



# In The Shadow of the Angel: Three Critical Decades in Mexico's History

*Kathryn S. Blair*

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"In the Shadow of the Angel," which has been called Mexico's "Gone with the Wind," takes place during three transformational decades in Mexican history: 1900-1931, as mirrored by the life of an extraordinary Mexican woman, Antonieta Rivas Mercado.

The daughter of the architect of Mexico's famous Independence Monument, popularly known as "The Angel," Antonieta defied tradition and class to bring change to her country, and paid the price for her passionate rebellion.

Her roller-coaster life paralleled Mexico's struggle for national identity: the final decade of a long dictatorship that ended in the lavish Centennial celebration of 1910; the chaos wrought by ten years of violent revolution; and the ensuing brutal struggle for power among the Generals who established the social and political order by which Mexico is governed today.

Brilliant, educated in Europe, heiress to a fortune, Antonieta became both muse and patron to the young writers, artists and musicians of the 1920s who were eager to join the modern world.

The "scandalous" Antonieta consorted with the likes of everyone from Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Tina Modotti, and Garcia Lorca, to bullfighters, Communists and ambassadors.

She dared seek a divorce: her ill-fated marriage to Albert Blair, an Anglo-American who came to Mexico to fight in the revolution, and her obsession with a homosexual painter became Antonieta's personal *vía crucis*.

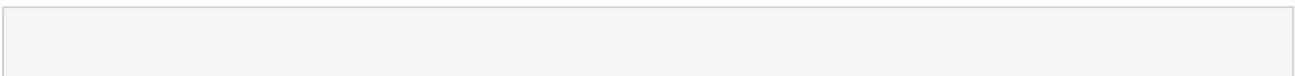
In 1928 she entered the political arena, championing the cause of women's voting rights in the campaign of presidential candidate, José Vasconcelos, with whom she shared a vision of an educated, just and democratic Mexico.

Committed to their mutual goals, Antonieta devoted her heart and her money to his campaign. Caught in the vortex of the fraudulent election of 1929, her lover defeated, violence flaring, fortune gone, she kidnapped her son and fled to Paris.

Though an inspiration to so many, the tired, dispirited woman churned with insecurities and conflicting emotions. At the age of thirty, Antonieta Rivas Mercado committed suicide in Notre Dame Cathedral. During Mexico's Bicentennial celebration in 2010, Antonieta was officially recognized as a primary promoter of modern Mexican culture.

The President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, called Antonieta "our national Angel."

Considered a classic in Mexico, "In the Shadow of the Angel" is acclaimed both for its historical and literary content. The author is married to Antonieta's son.



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