

SISTERS AT WAR

Mexican Women's Poetry and the U.S.-Mexican War

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Abstract: During the U.S.-Mexican War (1846–1848), Mexican women published poems that tested the boundaries of conventional definitions of female subjectivity and domesticity. Central to the construction of female authorship was the idea of a collective women's voice, a "lyrical sisterhood" that situated the individual poetic voice within a broader historical tradition and a contemporaneous coalition of women writers. In speaking out about the war, women poets foregrounded their symbolic authority to exalt Mexican resistance to the invader, to decry Mexico's political and military failures, or to measure the horrors of war. In doing so, they self-consciously used gender to blur the distinction between the public and domestic spheres.

One of the most promising areas of future research into literature and national identity in early Republican Mexico is the literature of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848. Mexican literary responses to the U.S. invasion of its territory, and to Mexico's continued defeats on the battlefield, constitute an invaluable archive for examining the emergence of Mexican nationalism. Indeed, during the war and its aftermath, Mexican writers recognized the value of national unity as they never had before, because they saw their defeat on the battlefield as a function of their political disunity. "A nation is nothing but a large family," wrote the distinguished *moderado* writer Mariano Otero (1848/2010, 139) in his 1848 assessment of Mexico's defeat, "and for this to be strong and powerful, it is necessary for all its members to be intimately joined by common interest and other feelings of the heart."¹ Such fraternal bonds did not take root between 1821 and 1848, when *pronunciamientos* and struggles between centralists and federalists, as well as *puro* and *moderado* federalists, destabilized the state (see Santoni 1995; Costeloe 2002). Yet the outbreak of the war, and the threat posed by the invading U.S. Army, afforded Mexican writers with a nationalist vision that transcended sectarianism. Literature, particularly poetry, gave writers an alternative to the highly partisan political tracts that populated Mexico's newspapers. As the stuff of individual feeling and sensibility, poetry enabled Mexicans to engage with their mythological or historical forefathers, imagine a collective victory against the northern aggressor, and evoke images of their nation's greatness.

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1. Translation by Gustavo Pellón.

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In the largely forgotten corpus of Mexican poetry published during the war, women's poetry represents a particularly revealing dimension of this nationalist literary moment in Mexican history (see Jiménez Rueda 1928; González Peña 1940; Foster 1994).² In fact, the war coincided with a rise in publications for women that blurred public and private spheres. Paradoxically, the marginality of women's voices in public affairs afforded them opportunities to define a platform from which to speak out. That is, women could express the horror and emotional anguish provoked by Mexico's military defeats and internal discord without explicitly compromising prevailing views of gender. Moreover, because combative and victimized women were dominant tropes in U.S. and Mexican discourses about the war, women writers discovered that they were already at the center of cultural representations of the deeper or symbolic meanings of the war. In the pages that follow, I trace the emergence of Mexican women's voices in the years leading up to and during the war, and the ways women poets understood and enacted their position as writers. Specifically, women poets cultivated a symbolic sisterhood through which they criticized Mexico's political failures and subtly challenged the separation of spheres that excluded them from political speech.

IN SEARCH OF A VOICE

Although Mexican women took on prominent roles during the War of Independence as republican spies, smugglers, nurses, and conspirators, the years that followed the war saw the rise and consolidation of European notions of domestic femininity, particularly the construct of the *ángel del hogar*, known in the English-speaking world as the angel of the hearth (see Dijkstra 1986, 3–24; Arrom 1985, 32–38; Galí Boadella 2002, 95–97). According to the emergent bourgeois belief system that enshrined the *ángel del hogar* as an ideal feminine type, women constituted the weaker and more sensitive sex, defined by motherhood and sensibility. The prospectuses of Mexico's women's magazines in the 1830s and 1840s reinforce the role of the *ángel del hogar*. In the first issue, in 1841, of the *Semanario de las Señoritas Mejicanas*, for example, we find a staged dialogue between various men and women at a *tertulia* over the merits of the prospectus of the magazine, which calls for the education of women. Some argue against women's education, seeing it as a threat to men, whereas others disagree, arguing that women need to be educated to strengthen marriage and motherhood (Gondra 1841, 15). One of the conversants, a woman called Doña Quitería, playfully communicates the idea that women's education is not coterminous with women's entry into the masculine sphere of politics: "while all clamor for political reform, I am up in arms in favor of reforming women's education" (Gondra 1841, 14, my translation).

Despite these restrictive views about gender, Mexico on the eve of the U.S.-Mexican War also saw countercurrents that created openings for women to seize the word and publicly speak for themselves. Under the mantle of enlightened do-

2. For the period spanning independence and the Reforma movement, twentieth-century Mexican literary histories privilege writers whose poetry and fiction were collected in book form after the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848.

mesticity, women began to represent and share their experiences through poetry, thereby carving out a space for their voice to be heard by the educated women who constituted the primary readership of literary print material in Mexico (for circulation figures and discussion, see Bergmann et al. 1990, 173–182). There were several reasons for this loosening of strictures against women's writing and the idea of women as visible, public writers. The first of these was the influence of romanticism. As Susan Kirkpatrick (1989) notes, the rise of romanticism in Europe created a space for women to express themselves as subjects. Kirkpatrick argues that the privileging of introspection as a source of knowledge about experience and nature, and of sensibility and emotion as the domain of a properly romantic imagination, afforded women a measure of authority to begin to construct a romantic literary tradition. "If feeling was a feminine specialty," writes Kirkpatrick (1989, 8), "if the loving and restorative spirit of the home was identical with the female psyche, then women surely had something to say in the forging of a language to represent the full range of subjective experience."

The realities of a booming print culture at midcentury and the rise of Mexican women's magazines also played a role in promoting the self-expression of women. The introduction of lithography into Mexico in the 1840s led to the publication of the most handsome, illustrated periodical publications Mexico had seen up to that time in its history (see Pérez Salas C. 2007, 168–169). In particular, women's magazines such as *Semanario de las Señoritas Mejicanas* and *Panorama de las Señoritas Mejicanas*, both of which were printed by Vicente García Torres, were predicated on valuing women and women's experiences as worthy objects of public discourse. Isidro Rafael Gondra's *Semanario* was conservative, with numerous articles emphasizing religious subject matter and the ideology of domesticity. *Panorama* was much more cosmopolitan and modern in its approach to gender, despite a prospectus that promised to downplay public affairs in favor of the themes of an enlightened domesticity (García Torres 1842, 1–2). In particular, many of the articles in *Panorama* provided historical precedents and philosophical and political arguments for women to step outside of the home into the public arena. For example, in 1842 the magazine reprinted a French article originally published in 1786 titled "Valor en las mujeres," which sings the praises of valiant women in history and myth, such as the Persian fighters who defeated Ciro, the Sabines who fought alongside the Romans, and the women of Saguntum. Individual women were singled out through the column "Biografías de mujeres célebres," which featured brief biographies of religious and historical heroines celebrated for their courage, sacrifice, and talents.

Indeed, we can find some intriguing evidence of how such galleries of warrior women and women writers might have fostered female empowerment and nationalist engagement in a striking article titled "Invitación a los mexicanos," by María de la Salud García; the article was published on August 31, 1846, in the Mexico City newspaper *El Republicano*. Little is known about Salud García other than the fact that her short stories and a novel appeared in the women's magazine *La Semana de las Señoritas Mejicanas* in 1851 (for more on Salud García, see Mata 2003, 38; Galí Boadella 2002, 375). In her article for *El Republicano*, Salud García explains that the urgency of Mexico's crisis empowers her to rise above the

limitations of her sex and authorizes her to call on the men of Mexico to restage, in the present war, their past triumphs against the yoke of Spanish colonialism (Salud García 2010, 114). If Mexican men do not rise to the occasion, she threatens, the women, whom she calls the weak and useless half of the human race, will abandon their household chores to fight to the death in place of the men, like the poet Telesilla of Argos, who led an army of women against the warriors of Sparta (114). Salud García's argument that women could be transcendental historical actors and replace men in battle did not go unchallenged. Three weeks later, an anonymous respondent called "M" published a poem in *El Republicano* (1846a, 3) about Salud García's article, imploring her and other women to refrain from becoming warrior women and to instead weave laurels for the battered heads of their male liberators.

Besides drawing inspiration from the heroines of the past, Mexican women readers and writers like Salud García also began to make horizontal connections between themselves and other Mexican women poets of their time. The construction of a lyrical sisterhood (to borrow a phrase from Kirkpatrick) becomes a frame for imagining a space through which women readers can become speakers and writers. For example, Mexican women poets explicitly dedicated poems to other women writers and to each other, and they used their art to explore their deep bonds. In 1845, Guadalupe Calderón published an elegy on the death of her brother, the distinguished poet and playwright Fernando Calderón, and dedicated it to her sister-in-law Josefa Letechipía de González. Josefa Letechipía de González, in turn, published an elegy about her friend Josefa Heraclia Badillo (see Vigil 1893, 179–180) and published another poem dedicated to the Spanish poet Carolina Coronado in which she admiringly cites other women writers: Sappho, Teresa de Ávila, and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (see Galí Boadella 2002, 378; for a discussion of women's friendships, poetry, and Sappho, see Galí Boadella 2002, 377–385; Kirkpatrick 1989, 79–80; Vincent 2004, 52–60). By writing to one another, invoking women writers of the past, and exploring their bonds of friendship, women poets made their plural voice a defining force within their own poetic subjectivity. In contrast, male authors of the romantic age such as José de Espronceda, Ignacio Rodríguez de Galván, William Wordsworth, and William Hazlitt did not have to frame their poetic self-expression in a collectivist manner; theirs was a Promethean poetry of the individual, of an exalted "author" whose identity was predicated on a solitary quest to know and celebrate the self (see Shanahan 1992, 94; Mora 1998, 133–134).

In addition to the ideology and aesthetic of romanticism, and the rise of spaces for women's voices in Mexican print culture, class privilege and family networks constituted another way to authorize women's voices in print. Most of the women who achieved a modicum of literary recognition in the middle and second half of the century belonged to notable Mexican families or to the families of the so-called *hombres de bien* (Granillo Vázquez and Hernández Palacios 2005, 133–134). The *hombre de bien* was a virtuous, honorable gentleman and "ideal citizen" belonging to an emergent middle class who prized public office, posts in the civil or military bureaucracy, and other professions associated with power and influence (Costeloe 2002, 18). Networks of women's literary vocation and solidarity

spread through the family ties of the *hombres de bien*, as well as through those of the urban and provincial elites. For example, one of the most celebrated Mexican poets of the first half of the nineteenth century was Fernando Calderón, and both his sister Guadalupe and his daughter Soledad were published poets (Granillo Vázquez and Hernández Palacios 2005, 134). In turn, Josefa Letechipía de González, apart from being Fernando Calderón's sister-in-law, was a close friend and collaborator of his sister Guadalupe, with whom she wrote poetry. Similarly, the daughter-in-law of Vicente García Torres, Josefina Pérez de García, was also a published poet, and Dolores Puig de León, Catalina Zapata de Puig, and Albertina Puig all belonged to the same extended family, which included the novelist J. M. Puig Cassauranc (Granillo Vázquez and Hernández Palacios 2005, 134). Writing ran in families, and it was precisely in the families of the *hombres de bien* and the enlightened upper classes that women writers found a space to write, as well as the networks to connect with or mentor female relatives in the art of literary expression.

LYRICAL SISTERHOOD AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Although prominent literary magazines intended for women readers and the publication of poetry by women had emerged by the 1840s, we have relatively few examples of poetry written by women about the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848. One problem is that women poets had to compete for space in national publications with men, whose patriotic poetry became increasingly visible during the war. Women's poetry was also often signed with initials only, when not presented anonymously, thus making attribution to women difficult, if not impossible. For this reason, the poems I have recovered and selected for this research note can be traced back to specific women's organizations and identifiable women poets of whom we have some biographical information. The poems illustrate the ways in which gender, voice, and literary convention shaped literary responses to a moment of grave national crisis and to the social status of women's voices.

Some poems by women about the war were printed in newspapers as marches or hymns, and although we do not know whether they were indeed sung, or to what music, or whether this labeling was just a literary conceit, their identification with song is significant because music was considered an extension of feminine refinement, sensibility, and beauty (Galí Boadella 2002, 187). Poems inspired by musical form, such as "Marcha que la junta patriótica de Señoritas poblanas dedica al batallón de los libres" (*El Republicano* 1846d) and "Himno dedicado a la sección militar que marcha a la villa del Paso a batir a los norteamericanos, por unas señoritas chihuahuenses" (*El Republicano* 1846b), also accent femininity insofar as they are put forward as works created by communities of women, a practice men did not share in this period.³ The corporate nature of women's collective authorship may be seen in relation to politically sanctioned forms of women's service to the state in nineteenth-century Mexico, as in the case of women's

3. A thorough review of all of the poems published in the newspapers *El Republicano* and *El Monitor Republicano* during the U.S.-Mexican War supports this assertion.

charitable societies and patriotic juntas that supported the war effort. In 1846, for example, the government of Zacatecas sought to capitalize on women's willingness to aid the war effort by creating the Junta Patriótica de Beneficencia, through which its women members could solicit supplies, sew clothes and sheets, and support the stocking of hospitals and medical personnel at war (Ríos Zúñiga 2005, 238). Indeed, at least one of the women discussed here, Guadalupe Calderón, and possibly her coauthors, belonged to this junta (Ríos Zúñiga 2005, 238). The offering of a song to departing troops, then, may be read as yet another service, like the sewing of clothes and bandages, that women could provide to the war effort without compromising their domesticity.⁴

The authors of the "Marcha que la junta patriótica," the "Himno," and the individual author of the composition titled "Marcha guerrera, compuesta por una mexicana" (*El Republicano* 1846c) all affirm a role for themselves as the inspiration and conscience of the war effort. Rather than directly challenging prevailing definitions of gender, these poets capitalized on their status as the "weaker" sex to inspire martial virility, demanding protection and promising recompense to men who are courageous in battle. The authors of the 1846 "Marcha que la junta patriótica," for example, conjure the horror of the frail virgin transformed into the invader's concubine, situating woman in the role of disempowered victim, along with children and the elderly: "The innocent child, and the weak elder / Already tremble as they watch the lost homeland; / The sinless virgin already hears the tyrant, / Collect the caresses of the surrendered slave." This imagery, common in poetry by men, sought to instill horror in the reader and inspire a renewal of courage and self-sacrifice in the face of the invader.⁵

If the foregoing poems deployed traditional definitions of gender to speak out on the war, one of two poems published on Friday, November 27, 1846, in *El Republicano* provides us with a much more pointed and complex testimony about the war. Both poems, "A la patria" and "La tempestad," are signed by no fewer than three authors, which reinforces the idea of a lyrical sisterhood: Guadalupe Calderón; Josefa Terán; and "Una Zacatecana," the pseudonym of Josefa Letechipía de González (Calderón, Terán, and Una Zacatecana 2010, 170–173). Their names are accompanied by a line that reads, "Hacienda del Pabellón, septiembre 1846," which indicates that the poems were written in Aguascalientes, which was then a department of the state of Zacatecas.⁶ Guadalupe Calderón, the sister of the writer Fernando Calderón, was a well-regarded poet in civic circles. Josefa Letechipía de González was the sister of both Manuela Letechipía, Fernando Calderón's wife, and Pedro Letechipía, whose valor in combat against the French twenty years after the U.S.-Mexican War garnered him a place in the *Rotonda de hombres ilustres*. Josefa Letechipía was active in the same circles as Guadalupe Calderón, reading patriotic and commemorative poems at public functions and providing support

4. In contrast, male poets in this period either titled their poems individually or generically titled them as odes.

5. My translation. For comparison to men's poetry, see "Al ser supremo" by R.B. (1847), "A mi patria" (June 3, 1846) and "A mi patria" (May 30, 1846) by Guillermo Prieto (1846a, 1846b), and "Veracruz y el General Scott" (*El Monitor Republicano* 1847).

6. Aguascalientes was a department of Zacatecas until 1857.

to the war effort against the United States (Ríos Zúñiga 2005, 237–236). The close relationship between the two women is clearly seen in Guadalupe Calderón's elegiac farewell to her brother Fernando, "A la memoria de mi hermano," which was prominently dedicated to Josefa Letechipía and published in *El Museo Mexicano* in 1846. Letechipía's poetry, usually signed "Una Zacatecana," appeared on more than one occasion in *El Republicano* and was also published in *El Album Mexicano* in 1849 and in *La Semana de las Señoritas Mejicanas* in 1852. Because the Letechipías owned the Pabellón estate, it is fair to surmise that Guadalupe and Josefa Letechipía both resided there, along with the widow of Calderón, Manuela (for more on the family, see Gómez Serrano 2001, 159). Less is known about Josefa Terán, but she was probably related to Jesús Terán, an Aguascalientes notable who came to national prominence as one of the ministers of Benito Juárez. In 1868 and 1871, Doña Josefa and one Doña Tomasa Terán took out loans in Aguascalientes, which suggests that Josefa managed her own household and financial affairs with Tomasa (Gómez Serrano 2001, 216, 379).⁷

The fact that "A la patria" and "La tempestad" are signed by three women, collectively, underlines their commitment to sharing a voice. In the brief and straightforward poem, "A la patria," the poets hit on the commonplace themes that characterized the vast majority of Mexican poetry written by men about the war, namely the Yankee invasion as a violation of the feminine homeland and the failures of Mexican unity (for more on Mexican poetry on the U.S.-Mexican war, see Conway 2010). In contrast, "La tempestad" breaks with contemporaneous poetry by men by introducing coded criticisms of Mexico and Mexican masculinity. The poem takes the motif of the tempest, and its effects on a peaceful, pastoral scene, to allegorize the effects of the war on Mexico. The poem begins with the gathering of dark, stormy clouds and the fearsome flashes of lightning and deafening sounds of thunder, which shake the earth to its foundation. The lightning, like the electric sparking of thought, illuminates the mind with peaks and reflections, diagramming ways of seeing and knowing the self in relation to the world. In these dramatic illuminations, the shadows of the branches of gigantic pine trees battle one another in the wind, evoking the image of warring antagonists. Then the rain comes in strong torrents, overflowing the river and destroying the fertile pastures and woods of yesterday, dragging heavy debris in its wake. The pastoral *locus amoenus*, with its cultivated fields and grazing lands, is overrun, drowned, and crushed by boulders and water. In the poem's frame of personal subjectivity, the image of the destructive flood mirrors the power of uncontrolled emotion, which overruns the ordered self. This reading is corroborated by a later poem by Letechipía de González titled "A un rosal, el día de la partida de mi hijo," published in *El Album Mexicano* in 1849, in which the poet uses the same image of the torrent of water to describe the effects of sorrow on her heart upon the departure of her son (Galí Boadella 2002, 362).

Yet "La tempestad" takes its exploration of the destructive power of the flood much further, ultimately linking it to the war, by suddenly introducing the image

7. In 1863, Josefa and Tomasa Terán visited the home of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, along with Benito Juárez, Jesús Terán, and Guillermo Prieto (Paz 1875, 12).

of a bull that has bolted into the hills, fleeing both the storm and its custodian, a “poor farmer” who finds his stable empty. The closing lines of the poem then amplify the image of absence and the experience of abandonment:

The innocent birds in their flight,
Cut the air, describing circles,
And return flustered to the nests
That once saw their fond wooing.
Oh, grandiose spectacle! Sublime!
Worthy of the great author of the universe!
(Calderón, Terán, and Una Zacatecana 2010, 172)⁸

The flight of the bull, an archetype of masculine virility, mirrors the flight of love from the nests of the innocent feminine birds, whose abandonment leaves them flustered and uncertain, flying in circles. Abandoned to their empty nests, and to the destruction caused by the flood, the birds, like the orphaned women of defeated Mexico, mourn the loss of the earthly paradise of the motherland.

In “La tempestad,” our poets have clearly indicted the martial virility of Mexico. Whereas their male contemporaries were quick to invoke the threat the United States posed to the safety of the virginal homeland as a propagandistic rallying cry, these poets represent the failure of Mexico and the abandonment of its women as something that has already occurred at the outset of the war. Indeed, the sublimity of the terrible scene in this poem allows for an unspoken margin of hope, as it is the very nature of the sublime to stir up the strongest emotions in the romantic subject. The form those emotions should take, and in which actions they should result, is not explicitly stated, but it can be safely surmised that self-sacrifice, valor, and resistance are the outcomes that the poets intended.

JOSEFA HERACLIA BADILLO’S DUAL VOICE

Although the poet Josefa Heraclia Badillo was very active during the war, appearing repeatedly in the pages of *El Republicano* between 1846 and 1847, much less is known about her than about Calderón and Letechipía de González. Letechipía de González’s elegiac poem “Ofrenda a la memoria de la señorita Doña Josefa Badillo” indicates that the two women knew each other, or at least that Letechipía de González admired her poetry. Little else is known about her, other than the fact she was a signatory of a women’s petition against the *tolerancia de cultos* in 1856 (for the petition in question, see Zamacois 1880, 1026).⁹ Of the six poems by Badillo that appeared in the pages of *El Republicano* between 1846 and 1847, only one, “Inquietud,” lends itself to an allegorical reading about the ongoing war (Badillo 1847). In this poem, Badillo develops the theme of the tempest that we’ve seen already, but to a much more contradictory end, without criticizing the nation-state or the martial virility of Mexico. Rather, her poem uses the conven-

8. Translation by Gustavo Pellón.

9. Two of Badillo’s poems are featured in Vigil’s (1893) anthology of women poets, but neither he nor other early commentators on women’s poetry in Mexico, such as Pimentel (1892) and Peza (1901), wrote anything about her life.

tions of feminine sentimentality to map her struggle to find a coherent voice in a moment of national crisis. The resulting poem is split in two parts, each one designating a separate theme, problematic, and resolution.

The poem opens with the poet affirming her sadness over the absence of her beloved, a sadness that is driving her to an early death. The poetic voice declares that it is her mission to suffer, to die of feeling, even going as far as to wish that she not be reunited with her beloved, because it would interrupt her defining sorrow: "I will not see you before I die, / because to see you again, I'd be glad / and my sad mission would not be fulfilled / if I expired less unhappy" (Badillo 1847, 3).¹⁰ Her life is a "desert of thorns," whereas her beloved lives the easy life, picking flowers on the easy path he travels. She has given up on being reunited with this man and muses that she may be lowered into her grave very soon. Up to here, the poem fits comfortably in the well-established canon of sentimental poetry, particularly poems inspired by Germain de Stael's popular *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), in which the titular protagonist, a latter-day Sappho, famously renounces her happiness in a much-imitated, sorrowful farewell titled "The Song of Corinne" (for more on "The Song of Corinne" and its popularity among women writers, see Vincent 2004). The focus of "Inquietud," then, is the sorrowful, female self that seeks to immolate herself on the altar of her own suffering. Abandoned by her beloved, the poetic voice embraces melancholy and solitude to realize herself.

It is at this point that the poem splits in two, effectively twisting itself into a different kind of thematic formulation. With the conjunction *pero*, Badillo introduces the fear that the object of her love is in danger while on a sea journey.

But . . . you yourself perhaps in this very instant
Find yourself surrounded by a thousand dangers;
And nothing more than a plank and a mast
Separate you from the abyss! (Badillo 1847, 3)

She imagines the tempest lowering a dark, threatening veil over his head and fear filling his previously peaceful heart, driving him to beg for clemency from the heavens. The poetic I calls out to the imperiled traveler, calling him "her good, her light, her love and her sweet brother," and then she sees him perish in the storm. There is little consolation in the fact that his death is only imagined, however, because the beloved is soon to depart on a sea voyage, and the poetic voice fears that harm will come to him. Specifically, she envisions a bandit with a bloodied dagger stabbing him in the breast. The poem closes with Badillo calling out to her beloved that she would rather never see him again than have him risk his life by leaving the homeland.

The duality of "Inquietud" is at first quite perplexing. In its first movement, the poem is anchored in the conviction that the mournful poetic voice has been abandoned by the male subject, whose life is lackadaisical. The "I" turns away from this betrayer to embrace the prospect of death. Yet the second part of the poem reconfigures this relationship significantly. Now the poetic voice situates herself

10. All translations from Badillo are my own.

not in opposition to her beloved, but as a caring and anxious protector who is consumed by anxiety over his safety. Her references to him as “her good, her life, and her brother,” and her praise for his inherent goodness, introduce intensely amorous and fraternal feelings into the poem. Whereas in the first half of the poem, the poet had turned away from her beloved to embrace solitude, she now associates her beloved’s presence to his safety and survival, and to her happiness. The focus is not on her own, solitary death, but on the prospect of her beloved’s death at sea or at the hand of an assassin. The poetic voice turns away from death to embrace life, but this gesture is fraught with tension, with disquiet (hence the title of the poem), as terrifying visions of her beloved’s death at sea haunt her.

One way to resolve the tension between the two parts of the poem is to read it as an unconscious revenge fantasy, in which the sorrow induced by the man in the first half of the poem results in a “tempest” and an assassin who threatens to exterminate him for his mistreatment of the speaker. Tempests are indeed a romantic figuring of emotion unleashed, and as such, “Inquietud” may be read in relation to a fundamental tension in the poem between repression (mournful sentimentalism) and unconscious rage (the apparition of disembodied, imaginary threats to the beloved). However, here I propose a more historical reading, one that maintains rather than resolves the tension between both parts of the poem through the suggestion of allegory.

When the poetic voice refers to her beloved as a brother, linking his endangerment to his departure from the “sweet homeland” and from the “patriot grounds” of Mexico, she begins to suggest that the emotional world of the poem has shifted from sentimental love to fraternal love and patriotic sentiment. The invocation of a sea voyage and a tempest as the matrix of her fear is also significant, because such maritime imagery has a long tradition of political symbolism, hearkening all the way back to Plato’s *Republic*, in which the Greek philosopher explored the question of educated elites and political power through the metaphor of the “Ship of State” (6.488b–489; for more on this metaphor and its use in the nineteenth century, see Quilley 2006, 23). The image appears in other Mexican poems about the war, as well as in a political cartoon published in the satirical newspaper *El Calavera* in February 1847, which shows a ship called *The Mexican Republic* being tossed on its side by waves as a mournful figure with a skull head watches the shipwreck.¹¹ It is not a great leap to associate “Inquietud” with this more explicit body of war literature, especially when we consider that the Yankee invaders, commonly referred to as murderous savages and barbarians in Mexican poems about the war, are a good allegorical match to the cold-blooded bandit who appears in the poem.¹²

Unlike the other poets discussed here, Badillo does not use sisterhood as a predicate for lessening her alienation and suffering. Although she remains isolated and unsettled, her poem enacts an important questioning of the thematic

11. The ship of state metaphor appears in the poem “Al ser supremo” by A.N. (1847) and Carpio’s (1883, 242–244) “México en 1847.” The caricature can be found in the work of Florescano (2002, 345).

12. R.B. calls the Yankee invaders bandits in “Al ser supremo: Oda” (1847). In “Oda,” Alejandro Villaseñor (1846) characterizes them that way as well.

conventions associated with women's poetry. Her poem documents a journey from a comfortable, predictable place in which suffering and death are not frightening, but rather are welcome, familiar, and fulfilling of the self's desires, to a terrifying position of uncertainty and very real fear. It's as if Badillo had traced the artifice of the conventions of a certain kind of controlled and formulaic elegiac poem associated with femininity to contrast it with something more immediate and dynamic: dreams and visions of disaster, and of woman's essential powerlessness to protect life in a moment of national catastrophe. In other words, literature in the sense of artifice gives way to an act of witness that documents the interior landscape of fear. Badillo does not go very far to make her engagement with the war explicit or accessible, but her poem dramatically displays the predicament of a poetic voice constrained by thematic and stylistic conventions associated with femininity.

CONCLUSION: A POETICS OF NEGOTIATION

I have sketched the reasons women's voices began to emerge in Mexican print culture shortly before and during the U.S.-Mexican War, as well as the ways women poets addressed the conflict. It is clear that the war afforded an opportunity to test the boundaries of acceptable women's discourse and to symbolically intervene in debates about Mexican politics and the war. Despite the fragmentary record that documents their voices, the extant pieces of their works attest to deep convictions and to a commitment to express those views publicly, despite the constraints imposed on them by a patriarchal society and culture. Indeed, women writers reinterpreted the very constraints imposed on them as writing subjects—such as the association of women with heightened states of sensitivity and fragility—to claim a sentimental, nationalist poetics for themselves. Yet it was a different kind of poetics than that which their male contemporaries shared. As mediated by their marginal position in the public sphere, and by their strong sense of sisterhood, women's poetry was best situated to go beyond hollow and predictable calls for victory and sacrifice. Their poetry was a poetry of negotiation, challenge, and plural voice; it was a form of discourse that was fully self-aware of its precarious authority in the arena of nationalist debate, and as such, more nuanced and conditional in its expression. The Mexican women writers of the U.S.-Mexican War were spokeswomen for Mexico but also for a vision of womanhood defined by solidarity, mentorship, and poetic creation.

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