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Revolution as an “Experiment” and Literary Experimentation in the Thirties: Europe and Mexico in the United States¹

In 1929, the editorial in *New Masses* written by its editor Michael Gold came out as a wholly peremptory generational manifesto both in content and in title: “Go Left, Young Writers” (3). In it, Paula Rabinowitz would pick up the rhetorical force of the century-old summons with which Horace Greeley wanted to open Western horizons to contemporary writers.² Gold’s rhetoric and communicative intentionality would subsequently be reinforced by the writings of V. F. Calverton, Marxist critic and intellectual exponent of the left, certainly not aligned with Gold’s positions. In 1932, with his stirring “Leftward Ho!” he would invite his contemporary writers to join the youth of factories, mines, and farms. The frontier, in effect, is both a national point of reference, as it was for Kennedy in more recent years, and an identity metaphor conveying historical awareness, intrinsic dynamism, and America’s political and moral goal.

Toward the end of the 1920s, we also witness the rise of a transnational dimension embodied in an outright fascination experienced by a great number of American artists and writers, who, having visited Russia after the revolution, came back full of admiration for the “Great Russian Experiment.” It is, in fact, at this point that the valuable and at times estranging political adventure of the writers belonging to the American left joins the literary and linguistic experimentation that permeated the whole of the artistic life in the early years of the twentieth century, both in Europe and in Russia. In this respect, Theodore Dreiser is a truly emblematic figure. The old skeptic spent eleven weeks in Russia in 1927, and immediately after published a volume about his experience (with abundant documentation, which the Moscow authorities provided) expressing amazement, admiration, and hope (Dreiser, Aaron 159-60).

Curiously, the winning slogan adopted by that whole generation is an earlier inspired declaration made by Lincoln Steffens after his trips to Russia in 1919 and in 1921. He proclaimed: "I have seen the future and *it works!*" (my emphasis).³ And what could be more apt to open and inform the new century if not the anticipation of a future "that works"? Is not the twentieth century the quintessence of a century bound to novelty, innovation, and "modernity"?

If the future of a revolution is bound to the fluid goal of a frontier, it is not surprising that with such symbolic or metaphoric objectives, which are substantially intellectual, the whole of the 1930s' generation and its difficult but honest political passion had to come to terms with the dramatic international context and a national context marked by the shattering of the illusion of perpetual affluence. It is not by chance that Italian critic Giordano De Biasio summarized in 1982 the symbolic double meaning and the twin ideal and ideological direction in the title of one of his works *La Frontiera Proletaria*.

For the literary generation of the 1930s the distance taken by literary criticism in all the following years necessarily had to be overcome. In the 1970s and 1980s, the interest in 1930s American art had to deal historically and critically with what was rightly defined as American "cultural amnesia" after World War II. The general tendency was to consider the term "communist art" and its corollary "proletarian art" as an oxymoron. A strong reference point was also the correlation between the intellectual left during the American Depression, the Communist Party and the objective needs of the working class; between the Soviet Union and world socialism; between the Mexican revolutions and the people's rebellions, and closely linked between art and politics, that is to say art as a political tool: "art as a weapon."

This has permitted an almost complete deletion of an entire literary generation. There are, however, quite a few exceptions. We cannot but recall that at the beginning of the 1960s an American cultural historian – who we were lucky to have as a colleague both in Rome and in San Francisco – Daniel Aaron wrote:

We, who precariously survive in the sixties, can regret their inadequacies and failures, their romanticism, their capacity for self-deception, their shrillness, their self-righteousness. It is less easy to scorn their efforts however blundering and ineffective to change the world. (396)

Nor is the sentimental element to be neglected when revisiting the 1930s in the years that followed. At times nostalgic of one's own youth, it resounds strongly in Alfred Kazin's *Starting Out in the Thirties*:

What young writers of the thirties wanted was to prove the literary value of our experience, to recognize the possibility of art in our own lives, to feel that we had moved the streets, the stockyards, the hiring hall to literature – to show that the radical strength could carry on the experimental impulse of modern literature. (15)

Significantly, his words blend together the radical strength and the experimental impulse of modern literature. Instead, many, perhaps too many, as already mentioned, tended to judge the entire artistic season as an important caesura within twentieth-century art that condemned the *avant-garde* and the artistic experimentalism as products of the dominant culture and the social system.

However, if we consider that the MOMA in New York was inaugurated in 1932, that Diego Rivera's muralism (revolutionary as a theme, an objective and an end) was given the task, not without some disagreement, of "illustrating Radio City" and in Hollywood, and that in the mid-1930s, Sergei Eisenstein was asked to shoot *Que Viva Mexico!*, it can thus be easily understood that definite schemes could not and cannot be made.

At all levels of ideological-political influx and artistic modernism, Europe and Mexico appear to be tied together in the 'not isolated' literary generation of the 1930s – a generation in which the political and cultural relations with Europe are, as can be easily inferred from what has been briefly said before, somewhat obvious. Less evident, or at least less directly known and often handed over to the "regional" bibliography, are the strong ties with Mexico, its revolution, and its muralists.

What American proletarian writers held in common with Mexican muralists was the notion that writing an easy book "written for whoever has enough elementary knowledge of the English language to read through the page of a novel" (Dos Passos, *A Note on Fitzgerald* 342) meant having recourse to the accumulated wisdom, subtlety, and technical experience of the craft as it had developed in the first quarter of the century. It is therefore

not surprising that Dos Passos himself should see the connection clearly just before starting on his "proletarian" trilogy:

I got back to New York in March with as many stories in my head as a dog has fleas. Something new had come into my thoughts further to distract me.... I was trying to organize some of these stories I had picked up in Mexico into the intertwined narratives that later became *The 42nd Parallel*.

Three Soldiers and *Manhattan Transfer* had been single panels; now, somewhat as the Mexican painters felt compelled to paint their walls I felt compelled to start on a narrative panorama to which I saw no end. (Dos Passos, *The Best Times* 191)

In the 1930s, besides, the muralists were also active in the States, bringing along their "mission" to Detroit, New York, and San Francisco. In Rivera's words:

An artist – that is, an accumulator of the strivings and desires of the masses and an emissary to whom the masses transmit the synthesis of their wishes to serve as an expression of their cause and to help them to social organization. (3)

A mission therefore met with interest but also with hot discussion, especially in Detroit.

We can therefore state that in Detroit, in the spring of 1932, all the themes that would be agitating and consuming the American "proletarian art" of that period as well as its relation to public opinion converged in a compendium of sorts.

What was in question was not only the legitimacy of art *engagée* (a theme that was neither new nor in this case particularly scrutinized) but also, and above all, the relation between ideological commitment and formal solutions. The relation between the need to speak *to* the masses (not just *about* them) and the fidelity to a search for language, which, to paraphrase Rivera, does not discard the contributions of the most recent artistic research, and which will not fall short of its own necessary loyalty to the "trade." This, in turn, involves the problem of the intelligibility of the work of art and of the relation between its modernity and its difficulty – the relation between the work's artistic and moral commitment and, consequently, its unpleasantness.

After all, the Mexican and Russian revolutions were somehow perceived by American intellectual public opinion in the 1930s as closely linked. This is how they were described in 1935:

In 1917, in both Mexico and Russia, acceleration of the rate of social change had reached a stage called revolution. Eighteen years hereafter, in 1935, each of the nations triumphantly proclaims its revolutionary character, and both are indiscriminately viewed with suspicion, hostility and fury by the peoples whose current social trends are more leisurely. The revolutions of Mexico and Russia, though possessed of more than one feature in common, are certainly not in the same category. They travel divergent roads toward separate goals. They vary in tempo. They employ different methods. They achieve diverse ends. (Rypins 151)

One of the great differences as far as the United States is concerned is certainly the geographic one. Mexico is close at hand stimulating innumerable passages and experiences from one country to the other. Written dispatches and periodicals also signed by important literary authors bear excellent witness together with the narratives of the time:

Then they went to have a cup of coffee in a Mexican restaurant where some of the boys hung out. Everybody talked Mexico. Madero had started his revolution. The fall of Diaz was expected any day.... The talk of revolution and foreign places made him feel happy and adventurous again, as if he had a purpose in life. "Say, Mac, let's go to Mexico and see if there's anything in this revolooosione talk". (Dos Passos, *The 42nd Parallel* 136-37)

We are right in the middle of Mac's story, one of the imaginary characters in *The 42nd Parallel*, the first volume of Dos Passos' trilogy *USA*, published in 1930. Mac is talking with Ben Evans, and both have been active members of a left wing union, yet now Mac, the real proletarian of the two, appears to be drifting into a quiet, middle class existence with a permanent job in a printer's shop with a wife, children, and tidy home. The trip to Mexico will be postponed. Yet, right from this initial exchange, some key words emerge that we shall deal with – as an interpretive grid as well – during our discussion: revolution and exoticism, adventure and happiness, all of which combine with the pursuit of the meaning of one's life.

Mac alone will cross the border ("I want to kinda get into things, into the revolution," 141) and with him the reader will go through the first years of the revolution rather superficially and with lengthy interruptions. When he arrives in Mexico, Madero has already been murdered and has become a popular myth. Mac, along with the readers, finds out about it from a song sung by two blind *Indios* in the market, while a Mexican anarchist who has worked in the U.S. and speaks English sketches out for Mac the main events, giving him a political key:

They sing about the murder of Madero ... It is very good for the education of the people ... You see, they cannot read the papers so they get their news in songs ... It was your ambassador who murdered Madero. He was a bourgeois idealist but a great man. (142)

The lesson in politics ends on an unusual note: the room of a young prostitute by the name of Encarnaciòn, with a small bed, a picture of the Holy Virgin and a portrait of Madero pinned to the wall. Here lands, for the time being, Mac's revolutionary rage.

Quick to pass judgment and given to naive impressions devoid of subtleties, similar to the elementary chromaticism of the scene just described, our hero falls easy prey to the most simplistic and gross opinions of those with whom he can exchange a few words in English:

"Say, what do they say around here about Zapata?" "My God, he is the bloodthirstier villain of the lot ... My God, pardner you don't know what kind of country this is ... d'you know what wa'd do if we had a man in the White House instead of a yellow-bellied reformer? We'd get up an army of a hundred thousand men and clean this place up ... It's a hell of a fine country but there is not one of these damned greasers worth the powder and shot to shoot 'em ... Everymother's sonvabitch of 'em is a Zapata under the skin. (347)

His interlocutor is now emblematically a North American who has been working for the petrol industry in Mexico for fifteen years. (All the details will be realistically confirmed, if from Dos Passos' ironic/sarcastic reconstruction we consider the contemporary accounts of the revolution.)

Mac, setting aside once more his good intentions in knowledge seeking and participation, finds a job in the printing plant of an English-language

newspaper in Mexico City, the *Mexican Herald*. The tone and the accents of his countrymen will not change:

round the printing plant everybody talked just like the man in the bar ... "One of these days there will be revolution and then goodbye Mexican Herald ... unless Wilson makes intervention mighty quick" "Sounds alright with me; I want to see the social revolution" said Mac. (348)

A short, ironic compendium of the Mexican revolution compared to the U.S. interface. In effect, Mac is not the only character in Dos Passos' trilogy *USA* to go to Mexico, nor the only historical context offered to the reader. Newspaper titles, front pages, news and history, that is to say the mix of news and history, provide Dos Passos with the information needed to synthesize and express life in the United States in the twentieth century. In the news reports and in the history of the United States of those years, Mexico and its revolution appear subdued but threatening and constant. Dos Passos accounts for it.

In the *Newsreels*, an assemblage of banality and drama, we find a quick and at times frantic synthesis of three or four years of Mexican history as perceived by the average U.S. viewer.

The sources, both for Dos Passos and the United States, are in turn also literary. Such is the autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, which, though published in the 1930s, reconstructs the atmosphere of the years before World War I, once again linking the Mexican revolution to the Russian one:

In both countries land-hunger was a prime stimulus to political upheaval. Initiated in 1911 by Zapata in the State of Morelos, the idea of land seizure spread quickly, without benefit of communist propaganda, through a population of 16,000,000 people, the bulk of whom do not know that Karl Marx ever existed. The need of land was basic in Mexico as in Russia. (Rypins 155)

Insurgent Mexico, John Reed's documentary book, offers a similar synthesis. As is well known, John Reed would also write *The Ten Days that Shook the World*, and he is now buried in the Red Square next to Lenin's monument. He became a strong reference point for the 1930s writers, who, among other things, set up Jack Reed's clubs for most of the decade.

Considering the chronological coincidence, the two authors take on very different positions in relation to the protagonists/antagonists of the Mexican drama during those years. Jack is a great admirer of Pancho Villa. His reconstruction of Pancho Villa's revolution is populated by hungry but generous *peones*, in rags but noble. Through his commentaries and reports they will win the hearts of certain American readers:

"The Revolucìon is good. When it is done we shall never starve, never, never, never, if God is served" – tells a pacifico to Reed, also adding upon a new question of the reporter – "Why don't the pacificos fight?" ... "Now they do not need us. They have no rifles for us, or horses. They are winning.... But if the Revolucìon loses, there will be no more pacificos. Then we will rise ..." (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 43-44)

Thus, the revolution is good, and it is the people's revolution. Steffens, on the other hand, who – as stated before – will get to the scene a little later, is detached and indulging in self-irony:

I was in Italy when the war broke, the long-expected, well-prepared-for, sudden world war, and I headed straight away to Mexico ... I thought ... that this inevitable war would put such a strain on the economic and political organizations of the already heavily indebted, overtaxed, unhappy countries that their people would rise in revolts which would merge in the inevitable "European revolution" ... I guessed that I would have to experience at least two revolutions to understand one. I looked around for a revolution and there was Mexico in the throes of one. I would go to Mexico. (Steffens, *Autobiography* 712-14)

For Steffens, the Mexican revolution is neither a senseless nor a cruel rebellion, but it is rather ironically and bitterly an attempt at a revolution.

From such starting points, it is not surprising that even the most apparently concrete and factual circumstances reveal a deep interpretive diversity. Reed's accounts of a defeat suffered by the rebel forces are to be considered the most beautiful pages of his book, pages that are both animated and moving and have rightly inspired more than one film version:

One sleeping soldier, squatting on the edge of the heap with his rifle across his knees, snored deeply. Flies covered him – the dead hummed with them.... the trench was boiling with men scrambling to their feet, like worms when you turn over a log.... They were simply peons who had risen in arms, like my friends of La Tropa ... among [them] were many who had been bandits in the old days. Unpaid, ill-clad, undisciplined... (208-21)

Up the track in the hot morning light straggled a river of wounded men, shattered bleeding, bound up in rotting and bloody bandages, inconceivably weary. (201)

The main protagonists of the revolution are certainly subjected to contrasting representations. Starting with Madero, who, though dead, represents the necessary background to the ongoing drama. For the insurgent *peones*, he is a myth (to the extent that Reed tells us that one of the revolution's programmatic declarations began with a surprising "We are fighting to restore Francisco I. Madero to the Presidency," (58)). Steffens, on the other hand, describes Madero in a somewhat detached fashion.

The saintly prophet was not able to cope with the worldly wise men. There was a plot. The Americans were in it. Madero the weak was disposed to be fair and his fairness showed his weakness. (726)

Though divided in judging the man and the statesman, our observers express the same judgment when it comes to the U.S. intervention in his affairs and what that intervention implied and produced. In effect, the American ambassador, Wilson, is accused of something more than mere disinterest. Aside from the role played in the subversive conspiracy, he is held responsible for not having at least acted to save Madero's life. He is also accused of hiding behind formal assurances as well as of the icy denial with which he responded to the interventions of other diplomats or to the pleas of Madero's father first and later of the wife of the deposed President himself. And yet "In Mexico everyone knew that Madero was in danger" (Waugh 142). Steffens bitterly recalls:

We wanted all, we Americans, so we did not join in the killing, oh no, we were only in the plot which anybody who knew Mexico knew would lead to

the killing of Madero, as it did "for attempting to escape", as the history goes. (Steffens, *Autobiography* 726)

For both Steffens and Reed, Carranza's contribution to the revolution is mythically endowed with ancient gestures:

When the Madero Revolution broke out Carranza took the field in truly medieval fashion ... and when the Revolution was done, Madero made him Governor of Coahuila. There he was when Madero was murdered at the Capital, and Huerta, seizing the Presidency, sent a circular letter to the Governors of the different States ... Carranza refused even to answer the letter, declaring that he would have no dealings with a murderer and a usurper. (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 241)

For Steffens, as we have seen, he's the only man to be counted on. He's not a revolutionary in strict terms, but he is "honest and liberal" (Tedeschini, "Revolution" 88). For Reed, instead, despite everything, he's the landowner who ignores the revolution's central theme:

Carranza's political program ... carefully avoids any promise of settlement of the land question ... But Villa, being a peon, and feeling with them, rather than consciously reasoning it out, that the land question is the real cause of the Revolution ... (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 139-140)

Villa, for Reed, is something else. In the dispatches that he sends to his newspaper, he narrates Villa's epic deeds and begins to sketch out his heroic traits:

When Madero took the field in 1910, Villa was still an outlaw ... about three months after they rose in arms, Villa suddenly appeared in El Paso and put himself, his band, his knowledge of the country and all his fortune at the command of Madero ... Villa became a Captain in the Maderista army, and as such went to Mexico City with Madero and was made honorary general of the new rurales ... In Jimenez, Huerta suddenly summoned Villa before a court-martial ... During all this time Villa never wavered in his loyalty to Madero – an unheard-of thing in Mexican history ... He set himself with all his force to learn to read and write ... He spoke the crude Spanish of the very poor – what is called *pelado*. ... From that time to the outbreak of the last revolution, Villa

lived in El Paso, Texas, and it was from there that he set out, in April, 1913, to conquer Mexico with four companions, three led horses, two pounds of sugar and coffee, and a pound of salt ... in seven and a half [months] ... Northern Mexico was almost free. (124-26)⁴

An epic narrated much like traditional storytelling, which is a perfect match for the ongoing popular mythologizing process: *El Amigo de Los Pobres*, *El General Invencible*, *El Inspirador de la Bravura y del Patriotismo*, *la Esperanza de la Republica India*. Reed does more than just mentioning these titles; his writing also appears to embody them in a series of unforgettable sketches:

Villa never drinks nor smokes, but he will outdance the most ardent novio in Mexico. (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 135)

His face was drawn into lines of fatigue. "Caramba!" he was saying with a grin, "we started dancing Monday evening, danced all night, all the next day, and last night, too! What a baile! And what muchachas!" (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 176)

The reds in New York who were watching Mexico were on Villa's side, but the only reason they gave was that he was at least a bandit, a Barabbas whereas Carranza was a respectable, landowning bourgeois (Steffens, *Autobiography* 715).

Without diminishing the moral and political tension of *Insurgent Mexico*, it is easy to detect in Reed's pages, even after they were turned into a book, the eye and the sensibility of a reporter:

I ran. – he narrates of his own participation to a dramatic defeat – I wondered what time it was. I wasn't very frightened. Everything still was so unreal.... I kept thinking to myself: "Well, this is certainly an experience. I'm going to have something to write about." (98)

Mexico, its revolution and the protagonists of the revolution itself offer themselves easily to literature. This Mexico is, in fact, also a landscape not without literary recollections. Often, the highly chromatic landscape is in contrast with the dramatic events taking place there. It is, however, counterbalanced by the vast and desolate Northern plains described by Reed, which are nonetheless vibrant with humanity:

A hot sun popped over the western mountains, burning in a clear sky. For a moment the ground poured up billowing steam, and then there was dust again, and a thirsty land. There might never have been rain. A hundred breakfast fires smoked from the car tops, and the women stood turning their dresses slowly in the sun, chattering and joking. Hundreds of little naked babies danced around. ... (179)

Folklore, at times splendidly interpreted, dominates the scene. It dominates in the crowds of the faithful filling the churches of Mexico City or the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, in the *veladas* narrated by Reed, or in the *pastores* represented during the night of the Epiphany:

The Pastores ... A nightingale burst into song somewhere ... Small boys were dispatched to tell the band to stop while the song went on. That was very exciting ... this was the kind of thing which had preceded the Golden Age of the Theater in Europe – the flowering of the Renaissance. It was amusing to speculate what the Mexican Renaissance would have been if it had not come so late. (282-92)

Together with its serene joyfulness, generosity is another aspect of this simple people. Some of Reed's sketches, in this sense, verge on the oleographic as in the case of Don Pedro, the goat keeper. He gives Reed his room and his bed (in a moment of overflowing, heartfelt generosity) while he and his family move to the kitchen, and again with his occasional fellow travelers "simply and generously divided the food: ... 'Hey, *compañero*, have you breakfasted? Here is a piece of my *tortilla*. Come and eat!'" (215).

A proper film scene (and we have seen many like it indeed). Again, cinematographic memories are tied to glimpses of the landscape while Mexican magic is invoked to put a seal on the extraordinary beauty of such unique nature.

As can be noticed, beyond the interest that the two reporters of the first Mexican revolution devote to bare chronicle from opposite sides, there is also, for both of them, an overpowering urge to romantic transfiguration more or less explicitly surrendering itself to the 1930s' generation, which draws from it all its own literary interest in the Mexican revolution experiment.

Sometimes, the theme of a Mexican story "outside history" appears, frozen in ideal Middle Ages where beauty appears to be an almost adequate reward for tragedy. Jack Reed recounts it almost painfully:

But already around the narrow shores of the Mexican Middle Ages beat the great seas of modern life – machinery, scientific thought, and political theory. Mexico will have to skip for a time her Golden Age of Drama. (292)

It has rightly been said that the Mexican revolution has often expressed itself in “image-like forms” (Bottiglieri), and it is also true that through them it continues to speak to our collective imagination. Let us reflect again, looking back to the “committed” 1930s discovering the Mexican revolution as a literary theme, on Eisenstein’s unfortunate Hollywood adventure. Commissioned to shoot a film on Mexico (*Que Viva Mexico!*), the great film director would not be given the authorization to edit and finish it. The script would be totally rewritten by Upton Sinclair. Eisenstein wanted “to tell the tragic history of Mexico, without actors or sets” (Bottiglieri). Some maimed versions are still surviving in film libraries.

Yet, if we were to consider the New York Museum of Modern Art version, we would immediately notice that, though conceived without a scenography, the film is highly scenographic due to the precious use the director makes of the Mexican landscape and people. His cactuses, his stones as essences of pure design, the dwarf palms sometimes used as curtains, the sea and the trees silhouetted against the light but also the rounded shapes of the *sombreros* and the bent shoulders of the *peones* become the real backdrop for the episodes (some as documentaries, others as thematic). “The Mexican people” had to be “the protagonist of the film as the symbol of unity against all oppression,” and it certainly does come into the scene: peasant, shepherd, *soldadera*;⁵ though “its elegant laziness” is also represented in the refined dressing up of the torero (who, with his enduring smile while the camera lingers on the silken stockings, is almost a citation from *The Blue Angel*) and the dramatic merrymaking in the worship of the dead.

This is a black and white film aiming to be a “symphony in colour” (Bottiglieri) of Mexico, and it achieves its end because its source, the Mexican muralists, is patently highly chromatic. It is with Orozco, Siqueiros and Rivera, that Eisenstein would make his exploratory trip before beginning to shoot his film. It is through the great muralists that the revolution has already become, at the beginning of the 1930s, art, representation, and teaching

material. The almost contemporary *Portrait of Mexico* makes for strong evidence. The book is by Bertram D. Wolf, and, as its subtitle clarifies, it illustrates Mexican history and characters and its revolution through Diego Rivera's watercolors, designs, incisions, and *murales*.

Thus, in the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, hunger, and union struggles, the United States takes on the Mexican revolution once more: juxtaposing the *topoi* of a literary chronicle and even its stereotypes with a more mature figurative experience providing the best of them with the filter of irony, sarcasm, and political satire. Obviously, this does not necessarily warrant a better understanding of the revolution, which conveniently took place next door. The transnational experience has to be aligned with the strong and obviously transnational presence of the Russian revolution.

The relation between the United States, the European experience (political and artistic), and the Mexican experience (political and artistic, too) consequently becomes an essential interpretive key of that historical-literary adventure.

Notes

¹ For the quotes related to Mexico see Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli's "'Art as a Weapon' as a Popular Issue: Detroit's Reception of Diego Rivera's Murals" and "Revolution in the Backyard."

² In his July 13, 1865, *New York Tribune* editorial, Horace Greeley famously advised "Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country." Cfr. Rabinowitz.

³ Letter to Marie Howe, April 3, 1919 (Steffens, *Letters* 463).

⁴ It should be noticed that Villa's romantic-heroic features are not only the prerogative of Reed's writings. His character, if not at a historical level, at least at the level of popular reception and construction, maintains some common traits. The recordings of the memories and impressions of the protagonists of the heroic years of the revolution still living in 1977 (cfr. Martinez) bear evidence on it. Reed's portrayal is intuitive.

⁵ Obviously even Reed talks about it: "Ah! it is a life for us *viejas*, says a *soldadera* to the American reporter – *Adio*, but we follow our men out in the campaign, and then do not know from hour to hour whether they live or die. I remember well when Filadelfo. ... said: 'Come! We are going out to fight because the good Pancho Madero has been murdered this day!' ... And I said: 'Why must I come?' And he answered: 'Shall I starve, then? Who shall make my *tortillas* for me but my woman?'" (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 188-189). *Soldaderas*, in contrast (but not excessively) to the women fighters, as Colonel Ramona Flores: "... stout, red-haired Mexican woman in a black satin princess dress embroidered with jet, with a sword at her side.

... Her husband had been killed while an officer in the first Revolution, leaving her a gold mine, with the proceeds of which she had raised a regiment and taken the field." (Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* 248).

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