

Rereading the Spanish - American Essay
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Alfonsina Storni

Argentina, 1892-1938

"Alfonsina" has become a legend in Latin America. Her name has been the topic of songs and stories that tell of a woman who broke the barriers of her time and place and who recorded in her bold poetry what her battles won and cost her. Especially poignant is her dramatic suicide, as she walked into the ocean after a losing battle with cancer. Yet she is also remembered as a high-spirited ironist who wove together melodrama and avant-garde poetry and theater to create an unmistakable voice that still speaks to the popular imagination.

Storni was a poet who achieved early recognition in Buenos Aires for her writing as well as her nonconformist personal style, yet her story is a typical one of her time. Like so many of her generation, she arrived in Argentina as part of an immigrant family and settled in the provinces. And like many women of her time and place, she entered the public sphere through her teacher training, becoming a *maestra* while still a teenager. As part of a growing group of women who joined a burgeoning middle class through professions such as teaching and journalism, she scrambled to find ways to support her writing career without the legacy of family wealth or patrons. In addition, her status as an unwed mother closed certain doors to her, a situation she records in her poetry.

ALFONSINA STORNI

Alfonsina Storni's career coincided with the expansion of Argentina's reading public, and she maintained a steady journalistic production throughout her adult life. Writing both for major newspapers and for more specialized literary magazines, she adapted her style and content for each type of reader. At the same time she published lyric poetry, often love poetry of an autobiographical nature, sentimental short stories, chatty women's columns in major newspapers, and, in more specialized publications, some piercing critiques of women's social lot. Storni's journalistic work can be read as a record of the excitement and the contradictions inherent in new situations for women during the period. Women like her, raised with dreams of romance and family ties, often found the entrance into urban public life a rude awakening. Storni captures vividly the clash between the expectations for women raised by the popular press and cinema, and the often harsh realities for working women beneath the veneer of city life.

Reading Storni's journalism adds a new dimension to her legendary status as a poet, causing us to read her again with new eyes. As she dissects social mores in her women's columns and comments on fashion, conventions, and the vicissitudes of daily life—sometimes under a pen name such as "Tao Lao"—she allows us to see with her the pretensions and delights of an urban society in rapid change, focusing especially on the sphere of women and children. Other histories have not given us this smaller, more intimate theater of daily life. Along with her poetry, her journalistic essays make even more dramatic and important the legend of Alfonsina.

GWEN KIRKPATRICK

The Immigrant Girl

Among the people who come to these lands as immigrants, there is an authentic character: the young girl who comes alone. This girl is the one who stays in the big cities as the family maid or the servant girl in a hospital.

She is the same girl who at festivals and local dances gets dizzy from the fast rhythms of her native land and, to the beat of the beloved regional music, forgets the feather dusters and casseroles, thus reviving her old familiar surroundings.

The Raise

The city produces rapid changes in the immigrant girl: like a repotted plant that doesn't know what to do with the exotic energy it is receiving, she suddenly gets it into her head to spurt upwards. (In truth, this business of a spurt is only a figure of speech; what really happens is that the immigrant girl puts on high heels.)

Well, then, she has already grown in stature and the completely changed plant continues its constant transformation, which consists of improving its leaves at the expense of its fruits, converting its sap, which was accustomed to send out sober shoots, into a showy excess of greenery.

Soon the immigrant girl takes pleasure in scanty work and external luxury. (When in Rome, shoot Roman candles.) And, day by day, she keeps adding to her costume with blouses of showy silk, the long gold chain

with a watch "that works," the silver mesh purse, and the bulky beaded necklaces.

This is only in the first stage; in the second, the colors become subdued, the leather shoes are of a finer quality and tend to harmonize with the tone of the outfit. Her model in the first stage might have been her roommate, but in the second stage this model has been replaced by none other than the daughter of the household. And, arriving at this point of her assimilative cleverness, she asks for a raise in pay.

Diminution

Over there on her native soil the immigrant girl had a personality: she was called Mary or Joan or Rose, and she was one of six or seven in a family. She thus became the flower of a small garden, implying hope, possibility, a new household to be formed.

But her life suffered from the weight of tradition as, watchful and watched, she moved between the church that shone white in the distance and the earth that turned black nearby, exhausted and very hard.

The trees along the country path would say: the girl who passes by is Mary or Joan or Rose. But the trees of Buenos Aires only say that the young girl who passes by is a Savings Bank Passbook.

The Letter

The immigrant girl has the habit of coming to you with an envelope in her hand; it is rectangular, like all envelopes, and has writing all over it.

From the dance of its black letters she has only deciphered one thing: her name, which proves that she still exists and that she is called Mary or Joan or Rose.

She hasn't opened that envelope, and she hands it over to you inviolate, perhaps remembering that paternal opinion that women don't need to know how to read—that opinion, substantially shared by her male relatives or friends, that typically left her empty-handed after some years of constant excursions to the bank where she kept her savings.

The Mentality

A case in point: one of the young girls enters into the service of a person who, in training her, gives her this warning: Be careful not to put your fingers in the electric socket, because it would kill you.

But as soon as the lady of the house leaves, the girl suspects that they take her for an ignoramus.

Translated by Patricia Owen Steiner

How is it possible that death, a thing so grand, can hide out in such a tiny little round hole?

She certainly knows what makes people die. They die from a stabbing, they die from drowning, they die in bed after a lot of praying, but they don't die from putting their fingers in a hole that looks very much like the ones she made with her index finger in the ground . . . just like this.

And so to have a good laugh on anyone who takes her for ignorant, she pokes her index finger into the socket with all her might.

Life Is Good

Let's just admit that the room where the girl usually sleeps is a poorly ventilated tiny attic room where there's hardly enough space for her cage of a bed and her trunk.

Also, in respect for the truth, let it be said that with some frequency her salary isn't paid at the end of the month, and that her meals are skimpy.

But despite the dim light in her room, and the trunk hidden under the bed, and the friend who swindles her, and the fact that her family is far away, and that the husband comes home late, the immigrant girl sings all day long with all her heart, and if you were to offer her a chance to return to her native village, she wouldn't take it. And if you ask her a little about her life now, she answers you that life is good, and since she says so it must be true.

TAO LAO

La Nación, 1 August 1920.

Alfonsina Storni

Women and Love

I begin this article with my umbrella open. . . . But I beg you, oh divine creatures, not to let anything other than flowers rain down on me.

If that happens, the umbrella will be turned inside out and I will catch them: thanks very much!

Now that I am here with your flowers in my hands and pleasantly intoxicated by their perfume, I can talk about love, and about all of you, and of how I conceive of love.

For the moment let us rejoice that we are still the zealous vestal virgins of Romanticism. (It is lovely to be a vestal virgin; the white tulle hangs divinely and brushes the rosy foot with delicate grace.)

Your imagination thus intercedes between reality and the dream the way a powerful spring dulls and softens shocks.

More flowers? Thanks again. What is love, divine creatures?

Let's descend from the golden Romanticism, where we were, to cynicism; after all, the leap is not so abrupt. The cynic used to be a hopeless Romantic; a kind of medieval troubador who was singing his verses to his fair love, in the soft splendor of the pale moon, and the hounds chased him away.

This cynic, this worldly Romantic, would say to you, "Love is the trap the universe sets for living beings to deceive them and make them perpetuate themselves."

Translated by Patricia Owen Steiner

Magda Portal

Peru, 1903 — 1989

One of the most visible and most vocal members of the Peruvian political vanguard during the first half of the twentieth century, Magda Portal was, above all, a pioneer in the struggle for women's rights. A close associate of José Carlos Mariátegui and an early supporter of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre's APRA Party (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), she was persecuted repeatedly by the Peruvian government. In spite of suffering imprisonment and exile, she remained outspoken and firmly committed to the ideals of social justice for all Peruvians and especially equal rights for women, beliefs that were not popular at the time.

Portal's writings include poetry collections, *Una esperanza i el mar* (1927; One Hope and the Sea), *Costa sur* (1945; South Coast), and *Constancia del ser* (1965; Constancy of Being); a volume of short stories coauthored with Serafín Delmar, *El derecho de matar* (1926; The Right to Kill); the novel *La trampa* (1956; The Trap); and numerous political essays. Many of the latter were originally given as speeches in various locales throughout Latin America and subsequently published as *América Latina frente al imperialismo y Defensa de la Revolución Mexicana* (1931; Latin America Facing Imperialism, and Defense of the Mexican Revolution). Her works reflect her active involvement in the political life of Peru. As an essayist she writes in a straightforward

and unambiguous manner, often in the form of a political tract whose value is propagandistic rather than aesthetic. As a literary critic she reflects a keen awareness of the social and political uses of literature in her promotion of the new committed poetry (the vanguard poetry of the 1920s) in *El nuevo poema i su orientación hacia una estética económica* (1928; The New Poem and Its Aesthetic of Social and Political Commitment). Unfortunately, Portal is not well known outside of Peru, owing in part to the fact that her writings have not been translated into English.

The first of the two selections that follow, "Andamios de vida" (Platforms for Living), appeared in Mariátegui's seminal journal *Amauta* in January 1927. In this text, written in response to an article by Miguel Angel Urquieta denouncing the work of young writers of that day as "so much effeminate, pseudo-leftist childishness," Portal assumes the mantle of apologist for the new literary wave by linking these artistic rumblings to recent and impending social and political upheavals.

The second selection is taken from a work published in 1933 under the title *Hacia la mujer nueva* (Toward the New Woman), also known as *El Aprismo y la mujer* (*Aprismo and Women*). Written some fifteen years prior to her split with APRA, this volume summarizes Portal's social and political philosophy, in particular her ideas on the role of women in society and the part Aprismo (the APRA party) will play in the creation of the "New Woman." In the essay "Toward the New Woman" Portal protests traditional values that require that women be silent and submissive and asserts that women can achieve equality without sacrificing their femininity.

MELVIN S. ARRINGTON, JR.

And to deny this movement in art is to act like the frightened and, for that very reason, incredulous petit bourgeois who refuse to acknowledge the still-distant but unstoppable march of the soldiers of the Social Revolution.

"Andamios de vida," *Amanta* 2 (January 1927): 12.

Toward the New Woman

This is the new woman: self-discipline instead of exaggerated sentimentality; appreciation of freedom and independence rather than submission and absence of personality; affirmation of her individuality as opposed to mindless attempts to become one with the man she loves; the affirmation of her right to enjoy earthly pleasures without having to don the hypocritical mask of "purity," and, finally, the relegation of love affairs to a secondary position in life. Before us, then, we have, not a female, not a shadow of a man, but rather a woman-individual.

ALEXANDRA KOLLANTAL,

"The New Woman and Sexual Morality"

What kind of woman is the Aprista movement creating? An ambiguous, asexual being who poses a threat to men even though she continues to be held back by the umbilical cord of prejudice, a restraint from which she has violently, but so far unsuccessfully, tried to free herself? An equivocal, liberated young woman who thinks like a man and absurdly tries to imitate him? A Yankee flapper, the tomboy type, sports-loving, agile, bold, totally fearless, but unsure of where she is going?

Every profound transformation brings with it violent acts and excesses that enable it to achieve the proper balance, the perfect harmony. Revolutions happen because of clashing eras and because of glaring contradictions between opposing economic, political, social, or scientific views of the world and society. Without this, there would just be a natural, gradual growth and evolution of the individual and society. Aprismo is a revolution. With respect to women, Aprismo is, if you will, even more all-encompassing, since it wrests women from one spiritual situation and social milieu and places them in another, unlike and adverse to the one in which they have lived.

We might illustrate this movement in terms of a cell door suddenly bursting open, thereby allowing the astonished inmates to walk out in

Translated by Melvin S. Arrington, Jr.

broad daylight, totally free, into a vast, limitless field. Cloaked in the old medieval spirit—which still survives more than one hundred years after national independence and the establishment of a democratic republic—women are suddenly entering an age of unrestricted freedom. They are being shown the road ahead, a road without signposts, and they will have to walk it courageously, alone and free. And since they are accustomed to playing a secondary role, always dependent on men, it is only natural to expect that they will be astonished by the experience. One can logically conclude that this new state of existence will create a new spirit in women. But what kind of spirit? There are no models to emulate. Movies and magazines tell about European and North American women, but movies and magazines serve the interests of and represent the mentality of a particular class. However, such images of the freedom enjoyed by women in more advanced countries will prove attractive, and our women will immediately want to enter that strange, blissful state.

Will this newly created being represent an intermediate stage of development between the liberated woman and the one who is enslaved? Will an ill-defined form lacking distinguishing characteristics, half man-half woman, serve as the bridge to the definitive, self-confident Aprista woman?

Possibly this age of transition, of full-scale struggle and boundless sacrifice, will engender a new modality in the feminine spirit, one unlike the ambiguous nature of those women living in decadent societies who embody the egregious diminution of the social system and spiritual ambience under capitalism. Instead, this new spirit will be manifest in a revolutionary type, a woman who is valiant, energetic, not predestined to the ways of her true sex, in the sense that femininity is synonymous with sweetness. This new being, capable of every kind of sacrifice, will have to struggle, “just like men” and forget that she is a woman. She should be less uncertain, however, than all of the aforementioned types of modern women, because Aprismo is grooming her for her true role in the future, which does not exclude motherhood, the basis of real femininity.

The New Woman, who is just now coming into being, will be the product of the profound contradiction between a mentally inferior age—considerably below the spiritual level of the capitalist countries, where women possess a level of culture and personal dignity unknown to the majority of Latin American women—and a superior stage of development, where new formulations of freedom and justice will open up pathways of opportunity that even surpass those available in capitalist coun-

tries. Our New Woman will not be like the flapper, that asexual animal, totally free and slightly irresponsible, who accepts all the gratifications of capitalist civilization and suffers its oppressions without protest other than refusing to submit to its sexual impositions. Instead, she will be a self-assured individual who has followed the road of heroic struggle and who, because of her efforts, has arrived at the point where she can enjoy the benefits of rights heretofore unknown but, by the same token, rights that she has no intention of abusing through licentiousness or otherwise.

For the first time, women are going to assume their just roles as intelligent co-partners of men, not their slaves, as companions in the broad spiritual meaning of the word on the same level as their male counterparts. And the struggle for existence, the push to find better ways of doing things, the constant striving for spiritual advancement, will be no longer the sole province of men but rather that of the human couple, man and woman. Finally, after centuries of losing ground, the couple will once again assume its rightful place of importance.

Thus, the family nucleus will be strengthened, since the woman will no longer be just the discreet female happy in her inferiority, a parlor doll, or a poor domestic servant locked into her daily routines and lacking initiative. The family, with its two firm bulwarks formed by the human couple, will begin to fulfill its grand mission of producing strong children. They will be united by love and mutual respect, by equality and equal sharing of responsibilities, and by the woman's spiritual influence, which will freely manifest itself in the formation of this new consciousness in her children.

If the woman suffers from anything (apart from the denial of all her other rights, including freedom itself), it is from never having had the chance to express her personality. Because of these restraints, she has never been allowed to release, except in a few instances, the great creative force that is in her and the superior impulses of her intelligence, which make her capable of exerting a healthy influence on the shaping of both family and society. She has locked her proverbial timidity in the most remote corners of her spirit, relegating it to the level of the unconscious. The virtues of her true personality can be revealed with greatness at any moment if only offered the proper stimulus.

And so Aprismo will broaden the New Woman's horizons. But she will not lose her femininity in the face of these new opportunities by failing to take advantage of them or by adopting equivocal positions. On the contrary, by framing her revolutionary activity within the lines of rigid discipline, she will continue to advance righteously toward her own liberation,

which will raise her to a superior level—in spiritual as well as material terms—and thereby enable her to fulfill her ultimate destiny, alongside her male companion. He, too, will be free of prejudice, and he will understand her and respect her for all her meritorious qualities.

Haía la mujer nueva. Lima: Cooperativa Aprista Atahualpa, 1933. pp. 50–54.

Teresa de la Parra

Venezuela, 1889–1936

Teresa de la Parra was born Ana Teresa Parra Sanojo in Paris to an aristocratic Venezuelan family. She spent her childhood on the sugar plantation of her family in Venezuela and later split her time between Paris and Madrid.

Her first book, published in Paris in 1924, was *Ifigenia: Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba* (*Ifigenia: The Diary of a Young Lady Who Wrote Because She Was Bored*, 1994). A novel about a girl from Caracas who falls victim to the schemes of her greedy uncle, loses her fortune, and has to give up her freedom in order to survive in traditional society, it was both praised and criticized for the way it depicted modern women. Her second novel was *Memorias de la Mamá Blanca* (1929; *Mama Blanca's Memoirs*, 1992). Whereas *Ifigenia* was a novel of the city, the *Memorias* occur almost entirely in the idyllic world of the patriarchal hacienda where the protagonist lives as a child.

Teresa de la Parra traveled through Europe and Latin America. She was an intimate friend of the Cuban writer Lydia Cabrera and friend to the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. Living in Paris most of her life, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1932 and spent her last years in sanatoriums in France and Spain until her death in 1936.

The three talks she entitled "Influencia de la mujer en la formación del alma americana" (*The Influence of Women in the Formation of the American Soul*), of which the essay included here is the first, were given in Bogotá in 1930. These were about different moments in the history of Latin America and the determinant roles various women played in the evolution of that history. In the period of the Conquest, de la Parra centers on the colonial period she talks about the lives of privileged women as exercising a certain power from behind the closed doors and windows of the convents and houses in America. The third essay, about women during the period of Independence, was in part a project for a novel about Bolívar that she never managed to write. The conferences were published in Caracas in 1961; they are just now beginning to receive overdue critical attention for their feminist orientation.

RICHARD ROSA

1930
Teresa de la Parra

The Influence of Women in the Formation of the American Soul

First Lecture

It seems to me that I am dreaming, seeing myself here at last in Bogotá in front of an audience of intimate and now old friends, without experiencing any of the unbelievable fears I envisioned at a distance, but, to the contrary, feeling the confidence and the happiness of the love-liest moments of life.

For a long time my heart yearned for this visit to Colombia. I responded to the yearning, but only from afar, with gestures and smiles, because, like shy people, even being much in love, I was afraid of coming too close. This autumn the call became a voice, and a voice so urging and promising that, putting aside every fear and trusting in the good star that protects the enterprising, I began to prepare my visit, not wanting to arrive, as you see, with my hands completely empty.

The urging voice I'm talking about came to me in the form of a letter. It was at the beginning of November, and I had just arrived in Paris after a long first trip through Italy. I was preparing to spend a quiet winter in my haven at Neuilly, a winter of reading and perhaps also of work—in Paris you never know—when one morning I was awakened by the messenger-letter from Colombia. It was written by a group of friends who lived in Bogotá. They transmitted to me the following invitation: come to Colombia to give a series of conferences about myself, about the history of my literary vocation and about my books. It isn't easy for me to explain to you the state of perplexity in which such a suggestive and dangerous invitation left me. Considering that I had never spoken in public, I was in a

Translated by Richard Rosa and Doris Meyer

sea of doubts and temptations for several days, thinking over the dilemma: How to put together a conference? How to assume the role of author present before a public that perhaps might have liked me from afar because it had not seen me very close? And the literary vocation, so intermittent and fragile? On the other hand, the idea of crossing the sea during long days of peace, of sailing perhaps very slowly up the Magdalena River and through the big jungle and the Andes to reach so many familiar and dreamed-of cities, filled my soul with exquisite restlessness. Through my window, over the golden leaves swept away by the misty Parisian autumn wind, the tropic was calling to me. I already recognized from a distance the Colombia of the first romantic scenes of my childhood: the Cauca Valley, the big hacienda, the bathing pool full of roses, the dog Mayo, Feliciano the black woman; and from there, from the top of the path that led onward, the distant window with its frame of flowers where María still glistened in white waving goodbye to Efraín.

With this bright fantasy of the trip, the question of accomplishing it and of its consequences ceased to exist. One of the more serious consequences was the decision regarding the topic for the conference. Accepting the one that was proposed was almost a duty. When a book has acquired an intimate friendship with the soul of a reader, as happens in every case of intimacy, a sweet thirst for confidence flows naturally from the ears to the lips. I know that my books are much loved in Colombia; I have seen this already, and I say so with the boast of the child who hasn't done anything to deserve love. They are loved with that charming affection, disinterested and domestic, with which we love dogs, flowers, caged birds, and, in general, all familiar and useless things.

I therefore understand that it was natural for me to smile with confidence the day I arrived at this paternal house. Unfortunately, a lack of distance and the abundance of witnesses has not made it possible to create a beautiful story about myself that is truthful to the needs of the heart. Within thirty, thirty-five, or forty years, I'll return to these Colombian cities, and then, as in Ronsard's sonnet, trembling of old age, between the spindle and the distaff, by the hearth at night, I will tell the wonderful story of my youth . . . without the danger of somebody denying it. I will see, reflected in the eyes of my listeners, not the image of what I am but the divine image of what I would have wanted to be.

This promise takes care of the first topic proposed. About the second, that of a literary vocation, I can only tell you that, however much I sought it out, I didn't find it. So much does the literary vocation tend to get lost

and desert me that when at times a detractor—for there are always gossips that, for lack of delicacy, tell us unpleasant things—when some detractor once spread the rumor that I was not the real author of my books, I was the first one to believe it happily and comfortably. With my vocation lost, I felt freed of a great responsibility, having also lost the books. After all, what are works accomplished without the vocation that reaffirms them and protects them from us? That my books are not mine now is true up to a point. Aside from my name, which has remained as if by oversight on the cover of the books, I recognize nothing of my own in my novels: the first one, written by a girl of our time, whose whereabouts are now unknown; the second, written by a grandmother, now deceased, who was hospitable and affectionate like many other women still living under the roofs of these good cities of America. Those tales and novels have, to my mind, no other authors than those two absent ones. Situated at opposite extremes of life, they remained with me for some time; one told me of her yearning to live, the other of her sadness for having lived, and when they finished confiding in me, they left discreetly when it was time to edit the books.

About the third topic, that of the books themselves, or, to be precise, that of the thesis of *Ífigenia*—the crucial situation of the modern girl—that one did seem very interesting to me because it lends itself to discussion and urgently requires a solution. I won't avoid that one.

Many are the moralists who, mostly with kind equanimity although occasionally with violent anathemas, have attacked the diary of María Eugenia Alonso, calling it Voltairian, perfidious, and dangerous in the hands of contemporary young ladies. I don't think that this diary is so harmful to the girls of our time for the simple reason that it merely reflects their lives. Almost all of them, especially those born and raised in very austere environments, carry inside themselves a María Eugenia Alonso in open rebellion but more or less hidden depending on how the environment oppresses her, who tells them through an inner voice what the other one told them through the written word. The journal of María Eugenia Alonso is not a book of revolutionary propaganda, as many far-right moralists have tried to see it. On the contrary, it is the exposition of a typical case of our contemporary disease, that of Spanish American Bovarism, of extreme dissatisfaction caused by an abrupt change in temperature and a lack of new air in the surroundings. Whether the moralists like it or not, you don't stop a plague by hiding the cases, as is done in some ports, when at the expense of the truth and of public health they want to get their bill of

health at all costs. Plagues are stopped with air, with light, with modern hygienic measures that neutralize the causes of the evil, which are sometimes also modern.

The crisis that today's women are going through cannot be resolved by preaching submission, submissiveness, and more submission, as was the practice during the time when a quiet life could be confined entirely behind doors. Life today, the life of the automobile driven by her owner, of the phone near the bed, of newspapers and of travels, doesn't respect closed doors. Like the radio that so accurately symbolizes it, it goes through walls and, like it or not, makes itself heard and mingles with the life of the home. For a woman to be strong, healthy, and truly clean of any hypocrisy, you cannot subdue her in the face of that new life. On the contrary, she should be free within herself, aware of the dangers and responsibilities, useful to society even if she is not a mother, independent with respect to money thanks to her work and her collaboration alongside man—neither master nor enemy nor exploitable marriage candidate, but friend and companion. Work does not exclude mysticism, nor does it keep one from sacred duties. Rather, it is another discipline that purifies and strengthens the spirit. But mysticism, submission, and passivity imposed by force, “just because,” and by the inertia of habit, produce dangerous and silent reactions and a hatred of chains that may have been good in other times; and they embitter souls that, in their peaceful appearance, take their reprisals wherever they can and end by becoming whitened graves. The true enemies of feminine virtue are not the dangers to which it may be exposed by healthy activity, nor by books, universities, laboratories, offices, or hospitals. It is the frivolity, the empty mundane flitting-about with which the girl of marrying age, or the unhappily married lady, brought up in the old-fashioned way and already sick with skepticism, seeks distraction in an activity that, directed toward work and study, could be a thousand times more noble and sacred.

When I say “work,” I’m not talking about the humiliating, badly paid jobs in which helpless young women are wickedly exploited. I’m talking about work requiring preparation, in careers, jobs, or specializations adequate to women, and fairly paid according to the talent and the work accomplished. I wouldn’t want you, as a consequence of the tone and the line of reasoning of what I’ve said, to think me a defender of women’s suffrage. I’m not a defender or a detractor of women’s suffrage for the simple reason that I am not familiar with it. Knowing that it raises its voice to get women to have the same political rights and responsibilities as men scares

and stuns me so much that I’ve never been able to listen completely to what that voice proposes. And it is because I believe, unlike the suffragists, that we women should thank men for the fact that they have shown the self-sacrifice to monopolize political office entirely. It seems to me that, along with coal mining, it is one of the toughest and most unclean professions. Why claim it?

My feminism is moderate. In order to show it and to deal, ladies and gentlemen, with this delicate issue of the new rights the modern woman should acquire—not by means of a sudden and destructive revolution but by a noble evolution that conquers by educating and taking advantage of the forces of the past—I had begun by preparing, in these three lectures, a kind of historical overview of feminine abnegation in our countries, that is, of the hidden and happy influence that women had during the periods of Conquest, Colonization, and Independence. Because I believe a spirit exists truly common to all the countries in our Catholic and Spanish America, and because I believe that promoting it through their union is broad patriotism, I included all our countries in this overview and I called it “The Influence of Women in the Formation of the American Soul.”

But, having finished my historical overview, due to unexpected circumstances I had to travel to New York and Havana on the first stages of my trip to Colombia. I thought that I would acquire in those two cities new and interesting information about modern women, an objective for my final conferences, and I actually did so, but at the same time my vocation forsook me at the very moment of writing. In New York you can’t work because of the excess of movement and noise, and in Havana even less, because of the *dolce far niente*. I have kept, then, to my selfless women. Frankly speaking, I will tell you that down deep in my heart I prefer them. They have the charm of the past and the infinite poetry of voluntary and sincere sacrifice.

As a brief summary of the recollections of my travels I will only say that Havana is one of the places where one can best see the happy evolution of Latin women toward a more useful and just end without losing the characteristics of femininity and with good results. Cuba has a strong Creole character, traditional and folkloric, that defends it miraculously from spiritual invasions. Its exaggerated “Americanism” has not yet reached the soul of any of its social classes. The people from Havana are dyed-in-the-wool Creoles, despite the presence of the English language, tourism, dollars, and constant traveling. Many Cuban women work and study without

losing their femininity or their respect for certain principles and traditions. I lived in the house of a friend's family whose garden was adjacent to the university. Through its doors I used to see the daily comings and goings of as many women as men. And I met a very honorable middle-class family with five sisters twenty to thirty years old. Three of them were graduates of the university and were working in clinics or hospitals very successfully. Two were still studying. All of them were perfectly correct, very beautiful, and feminine; the three who were doctors helped their aging parents and the other two who were studying. Their work didn't prevent them from marrying: two of them had fiancés whom they received at home in the classic Creole custom. The difference of outcome between this education and the traditional education that still prevails in the upper classes in Havana is notable. The high-society girl from Havana, the rich heiress, player of tennis and bridge, dressed by Patou, owner of an automobile driven by herself, sometimes raised in convents and under austere conditions, is generally speaking beautiful, very elegant, and socially charming; but her culture, the aspects of her nature, and especially her moral level, lacking preparation for modern life, is inferior to that of the girl educated by work.

Gabriela Mistral, who may come here in July or August, alluded to this desire in a letter to me in which she calls Colombia "the healthiest place in the tropics." Without a doubt, Gabriela will speak skillfully about this burning issue, which she knows a thousand times better than I do, being a militant in all her ideas. I refer precisely to the idea of establishing a parallel between her life and that of Delmira Agustini—the two best American women poets of our century—in order to demonstrate the redemption and dignity women acquire through work and financial independence. Briefly, I want to outline that parallel.

Delmira Agustini, young, beautiful, brilliant, born in a severe and bourgeois milieu, is the case of the María Eugenia, the protagonist of *Ifigenia*, carried to a tragic end. Because of the powerful tradition that "every woman has to get married," she marries very young in a so-called good match. Soon after the marriage, the drama of incomprehension begins. On one side, the despotic and vulgar master; on the other, the silent disdain of one who feels she's a thousand times superior and yet enslaved. As a consequence: mutual hatred mixed with passion, divorce, and, at last, during one of the interviews of the divorce process, the husband kills her and kills himself—the only way to subdue her and to quench his thirst for domination.

Gabriela Mistral, poor, born in humble and honorable circumstances, without worldly conventionalities, has worked since she was a child. As the days went by, her work and her good Christian faith led her to new ideals that she humanizes and adapts in her work to the real needs of life, and so she goes through the world, suffering and fighting as apostle, socialist, Catholic, defender of freedom and of the noble spirit of the race.

With her experienced voice she will perhaps talk to you of a just and already indispensable feminism. Meanwhile, it is time, if you'll permit me, to go look for my own selfless women, I mean, "The Influence of Women in the Formation of the American Soul." I admit that coming up with this title took a lot of thinking, numerous discussions with myself, and, in general, all the cruel anxieties with which the dilemma of self-expression torments us by tending to lose elegance in order to gain clarity. I didn't know if it would be correct or even if it would sound right to Colombian ears to say "American soul" instead of Latin American, Ibero-American, Spanish American, Indo-American, or Indo-Spanish-American soul. None of these combinations pleased me either in substance or in form. They don't have lightness, they don't have wings, they don't have charm. They sound, I don't know why, like criollo snobbery naturalized in foreign countries, which is the source of many good things but also of many evils and sins against good taste. On the other hand, it seemed to me very sad to have so many and such diverse baptismal fonts. Each one of these different terms contained a formula for disintegration in opposition to the others. I thought at random of the power of words to determine facts, I thought of the sweet intimacy of things related to their names, and I thought, at last, that our anonymous beautiful homeland—so ample, so diverse, and yet so miraculously and mysteriously similar without having had either the embrace of proximity or the fatherly connection of only one name—was being relegated now to the status of abandoned, nameless girl, in great danger of losing her fortune. So I decided to eliminate any composite name and, with a loving smile, just say "American Soul," certain that everyone would understand me.

I believe that as long as politicians, military men, journalists, and historians spend their lives putting antagonistic labels on things, the job for young, simple people, and above all women, since we are many and quite disorderly, is to shuffle the labels in order to reestablish a cordial confusion. I'm talking about the annoying antagonism, the work of the press, not of living language, that has effectively opposed Indo-Americanism to Spanish Americanism. I don't want to talk here about the evil contained in

these two formulas, confronting one another like two torches of discord in the same house: on one side, the inhuman scorn of the nonintelligent and insensitive white who still thinks of himself as lord and master; on the other, the romantic Indianism, the deaf hatred the mestizo feels toward the intruding race, the hate that incites daily the popularized and unfair version of the Spanish Conquest, as if made of blood and fire, as if it was only about destruction, as if the conquest of America was an isolated case in the history of the world, and not the eternal and hateful law of all wars and all invasions! This topic has been discussed a lot, inevitably and insistently bringing up the excellent and over-exalted Father Bartolomé de las Casas. I think Father las Casas was an apostle and a saint. He knew how to courageously condemn the spirit of cruelty that incites war and the injustice of the strong against the weak. But, like many leaders of pacifism and socialism, after loving pity and justice passionately, he came to love even more the fire of his own eloquence, which belonged to the school of Savonarola. A brilliant polemicist, he unfortunately lived in an age in which there were no political meetings and no press. His energetic campaigns, enriched with imaginary statistics of mortality and assuming the category of historical documents, have been used as weapons in alien hands—I mean in the hands of Protestants and of Northern races, double enemies of the Spanish Empire—to discredit us systematically. And often they have been used in our own hands to raise discord and to stir up hatred between races.

Other contemporaries of las Casas silently preached mercy and peace. They were the women of the Conquest: obscure Sabines, anonymous workers of concord, true founders of cities by setting up homes, their most effective work was prolonged through generations in their silent enterprise of fusion and love.

As we know, the epic of the Conquest was born of a woman, Isabel the Catholic. Reading Columbus' mind, she brought the splendid commotion of the Renaissance from Spain to America's jungles. From afar, from a spatial and temporal distance, she is the European mother and godmother of our America. Her symbolic figure, later softened by the indolence of colonial life, already contains the characteristics of the classic "criolla matron," our grandmothers of yesterday. In remembrance of them I want to evoke the queen for a few moments in this profile, which José María Heredia used as a prologue to his translation of the Conquest of the New Spain. I do it out of faith and devotion to the race, as one evokes the familiar saint during prayers repeated daily because they're known by heart:

"On 26 November 1504," says Heredia, "Queen Isabel died in her castle of Medina del Campo. A courageous, pure, and selfless woman, she combined the feminine charms with all the masculine virtues. Her soul was superior to that of her age. She loved wisdom and books intensely. An intrepid and astute queen, she conquered Granada and understood Columbus. On her deathbed she dictated her final testament with the serenity of an ancient philosopher. That famous testament, overflowing with faith, love, intelligence, and magnanimity, was the seal of her noble life. Isabel was good. In the midst of the anguish of dying, she still thought of her Castilian people and her children in the Indies with maternal concern. All of Spain cried for this incomparable woman. She had been the best and the greatest of their monarchs. Nature itself seemed touched by her death. There was an earthquake. The sky covered the simplicity of her ceremony with lugubrious pomp. She wanted to rest in the same ground she herself had won. Beneath the storm, the lightning, the thunder, and the pouring rain, a hearse took her to Granada. Isabel's reign was the dawn of Spain's glory, which later sank into the sea with the defeat of the Invincible Armada.¹

As opposed to Isabel, on this side of the ocean we see the founding women pass by, discreetly veiled by the tales of the chroniclers of the Indies. Their humble lives full of suffering and love are not told. They are hardly noticed. Almost all of them are Indians baptized with Castilian names. Many of them are princesses. The most famous ones go by the names of Doña Marina, Doña Catalina, Doña Luisa, Doña Isabel. . . . They share with their white husbands the governance of their lands, and along with the gift of dominion they teach them to use cotton pants, rope sandals, and palm hats.

The white *cacique*, or overlord, completely adapted to the Indian environment, is not, ladies and gentlemen, a romantic legend; he is a typical case of conversion through the miracle of feminine love. Father las Casas himself, praising the beauty of some Indian women, counts up to sixty who were married to Castilians in the city of Vera Paz alone. Very eloquent and touching is the story of the Spaniard named Gonzalo Guerrero who was shipwrecked with Viquesa's expedition and lived eight years among the Indians. One of his companions named Aguilar, who had managed to escape and then return to the tribe with enough money to pay for Guerrero's ransom, warned him, saying that he was going to lose his soul by living among idolatrous Indians. Guerrero dismissed him with these words, according to the chronicler: "Brother, I am married, I have

three children, and these people consider me a *caique* when there is war. Go in peace, for my face is tattooed and my ears pierced. You can see how beautiful these three little children of mine are. Please be so kind as to give me, for them, those green beads you are carrying."

And so, in grass huts under coconut palms in the villages by the sea, mixing cocoa with vanilla or cooking cassava bread, Indian women, like tropical Nausicaas, prepare, along with the supper of the newly arrived, the dawn of the colonial age, our criollo Middle Ages. The religion of that period will be an almost unconscious reverence of nature. She, nature, will catechize the new barbarians while they catechize the Indians. Their Gothic cathedrals will be the boughs that line the entrances to their haciendas, rising up in transparent vaults, melodious and stately. Inside will be the abundant blessings of cocoa, coffee, banana, cotton, tobacco, and sugarcane—more than enough so that all men will be brothers. Everyone will give thanks daily with old Don Juan de Castellanos, intoning his Colombian credo of the grateful conqueror (the same one I repeated a few days ago when I entered Colombia through the Cauca Valley and through the Quindío countryside):

Land of gold, well-stocked land,
Land for making a perpetual home,
Land with food in abundance,
Land of large villages and flat fields,
Land of bright and serene blessings,
Land that has brought an end to our suffering.

As often happens in traveling and in enterprises where the heart can be a mediator, our route changes when we least expect it. The Spanish and Portuguese conquerors who left the Iberian Peninsula as soldiers or traders like their Venetian rivals became, without realizing it, the poet-founders of a tropical Arcadia. They came to look for gold and found ideals. After the brutal clash with the generous land they began to discover the gold within themselves. How many obscure adventurers, upon crossing the sea, became, by a miracle of the environment, Patriarchs and splendid gentlemen! Ah! Not in vain do we navigate through the tropical seas, under the fragrant nights full of stars that grow larger and nearer. In the marvel of that spring that spreads over the sea from Europe toward our America, everything promises fortune and love to the traveler. Because of their travels the brutal conquerors often learned to be tender and docile lovers.

The women who play a role in the formation of our American society, imprinting it with their soft and deep mark, are beyond number. I think they can be divided in three vast groups. Those of the Conquest: they are the sufferers, crucified by the clash between the races. Then those of the Colony: they are the mystics and dreamers. And those of Independence: they are the inspirers and the activists. In Mexico, in Bogota, in Lima, in Quito, in Caracas, in Buenos Aires, in Havana they follow an identical evolution, seeming to move about in the same city like neighbors and sisters. Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador have their collection of female martyrs, the great women of Independence, active and loving heroines. But today I look toward Mexico and Peru to find two humble indigenous flowers who are prototypes of the first suffering women. The Mexican Malinche, Doña Marina, revered and happy at the end of her life, and the melancholy Peruvian princess Doña Isabel, granddaughter of the king Túpac Yupanqui and mother of the first American writer, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. The life of this last woman was spent sweetly between love and tears. For all her gentle selflessness, she reaped only ingratitude and indifference. No matter, she took refuge in silence and resignation. Her pain as an abandoned woman, heightened by separation from her son in exile, would inspire, many years later, one of the most beautiful books of classic Spanish literature: Garcilaso's *Royal Commentaries*.

Much has been said admiringly about the political genius of Hernán Cortés, about the extraordinary sagacity with which he negotiated and made treaties with the Indians. I believe, gentlemen, that that mysterious sagacity is named exclusively Doña Marina. In the various chronicles of the conquest of New Spain, at least in the two or three that I know, Doña Marina is credited with the important role of interpreter and mediator; she gave accurate advice and uncovered conspiracies, like the one in Cholula that plotted the death of Cortés and his entire expedition. From what little is said, one can guess how much is not told. It's absolutely certain that the influence of Doña Marina in the conquest of Mexico was more important, her interventions and advice more frequent and subtle than is acknowledged by historians, even by Bernal Díaz del Castillo himself, who talks about her with great affection. They are untold stories because the tumult of military actions overwhelms them. They are little tales not considered seemingly amidst the official splendor of history, whose field of action preferably extends over scenes of destruction and death. Harmony, almost always the work of women, is anonymous; it lacks tragic

(elements and is not the stuff of epics. Happiness, which is less remarkable, is perpetuated not in books but in offspring, in the fraternal fusion of races, and in the humble goodness of tradition that polishes the rough edges of life, bringing smiles and gratitude.

Hernán Cortés was known as a Don Juan. Before undertaking the conquest of Mexico he had already made numerous conquests of a romantic type. [. . .] Sometime thereafter, some *caciques* from the town of Tabasco took Doña Marina as a gift to Cortés, "along with four little lizards, some blankets, five ducks, two gold soles for sandals, and a few other things of little value," says Bernal Díaz. And at the end of the list of gifts, he adds, "After her conversion, that Indian woman who was given to us was named Doña Marina. She was truly a great princess, daughter of *caciques* and mistress of vassals. By her appearance it was evident that she was attractive, outspoken, and self-assured. Doña Marina was an excellent woman, a good translator [*buena lengua*], and a good beginning for our conquest, and because of this Cortés always took her with him."

Sold as a slave by her mother and stepfather, who gave her to some foreign Indians in order to usurp her kingdom, Doña Marina had passed through various masters and cities. During her wandering life, she managed to learn the talent of adapting along with the customs, aspirations, rivalries, and languages of the different peoples who would be conquered by Cortés. Thus she added to her natural intelligence the broad-mindedness gained by travel and the refined touch one acquires by having suffered. She spoke the Mayan and Aztec languages and quickly learned to express herself in Spanish with as much fluency and clarity as if she had been born in Seville.

It's hard for us to imagine the dazzling impression that Cortés must have made on Doña Marina's imagination. Powerful white god, descended from the sun and the moon (according to the common belief among the Indians), ambassador from unknown lands, captain of gods, he carried thunder and lightning in his weapons of combat and ran swiftly on animals that seemed to have wings; his height and his beard declared him invincible, and his presence, according to old prophecies, announced the destruction of the empire and the start of a new age atop its ruins. If for the Indian men Cortés was the Aztec antichrist, and his weapons, horses, and soldiers the monsters of an apocalypse of desolation and death, for the Indian women like Doña Marina he was undoubtedly the messiah.

Doña Marina owed little or nothing to her people. Her mother had sold her to disinherit her. In her bitter moving from town to town she

came to know tearfully the condition of the humble women of her race. Consigned to the lowliest jobs, mistreated, sold by one man to another when they were girls as victims for sacrifices—or, when they were grown, as slaves for marriage—they would surely improve their situation under these new masters who worshiped a feminine idol with a child in her arms. In allying herself with such zeal to Cortés and to the cause of the white men against her own people, Doña Marina was obeying the revolutionary imperatives of her love and initiating the future reconciliation of the two races. Albeit in a very primitive way, she was also the initiator in America of the first feminist campaign.

She was "outspoken and self-assured," says Bernal Díaz when introducing her. How much flavor these two blunt adjectives contain, and how much can be read into them! "Outspoken and self-assured," that is, diligent, attentive, witty, and discreet, with a bit of coquettishness and a lot of innate generosity. As Bernal Díaz' lively narrative proceeds, we observe her actions and get to know her well enough to strike up an intimate friendship. She is enthusiastically taken with novelties, like a typical woman and like anyone with a restless and creative mind. Being an idealist, she is credulous. Everything amazes her. She's a likable person, the classic lighthearted woman enjoyed everywhere she goes, because she knows how to fit in and reduce discord with the joy of her presence. The scribes or painters, sent by Moctezuma to give him an accurate account of the invaders, hasten to engrave the portrait of Doña Marina as one of the great mysterious forces. [. . .] There is no mission that she fails to perform, no peace proposal that she does not preside at along with Cortés. She goes about sweetening the bitterness as she translates everyone's discourse. This faith in her intervention, as if it were a secret providence, guides us continuously through the countless crises that Bernal Díaz narrates. There is one critical moment after the fall of Mexico when Cortés seems to have forgotten all the political tact and judgment he had maintained up to that time. He gets carried away with unnecessary harshness. He makes the arrogant displays of a conqueror and offends the sensibilities of the Aztec people, profaning the sacred person of Moctezuma. We sense the disaster that's going to explode; discontent heightens, we feel the "sad night" coming on with the horrible sacrifices of Spaniards to the god Huichilobos; we feel like interrupting our reading and calling on the spirit of mercy and harmony: Doña Marina, where are you?

Cortés' passions were short and violent. His love for Doña Marina suddenly changed to calm affection. Sometime after the conquest of Mexico

he married her to a noble Spaniard, Don Juan de Jaramillo. "Doña Marina, who had absolute rule over all the Indians in New Spain," the chronicler tells us, accepted the marriage with resignation. From that long war in which she was the mediator and adviser, she was left with the memory of a great love, the recovery of her power among the Indians, and her son Martín Cortés, Spanish hidalgo and knight of Santiago.

Let's hear how Bernal Díaz del Castillo narrates with a kind of biblical tone the scene in which, through unexpected circumstances, Doña Marina finds herself face to face with her mother, the Indian woman who sold her when she was still a child.

"While Cortés was in the town of Guazagualco, he summoned all the *caciques* of that province to address them on the subject of our Holy Doctrine. Doña Marina's mother and her half-brother, Lázaro (named thus after being converted), were among them. When the old woman saw Doña Marina, she recognized clearly that it was her daughter because of the resemblance between them. The mother and brother were afraid that she would have them put to death. When Doña Marina saw them both in tears, she comforted them and told them not to be afraid; she said that when they had sold her to the men from Xicalango, they hadn't known what they were doing, and so she pardoned them, giving them many clothes and gold jewelry. And she told them that God had been good to her by saving her from the worship of idols and by her marriage to such a gentleman as her husband, and by giving her Cortés' son. Even if they were to make her *cacica* of all the provinces in New Spain, she said, she would refuse the honor, for she would rather serve her husband Cortés than anything else in the world. All this that I narrate here, I saw with my own eyes and swear is true. Amen."

I don't know what you think about this page, but I find it charming. We see characters passing through it just as one does in reels of film taken long ago: they have the same brusque movements and comic ingenuousness at the dramatic moment. We see Doña Marina, another Joseph sold by his brothers, the symbol of mercy, receiving her people who remind her of the sad past. She no more than looks at them and they're forgiven. With generous display she gives them clothes and jewels, things that come from distant and marvelous places. She tells them her fantastic adventures, introduces them to her new family who all belong to the race of the foreign conquerors. Since she is happy, she forgives the evil of the past with a show of generosity.

During his evocative and lively narrative, Bernal Díaz constantly apologizes for his lack of style and the carelessness of his writing. He assures us

that he has felt obliged to "distill from his memory those facts that are not ancient stories, nor stories from adventure books, but things that happened yesterday, so to speak." Because men of letters and well-known writers have altered the truth when they wrote their chronicles of the conquest of New Spain, the famous war in which Bernal Díaz fought over a hundred times, it hurts him to see the memories of his youth being abused. In order to restore them, he narrates them as best he can, but he is not a man of letters, only a rude soldier. Once he finishes his true story, he finds it so rough that he will die without having dared to publish it. It is so full of trivial details! And so it is: those details are precisely what remain in memory, as if by some capricious grace, and they contain in their humbleness all the poetry of remembrance: the color of the horses in the expedition, their nicknames, their skills or qualities, the unexpected birth of a colt aboard the vessel, born to a brown mare; the amount of cassava and lard carried by a soldier named Juan Cedeño, resident of Havana, who was said to be rich. Juan Solís—he says—was called "Behind Doors" because of his inclination to listen without being seen. Tarifa was called "The One with White Hands" because he was equally useless at war and at work. [. . .] Such details are numerous and evocative in the flow of facts. Doña Marina's role is also part of this lively tumult. She will be the polestar of his story, which is not exactly history but something loftier and more beautiful: a ballad in prose.

I sense that more than one of you must be thinking that I'm talking like this because of occupational disposition and that it would be better if I confined myself to being a novelist so that I don't speak such nonsense. Well, no. I'm sure I'm not talking nonsense and that it's almost a duty to claim the moral superiority of this kind of narrative. In comparison, historical truth, the other, the official one, turns out to be a kind of banquet for men only where intelligent things are said and eloquent speeches are pronounced without touching anyone's heart because they're so formal. Having excluded women, they have cut off the connecting wires with life. If one looks at Roman times and at the Gospels, which are lively and moving stories par excellence, women play a role of first magnitude—as in this narrative by Bernal Díaz—and not only women but also friendly and brotherly animals. It has been almost two thousand years, and yet the mule and the ox of Bethlehem continue to warm our hearts. The drama of Christ's passion was written by evangelists who were rough chroniclers similar to Bernal Díaz. No writer of the age, not even the exquisite Plutarch, could have recorded it with the same enduring strength. In the Passion story, a rooster has its very important role and women pass by in a

hurry following the vicissitudes of the drama, just like Doña Marina. Nobody gets in their way; on the contrary: come on forward, all of you women! These are the heroines of the day. It's a street drama in which everyone participates. Described and performed ceaselessly for twenty centuries, the people perform it and describe it again during Holy Week, maintaining the same tradition of love and realism created by the smallest details. [. . .]

I don't think it's possible to write a historical scene any better. I say "better" because, since the moral objective of history is to make us love people or specific things, blending the present with the warmth of the past—making things appear more lovable—will improve it. I don't say this because of the common urge these days to denigrate all authorized and respectable things; rather I believe that, whereas the truth of historians is relative, the truth of tradition or the history of the nonhistorians is absolute, because it gets us closer to reality and in a more charming way. Besides, tradition is disappearing. We have to love it twice as much because of its ideal usefulness and because it's sentenced to death. The press has been devouring it. Memory does not make an effort to retain what is already written, and if it retains it, it's by imitating the printed form. No one today could narrate an action as Bernal Díaz does, or like the anonymous authors of the old religious verses; they wrote not as we write but as we speak. I was able to corroborate this statement some time ago in my own country. . . .

Once, in Caracas, a group of friends and I wanted to listen to popular songs, and we called on some black singers who enjoyed certain renown. They were men of the plains. Affable and overflowing with regional pride, they offered to sing the most typical music and lyrics of their repertoire. They sang, in fact, music of *galerones*, *joropos*, and *corridos*, scenes from the wars of Independence fought on the plains. Well, there wasn't one word that couldn't have been found in the newspapers. They said "the valorous defender," "the father of the homeland," "the magnificent centaurs," "eponymous hero"; it was, in short, a session in the Academy of History led by guitars and maracas. Since common people know how to inject charm into everything they do, especially when they're not aware of it, that was a very amusing academic session.

Having observed, ladies and gentlemen, that it is not characteristic of orators to put into practice what they preach, I don't want to be less than others. So having made these disquisitions against history, let's return to history. But not for much longer, so don't be afraid.

The Indian princesses, according to their laws or customs, often took up with the Spaniard conquerors. These unions, like Morgannatic marriages the Spaniard didn't always confirm with the Catholic sacrament, could be broken at the men's will whenever they thought convenient. Unilateral submission and faithfulness—the eternal law of the stronger—foreshadowed a chronic disease from which our gentle society still suffers. They often went home to look for younger or more prosperous European women with whom to establish a definitive family, as we have seen in the history of Doña Marina. This also happened in the case of the conqueror Garcilaso de la Vega and Isabel, the daughter and niece of the last Peruvian kings, who ended her days alone.

Garcilaso de la Vega, like all the great captains of the Conquest, was from Extremadura. He was related to the most illustrious families of Spain, from the poet Jorge Manrique to the Renaissance poet and soldier Garcilaso. [. . .]

Doña Isabel, his wife, lived in Garcilaso's palace in an environment accustomed to luxury. All the Spanish landowners who formed the Cusco aristocracy treated her with great courtesy and admiration. She received guests, maintained correspondence with the Archbishop, and was extremely favored by her husband. In his splendid palace, an early version of our colonial houses, she occupied the place of a criolla lady with cordial and generous hospitality.

When the deadly war erupted between Gonzalo de Pizarro and the viceroy Núñez de Vela, Garcilaso had to leave Cusco to affiliate himself with the party of the Viceroy. In the large empty house he left behind, Doña Isabel remained alone with her six-year-old child—the future author of the *Florida* and of the *Commentaries*. Seventy years later, old, poor, and secluded in his house in Spain, the mestizo poet Garcilaso described in his recollections of childhood, so full of life and tenderness, his mother's suffering during those years of blood and fire. Persecuted by his father's enemies who wanted to kill them, Doña Isabel and her son hid together in a secret room while the house was plundered and the furniture burned; frightened to death, they lived off the corn that their Indian and Spanish servants secretly took to them. Through the window at night more than once, the child Garcilaso had seen the enemy of his father, the fierce and handsome Carvajal, pass by in the street. With his white beard shining in the dark, the old man in a purple cape and white feathered hat rode his brown mule down the narrow, silent street, dictating plans for war and ordering tortures and deaths.

After the terror ended, Doña Isabel continued in the house with her son, occupying the position of wife and Incan princess. When the landholder came during the holidays of Christmas and Saint John to pay their taxes, her son helped her keep accounts in the Incan fashion, using the *quipu* knotted cords. In the afternoons there were extended family gatherings with visits from the old Incan princes who managed to survive the killings under Atahualpa and also the war against the Spaniards. In the gatherings of relatives around his mother, the child listened to their memories of past splendors, of the celestial forewarnings of the ruin of the empire, and, according to Garcilaso himself, in his own words, "The memory of past losses would always bring on tears and moaning that their reign had become a serfdom." Alone with his mother, she would often tell him in a voice trembling with emotion the legend of Manco Capac and his wife, children of the Sun, civilizers of the world and founders of Cusco. On warm starlit nights his mother used to take him by the hand and point out to him the shape of the heavenly alpaca whose extremities form the milky way; she would show him the spots on the moon and tell him they were the kisses of a love-struck goddess, and she would tell him how the rain comes from a damsel's jug, broken by her brother with a thunderclap.

One day, when the civil wars had concluded, Garcilaso's father returned to Cusco. He was the same great captain, fortunate and wealthy. His son, the mestizo child, went out to welcome him carried on the backs of servants, as was the custom of Indian princes on great occasions. But ah! The father returned married or about to marry a Spanish noblewoman. Thus, after the horrors of the war, came humiliation and abandonment by the absent one—the eternal drama between fidelity and the changes of heart woven by long separations! When narrating in his memoirs that great disappointment of his childhood, Garcilaso, the old writer, does not have a word of bitterness for his father, whom he loved with intense admiration. Nor a wounding word against his stepmother, of whom he does not talk. His pain overflows in the remembrance of his forsaken Indian mother. He seems to seek in the most pristine fountains of mystical idealism an understanding of such ungratefulness. His *Commentaries* are dedicated "To my mother and lady, made more illustrious by baptismal waters than by the royal blood of so many Peruvian Incas." A beautiful filial epitaph, full of hope and forgiveness!

When some years after his second marriage the father Garcilaso died in Cusco, his mestizo son, still an adolescent, went to the Spanish royal court

with the purpose of claiming from the king the rights over land and estates that belonged to his mother. The decision took a long time, and meanwhile Doña Isabel died in Peru. Garcilaso, left alone and in the flower of his youth, was surrounded in Spain with admirers and affection; he distinguished himself in the wars against the Moors, traveled, lived in Italy, and, upon returning to Spain, became a priest and devoted himself to a spiritual life. After completing his studies in humanities, badly learned in his earlier years, he opened his poet's soul to all the currents of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Along with the Latin and Greek classics, he studied the scholastics, read the most famous writers of the Renaissance, and translated charmingly the three *Dialogues of Love* of León Hebreo. In the autumn of his life, his lonely artist's soul began to yearn for his American homeland. It was going to be, from afar, in ripened years, the true promised land of his spirit. While with his own hands Garcilaso planted coca bushes in his Cordovan garden and tried to grow the flowers that he picked when he was a child in the fields of Cusco, he began to write, in a style full of charm and elegance, *The General History of Peru*, *The Civil Wars between the Spaniards*, and *The Florida of the Inca*. The historian-poet of America is really a folkloric narrator. But it is in the *Royal Commentaries* where his delightful prose reaches its creative zenith. Memories of his childhood, memories of memories that others told him, converge there and unite through love the two currents that will form the future American nations as they did in his own life. The *Commentaries* of the Inca Garcilaso, says the Anglo-American writer Prescott, are an emanation of the Indian spirit. In fact, if we listen carefully, under the transparency of the prose a moan from beyond the grave seems to flow with a sound of tears. It is the echo of the maternal voice that, under the stars at night, used to tell him the authentic legends of the Incan tradition. Entrusted to the voice for lack of a written culture, these legends would be forever silenced when the last maternal accents ceased to be heard in the ears of the mestizo child. But the child, in his old age and in exile, urged on by nostalgia, would return to his childhood, gather up the millennial voice with filial love, and encase it religiously in his transparent prose, making a symbol of it. That trembling of tears, like a distant *quena* or Indian flute, is the gentle lament that in the depths of the race our obscure and unrecognized grandmothers allow us to hear. Notes of sadness in a minor key, it is the most authentic and delicate of all the strains that vibrate in our tumultuous American soul. Like Garcilaso, the Spanish mestizo, let's keep it in its Castilian form and, without denying anyone, bless

the harmony of our faith in the future united with our sorrow for the blood spilt and the tears wept.

Obras completas. Caracas: Editorial Arte, 1965, pp. 471-489.

NOTE

1. The English translations of de la Parra's selected quotations from histories and chronicles are ours. [Trans.]

Rosario Castellanos

Mexico, 1925-1974

Rosario Castellanos, Mexican author, teacher, feminist, and diplomat, was born in Mexico City in 1925. Her childhood as part of a landowning family in Chiapas, near the Guatemalan border, led her to a lifelong interest in the dynamics of race, class, and gender in Mexico. Through her writings, she became an early spokesperson in Latin America for the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. As a young woman she studied philosophy at the National University in Mexico City. After a fellowship year at the University of Madrid, she returned in 1952 to Chiapas, where she spent two years in educational outreach work among the indigenous population. By this time she had already published several books of poetry. For the rest of her life, she combined significant literary and journalistic efforts with other pursuits: first, continued involvement with educational projects in Chiapas; later, teaching and administrative posts at the National University and visiting professorships in the United States; and finally, the Mexican ambassadorship to Israel between 1971 and 1974. Married to Ricardo Guerra in 1957, she was the mother of a son, Gabriel, becoming a single parent when her marriage ended in divorce. Castellanos died in 1974 after an electrical accident in her Tel Aviv home. Her eleven books of poetry were collected in *Poesía no eres tú* (1972; Poetry Isn't You). Her other works include two novels, *Balún-Candín*

(1957; *The Nine Guardians*, 1992) and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962; *Rites of Darkness*); three collections of short stories, *Ciudad Real* (1960; *Royal City*), *Los convidados de agosto* (1964; *The Guests of August*), and *Album de familia* (1971; *Family Album*); and the play *El eterno femenino* (1975; *The Eternal Feminine*). Her essays are key to understanding her feminism but so far are less studied than her other works. They comprise four volumes: *Juicios sumarios* (1966; *Summary Judgments*), *Mujer que sabe latín* (1973; *Woman Who Knows Latin*), *El uso de la palabra* (1974; *The Use of the Word*), and *El mar y sus pescaditos* (1974; *The Sea and Its Little Fish*).

Castellanos' essays range from analytical pieces on academic subjects to chatty newspaper columns on her own domestic struggles. Like much of her writing, they often reflect her life and concerns, and it is thus not surprising that the condition of women in Mexico and elsewhere is a frequent point of departure. In some essays, she examines the contributions of such significant women as Virginia Woolf, Simone Weil, and Simone de Beauvoir. Elsewhere, she discusses the women in Mexican history who have been termed archetypal—Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

In "Costumbres mexicanas" (Mexican Customs), originally published in 1964 in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, she gives a contemporary Mexican setting to her denunciation of traditional social practices unfair to women. As in other works, she decries the devaluation of women and their exploitation within Mexican society. Although ironic and slightly caricaturesque, the essay conveys her awareness of women's psychological experience. Castellanos' satirical approach is in keeping with her theory that undesirable social structures are better combatted through ridicule than through tears or indignation. But the seething anger that lies below the surface of her prose is nevertheless apparent.

MARTHA LAFOLLETTE MILLER

Rosario Castellanos

Mexican Customs

I'm not yet able to put it all into words. In the first place, my observations are just casual. Then too, I'm held back by the thought that we're dealing with a matter of no importance: an attempt at living together. Can anything be more commonplace, more natural for all of us, from the moment we're born and join first a family, then a social group, and finally a marriage?

This last item is the problem. Because it's a question of choosing the proper partner—that individual we're not afraid of swearing undying love and fidelity to.

I've mentioned choosing, but I think that to be more exact, I must change the verb. Because, in this country at least, women don't choose. We sit passively down to wait until a man casts his eyes toward the corner that our modesty has afforded us and discovers the marvelous qualities that adorn us. What follows is predictable and subject to fairly strict rules: the progressive stages of the male's approach, our conventional standoffishness, our attempt to hide our terror of losing this opportunity, because no one has guaranteed us we'll have another. At times, of course, the opportunity is so puny that we have no choice except to refuse it. But we're generally satisfied with little: with someone who holds a steady job, who enjoys a certain measure of health, and whose appearance isn't decidedly repulsive.

His moral qualities boil down to his acceptance of two ideas: that marriage is a valid institution, one not to be toyed with, and that within that

Translated by Martha LaFollette Miller

institution the wife has a place she must be granted. But what is her place? That, it seems, depends on the circumstances. If those "entering into the marriage contract"—as society pages so delicately like to express it—are wealthy, the wife's place may be that of a decorative piece of furniture that can be displayed not only to visitors in the home but also transported, for exhibition, to parties and other gatherings. She is expected to avoid any activity that might spoil her figure, though she is permitted to devote her spare time to works of charity.

Since this woman is an object almost totally out of touch with reality, we will not bother further with her but will consider instead the wife of her husband's employee. Of course, she too aspires to being decorative and is obliged to fulfill that function. But she has fewer means and less time at her disposal, because she not only performs all the domestic tasks in her household but also brings joy to the home each year with a visit from the stork. It is difficult, amidst diaper changes, bawling babies, the antics of those old enough to wipe mommy's expensive skin cream on the rug, and the alarming hisses of the pressure cooker, to maintain not just one's equanimity but one's resemblance to a human being. The wife little by little starts forgetting the most elementary principles of civilized life: she doesn't comb her hair, for example. And when her husband returns from his demanding duties at the office, he beholds—from the lofty vantage point of his own impeccable grooming—a disheveled woman. Isn't that good enough reason for him to turn to his buddies, go out and raise hell, hire mariachis to play, so they can help him forget the disaster at home? If the husband has a practical bent (and the money, of course), he sets up a second household, where he can always find waiting, arms open and clad only in an enticing negligee, the "other woman." That other woman whose existence looms largest in the mind of the wife whose husband leaves her at home alone with the classic excuses: the meeting with the board of directors that for technical reasons gets longer and longer; the open-ended dinners with old school chums; the sudden unexpected business trip to that branch office, whose accounts are muddled . . . and on and on. If the wife, alas, has been blessed at the baptismal font with a lack of imagination, she will take such alibis seriously; she will even earn his thanks by meticulously packing his suitcase or by ironing that special shirt or by digging out of the trunk where the family heirlooms are kept the cuff links that once belonged to that uncle who (if he'd only led a more orderly life) would have made them millionaires by dying (as in fact he did) a bachelor and intestate.

But the nights are long and women possess few means of amusing themselves. After putting the children to bed and blotting them out until the next day, they turn on the television set. There they become vaguely aware of an intrigue going on in some exotic country full of palm trees and natives, where a fair-haired young man distributes punches, foils the bad guys' evil schemes, and ends up with the booty and the blonde.

The woman yawns. She thinks it's time to go to sleep, so she gets into bed. But when she turns off the light a certain uneasiness creeps over her. Sleep doesn't come, and to pass the time, what could be better than one of those magazines designed especially for housewives? She turns the light back on and rummages through the newspapers until she finds what she is looking for. There it is, on its cover a seductive young female, with shining eyes, shining teeth, shining lips, and hair shaped and trained by the best hairdressers in the world. The woman regards her in the same way that someone damned to Hell might view an angel. Half irritated, half distracted, she flips through the magazine. Pastries in vivid colors to tempt the poor woman, who had so nobly skipped dinner hoping to trim even half an inch from her waist! Paris fashions that neither her figure nor her budget would ever permit her to wear! But at this late hour she's alone and she can dream. Yes, she strolls down the paths of a park with a dog on a leash; she attends a cocktail party and an elegant reception and awakens the next day with no trace of fatigue, spreading about her the folds of that marvelous dressing gown that both veils and reveals the charms that her successive pregnancies (which pregnancies? She had entirely forgotten them) had temporarily eclipsed.

Dear lady, at this critical moment, close the magazine and go to sleep. You will dream pleasant and impossible dreams. Because if you turn the page you will find your portrait. And little by little you'll recognize yourself. Your husband's absences, my dear, aren't really necessary; his excuses are false. Because you have failed to take care of yourself. Faced with choosing between being a wife and being a mother, you have chosen to be a mother, abandoning your man to the innumerable temptations that besiege him. And that, my dear, is costly. And you are paying for it now. But you must not lose control of your emotions. Men stray, it's true. But they come back. It's a natural law, as unvarying as the migration of birds. Don't spoil his return by making a scene—with tears, jealousy, or recrimination! Instead, double your sweetness and understanding; do your best to improve your appearance; find a way to make the children invisible during those brief moments when your husband is at home. In a pleasant,

cozy, and—above all—legitimate home. Because you, dear, arouse deep feelings of guilt in your husband, since you drive him to improper behavior. And as for the “other woman,” don’t hold a grudge. Contrary to what you may think, her life is no bed of roses. Her situation is ambiguous, and she knows that in the long run she’s bound to lose out. It’s simply a matter of time. When have pleasures not ended in boredom? As for you, try hard and you will win. Yes, my dear. You will win this time. And the next. And the next. Your cardinal virtue is patience, and if you practice it, you will be rewarded. When he’s ninety, your husband will be all yours (that is, if he’s managed to sidestep entanglements, and you to put up with his shenanigans). We assure you that no one will fight you for the privilege of preparing him for burial.

25 January 1964

El uso de la palabra. Mexico City: Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 1982, pp. 28–32.

Carmen Naranjo

Costa Rica, 1930–

Carmen Naranjo is a dynamic and controversial presence in Costa Rica whose work in the cultural arena, through political posts and publications, has achieved extensive diffusion in Central America. Her international renown, however, is attributable above all to her sixteen volumes of poetry and fiction. Her novels have won numerous awards and include such works as *Los perros no ladaron* (1966; *The Dogs Didn't Bark*), *Camino al mediodía* (1968; *On the Way to Noon*), and *Diario de una multitud* (1974; *Diary of a Multitude*). In both the personal and professional spheres Carmen Naranjo is a leader in the arts and a catalyst for social change.

Naranjo has many years of public service to her credit, including positions as ambassador to Israel, minister of culture, United Nations delegate for children's affairs in Mexico, UNICEF representative in Guatemala, director of EDUCA (Central American University Press), and director of the Costa Rican Museum of Art. She was instrumental in the drafting and passage of the Law for Social Equality (1989), a milestone for women's rights in Costa Rica, and she is a frequent contributor to national periodicals, as she engages her compatriots in dialogue on topics of cultural concern.

Although Carmen Naranjo's voice was heard as early as the 1960s, it was in the 1970s, a decade of cultural innovation and expansion under the governments of José

Women Essayists of the 20's and 30's: Towards a New Model

1)

"There are no models to emulate. Movies and magazines tell about European and North American women, but movies and magazines serve the interests of and represent the mentality of a particular class." (Portal 156)

"There it is, on the cover a seductive young female, with shining eyes, shining teeth, shining lips, and hair shaped and trained by the best hairdressers in the world... Pastries in vivid colors to tempt the poor woman, who had so nobly skipped dinner hoping to trim even half an inch from her waist! Paris fashions that neither her figure nor her budget would ever permit her to wear!" (Castellanos 231)

How do class differences affect society's view of women, and women's views of themselves? How is the model of North American or European women politically and economically unattainable for Latin American women?

"Our New Woman will not be like the flapper, that asexual animal, totally free and slightly irresponsible, who accepts all the gratifications of capitalist civilization and suffers its oppressions without protest other than refusing to submit to its sexual impositions." (Portal 157)

How would Rodó respond to this quote? Marit?

2)

How do these writers perceive their new relationship to/with men? How does this make a definition of "femininity" necessary?

"For the first time, women are going to assume their just roles as intelligent co-partners of men, not their slaves, as companions in the broad spiritual meaning of the word on the same level as their male counterparts." (Portal 157)

"Our New Woman will not be like the flapper, that asexual animal" (Portal 157)

"On the contrary, she should be free within herself, aware of the dangers and responsibilities, useful to society even if she is not a mother, independent with respect to money thanks to her work and her collaboration alongside man—neither master nor enemy nor exploitable marriage candidate, but friend and companion." (de la Parra 165)

"And it is because I believe, unlike the suffragists, that we women should thank men for the fact that they have shown the self-sacrifice to monopolize political office entirely. It seems to me that, along with coal mining, it is one of the toughest and most unclean professions. Why claim it?" (de la Parra 165)

3)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "femininity" as follows:
Feminine quality; the characteristic quality or assemblage of qualities pertaining to the female sex, womanliness; in early use also, female nature.

Which characteristic qualities do the following authors have in mind when using the words "feminine" or "femininity"? What does this reveal about their visions of women's new role?

Teresa de la Parra- the paragraph spanning pages 165-166 of "The Formation of the American Soul"

"She combined the feminine charms with all the masculine virtues." (de la Parra 169)

"But she will not lose her femininity in the face of these new opportunities by failing to take advantage of them or by adopting equivocal positions." (Portal 157)

"Instead, this new spirit will be manifest in a revolutionary type, a woman who is valiant, energetic, not predestined to the ways of her true sex, in the sense that femininity is synonymous with sweetness. This new being, capable of every kind of sacrifice, will have to struggle 'just like men' and forget that she is a woman. She should be less uncertain, however, than all of the aforementioned types of modern women, because Aprismo is grooming her for her true role in the future, which does not exclude motherhood, the basis of real femininity." (Portal 156)

compiled by Kerstin Pers