

Soldaderas and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution¹

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*Si Adelita se fuera con otro
la seguiría por tierra y por mar.
Si por mar en un buque de guerra
Si por tierra en un tren militar.
Adelita, por Dios te lo ruego,
calma el fuego de esta mi pasión,
porque te amo y te quiero rendido
y por ti sufre mi fiel corazón.²*

If Adelita should go with another
I would follow her over land and sea.
If by sea in a battleship
If by land on a military train.
Adelita, for God's sake I beg you,
calm the fire of my passion,
because I love you and I cannot resist it
and my faithful heart suffers for you.³

“La Adelita” was one of the most popular songs of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). According to some sources (see Soto 1990:44), this ballad was originally inspired by a Durangan woman who had joined the Maderista movement⁴ at an early age. Troubadours made the song—and Adelita herself—a popular emblem of the Revolution. As Baltasar Dromundo put it, “las guitarras de todas partes se iban haciendo eruditas en ese canto hasta que por fin la Revolución hizo de ella su verdadero emblema nacional” (guitarists from all over were becoming experts in that song and it became the true emblem of the Revolution) (1936:40). Significantly, Adelita’s surname, as well as the family names of many other *soldaderas* (soldier-women), remained virtually unknown. However, the popular songs composed in honor of these women contributed enormously to their fame and to documenting their role in the Revolution. Shirlene Soto has pointed out that: “Two heroines of the Revolution, Adelita and Valentina, were considered ‘the essence of Mexican femininity,’ and the *corridos* written to honor them had widespread popularity” (1990:44).⁵ Over time, Adelita’s name was used to refer to any female soldier who participated in the Mexican Revolution, so that “Adelita” gradually be-

came synonymous with “soldadera.” Today, among women in both México and the U.S., Adelita is a symbol of action and inspiration, and her name is used to mean any woman who struggles and fights for her rights.

But almost from the beginning, the song and the role of its subject have been given different, often conflicting, interpretations. As the battle hymn of Pancho Villa’s troops, “La Adelita” expressed the sensitivity and vulnerability of men, emphasizing the stoicism of the rebellious male soldier as he confronts the prospect of death:

*Si supieras que ha muerto tu amante,
rezarás por mi una oración,
por el hombre que supo adorarte
con el alma, vida y corazón.* (Dromundo 1936:39)⁶

If you find out your lover has died,
say a prayer for me,
for the man who adored you
with his soul, life, and heart.

Here, the speaking subject of “La Adelita” feels sorrowful at the prospect of dying in combat and never seeing his beloved again, but he accepts his likely death after expressing his love. In this guise, “La Adelita” is a song of hope, based on virility, and the name Adelita becomes a metaphor for love in times of war. Similarly, in other versions of the song analyzed by the feminist scholar María Herrera-Sobek, Adelita’s bravery and revolutionary spirit are lost to the fatalism and insecurities of male soldiers who are focused on passions, love, and desire as they face combat:

*Recordando aquel sargento sus quereres
los soldados que volvían de la guerra
ofreciéndole su amor a las mujeres
entonaban este himno de la guerra.* (1990:107)

The sergeant was remembering his loved ones
when the soldiers were returning from the battle
offering their love to the women
they would sing this song of war.

“La Adelita” is a composition that stages gender relations within their interrelated subjectivities. In situating “La Adelita” as the focus of my text, I discuss the narrative and subject position of the protagonist as a soldadera of the Mexican Revolution. Throughout this essay, as I employ the tools of literary criticism, textual analysis, and historical interpretation to gain a deeper understanding of the problematic identity of the soldier-woman Adelita, I am guided by insights from the work of contemporary feminist scholars. Just as Anna Macías, Clara Lomas, María Herrera-Sobek, and Shirlene Soto have attempted to reconstruct the dynamic participation of women in various contexts during the Mexican Revolution, so in this work I attempt to construct and deconstruct romantic notions of the revolutionary subject in the contexts of culture, and specifically drama, as I examine how the soldadera has been variously represented and misrepresented. Adelita, whether in popular songs or in plays, represents a contested paradigm that demands further critical reflection.

I begin my analysis by discussing the narrative included in Baltasar Dromundo’s 1936 book, *Francisco Villa y La Adelita*, in which “La Adelita” is presented as a major figure among the troops of General Francisco Villa. I also analyze Josefina Niggli’s play *Soldadera*, which she wrote about the same time

that Dromundo's book was released.⁷ Niggli's drama stages the participation of women in the Mexican Revolution, characterizing Adela, the protagonist of "La Adelita," as a hero of the Revolution. In both works, Adelita is presented as a soldier, but in Dromundo's book, the central tension involves the age-old equation of male power with superiority and female subordination with inferiority. Niggli preserves Adelita's bravery but undermines her position by attributing to the heroine overwhelming naivete and romantic idealism.

Clearly, Adelita's identity, in particular her subjectivity as a soldier of the Revolution, has been shaped and reshaped many times and in many contexts. Thus the aim of this study is to trace the connections between these various treatments of Adelita and the gender and power relations embedded in the larger social, political, and cultural environment.

Adelita As an Object of Desire

*Si Adelita quisiera ser mi esposa,
Si Adelita fuera mi mujer,
le compraría un vestido de seda
para llevarla a bailar al cuartel.* (Dromundo 1936:38)

If Adelita wanted to be my wife,
If Adelita would be my woman,
I would buy her a silk dress
to take her dancing at the barracks.

In his short book, *Francisco Villa y La Adelita*, Baltasar Dromundo uses folklore as a source of information about two legendary figures: General Francisco Villa, the leader of powerful revolutionary troops in the northern state of Chihuahua and a champion of agrarian reform; and Adelita, a soldier-woman whose beauty and courageous acts during the Revolution attracted much attention. Dromundo includes a version of "La Adelita" that he maintains is the original composition of an anonymous troubadour of the Mexican Revolution. He presents the story of Adelita, narrating a significant event in her life and dramatizing the situation by combining his prose with dialogue between the protagonists Adelita and Francisco Villa. As a text within a text, the musical composition increases the dramatic tension of the story Dromundo presents:

*Ya no llores, querida Adelita,
ya no llores, querida mujer,
no te muestres ingrata conmigo,
ya no me hagas tanto padecer.* (39)

Don't cry anymore, my beloved Adelita,
don't cry anymore, my beloved woman,
don't be hardhearted with me,
don't make me suffer anymore.

In Dromundo's book, Adelita is described as a *norte a* (a woman from the north) who is a beautiful and courageous soldier, but also a "heartbreaker." She is depicted as a major figure among the followers of Francisco Villa. According to Dromundo's anecdote, the day the General first noticed Adelita, she had been selected to give the speech at a banquet held in his honor. Adelita was at that point romantically involved with Francisco Portillo (also known as *el güero*), who was regarded as one of Pancho Villa's most courageous *dorados*.⁸ Villa, unaware of Adelita and Portillo's romance, found the

young woman's beauty and sagacious personality irresistible. That the General then followed up his feelings with immediate action was not surprising since Villa was reputed to be a passionate and daring man—and a womanizer.

In Dromundo's rendition, while Villa and Adelita are having a conversation, the General suddenly grabs her violently and kisses her: "*Cerca de la puerta se detuvo Villa y bruscamente tomó a Adelita entre sus brazos y la besó*" (Near the door, Villa stopped and violently grabbed Adelita in his arms and kissed her) (36). Although this scenario is absurdly romantic, in its melodrama it resembles images from commercial films produced in México since the 1930s, in which the beautiful *se orita* is always seduced, conquered, and loved—or "dishonored"—by a handsome *charro*. More significantly, in Dromundo's anecdote, gender relations are indirectly problematized so that domination comes to determine the protagonists' interrelated subjectivity. Moreover, this narrative encapsulates the manly power of a nation that subordinates the female subject, a symbolic paradigm of colonization. After the Spanish conquest of México, the subordination of women, already instituted in both countries, was reinforced by attitudes regarding caste and race. Anna Macías asserts that:

Undoubtedly *machismo* ("extreme male dominance") and its counterpart, *hembrismo* ("extreme female submission"), have been pervasive in Mexico, in part because of the Aztec subordination of women and even more because of the Spanish colonial experience. (1982:3)

Dromundo constructs a very dramatic text in order to explain the situation that links Adelita with General Villa. The central event in Dromundo's narrative—in which Villa imposes his power and strength on Adelita—is easily interconnected with the larger narrative of machismo and sexism in which the male protagonist imposes his power and maleness on a female. In my reading of Villa's imposition, representations of superiority and inferiority in relation to gender differences and sexual power are central. Villa's compulsive behavior is an affirmation of his superiority; Adelita's submission is inevitable. The physical and metaphysical force evident in Villa's action is self-explanatory: "It is force without the discipline of any notion of order: arbitrary power, the will without reins and without a set course" (Paz 1985:81). In Dromundo's narrative, Adelita—by virtue of her beauty and intelligence—is the seducer. She is Eve. Francisco Villa's action is predetermined by his masculinity. His attitude is never questioned; it is understood that his violent act is instinctual.

Villa's actions embody the representations of manly power as the generative force of his condition as a *macho*, and, of course, historically speaking, as the General. Whether Adelita liked or disliked Villa's imposition, or whether her flirtation (as it was described by Dromundo) induced the General to commit such an act, is irrelevant to my argument. I am much more concerned with the effects produced by the representations of sexual power and gender relations. Mexican poet and philosopher Octavio Paz believes that the inferiority of the female stems from her sexuality (specifically, her vagina), which he defines as an open "wound" incapable of healing. The macho's essential attribute is manifested in his capacity for "wounding, humiliating, annihilating" (1985:82). According to Paz, "the *macho* represents the masculine pole of life," and he feels superior because he cannot be made to "open" (81). The "real meaning" of macho, Paz says, "is no different from that of the verb *chingar* and its derivatives. The *macho* is the *gran chingón*" (81).⁹

In the Freudian scheme of thought, the female's lack of a penis contributes to her inferiority. For Freud, this connection between human sexuality and subjectivity was a product of established, subliminal processes that could be exposed and perhaps modified through psychoanalysis. In Paz's work, the ob-



session with the verb “chingar” is a manifestation of his own internalized racism. Emma Pérez has suggested that Paz’s inferiority complex “holds less power than that of his symbolic white father, *el conquistador*” (1991:168). Authoritarian and patriarchal, both Freud and Paz became trapped in the circles of complex paradoxes involving women, sexuality, and male domination. In Dromundo’s narrative, this paternal law seems to support the association of power with masculinity and Villa’s role as the General. The bipolar relationship between Francisco Villa and Adelita is a dramatization of the culture of the superior-inferior dyad—the complex set of rules and rights embedded in the position of “master” (the General, the man) and the “subordinate” (the soldier, the woman).

Although Dromundo’s textual treatment of “La Adelita” emphasizes the song’s narrative nature, it is important to remember that the story first gained currency as a popular ballad, a *corrido*. Thus, the story was and is integrally bound to its performance. In México, the *corrido* developed as a unique tradition of the lower classes. In giving representation to the illiterate masses and recounting (often satirically) stories of current interest, the *corrido* resembled the English ballad of the 17th century. However, while the English ballad was printed and then transmitted orally, the *corrido* was first performed and then later printed, often anonymously. Sometimes the printed ballads were sold for one or two cents each. Since *corridos* were transmitted orally before being transcribed from memory, versions of any single song varied among troops and between any one performer (or group of performers) and another. During the Revolution, *corridos* were sung not only for the glorification of soldiers, but also to disseminate news of national import. “La Adelita” served as model for the glorification of the female soldier who became the potential lover, girlfriend, or wife of combat soldiers. The performative functionality of “La Adelita” lies in its enactment of real—albeit contested—history. As a text within a text, the ballad is useful analytically because it helps expose the performance of gender relations rooted in the upheaval of social transformation.

The story of Adelita in Dromundo’s text does not end with the narrative of male imposition and cultural revenge. Portillo, witnessing the way in which Villa grabs his sweetheart Adelita, automatically draws his gun, intending to kill the General. But he hesitates, caught in the web of the master-subordinate relationship. He cannot kill his superior. He backs away, shooting himself, instead. Adelita runs toward the dead body of her beloved Portillo and embraces him, crying out. Francisco Villa, looking confused and upset, asks for an explanation:

—¿Qué sabes de esto? [What do you know about this?]

—Era mi novio, repuso Adelita sollozando. [He was my boyfriend, Adelita replied, sobbing.] (37)

Villa’s reaction is to blame Adelita. In his eyes, she created the situation by deliberately seducing him. In retaliation, he asks her to leave his troops, and Adelita agrees. She joins General Domingo Arrieta’s forces, but later disappears and then returns to Villa’s army disguised as a male soldier. Hiding her beautiful face under the shadow of a wide straw hat, she passes as one of his brave *dorados*. Adelita dies in combat in 1915, during one of the bloodiest fights of the Villistas (the first battle of Celaya). After the battle, when Francisco Villa is walking among the dead bodies of his *dorados*, he finds Adelita’s corpse. Very moved and surprised, Villa declares, “¡Era un dorado!” acknowledging her bravery.¹⁰ Dramatically, he takes Adelita’s dead body in his arms and gives orders for it to be buried beside Francisco Portillo’s grave. With Adelita the woman dead, all that remains is “La Adelita,” the song:

1. *Two defiant soldaderas appear ready for combat.*
(Photo in Casasola 1969:67; courtesy of Alicia Arrizón)

*Y Adelita se llama la joven
que yo quiero y no puedo olvidar;
en el mundo yo tengo una rosa
y con el tiempo la voy cortar.* (38)

And Adelita is the name of a young woman
whom I love and I can't forget;
in the world I have a rose
and in time I will cut it.

The Role of Women in the Revolution

Adelita and Other Rebels

Whether the Adelita celebrated in songs and plays was a real, historical subject or a mythical figure composed of bits and pieces of women who took part in the Mexican Revolution has not been definitively established. María Herrera-Sobek, for one, questions whether there was an actual Adelita. She offers the well-known argument that Adelita was a nurse and not a fighting soldadera. Herrera-Sobek's sources claim that during a personal interview, a woman named Adela Velarde recounted her involvement in the Revolution. Adela insisted that Sergeant Antonio del Rio Armenta, a member of the Carrancista's troops, had written the song in her honor. Mortally wounded in combat, del Rio had died in her arms, after declaring his secret love for her (Herrera-Sobek 1990:108).

If Adela Velarde was not a fighting soldier, many other women were, as Gustavo Casasola's pictorial work has documented. For example, in his *Biografía Ilustrada del General Francisco Villa 1878–1966*, Casasola includes a picture of two unidentified soldaderas (1969:67; plate 1). One carries a sword; the other holds a gun. Both women stare defiantly at the camera and appear ready for combat. Each captures the spirit of Revolution; with their aggressiveness and indigenous beauty, these women are models of the fighting soldaderas.¹¹

Most of the soldaderas who joined the front lines of the Revolution were *mestizas* or Indian women. Sometimes, they went into combat carrying their children on their backs. Some soldaderas were teachers who left the classroom to join or support the troops. They risked their lives and left their families to take part in the Revolution. Regardless of their backgrounds, female participants in the Mexican Revolution did whatever was needed—they fought, foraged for food, cooked, nursed the wounded, and performed many other essential services (Soto 1990:43–45).¹² In México in 1986, I met Justina Carrasco, a mestiza. Do a Justina was then 94 years old and very proud to have participated in the Mexican Revolution. Called “*mi coronela*” (colonel) by some people in her community, she was well known and respected by all. Do a Justina confirmed that at one point during the Revolution, women fought on the front lines (1986).¹³ Of course, many of them also took care of wounded soldiers. For example, Apolinaria Flores, a *curandera* (healer), was a source of faith and hope for the Zapatista rebels (Soto 1990:46).

Among Las Adelitas there were rich as well as poor women, educated as well as uneducated.¹⁴ Some upper-class women fought not with guns but with words. These aristocrats, rebelling against the ideals of their own social class, were important advocates of an ideology of resistance and contributed to the development of revolutionary feminist consciousness. Despite the intensity and integrity of their struggle for social reform in a society where the conflicting role of women demanded redefinition, these pioneering rebels have not received the credit that is their due. In noting the diverse role women played during México's crisis, Anna Macías observes:

Yet, except for occasional references to *soldaderas*, most historians of the revolution have ignored the active role of Mexican women as precursors, journalists, propagandists, political activists, and soldiers. Only artists and novelists have given serious attention to the way the revolution victimized millions of women and, outside of religious publications, there has been a vast silence concerning the active role women played in opposing the anticlerical aspects of the Mexican Revolution. (1982:49)¹⁵

Macías contends, further, that it was from the status of these women that the Mexican feminist movement of the 1920s and 1930s drew its power.

One important feminist voice among the aristocrats was that of Leonor Villegas de Magnón. A vehement critic of dictator Porfirio Díaz, Villegas was a conspirator and a willing participant in the Mexican Revolution.¹⁶ She rejected both the ideals of the aristocratic class and the traditional role assigned to women in Mexican society. Villegas migrated in 1910 from México to Laredo, Texas, where she began to write for a Laredo newspaper and became a member of the Junta Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Council). In her introduction to Villegas de Magnón's memoir, *The Rebel*, Clara Lomas describes the author:

Villegas de Magnón protagonizes an "aristocratic" rebel whose task is to immortalize the border activism of *los fronterizos*, to move them from a marginal backstage to center stage. Her story provides yet another instance of the struggle for authority and interpretative power waged by the various revolutionary factions of the borderlands through one of the most powerful mediums of their oppositional discourse, the alternative press. (in Villegas de Magnón 1994:xi)¹⁷

Villegas de Magnón supported the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. In using her writing as a tool for liberation and intellectual growth, she joined many other women of her generation (such as, Sara Estela Ramírez, the Villareal sisters, Jovita Idar, and other members of *La Voz de La Mujer* and *Pluma Roja*) and contributed enormously to the growth of political and socio-cultural awareness at the turn of the century.¹⁸ Clara Lomas has pointed out that, in their writings, these women expressed different discursive positions with regard to nationalism, religion, and anarchism. In spite of these differences, however, they all consistently rejected the many restrictions attributed to gender inequality and sexual oppression, helping to shape a feminist consciousness on both sides of the border. But in much the same way as the participation of women in the Revolution has been overlooked as a historical subject, these women's writings and ideology have gone unrecognized. "These women's stories and publishing efforts, nonetheless, capture the realities of a people, the significance of whose daily existence transcends the limitations imposed by political and national borders" (Lomas 1994:xvii).

It is not unusual for the writings and activities of women, and especially those of feminists, to be wholly absent from the annals of history; often, however, women's deeds and words are not so much deleted as they are transformed beyond recognition. This process of redefinition is strikingly clear in the case of "La Adelita." Historically, the subject position of Adelita represents the female revolutionary. In many versions of the song, however, little mention is made of her participation as a soldier. Instead, Adelita is viewed as an object of male desire. As María Herrera-Sobek has observed, the transformation of Adelita into a love object "became problematic for the troubadour since he or she could not employ the classic form of the heroic corrido; a more flexible structure, a more lyrical framework, had to be employed to fit the romantic contents of the ballad" (1990:104).

In her discussion of the status of Adelita, Herrera-Sobek compares in detail the form and content of two versions of “La Adelita” taken from the Guerrero Collection¹⁹ (104). One version leaves Adelita’s status unclear; the other more obviously presents her as a soldier (106). As a historical figure, Adelita was a soldier-woman, attracting attention with her military uniform—cartridge belts slung across her chest, a rifle hung on her shoulder—and her bravery. Adelita’s revolutionary subjectivity represents the feminist spirit of the Mexican Revolution, but in many well-known renditions of the “La Adelita” song, that spirit has been distorted by the romanticization of her subject position as a lover of men.

Still, not all representations of Adelita have de-emphasized her role as a soldadera. In fact, as a paradigm of the female rebel, the soldadera was a source of inspiration for many people during and after the Revolution. The work of the artist Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913) is important in this regard. During the Revolution, Posada used *calaveras* (skulls or skeleton) as characters in his drawings in order to address the subject of the Revolution as a social manifesto. In 1910, as a part of his calavera collection, he created the *Calavera revolucionaria*, representing a woman soldier riding a horse among the rebellious troops (plate 2).²⁰ More than 25 years later, in homage to this same female revolutionary subjectivity, Josefina Niggli, one of the most prolific writers of the Mexican American period, created the drama *Soldadera*.²¹

Niggli’s Depiction of Adelita and Other Soldaderas

Josefina Niggli’s *Soldadera*, a full-length play in one act, was the first theatrical representation, north or south of the border, of the participation of female soldiers in the Mexican Revolution. Niggli’s editor, Frederick H. Koch, described this play as embodying “the heroic struggle of Mexican Valkyries in the Revolution of 1910” (in Niggli 1938:vii).²² The play depicts this struggle in strong, vivid terms, referring to “the women who left their homes and dragged along after their men, cooking for them, tending their wounds, guarding their ammunition, fighting when necessary” (x). Niggli uses the drama to explore the heroic role of women in the Revolution and to illustrate the personal and ideological reasons for becoming active protagonists.

Adelita is presented as a hero who sacrifices her life for the revolutionary cause. The dramatist describes the characterization of Adelita this way: “She is the poetry of the Revolution, and the beauty, and she who has seen almost nothing of death finds life very gay” (1938:57).

This depiction of Adelita as “the poetry of the Revolution” is evident in the theatrical lyricism embedded in the musical compositions of “La Adelita.” In her play, Niggli represents Adelita, other soldaderas, and the Revolution in romantic terms. She views them all through the lens of her own reality, one significantly shaped by the circumstances of her life as part of a particular generation in the United States. Her formative years were divided between Monterrey, México, where

2. Calavera revolucionaria by José Guadalupe Posada. The calavera (skull or skeleton) represents the soldadera who rode, marched, and fought with the rebellious bands against the federals. The drawing is from circa 1910. (Photo in Berdecio and Appelbaum 1972:12; courtesy of Alicia Arrizón)



she was born (in 1910), and San Antonio, Texas (where she was sent in 1913 to escape the disruption of the Revolution). Niggli started her writing career in 1928, when her father financed the printing of her first book, *Mexican Silhouettes*, a collection of poems; she also published poems and short stories in magazines such as *Mexican Life* and the *Ladies Home Journal*. As Niggli tells it, her career owed much to the no-nonsense approach of one of her teachers: Sister Mary Clement, of Incarnate Word College, locked Niggli in a room and would not let her come out until she had written a piece for the *Ladies Home Journal* short story contest. Niggli won second prize in that competition and later also won the National Catholic College Poetry Award.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, Niggli became very popular in San Antonio, Texas, where she was writing and producing for KTSA radio (55.5 AM). After receiving her B.A. in 1931, Niggli began to study playwriting at the San Antonio Little Theatre. In 1935, she decided to join the Carolina Playmakers, a graduate program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She completed her M.A. degree with *Singing Valley*, a play produced by the Carolina Playmakers in 1936. These were very creative years for Niggli. In addition to *Soldadera*, she wrote three historical plays about México, *The Fair God*, *The Cry of Dolores*, and *Azteca*. During the late 1930s, she returned to México to work as stage manager for Rodolfo Usigli, a well-known Mexican dramatist who was at that time directing the theatre department at the Universidad Autónoma de México. In 1956, Niggli was hired to teach English and drama at Western Carolina University, where she headed the theatre department until her retirement in 1975 (Shirley 1981:279–86).²³

As a privileged upper-class writer, Niggli took part in the intellectual search for community that characterized the emerging Mexican American upper and middle classes during the 1930s. Her writing developed as a product of her Americanization, mediated by such institutions as the family, the Catholic Church, and the educational system. Moreover, her ideological consciousness was shaped by the ideas of the exiled Mexican *nicos* who settled in San Antonio between 1908 and 1914 (see García 1983:67–93). Thus, it is not surprising that *Soldadera* is suffused with romanticism. Niggli's writing reflects her desire to make the Anglo-American public appreciate the Mexican experience in the U.S.²⁴ Portrayals of "the Mexican" and an exploration of her own Mexicanness, carefully translated and adapted for a foreign audience, are the core themes of Niggli's work.

In *Soldadera*, most of the characters were played by Anglo-Americans, including the role of Adelita (and except the role of Maria, who was played by Niggli). For Niggli, the Mexican spectator/protagonist—on both sides of the border—remained absent. Her didactic system of representation was specifically crafted to target Anglos. The system of production in *Soldadera* (and in her work in general) was a means of demanding her rights as a Mexican American, of making herself heard by the Anglo majority, of making herself known and "visible" as an ethnic "other." Niggli's dramatic work embodies Mexicanness as an inscription that marks ethnic subjecthood as a model for performing identity. This is evident in plate 3, where Niggli is pictured in festive attire, wearing a traditional *zarape* over her left shoulder and allowing her wide straw *sombrero* to ride across her shoulders. Her expression is narcissistic; she seems to be engaging in a deliberate performance of Mexican folklore.

Most of Niggli's plays, including *Soldadera*, were originally produced by Professor Frederick H. Koch and performed by the Carolina Playmakers for Anglo-American audiences. Rodolfo Usigli has noted this regrettably narrow focus: "Her source is essentially Mexican, but the treatment strikes in certain ways as a deliberate one, intended for a foreign public" (in Niggli 1938:xix). Focusing on a "foreign public," he makes clear, simultaneously implies the *ab-*



3. In this photo from the 1930s, Josefina Niggli poses in traditional festive attire with a zarape and wide straw sombrero over her shoulders. Her expression is narcissistic; she seems to be engaging in a deliberate performance of Mexican folklore. (Photo in Niggli 1938:viii; courtesy of Alicia Arrizón)

sence of a Mexican audience. This was disturbing. An admirer of Niggli's work, Usigli ranked her highly among such contemporaries in Mexican theatre as Celestino Gorostiza, Xavier Villaurrutia, and Amalia de Castillo Ledón. Still, he did not hesitate to criticize Niggli's failure to write for the Mexican audience of the 1930s, as his closing remarks in the foreword to *Mexican Folk Plays* demonstrate:

It has been my contention for some time that we will be in no position to promote the advent of a poetic theatre in Mexico so long as we do not have a true realistic drama created by playwrights well possessed of their craft and of the necessities and limitations of the theatre. I will, therefore, take this opportunity to excite Miss Niggli to write something along this line in Spanish to give the contemporary audiences of Mexico an occasion to appreciate her talents and to rejoice at the appearance of a new Mexican playwright. (1938:xx)

Niggli countered this criticism by maintaining that "The United States needed the folk drama more than Mexico. I wanted people to know the wonderful world south of the border and that there was something besides Europe" (in Shirley 1981:286).

For Niggli, the essence of the "wonderful world" of México lies in its vividness, its dramatic potential. She is not concerned with bringing to her audiences an understanding of the complex realities of life in México, nor is she interested in examining the dilemmas facing Mexican Americans. She evokes instead a kind of magical world summoned from objective knowledge and memory—a gauzy mixture of the real and the imagined. Niggli's artistic imagination was dominated by her yearning for her beloved México and by the conflict implicit in trying to integrate her cultural and social heritage into Anglo society. Her (unsuccessful) solution to the difficulties of blending her two heritages was to place the Mexican world wholly in the past and situate the inevitable process of assimilation in the present. A poem she wrote, included in the introduction to *Mexican Folk Plays*, clearly illustrates her strongly nationalistic sensibility:

Mexico, my beloved,
 is not the clashing of cymbals
 not the curving of vermilion sails
 over the heart
 of the wind;
 it is not
 a vivid slash
 across the mouth
 of the world.
 But when the moon touches the silken waves
 of the Lerma,
 and the carnations
 breathe their scents
 into the souls of a thousand birds

forcing them to sing
 of something
 they but dimly understand—
 this, my beloved,
 is Mexico. (1938:vi)

Faced with the crisis of the Great Depression, she uses her poetic imagination to try to capture the Mexican soul as the essence of her own identity. For Niggli, México is a “landscape” with a colorful and rich past.

Thus, in *Soldadera*, as she translates the folklore of México and gives form to history and tradition within the medium of the theatre, Niggli emphasizes her country’s dramatic, passionate qualities. The play’s stark setting is meant to impart a particular atmosphere more than to capture a specific, historical site:

The rocks are rugged spikes of stone against the dark blue sky. Here is no flowery green softness, no delicacy of outline, but a grim fortress built by nature against the valley below. What vegetation exists is sparse and scattered. Perhaps a yucca palm stands aloof from the organ cactus that rears its pointed leaves here and there, while small round cacti, studded with thorns, wear scarlet flowers for crowns. (1938:55)

This romantic vision on the stage represents a camp in the middle of the desert, located in the Sierra Madre Mountains, near the capital city of Saltillo in the northern state of Coahuila. Niggli’s staging of the desert represents the terrain characteristic in the northern states of México where Villa’s troops gained control. While she uses rich metaphors to describe the setting in natural terms, the portrayal of the desert captures real geography. Set in the spring of 1914, the play’s action involves an event in the life of a group of soldaderas who support the Villistas. Their task is to guard the rebels’ ammunition, which is stored at this camp. When the play opens, “It is the hour just before dawn, that hour when even nature seems to be asleep, and the only moving thing in all that silence is the figure of a woman standing on the high rock that shields a part of the path from view” (1938:59).

Among the characters are Maria, the sentinel (played by Niggli);²⁵ Concha, the leader (Gerd Bernhart); The Blond One (Christine Maynard), the ammunition guard; and Adelita (Barbara Hilton), the youngest of the group. Two other soldiers are Cricket (Phoebe Barr) and Tomasa (Jessie Langdale). There is also The Old One (Mary Lou Taylor), a woman who decries the death of a son killed by the *federales*, their enemy. The enemy forces, known as *pelones* during the Revolution, are the “rich ones” in the play. The action develops when a spy, The Rich One (Robert du Four), who has been captured by the women and is being held in the camp, pretends to support the revolutionary cause and takes Adelita as his chosen target. He tries to seduce her in order to obtain information that later will be sent to the enemy.

Addressing the content of this play, Usigli asserted, “It is my feeling that, if presented to a Mexican public, the treatment of *Soldadera* would have to be somewhat different to be altogether satisfactory” (xix). I agree. Niggli’s dramatic idealization of the Mexican subject makes her work more suitable for the very audience she wanted to reach—the Anglo-American public of the 1930s, most of whom knew nothing about the Mexican Revolution. That she was consciously trying to transmit to an Anglo audience a sense of the culture and folklore of the country she loved is evident in the notes she wrote to accompany *Soldadera*. For example, when she introduces very specific cultural markers such as “mescal,” she provides this explanation: “Mescal is a colorless

liquor made from the sap of maguey” (58). Later, she includes another footnote to explain its significance: “Maguey: type of cactus found extensively in Mexico. Grows exceedingly fast—three feet in a night. The sap of the maguey is used as an inebriating drink, called mescal” (103). And, to explain the meaning of the word tequila, she remarks, “This is refined mescal” (101).

Niggli introduces the subject of Francisco Villa in a song.

MARIA: One thing always gives me laughter,
Pancho Villa the morning after.
Ay, there go the Carran[c]istas...
Who comes here?

THE OTHER WOMEN (*joining in the chorus*):
Why, the Villistas.
Ay, Pancho Villa, ay Pancho Villa,
Ay, he can no longer walk.
Because he lacks now, because he has not
Any drug to help him talk! Ay-yay! (64)

The protagonists joyfully sing and dance “La Cucaracha” (cockroach), a famous musical composition popular with the Villistas and Carrancistas in the north. The ballad tells the story of a cockroach who can travel no further without marijuana. This refrain became symbolic among the revolutionaries, for whom travel and fighting had become a way of life. Niggli reworked some verses by substituting “Francisco Villa” for “la cucaracha.”²⁶ Again, Niggli includes a footnote to provide her audience with basic information about Villa: “Pancho Villa was the leader in the north of the Agrarian Revolution of 1910. His followers were called Villistas. He was opposed to the government of Venustiano Carranza whose followers were known as Carran[c]istas” (64).²⁷

Notes like these, which place the Mexican world wholly within cultural markers, demonstrate the didactic nature of Niggli’s approach to theatre. At the same time, her system of representation was intended to transcend all geographical and psychological borders, and in so doing reveal the richness of her own culture. In that sense, her writing also displays her efforts to transcend her own state of exile. Tensions and unresolved conflicts remained, however, as plays like *Soldadera* make clear. Although Niggli uses the Mexican Revolution and the role of the soldaderas mainly as an intertext in her play and infuses the action with didactic romanticism, she never strips her key female characters of either strength or spirit. When she incorporates some verses of “La Adelita,” it is Concha, the strong, brave leader of the group, who sings the song:

If Adelita should go with another,
If Adelita should leave me all alone,
I would follow in a boat made of thunder,
I would follow in a train made of bone. (73)²⁸

Concha is depicted as a “woman of the earth.” She is a fearless, combative, and vehement soldadera:

As dirty as the rest of them, there is strength that flowers in her body and sets her above and beyond them. Born of the earth, it is the earth’s pulse that she has for her heart. She is the one who keeps these fighting, snarling women together...who can punish with a sure, cold hand, but at the same time can heal their wounds. As merciless as the wind and rain, she is as warm and healing as the sun. (74)

Concha is a force comparable to the strong elements associated with Mother Nature. A loving woman, she is also capable of going to extremes, if circumstances require.

When Concha is challenged by the prisoner, whom she has threatened to torture, he replies: “But you [are] women...not hardened soldiers” (94). Men and women are posited in separate and distinct categories. Even in times of war, one can be only a woman, never a “hardened soldier,” suggests the Rich One. Here, gender interrelations are placed within the context of male domination and hegemonic ideology. These relations, Jane Flax suggests, “have been concealed by a variety of ways, including defining women as a ‘question’ or the ‘sex’ or the ‘other’ and men as the universal, or at least without gender” (1990:45).

Concha rejects the prisoner’s presumption regarding the weakness of the female sex:

CONCHA (*more to herself than to him*): Are we women? Sometimes I wonder. The Old One who cooks our food [...] she saw her son crucified by men of your kind [...] and] another one saw her son hunted down by dogs for the sport of it. That doesn’t make women, my friend. That makes something worse than the devils in hell.

THE RICH ONE: But I had nothing to do with their sorrows. Why do they want to torture me?

CONCHA: You called Adelita a symbol of the Revolution. Well, you’re a symbol to us. You’re a symbol of all the hate and horror that the Rich Ones have made for us. There are no men here to tell us what to do. We stand alone. You are merely the victim. That is not our fault. (94)

These exchanges between Concha and the prisoner are perhaps the most powerful articulations in Niggli’s dramatic text. In staging class struggle as the main conflict of the Mexican Revolution, while also capturing as a subtext the internal struggle over gender differences, these passages clearly define the playwright’s feminist and ideological consciousness. Furthermore, Niggli’s characters’ dialogue embodies some of the important ideals of the Revolution, including the demand for extensive reforms that would distribute land to the Indians, the mestizos, and to other dispossessed communities.²⁹ *Soldadera’s* theatricality connects directly with a powerful discourse of class struggle in which the rich are understood to be the enemy of the poor. Niggli’s ideological formation, then, represents the Revolution as an act against the Mexican bourgeoisie.

In fact, the Mexican Revolution arose in response to social evolution motivated by the Díaz regime and the generation of the so-called *Científicos*. At the turn of the century, with the development of industry and railroads, and the freedom to acquire wealth, materialism, and dehumanization were championed as models of modern life. Of course, it was a type of modernism and freedom in which not all classes could participate. Concha strongly believes in the Revolution as a class struggle, as is clear in her remarks to The Rich One: “You’re a symbol of all the hate and horror that the Rich Ones made for us. There are no men here to tell us what to do” (94). As a true soldadera, she defends the ideals of the Revolution with passion and bravery:

THE RICH ONE (*sneering*): I suppose you women think you can stop the *Federales*, now you know so well they are coming.

CONCHA: I’ll stop them, never fear. They’ll be making a nice warm nest for you on the tail of Grandfather Devil. (96)

While Concha represents the force that holds the women in the group together, young Adelita is depicted as childlike. She is the essence of vulnerabil-

ity. Sweet and innocent, she readily believes the lies The Rich One tells her and tries to persuade her fellow soldaderas that he is trustworthy.

ADELITA: This man is different. He believes in the Revolution. Why, he even knows the words of “Adelita”...

TOMASA (*sneering*): What does he know about the great song of the Revolution?

ADELITA: He’s crazy about the Revolution and he wants to know all about us, what we think about, how we live, everything.

MARIA: And I suppose you tell him everything, eh? Not that the news will do him any good, when he is dead.

ADELITA: He says that if he hadn’t sworn an oath to the *Federales*, he’d like to join Hilario.

THE BLOND ONE: So he tells you that, eh? That eater of cow’s meat.

MARIA (*gibingly*): And she believes him.

ADELITA: Why shouldn’t I believe him? What do you know about him? Any of you? You’ve never spoken to him...not seriously you haven’t.

CRICKET: Didn’t I capture him?

ADELITA: You? It was Concha. (71)

It is Adelita who represents virtue. She wants to save The Rich One’s life, and she becomes distraught over the cruelty of the women whom she loves and respects. Listening to the group deciding what to do with their prisoner, Adelita is appalled by their plans:

CONCHA: Adelita! Come here, child.

ADELITA: I don’t want to touch you. I don’t want to touch any of you. You are not the women I used to know...you’re not the women who used to carry me around on your backs when my mother died. You’ve changed, all of you, horribly changed! Why, you’re just like you’re dead to me. All of the goodness and sweetness that used to be in you...it’s dead! (*Crouches on the ground, crying bitterly.*)

TOMASA: This is the Revolution, not a nursery.

ADELITA: What do you know about the Revolution? It’s beautiful, it’s glorious, it’s heroic. It’s giving all you’ve got to freedom. It’s dying with the sun in your face, not being eaten to death by little red ants in a bottle. If this is your Revolution, I don’t want to see it...I don’t want to see it!

CONCHA (*standing*): Yes, this is the Revolution. We had to forget how to weep, and how to be kind and merciful. We are cruel, because the Revolution is cruel. It must crush out the evil before we can make things good again.

TOMASA: Crush it lower than earth.

CONCHA: Adelita, Adelita, for you there is tomorrow, but for us there is only yesterday. The Revolution is a fire that flames up and destroys, and we are the fire.

THE BLOND ONE: Burning, burning, let us burn them all.

CONCHA: We are the flame, calling to flame, and we are the earth calling to earth, and we are the tempest blowing across the sky! (109)

Niggli uses rich metaphors to address the nature of the Revolution, both poetically and ideologically. The power of these dramatic representations is reinforced in the weaknesses and strengths of her protagonists. Beyond these symbolic representations, the portrayal of Adelita as unlike the rest of the members of the group gains additional import in the final outcome, when she becomes their unexpected hero. Concha discovers that the enemy troops are on their way to the camp to destroy the rebels' ammunition. The group's plan requires a sacrificial victim—one of the women must throw a bomb at the troops as they arrive. This means certain death for the woman who agrees to do the deed. The intended hero is Cricket, but at the last moment she becomes immobilized by fear. Adelita steps in and takes Cricket's place, giving up her own life without hesitation:

CRICKET (*screams*): No! Not me! (*Runs down, flings herself on her knees and throws both arms about Concha's knees.*) I wouldn't have a chance in a landslide. I don't want to die. Not me! I was only fooling. I didn't mean what I said. Please, Concha, not me, please. I don't want to die.

CONCHA: Choose quickly, my friend. Would you rather have Tomasa's red ants eating out your eyes? (*CRICKET screams and flings both arms up over her face.*)

ADELITA (*running toward them*): Wait! I will throw it. (*She snatches the bomb from Concha.*)

CONCHA (*horrified*): No!

ADELITA (*strikes CONCHA with her free arm and knocks her to the ground*): This the Revolution! The sun will be in my face! (*She flings back her head after the triumphant cry and THE RICH ONE, seeing the path free, gives a desperate pull, dashes past the women, and up the path.*)

THE RICH ONE (*screaming to the Federales*): Back, you fools, back!

ADELITA (*running up the path after him*): Long live the Revolution! (113).

Adelita is killed, but the ammunition is safe. Her bravery is exalted in this final act. The innocent and sweet Adelita sacrifices her life for the Revolution. This event represents Niggli's idealization of Adelita's character; the dramatist's sense of poetic justice makes Adelita the symbol of the revolutionary cause. Beyond Niggli's romantic metaphors, however, lies her rich ideological and feminist consciousness. She is intent on revealing the courage of women who fought in the Revolution, and therefore, she makes Adelita a hero. Carmen Salazar Parr and Genevieve M. Ramírez, in "The Female Hero in Chicano Literature," include *Soldadera* and consider both Adelita and Concha heroes (1985:50). They make a comparison between Adelita and the mythical Ifigenia. Although noting similarities in the two characters' sweetness and innocence, they point out a major difference. Adelita's self-sacrifice is motivated by her own conscious will in support of the Revolution; Ifigenia's sacrifice was influenced by her father, Agamemnon. They describe Niggli's soldaderas:

Niggli's women are not the stoical *mujeres sufridas* (women who are submissive to a social station imposed by male-dominated society and their maternal obligations); instead, their form of self-sacrifice is their deliberately assumed role as active agents. (1985:50)

Niggli's soldaderas are both theatrical subjects and products of the dramatist's dialectical imagination. Her marked discursive conventionalism, evident in the play's many romantic metaphors and fanciful staging, is intertwined with a



4. *The Rich One, Concha, and Adelita (seated) in a scene from the original production of Soldadera by the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, North Carolina (27–29 February 1936). (Photo in Niggli 1938:88; courtesy of Alicia Arrizón)*

feminist consciousness. Contradictions abound: Anglo women play Mexican soldaderas; they wear clean and colorful skirts and shawls; they are surrounded by basketry and cacti meant to evoke folk art and a warm, exotic countryside (see plate 4). At the same time, the theatrical subject is hard-edged, formulated on the ideological premise of the Revolution. The playwright's message is clear. Despite her childlike qualities, Adelita is revealed in the end as an aggressive, valiant hero. Beyond the folklore and subjective historical interpretation presented in *Soldadera*, Niggli's depiction of Adelita and the other soldaderas centers the courage and bravery of these women. The song "La Adelita" and the character Adelita become powerful intertexts which help to reconstruct the subject of history in relation to the courageous participation of women. Adelita's self-sacrifice was inevitable as the dramatist's metaphoric discourse. But this conventionalism helps to increase the dramatic tension and the cultural condensation, as Niggli's identity, too, is affirmed as a feminist and as a Mexican American.

The play closes with the women in the camp softly singing verses of "La Adelita":

CONCHA: Well, she got to them in time. The ammunition is safe. Aren't you glad? Aren't you happy? Hilario can fight on for the Revolution. You should show how happy you are. You should sing. Yes, sing, you devil's vomit, sing!

If Adelita should go with another,
If Adelita should leave me alone...

(As the women slowly join in the song, Concha stops singing, and her outflung arms drop slowly to her side.)

THE WOMEN (*singing softly*):

I would follow in a boat made of thunder,
I would follow in a train made of bone.

(*The curtains close.*) (114)

Metatheatrical and representative of folkloric interventions, “La Adelita” functions in *Soldadera* as an explicit link between history and popular culture. This use of the song is found in Dromundo’s work as well. In his narrative, the song breaks the monotony of the anecdotal. In Niggli’s play, “La Adelita” is a theatrical metaphor embedded in the emerging construction of Mexican American identity. This construction is heightened by Niggli’s sense of Mexicanness, which provided a consciousness of joy touched by the Americanness underlying the economy of the play’s stage production.

The fact that most of the characters in *Soldadera* are played by Anglo-Americans is not an accident. As members of the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, the actors and actresses who brought Niggli’s work to life were students in the Department of Dramatic Arts, headed by Frederick H. Koch (editor of Niggli’s folk plays). Indeed, The Carolina Playmakers gained a national reputation on the American stage as the founders of folk theatre. As a student at Chapel Hill, Niggli’s imagination was influenced by Koch, who defined folk theatre as a performance concerned with “legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people” (in Spearman 1970:16). Thus, Niggli’s construction of Mexican American identity is intertwined with the folklorization of culture. The theatrical methodology she learned at Chapel Hill shaped the way Niggli expressed herself, resulting in a bifurcated image of the Mexican American. One aspect represents the legacy of her culture and traditions, while the other reflects the reality of her present condition as a playwright for Anglo-American society.

Despite the dire economic conditions of the 1930s, which were detrimental for Mexican Americans, Niggli was able to succeed as a dramatist, novelist, director, actress, and teacher. Being in North Carolina during the 1930s was crucial for her development as a dramatist. The Playmakers at Chapel Hill provided her with the necessary space to create and develop her career as an artist of eclectic aptitude. Had she remained in San Antonio, she might never have succeeded; the Depression was devastating for theatre workers in the Southwest as was the resultant forced and voluntary repatriation. As a Southwestern artist who achieved great popularity, Niggli became the first dramatist of Mexican descent to have published previously produced material. *Lo mexicano* (Mexicanness) provided authentic material for a series of plays which deal in a colorful and theatrical way with the memories of her own exile. In *Soldadera*, Niggli represents the struggle of women and their active participation in the Revolution. In romantic terms, she “stages” herself as one of these women. Indeed, Niggli’s revolutionaries are the subjects of specific historical circumstances, but their staging becomes a reflection of her own experience at Chapel Hill.

Conclusion

Determining what constitutes representation and misrepresentation can be problematic. What one understands to be the relation between the real and its distortion, between what something is and what it can be imagined as, involves subjective judgment. From the musical composition of “La Adelita” to Dromundo’s narrative of deception and Niggli’s folkloric theatricality, the gendered position of the protagonist is repeatedly represented in romantic concepts. In the song, the subject clearly becomes the object of sexual desire,



5. La Adelita, by Angel Martin, from the popular calendars produced annually in México by *Calendarios y Propaganda*. (Courtesy of Alicia Arrizón)

but in both Dromundo's narrative and Niggli's theatricality, the protagonist is a fighting soldier who dies in combat. As a true tribute to the inscription of Adelita's subjectivity, both authors present her as a hero of the Revolution. In our contemporary society, north and south of the U.S.-México border, Adelita's heroism is frequently popularized. Today, however, this same soldadera has evolved into a glaring example of commodification. For instance, Angel Martin's calendars, which exalt Adelita's beautiful face and body, continue to be very popular, year after year. Nationalism and sensualism merge as the glamorous *femme fatale* is pictured with two cartridge belts slung across her ample chest; she holds the Mexican flag in one hand, a cornet in the other (plate 5). Thus, the current popular representation of Adelita, a product of consumerism and the exploitation of the female body, preserves nothing of her feminist spirit. Instead the portrayal of Adelita in her revolu-

tionary ensemble is sexualized and objectified. As an object of desire and erotic pleasure, Adelita is a commercial commodity.

And yet, the story of Adelita the fighting soldier lives on. Her revolutionary spirit inspires young Chicanas to challenge the exclusionary forces of American society of the 1990s. The song “La Adelita” continues to captivate people’s imagination, and as a cultural site, helps to construct and deconstruct Adelita’s subjectivity.

*Ya me despido, querida Adelita,
de ti un recuerdo quisiera llevar,
tu retrato lo llevo en el pecho
como escudo que me haga triunfar. (39)*

Farewell my beloved Adelita,
from you a token I wish to take,
your picture I carry in my heart
as a shield that will bring me victory.

Notes

1. The Center for Ideas and Society at UC Riverside supported work with my “Performing Identities” research group during the winter quarter of 1997. This article was discussed as part of that group.
2. These are popular verses. They were not taken exactly from any particular written text. Their oral character corresponds to the nature of the song itself. For more information about some of the collected verses of “La Adelita,” consult Baltasar Dromundo, *Francisco Villa y La Adelita* (1936), and María Herrera-Sobek, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis* (1990).
3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
4. The Maderistas were the followers of Francisco I. Madero, the educated son of a wealthy mining family. Madero was an outspoken critic of Porfirio Díaz’s autocrat government and is widely credited with having started the Mexican Revolution. The Maderistas defeated Díaz and made Madero president of México in 1912. Unfortunately, Madero’s government was chaotic and short-lived. Counterrevolutions broke out in the north, led by Generals Venustiano Carranza, Francisco Villa, and Alvaro Obregón. Francisco “Pancho” Villa (also known as the “Centaur of the North”) gained control of the northern state of Chihuahua. Villa demanded agrarian reform, calling for the confiscation of large haciendas in 1913. While Villa created powerful troops and often lead them into battle himself, his flamboyance earned him a dubious reputation both north and south of the border.
In the south, Emiliano Zapata (the “Attila of the South”) led a peasant movement aimed at securing land and liberty for the poor. The Zapatistas, as his troops became known, saw the struggle as a chance to control their lands. In the 1990s, the Zapatistas continue the struggle for social change as the Mexican government isolates and harasses the country’s indigenous communities.
5. Verses of “La Valentina” express a representative stoicism similar to that in “La Adelita”:

*Valentina, Valentina,
rendido estoy a tus pies,
si me han de matar ma ana,
que me maten de una vez.*

Valentina, Valentina,
I surrender at your feet,
if they’re going to kill me tomorrow,
let them kill me now. (Soto 1990:44)

6. These verses of “La Adelita” and others that I include in this discussion are taken from Dromundo’s *Francisco Villa y La Adelita* (1936). Later in this article, the discussion is based on verses of the song found in Josefina Niggli’s play, *Soldadera* (1938).

7. *Soldadera* was originally produced by the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, North Carolina (27–29 February 1936). A few years later, Josefina Niggli included this play in her *Mexican Folk Plays* (1938:53–114). Frederick H. Koch, editor of Niggli's work and director of the Carolina Playmakers, was responsible for the publication of Niggli's collection of plays. The foreword to this edition was written by the well-known Mexican dramatist Rodolfo Usigli. Other plays by Niggli in this collection include *Tooth Shave: A Mexican Folk Comedy*; *The Red Velvet Goat: A Tragedy of Laughter and a Comedy of Tears*; *Azteca: A Tragedy of Pre-Conquest Mexico*; and *Sunday Costs Five Pesos: A Comedy of Mexican Village People*. *Soldadera* was also included in Margaret Mayorga's *The Best One-Act Plays of 1937* (1938). The next year, Niggli's play *This Is Villa* was published in *The Best One-Act Plays of 1938* (1939).
8. This term was used to refer to Francisco (Pancho) Villa's troops; they were also known as the Villistas.
9. Note that there are alternative definitions of *machismo* that emphasize a man's honor and ability to provide for his family. These versions represent the male's power as a positive feature in patriarchal cultures. I use Paz's definition of *machismo* in this study because his theoretical formulations are consistent with my critique of the gender relations embedded in Dromundo's narrative. For Paz as for many in Mexican culture, the *gran chingón* is the perpetrator of violation. The verb *chingar* does not have an absolute definition. However, in some instances it can be translated as to fuck, to despoil, to subordinate and subdue. In the context of my analysis, the *gran chingón* is the motherfucker.
10. This statement, *¡Era un dorado!*, is self-explanatory: Villa recognizes Adelita as one of his heroic *dorados*.
11. See Gustavo Casasola's *Biografía ilustrada del General Francisco Villa 1878–1966* (1969:67). On the same page are other pictures of women soldiers. In one, the woman is playing a cornet; in the other, a female soldier is standing next to her man. Although this is the only page in this book that portrays female soldiers, Casasola includes other pictures of female soldiers in his four-volume *Historia gráfica de la Revolución: 1900–1960* (1960).
12. *Soldaderas* were also known as *galletas* (cookies) during the Revolution.
13. I had many conversations with her during 1986. I met Do a Justina Carrasco in San Luis Rio Colorado, a Mexican border town located in the state of Sonora, before she moved to the capital city, Hermosillo, to live with relatives.
14. Shirlene Soto has pointed out that Zapata's movement attracted women from all social classes and from all parts of Mexico. She notes, "Paulina Maraver Cortés, a professor and former Maderista, with Nachita Vázquez, initiated the agrarian movement in the state of Puebla" (1990:46).
15. Macías's book examines the history of the feminist movement in México from 1890 to 1940 and assesses the contribution of three significant women: the journalist Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza (1875–1942); the school teacher Dolores Jiménez y Muro (1848–1925); and the private secretary of President Carranza, Hermila Galindo de Topete (1896–1954). Macías's book is one of the best feminist works published in México.
16. Another aristocratic rebel was Elisa Acuña, who financed the publication of her work *La Guillotina* (The Guillotine) with her own money. During the Revolution, she was forced to leave México, but she later returned and joined the Zapatistas.
17. This book is introduced and annotated by Lomas, who discovered this work and others by the same author.
18. For more information about the contributions of these women see Clara Lomas's introduction to *The Rebel*, the memoirs of Leonor Villegas de Magnón (1994:xi–lvi).
19. The Guerrero Collection is an archive located at the Biblioteca Nacional de México. Eduardo Guerrero, composer of many *comidos*, started this collection in 1931.
20. Other figures represented in Posada's work were Emiliano Zapata, Francisco I. Madero, and dictator Porfirio Díaz. Prints of this type were created for sale on the Day of the Dead (2 November). See Roberto Berdecio and Stanley Appelbaum, *Posada's Popular Mexican Prints: 273 Cuts by José Guadalupe Posada* (1972).
21. This period incorporates different cultural, social, and political trends throughout the Southwest. However, in the 1930s, Mexican American thought emerged as a symbol of the rising middle class who wanted assimilation. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), founded in Texas (but with chapters throughout the Southwest), promoted this ideology. While the members of this organization emphasized the virtues of Mexican culture, they advocated for constitutional rights for all Mexicans living in the U.S. The Mexican American middle class demanded equal access to education

- and to other public and private institutions. They wanted to stop discrimination against Mexicans. For more information about the Mexican American experience, consult Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1988:198–250) and Richard A. García, “The Mexican American Mind: A Product of the 1930s” (1983:67–93).
22. This edition is the basis of my analysis and is the source of the material I quote here (appropriate page numbers are included in parentheses following each quote).
 23. For more information on Niggli, see also my entry, “Josefina Niggli,” in *The New Hand Book of Texas* (1996:1013–14).
 24. For example, in the novel *Mexican Village* (1945), Niggli portrays life in a Mexican rural community. The novel is structured around ten absorbing stories set in Hidalgo, one of the five villages in the Sabinas Valley of Northern México. In 1953, Hollywood released the film *Sombrero*, a romantic musical featuring Ricardo Montalván, based on this novel. The movie was filmed in México, in the state of Morelos, near Cuernavaca. Norman Foster, the film’s director, lived in Mexico City for several years before returning to Hollywood.
 25. The year Niggli went to Chapel Hill, she became an active participant in the Carolina Playmakers, acting, directing, designing costumes, and most importantly, writing.
 26. This song also appeared in a southern, Zapatista version, ridiculing Carranza, making fun of his glasses and his beard. During the Mexican Revolution, four songs—“La Adelita,” “La Valentina,” “La Cucaracha,” and “El Pato”—attained a popularity that continues today.
 27. Niggli returned to the subject of Pancho Villa in a later play, *This Is Villa*. In it she depicts him as a man of many contradictions: cruel, violent, and indecent; sensitive, generous, and brilliant. While in *Soldadera* she presents the heroism of women soldiers, in her later play, she explores various types of people involved in the Revolution: the intellectual, the killer, and the faithful soldier. When Villa kills the faithful soldier’s fiancée on their wedding day, the would-be groom chooses to kill himself rather than to avenge the death of his beloved.
 28. Niggli includes a note after these verses to point out that the song “La Adelita”: “holds the same place that Annie Laurie did to English soldiers during the World War” (1938:73).
 29. It is important to point out that the Revolution increased contacts between Indians and other Mexicans, as Indians left their own communities to fight and as mestizos traveled to the Indian areas.

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