The Ethics of Intervention: US Writers and the Mexican Revolution

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During the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), stories of dangerous bandits, rebels, dictators, and Indians defined Mexico for US audiences. Most scholars assume that these narratives reinforce the conventional rhetoric of Latin savagery that justifies US imperialism, but this essay reveals an array of writers who told such stories to undermine state power and contest military intervention. Three of the era’s best-known leftist journalists, John Kenneth Turner, John Reed, and Katherine Anne Porter, craft a discourse of activism to help the US public imagine themselves as participants in a new hemispheric democracy. These writers posit moral bonds between the US and Mexico that exceed the expansionist interests of politicians and industrialists. Their vision was embodied in the trope of the foreign correspondent, an American who could physically enter Mexican territory, witness the crimes and heroisms of the revolution, and relay the voices of the Mexicans whose lives were at stake in the conflict. Turner, Reed, and Porter hope that journalists can inspire democratic fraternity between the US and Mexican peoples. They also set the terms and conventions utilized by radical humanitarian journalists for decades to come.

Following the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in November of 1910, stories and images of Mexico’s civil war proliferated in the print and visual media of the United States of America. Fixated on the violence and danger of “our neighbor” to the south—as they still often are—these accounts reveal the anxiety of those in the USA who had already vested substantial economic and military interest in Latin America. Thousands of US citizens lived or owned property in Mexico. Railroad, cattle, mining, and oil magnates had invested millions of dollars there and owned millions of acres. Expatriates congregated in Mexico City’s American colony as other communities of settlers, including polygamous Mormons, migrated to the Mexican frontier to escape the strictures of US governance. Waves of tourists also traveled to Mexico.
via the railroads built in partnership with the autocratic President Porfirio Díaz, while readers imagined its pre-Columbian architectural marvels and exotic indigenous cultures via travel books and postcards. After the revolutionary Francisco Madero called for nationwide revolt against Díaz’s long dictatorship – the Porfiriato (1876–1910) – all of these interested parties worried that the violent revolt of indigenous and working peoples against oligarchy and dictatorship would ruin US properties, investments, and lives in Mexico and the borderlands.

Galvanized by public interest and armed with photograph and film cameras, journalists from every major US newspaper descended on the Mexican capital, as well as border towns and other strongholds of revolutionary activity. Most reports catered to anxious expansionists by reiterating stock narratives about Mexico that had circulated in the US since the early nineteenth century: covetous stories of Mexico’s untapped commercial promise alongside exoticizing, even threatening, tales of Mexicans’ primitivity and savagery. To cite one telling example: within two weeks of the revolution’s outbreak, a New York Times front-page report frames the revolution as an anti-American uprising, warning that Americans fleeing the country “Tell of Strong Feeling Against Them – Railways Are Crippled and Passengers Are Killed by Bullets.” The article also features a map of “Districts in Which Disturbances Have Occurred and the Cities Already Attacked,” beside salacious anecdotes about “Americans Hurrying Out” because of protestors with signs reading “Death to Yankees!”, “Down with Gringoes!”, and “Kill Diaz and his Yankee friends.”

In contrast to the hair-raising accounts that pitted the Mexican people against US Americans, some US intellectuals and writers envisioned the Mexican Revolution as an opportunity for a new kind of exchange between the US and Latin America – one that opposed the domination of state elites and advanced the cultural and material prosperity of working people on both sides of the border. This essay focusses on three of the era’s best-known foreign correspondents: John Kenneth Turner, John Reed, and Katherine Anne Porter, who viewed the revolution as occasion to disrupt

2 The history of these entwined discourses of danger and desire have been aptly analyzed by scholars such as Daniel Alarcón, Helen Delpar, José Limón, Shelley Streeby, Gilbert G. González, and most recently Jason Ruiz. For more on the interplay between desire and fear see Daniel Alarcón’s notion of the “infernal paradise” (which Ruiz expounds) in The Aztec Palimpsest: Mexico in the Modern Imagination (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); and José Limón’s American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).
the stock narratives and images that presumed US military, economic, and cultural imperialism in Mexico. Turner, Reed, and Porter craft a discourse of activism—of ethical commitment to Mexico—that invites the US public to imagine themselves as participants in a new hemispheric democracy rather than as citizens of an empire threatened by the uprising of its province. Inspired by the burgeoning anti-imperial sentiment among progressives and leftists throughout the hemisphere, these writers posit moral and affective bonds between US and Mexican peoples that counter expansionist visions endorsed by both the US state and the mainstream press.

Scholars of imperial ventures in (and beyond) Latin America have detailed how dominant cultural production—from propaganda and journalism to travel narratives and novels—has tended to reify colonial and commercial expansionism. Mary Louise Pratt’s influential *Imperial Eyes* traces the centuries-long colonialist gaze of European travel writers, who tended to view themselves as “monarch[s] of all [they] survey,” imagining for their readers both the wealth to be gained in colonized territories and the foreignness of indigenous peoples in the global South.4 Scholars Amy Kaplan, Shelley Streeby, Gretchen Murphy, and Louis Pérez have uncovered how, throughout the nineteenth century and as late as the Spanish–American War (1898), narratives of intervention in which the US would “rescue” Latin America for peace, civilization, and progress reinforced or occluded the state’s imperial interests.5 By 1910, the US had amassed more than a century’s worth of jingoistic accounts of Mexico

4 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 197. Other scholars have indicated how the racialization of Latin Americans and Mexicans began with the competing imperialisms of Britain and Spain. Walter Mignolo, for example, argues in *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), xv, that colonialism has structured both the historical narrative of Latin America and the contemporary ontological “idea of Latin America”: “The geopolitics of continental division are also of key importance for understanding the way that ‘Latin’ America could subsequently be imagined as part of the West and yet peripheral to it.” Mignolo further explains how nineteenth-century independence movements created a climate in which Latin America was considered inferior to and dependent on the US. See also María DeGuzmán, *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

in particular. Most recently, Jason Ruiz has built on the work of Streeby and Daniel Cooper Alarcón to illustrate how US travel writers during the Porfriato represented Mexico as both dangerous and desirable, “both a backwater and a potential ‘sister republic’ that was economically and politically compatible with the United States. This paradox … piqued the interests of audiences and created a demand among the American public for visual and textual representations of Mexico and its people.”

The authors I study anticipate these scholars’ arguments about the power of print and visual rhetorics to sway public opinion about imperial ideology and praxis. Moreover, Turner, Reed, and Porter sought to use their texts to undermine the entwined rhetorics of Mexico’s danger and desirability that dominated public discourse, thereby revealing the disparity between an ethical US public and its rapacious policymakers. They laud Mexico’s insurrection, defend rebels, and urge everyday Americans to picture themselves as members of a hemispheric community opposing the tyranny of both Mexican and US regimes. Of course, these radical writers faced two key challenges. First, they occupied a paradoxical position in Mexico. However principled they were, as foreign journalists Turner, Reed, and Porter were also Anglo US subjects intruding in Mexican space who bore physical, linguistic, and ideological markers of their privilege. How were they to transcend these disparities to connect and collaborate with subjugated people disavowed by even the Mexican state? Second, such a project required a new lexicon for representing Mexico (both its populace and its increasingly complex revolution) to the US public. As John Britton’s Revolution and Ideology explains, a decade of civil war and two more of transition and subsequent unrest “created difficulties for those who wanted to explain [Mexico’s revolution], whether their audience was made up of popular magazine readers, politicians and the politically engaged, or small circles of academics.” Precisely because the revolution’s multiplicity of international actors and agendas unsettled long-standing narratives about Mexico, the conflict also defied legibility.

Responding to this discursive quandary, Turner, Reed, and Porter turn to the conventions of literary journalism, especially the trope of the foreign correspondent, to embody their ethical vision of US international engagement.

7 John Britton, Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 12. A variety of excellent studies have made more space to explain the revolution’s most famous arbiters (from Díaz to Madero, Huerta, Zapata, Villa, Carranza, and beyond) than I may in this article. I mention several in the notes, but most students of Mexican history begin with Alan Knight’s excellent series, in particular The Mexican Revolution, Volumes I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
The foreign correspondent, they suggest, offers an exemplary American traveler to contrast the incursion of tourists, industrialists, mercenaries, and politicians in Mexico. During the upheaval of revolution, the journalist comes in search of stories not yet available in the public sphere. As a protagonist, the foreign reporter traverses Mexican territory on behalf of the American people, witnesses the crimes and heroics of the revolution, and enters into dialogue with the people affected by its array of agents and conflicts.

Perhaps most importantly, the foreign correspondent – as author and narrator – sculpts this material into a legible and compelling account for US audiences. The literary-journalistic stories I analyze focus their challenge to mainstream reportage on moments of connection, similitude, and understanding between correspondents and Mexicans that illustrate shared ideals instead of irreconcilable differences. Furthermore, each deploys familiar rhetorics of “danger” and “barbarity,” but aims them at Mexican elites and American interlopers instead of Mexico’s armed revolutionaries. Literary journalists thus posit their texts as cultural translations that bridge the ethnic and linguistic divides between states and align the shared values and ideals of the peoples of the Americas.

In examining how these stories enact this function, this essay reappraises the relationship between US imperial ideology and discourses of intervention. I trace the ethical visions that each writer espouses, identifying the discursive dilemmas they encounter as they attempt alternately to utilize and to transcend their status as US subjects. Thus I argue that Turner, Reed, and Porter represent an underexamined yet powerful challenge to the deeply ingrained jingoism that has characterized US foreign engagement since the inception of the United States. These literary journalists build on the history of hemispheric interchange so aptly detailed by hemispheric American studies scholars such as Kaplan, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Anna Brickhouse, and David Luis-Brown. Like Gruesz’s “ambassadors of culture” or Luis-Brown’s

8 In recent years, the field has endeavored to recover the nuance and contradiction that attend inter-American contact and conflict. Amy Kaplan’s key formulation of the “anarchy of empire” reminds us that imperialism is an uneven, contradictory project whose assumptions and ideals are perpetually reinforced and disputed in cultural expression. Kirsten Silva Gruesz’s *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Anna Brickhouse’s *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) have drawn our attention to nineteenth-century US “ambassadors of culture” whose texts both borrowed from and promoted Latin America, as well as the complex artistic dialogues between writers of multiple national identifications and languages. See also David Luis-Brown, *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
“hemispheric citizens,” Turner, Reed, and Porter acknowledged the uneven power dynamics that dominated US–Mexican relations and sought to use their wartime journalism to contest that power.

These writers responded not only to the anti-imperial call of US and Mexican thinkers (among them Emma Goldman, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ricardo and Enrique Flores de Magón, Manuel Gamio, and José Vasconcelos), but also to the rapidly expanding power of print news media to shape public opinion and thereby foreign policy. Indeed, Spanish-language newspapers in the US Southwest rallied the Mexican American community for Mexico’s revolution against Díaz. At the same time, journalists’ endorsements or rejections of military intervention in the mainstream English-language press had the power to sway foreign policy. In an era when Presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson routinely turned to the pages of periodicals to take the temperature of their constituents, Turner’s, Reed’s, and Porter’s optimism about the radical power of the foreign correspondent is well grounded, but these writers also register alarm about the misuse of that power by less scrupulous journalists. Their texts model a new form of foreign engagement, marshaling the voice of the US public for ethical humanism and transnational exchange in place of the neocolonialism already threatening to make such exchange impossible.

I. US WRITERS FOR THE REVOLUTION

Two of the most famous and outspoken writers to cover revolutionary Mexico, John Kenneth Turner and John Reed, were socialist reporters who used their dispatches (and later their monographs) to advocate for Mexico’s poor and working classes to American readers. Both utilized the rhetorical conventions of literary journalism, a genre popularized in the late nineteenth century by writers such as Richard Harding Davis and Stephen Crane and characterized

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by its focus on the perspective of the correspondent, “fact–fiction discourse” (a term Michael Robertson uses to theorize the genre’s literary flourish and liberality with the “facts” of a story), and emphasis on narrative.\footnote{Michael Robertson, \textit{Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).} Robertson’s argument is key here: literary journalism allows radical writers a generic mode through which to recount past events, but also to reflect on their own relationships to those events. Furthermore, the genre allows its writers to imagine and advocate for alternative futures. Turner’s \textit{Barbarous Mexico} (1910) and Reed’s \textit{Insurgent Mexico} (1914) exhibit all of these characteristics, but I concentrate on how they employ the trope of the foreign reporter to inscribe themselves as participant observers who exhibit the very ethical engagement they propose. To do so, they must navigate a crucial contradiction: both writers advocate nonintervention and criticize US incursion as they stand (literally and figuratively) on Mexican ground. Thus their texts must articulate the motives and practices that distinguish their own ethical foreign engagements from the economic and cultural imperialism that typified US incursion into Mexican space.

After developing an acquaintance with Mexican revolutionaries incarcerated in the US, including Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón, Turner traveled to Mexico in 1908 and 1909 to gather material for a series of articles for \textit{American Magazine}. Entitled “Barbarous Mexico,” Turner’s exposés were among the first to indict the dictator Porfirio Díaz for his regime’s abuse and exploitation of the Mexican people. Turner’s expanded book-length \textit{Barbarous Mexico}, published just before Madero’s call to arms, has often been compared with Stowe’s \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} (1852), both for its exposure of the brutality of slavery (albeit in Mexico rather than in the US) and for its vital role in changing the US people’s attitude toward Porfirio Díaz and US state support for his regime.\footnote{Shelley Streeby, \textit{Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 133.} \textit{Barbarous Mexico} is particularly concerned with the de facto enslavement of Yaqui and Maya debt laborers by plantation owners and overseers. Turner predicts the coming revolution and explains that his purpose is to give the reader a correct impression of President Diaz and his political and economic system, of the character of the Mexican people, and of the Diaz–American partnership, which has helped to enslave the Mexican nation on the one hand and has kept the American public in ignorance of the real facts on the other.\footnote{John Kenneth Turner, \textit{Barbarous Mexico} (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), “Preface.”}
Turner alludes to the prior American “impressions” of Díaz and Mexico shaped by xenophobic mass media, who saw Mexico as a dangerous country peopled with savage Indians and mestizos and who lauded Díaz as a bastion of stability and progress. Streeby demonstrates in *American Sensations* that nineteenth-century journalism and dime novels tended “to reproduce racialized stereotypes of Mexican savagery and lawlessness that can be traced to the U.S.–Mexican War era.”¹⁴ In the last years of the Porfiriato, ethnographic studies such as Carl Lumholtz’s *Unknown Mexico* (1902) and travel books such as Hans Godow’s *Through Southern Mexico* (1907) and Charles Macomb Flandrau’s *Viva Mexico!* (1908) provided the terms in which Americans thought and talked about Mexico under Díaz. Studying travel writing of the era, Jason Ruiz shows that postcards, travelogues, and newspaper accounts alike parroted the expansionist agendas of the Roosevelt and Taft administrations, both of which praised Díaz for industrializing Mexico and taming its primitive populace, thus readying the country for US travel and investment.¹⁵

In 1908, the American journalist James Creelman published a famous and widely accepted account of Díaz in *Pearson’s.*¹⁶ “President Díaz, Hero of the Americas” endorses the President as a hemispheric hero on whose shoulders rests a burgeoning democracy. For Turner, such propaganda obscures the imperial agendas of US elites and justifies their collusion with a dictator; Turner even cites Creelman by name as one of Díaz’s propagandists.¹⁷ Turner’s preface carefully distinguishes between the guilty US politicians, industrialists, and journalists who have perpetrated the crimes of the “Diaz–American partnership” and the “American public,” just as he distinguishes between the Diaz “system” and the “Mexican nation” it has enslaved. He presumes that the sympathies, values, and interests of US Americans and Mexicans will concur; if properly informed, Americans will see that the “barbarities” of Mexico are perpetrated by Díaz and by US industrialists rather than by an inherently savage indigenous and mestizo populace.

*Barbarous Mexico* makes its case against Díaz by positioning Turner as a witness whose US Americanness enables his ethical work, including his mobility in Mexican space (frequently disguised as a potential investor) and his

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¹⁵ Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House*.
¹⁷ Turner, 245.
encounters with people suffering under the Díaz regime. “Slavery?” Turner scoffs when he first meets the “Mexican revolutionists” who tell him about peonage and other state-sanctioned forced-labor practices in Mexico. “‘Human beings bought and sold like mules in America! And in the twentieth century. Well,’ I told myself, ‘if it’s true, I’m going to see it.’”18 Turner asserts that it is his duty as a citizen of both nation and hemisphere to interrogate the complicity of the US state with enslavement and oligarchy in Mexico. Here Turner’s imagined US readers are crucial – he hoped his monograph would reach the mainstream public in addition to the politically engaged leftist readers who had already read his dispatches.

He appeals to these readers by imagining the ethical foundations of US democracy extended to Mexico; invoking the rhetoric of the US Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, Turner asserts, “The real Mexico I found to be a country … without political freedom, without freedom of speech, without a free press, without a free ballot, … without any of our cherished guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”19 Turner assesses the Mexican government’s failure on its denial of the natural rights and freedoms considered the purview and explicit promise of Americanness. He indicts the notion that these rights end at the border, extending them to the Mexican people. Barbarous Mexico appropriates the catchphrases of American liberalism to project a shared purpose between two American nations. He asks US readers to support Mexicans as they achieve their own democratic promise. Moreover, his claim that US commercial and press interests have interfered with hemispheric democracy suggests that unity between the peoples of the US and Mexico could restore the ethical foundations of the US nation-state as well.

Turner himself has provoked a mixed response among scholars, who both credit him with exposing the Díaz regime’s atrocities to audiences beyond the borders of Mexico and (rightly) criticize the racial politics of his exposé. José Limón analyzes Barbarous Mexico alongside its reception in Laredo’s revolutionary Spanish-speaking newspaper La Crónica, which Limón views as disputing “the stereotypic thrust of Turner’s writing. They felt that Anglo-Americans, particularly Anglo-Texans, would … use this skewed vision [of Mexicans] as a further justification for continuing a system of racial oppression … against Texas Chicanos.”20 Streeby’s new history of transnational anarchist and socialist writers, Radical Sensations (2013), also explores

18 Ibid., 11.
19 Ibid., 3–4.
the vision of Mexico that Turner promoted within the US, comparing *Barbarous Mexico* with *Regeneración*, the leftist revolutionary newspaper published by the Flores Magón brothers. Streeby illustrates how Turner and his translator, Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara; the Flores Magóns; and other leftist writers of the era made sensational appeals to readers as they translated political and economic struggles into melodramatic stories of villains, heroes, and victims; focused on dead bodies and bodies in pain in order to narrate injustices; and expressed the hope that exposing horrors and atrocities might move readers to … participate in projects of social, political, and economic transformation.21

Streeby highlights the importance of Turner’s radical transnational vision, but also raises the possibility that Turner’s sometimes lurid descriptions stirred pleasure in addition to – or even instead of – anger among audiences. She also examines how his account reinforces destructive US attitudes about Chinese migrants, American Indians, and even US chattel slavery.

This uncertainty about how to study Turner – how to align his decades of dedicated activism and radical writing on Mexico (of which *Barbarous Mexico* was only the first effort) with the racial and sensational tropes that riddle the book – proceeds from Turner’s own fraught position as a middle-class US American man endeavoring to ally himself with the Yaqui and Maya.22 Turner utilizes what Wendy Hesford calls an “ocular epistemology,” a “seeing-is-believing paradigm” that uses visual rhetoric to build its case against the Porfiriato.23 Hesford critiques such “spectacular rhetorics” in humanitarian and human rights discourses, reminding scholars that “we need to investigate the underlying faith in vision and a dialectical politics of recognition.”24 Here Hesford’s reminder about the position of the “witness” from the global North intersects with Streeby’s skepticism about the unpredictable responses to Turner’s “sympathetic acts of witnessing.”25

Yet alongside his ocular rhetoric, Turner also employs oral discourse, asking readers to imaginatively listen to the voices and stories of those he interviews. I would thus argue that Turner’s self-positioning as a “witness” both enables his

22 Indeed, Turner’s monograph is ambiguous even in its title, which Turner explains in his Preface “is intended to apply to Mexico’s form of government rather than to its people.”
24 Ibid.
25 As Streeby explains in *Radical Sensations*, 139, “*Barbarous Mexico* suggests that sympathetic acts of witnessing the atrocities inflicted on Yaqui bodies can make a difference as Turner draws on the conventions of nineteenth-century antislavery and sensational ‘mysteries of the city’ literature to expose hidden horrors.”
ethical project and gives rise to its contradictions. Turner offers a textual connection between the US and Mexico meant to both promote understanding and preclude further incursion. Its seemingly unconscious recourse to racial stereotypes demonstrates the extent to which Turner found himself unable to shed the racial narratives of his milieu, but also his desire to incite particular feeling for indigenous Mexicans among US Americans. Indeed, Turner uses racial stereotypes as foils for the humanity of indigenous Mexicans, a population demonized by American cultural expressions. Writing just before Madero’s official call to arms, Turner anticipates and attempts to dispel the racial anxiety that would characterize mainstream accounts of the revolt. The New York Times, for example, would soon opine, “The sooner Gen. Díaz silences Madero … the better it will be for the peace and credit of his country. The most pitiful revolution is dangerous in a country whose population includes 52 different varieties of Indian.” This article demonstrates the centrality of indigenous peoples to debates about Mexico’s humanitarian crisis and its peasant revolution. Journalists and politicians alike used the threat of indigenous violence to vindicate imperial dominance; anti-imperial writers like Turner (and later Reed and Porter) counter this logic by arguing for the personhood of indígenas and peons and by decrying the violence perpetrated against them by the colluding US and Mexican states.

Ironically, Turner uses dangerous US racial stereotypes as foils for the humanity of indigenous Mexicans. As Streeby elaborates in Radical Sensations, Turner invokes American memories of chattel slavery to stir indignation among US readers regarding debt slavery in the Yucatán. He uses such tropes to ambiguous effect, as when he claims that debt slavery in the Yucatán is actually worse than chattel slavery during the Civil War:

Our slaves of the South were almost always well fed, as a rule they were not overworked, on many plantations they were rarely beaten, it was usual to give them a little spending money now and then and to allow them to leave the plantation at least once a week. Like the slaves of Yucatan they were cattle of the ranch, but unlike the former, they were treated as well as cattle.

This bizarre analogy recalls the inequity of the US racial past in order to illustrate the dramatic stakes of the extermination and enslavement of the Yaqui and Maya, but ultimately suppresses the brutality of US chattel slavery, assured readers that their own forebears, even in their darkest moments, have been less cruel than the barbarous Mexicans.

Here Turner struggles to draw equivalences that would make the subjugation of the Yaqui and Maya legible to American readers. His efforts to valorize

27 Turner, 25.
indigenous Mexicans also respond to these imagined readers’ stereotypes about American Indians. Turner explains that indigenous Mexicans “are Indians and yet they are not Indians. In the United States we would not call them Indians, for they are workers. As far back as their history can be traced they have never been savages. They have been an agricultural people.” By asserting that indigenous Mexicans are workers with a long history of civilization and an agrarian mode of subsistence, Turner aligns their history and values with those of US whites. Turner’s (false) distinction between the traditions of indigenous Mexicans and American Indians urges US readers to leave their racial prejudices at the border. Circumventing the stereotype of the lazy reservation Indian, Turner calls for an international coalition of workers that bypasses the racial differences that plague the US. He also asks his readers to overlook divisions of race, class, language, and nation—to use his analogies as means to understand and empathize with the Maya and Yaqui.

Turner, as a US journalist writing on behalf of Mexico, betrays his embeddedness in the contradictory racial hierarchy he hoped to unsettle. Yet, when viewed alongside the jingoism of his contemporaries, the radicalism of his vision of alliance with indigenous Mexicans also comes into focus. Turner assumes the mantle of the foreign correspondent to take responsibility for investigating the Díaz regime and relaying the truth to the US public. Turner assures readers, “Every essential fact which I put down here in regard to the slavery of Mexico I saw with my own eyes or heard with my own ears, and heard usually from those individuals who would be most likely to minimize their cruelties—the slave-drivers themselves.” Here Turner reminds his audiences that the foreign correspondent serves as both author and witness; his profession enables him to uncover and convey to foreign readers the “cruelties” of slave drivers and the regimes that sustain them. He relies on the premise that writing, and thereby writers, have the power to disrupt entrenched power hierarchies and stand with everyday Mexicans, whose character has been besmirched by long-standing narratives of empire.

Turner exhorts US public compassion for indigenous and working Mexicans through pointed references to their civilized cultures and physical beauty. Turner goes beyond such simplistic markers of humanness, however, by drawing attention to the “mutual understanding” he finds between

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28 Ibid., 28.
29 Turner’s rhetorical juxtaposition of American Indians with indigenous Mexicans, as Shelley Streeby, Radical Sensations, 147, suggests, casts “Yaquis as friends of the US Americans and enemies of the Mexicans in ways that both let the United States off the hook for its own genocidal Indian policies and perpetuate long-standing US imperialist views of Mexico as a failed state, fatally marred by corruption and cruelty.”
30 Turner, 11.
himself (as a representative of the US public) and the indígenas with whom he speaks. He proves the “extremely human character of the people” by connecting their modes of thinking, speaking, and feeling with his own:

The Yaquis are Indians, they are not white, yet when one converses with them in a language mutually understood one is struck with the likenesses of the mental processes of White and Brown. I was early convinced that the Yaqui and I were more alike in mind than in color.\footnote{Turner, 48–49.}

In addition to separating the “likeness” of minds from the racialized differences between their bodies, Turner also attempts to overcome linguistic and cultural differences between “White and Brown” with imagined moral similarities. In one remarkable scene, he translates the stories of a group of Yaqui, Pima, and Opata laborers who have been captured by the Mexican military. The workers tell gruesome tales of being stolen in the night and sold, of the parents and children who have died along the “exile road” to Yucatán. Turner focusses on the ruptured domestic scene (a long-standing sentimental trope), the households shattered and the families separated:

“But our men were good. When the little legs of the ninos [sic] were weary our men carried them on their backs … Yes, our men were good, but now they are gone. We do not see them any more.”

“The soldiers had to tear me away from my husband,” said another, “and when I cried out they only laughed. The next night a soldier came and tried to take hold of me, but I pulled off my shoes and beat him with them. Yes, the soldiers bothered the women often, especially that week we starved in Mexico City, but always the women fought them back.”\footnote{Turner, 53.}

Turner proffers these voices as testimonies to the criminal immorality of Mexico’s soldiers, extensions of the country’s dictator. He evokes the power of familial bonds – weary children, wives, pregnant women – and asks his readers to see their plight as a microcosm of the injustices suffered by all indigenous Mexicans. His use of quoted testimonies from the women themselves lends immediacy to the scenes he describes (even as it effaces the problems with translation and memory that necessarily bedevil ethnographic projects). This scene is the more striking because the women, even after they are separated from their men, are far from abject. Beating soldiers with shoes and otherwise fighting them back, these women demand freedom and autonomy rather than the new, more benevolent management of the US.

In contrast to his powerful stories of those who suffer and survive, Barbarous Mexico excoriates its villains, especially the Yucatán’s plantation overseers, who brag to Turner about their brutality:
“By the sixth or seventh month [the enslaved laborers] begin to die off like flies at the first winter frost, and after that they’re not worth keeping. The cheapest thing to do is to let them die; there are plenty more where they came from.” Word for word this is a statement made to me by Antonio Pla, general manager of one-third the tobacco lands in Valle Nacional.33

Again Turner emphasizes the voices of his interviewees, in this case to lend truthfulness to the callousness of the manager. Turner also ties Mexico’s villains to the cruel overseers to the US investors who fund them: “it has been so easy for such Americans as William Randolph Hearst, Harrison Gray Otis, E.H. Harriman, the Rockefellers, the Guggenheims and numerous others each to have obtained possession of millions of Mexican acres.”34

Most importantly, Turner seeks to use his own foreign correspondence to expose and contest what he calls the “Díaz–American Press Conspiracy,” the collusion between the Díaz machine and US periodical and book publishers and writers. Turner contends that imperialism has tainted even the “free” press, and that pressure and bribery from US business interests have motivated the news media to sacrifice “the principles for which their forefathers of ’76 fought.”35 Posing as an American industrialist–investor to explore the henquen and tobacco plantations in southern Mexico, Turner mimics such agents of empire, using his disguise to observe and interpret the conditions of Mexican plantations. This parodic performance, as Turner recounts it, distinguishes his intervention from those of actual imperialists by using the knowledge he gains to expose injustice and to undermine economic incursion.

In contrast to ignorant tourists, duplicitous investors, and, most obviously, the threatened intercession of the US military, Turner represents the investigative journalist as a lone warrior who brandishes only a pen on the side of justice for Mexico. Barbarous Mexico incorporates Turner as an enlightened interpreter, stressing his role as a witness to brutality and lingering over his affective reactions and relations to the peons he meets. Turner hopes that his readers will take up his cause: “For the sake of the ultimate interests of this country, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of the millions of Mexicans who are actually starving at this moment, I believe that the Díaz system should be abolished and abolished quickly.”36 Turner insists that armed intervention, even on behalf of the lower classes, is “unnecessary as well as impractical,” but he asks “decent Americans to make their voices heard” if the US tries to intercede against the revolution, to expose “the conspiracy against democracy and demand that, for all time, our government cease

33 Ibid., 67.
34 Ibid., 106
35 Ibid., 248.
36 Ibid., 339.
putting the machinery of state at the disposal of the despot to help him crush the movement for the abolition of slavery in Mexico.”37 Turner’s text evolves with the revolution itself; Turner expands his series into a monograph, then adjusts it as the revolution unfolds. In each of these iterations, Turner insists that armed intervention is unethical, and asserts instead that “decent Americans” should follow Barbarous Mexico’s example to “demand” and enact a new system of international engagement, one that replaces imperial interventionism with revolutionary understanding and popular sovereignty.38

As weeks of insurrection became years, another key American writer would advance Turner’s sympathetic portrait of Mexican underclasses, using literary journalism to convince Americans to support the armed rebels themselves. Radical political journalist and fiction writer John Reed models an ethical engagement with Mexico and its revolution through stories of his own encounters with hungry peons and stalwart revolutionaries. As I expound below, Reed’s strongest contribution to the era’s journalism is his insistence on seeing battles and interviewing the revolutionaries themselves, ultimately urging American readers to support armed insurrection in the name of hemispheric democracy.39

Perhaps the best-remembered foreign correspondent in revolutionary Mexico, Reed’s current fame comes primarily from his coverage of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, from his socialist fiction, and from Warren Beatty’s filmic portrait of Reed in Reds (1981). Following his early death from typhus in 1920, Reed was hailed as a visionary leftist and received a hero’s burial in the Kremlin. But long before he became a key figure in international socialism, in 1913 Reed spent four months traveling with Pancho Villa’s entourage and sending dispatches back to Metropolitan Magazine and the New York World. His time in Mexico ultimately produced the travelogue Insurgent Mexico (1914).

During and after the heyday of revolutionary activity, Mexicans lived under the constant threat of US invasion.40 As both the author and protagonist of Insurgent Mexico, Reed employs the figure of the foreign correspondent to

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37 Ibid., 339, 340.
38 See Turner’s revised version of Barbarous Mexico (New York: Cassell and Co., 1912), 292.
39 John Reed is not the only author of his moment to express enthusiasm for the revolutionary promise of Mexico. Jack London’s time as a foreign correspondent during the revolution produced the short story “The Mexican” in the Saturday Evening Post, 19 Aug. 1911, although London also vocally expressed disdain for Mexico’s mestizo peoples and skepticism about their ability to institute democracy. María Cristina Mena, a Mexican immigrant, published short stories that championed indigenous Mexicans in the Century Magazine (1911–14).
40 William Howard Taft stationed troops along the US–Mexico border with the mandate to protect US people and property in Mexico, and his successor Woodrow Wilson deployed
reject armed incursion, exhibiting in its place an ethical interventionism. Through a series of adventurist anecdotes; evocative descriptions of both pastoral Mexican scenery and brutal, chaotic battles; and sympathetic stories of contact with rural laborers and rebels, Reed exposes the injustices they have suffered and illustrates the principles that impel the revolution.

The few critics to discuss Reed’s writing on Mexico provide helpful insight into how his aesthetic and political projects inform one another in Insurgent Mexico. All of his critics note Reed’s relative inexperience as a correspondent in Mexico and the romanticism with which he often described Mexican spaces and cultures, but they tend to agree that Reed was unique among the correspondents of his moment. His biographer, Robert Rosenstone, explains that Reed, like many literary journalists, writes “between realms of fact and fiction,” endeavoring to narrate lived realities rather than daily experiences.41 Christopher Wilson notes, “While most reporters were interested in troop counts, Reed translates interviews with peons, and hardly infantilizes their commitment to battle. Rather, if more correspondents habitually detached Mexican words from intentions, Reed restores them.”42 Comparing Reed’s archives, including the notebooks he used to write his dispatches and his monograph, Daniel Lehman goes even further, arguing that

the Reed of Insurgent Mexico could never shed the recognition that he – as a gringo journalist trading on the wealth and rights of North American power – was implicated by the very terms of his project. He thus leaves, wittingly or unwittingly, unacknowledged “traces” of his manipulating presence throughout the text, most notably in the liberties he takes with the historical record,

as well as in Insurgent Mexico’s overt “morality play.”43 Each scholar ultimately suggests that while Reed falls prey to some of the writerly conventions of the yellow journalism that sold newspapers for his peers, he also cannily navigates those conventions for the sake of what Lehman calls “sustained and socially informed literary nonfiction” that attends to “the ethical implications of reproducing human life and death and of marketing war misery to voyeuristic readers.”44

41 Rosenstone, 150.
44 Ibid., 94–95.
Reed’s position as a war reporter is key to the ethics he espouses because of the narrative it sets in motion; like Turner before him, Reed comes to Mexico as a (supposedly) disinterested American journalist. Rosenstone cites one of Reed’s journals in which he announces his intention “to go there without any prejudices.” This status and mobility enable him to witness and interpret for the US public. Reed’s book, then, serves as both intervention and testimony. *Insurgent Mexico* begins *in medias res* with a tense border scene: Reed evades one general after another to witness “an unbroken procession of sick, exhausted, starving” Mexican refugees who flee from the fighting, only to be robbed first by federal troops and later by US Customs. This scene implicitly urges compassion for these refugees, who would go on to meet fierce racism, including theft, violence, and lynching by US citizens and Texas rangers in the borderlands.

In contrast to Turner’s assertive Preface, which declares his mission to indict villains and urge the US public to action, Reed reveals his purpose more subtly, establishing personal connections between his autobiographical protagonist—an exemplary American—and the people of Mexico. More frequently than Turner, Reed employs translations of the Mexicans with whom he speaks, seemingly effacing his own reportorial voice and offering their “authentic” speech acts (of course, in both cases we must question the exactitude of the renderings). He describes the voice of one evocative peon thus:

But I shall not soon forget the hunger-pinched body and bare feet of an old man with the face of a saint, who said slowly: “The Revolucion is good. When it is done we shall starve never, never, never, if God is served. But it is long, and we have no food to eat, or clothes to wear. For the master has gone away from the hacienda, and we have no tools or animals to do our work with, and the soldiers take all our corn and drive away the cattle.”

In the old man’s voice, Reed first issues the central claim of *Insurgent Mexico*: that the revolution’s promise lies with the peons. Reed begins by saying that he “shall not soon forget” the saintly suffering and sagacity of the old man, emphasizing as he does both the moral stakes of the revolution and Reed’s duty to record and disseminate the man’s words.

Following Turner, Reed observes and reports the poverty of Mexico’s indigenous and working peoples, extolling as he does the poignant idealism of the men he meets. Unlike Turner, however, Reed also champions the armed

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47 Ibid., 19.
revolutionaries. He ties the peons to the rebels who fight for them, lauding the Villistas as moral and just, despite their status as “rough ex-outlaws”: “Americans had insisted that the Mexican was fundamentally dishonest — that I might expect to have my outfit stolen the first day out.”

He marvels that the rebels never injure or rob him:

“They were without discipline and without education. They were, many of them, Gringo-haters. They had not been paid a cent for six weeks and some were so desperately poor that they couldn’t boast sandals or serapes. I was a stranger with a good outfit, unarmed … And I never lost a thing.”

Reed finds the generosity of the rebels even more astonishing: “I was not permitted to pay for my food; and in a company where money was scarce and tobacco most unknown, I was kept supplied with all I could smoke by the compañeros.”

For Reed, the honesty of the hungry rebels legitimates their cause. Because the insurgents refuse to steal from Reed despite their desperate poverty, their principles must triumph over the theft and dissimulation of the powerful Porfiriato.

Reed asserts a commonality of purpose between the Villista revolutionaries and the American public. He dwells on the poverty and courtesy of Mexican workers and rebels, implicating the US government in their plight but exculpating the American people. This rhetorical move rends the rights of Mexicans from the interests of the US government; Reed disputes the precedent established by the Monroe Doctrine, which conflated US imperial sovereignty with humanitarian intervention. That long-standing precedent had only recently enabled US intervention in the Cuban War for Independence (a struggle erased by the moniker Spanish–American War, 1898), but Reed’s hemispheric community is predicated on popular sovereignty rather than either US or Mexican military or state governance. He never explicitly condemns US military incursion, but often quotes Mexicans who denounce intervention:

“And you will be the army?” I asked.

“When the Revolucion is won,” was the astonishing reply, “there will be no more army. The men are sick of armies. It is by armies that Don Porfirio robbed us.”

“But if the United States should invade Mexico?”

A perfect storm broke everywhere. “We are more valiente than the Americanos — The cursed Gringos would get no further south than Juarez — Let’s see them try — We’d drive them back over the Border on the run, and burn their capital the next day …!”

48 Ibid., 46.
49 Ibid., 46.
50 Ibid., 46–47.
51 Ibid., 35–37.
In this passage, the conceit of the conversation between reporter and insurgents also illustrates Reed’s vision for collaboration between Americans and revolutionary Mexicans. He dares Americans to come to Mexico and to hear for themselves the words of revolutionaries and campesinos: “Let Americans take the trouble to go through the Maderista army, asking whether they want peace or not! The people are sick of war.”

In the passage above, he contrasts this dialogue with the threat of military interference; the revolutionaries do not associate Reed with the “cursed Gringos” whose capital they threaten to burn. Instead, Reed accepts and aids Mexican popular sovereignty, exhibiting the potential for transnational contact and dialogue instead of dominance.

By translating Mexico’s revolution for Americans, Reed hopes to restore the democratic promise of the US in the hemisphere. His romantic stories of encounters with starving peons and stalwart rebels are vital to this project because they bind the ethical principles of progressive Americans and racialized Mexicans. His anecdotes about the (admittedly masculinist and romantic) friendship, camaraderie, and mutual support that emerge between Reed and the rebels (including Pancho Villa) exemplify the bonds Reed hopes to forge. Thus Insurgent Mexico, like Turner’s Barbarous Mexico before it, imagines a new hemispheric community based on the ethics of everyday people rather than the interests of oligarchs. Reed advances Turner’s project, moreover, by proffering his own text as rhetorical space for community; he asks readers to experience Mexico through his eyes, to see the revolutionaries as he has, and to hear their voices through his translated transcription.

II. THE LAST PROMISE OF PROSE

Although major insurrectionary activity in Mexico continued in punctuated outbursts until 1934, the death of revolutionary leader and President Venustiano Carranza and the ascent of Álvaro Obregón to the presidency in 1920 signaled the decline of the revolutionary era. In the decade that followed, peace seemed tenuous. (Obregón, for example, was assassinated after his reelection to the presidency in 1928.) Newspaper articles diligently detailed any outbreak of violence and wondered if US military intervention was imminent. Furthermore, indigenous, poor, and working-class Mexicans had yet to see fulfilled many of the earliest promises of the revolution. Despite a burgeoning nationalist culture that celebrated its indigenous heritage, the revolution

52 Ibid., 40.
53 For more on Pancho Villa’s canny relationship with Reed see Wilson, “Plotting the Border.”
had done little to disrupt the race and class hierarchies that had plagued Mexico since colonization. In the US Southwest, a rapidly growing Mexican diasporic community composed of both established Mexican American families and new refugees from the revolution faced violent political and social oppression. Turner, Reed, and their leftist contemporaries on both sides of the border had imagined a hemispheric revolution that would alter these conditions and advance democracy and class equality in both Mexico and the US. Instead, while Mexico’s intellectual and artistic indigenismo inspired a wave of US writers, artists, and filmmakers to celebrate the revolution through primitivist romance, the dire circumstances that spurred Turner’s and Reed’s exposés endured in “greater Mexico.”

In this fragile state of affairs, Katherine Anne Porter perused postrevolutionary Mexico’s faults and assessed the unintended, even unpredictable, results of foreign involvement in the country. Just as Turner and Reed indicted the collusion of Mexican and US political and economic elites, Porter levied her critique against the burgeoning leftist cultural elite in Mexico (which included, but was not limited to, Americans). She came to Mexico as a journalist, but soon began publishing short stories in which she blended fact with fiction to reveal the power structures that endured in the country despite the revolution.

Porter’s stories undercut the romantic narratives of Mexico’s revolution that emerged in the US during the late 1920s and the 1930s, demonstrating how such stories and images glamorize the postrevolutionary Mexican state and mask its failures. Furthermore, she ties these leftist romances to long-standing romances of empire, arguing that progressive cultural production appropriates images of Mexicans for domestic consumption. Porter’s “Mexico stories” — “María Concepción” (1922), “Flowering Judas” (1930),

José Limón uses Américo Paredes’s conception of “Greater Mexico” to refer to the common community that includes both peoples within the geopolitical borders of Mexico and the diasporic communities of the Southwest. See Limón, American Encounters, 3. A large community of US artists and leftist activists and intellectuals congregated in postrevolutionary Mexico. Leftist conscientious objectors fled to Mexico to escape the World War I draft, and there attempted to forge an international workers’ alliance. See Dan La Botz, “American ‘Slackers’ in the Mexican Revolution: International Proletarian Politics in the Midst of a National Revolution,” The Americas, 62, 4 (2006), 563–90. La Botz, 566, finds that the slackers’ “revolutionary socialist internationalism was thwarted by Mexican nationalism.” Alongside these leftist activists (especially journalist and historian Carleton Beals), American modernists sought inspiration from Mexican artistic and cultural indigenismo. Porter, the Mexican American public intellectual Anita Brenner, and photographer and artist Tina Modotti developed their work on Mexico in conversation. For more on the dialogue between US and Mexican modernisms see Rachel Adams, Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).
and “That Tree” (1934) – feature Americans who misunderstand and misrepresent Mexico, inadvertently enabling oppression and violence against indigenous people.55

In “Hacienda” (1934), Porter shows how international arbiters of culture (including journalists and filmmakers) embody the ongoing incursion of state power into the lives of disenfranchised Mexicans. Despite their progressive ambitions, the American characters in her novella commodify indigenous culture and ignore the violence perpetrated against subjugated peoples before their own eyes. In this way Porter builds on the anti-imperial interventionism that Turner and Reed advocated; her stories criticize popular depictions of Mexico and represent the personhood of Mexican peons. Moreover, she demonstrates how narrative can grapple with the ethical dilemma at the heart of transnational humanitarian engagement.

Flowering Judas and Other Stories (1930) introduced most of Porter’s US readers to her vision of revolutionary Mexico. Porter added “Hacienda” to the collection’s second printing in 1935.56 Porter’s story demonstrates how the antidemocratic power that characterized the Porfiriat has been reproduced in the postrevolutionary state. By the 1920s–1930s, painters, writers, and filmmakers felt sufficiently removed from the revolution to reflect on its heroes and villains, making new claims for the conflict’s historical significance. These representations of the revolution tended to coopt its objectives and romanticize its struggles. In the US, Mexican leftist muralists like José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera achieved artistic celebrity while sensational biographies of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata flooded bookshelves.57 Perhaps one of the most popular textual

55 “Flowering Judas,” Porter’s most famous Mexico story and perhaps the tale for which she is best known, indicts the international left (embodied in her protagonist Laura) for betraying indigenous Mexicans. “María Concepción” also dramatizes the thwarted hopes of indigenous Mexicans in the postrevolutionary era, even as it excoriates cultural appropriation through Givens, a minor character who excavates archaeological artifacts and employs many villagers, but knows little and cares less about the living indígenas who work for him. Most pertinently, the story “That Tree” records Porter’s frustration with US journalists in Latin America; she depicts a failed poet who succeeds as a journalist in Latin America by developing a shallow “expertise” on the region’s politics.

56 Before Flowering Judas, Americans experienced Porter’s perspective on Mexico through her dispatches and stories for the Christian Science Monitor (1921–22), Survey Graphic (1924), and Century Magazine (1922, 1924). Porter also reviewed books on Mexico for the New York Herald Tribune (1924–43).

Porter herself accompanied Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov as they shot ¡Qué Viva México! (never completed, 1932) on location. She would first record this experience as nonfictional “interpretive journalism” in a 1932 issue of the Virginia Quarterly Review, expanding it to the fictional “Hacienda” in 1934. As both a foreign correspondent and a fiction writer, Porter had firsthand experience with the competing interests that structured any representation of Mexico’s politics and subjects. “Hacienda” focuses on acts of representation themselves, demonstrating how art, film, and journalism alike can breed political fictions with horrific consequences. The text thus exhibits a new level of self-consciousness about US cultural intercession; in addition to her critique of film, Porter inverts the genre of literary journalism, employing journalistic fiction to interrogate the position of the foreign reporter as “witness” to Mexico’s politics and cultures.

“Hacienda” follows the Russian communist filmmaker Andreyev (a clear fictional equivalent of Eisenstein), a wealthy American investor named Kennerly, and the narrator (a nameless female journalist), whose lives collide on a pulque plantation in the Mexican desert. The still-working hacienda serves as scenic background for Andreyev’s film, but his still shots erase the exploitative conditions of the hacienda, the decadence of its owners, and the humanity of its peons. “Hacienda” registers the disparity between foreign representations of Mexicans and the living subjects that film and text fail to record. The camera misses the erotic relationship that evolves between the plantation owner Don Genaro’s wife and his mistress behind the scenes. More importantly, it coopts the peons who live and work on the hacienda, invading and altering their lives. In one dramatic example, a young worker named Justino and his unnamed sister live out the tragic plot of the film. Weeks before the events of “Hacienda” take place, Justino had

58 See Janice Stout, Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 81, for more on the relationship between nonfictional and fictional versions of “Hacienda.”

59 Josefina Niggli and Américo Paredes also explore this problem in their Depression-era texts.

60 See Robert Mellin, “Unreeled: A History of Katherine Anne Porter’s Filmic Text, Hacienda,” Mosaic, 33, 2 (June 2000), 47–66, Academic OneFile, Web. Mellin interprets “Hacienda” as a narrative film, constructed with scenes and montages in conversation with Eisenstein’s unfinished Que Viva Mexico!. He studies the text’s elaborate first version, whose typeface and bibliographic references signal its engagement with film, and suggests that “Hacienda has nevertheless not been read as an account of a writer’s successful struggle to represent the ‘many opposing forces’ of Mexico; attention has tended to shift away from the narrator in order to focus on the ‘real’ meaning of the story, i.e., the follies of Eisenstein.”
played the role of a young peon who accidentally kills his sister. As the story unfolds, Justino really does shoot his sister while playing with a pistol he found on the set. In this incident the negligent filmmakers have generated real-life violence, killing a woman and condemning her brother.

Yet Porter also illustrates the more subtle violence wreaked by acts of representation, using the making of the film to evoke the romantic portraits generated by a variety of media (including photography, art, and even the reportage that her narrator writes). Porter describes the images recorded for their scenic nuance by the Russian radical filmmaker:

Andreyev went on showing me pictures from that part of the film they were making at the pulque hacienda … They had chosen it carefully, he said; it was really an old-fashioned feudal estate with the right kind of architecture, no modern improvements to speak of, and with the purest type of peons.⁶¹

Here the ocularity of the photograph is crucial: the filmmakers require these prerevolutionary archetypes to evoke the rampant inequality and exploitation of the Porfiriat. That they can still find this despotic locale in the 1930s should trouble the romantic tale they plan to tell, but the filmmakers seem unable to really see the peons they mean to film.

“Hacienda” demonstrates how the camera (along with its operators) has imposed its distorted perspective on both the subjects of the photographs and the audiences who will see them (and later, Andreyev hopes, the film). As Porter describes the peons in the film’s still shots,

The closed dark faces were full of instinctive suffering, without individual memory, or only the kind of memory animals may have, who when they feel the whip know they suffer but do not know why and cannot imagine a remedy … Death in these pictures was a procession with lighted candles, love a matter of vague gravity … Even the figure of the Indian in his ragged loose white clothing, weathered and molded to his flattened, narrow-waisted body … had this formal traditional tragedy, beautiful and hollow.⁶²

“Hacienda” undercuts the interpretive act of the photograph by articulating how the shot converts moving subjects to “a landscape with figures.” She notes how the photographs erase “individual memory” and replace the complex, human experiences of “love,” “death,” and want with images of quaint pageantry. For the narrator, the photographs reveal nothing about the “closed dark faces” of their indigenous subjects; the camera projects onto them the “instinctive suffering” of animals.

⁶² Ibid., 236.
In this way, the still shots illustrate the state of affairs between the US and Mexico in the 1930s and anticipate their fraught future. Andreyev, like many foreign journalists, artists, travel writers, and filmmakers before him, paints a heroic portrait of the Mexican proletariat, but his romance ultimately constitutes an addition to the dehumanizing narratives about Mexico that still pervaded the global North. For Porter, these narratives enable and reproduce both the systemic violence perpetrated against indígenas and the blithe intervention of foreign military, industrial, and cultural elites in Mexico. Neither “Hacienda” nor its author can undo these crimes, but they can uncover how acts of representation have supported them. In this way Porter, like Turner and Reed before her, exposes the multifarious avenues of US imperialism and illustrates a more ethical mode of engagement. In “Hacienda,” her journalist-narrator records and reports the toxic incursion of the filmmakers and their entourage; the story itself becomes her corrective intervention.

Although “Hacienda” is, in many ways, a tragedy, Porter ends with a subtle note of optimism. As the narrator leaves the hacienda, Justino is still incarcerated and the film continues to wreak havoc on the people whose lives it captures. The narrator worries that the plantation workers will always suffer “under a doom imposed by the landscape,” but finds and transmits comfort through the voice of her driver; he tells her to come back in ten days, that soon the barren dry season will make way for a green and plentiful scene. Here the driver alludes to a future belied by the film’s fantasy of stasis and timelessness, a future that proves that the deterministic power of Andreyev’s film is anything but absolute. Andreyev will lose his grim setting. His film, as readers familiar with Eisenstein’s abandoned project knew, would never be completed; its production would be hopelessly compromised by the competing agendas of its director and his entourage (men like Carlos, who writes patriotic theme music, and Kennerly, who issues bribes and handles the budget), as well as the Mexican officials who censor him. In other words, its contradictory objectives would become its undoing.

By illustrating why and how portraits of Mexico distort the very people they aim to represent, suspending them in time and space for the consumption of the US public, Porter warns readers not to fall prey to the dangerous visual fantasies that the film promotes. Most importantly, she also suggests how the peons themselves evade and defy the filmmakers’ efforts to render their lives and stories. The actions and reactions of the laborers, including Justino’s sister’s death, always happen offstage in Porter’s novella, eluding appropriation by filmmaker and fiction-writer alike. In fact, Kennerly even

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65 Ibid.
bemoans the fact that they couldn’t capture the real shooting on film! Porter refuses to replicate the film’s exhibition. By displacing these dramatic scenes of violence and exploitation, Porter defends the autonomy of indigenous Mexicans and refuses to render them stock characters or spectacles in her own drama of Americans in Mexico. Even as it unsettles the acts of representation within the story, “Hacienda” insists on the limits of its own empiricism – its ability to know and translate Mexico for the US public.

In “Hacienda,” Porter expands Turner’s and Reed’s earlier exposés of US imperial power by interrogating her own role alongside other progressives as an agent of that power; her novella advances this reflexivity as a corrective to romantic narratives of imperial and progressive intervention alike. Read together, Porter’s Mexico tales exemplify the power of stories to theorize the vital connection between the US and Mexico and to reveal its tenuousness. Attuned to state and interstate violence and the discourses and images that enable it, she sees texts as the locus for ethical engagement, the space to expose these acts of violence and to dispute the logic that makes them possible.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Turner, Reed, and Porter might be perturbed to find how the radicalism of their ethical vision has been interpolated into dominant culture. The “foreign correspondent” given flesh and moral purpose in their texts (and those of their contemporaries) became a key trope in internationalist literature and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Inspired by early twentieth-century reporters, later novelists from Graham Greene to Joan Didion, along with innumerable films, including Roger Spottiswoode’s Under Fire (1983) and Oliver Stone’s Salvador (1986), use the trope to varying effects in their portraits of Latin America, figuring foreign correspondents either as “flawed but sincere seekers of the truth” who orient audiences to the moral compass of text/film or as charismatic adventurers whose derring-do involves stealing the compass itself. The clearest example of this appropriation is Reed’s biography, the source material for eponymous characters in Reds and the HBO film And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself (2003), a misleading title insofar as Antonio Banderas played the role of Villa. These multifarious uses of the trope should remind us that the international journalist as author or character is neither inherently radical nor impossibly mired in state power, neither an unrestricted agent nor a passive receptacle for nationalist ideologies.

Porter’s, Reed’s, and Turner’s ethical quandaries actually anticipate those of future correspondents and other political arbiters in a century marked both by unprecedented international travel and by perpetual multinational war. They demonstrate a progressive impetus for alliance with and activism on behalf of peoples subject to political oppression and violence, as well as the range of dilemmas that accompany this impetus. Turner and Reed endeavor both to use their power as reporters and to transcend it, an ideal that neither fully accomplishes. Yet these correspondents do disrupt the circulation of stock narratives about “barbarous Mexicans”; Turner in particular is remembered in and beyond Mexico as a hero of the revolution precisely because of his willingness to speak against Díaz on behalf of those who could not.

In contrast, Porter’s “Hacienda” presents a writer whose reflexivity corrects her predecessors’ lack of reflection, despite how that suppleness risks inaction, a kind of political negativity. In Porter’s refusal to reinscribe imperial power via text, scholars of hemispheric American studies may see our own fraught endeavor to challenge long-standing rhetorics of US national insularity and global dominance, even as we critically reflect on our own positions within the US (and within the academy) and the benefits we adduce. Thus, like Porter, we problematize, emphasize limitations, and mine the archives for figures who once defied state hegemony. Yet we can also follow Porter’s example in two other ways: first by remembering the subjects who have evaded narrative – not as silenced subalterns but as actors and speakers in a vertiginous period that textual archives have only recorded in fragments. Second, analyzing Turner, Reed, and Porter together may remind us of the importance of recovering radical voices, but also of looking again to the future, of taking up their challenge to change the discursive terrain by which the US imagines its national, racial, and cultural others.

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