Introduction

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The roots of Mexican poetry wend out from many traditions. Indigenous epic and lyric poetry survive in early modern works that simultaneously preserved and overwrote them. They subtly informed the practice of Mexican poetry in subsequent centuries and reemerged in full voice in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Diverse poetic practices stemming from both popular and learned traditions were introduced by Spaniards into Mexico over three centuries of viceregal rule in New Spain. European languages, ranging from classical to vernacular, brought their respective forms and traditions to the Mexican poetic radix: Latin and Greek; Italian and then – centrally – French; and later English, with the stems of Portuguese and German traditions grafted on.

Nineteenth-century readings of other American poets nurtured Mexican poetry within its hemisphere, with these efforts being traceable in contemporaneous periodicals, anthologies, and the essays of authors such as Ignacio Manuel Altamirano. The intra-hemispheric intertwining only grew more intense during the twentieth century, accompanied by a veritable flourishing of Mexican poetry. Poetic roots wound out in other directions as well. The Spanish Civil War and the ensuing exile of peninsular authors, many of whom had met Mexicans living in Spain after the Mexican Revolution, rekindled a strong link with Spain in the first half of the century. State-sponsored regimes of terror in South and Central America precipitated a powerful influx of intelligentsia into Mexico in the 1970s.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, conversations with diverse poetic lineages remain compelling as Mexican poetry negotiates its relationship to works written in and about Greater Mexico, as well as to texts written in languages other than Spanish. It would be remiss, however, to interpret Mexican poetry as a series of conformist (and perpetually imperfect) imitations. Instead of analyzing these texts under the aegis of "influence," we prefer to consider them complex negotiations and moments of, to use Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado's felicitous turn of phrase

in his eponymous book, strategic Occidentalism (which often includes in its fold Orientalism and *Indigenismo*).

In this volume, we pay close attention to poetry's role in an array of social contexts, considering the positions from which poetry has been written, performed, and received. In doing so, we restore to the genre the powers it possessed as a religious conduit, as the substrate of civic occasions, and as the affective core of learned societies – vital social aspects of poetry long neglected in abstractive literary criticism. The long history of poetry as performance twines through song and oral text, on stage, in sacred functions, and within domestic spaces. Far from always and only a text silently enjoyed by a reading individual, poetry has been and still may be that communal experience which can become spectacle.

Our book aims to kindle the full range of Mexico's variegated "poetries." This prickly noun allows – despite its peculiarity and admitted clumsiness – for the denaturalization of the concept of Mexican poetry as a shorter lyric form written in Spanish by a male author and published in a book. Accomplishing this requires considering the different material supports of poetry; inviting indigenous languages, English, and Spanglish to the conversation; attending to female authorship and how it was silenced, erased, and forgotten; and remembering, firstly, that books were unaffordable for both authors and audiences for centuries and, secondly, that today's digital media, including a panoply of social platforms, open up the possibility for poetry to reclaim democratic center stage. The following pages show how, by paring the poem of its purity and unicity, we can cull the political implications and complications that surrounded Mexican poetry, and which remain codified in its verse.

This approach displaces timeless poems in favor of timely poetry. However, we wish to avoid that facile urgency which automatically crowns the contemporary with pride of place by virtue of the present-day nature of its flowering. Many of the timelier texts examined in this volume are rooted in deep strata of the archive, where they have lain dormant, weighed down by the pressure exerted by an ossified canon constructed around the authors who published in the *Contemporáneos* literary magazine in the first half of the twentieth century, and around poet and critic Octavio Paz in the latter half. It would be all too easy to act iconoclastically and destroy this crucial lineage, but weeding out this hegemonic canon entirely would leave a notable gap in the poetic landscape. In this volume, we propose instead a historization of this canon's importance that uncovers the functions it served, revealing that its constitution is far from unquestionable. As we pull the canon aside, poets such as Bernardo de Balbuena,

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Juana de Asbaje), Ramón López Velarde, José Gorostiza, and, of course, Octavio Paz remain vital in the materials discussed here. Yet, their roles have shifted from those typically conferred upon them. Instead of considering them static eternities, we consider how they should be read today – not only as authors, but also as cultural actors, as agents that worked diligently to create the frameworks through which their work would be considered.

Several of the poetic practices and processes examined in this volume warrant a *longue durée* treatment. To address this, we have combined epochal with durational texts: some chapters unfold over several decades and even, on occasion, over centuries. This type of treatment affords a better comprehension of the metamorphoses that the performance of poetry – as music, as recitation, as slam – has germinated, or the fraught genealogies of particular strains of poetry. Through our examination, the roots and flowering of Mexican poetry become more fully evident.

Poetry produced and documented during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in Mexico offers a glimpse into the ubiquity of the poetic form during the colonial period. The production of Novohispanic poetry in Mexico represented, as in Europe, a type of prestige, demonstrating mastery of accepted poetic conventions, aesthetics, and erudite knowledge. In contrast, however, to the European artistic movements to which colonial Mexican poetry has long been compared, Novohispanic works drew from and included the originary poetics of the region, and developed an increasingly pronounced, distinctive sensibility that distinguishes it from contemporaneous literatures elsewhere.

Novohispanic poetry in its many forms made up the fabric of colonial Mexican life: from the expected intellectual, religious, and personal circles in which some works moved; to the sharing of *villancicos*, *romances*, and *cantadas* in song with broad audiences; and to the incorporation of verse into public spectacle, as in the triumphal arches welcoming the Viceroy and Vicereine of New Spain in 1680, to which famed poets Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora contributed poetic works. Poetic competitions (*concursos* and *certámenes*) provided opportunities to partake in the open display of poetic dexterity, often resulting in commissions and publications for poets and performers. Novohispanic poetry moved beyond the limits of New Spain, and commentary by its readers in Europe and other Spanish colonies returned to Mexico and its poets. Perhaps more than any other literary form, poetry, with its lush variegation and abundance, became interwoven with New Spanish life and society.

In addition to popular poetic production, which derived from and synthesized European and American traditions, the colonial-era poetry of Mexico encompassed a wide variety of genres. Epic poetry treating New Spain reflected the Renaissance recovery of the classic form and used it primarily to glorify Spanish conquest, as in *Canto intitulado Mercurio* (1623), *Nuevo mundo y conquista* (late sixteenth century), *Peregrino indiano* (1599), *Historia de la Nueva México* (1610), and other works. Novohispanic lyric poetry has frequently been read through a critical lens comparing it to European literature. Such interpretations provide a sense of connection and continuity, highlighting the relationships between Mexican works and the literary trends of classical/Renaissance Latinate and Italianate stylings, *Manierismo* (the transition between the Renaissance and the Baroque), and *Gongorismo* (relating to the work of Spanish poet Luis de Góngora). More recent scholarship argues for the primacy of Novohispanic place, people, and objectives in understanding works of colonial lyric poetry. Poetry appears in colonial-era dramatic works and across the spectrum of religious, political, and musical contexts, its forms adapting to the particular exigencies of its many roles.

Not all authors of colonial-era Mexican poetry are known by name. Novohispanic poetry circulated in print and in manuscript form, sometimes under pseudonyms or penned by anonymous writers (Buxó 298–300; Serna 153–156) and was often shared orally. These practices, difficult to trace in the historical record, have obscured the poetic voices of women as well as other marginalized groups writing during this time. Their recovery is an ongoing project of scholarly labor. During the early colonial period, many Spaniards took up residency in New Spain; some later became known as poets of the Mexican *colonia*, among them Gutierre de Cetina, Fernán González de Eslava, Cristóbal Carrera, Pedro de Trejo, Mateo Rosas de Oquendo, Juan Bautista Corvera, Arias de Villalobos, Eugenio de Salazar, Juan de la Cueva, and Diego Mexía de Fernangil (see Barrera for further commentary). Criollo poets Francisco de Terrazas, Matías de Bocanegra, Fray Miguel de Guevara, Antonio de Saavedra Guzmán, Bernardo de Balbuena (brought to Mexico as a child), Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, and, most importantly, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz would come to define the criollo voice in Western-style Novohispanic verse, in conversation with European poetic production. Poetry by Indigenous poets such as Nezahualcóyotl was fundamental to the predominant popular forms of spoken or sung poetry, created in the tradition of *xochicuicatl* (*canto florido*, or "songs of flowers," in Nahuatl), and to other poetic genres (Campa and Chang-Rodríguez 57–62). Other texts,

including the *Cantares de Dzitbalché*, preserve native poetic praxis in Maya K'iche' (Campa and Chang-Rodríguez 51–56). Translations of works of Indigenous poetry into Spanish by scholars Miguel León-Portilla, Ángel María Garibay, Alfredo Barrera Vásquez, and others provide connections among the many poetic texts of the Novohispanic world.

Jorge Téllez's chapter, "The Practice of Epic and Lyric Writing in Colonial Mexico," questions the critical cartographies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hispanophone lyric and epic poetry. Building out from established anthological and critical approaches to Novohispanic poetry, Téllez interrogates earlier Eurocentric perspectives on works of the period, pointing to interstitial texts such as Diego Mexía's *Parnaso antártico*, published in 1608, that complicate such critique. Téllez's reading centralizes Mexican context in understanding poetic works for which "literary models were European, but material conditions of writing, including patronage, were dependent on the new territories." Connecting the performative, public poetry of New Spain with similar enactments in present-day Mexico, Téllez suggests that for colonial lyric poetry, performativity transpired in distinct but overlapping senses. In considering the epic form in its historical context, Téllez signals the many facets of power dynamics at play in the commission, composition, and reading of the genre.

Among colonial-era poets, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz stands as the *sine qua non* not only of the epoch, but of Mexican poetry and, indeed, of Mexican letters. One of few poets of the colonial period whose work was published in book form during their lifetime, Sor Juana's poetic voice was celebrated in its time in Mexico and in Europe and continues to engage audiences with its subtle artistic perfection and Baroque sensibility. As feminist scholars such as Stephanie Merrim have explained, Sor Juana's female subjectivity was vitally constitutive of her writing, emerging implicitly and explicitly, and leading critics to "elucidate the many-layered and intermeshing spheres of the literary worlds in which she wrote and whose conflation brought her works to such admirable heights" (Merrim 31).

Sor Juana is the subject of Anna M. Nogar's chapter. The longevity of the interest in Sor Juana's work is matched by the timelessness of her writing; extensive critical study has been dedicated to both her poetry and her biography. "*La lírica del Fénix*: Sor Juana's Poetic Legacy" examines signal works in several of the poetic forms Sor Juana employed (sonnet, *romance*, *décima*, *redondilla*, *villancico*, epithet) and connects these with their present-day expressions in music, translation, and popular culture.

Nogar focuses on Sor Juana's tour-de-force work of Baroque literature, *Primero sueño* (1692), whose hundreds of verses of complex poetic play are skillfully juxtaposed with its resolute assertion of the female poetic voice that inhabits it, as well as the human female who composed it. Capturing Sor Juana's intellectual agility, political acumen, great humor, and emotional register, as well as her extraordinary poetic faculty, Nogar closes the essay with an invitation to closer examination of Sor Juana's poetry, in pursuit of the female-centered expressions found throughout the rest of her poetic oeuvre.

Many of the traits that defined late-colonial poetry, both in terms of production and of reception, survived into the State-formation period that followed the 1810–1821 War of Independence. Musicologist Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell helps us understand this in his chapter, where he interrogates poetry in relation to transmission. In "The Sound of the Word: Music and Social Transgression in Lyric Poetry from the *Colonia* Onward," Ramos-Kittrell draws on critical theories on sensing, author–reader complicity, and poetic publics operating within social structures. He invokes Margit Frenk to note that "literature involved multi-sensory spoken utterances, which moved from sight, to mouth, to the ear." Reading in this vein, Ramos-Kittrell deconstructs the poetic reworking of the myth of Echo and Narcissus in Sor Juana's Romance 8, focusing on how the concept of sensorial recognition through the auditory function is articulated in the colonial-era poem. Shifting his focus to the Enlightenment *tertulia* space as a site of social aesthetic codification in which notions of *buen gusto* (good taste) were established for literature and music (among other arts), Ramos-Kittrell considers lyrics and musical arrangement as they play against each other in an eighteenth-century *cantada* by Mexican composer Manuel Sumaya. The chapter concludes by explaining how the nineteenth-century intellectual group Arcadia Mexicana regarded the human voice as a transmitter of sentiment – particularly in the context of opera – and how a poem by Mexican poet Guillermo Prieto dedicated to singer María Napoleona Albini manifests this aesthetic concept in lyric form.

Perhaps the most crucial change to Mexican poetics lies at the powerful fulcrum of Romanticism, which provided a new idiom for Mexico and especially for the new collective of the Mexican people, the *mexicanos*. This turn is the core of José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra's "We, the Romantics," a chapter that picks up where Ramos-Kittrell ends. The rise of Romanticism does not, however, mean that Neoclassicism disappeared completely. Rather, both styles can often be found in the same poet, even in the same

poem. Reading from this coevality allows for a more complete understanding of foundational compositions such as José María Heredia's "En el teocalli de Cholula," the source of an important and productive dialogue with the pre-Columbian past of Mesoamerica that continued in "Profecía de Guatimoc" (1839) by Ignacio Rodríguez Galván. Heredia's poem, furthermore, posits a poetry of an existing landscape, the Humboldtian mode that can be traced in the poetry of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano and, later, Manuel M. Flores. As the landscape becomes urban with Guillermo Prieto, the speech of the popular classes also finds its space in poetry, allowing Mexicans to speak like Mexicans in verse. The main tenet of the chapter is that the more important authors of Mexican Romanticism – José María Heredia, Ignacio Rodríguez Galván, Ignacio Ramírez, Guillermo Prieto, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Manuel Acuña, and Manuel M. Flores – tarry with the *We* as the crucial pronoun position of the poem. The *I* of the received formulation of Romanticism is, according to this new articulation, a byproduct that appears subsequently, only as a problematization of the collective *We*. This allows Ruisánchez Serra to isolate the main trait of civic poetry, a sorely undertheorized aspect of poetry in the nineteenth century. In civic poetry – including its acme, the National Anthem – the collective of the nation remains perfect, instead of being questioned by the splintered *I* of Romanticism.

One of the urgent tasks this volume undertakes is a survey of nineteenth-century women authors that have been historically ignored, leaving a gaping hole between Sor Juana and the twentieth century. This is precisely what Lilia Granillo Vázquez addresses in her chapter, "Sentimental Sociabilities: The Young Romantics and Their Long-Lived Widows." She privileges the work of pioneering women writers – Laura Méndez, Refugio Barragán, Isabel Pesado, and María Enriqueta, among others – to understand why their careers were often cut short when they associated with (or married) male writers. As Granillo Vázquez documents, this silencing was further facilitated by the practice, common throughout the nineteenth century, of male writers encroaching on feminine positions, such as the infamous Rosa Espino, the female *nom de plume* under which General Vicente Riva Palacio wrote poetry.

Most of these female authors lived long lives. This allowed them to begin their careers as Romantics and to continue through *Modernismo*, the movement that spanned the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century into the first decade of the twentieth, and persisted as an aesthetic sensibility for many years after that. *Modernismo* must be studied as the process that allowed the opulence and exoticism of the world of the

Porfiriato to flow into verse. In "*Modernismo*'s Strategic Occidentalism," Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado discusses three key poets of *Modernismo* – Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Amado Nervo, and José Juan Tablada – in connection with the questions of cosmopolitanism, world literature, and what he calls "strategic Occidentalism," or the idiosyncratic ways in which writers in Mexico relate to the Western canon. The chapter discusses the many ways in which these poets connected with the French poetic canon, from their affinity with figures such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, to their adoption of verse and metric forms from the French tradition. In addition, the chapter discusses the editorial efforts related to the work of these three poets and the way in which our understanding of their "complete works" has evolved along with the publication of various compilations and editions of their texts.

While creating a strategic Occidentalism, *Modernismo* also furthered a rediscovery of provincial towns. An analysis of *Modernismo*, then, would remain incomplete without a close examination of this reinvention of the Mexican intimate landscape. Luis Vicente de Aguinaga's chapter, "The Crepusculars: Criollo Modernism and the Invention of the Literary Province," deals with Mexican poets who, although affiliated with *Modernismo*, "reacted against what they perceived as superficial preciosity, decorative cosmopolitanism, and feigned decadentism": Alfredo R. Placencia, Rafael López, Enrique González Martínez, Luis G. Urbina, Francisco González León, and Manuel José Othón, all considered precursors of the great Ramón López Velarde. Together, these poets prove that an important modernism of the provinces existed: not a provincial poetry, but rather a powerful reexamination of common assumptions about the crucial moment when Mexican poetry achieved maturity.

A discussion of *Modernismo* must also delve into poetry as a public event. In her chapter, Jill S. Kuhnheim reads a broad arc of poetry as performance in Mexico. She considers the strong oral component in pre-Columbian poetry, and in school and *tertulia* recitations, and emphasises two great performers of the twentieth century: Amado Nervo, in the early part of the century, and Bertha Singerman, in mid-century. This allows her to reflect on how the powers of poetry were used by pioneering radio broadcasts, which, in turn, led to the eventual recording of numerous poets. Kuhnheim argues that performance shifts poetry away from the perception of it as a high-brow form. In the last part of her chapter, devoted to the twenty-first century, she examines the musical style *huapango arribeño* and contemporary performance practices by Rojo Córdova, Rocío Cerón, José Eugenio Sánchez, Minerva Reynosa and the group

Benerva!, and Mare Advetencia Lirika to exemplify crucial instances of the creation of new audiences for poetry.

It is by now taken for granted that the different lineages of *Modernismo* came together in the unparalleled poetry of Ramón López Velarde. But this assertion must be historicized. López Velarde not only represents the peak and, concurrently, the conclusion of *Modernismo*, but is also the first of a distinguished lineage of critical poets. He was viewed as the key predecessor of the tradition by the most influential of the *Contemporáneos* group – Xavier Villaurrutia and Jorge Cuesta – and later by Octavio Paz and José Emilio Pacheco. These names, with the addition of José Gorostiza, form the canon of twentieth-century Mexican poetry. In his chapter, "The Great Synthesis of the Critical Poets: The Rise of Octavio Paz," Anthony Stanton reads Paz as the acme of the tradition of the critical poets. Villaurrutia, Cuesta, and Gorostiza left a deep impression as mentors on a young Paz. But it is important to remember, as Stanton does, that the sources of Paz's thought and lyric poetry extend beyond this group and include the English metaphysical poets (and the way in which T. S. Eliot read them), as well as Francisco de Quevedo and Antonio Machado in Hispanic letters.

Paz, of course, was not only one of the great writers of the twentieth century, but also an extremely adept architect of the politics that shaped the Mexican cultural field, an impressive system of State sponsorship. In his chapter, "Octavio Paz and the Institutions of Poetry," Ángel M. Díaz Miranda reads Paz as the crucial public intellectual who master-minded the system of vast subsidies for certain cultural productions, which to this day determines much of what is written and published, and which is especially important for the genre of poetry.

The long poem demands particular attention, first because it is one of the central achievements that leads to literary canonization: José Gorostiza remains a more important poet than Xavier Villaurrutia or Salvador Novo because of his book-length *Muerte sin fin* (1939), and Paz's distinguished career would not have been the same without his long poem *Piedra de sol* (1957). And, secondly, it defines the logic of many of the more interesting productions penned in the twenty-first century. In a veritable tour de force, "The Form That Contains Multitudes: The Mexican Long Poem (1924–2020)," Tamara R. Williams exhaustively explores these contemporary book-length poems and their extensive history. Harkening back to colonial-era works like Balbuena's *Grandeza mexicana* and Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*, and then to the form's key twentieth-century moments, from José Gorostiza to Octavio Paz, Jaime Labastida, and David Huerta,

Williams reconsiders the important change that took place in Mexican poetry, and specifically in the long poem, around the year 2000, with the rise of gifted practitioners such as María Rivera and Luis Felipe Fabre, among many others.

Jacobo Sefamí claims that the Neobaroque, as defined by Caribbean critic Severo Sarduy, exerted and continues to exert considerable influence on Mexican poetics. His chapter, "Radical Freedoms: Neobaroque, Postpoetry," demonstrates the precise depth of this sway, from the last decades of the twentieth century, when Gerardo Deniz, David Huerta, and Coral Bracho achieved canonicity, to the twenty-first-century poets who "gravitate towards the same experimental manner as the Neobaroque," as in *Basalto* (2002) by Rocío Cerón, *Negro marfil* (2000) by Myriam Moscona, *La sodomía en la Nueva España* (2010) by Luis Felipe Fabre, *Litane* (2009) by Alejandro Tarrab, and *Palas* (2013, 2017) by Ricardo Cázares. This chapter dovetails with Williams's, discussing some of the more prominent contemporary Mexican poets from a different vantage point.

Certain anthologies have proved crucial in the formation and reshaping of the history of Mexican poetry. Alejandro Higashi fittingly entitles his chapter, in which he considers the role anthologies have played in the process of canon formation in Mexican poetry, "The Age of Anthology." Starting with nineteenth-century precursors, like the thirty-six volumes of the extensive *El parnaso Mexicano*, published in 1885 and 1886, Higashi reads important collections from the first half of the twentieth century, like *Antología del centenario* (1910), *Antología de poetas modernos de México* (1920), *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna* (1928) and *Laurel* (1941) arriving at the crucial volume *Poesía en movimiento*, published in 1966 and reprinted since. This last volume, Higashi shows, has exerted a constant influence and shaped much of the poetry written after it was published, in particular the work of poets with government grants who publish in heavily subsidized collections. This harkens back to the genealogy of state-sponsored literatures Díaz Miranda describes in his chapter.

This framing begs the question of what poetry was excluded through *Poesía en movimiento*'s privileging of an experimental ethos and, further, what happened to those productions that refused to comply with it. Political poetry of the twentieth century is the most poignant archive revealed through this exploration. To this, one must add verse that was predominantly oral at the time of publication and, unsurprisingly (but no less regrettably), poetry penned by women and poetry written in languages other than Spanish. "Twentieth-Century Mexican Poetry: The Popular