

Women and Revolution: Maruxa Vilalta's *1910*

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Homi Bhabha has observed, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time" (1). I would argue that often those origins are not "lost" but erased. Such is certainly the case with Mexico, the Mexican Revolution, and the national imagination that has come to surround and define them, as Maruxa Vilalta dramatizes in her recent play, *1910*. The year 1910, of course, marks the onset of the Mexican Revolution, which, in turn, is generally imaged as the "birth" of the modern Mexican nation. That same Revolution, which simultaneously created a "new" national origin as it relegated earlier ones to varying degrees of oblivion, eventually led to the creation of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), which virtually controlled Mexican politics and government until Vicente Fox's election to the presidency in the year 2000.¹ The Vilalta play, which premiered in 2000, employs a collage structure to present a series of rapid-fire "imágenes, instantáneas, impactos" of the Revolution and the people who lived it. I have discussed elsewhere how *1910* continues in the lines of other recent dramatic as well as historical works that question, in one way or another, the rhetoric and metanarratives that surround the Mexican Revolution, the "official memory," which has long served the interests of those who wield the political and economic power in Mexico while veiling the lack of gains for the majority of those who fought that Revolution.² In this paper, I will analyze Vilalta's presentation of the women of the Mexican Revolution and the mythification and commodification of that Revolution, with its self-styled "masculinity" that justified the status quo and kept those women in their "place" at the margins of the Revolution and the nation, out of the mainstream of history and reform. As depicted by Vilalta, not only did the nation "born" of the founding revolutionary fathers accomplish little for the majority of men, it did nothing to "free" women from

their oppression by those same “fathers” although it did effectively erase their role in that metaphoric “birth,” thereby rendering them even more peripheral in representations of nation.

Maruxa Vilalta’s *1910*
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CUADRO 1

- narrator: [...] “El pueblo no tiene nada”
- hombre y mujer
- [...]

[. . .]

CUADRO 11

- campesino’s conversation
 - young couple
 - piropo
 - old couple
 - conversation on rifles
 - huertistas and campesinos
 - narrator
 - huertistas and Jelipe
 - narrator
-] coronela

(36 pages of text)

INTERMISSION

CUADRO 12

- [...]
- narrator
- Villa and Zapata
- [...]

[. . .]

CUADRO 18

- [...]
- hombre y mujer
- narrator: “El pueblo no tiene nada”

(39 pages of text)

END

Eighteen “cuadros” comprise this painstakingly researched and documented historical play with 12 actors who portray 168 characters, some of them well-known historical figures (such as Villa, Madero, Zapata, etc.) but many of them simple folk, “el pueblo,” caught up in the Revolution, which, as one of them says, “se nos metió [. . .] en la casa” (102). Like most representations of the Revolution, this one too focuses overwhelmingly on the male participants, in part at least because, as Ruth Roach Pierson has argued, “Histories of nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism have, as has so much other historical writing, traditionally neglected the experiences of women” (1). Surely, in her research Vilalta had far less access to information regarding the females who participated in the insurrection. Thus, of the 12 actors, only 3 are females. Nonetheless, while depicting the events of the Mexican Revolution in a manner that does not immediately appear to undermine the official version, Vilalta cleverly and subtly destabilizes that national narrative. Specifically, she simultaneously presents the “facts,” indeed frequently quoting from official documents, and undermines them, first by juxtaposing contradictory documents and declarations and second by exposing the theatrical strings, the acting, posturing, and manipulation involved in her play in a way that evokes the posturing and manipulation that characterized the Revolution itself as well as contemporary “official” versions of it. Her theatrical strategies of collage, rapid-fire scene changes, and the disruption of chronological order stand in sharp contrast to the nationalistic discourses, which, as Bhabha has also argued, persistently attempt to produce the idea of nation as a continuous narrative of natural progress and self generation (1), rather than a narrative designed for the benefit of its creators. Indeed, by foregrounding the betrayals of the Revolution (not the least of which is the betrayal of Mexican women), Vilalta compels us to re-view and re-member the violence, myth-making, and deception that are at the core of this national narrative, which has effectively erased “real” women from the national imagination.³

It is primarily in the structuring of the play and in its juxtaposition of contradictory elements that Vilalta leads the audience to recognize the numerous betrayals that comprised the Revolution and its resulting narratives/myths. The question of betrayal is perhaps most poignantly evoked via Artillero’s cannon (affectionately called Sebastián). In many ways that cannon, latent phallic symbol, comes to represent the Revolution itself and the masculinity evoked in portrayals of that Revolution, as I shall discuss below. Artillero appears several times during the course of the play, pushing

Sebastián, a cannon that does not work, will not fire (as perhaps the Revolution itself did not “work”). Still, Artillero is convinced (as perhaps were the Mexican people about the Revolution) that one day he will be able to fix Sebastián, and he/it will indeed work. Late in the play, after years of nonperformance, silence, Sebastián suddenly fires in the presence of some Villista soldiers who have just been assured that the cannon is inoperative. As a result of Sebastián’s “betrayal,” Artillero is shot.

In a similar foregrounding of bad faith, throughout the play Vilalta juxtaposes various historical documents in a way that allows us to see that political leaders said one thing yet did another, that is, betrayed their verbal promises (or silences) with their actions. Nonetheless, it is in the structure of the play itself, I believe, that the betrayal of Mexican women becomes most apparent. That structure is essentially circular: the final scene reflects the opening one in the physical positioning and gestures of the characters as well as in the words that quote those of the first scene. In this sense the play ends where it began, with a narrator (designated only as Narrador) who reads from a script that is the play itself, thus continually underscoring for us the control wielded by the narrative, mythic, rhetorical renditions of the Revolution and/or those who have controlled that narrative. On any number of levels then, the play becomes a comment on narrative and theatrical representations themselves, specifically on the “historical” and popular representations of the Revolution. In the hands of the narrator, however, contemporary perceptions of the Revolution are shown to be largely invention, part of the stock of national images promulgated by politicians to the populace as reflections of the “true” modern Mexico. At the same time, the Vilalta play subtly underscores the extent to which Mexico’s nationalistic discourses depend on the erasure of the female other and the concurrent feminization or infantilization of the enemy, whoever that might be. Again, via the structuring of the play, Vilalta discreetly, without jarring her audience, disrupts that “neat” national narrative and foregrounds that erasure by placing the scene that highlights the betrayal of Mexican women at the physical center of the play, immediately before the intermission, halfway point in the work.

In order to emphasize Vilalta’s challenge to the standard narrative, I would like to focus on the structure of the play and approach it by starting at the center and working outward, in terms that approximate an approach to the plastic or pictorial arts encouraged by the dramatist’s own perception of the play as a series of images or snapshots.⁴ That is, rather than working through the play in chronological order or focusing on its linear progression

(as we so often do, and as indeed the linear presentation and narrative tendencies of many theatrical works encourage us to do), I would like to disrupt that order/progression (much as Vilalta herself does by not proceeding in chronological order) and begin my analysis at the center of the play and then move backward and forward to the edges or the frame.⁵ Significantly, for this critic, the center of the play (as is the case in any play with a single intermission) is marked by a blank space, non-theatre, absence, that very intermission during which the audience takes a break, and dramatic action is halted, marginalized (temporarily at least). In many ways one might argue that this intermission, blank space, signals the other “blank spaces,” other elided potential narratives, of the Revolution, such as those of the females and the Indian populations for whom little also changed.⁶ In this sense, it marks or reflects the absence of “real” (flesh and blood) women and contemporary Indian populations within the Mexican historical imagination and representations.⁷ Not irrelevantly, the intermission comes immediately after Scene 11, the scene that deals most directly with the role of women in the Revolution and implicitly, by analogy, in modern Mexico, an artistic choice that, for me, signals first the centrality of Vilalta’s mission to include women in the nationalistic narrative and second the link between women and other “blank space” of the Revolution such as the elided narratives of indigenous groups and other minorities.⁸

Scene 11 is an impressively dense one with a powerful set of strategies that provide lightning flashes of insight for the audience. At the start of the scene there are several “campesinos guerrilleros” present on stage along with two campesino couples, one young, one old. After a brief conversation among the characters that allows the audience to orient itself and recognize the campesinos as Zapatistas who have recently completed a raid to obtain rifles, their Coronela arrives. What follows are a number of overlapping and mutually evocative foci: the exchanges between the Coronela and a campesino, the interactions between each of the two couples, and the final moments of the scene in which the male Zapatistas are slain by Huertistas – and all this in a mere seven and a half pages of a 77 page play text (not counting notes, etc.).

When the Coronela enters the stage carrying a rifle and cartridge clips (traditional signs of power and ones generally associated with masculinity), she announces that she is going to town to get more ammunition but that none of the male campesinos should accompany her since they might be recognized. She orders the young campesina (Micaela) to go with her.

Significantly, and in what I read as a comment on female marginalization and lack of agency, the young woman obeys not the order of the Coronela, their military superior, but the echoed order of her partner, Jelipe: “Vete con ella. ¿Qué no oíste a la coronela?” (61). In other words, the Coronela’s order is to be taken seriously only when issuing from the mouth of a male. Lest this marginalization and affront to the Coronela’s power be overlooked by the audience (and if there is any doubt that it is precisely this, try imagining a male failing to obey a military order until it is repeated by a female), Jelipe’s words are immediately followed by those of another campesino, words again directed to a female, this time to the Coronela: defying all “military” protocol, that campesino coos to her, “Está muy buena mi coronela.” Thus, Vilalta makes dramatically clear that the female may be in a presumable position of power, but she is still viewed first as a woman and only second (if at all) as an authority or even a soldier. But, at the same time, the campesino’s “piropo” should surely be recognized as its own (attempted) form of counter-power. By objectifying and degrading the Coronela, reducing her to a sex object, the campesino reaffirms his masculinity while neutralizing her power and his own perceived inferiority in the face of that power, which in this particular case is quite clearly coded as masculine. In this way, Vilalta dramatizes that even within this socioeconomically homogeneous group, theoretically working together for the good of that group since, in the words of one of them earlier in the scene, “Hay que luchar pa que vivan mejor nuestros hijos” (60), the need to act in stereotypical macho ways that would mark the gender heterogeneity of the group and establish the superiority of the male over the female overrides the common goal – a better life for “our children.” As a result, one suspects that if any “hijos” will live better as a result of the Revolution, it will be only the male ones. Indeed, although she was speaking of earlier times in Western history, Roach Pierson’s comment (based on words of Carole Pateman) seems particularly appropriate here: “the social contract into which equal men freely entered was predicated on a prior, sexual contract that subordinated women” (3-4). Similarly, as O’Malley has observed, the machismo that attempts to compensate for the perceived inferiority of some Mexican males because of “their racial and economic status as well as their heritage as a conquered, colonized people” functions and provides “compensatory potential” only because it presupposes the superiority of men over women (8).⁹ Clearly, as Vilalta’s brief episode demonstrates, the improvements sought by the Revolution did not and still do not include full personhood and equality for women and other minorities.

When the Coronela challenges the campesino's "piropo" with "respétame, o te meto una bala entre los ojos" (61), he recants, assuring her he was only playing ("jugando"), to which she retorts that they are not there to play: "¡Acá estamos peleando por lo nuestro!" Still, once again, it is evident that "lo nuestro" does not have the same meaning for the male and the female since his parting line is merely a repetition of his earlier one: "Sí, mi jefa... (*Se aleja unos pasos pero voltea otra vez hacia la Coronela.*) De todos modos, está muy buena, mi coronela" (62). At the risk of getting a bullet between his eyes, he still has to (try to) prove his masculinity with its implicit superiority. The fact that his final line echoes his opening one duplicates the structure of the play as a whole (as I shall discuss below) and again evokes the theme of betrayal, the circularity and lack of significant change at the heart of the play. Just as soon as progress seems to have been made ("Sí, mi jefa"), the stasis of the structures and the ideology reassert themselves. Even more illuminating, this mini scene between the Coronela and the campesino is framed in a way that mirrors the framing of the larger scene (Scene 11) within the overall structure of the text (this second framing I shall also discuss below).¹⁰ Not only is this mini scene immediately preceded by the brief exchange between the young couple already discussed, but also it is immediately followed by a parallel mini scene between an old couple. It cannot be fortuitous that this third mini scene provides yet another slant on the male/female relations that the insurrection might have been able to change. Here Vieja, witness to the earlier mini scenes as are all the campesinos on stage, announces, "Coronela, yo también voy con usted" (62), to which her partner, Viejo, barks, "Estáte silencia" (62), an order he repeats a few lines later. What we witness then is the same imbalance of power we saw with the younger couple; in each case, the woman is subordinated or silenced. Unlike the young Micaela, however, who might have been expected to be the more rebellious woman insofar as we tend to associate rebellion with youth, it is Vieja who in fact rebels and insists she is tired of hanging around waiting and suffering.¹¹ The Coronela agrees to have her accompany her, telling her to leave the rifle because "her man" might need it, but still Viejo will not accept her "rebellion," her agency and self-determination (and by implication the Coronela's concurrence with it), and insists on attempting to assert his power over her by denigrating her, in what echoes the campesino's debasement of the Coronela: "¿Pero no te das cuenta de que eres una anciana?" (as if he were not), and "Ya ni puedes montar a caballo" (62). Finally, he resorts to an implicit command (if ridicule does not work, then an

order might), “¡No te vas!” (62). Thus, as the younger man ordered “his” woman to go, the older man orders “his” to stay. Interestingly, however, the “command” here is not in the imperative: instead, Viejo uses the present tense, “you are not going.” The subtle suggestion is that Viejo does not need to command her; he can simply make a statement of fact about how it is or will be because he (believes he) has the power to impose his will. His will, his word, and his representation of events create the “reality,” not unlike how the nationalistic discourses of the Revolution have created what has been perceived as the Mexican “reality.”

Lest the audience overlook the gendered and, as we shall see, sexual and potentially violent basis of this interaction, Vieja responds to his command/statement of fact, “Ay, sí, tú, muy macho” (62). What then follows is a delightful interchange in which Vieja consciously performs a mini theatre of submission (a play within the play, which we shall see mirrored at the end of the scene). She feigns to surrender to his power and machismo when he boasts, “¡Claro que muy macho! ¿Quieres que te lo demuestre?” (62). In this way, Vilalta highlights the machismo that underlies daily relations and is carried over into the Revolution (or is it vice versa?) while emphasizing the role-playing involved in that machismo. As depicted in the continuation of the mini scene, he can play the macho role only to the extent that she assumes a properly submissive role that allows him to feel “conquistador,” that he is violating her, asserting his power over her and against her will. In other words, her role playing, her submissive attitude leads him to assume a role also, that of, in the words of the stage directions, “Conquistador,” as he admonishes, “No se me asuste... Nada más te iba a mostrar que sí soy macho” (62). Then, continuing the game, “playing” in the words of the campesino “flirting with” the Coronela, Vieja, “Coqueta,” responds, “¡Ah, era para eso!” and subtly calls to mind his earlier words, now using them against him, “Pero si ya estamos viejos” (62). Significantly, however, once she changes her tactics (role) and agrees to the implicit copulation (that he threatened to impose by force), “te tomo la palabra,” his macho role no longer “works,” and he decides they should leave it for another day. Not willing to let him get away so easily, change his tactics and rhetoric at whim (as political leaders are often likely to do), she insists, “te estoy esperando” as he decides that he needs to look for a younger woman, that he is too tired today. And, all this, let us not forget, is occurring in the middle of a revolution whose goal in theory is to improve the lot of all and erase the very inequality we watch being played out here. Surely, Vilalta’s point is that even if inequality among men had been eliminated, the patriarchal

social structure and ideology would still promulgate male superiority over females and enforce gender performances as Judith Butler has discussed them.¹²

As this mini scene ends, Vieja goes off to accompany the Coronela, and Viejo is left with the other male campesinos, who, I think not irrelevantly, begin talking about the rifles they stole from the federals, rifles whose phallic associations are immediately underscored in the conversation that ensues:

Campesino 4: Estos rifles ya están muy traqueteados, pero todavía sirven.

Campesino 1: No depende del rifle, sino del hombre. Depende de cómo lo manejes. (63)

But those rifles, with their phallic associations, appear not only to be a (compensatory?) comment on the scene with the old couple that we have just witnessed but also to be linked back to the mini scene that preceded it: remember, Coronela, who challenges stereotypical gender definitions here, carries a rifle and ammunition and is going to town to get more, all factors that mark her “masculinization” if you will. As a result, her presence is perceived as a certain “threat” to or emasculation of the male campesinos. Paradoxically and cleverly, the references to the rifle made by Campesino 1 are contradictory as is so much of the rhetoric of both machismo and the Revolution. By insisting that it does not depend on the rifle, but on the man, the campesino implicitly defends himself against the perceived emasculation: she (Coronela) may have a rifle, but she is not a man, so it is not the same. By inference then, having a male anatomy is more important than having a “real” rifle, and, without a male anatomy, the rifle (and by implication any of the rights to be gained via the Revolution) is of little use. That philosophy is revealingly contradicted in the campesino’s follow-up statement that it depends on how you use it. If all that matters is how you use it, then surely someone without a male anatomy might well learn how to use it also. Nonetheless, as the play has already demonstrated via the scenes with Sebastián, the cannon, it may not always be a case of how one handles/manipulates/uses it; sometimes these things, Revolutions like guns, defy control, escape from the hands of those who would control or use them and, like Sebastián, fire or do not fire when least expected. Even more telling, this association between rifles and masculinity is also connected to the mini scene to come, in Vilalta’s continuing kaleidoscope of mirror reflections and refractions.

Before I examine the next mini scene, it is important to note that numerous scholars have reflected upon the association of the Revolution

with a certain masculinity or machismo, elements that Vilalta has clearly foregrounded in this central scene and in the mini scenes I have already discussed.¹³ Recently, too, there has been much discussion about the feminization of the conquered other and/or those considered racially or socioeconomically inferior. For example, Roach Pierson has remarked, “While theorists of race and sex differences proceeded often in apparent independence from one another, the interchange of metaphors between the one discourse and the other betrays their mutuality, as conquered territories and their male inhabitants became feminized and the marginalized of the metropole became racialized” (4).¹⁴ Indeed, one might well argue that the rhetoric of the Revolution depends on a certain feminization and infantilization of the campesino and/or the enemy in addition to the masculinization of power, all of which are underscored in the next mini scene (still part of the structure labeled Scene 11).¹⁵

In what can only be considered a refracted reflection of the earlier mini scene between Viejo and Vieja, the mini scene that immediately follows the conversation on rifles focuses on another performance of feigned submission, this time that of the male Zapatista campesinos. When confronted by Huertista soldiers, the campesinos, like Vieja, pretend to obey. At the hands of the more powerful soldiers, they are cast into and perform the feminized role on which their survival depends, hiding their rifles, literally and figuratively.¹⁶ When the soldiers find the hidden rifles, they shoot the campesinos (except Jelipe, who has escaped) with the rifles that now patently become instruments of death and destruction (thus figuratively tying sex/eroticism to violence), and decide, “Nos llevamos los rifles, nos pueden servir” (65). Thus, in metaphoric, sexual terms, the federal soldiers emasculate the campesinos and steal back the rifles, the masculinity, that the rebels had stolen from them during the previous night. In this manner, Vilalta stages the way in which the masculine and machismo have been linked to the Revolution in representations of that Revolution and dramatizes how issues of class, race, and gender have been conflated in those representations. At the same time, she underscores the fragility of the tenets upon which both machismo and contemporary perceptions of the Revolution and modern Mexico are based.

The soldiers then pursue Jelipe, catch him, and curiously, hang him rather than shooting him. Once again, the mini scene is memorable for its conflation of race, gender, and class as Jelipe is both feminized and infantilized. Pushed around by the soldiers, he is called “hijo de tu madre,” common

words of insult but ones that also feminize by linking the son to the mother rather than the father. Those words degrade this particular mother (and women in general) by implying that the mother (and by inference the “other’s” woman if indeed not “my woman”) is immoral, as they simultaneously infantilize Jelipe by emphasizing the child factor (hijo). This motif and play on family, patriarchal images, is continued in the soldier’s insistence that Huerta is their father. By implication, then, Jelipe is inferior, for he is not a “son” of Huerta; he is the son of his mother. After they have hung him, they again infantilize him and the other rebels with the words, “Para que aprendan” (67). The campesino rebels here, who as Zapatistas would likely be primarily of Indian descent, are perceived as children, needing education and guidance from the superior “fathers” or the agents of those “fathers”— the soldiers. Not irrelevantly, of course, it is in just such terms that women along with males from the lower classes and/or ethnic minorities have long been depicted and perceived in Western culture: as unruly children who need to be controlled and kept in their place, who need “daddy’s” guidance and hand (the law of the father?).

Before I leave the physical center of the play and move out to the frame or the edges as I have promised, a brief discussion of Scene 12, which follows the blank hole of the intermission is in order. That scene presents a dialogue between Zapata and Villa, the two revolutionary leaders perhaps most marked by race and class and considered, in the popular images that have developed over the years, the most macho of the revolutionary leaders. Their dialogue is framed by the narrator (a frame to which I shall return) and introduced by a “dialogue” between a newswoman and that narrator. In this dialogue, which introduces the scene, the reporter and the narrator share the stage although they are located at opposite extremes of it, perhaps a proxemic indicator of the ultimate split between Villa and Zapata, with their “división del norte” and “división del sur,” as well as the immense gap between the rights of males and those of females, the dominant classes and the marginalized. Here the female is not ordered around or treated like a sex-object as she was in the previous scene, no doubt in large degree because of the class difference. (Let us not forget that gender definitions are modified in relation to class.) As a reporter in the time period evoked (or perhaps even now), she is clearly not a campesino, surely comes from a higher socioeconomic class, and is most likely not Indian. Still, although her class and race grant her privileges not granted to the campesino and/or Indian woman, the subtleties of the scene remind us that she is still not considered

quite equal to the male.¹⁷ Furthermore, although in their brief, alternating exchange she is given the first word, the narrator (by now viewed as the “authority” of the text) adds details or what might even be understood as correctives to her summary of events. Indeed, of his four responses to her words, two of them begin with “pero.” One, of course, might argue, and rightly so, that his gesture serves to correct or expand the “facts” reported in newspapers and other official documents, to remind us that the “facts” do not necessarily tell the whole story. But, Vilalta’s choice of a female rather than a male as her *periodista* encourages us to read the scene in gender terms as well and conclude that her “words” and representations do not have quite the same authority as his. Indeed, as this segment of the scene ends, what is underscored is precisely the power of his word to control. She exits; he is about to follow her but then does not. Instead, he returns and again reads the script of the play, specifically the stage directions, which are then concretized on the stage by the actors as they enter. Thus, in a very visual sense his words control the actions of others, much as the historical representations of the Revolution and other political rhetoric are wont to do. But, of course, the ultimate irony not to be overlooked here, along with Vilalta’s unexpected “*coup d’état*,” is the fact that the “controlling” words he reads, the script, are not ultimately “his” words, but those of yet another female – Maruxa Vilalta herself, also a *periodista* – in this delightful little inversion of alleged power that recalls the mini scene between Vieja and Viejo. As is so often the case in Mexican politics, just when one’s power and authority seem most strongly affirmed, that power and authority prove to lie elsewhere.

What follows is a mini scene in which only males participate, but even here, among the males, the questions of authority and periphery are underscored in the spatial distribution of the characters, a distribution that is articulated in the words of the narrator as he reads from the script: “Villa y Zapata quedan al centro y los Soldados alrededor de ellos [. . .] De cara a sus jefes. [. . .] Los Soldados no parecen participar en la escena entre los dos generales, sino más bien enmarcarla” (69). That these words are not **just** part of the stage directions but are actually read, shared with the audience, confers special importance on them, and, I would argue, evokes the female reporter anew. Like the soldiers here, she does not participate in the action, only frames it, as does Vilalta, but that frame, like the narrator’s ever-framing presence, evokes the strings by means of which the Revolution, its historical documents and its national myths, have been controlled and framed and have in turn controlled and framed our perception of that Revolution.

Before abandoning Scene 12, one more comment is in order. I have spoken about the feminization and infantilization of the enemy, the others who are perceived as enemy, and I have suggested that, in lines with the theories of O'Malley, the hypermasculinity of the campesino soldiers might be viewed as a compensation for a certain perceived inferiority. Still, it is important to note that this "emasculatation" also functioned in reverse, as Vilalta demonstrates in this very scene. Here Villa and Zapata not only aggrandize their masculinity but also demean that of the upper classes. In an often alluded to statement, Villa notes, "Los carrancistas son hombres que han dormido en almohada blandita" (69), suggesting that they are somehow less "macho" than the campesinos or soldiers, the "real men."¹⁸ Their dialogue/conversation ends as each flatters the other with assurances of masculinity. Villa refers to Zapata and his men as "los verdaderos hombres del pueblo" while Zapata refers to Villa as "un hombre que de verdad sabe luchar" (71). Significantly, it is here also that Zapata refers to his role in "taking care of" and tending to (being the shepherd of) his friends, thus projecting himself in the role of the patriarch who must take care of the weaker (69), a rhetorical gesture that echoes the feminization and infantilization of the "other" as discussed above.

Finally, as promised let me move from the center, the intermission and the two scenes that surround and frame it, to the outer frame of the play. Significantly, the scenes that surround the intermission at the center of the play ultimately echo and are echoed by the play in its entirety, for the latter is also framed by the narrator and by a key scene, which appears at both the beginning and the end of the play. In addition to underscoring the betrayals of the Revolution as already discussed, that framing serves to conflate present and past, progress and return, in a way that again highlights the lack of great advances. The narrator, of course, belongs to the present – he is reading from the present script, a script that looks back, re-members, re-views the past, and in many ways re-frames that past in both senses of the word "frame." Consequently, at the start of the play, the text from which he reads seems to refer to pre-revolutionary Mexico. His opening words, evocative of a fairy tale, state: "Hace muchos años, en un país llamado México, había una vez un dictador..." (31). Thus, on one level his initial reading and the mini scene that immediately follows it, a scene between Hombre and Mujer, evoke the conditions that led up to the armed conflict. In his final "reading" at the conclusion of the play, he repeats verbatim words from the first scene, but now his references to Mexico are all in the present tense and clearly evoke the similarities between pre- and post-revolutionary Mexico: as he says/reads

in both the first and the final scenes, “El pueblo nada tiene, todo le quitan...” (107). By quoting from the first scene, the earlier words are thus recontextualized and perceived differently as “history” is revised, remembered, made present as it were. At the same time and in what both emphasizes the circular structure and highlights the motif of women, an identical mini scene is played out immediately after the narrator’s reading in the first scene and immediately before his re-reading in the last. In those identical mini scenes we find two characters designated simply as Hombre and Mujer (the metaphoric Adam and Eve in a paradise gone awry). He is apparently returning from a day working or looking for work and says to (shouts at) her five times: “No traje nada” (31 and 106-07). Thus, what at the start of the play appeared to be a statement about conditions that motivated the Revolution is at the end a statement about contemporary conditions and the fact that little has changed for many Mexicans. But, at the same time the repeated mini scene also serves, subtly to be sure, to underscore the fact that little has changed in male-female relations in all these years and in spite of all the revolutionary rhetoric. As presented, at both the beginning and the end, the female stays home, submissively and silently awaiting the male. Note that it was precisely this submission and silence against which Vieja rebelled in Cuadro 11. I would argue, then, that this tiny scene, whose importance is underscored by its repetition, serves to link gender and class as it provides something of a comment/explanation on the machismo/masculinity, which defines the Revolution and participates in what I am calling the betrayal of the Mexican women, a machismo that is openly derided in Scene 11.

In addition, this tiny scene between Hombre and Mujer replays in gender terms and on a different level to be sure, a number of the premises of the scene between Zapata and Villa already discussed. As noted, in the latter, Zapata presents himself as a “pastor,” a shepherd who must tend to, take of his flock of friends, dependents in some sense. That is what a “real man” does. Quite the same ideology underlies the mini scene between Hombre and Mujer, where the implicit message is that 1) she needs to be taken care of, cannot do it herself, and 2) he is somehow less of a man since he cannot provide for his family. In this way, as Vilalta demonstrates, class, gender, and (implicitly) race are conflated. As O’Malley has cogently argued, “the glorification of the revolutionaries’ manliness, especially that of lower-class men, represented an advance over pre-revolutionary social consciousness. The caste hierarchy of the *porfiriato* had deprived lower-class men of their

manhood [. . .] in the patriarchal sense: their class position made it difficult to provide adequately for their families or to exercise their patriarchal privileges of exclusive sexual control over ‘their’ women” (136). While I would agree that the glorification of manliness might represent an advance for the lower class male, it certainly does nothing for the lower class female, as Vilalta clearly shows us.

The fact that Vieja at the end of Scene 11 rides off with the Coronela surely evokes other traditional narratives with happy endings, narratives that close when the cowboy/rebel rides off into the sunset to live happily ever after now that he has defeated the “bad guys” and resolved the problems of the world. It is significant that the Vilalta play refuses us this comfortable (and indeed unrealistic) ending. The problems of the world are not solved, and rather than proffering the end of Scene 11 with its brief moment of ostensible triumph (the campesinos have out-foxed the federals) as “the end,” the play continues on the other side of the gap of the intermission and the years that have passed since the Revolution. Although it would seem that because Joven and Vieja have ridden off with the Coronela, they escape the violence and violation that they surely would have suffered at the hands of the same Huertistas who kill their *compañeros*, we, in fact, do not know what their fate was, what other violence or violation they may have suffered, since they disappear from our view and perhaps from our memory. Because their fate (unlike the males’ tragic ending) is elided, we tend to impose a happy ending and/or presume it was unimportant. Still, by reframing the larger play with the narrator and the repeated mini scene between *Hombre* and *Mujer*, Vilalta reminds us (as she does so many times during the play) that the individuals may be gone but the structures and ideology live on. As a result then, rather than viewing the end of the first act (or the end of the second for that matter) as a “happy ending,” we are encouraged to re-view both as a re-enactment/performance on stage of the marginalization which women and other minorities have suffered and continue to suffer in Mexico. The women who in Scene 11 echo the cowboys with their “ride off into the sunset,” disappear into the void of history as their stories are covered over and mostly forgotten. But, of course, if Roach Pierson is correct when she argues that the margins effect the center not just vice versa and that the sense of self is shaped by one’s relationship to the imperialized and colonized margins (3), then this forgetting and marginalization of the female and minority classes and races is essential for the self identity and self generation of the controlling male population as Vilalta so subtly dramatizes in this work.

Lest we forget that this “erasure” is no accident but rather the result of having manipulated the strings of history, the first part of the final scene (Scene 18) emphasizes the theatrical strings on which this work is based by having the actors appear to remind us of their position as actors who have “interpretado personajes y representado acontecimientos que forman parte de la historia de nuestro país” (100).¹⁹ In their role as actors they note the positive aspects of the Revolution (“Un país agrario y feudal se convirtió en industrializado” [100]), but toward the end of the scene and immediately before the already discussed mini scene between Hombre and Mujer, the actors, now in the role of El Pueblo, insist, “No queremos más muertos,” “No queremos otra guerra,” “¡Pero exigimos soluciones! ¡Exigimos justicia” (106). The fact that the play then turns back on itself one more time in a circular fashion by repeating the final mini scene between Hombre and Mujer merely reminds us how little justice has been gained in this mythic, fairy tale land named Mexico: “Tierra esplendorosa, tierra de luz” (107), a land perhaps as illusory as the play we have just witnessed. The feudal country may have been converted into an industrialized one, but as the play has made clear, that industrialized country has been built on and to large degree still depends on the continuation of the old structures and inequalities. The Revolution has barely begun, as the circularity of the play’s structure patently reminds us.

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Notes

¹ The PRI has been in power under three different names since 1929. Originally named, Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) in 1929, changed to Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) in 1938, it finally became the PRI in 1946 (Crow 722). By designating the Revolution as the birth of modern Mexico, politicians “forget” or erase at least two other “founding” moments that might equally well be considered the “birth” of the nation: the Conquest and Independence.

² I think specifically of dramatic works such as Mexican Sabina Berman’s *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* (1993) and *Krisis* (1996) as well as historical works such as *The Myth of the Mexican Revolution* (1986) by O’Malley and *La Revolución* (2000) by Benjamin.

³ In quite a different context (that of Iran) Groot discusses how discourses of nationalism depend on exploiting metaphors of manliness and feminine weakness in order to (in the words of Roach Pierson) “entrench gender at the core of political language while marginalizing women as political actors in their own right” (10). Interestingly, for this critic at least, much of what Groot says about the use of gendered metaphors in Iran would be applicable to Mexico in spite of the vast differences between the two countries. I use the term “real” women because, as in so many other Western cultures, women in Mexico tend to be imaged mythically as virgin, self-sacrificing and self-effacing mother, or whore. Most flesh and blood women fall into other, less simplistic categories.

⁴ Obviously, the visual and the spatial are important, even fundamental elements in most theatrical works. Vilalta is particularly emphatic about these elements in this play. Throughout the play, the visual is a significant element, often used with the precision that reflects the formal composition of a painting or a photograph, perhaps particularly at those moments when the action and the dialog are halted and characters “freeze” on stage. The stage is divided into a number of “Espacios.” The “espacio principal,” at stage level is the largest and includes steps, higher and lower sections. Then, there are four more “espacios” located on higher levels (that is, above the main stage level) in what, from a distance and considered in two dimensional rather than three dimensional terms, would approximate an artistic canvas, filled not just at the bottom (as a more traditional scenic space might be) but all the way to the top. A good example of this plastic, pictorial emphasis can be found at the end of Scene 11 that precedes the intermission. Here, after the narrator exits, the stage directions highlight the pictorial: “*El Campesino apunta con su fusil hacia el lugar por donde salieron los Soldados* [Espacio 3]. *Viene el oscuro en el Espacio principal* [Espacio 1] *después en el área del Colgado* [Espacio 3], *finalmente en la del Campesino armado* [Espacio 4]” (67). Thus, the spectator’s eyes are led both horizontally and vertically to various parts of the stage, guided as they might be in any of the plastic arts.

⁵ Jeanie Forte has discussed the problems of both realism and narrative for feminist theatre.

⁶ As I discuss below, this blank space in some sense draws a curtain over the fate of the three female characters who ride off to town in Scene 11 and whose fate we never learn.

⁷ I say “real” and “contemporary Indian populations” because, as a number of historians have noted and as is obvious to even the most casual observer of Mexican culture, the Indian heritage may be accepted but the present day Indian is not. As Cano has observed in reference to the years preceding the revolution, “A reconstruction of the Indian past was a central component in the liberal view of the nation. [. . .] It must be stressed, however, that the recognition of the Indian legacy did not imply an acceptance of present-day Indians” (106-07). She later adds, “The Revolution, on the other hand, did not alter in any significant way the liberal conception of Indians as an obstacle to progress. As in the nineteenth century, the tendency of revolutionary reforms was to integrate Indians for national republican use, not to recognize them as groups with any sort of autonomous rights. In terms of representation of nationhood, the Revolution strengthened the symbolic importance of Indian heritage” (108). Thus, Indians, like women, are important only as removed, distanced, mythified representations, not as “real,” living beings.

⁸ Although the intermission may seem less “centered” than I am arguing since it follows Scene 11 in an eighteen-scene play, in fact in the published text it is preceded by 36 pages of text and followed by 39.

⁹ As O’Malley also cogently observes, “machismo” with its “compensatory potential” does nothing to change the real socioeconomic basis of power (8).

¹⁰ My reader will note that to facilitate communication, I have taken some liberties with my terminology. The play itself is divided into 18 cuadros, scenes that are the only structural divisions that Vilalta includes in the play text. I have further broken those divisions down and used the term “mini scene” to refer to segments within the scene. While the mini scenes are certainly related to other parts of the scene/cuadro, they might well stand alone. In the other direction, I have also used the term “act” to group the eleven cuadros that precede the intermission and the seven that follow it.

¹¹ The female’s designated role as the one who waits is apparent again in Cuadro 16 in the character designated only as “La que pide agua.” After the Villista soldiers refuse to give her water (because they have none), one of the soldiers tells her she will have to wait. She snaps, “Estuve esperando. Mi bebé murió porque no teníamos agua,” and continues, “Siempre estoy

esperando. Mi bebé murió" (91). The soldiers brush her off, because they need to catch up with "nuestro general Pancho Villa [. . .] Así es esto de la Revolución."

¹² Butler has argued that gender is performative, a series of citational and reiterative acts that are learned from prior norms and acts, rewarded and punished by society, and in that sense not freely chosen. See *Bodies That Matter* and *Gender Trouble*.

¹³ Among them, see O'Malley and Cano. As the former states, "the association of the revolutionary with the macho is neither accidental nor innocent" (3), and "[m]achismo has long been a recognized behavior in Mexico, but its institutionalization seems to have more or less paralleled that of the Revolution" (8). Similarly, Cano observes, "masculine traits were linked to the Revolution" (107-08). While Benjamin does not refer specifically to masculinity, he does repeatedly refer to the Revolutionary Family, which traditionally, if indeed tacitly, evokes a masculine figure as the leader.

¹⁴ See the Roach Pierson essay for a bibliography of theorists who have worked in these lines.

¹⁵ O'Malley has argued in reference to the Mexican Revolution, "Sexism suffused the thinking and language of the day and was therefore amply reflected in [. . .] the regime's propaganda. It was evident in the equation of strength and political power with sexual potency and masculinity [. . .], and in the fact that 'virile' was the favored positive adjective for men, while a lack of virility was commonly attributed to ideas or men one did not like, as when one speaker ridiculed his opponents as castrated men" (134-35). I find it significant that the changes made in the original manuscript include combining the original Cuadro 11 and Cuadro 12 (thus reducing the play from 19 scenes to 18). For me, this further underscores the links between a certain macho paternalism and the feminization, infantilization of the campesino. In that earlier version, Cuadro 11 ended after the campesinos are shot by the Huertistas, but before they hang Jelipe. The remaining action of the current Cuadro 11 comprised the old Cuadro 12.

¹⁶ It is important to bear in mind that neither the masculinization nor feminization to which I refer here are literal. It is a question of representation and perception. Just as power itself is ultimately neither masculine nor feminine, it has long been represented (and as a result perceived) as masculine. Surely, the representations themselves reflect the interests, will, and wishful thinking of those who forge the representations.

¹⁷ It is important to note, as Cano reminds us, that the revolutionaries were still determined to exclude women from citizenship (the vote) in 1917 (108). The Constitution of 1917 "granted many social and labor rights to women, but it denied women's suffrage" (116)

¹⁸ But, at the same time he seems to recognize that "macho" or not, the upper classes have been able to control because they are intelligent (powerful because they are intelligent or intelligent because they are powerful?) and "cuando hay inteligencia, y se llega a una tiranía, y si es inteligente la tiranía, pues tiene que dominar" (69). Thus, as is so often the case in this play, his words are belied by actions or other words.

¹⁹ See Benjamin for a discussion of the theatrical aspects of the celebrations and monuments honoring the Revolution and the revolutionary heroes.

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