

Elena Poniatowska Princess of Mexican Letters

She was born in France in 1932. Her full name is H el ene Elizabeth Louise Am elie Paula Dolores Poniatowska Amor, and she is the daughter of Prince Jean Joseph Evremond Sperry Poniatowski, a direct descendant of King Stanislaw II Poniatowski of Poland, and Paula Amor Escand on, a Mexican citizen of French ancestry. In 1941, Paula fled World War II with her daughters and took refuge in Mexico. Elena Poniatowska inherited the title of princess of Poland —something that matters very little to her, and, which in addition to spending very little time with her European family, has earned her the soubriquet “The Red Princess.”

Elena, known for her unpretentious personality, critical spirit and enormous sensitivity to social issues, is the author of a large body of literary work. In it, she particularly gives voice to the people most ignored by society: the poor, the displaced, the young, opponents of the regime, women who are not part of government power circles, and children, among others.

She has been awarded honorary doctoral degrees by institutions of higher learning in Mexico and abroad, like the Autonomous University of Sinaloa (1979); the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (1980); New York’s New School of Social Research (1994); Florida Atlantic University (1995); the Autonomous Metropolitan University (2000); New York’s Manhattanville College and the UNAM (2001); and, most recently, the Autonomous University of Puebla (2002). In 2007, the Mexico City government’s Ministry of Culture established the Elena Poniatowska Interamerican Prize for the Novel. She has also been given many other prestigious awards, among which are the 1970 Mazatl an Prize for her book *Hasta no verte Jes us m io* (published in English as *Here’s to You, Jesusa!*); the 1970 Xavier Villarrutia Prize for *La noche de Tlatelolco* (The Night of Tlatelolco, published in English as *Massacre in Mexico*) —a prize she rejected to emphasize her position about the events of October 2, 1968; the 1978 National Prize for Journalism, making her the first woman to receive it; the 1992 Mazatl an Prize for *Tin sima*; the 2001 Alfaguara Prize for a Novel for *La piel del cielo* (The Skin of the Sky); the 2002 National Prize for Science and the Arts (in the field of linguistics and literature); the 2004 Columbia University Mar a Moors Cabot Award; and the 2007 R omulo Gallegos International Prize for the Novel for her book *El tren pasa primero* (The Train Goes By First).

Among her most outstanding works are the following:

Novels and short stories: *Lilus Kikus* (short stories, 1954); *Hasta no verte, Jes us m io* (novel, 1969); *De noche vienes* (novel, 1979); *La piel del cielo* (novel, 2001); *Tlapaler a* (short stories, 2003); and *El tren pasa primero* (novel, 2006).

Chronicles: *Palabras cruzadas. Cr nicas* (1961); *Fuerte es el silencio* (1980); *Amanecer en el Z ocalo. Los 50 d as que confrontaron a M xico* (2007).

Testimonios: *La noche de Tlatelolco. Testimonios de historia oral* (1970); *Gaby Brimmer* (1979);¹ *Nada, nadie. Las voces del temblor* (1988).



Essays: * Ay vida, no me mereces!* Carlos Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos, Juan Rulfo, *la literatura de la onda* (1985).

Interviews: *Todo M xico I-VII* (interviews done between 1991 and 2002).

Biographies: *Tin sima* (1992); *Octavio Paz, las palabras del  rbol* (1998); *Juan Soriano. Ni o de mil a os* (2000); *Mariana Yampolsky y la buganvilla* (2001).

Her books have been translated into English and French. Published in English are the following:

- *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1975).
- *Nothing, Nobody. The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).
- *Tin sima* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).
- *Here’s to You, Jesusa!* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001).
- *The Skin of the Sky* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004).
- *Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican Revolution* (El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press, 2006).
- *Lilus Kikus and Other Stories*, with drawings by Leonora Carrington (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).
- *Gaby Brimmer: An Autobiography in Three Voices* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2009).

Recently, Poniatowska, who has worked in almost all the genres of literature, surprised her readers with the magnificent volume of poetry *Rondas de la ni a mala* (Nursery Rhymes of a Bad Little Girl) (2008), which she talks about at length with Claire Joysmith in this issue of *Voices of Mexico*. A woman of her time, Elena Poniatowska offers all those interested in dialoguing with her, her Face Book page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Elena-Poniatowska/28038002741>. **MM**

Mar a Cristina Hern andez Escobar
Assistant Editor



NOTES

¹ This book was made into a film titled *Gaby: A True Story* by Mexican director Luis Mandoki in 1987.