

Research Article

MEXICAN FEMALE PORTRAYALS IN RECOLLECTIONS OF THINGS TO COME AND WOMEN WITH BIG EYES

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ABSTRACT

Novelist Elena Garro set her first novel *Recollections of Things to Come* in 1926 to 1929 during the first Cristero War while Angeles Mastretta had *Women with Big Eyes*, a collection of stories, set in the 1930s and 1940s after the Mexican Revolution. Their works of magical realism illustrate different aspects of Mexican women and fill in the gap of Mexican female writers writing about women at important junctions of Mexican history considering that most *novelas de la guerracristera* (Cristero War novels) are most often written by male writers who take on either a pro or anti-government stance. This paper discusses how Mexican women are portrayed as major characters in the Cristero Rebellion in Garro's novel and as individual characters in the post-Cristero Revolution era in *Women With Big Eyes*. Moreover, the comparative analysis of these two literary works shows that Mexican women of a traditionally oriented society are not only capable of assuming leadership in a violent enterprise but can return to old conservative patterns when situations return to normal. They are an interesting mix of Mexican women archetypes with their own agency when the situation calls for strong action. In many ways, Mastretta and Garro have succeeded in using the magical realism genre to present the Mexican woman as a prominent figure during important crossroads of Mexican history and as an "ordinary" woman who has agency in a post-war world.

Keywords: magical realism, feminism, Mexican women.

INTRODUCTION

It takes a war to wake people from their somnolence and for a novel to be dynamic. It takes the end of a war to have women take on new patterns and for a novel to present multi-faceted females. If a one-sentence review were to be written of *Recollections of Things to Come* by Elena Garro (1963), the first sentence would fit best while the second sentence would best describe Angeles Mastretta's *Women with Big Eyes* which was published in 1990 in Mexico and 2003 in the USA. When read one after the other, the two novels give a fascinating, intimate, and compact view of the complicated being that is the Mexican woman – she who is an amalgam of La Malinche, the Virgen de Guadalupe, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz thrown into the magnificent melting pot of Mexican history and gender politics. With *Recollections of Things to Come* set in 1926 to 1929 in the first Cristero War (also known as the Cristiada) and *Women with Big Eyes* in the 1930s and 1940s after the Mexican Revolution, we are given the opportunity to see how *boom femenino* writer Garro and *post-boom femenino* Mastretta, both born in Puebla, Mexico, present different facets of the Mexican woman in the genre of magical-realism. While much has been written about Latin American female writers writing in the magical realist genre vis-à-vis various issues from art to feminism, there is still much room for discussions on Mexican female writers writing about women in important junctions of Mexican history. This essay's comparative analysis may be appreciated in the light of *novelas de la guerra cristera* (Cristero War novels) that are most often written by male writers and therefore, as Bowskill (2009) writes, "adopt a first ideological stance either for or against the government (p. 440)." Bowskill further argues that only a minority, including *Recollections of Things to Come*, are "free from this perceived bias and may be considered neutral (p. 440)" which

she claims can be seen in the narrator who supports neither the State nor Church. Moreover, Bowskill explains that *novelas de la guerra cristera* have the common feature of women playing prominent roles and cites Thiebaut as arguing that the major contribution made by these novels is their use of female protagonists. "By placing women in such important roles, the novels reflected women's real-life contribution to the Cristero wars, whereas women's participation in rebellion was often distorted or omitted from novels of the Mexican revolution (p. 442)." "The Cristero Wars was an "uprising and counter-revolution against the Mexican government of the time, set off by religious persecution of Catholics" (Brunberg, 2013, par. 1) with the strict implementation of the 1917 Mexican Constitution's anti-clerical provisions with its closure of churches and attempts to end Catholic religious activities. Bowskill further explains that "both Church and State fought for the support of and control over women" (p. 438). She also expounds that in the first Cristero War, the women defended their religion by engaging in both violent and non-violent resistance; quoting other researchers who assert that it was often the women who "took the decision to engage in first resistance and then rebellion", and that it was they who encouraged men to act. However, Bowskill further writes that while Garro's novel is historically accurate in giving women prominent roles, the women in the novel are not similar to the heroines of pro-Cristero novels who are unchaste. They are not equal to men and are often inferior. Garro's characters are simply ordinary women with an agency driven to action, according to Bowskill. On the other hand, in *Women With Big Eyes*, with its post-Cristero rebellion setting, we read about 39 women (*tias* or aunts) whose stories are told by the author to her almost-dying infant daughter in the hospital in the hope of reviving her. Each of these stories shows aunts acting outside the Mexican norm. They either follow their independent streak by remaining unmarried or leaving their husbands for a better life or to escape abuse. Some set up their own businesses or followed their hearts by taking on lovers. Only twice was there a mention of war for Mastretta's stories were focused on the individual daily lives of the strong *tias* – presumably at a time of relative peace when women can revert to their "old selves". Anent

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to the above background, this paper discusses how Mexican women are portrayed in literature as major characters in the Cristero Rebellion in Garro's novel and as individual characters in the post-Cristero Revolution era in *Women With Big Eyes*. The thesis of this paper runs on the contention of Sr. Barbara Miller in her 1984 article, "The Role of Women in the Mexican Cristero Rebellion: Las Señoritas y Las Religiosas" published in the journal, *The Americas*:

"Not only were Catholic women of a traditionally oriented society capable of assuming leadership in a violent enterprise, but they were equally capable of falling back into their conservative patterns once the crisis had ended....Nevertheless, the vital role women played in the church-state conflict prepared them for the emerging role of women in the twentieth century. (p. 303)

Thus, it is apropos for the purpose of this research paper to identify how the women in *Recollections of Things to Come*, morphed into women of religious and social purpose. The reversion to their traditional roles can be seen in *Women With Big Eyes* where there are few suggestions of anything political. While Garro's work is historical fiction and many have commented on Mastretta's novel as "literature light"-- both have used magical realism to compelling effect and are convincing studies on the portrayal of the complexities of Mexican women. Moreover, even as the women return to their "conservative patterns" (Miller, 1984) in *Women With Big Eyes*, this paper also looks into what these "conservative patterns" are and if there are any deviations from it given the three archetypes of the Mexican woman discussed in the Review of Related Literature that follows.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of related literature briefly discusses the evolution of *boom femenino* and *post-boom femenino* in Mexican literature so as to put the technical aspect of Mastretta and Garro's work in context vis-à-vis criticisms in their individual writing style and novel content. For the purpose of the analysis of the female characters in the two novels as well as updates on the latest studies regarding the portrayal of Mexican women in literature, three archetypes of Mexican women will also be discussed here.

Acknowledging Boom and Post-Boom Women Writers.

In Mexico, the *boom* credit goes to the Mexican Revolution (1910 to 1920) for waking up the country's literary world. Berrutti (2015) explains that the revolution played a major role in the development of Mexican literature in the 20th century as it appeared in many short stories, plays, and novels. Berutti says there was a trend of connecting one's work with the Mexican revolution which led to the development of 'revolutionary literature' which includes the works of writers like Juan Rulfo and Rosario Castellanos. Berrutti further explains that the contemporary Mexican novel arrived in 1947 with the publication of *Al filo del agua (the Water's Edge)* by Agustín Yáñez (1904-1980) as it incorporated the influences and techniques of Western writers. She also writes that when Garro published her novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir (Memories of the Future)* in 1963, it was seen by some as a breakthrough for a Mexican female writer in the magical realist genre. *Los recuerdos del porvenir* was then translated into the more romantic *Recollections of Things to Come* in 1963 for its Western audience. Moreover, Jörgensen, as cited by Finnegan and Lavery (2010) writes that Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, and María Luisa Puga are a few of the writers who prepared the ground for the writing practices and the success achieved by Molina, Mastretta, Brianda Domecq, Sara Sefchovich,

Carmen Boulosa, and many others. Thus was born *boom femenino* or an increase in the publishing of the works of Latin America women writers from the 1980s onwards (Berutti). Along with the *boom femenino* was the interest of Western publishers to cash in on the popularity of the magical realism genre especially the ones espoused by Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel. Such was the level of popularity and success of Latin American women's literature that the "products have often been categorized as populist and market-led and therefore light literature, or in other words, less worthy of critical attention" (Berrutti, p. 14). Among those "accused" of pandering to the Western standards of "readability" and commercialism was Mastretta. Her fellow writer's scathing criticism is withering even in its English translation. Angelica Gorodischer says in the newspaper *Clarín* that "Isabel Allende, Angeles Mastretta or Marcela Serrano write horrible stories about how divine and suffering women are fed stereotypes and sells books, but does not contribute anything at the level of literature or gender" ("The successes and criticisms," 2003, par. 8). In the same breath, no less than Mexico's own elite female writer, Elena Poniatowska says: "Isabel Allende, Angeles Mastretta or Laura Esquivel enter literature as commercial phenomena and make "feminine literature" ("The successes and criticisms", 2003, par. 8).

However, Kathleen Ross, in her 1993 article in *Hispanic American Historical Review* argues that "Mastretta's appropriation and alteration of the concepts and genre of the historical novel provides a stimulating glimpse into the complicated politics of today's Mexico and its relationship to the icons of the past" (p. 333).

Berutti, moreover, cites Nuala Finnegan, author of *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico since 1980*, that there is a difference between the national and international criticism of Mastretta's novels. Finnegan claims that the international reviews that are influenced by feminist literary theory look at Mastretta's work as light literature worthy of critical examination. On the other hand, Mexican newspapers such as *Excelsior* and *la Reforma* counteract the negative evaluations of the literary elite and praise her and find pride in her international success (Berutti). Shaw (1995) explains that the post-boom began in the mid-1970s, most likely 1975 with the publication of Antonio Skarmeta's first novel, *Sone que la nieve ardía (I Dreamed That the Snow was Burning)*, which is about the collapse of the left-wing Allende government in Chile. But moving on to the history of *boom femenino*, Finnegan and Lavery (2010) write that:

Typical of *post-boom* writers such as Ángeles Mastretta or Guadalupe Loaeza is the gravitation towards plot-centeredness and chronological structure which provide for greater accessibility than did the typical *boom* novel. In comparison with their *boom* predecessors, the *post-boom* writers are often more concerned with the everyday issues than with complex philosophising. (p. 8)

Characterization of Women in Mexican Literature via three archetypes.

While LaMalinche and Virgen de Guadalupe are the two archetypes that heavily influence the portrayals of women in Mexican literature, I would like to add a third one for the purposes of this essay. That of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz -- dramatist, poet, scholar, and nun. She is representative of those who choose to be independent or single and pursue life outside the norms that society has set for women.

This is in support of Charlene Merithew writing in her 2001 book *Re-Presenting the Nation: Contemporary Mexican Women Writers*, that there should be a third female Mexican woman archetype (Schneider, 2010). Luis Leal in Berrutti (2015) notes that the characterization of women throughout Mexican literature has been influenced by the

woman who has kept her virginity (Virgen de Guadalupe) and that of the one who has lost it (La Malinche). La Malinche also symbolizes the woman who betrays her homeland by assisting the enemy while her opposite, Virgen de Guadalupe, is the pure woman who protects Indians, as well as mestizos and Creoles. Leal (in Berutti) opines that in Mexican literature, this opposition between the good and the bad woman reflects the characteristics attributed to women in Mexican society throughout the years. These characteristics are seen in the literary analysis of Garro and Mastretta's novels in this essay, albeit there is also a strong presence of the Sor Ines archetype.

La Malinche, the woman of betrayal, tragedy, and exploitation.

Schneider (2010) explains that the first Mexican female archetype is symbolized by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés's translator and mistress La Malinche, the Mexican Eve. Schneider further quotes Jocelyn Olcott as writing that the Mexican nation springs from her betrayal and the subsequent tragedy and exploitation. Mexican writer Octavio Paz, husband of Garro, explains the Cortés-Malinche relationship in his work *El laberinto de la soledad*, which was first published in 1950. He illustrates why the sons of La Malinche reject everything feminine as *chingada* or someone who is "devalued, passive, and ill-treated" or "wronged but has also betrayed."

Aside from the shame that La Malinche brings as "the flawed mother, the impure, the traitor, the opportunist" (Cypess in Romero & Harris, 2005), her own relationship with Cortés runs counter to the morality that the Virgen de Guadalupe espouses. Here is an indigenous concubine whose union with a European is unrecognized by the Catholic Church. Thus, no self-respecting Mexican woman should follow La Malinche's example.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the idealized Mexican image of femininity and motherhood.

The positive archetype of Mexican national identity, as opposed to La Malinche, is the Virgen de Guadalupe. Among other attributes, she is "all-suffering, noble, selfless, and dedicated to her children as well as taking on the iconography of the virgin as a solitary mother and therefore, "peerless and pairless" (Cypess, 2012). Schneider also writes that the Virgen de Guadalupe symbolizes asexual femininity and motherhood and therefore plays a great role in Mexican society with the following idealized Mexican image of femininity and motherhood which is *abnegación*—selflessness, martyrdom, self-sacrifice, an erasure of self and the negation of one's outward existence (Schneider, citing Olcott, p.15-16). Interestingly, Gonzalez (in Romero and Harris) explains that Mexican essayist Carlos Fuentes considers Malinche as the forerunner to the Virgen de Guadalupe.

Fuentes writes: "In one fabulous stroke, the Spanish authorities transformed the Indian people from children of violated women to children of the pure Virgin." And so, Fuentes explains that the Virgin now becomes the legitimator of Mexicanness and of the nation, "a task to which poor Malintzin Tenepal, as its first betrayer-in such constructions—could not rise" (Gonzalez in Romero & Harris).

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, fiercely independent icon of Mexico and Mexican identity.

If a woman cannot be bad as La Malinche or as pure as the Virgen de Guadalupe, then she can at least be "strange" – if one goes by the contention of Charlene Merithew as she outlines a third archetype (Schneider, 2010). Said to have been born on November 12, 1651 in Mexico and died in April 17, 1695, Merrim (2017) writes that Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz now stands as a national icon of Mexico and

Mexican identity and is claimed to be the first published feminist of the New World and as the most outstanding writer of the Spanish American colonial period. This prominence came to light only after feminism came in vogue, explains Merrim.

Merrim further describes Sor Ines as a poet, dramatist, scholar, and nun. She was also respected as an excellent writer of the Hispanic Baroque and the Latin American colonial period. Articles on Sor Ines describe her as a fiercely independent woman who retreated to a cloister to read, write, and generally follow her scientific and artistic inclinations. In post-Revolutionary Mexico, Sor Ines was someone whom women writers can relate to and base their literary creations. The nun was the badly needed breath of fresh air for those women aching to break out of the norm – both in reality and in fiction.

It must also be noted that the archetypes above shape the social conditions for Mexican women in the same way that the concept of machismo determines the role and even circumstances of Mexican men. In general, the archetypes contribute to Mexican gender, sexual identity, and even politics.

ANALYSIS

Recollections of Things to Come: La Malinche amidst Ixtepec soldaderas.

Although the first part of *Recollections of Things to Come* is basically the love story of Julia Andrade and Felipe Hurtado, we see strains of La Malinche in Julia. She is General Francisco Rosas' "consort" and his prisoner in the Hotel Jardín just as Malinche was Cortés' prisoner, but Julia does not become the interpreter or the liaison between Rosas and the townsfolk of Ixtepec. After all, she herself is a stranger in the town and her only betrayal is cheating on Rosas when she runs away with Felipe Hurtado in that iconic magical realist scene in the novel when all of time and activity stops in Ixtepec so that destiny would allow the lovers to escape, never to return. In the second part of the novel, the plot thickens as it focuses on the impact of the Calles law on Ixtepec. Tension was rife in the town with all the churches closed, religious services and activities at a standstill, and the lives of the local priest Beltrán and the sexton Roque in danger. It is in this scenario that this analysis focuses on: Isabel as the La Malinche of Ixtepec and the role of the townswomen in the Cristero War. Readers are wont to ask why the Puebla-narrator does not explain Isabel's motive for going with Rosas and distancing herself from her family after the fiesta to celebrate the truce that ended in disaster. What is very clear though, as the novel progresses, is that Isabel has asked Rosas to spare the life of her brother Nicolás and while a plan has been made to give him the opportunity to escape, Nicolás was extremely committed to the Cristero spirit and returned to the execution site to die as a martyr. The people of Ixtepec beg Isabel to plead for her brother's life, thinking this is the first time she would intercede on his behalf. She explains to the other women around her that Rosas promised to spare Nicolás but she was told that Rosas had lied to her. She runs after the execution party but came too late as Nicolás arrived ahead of her and an embarrassed and confused General Rosas allowed him to be shot.

Towards the end of the novel, Isabel mistakenly thinks that Rosas was leaving Ixtepec after executing the five men and laments, "Although God may condemn me, I want to see Francisco Rosas again!" (p. 286). And in her rush to look for her lover, Isabel got lost and was turned into stone. Garro writes that Gregoria "spent the whole night pushing the stone up the hill to leave it at the feet of the Virgin, next to the other sinners who live here; she brought it here as evidence that man loves his sins. Then she went down to Ixtepec to tell what had happened" (p. 287).

Bowskill (2009) writes that Isabel's actions are extraordinary, "and represent a serious transgression of all acceptable and archetypal models of female behavior". Bowskill explains that Isabel would fit the La Malinche archetype in view of her having "betrayed" the townsfolk of Ixtepec. Prior to that as their potential savior, Bowskill writes that she would be 'la diosa vengadora de la justicia'. When she pleads for the release of her brother, she could be the Virgen de Guadalupe archetype. "Were Isabel to accept Gregoria's suggestion that she enter the convent, she could play the role of a repentant sinner like La Llorona" says Bowskill, at the same time, emphasizing that Isabel was none of these archetypes. It is because of these indefinable characteristics of Isabel and her "transgressive behavior" that Gregoria creates a narrative that seeks to re-establish authority and traditional gender roles (Bowskill, 2009). To do this, Gregoria inscribes a different version in the stone whom she claims is Isabel – the version that will be in the collective memory of Ixtepec:

"I am Isabel Moncada, the daughter of Martin Moncada and Ana Cuetara de Moncada, born in the town of Ixtepec on December 1, 1907. I turned into stone on October 5, 1927, before the startled eyes of Gregoria Juarez. I caused the unhappiness of my parents and the death of my brothers Juan and Nicolas. When I came to ask the Virgen to cure me of my love for General Francisco Rosas, who killed my brothers, I repented and preferred the love of the man who ruined me and ruined my family. Here I shall be, alone with my love, as a memory of the future, forever and ever." (p. 288-289)

Recollections of Things to Come, being a *novela de la guerra cristera*, highlights the role of Ixtepec women in the Cristero War though they came to a tragic ending. Nevertheless, the novel emphasizes the courage of the women to protect their right to worship as well as take care of those who attend to their spiritual needs. The Ixtepec women needed more than courage, given the description in page 157: "At 4 a.m. the last invaders left their positions in the courtyard. Under the almond trees there were women whose heads had been shattered by gun-butts and men whose faces were mangled by kicking."

The plot of the second part of *Recollections of Things to Come* puts women in the center. The action revs up when three townswomen appear at the office of Rosas. This was after Rosas rampaged around town to enforce the Calles law and his men had beaten up Roque the sexton but whose corpse simply disappeared. Rosas thinks the women will return Roque's body. However, Doña Elvira and her friends Ana Moncada and Carmen Arrieta offer reconciliation to Rosas and his men and invite them to a fiesta in their honor at the home of Carmen Arrieta. Rosas warily accepts the invitation. The town makes elaborate preparations and on the night of the party, the officers were escorted to the home of the party host by no less than Isabel and several young women. Dancing and revelry commence but then, General Rosas and his men insist on leaving but with the General giving strict instructions that the party must continue until he returns. The only people allowed to go home were Isabel and her family members. The partying continues well unto the next day until an exhausted musician collapses and the rest of the partygoers had to withstand the heat waiting for Rosas' return. The General had uncovered the conspiracy to help the priest and the sexton escape. An enraged General Rosas arrests Father Beltran, Nicolas Moncado, and Juan Cariño under the charges of sedition and treason. In the conspiracy, it was the women who faced major consequences. The owner of the brothel, La Luchi, was shot as she accompanied Father Beltran leaving the church. Rosario Cuellar, the beata, was imprisoned for five years. Dona Elvira lives with the shame and guilt that her own servant betrayed the escape plan. Carmen Arrieta, in whose house the party was held, was fined and her husband-doctor was executed for possessing rifles and having Cristero propaganda.

Old Dorotea who had hidden Father Beltran and Roque in her home together with valuables belonging to the church was killed by Rosas' men upon discovering them. However, it is Isabel's family, the Moncadas who had the biggest share of misery. Isabel's uncle Joaquin Melendez and her brothers were killed and Isabel herself was presumed dead. Such was the commitment of the Ixtepec women to the Cristero War that even the northern women who have no love lost for Ixtepec participated in their own way. Rafaela and Rosa, the mistresses of Teniente Coronel Cruz as well as Luisa, the mistress of Capitan Flores, were less amorous and withheld sex from the two men for their roles in arresting and executing the priest of Ixtepec.

Women With Big Eyes: Malinche, The Virgen, or Sor Ines?

In *Women With Big Eyes*, the protagonists in the individual stories often start as the Virgen de Guadalupe in their backgrounds, in the way they are brought up, in how society looks at them, and even in themselves -- feeling guilt and remorse if they don't live up to being The Virgen whose archetype is selfless, self-sacrificing, a martyr with no outward existence who has erased herself (Schneider, 2010) in favor of her husband, children, siblings, parents, and society. The description of Aunt Laura is typical of the women in Mastretta's novel. Aunt Laura, however, had to endure the praise of her husband in public as he viewed her as perfection personified where, depending on the preferences of their particular party host that night, Aunt Laura was "an excellent reader and a sensitive pianist, or a great pastry cook, a sacrificing mother, a wife of gentle and aristocratic habits" and more:

According to her husband, she went to mass twice daily, prayed the Rosary at five in the morning and again at six in the evening, taught catechism, took care of one hundred poor children, visited a hospital and an insane asylum, had become the guiding light of an old-age home, and had so great a devotion to the Blessed Sebastian de Aparicio that sometimes the Blessed One visited her at night while everybody else was sleeping. Her husband knew of this last item because the celestial light of a halo illuminated the kitchen and in his bedroom, he could hear the voice of the saint blessing his wife. (p. 108)

Then, Aunt Laura becomes La Malinche as she turns into a "public speaker" when upon eating dessert that tasted like pigsty because of rancid milk, she lets out a volley of coarse words that she has learned in her bid to cure herself of her insomnia. Since Mastretta's novel is set after the Mexican Revolution when women became more assertive of their financial and emotional independence, it thus follows that there would be more stories of such. 13 tales hewed to the archetype of Sor Ines with 11 of these women opting to be unmarried or be treated as a widow but certainly with their own tales of love – circumventing the Virgen de Guadalupe archetype that one must be entered into holy matrimony to "enjoy" love. Of the 13 stories, three tell of how the protagonists became businesswomen to fend for themselves and their children.

There were also 12 stories of marital infidelity – stories that begged to be told only because the women were so miserable in their marriages to either irresponsible or indifferent husbands or they just chose to fall into the temptation of enjoying the temporary thrills of being in forbidden relationships and reliving the happy memories of these indiscretions in their old age. While Mastretta writes with a somewhat cloying sentimentality, especially in her love stories, it is clear that her tales denounce the Mexican macho double standard where men are allowed and even encouraged to have extramarital affairs but not so for women. Her stories break through the conservative fabric of Mexican society and one can imagine Mexican women who read her

stories winking at each other. While there is not a single La Malinche archetype in *Women With Big Eyes* in the mold of Julia or Isabel the “betrayers” owing to the novel being post-Revolution, there is one aspect of the La Malinche archetype that stands out: that of La Malinche as a translator, intermediary, and public speaker.

This can be seen in the stories of Aunt Chila Huerta and Aunt Charo. Aunt Chila left her husband without any explanation and set up a business to support her children. The city people did not take kindly to her silence about the breakup of the marriage or to her life as a businesswoman until one day when the angry gun-toting husband of another woman comes to the local beauty parlor and verbally and physically abuses his wife. As others cowered, Aunt Chila stands up for the wife and berates the man and it was only then that the other women found out that Aunt Chila had left her husband because she was also abused. From then on, she was respected. Rollins (2004) cites Laffey as analyzing that Chila used the public arena of female gossip to bring the issues of social position and spouse abuse into the light. “By making the private public, Chila sets a new standard to guide women’s lives” (p. 69).

Gossip is the nearest thing to “public speaking” that Mexican women can do. Aunt Charo on the other hand is La Malinche and Virgen de Guadalupe with a penchant for gossip rolled into one. A fraudulent priest comes to town. When Aunt Charo goes to him for confession and to inquire if gossiping is a sin, the “priest” says it is “zest for life” and besides what else is one to do aside from working and saying prayers? She felt free from the sin of gossiping and went about as usual, with everyone else in town inviting her to their parties as her storytelling made their events livelier. While at the Guadalupe bazaar, a friend tells her that the priest, her confessor, is a fraud, Aunt Charo lies to defend the imposter’s reputation. She then goes to the same “priest” and asks for forgiveness, saying that her lying was out of necessity, to which the imposter responds, “Doubly worthy are you. May God preserve your charity and good milk. Go with Him” (p. 20).

Rollins further cites Reckley-Vallejos as explaining that Aunt Charo and the imposter priest are “accomplices in their subversion of the unconditional religious and social prohibition against lying.” This allows Aunt Charo to get on with gossiping, free from guilt, and the imposter to continue with being a priest – both protecting each other from society’s condemnation of such duplicitous behavior. Cypess in Romero and Harris (2005) writes that in history, La Malinche was “la lengua” for Cortes and transcended all gender constraints of both Aztec and European societies when she functioned in the role of intermediary and translator. Moreover, as Cypess explains, Aztec society forbade women to speak in “high public occasions” considering that the Aztec leader was called “Tlatoani,” meaning “He Who Speaks.” Cypess is of the contention that La Malinche “disrupted the general Amerindian curb on ‘women’s tongues in public places’ as well as the Christian restrictions against women as speakers in public.”

In Mastretta’s stories, therefore, the outspoken *poblana* is the empowered one – a power given to her by La Malinche’s intelligence, confidence, and facility for learning a language.

CONCLUSION

If we look at the Virgen de Guadalupe as the “conservative pattern” of the women in both novels before the crisis came out in either the Cristero War or before the life crisis of the individual women in Mastretta’s post-Cristero Warnovel, then that pattern takes on a more exciting design but never entirely conservative at all. Vestiges of the Virgen de Guadalupe archetype may remain in that pattern but certainly, the marks of either La Malinche or Sor Ines are brighter,

more indelible -- and certainly the most fascinating design in what starts as feminine lives of gentility. In *Women With Big Eyes*, the *poblanas* would like to believe they are Virgen de Guadalupe and this is so in the eyes of their husbands and children, but there is an inner Malinche or Sor Ines and a striving for agency even in the daily things that they do.

In *Recollections of Things to Come*, the women of Ixtepec play an active role in the Cristero War as strains of the Sor Ines archetypes and though one of their own plays La Malinche to the hilt, Isabel starts out as Virgen de Guadalupe but in following her own desire for General Francisco Rosas, ends up to be La Malinche who is forever a cautionary tale in the collective memory of Ixtepec. Thus, the contention of Sr. Barbara Miller in the thesis of this research is that Catholic women of a traditionally oriented society were not only capable of assuming leadership in a violent enterprise but also return to their old ways once the situation returns to normal is partly true for one could not simply box Mexican women in fiction into just one archetype. They form a fascinating amalgam of Mexican women archetypes with their own agency especially when push comes to shove. In many ways, Mastretta and Garro have succeeded in using the magical realism genre in presenting the Mexican woman as a prominent figure in an important junction of Mexican history and as “ordinary” women who have agency in a post-war world.

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