few images of female nurses. The photos, therefore, feature the Revolution through embodiments of masculinity. In this study of the Soldadera I have chosen to analyze photos from the small fraction that feature women during the Revolution in different roles in order to compare how they are represented in the archive and the Revolution with how they represent the Revolution through their bodies and experiences to reveal differences in subjectivity, experience, and registers of femininity.

I was inspired to investigate the representation of Soldaderas in the Revolution because of a photo I found on display at Hernán Cortés's Palace in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 2010. The photo is one of the most famous of the Casasola archive taken of women during the Revolution. The woman leans out from a train car with a furious look in her eye while other women with baskets stand behind her on the train platform (Figure 1).

⁴ There exists what John Mraz calls the "myth" of the Casasolas, wherein Agustín Víctor was credited as being "the" photographer of the Revolution because he did not document the names of many of the people who took the photographs in the archive (Mraz 64).

While it was once believed that this woman was a Soldadera, or a female soldier, recent research by John Mraz points to the notion that such Soldaderas rode on top of or under the trains, and that the women in this photograph were most likely food vendors (233). Even when considering this likelihood, whether in combat or selling food these women helped the Revolution's cause, although the official record would claim that they were helping the male soldiers. In that the women are credited with helping the men rather than for their own individual merits, viewing the women as helping the men negates their own agency. Mraz says that the misrepresentation of this woman's role in the conflict disseminates revolutionary myths of fictional Soldaderas, where myths obscure the reality of their situation (233).

While some of the Casasola photos show individual women or smaller groups, women were often not featured as prominently as men were in the photographs. Poniatowska observes that women in these photos "aunque siempre están presentes, se mantienen atrás" ["although they're always present, they remain in the background" (*Las soldaderas* 13; 16)]. This describes the cultural perspective where women are both visible yet invisible at the same time (Berger, *Ways of Seeing*). The photographs of women in the Revolution represent a paradigm shift as women received camera-time, mostly in the background, although they were rarely the subject matter. For example, there are many photos that feature soldiers sitting around the camps, often eating casually. In such photos, women are also present, but they are washed out like scenery. This anonymity and washing-out also, however, occurred to the male soldiers who were represented in large groups, but in many of the photos men were also photographed prominently as the high-ranking officials, which did not happen as frequently for the women. As I analyze

the Mexican *corridos* further on in this study, I will examine how the ballads often reference the soldiers as *Juanes* and the women as their *Juanas*. These anonymous group photographs paint the soldiers and Soldaderas in this same light; a *Juan*, just like a “John” in English, is both everyman and nobody. The soldiers come to represent both the nation and no one, just as the Soldaderas become almost invisible as *Juanas* at their sides and in the backgrounds. In photos where women sit in the background more like scenery than people, Kristine A. Byron says that, whether intentional or not, this mode of representation takes away from the Soldaderas’s agency (30). The grouping of women creates a homogenized version of the Soldadera that erases their individuality. One could argue, on the other hand, that this is also the case of the male soldiers of the Revolution, or of any war, where the individual is replaced by the collective.

One example of representing Soldaderas in groups is the photo numbered 292490,⁵ which shows a group of women at a train station (Figure 2). Some sit while others stand or walk around, some women blurred from moving as the camera attempted to capture the scene. They are women with their children who have baskets and bundles of provisions, most likely waiting to sell food and other goods to soldiers arriving on the trains. While not in the campground, these women are helping the soldiers in the same way, the female collective helping to sustain the soldiers. Mraz points out that such group photos of women in the Revolution were often taken in the Mexico City train station, and for the women they continue “emphasizing their role as camp followers” (196). Mraz’s insight helps to define these women’s agency in both the photos and the Revolution. The image perpetuates the idea that women did not play an active role such as in combat as a

⁵ Many of the photos in the archive are labeled as a number rather than formal title due to the sheer number of photographers and photos collected.

female soldier. Here the term Soldadera again labels them as “camp followers,” not women who also fought alongside the men; the two roles become rolled into one minor role when compared to the male soldiers. The women are portrayed as the support system to the male soldiers. This portrayal in itself is not a negative or destructive role in terms of the Revolution, but it does serve to belittle the various roles of women in the Revolution.

In reading these photos of women at train stations, in front of, or on trains, one can't help wondering if the photographs were meant to represent the women as their focus or the train. During the period of Porfirio Díaz's reign, the train represented progress for the nation, and a familiar image of the time was of upper-class women riding trains into the capital. These images of Soldaderas and trains starkly contrasts with the typical representation of women and trains of the time period, and act as a coded image that counters the Porfiriato. The sight of poor women boarding the transportation mode that symbolized national progress creates a new image of progress in line with the ideals of the Revolution.

These photos and others from the time period provide viewers with a literal snapshot of a historical moment and also with images of how men and women constructed their appearance, and therefore noteworthy aspects of these photos are the similarities between men and women's clothing and accessories for battle. For example, when one imagines the Mexican Revolution, one envisions soldiers wearing cartridge belts across their chests, an image Gabriela Cano credits to the *Maderista* movement (*Se llamaba Elena Arizmendi* 98-99). The image does not solely represent the male soldier, however, as women also wore these cartridges. There are many photos that show women

alongside men with each of them wearing the cartridge belt sash and holding either a pistol or rifle while looking at the camera. These accessories are necessary for the Soldaderas's gender performance. For example, in photo 186449 two men and two women pose for the camera (Figure 3). The men are holding weapons, one a sword and the other a rifle, three of them are wearing wide-brimmed hats, and it appears that all four are wearing the crossed cartridge belts across their chests. However, if one looks carefully at the photograph, only the two men are wearing cartridge belts; the women have slung *rebozos* around their chests to imitate the cartridge belts. A *rebozo* is a traditional Mexican woven wrap used by women to carry items such as food or their children slung around their chests and shoulders. By comparison, the women in Figure 2 also wear *rebozos*, but in the traditional fashion; they most likely carried bundles of food on their backs before sitting down and being photographed. In Figure 3, the *rebozo* is appropriated from its traditional use to imitate this male military garb. This photograph exemplifies how the relationship between clothing, culture, and gender is a necessary component for the gendered performance of the female soldier. In mirroring the belts, the women take on this masculine image of war used by the men to identify themselves as soldiers. Whether as cartridges or *rebozos*, the belts form part of the performance because they act as a prop or piece of costume to construct a soldier's identity. The women did not use the *rebozos* and cartridges as part of a male performance like props in drag; they chose to masculinize their performance of a female soldier while not completely dressing in men's clothing to be able to better fit the masculine space of the battlefield and campground with the men.

Apart from this photo of the women with *rebozo* sashes, there are many photos that show women wearing actual cartridge belts. Photograph 68115 shows the famous Soldadera Valentina Ramírez, who was also known as “La Leona de Norotal” and commemorated for her heroism in Mexican *corridos* (Figure 4). She was photographed for the archive wearing two cartridge belts over her shoulders and a pistol in front of her hip with a rifle at her side. The inclusion of her name in the catalog indicates she was well-known at the time, unlike the thousands of photos that are only sorted by numbers and their subjects trapped in the anonymity of the archive. While there are men behind her looking at her, she is the only one in the photo dressed as a soldier. The men behind her wear casual clothes, are barefoot, or even wear suits. The spectators were most likely drawn to the scene because of the presence of the camera, but they do not look at it; they look at her. She, however, looks sternly to the side of the camera almost as though she is about to begin giving orders to soldiers out of view. And even though these cartridges and weapons mark this woman as a soldier, the women in the previous photograph who had neither weapons nor actual cartridge belts could also be Soldaderas rather than “merely” supporters. Poniatowska asserts that this Valentina is the inspiration for the famous *corrido* “La Valentina” (*Las soldaderas* 18), but Herrera-Sobek claims that it was another Soldadera, Valentina Gatica, who inspired the ballad (109). While the *corrido* “La Valentina” is a love song directed towards the soldier’s sweetheart with no focus on her deeds in battle (109), Poniatowska uses Ramírez as an example of Soldaderas who did not receive their pensions and could barely afford to buy food after they left the armed forces (*Las soldaderas* 18). Reduced to love-interests and unpaid followers, these women

experienced a double marginalization in Mexican history through the lack of acknowledgment for their accomplishments.

Most of the women photographed during the Revolution are shown wearing traditionally feminine outfits with blouses, *rebozos*, and long skirts. However, another way the Soldaderas mirrored the men was by wearing men's clothing on the campaign. It is a significant detail because it becomes the focus of the Soldaderas's gendered performance. Two photographs from the Casasola archive feature women dressed in men's clothing; one is of Ramírez, already mentioned above with her cartridge belts, and the other is of a *coronel*. In her photograph Ramírez is dressed in dark checkered pants, men's shoes, a wide-brimmed hat, a simple white top, and a short jacket similar to one worn by a man in the background. Although she does not wear an actual man's uniform as other women do in such photos, compared to the women featured in Figures 2 and 3, she is strongly set apart by her clothing, as she imitates the male soldiers's dress rather than wearing a dress or *rebozo*. Gabriela Cano refers to "strategic transvestism" when discussing reasons Soldaderas wore men's clothing during the Revolution:

strategic transvestism—the adoption of male dress in order to pass as a man—to which some women resorted during wartime to protect themselves from the sexual violence that intensifies during armed conflicts, to gain access to military commands prohibited to women, or simply to fight as soldiers and not as soldaderas, that is, without the social gender restrictions that usually burden women in combat. ("Unconcealable Realities" 37)

Cano's reasoning is loaded with social implications. First, such gender restrictions for women existed both on and off the battlefield in many historical periods. Women like Ramírez might have adopted more masculine attire in order to avoid these social gender restrictions of war. Judith Halberstam argues that in times of war women were able to masquerade as men, that is, pass as men to "bypass the social restriction of womanhood"

(93) regardless of sexual orientation. As Ramírez was known as Valentina, however, I doubt she intended to pass as a man. Rather, she most likely wore men's clothing, as Cano says, to be allowed to further her role as a Soldadera beyond that of other women in the campground in terms of reception by the men and inclusion in the fighting ranks. Such a consideration of her clothing indicates to what extent these gendered clothes were a strategy for women to access the male space of the Revolution outside the traditional role of camp-following Soldadera. One must also consider that during the 1910s it was not common for women to wear pants; for example, it became fashionable in the 1920s in Europe. These certain women of the Mexican Revolution, however, performed femininity through men's clothing even earlier during times of war, a progress for resistance against gender restrictions that was not even seen during World War I.

Second, Cano mentions another detail in terms of transvestism and the Revolution in general: sexual violence. In *Las soldaderas* Poniatowska refers to Mariano Azuela, a doctor in Villa's forces and later the famous author of *Los de abajo*, and his first-hand experience of the Revolution. According to Azuela, "lo primero que querían los revolucionarios al llegar a un pueblo era mujeres y dinero, en ese orden. Después se preocupaban por la comida, las armas y los caballos" ["the first things the revolutionaries wanted upon reaching a town were women and money, in that order. Later they'd worry about food, weapons and the horses" (15; 18-19)]. Poniatowska also refers to women dressing as men to avoid rape or kidnapping (15). These blatant references to sexual violence support the claim that women might try to appear more masculine and man-like in order to seek protection. As women's bodies were constantly threatened by violence in the public space of the towns and battlegrounds, the images include an air of underlying

violence. These expressions of femininity in wartime, then, become tied to violence. Women dressed as men create a strong image of the Soldadera that is found both in the photographs and the testimonies of actual Soldaderas, as we will see in the analysis of the novel *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*. It is difficult to know why these women dressed in men's clothing because there are few personal testimonies of women from the Revolution, but it is necessary to study such Soldaderas because of the contrast they provide to the feminine gender performance of women dressed in traditional women's clothes both during the time period in general and in the more common photographic images from the Revolution. These women are seen as masculine because of their wardrobe, but this masculine performance does not make them manly or a man; there can be both masculinity and femininity in male and female bodies. These gendered bodies add to the registers of representation for the Soldadera and capture a different and expanded expression of womanhood.

The other photograph of a woman dressed as a man is one of the most fascinating photographs of the archive in terms of representing gender in the Revolution: the photograph of Amelio Robles (1889-1984). Amelio Robles was a coronel, or *coronela*, for forces in the south of Mexico. Amelio was born as Amelia,⁶ but he lived his adult life as a man, both during and after the conflict until his death. Although not much is known about Robles's life, there are two significant markers of his identity: the Casasola photograph and his bullet wounds. As a historical figure, Robles's identity is best interpreted in terms of gender through these visual and bodily constructions. Robles's change in gender is significant both within and outside of the context of the Revolution.

⁶ While some sources refer to Robles as a woman, I will refer to Robles as a man as it is said he called himself a man and had others refer to him in masculine pronouns and adjectival agreements.

While I mentioned how women might have adopted men's clothing and behavior in some instances to obtain power or protection, this was not the case with Amelio Robles. As Cano explains in her study of Robles, "His radical change in gender and sexual identity was not simply due to a pragmatic desire to enjoy the social advantages of men, but rather the product of a deeper, more vital desire to radically transform the female identity assigned to him at birth in order to make himself masculine in every aspect of life" ("Unconcealable Realities" 37). Therefore when Robles wears a suit and tie in his photograph, his performance is not the same as when the women in Figure 3 imitate cartridge belts with *rebozos* or when Valentina Ramírez in Figure 4 wears cartridges and men's clothing. Those women copied the accessories or clothing of the male soldiers without the intention of becoming men, even though the objects and clothes allotted them a more masculine power. As Halberstam puts it, masculinity can exist without men (1). It appears that Robles wore men's clothing because he viewed himself as a man. As Robles lived his adult life as a man and had female lovers, Robles should be considered a transgender man rather than a cross-dresser; his male identity went far beyond the masculine markers of his clothing.

The photograph of Amelio Robles serves as a permanent visual and historical document of his corporeal representation. The image is posed with him standing beside a chair, one hand off the chair dangling a cigarette, the other hand pointedly on a revolver worn at the hip under a dark jacket (Figure 5). The shoes are polished, the hat is smart, the tie is straight, and the look into the camera is one of cold authority. Such posed studio photographs were very popular at the time in Mexico and also possessed a certain social power (Cano, "Unconcealable Realities" 35). The image and identity designed in the

studio would become their historical, visual memory, just as Robles's photo resides permanently in the Casasola archive and publications. Returning to Robles's appearance, she presents as masculine in the photo. During this period in Latin America portrait photography was popular for two reasons: to stage a specific image of self-representation and to exhibit middle- and upper-class wealth (Schwartz and Tierney-Tello 4). However, this portrait of Robles is not of a woman showing off her wealth in jewels and elaborate dresses; the picture is of a man designing his own self-representation in terms of class and overall masculinity through his dress and props. Halberstam discusses the sexual identity of American women in the early decades of the twentieth century who lived as men but who should not be referred to as lesbian or pre-transsexual despite their desire to be men: "most satisfied their desires for masculine identification through various degrees of cross-dressing and various degrees of overt masculine presentation" (87). This identification is exactly what we see in the photo and in Robles's life in general according to testimonies, including another photograph of Robles taken in 1976 when he is in his late eighties. I see the photo from 1915 as a strong masculine representation of Robles's identity. In the photograph, the positioning of Robles's hand on the gun and the way that same leg is slightly forward is almost menacing toward the cameraman or the viewers themselves. Such a cold and serious pose paired with the gun dares the viewer to question the presence, or the gender, of the person in the photograph. Famously, Eduardo Albarrán Orozco wrote that Robles would point a pistol at anyone who referred to him as *mujer* (qtd. in Cano, "Unconcealable," n18). Whether a rather violent social gesture or the quiet posing in the photograph, I see Robles's pistol as a stand-in phallus in his construction of male subjectivity (Garber 98), an addition to his masculine performance.

The other way in which Robles created a personal and social masculine identity was through the bullet wounds he sustained from his involvement in the Revolution. In 1974 Robles was selected for status as a veteran, but in order to achieve this status, he first needed a medical exam. The medical report from Doctor Pedro González Peña from 1948 included the details of Robles's age, his good health, and that he had six bullet wounds on his body; the report does not, however, mention Robles's sex ("Unconcealable Realities" 41). Despite not mentioning Robles's gender, both the medical document and Robles's bullet wounds create another social contract similar to the photograph from 1915. Cano asserts that the medical exam served above all else to legitimize Robles's masculine identity; while it was incomplete in not recording Robles's sex, the exam documented the war wounds and therefore Robles's "irrefutable proof of valor on the field of battle" (41). I agree that the bullet wounds act as these unquestionable traces of the Revolution on Robles's body. Moreover, the scars act as a masculine medal of honor. While many women were also wounded in battle as Robles was, the majority of them were not present on the battlefields the way that male soldiers, generals, and colonels were. Robles carries these scars as proof of his involvement in battles as a man; the body he wishes to be male is made more masculine with these marks which bear witness to a male identity. Just as Judith Butler says that bodies are passive objects upon which cultural inscriptions are made (12), this representation of Robles shows that the Revolution inscribed itself on his body and aided in labeling it culturally as male. Elizabeth Grosz says of tattoos, piercings, and ritual scarring that "they form maps of social needs, requirements, and excesses" (*Volatile Bodies* 140), marking the body with signs and subjectivities. For Amelio Robles these bullet scars serve to deepen his identity

through a social reading of excessive violence and masculinity. The bullet scars also allow Robles to interact with the narrative of the Revolution in terms of how the events were written across the bodies of both the men and women involved. Whether considered to have a male or female body, the Revolution clearly marked Robles's memory and body, and he was famed for hiking up his pant leg to show people his bullet wounds (Cano, "El coronel Robles" 24). The photograph of Robles from the Casasola archive dialogues with the photos of female Soldaderas not only in visually representing women's bodies in the Revolution but also in showing the different ways that women were able to participate, both as *coronelas* and as transgender colonels. Robles and the photograph demonstrate the differing means and meanings of representation and gender performance for women during the Revolution.

These photographs from the Casasola archive barely scratch the surface in terms of what the archive and its contents have to offer for studying the Revolution and the involvement of women. While some strong figures stand-out such as Valentina Ramírez and Amelio Robles, many of the figures fade into the background of the photographs and the historic documentation of the Revolution, as demonstrated by the misrepresentation of the food seller on the train in Figure 1. The photos of either individuals or groups represent femininity and the Revolution as they document the roles and presence of women, from cooks in the campground to a transgender general. These photos are invaluable for studying not only the Revolution but the appearance of Mexican women in the public sphere in the twentieth century. These women negotiated the space and gender(ed) roles alongside the male soldiers to create a new space to explore femininity, with differing levels of subjective activity from soldier to cook. The photographic images

demonstrate the multiple modes of defining the Soldadera, especially in terms of dress, although that does not define their gender; their clothing is a tactic. Even masculine figures such as Amelio Robles help re-define these feminine spaces. Just like the male soldiers, women's bodies and memories were also marked by their difficult involvement in the Revolution. The registers of gendered performance are best defined through these visual representations, or documentations, of actual women in the Revolution. In representing women in the Revolution, the photographs also create an alternative, visual history to the official records, of the ninety-eight percent of the Casasola archive and its representation of men. These pictures construct a feminine archive of these women and of women's achievements as they reflect a paradigm shift in how women are perceived in public spaces during, and subsequently after, the Revolution.

Calendar Art: Sexualized Nationality and Mythified Femininity

A complex visual representation of Mexican identity comes in the form of calendar art, or *cromos*, from roughly 1933 to 1970. While the image accompanied a calendar, it served another purpose: “no sólo se vendieron cigarros, cervezas, neumáticos, tequilas o electrodomésticos; también se difundió el sueño de un México arcádico e idealizado, la fantástica ilustración de sus mitos, leyendas, y deseos” [“not only did they sell cigars, beers, tires, tequilas or appliances; they also diffused the dream of an archaic and idealized Mexico, the fantasizing illustration of its myths, legends, and desires” (Morales Carrillo 9)]. These images were used to sell both a national myth and a commercial product. These images offer a variety of subjects and themes, all to be sold with calendars. They depict national figures such as Benito Juárez, legendary figures such as Cuauhtémoc, revolutionary figures such as Francisco Villa, landscapes like the

volcanoes, precolonial sites like the Aztec pyramids, national iconography like the nopal cactus, Catholic iconography like the Virgin Mary, and also advertising products such as beer. As a genre of art, the *cromos* are fascinating because of how skewed the correlation is between the image's circulation and value. Carlos Monsiváis points out that “los artistas saben que su trabajo no será valorado pero sí visto a diario, (y nunca sin admiración) por las decenas o centenas de miles de personas que pasan por el comercio o el taller de automóviles o el departamento o la panadería o... El calendario es la institución más presente en la vida de las ofertas a bajo precio y los servicios urgentes” [“the artists knew that although their work would not be valued, it would be seen daily (and never without admiration) by the tens or hundreds or thousands of persons who passed by businesses, mechanic's shops, cantinas, or bakeries. The calendar is the most ubiquitous form of advertising in the life of village shopkeepers and professional service providers” (*Mexican Calendar Girls* 8-9)]. The calendar art was widely-circulated for its national imagery and visual appeal. Even when used for product advertising, the images intentionally play on national sensibilities: the flags, the sombreros, and folkloric images are all used to sell a timeless version of the nation to the public.

Alongside national iconography, as they are in essence advertisements, it is not surprising that a majority of these calendar images also use sex appeal. There is one main difference between the Casasola photographs and these *cromos* that must be considered when discussing the Revolution, women, and representations of the nation. As in the photographs, the majority of actual Soldaderas were indigenous and *mestiza*, with facial features and bodies much more Indigenous than European. In contrast, these *cromos* of Soldaderas almost always depict a more whitened version of the Mexican woman than

those of the photographic archives. Mexican women are then divided into registers or types based on representations of Mexicanness, whether as a dark-haired actress type from Hollywood and Mexican cinema like María Félix or as the indigenous women with their *metates* and *rebozos*. Interestingly, however, regardless of type, Soldaderas are almost all dressed in the same manner in these *cromos*: in traditional folkloric dresses, *rebozos*, hoop earrings and flowers. Their fanciful colors contrast strikingly with the black-and-white photographic images of the Casasola archive, and also in terms of content. The *cromos* painted and sold the nation through the women's clothing and props which any Mexican woman could wear regardless of her background. Very few *cromos* depicted indigenous-looking women, however, and tended to show a whiter version of Mexicanness. For example, many of the *cromos* depicting Aztec scenes feature tall and leggy topless women being carried by men or as splayed out on their backs beneath a powerful male warrior figure. Similarly, images of *toreras*, or female bullfighters, feature women in a version of the traditional *traje de luces* that includes short-shorts and an open vest on the verge of exposing their breasts. The *cromos* tie women to constructions of the nation and "sell" these national images with consumer sex appeal.

One of these overtly sexualized Revolutionary images is a *cromo* entitled *La Adelita* (year unknown) by artist Ángel Martín (Figure 6). Martín also created other *cromos* in the mid-twentieth century that range from religious iconography to topless Aztecas. In this *cromo*, the Adelita is kneeling and leaning forward while holding a Mexican flag. She wears the cartridge belts across her full chest, and from under her white blouse her nipples protrude with dramatic shadows. With her rifle on her back and a trumpet in her hand, her head leans back in what can either be victorious laughter or

sexual ecstasy. As Alicia Arrizón puts it, this image of the Soldadera “preserves nothing of her feminist spirit. Instead the portrayal of Adelita in her revolutionary ensemble is sexualized and objectified” (*Latina Performance* 70). The term “feminist” at the time of the Revolution in Mexico meant to be feminine, or woman-like, rather than a call for equality. As women were not part of the public social space, before the Revolution it was about femininity and not equality, but that changed after the Revolution, and Mexico held its first Feminist Conference in 1916 (Foppa 193).⁷ Arrizón’s use of “feminist” works for both contexts; the sexualization of the woman traps her in a patriarchal, sexist portrayal in which she is neither feminine nor liberated on her terms. *Cromos* use women’s bodies to package together nation and sex as a commodity, and it is no coincidence that some of these images include naked or sexual images of women in their advertising. These images were circulated in businesses and shops; sex sells. While there were also more conservative and religious images for the calendars for families to display in their households, these instances of sexualization and whitening of the Soldadera in these calendar *cromos* create a particular image of Mexican femininity to sell, reducing the role real Soldaderas played into a sex object.

In this calendar art by Martín the Adelita figure references a famous painting with a similar woman and context. The French painting *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, or *Liberty Leading the People*, by Eugène Delacroix in 1830 commemorates the July Revolution of that same year (Figure 7). The painting shows dead bodies piled on a barricade, and while armed soldiers march through the background, on top of the barricade stands the figure of a woman holding a French flag in one hand and armed with a rifle and bayonet in the other. She wears a long beige dress that is torn at one shoulder,

⁷ Mexican women did not receive the vote until 1953 (Foppa 193).

exposing her breasts as she raises the flag. The image clearly inspired Martín's Adelita *cromo*, as both depict their respective Revolutions and victorious (liberal) women. The Adelita also holds a flag and has her rifle strapped to her back, her breasts are almost completely exposed, and her skirt is torn above her knee. She kneels at the top of what could be a hill in the same way that the French figure stands atop the barricade. Each representation includes armed soldiers in the background; to the right of the Adelita sits a church off in the distance, just as to the right of the French woman a town appears through the gunpowder smoke. If the French painting of the July Revolution represents Liberty and the People through this brazen and resilient female figure, the Adelita of the *cromo* represents these same ideals and therefore becomes, in the same way, the embodiment of the Mexican Nation and Revolution. The Adelita is surrounded by national imagery such as the a maguey cactus, a *charro* sombrero, the flag, and even the cartridge belts that fortify the visual identity of the nation that this woman valiantly asserts. Even the women's forms become embodiments of the nation: the French Liberty's breasts are exposed, and the Mexican Soldadera's chest is incredibly prominent, along with her head tossed back laughing in what appears to be pleasure. These images both therefore tie Nation and Revolution to an erotic and sexual ideal, as a feminized object to be taken and conquered and yet the image of exposed female breasts can either be seen as sexual or maternal. This eroticism relates to how Octavio Paz describes Mexican women alongside *la Chingada*, where women, like the nation, are possessed, penetrated, dominated by a masculine violence, and yet remain maternal (100). While this Mexican *cromo* remains a sexualized image geared toward the consumer, both female figures demonstrate the way that women are used to embody Nation and Revolution and

how these events are used to mark their bodies; the women's bodies are positioned to stir national pride as well as sexual desires for the male viewer and masculine nation.

Rather than strict divisions between the Soldadera and the Adelita, the *cromos* reveal how the female figures are often represented as an amalgamation of an excessively feminized female soldier who is also the men's love interest. The difference between these figures and those seen in the Casasola archive is that the women photographed were not depicted in overtly sexualized ways, regardless of whether they were camp followers, wives, or female soldiers. The female figures in these *cromos* stand alongside the men in battle-like scenes rather than only in the campgrounds. One such *cromo* of women in battle, the image *Las soldaderas* by Gómez R. from 1938, depicts four female figures at night posed to fire their weapons down from a rocky outcrop (Figure 8).⁸ The dark cactus above contrasts with the bright flames below as two figures hold rifles, another a pistol, and another what appears to be a machete glistening in the firelight. Three of them have cartridge belts across their chests, and all are dressed in blouses and long skirts, three with dangling earrings. This *cromo* offers an example of the juxtaposition between a soldier and an excessively feminine woman because the female figures and their rifles conjure the image of a traditional, male soldier, and yet they wear their long dresses and earrings while they fight. The women in the Casasola photos seemed to belong organically in the setting, most likely because the photographs rarely were posed. Additionally, a barely noticeable detail in the *cromo* adds to the figure's wartime femininity. Beside one female figure on the ground with her rifle are scattered bullets, but among the bullets are two scallions. The possibility now exists that the women were

⁸ Similar to this image of four women and firearms is a photograph from the Casasola archive which features four women kneeling in a row and aiming their rifles beyond the frame of the photo. This image possibly inspired the *cromo* by Gómez R.

either about to prepare a meal or search for food when this battle began. Despite the women's body language and positioning on the outcrop, the onions remind the viewer that the women cooked the meals for the men; an onion undermines their authority or constrains their usefulness to merely domestic. The artist, Gómez R., repeated this scene for another *cromo* two years later that was used for a rifle advertisement. In that scene, however, the three women are darker-skinned than those of the original, perhaps to more accurately depict the Soldaderas who would have been in that scene. The mixing of these feminized women with the masculine power of the rifle was used to sell the weapons, also using the backdrop of the Revolution to play to nationalistic sympathies; the Soldaderas are selling the rifles. The image of the Soldadera for consumption is evident in the *cromos*, whether as an advertisement or to sell the calendars.

Similar to the cartridge belts in the study of the photographs, the object that complicates the Soldaderas's femininity the most is a firearm. Amid softly-painted long, flowing skirts, jeweled earrings, and elegant hairstyles, each woman poses holding or carrying a rifle or a pistol. While it is not surprising for an actual soldier, male or female, to brandish a firearm, these women put into play gender performance through the juxtaposition of this feminine persona with the masculine image of a rifle. One obvious observation is the masculine representation of the rifle as its phallic form, both in shape and symbol, which converts the woman into a phallic woman (Garber 124). A *cromo* depicting a Soldadera holding a rifle shows how she attempts to gain the same level of authority as her male counterpart by assuming this societal power. However, in this process she is also labeled "macha," or manly, for the rifle among her other supplies. In becoming more like the male soldiers she is then categorized as being or wanting to be

male and is labeled as “macha” for becoming a soldier. For example, when Robles carried a gun with his clothing it was a part of his performance to be perceived as male.

However, these other women who wield rifles do so to proclaim a powerful masculinized performance and yet remain feminine. In remembering Cano’s comment about sexual violence in war, some women arm themselves off the battlefield to protect themselves from such violence.

The mixing of the feminine woman with the masculine-marked rifle creates a new definition of the feminine for the Revolution which is not, in essence, a masculine model. For example, an untitled *cromo* by Humberto Limón features a woman dressed in an elegant country ensemble with a high collar leaning against a tree with her rifle pointed up from the hip and wearing the cartridge belt across her chest (Figure 9). In the background soldiers ride on horseback through a valley. Beside the woman sits a basket with jars and tortillas partially covered by an elaborately embroidered cloth. This female imagery is one of the women providing food for the soldiers, an image which repeats in other *cromos* as well as photographs we have already seen. With her dress, her basket, and her rifle, the female figure again complicates the image of traditional femininity in the Revolution through the imposition of masculine models. The figure’s high lace collar, lace cuffs, and hoop earrings not only identify her as being stereotypically feminine, but also out of place on the battlefield and campgrounds because she is from the upper class. One can question why the artist would include such a female figure rather than one from the lower class who made up the majority of female participants as Soldaderas. Most of the women in these *cromos* wear long, flowing skirts and either a button-down or loose-fitting blouse. This figure also wears a *rebozo*, but it is slung lazily over her arm; her

rebozo does not have the same semiotic value as it does for women of a lower class.

However, like the other Soldadera figures, in this *chromo* she is armed with a cartridge belt sash and rifle. The rifle is most likely to protect her as she goes to provide food for the soldiers who are arriving in the distance, as Cano mentioned, yet this rifle immediately suggests a reading of masculinity on her body and performance. She is able to protect herself without the presence of a man because of the weapon; the rifle shooting up from her hip is not only a protective stance but also a rather phallic positioning of her weapon. Like the posing of firearms by biological women in the Revolution noted in Robles and his photo, in this image the gun bestows masculine power onto the user. The woman is protected and powerful like Robles, and yet in the whole picture of the *chromo* the woman does not become masculinized by the gun. Her dress and its lace trim and collar, her make-up, her earrings, and even the men that gallop towards her mark her as a feminine object despite the gun; she is there for the male audience and therefore is not marked as masculine.

In depicting these Soldaderas, only a few images represent the female figures who were in the campground but presumably not in battle. These figures are included only as being the beloved Adelita beside her man or as other women in the backgrounds of these scenes. The Adelita is the subject and the other women are often scenery. By way of example, a *chromo* by Antonio Gómez R. from 1946 entitled *Amor guerrillero* shows a man and woman by the campfire as other men and women sit and eat in the background (Figure 10). The figures in the background are obviously just used as scenery to add authenticity to the moment being represented. One of these background women reaches for a tortilla that is tucked into a basket, and we can presume that she was one of the

women who prepared those tortillas that day. Another female figure is serving the man beside her a drink; in a gesture which is both maternal and seductive, she holds the cup up to his mouth, and the man smiles as he drinks. This is not, however, a *cromo* representing a campground of the Revolution where the focus is the women cooking for the soldiers; the actual focus is on a woman in the foreground and the men serenading her, which I will address momentarily. Just as in the untitled *cromo* by Limón of the woman leaning against the tree with her rifle and her food basket, here women are shown caring for the troops through the preparation and provision of food. There are images of such women in *cromos* with a *metate*, of course, but not strictly in the context of the Revolution. Aside from the women eating in the background, the only *cromos* subjects are those of the Soldadera in battle and of the Adelita. That the female figures are only in the background of the *cromo* diminishes their significance in the narrative of the Revolution, literally pushing them to the back and into the shadows to make way for the Adelita and sexy Soldadera to take center stage.

Unlike the Casasola photographs, the *cromos* instead recreate scenes from the Revolution that carry the out-of-place romanticizing tone from the cinematic classics of the time the *cromos* were made. The men are less like soldiers and more like the *charros cantantes* singing to beautiful women; many of the *cromos* I have analyzed include at least one man on horseback or by a campfire holding or playing a guitar, often singing to one of the women. In these depictions of the love-interest Adelita, her representation and myth is riddled with contradictions. These female figures are a combination of soldier and sweetheart, of subject and object, holding a rifle while men hold guitars. With the exception of the *cromo* by Ángel Martín, the Adelita image is more sexualized than the

Soldadera figures in the calendar art of the Mexican Revolution. The chorus of the *corrido* is:

Si Adelita quisiera ser mi novia,
y si Adelita fuera mi mujer,
le compraría un vestido de seda,
a llevarla a bailar al cuartel.

[If Adelita wanted to be my girl,
and if Adelita were my bride,
I would buy her a silk dress
to take her dancing at headquarters. (Monsiváis 5)]

In this tradition the Adelita is depicted by the artists as being desired by the soldiers in the image, and therefore she is also desired by the male viewer of the image itself. As Berger explains of the female figure looking out at the intended viewer with the world divided between the male surveyor and the female surveyed, “She is offering up her femininity as the surveyed” (55). For example, the *cromo Adelita* by Alberto Carmona from 1953 shows a woman sitting and wearing a long red skirt and sombrero as she rides side-saddle on a dark horse, wielding a rifle and wearing the cartridge belt sash (Figure 11). Two men on horseback follow her, one playing a guitar as they ride and sing. While the overall scene is one of battle, the inclusion of the men serenading the woman as she advances on the battleground mythifies, objectifies and sexualizes the Adelita figure. This figure of the *charro cantante*, or this serenading cowboy, comes directly from Mexican cinema with figures such as the film star Pedro Infante and his stylized *charro* persona, singing and serenading women in the same fashion as in this *cromo*. This figure from cinema also emerged several decades after the Revolution; the *cromos* illustrators inserted these popular images from the mid-twentieth century into the context of the Revolution to popularize them and make them more appealing to consumers. The feminized woman

serenaded by her *charro* won over depictions of realistic Soldaderas in campgrounds or battlefields. The juxtaposition of the *charro cantante* with the Soldadera romanticizes the Revolution with cinematic figures and reverie. These men revere the figure of the Adelita, but beyond a respect for her bravery or presence in battle, they are singing to her because she is someone's sweetheart, because she is a sexualized object. Here the Adelita is being wooed. This image is also seen in the popular *corridos* of the Revolution, as I will analyze shortly.

The image *Amor guerrillero*, Figure 10, by Gómez R. that included the women and tortillas in the background is an excellent example of the romanticized Adelita. In the foreground a woman sits holding a rifle and smoking a cigarette, with the light of an off-scene campfire lighting up her face, exposed ankles, and cartridge belt sash. The man behind her leans over his guitar, his face smiling down at the Adelita as he sings in the firelight and the woman looks out smiling at the viewer. The woman's image is overly-feminized, with her bright and open face, long skirt, and red heeled shoes with a bow; she is not the image of a soldier but rather of a feminine, cinematic sweetheart. The only ways we know it is wartime and she is in a soldier's campground are the rifle across her lap and the cartridge belts over her shoulder. The feminine image is not as sexual as that of Ángel Martín's *cromo*, yet she again represents a shining beacon of femininity in the sea of masculine Revolution. Despite her cartridge belt and rifle, she does not appear to be a Soldadera; she is again the Adelita objectified by the man singing to her. Her gaze is different from other depictions of *cromo* Soldaderas because she looks straight out at the viewer as she smiles coquettishly. In considering the calendar art and the gaze, as previously stated, the viewership of the calendars was vast, from homes to businesses.

Traditionally in Western art, the gaze is masculine and the viewer of the artwork male. In such artwork, therefore, the surveyed female (object) does not return the surveyor's, or male viewer's, gaze, allowing the surveyor to admire the female figure without interruption (Berger, *Ways of Seeing*).⁹ The female is a passive object in such an interaction between subject/gaze and the object/viewed. However, some Soldaderas and Adelitas of the *cromos*, such as the woman in *Adelita* and this woman in *Amor guerrillero*, look out at the viewer. When Berger examines art where women return the gaze he points out that the women's gazes back at the men serve to "feed their appetite" (55) or to look out at her true lover, the viewer, rather than back at the other men in the painting (56). Therefore this Adelita that looks out at the spectator is responding to the gaze of the male spectator, furthering her artistic purpose of sex object in the *cromo*.

I wish to briefly analyze a different illustrated example of the Soldadera to conclude this section on visual representations of Soldaderas. While the photographs of the Casasola archive and the *cromos* of Mexican calendar art are well-known in either popular culture or historical references, there remains a famous Mexican artist¹⁰ who also created an image of a female soldier in the Revolution: illustrator José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913). Posada is famous for his etchings of *calaveras*, or scenes in which the figures are skeletons. This satirical Mexican tradition depicts humorous scenes from daily life, celebrations, and historical moments through the morbidly active figures of skeletons, which highlights Mexico's cultural interest in the relationship between death and life. Posada made many of these *calavera* prints, with scenes and figures such as Emiliano Zapata, Porfirio Díaz, Francisco Madero, and even Don Quijote from Spanish

⁹ Also see my discussion of Laura Mulvey's term "looked-at-ness" in my Introduction.

¹⁰ Other Mexican artists who depict a Soldadera in their work are Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, among others.

literature. During the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, a popular sight were broadsides, or printed sheets of paper that covered a variety of topics from political scandals, songs, and humor. They pictured both text and illustration, as those who saw the broadsides included a large illiterate population; Posada's visual alongside the text served this dual purpose of informing and entertaining (Ruerter 66). In their book *Photography and Writing in Latin America*, Schwartz and Tierney-Tello write of Posada's broadsides that "Posada defined and established a style of popular illustration with verbal narrative that affected Mexican popular graphic art for the rest of the twentieth century" (7). One popular way that Posada's illustrations were used with broadsides were to accompany the lyrics to *corridos*. In *Posada's Mexico*, Jas Ruerter discusses the relationship between some of Posada's illustrations and Mexican *corridos*, or folk ballads that often told of Revolutionary figures and battles: "Since the happenings narrated in the corridos are usually of a sensational nature and sensationally presented, it is no surprise that Posada should give the illustrations just the sensational tone that would encourage the sale of the broadsides in order to arouse and satisfy the curiosity of those who listened to the songs or saw the sheets" (66). Just like the *cromos*, Posada's broadsides were a popular and highly-circulated tradition in Mexican culture.

One of the broadsides from Posada's collection is entitled *Calavera revolucionaria*, or *Calavera de la Adelita*, created around or after 1910. It features the giant figure of a skeletal Soldadera on horseback with her cartridge belt and her pistol at her hip (Figure 12). Smaller skeletal figures beneath her appear to either cheer or flee with their arms in the air. Although the public might be unable to read, the *calavera* image of a female soldier was circulated throughout Mexico, writing women into the

archive in a visual, albeit satirical, way. While considering Ruerter's previous statement, this use of illustrations alongside broadsides is similar to the *cromos* and calendars in how they elevated historical moments to this "sensational" or exaggerated level for circulation, even to the illiterate masses. Given that Posada died in 1913 his representation of the Soldadera figure appeared while the Revolution was still in its infancy. While there are many examples of female *calaveras* images, Posada's Adelita etch helped to write, or in this case draw, a feminine figure into the cultural imaginary of the newly-developing twentieth century in Mexico. As Posada's artwork was rooted in political and cultural satire, by drawing a Soldadera, even as a *calavera* (or especially because so), Posada's illustration also cemented a female presence into the Revolution, not just as the examples of women in the campgrounds as seen in the Casasola photographs but as a woman valiantly riding into battle with the troops on horseback. *Calavera revolucionaria* demonstrates another visual display that inscribes women into the Revolutionary archive as valiant, active, and visual subjects.

Conclusions

The calendar art of these *cromos* represents national and folkloric imagery and inserts the female figure into that national imaginary and memory alongside other, more masculine and heroic, images of the Revolution by means of the Soldadera and Adelita. While in this study there are many that represent women in the Revolution, the *cromo La Adelita* by Ángel Martín in Figure 6 exemplifies how the *cromos* added to the mythification of the Soldadera through sexualized femininity and national imagery. The calendar *cromos* are famous for their use of women and women's bodies in advertising and as pin-up girls, both naked and otherwise, and it is easy to see how these *cromos* of

the Soldadera blend with those two styles grounded in selling female sexuality and objectivity. These women were not key players in the battlefield action themselves, and yet rather than campground cooks they are still present as Adelitas, romanticizing the Revolution and women's involvement. The Adelita in Figure 6, displaying her chest and the flag, fulfills the same function as the masculine narrative of the male soldiers; it only allows women to represent the nation passively rather than act as soldiers with the men, glorifying the Revolution through their bodies but not their actions.

The photos of the Casasola archive and the *cromos* of Mexican calendar traditions are different in many ways, and one of these differences is how they represent not only the Revolution but also women's participation in the Revolution. The women in the photos as documentary were real Soldaderas while the *cromos* construct an idealized, Hollywood-like, sexualized image of these women in the prints. In both media the viewer sees traditionally feminine constructions of presentation in their clothing except for the examples of the photos of Valentina Ramírez and Amelio Robles; note that all the women in the *cromos* I analyzed were depicted riding side-saddle or straddling the horse despite their skirts. I wanted to show how the images inserted femininity into the backdrop of the Revolution in an exaggerated and sexual way. This sensual version of the Soldadera remains a striking, albeit dramatized and romanticized, visual representation of women's involvement in the Mexican Revolution that, like the photos, adds to the models of definition for the Soldadera. Even Posada's *calavera* benefits the subjectivity of the Soldadera by including her in the illustrated archive of scenes, events, and people of the Revolution; his *calavera* of the Soldadera holds the same power as that of his depiction of Madero or Zapata. Whether as satire, sexualized national consumerism, or

photographic archives, these images of women in the Revolution all represent an emerging discourse of counter-Revolution to the male players and their account of events and people. Having seen these visual representations of a female counter-archive to the Revolution, I now turn to a study of literary representations in both Mexican *corridos* and novels that feature women prominently and offer an alternative to the traditional male-centered narrative of the Revolution and its key players.

Chapter 2. The Bravery and Authority of the Women of the Mexican Revolution in *Corridos* and Novels

In the previous chapter I compared two different visual representations of women in the Mexican Revolution and showed that the historical archive and memory that depicted the Soldadera created a counter-archive of women's presence and bodies. In the *cromos* the female figures were sexualized to serve national imaginaries as passive recipients of the male gaze and male sexuality, yet the photographs allowed women to embody non-traditional female roles such as the brave soldier or even a transgender identity. Now that we have seen visual examples of the gender performance of the Soldadera in photography and *cromos*, I move to a study of representations of the Soldadera in Mexican *corridos* and novels. Not unlike the narrative of anonymity or masculinization seen in the photos or the sexualizing narrative of the *cromos*, the narrative in the *corridos* and the fiction depicting the Revolution is one mostly of male soldiers, male heroes, and the masculine nation where women are almost completely absent or are secondary players. Most *corridos* praise the male heroes, victorious or fallen, and the valiant battles, and remain as testament to the masculinity and virility of the movement and its players. For this study I have chosen *corridos* that describe female figures and literature that was written by women and features female characters. These songs and novels add to the feminine counter-archive mentioned in the previous chapter of women's involvement as excess and resistance to female archetypes to create their own embodiments of Mexican womanhood. The counter-archive represents women or female characters that create a paradigm shift in the traditional gender roles or identities ascribed to Mexican women at that time. These public and Revolutionary women show a

version of Revolutionary femininity that is active, public, and autonomous, and one that was able to continue after the Revolution ended and expand into Mexican culture and society.

As stated, the Mexican Revolution was not only composed of mainly male players, from soldiers to presidents, but men were often the ones who documented the events and whose actions were documented. *Corridos*, or folk ballads, are a Mexican musical genre¹¹ that chronicled the events of the Revolution and frequently sang the praises of male heroes in battle, with many narrating the movements, battles, and often the death of figures like Madero, Zapata, Villa, Carranza and Huerta. While some *corridos* mention women, the female figures were often reduced to the Adelita role of sweetheart on a romantic and objectified pedestal rather than praised for their feats in battle. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I organized these chapters to present the popular visual or lyrical genres before my analysis of the literature in an intentional inversion of traditional studies of the Revolution. The *corridos* consist of a formula where the lyrics can be adapted and different songs put to the same simple tune for an easy circulation among the illiterate masses of the country during the time period, away from the restrictions of the high culture literary world of the *novelas de la revolución*. Just as the photographs and *cromos* represented a plurality in national imagery as seen in Benjamin's mechanical reproducibility of art, the *corrido* demonstrates a similar reproducibility through the oral tradition of altering versions. Additionally, there are no official composers of these folk ballads; in this way the masses become the creator as they put the versions of history into song. For this study I have gathered five

¹¹ As mentioned in the analysis of Posada's *calavera*, *corridos* are often sensationalist in how they retell historical events.

Revolutionary *corridos* that, in their versions of the Revolution, include women to counter the traditional, male narrative of the ballads and the historical events and figures preserved in song.

In addition to the hundreds of *corridos* about the Revolution, there is an impressive corpus of literature written about the Revolution that paints a similar picture of male participants and their relationship to the nation: *la novela de la revolución*. To the point, the literature written about the Revolution in the 1920s is labeled as “literatura viril” as part of a nation-building strategy to depict the nation, and therefore its literature, as masculine, so much so that the literature of the previous generation, the *contemporáneos* movement, was referred to as effeminate (Díaz Arciniega 56). This underscores the extent to which the Mexican male experience is tied to the construction of the nation and its literature.¹² Víctor Díaz Arciniega explains that such literature may include characteristics ranging from “fortaleza, hombría, rectitud, decisión, compromiso, entrega e, incluso, ‘revolucionario’” [“strength, manliness, rectitude, decisiveness, compromise, dedication and, including, ‘revolutionary’” (57)].¹³ As Robert McKee Irwin writes of the development of the *novela de la revolución* in the 1930s that the genre, “insofar as it presented the male world of war and politics, simply provided a different scenario in which the same unresolved issues about masculinity might get played out” (131). These novels sought to explore or assert masculinity on the backdrop of the Revolution. In such literature, the role of women was miniscule or stereotyped without options for exploring new definitions of Mexican femininity. Therefore I have chosen to

¹² Some examples of “literatura viril” are *Los de abajo* by Mariano Azuela, *Al filo del agua* by Agustín Yáñez’s, and *La sombra del caudillo* by Martín Luis Guzmán.

¹³ All English translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The translations of the *corridos* are ones provided by the author of the work in which they’re quoted.

analyze novels that have well-developed female characters during the Revolution, a trend that occurred mostly in the later part of the twentieth century as part of a re-writing of the Revolution by female authors. The five novels by such authors I include here are *Cartucho* and *Manos de mamá* by Nellie Campobello, *Los recuerdos del porvenir* by Elena Garro, *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska, and *Como agua para chocolate* by Laura Esquivel.¹⁴ I first chose novels written by women to counter the male-authored canon of the Revolution, but more so I chose these novels because they include female characters that, whether fictitious or based on real people, have a more autonomous and active role away from traditional femininity and therefore offered new, public ways of embodying femininity during and after the Revolution.

In these novels and *corridos* the female figures represent a paradigm shift in the ways that women participated in the Mexican Revolution and in how they were able to enact femininity publicly both during and after the event. The *corridos* about women, not unlike the Casasola photographs, serve to document women's involvement and even heroism, writing (or singing) them into the official history of the Revolution. These novels written by women, on the other hand, demonstrate a re-writing of how women's bodies were used to document the events of the Revolution. Similar to Amelio Robles's bullet wound scars across his body, these works show that the bodies and memories of these female literary figures are marked by the Revolution just as the women marked the Revolution. While some of the female figures in this lyrical archive are based on real

¹⁴ Although this chapter only examines a small handful of novels by women, other texts about the Revolution that include prevalent female characters are: the novel *La negra Angustias* (1948) by Francisco Rojas González that features an Afro-Mexican protagonist, the novel *Arráncame la vida* (1985) by Ángeles Mastretta, and the plays *Soldadera* (1938) by Josefina Niggli and *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* (1993) by Sabine Berman.

women and others are purely fictional, they represent how women were able to take a more active role on and off the battlefield. The composers of the *corridos* and the literary authors ensured that, in mentioning women as active subjects, especially as protagonists, figures like La Valentina, Jesusa, Gertrudis, and Petra Herrera were remembered as they represent resistance to traditional gender roles around the Revolution.

Corridos: “Eran todas muy bonitas y de muchos pantalones”

The Mexican musical genre of the *corrido*, not unlike the medieval *cantar de gesta*, is categorized as lyrical, epic, and narrative, and recount moments in history and battle as put to song. They are another example of *lo popular* for studying the Revolution and women’s involvement despite an overall absence of female players. I wish to situate the place of women in the Mexican *corridos* briefly through the work of María Herrera-Sobek and how she examines the history and content of these ballads. She categorizes the traditional archetypes for women in these songs as good mother, terrible mother, mother goddess, lover, and soldier (xviii).¹⁵ In her study of the female soldier, Herrera-Sobek focuses on the presence of women in the *corridos* of the Mexican Revolution as well as the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929). While it is no surprise that the vast majority of the protagonists of these ballads are men, women do appear in such *corridos* as the figure of the anonymous and homogenous Soldadera, Adelita, Valentina, or *Juana*, or occasionally using their real name, such as Petra Herrera. As I mentioned with the group photographs from the Casasola archive, to refer to the men and women as *Juanes* and *Juanas* makes them at once every person and no one in particular. Additionally, as the women are

¹⁵ These are archetypes that Herrera-Sobek says she has taken from works by Toni Wolff and Nor Hall (xviii).

named according to their husband or soldier, that *Juana* comes from *Juan*, the women are depicted as being dependent upon the men.

Just as with the *cromos*, the *corridos* divide the women into the categories of Soldadera and Adelita, although there is often overlap. Kristine A. Byron points out that in the *corridos* about the Soldadera, or even of the female sergeant or coronel, women move beyond the objectification of the Adelita image and are depicted as being stronger figures (29). For example, the *corrido* of “Marijuana, la soldadera” tells the story of how María accompanies her husband in the Revolution, not unlike the anecdote told by Poniatowska in *Las soldaderas*. Once again the name Marijuana combines both the common Hispanic name María with the male counterpart of Juan, her husband, tying her to the masculine nation, her masculine husband, and anonymity lacking subjectivity. The *corrido* narrates that María used to stay in the camps but when her husband died she took his place and was described as being “más valiente que su Juan” [“braver than her Juan” (qtd in Byron 28)]. She receives acknowledgment for more than just her role in the campgrounds. The Soldadera, as Byron suggested, does gain some agency in representations such as this in the *corridos*, despite the references to *Juanas* and *Marijuanas*. Byron reminds us that “Women need not literally take up arms to be revolutionaries, any more than men do. Yet this is often assumed to be a prerequisite or a sort of measuring stick to be applied when ‘evaluating’ women’s role in political struggle” (26). Byron’s statement exemplifies how Soldaderas are underestimated in the annals of history as not being soldiers but “only” camp followers. That Marijuana is a more expert soldier than her deceased husband was is a detail that supports women’s involvement in the Revolution beyond the soldiers’s caretakers.

One of these iconic female figures from the *corridos* is an actual historic figure: Petra Herrera.¹⁶ Herrera was a famous Soldadera in the Villista forces. She fought alongside hundreds of women at the battle of Torreón, and Elizabeth Salas reports that Herrera later formed her own all-women's brigade because Villa did not acknowledge the women soldiers (48). To enter the armed forces Herrera dressed as a man and called herself Pedro, but once she established herself she wore her braids and used her true name (48). In Poniatowska's text she wrote that Herrera said "Soy mujer y voy a seguir sirviendo como soldada con mi nombre verdadero" ["I'm a woman and I will continue to carry out my duties as a soldier using my real name" (17, 21)]. We must consider whether Poniatowska created this line or whether Herrera actually said this because she refers to herself as a "soldada" instead of a Soldadera; she insists on being a female soldier and not a camp follower. For Herrera, she is not merely helping the troops; she is part of the troops, later even leading them with her own brigade. There is more than one *corrido* that mentions her deeds in battle, depicting her in the same valiant light as Marijuana at the end of her *corrido*. In "Corrido del combate del 15 de mayo en Torreón" the *corrido* describes Petra Herrera's participation and her manner in the following manner:

La valiente Petra Herrera
al combate se lanzó
siendo siempre la primera
ella el fuego comenzó.

[The valiant Petra Herrera
To battle she entered
Always being the first
To start the exchange of fire. (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 94)]

¹⁶ Herrera has also been immortalized both in theatre and performance art through visual artist Jesusa Rodríguez.

Again a Soldadera is described as valiant, and now as more aggressive and fearless in how she entered battles. Herrera-Sobek points out that Petra Herrera's noted praise is significant in the *corrido* because it was a crucial battle that was led by "outstanding professional military school men... That Petra is singled out for praise is indeed an honor" (94). In being comparable to professional military men and that she lived through multiple battles tell not only of her bravery but of her skills on the battlefield. Herrera is therefore praised with having positive qualities which are considered to be masculine in this context; she presents a fluid gendered performance, as she is commended for being masculine in her performance of gender rather than receiving praise as a stereotypical woman. Another example of Herrera's man-like fearlessness appears in another *corrido*, "Corrido de las hazañas del General Lojero y la Toma de Torreón por el ejército Liberador," in a section that narrates when she is captured by Lojero's troops:

La llevaron los rurales
ante el general Lojero
y sin temores cervales
le dijo: ¡Viva Madero!

[The Rural Soldiers took her
To General Lojero
And without deerlike fear
She said: "Long live Madero!" (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 93)]

Herrera's bravery and lack of fear strongly relates to the *corrido*'s construction of her performance as a soldier. The description of her lack of "deerlike fear" means that to be like a deer would denote female characteristics because it would not be the description of a soldier or of a man when compared to a stag. This ballad of Herrera therefore credits her heroism as a female soldier, yet praises her man-like qualities that make her admirable. These *corridos* of Petra Herrera demonstrate how women were praised for

their ability to be man-like in battle. However, they remained women as they were not attempting to be a man like Amelio Robles, and therefore this in turn demonstrates how women were actually being praised for changing gender roles in the context of the Revolution. These paradigm shifts allowed women to perform gender differently in the public sphere by creating new performances of femininity for the Revolution.

Just as in the calendar *cromos*, the *corridos* represent women not only as the valiant Soldadera but also as the adored Adelita. For this study of Revolutionary women in the *corridos*, I find the song “La Adelita” to be crucial, as it is one of the most famous Mexican *corridos* of the Revolution or any other period. As previously mentioned, there is ambiguity as to whether Adela was a real person or if she was a fictional character for the *corrido*. Carlos Monsiváis says of Adelita’s identity that while there may be no definitive answer, “[W]hat is definitive is the way a song can evoke an ambiance of love and loss, becoming the emblematic seal of daily life in the revolution” (6). “La Adelita” stands as a universal, although romanticized, lens through which to view the Revolution. There are at least two versions of this *corrido*, the second one borrowing lines from the first with a more polished and less colloquial style (Herrera-Sobek 108). Herrera-Sobek points to the overtly romanticized view of the Adelita when compared to the *corridos* of the Soldaderas; there is an obvious shift in tone from subject to revered objects as Adelita is at once strong warrior and delicate woman:

En lo alto de la abrupta serranía,
Acampado se encontraba un regimiento,
Y una joven que valiente lo seguía
Locamente enamorada del sargento.

[On top of a rugged mountain chain
A regiment was found camping,
And a young girl who courageously followed them,

Crazy in love with the sergeant. (qtd in Monsiváis 5)]

The initial presentation of Adelita following the sergeant does not necessarily describe her as being active on the battlefield like Petra Herrera; she could also prepare meals and stay in the camp. However, while she was the sergeant's sweetheart, later lyrics of the *corrido* show that Adelita has also proved herself to be brave like the other Soldaderas: "Que además de ser valiente era bonita,/ Que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba" ["Aside from brave, she was pretty/ And even the colonel respected her" (qtd in Monsiváis 6)]. The colonel's respect for Adelita functions like Robles's medical exam: proof of valor and of value.

However, the chorus keeps Adelita trapped in traditional femininity and women's roles. The lines note that if Adelita wanted to be "my" girlfriend or my wife, "Le compraría un vestido de seda/ Para llevarla a bailar al cuartel" ["I would buy her a silk dress/ To take her dancing at headquarters" (qtd in Monsiváis 6)]. In the other version of the *corrido* the second line is "para hacerla reina en mi cuartel" ["And make her queen of my barracks" (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 104)]. The lines instantly label Adelita as the feminine sweetheart and erase her previously-established bravery and role as Soldadera. The silk dress is an image that is the antithesis of the Revolution that removes Adelita from the scene of battle and places her on a pedestal of beauty and femininity: the dress acts as synecdoche through the imagery of delicate silk womanhood. The use of the Spanish subjunctive implies also that the men wish her to be their bride and that they dream of being with Adelita as they admire her beauty and bravery. However, Adelita is not theirs; she "belongs" to the sergeant. Alicia Arrizón comments that in combining valor and love, Adelita came to represent the "sensitivity and vulnerability of men" (91).

If we consider Adelita in this light, she only represents male vulnerability as an overly-stereotyped feminine figure herself, again pushed back into objectivity. If “La Adelita” is an expression of the male soldiers’s vulnerability in desiring a woman, in being their sweetheart, Adelita gave them hope and someone to strive to come home to at the end of the battle. The Adelita was, in part, the men’s fictitious reason for fighting and she therefore embodied part of the Revolution itself. These Adelitas and Soldaderas embodied the soldiers’s motivation, including also their vulnerability, bravery, or physical presence. The men’s adoration for Adelita turned her into a lyrical embodiment of the Revolution rather than an individual person or soldier.

This wartime vulnerability of men is especially present where they are confronted with death and their own mortality. In such moments in the *corridos* the men ask that the Adelita keep them in her memory and mourn their deaths. It is not surprising that both versions of “La Adelita” ask that the women pray for and mourn them: “Adelita, por Dios te lo ruego/ que con tus ojos me vayas a llorar” [“Adelita, in the name of God I beg of you/ That you will shed tears for me” (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 108)]. The pleading for someone to acknowledge and remember their death in battle describes the desperation for acknowledgment and memory, their fear of anonymity and becoming the unnamed soldier. Additionally the singer pleads: “Adelita, Adelita de mi alma,/ no me vayas por Dios a olvidar” [“Adelita, Adelita, my very soul,/ Please, in God’s name don’t forget me” (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 105)]. If, again, the Adelita personifies part of the Revolution itself, the men as asking for the Revolution to remember what they did to fight for their cause. This image of woman as keeper of memory is one I will explore more deeply in

the section on literary Soldaderas. Such stoicism in the face of death (Arrizón, “Soldaderas” 91) is masked by the gentle face of the Adelita.

Another vision of the Adelita is that of the *Juana* following her *Juan* into battle. The *corrido* “La Toma de Zacatecas” has several versions, but one mentions *Juanas* (Herrera-Sobek 98). In this version we see how the *Juanas* are similar to the Adelita from the previous *corrido*: “eran todas muy bonitas/ y de muchos pantalones” [“All were very pretty/ And were very brave” (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 99)]. While this is the translation that accompanies the Spanish, I take the phrase “de muchos pantalones” to mean that “they wore their pants well,” meaning they were well-suited to the role of soldier, as much so as the men. As I mentioned in the previous chapter when examining the photographs of the Casasola archive, at this time period in much of the world pants were not part of women’s fashion. Within the gender stereotypes of acceptable femininity, the pants act as a masculine gender marker to reference the women and therefore identify them with the male soldiers. While the Adelita and the *Juanas* are described to be both beautiful and brave, the similarities go deeper in the description of the *Juanas*’ role:

Andaban las pobres “juanas”
empinadas de los cuerpos,
recogiendo a los heridos
y rezándole a los muertos.

[The poor soldier women were
Bending down their bodies,
Picking up the wounded
And praying for the dead. (qtd in Herrera-Sobek 99)]

Just as the Adelita is asked to remember the dead, here the *Juanas* must also care for the dead and wounded. Their presence on the actual battlefields is not to fight but to clear the wounded and dead from where the battle had taken place. I want to look at the other,

more moral, support for the troops the women are to give in caring for the men's souls in praying for them. Whether as camp, battle, or spiritual support, the women are surrounded by death as they participate in the Revolution.

The figure of the Soldadera also appears in the 1912 poem "Soldadera" by Julio Sesto (1879-1916) in which the poet addresses the state of women in the Revolution. As seen in the Casasola group photographs and *corridos* of *Juanas*, the Revolution had the effect of painting all women with the same, anonymous brush. Despite the Soldadera's crucial role in the Revolution, historically both during and after the conflict these women remained silent and away from subjectivity, out of active historical memory and the national imaginary of men's accomplishments. In Sesto's poem his consideration and praise of the Soldadera figure also acknowledges how these women were already in 1912 being left behind by history and national memory early on in the Revolution: "Marchan constantes, marchan ligeras,... Como una sombra, tras de su 'Juan'" ["They march persevering, they march lightly... Like a shadow, behind their 'Juan'" (Noble 99, Noble's translation)]. This poem reads exactly like the *corridos*, and the image of the *Juanas* is one that, like the Adelita, homogenizes the role these women played. I argue that the image of the woman as shadow demonstrates the lack of subjectivity and even corporeality for these women in that they are not even women, similar to the *Juanas corrido* with the women silently combing the battlefield for bodies much like a shadow or specter. Sesto's verses continue:

¡Oh soldaderas tan desdeñadas,
Tan escondidas, tan olvidadas...
Tan solas mueren en sus afanes
Por ir siguiendo los pobres "Juanes."

[Oh soldadera so scorned,

So hidden, so forgotten...
 So alone they die in their effort
 To go following their poor "Johns". (qtd in Noble 99)]

If the soldiers are asking the Adelitas and *Juanas* to remember them when they die both here and in the *corridos*, then who is entrusted with the task of remembering the women? Whether as Soldaderas, Adelitas, or *Juanas*, Sesto points to this image of the women as being both hidden and forgotten, and also as alone; the women become isolated in their role. They are constantly only defined in terms of the male soldiers and in how they serve them. Sesto's poem points to the fact that these women have no voice or representation and yet in the poem the women do not speak for themselves. While he addresses their lack of agency, the poem does not provide the women with agency either.

The Mexican *corrido* stands as a popular representation of the nation through a chorus of anonymous voices, not unlike the photographs and *cromos*. Like the *cromos*, the *corridos* neatly package the nation and the feats of the Revolution into a ballad to be sung, shared, and circulated throughout the country over the decades, and like Posada's *calaveras* they can reach even the illiterate population. And similar to the photographs, while a small number of them address female characters, those that do add to the feminine counter-archive of female involvement in the Mexican Revolution. Figures like Petra Herrera, Marijuana, and Valentina are commemorated in these ballads, commended for their bravery because they were women who acted like the men; as they are seen as masculine at time, such as through "muchos pantalones," they were in fact altering the models for femininity at that time and creating what would evolve into acceptable versions of femininity. These female figures received recognition for in fact failing to adhere to traditional womanhood, for creating forms of resistance through new excesses

of gender through the body. Now that we have seen how the Soldadera and Adelita are interpreted through *lo popular* of the *corridos*, I now turn to the traditional classic literary examples of these female figures to show how the female characters also add to a creation of a paradigm shift through resistance to gender structures of how to be a woman and be feminine during the Revolution.

Mexican Women Writers: “Ojos hechos grandes con revolución”

The *novelas de la revolución* include a wide range of sources, ranging from pieces written both during and after the Revolution as well as pieces written by those who lived it, those who have transcribed testimonies of the soldiers, and those who use it, like the *cromos*, for the background to a historical but fictionalized story. As previously mentioned the classic *novelas de la revolución* were often described as *viril* for their creation of a masculine national identity. One of the most famous of these texts is Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo* from 1915. Strong male characters dominate the narrative but are accompanied by three female characters; two Soldaderas and the protagonist’s wife. The prominent Soldadera figure is the famous character of *la Pintada*, who is brash, violent, and wears blue tights and too much rouge, while the other is Camila who is meek and acts only as a love interest for the men. Demetrio’s wife remains his loyal supporter who holds down the home front, and the other female characters are young girls around age twelve or fourteen taken by the men when they take the towns. In this one literary example we find multiple yet limited modes of binary representation for women in the Revolution, ranging from Soldadera to Adelita, from strong to weak, from sexualized to passive, from masculine to feminine. Guadalupe Ríos de la Torre explains that Azuela’s female characters fall into two categories for women in this genre: the passive female

partner or wife who embodies virtue and purity and the prostitute who is corrupt, promiscuous, and morally contradictory, which she reasons comes from the social restrictions and control for women at the time of the Revolution (30, 32). I therefore argue that these categories come from the archetypes of *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* and that the male authors wrote women into these limiting roles. Robert McKee Irwin points to a different way that one Mexican author approached the women, gender, and the Revolution. Author Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta in 1933 in his *México marimacho* wrote women onto the Revolutionary stage as a threat through *marimachos*, or masculinized men and virile soldiers (Irwin 151). The novel situates masculinized female appearance and sexuality as a threat to nation-building;¹⁷ to be included in the narrative of the Revolution and post-Revolution women must remain feminine.

Instead of traditional *novelas de la revolución* here I have chosen to analyze novels that were written by women and depict women in the context of the Revolution. While the novels are penned by women, I situate them with Nellie Richard's view that they should not escape the title of universal literature just because they are of women writing about women (20). The novels are: *Cartucho* (1931) and *Las manos de mamá* (1938) by Nellie Campobello; *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963) by Elena Garro; *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1969) by Elena Poniatowska; and *Como agua para chocolate* (1989) by Laura Esquivel. I want to counter the male-authored *novela de la revolución* with authors that opened up the possibilities for women's gender definitions where their resistance to traditional femininity created new expressions of womanhood. They also represent varied perspectives of the Revolution: Campobello witnessed the Revolution as

¹⁷ The threat of masculine women to the nation was also seen in this time through the emergence of *las pelonas*, or women with short hair in the 1920s and 1930s when Quevedo y Zubieta published his novel (1933) (Ruiz-Alfaro 49).

a child; *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* narrates the transcribed experience of a Soldadera; and Garro's and Esquivel's novels are fictitious re-writings of the Revolution. After my study of visual examples of women of the Revolution in *lo popular* with photographs, *cromos*, and *corridos*, I want to close this chapter with these texts to highlight the registers of femininity as resistance and women's involvement through literature. These female figures are more autonomous than the previous examples, written into the Revolutionary narrative as strong examples of femininity during the Revolution compared to the notable lack of womanhood in the traditional masculine *novela de la revolución*.

To begin, Nellie Campobello's novels *Cartucho* (1931) and *Las manos de mamá* (1938) are autobiographical and are some of the only works about the Revolution from an author who experienced it first-hand. They are also written from the perspective of a female narrator, in the voices of Campobello as a child and later as an adult. Campobello's narration describes moments she experienced and ones about which her mother told her, weaving together the stories from mother and daughter in what Oswaldo Estrada refers to as a "doble voz femenina" ["double feminine voice" (225)]. While the two women were not on the battlefields, the Revolution came to their town, and they were forced to experience the violence the soldiers brought to their doorstep. The mother enacted valor, strength, and leadership, a risk during the time period. I view Campobello and her mother as similar figures to the Soldadera as women of the Revolution; while not paid, they cared for the soldiers and the mother provided them with food and shelter in her home and in medical services in town. The mother enacted a double motherhood by caring for her own children and for the soldiers as a surrogate mother.

The mother complicates the archetype of *la Guadalupe* character as she combines traditional motherhood and a strength of character to enact a more complex image of motherhood. Demonstrating notable duality, she alternates between selfless compassion and hardened defiance, with scenes in which she is confronted with soldiers and generals in her house. In one such scene in *Cartucho*, it was rumored that a soldier planned to kidnap the mother's niece, so she distracted the soldiers while the girl escaped. As the soldiers entered her house, Campobello's child narrator remembered that "Mamá se puso a cantar alto" ["Mama began to sing in a loud voice,"] and when she spoke to them, "Mamá estaba tranquila, torciendo un cigarro" ["Mama was calm, twisting a cigarette" (24; 11)].¹⁸ As with the discussion of women's clothing in the photographs of the previous chapter, there is evidence of the threat of sexual violence towards women even off the battlefield as a man threatens to kidnap and presumably rape the niece; the women protect one another. The image of the mother smoking goes against a typical depiction of women's fear in the face of violent soldiers, and is reminiscent of Amelio Robles's pose with his cigarette and cold, confident demeanor in the photograph. When faced with these uninvited soldiers in her home, she remains calm and simply smokes and sings.¹⁹

During another scene that highlights the effects of the Revolution on her and her family, the mother demonstrates a strength of character that breaks from traditional gender performance. The sinister figure of "[un] hombre alto, tenía bigotes güeros" ["a tall man with a blond moustache" (73; 33)] threatened her and her family when the mother was accused of hiding firearms in her house for Pancho Villa's men. The man

¹⁸ For *Cartucho* and *Las manos de mamá* the English comes from the translation by Meyer and Matthews. I have modified this translation from "smoking a cigarette".

¹⁹ The mother singing in the face of adversity is reminiscent of Anna from Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1951 *The King and I* when Anna sings about whistling to not act afraid.

harassed her and her children while his men looked for the weapons: “Mamá no lloraba, dijo que no le tocaran a sus hijos, que hicieran lo que quisieran. Ella ni con una ametralladora hubiera podido pelear contra ellos... Los ojos de mamá, hechos grandes de revolución, no lloraban, se habían endurecido recargados en el cañón de un rifle de su recuerdo” [“Mama didn’t cry. She told them to do what they pleased but not to touch her children. Even with a machine gun, she couldn’t have fought them all . . . Mama’s eyes, grown large with revolution, did not cry. They had hardened, reloaded in the rifle barrel of her memory” (73, 74; 33)].²⁰ Here the mother defends her house and her children not with force or violence but steadfast fury. Just as when the men attempted to kidnap her niece, the narration implies that, according to what Campobello had seen, other women would have cried when confronted with such insults and threat of violence. Comparing the mother’s memory to a rifle barrel marks the memories as being violently inserted inside of her, and keeping them hardens her. Her eyes being hardened from the Revolution indicates the mother’s steadfast character in such times and the possibility that she had in fact hidden Villista weapons. This hardening demonstrates the effects of the Revolution on her, a concept I will further analyze in Garro’s novel, a hardening seen as both necessary and positive for the mother as she adapts to protect herself and her family from the Revolution.

The mother’s character goes beyond the hardened, smoking, fearless exterior she presents to the soldiers. In *Las manos de mamá*, Campobello praises her mother’s attributes and her sacrifice during the Revolution. Campobello narrates that “Nos daba sus canciones; sus pies bordaban pasos de danza para nosotros. Toda su belleza y su juventud nos la entregó” [“She gave us her songs; her feet embroidered dance steps for

²⁰ Translation modified from “grown large with revolt”.

us. She gave us all her beauty and her youth” (17; 101)]. This image of the mother is more whimsical and dream-like than the strong, smoking one from *Cartucho*. Here the mother exemplifies the Mexican *mujer abnegada*, or abnegated or selfless woman who sacrifices herself for her family and, here, for the Revolution. However, a *mujer abnegada* is also considered a passive woman, whereas in *Cartucho* there are many examples of active action and strength. The mother wishes, regardless of politics, to protect and assist both her family and the needy and wounded soldiers. As Campobello narrates in *Las manos de mamá*, “Nuestros muchachos, los guerreros altos, de cuerpo dorado, fueron siempre protegidos por *Ella*” [“She always protected our boys, tall warriors with golden bodies” (37; 111)]. First, I wish to underscore that in the original Spanish version “ella” is both capitalized and italicized, emphasizing the goddess-like idealization the narrator has for her mother and her role in the family and community. Second, in referring to the men as “nuestros,” this “our” puts them in a category bound by community, to protect our own; the women who help them help preserve the community so it can heal after the Revolution. The mother’s selflessness is described throughout the two works with examples of how the women honored and served the men who were in battle. For example, in *Cartucho* she mourns the death of a Villista General, a man famous for giving sword whippings, who the mother held in high esteem: “Cuando se supo la muerte de Antonio Silva, mamá lloró por él, dijo que se había acabado un hombre” [“When the news came that Antonio Silva was dead, Mama cried for him. She said it was the end of a real man” (29; 14)]. This image of her crying and mourning is comparable to the *Juanas* from the *corridos*, where women publicly remember the men who have died.

The strongest demonstration of the mother's character and women's roles in Campobello's texts is when the narrator describes how her mother was a hospital volunteer. In *Cartucho* the young Campobello recounts one day spent with the wounded, a significant narration that illustrates her mother's actions and the grisly details about the young men's wounds; "Mamá me dijo que le detuviera una bandejita, ya iba a curar . . . curó catorce, yo le detuve la baneja. Mamá era muy condolica de la gente que sufría" ["Mama told me to hold the tray for her as she made her rounds . . . She treated fourteen in all, and I held the tray for her. Mama was very sympathetic toward those who suffered" (131, 132; 59)]. After initial efforts, the mother steps in to help the abandoned soldiers at the hospital as best she can under the circumstances, faced with political resistance:

Mamá en persona habló con el Presidente Municipal y pidió, suplicó, imploró; si estas palabras no son bastantes para dar una idea, diré que mamá, llorando por la suerte que les esperaba a los heridos . . . El Presidente le dijo a mama que se metía a salvar unos bandidos, ella dijo que no sabía quiénes eran, "en este momento no son ni hombres", contestó mamá. (133)

[Mama went in person to talk to the municipal president. She asked, begged, implored, and, if these words are not enough to get the idea across, I will say that she cried for the fate awaiting the wounded men . . . The president told Mama that she was getting herself mixed up in trying to save bandits, but she said she didn't know who they were. "Right now, they aren't even men," Mama answered. (60)]

I wish to analyze the two meanings in her statement that they are not even men. On the one hand, some of the soldiers are so young that they are merely boys and not grown men. On the other hand, this references their wounded and abandoned state, with no form of identification and some on the brink of death; they are not fully present or even human. Both interpretations fit as the mother acknowledges the effect of the Revolution on the men, or rather boys, and how it has made them shadows of their former selves. The mother's sympathy for the wounded highlights how she valued their lives over

politics. Regardless of which side they were fighting for, to her they were members of the community and the nation who needed medical care.

In *Cartucho*'s tales of male generals, soldiers, and children that she or her mother saw killed is a female figure: Nacha Cenicerros. Campobello writes that Nacha Cenicerros was cleaning her gun in the camp one day when it fired and shot her lover, and she was to be executed. This is the narrated image at the end of Cenicerros's life: "Lloró al amado, se puso los brazos sobre la cara, se le quedaron las trenzas negras colgando y recibió la descarga. Hacía una bella figura, imborrable para todos los que vieron el fusilamiento. Hoy existe un hormiguero en donde dicen que está enterrada" ["She wept for her lover, put her arms over her head, with her black braids hanging down, and met the firing squad's volley. She made a handsome figure, unforgettable for everyone who saw the execution. Today there is an anthill where they say she was buried" (44; 21)]. The text emphasizes the image of the woman in mourning with her long braids and the passive image of the docile femininity of the *china poblana*: she is the *mujer abnegada*. In a later edition of the text, however, the tale does not end there; it explains that Cenicerros had not died but instead had left the Revolution and was now raising horses. She had become a martyr-like myth, condemned to die as a *mujer abnegada* rather than reveal her true story. I agree with Estrada that this is a prime example of how often the true version of feminine histories is hidden, intentionally or not (229). The narrator describes Cenicerros's life after she left the battlefield: "[She] rode horses better than many men. She was what's called a country girl, but in the mountain style. With her incredible skill, she could do anything a man could with his masculine strength" (21). Now Cenicerros and her *trenzas* evoke a powerful image unlike that of the weeping woman. Campobello's

child narrator distinguishes Cenicerros from other Soldaderas who were often not seen as able to do “men’s work.” And, yet while comparing her skills to a man’s, her strength remains feminine. However brief, Nacha Cenicerros and her inclusion in *Cartucho* is a complement to the mother character as another example of different forms of public gender identity for women in the Revolution, albeit one that was censored.

To conclude this section on Campobello’s texts, I want to again explore women’s role as keeper of memories, where women stand as witnesses to the events, deaths, and personal details that would otherwise be forgotten. Just as with the Adelita in the *corrido* who is asked to remember the soldiers when they die – “no me vayas por Dios a olvidar” – there is another example of this in Campobello’s works. In *Cartucho* we see how the female characters experience the Revolution and how the events stay ingrained in their memories, as indicated in the existence of these texts themselves. Here the women are living memories, their bodies embedded with the passing of the Revolution, such as when the narrator refers to her mother’s memory as a loaded rifle. This image contrasts with the women who were asked to keep the soldiers’s memories; this act of remembering is active. Another example is when she recounts one of her mother’s wartime stories, emphasizing the impact and weight of the memories with the following phrasing: “Decía mamá con el recuerdo entre sus labios” [“Mama said, with the memory between her lips” (85; 38)].²¹ In this way, it is as though the memories are telling their own story through the mother as a vessel, a keeper of these memories. In another moment Campobello narrates a story told to her by her mother about a man who betrayed Villa and was shot; she says that “los ojos de mamá detienen la imagen del hombre que al ir cayendo de rodillas se abraza su camisa y regala su vida. Cuentos para mí, que no olvidé. Mamá los

²¹ Translation modified from “with memory between her lips.”

tenía en su corazón” [“Mama’s eyes held the image of the man grasping his shirt as he fell to his knees and gave up his life. Stories saved for me, and I never forgot. Mama carried them in her heart” (104; 46)]. I use this moment to underscore how the mother passes on these memories to her daughter, the passing of oral histories and memories from woman to woman across generations. Campobello not only recounts her own tales and those that came to her by her mother and the soldiers through oral histories of the Revolution. As Campobello puts it, the women of the North were witnesses to the tragedies and therefore their stories, like the ones she compiled in her book, serve to document what occurred (202). The dead men cannot tell their tales; it is up to the women who stayed behind or saw them die in town. This feminine creation, documentation, and transmission of histories they witnessed and were told create a counter-archive and even a counter-Revolution to the official male-authored written history through women’s living, embodied memories.

I now move to other *novelas de la revolución* that were written by women after the Mexican Revolution had ended, and one famous example is *Los recuerdos del porvenir* by Elena Garro in 1963. The novel revolves around a domineering general and the effect he and his soldiers have on the town, especially on the women they take as lovers; the drunk and violent military men contrast with the women who range from intimidated to defiant. The story takes place in the Mexican town of Ixtepec, and its narrative style combines memory and history as the town narrates its past, before and after the Revolution and during the Cristero Rebellion.²² *Los recuerdos del porvenir* is comparable to how Campobello converts her mother’s oral history into a written text to

²² The Cristero Rebellion was a shorter war after the Revolution from 1926 to 1929 which resulted in the separation of Church and State in Mexico (Thornton 101).

preserve the version of the Revolution of women who act as keepers of memory. As the town narrates its own history, recalling memories of events and emotions, its history acts as a collective memory of the townspeople's experiences. The narration refers to a *nosotros*, a collective "we" rather than one person's story and perspective; the town and its memories are plural, as when Campobello narrates her own town's experiences. In the opening paragraph Ixtepec says, "La veo [la memoria], me veo y me transfiguro en multitud de colores y de tiempos. Estoy y estuve en muchos ojos. Yo sólo soy memoria y la memoria que de mí se tenga" ["I see it [memory], I see myself, and I am transfigured into a multitude of colors and times. I am and I was in many eyes. I am only memory and the memory that one has of me" (11; 3)].²³ The city stands empty and alone now, filled with silence and memory. This plural history and retelling of memories, while similar to the oral history of Campobello's mother and texts, is distinct in its perspective; the memories of many are absorbed into the geographical town itself.

The negative effects of the Revolution and its violence on the townspeople are woven throughout the narration alongside the altered passage of time, causing time to stop or pause. The town claims that before the arrival of the Revolution, despite being conquered before, its valley was green and easy to cultivate (11), but once it arrived soldiers went to fight and others came, opening brothels like Hotel Jardín where the female protagonists, all *queridas* of the generals, reside. Unlike its fertile and green beginnings, the town becomes dry, desolate, and dark in a symbolic transformation to represent the destruction of the Revolution; its houses and townspeople are burned and their memories scattered among the ashes of the town. These images of the town being conquered and destroyed by male soldiers situates Ixtepec in the same space as the

²³ The English comes from the translation by Simms.

Americas during the Conquest, as men overtook and destroyed the land. Ixtepec therefore also situates itself as feminine, receiving the soldier's destruction (Paz), a destruction deeply-imprinted onto the town's collective memory that moves around silences and what has been forgotten in stopped time.

Among the town's violent memories of the Revolution I wish to discuss the many instances of silences and how they relate to women's experiences. When the Revolution came to Ixtepec, the town says that "Un silencio sombrío se extendió del norte al sur y el tiempo se volvió otra vez de piedra" ["A dismal silence spread from north to south, and time turned to stone again" (37; 31)]. Time stood still during Julia's escape and the town said that "También llegó el silencio total" ["There was also total silence," (145; 138)] and when at a party General Rosas discovers that the townspeople plan to trick his troops, the town recalls that at that moment "la fiesta se había paralizado. El miedo flotaba entre la música dejando quietas las ramas de los árboles y a los invitados. Los balcones silenciosos nos anunciaban la catástrofe sucedida en Ixtepec" ["the party came to a standstill. Fear hovered behind the music, keeping the branches of the trees and the guests quiet. The silent balconies announced to us the catastrophe that had occurred in Ixtepec" (208; 202)].²⁴ I use these moments to explain how silence is tied to such out-of-time moments of destruction like the calm before the storm or at the eye of the hurricane. These silences are significant because Garro uses them to represent the silent threats or acts of violence from the Revolution. Two key relationships in the novel include the effect of the Revolution on the town, particularly on the female characters (Thornton 99), and the effect that the Revolution and the women have on the passing of time. Julia Kristeva analyzes the different kinds of times, asserting that male time is historical and

²⁴ Translation modified from "the party was at a standstill".

female time is cyclical (14). Clearly Garro's Ixtepec does not function in linear or historical time due to the stops and moments of forgetting; she has created a town where women can change time. Therefore Ixtepec experiences a feminine time, as seen in the feminine town narrating its memory, a cyclical time in opposition to the townspeople's shared experiences rather than in linear time.

When the Revolution arrives at the town, the image of a stone surrounded by silence symbolizes the destructive effect of the Revolution on the town: it becomes stagnant and lacks action. This silent time also represents an inability to remember, for if no action occurs there are no memories to record. The two main female characters, Julia and Isabel, have profound effects on the town's time, as pointed out by Niamh Thornton (99), again adding to the town's feminine and cyclical time. When Julia leaves Ixtepec with Felipe, the town explains that something strange occurred: "el tiempo se detuvo en seco" ["time stopped dead" (145; 138)] and the town asserts that "En verdad no sé qué pasó" ["I really do not know what happened" (145; 138)]. If the town does not know, then none of the townspeople witnessed how Julia and Felipe managed to escape; their departure stopped or paused time. This lack of memory or forgotten time contrasts with the actual action which occurs in the scene, just as the town exists during the events of the Revolution and is also trapped in time. These cycles of remembering and forgetting, like action and stillness, coexist in Ixtepec. Garro created this overlap to demonstrate how the Revolution disrupted the nation and the lives of its citizens, and women play a large role in these time cycles, as seen in the emphasis Garro places on her female protagonists.

A similar event of altered time occurs with Isabel at the end of the novel: it is said that she turns into a stone. The novel ends with the town reading what is inscribed on the

stone: “En piedra me convertí el cinco de octubre . . . Aquí estaré con mi amor a solas como recuerdo del porvenir por los siglos de los siglos” [“I turned into a stone on October 5 . . . Here I shall be, alone with my love, as a memory of the future, forever and ever” (292; 288-289)]. I relate this symbolic image to memory in two ways. First, it again points to how Ixtepec is composed of the townspeople’s memories, and therefore this woman becomes part of the town’s physical geography as a stone. Second, it shows a different way for women to be keepers of memory, with Isabel the stone as a permanent reminder (*recuerdos*) or monument in the town to mark the events of the past, similar to the word *recuerdo* as a souvenir. In this way Isabel is different from the oral history of Campobello’s mother, in that she keeps the memory but cannot tell it, only instead helping others remember through the physical presence of the rock marker. She is more like the photographed Soldaderas who can no longer tell their own story but remain a visual reminder of history. Christina Karageorgou-Bastea proposes that the memories of the town involve a transfer of Isabel’s bodily memory when she is supposedly transformed (81). To consider this connection between corporeal bodies and historical memory relates to how bodies such as Amelio Robles’s were marked physically by the Revolution. However, Karageorgou-Bastea also proposes that this transfer of memory from woman to collective town, rather than a dialogue between them, results in the freezing of time and the downfall of the town and the novel (81). In this narrative, as a stone, I maintain that Isabel stands as a permanent testament of the effects of the Revolution on the town and its people. Isabel’s memory joined that of the collective town to retell her story. This joining and female perspective construct and document the events, however destructive, of the Revolution.

These texts from Campobello and Garro include different ways in which women keep the memories of events, people, and entire communities. The narrator's mother in *Cartucho* and *Las manos de mamá* represents the conversion of oral history into written history from the perspective of a woman; her body and her memory are marked by the Revolution and she is then charged with remembering and passing down the history. Her perspective is different from those in other *novelas de la revolución* because it is from the point of view of a woman and describes the experiences of other women. Such women were able to tell the stories of the men who died in battle, camps, or the towns. In *Los recuerdos del porvenir* the town's collective memories are contained in the stone that used to be a woman, and she represents another female narrative, narrator, and perspective that withstands the test of time after the Revolution has ended. Here the corporeal archive seen with Campobello physically changes to become stone, combining the experiences of the townspeople with the Mexican landscape of the town as a monument. Campobello and Garro wrote these narrations of female perspective into the literary archive about the Revolution where the characters represent an ability, and even a necessity, to tell the stories of what the women witnessed and add that as a counter-narrative to the traditional all-male perspective. They also represent the ways in which women resisted traditional womanhood: the mother resisted passivity and took action to aid the soldiers and protect her family, and Garro's female characters resisted traditional linear time and the oppression of the soldiers and generals. These texts have become catalysts for women to enter the public space and the official history of the Revolution through literature.

One of the most prominent literary examples of an active role for women during the Revolution in the campgrounds is a famous work that combines a real woman's testimony of her experiences and the author's literary filter: Elena Poniatowska's 1969 novel *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*. Poniatowska interviewed Jesusa Palancares, whose real name was Josefina Bórquez, and transformed her taped interviews into a novel. The novel narrates Jesusa's version of her life: she grew up in Oaxaca with her father, brother, and abusive stepmother, followed her father onto the battlefield during the Revolution, was married to a soldier there at age fifteen and suffered infidelity and violence, was widowed during the conflict, then after the Revolution worked numerous jobs and found spirituality. The novel features the Jesusa of the late 1960s, an older, more spiritual Jesusa retelling the events of her life in a first-person narrative. The novel is not only famous for its format as a fictionalized testimonial but also for the character of Jesusa.²⁵ She does not fit the traditional passive female Soldadera roles of the Revolution; she is rough, decidedly unfeminine, and stone-cold. While there is much to study in this novel, I will focus here on Jesusa's active role in the Revolution as well as the gender markers that complicated her femininity both on and off the battlefield.

Poniatowska takes Bórquez's experiences and turns them into the life of her character Jesusa, and it is through this altered first-person narration that Poniatowska's Jesusa describes her life in the Revolution. Jesusa's narration is at once non-fiction and fiction, then, due to the author's style, but Bórquez's account of being in the campgrounds with the male soldiers is what makes Jesusa a Soldadera. The Revolution

²⁵ The novel received much criticism for its use of Bórquez's interviews as a form of testimonial, for the complex relationship between the privileged ethnographer and the racialized interview subject, for Jesusa's use of Spanish and her representation as a poor Mexican woman, among other criticism (Steele). See also the work of Jorgensen and Sommer on the novel.

arrived in their town soon after 1911, after Madero had taken the Capital. Jesusa's brother had died in battle, and that is when her father decided to join the forces and take Jesusa with him. As Jesusa explains, "Dijo que ya que había perdido a su hijo, no quería perderme a mí" ["He said that since he'd lost his son he didn't want to lose me" (Poniatowska, *Hasta no verte* 63; 62)].²⁶ Not unlike the story in which the pregnant Soldadera must accompany her *Juan* in order to cook, Jesusa was one of the women brought into the battlefield and campgrounds not of their own will but because of an obligation to a husband or family member. What is ironic, however, is that Jesusa already recounted how she never learned to cook well. Jesusa outlines the women's responsibilities:

mi papá siempre me mandó dos o tres horas antes de que él saliera. Al llegar procurábamos prepararles la comida. Veníamos como diez o quince mujeres, adelante, luego seguía la vanguardia que es la que recibe los primeros balazos . . . Por lo regular las mujeres no estábamos pendientes del combate. Íbamos pensando en qué hacerles de comer. (66, 67)

[my father always sent me on ahead two or three hours before he set out. When we arrived, we tried to get the food ready. There were about ten to fifteen of us women, then came the advance guard, the ones who take the first bullets . . . We women didn't usually pay attention to the fighting; we worried about preparing food for the soldiers. (64-65)]

This description of the women's responsibilities seems to give voice to the silent photographs of the Soldaderas, explaining their mentality and involvement. After Jesusa's short-lived marriage when her husband died, Jesusa turned down the opportunity to replace her husband's position as a soldier (131). She explains that she was not there of her free will but from her obligation first to her father and then to her husband; with the two of them dead, she leaves the battlegrounds and returns home. Her decision to leave readily explains that Jesusa's attachment to the Revolution and the cause was only

²⁶ The English comes from the translation by Heikkinen.

through her womanly obligation to the men in her life. Jesusa is not an example of a woman who went to battle to fight or to serve a soldier for wages, and yet her involvement marks her as a *Soldadera*.

In discussing Jesusa's gender resistance, I wish to explore how before, during, and after the Revolution Jesusa dresses often in men's clothing, sometimes by choice and other times by obligation. As seen in the Casasola photographs, some women such as Valentina Ramírez or Amelio Robles dressed in men's uniforms or clothing for protection or to actually play out a male identity during and potentially after the Revolution. Niamh Thornton addresses Jesusa's complex gender performance in the novel when she questions Jesusa as transgendered, transvestite, or transsexual (155). Thornton acknowledges the ways in which Jesusa breaks from traditional female descriptors and actions both during and after the Revolution. At the start of her story Jesusa says she was a tomboy as a child: "Yo era muy hombrada y siempre me gustó jugar a la guerra, a las pedradas, a la rayuela, al trompo, a las canicas, a la lucha, a las patadas, a puras cosas de hombre, puro matar lagartijas a piedrazos, puro reventar iguanas contra las rocas" ["I was a tomboy. I liked playing war, hopscotch, tops, marbles, throwing stones, fighting, stoning lizards to death, smashing iguanas against rocks: boy things" (19-20; 14)]. I use this quote to show how, as a self-proclaimed tomboy, or being "hombrada," Jesusa distinguishes herself from traditionally feminine girls and women, and this identification goes beyond fighting and killing animals. This masculine identification is seen increasingly throughout most of her life; she cannot cook, she drinks, and she dresses as a man during and at times after the Revolution.

Jesusa's use of men's clothing reveals her gender identity and gendered performance as a Soldadera and afterward. Once she is married, she is forced to travel with the men instead of with the women who prepare the fire and cooking. This change causes Jesusa, like other women in this situation, to dress as a man:

Casi no iban mujeres en campaña; a mí me llevaba Pedro sin orden del general Espinosa y Córdoba; por eso me vestía de hombre para que se hicieran de la vista gorda. Me tapaba la cabeza con el paliacate y el sombrero. Por lo regular, unas iban como yo, porque sus maridos las obligaban, otras porque le hacían al hombre, pero la mayoría de las mujeres se quedaban atrás con la impedimenta. (109, 110)

[Not many women went into battle; Pedro took me even though he didn't have orders from General Espinosa y Córdoba; that's why he made me dress like a man, so they'd look the other way and not report me. He covered my head with a scarf and a hat. Most of the women went into battle for the same reason I did, because their husbands made them; others went because they were with a man. But most of them remained behind. (109)]²⁷

At that time she does not wear men's clothing in a conscious effort to create a masculine external image for the Revolution but rather out of necessity; it was believed that women had to dress like this in the battalion in order to survive. There is much evidence of women disguising themselves as men in order to fight in the ranks, as women were often barred or kept from joining the troops, as in the example of Petra Herrera (Salas 42). Jesusa also claims that her husband never let her take her clothes off: "Yo nunca me quité los pantalones, nomás me los bajaba cuando él me ocupaba . . . tenía que traer los pantalones puestos a la hora que tocaran" ["I never took my pants off, I just pulled them down when he used me . . . I had to have my pants on whenever they played reveille!" (86; 85)] This is not only a very revealing look into the couple's sex life during the military campaign but also shows the demands on the soldiers to be ready whenever needed. Jesusa was forced by her husband to blend in with the male troops. The

²⁷ Translation modified from "because they were trying to be men".

masculine exterior which her husband demanded that she maintain while on the campaign contrasts with the gender performance of the women who prepared the camp. It is the husband's insistence that causes Jesusa to enact a more masculine appearance and therefore a different representation of gender identity for women in the Revolution.

What is most telling is that even after she has left the Revolution, Jesusa still dresses as a man on occasion. She explains that she does so to socialize with men without being harassed. Here she helps a female friend prepare to go out with her:

Me alzaba yo las greñas para arriba, me ponía mi sombrero y mi uniforme y me iba a correr gallo con ellos; a cantar con guitarra. Yo le hacía de hombre y les llevábamos gallo a toda la tendalada de viejas calientes. Anduve con muchos soldados paseándome con ellos en el puerto de Acapulco por las calles, cargando guitarra y botellas y nunca me metieron mano. (154)

[I'd pull back my matted hair, put on my hat and uniform and I'd go out with them, to sing with the guitar. I made her up as a man, and we'd serenade all the hot women. I went out with many soldiers in the port and walked the streets of Acapulco, playing guitar and drinking, and they never laid a hand on me. (156)]²⁸

This scene exemplifies how Jesusa finds dressing as a man to have its advantages in public at times, as when dressing as a man to accompany her husband; she chooses to modify the social code controlled by men. Thornton analyzes Jesusa's cross-dressing alongside gender constructions as well as formations of power. She asserts that Jesusa's perception of men and women has provided her with no examples of women with power or respect, and therefore she believes that being a man means that one is entitled to these societal powers (158). Also, some of Jesusa's strong sentiments about the difference between men and women define this view of power and respect: "¡Mil veces mejor ser hombre que mujer! Aunque yo hice todo lo que quise de joven, sé que todo es mejor en el

²⁸ Translation modified from "I'd hide my long hair under my hat and go out with them; singing to the guitar, serenading all the hot women, strolling through the streets of Acapulco, drinking straight out of the bottle, and no one ever laid a hand on me".

hombre que en la mujer. ¡Bendita la mujer que quiere ser hombre!” [“It’s a thousand times better to be a man than a woman! Even though I did everything I wanted when I was young, I know that everything is better for a man than for a woman. God bless the woman who wants to be a man!” (Poniatowska, *Hasta no verte* 186; 191)] In the scene when Jesusa dressed as a man to go out and enjoy her evenings, one can see her personal opinion that, in her experience, men have more social freedoms than women. As a woman she cannot move about town as freely due to social restrictions that prevent her from going out alone, at night, or in the company of men. I agree with Thornton that Jesusa’s acceptance of drag penetrates gender roles and shows “how [Jesusa] can, through drag, simultaneously disrupt and reinforce these roles” (95). Even though her actions are personal, her cross-dressing takes a stance of resistance against cultural and social norms. Additionally, that she accompanied her husband unnoticed by the Revolutionary generals while dressed as a man proved to her that a woman can maneuver through certain masculine, public spaces if she can pass as a man. These acts of cross-dressing, therefore, serve different purposes and either affect or define her construction of gender. While it is not so true during her service in the Revolution as after, Jesusa consciously chooses to dress as a man in order to gain this societal power allotted to men, and while she believed men to be better than women, she did not dress as a man to become one but rather to perform as masculine to gain society power and mobility.

Despite what we have seen of Jesusa’s story and involvement in the Revolution, Bórquez denied that she was ever a Soldadera. There was, and still partially remains, a cultural perception of the Soldadera as merely a sexual companion to the soldiers, which helps contextualize the sexual images of the Soldadera and Adelita found in the calendar

art. In the text Jesusa defended her role in the Revolution to her uncle in the following way: “¿Que vengo con la tropa? Pues sí, porque como mi padre fue gente de tropa, yo quiero mucho a los soldados y los sigo. Pero no crea que ando de Soldadera. Una cosa es andar en campaña y otra en compañía” [“I came with the troops? Well, yes, because as my father was a soldier, I care for them and I follow them. But don’t think that I’m a Soldadera. One thing is to go with the campaign and another to go with everyone” (220; 226)]. The wordplay between the military campaign and others’s company is echoed by Frederick C. Turner; he said of the Revolutionary woman that “mantuvo la moral [de los hombres] por medio del aliento y [what he very coyly calls] la compañía” [“she maintained the moral [of the men] by way of encouragement and [what hey very coyly calls] company” (qtd. in Thornton 90, original brackets)]. Even up to the 1960s the vision of the Soldadera was still limited to one of cook and “companion;” this allusion to prostitution is why Jesusa says she was not a Soldadera: she was denying she was a prostitute. While there certainly were women who provided such companionship to the troops, this misconception of the role of Soldaderas is an example of how the work of women who held other responsibilities was misrepresented, whether they were paid followers or fighting alongside the men.

Hasta no verte, Jesus mio contrasts with canonical literature of the Revolution by being penned by a woman, by being based on the experiences of a woman who participated in the Revolution, and by showing the non-stereotypical ways a woman chose to resist the male space of the campgrounds and Mexican society after the Revolution through her behavior and dress. Jesusa’s brash and assertive character provides literature about the Revolution with the actual experiences of a soldier’s

daughter and later wife through the interviews Poniatowska conducted with Bórquez. This controversial narrative style does, however, detail Jesusa's interpretations of female gender performance through her cross-dressing out of requirement and later by choice. What is also important about the narrative is that it depicts a *mestiza's* body and experience in the Revolution, a self-proclaimed tomboy who is an example of how women entered the public space of the Revolution and how they entered Mexican society afterward with her many jobs and going out at night with the men dressed as a man to enjoy herself. Similar to the roles of Campobello's mother and of the women of Ixtepec, Jesusa is able to tell the stories of her father and her husband, the dead men and soldiers she must remember and whose stories she must tell. As seen in *Cartucho* and with Jesusa, the men have died but the women live on and are obligated or choose to tell their stories at the same time they can tell their own stories. The character of Jesusa was marked by the Revolution and offered new ways to be a woman in public as society changed after the Revolution ended, able to retell her story and the stories of those who went before her during the Revolution.

I now move from Bórquez's life and role as a Soldadera to a purely fictional female character to further reveal other gender identities for women during and after the Revolution. Another literary example of women's participation in the Revolution comes in the character of Gertrudis from Laura Esquivel's novel *Como agua para chocolate* from 1989. The novel spans several decades, including the Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion, and has moments of magical realism such as the kilometer-long *colcha*, or bedspread, that Tita knits during years of insomnia (104).²⁹ The novel is composed of

²⁹ That Tita knits every night references the trope of women's weaving such as Penelope's weaving (and unweaving) of her tapestry in *The Odyssey*.

monthly installments that parody nineteenth-century women's periodical fiction (Valdés 184), and each chapter's installment includes an actual recipe that is cooked in the narration. The main narrative revolves around Mamá Elena, her two daughters, Tita and Rosaura, and Pedro, Tita's love interest, but the mother forces Pedro to marry Rosaura instead, so that Tita may care for her as she ages. In the end Pedro and Tita are able to consummate their love when they are older, but their story ends in tragedy. It is revealed that Tita's great-niece kept her recipes and stories, again a story of women passing on histories throughout the generations like in *Cartucho*. While the story revolves around the women of the house and the oppressive matriarch, there is a third sister: Gertrudis. She was conceived when Mamá Elena had an affair with a mulatto and only learns of her mixed heritage when she in turn has a mulatto child. She is not a main character, and yet while the other female characters live out stereotypical roles of housekeeper, wife, or cook, Gertrudis becomes a *generala* in the Revolution. Patricia Hart explains that Gertrudis resides between the two extremes of her passive sister Tita and her domineering mother, Mamá Elena and compares the two women to the cinematic Soldadera figures of Lázara and Juana Gallo respectively (168). In this way Gertrudis breaks from the traditional images of the Soldadera and creates a new definition for women in the Revolution. I include Gertrudis in this study of women in the Revolution because of how her character breaks from traditional social and sexual roles for women as she becomes a public and powerful female figure in the Revolution.

Gertrudis joins the Revolution when she leaves home after becoming sexually liberated. She escapes from under Mamá Elena's stern thumb during a madcap scene in which she is affected by the magical effects of Tita's cooking. Tita had cooked quails in

rose petal sauce with roses from Pedro into which she had transferred her sexual passion. Therefore, in a scene of magical realism, everyone at the dinner table feels aroused, and Gertrudis is overcome by lust, sweating and burning up as she envisions a Villista soldier she once saw in town (56). When she goes outside to shower after the meal, her rose-scented sweat attracts the same Villista she had envisioned, and her body heat causes the wooden shower to burn. She runs out naked, and the soldier whisks her on to his horse, facing him; “El movimiento del caballo se confundía con el de sus cuerpos mientras realizaban su primera copulación a todo galope y con alto grado de dificultad” [“The movement of the horse combined with the movement of their bodies as they made love for the first time, at a gallop and with a great deal of difficulty” (60; 56)].³⁰ I wish to emphasize here how, in a play on an appetite for food, Tita’s food has ignited Gertrudis’s sexual appetite that becomes insatiable for a time. These exaggerated effects of the food on Gertrudis represent her liberation, both sexual and social, which allow her to abandon the hacienda. It is a sexual entry into the outside world and the space of the Revolution, one which later culminates in her marriage to this same soldier. While marriage seems to be in opposition to Gertrudis’s liberation, in her marriage she and her husband are happy and she chose her husband; she resists a traditional marriage script through the happiness and power she holds. The grand spectacle of Gertrudis’s departure from the house and the stirrings within her body result in her desire and ability to leave. The title of the novel, *Como agua para chocolate*, is a Mexican saying about the boiling point of water used to make hot chocolate; this represents the boiling point in Tita’s life which creates and advances the narrative’s action (Valdés 185). The scene represented Gertrudis’s boiling-over point from being trapped in the house and away from any action, revolutionary or

³⁰ The English version comes from the translation by Christensen and Christensen.

sexual. The rose petal sauce allows Getrudis to discover her true self outside of the home while the others remain stagnant at the hacienda.

Getrudis continues to evolve as a sexual woman as her story unfolds in the narration, taking her from a brothel to the front lines of the Revolution. Of the female characters in the novel, Tita and Getrudis attempt to create new spaces for expression away from Mamá Elena's rules and restrictions through finding pleasure and happiness, for Tita with Pedro and for Getrudis with her Juan and other men. María Elena de Valdés writes that just as Tita questions her mother's authority, "Gertrudis challenges her mother indirectly by expressing her emotions and passions in an open manner that is unbecoming of a lady" (186). This liberated behavior by Getrudis is seen not only in how she runs away naked on horse-back, but also in where she ends up, both as a resistance of societal norms for the decent women Mamá Elena is trying to raise. The next piece of news the family receives about Getrudis is that she is living in a brothel on the border, which is confirmed in a letter she writes to Tita: "[Juan] me dejó porque sus fuerzas se estaban agotando a mi lado, sin haber logrado aplacar mi fuego interior. Por fin ahora después de que infinidad de hombres han pasado por mí, siento un gran alivio" ["He [John] left because I had exhausted his strength, though he hadn't managed to quench the fire inside me. Now at last, after so many men have been with me, I feel a great relief" (133; 126)]. I use this moment to underscore how although she is in a brothel, Getrudis does not fit the archetype of *la Chingada* as the suffering violated woman. She lacks passivity, and is in a brothel to feed her own sexual appetite rather than that of her clients. This inner fire is also attributed to her identity as a mulatta, which is hinted at when Tita learns of her sister's parentage and observes people commenting on how well Getrudis dances. As she

dances to a polka, “Con liviandad, se laventaba la falda hasta la rodilla, mostrando gran desenfado” [“She lightly hitched her skirt up to her knee, quite uninhibited” (182; 180)], and Rosaura wonders out loud from where Gertrudis had acquired such rhythm if neither of their parents danced. This moment also serves to remind the reader of how “uninhibited” Gertrudis is contrasted with the rigidity by which her two sisters still live in the hacienda; Gertrudis is free socially and sexually. While there are some examples of Afro-Mexicans in the Revolution, here Gertrudis gives representation to this sector of the population. The years she spent pent up at the hacienda have created this nearly unquenchable sexual thirst that not even one man alone can satisfy in her. Gertrudis therefore needs the space of the brothel so that she can use the clients for her own needs rather than being used to satisfy theirs, in a complete inversion of norms for both the brothel and female sexuality.

After her time at the brothel Gertrudis disappears for several years, but when she returns to the narration she has become a *general* in the Revolution. On the night of their Epiphany party Gertrudis returns, preceded by the sound of horses; “Era *general* del ejército revolucionario. Este nombramiento se lo había ganado a pulso, luchando como nadie en el campo de batalla. En la sangre traía el don de mando, así que en cuanto ingresó al ejército, rápidamente empezó a escalar puestos en el poder hasta alcanzar el mejor puesto” [“She was a general in the revolutionary army. The commission had been earned by sheer hard work, she fought like mad on the field of battle. Leadership was in her blood, and once she joined the army, she began a rapid ascent through powerful positions until she arrived at the top” (181-182; 178-179)]. Gertrudis not only returns as a General but is also happily married to Juan, the same man who had taken her away on

horseback years ago. She rewrites the script of traditional marriage by picking her husband and taking an active role in the relationship. She also chooses to be with the man who first aroused her inner fire, which indicates that they still have a sexually satisfying relationship. Additionally, it is no accident that the General is named Juan; once again a revolutionary male figure is named Juan, both no man and every man, followed by the *Juana Soldadera* figure. In Gertrudis's case, however, she marries him and becomes his equal. Gertrudis is a *general*, and the description above paints her not as a passive Soldadera cooking for the troops but as a woman leading the troops, reminiscent of the *corrido* lyric "y de muchos pantalones." As Valdés points out, when Gertrudis returns home "she is dressed like a man, gives orders like a man, and is the dominant sexual partner" (186). She also later raises a child on the battlefield, a detail that allows Gertrudis to resist traditional motherhood by allowing her to redefine the categories of general and mother in that she can be both at the same time. Thus, Gertrudis demonstrates the evolution of women's roles after the Revolution; women could be strong public figures outside the home and still be mothers. Although a work of fiction, I consider Gertrudis's character to add another layer to this counter-archive that offers alternative forms of involvement for women in the Revolution, standing as a model of feminine power.

While Gertrudis's role in the novel is small compared to her two sisters, she becomes a *general* in the Revolutionary forces, redefined gender roles and motherhood through acquiring this high rank, and resisted passive sexuality by fleeing to the brothel and later by marrying based on her own desires. Gertrudis compliments this look at the literary woman of the Mexican Revolution because in her role as a *general* she is one of

the few literary female characters who fights alongside the male soldiers. While we see an example of a woman's emotions and perspective with Campobello and Poniatowska's texts, this brief glimpse at Gertrudis offers another perspective, one that shows the woman as a much more sexualized subject, and not in the negative category of prostitute catering to men's desires as *la Chingada*. Of all the characters in the novel, Gertrudis is the only one who manages to free herself from the hacienda, live her life and she wishes, and be truly happy.³¹ Therefore Gertrudis's character is an example of women who succeed outside the home, and yet she is also a mother and is sexually satisfied in a relationship that she sought out. She resists the stagnant models of *la mujer abnegada*, the passive "fallen woman"³² who is forced into prostitution, and traditional motherhood.

These literary examples are the most revealing portrayals in this study of how women were involved in the Mexican Revolution. As the texts by Campobello and Poniatowska were directly or indirectly women's personal stories from the time period, they provided unique insight into the action of the Revolution in general and for women from the rare perspective of women who lived it. And despite Garro's Ixtepec and Esquivel's Gertrudis being fictitious, the authors use the female characters to add another level of visibility and agency to the role of women, especially of women with high-ranking roles, in the Revolution. These novels differ from traditional *novelas de la revolución* because the female characters resist traditional or romanticized stereotypes and readings of women's bodies. These texts represent women who are not defined in terms of the male soldier; the mother, Nacha Cenicero, Julia, Isabel, Jesusa, and Gertrudis

³¹ Tita reaches this level of satisfaction at the end of the novel, but only briefly before Pedro dies and she commits suicide.

³² I will discuss the trope of the "fallen woman" more in the next two chapters.

are not dependent on a male counterpart, as the *Juanas* were, despite comparisons to men. Instead, the authors created female characters who forged their own identities and made their own decisions, such as to help the soldiers, leave the Revolution, or live in a brothel, rather than being defined by the men around them or by stereotypes about women's roles in times of war. These women, like Julia and Isabel, had the ability to affect the passage of both time and history in and around the Revolution as they are hailed as key players who were women.

Conclusions

As mentioned in the previous section on photographs and *cromos*, the feminist movement's impact in Mexico was much slower than those of North America or Europe, with women not receiving the vote until 1953. But it was during the Mexican Revolution that the first Feminist Congress was held in the Yucatán in 1916 (Foppa). This demonstrates how women's roles began to change during the Revolution and led to new ways of thinking, of women exploring more visible and public roles, and of breaking the mold for how to be a woman in Mexico. In these two chapters I looked at several versions of women in the Mexican Revolution from photography, *cromos*, *corridos*, and novels in order to explore how women's experience is represented in a counter-archive to the traditional masculinist historical archive. It is evident that thanks to the efforts of women during the Revolution in resisting traditional gender roles they carved out new public roles for women. They became more visible either as camp follower or female soldier, taking on roles that had traditionally belonged only to men. Even though the roles were romanticized in *corridos* and later sexualized in *cromos* as the Adelita, the Revolution provided women with the opportunity to re-imagine their space in Mexican

culture and society and even how they viewed femininity and their own bodies. The varied and crucial ways these women performed excess gender reflected the changing roles for women during and after the Revolution. Unlike Amelio Robles, none of these authors created female characters who wanted to become male and live as a man both on and off the battlefield. Jesusa comes close in her use of men's clothing after the conflict, but otherwise the varying degrees to which men's clothing acted as a defense for the women in allowing them to enter the space of the Revolution as someone other than a cook or *Juana*. Therefore one unintended consequence of the Revolution was to change, out of social necessity, the evolution of gender identity and a female consciousness in Mexico.

These examples demonstrate how often the women in the Revolution seemed to exist only to serve the men and only in terms of the men, and, as Sesto's poem pointed out, the women in return get nothing besides lost in the annals of history. These women represent memory, death, hardship, and labor, which marks their memories and bodies. These female bodies in the masculine space of the Revolution not only aided the troops or fought alongside them, but they also acted to preserve the memories and weave the stories, whether their own or of other people, in a female archive that contrasts with the official, masculine, and as Kristeva says, linear history. In removing them from this nation-building myth in these examples, one can see how the characters used their experiences and bodies to narrate a different story about women's involvement in the Revolution while encompassing many roles and meanings both in the context of the Revolution and of the role of women in Mexican culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. After 1985 historical novels in Latin America began to reconfigure the

definitions and limits of history and therefore revise it in what Magdalena Perkowska calls “hybrid histories;” “crean un espacio histórico abierto a pulsiones y presencias marginadas, silenciadas, o descuidadas; se imaginan una historia plural y heterogénea” [“create a historic space open to marginal, silenced, or neglected impulses and presences; a plural and heterogeneous history is imagined” (339)]. While some were published before 1985, this view of historical fiction relates to the novels I analyzed in this chapter in how the texts presented these women’s voices and created a plural version of history that adds to the existing archives. The photographs, *cromos*, *corridos*, and novels provided a counter-archive of resistance to the historical account of the Revolution documented through men’s bodies and experiences, making room for the plural voices of the women of the Revolution. Within this grouping I analyzed maternal figures such as Campobello’s mother and even the new maternal script for Gertrudis as a *general* mother, as well as the selfless (but paid) camp followers photographed in the Casasola archive who sacrificed themselves for the cause and occasionally the men themselves. In the next chapter I turn to the figure of the *mujer abnegada*, or selfless woman, in two novels to discover the process through which the female protagonists move from sacrificed objectivity to complete subjectivity through a refusal to adhere to the Mexican stereotype of the submissive, suffering mother.

Chapter 3. The Rejection of Abnegation through Epistolary Spirals

The last two chapters on the women of the Mexican Revolution demonstrated how the women were excluded from official histories and representation as individuals with agency, and instead were trapped in the passive representations of maternal or invisible Soldadera or soldier, or sexualized Adelita. I demonstrated how, whether on the home front, in the camp grounds, or in the battlefields, women were able to resist the social confines and cultural expectations and create new expressions of womanhood for the time period. While moving forward in time in Mexican history and literature, in order to fit the perfect mother model, women were still expected to be *abnegada*, or selfless. The model of the *mujer* or *madre abnegada* is the essential core of Mexican womanhood, related to the archetype of *la Guadalupe* with pure, passive motherhood. *La abnegada* is based in selflessness and submission, where the woman must sacrifice herself for both for husband and children, which results in her loss of self. In this chapter I will compare how two female literary characters from the twentieth century, Quiela and Beatriz, move away from abnegation, loss, and motherhood in the epistolary novels *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978) by Elena Poniatowska and *Demasiado amor* (1990) by Sara Sefchovich. I wish to show how the use of letters and journals, where the female characters write to their former lovers, brings them through a journey of self-realization as they grapple with different personal losses.

While the *abnegada* model forces women to be submissive and to suffer, I assert that for Quiela and Beatriz being submissive becomes a journey that results in their ability to resist abnegation. Through this resistance to passive femininity they rediscover an identity outside of their relationships with their lovers and away from traditional

women's roles. During this process they define themselves not only in terms of their former lovers and loss but also the physical space they inhabit, inviting the comparison between their bodies, sexualities, and the physical space of their apartments. In their suffering both female characters view and define themselves as being multiple, in excess, as no longer being a singular, affirmed self; after this fragmentation they are able to reassert their true selves, whether as single or multiple. Both figures also grapple with the role of the Mexican mother in their private lives, ultimately rejecting motherhood and its social constructs for women for different reasons. It is this intimate space of women's writing, albeit directed at their lovers, in which Quiela and Beatriz can embark on journeys of self-discovery and self-reflection through their letters.

I have chosen to center my close readings of these two novels on the image of the *mujer abnegada*, a typical image alongside *marianismo* for Mexican and Latin American women. In this negation of the self, women find themselves as severed from an autonomous self and trapped in solitude, a consequence that these characters experience alongside loss. In *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* after Diego leaves Quiela, her loneliness creates a self-imposed spiral of solitude for her; it causes sadness that keeps her from leaving the house, further perpetuating her isolation and loneliness in not being social. Her solitude is also what keeps her from being able to process Diego's absence and make an independent life without him. In *Demasiado amor*, Beatriz is lonely because her sister has left for Italy so they can open a boarding house there. In order to combat this loneliness, Beatriz instead looks to fill the void physically with the company of men, both with her nameless weekend lover and with her clients during the week as a sex worker. In both novels, solitude combines with either the memory of absent lovers or of

present male lovers to keep the characters from being able to establish independent identities in their loss.

I want to show how both characters internalize what is absent, and even attempt to possess what is absent while it in turn consumes them, in order to preserve the physical and emotional connection to their lovers. Quiela keeps the absent Diego present by maintaining his art supplies and belongings in the apartment and through her letters, and Beatriz also surrounds herself with objects that remind her of her weekend lover and writes in her notebook about the lover. Here I refer to Diana Fuss's *Identification Papers* and her view of identification laid out by Freud and Lacan wherein the lost love-object is replaced in its absence (1). The attempt to replace the lost love-object results in the internalization of the other, which results in the self becoming tied to the absent object (1). In the example of Beatriz, she veers from sexual norms and transforms her transgression into an empowering sexual position. Her position is in line with the theory by José Esteban Muñoz on disidentification wherein the minority subject is able to "disidentify with the mass public and . . . contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere" (7) due to gender, race, or sexuality. Quiela and Beatriz, at first by way of this identification through the other, remain constricted by expectations of motherhood or marriage from which they cannot break away. The characters's identities and journeys are tightly bound to their male lovers in what is referred to as a complete "attachment to the master" in his absence. Both characters are consumed by their masters, and refer to the men as living inside of their bodies. This relates to the internalized identification from Fuss: in wishing to possess their lovers, the lovers continue to possess them. Their inability to move on from this possession results in an inability to develop autonomous

identities, but at the end of the novels after periods of self-discovery they are able to resist traditional representation and abnegation.

The female characters are able to break free from their attachment to their lovers only through the act of writing. *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* is solely composed of letters that Quiela addresses to Diego. There were real letters written by Angelina Beloff to Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, with whom she lived for a decade in France and had a son. The narration consists of the fictionalized letters³³ written to Diego after he went back to Mexico; the letters, and Quiela's inquiries and wants, remain unanswered. There is also a moment where Quiela has written a note to herself, which I will analyze as possibly the most important piece of writing in the narration for Quiela. In *Demasiado amor*, part of the novel is composed of letters Beatriz writes to her sister in Italy, and the other half is the journal entries written to a masculine *tú*. This *tú* is Beatriz's weekend lover, and although these sections are not actual letters, they closely resemble Quiela's letters to Diego; they are directed to male lover, written in the style of a confessional journal, and they are not answered. I wish to frame these texts with Susan Gubar's study of writing for women to underscore how letters and journals are forms of women's writing that are personal and reflect a private, interior space inhabited by women (251). Poniatowska and Sefchovich created protagonists that write as a form of resistance; it counters their destructive relationships with a private, feminine space for reflection during their processes of self-discovery and loss. Marina Pérez de Mendiola says that the memory associated with Beatriz's letters and journals acts as both self-reflection and catharsis (47). I also view the act of letter-writing as a performance of the self through the

³³ Not unlike Poniatowska's controversial testimonial voice of Jesusa, this narrative is composed of pieces of Beloff's letters from a secondary source, as I explain in the section on the novel.

written word, where Quiela and Beatriz project a certain version of themselves onto the letter to be read by Diego, the lover, or the sister. I now turn to a study of Quiela's journey of self-discovery through loss and solitude to explore her performance of femininity in excess through abnegation and later as resistance.

Quiela's Journey through Diego's Inferno

In *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*, Elena Poniatowska weaves together fact and fiction into a tale of a woman's personal losses in a similar literary style as seen in the last chapter in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*. The novel is composed of twelve letters that Quiela writes to her former lover Diego from October of 1921 to July of 1922. Diego has gone back to Mexico, his homeland, and Quiela, who is originally from Russia, is left to live on her own in Paris. The letters reveal that Quiela and Diego lived together in Paris for many years and that they had a son, Dieguito, who died in 1917 of meningitis. Diego and Quiela are artists, but Quiela expresses her lack of motivation to produce art; she has lost the motivation for almost everything in Diego's absence. She writes these twelve unanswered letters in which she tells him how much she misses him and wants him to return to her as she recounts their shared past and her current suffering. One night Quiela scribbles on the table to herself, and it is then that she breaks free from her seemingly ceaseless suffering. She then writes to him six months later only to thank him for sending her money, having realized her pleas are hopeless and resigning herself to accept his silence. These letters from Quiela to Diego are in fact reconstructions of letters written by Russian artist Angelina Beloff (1879-1969) to Mexican artist Diego Rivera³⁴ (1886-1957). Bertram Wolfe published his biography of Rivera in 1963, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*, in which Beloff was presented as a minor character in Rivera's life.

³⁴ Diego Rivera also appears in Chapter Four when I analyze Frida Kahlo's paintings.

Poniatowska took the pieces of the letters referenced in the biography and created a fictional reconstruction of them for the novel; Poniatowska's novel recuperates and affirms Beloff's silenced identity and voice (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, "Loss, Identification" 73-76). Throughout the letters it is apparent how she has given herself over completely to Diego although he is no longer present, only defining herself through him and through motherhood. The result is an identity defined by loss, solitude, silence, and death, or a non-identity through an absence. Quiela's journey into solitude through the letters becomes an act of self-reflection and to realize her true self, resulting in a final resistance against passive femininity.

Quiela rediscovers her identity through the act of writing. Her letters reveal how she misses her lover and how she attempts to regain either a sense of self or for him to return to her, but in doing so she focuses on her feelings of loss, pain, and self-erasure. In Quiela's writing, although he is no longer with her, she identifies herself completely with and through Diego. Every letter but the last has the tone of a desperate, broken-hearted plea for her lover to return to her; Quiela's world continues to revolve around him even in his absence. When first writing to him she describes the art she is working on and says "me encuentro bien haciendo paisajes un tanto dolientes y grises, borrosos y solitarios" ["I am comfortable making landscapes that are a bit painful and grey, blurry and solitary" (Poniatowska and Gardner 16; 17)].³⁵ These landscapes reflect her state of mind in Diego's absence, focusing on her loss and solitude in the grey winter of Paris she experiences while writing the letters. The description of the landscapes as blurry is reminiscent of another statement she makes: "Siento que también yo podría borrarne con

³⁵ In this chapter all translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Here the English translations of the novel come from the bilingual edition translated by Nathaniel Gardner.

facilidad” [“I feel like I too could be easily erased” (16; 17)]. The symbolic erasure of the self in her artwork epitomizes how she views herself in Diego’s absence. This is similar to my analysis of the Soldadera in the last two chapters who were viewed as *Juanas* or shadows, defined by the men or erased from the narrative of the Revolution. It is as though Diego as artist created her and then partially erased or destroyed her image on the paper before leaving. Her ability or desire to erase herself also indicates how she feels useless or unfulfilled without her lover. Quiela expresses similar sentiments later when she writes to Diego that “. . . después de todo, sin ti, soy bien poca cosa, mi valor lo determina el amor que me tengas y existo para los demás en la medida en que tú me quieras” [“after all, without you, I am not worth very much, my worth is determined by the love that you have for me and I exist for others only in the measure that you love me” (22; 23)]. The statement shows how she has given Diego the power to control how she feels about herself; his gaze determines her existence. Her inability to identify herself without Diego reveals a lack of self-constructed identity that traps her in loneliness and solitude, both from Diego and herself.

Quiela’s continued attachment to Diego not only reflects a strong loss of self but also how these losses have resulted in solitude and absences that drown Quiela in sorrow and pain. The following description of Quiela and her actions in Diego’s absence underscores how he continues to affect her body despite a lack of physical presence: “Te amo Diego, ahora mismo siento un dolor casi insoportable en el pecho. En la calle, así me ha sucedido, me golpea tu recuerdo y ya no puedo caminar y algo me duele tanto que tengo que recargarme contra la pared” [“I love you, Diego, now I feel a pain which is almost unbearable in my breast. On the street, that is how it has happened, your memory

strikes me and I can't walk and something hurts me so much that I have to lean against the wall" (20; 21)]. Rather than causing Quiela pain while being present those years before, it is Diego's absence, both physical and written, that hurts her. I wish to refer to Cynthia Steele's analysis of the novel in how, for Quiela, Diego is the incarnation of male power, be it social, erotic, or artistic, also pointing to the correlation between patriarchal male power and violence (21). Steele refers to Quiela's attachment to Diego as masochistic in the prolonged suffering he brings her (21); this traditional female suffering and abnegation revolves around pain, which I also address in my fourth chapter. The silence of her unanswered letters continues to fill the void with a physical and emotional pain, trapping her in the confines of *marianismo* as the suffering woman.

A crucial aspect of their current relationship is that, for Quiela, Diego is still present in her life despite his physical absence. He continues to control her behavior, thoughts, and emotions from across the ocean, and therefore Quiela's self-perception relates to the power of the male gaze, even in his absence, which results in her self-erasure. Quiela's relationship with Diego can be viewed as a "complete and utter attachment to the master and identification with him" (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 73); I agree with this description of Diego as Master, which helps explain why Quiela is unable to move beyond her now-ended relationship with her former lover. The power Diego unknowingly (or knowingly?) wields over Quiela does not fade until her last letter. Steele describes this contradiction of being more absent and yet more present as Quiela continues to obsess over Diego's silence (21). Here is one instance where Quiela refers to Diego and the silence she feels from her unanswered letters a month later: "yo me voy metida de nuevo en mi esfera de silencio que eres tú, tú y el silencio, yo adentro del

silencio, yo dentro de ti que eres la ausencia, camino por las calles dentro del caparazón de tu silencio” [“I continue on submerged in my sphere of silence that is you, you and silence, me inside silence; me inside you who are absence, I walk down the streets inside the shell of your silence” (22; 23)]. This quote illustrates how his silence has become a presence for Quiela; it has become a physical representation in Quiela’s studio, further embodied by the objects Diego left there that Quiela keeps, which I will analyze momentarily. While Quiela shrinks into a state of erasure and negation, Diego’s ominous silence and presence continue to grow.

One way that Quiela preserves her image of Diego and continues to need him is through her treatment of the apartment. Even though he is gone, she leaves all of his belongings as they are. Shortly after his departure, in her first letter Quiela describes the state of her apartment to him: “En el estudio, todo ha quedado igual, querido Diego, tus pinceles se yerguen en el vaso, muy limpios como a ti te gusta . . . como si estuvieras presente” [“In the studio everything has remained the same, dearest Diego, your paintbrushes are standing in their glass, very clean just as you like them” (16; 17)]. This stresses how Quiela preserves the apartment, as though she could will him to return by keeping his belongings out and therefore he would return. The problem with this is that, because she keeps his belongings around the apartment, they cause her pain through remembering her loss. The presence of the objects is made worse by the “presence” of Diego’s silence and absence, as seen in this excerpt:

Hoy como nunca te extraño y te deseo Diego, tu gran corpachón llenaba todo el estudio. No quise descolgar tu blusón del clavo en la entrada: conserva aún la forma de tus brazos, la de uno de tus costados. No he podido doblarlo ni quitarle el polvo por miedo a que no recupere su forma inicial y me quede yo con un hilacho entre las manos. Entonces sí, me sentaría a llorar. (22)

[Today like never before I miss you and I hunger for you Diego, your huge body filled the studio. I didn't want to take your smock down off the nail in the entrance: it still maintains the form of your arms, the form of one of your sides. I haven't been able to fold it or dust it for the fear that it won't be able to recover its initial shape and I am left with a rag in my hands. If that happened, then surely I would sit down and cry. (23)]

Here we see how Diego's smock keeps alive the illusion that Diego is there, filling the space as his smock maintains the form of his body as it hangs as a shrine to his absence. Quiela's inability to fold and dust the smock represent her inability to part with Diego, to fold up his memory and tuck it away so that she may progress past their relationship. She is motivated by love and by fear as she avoids confronting her loss through identification with objects, as stated by Fuss. His pencils and smock continue to bestow Diego with power over her that grows more powerful in his absence.

Quiela further remains attached to Diego through their shared passion for and production of art. Quiela has a difficult time producing art in Diego's absence, and in her letters she wishes for him to affirm her abilities, just as his gaze had affirmed her identity. In December she tells him how she had worked herself sick trying to produce art in the way that he once had done, working feverishly at night. Here she reveals that she felt possessed by Diego:

Pensé que tu espíritu se había posesionado de mí, que eras tú y no yo el que estaba dentro de mí, que este deseo febril de pintar provenía de ti y no quise perder un segundo de tu posesión. Me volví hasta gorda Diego, me desbordaba, no cabía en el que se movían. (28)

[I thought that your spirit had taken possession of me, that it was you and not me who was inside me, that this feverish desire to paint came from you and I didn't want to lose one second of your possession. I became fat Diego, I overflowed, I didn't fit in the studio, I was tall like you . . . I felt you over me, Diego, they were your hands and not mine that were moving. (29)]

What this shows is how Quiela chooses to channel his motivation and energy through her body since he does not encourage her in person or via letters. To return to Fuss's concept of replacing the love-object in its absence, in being possessed by him Quiela herself becomes Diego through this possession; he continues to consume her image. I also use this quote to show how she feels him over her, in an allusion to possible auto-eroticism she excuses with Diego's hands. Only he can give her sexual validation as well, so she channels his spirit to find such sexual fulfillment. The scene demonstrates again how Quiela gives herself over to Diego and his power for validation of both herself and her artwork. She is unable to take credit even for this artwork she produced, saying it is not her art because Diego's spirit was inside her. It is only at the end of the novel that Quiela can replace her frustrated solitude with artistic production and an identity as woman and artist.

This scene of artistic production requires a further discussion of symbolic sexual roles for Quiela and Diego. Despite her attempts, Quiela is unable to produce any art and therefore constantly faces a blank canvas. She also has left Diego's art supplies, including pencils and brushes, where they are in the apartment. Steele points to the metaphor of feminine page and masculine pen, referring to Quiela's inability to produce art as "*su propia esterilidad artistica*" ["her own artistic sterility" (25)]. Not only is Quiela unable to produce art in Diego's absence, but she is unable to produce more children, a subject I will discuss momentarily.³⁶ Diego's objects that she leaves out to encourage his return represent his masculine and phallic power, and while they are present in her space they keep her from producing her own art. Her creative block is the result of his masculine

³⁶ See another reference to the relationship between artistic production and reproduction in motherhood in Chapter 4 in my section on Frida Kahlo (again, one of Rivera's lovers).

influence permeating, or penetrating, her space. Additionally, in thinking of Quiela as the page, there is a correlation between the artistic page and her sexual organs in their ability to produce either children or art. Without Diego, however, she is unable to produce either. Steele views this relationship as one in which Quiela wishes for Diego to return so that he may use those artistic implements to draw on her white canvas (25). This relates to Gubar's description of the "blank page" of women against men's artistic creation on them. The view of the female body as a canvas situates Quiela in the social construct wherein women's bodies are marked, and even created, by culture, society, and even men because external forces enforce such norms (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 12); Diego then reformed Quiela, both writing on her body and actually writing her body. I agree with Steele's opinion that, in her dependence on Diego and negation of the self, Quiela's desire for his return mixes artistic and sexual production, or reproduction. The pencils on the drawing board represent her desire for him to return and cure her of her maternal and artistic sterility.

One way to track the development of Quiela's identity in the novel is to see the ways in which she defines herself in terms of both Diego and his national identity, or Mexicanness. We can see, in her attachment to Diego and erasure of herself, has caused Quiela to, as she calls it, become "Mexicanized." This demonstrates another way in which she lost her own identity in this acculturation, by appropriating his Mexican identity. For example, Quiela tells Diego in her letters about how she imitates his behavior, such as her painting or sleeping habits. Although he is gone she still follows the same routine and habits developed from their ten years together: "Mira Diego, durante tantos años que estuvimos juntos, mi carácter, mis hábitos, en resumen, todo mi ser sufrió

una modificación completa: me mexicanicé terriblemente y me siento ligada *par procuration* a tu idioma, a tu patria” [“Look Diego, during so many years that we were together, my character, my habits, in sum, my whole being suffered a complete modification: I was terribly Mexicanized and I feel linked *par procuration* to your language, your country” (50; 51, French in original italics, “by proxy”)]. Here I emphasize how, away from her Russian homeland, she adopts Diego’s language and nation as her own while in Paris. She further refers to this acculturation when she describes the sky, comparing the grey skies of Paris to the blue skies of Mexico that Diego used to describe to her (24; 25). Although she had not been to Mexico, she even visualizes Diego’s skies. Another example of how she has replaced her identity with Diego’s is that she lost the ability, as a Russian, to prepare tea. When some of her Russian friends come over, one is upset that she no longer has a samovar or tea, and when she does prepare him his own tea he claims she has ruined his tea from becoming so Mexicanized (56; 57). I refer to this moment because it demonstrates how Quiela took on Diego’s habits while living with him as though he were her new country; she adapted to his culture and adopted his customs. She even continues to learn Spanish, the tongue of her adopted nation. Just as we will see in *Demasiado amor*, Quiela does everything for Diego, including lose her own identity in order to give herself completely to him and be consumed by him. She is neither Russian nor Parisian nor Mexican; her nation is Diego.

As Quiela’s identity remains fragmented in its identification through Diego, another way she ties herself to him and experiences loss is as a mother. As mentioned, Quiela and Diego had a child, Dieguito, who died of meningitis as an infant. In her letters Quiela continues to mourn for her son and her lover: a double loss of Diego her lover and

Diego her son (Sifuentes-Jáuregui 72). These losses also Quiela's loss of her role as caretaker, of the maternal Mexican archetype of *Guadalupe*, in having acted as mother to both of them. Throughout the letters it is evident that the loss of her child continues to trouble her sense of self and fragment her. Here is what she writes in a letter in February after finding a portrait that Diego had painted of her: "veo a tres Angelinas; antes, durante y después del embarazo, veo mi vientre abultado en que te has detenido morosamente" ["I see three Angelinas; before, during and after the pregnancy, I see my swollen stomach on which you have paused lingeringly" (66; 67)]. While the painted image only shows one face, I use this quote to emphasize how, Quiela divides herself into three versions that revolve around motherhood. Although she refers to a time after pregnancy, there is also a fourth stage for her: after the death of her child. While it is impossible to no longer be a mother, her identity is complicated because while experiencing an erasure of the self she is unable to erase the fact she gave birth to a child who is now gone. For Quiela's loss of motherhood, there is a literary apostrophe. As she addresses Diego in her letters, she also addresses her dead son, Diego; in this double loss, Quiela directs her letters to an absent figure in double (Johnson 185, Sifuentes-Jáuregui 76). Even though Diego the father is not dead, even if his silence and absence are forms of death, both Diego and Dieguito remain silent in the face of Quiela's search for answers and healing, and without their responses Quiela is still trapped in this spiral of solitude.

The loss of her son and this state of fragmented maternal identity also further complicates Quiela's relationship and connection to Diego through motherhood. After the death of Dieguito Quiela wanted to have another child, but in her letters Quiela recounts how distant and removed Diego had become during and after her pregnancy. Quiela, in

her construction of her identity, clearly involves Diego in his contribution to her being a mother. She writes to him that “Siempre quise tener otro, tú fuiste el que me lo negaste. Sé que ahora mi vida sería difícil pero tendría un sentido. Me duele mucho Diego que te hayas negado a darme un hijo. El tenerlo habría empeorado mi situación pero ¡Dios mío cuánto sentido habría dado a mi vida!” [“I always wanted another one, you were the one that denied that to me. I know that my life would have been much more difficult but it would have a purpose. It hurts me deeply Diego that you denied me another child. To have one would have worsened my situation, but my God how much more meaning it would have given to my life!” (24; 25)]. I wish to underscore here how Quiela believes it was Diego’s job to make her a mother again, and therefore just as she blames him for why they did not have another child she also blames him for her subsequent misery and lack of fulfillment. This view of what another child would have brought her shows how she values and needs motherhood. This also shows how she was able to possess a part of Diego through having his child; with another child she would be relieved of her solitude and still possess a piece of Diego. Now she is alone, does not have Diego’s child and therefore part of Diego, and is no longer fulfilled in her connection to him through motherhood.

Another way to view Quiela as a mother is through her past relationship with Diego himself. Through a definition of mother as caretaker, in describing all that she did for Diego when they lived together, it is obvious that Quiela took care of the Mexican artist like a mother and now she misses caring for him.³⁷ This is hinted at in Quiela’s

³⁷ This is similar to the way that Frida Kahlo also viewed her relationship with Rivera, as seen in her paintings of him as a naked figure in her arms in *El abrazo amoroso del universo* (1949) or of him depicted as a boy in a photograph she holds in *Las dos Fridas* (1939).

description of the first time the two met. Apart from describing his eyes and the way he dominated the room, she also adds that he had “la ropa sucia y arrugada de un hombre que no tiene una mujer que lo cuide” “[your] dirty and wrinkled clothing of a man who doesn’t have a woman to take care of him” (72; 73)]. Another example is when she explains that she could not paint despite imitating Diego’s methods, and she says that at that time she wished there had been an Angelina to take care of her and make her eat so she would have avoided getting sick (28; 29). In essence, she wishes for someone to mother her at that time, and in her description of Diego’s clothes, she was wishing to mother him; she experiences maternal love toward Diego as well. This begs the question for the Mexican archetype of *la Guadalupe*: who takes care of the mothers? Quiela does not truly wish to have a husband again; she wishes to have a wife to care for her.

In summarizing Quiela’s attachment to Diego in terms of identity and motherhood with these examples, I see a critique of her stance as an attachment to the Master and as an insatiable need to identify herself as mother to validate herself as woman. One can view Quiela’s construction of the self in terms of what Judith Butler calls “the heterosexual matrix,” in which practices of gender and sex are determined by culture with a focus on compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, n6, qtd. in Sifuentes-Jáuregui 79). Quiela wishes to be a mother because she has been programmed by society to feel that way: in order to be a woman she must be a mother, either to Diego or to her son Dieguito. What results from these absences is a lack of identity and happiness for Quiela, as seen in the blame she directs at him above for keeping her from having a second child. Her letters to Diego reveal that she believes she is worthless if she is not a mother. It is only when she removes herself from this matrix and rejects culturally-driven

constructions of happiness through motherhood and worth that she is able to break free of Diego and redefine herself without him and outside of him.

This sexual identification and appropriation goes further in Quiela's use of Diego's art tools in a scene that may be viewed as either a moment of insanity or lucidity, and what could be interpreted as the most important piece of writing in the novel. In a letter from early January, Quiela explains that she found pieces of drawing paper with notes to herself. This is what was on the paper:

Diego definitivamente no está, pienso que no vendrá nunca y giro en el cuarto como alguien que ha perdido la razón. No tengo en qué ocuparme, no me salen los grabados, hoy no quiero ser dulce, tranquila, decente, sumisa, comprensiva, resignada, las cualidades que siempre ponderan los amigos. Tampoco quiero ser maternal; Diego no es un niño grande, Diego sólo es un hombre que no escribe porque no me quiere y me ha olvidado por completo. (46)

[Diego definitely is not here, I think that he won't ever come and I go around the room like someone who has gone mad. I don't have anything to do, my engravings don't turn out right, today I don't want to be sweet, calm, decent, submissive, understanding, resigned, the qualities that friends always praise. I don't want to be maternal either; Diego is not a big child, Diego is just a man who does not write because he does not love me and he has forgotten me completely. (47)]

This entry presents itself as the most significant letter in the novel, more so than any she writes to Diego. It is a letter to herself asking to escape the downward spiral of abnegation and self-erasure she has suffered in his absence. In the letter she gives herself permission to no longer be passive, no longer be a mother, no longer adhere to the heterosexual matrix for him but instead live and thrive without him. She uses the act of writing to free herself. After months of suffering through these multiple losses, trapped as *la abnegada*, Quiela is finally able to detach herself from Diego, first set into motion by a letter to herself that signifies the beginning of the end. Quiela also acknowledges that Diego is not a child, a first step in disconnecting from her role over him as maternal lover

related to *la Guadalupe*, rejecting this heterosexual matrix. In her months of writing to him, of unanswered letters, the last letter in July is written six months later. This is revealed to be because she had not wanted to continue writing to him: “No había querido escribirte porque me resulta difícil callar ciertas cosas que albergo en mi corazón y de las cuales ahora sé a ciencia cierta que es inútil hablar. Tomo la pluma sólo porque juzgaría descortés no darte las gracias por el dinero que me has enviado” [“I hadn’t wanted to write you because it is difficult to stifle certain things that I harbor in my heart and which I know for sure are useless to speak about. I am taking my pen in hand only because I would judge it to be impolite not to thank you for the money that you have sent me” (74; 75)]. Quiela demonstrates how her self-revelation in the scribble revealed to her that her pleading and wishes for him to return and to answer him are useless. At the end of this letter she informs him that it will be her last, but in the postscript she asks him his opinion of her engravings once again (76; 77). Even as she attempts to sever this line of communication with him she still seeks his approval of Quiela as artist, yet this realization helps her to define herself outside of Diego’s power. The act of writing not to Diego but to herself in her scribble is what allows her to now create or restore an identity away from the Master and the heterosexual matrix as she moves forward with her life and her art.

While this letter she scribbled to herself is the turning point of the novel, we must analyze the moment and what allows her this self-revelation. In this declaration of independence from Diego, as I mentioned above, Steele explains that she is also affirming a desire to free herself from traditional female roles like passivity and submissiveness (26); she throws off the yolk of *marianismo* and of *la abnegada*. In

addition to this move away from female archetypes and stereotypes, the sentence that follows in her letter to Diego says that she wrote the last part so ferociously that she almost ripped the paper with the pen (46). Steele points to the fact that this negation of female roles is written with one of Diego's drawing tools, and done so violently; she takes on male aggression when writing on the paper (26). She enacts a role that is opposite of her female passivity by taking up the male phallus-pen; she breaks from the role of female muse and blank page for the man's tools in order to become an active subject and artist, and uses a male instrument to do so. This moment of phallic assertion resembles the women of the Mexican Revolution who used male dress or weapons for their transgressive femininity. They had to adapt other gendered markers to create a femininity that functioned actively in the Revolution, just as Quiela must also use other gendered objects like the phallus-pen. It does not make her performance male but rather part of a spectrum of gender that escapes binaries as she appropriates this male power of the pen.

What becomes evident both at the end of the novel and by its very genre is Quiela's eventual freedom and self-discovery away from Diego. In writing her letters Quiela maps out her own journey and versions of herself she has performed for Diego. In discussing Quiela's fragmented self through her forced identity as a mother, there is another fragmentation she experiences in the text: that of the letters themselves. Schaefer points to the work of scholars on the history of letter-writing, outlining the fact that epistolary genres are, by nature, fragmented and incomplete in their telling of events (66). Quiela, therefore, is presented to the reader in a fragmented manner through these twelve letters that do not tell her whole story but rather only her performance for Diego on paper.

Juan Bruce-Novoa's analysis of the novel likens Quiela's letters to a mirror; "only then is her life, her self-image, set outside her as if seen in a mirror positioned to reflect her. In this sense the letters are part of the encountering of her objectified self for the first time, and thus can function in a healing mode" (127). I agree that there is a dual reflection in the text within the Spanish wordplay on "reflect" as *reflejar* and *reflexionar*; Quiela sees her reflection in the letters and she is then able to reflect upon her identity and experiences. The act of writing leads her to this self-awareness where she can see herself reflected in her writing, which comes to a head in her scribble to herself. Quiela's own history, one individual and one tied to Diego, is revealed in these letters, and what remains is a written literary creation that is also a creation of the self. In essence, the novel is Quiela.

I would like to address another way that the written text affects Quiela and her resistance to traditional structures of womanhood and motherhood. After having discussed the many losses and fragmentations of Quiela, the novel itself and therefore the protagonists's letters serve as a contrast to all of the losses Quiela recalls while writing, and unknowingly also combats her loss of motherhood as self. While the act of writing the letters produces this new autonomous Quiela away from Diego, it has served as another form of production that unknowingly benefits Quiela. Sifuentes-Jáuregui notes the symbolic nature of the letters: "Quiela's illusions for a child are not figurative, but uncannily literal: this last letter ends nine months and three days after the first one. The text is her child. Thus, the real child is replaced by a 'literary' child. The text fulfills her illusions of motherhood" (77). This underscores how the structure of Poniatowska's novel itself takes the letters Quiela writes or produces and gives her a surrogate pregnancy

where the novel is her child that she made for Diego. As she no longer suffers as deeply as she did at the start, she feels satisfaction through having written these letters because they occupy the space of child and motherhood for her as a literary creation. Therefore just as Quiela once experienced the dual loss of Diego-Dieguito, through the writing of the letters she also has made the dual creation of self and child where the text represents her and her child as a literary production or re-production.

In *Querido Diego* the relationship between woman and text demonstrates how, through the act of writing, Poniatowska allows Quiela to resist her dependent and traditional female role as lover and mother like *la Guadalupe* to reassert her identity outside of her relationship to Diego. This is similar to the examples in the last two chapters of how women resisted traditional passivity and created more active roles in the Mexican Revolution. Just as they refused to follow the expected script of femininity or womanhood, so did Quiela refuse to adhere to *marianismo* as *la madre abnegada* at the end of the novel. Quiela's personal journey takes her through the heterosexual matrix of seeking validation and identification as lover and mother, which initially began with descriptions of her suffering and feelings of erasure, a loss of self. It is only when she returns to her identity as a female artist, taking Diego's tools and rejecting submissive, maternal behavior and ceasing to be controlled and consumed by Diego, that she can discover her own autonomy. This moment occurs in what I see as the most significant letter of the novel: when she scribbles the note to herself using Diego's masculine art implements on the feminine white page. While she might still be affected by him and remain a "Mexicanized" Russian in France, Quiela is able to separate herself from the relationship and away from the Master, no longer defined by the absence of her "other."

And, in a textual twist, despite not being a mother again, the nine months of letters represent a literary child and a rebirth for Quiela away from Diego. She has united the Three Angelinas and become one singular, self-defined Quiela. In my reading of the letters as the discovery of Quiela's whole self, this parallels Poniatowska's own act as author in reconstructing the Angelina Beloff from the shadow of Diego Rivera's biography and giving Beloff her own autonomy and voice in the letters (Schaefer 65). In the novel *Demasiado amor* we also see many of these same themes; a woman's loss of identity through her relationship to a lover; divided or fragmented identities; resisting heterosexual norms and gender structures; and the use of written letters as a journey of self-discovery. The protagonist, Beatriz, is a woman whose assertion of her sexuality is shaped by her relationship with her lover and her identity as a sex worker. At the end of the novel she is able to resist societal expectations and find happiness, a process achieved by the narrator through her written letters and journal.

Down with Love: The Journey to Become a Sex Worker

The manner in which Quiela came to declare her own identity outside of Diego's grasp was through the act of letter-writing, which allowed her to break from traditional models of womanhood and motherhood. In *Demasiado amor* by Sara Sefchovich, the protagonist, Beatriz, experiences this same journey of self-discovery through women's writing to reject traditional or acceptable models of womanhood. In the novel, Beatriz wishes to open a boarding house in Italy with her sister, so the sister departs for Italy and Beatriz stays in Mexico to earn the necessary money. She works as a secretary, but at night she begins to go to the Vips restaurant to meet men. After taking a few men home, one pays her after they sleep together, and from there Beatriz begins a small business on

weekday evenings. Additionally she has a lover she sees only on the weekends, and they travel all over Mexico: sight-seeing, eating, dancing, singing, making love, and buying handcrafts and souvenirs. At the end of the novel Beatriz decides to no longer help her sister open the boarding house in Italy but instead transforms her apartment into a makeshift brothel as she and the weekend lover part ways; she accepts her life as a sex worker³⁸ and finds fulfillment in her lifestyle. The narration is divided between letters Beatriz writes to her sister and a journal she writes directed at the weekend lover. The narration and Beatriz herself are fragmented, split between identities as: sex worker and lover; lover and sister; subject and object; and other and self. The fragmented narrations and selves provide Beatriz with a written, personal journey through which she is able to develop into her own true self independent of the weekend lover, her sister, and traditional womanhood. Her role as a sex worker allows her to break from the traditional story of the “fallen woman,” offering a version of selling one’s body where the woman retains power and experiences pleasure.

To begin, I wish to show how Beatriz is fragmented, and one example is that the novel begins with her dual solitude, similar to Quiela’s. While solitude is what kept Quiela from establishing her identity without Diego, for Beatriz her solitude without her sister is instead what motivates her actions. The reader learns that Beatriz does not wish to be by herself, that the traditional solitude of Mexican women makes her anxious.

Although at moments she is surrounded by her clients and her weekend lover, she writes to her sister that “¿Sabes de qué tengo la impresión? Que la gente anda muy sola, con

³⁸ Felicia Fahey criticizes Elvira Sánchez-Blake and her use of the word “prostitute” in analyzing the novel. Here I agree with Fahey’s assertion and therefore refer to Beatriz as a sex worker as well. A prostitute takes her role in misfortune like the fallen woman and answers to a pimp or madam, but a sex worker chooses her profession and remains in control of her clients.

ganas de pasarlo bien y sobre todo con ganas de hablar y que alguien escuche” [“Know what I think? That people are alone, wanting to enjoy themselves and above all to talk and for someone to listen” (64)]. Her view of people’s basic need for company helps to explain her own feelings and actions throughout the novel. In the narration of letters, she writes to her sister in Italy to feel they are still close, telling her of the on-goings of her life, including some details about her lovers. In the narration addressed to her lover, she writes to him in a past tense, having ended their relationship and now, in his absence, she reflects on everything she experienced and learned with him. This dual solitude for Beatriz at the start of the novel without her sister and her lover, at different points in linear time, first situates her in the traditionally passive space of female loneliness and suffering, the same as seen with Quiela. In one of her first letters to her sister, Beatriz closes with “No aguanto las lágrimas. No aguanto el dolor de esta separación” [“I can’t stand the tears. I can’t stand the pain of this separation” (16)]. Without her sister Beatriz feels not only pain but also a physical lack, and she fills this void with her lovers at Vips. She replaces her familial relationship with a sexual one to avoid being alone. However, her relationship with her weekend lover is more complex. Although they spend weekends together for years and form a strong bond, because it is rooted in sex, there is an emotional distance between the lovers. To analyze the novel and the ways Beatriz replaces loneliness with the company of and sex with men, I will first focus on her identity as a sex worker and then move to her identity with her weekend lover to compare how the separate relationships fragment Beatriz until she accepts her identity as a sex worker, is no longer lonely, and finds happiness.

As Beatriz negotiates female roles, it becomes apparent that her motivation at first was to avoid solitude, but by the end of the novel she also avoids other traditionally passive female roles. As I have mentioned, within Mexican gender roles and the acceptable archetype of *la Guadalupe* there is little to no discussion of women's sexuality because *la Guadalupe* is devoid of sexuality. Despite the expectation of the mother to bear children, there is no discussion of the sexual act that produces said children. The role of prostitute, of *la Chingada*, is also devoid of female sexuality because it caters to male sexuality, pleasures, and desires. In essence, then, the trinity of female roles of virgin, mother, and whore serve men and society at large, whether in the open or behind red shades. I agree with Delgado Merrill's assessment of Beatriz as a sex worker or prostitute wearing her sexuality on her sleeve, that "Esta imagen contraviene el estereotipo femenino referente a la pasividad de la mujer y a la negación del placer sexual" ["this image contradicts the feminine stereotype that refers to a woman's passivity and negation of sexual pleasure" (100)]. I find Donna Guy's description of the role of the prostitute in the construction of Latin American nations useful for this Mexican study. Nation-building focused on social order where women were tied to the family, and therefore any woman outside these traditional family structures was a threat to the nation (2-3). The prostitute existed outside of these social, family structures as a threat to the nation because of her ability to have children outside of the family unit, giving men less control. While Beatriz does not wish to have children, she inverts passive female norms devoid of sexuality and creates a new form of womanhood.

Beatriz chooses to have sex for money in order to acquire funds for the boarding house. The traditional role of the prostitute is one of passivity, where the male client and

male pimp both retain control over her. Here I wish to refer to Rosario Castellanos's play *El eterno femenino* and how she addresses the Mexican prostitute in her theatrical farce.

In this scene a prostitute tells the new girl to not tell her clients the true story of how she came into prostitution:

PROSTITUTA: Porque desanimas a la clientela. El cliente, métete bien ésto en la choya, es un enemigo. Y lo que le gusta es pensar que te está chingando. Que eres una infeliz, tan infeliz que ni siquiera te das cuenta de si él es muy macho o no. Tan desdichada que, aunque sea un desdichado cabrón, seas tú la que provoque lástima, no él. ¿Y quién va a creer en tu desgracia si no caíste contra tu voluntad? (154-155)

[PROSTITUTE: Because you discourage the clientele. The client, get this in your head, is the enemy. And what he likes is to think that he's fucking you. That you are unhappy, so unhappy that you don't even realize if he's very macho or not. So unfortunate that, although he's an unfortunate jerk, you're the one who provokes pity, not him. And who's going to believe in your misfortune if you didn't fall against your will?]

The humor in this scene points to society's need for the prostitute to be a "fallen woman" passive to the sexual dominance of the male client, in a space of vulnerability for men that results in their need for a prostitute and yet causes them to condemn and fear them in a cycle of self-loathing. Therefore Beatriz's role should be to remain passive and obey her clients's wishes without pleasure. In her relationship to her weekend lover she is also passive, accepting his will over her and his possession of her as she follows him all over the country. However, once she claims her identity as a sex worker, as she has no authority to report to, she sets her own fees and standards and establishes an active role in her job.

I want to stress in Beatriz's role as a sex worker that not only did she not follow the traditional paths for women of mother or virgin, but neither as a sex worker did she follow the traditional path of "the fallen woman." Rather than having been forced into having sex for money, it happens by accident and does not subordinate her as a sexual

object and tool. Beatriz explains how she goes to the restaurant Vips at night and begins taking men home with her, but she does not at first do so for money. One night, however, a man leaves her money; “Antes de irse me dejó un poco de dinero sobre la mesa. Primero me sorprendió que lo hiciera y después me dio una ofensa enorme y me puse a llorar. Pero ya se había ido, no había forma de devolvérselo. Y ¿sabes algo?, luego pensé que era justo porque por estar con él no había yo adelantado nada de mi trabajo” [“Before leaving he left me a little money on the table. First it surprised me that he did it and after it I was hugely offended and I began to cry. But he had already left, there was no way to return it to him. And you know what? I later thought that it was fair because from being with him I hadn’t gotten ahead in my work” (55)]. Beatriz had been taking extra work home from the office to earn more money, but in entertaining her visitors she was unable to work; this is how she justifies to her sister that she accepts the money, to earn money for their Italian enterprise. Sefchovich’s narration provides humorous wordplay on the subject; Debra A. Castillo points out that before Beatriz reveals the truth of her sexual adventures to her sister, she covers up her relationship with the man mentioned above who left her money, and simply claims that a man comes to the Vips and gives her money, that “cada vez que viene, me regala dinero” [“every time he comes he gives me money” (Sefchovich 47)]. Castillo points out the wordplay in both Spanish and English on the verb “to come” or *venir* (145). Beatriz says this before revealing to the sister that she is sleeping with the man; the verb reveals the true nature of these monetary exchanges. The partnering of her client’s arrival with his sexual satisfaction is what keeps Beatriz in business with a steady supplemented income.

It is significant that Beatriz quickly moves from being offended by the gesture to accepting it and capitalizing on it. That she would take offense at the implication that she has sex for money, that she is a prostitute, shows the societal views toward women in that line of work. I find it noteworthy that in her letters to her sister, while Beatriz describes what she does for work on the side, she does not mention outright that she is a sex worker. The sister realizes the truth, however, and voices a strong condemnation (which we do not read), to which Beatriz responds: “Tres veces dices que mi trabajo ‘tiene un nombre muy claro’ y las tres veces pusiste ese nombre con mayúsculas” [“Three times you say that my work ‘has a very clear name’ and three times you put that name in capital letters” (93)]. While there is no direct mention of the word, the reader is able to fill in the literary gap that points to either Beatriz’s refusal or denial to accept her own situation (Castillo 145). Here Sefchovich is reckoning back to the novel *Santa*, the famous figure of the fallen prostitute who is forced into the sordid trade of selling her body for money to make a living. In that novel there is no actual mention of this literally “unspeakable” profession, as I will mention in the next chapter. While Beatriz is neither a fallen woman nor a prostitute, the sister’s opinion acts as the critical voice of society that judges Beatriz harshly for her line of (sex) work. There is irony in that it is the sister, a woman, who harshly criticizes Beatriz’s actions. The sister’s criticism contrasts starkly with Beatriz’s actions, as well as this allusion to *Santa*; rather than being taken to market in selling her flesh through sex, here “the commodity *does* take itself to market and becomes an active partner in the mechanism of social exchange” (Castillo 137, original italics). Beatriz’s profession resists societal constraints for women, as does her personal satisfaction and

gratification with her profession, and it is this gratification that contrasts with the fulfillment believes she has at first in her weekend lover.

I now wish to look at Beatriz's relationship to her weekend lover and how it contrasts how she views herself as a sex worker and with this one weekend lover. Beatriz has already established herself in her job as a sex worker at Vips when she meets the lover and forms an obsessive relationship with him, in a relationship similar to Quiela's identification with and through Diego, "the master." Beatriz's infatuation with the man is evident from the minute she sets eyes on him: "Y de repente, tú te paraste y yo me paré, tú caminaste hasta la caja y yo caminé detrás de ti, tú te formaste en la cola y yo me formé atrás de ti, como advertencia de lo que sería mi vida pero que entonces no supe ver" ["And suddenly, you got up and I got up, you walked to the register and I walked behind you, you got in line and I got in line behind you, like a warning of what my life would be but that then I didn't see it" (17)]. What should be emphasized here is not just her immediate attraction and desire to be near the man but also how she is willing to follow him anywhere. As in the case of Diego and Quiela, he becomes her "master," and in their travels she follows him all over Mexico to be with him physically and sexually. When she reflects on their experiences in the journal, this is one way she justifies their time together: "Por ti metí los pies en el lodo, pasé vergüenzas, oí conferencias, compré unos zapatos de piel, un día me emborraché y muchos se me fueron en llorar. Todo lo hice por sentirte dormir pegado a mí y por amanecer contigo" ["For you I put my feet in mud, was shamed, heard conferences, bought leather shoes, one day I got drunk and many left me crying. I did everything to feel you sleep against me and to wake up with you" (57)]. I view this moment not only as a desire for sexual intimacy but also as her

desire to not sleep alone; she is afraid to be alone without her sister's company. She lists the many uncomfortable situations she suffers through all over Mexico in order to be with this man. She writes many times that she did everything for him, therefore putting aside her own desires in order to satisfy his, admitting a lack of autonomy and becoming *la abnegada*. At the end of the novel, when she is working through leaving him, she even states in the journal that “yo he tenido contigo una obsesión, una enfermedad” [“With you I have had an obsession, a sickness” (220)], admitting the detrimental effects of her attachment to her lover. As Quiela did after Diego's departure, so too must Beatriz travel her physical and emotional journey with her weekend lover before she is able to realize her identity without him.

The relationship between Beatriz and this nameless weekend lover is sexual and based on his connection to her body. In the journal to him Beatriz describes their first night together:

Dos días y dos noches que me tuviste desnuda, echada sobre la cama, parada junto a la ventana, a gatas sobre el tapete, debajo de la regadera, sentada en el excusado, subida en el lavamanos, volando sobre las sillas para hacerme el amor . . . Dos días y dos noches en las que dentro de mi cuerpo escurrió agua, mantequilla, vino, saliva y miel, porque todo ese tiempo dentro de mi cuerpo habitaste tú y todos los objetos de ese cuarto y de entre mis piernas salieron frutas y panes que tu boca mordió. (18)

[Two days and two nights you had me naked, thrown on the bed, up against the window, on all four on the rug, under the bath faucet, seated on the toilet, up on the sink, flying over the chairs to make love to me . . . Two days and two nights during which inside my body ran water, butter, wine, saliva and honey, because all that time, inside my body, you and all the objects of that room lived, and from between my legs came fruit and bread that your mouth chewed.]

First, I use this scene, one of many that Beatriz narrates in the journal, to describe the sexual nature of their trips around the country. This can be considered love or sex in excess in that it goes on for several days and happens all over the apartment, similar to a

scene I will analyze in my fifth chapter. Beatriz describes their love-making almost as much as she describes the other details of their trips, rarely even listing what they talked about; with him she goes on a physical and sexual journey. Second, I wish to emphasize how she connects her body to objects for consumption like wine and honey, just as Diego consumed Quiela. This description of the female body as being consumed by the male is fitting for both Beatriz's relationships with her clients as a sex worker and this personal relationship to her weekend lover. As Castillo says of the novel, "In dominant cultural discourse, 'sex' and the erotic describe the site of objectification in which women become consumable things among a plethora of other consumer items" (143); Beatriz is dependent upon her attachment to the lover, or "master," and he is the one who consumes her body through sex. Felicia Fahey compare this narration to the story of the Conquest (109). This turns Beatriz's attachment to the master into the image of the woman's body as the country conquered by the male soldiers during the Conquest, turning Beatriz into the *Malinche* figure to her lover's Cortés. Finally, Beatriz says that the man and objects lived inside of her, like when Quiela said that Diego possessed her through her memories. She gives him her body sexually in a gesture that gives him food, drink, and a home. Her surrender culminates in her assertion that "Tú fuiste mi dueño, el que de mí se adueñó" ["You were my owner, the one who made himself my owner" (179)]. This stresses how her body and self are no longer her own: she gave him ownership over her through possession and consumption, taking away her autonomy.

Two additional ways Beatriz and her weekend lover mirror the relationship between Quiela and Diego are through the man's silence and the preservation of objects tied to him. As in *Querido Diego*, in which Quiela's letters remain unanswered, Beatriz

too desires to fill the silences of the solitude she experiences. While Beatriz writes in her journal of all the travels, adventures, objects, and actions they share, she rarely includes their conversations; their relationship is purely sexual. Beatriz's written journal serves to fill in the lover's silences with her own memories and words as she writes for him in the same monologue fashion found in Quiela's letters, in the style of one-sided epistolary writing. Additionally, just as Quiela keeps Diego's things around the apartment, so too does Beatriz fill her apartment with souvenirs from their travels. Half of the novel is a lengthy list of details from their journeys together, in the style of a travelogue, and each place they go she buys something to remember it by; the objects take over her apartment and even to a certain extent replace her. Beatriz writes that "Y allí iba yo comprando todas las artesanías que veía, no para adornar mi casa como tú creías sino para traerme pedacitos de los lugares en donde tanto te amé" ["And there I was buying all the handicrafts that I saw, not to decorate my house like you believed but to bring me pieces of the places where I loved you so" (31)]. She keeps the objects like artifacts of their relationship and love-making in the same way that Quiela keeps Diego's belongings untouched in the apartment, creating a museum or shrine of possessions to possess. By possessing the objects she feels she can preserve their relationship, like Diego's art supplies and Quiela's wish for another child. Later Beatriz discovers the souvenirs are empty for her; in the end she has an apartment filled with objects but is no closer to possessing or knowing her weekend lover. I use Castillo's analysis of the objects to emphasize the complex nature of Beatriz's relationship to the lover, in that the travel and purchases slow down on the page to become a "timeless still life" (149), just as Quiela was at a stand-still emotionally before the letter she writes to herself. The juxtaposition of

the couple's movement through travel and how the objects weigh Beatriz down reveals her emotional stasis in the relationship.

Beatriz's refusal to obey passive norms for women results in a non-traditional view of motherhood throughout the novel. Beatriz has sex with many men for money and also has her relationship with her weekend lover, and at no point is there any mention of her wanting to get married or have children. These two norms for Mexican women's archetypes do not fit into her personal plans, and she therefore avoids getting pregnant and becoming ensnared in these passive, non-sexual roles. Here is what Beatriz writes to her sister once she has started sleeping with the men at Vips: "Me siento muy rara desde ese día. Por muchas razones. Porque no tenía ninguna protección y me da miedo quedar embarazada" ["I've felt weird, since that day, for many reasons. Because I didn't have any protection and I'm scared about getting pregnant" (40)]. I wish to focus on her fear and how it reveals that she does not want to get pregnant and become a mother. In these letters and journals Beatriz contrasts giving birth and having an abortion. At one point she writes in the journal directed at her lover about a time he kept bringing up marriage, which she intertwines with another list of Mexican goods: "me diste un caracol como Quetzalcóatl, un espejo de obsidiana como Tezcatlipoca y una olla llena de pulque porque eso es lo que toman las mujeres después del parto" ["you gave me a shell like Quetzalcóatl, an obsidian mirror like Tezcatlipoca and a pot full of *pulque* because that is what women drink after giving birth" (148)]. The inclusion of the Mexican god Quetzalcóatl, or the feathered serpent, is significant as he is known to represent fertility, and it is said that the gods Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca created the earth. *Pulque* is an alcoholic Mexican drink that comes from the fermented juices of the maguey cactus, said

here to be associated with women giving birth. That the shell can be said to symbolize the vulva and vagina, therefore the lover essentially hands Beatriz objects representing fertility, creation, the female body, and therefore motherhood. While lists of such Mexican objects from the couple's journey are not new in the narration, it is the detail about giving birth that contrasts with Beatriz's fear of becoming pregnant. The combination of these objects and Beatriz's discomfort with pregnancy and motherhood predicts her resistance to traditional womanhood.

While Beatriz never says outright why she does not wish to have children, details in the narration demonstrate her desire to live a sexual life without them. Beatriz's next letter to her sister reveals why the *pulque* is an even more salient detail: Beatriz has just had an abortion when the lover presents her with the symbolic *pulque*:

Me tardé en escribirte porque ha sido para mí un tiempo muy malo. Tuve que hacerme un aborto y te juro que no existe nada más espantoso en vida. Desde buscar al medicucho que lo quiera hacer hasta aguantar sus burlas y malos tratos y desde conseguir el dineral que cobra hasta vivir esa experiencia terrible; te aseguro que sufrí mucho. Pero ¿qué remedio quedaba? . . . Y encima, sola. (148)

[It took me a while to write to you because the timing's been bad for me. I had to have an abortion and I promise you there's nothing scarier in the world. From looking for a quack willing to do it to tolerating the jokes and horrible treatment and from getting all the money to cover it to living that terrible experience; I assure you I suffered greatly. But what other option was there? . . . And above all, being alone.]

Here the letters to her sister parallel the journal entries to her lover chronologically, with the mention of the *pulque* in the journal followed immediately by the mention of her abortion in the letter. While Beatriz is afraid of being alone, she does not wish to have the company of a child the way Quiela does, and she therefore undergoes this traumatizing ordeal to avoid becoming a mother. The reader then realizes that Beatriz most likely drank the *pulque* with her lover either while still pregnant or soon after the abortion. The

letter also highlights the social stigma of abortions for Mexican women at the time; her experience would not be an isolated incident, with women all over the country being reprimanded for having an abortion. With the societal pressure for women to get married and have children, in line with *la Guadalupe*, Beatriz's abortion transgresses that expectation as she focuses on her own pleasures.

In dividing herself between her office job, her evening clients, and her weekend lover, Beatriz experiences a fragmentation of her different selves. The narration is split between Beatriz the sex worker who earns money to open a boarding house with her sister and Beatriz the lover to her nameless weekend man and their travels together. Even the narration itself is split between the letters and journal entries. Fahey describes Beatriz's fragmented selves through the term "mental nepantilism" from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera*, wherein she describes how one can be in between two spaces or binaries: "In this way the bi-textual narrative reveals Beatriz's double consciousness and her process of coming to terms with her fractured identity. Moving back and forth between her fantasy world and her day to day life we witness her negotiate the 'two ways' of being that she has embraced" (106). She negotiates these two ways of being, these two selves, until she chooses sex work over her would-be monogamous relationship. Beyond being divided by her weekend lover, she is also split between being in Mexico and in Italy with her sister, and by her day job as secretary and her night job as sex worker in a division of sexual selves. As a sex worker she breaks from the passivity of traditional Mexican roles by being an active sexual subject, yet with her weekend lover, in giving herself over completely to him, she remains passive. After the first passionate encounter with her weekend lover, Beatriz writes to her sister: "Ahora soy dos

personas, una que trabaja y una que vuela, una que existe en la tierra de lunes a jueves y otra que se instala en el paraíso de viernes a domingo” [“Now I’m two people, one that works and one that flies, one on the ground Monday to Thursday and another that settles in paradise from Friday to Sunday” (71)]. Her multiple selves are explained further when she writes in the journal entries to him later on that: “Fui dos, tres, diez mujeres para ti. Todas las mujeres que tú querías yo las fui. Con tal de que nunca te enojaras, nunca te alejaras, que nunca volviera esa tu mirada ausente” [“I was two, three, ten women for you. All the women that you wanted, I was. So that you would never be angry at me, would never leave me, that your absent look would never return” (220)]. In her tone there is the indication that this split self was painful and detrimental to her; being many women for him did not make her happy. Later, however, she learns that another kind of multiple selves satisfies her.

At the end of the novel, Beatriz realizes she must leave her weekend lover as she embraces her positive identity as a sex worker, having become aware of the destructive nature of their relationship. As she resists the expected, monogamous path of womanhood, she acknowledges what she learned from her years of trips with her weekend lover, lessons she repeats throughout her journal entries: “Aprendí a respirar, a romper los límites, hallarle gusto a la felicidad. . . . Contigo viví en un encanto místico, en un milagro” [“I learned to breathe, to break the limits, to find pleasure in happiness . . . With you I lived in a mystical enchantment, in a miracle” (69)]. After all of the dancing, singing, laughing, partying, and sex, she understands that the journeys all over Mexico with him brought her to her true self in a journey of self-realization similar to Quiela’s. Beatriz learned that she would not find happiness with him, as a secretary, or in the

boarding house in Italy. She is able to see this happiness without her lover when she realizes the destructive effect of her own obsessive relationship:

Para que me amaras, para que nunca miraras a otra, para que jamás te fueras, le recé a todas las vírgenes y a todos los santos. Y para soportar tanta angustia probé la acupuntura, las calabacitas crudas, los masajes de relajación y las técnicas de grito, las galletas de avena y las pastillas de miel. Probé respirar hondo, aullar a todo volumen, brincar y correr. Hasta probé llorar. Pero tú no te diste cuenta, tú nunca supiste nada de mí. (220)

[So you would love me, so you would never look at another woman, so you would never leave, I prayed to all the virgins and saints. And to stand such anguish I tried acupuncture, raw squash, relaxing massages and shouting techniques, oat cookies and honey pills. I tried deep breathing, howling at full volume, jumping and running. Until I tried crying. But you didn't realize it, you never knew anything about me.]

The physical, emotional, and psychological effects of her obsession and their relationship on her are powerful, and he remains ignorant to her suffering. Not unlike the effects of Diego on Quiela in his absence, Beatriz suffers emotional stress that causes her to end the relationship. What is notable is that while she was learning about herself he learned nothing of her, like the one-sided relationship in Quiela's letters to Diego. With the revelation of her true identity, Beatriz transitions into her life as a sex worker and rejects forms of feminine passivity that include identification through her lover and with motherhood. Rather than solitude, she is now filled with satisfaction and autonomy in her new profession.

I now wish to explore Beatriz's own perception of her performance as a sex worker. With her lover she sees herself split into multiple women for him, and she also has her separate lives of secretary and sex worker. When she discovers the destruction of these fragmented identities, she chooses to embrace her identity as a sex worker. This identity for her is composed of layers that again exist outside of normal constructs for women. Beatriz compares her role as a sex worker to a kind of theater. As she writes to

her sister: “Es más, el dinero es lo de menos. Me gusta el teatrillo de seducir y de cambiar de personalidad según lo que quiera el señor en turno. Cada noche puedo ser otra una vez, seis veces, diez veces” [“What’s more, the money is the least of it. I like the little theater of seducing and of changing my personality according to what the man wants. Each night I can be someone else, one time, six times, ten times” (217)]. While she performs as a different woman based on the client’s demands, one could argue that she loses autonomy in her performance. However, while the client chooses how he wants her to be, she finds pleasure in the performance. While previously with her lover she only found destruction in her multiple selves, she now finds satisfaction in being multiple people. Here Beatriz performs as a transgressive female sex worker. This returns to the performance theory of Laura Gutiérrez of same-sex masquerade, where women play a female role on stage to act out femininity, rather than men performing femininity in drag, for example (118). The layering of female identities onto one female body in such a performance is a way to represent and critique many gendered representations of Latin American femininity and roles (118).³⁹ It is through these feminine sexual performances that Beatriz finds fulfillment and happiness, without relationships, monogamy, or matrimony. In her last letter to her sister she writes that she is finished with love and will now only seek out simple pleasures (Sefchovich 240). While they may seem to be selfish pleasures, she is now happy in this empowered role of the woman who has sex for money.⁴⁰

³⁹ In analyzing performance artist Astrid Hadad, Gutiérrez writes that “Hadad’s same-sex masquerade is a critique of the construction of gender – more so than male-to-female drag in the sense that the multiple stage personas and female representations that the artist appropriates from Latin American popular culture are highlighting the constructedness of femininity” (118).

⁴⁰ Beatriz is in charge of her own sex work; she does not report to a pimp.

In refusing motherhood and traditional female passivity, Beatriz transformation into a sex worker is paralleled in how she transforms her apartment into a physical space that avoids domesticity. At the end of the novel Beatriz remodels her apartment to make it exclusively serve her business of pleasures: “Yo aquí sigo en mi casa vacía, con sólo la alfombra de color café y las paredes tan blancas. Ya he quitado también todas las puertas y los vidrios de las ventanas. Nada más he dejado mi enorme cama como altar en el centro de la habitación” [“Here I continue in my empty house, with only the coffee-colored rug and the white walls. I’ve already gotten rid of the doors and window glass. I’ve left nothing more than my enormous bed like an altar in the center of the room” (236)]. This highlights how she removes the souvenirs, or the physical reminders of her lover, and she also rids herself of physical divisions (walls, doors, windows) or domestic structure that can symbolize domestic sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality. Fahey claims: “By eliminating the physical signs of patriarchy, which relegate sex and sexual conduct to the domesticated ‘home’ space or the public/private domain of the brothel and by providing an indoor garden where people walk about naked, Beatriz challenges the binaristic significations surrounding private/public sex” (115). Fahey’s statement connects the physical space of Beatriz’s apartment and her sexuality. The placement of her bed in the center of the room, as she says, as an altar also transforms the focus of sex in that space from procreation to sexual pleasure (115). Beatriz also explains that all of the neighbors have left, most likely because of her business, and since the apartments are empty she pays the rents and uses the space (237). Therefore she has an entire building filled with her clients who lounge around naked in her new space: she has actually created her own sexual version of the boarding house which she and her sister had

attempted to start in Italy. The physical space ceases to be domestic or foster the heterosexual matrix; domesticity would require private, monogamous, heterosexual sex behind closed doors, as is the tradition in Latin American and other cultures. Additionally, she says that one of her client's wives accompanies him, and that the clients lie around the house and sometimes have sex without her (234). While she does not provide more details, I suggest that Beatriz also entertains female clients and that the male clients may explore homosexual pleasures with one another in her absence. The space she creates caters to all desires as it breaks down physical and sexual walls. What is surprising about Beatriz's role as a sex worker is that she does not choose it for the anonymity of her sexual partners. Instead we see that she establishes relationships with her clients, ones that are sexual but without the pressure for monogamy or romance. As there are no physical barriers, Beatriz has made the space both a private and public display of her body and her sexuality; the space mirrors her own body's pleasures and desires.

Beatriz's many journeys through Mexico, her lover, her letters, and her journal allow her to move from a woman trapped in solitude and traditional sexual relationships into an empowered and satisfied sex worker. The initial absence of her sister causes her to seek new companionship through sexual partners at the Vips, but they and the weekend lover do not fill this personal void. It is only through her affirmation of her sexually transgressive role as a sex-worker and the conversion of her apartment into a sexual version of the Italian boarding house that she is able to find happiness. As in Quiela's case, Beatriz was negatively fragmented through her identification with her weekend lover, living more for him than for herself and following him all over Mexico to feel connected to him. This relationship did not satisfy her despite the gifts, adventures, and

sex. Beatriz desired to seek out pleasure with many partners, an affirmation that opposes traditional norms for Mexican women in line with the pure *Guadalupe*. This rejection of *marianismo* is what results in her ability to accept her role as sex worker and be happy, inverting the sexual *la Chingada* as empowering sexuality. Quiela had to escape the heterosexual matrix of desiring Diego and motherhood in order to realize an autonomous identity, and Beatriz had to escape the matrix by rejecting motherhood and even heterosexual monogamy by becoming a sex worker. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Beatriz sent the journal entries to her niece in order to teach her about love and show her ways to break from traditional models of Mexican womanhood. She says in her last letter to her sister to tell Beatriz's niece that "Dile que se puede amar demasiado. Dile que hasta es posible amar demasiado, con demasiado amor" ["Tell her that one can love too much. Tell her that it's even possible to love too much, with too much love" (241)]. Here I wish to emphasize how she warns against love, presumably a construct she ties to the heterosexual matrix as what was not reciprocated by the weekend lover but something else found with her clients. Therefore, rather than love, Beatriz seeks out pleasure in this open space where she re-appropriates her body away from male-centered definitions of sexuality and embraces this excess of sex, lovers, and female pleasures. This exchange shows how Beatriz educates her niece, an example of women educating each other, here in matters of love and sexual identity. While Beatriz and her sister did not share such a mutual education, Beatriz's experiences will last into the future to guide the niece.

Conclusions

My close readings of *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* and *Demasiado amor* brought together two protagonists who do not appear at first glance to have much in

common. Quiela is the mourning woman consumed by being abandoned by her lover, and Beatriz is the secretary who leaves her job to become a sex worker. I began by examining both novels through Quiela's attachment to the Master to see how it results in a fragmentation of the self and a creation of the *mujer abnegada* under a male-centered definition. In each case the destructive effects of their "master" is evident in their solitude, from Quiela's voluntary solitary confinement to Beatriz's split self with the weekend lover. Due to this attachment and their lack of happiness or autonomy in self-identification, their movement is at first a downward spiral comparable to the concept of Dante's Inferno. Not unlike the nine circles of suffering in Hell from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the female characters pass down through a spiral of solitude and loss and can only become autonomous selves separate from their relationships after passing through their downward spiral. I perceive their Infernos as their lovers, the "masters" of the heterosexual matrix to which they are bound through motherhood and monogamy; Quiela must pass through Diego and Beatriz through her weekend lover. These spirals would have continued had it not been for their letter or journal writing; through the act of writing they were able to reflect on their relationships, rediscover their identities, and escape the spiral. Their letters and journals allowed them to see themselves away from their lovers and imagine an identity away from the heterosexual matrix and *marianismo*.

Quiela and Beatriz's processes of self-discovery and personal rebirth are similar in their comparison to Dante's Inferno. The novel *Demasiado amor* has an overt theme of self-discovery and self-reflection as seen through Beatriz's travels through Mexico with her lover. Elvira Sánchez-Blake points to the importance of the protagonist's name and how it adds to this image of her journey. In *The Divide Comedy*, while Virgil acts as the

guide through hell it is the female figure of Beatrice who guides Dante up to the heavens (110). This affirms my view of both Beatriz and Quiela's personal journeys in terms of Dante. Quiela's journey is a spiral downward through self-abnegation through her self-identification solely through Diego until the letter written to herself when she can be reborn, no longer defined through Diego, their relationship, or a dependence on motherhood. It is the act of writing letters that both bring her down the spiral and also free her from it, in that writing causes her to write herself the late-night scribble that releases her from Diego's influence. Quiela's revelation of not wanting to be maternal or submissive results in her detachment from Diego and the spiral. I therefore choose to call Quiela's a journey through "Diego's Inferno," just as Beatriz's is a journey through experiences with her weekend lover. Were *Demasiado amor* similar to *Santa* or another "fallen woman" redemption-style narration it would result in Beatriz's clients acting as her spiral until at the end she wishes to be with the one lover or is punished for her prostitution, but Beatriz's tale inverts this Mexican cultural expectation. For Beatriz, she instead rejects motherhood and traditional, monogamous relationships and thrives without them, a revelation she experiences only after realizing her dissatisfaction with her weekend lover. It is only through these downward spirals through writing and memories of lost love on the written page that the characters emerge at the end as self-realized and autonomous feminine figures.

I would like to close this chapter by analyzing the importance of women's writing in these novels at the levels of the female characters with their letters and journals and of the authors themselves, Poniatowska and Sefchovich. With women's traditional passivity in Mexico and other countries, their bodies and lives are often seen as the object which is

marked or written upon (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 12), or, in terms of artwork, women are seen as muses who inspire but do not produce art themselves. The female author, then, transgresses this notion of male authorship through female expression in excess. I wish to refer to Susan Gubar's article "*The Blank Page and Female Creativity*" and her assertion that without women's writing their experiences are muted (248). Additionally, Barbara Johnson explains that, for women, muteness can act as "a form of resistance and subjecthood" ("Muteness envy" 143). For Poniatowska and Sefchovich, their artistic production resists this muteness and fills the page with a female voice and perspective. Similarly, both write novels where their female protagonists write letters or journal entries in a layering of women's production and reflection. Not only do these forms of women's writing serve to help the characters on their journeys of self-discovery, but it turns out to be a stereotypical form of women's writing that in fact helps free these women from the trappings of traditional women's roles of motherhood and, for Beatriz, marriage. The private acts of letter and journal writing are accompanied by the ways Quiela and Beatriz use their bodies as text as well, as Gubar lists the example of the bloody bed sheets from the princesses's wedding nights from Isak Dinesen's story "The Blank Page" (248). Women can use their blood, tears, and reproductive capabilities to create with their bodies; when written, their blood and tears become the ink. Here, the authors's texts and those written by their female characters go against the passive, muted existence of *la mujer abnegada*. Similar to the attachment to the Master, it is when they detach themselves from their male lovers that they can fully find their autonomous identities, just as when the female authors progress from the passivity of being the muse to the male author to writing their own stories. They use their pens to create and perform

their own representation of women's experiences in Mexico through bodily texts and textual journeys.

Ultimately, both Quiela and Beatriz must re-appropriate the space around them from a space in which they tried to possess their lovers into an extension of themselves. Quiela must remove Diego from her apartment and make it a space in which to create her own art in order to move past the loss of not only her lover but her dead child. In doing this, she also breaks away from her need to be a mother; she finds herself outside of that definition of womanhood. For Beatriz, she must end her relationship with her weekend lover and her office job to embrace and establish her identity as a sex worker. With her altar-like bed and lack of windows and doors, her apartment's new design frees her, as it reflects her sexual freedom and desire that is no longer enclosed by the symbolic barriers of societal restrictions and passive gender roles. Quiela and Beatriz therefore free themselves from the heterosexual matrix in terms of identification through the male lover, motherhood, and acceptable sexual practices and professions by embracing alternative femininity in excess through their bodies.

I brought together the characters of Quiela and Beatriz for this study because both are female figures who experience a loss from the Other, a male lover, that results in a loss of self and an inability to resist motherhood. In the next chapter the characters also reject these model of *la Guadalupe* and *marianismo* in passive motherhood and other heterosexual, patriarchal constructs for women. While for Quiela and Beatriz their loss was of the male Other, the female figures in the next chapter experience personal losses. They also find ways to resist motherhood and other traditional roles for Mexican women and instead use their bodies to assert a different kind of reproduction, even drawing a

comparison between Beatriz's sex work and Santa's prostitution. In the next chapter I look at suffering and bleeding female bodies to explore how the characters act against hetero-normative roles for women such as motherhood in two Mexican novels and in the paintings of Frida Kahlo.

Chapter 4. : Sexuality Without Maternity: Wound(ed) Wombs and Feminine (Re)production

In the previous chapter I compared two literary examples of *la mujer abnegada* to demonstrate how the female protagonists moved through traditional passivity and self-negation to create their own identity outside of patriarchy, the heterosexual matrix, and subsequently expectations of motherhood. Just as those characters inverted that traditional role of abnegated femininity in re-appropriating the image of the virginal *Guadalupe* and resisting a desire to become mothers, in this chapter I look more deeply at three examples where female figures rethink an identity outside of traditional motherhood and reproduction. In different contexts the maternal body is replaced with suffering, and bleeding replaces giving birth. I have selected the following works to study the female figures's bleeding bodies: the novel *Santa* (1903) by Federico Gamboa; the visual and written works of artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954); and the novel *Duerme* (1994) by Carmen Boullosa. While the works are from different time periods and of different media, I look at how the bleeding female bodies they feature, whether narrative or visual, experience a lack of reproduction. The bodies and characters develop alongside images of prostitution, filth, complications during pregnancy, cross-dressing, and suffering, and I want to show how in this space suffering and pain invade the site of female reproduction and motherhood as the characters assert alternatives to the maternal body. Their alternatives to reproduction are: production in bodily commerce for Santa; artistic production for Kahlo; and the production of a masculine identity for Claire.

The three female figures I analyze in this section transgress traditional images of motherhood through their refusal or inability to become mothers which, according to

Mexican cultural expectation and correlation between womanhood and motherhood, questions their identity as women. While Santa and Claire are literary characters, Frida Kahlo acts as both author and object in painting her own figure in her art; besides using her diary and letters to relate the paintings to her actual life, I will be comparing Santa and Claire mostly to the painted Frida. As I mentioned in the introduction, María Elena de Valdés notes that Mexican women are culturally engrained to become mothers and that these mothers, when compared to *la Guadalupe*, embody “the social symbol of the virgin mother, that is, maternity without sexuality” (47, 54). For this chapter I wish to consider this concept of “maternity without sexuality” and invert it in order to study how these women instead enact sexuality without maternity:¹ Santa miscarries and is forced to become a prostitute; Kahlo suffers several miscarriages and abortions; and Claire cross-dresses as a male. Although they describe different periods of Mexican history, I wish to stress how the works illustrate the dynamic between femininity and the productive, public, and modern space of the Mexican city as the characters renegotiate the public sphere. I question of how these female figures operate in the city in a space outside masculine constructions of society for women as they enact sexuality without maternity.

These female characters develop their subjectivity away from Mexican motherhood and reproduction while suffering psychological and physical pain. Their physical pain is accompanied by scenes of bleeding, demonstrating the connection between the female body and its fluids. The flow of blood for the female characters relates to excesses and containment, or control, of the female or maternal body. Just as the relationship between transgressive femininity and pleasure or satisfaction in other

¹ This is, in essence, what Beatriz did in *Demasiado amor*, but I did not include that novel in this section because of the additional aspect of bleeding and women’s suffering.

chapters is paramount, in these three examples the female figures represent sexuality and embodied subjectivity without reproduction. While Santa's case is specific to its Porfirian context, Kahlo and Claire find fulfillment away from maternity as they work through their suffering. I want to explore the states of suffering and bleeding the characters experience to compare how the bodies react to and oppose the patriarchal societal constructions into which they are woven as pure *Guadalupe* or suffering *Chingada*, such as motherhood and prostitution. Suffering and bleeding are tied to literal and symbolic deaths throughout the works as the characters experience traumas that are often related to their wombs. The female womb is a site of symbolic motherhood, and the destruction or illness of the wombs, and subsequent bleeding and pain, can act as either the cause or effect of their reformulated identities away from motherhood and masculine, patriarchal constructs. The characters move from a reproductive body to a productive one, rooted in prostitution, art, and a masculine identity, respectively. The embodied excesses of the womb and blood narrate a new or altered perception of femininity for these female characters, and the women experience and react to physical and psychological pain as they move from a reproductive to a productive female body.

The Prostitute: The Shattered and Diseased Womb

To begin my analysis in this chapter of alternative motherhood and reproduction through the image of bleeding female bodies, I first turn to *Santa* by Federico Gamboa and the impact of its ill-fated protagonist and her profession. Written at the turn of the last century in 1903, the novel was the first "best-seller" in modern Mexican literature. The novel narrates the life of a young country woman whose life is filled with loss, suffering, and destruction during and from the perspective of the Mexican Porfiriato (1876-1910).

At the start of the novel Santa moves to Mexico City and begins her life as a prostitute. A flashback reveals that she has slept with a soldier, Marcelino, who abandons her after the encounter, and she is left alone and pregnant. She suffers a miscarriage and is forced from her home for bringing shame to her family, and now is able to work only as a prostitute in the city. Although she tries to escape life in the brothel by marrying a Spanish bull-fighter, she remains trapped, accompanied by the blind piano player Hipólito. Santa falls ill, starts to cough up blood, and is diagnosed with uterine cancer, most likely actually a disease she contracted from a client; and at the end of the novel she dies during a hysterectomy. Once she has lost her virginity outside of marriage she is a “marked” and “fallen woman” whose only option is to move to the city and become a prostitute. Prostitution replaces Santa’s failed motherhood, or her reproduction.

Throughout this dramatic and gritty novel, Santa’s life follows a cycle of sex, bleeding, and death; her loss of virginity (sex) results in a miscarriage (death and blood); this forces her to live a life of prostitution (sex); and her profession leads her to contract a venereal disease which then results in the hysterectomy (death and blood). In terms of Mexican archetypes for women, her suffering resembles *la Chingada* and her violated, punished, and suffering body, yet she does not become a mother. The novel is an example of the positivism of the Porfiriato; Santa has gone against acceptable social behavior, or the law of the father, and therefore her only option is death. Within this cycle I wish to focus on two specific moments in her life: her miscarriage and hysterectomy. These moments define Santa’s femininity through the excesses of the womb, creating a correlation between the bleeding body and female suffering. Santa’s lack of motherhood or reproduction is comparable to viewing the female body as a commodity to be

sectioned and sold. The comparison between prostitution and the butchering and selling of meat also parallels the treatment of the production of the female body as cattle, or chattel. Gamboa wrote the novel to serve as a cautionary tale against women who break the family structure through its narrative that punishes women with death to prevent them from becoming a “fallen woman,” in line with *la Chingada*. Santa’s case is different from that of Kahlo or Claire as Santa does not choose prostitution as an alternative to motherhood. I instead read the prostitute’s bleeding body, through her miscarriage and hysterectomy, to illustrate the relationship between her female body and the turn-of-the-century Mexican patriarchy and culture.

As *Santa* depicts the sordid state of the prostitute in Porfirian Mexico City as a cautionary tale, it does not offer the protagonist a path to happiness or relief from her suffering and demise. In Mexico and Latin American countries after the period of independence, the formation of nation and social structures were priority in maintaining social order, and for women, as I mentioned above, they were tied to the nation through the family. In the context of national processes in Buenos Aires, Donna Guy explains that any woman outside of these traditional family structures was a threat to the nation (2-3). In Mexico as well, the prostitute resides outside of these social, family structures as a threat to the nation because of their ability to reproduce; the nation feared that prostitutes would create “a future generation riddled by disease and devoid of family life and economic stability” (3). Guy’s analysis pertaining to Argentina parallels Gamboa’s Mexican context and the same conflict between the prostitute and the nation. In *Santa*, the female protagonist is a perfect example of “the fallen woman” who plummets from grace to corruption in the city, even though Santa is first corrupted by the soldier in the

countryside before going to the city. Guadalupe Pérez-Anzaldo argues that the novel comments on Mexican society's entrapment and destruction of women at the time it was published (n.p.). I agree that Gamboa demonstrates this destruction of women in the public sphere because he does not offer an alternative to these masculinist and Catholic constructions; Santa must be punished. Working from Guy's analysis of the prostitute's social standing, such women are also trapped in a moral paradox: "Siendo ésta una actividad descalificada, despreciada y rechazada por los hombres es, paradójicamente, regulada, celebrada y disfrutada por ellos mismos" ["This being an activity that is indescribable, looked-down-upon, and rejected by men it is, paradoxically, regulated, celebrated, and enjoyed by they themselves" (Pérez-Anzaldo n.p.)].² This relates to the paradox of *la Chingada*, where the woman is punished for being penetrated, but not the man. Santa's suffering and death reasserts the strict, albeit hypocritical, morality of the Mexican bourgeoisie and affirms the gritty reality for marginal women in constructions of commerce and desire. She is the object of male desire and power, a marginal yet transgressive subject: "la prostituta siempre está en los intersticios, entre lo legal e ilegal" ["the prostitute is always in the interstices; between what is legal and what is illegal" (n.p.)]. The prostitute walks the line between the binaries of degradation and desire, of subject and object, of marginal and transgressive. As she remains both trapped and fostered in these systems, her femininity resides in the marginal, depreciated state of objectification and contradiction.

Santa's marginal status as prostitute is further developed, and even doubled, in the moment where the narration denies her even the category of "woman." When the narrator first mentions Santa's profession he says that "Santa no era mujer, no; era una . . . !"

² Translations into English in this chapter are mine unless otherwise noted.

[“She was not a woman now, but a . . .” (35; 11)].³ I wish to stress how the silence of the ellipsis is crucial to Santa’s identity in this moment that resembles when Beatriz’s sister refers to her profession as well. Margo Glantz dissects this moment in the following way: “Y con estos puntos suspensivos calla la palabra ‘nefanda’, hacienda de la prostituta un ser equívoco; ni mujer ni palabra pronunciada, la puta como animal marginado, aunque público; femenino, aunque negado a la feminidad, terrestre apenas: un cuerpo solamente” [“and with these suspensive points the ‘heinous’ word falls quiet, making the prostitute a mistaken being; neither woman nor pronounced word, the whore like a marginal, yet public, animal; feminine, although denied femininity, barely terrestrial: only a body” (42)]. As Gamboa never directly states Santa’s profession, the novel is devoid of vulgar terminology, as Glantz claims that the absence of the word prevents Santa from being realized as a completed female subject. In this way, Santa is incomplete and silenced as Gamboa left out the word to depreciate such women and their profession. In being a best-seller aimed at the female reading public, one must also consider that the author also did not wish to offend his readers with such vulgarity in his highly-circulated novel. The act of silencing Santa by making her unspeakable serves the masculine ideal of the prostitute; Debra Castillo affirms that the prostitute is “a socially approved outlet for surplus male repression” (40). She is an approved yet silent outlet to serve repressed sexual desires outside the home; on the outskirts of decent society, the prostitute is marginalized and forced to suffer. As she is not a woman according to the narration; Santa is dehumanized.

With this dehumanized view of the prostitute, I wish to draw parallels between the brothel and a slaughterhouse in the treatment of flesh in commerce. The start of the novel includes several descriptions of Santa and the prostitutes where the women are described

³ Translations for *Santa* come from the English version by Chasteen.

in terms of their bodies and flesh; “[tiene] carne fresca, joven y dura” [“fresh, young and firm flesh” (Gamboa 83; 50)]⁴ and “carne sabrosa y picante” [“spicy, delicious flesh” (84; 50)].⁵ These descriptions reduce the women to being only a piece of meat, defined and valued for the cost of their bodies. It is easy to see how Glantz came to compare the treatment of Santa’s body to descriptions of the butchery of cattle: “En el prostíbulo se vende carne ‘palpitante de pecado’ o simplemente ‘carne de placer’ y la novela hace de esa carne el objeto principal de su discurso” [“In the brothel flesh is sold, ‘pounding with sin’ or simply ‘pleasure flesh’, and the novel makes this flesh the principle object of its discourse” (42)]. Gamboa also depicts Porfirian institutions and social systems with descriptions of factories and slaughterhouses alongside the narrative of prostitution (Castillo 53). Just as I mentioned that the women are objects of male desire, these descriptions of women as meat show how the women are dehumanized:⁶ they are divided into pieces as the result of the desiring gaze of the men, just as the cattle are cut into pieces for a consumption. The effect of the male gaze on these women divides them into desirable, sexual parts. The violence of this graphic imagery of butchered cattle and prostitutes is palpable, and Glantz takes this argument a step further as she compares the butchered animal’s blood to a woman’s lost virginity (44). This butchering-virginity concept brings to mind the image of *la Chingada* and her open, passive, and violated femininity, now turned into butchered cattle. Another layer of this discussion of Santa’s flesh is found in the same scene of the novel, when she takes a bath in champagne and

⁴ Translation modified from “fresh flesh”.

⁵ Translation modified from “spicy, delicious, unresisting flesh”.

⁶ Castillo points out that in the novel, aside from the prostitute, other anonymous laborers are portrayed as cattle as well, as dehumanized objects within the metropolis (54). This relates to the anonymous *Juanes* during the Mexican Revolution that I analyzed in the first two chapters, both every man and no man.

she is described as “esta Friné de trigueño y contemporáneo cuño” [“this Phryne, marked as olive-skinned and contemporary” (84; 50)].⁷ The reference is to a famous Greek concubine from the fourth century B.C. who was represented in sculpture for her resemblance to Aphrodite. Here, then, Santa is at once white like the Greek sculptures of Phryne and a darker skin tone of Mexico, and compared to a courtesan. While the description places her skin tone on a scale of *mestizaje*, or mixed race, she is not described outright as *morena*⁸ or dark; her Mexican beauty is whitened, like the Greek sculpture she represents. Just as Santa is dehumanized by the male gaze, she is also marked as racialized flesh for sale.

To view these women in fragments and parts rather than a whole also relates to the effects of the profession on the prostitute’s body. Glantz situates the prostitute as a commercial product, saying that women are objects that are to be devoured in the city (45). The women are butchered and quartered to be handed out for their clients to consume or possess in the form of feigned virgin bodies. The narration refers to these effects from the consumption of the prostitutes’s bodies when Santa arrives at the brothel and meets Pepa, the madam. Pepa was once a prostitute but is now a sickly, sunken shadow of her former self. She warns Santa of what will happen to her body, and lifts her nightgown to show her: “Santa miró, en efecto, unas pantorrillas nervudas, casi rectas; unos muslos deformes, ajados, y un vientre colgante, descolorido, con hondas arrugas” [“Santa saw, in effect, her sinewy, undefined calves and withered, deformed thighs, her hanging, discolored belly split from side to side by deep folds“(Gamboa 32; 9)]. While

⁷ Translation modified from “like a modern, olive-skinned version of a legendary Greek concubine”.

⁸ Analysis of the word *morena* will appear in detail in the next chapter with the character Selene.

the brothel represents the promise of young and beautiful flesh for men's sexual pleasures, Pepa is evidence of what happens from the constant use and abuse of the women's bodies for commerce. The narration's list of female body parts, however unattractive to the clients, fragments Pepa's female body for the reader in the same way the prostitute's body is fragmented by the male client. Pepa also foreshadows what is to happen to Santa as her body becomes diseased from her clients, her femininity to be consumed, abused, and destroyed.

The modern Mexican city spaces attempt to cover up the corrupt spaces of the brothels with beautiful gardens and flowers, masking male destruction with images of blooming, virginal, intact femininity. The garden that surrounds the brothel symbolically unites the conflicting images of virginal innocence and sexual commerce.⁹ The floral façade is one aesthetic way prostitution functioned within the Porfiriato: everywhere but hidden in plain sight by a beautifying exterior. The garden also symbolizes the desirable female bodies that the clients seek; the men wish to pass through the exterior garden of flowers to enter the brothel, penetrating the sexualized space and the women within. The women themselves have flowery and virginal façades but on the inside they are "fallen women" who are far from virgins, just like the garden beautifying the brothel. To compare the city and countryside in the novel, Castillo states that the idyllic countryside of Santa's youth and later the seedy city represent the girl's innocence and corruption (42). Images of factories and brothels surround Santa's transition to the city, where lost innocence, suffering, and degradation of women are intertwined in the modern Porfirian

⁹ Santa's name also accomplishes this: a woman named Santa, or saint, is a prostitute. Upon meeting Santa, the brothel madam immediately acknowledges that her name will bring her more business (29). That men would enjoy sex with a woman named Santa also brings together the sinful space of the brothel with the purity of the Church.

Mexican city. For Pérez-Anzaldo, the city is a corrupt, chaotic, and dangerous space where women constantly suffer varying levels of degradation (n.p.), although it is in the countryside where Santa has lost her innocence at the hands of the soldier. A similar use of flower imagery appears when Santa loses her virginity: “Marcelino, desfloró a Santa en una encantadora hondonada que los escondía. Y Santa que lo adoraba, ahogó sus gritos —los que arranca a una virgen el dejar de serlo—” [“Marcelino deflowered Santa in the enchanting hideaway where the two had ensconced themselves. And Santa, who totally adored him, stifled the cries that normally accompany the loss of virginity” (Gamboa 71; 39)]. Here I wish to underscore how the use of the verb *desflorar* replaces the pain of the woman’s torn hymen; her pain is silenced by a flowery, beautiful image. The floral imagery also symbolizes the female sex at the site of this lost virginity. The brothel garden and flower imagery force female sexuality into passivity, as given to the men, as something to be seen as beautiful but not heard.

The excesses of Santa’s body are also found in the image of her bleeding body in the scenes of her miscarriage and hysterectomy. Throughout the novel Santa suffers physical, symbolic punishments for her actions, and aside from the fragmentation and depreciation of her body, she equally suffers from the destruction of her womb in these two instances. After she is “deflowered” and abandoned by Marcelino, the young unmarried Santa suffers a miscarriage after four months. During the scene she goes to retrieve a water jug from the well:

. . . Santa, un pie sobre el brocal del pozo, tiraba de la cuerda del cántaro, que lleno de agua, desparramándose, ascendía a ciegas. Fue un rayo. Un copioso sudar; un dolor horrible en las caderas, cerca de las ingles, y en la cintura, atrás; un dolor de tal manera lacerante que Santa soltó la cuerda, lanzó un grito y se abatió en el suelo. Luego, la hemorragia, casi tan abundosa y sonora cual la del cántaro, roto al chocar contra las húmedas paredes del pozo. (79)

[. . . She had one foot on the rim of the well and was pulling up a heavy earthenware jar of water that chanced to spill, throwing her off balance. She felt a bolt of lightning; a sudden, copious sweat, a horrible sensation in her hips and groin, and in her lower back a stabbing pain so powerful that Santa dropped the jar, let out a scream, and collapsed to the ground. Then came the hemorrhage, as abundant and loud in her memory as the water that had spilled from the jar as it fell and shattered against the most walls of the well. (45)]

This quote illustrates how the water and blood act as literal and symbolic destructions of the female womb as well as an inversion of giving birth. Traditionally a woman's water breaks before she gives birth; in the scene the jug acts as the breaking water, but what follows is not a birth but a miscarriage, or a "false" birth, replaced by the flow of blood as she hemorrhages. The water and ruptured jug mirror the blood and the destruction Santa's womb as an outpouring of her ruptured maternal womb and lost motherhood, viewed in that time period as a failed womanhood, having already "fallen." Flowing water can often represent a baptism or a celebration of new life or symbolize purification and cleansing.¹⁰ Rather than a cleansing or a baptism of birth, Santa's body remains contaminated from her premarital relations and from the miscarriage. She remains symbolically marked by the blood from her sin for which she must suffer in the Porfiriato, and her womb remains a site of violence, trauma, and suffering.

Santa's womb is further depicted as a vessel linked to destruction and disease at the end of the novel with her hysterectomy. A hysterectomy as Santa's final social and moral punishment for her lost virginity and life as a prostitute is poignant for its embodiments of womanhood, motherhood, and illness. Elizabeth Grosz refers to Julia

¹⁰ Traci Roberts-Camps mentions a desired cleansing for Santa. As the novel progresses Santa seeks to be cleansed through the promise of marriage to Jarameno, the bull-fighter; this fresh start would allow her to wash away and negate the impurities of her past as a prostitute (*Gendered self-conscious* 79-80). Additionally, the bullfighter adds to image of bleeding, the slaughter, and the violence in which Santa is trapped.

Kristeva's theories surrounding the female body, abjection, and fluids, comparing female sexuality to the image of a vessel:

The representation of female sexuality as an uncontrollable flow, as seepage associated with what is unclean, coupled with the idea of female sexuality as a vessel, a container, a home empty or lacking in itself but fillable from the outside, has enabled men to associate women with infection, with disease, with the idea of festering putrefaction, no longer contained simply in female genitals but at any or all points of the female body. (206)

For men and the patriarchy, the womb is metonymic in its representation of the female body. In this way, patriarchal society views woman as a womb, reducing her only to the essence of her reproductive duty and trapping her in the function and role of mother.

Kristeva's view of female vessels and seepage relates to the scene of Santa's miscarriage, but now the womb, or feminine vessel, is not emptied out but removed completely.

Grosz's comparison between female sexuality and the body applies to the image of infection for Santa's womb and perception of the prostitute in general. That the womb is to be "filled from the outside" traps the woman in hetero-normative and masculinist definitions of womanhood, dependent upon fulfillment by a man. Rather than the pure, (re)productive womb (and womanhood) of the mother who gives birth, the prostitute's opening and womanhood is unproductive and subject to danger and disease. Deleuze and Lois LaCivita Nixon explain the perception of the uterus for hysterectomies and menopause: "So tied to women's reproductivity, the uterus becomes easy for others—physicians, husbands, lovers, children—to discount or trivialize, or literally and figuratively throw away . . . Because an important dimension of one's sexual identity is actually removed, the metaphorical thought that hysterectomy arouses is different from those a natural menopause evokes" (99). I apply Deleuze and LaCivita Nixon's North American literary perspective to Santa's Mexican context to show how hysterectomies

are viewed as a removal of a woman's sexual identity, which defines Santa as prostitute. The removal of Santa's womb becomes a removal of her female identity even though the vagina remains intact. Whether from a hysterectomy or menopause, womanhood is affected, or removed, through the womb's correlation with female reproduction and sexuality. While Santa's profession benefits from her avoiding motherhood to not have children in the brothel, it is the disease and attempted removal of the womb, or the feminine vessel, that causes her demise. Santa's femininity is thus directly correlated to bleeding, disease, suffering, and death.

Just as the womb is contextualized by how men and society trivialize it, in the novel the blind piano player from the brothel, Hipólito, is equally perplexed by Santa's situation and body when she falls ill. Here Hipólito speaks with the doctor about Santa's condition, which is surrounded by mystery and confusion:

— ¿Cómo se llama la operación? —preguntó Hipólito por último, desencajado.
— ¡Histerectomía!

Y el enrevesado nombre acabó de anonadarlo, encontraba enrevesada la estructura y siniestro el sonido, le sonaba a terrible, a peligroso, a inhumano. No colegía nada bueno, y si con ella apechugaba, debía a la pasividad de ser imperfecto que humilla al hombre y lo obliga a conformarse con todos los males que sin cesar se le van encima. . . . Aquel doctor asegurábale que de no proceder a esa histero... demonios, Santa moriría. (Gamboa 321)

[“What is the operation called?” Hipólito asked his final question, contorted with grief.

“A hysterectomy.”

The strange and sinister-sounding name was the last straw. It had a terrible, dangerous, inhumane ring, and he accepted it with the passive resignation of someone accustomed to absorbing the evils that had washed over him incessantly for a lifetime. . . . So if the doctor said that without the hysterect... or whatever the devil it was . . . Santa would die . . . (225)]

We see here how Hipólito does not know the nature of the surgery but simply infers that the procedure is dangerous and inhumane, relating to the dehumanization of Santa

through the cattle imagery. Just as losing her virginity, suffering the miscarriage, and becoming a prostitute reinforce the ways in which Santa transgresses the traditional roles of virgin or mother, the hysterectomy continues to reinforce this image of the infertile, infected female body which cannot bear children and fulfill its purpose for Mexican society. Glantz's concept of the unnamable helps explain Hipólito's inability to handle the word *histerectomía*. Just as the narrator was unable to name Santa's profession, Hipólito's is the male voice that cannot name this medical procedure. While both prostitution and the hysterectomy result in the destruction of the female body, the former is cloaked in silence although men actively seek it out while the latter is silent because masculinist society cannot comprehend it. The female sex is only conceived in terms of male pleasure and not of disease or extraction. The female form remains a silent, now infected and operable, secret. Although Hipólito is blind and therefore "blind" to the evils around him in the brothel, he is more perturbed by the private, invisible illness of Santa's womb. Additionally, for the Porfiriato the death of a prostitute was not a cause for grief or mourning, as it was viewed as justice from the patriarchal perspective. As Santa dies during the surgery, she remains tangled in the silent incomprehensibility and disapproval of society toward her diseased womb and body.

Pain is the final element that acts alongside Santa's bleeding body to define her femininity. As stated previously and seen throughout this analysis, Gamboa wrote the novel in 1903 to act as a cautionary tale to advise women against premarital sex, and yet, of course, Marcelino and the men of the brothel are not punished with disease and death in the same way. Just as Santa's profession is unspeakable and her surgery is unfathomable, the hysterectomy is actually another glossing-over of a sordid truth, that

Santa has contracted a venereal disease. This hidden truth would align with the Porfirian cautionary tale of what happens to such “fallen women,” again as something that cannot be named in decent society. For the moral of the story, almost as an actual saint as her name indicates, Santa therefore must find redemption through her pain: before her surgery she is “purificada por el dolor” [“purified by her pain” (Gamboa 316; 221)]. Santa must find pleasure, or peace, and redemption in order to justify why she had to suffer throughout the novel, reflecting on her long-suffering life and embracing this pain as something deserved. The pain is her penance that she feels can cleanse her in her ailing state, a catholic penance in line with the Porfiriato as well. *Santa* is not a tale of escaping to the brothel to avoid motherhood as Beatriz did in *Demasiado amor*. Instead, Santa’s “marked,” suffering body is offered on the page as the Porfiriato’s brand of social justice for women who veer from the impossible path of respectability and morality of *la Guadalupe*. At that time an author could not write the story of the transgressive heroine who escapes punishment and enjoys her body and her pleasures. I view Santa outside the novel’s original context and alongside Frida Kahlo and Claire from *Duerme* to use her body as an example of bodily excesses of pain and bleeding away from motherhood. Rather than focusing on the punishments of the masculinist patriarchy over her body, the novel may also be viewed as the literary figure of the prostitute in Mexico and set the stage for future representations of resistance such as in Cristina Rivera Garza’s *Nadie me verá llorar*, María Amparo Escandón’s *Santitos*, and even Sefchovich’s *Demasiado amor*.

Santa’s body, while defined and punished by the Porfiriato, remains the site for exploring embodied womanhood in the excesses in her womb. The symbolic flowing of blood and seeping of disease, while they act as her punishment through pain as righteous

vindication, support the affirmation of Santa's identity away from Mexican motherhood as she sells her flesh in the city with production as her alternative to reproduction. Her example of sexuality without maternity results in business rather than procreation in this model of public women in the Mexican city. For Santa in this time period the gender category of "mother" is unattainable because of her scandalous misfortune, and subsequently the category of "woman" because of her profession. She is therefore forced to enact sexuality through her wounded body, as one that is punishment in the Porfiriato but later becomes an active choice for Mexican women. Here Santa sets the stage as a female protagonist who is an impure, sexual, and transgressive version of traditional femininity. She resembles Roger Bartra's *Chingadalupe* who, although against her will, impossibly combines the pure and impure identities of the *Guadalupe* and *Chingada* archetypes for women (211). Even though her sexuality without maternity is punished by death, Santa has offered an alternative womanhood beyond the boundaries of Mexican motherhood that would later become an active mode of resistance rather than a passive societal punishment. Just as with Santa's bleeding and diseased womb, the example of Frida Kahlo and her painted and written work follows this similar vein of bodily suffering and unfulfilled motherhood embodied in the womb. I now move from a literary study to both the textual and visual examples of femininity offered by Frida Kahlo in order to reveal how Kahlo maneuvers her re-characterization of the Mexican mother and reproduction.

The Painter: (Re)production of Suffering through Blood and Art

In a study of Mexican female bodies, one must include the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Her impact goes beyond the painted canvases of her artwork; she is a cultural pop

icon both within Mexico and beyond its borders. Since most of her paintings were self-portraits, she is also featured prominently as an artistic subject in her paintings and in photographs other artists have taken of her. Kahlo is included in this study of the literary and the visual because she explored the themes of a national identity, femininity, motherhood, and suffering in the female body in her art and her writing, such as her diary and in letters. This section on bleeding bodies and transgressions of Mexican motherhood also addresses physical and psychological suffering through the body, as seen in Santa's social and bodily punishments. Those familiar with Kahlo's life, her artwork, or the movies depicting her life undoubtedly consider the artist as being synonymous with corporeal suffering; her battle with polio, her trolley accident, her miscarriages and abortions, and her leg amputation are infamous, and also find representation in her art. I weave together Kahlo's art, writings, and personal life to address her combination of womanhood, bleeding, and suffering. Although her work is expansive, in this study I focus on three of her paintings, one of her lithographs, two drawings in her diary, and assorted writings from her letters and diary. These written and visual pieces demonstrate how Kahlo used the female body, blood, wounds, and the womb to create gritty and problematizing representations of femininity in Mexico, rewriting the national maternal body.

The relationship between Kahlo's body and pain is very different than the examples seen in *Santa*. Kahlo herself associates her life and her body with constant pain and suffering spanning from having polio as a child to the trolley accident, her miscarriages, and later operations on her spine and infected parts of her legs and hands. As the result of the pain she lived with an awareness of her corporeality and physical

limitations. Claudia Schaefer explores Kahlo and her depiction of the body, looking into this recurring theme of pain in her artwork: “Kahlo seems to paint as an outlet for or ‘antidote’ to her pain, exorcising it in objectified images of concrete hurt as a survival tactic in her role as victim. The suffering image, or her body as the iconic image for suffering, is narcissistic in its self-examination and exhibition, yet it is also cathartic in its public display of self-affirmation” (16). While I agree she might have used art as an outlet for her pain, Kahlo’s artistic production served another personal purpose for her. In her never-ending medical battles alongside her artistic career, rather than reproducing in the role as mother, she instead produces art from her pained body. As Schaefer hints, Kahlo found pleasure in the “public display” of herself in her artwork. The cultural appropriation of Kahlo’s image in the last twenty years is referred to as “Fridamania” (Lindauer 152); just as the clients consumed Santa and the prostitutes, the public consumes Kahlo’s image. Production and consumption again replace the space of motherhood and reproduction, as with Santa, for the bleeding and suffering female body, now through artistic production.

I wish to begin this study of female bodies, bleeding, the womb, and suffering in Kahlo’s artwork and writing with a close examination of her famous debilitating trolley accident. In 1925 when she was a teenager she was in a trolley accident and was critically wounded, forcing her to spend months recovering in a brace. Just as with Kahlo’s view of motherhood, there are varying versions of her accident and the placement of a metal rail. Critics who have analyzed Kahlo’s life and art are in disagreement as to whether, during the trolley accident, the bar that penetrated her pelvis exited her body. Most accounts of the accident claim that the rail entered her body and exited through her vagina. Elena

Poniatowska's fictionalized literary portrait of Kahlo entitled "Diego, estoy sola; Diego, ya no estoy sola: Frida Kahlo"¹¹ is a first-person narration and creative reconstruction of Kahlo's life, not unlike Poniatowska's reconstruction of Jesusa's or Beloff's stories. In describing Kahlo's trolley accident, Poniatowska includes a quotation from what is supposedly the original diagnosis in the medical document:

Fractura de la tercera y cuarta vértebras lumbares, tres fracturas de la pelvis, once fracturas en el pie derecho, luxación del codo izquierdo, herida profunda en el abdomen, producida por una barra de hierro que penetró por la cadera izquierda y salió por la vagina, desgarrando el labio izquierdo. Peritonitis aguda. Cistitis que hace necesaria una sonda por varios días. (25)

[Fracture of the third and fourth lumbar vertebrae, three pelvic fractures, eleven fractures in the right foot, dislocated left elbow, deep abdomen wound, produced by an iron bar that penetrated through the left hip and out through the vagina, tearing the left lip. Acute peritonitis. Cystitis makes a catheter necessary for several days.]

The fictionalized account of the accident includes the metal rail passing through her vagina, categorizing her injuries as physical and sexual. As Poniatowska appropriates Kahlo's voice in the first person, the narrator says of the accident, "Perdí la virginidad" ["I lost my virginity" (25)]. Margaret A. Lindauer addresses the symbolic significance of this version of the event, writing that this violent penetration "metaphorically associates the impaling handrail not merely with sexual intercourse but with a forced penetration, or rape, of Kahlo's body" (58). Lindauer's reading of the event suggests a rape as a strong and political stance, with violence enacted at the womb. However, in a letter dated 13 October 1925, Kahlo writes to Alex Gómez Arias that the longest rod goes through her body, but she does not detail the precision of the rod's exit: "la herida . . . que me atravesó enteramente de la cadera a adelante" ["the wound . . . that crossed me completely from my hip forward" (Kahlo and Tibol 32)]. I question whether Kahlo

¹¹ The chapter title is taken from text found in Kahlo's diary.

omitted where the rod exited so as to not disclose such intimate and gory details in the letter or whether the omission indeed signifies that the rod did not exit through her vagina, such as the silence of not naming Santa's profession. The accident is (mis)represented, depending on whether the event is recounted literally or symbolically. The film *Frida* (2002) by Julie Taymor glorifies the scene as Frida is wounded, covered in gold dust and blood in the street. In terms of the mythification of Frida Kahlo, the trolley accident is almost a creation myth of how Kahlo came to be who she was, heightened immensely by the location of the rod as it marks her body with physical and sexual destruction at a young age. The public consume this violent story, along with the others of Kahlo's miscarriages and marriages to Diego Rivera.

Another struggle between truth and exaggeration in Kahlo's personal life relates to her opinions of motherhood, as critics who have studied Kahlo's life in detail offer conflicting information as to the artist's true opinions. According to Martha Zamora's research, Kahlo's obsession with motherhood is a falsity, pointing to reasons taken from Kahlo's personal correspondence with her doctors:

Contrary to widespread belief, Frida was not obsessed by frustrated maternity, although it was an idea she encouraged . . . In fact, Frida's correspondence reveals that she had abortions for unwanted pregnancies before and after the medical crisis in Detroit . . . Aside from the risk that a pregnancy posed to her own health . . . she was concerned that her father's epilepsy might be hereditary and that she herself might transmit syphilis. (*The Brush of Anguish* 91)

Once again the image of the womb and its venereal disease appears, as it did with Santa, this time possibly with syphilis, with the implication that she cannot and should not reproduce. Research by Lindauer partially supports this claim against frustrated maternity, but instead points to the trolley accident, which I address later in detail, as the reason she cannot conceive or reach full term: "Two of her four pregnancies ended in

miscarriages and the others in doctor-prescribed abortions” (56). Zamora and Lindauer’s arguments against Kahlo’s frustrated maternity demonstrate how she suffered frustration strictly linked to her body rather than the social and cultural pressure of maternity.

Miscarriages, her accident, and abortions all emanate from a central point, both physically and emotionally: her damaged womb. Zamora also discusses how the subject matter of Kahlo’s work was altered after the year 1932, attributing the changes to both the miscarriage and the death of her mother that same year: “She was creating many works now, experimenting with techniques, painting on tin, making lithographs, even trying her hand at fresco. More noteworthy was a change in content: her work was beginning to emphasize terror, suffering, wounds, and pain” (Zamora, *Frida Kahlo* 46). For Kahlo, therefore, suffering and femininity are intertwined within these two confrontations with death for her unborn child and her mother. Her mother’s death holds a symbolic death of motherhood, as is the miscarriage through the ended pregnancy. As these tragedies both represent the halt of reproduction, Kahlo therefore replaces these reproductive voids with the production of art.

Kahlo’s art often depicts personal struggles between the wounded female body and maternity alongside of blood and pain. Her piece entitled *Henry Ford Hospital* (Figure 13) from 1932 includes images that represent the miscarriage she suffered that same year in Detroit while traveling with Diego Rivera through the United States. The painting depicts Frida¹² naked on a hospital bed with industrial Detroit as the landscape painted in rusty browns and greys, accompanied by a span of light-blue sky with wisps of white and purple clouds. Frida lies on the bed naked with blood stains beneath her legs,

¹² As others do, I will refer to the artist as Kahlo and her painted self-image as Frida, as they are separate subjects.

and a large tear dangles from the corner of her eye. Emanating out of the center of the painting from Frida's abdomen stretch six red strings tied to several objects. These images surrounding the bed include a pink medical diagram of the female pelvis, a brownish-red fetus, a grey snail, an off-white pelvic bone, a purple orchid, and a bluish-grey machine. The painting creates a violent image of femininity through the intersection of the female nude and the bleeding female. The female nude represents classical beauty, and yet Kahlo's nude is tarnished by the bloodstain on the sheets. Her naked, bleeding body evokes medical procedures and illness that relate to Kahlo's accident, as well as Santa's hysterectomy, and reinforce how the miscarriage marked Kahlo's body as a clinical one that is neither sexual nor erotic. The blood underlines the image of violence against women's bodies,¹³ although in this instance the violence comes from within her body, specifically her womb.

Kahlo's striking painting of the miscarriage dialogues with representations of Mexican motherhood. Similar to Santa and the Porfiriato, in analyzing this painting Lindauer refers to gender roles that rose from the Mexican Revolution and its post-revolutionary period, which promoted motherhood to solidify the national systems (22-23). Rather than inserting a mother into the national imaginary, Kahlo instead inserts the woman who miscarries, or the undoing of a future mother, into her painting to develop her own identity after the incident. The painting's depiction of the miscarriage is incontrovertible, with its imagery juxtaposing Kahlo's view of the female womb and motherhood. Beyond the theory surrounding the painting and its subject matter, Kahlo

¹³ Her painting *Unos cuantos piquetitos*, "A few small nips", from 1935 illustrates a newspaper headline where a man stabbed his unfaithful wife in a jealous rage, claiming "Pero solo le di unos cuantos piquetitos!" "But I only gave her a few nips!" In the painting the woman is naked on a bed and covered in blood and cuts (Lindauer 33).

herself discussed her ability to bear children with her doctor through personal correspondence. Here is a letter addressed to Dr. Leo Elosser from Detroit in 1932:

Como por el estado de salud en que estoy creí fuera mejor abortar, se lo dije [a Doctor Pratt], y me dio una dosis de *quinina* y una purga de aceite de ricino muy fuerte. Al día siguiente de haber tomado esto tuve una ligerísima hemorragia, *casi nada*. Durante cinco o seis días he tenido algo de sangre, pero poquísima . . . Me examinó y me dijo que no, que él está completamente seguro de que *no aborté* y que su opinión era que sería mucho mejor si en lugar de hacerme abortar con operación me dejara yo la criatura . . . (Kahlo and Tibol 104, emphasis is original)

[Given my health, I thought it would be better to have an abortion. I told him [Dr. Pratt] and he gave me *quinine* and very strong castor oil for a purge. The day after I took this I had a very slight [case] of bleeding, *almost nothing*. I've had some blood during five or six days, but very little . . . He examined me and told me that he is completely sure that *I did not abort* and that it would be much better to keep the child instead of causing an abortion through surgery. (Zamora, *The Letters* 45)]

I refer to this letter to underscore how even though Kahlo's sick and injured body complicates her pregnancies, she is forced to keep her unborn and un-aborted child. The details of the letter also relate to Santa's diseased womb and how infected wombs cannot produce. In asking the doctor for his advice after this incident, one can see the slow, agonizing, and bloody process during which Kahlo's body suffered. She attempted to erase the pregnancy and the potential for more pain only to experience more physical and emotional pain after the miscarriage. As a miscarriage is a failure to give birth or reproduce, that Kahlo then went on to interpret these visions of suffering and the womb onto her canvas turn this miscarriage into a production of the artwork and the reproduction of the self.

Additionally, the same miscarriage that inspired *Henry Ford Hospital* also inspired Kahlo to create a lithograph print while in Detroit. *El aborto* (Figure 14), or "Frida and the miscarriage," depicts Frida with the same fetus figure as the one from the painting. In the lithograph the fetus figure is connected to Frida's womb by a line which

winds around her leg and to her womb, with a fetus figure also drawn on her stomach. Similar to the painting, Frida is naked with tears running down her face, and there is a drawing of a moon who also weeps in the corner of the lithograph. From between Frida's legs run drops of liquid, presumably blood, down her left leg and into the soil, and from there three plants attach their roots to where the blood has pooled. Another plant image in the lithograph grows out of Frida; behind her left shoulder there sprouts what looks like a third arm, but at the end of it is a giant lily pad-like leaf. The left side of her body is also a darker color than the right side, possibly nourished by the soil and her blood like the plants, causing her body to bloom as well. The leaf growing out of her back has a hole next to the top bend, possibly to represent a painter's pallet and show how her artistic production can come out of her because of or despite this personal tragedy, relating to Schaefer's view of Kahlo's art as therapeutic for her post-miscarriage life. The lithograph was most likely the precursor to *Henry Ford Hospital*, but both artistic representations of Kahlo working through her miscarriage are a crucial first step to understanding the close relationships between Kahlo and her art, Kahlo's body and the body represented in her art, and the female body and blood. The lithograph is powerful in its examination of Kahlo's view of motherhood and womanhood.

For this analysis of artistic representations and reproductions of the artist, Kahlo's painting from 1939 of *Las dos Fridas* (Figure 15), while not as visceral, also uses blood for reproducing Kahlo as Frida. In this painting, two full-bodied Fridas sit side-by-side holding hands on a green wicker bench with a jagged grey and black background that mimics a stormy sky. One is dressed in a traditional European white gown that has a long white skirt with red flowers along the hem, layered elbow-length sleeves, and an

embroidered collar that covers her neck. The other Frida is dressed in a traditional Tehuana dress, with a bright blue and yellow top and an olive green skirt and tulle-like hem. The two Fridas, while fully dressed, have their hearts exposed in their chests with blood flowing between them through a shared vein between their necks. The European-style Frida also has one vein that runs down to her arm and she clamps the end of it with a medical tool to stop the flow of blood. The medical tool and blood over her lap are reminiscent of her art from after her miscarriage, with blood at the site of her sex. The image can act as an allusion to women's menstruation as well. Kahlo's then ex-husband, Diego Rivera, also appears in this double self-portrait; the Tehuana Frida holds a small picture of a boy in her left hand, as a vein connects the portrait and Frida's heart. This Frida's hand is also positioned in her lap, putting Rivera close to her sex.

I wish to explore the traditional assertions that the two Fridas represent: Kahlo's dual heritage; the two sides of Mexican culture; the Fridas that Rivera did and did not love, among other explanations (Lindauer 144). Arturo S. Mujica J. argues that Kahlo's divorce from Rivera that same year was the painting's primary influence, and that therefore "La pintora busca reforzar su golpeada condición femenina y se hace acompañar con otra igual a sí misma . . . Al sentirse sola buscó apoyo en la pintura y en el lenguaje que le permitía reflejar su dolor" ["The painter looks to reinforce her struck feminine condition and makes herself keep company with another equal to her . . . Upon feeling alone, she looked for support in painting and language that would let her reflect her pain" (68-69)]. There is wordplay here between the Spanish *reflejar* and *reflexionar*, as seen in the last chapter in Quiela's letters as well. When Kahlo reflects her pain on the canvas like mirror she can then reflect upon it, not unlike her viewing audience. That she

would fill Rivera's void with herself is plausible, therefore using the painting to reaffirm and rediscover her individual, yet here doubled, identity after their divorce. Such an interpretation recalls Diego's effects on Quiela in *Querido Diego*; his departure causes the women to inhabit multiple, fragmented selves. In the painting we see Fridas in excess in that Kahlo's "feminine condition" had been split in two along with the other bodily sufferings she had been forced to endure; the two Fridas, hand in hand, are reconciled, just as Beatriz embraced her multiple selves. As *Henry Ford Hospital* replaced reproduction with artistic production of herself, *Las dos Fridas* also represents a transgression of the traditional mother role; she produces a double of herself, connected to her by blood. Such doubles could mean that she has created a daughter-like equal for herself, similar to Claire's alternative motherhood in *Duerme*. The appearance of a second Frida here can be seen as a painted embodiment of this pain, a pain in excess that extends beyond her own body; the emotional pain becomes so strong that it becomes physical and corporeal. Kahlo's tortured life caused many ruptures in how she viewed herself, with new pains and obstacles creating a different vision of her identity, and therefore when she tries to condense these differing images into one body in her painting it is impossible. This artistic rendering of Frida on the canvas cannot be reconciled or contained in merely one physical body, just as the blood within her veins and dual hearts cannot be contained, spilling onto the European-style Frida's white dress. The painting is a quiet but also violent demonstration of Kahlo's identity and femininity in excess, embodied and united on the canvas.

Kahlo's choice of Tehuana clothing for one of her Fridas is an intentional assertion of certain values in her exploration for embodiments of Mexican femininity. In

Mexico, Tehuana women from the region of Oaxaca are known for forming a matriarchy. Relations between men and women are considered to be, for the most part, equal, and the region received much attention during the 1920s to 1940s due to Kahlo's paintings¹⁴ and photographs by Anita Brenner and Tina Modotti. While Kahlo herself was known for wearing eccentric and brightly-colored traditional Mexican outfits, that one Frida is dressed in Tehuana attire is intentional. If Tehuana women were known for being powerful public presences, assertive, and on a level field with men, then Kahlo would paint herself in such clothing to claim this atypical feminine strength. It is also the Tehuana Frida who is holding the image of Rivera in one hand and supporting the European Frida's hand in her other. The Tehuana version of Kahlo, then, imitates the matriarchy or matriarchal role in supporting both Rivera and her other self through an inner feminine strength. Here Kahlo asserts a version of traditional maternity through the image of the Tehuana woman but seeks to reconfigure its example of womanhood while still representing its ideals in the painting. Kahlo's self-figuration as strong femininity is fitting, whether it relates to her self-definition after her divorce, to her artistic persona, or to her seeking strength and satisfaction from her pained physical body.

I wish to examine the information surrounding the meaning of this painting available in Kahlo's own diary. On plate 82 of the diary the page begins with "El origen de Las Dos Fridas" from 1950; Kahlo writes "Recuerdo = Debo haber tenido seis años cuando viví intensamente la amistad imaginaria con una niña, de mi misma edad más o menos" ["Memory = I must have been six years old when I had the intense experience of an imaginary friendship with a little girl . . . roughly my own age" (plate 82)].¹⁵ After a

¹⁴ Kahlo paints herself in Tehuana dress in *Autorretrato como Tehuana* from 1943.

¹⁵ The English translation of the diary is from Sarah M. Lowe.

description of her Alice in Wonderland-like journey through glass windows to interact with this girl in an imaginary store, at the end of the passage she reflects, “Han pasado 34 años desde que viví esa amistad mágica y cada vez que la recuerdo se aviva y se acrecenta más y más dentro de mi mundo” [“It has been 34 years since I lived that magical friendship and every time I remember it it comes alive and grows more and more inside my world” (plate 85)]. With this in mind, one can infer that after the divorce Kahlo found comfort in envisioning her childhood “friend” who both is and is not part of herself to be the separate-but-equal company to which Mujica J. referred in her view of the painting. The imaginary friend has remained one with Kahlo, tied to a time before divorce and heartbreak. The painted Fridas as representations of Kahlo are the reproduction of this childhood memory and the reproduction of her divided selves; they produce a sense of reconciliation and comfort to both a life of pain and the present painful divorce. Just as in the verbs *reflejar* and *reflexionar*, Kahlo’s imaginary friend was a reflection of herself upon which she can now reflect.

Another painting that depicts Kahlo as a bleeding and mutilated body closely associated with physical and emotional pain is *La columna rota* (Figure 16) from 1944. It illustrates the torso cast and metal back brace Kahlo used after her accident as a youth, and her chest, opened from neck to navel, reveals a fractured Greek column in place of her spine. Frida sits naked from the torso up but covers her hips and legs with a creamy sheet, and her torso and chest are split open yet bound by the straps of the brace. The column is tapered and broken, and the cracks or gaps cause it to resemble vertebrae. Nails impale her skin and continue down the sheet, and similarly to *Henry Ford Hospital*, Frida’s cheeks are speckled with tears. Behind her lies a muddled and jagged green

landscape that becomes a blue sky; behind her torso there is land, and behind her head there is sky. Schaefer says of this self-portrait that “Frida’s crumbling spinal columns allegorize similar processes, but the additional element of the human countenance in her likeness redirects the spectator’s gaze. The broken body is not an empty edifice but a living, inhabited space into which we are drawn” (“Framing” 292). The Frida in the painting is the epitome of suffering; she is cut open, bleeding, and weeping, but she is still alive.

I find a conflicting correlation between these images of the female body and the Greek column. On the one hand, the cast and brace represent the artist’s debilitating accident as both a physical and symbolic destruction of the female body. On the other hand, Kahlo has replaced a severed spine or shattered bones with a Greek column. The column is an ionic column, which is said to imitate the slender, tapered form of a woman in Greek architecture; it is no accident that Kahlo has placed a column in her shattered torso that represents strength and femininity. Lindauer notes that the year Kahlo painted this piece she was again experiencing severe back pains (56). The column, while broken, demonstrates a metaphorical strength within her injured body that, despite its constant suffering, will continue to endure. Just as the two Fridas are able to live with their shared blood flow and exposed hearts, this Frida is able to live with her open chest to expose her fragmented insides as a symbolic image of Kahlo’s own emotional love life and physical suffering. While there is no blood present in this painting, the deep red lining of her body cavity surrounding the column is visible. The bindings around her torso are not meant to heal the fissure but to help Frida live with an open chest; the physical ailments provide symbolic and ongoing psychological suffering for Kahlo. The painting shows embodied

suffering and how pain is inseparable from Kahlo's life or body. Kahlo negotiates her womanhood with excessive suffering and bodily constraints, and in *La columna rota* Frida's split torso, similar to her split Fridas in *Las dos Fridas*, establishes a wounded feminine subjectivity.

The image of a Greek column also appears in Kahlo's diary, further permitting the comparison among the female body, fragmentation, and injury. Early in her diary there is a watercolor where Kahlo has painted herself as coming apart, balanced atop a column (Figure 17). Sarah M. Lowe writes the following of the image: "What [Janus, god of the new year] sees in the past, on the left-hand page, is a proud, strong, imposing profile of a woman — Kahlo as figurehead on a Roman coin.¹⁶ But when Janus (and Kahlo) gaze to the right, into the future, they foresee disaster" (224). What Janus sees to the right is Frida atop the column, her body falling apart; her eyes, hands, arms, and even her head are shown crumbling off of her body. Above the figure reads "Yo soy la desintegración" ["I am disintegration" (plate 41)]. While the column appears to be sturdy and unwavering, atop it balances Frida, disintegration and fragmentation personified. I claim that the fragmentation of Frida's body acts as a premonition of things to come with its association to Janus. There is of course the eminent physical destruction of Kahlo's body with further medical complications, but there is also the premonition of a psychological disintegration. As her painted body falls apart so does her spirit become undone from decades of pain. It can be said that this pain, like the same pain the Frida of *La columna rota* must live with, has caused her body to split and fragment, represented in this broken and falling Frida. The fragmentation of the physical and spiritual self could also be the

¹⁶ To have Kahlo's face on a coin makes her an object for exchange; this juxtaposition could be seen as positioning her body against that of the prostitute, combining both the female body and the money for which the good are exchanged.

premonition, or anticipation, of her future death. The fragmented Frida falling off the column, I assert, is also a metaphor for Kahlo's destructive and painful relationship with Rivera, where their relationship also causes this destruction to her physical and emotional selves. Her body begins to transition from two Fridas attempting to embody her emotions and pain to disintegration and the body as fragmented by physical and emotional pain. The illustration also parallels wording from letters that Kahlo wrote after the trolley accident and after the miscarriage in Detroit. In the letter to Gómez Arias after the trolley accident she says of her body that "me quedo hecha una ruina para toda la vida" ["I'll stay made as a ruin my whole life" (Kahlo and Tibol 32)], and in describing the miscarriage to Doctor Elosser she writes that "El feto no se formó, pues salió como desintegrado" ["The fetus didn't form, so it came out disintegrated" (107-108)]. The image of her body in ruins, therefore, was one that she had formulated early in life as a youth, before the miscarriages, abortions, and surgeries she suffered as an adult. The image of the crumbling body on the pillar connects to the struggles of her womb to keep a child as well and a disintegrating loss through miscarriage, both for mother and future child.

Another diary drawing that emulates the relationship between the body and suffering is one that also illustrates the intersections between the textual and the visual prior to Kahlo's leg amputation. In August of 1953, a year before her death, she writes the following: "Seguridad de que me van a amputar la pierna derecha. Detalles sé pocas pero las opiniones son muy serias . . . Estoy preocupada, mucho, pero a la vez siento que será una liberación" ["It is certain that they are going to amputate my right leg. Details I don't know much but the opinions are very reliable . . . I'm very very, worried, but at the same

time I feel it would be a relief” (plate 143)]. Two pages before her entry Kahlo drew a headless body for which wings replace the arms and a coiled, column-like support for the left leg (Figure 18). The two legs are labeled as “apoyo número 1” and “apoyo número dos. 2” (plate 141), or supports one and two. Here the column-like leg support is not cracked, nor does a female figure balance or fall precariously from it, but rather it is a strong albeit artificial support for the torso. Both the organic and the artificial legs are labeled as supports, and again Kahlo has provided text alongside the sketch. In having her leg amputated, Kahlo envisions a strong column in place of the loss; the physical column is an emotional crutch. However, almost exactly replicating *La columna rota*, the torso is open and the spinal column visible, with a jagged line demarcating large cracks throughout.

Additionally, alongside this recurring image of the spinal (Greek) column in the diary entry there are both literary and visual references to a dove and wings that further embody Kahlo’s sense of fragmentation and disorientation during her final year and from the threat of losing her leg. Underneath the drawing of the figure and its two supports Kahlo wrote “Se equivocaba la paloma. Se equivocó” [“The dove made mistakes. It made mistakes” (plate 141)]. These lines are the first stanza of the 1941 poem “La paloma” by Spanish poet Rafael Alberti that Argentine composer Carlos Guastavino put to music in the same year:

Se equivocó la paloma.
 Se equivocaba.
 Por ir al norte, fue al sur.
 Creyó que el trigo era agua.
 Se equivocaba. . . .
 Que tu falda era tu blusa;
 que tu corazón, su casa.
 Se equivocaba.

[The dove made mistakes.
 It made mistakes.
 Instead of going north, it went south.
 It thought the wheat was water.
 It made mistakes. . . .
 That your skirt was your blouse;
 That your heart was your house.
 It made mistakes. (1-5, 12-14)]

Kahlo's textual reference emphasizes how both Kahlo and the dove are disoriented in learning that she will lose her leg; she has literally and figuratively lost her footing. Similar to the lines in the poem, Kahlo's leg in the drawing is replaced with a spiral support or column, (*se equivocaba*). As Kahlo has drawn a bird perched on top of the body, it is as though the dove has mistaken the body for a statue on which to perch. The drawn figure has no head, further describing emotional disorientation, and yet the figure itself has wings instead of arms; it is as if she were adding lines to the poem, where Frida has become the dove with its mistakes, "Que las piernas eran apoyos, que tus brazos eran alas," ["That your legs were supports, that your arms were wings"]. This winged figure, like the disintegrating figure atop the pillar, as states of disorientation and disintegration, take on a symbolic representation for Kahlo's embodiment of womanhood and identity and how her injuries continue to undo her physical body and emotional spirit.

The representations of Kahlo's body in her artwork constantly depict the violent intersections of physical suffering, the womb, and the feminine self at the forefront. Just as in the Porfirian model of Santa accepting her pain as a pleasurable punishment, to view Kahlo's suffering as pleasurable is an overly-romanticizing ideal that caters to the Mexican woman's role as the self-sacrificing and suffering *mujer abnegada*. Yet Kahlo's suffering was real, both physically and mentally, due to her injuries and failed attempts to

stay pregnant, and she therefore replaced her pain and her failed motherhood with artistic (re)production. Kahlo used the pain to create art so that she could find pleasure in her artistic selves, which were often depicted as bleeding and suffering like the actual artist. That is, as the artist found social validation through her art, she also found pleasure in how the public consumed these images. Returning to the idea of the public as consuming Kahlo's image and Fridamania, Lindauer discusses Kahlo's production in the following way; "Kahlo herself is construed as devouring, expending herself and her audience, but she also is devoured, consumed by the implicit ideologies of the author=corpus paradigm" (4-5). I use this quote to connect the idea of consuming Santa's flesh in the previous section with how Kahlo's artwork was turned into consumer goods to be bought and consumed by the public. Kahlo's body, art, blood, and pain are consumed by her audience as she took pleasure in this cannibalistic consumption of her image, before Fridamania. Rather than allowing the viewing public to fragment her, such as Santa experienced from her male clients, Kahlo fed off of how they viewed or consumed her because it was not based on desire. In this way she was able to take her personal anguish, whether physical or emotional, and turn it into satisfaction in being consumed and appreciated, an appreciation she perhaps did not feel in her relationship with Rivera, therefore replacing male valorization. Her viewing public also, then, in a vampiric way, consumes her blood and bleeding female form in a large number of her paintings. The blood of her accident, miscarriages, and abortions are what kept her from realizing her role as a biological mother, yet the packaging of her body, blood, suffering, and femininity in her artwork allowed her to resist the Mexican patriarchal role of motherhood and reproduction with artistic production and consumption. After exploring

Kahlo's artistic and written work and its bleeding and suffering imagery, I now turn to another narrative example in *Duerme*. Where Kahlo's womanhood was bleeding and violent in the artistic reproduction of her image, Claire's creation of a masculine self also results in bleeding, violence, and alternative self-reproduction. I now shift from forms of feminine resistance to bodily resistance that explores the inclusion of masculinity on the gender spectrum.

The Cross-Dresser: Reproduction through Gender Transgressions

After analyzing the suffering and bleeding bodies and wombs of Santa and Kahlo, I now turn to a novel that, as both fantastic and historical fiction, offers a different view of resistance through gendered subjectivity, the womb, bleeding, motherhood, and excess. In *Duerme* by Carmen Boullosa the protagonist, Claire, enacts gender and sexuality to resist the limitations of the female body and of colonial Mexican patriarchy, allowing her to manipulate her feminine, corporeal identity by cross-dressing. In Boullosa's novel, Claire is a woman who, to escape a life of prostitution in France, dresses as a man¹⁷ to travel to the Americas during Mexico's early colonial period. She, as the count she is impersonating, is sentenced to be hanged, but an indigenous servant woman discovers that she is female and makes her immortal by cutting her chest and pouring in magical water so that she can survive being hanged and escape dressed as an *india*. During her escape Claire encounters the actual count she had impersonated, and he rapes her while mounted on his horse. Claire then resides at the count's home, where she keeps company with Pedro, a poet, and she occasionally leaves the palace and gets into sword fights with Spanish soldiers. The poet writes a play, and an Italian actress, Ifsi, is cast and makes

¹⁷ Interestingly, Frida Kahlo was also known to wear men's clothing occasionally, as seen in a famous family portrait. I did not, however, choose to do close readings of her masculinized body in her artwork.

sexual advances towards Claire. When the count is to return, Claire must flee again, but the indigenous woman reveals that if Claire leaves Mexico she will die. As she flees with Pedro, she falls asleep. She wakes up twenty-five years later and, again dressed as a man, prepares to fight for independence.

Rather than enacting femininity in excess, Claire enacts gender and a masculine performance through her cross-dressing. Even while she attempts to dress and live as a man, her body continually betrays her performance. Her body constantly affirms and contradicts her masculine performance; she no longer menstruates, but her female “sex” is repeatedly violated. Despite these betrayals or interruptions, however, the complexity surrounding Claire’s gender identity comes from her cross-dressing, as she enacts a masculine performance over her feminine body. For this study I wish to analyze: Claire’s cross-dressing; her clothing and use of a sword; her relationship with her biological body; her transgressive view of motherhood; and the role of blood. In this novel gender is construed as malleable, with clothing, gestures, and the ability or inability to bleed no longer determining or limiting the embodiment of femininity. In studying Claire’s construction of the self, her construction of masculinity is repeatedly betrayed and complicated by her female body. She struggles to be perceived as a man while negotiating the excesses of her female body and gender, physically and socially constrained by her female body and, like Santa, punished with sexual violence for transgressing her gendered role as woman.

Duerme mixes history and fantasy to narrate the creation of Mexico during its colonial period alongside Claire’s complex constructions of identity and gender from her desire to live as a man. When the novel begins its first-person narration, the Spanish

adjectives used to describe the narrator are either masculine or neutral. Claire has been discovered on the ship, and those who have found her refer to her in masculine terms, such as “está helado” [“he’s frozen,”] “es francés” [“he’s French,”] and “él” [“he” (Boullosa 16-17)]. There is no indication that a woman is narrating until a servant begins to undress the narrator and discovers the body under “his” clothing. The reader learns that Claire began cross-dressing as a youth; she dressed as a boy to accompany and protect her mother while she worked as a prostitute, found work as a male page, and later escaped prostitution when she dressed as a count to travel to the New World. Claire dresses as a man in order to leave her gendered social position as a woman during this time period. Claire’s cross-dressing and the time period parallels the infamous figure of Catalina de Erauso (1585-1650), known as *la monja alférez* [“the lieutenant nun”] of the seventeenth century. Like Claire, Erauso traveled from Europe to the Spanish Colonies at the same time period and dressed and lived as a man. Both women escaped the extreme spaces for Hispanic women: Erauso the convent and Claire the brothel, again contrasting the virginal *Guadalupe* with the violated *Chingada*. Catalina de Erauso acts as a precursor to Claire’s adventures, demonstrating how a woman was able to escape the confines of traditional female roles and move to the New World and into the public sphere through living as a man. Claire, too, rethinks the biological confines of her body and creates a masculine, public embodied performance.

Claire chooses to resist the gendered and social scripts allotted to her as a woman during the time period of colonial Mexico. The social division between men and women were divided by public and private spheres; similar to Santa, the only women allowed in the public sphere on their own were prostitutes. Claire wants a public identity to travel

openly, and such an identity has to be male. For this reason, Salvador Oropesa refers to Claire as a *pícaro*, stating that “her goal is to usurp a social status that she does not deserve according to the social norms of the second half of the sixteenth century” (103). Claire rejects the limitations of womanhood, refusing society’s view of the single woman of the street, even though for a time she is forced against her will to be a prostitute. In becoming a man she breaks away from her dual-marginalization of a lower-class woman and acquires the honor denied to her as a woman and prostitute in sixteenth-century Mexican society (101). It is through the social powers of cross-dressing and a gendered performance that the daughter of a prostitute becomes a count. Male-to-female transvestism in Latin American literature demonstrates how the transvestite embodies and realizes the difficulty of gender; it compares what transvestism means for outside viewers and for the subjects themselves in terms of the motivations behind their performance through self-figuration and gender difference (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism* 2, 4). Claire’s female-to-male transvestism rewrites this relationship between her body and others’s views, like Catalina de Erauso. Additionally, her cross-dressing is rooted in a need for survival, agency, and power, as well as a desire to live as a man, as we saw in my first chapter with the photograph of Amelio Robles: “En su condición de des-identificada, Marie Claire representa una posibilidad para la trascendencia y transformación del sistema social al que se halla inscrita y que compulsivamente busca suscribirla en una categoría definida” [“In her condition of un-identification, Marie Claire represents a possibility for transcendence and transformation of the social system to which she is found engraved and that compulsively looks to assign her to a defined category” (Blanco-Cano 105)]. Claire’s male performance is determined by how others

view her performance, and therefore her success at transgressing gender and social codes in public relies on others.

Claire's desire to live as a man and her cross-dressing violently disrupt Mexico's patriarchal and national systems. Even though her cross-dressing is social rather than sexual in that she is not attracted to either sex while on her journey, her attempt to gain social power and freedom allotted to men causes men to respond with violence. Claire is confronted with sexual violence on several occasions, and there is only one time when she is able to avoid being raped and have the upper-hand: when she has a sword. As I explored in my chapter on images of *Soldaderas* holding firearms in the Mexican Revolution, Garber's exploration of the relationship between the male transvestites or transsexuals and the role of the phallus relates to a construction of male subjectivity that transcends the anatomical (98). This extends to the woman who dresses like a man and develops her own view of male subjectivity, employing a stand-in phallus as Claire does with her sword, based on how others observe her. Claire's sword, more than her clothes, gives her masculine social power. In one scene while dressed as a woman she is confronted by two drunken soldiers and takes one of their swords to display her skill with the weapon; Claire becomes a phallic woman as she takes his "manhood" (124). Later when she sees one of the soldiers, now sober, he challenges her to a rematch, and before the duel she asks, "¿Es tu espada virgen?" ["Is your sword a virgin?" (Boullosa 83)]. She insults his manhood by taking his sword, proving to have better skills with it, and accusing the man of being inexperienced both with his sword and his member. Claire avoids the male threat of sexual violence by wielding a sword and appropriating its masculine power. These moments represent the patriarchal structures of the time period

against those, especially a woman, who transgresses gender and social norms; Claire has to appropriate the masculine power of the phallus and to fight violence with violence.

The way Claire is able to shift between genders, races, and social classes throughout the novel demonstrates how fragile the patriarchal constructions are and how easily they can be dismantled. Apart from her masculine performance, she can alter her identity in other ways through other performances and dress. While in New Spain Claire has numerous identities: she is a French-Jewish male pirate; a count; a *mestiza* servant; and a white woman, depending on her clothing and performance of gender. When dressed as an indigenous woman she says: “Ven mi porte de blanca, mi cuerpo de blanca, mi ropa de india, y dicen «es mestiza»” [“They see my white woman’s demeanor, my white woman’s body, my Indian woman’s clothing, and they say ‘she’s *mestiza*’” (58)]. This racialized moment illustrates how a white woman in indigenous clothing is no longer identified as white or indigenous due to conflicting elements of race and class on her body. When she is dressed in male clothing, however, she becomes a man, here having the upper-hand from being a white European man and not *indio*. Blanco-Cano comments that Claire can possess multiple identities at one time: her identity is fragmented through these divisions between how she perceives herself, how she wishes to be perceived, and how others perceive her identity (109). The ambiguous perception of Claire’s body explains gender in excess because it stretches beyond corporeal definitions of what it means to be a man or woman. Garber’s work on cross-dressing is also key to understanding Claire’s role in colonial society and the way in which she questions it: “One of the cultural functions of the transvestite is precisely to mark this kind of displacement, substitution, or slippage; from class to gender, gender to class; or, equally

plausibly, from gender to race or religion” (37). As Claire slips between definitions of gender and race, she deconstructs masculinist colonial society by proving how easy it is to slip into a new identity with her performances. She can become the phallic woman when wielding a sword, change into upper-class men’s clothing and become a count, and wear indigenous dress and become a *mestiza*. While occasionally her biological body foils her masculine performance, Claire’s ability to move between genders, classes, and races demonstrates the feeble nature of these structures in colonial New Spain. She cannot move around and find success in the public sphere as a woman, yet she can do so hidden in plain sight as a man.

Claire’s subjectivity is divided between her female body and her masculine performance through gesture and clothing, although her performance may fall short of creating a true male external identity. Despite the masculine identity she creates, there are moments when her female body betrays her when it reveals itself to be female and leads to punishment for her gender transgression. In relating gender and drag, Judith Butler explains how the performance falsifies the gendered experience for male-to-female drag in the following way: “As much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘woman’. . . *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*” (“Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions” 418, emphasis is original). Despite the external depiction of the desired gender representation, there remains a split that causes the drag performance to fail. When Claire is first discovered on the boat dressed as the count, the indigenous slave who later cuts into her is given the task of undressing the count, and what follows in the narration is Claire’s inner monologue:

Me descubre y me revisa, esta vez sin tocarme . . . Sí, soy mujer, ya lo viste. Yo me siento humillada así expuesta. Creí que ya lo había vencido, que nunca más volvería a ser ésta mi desgracia, el cuerpo expuesto, ofrecido (como si él fuera mi persona), al mundo. «¡Yo no soy lo que ves!», quiero gritarle. No puedo, y no me serviría de nada. Ella ve que no soy lo que quiero ser. (19)

[She undressed me and looks me over, this time without touching me . . . Yes, I'm a woman, you already saw that. I feel humiliated so exposed. I believed I'd been had, that never again would this be my disgrace, the body exposed, offered (as if he were my persona), to the world. "I'm not what you see!" I want to shout at her. I can't, and it will do me no good. She sees that I'm not what I want to be.]

This quote shows how Claire's performance is not based on her body but instead of clothing and gestures like Butler's view of drag, and here when she says that she is not what the woman sees affirms that she wants to construct her identity away from her physical body. As Claire Taylor observes, Claire views her body as separate from herself, and therefore the body is not part of her self (230). In this moment Claire is devoid of her masculine identity because her naked, vulnerable female body is unable to perform her masculine identity at this time without its clothing, and therefore the servant will no longer view her as a man. Claire's anxiety reveals that she has dressed as a man not just to ensure her safe passage from France to New Spain but because she wishes to be male and therefore must construct a male exterior for the time period. Taylor further explains Claire's self-perception: "the [female] body is deemed to be inadequate by Claire, and there is no free-floating space of liberation from gender on offer" (228). What she believes to be her inadequate female body will continue to complicate her gender and perception in the New World. She uses her body only as the site of her performance rather than for its expected uses in enacting femininity, creating a family, and becoming a mother. What Claire has done in her male performance is to reject her biological body and its social constraints, which is to reject traditional womanhood of the time period.

Just as Santa and Kahlo were defined as inverting the traditional Mexican mother ideal into sexuality without maternity, Claire's vision of femininity and motherhood goes against traditional female reproduction. In her desire to live as a man, she does not wish to become a mother and fulfill her social and biological function as woman, as seen in her rejection of her female body. As she resists this maternal function she constructs a new version of maternity and reproduction for and with her masculine identity. After the servant disrobes her and discovers her true biological identity, Claire cries for her dead child, that is to say, she cries for herself; "yo, sí, yo soy mi propio hijo, Claire vuelta varón" ["I, yes, I am my own son, Claire turned male" (Boullosa 19)]. She views her cross-dressing as a rebirth where she herself produces a son in her own Self and in her same body; she is a female man. In constructing her masculine identity, she gives birth to this masculine version of herself. In re-imagining the female role of reproduction, she both represents and reproduces herself to be the male product of her female body. Her body is not a commodity or the site of reproduction but rather a producer, or even auto-producer. Yet, as previously mentioned, Claire has emotionally removed herself from her biological reproduction, undergoing what I call a "psycho-hysterectomy." This differs from Kahlo's reproduction of the self in her art because Claire reproduces or reinvents herself as a man. This is a re-imagining of the maternal body where she can produce a male image of herself that replaces her female identity.

Her re-imagining of the maternal body through her masculine performance is occasionally undone by the assertion of her biological body and is countered by violence. In analyzing the sexual violence men enact on Claire's female body, the following question by Judith Halberstam guides the character's journey through colonial Mexico as

a man: “How does gender variance disrupt the flow of powers presumed by patriarchy in relations between men and women?” (17). While Claire is renegotiating the relationship between man and woman on her own body, the novel constantly asserts the colonial social order between men and women with scenes of sexual violence. The first of these instances occurs when Claire is a youth and, after her mother’s death, she seeks work as a page boy for a colonel. This is the first instance where her biological body betrays her performance: “soy del Coronel esclavo . . . él abusa de mí, cuando, por un descuido de niña, mi ropa manchada de menstuo, él descubre que soy mujer, y veo que lo abandono y que ejerzo el mismo oficio de mamá, con mis piernas de misma forma que las de ella . . . también abiertas siempre” [“I am the colonel’s slave . . . he abuses me when, because of a girlish oversight, my clothes stained with menstruation, he discovers that I am a woman, and I see that I abandon it and that I practice the same profession as my mother, with my legs the same shape as hers . . . also always open” (35)]. Although Claire had sought to avoid the same path of prostitution as her mother by living as a man, this quote shows how the comparison between her female body and the prostitute body of her mother explains Claire’s rejection of the maternal body; she connects maternity and prostitution. In this scene the colonel forces her to become a prostitute, believing she is no longer able to fulfill her job as a page as a woman. Her menstruation undoes her male performance to the colonel as he defines her body by her gender rather than her clothing and performance as a boy. Grosz critiques Kristeva’s assertion that menstruation threatens the relations between men and women (207); just as the hysterectomy caused fear and even panic in Hipólito in *Santa*, here the female body marked by menstrual fluids can also cause panic in men. Kristeva’s stance explains why the colonel rapes Claire upon discovering she is

not a young boy; he views her as a threat. Even though she hides her female body, any hint of public, unaccompanied, and female sexuality is a threat and disruption to the social order of the time period that must be countered with violence, as seen with Santa's restriction to the brothel. In this instance, the violence and domination over her is sexual.

Claire encounters sexual violence again as an adult when she comes face-to-face with the count whom she had impersonated. The indigenous woman informs the count that Claire is immortal and thus cannot be killed, so rather than kill her body he abuses it with equal violence as she is forced onto his horse:

Me levanta el huipil, lo quita de mi torso, quiero zafarme, los criados me sujetan de las piernas y las manos, dejándome herida y pechos desnudos . . . Abre sus calzas, me levanta las enaguas, y me posee, sujeta de los pies por sus criados, sobre mi caballo, doblando hacia atrás mi torso, sin importarle que la silla me lastima. En tres sacudidas suelta su emisión, para mi suerte, sin gesticular, como si no lo hubiera hecho o no le importara, y cuando termina me baja dejándome entre los criados medio desnuda. (Boullosa 53-54)

[He lifts my embroidered dress, takes it off my torso, I want to wriggle loose, the servants hold me by the legs and hands, leaving my wound and breasts naked . . . He opens his breeches, lifts my skirts, and takes me, my feet held by the servants, on my horse, bending back my torso, not caring that the saddle hurts me. In three shakes he lets out his emission, just my luck, without gesticulating, as if he hadn't done it or hadn't cared, and when he finishes he lets me down, leaving me half-naked with the servants.]

In both this instance and the example from her youth, the men punish Claire for cross-dressing by forcing her to submit sexually as a woman; the men use violence to assert the masculinist patriarchy and keep her in her place. Norma Alarcón proposes a masculinist connection in Mexican studies between *la Malinche* and the role of rape. In the context of the violence of the conquest, the options for women were violence or sexual submission. In this regard, Alarcón proposes that *la Malinche* chose her role of translator and companion "to avoid rape and violence upon her body" (291). Here I compare Claire's

rape to that of *la Malinche*, where in the New World women are trapped in this cycle of sexual violence as the result of male power and domination, yet both women took action to avoid such a fate; Claire cross-dresses, and *la Malinche* became Cortés's companion. In Claire's cross-dressing she seeks to achieve a powerful status as a man where she would no longer be "woman" and therefore no longer subject to the threat of rape. While Claire wishes to live as a man, her bleeding or wounded female body continues to bring sexual violence upon her as a woman. In cross-dressing, as stated earlier by Oropesa, Claire attempts to obtain honor, and yet in these scenes the colonel and count strip her of her acquired masculine mask of honor as well as her sexual, feminine honor through rape.

The flow of blood affects Claire's gendered performance and subjectivity and complicates the relationship between her body and womb in New Spain. When the indigenous servant discovers that "the count" is to be put to death, she performs a ceremony to make Claire immortal in order to survive being hanged and escape to safety. The scene and its bloody wound reflect Claire's subjectivity and her feminine womb, or her sex:

Al abrirme con la piedra, mi sangre roja se deslizó abundante por la piel, sin premura, a tibia velocidad. Ahora con sus dedos abre la herida, jalando cada uno de sus bordes a extremos opuestos, vuelca agua en ella, y a pesar de forzar los bordes de la profunda herida a una posición que la debiera hacer sangrar más, la sangre deja de brotar. Con el paso del agua, el centro de la herida queda limpio, como si no fuera carne abierta. El agua sigue cayendo del cántaro, pero no cae sobre mi piel, es absorbida por la herida. (Boullosa 20)

[Upon opening me with the stone, my red blood flowed abundantly from the skin, without haste, at a warm speed. Now with her fingers she opens the wound, pulling each of its edges to the opposing extremes, spilling water in it, and despite forcing the edges of the deep wound to a position that should have caused more bleeding, the blood stops coming. With the flow of the water, the center of the wound becomes clean, as if it weren't open flesh. The water keeps flowing from the jug, but it doesn't fall onto my skin, it's absorbed by the wound.]

This is also reminiscent of scenes of Aztec sacrifice. The scene serves to compare it to the blood and water in the miscarriage scene from *Santa*, as the pouring of mystical waters into Claire's wound from a jug is similar to the rupture of the water jug during Santa's miscarriage. This scene, however, lacks the symbolism of cleansing an impurity or filth, yet it is still a cleansing. Similar to the scene from *Santa*, Julie A. Kroll refers to the absorption of water into the wound as a baptism for Claire: "her 'feminine baptism' does not reverse her gender identity, but rather, multiplies it . . . Claire's sex and identity are not one but many" (113). While the pouring of water into Claire can be seen as a cleansing baptism, this fusion of blood and water in Claire's veins is more so a problematic intersection of identities. She is transformed from woman not to man as she wants but instead into multiple possibilities. Now her identity is no longer tied to one gender because her body allows for multiple identities to inhabit it. With her possibilities to occupy many identities, she moves further away from the constraints of womanhood from which she wishes to free herself. In this way, Claire sheds part of her biological, old identity as the rebirth through the poured waters of immortality allows Claire to rediscover her desired or multiple identities in the New World. Additionally, it is native Mexican water that is poured into Claire's veins; she receives her powers from indigenous forces, from an indigenous woman, that are more powerful than her European blood. Such a struggle between European and indigenous forces relates to Kahlo's painting *Las dos Fridas* and how the Tehuana Frida is stronger and supports the European Frida. Therefore this scene also ties Claire's gender to national and racial structures.

The immortality ritual has another effect on Claire's body that combines blood and the maternal body that I wish to discuss. While living at the count's palace Claire has

a self-realization: “Recuerdo que hace mucho que no sangro, hace muchas semanas que no hay sangre menstrual en mis ropas. Meses. Desde que estoy en México” [“I remember that it’s been a long time that I haven’t bled, several weeks I haven’t seen menstrual blood in my clothes. Months. Since I’ve been in Mexico” (Boullosa 111)]. Similar to the effect of Santa’s hysterectomy, this cut and pouring of magical waters also affects Claire’s embodiment of maternity and womanhood. In no longer being able to menstruate, like a woman who has had a hysterectomy or reached menopause, Claire can no longer conceive and have children. In the strict binary terms of patriarchy, if a woman is biologically defined through the ability to bear children, then Claire is no longer a useful woman in Mexico as she has ceased to menstruate. This lack of bleeding results in a comparison between Claire’s cut wound and her sex. As neither her body nor her wound can bleed any longer, the cut on her chest is a duplicate vagina which has caused, or produced, the multiple identities now possible for Claire to live through her un-bleeding body. It can also be said, then, that when the servant cut into Claire, that was her final bleeding, or menstruation while in Mexico. When Claire is a youth, her menstruation causes the colonel to rape her, and as an adult when she receives the magical cut and stops bleeding she is raped by the count. Therefore Claire’s “becoming a woman” at puberty as well as her ceasing to be a “woman” are marked by the sexual violence of the rape scenes. While still tied to her female body, the end of her menstruation symbolizes a possible embodiment of gender that embraces the inclusion of her masculine performance. Her menstrual blood can no longer betray her performance as a man as she steps further from the maternal female body she avoids.

Despite her altered gendered identity and body, Claire is constantly reminded of and contained within her female body. Another example again involves a sexual encounter, this time with a woman. Claire narrates a scene at the count's palace when an Italian actress, Ifsi, crawls into bed with her and begins to touch her between her legs:

. . . y antes de que yo me diera cuenta, ella me estaba propinando caricias donde menos debe tocarse a nadie. ¿Cuánto tiempo? Mi camisola blanca, las sábanas blancas eran mi único escudo. Y su cuidado, que bueno lo puso en no lastimar con sus manos mis heridas abiertas. Aunque donde las puso puede bien ser considerado herida abierta. En mi caso ya no sangra, pero no le hace falta esa expresión de roja inmoderación para decir que es la herida siempre abierta en un cuerpo. . . . (Boullosa 114)

[. . . and before I realized it, she was giving me caresses where one should never touch someone. For how long? My white camisole, the white sheets were my only shield. And her care, the care she took in not hurting my open wounds with her hands. Although where she put them can well be considered an open wound. In my case it no longer bleeds but it doesn't lack that expression of red immoderation to say that it's the always-open wound in a body . . .]

In the narration Claire compares her sex to an open wound that does not heal, not unlike the mark on her chest. Kroll offers insight into Claire's perception of her body when she is equally appalled during both sexual encounters with the count and Ifsi, rejecting anyone touching "the red gash of femininity between her legs" (113). The rejection of sexual touch affirms the reason for Claire's cross-dressing; she did not dress as a man to embody and perform sexual desire toward women. Kroll explains that Claire feels a "rejection of her own corporeality, due to the association of the female body with prostitution, subjection, and death," therefore void of desire for either men or women (113, 114). Claire associates her mother's body with prostitution, and therefore masculine, negative objectifications of the female body are what Claire too projects on to her own. Claire rejects being touched because of her aversion to her own sexual organs, as they mark her body as the sexual identity from which she wishes to free herself

through her masculine performance. Grosz explains in her consideration of body image how gendered parts of the body such as sexual organs are associated with gendered social expectations (79). Like Claire's lack of menstruation, when Ifsi touches her sex, Claire is reminded of how it binds her to biological and social definitions of womanhood that she desperately has tried to avoid through cross-dressing. The wound on her chest that does not bleed and the end of her menstruation symbolize an embodiment of gender that embraces the possibility for her to define herself and possess male power and privilege as she dresses as a man.

Although she is situated in the context of colonial Mexico, Boullosa's gender-bending protagonist reworks the societal structures available to women at the time for personal reasons. In seeing how her mother was treated as a prostitute and in feeling the freedom of dressing as a man to accompany her, she comes to disavow her female body in favor of a masculine identity to free herself from the female objectivity of prostitution, seen as her only option, albeit oppressed and sexualized, for being in public as a woman. She creates an embodied masculinity to gain social power and an independent subjectivity: freedom. It is evident that Claire's womb is connected to violence and blood, where her menstruation and her sexual organs problematize her identity and bring sexual violence upon her. While a lack of menstruation signifies for society that she is no longer a woman and helps Claire separate herself further from her female body, she is still trapped in her body by her "red gash of femininity." She enacts gender as resistance through a transgression of corporeal limits both by cross-dressing and her magical transformation through which she ceases to bleed. As Claire becomes a masculine version of herself, Boullosa comments on the stark binaries of colonial Mexico and its cruel

social systems, still seen today, that utilize the threat of violence as punishment for transgressing the divisions among genders, races, and classes. One could suggest that in performing masculinity to be perceived as a man Claire in fact contributes to masculinist social models, yet her biological body betrays her cross-dressing. Claire's masculine performance through cross-dressing, swordplay, and a masculine "I" does, however, problematize masculinist social systems. Despite the occasional success of her gendered performances, the conflict illustrates the disparity between Claire's performance and her biological body.

Conclusions

For all three female figures in this chapter, Santa, Frida Kahlo, and Claire, blood and pain are present in their rejections and inversions of Mexican motherhood and reproduction. For various reasons they cannot or do not wish to reproduce and therefore seek production and reproduction through other means. The image of the bleeding or wounded womb represents the inability to give birth, and the significance of the miscarriage or hysterectomy and the failure or removal of the symbolic womb destroys these characters's sense of identity and femininity. Each of their bodies is marked by blood, and while pulsing blood can represent life, here the representations of blood relate to illness, violence, or death, such as the blood seen in Santa's miscarriage, Kahlo's art depicting miscarriages and split selves, and Claire's cut and rapes. While it is their bleeding wombs that keep them from becoming mothers, it is this same blood, or lack for Claire, which allows them to create their new identities around a different configuration of womanhood away from motherhood. Santa's bleeding womb moves her from expecting mother to fallen woman and prostitute, from reproduction to the production

and consumption of her body in the brothel. Kahlo's wounded womb prevents her repeatedly from carrying a baby to full term, and she therefore moves from future mother to artist where reproduction is replaced by the reproduction of her pain, blood, and self in her art. Claire's transformed womb that now does not bleed moves her further from definitions of womanhood for herself, and she is able to transition from biological reproduction to a reproduced male version of herself through her cross-dressing. The female characters resist and re-appropriate the traditional role of Mexican mother as *la Guadalupe* in their production or reproduction and create spaces for other women that do not involve having children so Mexican women can find validation for themselves away from personal fulfillment defined by cultural bodily expectations.

In *Santa, Duerme*, and the artwork of Frida Kahlo, the narrative or artistic scenes each connect the female characters to a violent, bleeding femininity that all of them, especially Claire, look to avoid. The characters demonstrate the possibilities for enacting a gendered identity in the public sphere just as the women of the Mexican Revolution did. Claire's masculine performance is comparable to the examples of women of the Revolution that used masculine markers such as dress, or even the constructed image and identity of Amelio Robles and his male pronouns and clothing. The characters also relate to the figures of Quiela and Beatriz in their ultimate rejection of the Mexican female role as mother. Quiela and Kahlo in particular walked similar paths in that they were both Diego Rivera's lovers, and the destruction that he brought to both women is powerful. As both Angelina Beloff and Frida Kahlo were artists, and both Diego Rivera's lovers, they were forced to move away from traditional motherhood and seek artistic production without Rivera, and ultimately both figures reproduce their own image and identity

through their writing and art. The theme of prostitution or sex work in the stories of Santa and Beatriz differ in that Santa, in her Porfirian punishment, has no alternative whereas Beatriz chooses and enjoys her profession without suffering. While she remains trapped in her social and cultural context, Santa's story takes a "fallen woman" from the Mexican countryside and makes her a protagonist who must die for her sins. I do not proclaim that Kahlo or Claire experienced the same "fall" as Santa despite their sufferings, however. Santa is a "fallen woman" as a moral punishment in the Porfiriato for her lost virginity, and while Kahlo and Claire suffer physically or psychologically for their inability to bear children, especially Claire's punishments for her cross-dressing, the artwork and novel do not read respectively as punishments for the figures in the same way. What remains at the center of Santa and Kahlo's identities is a struggle to assert a feminine identity and body despite their sufferings. Just as the female figures used their wounded or bleeding wombs to redefine motherhood, in the final chapter the female protagonists defy social expectations for body image, beauty, and female sexual pleasure. Where Santa, Kahlo, and Claire assert alternatives to motherhood through their bodies, these characters use the female body to assert female desire and pleasure.

Chapter 5. Resisting the Male Gaze and Male Pleasure: Female Body Image, Desire, and Sexual Pleasure

In the previous chapter I analyzed female figures where their bodies enacted sexuality without maternity and offered alternative modes of maternal reproduction centered on their wounded wombs and subjectivity rooted in bleeding and pain. As they are kept from becoming mothers they resisted the image and model of *la Guadalupe* and instead turned their lack of reproduction and their pain and suffering into pleasure, defying masculinist constructs of Mexican female maternal roles through their wounded bodies. Here I continue to look at pleasure, sexuality, and female bodies, but not in terms of the dominance of male desire and sexuality over the passive female form. Like the examples of Beatriz from *Demasiado amor* and Gertrudis from *Como agua para chocolate* in previous chapters, here I also contemplate sexuality and sexual desire felt and enacted *by* women. To address female beauty and desire I will analyze two Mexican novels that happen to be the first by their respective authors: *Señorita México* (1987) by Enrique Serna and *Vapor* (2004) by Julieta García González. Within the spaces of the Mexican beauty pageant and the health spa I will reflect on constructions of body image, definitions of beauty, and the comparisons between motivations in male and female desire in dialogue with pageant culture and fat studies. For the protagonists Selene and Gracia I wish to show how the combination of physical beauty and female desire allows them to transgress masculinist constructions on their own terms; they style their body and assert their sexual pleasures for themselves.

Through their corporeal identities as a beauty pageant contestant and an obese woman, the female characters enact femininity and beauty in excess in terms of quality

and quantity. Gracia, as an obese woman, is measured in terms of her bodily excess, or her quantity. Selene, the pageant contestant, is measured in terms of both quantity and quality for regional, national, and later international standards of beauty. Whether qualitative or quantitative, both scales of measurement and value are rooted in patriarchal, masculine constructions of embodied beauty, and these novels demonstrate how measurements of beauty in the body affect women. I consider these scales as a Pygmalion effect that patriarchal society imposes on women and that women in turn impose on themselves, related to visual theory of the gaze on women's bodies. Laura Mulvey describes typical interactions between men and women in terms of passive and active roles: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (19). Mulvey says that in cinema women are often coded with "to-be-looked-at-ness," positioned as an object to be looked upon by the male viewer (19).¹ The female role is traditionally that of passivity, accepting the active male fantasy over her; the perfect woman. I relate this view of female passivity to Selene in her role as pageant contestant, where she serves only as an object of female beauty and male desire, and to Gracia and other women in public whom men view. Gracia uses her female body as resistance against cultural and masculinist expectations for women, but Selene instead is unable to resist the power of the male gaze for her self-validation, like Quiela throughout most of *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*, causing her demise. Selene and Gracia differ in their embodied subjectivity or objectivity and how they allow the male gaze or fantasy to influence their femininity.

¹ I acknowledge that these binaries only consider heterosexual men and heterosexual women with no room for other spectrums of gender.

While the male gaze factors into how the characters configure their perceptions of body image and femininity, I also wish to look at the female gaze toward Selene and Gracia, or that of women looking at women. Within this public display of the female body there exists what Diana Fuss refers to as the homospectatorial look. Of women's fashion photography she claims that "To look straight *at* women, it appears, straight women must look *as* lesbians" ("Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look" 714; emphasis is original), that is, heterosexual women are to take cues about their own feminine appearance by looking at sexualized photographs of other women. The image is for consumption by a female audience not only for desire but also identification, playing on the oedipal mother-daughter identification studied by Freud and Lacan (714, 718). The pressure to imitate the bodies shown in fashion magazines comes from outside forces and internalized thoughts, and in the novels we see how the characters internalize these cultural expectations of femininity for determining their construction of beauty and their body type. Selene and Gracia internalize their own female desire against the masculine gaze and desire to assert their own image of female sexuality; as John Berger says of the female nude in classical European paintings, "her body is arranged in the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture. This picture is made to appeal to *his* sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality" (*Ways of Seeing* 55; emphasis is original). Woman is for man to view and enjoy her form, but the homospectatorial look includes the woman who looks upon another woman, as straight or gay. In line with Mulvey's "looked-at-ness," women are conditioned to be seen as possessions for men and society to desire and possess through a process of consumption similar to what has been mentioned in the previous chapters concerning Quiela, Beatriz, Santa, and Kahlo. Both the male gaze and

the homospectatorial look have to do with models of power and the acts of identification, desire, and possession.

What I also want to compare in these novels is the inclusion of the female protagonists's sexual desires as a highly disruptive and transgressive example of female agency and sexual identity. Just as in the previous chapters when the characters enacted a sexuality that inverted the expectation of maternity, here too the female characters seek to own and demonstrate female desire rather than follow traditional female sexual passivity and succumb to male ideals and desire. As Mexican women are tied to the roles of daughter, wife, and (Virgin) mother through *la Guadalupe*, in those spaces there is no room to consider female sexuality, pleasure, or desire, as these do not serve such patriarchal constructs. By enacting sexual desire Selene and Gracia subvert this image of *la Guadalupe* and the virgin, pure mother-wife. Luce Irigaray says of the confusion surrounding women's desire that, "Their desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole" (29); this interpretation is from the viewpoint of men and patriarchy rather than an assertion by women. Here female desire, and subsequently female sexuality, evokes fear and panic in men, for women are to remain passive and subservient to male desire, the only desire. The description of female desire as a hunger connects with the previous chapters's focuses on consuming. Not unlike Hipólito's inability to comprehend Santa's hysterectomy, society cannot comprehend or view female sexuality outside of motherhood. As I mentioned, female sexual organs are to serve only for male pleasure and to preserve male lineage and authority by way of offspring. The novels in this chapter, however, include scenes of female masturbation, which serve as the ultimate resistance against male codes of female

sexuality and pleasure. The pageant contestant and the obese woman move away from a space where they give into the male desire directed at them; they enact their own desires and gain agency. I wish to show how Selene and Gracia's body image and sexuality differ from masculinist constructions of beauty and desire for women and how the characters perform these embodiments of beauty and sexuality either in public or private. I begin with a feminist reading of *Señorita México* and how Serna negotiates male and female ideals of beauty and womanhood with the beauty pageant queen, Selene.

The Forbidden Desires of a Beauty Queen

The novel *Señorita México* from 1987 explores the relationships between beauty and female desire as it tells the story of Miss Mexico 1966. It is apparent from the beginning that Selene aches for her former glory; although she did not win the Miss Universe pageant, she was famed throughout Mexico for her beauty, brandishing her title of *Señorita México* until her death. Her title goes hand-in-hand with her beauty, in what she continues to embrace as she ages and loses fame and her audience. However, one would expect a beauty pageant narrative to only demonstrate how the contestant caters to her male audience. The novel *Señorita México*, however, also details Selene's personal life, which explains how she catered to male desire during the pageant but behind closed doors enacted her own female desire that overturned expectations of femininity. Beyond her transgressive and queer sexual relationships with her male cousin and female dance partner it is the pleasure she finds in her own body that defines her female desire over the passive sexuality she enacts for men during the pageant. A consideration of the novel is divided into two components: how Selene as the pageant queen serves male constructions of desire and beauty; and how in certain moments away from the pageant she caters to

her own female desire. I want to show how these later constructions truly demonstrate how Selene enacts femininity outside of the pageant and in her personal life.

Enrique Serna is a novelist, short-story writer, and essayist from Mexico City who is best known for his historic novel *El seductor de la patria* (1999) for which he won literary acclaim and awards. While also known for *Ángeles del abismo* (2004), his first novel, *Señorita México*, has received the least amount of attention and has not been translated into English.² What adds a meta-historical element to the novel is that in 1966, the year the fictional Selene wins the pageant in the novel, there was no actual Miss Mexico pageant. The pageant has been held since 1952 except for a few years, and since 1966 was one such year Serna's novel fills a historical gap. In an interview Serna reveals how he found Selene's voice while working publicity campaigns for Mexican films and collecting sound bites from female celebrities and models that were, as he puts it, "ridiculeces llenas de humor involuntario" ["absurdities full of involuntary humor" (Camps 170-71)]. The novel is filled with such unintentionally humorous quips by Selene in the interview portions of the narration or her internal monologues. For example, at the start of the novel when she is planning her suicide she phones her friends to say goodbye, but many do not answer; she thinks, "Es de mala educación no estar en casa cuando una suicida llama para despedirse" ["It's bad manners to not be home when someone who's suicidal calls to say goodbye" (Serna 11)]. Serna includes other moments of dark humor when Selene voices her opinions about the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, Franco's dictatorship of Spain, and feminists. The voice Serna gives Selene helps paint the picture of a vain woman without regard for or awareness of much else beyond her own beauty

² It was originally published with the title *El ocaso de la primera dama*, but after copies were destroyed in a flood at the publishing house, he changed the title of the reprinted version the following year (Camps 169).

and self-interest.³ Selene, as Miss Mexico, becomes a national allegory of Mexico, as I address later on. I assert that Serna's dark humor paints a candid, humorous, and critical picture of Mexican pageantry and femininity, playing off the fame, fortune, and failure of ridiculous tabloid figures.

Selene Sepúlveda manages to acquire multiple dimensions within the narration as Serna alters between first- and third-person narrations to tell Selene's story. Chapters where Selene talks to the reporter⁴ add affect to her tale, while the omniscient third-person narration adds an objective "truth" to fill in the gaps or spin Selene's stories and histories differently. This second level of narration, just like the celebrity quotes, helps question the value and truth of the biography and first-person account of Selene's life. Serna also tells the story from end to beginning:⁵ the narration begins with a solitary line referencing Selene's suicide, and throughout the first- and third-person narration there are references to her "vocación de suicida" ["suicidal vocation" (Serna 179)]. Her story starts with her final years, working backward from her post-pageant career doing commercials, drinking, and dancing, her failed attempt to become Miss Universe, her European tour, and her success as Misses Mexico and District. Additionally there are accounts of her husband and lovers at various times in her life, as well as a revelation at the end that her supposed uncle was her actual father due to a secret affair the uncle had with Selene's mother. There are also levels woven between what Selene tells the reporter, how she wishes to be perceived and remembered by the public, and how she actually is perceived

³ This relates to the poem "Hombres necios" by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, how the patriarchy forces women to behave a certain way and are then ridiculed for it.

⁴ The first-person narration to a reporter resembles Rosario Castellanos's poem "Kinsey Report" where women talk about their sex lives.

⁵ Serna admits to borrowing this reverse chronology from authors like Pintor and Carpentier (Camps 171).

by the public. It is through Selene's failures that the reader understands that she is, like most celebrities or public figures, "una mujer que ha sido víctima de sus propias circunstancias" ["a woman who had been the victim of her own circumstances" (Camps 166)]. These narrative layers make Selene into a three-dimensional subject.

The crux of the novel's fictitious account of a Mexican beauty pageant is situated in the intersections between visibility and beauty. Just as her body is the embodiment of national beauty standards for the public during the pageant, her body remains a physical representation of the self, and therefore at the end of her short forty years she has lost both her figure and her self. A moment that exemplifies this loss is when she talks about how she feels about the magazine article for which she had agreed to be interviewed and which comprise the sections of the novel narrated in Selene's own voice. When she reads the article she considers it all to be lies and exaggerations, and regrets having revealed her life to the journalist: "pensó que después de 20 años de olvido . . . pudo haberse negado [al reportero] para quedar a salvo del escenario y seguir siendo, en el recuerdo de sus antiguos admiradores, la frondosa morena de medidas 94-60-92 cuyas aficiones eran la esgrima, el ballet acuático, y la ópera" ["she thought that after 20 years in obscurity . . . she could have rejected [the reporter] to stay safe from the scene and continue being, in the memory of her old admirers, the luscious dark-skinned woman who measured 37-24-36 whose interests were fencing, synchronized swimming, and the opera" (16)]. The narration mirrors the dissatisfaction that Josefina Bórquez felt when Elena Poniatowska read the novel *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* to her, feeling her words had been changed. Besides this list of overly-elegant and, in spite of fencing, feminine personal interests, Selene also wants the public to remember her youthful body and that she is more busty

than the ideal hourglass figure of 90-60-90 centimeters, or 36-24-36 inches, of bust, waist, and hips. In reducing herself to her measurements, she becomes simply a bust, waist, and hip; she fragments herself by clinging to beauty standards that take away her personhood. Were she to have control over how her fans remembered her, she would make it so that they were left only with the image of the Miss Mexico of her youth and not the aging and fatter version when she dies.

I would like to compare ideals for inner and outer beauty for these contestants and how that points to the differences between Selene's appearance and her health. From the start of the novel we know Selene to be a raging alcoholic, and she is afraid of an autopsy; "que las observaría [las vísceras] con el mismo criterio exigente de los jueces que habían calificado sus piernas el día del certamen: 'De páncreas está buenísima, pero el hígado se pasa de las medidas reglamentarias'" ["that they would observe her [entrails] with the same demanding criteria as the judges that had graded her legs the day of the pageant: 'The pancreas is excellent, but the liver is beyond the regulation measurements'" (Serna 13)]. Selene still remains obsessed with how she measures up to other women, whether with her bust in the pageant or her liver on the autopsy table, another example of Serna's black humor. The deterioration of her organs despite only being forty parallels the deterioration of her figure, her beauty, and the self, all of which she values on the surface of her body. Another moment I wish to look at happens when, while reading the article and crying in her final moments, Serna writes that Selene listens to an Alberto Vázquez record playing *Perdóname mi vida* on repeat. The 1963 classic Mexican *bolero*, sung in a film with Vázquez by the same name in 1964, has lyrics such as:

Si acaso te ofendí, perdón.
 Si en algo te engañé, perdón.
 Si no te comprendí, perdón.
 Perdóname mi vida.

[In case I offended you, forgive me.
 If in something I deceived you, forgive me.
 If I did not understand you, forgive me.
 Forgive me, my life. (1-4)]

I focus on these song lyrics because I view the song's reference to *mi vida*⁶ as the relationship between Selene and her body. In her final moments Selene plays the song while she asks herself for forgiveness for betrayal in not being able to maintain her beauty pageant body. I also see this as Selene lamenting how she did not stay true to her true sexual desires, as I will analyze further on. As she is in the process of committing suicide, it is possible she also asks herself forgiveness for killing herself; Selene's apology indicates that she has regrets in how she lived her life.

Selene's values photos of herself in a consideration of her body's visibility and self-worth for how they preserve her former beauty as she ages. In the novel's first chapter when she is waiting for the room to fill with gas, Selene looks through photo albums and in finding one from her trip to Europe she comments that "Eran fotos de la misma vida, pero no de la misma mujer. Esa morena cosmopolita, representante de la belleza mexicana en el extranjero, esa flamante mariposa de ojos verdes" ["They were photos of the same life, but not of the same woman. That dark-haired Cosmopolitan woman, representative of Mexican beauty abroad, that flaming butterfly with green eyes" (Serna 10)]. Even twenty years after the pageant Selene is preserved in the images from her youth and in the memories of her fans. Her legendary image remains, for her, that of

⁶ There are two possible meanings, depending on the comma. "Forgive me my life" would ask forgiveness for her actual life, while "Forgive me, my life" makes *mi vida* a term of endearment, directing the phrase at a lover.

the international representative of Mexican beauty and not that of a washed-up former star. She yearns to remain as she was: a diva of the Mexican pageant stage. However, the readers of the newly-published article are faced with a different Selene, and the Selene of her memory and of the public's current perception are two different women. The article is accompanied by photos of Selene, and she is horrified that the magazine has included "a un cuarto de plana el *close up* de sus nalgas con celulitis" ["on a fourth of a page a close up of her backside with cellulitis" (14)]; this is a public testament as to how she has lost her former pageant figure, a degradation of her former diva self. Once during the interviews Selene was concerned there was no photographer (73); even though she has aged, she still wishes to be photographed. The camera had validated her beauty, but now reveals her deterioration and continues to document it.

The novel shows how the beauty pageant has significant resonance in both national and international contexts for defining constructions of femininity, race, and beauty. These pageants carefully negotiate embodiments of gendered and national representations by the contestants (Banet-Weiser 2). The pageants propose that there be only one female representative of the nation, and as Sarah Banet-Weiser declares, "It is also a highly visible performance of gender, where the disciplinary practices that construct women as feminine are palpable, on display, and positioned as unproblematically desirable" (3). The female body is highly problematized in the national pageant, in that the women are considered to be physical embodiments of national ideals; this concept of "woman as nation," however, revolves around masculine concepts imposed upon the women and their bodies (6).⁷ Banet-Weiser's view of pageants relates

⁷ In Octavio Paz's poem "Piedra del sol" he likens the landscape of the recently-discovered Americas of the Conquest to the figure of a woman.

to Mulvey's discussion of visual pleasure and female passivity from earlier, where the perfect pageant contestant strikes this contradictory balance between the passive object and active subject, "weaving desirability with respectability, and sexuality with morality" (8). The pageant is the ultimate representation of excessive femininity, or hyper-femininity, with the need to represent *the* perfect Mexican beauty qualities, from femininity to cup size.

The title of the Mexican beauty pageants also reveals the impossible space in which the women are judged as they embody the nation. In 1994 the main national beauty pageant switched from *Señorita México* to *Nuestra Belleza México*, or Our Beauty. I interpret the title as meaning that the woman is the nation's one beauty, and the word *nuestra* creates this national inclusion as though the whole population were beautiful and the contestants merely highlight everyone's beauty. *Nuestra Belleza* also shows how the pageant focuses on Mexican definitions of beauty and certain racial and bodily types, where female body image exists between definitions of national beauty in Mexico and what men consider desirable. When she reflects on why she won *Señorita México* over the other Mexican girls, Selene says: "Mire, a mí realmente lo que me ayudó fue ser morena" ["Look, what really helped me win was being dark-skinned" (71)]. In identifying herself as *morena* she positions herself against other national types such as indigenous women or blonde, fairer-skinned women. Being *morena* marks her as having a mixed background, and she uses her skin color as proof of her Mexicanness. Mexico's history in the Conquest and the various mixing of Indigenous and European types has created a spectrum of colors, classes, and identities where the woman crowned Miss Mexico could have many different skin colors, all marked as Mexican. Selene then

believes that the judges wanted a *morena* to win,⁸ and this is why she won the title, a title that appears only skin-deep. Selene continues her explanation: “La de Yucatán estaba más guapa que yo, se lo digo con toda franqueza, pero tenía tipo de gringa y los jurados tomaban en cuenta que la ganadora iba a representar a nuestro país en el extranjero y tenía que ser una belleza autóctona” [“The one from Yucatán was prettier than me, I’ll say it with all honesty, but she had an American look and the judges took into account that the winner was going to represent our country abroad and had to be a native beauty” (71)]. According to Selene and possibly the judges, a lighter-skinned woman could not represent Mexican female beauty despite how desirable the woman’s face or figure. Selene’s belief that being *morena* is native or natural to Mexican beauty qualifies her as a national beauty; she affirms her body is more indigenous, or *mestiza*, when compared to a *gringa*. The woman from Yucatán could be considered *gringa*, or looking to be from the United States in this context because of her hair and complexion, and therefore at the international level of Miss Universe she would not look Mexican and properly represent her country.

Another detail that Serna clearly considered is that, although in real life there was no Miss Mexico pageant held in 1966, in several consecutive years before and including 1965 the winner was Miss Mexico City, but in 1967 the winner was Miss Yucatán. Serna’s narrative plays with these historical facts in comparing Selene to Miss Yucatán to comment on Mexican types due to regional and racial differences, always masked with Selene’s honest yet superficial tone. For Selene, Mexicanness resides in the body and its appearances, and she believes her body’s Mexican performance during the pageant is

⁸ This contemplation of racial types and beauty also dialogues with the India Bonita (Pretty Indian) beauty contests after the Mexican Revolution and their proposed project for asserting national unity (Zavala).

what will help her win Miss Universe. Although Selene felt being *morena* gave her an advantage in this competition, the reader knows from the beginning of the narration, at the end of Selene's life, that she lost the Miss Universe competition. Perhaps Selene lost the competition because in the 1960s her Mexican type could still not compete on a level playing field at a time of rampant racial struggles throughout the world.⁹ It seems Selene did not realize the prejudice she faced on the international stage for the very selling point of her pride: being *morena*.

This world of Mexican pageant beauty revolves around body types and size, where the contestants are rewarded for having achieved a certain type, or even stereotype. The women must meet certain criteria, demonstrated when Selene's measurements are taken during a party when a group of men realize she should compete in the pageant. In assessing these criteria, Selene again compares herself to Miss Yucatán during the competition:

Selene casi lloró de coraje al descubrir la colosal perfección del culo de la Señorita Yucatán, que hasta entonces le había pasado inadvertido.

-¡Esta joven tiene un eeenorme talento! -dijo Malgesto, al pedirle que diera un paso al frente.

. . . [Selene] Tomó aire para que se hincharan los dos talentos con que podía opacar a la yucateca. (126-127)

[Selene almost cried in rage when she discovered the colossal perfection of Miss Yucatan's ass, which until then had passed by her inadvertently.

—This young woman has a looooot of talent!— Malgesto said, asking her to walk down to the front.

. . . [Selene i]nhaled to inflate her two talents with which she could overshadow the Yucatecan woman. (126-127)]

⁹ The novel mentions the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco, and how Selene was irritated that the news coverage kept her from watching her television show (81-82). The mention of Tlatelolco and 1968 also connects to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City and the debates on race and culture that arose, concluding with the student protest and massacre. Selene's artificial pageant world contrasts with the gritty Mexican reality of that year.

The scene emphasizes how the praise of women for being “talented” in the competition is a reflection of certain physical attributes, with the judging criteria residing in their bodies alone. Let us consider for Selene how the emphasis directed toward Miss Yucatán’s backside brings to light the differing visions of national beauty within Mexico.

Comparing Miss Yucatán to Miss Mexico City is an inclusion of Yucatán or Caribbean models of womanhood, such as the vision of *el trasero*. In Latino culture it is the female backside that is not only now an object of pride, such as in the case of Jennifer Lopez’s as studied by Frances Negrón Muntaner, but also a sexual object of male desire.¹⁰ Miss Yucatán is defined by her backside, and because it is larger than Selene’s she is potentially considered more desirable. The only way Selene can compete with a backside is with her breasts. In another consideration of bodily beauty, during an interview Selene addresses rumors surrounding contestants enhancing their “talents” with cosmetic work: “el ambiente [del concurso] es de lo más sano, de lo más positivo, y es mentira que les inyecten silicones o que haya que acostarse con los jueces para ganar” [“the atmosphere [of the pageant] is the most healthy, the most positive, and it’s a lie that they inject you with silicone or that you have to sleep with the judges to win” (65)]. Cosmetic alterations can also point to changing one’s facial characteristics to look more or less like Mexican racial types, whereas Selene prides herself on being naturally *morena*. If cosmetic surgery is a means to achieving a fictitious beauty ideal for which women strive, Selene’s comment acknowledges that the contestants appear similar to women who have had work

¹⁰ The Mexican film *Casi Divas* includes a beauty pageant to select the new star of a film based on a Telenovela character. One of the finalists is a trans woman, and her feminine figure and performance stand up to the other contestants. Although she wins runner-up, she wins a better role on the Telenovela, becoming a prominent female figure for the show and its audience. The male audience is unaware it is directing its desire at what was a male body and backside.

done. Therefore not just any body type can be crowned Miss Mexico because the contestants must already possess “talent” in their chests, hips, and backsides; their beauty must already be at an impossible, excessive level that appears artificial.

Despite how Selene sees herself, what is essential to her is how others perceive her beauty and, similarly, how they desire her. The narration includes many comments from those involved in the production of the pageants apart from the interviews with Selene. During the pageant one of the photographers exclaims “Este año están más piñatas que nunca” [“This year they’re more like piñatas than ever” (125)]. For me, although the comment goes unheard by the contestants, it immediately erases their beauty, turns their appearance into a parody of their aspiring embodied beauty, and refuses them the validation they so desperately seek from the male gaze symbolized by the camera lens. Additionally, when Selene is older and broke she takes a job as a spokesperson/model for a grocery company. Here the spotlight operators talk about Selene in a bikini on the set:

—Dicen que ésta fue Miss México, ¿tú crees? —dijo el operario de los reflectores.
Su compañero negó con la cabeza.

—Chale, si está rete fodonga. (52)

[—They say that woman was Miss Mexico, you believe it? —said the spotlight operator. His companion shook his head.

—No way, she’s really unkempt.]

In this scene there is an obvious disconnect between Selene’s former appearance as Miss Mexico and the way her body has aged over the years; these men do not desire Selene’s *fodonga* body the way her male audience desired her during the pageant. Both the photographer and these light operators, who are meant to ensure she is filmed or photographed for consumption by the desiring viewing public, deny Selene the

affirmation she seeks through their male desire; to them, she is not beautiful. With this swift negation of her title based on her current looks, the men erase her beauty and therefore her identity by refusing to desire her.

Selene perverts her role as a former pageant winner in an alternative means of being viewed and desired by an audience, once her beauty and fame start to dwindle. She alters her role as an object of beauty by becoming a burlesque dancer. As the narrator puts it, those in the audience wanted to know “si la Miss México del año del caldo seguía teniendo buena chichi” [“if this old Miss Mexico still had nice tits” (28)]. The men want to see what they could not when she was on stage as Miss Mexico: her bare breasts. Now in the sexualized space of the cabaret, she must oblige; “se encendía el reflector que bañaba su pecho de luz morada. Mientras torcía lujuriosamente los labios, Selene se tomaba los senos con ambas manos, como frutero que palpa su mercancía. Era parca en exhibirlos” [“the spotlight lit up that bathed her chest in purple light. While she twisted her lips luxuriously, Selene took her breasts with both hands, like a fruit vendor feeling his goods. She was sparing in exhibiting them” (28)]. This burlesque scene parallels Selene’s role in the pageant. For example, she is still a sexualized object placed under a spotlight on stage, and she even wears the crown and sash of the pageant that she removes during her striptease. Before she exhibited her body to be judged and looked upon in order to win; the only difference here is that she wears less clothing and there are no judges, although the male spectators “keep score” by comparing her current body type to her past figure. As Benet-Weiner puts it, the pageant is a highly visible spectacle (3), and the burlesque dance mirrors this element of spectacle. It even parodies the talent portion of the pageants, again using Serna’s word play on the girls’s “talents” on display.

Another way Selene still directs her performance at the male gaze and male desire is that the act had once required Selene and another female dancer to simulate lesbian sex together.¹¹ A former Miss Mexico and another woman simulating sex on stage caters strongly to the desires of the men at the cabaret. Selene takes part in this public (simulated) sex show to earn money and be desired by and find validation through a male audience.

Selene's reliance on male validation is reminiscent of the journeys of Quiela and Beatriz when they are trapped in the heterosexual matrix while descending through their spirals of self-discovery. While it is true that Selene is also trapped in the heterosexual matrix in finding validation through and catering to the sexual desire of her male audience, one can easily identify the moments she breaks away from the validation of the viewing public, where she eacts her own female desire away from the pageant through two transgressive relationships with other people and one with her own body. Selene has several relationships, including a very public and tumultuous marriage, which can be categorized as destructive, violent, and dramatic; one such example would be when her husband forces her to get an abortion, calling her desire to have children her "necedades" ["foolishness" (85)]. When compared with these destructive relationships, the ones Selene has with Arturo, her cousin as a child, and later with Iris, her female cabaret partner, were positive and satisfying for her while also incestuous and lesbian. Within the boundaries of the Mexican roles of daughter, wife, and (Virgin) mother in line with *la*

¹¹ Serna stirs reality into his fiction, as this situation is reminiscent of the Miss America scandal of 1983 with Vanessa Williams. Williams, the first black Miss America, was forced to resign her crown after photos of her surfaced from *Penthouse*, some of which included Williams and another woman imitating lesbian sex (Banet-Weiser 124). It is apparent that such behavior was not deemed appropriate for a representative of national femininity.

Guadalupe, as seen throughout these chapters, there is no space for female sexuality in terms of sexual pleasure or female desire. Despite how Selene caters to men's desire publicly in the pageant, it is behind closed doors where she enacts her own female sexual desire and subverts the image of the virgin, pure mother-wife. If we consider how Luce Irigaray categorizes female desire as an insatiable hunger (29), the female body is not only consumed but can consume away from male desire. In the novel, the pageant contestant on her statuesque pedestal moves away from the male desire directed at her; on her own, she enacts her own desires and gains agency. It is crucial that the transgressive relationships through which she finds pleasure are private ones not presented publicly like her destructive marriage; her relationships with Arturo and Iris are kept in private, off-camera, and out of the tabloids. One can ask whether Selene keeps the relationships private to avoid shame and scandal or to preserve her intimacy. Selene's exploration of transgressive sexual relationships, when kept in private, follows a tradition of queer and transgressive desires behind closed doors in Latin America and Mexico (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, masculinity, and Latin American literature*). For Selene, such pursuits are kept out of public view and take precedent over her pageant persona and other public heterosexual or hetero-normative relationships.

At the end of the novel and the start of Selene's life, the reader learns that her male cousin, Arturo, was her lover as a youth, to whom she lost her virginity at her *Quinceñera* party. Their families never discovered the relationship, and even after it ended their relationship continued to affect Selene her entire life, as she mentions him several times when they are adults. After starting a sexual relationship in their youth, Arturo visits her bed each night until he is forced to marry another girl in a shotgun

wedding. The love that Selene has for her cousin, however, is the beginning of her transgressive desires and exploration of the erotic. Firstly, they are cousins and cannot be together publicly due to social taboos. In daylight they avoid one another and appear to their family to be in a quarrel, but at nightfall Arturo goes to her bed. Secondly, one reason they seek each other's nightly company is because of the risk: "El placer de la visita nocturna se duplicaba por el hecho de que alguien pudiera sorprenderlos en cualquier momento . . . y con el tiempo, seguros de que la suerte los protegería mientras más audacia tuvieran, mandaron la precaución al diablo y ya no se molestaron en reprimirlas" ["The pleasure of the nightly visit was duplicated by the fact that someone could have surprised them at any moment . . . and with time, sure that luck protected them while they became more bold, they threw caution to the wind and no longer bothered holding back" (170)]. The cousins's reckless abandonment is a confirmation of Selene's need to explore the desire and pleasures with her cousin away from others's judgment or approval. Additionally, the narration affirms that "El amor la moldeaba . . . La suya era una pasión de tecolotes, muda por timidez, que habría desfallecido al menor embate de su conciencia diurna" ["Love molded her . . . Theirs was a passion of owls, muted by timidity, which would have died at the slightest wavering of its daytime consciousness" (170)]. It is not the male cousin but rather their love that molds her; the concept of molding women also appears in the novel *Vapor*. Arturo's love shapes her into who she becomes as an adult, with the space for such transgressive desires, yet we can also view this as Arturo corrupting his cousin by instigating these sexual encounters at age fifteen. While their love strengthens her, as it can only survive in the night, which signifies it is sexual in nature and therefore foreshadows its doom. Subsequently, when

Arturo does not choose Selene over his betrothed, Selene is distraught both because he was with another girl and because now he can no longer be with her. Selene is denied the fulfillment of a public, official relationship and therefore Arturo only remains a memory for her. She remembers him fondly and frequently, especially during sexual encounters, such as when Selene masturbates and when she wishes to become aroused while kissing a lover. She continues to remember her desire for him and the joy and pleasure she found with him as a youth and to mix those emotions with her future relationships.

The other relationship that complicates Selene's desires is one she has with her female dance partner. As mentioned, Selene performed in a burlesque show and simulated lesbian acts. Selene and the other dancer, Iris, become roommates until Selene commits suicide, and they are described as both friends and enemies. One night in their dressing room, after crying from a financial dispute, Selene sits fanning herself with the collar of her blouse:

Iris, para poder estirar las piernas, recargó el pie derecho en su hombro. Del hombro fue bajándolo discretamente hasta rozar con la punta el seno de Selene. Ella no pudo o no quiso darse cuenta de lo que ocurría hasta que el pie de su amiga se internó por el escote de la blusa para acariciarla por dentro . . . Era imposible resistirse a una fricción tan delicada y al mismo tiempo tan procaz . . . ¿Cómo pudo Iris besarla en la boca sin interrumpir esa caricia? ¿Por medio de qué artes logró bajarle el cierre del vestido sin usar las manos y ponerse a horcajadas sobre sus muslos? (36-37)

[Iris, to be able to stretch out her legs, leaned her right foot on her [Selene's] shoulder. From her shoulder she lowered it discretely until she brushed against the tip of Selene's breast. She couldn't or refused to realize what was happening until her friend's foot inserted itself into the neckline of her blouse to caress her underneath . . . It was impossible to resist a friction so delicate and at the same time indecent. How was Iris able to kiss her mouth without interrupting that caress? By what art did she manage to lower the dress's zipper without using her hands and straddle her thighs?]

The scene illustrates Selene's exploration of sexual pleasure with a woman and demonstrates how this relationship disrupts the male gaze of the heterosexual matrix of

the pageant world. What is essential in this scene is that Selene does not stop Iris's advances; she has a curiosity she wishes to explore, coyly wondering "how do you do that?" rather than taken aback with "how could you do that?" She allows Iris to arouse her, but during this scene Selene does not participate actively. She allows Iris to actively use her body and she assumes the passive role of the female. This passivity makes Iris's advances appear more aggressive and masculine against Selene's almost statue-still observation of the action in what I interpret as an intentional maneuver to maintain a position of femininity through passivity.

The sexual experience with Iris is similar to the one with Arturo because of the possibility of unknown and forbidden pleasure outside of approved avenues. As the scene progresses, Selene reflects that, "Pero lo que más la inquietaba era la sospecha de haber descubierto demasiado tarde los placeres prohibidos" ["But the most disturbing thing of all was the suspicion of having discovered forbidden pleasures too late" (37)]. Selene takes pleasure in the forbidden desires she finds with Iris like she did with her cousin, but in saying she found them "too late" suggests she would have enjoyed such pleasures with a woman earlier in her life as well, something she had not contemplated as Miss Mexico. In the public eye as Miss Mexico, Selene represents a pure but (hetero)sexual ideal of womanhood, but behind closed doors Selene transgresses this public image through her relationships with Arturo and Iris. In the public opinion Miss Mexico should, in representing the nation, represent a perfect heterosexual woman who would never sleep with her male cousin or a woman. Were she to have these relationships in public they would offer a porn-like perversion of Miss Mexico like her striptease at the cabaret, but she enacts these desires for herself away from the viewing public. Her desire is no longer

dictated by what the public and society expects of either a woman or of a Miss Mexico contestant. The narration does not reveal whether this scene with Iris was a one-time encounter between the two women or whether it continued as they lived as roommates or “roommates,” but this scene is not written in Selene’s first-person narration from the interviews she gives but rather the omniscient third-person narration that fills in the gaps of Selene’s stories. I see this as assurance that Selene did not want anyone to know about her and Iris. When considering the women’s performance onstage, Iris’s backstage advances allow the women to consummate their performance and the desires it possibly aroused onstage. The scene also adds more layers to my reading of Vazquez’s song *Perdóname mi vida*; perhaps she is asking forgiveness from Iris, her *vida* or “love” as she leaves her in her suicide. Whether or not the relationship was ongoing, Selene’s desire and self have been altered.

I now want to analyze what I find to be the most central scenes in the novel; when Selene masturbates. Selene’s sexual relationship with her own body demonstrates how she further constructs female desire and subjectivity away from the influence of the public and the pageant, or the heterosexual matrix mentioned by Butler. In evaluating masculine constructions of female sexuality, if a woman having heterosexual sex is an “obliging prop” for male fantasies, then the masturbating female does not serve such male confines in that personal act (Irigaray 25). Additionally, Eve Sedgwick says of masturbation that, “And in the context of hierarchically oppressive relations between genders and between sexualities, masturbation can seem to offer – not least as an analogy to writing – a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that we owe relatively little to political or interpersonal

abjection” (111). If we consider this metaphor of self-possession through auto-eroticism, then when Selene takes pleasure in her own body she is re-appropriating the body from its exhibitionist-like purpose during the pageant of pleasing the male audience and catering to their masculine pleasure, as she also does during her cabaret show. The night Selene is crowned Miss Mexico, once alone, dressed in her pageant regalia like a “piñata” she begins to undress. She asks herself how many men would sell their soul to be in that room (128), a premonition of her future striptease before a different audience. After she strips she begins to touch herself while looking at herself in the mirror.¹² As she looks in the mirror while pleasuring herself, in viewing her reflected physical self she consumes her own image the same way the pageant spectators did, with identification and desire. She is able to control how she views herself whereas during the pageants she has no say in how the audience views her; she can now consume the image she wishes to see as she stands before the mirror naked. For once she can view her own body and feel pleasure without the need for others to look at her to do so. Yet we must remember that this was written by a male author who ultimately controls this scene and Selene’s masturbation.

In this scene of autoeroticism Selene is unable to separate her body from symbolizing the nation. She begins to think of her role and image as Miss Mexico and suddenly stops pleasuring herself: “De pronto se contuvo asaltada por un sentimiento de culpa. Su cuerpo ya no le pertenecía” [“Soon she was assaulted by a feeling of guilt. Her body no longer belonged to her” (128)]. Selene feels the pageant has stripped her of her identity; the public and the pageant own her with that same possession mentioned in the

¹² Anne Anlin Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race* discusses *Flower Drum Song* and representations of Asian-American female beauty. Cheng references the musical number for “I Enjoy Being a Girl” during which the female character looks at herself in the mirror. Such a scene parallels how Selene enjoys herself sexually before the mirror.

male gaze: “No era suya la mano que se deslizaba cuerpo adentro: era la mano colectiva de su grey ardiente . . . convirtiendo su juego solitario en algo parecido a un servicio social” [“The hand that slid inside her body wasn’t hers: it was the collective hand of her passionate flock . . . turning her solitary game into something like a social service” (128)]. Here we see the toll that the pageant circuit is taking on Selene and her perception of herself as embodying the nation; she cannot take sexual pleasure in her body because it belongs to the nation, not her. Selene refers to herself in this scene as “un bien de la nación” [“national property” (128)], and if she is a national monument to Mexican beauty, for her to masturbate is to sully national property. This, ironically, does not consider the male audience and if it sullies her symbolic national body if men masturbate to the sight of her. However, she begins touching herself again, this time while recalling her cousin Arturo; here she combines her bodily pleasures with the transgressive ones once brought on by her cousin. As Irigaray refers to female eroticism and auto-eroticism, in seeking pleasure against traditional female passivity as both “a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat” (26) we see this duality in Selene’s actions, where this chaste retreat interrupts her pursuit of pleasure. Similar to Selene’s actions in that hotel before the mirror, when she is touring Europe before the Miss Universe competition she says of her hotel in Florence that “el baño tenía una simpática regadera de mano que le hacía cosquillas en las axilas, en el ombligo, en la mariposa negra del pubis” [“the bath had a sympathetic hand-held shower head that tickled her armpits, her bellybutton, and the black butterfly of her pubis” (103)]. I find it noteworthy to remember that a male author wrote these scenes. Yet as the narration cracks away Selene’s shallow pageant exterior, masturbation is revealed as Selene’s only way to find pleasure away from the

stage during the pageants; she replaces the male gaze of her audience with her own bodily pleasures alone. Just as when she watched herself in the mirror, in order for Selene to relax and disconnect from her pageant persona she requires these opportunities to seek pleasure in her own body. If the pageant and being on display for the male gaze fragments her and forces her into passive objectivity, then masturbating allows her to become whole again, one with her body and pleasures, without men.

As Selene's rise and fall in the pageant world during her short life covers the decades of the 1960s thru the 1980s and the slow development of feminism in Mexico, her tragic story and the pageant may be viewed as a national allegory. Beauty pageants allow women from different classes the opportunity to rise to celebrity fame. Selene attempted to climb the class ladder but is unable to overcome the hurdles and get by on her looks alone. The common trope of *el fracaso*, or failure, in Mexican literature shines through in Selene's spiral to suicide, ending as a washed-up version of her former self striving to regain lost glory. This fatalistic allegory summarizes Serna's dark humor and critique of Mexican nationalism; when the beautiful pageant queen kills herself, it is Mexico taking its own life and being devoured by its own narcissism and patriarchal expectations, unable to achieve glory. Additionally, Selene's desire for fame and the persona she enacts during the pageant relates to the Mexican archetypal hybrid of Roger Bartra's *Chingadalupe* (211), combining *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* to create a woman who enacts purity yet succumbs to the sexual desire of the man, here the male spectators. She is expected to embody both virginal purity and sexual desire. It is this impossible duality that causes Selene's *fracaso*; she is unable to explore her lesbian sexual desires publically and as she ages she is no longer viewed as sexually desirable by

her male viewing public. This sexual repression and rejection are what finally cause Selene to end her life.

The novel's weaving of first- and third-person narratives tells Selene's story as Miss Mexico and creates a space to study how she performs femininity and the nation through her body. Selene's pageant performance is based on her understanding of Mexicanness as enacted through the body, and yet her final gesture of her national body is to take her own life. The figure and skin color of the Mexican female body are, according to Selene, the most valued markers for Mexican, national beauty, and her bodily feud with Miss Yucatán reveals the different bodily and racial types on this national pageant stage. Also, the contrast between the public and the private are what complicate her subjectivity, for herself and for how the public remember her after she dies. When she performs the role of Miss Mexico, her public display before the desiring male gaze exhibits perfection through passivity and her definition of Mexicanness. Whether in the pageant or in the cabaret she thrives on the approval of a male audience, yet in private she can become not only sexual but a sexual subject, exploring transgressive relationships with her cousin, a woman, and her own body. This contrast between the pleasures of the public gaze and autonomous body is what challenges Selene's performance of femininity as a pageant contestant. Ultimately it is her relationship with her own body that most notably transgresses patriarchal visions of femininity and passivity, as that is where she can assert her subjectivity by combining her body image and personal sexual pleasure. I set out to map Selene's transformation from a metaphorically flattened figure into a multi-dimensional woman who questions definitions of Mexicanness and patriarchy on the female body in public who challenges

traditional sexual and social roles for women through her explorations of female sexual pleasure in her private life. Just as Selene resists the male gaze and explores transgressive embodiments of female desire, the protagonist of Julieta García González's novel *Vapor*, Gracia, also resists the male gaze and masculinist norms when constructing her own embodiment of female pleasure and desire. In another example of beauty as only skin-deep, I wish to contrast Gracia's obese body with Selene's beauty pageant body and how both women enact transgressive sexual desires, whether in public or private spaces by themselves or with a partner.

The Bodily Pleasures of an Obese Beauty

I now turn to Julieta García González's novel *Vapor*, where the reader is immediately confronted with these same themes of female beauty, sexuality, and desire by way of a very different body type than Selene's: the obese woman. The protagonist Gracia Peniche Valdés is a beautiful, upper-class obese woman in early twenty-first-century Mexico whose parents force her to go to a health spa and doctor in order to lose weight. While the story describes Gracia's relationships with the doctor and other patrons of the health spa, it is ultimately based on her relationship with her own body. What I find most telling about Gracia is that she does not want to change her appearance, adopting what is a seemingly unintentionally feminist attitude when confronted by judgment and negativity from her doctor and society. Rather than losing weight, Gracia takes pleasure in her flesh by masturbating at the spa and having sex with Doctor Pereda. The excesses of her body contrast with traditional and popular visions of femininity, which are slim and controlled by both the women themselves and by society. Gracia is happy with her

body and focuses on her pleasures, and therefore her seemingly uncontrolled body in excess is seen as beautiful and desirable not only to her but to male on-lookers.

Julieta García González is a Mexican author and editor who has found acclaim in her collection of short stories *Las malas costumbres* (2005), her children's story *El pie que no quería bañarse* (2011), and her recent short story collection *Pasajeros con destino* (2013). Just as with *Señorita México*, *Vapor* is García González's first novel and has been translated into English. The novel is a study of the female body and desire in contemporary Mexico where the obese Gracia maneuvers and ultimately resists conventional aesthetics of beauty and body image. As the novel begins, Gracia and the other characters are at the health spa, and the reader learns that she is there to lose weight. However, rather than exercise, she masturbates in the shower and sauna. When she appeases her parents's pleas and goes to a doctor about her weight, she is immediately attracted to Doctor Pereda. He is repulsed by Gracia's weight and takes on her weight loss as his greatest challenge. However, during her second visit the two have sex in his office. Pereda is then forced to decide between Gracia and his fiancée, Amalia, who is slender, successful, and a "stable" option for marriage. The characters of Señor and Señora Calderón also dialogue with Gracia's body. The husband spies on Gracia through a hole into the sauna wall and finds the obese beauty more desirable than his wife, while Beatriz continually critiques Gracia for her weight while fighting to lose more weight herself and find happiness. Gracia also briefly believes she is pregnant by Pereda, but in the end, after one final fling, she and Pereda part ways. García González's text moves between third-person narrations from the points of view of the different characters; Gracia, the doctor, Señor and Señora Calderón, and Señora Juárez. The narrative style

layers these comparisons of Gracia's and other characters's opinions of her body, her need for weight-loss, and her desire, that she embodies through her obesity.

From the start of the novel it is evident how Gracia's body contrasts with the other characters and their judgment of how she should look: she is judged for being fat.

Fernando García Ramírez wrote of the novel that "Gracia es un monstruo" ["Gracia is a monster"] and that the intentional lack of descriptions of Gracia means "cada quien construye [ese cuerpo excesivo] con sus propios miedos, inspirados en las ambiciones de alcanzar un cuerpo perfecto y sus cotidianas frustraciones" ["each person constructs [that excessive body] with their own fears, inspired in the ambitions to reach a perfect body and their daily frustrations" (n.p.)]. The label of "monster" equates Gracia's body with danger, mystery, and frightening excesses beyond one's imagination, but García González's missing descriptions in fact create the space of an obese female protagonist away from such fears or preconceptions of the body. The character dialogues with contemporary fat studies that wish to bring fat bodies into question and analysis, allowing them subjectivity rather than marginalization and objectification. *The Fat Studies Reader* quotes Lacy Asbill, founder of the all-fat burlesque troupe Big Burlesque as saying "The fastest way to fat liberation is physical. We will never have our freedom if we live only 'from the neck up'" (6). I assert that this is exactly what Gracia does; she does not hide from the public eye but rather is out and about the city and living her life as a visible figure. In any contemporary metropolis, whether Mexico or anywhere else in the world, where women are bombarded by images of supermodels, diet regimens, and beautifying techniques, the fat female body stands in defiance of these masculinist controls over women's bodies. In studying female normativity, these homogenizing concepts are

projected onto the woman and shape (sometimes literally) her body and behavior through power and control (Bordo 27). Female weight, or women themselves, are social constructs, as we have seen throughout this study. However, Gracia shakes off the control, shame, and judgment by others onto her body and focuses on her body and its pleasure positively. Gracia and her obesity are pitted against the other female characters who work hard to lose weight and gain muscle tone, such as Amalia and Señora Calderón. Gracia instead resists the pressure to conform to such standards of beauty, and despite minor weight loss and seeing the doctor, her body is her own.

To begin this analysis of the novel I wish to start by considering the protagonist's name and size. That her name is Gracia, or Grace, ironically evokes the image of female elegance and beauty, just as Santa's name was ironic because of her profession. However, this embodiment of grace is found in an obese female body. What this does is disconnect Gracia from contemporary images of female grace and evoke an older artistic style of women's bodies that embraced larger figures. Despite the emergence of fat studies, overweight bodies are not often represented or researched when discussing embodiments of gender or sexuality. The oldest figurine that depicts the human form is that of the Woman of Willendorf from around 23,000 B.C., a small statue of an obese woman with large hips, stomach, and breasts. One prominent space for representing larger women has been the world of classical painting, such as the sixteenth-century European Baroque artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). From his paintings such as *The Three Graces* (1639-1640) and *Venus in Front of the mirror* (1614, 1615), Ruben's paintings of full-figured women resulted in such women being called "Rubenesque." With the name Gracia, I see the Mexican character as standing-in as the fourth of Ruben's Graces. As

Michael Moon and Eve Sedgwick contextualize body size and queer sexualities in “Divinity,” it is the image of the fat drag queen to which the queer male aspires in his performance of femininity (218). One can see the similarities between Gracia and John Waters’s drag star Divine through her name and body size. Not only are grace and divinity intertwined in these obese bodies, but there is also a relationship between the pleasures and power, or what one could refer to as a “fabulousness” or “fierceness.” While the character of Divine in Waters’s films represents a perverseness and vulgarity that is not seen in Gracia, this literary protagonist does enact transgressions such as public masturbation and unprotected sex. These figures problematize the image that their names evoke, not unlike Santa the prostitute. Gracia’s embodiment of grace contrasts with her size and the negative opinions of the other characters, which question the limits of femininity in the obese female body and of what is beautiful or graceful.

I now wish to look at the space around which Gracia and the other characters all revolve: a health spa. The health spa is associated with weight-loss, fitness, and positive body image, and in the novel’s opening scene García González juxtaposes this space with Gracia’s obesity as she sits on a shower bench with what is described as “su enorme trasero” [“her enormous backside” (García González 11)]. Just as with Miss Yucatán in *Señorita México*, Gracia’s backside represents her racialized and sexualized body and its desirability for male on-lookers. Rather than the stereotypical image of a young, fit woman admiring herself in the health club’s changing room mirror, the reader finds the naked and obese Gracia looking at her body:

Frente a[l espejo], podía verse los pechos enormes, pesados, de una piel increíblemente blanca, tachonados de estrías y venas azuladas. Le gustaba levantar los brazos para que se sacudieran ligeramente y así sentir el golpeteo de sus pezones contra las costillas. También disfrutaba verse dando pequeños saltos. Sus carnes

bamboleantes le proporcionaban una extraña felicidad. (13)

[Before [the mirror], she could see her enormous, heavy breasts, of an incredibly white skin, studded with stretch marks and blue veins. She liked to raise her arms so that she could shake them lightly and so feel the knocking of her nipples against her ribs. She also liked to watch herself doing small jumps. Her swaying flesh provided her with a strange happiness.]

Let us consider this scene for the two ways that Gracia opposes the space of the health spa. First, an overweight person at a health spa is expected to appropriate the disapproving gaze of society, like Selene appropriated the male gaze of her pageant audience. The person is expected to feel ashamed when looking at the mirror and disgusted by the excess weight he or she is trying to lose, yet Gracia, in comparison, is happy and proud of her body. Second, she is immediately defined in terms of her body and physical mass and its excess of flesh; one must consider that such excess, or curves in the breasts, backside, and hips, is often seen as sexually attractive. However, she is described as being too big, exceeding the size considered desirable by others, and yet here Gracia takes pleasure in her body. Just as when Selene looked at herself in the mirror, Gracia consumes her own image taking delight in her excessive proportions. In seeing Gracia's delight before the mirror, the reader understands how she perceives her own body and that she struggles with weight loss because she does not wish to lose weight; she considers losing weight to be a betrayal of her true self (Roberts-Camps, "The Female Body as a Makeover Project in *Vapor*" 159). Despite how others might view her, Gracia views her body, in all its excess, positively.

Let us consider how Gracia's body problematizes the norms of aesthetic beauty in the novel, and how this is evident in how others wish to change her appearance. The doctor's plan for slimming Gracia reveals how he relates the woman's physical health and

desirability. Pereda's challenge and mission for Gracia's weight loss revolve around her health and her unhealthy amount of extra weight, which is scientific and calculable. The doctor explains to Gracia that carrying excessive extra weight is detrimental to her health and negatively affects the heart (García González 32). His assessment of her body and plan reveal how, to him, weight and beauty are inversely correlated in that the more weight a woman gains, the less beautiful she is;

Hizo un plan en el que detalló no únicamente el tratamiento médico que le impondría, sino todo un itinerario para que debutara en el mundo de la belleza. Según sus cálculos, el procedimiento tardaría nueve meses. En ese tiempo calculaba treinta kilos menos en el cuerpo de Gracia —lo que no la haría para nada delgada, pero sí la tendría en un estado de salud menos preocupante— la recuperación de la forma femenina convencional . . . y la exploración de nuevas relaciones con la comida y con su propio cuerpo. (42)

[He made a plan in which was detailed not only the medical treatment he would impose, but also a whole itinerary so that she would debut into the world of beauty. According to his calculations, the procedure would take nine months. In that time he calculated thirty kilos less on Gracia's body —that which wouldn't make her at all thin, but would have her in less worrisome state of health— the recuperation of the conventional female form . . . and the exploration of new relationships with food and her own body.]

I see this timeline for Gracia's weight-loss as a reverse pregnancy the doctor has unknowingly and ironically prescribed for Gracia, her weight loss like a thirty-kilo baby to be removed from her stomach and hips. I also use this scene to point out additional irony in the doctor's belief that she will be able to "enter" the realm of beauty upon losing thirty kilos. At this point in the narration the reader knows that some men are secretly attracted to Gracia; a group of men at the spa gather in the men's sauna to watch Gracia through a hole in the tiles. The doctor himself becomes sexually attracted to her, and during her next visit the two have sex. The doctor's belief that she will "recuperate a conventional female figure" by losing thirty kilos is problematic because he does not

insist that she become thin but rather merely become less obese. Therefore he is implying that a woman is considered beautiful until she crosses over from curvy to obese.

While Gracia's perception of her body is a positive, feminine, and pleased one, others judge her size negatively as their perspective goes through traditional masculinist constructs, like those that shaped Selene, and demand that Gracia alter her body. Traci Roberts-Camps classifies the novel as a challenge to the preconception of the female body as a makeover project, with Gracia to be molded to fit conventional forms of beauty (159). This is evident not only in how others perceive Gracia but also in her interactions with the doctor. During her first visits, Doctor Pereda assigns her a strict diet and exercise regimen; he then examines, pokes, and prods Gracia's body like an animal; "Tras palmearle firmemente el vientre y buena parte del abdomen —sumiendo sus dedos, perdiendo sus manos entre los pliegues de carne abultada . . . Pereda se hizo un juramento solitario y silencioso: esa mujer sería su reto" ["After firmly handling her stomach and a good part of her abdomen —plunging in his fingers, losing his hands between the folds of bulging flesh . . . Pereda made himself a solitary and silent promise: that woman would be his challenge" (García González 35)]. The doctor imposes his male perspective onto Gracia of what a woman should be. As the doctor's hands are lost within the rolls of her flesh, her body appears to devour him, as it does later when they have sex, and adds another way in which women's bodies can consume. The doctor's Pygmalion promise is to rid her of her excess flesh. With his challenge to reshape the body, he views her mass as disconnected from her person; to him, she is merely a "case" (Roberts-Camps 162). The doctor, before Gracia's body like a sculptor before his medium, continues this Pygmalion consideration of Gracia: "Creía que podría moldearla, como si la grasa fuera

cera o barro. Creía que, sin muchos esfuerzos, podía estirar, jalar y reubicar la piel estriada y dañada por años de obesidad. Se imaginaba los resultados: una esbeltez opulenta, una mujer deseada por todos” [“He believed that he would be able to mold her, as if the fat were wax or clay. He believed that, without much effort, he could stretch, pull and reposition the skin stretched and damaged by years of obesity. He imagined the results: a luxurious slender woman, one desired by all” (García González 41)]. This scene furthers the doctor’s ideas that Gracia’s excess flesh can be removed as easily as extra clay from a statue in progress and that she will be desirable when skinnier. Yet as the narration progresses it becomes evident that the doctor and other male characters are secretly attracted to Gracia’s obese body. Thus, there is a split between the outward attitudes of the male characters and how they desire in private, not unlike Selene’s outward performance and private relationships. Gracia acts against the traditionally skinny model of beauty and the opinions of the doctor and other male characters.

We see how Gracia rejects the Pygmalion views directed toward her body by the doctor and other characters and continues to view her body’s excesses in positive ways rather than embracing the doctor’s weight-loss regimen. When considering her own size, Gracia compares herself to a Buddha: “Ahora era un Buda femenino de la suerte, un amuleto de carne; la misma placidez, el mismo vientre expuesto para ser sobado, la felicidad radiante” [“Now she was a feminine Buddha of luck, a flesh amulet; the same calmness, the same belly exposed to be rubbed, radiant happiness” (79)]. This is also when Gracia falsely believes that she is pregnant with the doctor’s child, a detail that relates Gracia’s already large Buddha belly with a pregnant belly. The visual of a feminine Buddha focuses on the excesses of Gracia’s body away from negative judgment

and shame. Rather than a desire to hide her excesses, Gracia flaunts her body and wants other to touch it, like how people often rub a Buddha's belly. Gracia again associates her body with pleasure, like when viewing it in her mirror; her body exudes happiness. As she believes she is pregnant at this time, she embraces the fact that her large belly would continue to grow, now with child. Doctor Pereda's perception of Gracia between beauty and obesity are confused by his desires. When the doctor plans her regimen he emphasizes the necessary change and weight loss, "la pérdida de los bultos bajo las caderas, de su apariencia de diosa de la fertilidad" ["the loss of the bulge under her hips, of her appearance of a fertility goddess" (42)]. At first the doctor views Gracia's excess weight negatively, but the comparison to a fertility goddess reveals sexual attraction. A fertility goddess would have large hips and breasts, and traditionally a man would choose a fertile woman to bear him offspring. This relates again to the figure of the Woman of Willendorf, whose large figure most likely represented the value of female fertility and of women of such dimensions thousands of years ago. The doctor's statement relates to Gracia's personal comparison to a pregnant Buddha; her body is seen as fertile and sexual. The perceptions of Gracia's excessive body as a fertility goddess and Buddha evoke images of happiness and beauty, positively affirming her size.

The topic of eating disorders is related to this discussion of Gracia's body; obesity suggests the topics of eating and control. Susan Bordo refers to the practice of treating female hysteria in the nineteenth-century as a necessity in order to correct "non-feminine behavior" (17). She reiterates how the body is a social construct and that because the female body is expected to be thin and in control, "female eating is seen as a furtive, shameful, illicit act" (18). Subsequently, women who indulge or eat excessively are

viewed as selfish (18). Bordo says that eating, and symbolically sexual desire, is to be controlled in the female body whereas men are allowed to indulge both appetites, again in a consideration of what or who can consume or be consumed. While Bordo relates this control over appetite to anorexia, I will use her analysis to refer to any dietary restriction or in exploring overeating in the case of Gracia and her obesity. Furthermore, Bordo makes a bold comparison between control and gender roles when she asserts that this self-constraint and control over the body was actually a “masculine” value in the public sphere, which women were now required to embody; masculinity and femininity were no longer mutually exclusive as they were in nineteenth century gender constructs (19). These social and gender factors that affect the female body and cause anorexia are the same factors that cause the other characters to so harshly judge and wish to transform Gracia’s obese body.

The other side of Gracia’s eating and appetite is the actual pleasure she takes in both being obese and in eating. A comical example of how Gracia rejects how others wish her to control her appetite takes place when Gracia is out to lunch with Señoras Calderón and Juárez. Calderón, as a fitness and plastic surgery aficionada, suggests that Gracia order a salad:

La gorda enarcó una ceja y miró [su menú] por tercera vez. Ella sabía de ensaladas. Su estómago estaba acostumbrado a inflarse con cáscara de manzanas y berros crudos. Pero había delicias que no quería desaprovechar ¿Un *fussili* con tocino de soja?, no, tampoco eso porque el tocino de soja no era tocino y . . . ¿Qué tal un espagueti con variedad de nueces y cremas? O mejor: ¡chocolate!, ¡azúcar!, ¡mantequilla!, ¡pan! . . . Gracia levantó la mirada del menú y se enfrentó a los ojos duros de Beatriz Calderón. No, no pediría una ensalada. (73)

[The fat woman arched an eyebrow and looked [at the menu] a third time. She knew about salads. Her stomach was accustomed to swelling with apple peels and raw watercress. But there were delights that she did not want to waste. A *fussili* with soy bacon? No, not that either because soy bacon was not bacon, and . . . How about

spaghetti with nuts and creams? Or better yet, chocolate! Sugar! Butter! Bread! . . .
 Gracia lifted her gaze off the menu and faced the hard eyes of Beatriz Calderón.
 No, she would not order a salad.]

The moment is reminiscent of the scene in the film *Real Women Have Curves* where, after her mother commands her to not eat the flan, Ana eats the last big bite with a look of cold, satisfied defiance. While Señora Calderón expects Gracia, whether because she is a woman or because of her size, to control her appetite and only eat a salad, Gracia rejects what she is implying. The salad comically stands in as a symbol for the weight-loss and control to which others want her to adhere. To eat the salad is to give in to Señora Calderón's, and society's, control over her figure, and Gracia therefore opts for eating richer food with flavor that is more satisfying and indulgent in order to take advantage of what the menu has to offer her body. Therefore she refuses to let others control her desire to eat so that she may find pleasure in eating. Beyond sexual pleasures she enjoys with her body, she even focuses on the pleasure of enjoying good food.

These instances of Gracia taking pleasure in her body and in eating are examples of how she defines herself and constructs her own embodiments of femininity as resistance to societal standards. It is also possible to view her body, in all its pleasures, as an assertion of her chosen type of femininity. She does not wish to be thin, and therefore revels in her size. In one scene Gracia is described lying around her apartment and eating sweets:

A la diestra de Gracia languidecían una caja de mazapanes de almendra y un bote de trufas. Estaba recostada en un diván y de vez en cuando se chupaba los dedos, embarrados de chocolate. La pereza, el desencanto o la convicción de que no había en su casa ninguna auténtica golosina le impidieron pararse a rebuscar entre las gavetas de la cocina . . . Casi tuvo el impulso de moverse, desdoblar las piernas y buscar más chocolates. (90)

[At Gracia's right hand languished a box of almond marzipans and a jar of truffles.

She was lying down on the couch and occasionally sucked on her fingers, covered with chocolate. Laziness, disillusionment or the principle that there was not in her house a single authentic candy kept her from stopping to rummage in the kitchen drawers . . . She almost had the impulse to move, unfold her legs and look for more chocolates. (90)]

On one hand, as Bordo writes, Gracia's body has the luxury to over-eat (22). As Gracia is a rich upper-class woman with no job, she therefore has time to laze about and suck chocolate off her fingers. On the other hand, despite her privilege and status, in this moment Gracia actively denies outside influences on her body, just as when she refuses the salad. As Roberts-Camps affirms, Gracia challenges the control others wish to assert over her body, with this happiness including "her capacity to experience her body through the erotic" (159). Gracia's large body acts to protect her from giving in to outside pressures, and therefore the pleasures she takes in rich meals and bon-bons reinforce her protective layer and armor and provide her with more bodily enjoyment through the erotic than a salad. Although she is alone, she is positioned erotically, licking her fingers. Her erotic body pose on the couch is one taken from the image of the Odalisque¹³ in artwork where her appearance in paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exhibited these nude women from the East as sexual, erotic objects for a European male audience. The Odalisque is on display for the male gaze as a passive object of male desire. However, rather than being an object for male consumption, Gracia is the one who consumes, both her bonbons and her own voluptuous image. Although one can view this image of Gracia eating bonbons while splayed out on the couch as representing the height of luxury for the rich, I also view it as another of Gracia's affirmations of her excessive

¹³ The painting *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres famously portrays a woman lying naked with markers which paint the scene as from the exotic Orient. An odalisque refers to a female sexual slave.

body and the enjoyment of pleasure. The rich restaurant foods and the chocolates represent her bodily pleasures.

It is apparent that Gracia rejects weight-loss regimens as a negation of male desire against her body and its own pleasurable desires; the examples of the salad and bonbons demonstrate how she finds pleasure in eating and in enjoying her excess size. As previously mentioned, Mulvey discusses how the male gaze projects fantasy onto the female figure, ultimately affecting how the woman designs or styles herself (19). Gracia, however, does not act upon the male gaze when constructing her image, instead resisting and even protesting it; as Roberts-Camps asserts, the doctor is confronted with these difficulties to his Pygmalion regimen over Gracia because she dominates their interactions, standing before him as “an active subject, a woman who enjoys her body the way it is and takes control of her own pleasure” (Roberts-Camps 163). It is easy to see how Gracia rejects others’s gazes over her body in comparing her to the character of Beatriz Calderón, the middle-aged woman who had suggested that Gracia eat a salad. When Señora Calderón leaves the cosmetic clinic, she accentuates her chest and backside, “Sintió cómo la miraban: el deseo en los ojos de los hombres, cierto reproche en las miradas femeninas” [“She could feel how they looked at her: desire in men’s eyes, a certain reproach in the women’s” (70)]. However, at the end of the novel Gracia walks down the street in the following description: “se bamboleaba con gusto por todos lados y se sentía complacida—nalgas complacidas, pechos agradecidos, felices piernas monumentales—con las miradas que la seguían a donde quiera que fuese” [“she swayed with pleasure all over and she felt pleased—bottom pleased, breasts grateful, happy monumental legs—with the looks that followed her wherever she went” (160)]. While

Señora Calderón finds validation and pleasure in being desired and envied, Gracia is only concerned with the pleasures of her body; how often do women describe their bodies as monumental, grateful, and pleased? Gracia finds pleasure in her own self-image, and it is also possible that she even finds pleasure in opposing these bodily conventions, finding satisfaction in defying expectations of female body image.

There are several scenes, even within the first few pages of the novel, which highlight how Gracia not only finds happiness in her excess body in her self-perception but also in its sexual pleasures. As mentioned before, Gracia uses her time at the spa to pleasure herself, just as Selene did in the hotel rooms during the pageants. At the start of the novel after Gracia first appears before the mirror, the reader then finds Señor Calderón watching Gracia through a hole between the men's and women's saunas: "Sobre el mosaico húmedo, a gatas, con el larguísimo cabello cubriéndole el rostro, la mujer se movía rítmicamente en un sabroso balanceo: penetraba su cuerpo con una manguera de goma" ["Above the humid tile floor, on all fours, with very long hair covering her face, the woman moved rhythmically in a delicious rocking motion: she penetrated her body with a rubber nozzle" (17)]. This erotic scene shows how again, as seen with *Señorita México*, Gracia demonstrates how she refuses to cater to male desire and control, asserting her female desire in pleasuring herself. She penetrates herself with a shower nozzle, replacing the phallus and finding pleasure without a man. Additionally, not only does Gracia penetrate herself, but she also focuses the stream of water onto her clitoris; "se proporcionaba una sensación que ni el más loco esfuerzo de sus dedos podía igualar" ["it produced a sensation that not even the most reckless force of her fingers could equal" (20)]. Beyond the physical form and use of the nozzle, here the stream of

water also serves as a surrogate phallus. It cannot be ignored, however, that these private sexual pursuits are done in the public space of the health spa. In other words, not only does she masturbate, but she essentially has sex in public, heightened by the voyeuristic gaze of the men through the wall. Unbeknownst to Gracia, her sex is more public than she knows, as not only Señor Calderón but a group of men gather in the men's sauna to watch her through the hole as she pleasures herself: she takes part in a sex show for the male spa patrons. Her public masturbation is a prominent display of transgressive sexuality that rejects traditional masculinist control over the female body. Before I had explored how others wished to control Gracia's size through her eating, to control her appetite. Through her act of masturbation we also see how Gracia does not let others, such as the men secretly watching her, control or influence her desire or even enter into her female desire. The men watch as Gracia finds sexual pleasure without them; her voyeuristic performance in the same instance both arouses and castrates them. Through her own sexual pleasure she strengthens and asserts her femininity, sexuality, and desire. The reader then understands why Gracia did not mind going to the health spa; for her she inverts the space from slimming her body to pleasuring and enjoying it.

Beyond the pleasure Gracia finds for herself at the spa, her sexual relationship with her doctor is crucial for further considering Gracia's sexual desire. First, Gracia is attracted to the doctor, so she feigns stomach pains in order to schedule another visit so that he may touch her again. She initiates sex with Pereda and their desires intersect. Afterward, however, graphic evidence of Gracia's desire and arousal is found in the doctor's office, now strewn with Gracia's "secretions," or vaginal fluids: "Ante la ausencia de la gorda —ante el hueco inmenso de su ausencia—, se decidió a limpiar la

cama de auscultación, el piso, la pared y el escritorio, lugares todos en los que habían dejado, al menos, una marca. Las secreciones de Gracia —y probablemente las suyas propias— habían sido tan abundantes y tan viscosas” [“Before the absence of the fat woman —before the enormous hollow of her absence—, he put himself to cleaning the observation table, the floor, the wall and the desk, all places in which they had left, at least, a mark. Gracia’s secretions —and probably his own— had been so abundant and so viscous” (García González 81)]. I refer to this description of these excess secretions in order to analyze Gracia’s sexual excitement during their encounter. Normally when discussing sexual arousal between men and women, it is the bodily fluid of the male that receives the most attention, as it is his climax that marks the act and its biological purpose of insemination. As Elizabeth Grosz discusses the bodily fluids of the different sexes, she points to a traditionally masculinist concept of sex: “[Seminal fluids are] seen as the only fluid exchanged, the one for which the female flows are merely preparatory, the media or conduits for male sexual flow” (196). Beyond lactation, menstruation, and waste, women’s bodies are thought to be free of fluids, and therefore during sex only the male’s ejaculation is present and holds any significance. In the novel, the doctor’s bafflement and obsession with Gracia’s fluids demonstrates this phallo-centric perception of the doctor where he had not previously considered the wetness, or sexual pleasure, of his female partner; now he lays about his office licking this evidence that Gracia, the woman, was aroused. Gracia’s arousal and wetness is much more a masculine representation of sexual fluid than feminine; it is male fluids that are in excess and more visible, but it is Gracia’s fluids that cover the office space. Here Gracia’s wetness makes

her sexuality appear masculine through its excessive and dominant presence in her sexual encounter with the doctor. She teaches the doctor about the limits of female sexuality.

The discussion of Gracia's sexual secretions turns into a comparison of Gracia's body and that of the doctor's fiancée, Amalia. As he sits and reflects on Gracia's fluids, the doctor compares how the two women embody different versions of femininity in terms of desire and control. The doctor summarizes this by asserting to himself that Amalia represents "una vida estable, un matrimonio cercano, hijos en un momento dado" ["a stable life, a close marriage, children at a given moment" (87)]. In other words, she is the perfect, and safe, option for the doctor's career and future. First, Pereda compares the women's bodies, with Gracia's obese one against Amalia's athletic one: "Era perfecta. No tenía estrías ni celulitis. Sus pechos eran firmes y sus pezones miraban al cielo. Tenía las caderas estrechas y su trasero no era de los mejores que el doctor había visto —o tocado—, pero tenía las carnes duras, uniformes y lisas" ["She was perfect. She didn't have stretch marks or cellulite. Her breasts were firm and her nipples looked up at the sky. She had slim hips and her bottom was not one of the best the doctor had seen —or touched—, but she had tough, uniform, and smooth flesh" (87)]. The description of Amalia reduces her to just breasts, hips, and backside, the same fragmenting effect that the male gaze of the audience had on Selene's body in looking at her shapely parts and not a whole subject, and of Santa and the other prostitutes being reduced to parts for consumption. The doctor's description of Amalia, while praising her perfect figure, speaks of her body in the past tense, although they are still engaged. The comparison indicates that the doctor has realized that Amalia's body will not remain this perfect and toned as she ages, just like the photo of the older Selene's cellulite. He also speaks of her

backside; compared to Gracia's, Amalia's appears just to be satisfactory according to the doctor's "research" with other women. Amalia is an example of fitness and a beautifully thin body yet the reader can sense that the doctor does not speak of his fiancée with desire or excitement. Her slender, cellulite-free body does not affect him the same way Gracia's does.¹⁴ Amalia is "safe" while Gracia is "savage."

A comparison of Amalia and Gracia's bodily fluids and odors leads to further insight into their differing sexual desires. The doctor remembers Amalia's odor and her bodily control:

Olía sólo a perfume. Por primera vez, sumergido en una reflexión que no lo parecía, Andrés Pereda se preguntó por qué del cuerpo de Amalia no se desprendían olores naturales, por qué él no sentía ninguna exhalación si llegaban a acercarse sus caras o si hundía la nariz —muy rara vez, a ella no le gustaba— bajo el crespo y perfectamente depilado vello púbico . . . parecía no sudar, su cuerpo era un poco falso . . . como si sus fluidos dependieran de la voluntad. (87)

[She smelled only of perfume. For the first time, submerged in a reflection that didn't seem to be so, Andrés Pereda asked himself why Amalia's body did not produce natural smells, why he never felt any exhalation if their faces were close or if he buried his nose —very rarely, she didn't like it— beneath the curly and perfectly waxed pubic hair . . . she seemed to not sweat, her body was a little false . . . as if her fluids were of her control.]

The doctor does not find sexual excitement in Amalia's body nor is sex exciting or pleasurable between them; she is too controlled and manicured. However, when reconsidering Gracia's sexual fluids, the doctor paints a different picture. After having sex, the doctor cleans the office, and he begins to lick the stains of vaginal fluids that Gracia has left: "El olor hizo que se le erizara la piel, lamentó que en su boca no hubiera descansado el ávido sexo de la mujer . . . '¡Dios Santo!', pensó Pereda, 'cómo lubrica

¹⁴ Just like the Odalisque and "Rubenesque" women, the comparison between Amalia and Gracia's backsides also evokes the work by artist Lucian Freud (1922-2011). His paintings of women, including overweight women, naked and sometimes after sex, explores sexuality in his overweight female subjects. The doctor is drawn to Gracia like Freud's obese model.

esta chica” [“The smell gave him goosebumps, he regretted that in his mouth would not rest the woman’s eager sex . . . ‘My God!’ thought Pereda, ‘how wet this girl gets’” (82)]. The doctor’s exclamation of this wetness again points to Pereda’s opinion that Gracia’s body lacks control through her masculine-like fluids, not only in terms of appetite and size but sexuality and arousal. The lack of control and excess, surprisingly, attracts the doctor, as does Gracia’s size. In recalling the doctor’s reaction to the smell of Gracia’s vaginal stains, here his matter-of-fact appraisal of Amalia’s odorless body leaves the reader with an acute understanding of the couple’s sex life. To summarize their differences, Pereda says that Amalia’s body is a more controlled organism than Gracia’s: “Era como si se hubiese propuesto mantener su propio organismo bajo estricta observación y el más férreo control, y lo hubiera llegado a dominar a la perfección en calidad de objeto” [“It was as if she had proposed to maintain her own organism under strict observation and the most fierce control, and would have come to dominate it to perfection in object quality” (87)]. It is strange, then, that the doctor believes Amalia’s controlled body holds the promise of a stable future and of motherhood because this inorganic, slender, and odorless body is physically positioned against the wide-hipped fertile image of a curvaceous woman, or of a sexually excited or excitable woman, such as Gracia. I relate this comparison again to the difference between the Mexican female archetypes of *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada*. Here Amalia is in line with *la Guadalupe*, with her controlled body resisting sexual desire and yet acting as the perfect mother, while Gracia evokes the image of the dangerous sexual woman of *la Chingada*, although she is not passive in her interactions with the doctor or her own sexuality. The doctor’s opinion of Gracia’s uncontrolled or uncontrollable body puts Gracia in competition with

toned women like Amalia and Beatriz, and as the reader knows, both the doctor and Señor Calderón are no longer attracted to their slender girlfriend and wife. They desire the body which they cannot control, the body that represents a new version of desired femininity.

After looking at these moments of sexual pleasure for Gracia, the importance of water and wetness in her arousal and pleasure is undeniable. Besides the moments in the shower with the hose, Gracia also enjoys, as the novel's title indicates, the sensation of the sauna vapors on her body while she pleasures herself. She refers to the sauna as her temple, going very early every morning to worship and pleasure her body; "Desde que habían recorrido el horario del vapor, Gracia lo había convertido en un salón ritual, el lugar donde ejercitaba sus rutinas de placer" ["Since they had covered the hours of the sauna, Gracia had converted it into a ritual room, a place where she exercised her pleasure routines" (19)]. She enjoys the sauna in all ways, from the pleasure of feeling sweat and condensation on her body to the pleasure she finds in the shower nozzle. The idea of ritual relates to her perception as a Buddha or fertility goddess, performing her pleasuring rituals in her temple. After she masturbates in the sauna for a great length of time, with multiple orgasms which make her laugh, Gracia acknowledges that "las señoras y señoritas que entraban al baño de vapor se sentarían, sin saberlo, sobre la humedad de sus secreciones" ["the women and ladies that entered the steam bath would sit, without knowing, on the humidity of her secretions" (20)]. Not only does her sweat combine with the sauna condensation, but also Gracia's humid vaginal secretions mingle with the humid sauna air like a damp fog of incense to become unseen evidence of her arousal and use of her temple. At the end of the novel when she frequents the pool, and

while also having a sexual relationship with her swim instructor, the final scene narrates how she dives into the pool from the diving board in front of the patrons who look on aghast; “rompió la lisa superficie del agua como si rompiera un himen” [“she broke the smooth surface of the water as if breaking a hymen” (164)]. The intentional wording reveals Gracia’s erotic relationship with water and how she finds arousal and pleasure in the vapors of the sauna and swimming in the pool. The novel’s title itself, *Vapor*, then moves beyond the physical space of the health spa from the beginning to uncover the association for Gracia between female sexual arousal and moisture or water. Additionally, with the patrons watching disapprovingly, Gracia dives in regardless of their judgment, again reinforcing how she disregards how others view her and finding validation from within. The moment of entry into the pool arouses excitement for the anticipated sensation to come as it encases her whole body, and brings Gracia’s sexual relationship to water full-circle, beginning with the sauna and shower and ending with the pool.

Vapor dialogues with both fat and feminist studies, as well as its critique of the preconception and social construct that one can only achieve beauty and happiness by being thin and that obesity prevents these constructs. Gracia’s stance is a feminist reaction to the masculinist, Pygmalion regimens imposed on her body in order to remain true to herself and enjoy her body. While ultimately the doctor is rejected by both Amalia and Gracia, he refuses to accept either model of beauty as truly satisfying, as norms conflict with his own desires. At the end of the story, Amalia leaves Doctor Pereda, and even after he leaves town and they have one last fling, Gracia is not satisfied, and leaves the doctor half-naked and alone in his new office. And as we have seen, the last scene is of Gracia at an outdoor pool as others watch her swim, just as the novel began with men

watching through a hole in the health club shower as she pleased herself. Throughout the novel Gracia faced constant criticism and judgment from the other characters who were appalled by her size. And yet, not in spite of but because of her size, Gracia remains happy and satisfied personally and sexually in the end, asserting her own versions of beauty and desire into the Mexican imaginary.

Conclusions

Selene and Gracia make a surprising duo for comparing how the female protagonists enact beauty, female body image, and female desire in these two Mexican novels. One woman climbs the social ladder in becoming a beauty pageant queen and the other lives comfortably in her upper-class privileged life as an obese woman. However, both women are highly visual figures in the public spaces of the beauty pageant and being an obese woman out around the big city. When considering their bodies, one does so in relation to others's gaze, particularly a male audience, and the other resists using others's gaze as validation of herself. Selene finds pleasure and validation from her male audience while Gracia finds pleasure from her own perception of her body and its pleasure, even though she is secretly watched through the wall at the health spa. What is noteworthy is how opinions differ on whether or not they are attractive. Selene is desired as a youth during the pageant but as she ages she is no longer considered beautiful by her public but rather washed up and a former beauty. However, although Gracia is ridiculed for her size, and while women continue to judge her, men who look upon her wish to sleep with her, or to possess this excess body, as seen with the doctor and spa patrons.

The characters are comparable not only in terms of how they utilize masturbation to enact their own pleasures but also in how they use mirrors; Selene looked at herself in

a mirror when she stripped and then touched herself, and Gracia watches her body as she bounces in front of the health spa mirror. Just as how Santa's clients consumed her flesh and Kahlo's public consumed her reproduced image, Selene and Gracia use mirrors to consume and take pleasure in their own image and body. Selene is able to break from her need for the male gaze and enjoy herself in private when looking in the mirror, and Gracia enacts this same self-enjoyment from viewing her own body in the health spa's mirror. When the characters are alone with their reflection they are the only one viewing their body, and their desiring female gaze allows them to find pleasure in consuming their own body away from the male gaze of the judges, the viewing public, or male passersby on the street. Additionally, Gracia's excessive weight can be viewed as the way she protects herself from the male gaze, or rather, in rejecting traditional female body types and embracing her obesity, she does not have to engage those standards. Therefore as Selene protects herself from the destruction of the pageant by masturbating in private, Gracia protects herself from the destruction of people's judgments by enjoying her obese body.

The former Miss Mexico and the obese young woman are both beautiful, yet they construct and imagine their ideas of female beauty differently. Selene only considers herself beautiful through the validation of the public, masculinist, eye, as well as photographic documentation from her youth and glory. Gracia, on the other hand, does not let the male, or even female, gaze enter into her construction of her beauty. In *Señorita México* the reader experiences Selene's transition from love-struck youth to washed-up suicidal beauty queen, developing her story backwards as the narration progresses from end to start. Selene takes pride in her former figure, beauty, and fame,

but as they were valued by the audience that now does not look upon her with such desiring approval, through the novel's format the reader is first confronted by Selene at the end of her life, filled with loathing and self-pity, sadness and poor self-esteem brought on by the tabloids and the passage of time away from the glamour of her pageant past. In *Vapor* the reader sees how Gracia is not interested in losing weight but rather in enjoying the pleasures of her excess flesh and size as she rejects the judgments and negativity directed toward her by others on the street and in the health spa. Gracia, in considering weight-loss to be a betrayal of the self, therefore not only identifies as a fat woman but also finds pleasure and satisfaction in her body. A happy fat woman is not the model to which women aspire, as seen within the space of the health spa, Señora Calderón, and the homospectatorial look in women's fashion. Gracia finds pleasure in her size, enjoying how her flesh sways and breasts bounce, and would rather enjoy the literal and figurative pleasures of the flesh rather than lose weight. Selene and Gracia differ in terms of beauty and body image; in the end it is Gracia who is happy with herself, as Selene suffers her ultimate demise in the loss of self through the loss of her figure. For Selene, her corporeal identity was all she clung to and subsequently lost.

While it is Gracia who is happier with her beauty and body image, both women experience happiness in their assertions of female sexual desire. Selene is a visual and public figure, and yet it is in her life out of the public eye where she chooses to enact her sexuality and desire. Her relationships with her male cousin as a youth and with her female dance partner later in life go against the ideals she represents as Miss Mexico, a national symbol of purity, virginity, and heterosexuality. Such transgressive sexuality is also exemplified in the moment where Selene stops touching herself because she feels as

though she were defiling a national monument. Her female desire leads her to explore sexual relationships based on incest and lesbian desires that transgress her pure, heterosexual pageant persona. These forbidden pleasures, as she calls them, represent the discovery of her true self through her transgressive female sexuality. Similarly, Gracia also enacts sexuality away from the masculinist constraints over her body and desires. In initiating sex with Doctor Pereda and in masturbating in the health spa she breaks from a pure, male-oriented traditional sexuality where the woman does not seek out pleasure for herself. Additionally, through masturbating she removes the phallus from her pleasure, and in being unknowingly watched by the male patrons, castrates them despite their arousal. Their arousal also speaks to how they consider Gracia to be beautiful and desirable as a fat woman. The attractive obese female body is contrasted in the novel by Pereda's fiancée and Beatriz Calderón, both of whom are no longer considered to be sexually attractive after Pereda and Señor Calderón set eyes on Gracia's body. Selene and Gracia's masturbation removes men as well as male desire from their search and need for sexual pleasure, the ultimate castration of the masculine patriarchy and resistance to male-dominated expectations of femininity. They push for women to be defined by more than just their appearance in terms of beauty or size.

Conclusion.

In my thesis I have studied twentieth- and twenty-first century Mexican literature and visual art with the hope of finding and discussing examples of womanhood and femininity in excess as resistance to traditional Mexican gender models. I have explored these excesses through women's, or female characters's, bodies to see the relationship among gender, sexuality, bodies, and performativity in what were often transgressive examples of womanhood. I looked at a wide range of sources from a variety of time periods, with the inclusion of the Mexican Revolution and artwork such as photographs, calendar prints, and paintings to provide a richer analysis of female bodies and excessive gender as resistance. Ultimately, I have showed how these selected transgressive female figures deconstruct the archetypal restrictions for women to *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada's* definitions as either virgin mother or violated mother. It is noteworthy that, after analyzing all of these works, the two male-authored books resulted in the female protagonists's death. The literature in my corpus penned by women involve female protagonists who instead survive through resisting the destructive effects of the Mexican patriarchy on their bodies. My scholarship illustrates how the figures created their own fluid versions of femininity away from these archetype models and have paved a way for women to expand the definition of womanhood and "feminine" through their bodies. Each chapter allowed me to look at different components that exemplified these transgressive acts of resistance by the female figures.

My first two chapters on women in the Mexican Revolution revealed a counter-archive to the traditional masculinist representation of the Revolution. The chapters highlighted how women participated in the campgrounds and battlefields alongside the

male soldiers as they created new spaces for womanhood and female bodies outside of the home. Some of these bodies like Amelio Robles did enact a male identity and a masculine performance, while others remained feminine and redefined their performance and body in the context of Revolution. I chose to invert the classical study of the Revolution first through literature and instead studied the examples of popular culture first in the photographs, *cromos*, and *corridos* to frame the literature and the female characters in the context of women's experiences and their visual and literary representations, looking at the texts as a feminine re-writing of the historical archive. In this post-Revolution re-writing by the female authors, female characters were able to gain a multi-dimensional portrayal that brought the feminine archive to life and brought the woman of the Revolution autonomous representation. After this framework for viewing an archive of women's involvement throughout the twentieth century, in my third chapter I turned to two epistolary novels that revolve around themes of loss, maternity, and abnegation. There I revealed how the female protagonists use the act of writing as their journey of discovery of their selves and subjectivities in order to break from negation and objectification by their consuming male lovers and the societal expectations to become mothers. My view of Quiela's downward spiral through "Diego's Inferno" demonstrated her path to break from her reliance on the heterosexual matrix to define herself through a relationship and a maternal identity, and Beatriz's similar journey allowed her to embrace her identity as a sex worker and find satisfaction with multiple partners. Both characters find satisfaction away from the archetypes of motherhood and passivity.

My fourth chapter brought together literature and artwork again to further emphasize how the female figures used alternative reproduction as resistance and chose

suffering over following the heteronormative virgin mother model. In the unlikely grouping of Santa, Kahlo/Frida, and Claire, I discovered similarities in how the figures created alternative modes of (re)production and sexuality. The space of the wounded womb proved to be the site of this production that evolved from their suffering, and ranged from the commerce of flesh and sex, turning the non-maternal body into art, and creating a male identity as one's own son through gender-bending. I also revealed the similar psychological suffering Quiela and Kahlo experienced at the hands of Diego Rivera which also revolved around motherhood, in terms of being a former mother or an inability to become one. That the figures in this chapter chose bleeding and suffering over traditional womanhood is a strong message of what they are willing to do to avoid falling into line with stagnant expectations for womanhood, with images of blood and wounded wombs defining their womanhood. My fifth chapter continued the discussion of sexuality in also addressing body image, beauty, and female pleasure for Selene and Gracia. I explained how Selene and Gracia rejected female passivity, negated sexuality, and the traditional masculine gaze on their bodies and enacted their own constructions of body image and desire. Although Selene enjoyed her state of looked-at-ness, she was able to turn that power of the male gaze into sexual pleasure for herself. Gracia's stance against body image and body shaming questioned standards of beauty and challenged these aesthetics, just as Selene's beauty pageant woes did in that specific context. I discovered how their transgressive relationships with their lovers go against traditional womanhood in focusing on their own pleasures over acceptable, passive relationships. The chapter reveals that characters's transgressive act of masturbation became their most powerful

mode of resistance to Mexican archetypes, turning their sexual organs into a site of self-pleasure and not their traditional purpose of reproduction.

While studying womanhood and femininity in Mexico there were certain themes I chose to focus on such as the female body and female sexuality, yet there are other areas that would be interesting to look at as this project develops in the future. For example, I touched on Selene's lesbian relationship in *Señorita México*, Claire's cross-dressing and her encounter with Ifsi in *Duerme*, and Amelio Robles's trans identity during the Mexican Revolution. It would be productive to continue to look at both the limits of femininity and masculinity in LGBTQ bodies in future studies alongside my dissertation. While Laura Gutiérrez studies the same-sex masquerade of women performing as women, there is much work by scholars such as José Quiroga, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Lawrence La-Fountain Stokes that look at femininity in male bodies, for example. Additionally, while I explored different configurations of reproduction for women, in the future these could join with examples of alternative motherhood by women or men that further displace the archetypes of Mexican motherhood. Such future explorations of gender would be interesting to view alongside my scholarship on femininity in excess in Mexico.

In studying Mexican women, the racial identity of the *mestiza* or indigenous woman is crucial to dialogues of power, sexuality, and subjectivity. As seen with *la Chingada*, these racialized women are met with shame and violence, and marked as sexualized but passive bodies to be colonized and violated.¹ My thesis included the figures of Jesusa, Selene, Gracia, Claire, and the Soldaderas and Adelitas of the photographs and *cromos* of the Revolution alongside discussions of race in Mexico. In

¹ Another way to view these racialized bodies upon which violence is enacted is through the *femicidio* at the border in Juárez since 1990. For scholarship on this topic see the work of Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Lourdes Portillo, Alice Driver, and Steven S. Volk.

the future it would be interesting to examine race in womanhood more deeply. One way to situate race in such a study of these embodied femininities and sexualities would be to include Chicana and Mexican-American authors's or artists's representations of *mestizas* and indigenous figures. Such racialized modes of resistance would result in a fruitful direction for these studies of Mexican gender and sexuality.

My dissertation covered a range of literature and art from 1903 to 2004, yet other points of departure for studying femininity in the future involve the inclusion of different genres and recent authors. While I referred to Julio Sesto's "Soldadera" poem, Rosario Castellanos's play *El eterno femenino*, and the films *Casi divas* and *Real Women Have Curves*, the inclusion of other genres would bring together a wider span of texts and art. Another option for expanding the corpus would be to include novels published in the last five or ten years and from newer or less-studied authors. The works I studied by Elena Poniatowska and Elena Garro, for example, are crucial to the Mexican canon in general and literature by women, yet studying more authors like Julieta García González such as Guadalupe Nettel, Cristina Rivera Garza, and Ana Clavel and works published in the recent 2000s will uncover new voices and topics as Mexican literature as gender studies progress in the twenty-first century. I am interested in seeing the types of female protagonists that have and will emerge from these and other writers as the notions of feminine, masculine, male, and female continue to be reassessed, transgressed, and reimagined in Mexican literature and society.

In these chapters my analysis revealed that the women or female characters ultimately refused to adhere to traditional Mexican expectations for women that relate to motherhood, body image, private spaces, gender markers, sexuality, or desire. They broke

with tradition and the female archetypes of *La Guadalupe* and *La Chingada* to produce new modes of womanhood through resistance and open the spectrum of definitions of embodied femininity in Mexico. Whether from 1903 or 2004, the examples in this study demonstrate how women, who are often tied to the nation and yet are defined by masculinist national constructs, are able to create new embodied spaces for womanhood in Mexico, a process which will continue to evolve in both literature and art in the twenty-first century. These figures therefore put into question the relationship among gender and the nation in future studies of womanhood in Mexico. In my dissertation my intention was to reveal how women have created modes of resistance to the dominant gender roles in Mexico in literature and art and create embodiments of excessive gender. I hope that the ways in which I framed my corpus has lead scholars to a new reading of how women resist Mexican female archetypes and the impossible dualities they maintain between virgin and mother through alternative embodiments of womanhood. I aspire for my approach to assist in how, in literature and art, the performativity and viscosity of women's bodies are valued, that this study opens a dialog of women's sexuality and subjectivity in the profession in the future. The female figures in these chapters, from the sex worker to the female general of the Mexican Revolution, resist the stagnant roles of virgin or whore by transgressions that enact fluid excesses of gender. These excesses I uncovered in my dissertation have created a feminine counter-archive that I hope continues to push scholars to move beyond *la Guadalupe* and *la Chingada* in future feminist readings of Mexican womanhood.

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Illustrations



Fig. 1. Jerónimo Hernández. *Soldadera* or food seller, Mexico City. 1912. Inv. #5760. Fondo Casasola, SINAFO- Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, México.



Fig. 2. Casasola, 1914. Inv. #292490. Fondo Casasola, SINAFO- Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, México.



Fig. 3. Casasola, ca1915. Inv. #186449. Fondo Casasola, SINAFO- Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, México.



Fig. 4. Casasola, 1910. Inv. #68115. Fondo Casasola, SINAFO- Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, México.



Fig. 5. Casasola. ca1915. Inv. #63944. Fondo Casasola, SINAFO- Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, México.



Fig. 6. Ángel Martín. *La Adelita*. Reproduced from the popular calendars published annually in Mexico by Calendarios y Propaganda, S.A.



Fig. 7. Eugène Delacroix. *La Liberté guidant le peuple*. 1830. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre. Paris, France.



Fig. 8. Antonio Gómez R. *Las Soldaderas*. 1938. Pysa-Lito-Leosa.



Fig. 9. Humberto Limón. *Untitled*. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 10. Antonio Gómez R. *Amor guerrillero*. 1946. Galas de México.



Fig. 11. Alberto Carmona. *Adelita*. 1953. Oil on canvas. Collection Museo Soumaya. Mexico City, México.



Fig. 12. José Guadalupe Posada. 161. *La calavera revolucionaria*. Broadside, 1911, full sheet, zinc etching. Denver Art Museum, New World Department.



Fig. 13. Kahlo, Frida. *Henry Ford Hospital*. 1932. Oil on sheet metal. Collection Museo Dolores Olmeda, Xichimilco, México.

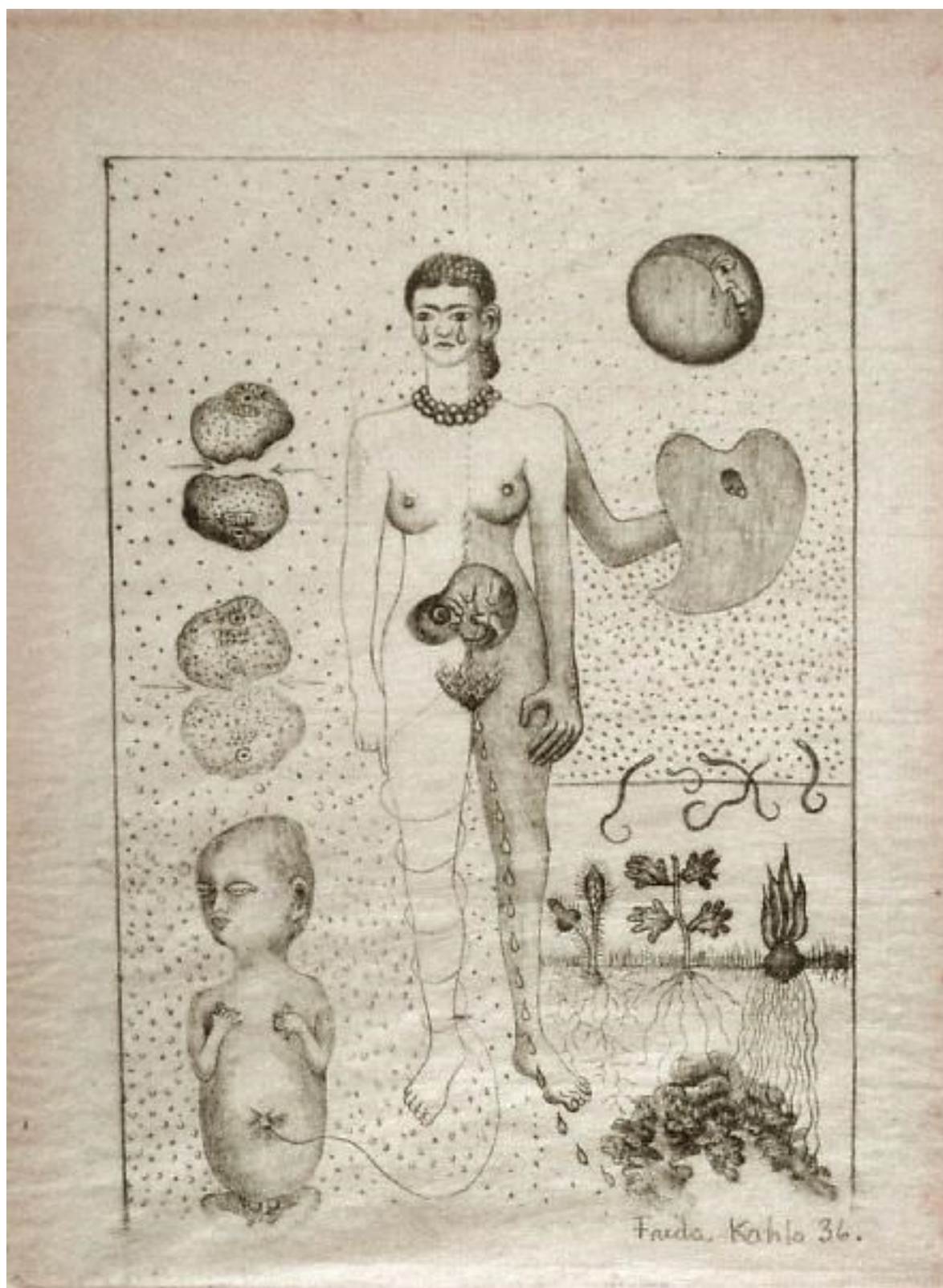


Fig. 14. Kahlo, Frida. *Frida y el aborto*. 1932. Lithograph. Collection Museo Dolores Olmeda, Xichimilco, México.



Fig. 15. Kahlo, Frida. *Las dos Fridas*. 1939. Oil on canvas. Collection Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.



Fig. 16. Kahlo, Frida. *Columna rota*. 1944. Oil on masonite. Collection Museo Dolores Olmeda, Xichimilco, Mexico.



Fig. 17. Kahlo, Frida. "Yo soy la desintegración." 1945 or 1946. Watercolor. Plates 40-41.
The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait.

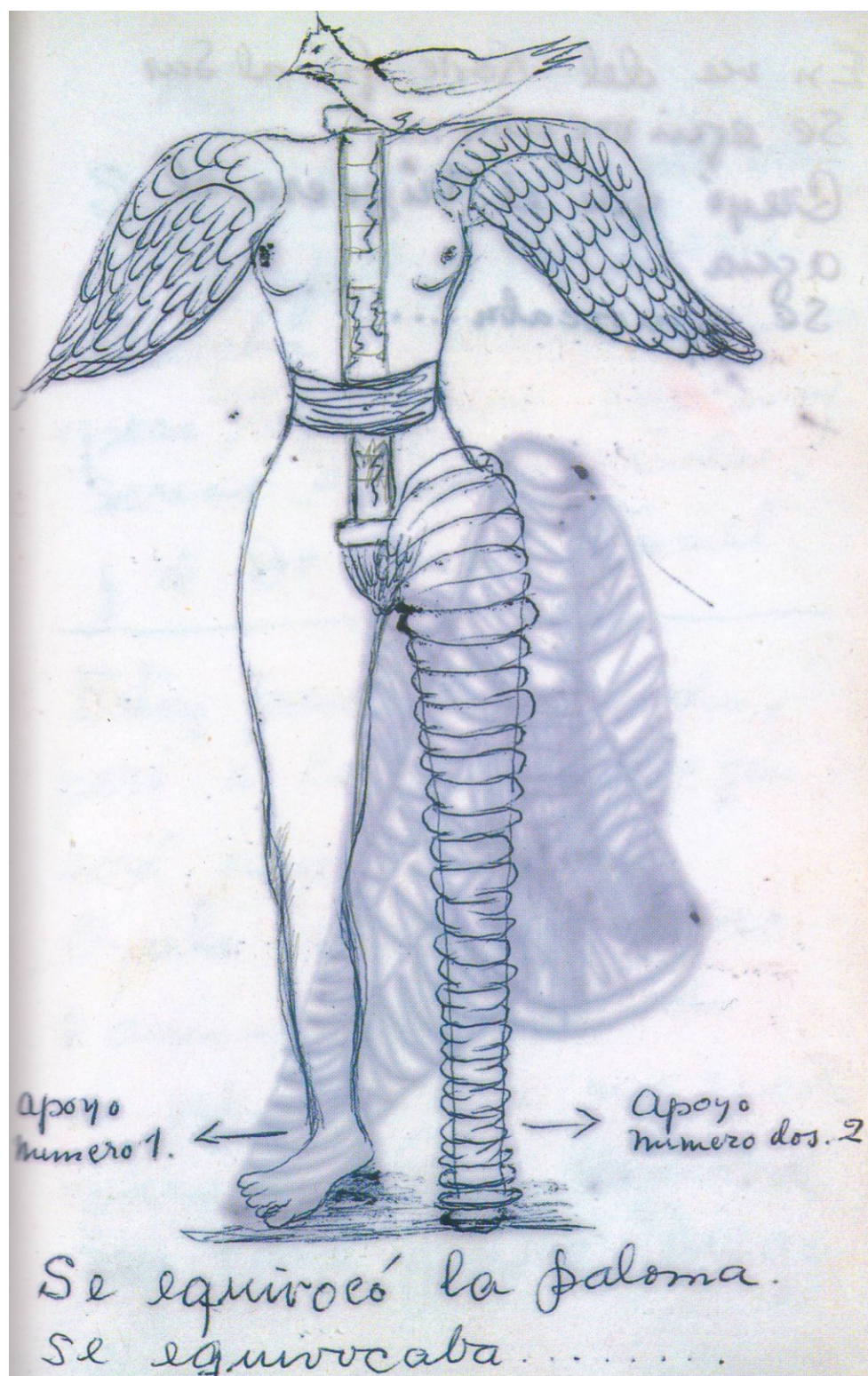


Fig. 18. Kahlo, Frida. "Se equivocó la paloma, se equivocaba." 1953. Ink. Plate 141. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait.*