

Icons in Migration: Mythic Mexican Femininity in Literature and Popular Culture

Undergraduate course
Dr. Britta Anderson



What do an indigenous colonial translator, a ghost, a goddess, and a soldier all have in common? They are archetypal female figures that operate as foundational symbols of national identity in Mexico, and that migrate beyond Mexico as icons of Chicana empowerment or cultural identity. In this seminar, we will study the colonial legacies and paradigms of womanhood constructed and challenged through 20th and 21st century adaptations of La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Llorona, Coatlicue, Sor Juana, and La Adelita in Mexican and Chicana@ literature and popular culture. By examining key Mexican images and writings on these figures alongside Chicana@ texts, we will trace the migration of these iconic figures through Greater Mexico, from elite to popular culture.

We will identify the cultural workings of these mythic female figures in literary works by authors such as Carlos Fuentes, Laura Esquivel, Sandra Cisneros, Cherrie Moraga, and Josefina Niggli and in visual representations such as murals, horror films, performance art, photography, feminist prints, and tattoo art. Critical readings include works by Octavio Paz, Rosario Castellanos, Margo Glantz, Jean Franco, Emma Pérez, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

As we practice visual analysis and cultivate a transnational analytic framework, we will ask: What lies behind the pervasive presence of these figures in official and popular culture? Why have these particular symbols survived? What purpose do they serve as tools of activism and resistance, or as expressions of national and community identities? How do these icons establish cultural constructs of national identity and norms of good and bad motherhood and femininity, and how do they transgress those norms? What are the contemporary contentions in which these mythic Mexican women find renewed relevance in the United States?

Course Requirements

Language: While our course readings will be in Spanish, English, and Spanglish, all class discussions and written work must be in Spanish.

Attendance and Participation: Your active presence in class is essential to your success in this course. Your participation grade will be based not only on your contributions to discussions, but

also on your ability to listen, make space for other voices, and thoughtfully respond to ideas that differ from your own. Each absence after your second will reduce your final grade by 2 percentage points.

Blog posts: Short response (less than 300 words) posted to our class blog, due every class by midnight the night before. Responses may include your reactions to the readings, questions and concerns you want to address in class, and responses to those who post before you.

Dialogue paper: Imagine you could speak directly with La Malinche or Sor Juana. What would you ask them? Inventing an interview with any of the six figures studied this semester, you will produce a 5-6 page paper in dialogue form. The interview must include references to the texts covered in class as well as to additional popular culture representations of the figure. See handout for details.

Visual analysis paper: You will demonstrate visual literacy in a 6-8 page paper on a visual representation of any of the figures studied this semester. Applicable mediums include painting, photography, film, graffiti, performance, murals, and other popular culture representations. Proposal abstracts with images attached due at midterm. See handout for details.

Final exam: In our final take-home exam, you will identify the central arguments of the critical texts covered through the semester, trace the cultural significance of each iconic figure, and perform a close reading of a previously unseen text using a transnational analytic framework.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Blog posts: 20%

Dialogue paper: 20%

Visual analysis paper: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Course Schedule

Foundations: National Identity, Female Archetypes, and Feminist Revisioning of the Past

Week 1

John Mraz, "Introduction," *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*

Rosario Castellanos, "La mujer y su imagen," *Mujeres que saben latín*

Jean Franco, "Introducción," and "Re-escribir la familia," *Las conspiradoras: la representación de la mujer en México*

Week 2

Emma Pérez, "Sexing the Colonial Imaginary: (En)gendering Chicano History, Theory, and Consciousness," *The Decolonial Imaginary*

Gaspar de Alba, "Introduction," *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman"*

Anzaldúa, Gloria, "La consciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness," *Borderlands/ La frontera*, selections

La Malinche

Week 3

Octavio Paz, "Los hijos de la Malinche."

Margo Glantz, "Las hijas de la Malinche," *La Malinche, sus padres y sus hijas*

Sandra Messinger Cypess, “La Malinche as Palimpsest” and “Re/visions of the Cultural Metaphor,” *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*

In class: images: José Clemente Orozco, “Cortés and Malinche;” Diego Rivera, “La Gran Tenochtitlan,” Palacio Nacional, detail of Malinche; Antonio Ruíz, “El sueño de la Malinche;” Rosario Marquardt, “La Malinche”

Week 4

Laura Esquivel, *La Malinche*

Irma Cantú, “Malinche as Cinderella: Sweeping Female Agency in Search of a Global Readership,” *Colonial Itineraries of Contemporary Mexico: Literary and Cultural Inquiries*

Sandra Cisneros, “Never Marry a Mexican”

Norma Alarcón, “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism.”

Cordelia Candelaria, “La Malinche: Feminist Prototype” (optional)

La Llorona

Week 5

Rudolfo Anaya, *La Leyenda de la Llorona*

Luis Leal, “The Malinche-Llorona Dichotomy: The Evolution of a Myth” in *Feminism, Nation, and Myth. La Malinche*.

Sandra Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek”

In class: watch: *La Llorona*, clips from 1960s Mexican horror film, with subtitles; Short film: *The Return of La Llorona*, Shannon Ivey, director; “ExtraNormal - La Leyenda de la Llorona Huatulco,” Llorona “sighting” in Oaxaca

Week 6

Soledad Marjon-Hindi, “River of Tears/Rio de Lagrimas,” performance

Marisela Treviño Orta, “Braided Sorrow”

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “La Llorona on the Longfellow Bridge”

In class: image: Alma López, “La Llorona Desperately Seeking Coyolxauhqui in Juárez,” digital print; Delilah Montoya, “La Llorona in Lilith’s Garden,” photographic mural

The Virgin of Guadalupe

Week 7

Stafford Poole, “Introduction,” *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol*

Vicente Leñero, *El Evangelio de Lucas Gavilán*

Film: *Flores para Guadalupe*, dir. Judith Gleason

In class: Images from Mexico City’s Basilica

Week 8

Sandra Cisneros, “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess.” *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*.

Ana Castillo, “Introduction.” *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*.

Emma Pérez, “The Decolonial Virgin in a Colonial Site: It’s Not About the Gender in my Nation, It’s About the Nation in my Gender,” *Our Lady of Controversy*

In class: analysis of images: Ester Hernández, “La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo los Derechos de los Xicanos,” “La Ofrenda,” “Wanted;” Yolanda López, “Walking Guadalupe,” “Guadalupe Series,” “Tableaux Vivant,” “Nuestra Madre” Alma López, “Our Lady,” “Tattoo,” “Lupe and Sirena in Love;” Delilah Montoya, “La Guadalupana”

Coatlicue

Week 9

Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente*

In class: images of Coatlicue statue in Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City

Week 10

Anzaldúa, Gloria, “La Herencia de Coatlicue/ the Coatlicue State,” *Borderlands/ La frontera*

Cherrie Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*

Helena María Viramontes, “The Cariboo Café”

Ana Maria Carbonell, "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros." (optional)

In class: Michael Schnorr and Susan Yamagata, Coatlicue mural, Chicano Park

Sor Juana

Week 11

Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*

Rosario Castellanos, “Otra vez Sor Juana”

Jean Franco, “Sor Juana explora el espacio,” *Las conspiradoras: la representación de la mujer en México*

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Hombres necios que acusáis”

Arminé Arjona, “Maquilas necias que acusáis”

In class: images: Mexican Sor Juana images: 200-peso-note; series of national murals

Week 12

Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Sor Juana’s Second Dream*

Estela Portillo Trambley, “Sor Juana”

Sara Poot Herrera, “Traces of Sor Juana in Contemporary Mexicana and Chicana/Latina Writers”

In class: Visual archive of Sor Juana street art images and tattoos

La Adelita

Week 13

Eric Zolov, “Adelita,” *Iconic Mexico: An Encyclopedia from Acapulco to Zocalo*

Elena Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican Revolution*, excerpts.

Tabea Alexa Linhard, “Adelita’s Death,” *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War*

Marta Romo and Tomasa García Magallanes, “Interview with an Adelita”

In class: Movie clips: *Con los Dorados de Villa*, *La Cucaracha*, *Juana Gallo*, *La Soldadera*

Week 14

Josefina Niggli, *Soldadera*

Las Adelitas de Aztlán: Dionne Espinoza, “Revolutionary Sisters:” Women's Solidarity and Collective Identification among Chicana Brown Berets in East Los Angeles, 1967-1970”

In class: listen to Adelita songs and close-read lyrics: “La Adelita” corridos, “La Adelita” 1980’s protest song, and “¿Dónde estás, Adelita?” 1930s Nicaragua

In class: Images: iconic Jerónimo Hernández photograph; José Guadalupe Posada, soldadera woodcut; Frida Kahlo, “Pancho Villa and Adelita”; Marilyn Monroe Adelita pin-up