Literary Travel, The Woman Traveler, and
Twentieth Century Constructions of Mexican Tourist Spaces

by

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Dedications

To my family, my grandmother, and my uncle Gonzalo
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Abstract

Literary Travel, The Woman Traveler, and Twentieth Century Constructions of Mexican Tourist Spaces

by

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Chair: Sidonie Smith

Twentieth-century American travel narratives have created representations of travel in Mexico that have captured the tourist gaze, inspired travel at various historical moments and to various tourist sites, and anticipated the direction that 20th century tourism in Mexico has taken. Through the figure of the woman traveler, this dissertation examines the construction of 20th century Mexico as an “infernal paradise” in the gendered narratives of travel by modernist and postmodern American writers. Imagined places ignite the literary traveler’s imagination. Travel narratives ignite the tourist imagination, helping to shape the sites the traveler wishes to visit and the way he or she will enter, inhabit, and leave them. Travel literature and the literary traveler inspire travel circuits, identities, scripts, and performances, all of which are complexly gendered in their effects and their representations.

I explore how male and female travel itineraries, traditions, and representations clash; and how iconic travelers engage in a battle of the sexes that renders visible the gendered politics of literary and touristic travel. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the woman traveler captures the tourist gaze as she enters into and disrupts with
her spectacular presence and incisive perspective previously masculinist travel traditions.

Beginning with the modernist musings of Katherine Anne Porter and Maria Cristina Mena, I uncover a modernist tradition of women travelers and artists/writers that also takes shape in Mexico and defines its touristic attraction. I then proceed to the exilic and provocatively gendered spaces of Tennessee Williams’s The Night of the Iguana (a story and a play), in which the woman traveler once again makes her disruptive presence felt, as Williams redirects the tourist gaze to the beach. I follow with a study of how spectacular place images and touristic after-productions generated by John Huston’s production of The Night of the Iguana as a film helped to transform a small Mexican fishing village into a glamorous and eroticised tourist site. I end with the transnational, postmodern imaginings of Ana Castillo and Harriet Doerr, whose novels explore how the tourist becomes cued to a proliferating set of tourist sites, even as they also expose through their experimental poetics, the limitations and dangers of this palimpsestic touristic terrain. Places, travelers, and narratives become entwined in a gendered touristic imagination, and the Mexican tourist industry diversifies as it adapts to seduce the more sophisticated “post-tourist” traveler.

In the course of these literary travels, I demonstrate that the literary traveler’s “infernal paradise” construction of Mexico mixes gothic, colonial, modernist, and postmodernist fantasies with a desire for exile from the modern world into a more primitive, and simultaneously rebellious or revolutionary, place. For the North American traveler, “Mexico” also becomes a space where escape from modern unease and restrictive gender politics is possible—even as locals and the Mexican tourist industry rearticulate touristic desire into marketable forms.
Introduction

It’s a literary thing.
The story is an old one, and it’s not over yet.

--Andrew Hoffman, “Dante’s Journey”

“Literary Travel, The Woman Traveler, & Twentieth Century Constructions of Mexico and Mexican Tourist Spaces” examines the relationship between travel literature, the tourist imagination, and the construction of Mexican tourist spaces. Conceptualizing the tourist gaze as a literary gaze, I regard the ways in which travel literature and the literary traveler inspire travel circuits, identities, scripts, and performances, all of which inform how the tourist gaze is cued to places. A literary narrative ignites the tourist imagination, helping to shape the sites the traveler wishes to visit and the way he or she will enter, inhabit, and leave them. Through the figure of the woman traveler, this dissertation examines the construction of 20th century Mexico as an “infernal paradise” in the gendered narratives of travel by modernist and postmodern American writers. I trace the ways in which 20th century American travel narratives have created representations of travel in Mexico that have captured and fascinated the tourist gaze, inspired travel at various historical moments and to various tourist sites, and even anticipated the direction that 20th century tourism in Mexico has taken. I demonstrate that travel in Mexico is “a literary thing,” as Andrew Hoffman states above.

My motivating interests have been two: the growing attention and body of work on literature-tourism relationships in the field of tourism studies and the notion that infernally paradisal constructions of Mexico have supplied the blueprints for 20th century
tourism in Mexico. Mike Robinson’s and Hans-Christian Andersen’s first comprehensive collection of essays on the subject, *Literature and Tourism Studies* (2002) maps the work of interdisciplinary tourism scholars. The work of these scholars has suggested how to look for details in travel writers’ depictions that speak to the practice of tourism and the creation of tourist spaces. As a result of the influence of tourist scholars’ work, markers or traces of travel embedded in narratives, including travel circuits, travel identities, scripts, and performances, have become important to my literary analysis, along with the ways in which authors also use signs and clusters of motifs in their own constructions of tourist spaces. At the same time, I have become attuned to the role that literature and literary insights play in illuminating the practice of and motivations that drive tourism. Drawing on previous impressions by scholars and writers about the ways that foreigners write about and experience Mexico, Cooper Alarcón has crystallized the tendency among writers to depict Mexico as an “infernal paradise.” In this discursive construction, Mexico exists in the imagination as a fusion of opposites. It is at once a meeting of the old and new worlds, a paradise and hell, a world of intoxicatingly vivid life, color, and art as well as death. The “infernal paradise” construction is an amalgam, or a central organizing metaphor in the way that foreigners have written about Mexico. Cooper Alarcón has begun to sketch the ways in which this tradition has supplied the blueprints for the construction of tourist spaces in Mexico. Principally, he suggests that the many themes and sites depicted by this infernally paradisal tradition have created a touristic palimpsest that allows the tourist to rearrange travel fantasies and themes and to experience infernally paradisal sites in infinitely malleable ways.
Significantly, what Cooper Alarcón finds most frustrating about the “infernal paradise tradition,” is that although it is clearly a mythic and literary construction, it has seduced even literary critics, those in the best position to unpack and critique it. Instead of dismantling this construction, literary critics have reproduced it, suggesting that Mexico itself somehow elicits such literary responses. Robinson and Andersen similarly note that “despite some academic excursions into tourism & literature relationships, there seems to have been surprisingly little analysis of the relationship between the two, particularly in the light of two fundamental realities, namely, firstly, that much tourism is based on the written word, and, secondly, that tourists read and are inspired by literature” (4). Indeed, while travel brochures and tour operator’s advertisements may hint at opportunities for exotic, adventurous, or even eroticized encounters, “it is imaginative fiction that feeds these promises, when we read before and during our holiday” (Robinson 47). Yet, Robinson and Andersen observe that within the context of an expanding tourism culture, literature’s role has been underestimated and largely under-researched, even as tourism marketers have picked up on the point that storytelling is a potent promotional tool (30). Like Cooper Alarcón, they invite further literary analyses and welcome literary scholars to a field of tourism studies that is interdisciplinary.

This dissertation is a response to these two calls for literature-tourism studies, specifically in relation to how Americans’ travel narratives inform patterns of tourism and experiences of tourist sites in Mexico. To carry out this literary analysis, I bring together four threads that intertwine in the arc of this dissertation: the construction of Mexico as an infernal paradise; the understanding that tourist sites are also embodied sites that are constructed as they are performed; the central role that gender plays in travel
literature; and the idea of the tourist gaze returned, with which I signal the fact that
Mexicans also gaze at the traveler and register, critique, and interact with the ways in
which the traveler experiences Mexico.

The first thread that I take up is the construction of Mexico as an infernal paradise.
I begin by offering an alternate route through which one can arrive at and understand the
infernally paradisical construction of Mexico and why it “sticks” in the traveler’s
imagination. Previous traditions of travel produce the tendency to regard Mexico as an
infernal paradise and supply the inscrutable, disruptive, and haunting traits that constitute
it as a dark, fantastic place. I then demonstrate as I explore a 20th century tradition of
literary travel in Mexico, how this infernal paradise construction invites the traveler to
mix gothic, colonial, modernist, and postmodernist fantasies with a desire for exile from
the modern world into a more primitive—and simultaneously rebellious or
revolutionary—place. I suggest that Mexico becomes this place for the North American
traveler, as it also becomes a space where escape from modern unease and restrictive
gender politics is possible.

The second key thread that runs through this dissertation is the awareness that
tourist sites are constructed in both discursive and embodied ways. I demonstrate that
like the tourist industry, authors skillfully manipulate artifacts, signs, and themes to
create the “sight” and stage that their tourist characters will encounter. It also becomes
apparent that characters as tourists take up spaces, create them, and transform them—
according to the literary scripts and traveler types they perform. Katherine Anne Porter’s
and Maria Cristina Mena’s women characters especially disrupt the gender politics of
tourist spaces, transforming Mexico into a series of travel scenes in which a battle of the
sexes is staged. In Tennessee William’s *Night of the Iguana* story and play, characters as tourists “flirt” with a spaces of travel that reflect their alienation and desire, as they help to construct (through their behavior) the exilic and eroticized “Costa Verde Hotel.” The powerful representations of Tennessee Williams’s women travelers projected on the screen of John Huston’s film help to construct Mexico’s unruly tropical beach and to cast a formerly primitive, “undiscovered” Mexican fishing village, Puerto Vallarta, as a steamy, glamorized tourist destination. As Harriet Doerr’s and Ana Castillo’s characters swiftly traverse an extended touristic palimpsest composed of a mix of tourist sites and travel themes, tourist spaces shift and transform to reflect the poetic or treacherous drift of the characters’ travels.

The third thread is the role that gender plays in travel. I pursue the ways in which gender politics also define and redefine traveler identities and tourist spaces, as travel narratives engender tourist practices. Recognizing that travel is traditionally a masculinist tradition, I highlight the woman traveler to make visible the clashing feminist and masculinist traditions of travel and the battles of the sexes that also define travel as a historical practice. By focusing on the woman traveler and following her through the 20th century, I am able to trace the ways in which traditional male and female travelers morph and yield to newly emerging traveler icons as Mexico provides a space for American travelers to negotiate tensions of gender that are originating in the U.S. Thus I highlight the traveler types that parade across the different travel moments and travel scenes depicted in each chapter. The Grand Tourist gentlemanly traveler gives way to the homoerotic, brooding, and exilic modernist traveler, to a perplexed and troubled post-WWII male traveler. The Victorian lady traveler gives way to the New Woman traveler;
to the mass female tourist and transgressive, sexually liberated woman traveler; to the independent, often post-marriage, post-tourist expatriate—or to the post-colonial traveler visiting her ancestral home. And, the battle of the sexes that ensues between these morphing male and female traveler icons helps to define the tensions that inform the allure or notoriety of changing travel scenes in Mexico—whether in the modernist, artistic moment of the 1920s and 1930s; the eroticised 1940s and 1960s beach setting; or in the different nodes of the touristic palimpsest of the later 20th century.

Finally, this project examines a tourist gaze that is inflected across multiple perspectives and that is, in turn, “returned” by the gaze of native or local residents. In every instance/chapter, I attempt to take into account a counter-response to the Anglo-American gaze or to the Anglo-American representations of Mexico that dominate tourist experiences in Mexico. Mexican writer Carlos Monsivais’s criticisms of revolutionary-era writers/travelers in Mexico and Diego Rivera’s satiric tourist mural are examples of the instances that I cite in my history of 20th century tourism in chapter one. Mena’s and Porter’s Mexican stories in chapter two are examples of the ways in which women writers can inflect the tourist gaze across nationality, race, and especially, gender. Similarly, in chapter four, local historians and residents of Puerto Vallarta correct the tourist myth that *The Night of the Iguana* “discovered” their town. In chapter five, Castillo provides a Mexican American female counterpoint to Doerr’s highly reflexive Anglo American woman post-tourist, while Mexican film artist María Novaro supplies her own representations of Mexican-American and Anglo-American woman travelers, as she repatriates the first and casts the second as the imperialist white woman. Thus I
remind my readers that although tourism in Mexico is an uneven enterprise, it is also, always, a contested and negotiated constellation of practice.

Here then, is the road map for the journey that we will take. In chapter one, I begin by defining the ‘literary traveler” that participates in a 20th century tradition of tourism in Mexico, along with the inherited predispositions of personality and place with which he or she arrives in Mexico. I discuss how these predispositions generate the infernal paradise motifs. I then lay out the 20th century touristic terrain that we will traverse in our literary travels, by identifying the different kinds of tourist sites that have emerged in each of four touristic moments: the Porfiriato; the Revolution; the mestizo modernist moment; and post-WWII mass tourism. In chapter two, I present the modernist musings of revolutionary era Mexico by María Cristina Mena and Katherine Anne Porter, as I uncover a modernist tradition of women travelers and artists/writers that also takes shape in Mexico and defines its touristic attraction. In chapter three, I proceed to the exilic and provocatively gendered spaces of Tennessee Williams’s The Night of the Iguana (a story and a play), as Williams redirects the tourist gaze from the city and its colonial and folkloric provinces to the beach. In chapter four, I trace how as a result of John Huston’s filming of The Night of the Iguana, a tiny, Mexican fishing village is marvelously constructed as a tourist site, along with the many ways in which local Mexicans and earlier American travelers debunk this tourist discovery myth. I end with the transnational, postmodern imaginings of Ana Castillo and Harriet Doerr, as the ‘post-tourist’ of Doerr’s Consider this, señora and the Mexican American traveler of The Mixquiahuala Letters joins the stream of travelers I have depicted thus far. Through this lens, Mexico is experienced as a touristic palimpsest. Mexico’s tourist sites and
attractions multiply and mix in myriad ways, even as they continue to construct “Mexico” as an “infernal paradise.”

Let us begin then by looking at the ways in which literary travelers have created the longing to re-experience tourist spaces in Mexico that are infernally paradisal, transgressive, and estranged.
Chapter 1

The Literary Traveler, the “Infernal Paradise,” and Four Key Moments of Tourism in Mexico

Mexico is many things: beautiful and chaotic and surreal... It is the revolution, the art, the adobe brick and the leather sandal. It is the Olmeca, the Maya, the Azteca, and the priest. It is the cantina and the market, the festival, the poverty and filthy urban air... It is wild mountains and ten thousand hidden villages. In my mind, Mexico is also a history of crossings, of spiritual experiments, of art projects. And for the gringo of this tradition there is a distinct feeling immediately upon crossing the border, a feeling that anything can and will happen... This is the land where warriors fall into lonely retreat, where artists face the wind and disappear against the sun’s last light.

Andrew Hoffman, “Dante’s Journey,” bello 2004

Mexico is “many things,” inspiring the traveler and making it worth traveling. One can begin to glean the many traits that shape what Mexico is (to the traveler) from the travel narratives that describe it. Hoffman, for example, captures what Mexico is, especially to the “gringo” traveler. It is revolutionary, indigenous, artistic, wild, and hidden. As signified by the adobe brick and leather sandal, it is also colorful, folkloric, and picturesque. At the same time, what Mexico is, is complicated by contrasting traits—like poverty and filthy urban air--that darken it and mark it as Third World, as they signify that Mexico is modern. Mexico is also constituted by “history”—a history of “crossings,” “spiritual experiments” and “art projects.” These experiences include the crossings/experiments/projects alluded to but also experiences signified by tourist sites: the cantina, or tavern (drinking, gathering and hanging out, storytelling); market (shopping); festival (folklore; fiestas); hidden villages (discovery and possibly, steps back in time) and wild mountains (adventure/eco-tourism). These sites and experiences make
up a tradition that is also defined by the travelers who take part in it—“the gringo,” among
others—and Mexico is figured, along with its travelers, as heroic. Mexico is, after all, the
land where “warriors fall into lonely retreat” and where artists “face the wind and
disappear against the sun’s last light.” Here, travelers are also solitary, artistic, and
daring; they are exilic. Mexico is a space of exile even as it shifts in the same sentence
into a land of disappearance and even death. Immersed in this “tradition,” the “gringo”
traveler arrives in Mexico with an immediate sense that anything can or will happen.
Above all, the traveler knows that he or she will encounter a colorful, unruly, fantastic
place—because Mexico is “beautiful,” “chaotic,” and “surreal.”

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, many of these themes are “literary.” They
have been transmitted through previous literary works and stories of travel. They have
picked up a poetic quality; they resonate for the traveler. It is not surprising that they are
literary traits, since they are gathered by literary travelers. Hoffman is a literary traveler.
He reads about others’ travels in Mexico in preparation for and perhaps during his travels.
When planning and carrying out his itinerary, he follows in the footpaths of previous
literary travelers. He also draws from other literary travels in the production of his travel
narrative. He thinks about the Beats as he treks across Mexico; in fact, he begins his
tavel narrative by invoking their travels in Mexico and throughout, he refers to other
literary travelers as well. Hoffman is a perfect example with which to begin an inquiry
into what Mexico is to the traveler and how it is constructed as “this” place of travel,
because he points to two key factors involved in this production of Mexico: the literary
traveler and a tradition of travel to Mexico in which the literary traveler takes part.¹ In

¹ One can also see that as Hoffman offers up literary themes to the tourist gaze (and to the audiences who
read his work), the tourist gaze filters across these literary motifs and becomes a literary gaze.
this first chapter, I want to define both the literary traveler and a tradition of 20th century travel in Mexico, as I also bring together the many traits that constitute what Mexico is to the traveler and the different historical moments that generated these traits.

In part I of this chapter, I explore the previous traditions of travel that have influenced the literary traveler: The Grand Tour, the Romantic turn (of the Grand Tour), The African Sublime, and Orientalism; and I trace how these traditions have also shaped tourist sites and tourist itineraries. I turn in part II to how these histories of travel contribute to the literary traveler’s construction of Mexico as a dark, fantastic place and a place of fierce contradictions—the “infernal paradise.” In part III, I provide a history of 20th century tourism in Mexico that explains how the “many things” that Mexico has become for travelers coalesced and were anchored in the tourist imagination at specific historical moments. I identify four touristic moments and the different tourist sites that emerged in each.

I. The Literary Traveler

I begin with the literary traveler, because the literary traveler also has a history that informs how he experiences his travels in Mexico. The literary traveler inherits many traits and textual attitudes towards certain kinds of places—classical and strange or exotic places—that he carries with him. They, in turn, shape the way he regards and travels across new terrains. These previous traditions of travel inspire many travel themes, identities, and itineraries that continue to define the practice of tourism today.

In this section, I simplify and mark the literary traveler as male because until the end of the 19th century when the Victorian lady traveler emerged, the literary traveler was imagined as male and his travels as constituting his masculinity. Travel cultivated a
gentlemanly identity; class, taste and manners; a worldliness and cultural and aesthetic appreciation; and a virility defined by adventure and territorial or sexual conquest. One of my interventions in this dissertation is to highlight the crisis in this masculine arena of travel as women travelers make their presence felt. Their emergence will be perceived as “spectacular” and intriguing precisely because their presence will be registered as relatively new and unconventional. Here, then, I reconstruct the masculine terrain that we will see disrupted by the figure of the woman traveler in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The history of travel and of the literary traveler is long, but several trajectories have intersected across time to produce the literary traveler and to give him, and the places across which he has traveled, traits that fascinate his readers. These traits contribute to the great mystique and charisma of the literary traveler and heighten his personality traits, experiences, and feats. Understanding the charisma of the literary traveler is crucial because for his or her readers this charisma becomes intimately tied to the author’s work and to the places to which he or she has traveled (Robinson 62-64). Places can gain an attractiveness as a result of their association with the literary travelers who visited them. Moreover, charismatic authors and places inspire tourism. Tourists may imagine themselves by way of the same themes, characters, and intimate connections to places or pasts featured in literary works (Robinson 44-45). They may wish to reproduce the same experiences or take on the same personality traits. Or they may simply follow in the footpaths of writers they admire, seeking a more intimate connection with the writer (Robinson and Andersen 20-23). In these cases, the tourist is inspired by the writings of literary travelers and their personas as celebrities (Robinson
and Andersen 31, Robinson 62-64). When readers as tourists read travel narratives, follow literary trails, or visit authors’ homes or theme parks associated with authors’ works, they perceive the places they visit in highly literary ways (Robinson and Andersen 23-26). They too become literary travelers.

I want to suggest that the literary traveler gathers many traits from earlier and still resonant traditions of travel, including the classical values of the Grand Tour, the turn from the Classical to the Romantic in Grand Tourism, the African Sublime, and Orientalism. Each tradition is at once a historical moment, an aesthetic, an imaginary, an identity, an itinerary, and a social relation (Smith 2001). These legacies are primarily masculinist, initially aristocratic, and in many ways heroic. In the conditions that enable them and the kinds of travelers they produce, they also make possible MacCannell’s notion of the modern tourist as a metaphor for modern man—that is, modern man as an alienated, authenticity-seeking, touring figure. As will become evident in the following summaries (and in part III), the same material conditions of modernization and colonial expansion produce related terms of displacement, including social alienation, artistic exile, and leisure travel. Traces appear of the colonial and uneven relations of power among nations, previous military conquests and wars, and access to class privilege that make possible the infrastructures of travel that enable both the literary traveler and MacCannell’s tourist (Kaplan 2). Finally, these traditions generate attitudes, activities, and the desire to visit certain sites that continue to define the tourist and travel in the 20th century.
The ‘Grand Tour’

One of the earliest travel traditions that continues to influence travel is the Grand Tour. Developing in the 1500s, it reached its zenith in the 1700s and fragmented by the 1840s (Towne 227). The Grand Tour was an agenda of education through the classical – classical sites and works, or the ancient classics of Rome--that constituted the grand tourist as aspiring gentleman. Grand Tourists were touring aristocrats, who covered an extensive and expensive travel itinerary that could take years and that included: lessons in French; lessons in dancing, fencing, and riding; the study of music, architecture, and Renaissance art; visits to classical ruins, natural wonders and archaeological discoveries like Rome, Mount Vesuvius, Herculaneum and Pompeii; and visits to Venice during the Carnival season. The Grand Tour also required tourists to engage with literature, and more specifically, the ancient classics of Rome. Grand tourists read Horace, Virgil, Cicero, and Livy. They also sketched and wrote as they traveled. They kept diaries, letters, and journals on their travels; and as they visited classical sites in Greece and Rome, numerous references to classical literature suffused their travel accounts.

The Grand Tour left several legacies. It is from the Grand Tour that the literary traveler inherits the imperative to visit classical sites by way of grand itineraries and an appreciation for sites and works of classical antiquity. As John Towner argues, “the whole tenor of the Grand Tour until the second half of the 18th century, both in terms of is spatial patterns, or travel circuits, and the sentiments expressed, was essentially ‘classical’” (232). The figure of the traveler is that of a gentlemanly traveler, or simply the “traveler,” who is positioned above the mass tourist, for the gentleman has the elitist stance of his higher class positioning and all the things, like taste and worldliness, that
This class positioning entails. Interestingly, according to Towner, the great literary legacy of the Grand Tour is the guidebook. To the Grand Tour one can trace the habit of traveling with a guidebook, and perhaps even the desire to produce a guidebook. Finally, the leisure pursuits of the Grand Tour—sketching, keeping a diary, collecting souvenirs, observing customs and manners—also came to define the experience of travel.

**The Romantic Turn**

During the later 18th century, as the Romantic era gathered momentum, its literary influences came to bear on the Grand Tourists. A new interest in the Medieval and the Gothic emerged. Accordingly, new destinations were sought out and monuments that had been previously dismissed as ‘gothic’ were re-evaluated. References to Dante and Petrarch “began to creep into travel accounts,” and travelers also began to carry copies of Goethe and Rousseau \(^2\) (Towner 233). Ruins and graveyards became popular as did expressing one’s encounters and sentiments through the vocabulary of the sublime and picturesque. An interest in simple, peasant societies also surfaced with literary figures like John Clare. Thus new affects were attached to new places. And, of course, the Romantic era “also created its own literary heroes and heroines, and they rapidly became assimilated into the tourist’s world” (Towne 233-234). The great charisma that authors could have for tourists became evident in the preeminent figure of George Gordon Byron, as places visited by Byron on his continental travels, and marked by references in his poem, rapidly became literary shrines (Towne 233). It was Byron’s semi-autobiographical *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* that imbued the traveler with the melancholy, brooding, and at times scandalously transgressive traits of the ‘Byronic

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\(^2\) According to Towner, Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1759) and Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* (1786-8) were major literary influences.
hero.” As he more boldly dared to challenge and find relief from the conventions of society, the gentlemanly traveler took on a stance of defiance. At the same time, his sense of alienation became more palpable. Thus another image that can be gathered from this moment is that of Percy Bysshe Shelley writing “Prometheus Unbound” in the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla as he found in their overgrown wilderness relief from the despotism that ruled Europe (Woodward 64-67). The traits or legacies contributed by the Romantic Turn thus sprang from the authors, ruins, and monuments associated with the medieval and the gothic. To these traits we may add the contemplative, brooding, and defiant sensibility of the Romantic poet as traveler.

The ‘African Sublime’

Coinciding with the Romantic Turn and interlacing with many of its traits, is the tradition of the African Sublime, which also coalesced in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries (Vogel 279-295). As Amber Vogel argues, a tradition of travel in the 18th century that was fed by, and fed into, an interest in the Gothic, and related interests in the graveyard and in ruins and ruination, opened the way for an African Sublime (292). Travel began to register a sharper turn towards “darkness”—dark terrains, dark dangers, and dark associations in the conceptualization of travel—as the traveler took on a new identity, that of African explorer. The familiar Grand Tourist “transformed into the exotic African explorer: a contemplative, essentially solitary figure set down in a beautiful but alien landscape cluttered with real and invented artefacts signifying danger, dissolution, and darkness” (Vogel 293).

Travelers of this tradition were interested in discovering the unknown, interior parts of Africa, and they saw themselves as partaking in “the cause of African discovery”
What they saw in Africa ranged from picturesque, alienated, or exotic landscapes—like the vast African plains that could be described as picturesque, alienated, or exotic; to bands of hunters gathering around cooking fires at dusk; to African dances; to traces of the trials of previous travelers. Curiously, the vocabulary of the picturesque and sublime predominated and recurred even in travelers’ descriptions of less-hospitable and less-traveled parts of Africa like Sierra Leone. At times, African landscapes seemed very much like the landscapes of Northern England, or the paintings of Gaspard Poussin and Claude Lorrain (Vogel 282-284). Or, as a result of the Romantic influence, stoney mountains and rocky anthills looked like “ruined castles” with “niches, windows, and ruined staircases” or “Gothic cathedrals in miniature.” And African nights were experienced as oppressively closing in on the traveler and described as “dark dungeons of innumerous boughs” (289). Solitude also became an essential part of the aesthetic and was insistently highlighted in travel narratives (291). Indeed, solitude was a “Gothic ornament…transported from its soothing, pastoral origins to a thrilling, terrible setting and transfigured there” (290).

The African Sublime came to highlight the solitary traveler engaging in lonely and highly dangerous exploration, as travel also came to be defined by the gothic elements of death and ruination. Travelers perishing in Africa became a central theme. A long list of travelers who died in Africa informed travel in Africa, and places like Sierra Leone were labeled “this grave of the British” or “the white man’s grave” (290). In fact, the list was a running inventory that became a ritual of narration in African travel narratives and reports of the period, and travelers who ventured into Africa were aware that a similar fate might await them. Still, these explorers considered the experience of
travel a means to fame and a valiant endeavor (Vogel 289). To fall victim to their heroic devotion as they attempted to penetrate into Africa was not a bad way to die; it was this risk or danger after all that made travel in Africa a “dark” adventure.

**Orientalism**

It was with the tradition of Orientalism that travel to “othered” strange and exotic places like the Orient picked up an erotic valence unmatched by the Grand Tour or the other traditions that surrounded it. If Africa was dangerous and dark, the Orient was dark and eroticised, and othered lands become terrains of sensual and erotic possibility.

Orientalist travel directly coincided with the tradition of pilgrimage, but also intertwined with the Grand Tour and Romanticism. From one end of the 19th century to the other—after Napoleon, that is—the Orient was a place of pilgrimage, and all pilgrimages to the Orient passed through, or had to pass through, the Biblical lands (Said 168). Aligning with the Grand Tour tradition, most of these travels were really “attempts to relive or liberate from the large, incredibly fecund Orient some portion of Judeo-Christian/GrecoRoman actuality” (Said 168). Like the Grand Tour, the Orientalist tradition of travel was marked by the impetus to travel to the hallowed sites of classical and biblical antiquity, in places like Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey. From Romanticism, travelers gathered the notion of seeking regeneration in foreign lands, especially the Orient (Said 114). The theme of rebirth haunted the literary traveler’s imagination (Brown 79).

Literary pilgrims who traveled to the Orient also hoped to find peoples and customs that embodied an ideal of *luxe, calme, et volupté* (Brown 79). Situated outside the confines and confinements of bourgeois Europe, the Orient spoke to young male
travelers’ fantasies of sensual bliss unconstrained by social norms and mores. As in the African sublime, travelers took a masculine pride in enduring the rigors of travel through lands still innocent of organized tourism (Brown 79). And, like Gérard de Nerval, who called the Orient “la terre maternelle,” travelers also experienced the eastward voyage as a return—a regressive adventure into pre-modernity (Brown 79). These were general characteristics of travel in the Orient that often coincided. For example, travelers to the Orient expected to find the invigoration provided by the fabulously antique and exotic (Said 180). And yet, the Orient might be imagined very differently according to one’s national identity. Edward Said makes a keen distinction between what the Orient was to the French traveler and what it was to the English traveler--based directly on the French and English traveler’s colonial relation to the Orient. For the English, the Orient was India, an actual British possession, and to pass through the Near Orient was therefore to pass on route to a major colony, “the Orient was defined by material possession, by a material imagination” (Said 169). For the French, however, “the Mediterranean echoed with the sounds of French defeats, from the Crusades to Napoleon” (Said 169). Consequently, “theirs was the Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets, hidden correspondences, and an almost virtuosic style of being” (Said 170). It is thus the French experience that produces two of the most compelling literary travelers in the Orient, Gérard de Nerval and Gustave Flaubert, “both of whose work was solidly fixed in an imaginative, unrealizable (except aesthetically) dimension” (Said 170).

The overwhelming trait that all travelers registered was the Orient’s eroticism. As Said notes: “a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient” is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. The Orient suggested “not only
fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (188). And although Said cannot make it the province of his analysis, but only notes it in passing, he acknowledges “its importance as something eliciting complex responses, sometimes even a frightening self-discovery, in the Orientalists” (188). Oriental women played a direct role in this eroticised relation, as muses, lovers, or richly suggestive mythological or historical figures—and travelers made many associations between the Orient and female figures like Cleopatra, Salomé, and Isis. A powerful example is Flaubert’s Egyptian dancer/prostitute lover who came to embody Flaubert’s desire as well as his barrenness (and the barrenness of the West). Luxuriant, delicate, and sensual—yet also self-sufficient, emotionally careless, and mindlessly coarse--Kushuk’s sleeping body next to his allowed Flaubert’s “mind to wander in ruminations whose haunting power over him would resonate across his many works” (Said 186-188). In fact, the Western desire that spread across the Orient was not strictly heterosexual. Travel in the Orient became associated with sex with males and females, and a vast homoeroticism was cast over the Mediterranean in particular.

Lastly and also crucial to this tradition is that Orientalism reinforced the intense, penetrating, unrelenting ego of the Western self that traveled, interpreted, and documented foreign lands (Said 175). This conquering ego is another version of Mary Louise Pratt’s “imperial eyes.” The citationary way in which Orientalist writers quoted

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3 The British writers featured in Paul Fussell’s Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars and Paul Bowles, author of The Sheltering Sky, are examples of literary travelers who feature the Orient in highly eroticised ways.

4 With Maxime Du Camp, Flaubert’s travels in the Orient also coincided with the nascent art of photography. While Flaubert was given the ludicrous task of observing Egypt and Turkey with an eye to possible markets for exploitation by French commerce, Du Camp’s mission was to record for the Academie des Inscriptions Egyptian antiquities. Thus the habit of traveling with a camera. In their case, a heavy photographic apparatus added to the weight of baggage (more than half a ton) that crossed the sea with them in 1849. See Brown.
from one another, inserting direct excerpts even into works of fiction, served to build and reinforce a field of writing about the Orient—as well as the authority of Orientalist writers. At the same time, artistic literary travelers like Nerval and Flaubert exploited the Orient “aesthetically and imaginatively as a roomy place full of possibility” (Said 181).

It is not surprising that as the foreign literary traveler arrived in Mexico, with the baggage of predispositions of personality and place that he picked up from these previous traditions of travel, he came to perceive Mexico as similar to previously traveled and narrated classical, strange, and exotic places. Again, he may have gathered this “baggage” when reading the works of previous travelers or simply from hearing famous tales about authors’ travels. Whatever the case, Mexico registered for the traveler in intriguing ways, triggering the complex reactions and themes that one can trace to the travel experiences of the Grand Tour, the Romantic Turn, the African Sublime, and Orientalism. These traditions influenced the ways that Mexico was cast, by the traveler, as an infernal paradise.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{II. Previous Traditions of Travel & The Infernal Paradise Motifs}

To Mexico travelers attached many traits with which it became like classical Greece or Rome, Gothic Europe, Africa, and the Orient. As a result, Mexico resonated for the traveler in powerful ways. Really, it was the foreign traveler who dispersed these traits and cast over Mexico impressions that associated Mexico with classical, strange, and exotic places. Since I speak of these impressions as foreign and primarily Western

\textsuperscript{5} In my introduction, I identify previous scholars’ and writers’ identification of this infernal paradise construction as one of my points of departure for this dissertation. These writers and scholars include Malcolm Lowry, Thomas Walsh, and Ronald Walker who use this idea in passing. Daniel Cooper Alarcón takes it up directly and develops the ways in which foreign writers have constructed Mexico in this way. Taking into account previous histories of travel, I am offering another route through which one can arrive at and understand this construction and why it “sticks” in the traveler’s imagination.
interpretations, in this section I treat the foreign traveler generally and am not limited to the American traveler. As I trace the ways that foreign travelers drew from previous traditions of literary travel to construct an infernally paradisal Mexico, I include British and French travelers as well.

Although Mexico was not a bastion of elite culture or beauty like Greece or Rome, it appeared to offer its own antiquity—a pre-hispanic indigenous and colonial antiquity—and came to be perceived as a primitive land with its own Grand Tour itineraries. These itineraries might occur within the immediate region of Mexico City and include: the historic center, or “Zocalo,” and buildings dating to the pre-Hispanic and Spanish colonial periods; the new Mexico City architecture of the Porfiriato (that reflected classical European influences); the city’s provincial outskirts (Cuernavaca, Tepoztlan, Taxco); the city’s particularly folkloric tourist sites (the bullfight, Xochimilco, local markets, the shrine of the Virgin Guadalupe); and surrounding ruins (the pyramids of the sun and the moon of Teotihuacan). Greater itineraries (like those taken by Fannie Calderon de la Barca or Graham Greene) might begin with Mexico City and extend out to more remote colonial provinces, the ruins of Yucatan, and the tropical southeast. In either case, what is registered in such itineraries is the imperative that the traveler inherited from the Grand Tour to map Mexico’s geography and attractions along circuits that highlighted the antique and quaint—and the effect that this mapping had on the imagination. As the traveler became acquainted with Mexico’s antiquities, he was at the same time, and almost unwittingly, exposed to Mexico’s impressive range of highly contrasting sites—and the highly contrasting traits that these sites represented.
For travelers influenced by a continuing Romantic sensibility, Mexico also registered as a gothic place haunted by previous conquests, temporalities, and ruins. Especially at night, a traveler might register the details of its streets by way of gothic traits, and Medieval Europe might suddenly be superimposed on Mexico’s city landscape:

> When the white-walled buildings seemed still as ruins in the moonlight, and only the wandering watchman was abroad, playing musically on his whistle,” the watchman became “a ghostly figure wrapped in his sarape as in a medieval cloak, haunting the streets with silent footfall” (Diamant 74).

Among travelers in Mexico, a gothic sensibility also interlaced with the sensibility associated with the African sublime. Like Africa, Mexico offered picturesque and sublime landscapes that elevated the traveler, even as these same landscapes threatened to turn on him abruptly. Mexican landscapes transformed into dark and dangerous terrains that destabilized and crippled the traveler, derailing his itinerary. Mexico might even become a land of disappearance and death. This idea was secured when a series of writers such as Ambrose Bierce and Hart Crane disappeared or died in Mexico. A “list” became discernable and began to grow--paralleling English travelers’ lists of lost African explorers. Mexico was cast as a gateway into the unknown and a place of discovery; and the price of that exploration: intense solitude, dangerous detours, and even death.

Mexico also had traits beyond the sublime and estranged. Like the Orient, it was imagined as an eroticised terrain as the traveler arrived seeking spiritual regeneration and erotic release. Mexican women, like women of the Orient, became sirens or muses who lured and inspired the traveler—without, of course, disturbing Mexico’s homoerotic possibilities. Writers including Langston Hughes, Jack Kerouac, and the fictional

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6 Here I am thinking specifically of Kerouac’s prostitute/drug addict lover, Esperanza Villanueva, who he renames “Tristessa,” also the title of his novel about his travels and affair with Villanueva in Mexico City.
characters featured in this dissertation, had Mexican women lovers who made possible an intimacy with Mexico as they inspired the traveler’s spirituality and art. This eroticism made Mexico an exotic place and completed its alignment with previously traveled, classical, strange, and exotic places as the traveler took many traits from these places and used them to interpret Mexico.

In time, such motifs mixed in incontestable ways, as they also mixed in predictable ways, to create an impression of a place that was living, breathing, and traitorous. The land itself “behaved” in capricious ways. Shaken and besieged, D.H. Lawrence exclaimed:

Everything is of a piece...what the Aztecs did, what Cortés did and what Díaz did—this total, interminable cruelty—the land itself behaves in this way to whoever lives here. Look at this dead land around us, the cactus with fingers like daggers, the sun with knife-sharp edge. Everything is death! (quoted in Monsivais 72)

For Lawrence it was as a result of previous conquests that Mexico had turned cruel and deadly; having internalized the conqueror’s traits, Mexico itself threatened the traveler with cruelty and death. Just the same, other travelers, like Andre Breton, took such traits and added them to Mexico’s fruitful contradictions: “The power of the conciliation of life and death is without a doubt the principal attraction of Mexico. In this regard, it keeps open an inexhaustible register of sensations, from the most benign to the most insidious” (Breton 74). In this inexhaustible register of sensations, perhaps what was new for Mexico was an extremist aesthetic that included this insidiousness, since Mexico was often labeled “treacherous,” “barbarous,” and “sinister.” If Mexico was artful and beautiful, it was also cruel.

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Significantly, Kerouac is experimenting with a Buddhist spirituality (and celibacy) during his travels in Mexico.
Beautiful and cruel, Mexico took its traitorous nature to inexhaustible extremes, and in this way, became a place of fierce contradictions. Thus we arrive at what various scholars and writers (Malcolm Lowry, Thomas Walsh, Ronald Walker, and Daniel Cooper Alarcón) have established as Mexico’s construction as an “infernal paradise.” As I stated in my introduction, this is a discursive construction constituted by a fusion of opposing traits, such that Mexico is figured simultaneously as a meeting of the old and new worlds, a paradise and hell, a world of intoxicatingly vivid life and color and art as well as death. In this “infernal paradise” construction Mexico is, as Hoffman noted, “many things”—many contradictory things that take what Mexico is to the traveler to extremes.

Significantly, these contradictory constructions usually line up along the binary of modern and primitive. Travelers have a tendency to highlight Mexico’s primitiveness, yet admit that Mexico is a mix of both, even as they struggle with this contradiction. I suggest that Mexico’s modern traits are inescapable because when modern tourism begins in Mexico at the turn of the 20th century under the Porfiriato, Mexico is a fastly modernizing nation. Thus, even the unshakable marker of the primitive, the Indian, is often sighted by the tourist in the modern city, glaringly highlighting the city’s modernity:

And they come to the city as though it were only a big village, and they never take the streets seriously, but sit down to rest and eat their tortillas in front of the modern buildings. Groups of campesinos come in their smocks and white trousers, sandaled or barefoot…on pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe or to see about their lands. And they gape up at the big buildings, or look into the store windows where there are displays of modern farm machinery, or stand listening to a gramophone bawling American jazz. I think it is this constant reminder of the primitive in a modern setting that gives Mexico its quality of excitement. (Diamant 44)
In examples like this one, it seems that in the face of the modern, the Indian is less daunted than the tourist—even as the presence of the primitive (the Indian) constitutes the city’s modernity as progress and non-primitive. And still, despite the country’s many signs of modernity, travelers insistently recast Mexico as a primitive land, just as pages earlier the same author insists that Mexico City remains in its past:

But Mexico City is different [from an American city]. For all the shining new cars that rush so wildly through the streets, and the modern hotels proudly advertising ‘Steam heat,’ and the skyscrapers built on special foundations on the swampy ground, the modernism of the city is only the thinnest veneer over all its past. It is still a village, part of the primitive countryside around it and the primitive Indian life. It is still the colonial city of the Spaniards, and the romantic nineteenth-century city of Porfirio Díaz; it is only superficially of this century and the things of this century. (Diamant 40)

Capriciously, the same author notes that the American city is also riddled by contradictions, but “all its contradictions are part of one age, part of its industrial growth” (Diamant 40). What we see in such examples is that Mexico’s contradictory traits are in part defined by the traveler’s obstinate tendency to snatch its modern signs and recast them as only superficially present—because the Mexico that lies beneath is inherently primitive.

It was in this way, through the travelers’ denial of Mexico’s modernity, that Mexico could function as the antithesis of—and more importantly, the antidote to—the stale modernity of industrialized countries that American and European travelers so desperately sought to escape. And so they treated and took from Mexico in this way. “Not so systematized as the United States, but fresher and freer,” Mexico was for Witter Bynner, a “barrier against the blighting southward progress of Anglo-Saxondom” (Delpar 38). Just as rooted in a native primitiveness, Mexican art and culture offered in the
mestizo modernist moment an alternative to stifling European rational consciousness (Geis 8). Many travelers became “convinced that it was necessary to ‘voyage to [this] land of speaking blood’ in order to find an alternative to the ‘rot’ of European culture” (Geis 5). As Antonin Artaud declared, “Bound to the soil, buried in streams of volcanic lava, stirring in the Indian blood, there exists in Mexico the magical reality of a culture whose fires it would, doubtless, take little to actually rekindle” (Geis 5). 7 What is implicit in his statement is that the same could not be said—or at least not to the same degree—of America or Europe.

As a result of the literary musings inspired by Mexico’s primitiveness, travelers also perceived Mexico as a colorful, mysterious, and even mystic place. Mexico’s “magical reality” became another characteristic that many travelers noted, adding it to the mix of infernally paradisal traits. Like the art it inspired, Mexico was “surreal.” Always an extremely paradoxical place, Mexico continued to be in some cases even more primeval than primitive and capable of swallowing the traveler. It appeared to keep just at arms-length a gaping pre-modernity, in large part defined also by Mexico’s darkness (again, not unlike Africa’s). Perhaps this is why in countless descriptions of Mexico, Mexico’s darkness always looms at the edge of the traveler’s experience. It is sensed in the Mexican night or in the dark, savage (and highly eroticised) primitive outskirts that surround American enclaves or remote inns in Mexico. Certainly, this is a darkness defined by a long list of traits: the dark faces or eyes of its natives; the macabre indigenousness of its artifacts and ruins; its dirt and poverty; its unrelenting strangeness;

7 Of course, “even before he left for Mexico in early 1936 Artaud had developed a highly esoteric vision of the country based upon Mesoamerican solar and astrology-based religions and rites of sacrifice, and he arrived hoping, if not expecting, to find traces of these in contemporary indigenous groups and in the Mexican earth itself.” See Geis, 5. Although of a scientific bent, he was also a literary traveler.
its lack of development; its remoteness, far beyond its distance in miles; its ability to
remain shrouded in an atmosphere of mystery and danger; its tawny eroticized allure; its
decadence; or in some instances, its actual lack of electricity. Although many of these
traits are rather mundane, they intertwine with Mexico’s particularly folkloric traits (or
with the traveler’s appreciation of Mexico’s folklore), gathering them also to create an
otherworldly effect, as we see in the following example.

And walking through the streets at night I used to think of the city’s
legends, the weird and fearful legends that do not seem things of the
past in the city’s strange atmosphere. There was La Llorona, the weeping
one, who wailed through the streets at night, punished because she has
betrayed her people to the conquerors; and La Mulata, the witch who
flew through prison bars to escape the torture of the Inquisition; and a
host of others, demons and witches and ghosts and assassins. It is a city
twice haunted, from the time it was Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs, and from
the time of the friars, who brought the middle ages to Mexico and all
their demonology and superstition. (Diamant 74)

We see that such traits also interlaced with the gothic sensibility that travelers brought
with them to Mexico.

In the highly literary imagination of the traveler, previous sensibilities intertwined,
and Mexico became the “many things” of an infernal paradise. Above all, it became a
land upon which the traveler might project former impressions of spectacular landscapes
and infamous travels--as he (and she) performed the roles of worldly Grand tourist,
defiant exile, adventurer/explorer, writer/artist, or cultural interpreter modeled by
previous travelers. Mexico also became a land about which he (and she) might speak in
authoritative ways. In this sense, Mexico became especially important to the American
traveler.

For the American traveler, Mexico was not really different from Africa or the
Orient. Rather, because of its proximity to the U.S. and its accessibility as an affordable
exotic—and because its travel infrastructure has in large part been made possible by transnational flows of capital from the U.S. to Mexico that in many ways establish a colonial relation between the U.S. and Mexico--Mexico became for the North American traveler what other exotic countries have been for the English and the French. The American traveler’s sense of intimacy in his encounters and authoritative knowledge about Mexico speaks to this relation—and this is a relation that has been visible to Mexicans as well. As Carlos Monsivais observes, “There is always the confrontation between the North American adventurer, individualist, technologically efficient and a nomad, and ‘Mexico,’ romantic, unbridled, the lover of death, submitting to family, full of traditions that crouch within cloaks and are uncovered in the presence of idols…” (73).

It is also this relation that appears to have prompted Diego Rivera to paint among his many murals, “Folklore and Tourist Mexico”—a satirical, anti-colonial mural that targets tourists in general and Americans in particular. Rivera painted it in 1936 for the stylish Hotel Reforma, a chic destination for North American tourists. As Jeraldine Kraver explains, this “picturesque jest” depicted

“Yankee savants bedecked with asses’ ears and fat fountain pens…interpreting the country to the world…faintly unpleasant masked types waving banners and holding bags of gold, while a plucked chicken represents Mexico. Writing about the panel, Rivera explained that it was designed to burlesque “the Mexico of tourists and lady folklorists—dessicated urban types whose imbecile pretensions were satirized by asses’ ears sprouting from their heads.” (Kraver 68).

One wonders to what degree American travelers were aware that their fanciful constructions and particular behavior were witnessed and also critiqued by Mexico’s inhabitants and native interpreters, but that Americans were recognized in this way points to the fact that the American traveler’s particularly, territorial identification with Mexico indeed existed.
Of course, the traits and constructions of Mexico that I have presented in this section are very generally drawn. It becomes necessary to investigate how these traits and constructions dispersed and became anchored in the tourist imagination at specific historical moments—and according to the specific economic, political, and cultural contexts that informed tourism at these moments. Thus I present a history of tourism in Mexico that attempts to do just that.ª

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge previous scholars whose work informs my history of tourism in Mexico and the greater project of understanding the kind of space of travel that Mexico has been for the American traveler. Although Cecil Robinson’s *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* begins much earlier, from the moment of conquest, in fact, his study informs my focus on the 20th century, and affirms my decision to begin a history of tourism with the turn of the century episode I refer to as the Porfiriato. It is Robinson who observes most clearly that the turn of the century marks a dramatic change in attitude towards Mexico, a change in attitude that is central to the great touristic interest that Mexico has for the traveler in the 20th century. According to Robinson, “from the days of the earliest cultural contacts, for all the turbulence of these encounters, American writers, far from wishing to ignore the presence of Mexico, have discovered a special fascination in the heightened color and intensity of Mexican life” (ix). Still, he emphasizes that “it was only toward the end of the nineteenth century when the pace of American life had become increasingly harassing that Americans felt

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ªI constructed this history because a history of tourism in Mexico does not appear to exist. The many sources cited take into account the role of tourism in other histories or cultural phenomena but there seems to have been a lack of interest (among American cultural scholars) in writing a history of tourism in Mexico for its own sake, despite the facts that Americans compose the majority of tourists in Mexico and that tourism fuels a major percentage of Mexico’s economy. Scholars in the field of anthropology appear to be taking an interest in tourism. This history is, thus, one of my contributions to literature-tourism studies in relation to Mexico.
the impulse to portray and to read about Mexican culture in quite a different light” (x).

Whereas American writers had previously toured Mexico with a puritanical aversion to Mexico’s and Mexicans’ technological backwardness, lack of hygiene, Catholicism, pervasive sexuality, laziness, and class structure, they now came prepared to write seriously about Mexico in ways which reflected an increasingly critical attitude toward their own society. In their growing sense of isolation, their uneasiness at the fragmentation of modern American life, their disgust with materialism and profiteering individualism, their sympathy with the primitive, the passionate, and the oppressed, and in their changed attitudes toward sex and death, modern American writers have tended to find intriguing and salutary the very aspects of Mexican society which had most disgusted the early writers of journals, and the nationalist novelist, poets, and essayists of the second half of the nineteenth century (x).

From Robinson, I also borrow the idea of “Mexican traits” to similarly “catalog…ideas and attitudes” about Mexico, as I also keep track of “the language used” and the “emotional environment” surrounding events and in particular, touristic episodes, that define Mexico for the traveler (Robinson 33). Drewey Wayne Gunn’s study, American and British writers in Mexico, 1556-1973 also begins earlier and provides crucial background to my study of 20th century American travel narratives. He brings an interesting preoccupation with the quality of the writing produced in or about Mexico and its importance to English letters. As they note Mexico’s ability to both inspire and disenchant American writers, both Robinson and Gunn note what Daniel Cooper Alarcón actively catalogues as Mexico’s infernally paradisical traits. In his study, Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1881-1930, Gilbert González notes in particular the colonialist attitudes towards Mexico and the capitalist interest in exploiting Mexico’s many natural resources that fueled the turn of the century interest in both touring and writing about Mexico. He also identifies the ways in which
travelers invoked Rudyard Kipling as they imagined themselves traveling across Mexico with their servants and guides following itineraries that included stops at oil camps and plantations, where they might partake in a colonial lifestyle like the British in India. Yet, although these scholars can be said to recognize how Mexico became like the Orient, Africa, and India, they do not trace these attitudes to earlier traditions of travel as I have.

This is where my work begins to depart. In fact, Robinson clumps Mexico with the Southwest as part of a greater region of influence and travel. I view Mexico as distinct from the Southwest—that is, as even more remote and intriguing, dark and destabilizing, and far more diverse. I see Mexico as defined by a mixture of even more turbulent contrasts and traits and an indigenousness far more sinister and macabre than that of the Native Americans of the Southwest (who epitomize the “noble savage”). Although I draw from previous scholars to construct the material and ideological conditions that both enable and inspire travel in Mexico, the thrust of my work is to display the actual material effects that the traveler’s interest in Mexico has on Mexico’s cultural landscape and economy—in the form of tourism. Touristic episodes, tourist sites, and touristic ideas about Mexico emerge from the various moments and strains of interest in Mexico. By identifying the different moments in 20th century tourism, the infrastructures that develop, the types of travelers who visit, and the books that get produced, I anchor these scholars’ observations, including Cooper Alarcon’s attentiveness to the ways in which themes of Mexican-ness inform tourism in Mexico. Place their work in the greater context of a developing touristic terrain. Moreover, as I have begun to do already, I pay close attention to role that gender plays in the development of travel scenes and tourist sites. I demonstrate throughout that Mexico
becomes a space that offers different possibilities for male and female travelers, different ways to reinvigorate American masculinities and femininities, as it becomes a space of possibility and escape for the American traveler in general. With this nod to previous scholars, I begin my tourism history.

III. A History of Modern Tourism in Mexico

A First Moment: The Porfiriato

A history of modern tourism in Mexico begins with the reign of Porfirio Diaz at the turn of the 20th century. The Porfiriato is usually alluded to as a definitive modernizing moment and is the point of departure for studies of literary travel in Mexico, including Drewey Wayne Gunn’s *American and British Writers in Mexico, 1556-1973* and Gilbert González’s *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1881-1930*. Since “travel” is very much a modern concept, signifying both commercial and leisure movement in an era of expanding Western capitalism (Kaplan 3), travel in Mexico accurately coincides with Mexico’s emergence into modernity. I situate the beginnings of 20th century tourism, in particular, in the period of the Porfiriato, coinciding with a program of modernization that encourages a capitalist driven tourist infrastructure that enables mass tourism.

In a context of capitalist expansion Mexico enthusiastically promoted itself for a tourist gaze by participating in spectacular events like the World’s Fairs. Mobilizing “wizards” to orchestrate highly controlled spectacles, Mexico participated with pragmatic goals in mind (Tenorio-Trillo 11, 13). Significantly, one the state’s goals was to attract

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9 As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo establishes in *Mexico at the World’s Fairs*, “if we are to mark the origins of modern Mexico, the Porfirián era constituted the first period of relative social peace, political stability, and dynamic economic development since independence had been won in 1821, and it was during these years that the notion of a modern nation took hold” (8).
“immigrants,” also travelers, who, with their ideas, lifestyle, and capital, could serve as agents of modernity.

to show the progress of Mexico and to change the common impression of a violent, uncivilized, insecure, and wild country and present instead the picture of Mexico as “the promised land.” These efforts it was believed, would eventually attract foreign investment and Northern European immigration. To produce this image, the Porfirian elite undertook to present in impressive fashion both the economic and the human resources of the nation for the world to see. Indeed, they consciously produced an ideal of what modern and progressive Mexico was supposed to look like. (Tenorio-Trillo 8)

In striving to be perceived as cosmopolitan, Mexico shared Europe’s orientalist and exoticist interests. Without colonies of its own that it might exhibit, it undertook an “autoethnography” and put itself on display. Anticipating the folkloric traits that would attract the tourist gaze more poignantly in the 1920s and 30s, Mexico displayed indigenous food and drink, dresses, and *tipos populares* (popular characters). For example, the “Street of Mexico” at the 1901 Buffalo World’s Fair put indigenous people on display. At these exhibits, Mexico satisfied the hunger for exotic objects and people, while responding to Europe’s exoticist, economic, and imperialist desires more broadly (Tenorio-Trillo 16). And all of this it did as it also proved its mastery of science, progress, and industry. Above all, it demonstrated that it had the components of a modern nation: a well-defined and well-integrated territory, a cosmopolitan culture, good sanitation conditions, etc. (Tenorio-Trillo 13). If Mexico’s raw resources and exoticism earned it a place in the World’s Fairs, Mexico took the opportunity to prove itself worthy of participating also in the economic advancements and civilizing effects of commerce.

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10 According to Tenorio-Trillo, by way of scientific exhibits, statistical demonstrations, and the constant use of a scientific discourse, exhibits expressed everything from an understanding of public administration to the effects of pulque on the Indian population, from the measurement of skulls to the calculation of the resistance of the hymens of Mexican women.
Participating in the World’s Fairs was a way of attracting the tourist gaze and future investors and travelers, as it was also a means of integrating into a modern world imaginary, of performing modernity.

Such efforts apparently succeeded, for Diaz welcomed an intense wave of foreign investment to aid Mexico’s modernization. Indeed, as a moment of travel, the Porfiriato came to be defined by transnational flows of capital that made travel in Mexico possible. This was the first moment of “mass tourism” in Mexico as American enterprises arrived and American “colonies,” or clusters of residence, began to thrive there. It was also at this historical moment that travel literature about Mexico developed into a diverse and explosive market.

As Gilbert González argues, travel literature, travel, and capitalist investment went hand in hand. As the U.S. carried about a “peaceful [imperialist] conquest” by investing millions in railroads, mining, and industry, it helped to create the tourist infrastructure—railroads, Pullmans, inns, American colonies, and guide books—that made it possible for tourists to swarm into Mexico City and out into Mexico’s countryside. Alongside this capitalist driven tourism, countless articles in professional and popular journals and magazines complimented an explosive market of books on Mexico (González 46).

Mexico inspired its visitors to write, and although some visitors traveled for leisure purely as tourists, most had a more complex plan in mind (54). Tourists’ interests in commerce, science, and art intertwined. According to González,

A few wrote of their experiences as mining engineers, others accounted for Protestant missionary works in search of converts, professional travelers sought novelty, some wrote articles for a local newspaper and later published them in book form… Artists searched for inspiration,
geologists hoped to master Mexico’s natural terrain, anthropologists envisioned a map of Mexico’s ethnography, and the wife of a businessman exercised a repressed literary bent. (47)

Moreover, these writers looked to and read one another: they referred to and quoted from each other; they borrowed and reproduced the same photographs. Just as in the Orientalist tradition, an intertextuality marked their work. “Clearly,” González argues, “they were aware of an emerging genre of work dedicated to Mexico…and they partook in the process of its development” (48). Situating themselves in this emerging genre, they wrote as authorities on Mexico, becoming Mexico’s interpreters for Americans back home, as they laid out Mexico for future travelers and investors.

That the American interest in travel writing about Mexico was situated in a project of modernization driven by foreign investment could be seen quite transparently in tourists’ desire to write about sites of capitalist investment. These “tourist sites” attracted the traveler. Plantations, mining and oil industries, and the American colonies that grew around them were sources of touristic fascination that connoted progress while offering Americans an opportunity to take part in a “colonial” scene and lifestyle as compatriots. Alongside their fellow Americans, as on the first-class American Pullmans, American travelers experienced the thrill of penetrating Mexico’s remotest regions while admiring American feats of modernization and progress. These impressions made their way into the fictional travel literature that coincided with such capitalist travel, such as in the pages that D.H. Lawrence dedicates to the Pullman as it cuts across Mexico’s countryside in Quetzalcoatl-- after a first expression of delight. “It was a Pullman,” after all, “looking clean and fresh, with hot green plush seats, exactly as in the U.S.” (51).

Above all, as Americans wrote about such thrills and feats, they “bought into the idea of
economic conquest and worked within the context of U.S. economic expansionism”; and they “rarely critiqued U.S. economic policy toward Mexico” (González 48). In their writing it was clear that “Mexico could not develop—indeed, could not exist—without U.S. capital,” and that they evaluated the country in terms of progress toward American standards (González 62, Delpar 5). Accordingly, the tourist gaze constructed Mexico at this moment as a transformative space whose backwardness and darkness would inevitably be brought to light--by way of Pullmans, new industries (mining, oil companies, and railroads), American capital, and much writing.

Three other popular tourist sites can be traced to this moment. First, because Diaz made an incredible investment in public works to ensure that Mexico City itself reflected the nation’s new modern status, impressive European-influenced architectural works were placed on the tourist itinerary. These works included new state and cultural buildings, including the building of public works, the new post office, and the Palace of Fine Arts.

The second tourist site is the foreigner’s home as museum. Helen Delpar also features this site in her work, referring to the same example that I offer, but without identifying it as such—although she accurately calls it “a Mexican showcase.” It is the “Casa de Alvarado.” I draw it from D.H. Lawrence’s Quetzalcoatl; it is a place that his British and American characters visit when they are invited to tea during their stay in Mexico City. The hostess is the “widow of an English ambassador of the bygone days of Don Porfirio” who lives in this “big, old fortress of a house beyond Tacubaya, and is famous for her collection of Aztec and Indian things” (15). According to Delpar, the
character of Mrs. Norris is based on a true personality of the time, an archaeologist. She filled her house with furniture, porcelains, and other artifacts from the colonial period and created a garden that visitors found unforgettable (Delpar 6). Significantly, in the novel, Mrs. Norris’s physique is transformed by her time and trade in Mexico, and by her very inhabitance of this house: “Her face reminded Kate always of one of the Aztec masks carved in black-grey lava, with a sharp nose and slightly prominent eyes and a look of tomb-like mockery. She had lived so many years in Mexico, and rooted among Aztec remains so long” (Lawrence 17). In effect, Mrs. Norris adapts Mexico’s infernally paradisal traits. Although D.H. Lawrence does not make it explicit, Mrs. Norris’s home also reminds the reader familiar with Mexico of Cortés’s great stone palace in Cuernavaca. Perhaps this is why visitor Kate Burns finds the artifacts sinister and oppressive and Mrs. Norris, like her home, reminiscent of Spanish conquistadores.

Delpar incisively cites a later visitor to this house in the 1920s who years later recalls his “astonishment close to repulsion” at the sight of white-gloved Indians serving tea in the drawing room” (Delpar 6). By then, Nutall is certainly a relic of the Porfiriato, although the foreigner’s home as museum is replicated even today—by tourists who buy homes in Mexico and by hotels.

Following closely upon the Casa de Alvarado and its imperialist associations, is the third tourist site, the hacienda. It is a structure also symbolic of previous Mexican feudal hierarchies and economies such as the infamous henequen plantations of Yucatan-as well as more recent foreign capitalist investment like the haciendas constructed as headquarters for British and American mining complexes. Haciendas will continue to

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11 She is Zellie Nutall, born in San Francisco to a Mexican mother and an Irish father, who after the dissolution of her marriage to a French archaeologist, settled in Mexico and purchased the house in 1902.
figure in the tourist imagination as picturesque, romantic, colonial sites. Tourists will visit them, wishing also to experience the etiquette and ‘quaint’ hierarchical customs, like tea parties and servants, associated with them. A discussion of haciendas returns in chapters two and five, and I describe an actual hacienda tourist site in my conclusion.

A crowning moment of the Porfiriato occurred on September 16, 1910. Diaz celebrated the centennial of Mexico’s declaration of independence and commemorated this event (along with his eightieth birthday the day before) with an entire month of festivities. Thousands of guests from the world over were invited to admire, and remark upon, the progress they found in modern Mexico (Gunn 54). Nevertheless, this capitalist-driven phase of travel came to a halt when Diaz’s presidency was finally challenged by Francisco I. Madero’s candidacy for vice president and when Madero became president in 1911.

A Second Episode: The Revolution

With the Revolution, Mexico began to transform for the tourist and traveler away from the colonial and primitive to an exciting mix of the former and the new. Travel to Mexico was interrupted when civil revolution erupted in 1910; after which certain types of travel and enterprises came to a halt. But it was also then that the Revolution (1910-1920) made Mexico especially attractive to the more politically minded traveler--still a kind of tourist today in places like Central America and Chiapas. This traveler tended to be male, leftist in his political leanings, and preferred to stray from the American colonies and to venture off the beaten path of previous tourist itineraries and societal conventions. To the radical from the U.S., Mexico offered a dynamic revolutionary present and an alternative zone of activism to the Russian Revolution, or an extension of it in North
America. Thus Mexico became a chosen destination for the political pilgrim\textsuperscript{12} interested in translating Mexico’s politics to a skeptical U.S.—even as it continued to be a coveted site for American capitalist investment allied to Mexico’s industrial development and modernization.

At this Revolutionary moment writers and journalists such as John Kenneth Turner, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, John Reed, and Lincoln Steffens ventured into Mexico. It was a highly masculinist moment, and Mexico became a place of political possibility—or more precisely, a proving ground of political masculinity—for the radical, as well as the authoritative, imperialist figure who tried to contain him. For example, many American interests were quite vocal in their disgust when Woodrow Wilson withdrew troops from Veracruz in 1914 and called back general Pershing’s expedition in pursuit of the Mexican revolutionary bandit and general Francisco Villa (Dunn 53-54). The Villa/Pershing standoff spoke to more than the obvious sentiment that the U.S. should intervene in Mexico’s internal affairs to protect American interests. This antagonism was an instance in which one nation’s hyper masculine symbol raced to catch its rival, openly defying territorial boundaries. Villa also trespassed defiantly into American territory, in his way answering the bullying nature of the Monroe Doctrine\textsuperscript{13}. Venturing into Mexico was also a form of defiance for the American radical. There he pursued his political interests and disavowed the capitalist priorities of his own nation.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} If we understand the political pilgrim according to Helen Delpar’s and sociologist Paul Hollander’s definition, this category of the traveler came to include intellectuals, journalists, and artists, with leftist leanings, who visited revolutionary societies in this tourist moment and the next. See Delpar, 15.

\textsuperscript{13} As Drewey Wayne Gunn reminds us, between 1898 and 1916 the American government pressured six Latin American countries around the Caribbean to take directions it desired (53).

\textsuperscript{14} Also, in Mexico the male radical had the opportunity to reinvigorate a masculinity weakened by the feminizing effects of American industrialization and progress. In these ways, Mexico served as a forging place for an American masculinity. In The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West
According to Mexican writer Carlos Monsivais, the Mexican Revolution convoked two fundamental species of travelers: those who came to be horrified and to extract sensational material that would cause delightful shivers among the civilized, and radical reporters who tried to understand and support a popular movement (69).

Monsivais is more skeptical than American writers on the subject of American travelers and observes even of the latter species that “in the social upheaval, very few…kept a sufficient distance, an intelligent understanding” (70). He contrasts, for example, Jack London with John Reed and Lincoln Steffens. London arrived at the beginning and was partisan of the revolution and the Socialist project of the Flores Magón, but he was later angry when faced with a devastated country. Moreover, as both Gunn and Monsivais reveal, London despised the natives, who he saw as “only descendants of the millions of stupid people who could not hold up under the hundreds of vagabonds of Cortés and stupidly passed from the hard slavery of the Montezumas to the no less hard slavery of the Spanish and later the Mexicans.” Like many others, London came to believe that Mexico needed to be saved from itself. Monsivais regards John Reed and Lincoln Steffens far more favorably. Reed traveled with Pancho Villa’s troops and dealt directly with this dramatic and contradictory figure but resisted theorizing the appearance of an order that was still undecipherable. Steffens traveled with Carranza, proclaimed the justness of the anarchic unionists, and defended Mexico in the North American press (Monsivais 70). Helen Delpar presents John Kenneth Turner in a similar light: “Turner, best known for his exposé of the Díaz regime in Barbarous Mexico (1910), was initially a supporter of the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón and his Liberal party; he later became

_of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister_ (1968), G. Edward White makes a similar argument for the West._
[like Steffens] a partisan of Carranza” (20). Pulling his famous disappearing act, Ambrose Bierce also ventured into the thick of the Revolution with what one may regard as a more individualist stake in preserving his masculinity, as he faced the fact of aging. He declared, “If you hear that they put me against a Mexican stone wall and tore me to pieces with bullets, think that I believe it is a good way to leave life. To avoid old age and illness or risk of falling down the stairs in some wine shop” (69-70). For Bierce, “to be a gringo in [revolutionary] Mexico [was] truly euthanasia!” (70).

Gunn comments that various wars have so excited the imagination of American writers that it seems surprising that the battles of the Mexican Revolution influenced American literature so little. It was the first great social upheaval of this century, and the U.S. had a front-row seat for the event (53). Nevertheless, as Delpar reports, from the start of the Revolution in 1910, periodicals such as the _Appeal to Reason_, the _Masses_, and _Mother Earth_ carried reports of events in Mexico, supported the revolt of the dispossessed, and expressed opposition to intervention by the American government (20). In fact, the Revolution inspired many works that ranged from _Diaz, Master of Mexico_ (1911), James Creelman’s favorable rendering of Diaz; to highly critical _Barbarous Mexico_ (1910) by John Kenneth Turner; to Reed’s more nuanced _Insurgent Mexico_ (1914). Moreover, Mexico’s revolutionary zeal would have lasting effects and reach new heights as it carried into mestizo modernism and inspired works like Anita Brenner’s _The Wind That Swept Mexico_ (1943). Revolution-era radicals served as trailblazers for the American leftists who would follow.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) The extensive works of Carleton Beals are a direct example. They included a biography of Diaz, several travel journals, various social-political interpretations including _Mexican Maze_ (1931), and two novels. _The Stone’s Awake_ (1936) is the story of an Indian girl in the Revolution and _Black River_ (1934) is an exposé of the oil industry based on documents he had accumulated (Gunn 82). Indeed, the Revolution and
I identify the tourist site of the moment to be Mexico in all its tumult as a battleground and laboratory of Revolutionary possibility.\textsuperscript{16} American radicals mingled with Mexican radicals, even following them into the battles of the Revolution.

**A Third Episode: The Modernist Moment of Transnational Artistic Exchange**

After the Revolution, tourists returned to Mexico. As peace settled and the railroads were repaired and roads opened up, tourists came fast, most clutching their copy of *Terry’s Guide to Mexico*, quickly revised by its author\textsuperscript{17} to meet the changed scene (Gunn 76). The process of reconstruction that repaired Mexico’s travel infrastructure was also ideological and aesthetic. Influenced by a generation of mestizo artists, the state incorporated the country’s native folklore, landscape, and art in Mexico’s new nationalism. A dazzling and politically charged artistic renaissance began. Mexican, American, and other international artists, writers, journalists, and political agents interacted to translate Mexico’s new travel scenes. As Marie Brenner recalls, alluding to Edward Weston’s and Tina Modotti’s photographs, the images projected by Mexico’s many cultural currents came to define an era:

Modotti’s campesinos [agricultural peasants], Indians sitting on petates (straw mats), mothers with plump babies on their laps, men in sombreros reading the revolutionary newspaper *El Machete*, calla lilies, and telephone wires; and Weston’s abstract maguey cacti, laundry hanging above community washtubs, Oaxacan clay pots, and erotic renderings of Modotti… (Brenner 3)

\hspace{-2cm}
\textsuperscript{16} As Helen Delpar notes regarding areas like Yucatán, “For American liberals and radicals, in the early 1920s, Mexico, or at least Yucatán, offered a Revolution older than Russia’s, at least as interesting, and certainly more accessible.” See Delpar, 22.

\hspace{-2cm}
\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Phillip Terry (1864-1945).
These were colorful images with a political, modern, and eroticized edge that spoke to and lured more artistic and culturally-appreciative traveler types to Mexico. Delpar refers to these travelers as “cultural pilgrims.” This is the third touristic episode and the object of such studies as Helen Delpar’s The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican and chapter two of this dissertation. It began with President Alvaro Obregón’s inauguration and it is said to have peaked between 1927 and 1935 (Delpar 55).

This touristic moment is characterized by the increase in women travelers. They arrived on the heels of the Revolution and joined the male radicals identified in the previous touristic moment. For interested, dynamic, modern women--American and Mexican, Mexico City offered an exciting social, artistic, and political environment. This is an environment that Kathryn Blair describes for Antonieta Rivas Mercado, an elegant Mexican patroness of the arts.

Life took on a new hue, a new accelerated pace…[as she] moved from crowded salons to popular cafes to [the artist’s] studio to the sawdust-covered floors of dance halls, a life that moved to the sensuous rhythm of rumbas and tangos, fast-stepping danzones, and the paso doble. She became a devotee of the bullfight and mixed with threadbare intellects and women with florid vocabularies. (quoted in Unrue, 621)

Immersed in this milieu, Rivas Mercado, who like many Mexican women artists was brought up during the Porfiriato, now rebelled against its mores. I highlight this feminist turn in chapter two when I feature the North American woman traveler/travel writer as she arrives on the scene and becomes, like the Mexican women artists that define this moment, a spectacle that also defines Mexico’s attractiveness. In fact, it was also at this moment that Mexico became a land of many muses: Maria Asunsolo, Lupe Marin, Nahui Olin, Frida Kahlo, Maria Izquierdo, and Lola Alvarez Bravo. These were sensual, extravagant, glamorous women who supported the arts, were artists themselves, modeled
for artists, and took artists and radicals for lovers. As a result of spectacular foreign women travelers and Mexico’s muses, Mexico would thereafter be identified with figures like Tina Modotti, Katherine Anne Porter, Alma Reed, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Lupe Marin, and Frida Kahlo. I here mark a gender shift as travelers with masculinist and feminist interests meet and the more exclusively masculine arena of political possibility of the Revolution conjoins with a feminist arena of professional and artistic possibility.

Mexico also became a place of exile, as the American experience of travel and tourism inherited modernist themes: exile, the singular alienated traveler, escape into art, escape towards the primitive, and sexual experimentation. The American traveler now looked to Mexico for an escape into art and into the primitive. Of course, it is now possible to note that the traveler’s alienation and escape (whether socially defiant, artistic, or eroticised) was also fueled by earlier traditions of travel. Unsurprisingly, those drawn to Mexico had already been, were planning to visit, or perhaps even wished to bypass other literary and artistic centers in Europe, New York, or the Southwest. Despite its nearness, Mexico City became for the expatriate a last outpost in an exilic geographic imaginary that included Harlem, Greenwich Village, Montmartre, Paris, and Berlin, as Mexico City also became a kind of artist colony.

As a result of Mexico’s own modernist trends, or mestizo modernism, Mexican artists themselves produced colorful, contrasting images and expressions of Mexico. Highly circulated, they were visible to the political pilgrim as well as his/her less politically involved follower, the cultural pilgrim.18 As seen in Mexico’s muralism and

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18 According to Helen Delpar, after 1927, the diminution of the revolutionary fervor and the improvement of relations with the U.S. lessened Mexico’s appeal to political pilgrims. Veteran observers such as Beals and Tannenbaum retained and deepened their Mexican ties, but culture now became the primary magnet for artists and intellectuals who visited Mexico (61). Unlike the first category, cultural pilgrims were
plastic arts, a flourishing of hybrid productions powerfully blended the modern and the 
primitive: a dynamic, revolutionary, modern present and a colonial, indigenous past.
Linking with a fiery palette man and machine; peasant, worker, and intellectual; and the 
indigenous and industrialized modern, these productions—and their charismatic artists—
captivated the U.S. artistic imagination. Indeed, Mexico presented a powerful range of 
artistic expression, from the overtly historical and didactic work of the Mexican muralists 
to the more poetic and mysterious work of artists like Maria Izquierdo and Rufino 
Tamayo (Geis 4).

Infernally paradisal traits again began to mix and stick. The jarring contradictions 
in Mexican social life and culture continued to provoke bewilderment—as they also 
provoked wonder. Indeed, the incredible contrasts between Mexico’s rich art and radical 
ideals—and Indians and peasants still toiling under brutal circumstances in Mexico City 
and Mexico’s countryside and traditional economies—could not be ignored. But these 
contrasts also informed Mexico’s difference—an “enthralling” difference from Europe 
and the US that also lured travelers. Hart Crane wrote

Mexico with its volcanoes, endless ranges, countless flowers, dances, 
villages, lovely brown-skinned Indians with simple courtesies, and 
constant sunlight—it enthralls me more than any other spot I’ve ever 
known. It is and isn’t an easy place to live. Altogether more strange to us 
than even the orient…. There is never an end to dancing, singing, rockets 
and the rather lurking and suave dangers that give the same edge to life 
here that the mountains give to the horizon.” (quoted in Delpar, 79-80)

And indeed, many travelers came to agree with Crane that Europe was “an environment 
not half so strange and distractingly new-old curious as this” (Gunn 254). For example, 
in a 1930 article, Katherine Dos Passos, wife of the novelist, expressed that “A trip to
Mexico is more exciting than a trip to Europe, because the country is not standardized or
touristed, and even the most experienced traveler makes his own discoveries” (quoted in
Delpar 58). Moreover, as Malcolm Cowley added, sharing his “enthusiasm about
[Mexico’s] somber landscapes, its baroque churches, and its mixture of Spanish and
Indian cultures”—“Life there was even cheaper than in Europe. One heard of sexual
customs not unlike those of the Arabs” (quoted in Delpar 77). At a moment when
anthropology, literature, and tourism merged in their fascination for the exotic, Mexico
trumped other places by offering an affordable exotic.19 Nearby and inexpensive,
Mexico offered the traveler an opportunity to experience an otherworldly exoticism first
hand.

Above all, Mexico became a site of exciting transnational artistic exchange. I
offer Langston Hughes as a quick example because his experience is emblematic of the
many artists that traversed the city streets—and of the many “Mexicos” and temporalities
that existed in the same city. As a figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes also makes
visible the interesting intersections and interactions that occurred between American and
Mexican artists of the time.20

19 Mexico’s affordability contributed to increased tourism even in the early years of the Depression. See
Delpar, 58.
20 In the following segment, I pull pieces directly from Hughes’s travel narratives, “Period to a Will” and
“Diego, Lupe and a Leper” from I Wonder as I Wander (1956) as captured in an excerpt, “Bohemian Life,
1934-1935” in The Reader’s Companion to Mexico. I also want to point out that Hughes had a certain
access to the city and its inner circles because he had a familial connection to Mexico. As he narrates, his
father had moved to Mexico, after Cuba, fleeing the racism and color line of the U.S. Thus Hughes first
visited Mexico briefly as a 5 year old with his parents, when his father sent for him and his mother. But
that April 1907, an earthquake shook Mexico from the capital to Acapulco for four and a half minutes.
“The Cathedral was seriously cracked, the new Palacio de Bellas Artes (then under construction) sank a
little, scorpions crawled out of the exposed earth, and hundreds of people were killed.” His terrified mother
took him home, and Hughes instead grew up in the States.
Hughes traveled to Mexico in December 1934 after his father’s death to settle his estate. What made Hughes’ experience so interesting is that he shuttled between the city’s bohemian circles and the home of his father’s friends, the Patiño sisters, with whom he first stayed and whom he later frequently visited. Indeed, the Patiño sisters represented a different world from the city’s bohemian life altogether. But Hughes was able to inhabit the two worlds simultaneously and even bring them together. For example, when his frequent companion, Diego Rivera’s extravagant, model/former wife, Lupe Marín, visited the sisters, she was captivated by these living relics of pre-revolution times. According to Hughes, they, on the other hand,

...looked at Lupe without smiling and spoke with formal politeness to this exotic Mexican whose lips were bright red and who dressed in so colorful and careless a way. To make matters worse, however, Lupe was entranced by the three Patiño sisters, who she thought were like quaint figurines under glass, lovely leftovers of distant days beyond even Diaz. So Lupe came back to their house especially to see them and to admire the precious lace mantillas they wore about their shoulders in the chilly stone rooms where candles before the madonnas provided warmth (Hughes 41).

Indeed, the “‘darling old-school’ sisters did not approve of the artists, writers, models, and bullfighters who sometimes came by their house looking for [Hughes]” (Hughes 40). “As young ladies,” they “had worshipped President Porfirio Díaz” and “hated the leaders of the revolution, along with its art and artists” (Hughes 40). As Hughes exclaims, “The mere name, Diego Rivera, caused them to turn pale and cross themselves for protection” (Hughes 40).

By spring, Hughes had sold a few stories and could afford to move out. So “with a young French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and a Mexican poet, Andrés

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21 Hughes returns twice: when his father sends for him again in 1919, Hughes is 17; and when he visits his father the next summer to convince him to pay for his college education at Columbia. By 1934, Hughes had traveled extensively and won a place in the literary world.
Henestrosa, [he] took a tiny ground-floor flat near the Lagunilla market, across from the stalls of the coffin merchants” (Hughes 40). Although he and his friends were always nearly broke, he continued to have a wonderful time. All three were interested in the folk dances, songs, bullfights, and night-life of the capital that were tourist interests of the time. And, all three had Mexican girlfriends. These romantic liaisons were typical of the moment and also reflective of the continuing orientalist interests that marked male travel.

Interestingly, Hughes’ “winter in Mexico” was “the nearest that [he] ever came to la vie bohème” (Hughes 43). He never lived in Greenwich Village in New York and although he lived for a year in Montmartre in Paris, “he lived there as a worker, not an artist” (Hughes 43-44). In Mexico City, his friends “were almost all writers and artists,” and they included Juan de Cabada, María Izquierdo, Luis Cardoza y Aragon, Manuel Bravo, Rufino Tamayo, Francesca and Nellie Campobello (Hughes 43). Hughes also met the famous Mexican painters: “the sad Orozco, the talkative Siquieros, and the genteel Montenegro” (Hughes 39). And of course, he was friends with Lupe Marin and Diego Rivera, whose infamous spats and contests of wit he also witnessed and helped to memorialize. In fact, it was Miguel Covarrubias, whom Hughes “had known in New York in the days when Harlem was in vogue,” who introduced him to Rivera (Hughes

22 According to Hughes, “Henestrosa was courting a beautiful and much-photographed Indian girl, dark brown in complexion, whom he later married; Cartier was in love with another Indian beauty from Tehuantepec who went barefooted; and Hughes’ ‘favorite girl was a tortilla-maker’s daughter.’” (Hughes 43).

23 According to Hughes, “anecdotes about Diego and Lupe were as common in Mexico City then as were tall tales about Robinson and Una Jeffers at Carmel, or stories of the amazing doings of Mabel Dodge Lujan and Tony at Taos. Rivera and his ex-wife were favorite conversation pieces in the capital” (Hughes 46).
42). Covarrubias had done the jacket for Hughes first book, *The Weary Blues*. Hughes became a celebrity in Mexico when his journalist friend from Cuba, now a diplomat in Mexico, “began broadcasting to the Mexican press what an important writer he was” (Hughes 43). He also served as an active liaison in the artistic exchange that fascinated his generation of travelers and that proved pivotal for some travelers’ careers.

In this highly artistic, transnational modernist moment, the interest in Mexico was characterized by an intoxicating sense of discovery. Americans were eager to read and write about Mexico. Such that the already existent and greater body of touristic travel writing about Mexico boomed. New publications joined those of the Porfiriato and the revolutionary-era radicals. Magazines that featured Mexico in the 1920s and 30s included: *Cosmopolitan, The Nation, The New Masses, Esquire, Mexican Life, The American Magazine, The New Republic, Century Magazine,* and *Outlook*. Countless books were published. These were works that helped to create the vogue of things Mexican.

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24 It is important to note that the US also became the destination of cultural migrants from Mexico—painters, composers, actors, and others—whose presence, like that of Covarrubias also contributed to the enormous vogue of things Mexican (Delpar x). Paradoxically, as Delpar so aptly notes, many of these cultural migrants achieved great success in the U.S. even as Americans debated the desirability of Mexican immigration in general and moved to expel thousands of Mexicans during the Great Depression (x).

25 According to Hughes, “the result was a number of newspaper interviews, sessions with photographers and artists, and translators asking him how to translate the syncopated rhythms and Harlem slang of his poems into Mexican idioms and Spanish meters” (Hughes 43). He had himself translated into English a number of Mexican short stories and poems by young writers for publication in the U.S., including a short story by Antonio Acevedo Escobedo, poems by Nellie Campobello and some of the Indian poetry in Covarrubia’s *Mexico South* (Hughes 39, Dunn 86). However, when he “soon began to receive invitations to speak at literary soirees, the attention embarrassed [him] and [he] began to think about returning to California to find peace for writing again” (Hughes 43).

26 Hughes and his housemates would have impressive careers. Hughes describes Henestrosa as “a little Indian—a white Indian from Oaxaca—a poet and transcriber of folk tales, who was busy beginning to make the first dictionary of his own Indian language.” He would later complete this project at Columbia University and would go on to become a politician and a congressman in Mexico. Hughes mentions that Cartier-Bresson came to Mexico from Paris on a sightseeing trip and liked it so much that he stayed, despite his father financially cutting him off. Still, he managed to take pictures and had a joint exhibition of his photographs with Manual Alvarez Bravo at the prestigious Palacio de Bellas Artes. Cartier-Bresson would be credited with developing the “street photography” style that would influence generations of photographers to come. He would also be remembered as the father of modern photojournalism.
Mexican while shaping readers’ conception of Mexico and encouraging travel to that country (Delpar 71).

Unsurprisingly, with so many Americans in Mexico, tourism in Mexico became an obvious presence and the American tourist a familiar sight to Mexicans. According to Delpar the presence of so many American visitors at the inauguration of Ortiz Rubio in 1930 reflected not only improved relations between the U.S.-Mexican governments, but also an ongoing Mexican campaign to revive the tourist industry (57). According to Delpar,

Starting in 1928, American tourists were no longer required to present passports to enter Mexico but were allowed entry with tourist cards valid for six months. Customs officials were instructed to expedite examination of tourists’ luggage. (Delpar 57)

Reflecting the state’s growing recognition of tourism, Mexico’s first national congress of tourism convened in April 1930 and the National Commission of Tourism was also created that year (57). In the U.S. Mexico was promoted as a safe yet unspoiled destination for travelers who would enjoy its quaintness, natural beauty, and artistic treasures (58). I offer three examples of typical tourist sites that came out of this touristic moment.

The first tourist site is the summer school, which can be traced to the Summer School for Foreigners at the National University. Established in 1921, the Summer School began the long tradition of learning institutes for foreign student tourists in Mexico offering courses in Spanish language and literature, as well as Mexican history, folklore, archaeology, economic development, and other subjects. At its inception, it was an important vehicle for increasing American understanding of the revolutionary process. It also fostered a dynamic transnational intellectual exchange, by employing as lecturers...
very well respected Mexican and American intellectuals, like Cosío Villegas, archaeologist Alfonso Caso, art critic and painter Walter Pach, and educational philosopher John Dewey (Delpar 18-19). One might also say that the Summer School offered the first tourist package: students could receive discounts on rail and steamship fare and on the cost of hotel accommodations (18-19). And, it reinforced the new extended tourist itinerary by including excursions to nearby sites of interest such as the ancient ruins of Teotihuacán and the colonial town of “eternal spring,” Cuernavaca.

The second tourist space is aligned with the woman artist/traveler in Mexico, and I call it the woman artist/traveler’s home. This “home” functions as refuge, studio, and salon and is an artistically decorated and feminized space. A clear example is Frida Kahlo’s “Casa Azul,” or Blue House, which then also functioned as a salon for Kahlo’s artistic and political guests and today is the Frida Kahlo Museum, especially popular among women tourists. Feminists today would immediately identify this site as a woman’s “room of her own,” a literary space imagined and passed down to us by another modernist artist/writer, Virginia Woolf. Significantly, even male artists/writers of the time seemed to be aware of its salience for their female counterparts. In Quetzalcoatl, for example, D.H. Lawrence’s woman traveler protagonist, Kate Burns, has grown weary of wandering about and staying in hotels and longs for her own Spanish colonial home with a patio. I include the novel’s passage here, because it is a wonderful example of how even the architecture of colonial Spanish homes is appropriated and made meaningful by the traveler.

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27 I trace the woman artist/traveler’s home to two spaces of the first tourist episode, or the Porfiriato: the foreigner’s home as museum and the haciendas and other Spanish-influenced colonial homes that were transformed into inns and homes for foreigners. It can also be traced to the salon of the Porfiriato, usually an upper class and highly exclusive custom among intellectuals and aesthetes.
What she wanted was a house of her own, with a Mexican woman-servant, to be alone for a time... And she, Kate, would be alone to nurse her wounds and her weariness, and wait for a new relief to enter into her life. She believed that here in Mexico a new relief would enter into her life... That is why she liked the old Spanish houses, with their inner courtyards or patios, shady, with an arched gallery around, and in the center, water, and a few growing flowers. The shade, the enclosure, the few bright flowers, or the oranges, growing within... Life turned inwards, instead of outwards. Not to have to look out and see a wide, aching world. Not to look out any more. To turn inwards, to sit quietly in the shadow of the patio and be still, without effort of any sort. (Lawrence 70).

Of course, Lawrence’s protagonist is thwarted, because he stops short of imagining her as an artist, although he does grant Kate the ability to identify with her garden, an exotic, proliferating thing. Still, through Kate Burns, Lawrence signals to women travelers who also travel and make a home in Mexico, especially after a divorce or disappointment in life. In fact, the woman traveler/artist’s home is not simply an exilic space for the exhausted woman traveler. It is an intimate, aesthetic space that can sustain beauty and creativity and open to and host public activity and wider artistic exchange, in the form of parties and artistic salons. For Lawrence’s contemporary, Katherine Anne Porter, this “room” is figured through the activities of the moment, such as when she is writing her monograph for the Exposition of Popular Art of the Centenary and writes in a letter to the Christian Monitor (June 5, 1922):

I spend my time in an old house of the 17th century in an immense hall littered with beauty and great windows opening on the patio garden. Diego Rivera comes there at times, and Best, and Vasconcelos, and Toledano. Indians from the country help to assort pottery and painted boxes and serapes more beautiful than ever I imagined serapes could be,

Certainly, even Lawrence’s contemporaries, Frida Kahlo and Anita Brenner are examples of women who find solace and healing in their homes (in Mexico) after shattered marriages. Of course, these artistic, dynamic women also find healing, social activity, and meaning by harnessing their creativity, and like these figures, future women travelers will also heal themselves by pursuing or fostering an art in Mexico. Kate Burns also foreshadows Susana Ames, the early 1960s divorced protagonist of Harriet Doerr’s Consider this señora, which I will feature in my chapter five.
and great silver embroidered saddles and spurs that glitter like jewels… (Walsh 61).

At the same time, this space generates a deeply gendered desire for a home with similar traits. The woman artist/traveler’s sense of exile informs this space but does not enable it. For the woman traveler in Mexico, this space will remain an ideal, if not a reality, certainly in the imagination and one that she will re-member throughout her travels.

The third tourist space is the artist colony, as American colonies now become ‘artist colonies,’ and picturesque, provincial, colonial towns like Taxco, Cuernavaca, and Chapala get listed on the tourist itinerary as such. For example, in 1925 Bynner returned to Chapala to find some changes, apparently brought about to some degree by foreign tourists: “Too much elegancia now,” he complained, “constant shrill clatter, no calzones, not so many guaraches [sic], no plaza-market” (quoted in Delpar 38). Among these changes, he finds several other American writers and a painter in Chapala, making up “a real little colony” (quoted in Delpar 38). Similarly, when William Spratling first settled in Taxco he was virtually the only American there, but within a few years, “the picturesque place [became] the haunt of Bohemian American artists and literati” (quoted in Delpar 67). Consequently, when Bynner visited in 1931, he was put off by the

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29 This is a sense of exile due to the personal circumstances of her life or background, the modernist politics of exile that makes displacement a requisite for artistic production, as well as the alienation that continues to haunt her identity as a woman who appears destined to be always ahead of her time.

30 Again, Porter is a perfect example, for on a trip with artist Xavier Guerrero to climb the famous volcano Popocatapetl, she comes across the town of Amecameca and discovers this dream—-as she jots in her notes: “I shall come back some day to live in Amecameca, at the foot of the Volcano, in a house of adobe with an adobe wall around it, and mottled, copper-green moss will cover it over within a year. There shall be a tiled fountain in the garden, with ducks and ferns and figs and pomegranates growing along the walks. There shall be a tiled fireplace in the room where I keep my books, and the design shall be made by Adolfo Best Maugard. A silence will be over the place, so enormous that any spoken word shall sound quite unnecessary. This, no matter what end is prepared for me in the stead, is my dream.” See Walsh, 46-47.

31 These towns are usually quite lovely, like the Taxco that Bynner describes in 1931: “beautiful beyond description with cobble-stoned lanes leading always up and up into a hundred little heavens, all at strange angles, and the huge ornate church standing in the center like the giant parent of eight other smaller churches.” Quoted in Delpar, 67-68.
Americans in Taxco, “all semi-crazy and completely drunken” (quoted in Delpar 68). As these little towns became more and more identified with American expatriates and artists, this identification came to inform their charisma for tourists. Art classes and summer schools or programs reinforced their status as artist colonies, explaining places like San Miguel de Allende today.

**Post WWII Mass Tourism**

As Helen Delpar explains, cultural relations in the modernist touristic moment occurred as a process of interaction between individuals and institutions from Mexico and the US at a time when neither government had as yet formally entered the field (viii). Not until the late 1960s did the Mexican state take a more comprehensive and dynamic role in leading the direction that tourism would take. Mexico fell into step with the rest of the world, as many countries became aware that mass tourism had arrived.³²

There was an interim period of tourism in Mexico before the 1960s, which I want to note because it made Acapulco into a glamorous seaside resort—a site that anticipates the sun, sand, and sea tourism that the state officially organizes and supports. It is its own touristic episode of the 1940s, associated with President Miguel Alemán Velasco (1946-1952), the “father of Mexican tourism.” As Andrew Sacket documents, during the 1950s and 1960s, Acapulco “became Mexico’s most alluring showcase for foreigners while still serving as a magnet for the nation’s nouveau riche” (501). The reader may recall, for instance, the Acapulco featured in the 1963 film, *Fun in Acapulco*,

³² Mass tourism is a post World War II global phenomenon made possible by several conditions that spurred travel on an international scale. First, the larger global boom coincided with rapid postwar economic growth and increased leisure for inhabitants of advanced industrialized countries. Technological improvements in transportation, especially development of the jet engine (the airplane), were also key. Third, the war itself exposed many travelers to foreign lands, and inspired nostalgic tourism among former soldiers; it triggered the return of American G.I.s to Europe and the desire to travel. Fourth, following the war, government restrictions on travel and foreign exchange were gradually lifted. See Clancy, 1, 39, 47.
starring Elvis Presley. In fact, Acapulco was the personal project of Alemán and he may be regarded as the first to put Mexico’s infernal and paradisical traits into play in a touristic palimpsest: “His genius as entrepreneur,” writes Sacket, “was his ability to promote regional sites as diverse as Acapulco and Chichén Itzá; to juxtapose modern beaches and quaint folkloric displays like the jarabe tapatio...; and to persuade countrymen and foreigners alike that both represented lo mexicano” (Sackett 501). He also foresaw the establishment of the National Tourism Commission (CONATUR) in 1947. In many ways, Alemán’s Acapulco anticipated the future of Mexican tourism through beach tourism: “tropical, exotic, easy-going, sexualized, and debauched—this was [as it would be in the future] Mexico for the middle-class and wealthier vacationers” (Sackett 502).

After WWII, tourists continued to visit Mexico City and increasingly ventured out into the provinces as more and more roads, railroads, and airports opened. In time, formerly popular sites like Cuernavaca and Acapulco became sterile international playgrounds as new sites like Yucatan attracted increasing numbers of tourists (Dun 230, 231). Increasing numbers of students also journeyed to Mexico, many enrolling each year in the Universidad de México and in the many summer schools that now existed in various state capitals. In addition to playing host to transient visitors, Mexico remained

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33 The development of Acapulco is also associated with high-end corruption. State and local officials stole from funds that were designated for the development of badly needed local infrastructure. Consequently, Acapulco’s uneven development resulted in the careless construction of a town with “two faces,” its glamorous touristic showcase and its shantytown laboring resident side steeped in deplorable conditions. As we will shortly see, it is as a result of this disaster in Acapulco’s planning, or lack of it, that the state will make sure to design future tourist sites in a way that prevents the messy juxtaposition of a tourist site’s two faces.

34 In fact, immediately after WWII many American veterans used their GI bill education benefits at Mexico City College, an American school founded in 1940 and later renamed the University of the Americas (and ultimately moved to Cholula). In 1961 Ivan Illich opened his Center for Intercultural Documentation at Cuernavaca, which attracted many educationalists, sociologists, political observers, and literary figures—
as always a sort of permanent haven for would-be writers, painters, and mere escapists. American artist colonies in Mexico City, Cuernavaca, and Taxco were replicated in San Miguel de Allende and several towns around Lake Chapala.

According to Gunn, from WWII to the date of his publication, nearly 100 novels, over 50 additional works of fiction for children, and innumerable short stories were published about Mexico (240). The postwar period, however, was an extremely troubled time spiritually. The nonfiction novel became a new form of travel literature. Gertrude Diamant’s *The Days of Ofelia* (1942) and Oscar Lewis’s *The Children of Sánchez* (1961) are two powerful examples. A number of important poets—William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, and Robert Hayden—visited in the 1950s, and were joined by Robert Lowell, Ferlinghetti, and maybe Robert Creeley in the 60s. They, along with the Beatniks, formed the next distinct generation of literary travelers (Gunn 234).

Yet, with the brief exception of Acapulco, through the mid-1960s tourist activity was somewhat neglected within Mexico. It was not until the mid to late 1960s that the Mexican government turned actively to developing tourism—as an answer to the country’s economic shortcomings. It is then that we see the shift from the city and traditional tourist sites to the beach.

The sudden government interest in tourism was distinctly economic. The Mexican economy had stagnated to a large degree, based as it was (since the Revolution) on an import-substitution industrial model. Mexico’s economy demanded an increase in export revenues and in jobs (Clancy 49). The new interest in marketing tourism was considered an “export push,” and an especially feasible move, favored by three factors in

but as Illich observed truthfully in conversation with Drewey Wayne Gunn, they came not to Mexico but to CIDOC (Gunn 232-233).
particular. First, international travel was already booming at a global level. Second, tourism to the Third World and the Caribbean, including the Americas and Central America, was also increasing dramatically; and, international development officials and agencies had jumped on the bandwagon, arguing that tourism could enhance development in the Third World. And third, Mexico benefited from its proximity to the United States, the largest tourism-sending market in the world (Clancy 38).

Thus, in 1967, the central bank began a three-year study that emphasized tourism through the planning and creation of five new tourist resorts—and in 1968, the building of tourist infrastructure began in earnest. The five new facilities were called “poles,” and included: (1) Cancun on the eastern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula; (2) Ixtapa, not far from Acapulco in the state of Guerrero; (3) Los Cabos; (4) Loreto on the western peninsula of Baja California; and (5), the bays, or Bahias, of Huatulco in the poor southern state of Oaxaca. All five poles were located in some of the least populated and poorest areas of Mexico, thereby meeting regional development goals. All were designed as beach resorts; all were completely planned from the drafting tables located in Mexico City; and all were to be directed by state officials (Clancy 49, 50). Each was carefully chosen. Cancun, for example, was designed to attract Americans visiting the Caribbean, a substantial market untapped by Mexico.\(^3\)\(^5\) And in fact, all poles were completely planned and developed from the top down, and this is why they are often referred to as “master-planned resorts.” To give a sense of the kind of planning involved, I include the geostrategic detail that after deciding to develop the now famous Cancún coastline into a resort area, Mexican analysts spent two years reviewing possible sites and calculating

\(^{35}\) Indeed between 1961 and 1969, the number of American visitors to the Caribbean increased from 400,000 to 1.5 million (Clancy 53).
such factors as average weekly hours of sunshine, soil types, and tidal patterns” (Cooper Alarcon 163). Moreover, the state played a strongly interventionist role in "pushing" tourism through planning, infrastructure development, and financing.36

In addition to basic infrastructure, the state also took on projects viewed as necessary to attract foreign tourists yet un-profitable or profitable only over the long term. Foremost among these in Cancun were a golf course and a central market, because both were considered indispensable for attracting not only tourists but also private investment in hotels. State officials also planned and built Cancun City, a worker city nearby on the mainland. The initial phase of the project also included the refurbishing of nearby archaeological sites (Clancy 55). Mexico’s old tourist sites were in this way re-furbished and put into play in Mexico’s new tourist attractions.

These mass development projects were an astounding success. In 1974 Cancun began to draw tourists by the thousands. By 1986 it surpassed Acapulco, by 1989, Mexico City. Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo began to attract foreign tourists by the mid-1970s. In Baja California, Los Cabos and Loreto came on line in 1980 and 1981 respectively, and

36 By organizing resorts in this way, some of the more negative aspects of unregulated tourism development were avoided. Planning was also seen as key to maximizing the benefits of tourism while minimizing costs like pollution, land speculation, hyperinflation, and rapid unzoned growth that often lead to the growth of large shantytowns near resorts (Clancy 7). To carry out the planning and creation of infrastructure, several institutional changes were undertaken. First, the federal government created a new agency to promote tourist infrastructure, the Fondo de Promocion de Infraestructura Turistica (INFRATUR) in May of 1969. INFRATUR was located within the central bank (BANXICO) and administered by the bank. The agency was staffed primarily by bank officials, including several who had undertaken the original study of tourism. And it was the primary state bureaucracy charged with carrying out development of the new poles (Clancy 8). In Cancun, for example, INFRATUR was in charge of planning the site, building basic infrastructure, promoting private investment, developing and selling land, and maintaining general oversight and coordination with other government entities involved in the project (Clancy 51). The agency was well-funded and granted legal powers such as the ability to expropriate land. In 1974 INFRATUR merged with FOGATUR (Fondo de Garantia y Fomento del Turismo), a government trust fund for hotel development founded in the 1950s, and was renamed the Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo (FONATUR). That same year, the department of tourism, which had existed in various forms for several years, was granted cabinet-level status as a secretariat or ministry entitled Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR) (Clancy 56).
Huatulco finally began to attract foreigners in 1987. By the early 1990s, just fifteen years after they began to receive visitors, the five poles accounted for about one-quarter (25%) of all international tourist arrivals in Mexico. Indeed, the 5 coastal “poles” had the effect of bringing the sun and sea segment to the forefront of Mexican tourism (Clancy 61).

What we can gather from this last episode in Mexican tourism is that for the first time, and on a magnificent scale, the Mexican state played a key role in re-directing the tourist gaze. In doing so, it mobilized a highly specialized, economically driven tourism perspective--which we may regard as the state’s own “tourist imagination.” As economist Michael Clancy notes:

The particular model of tourism development taking place in Mexico [was] a product of a “tourism imagination” originating in the minds of central bank bureaucrats. [It] linked large scale development of grand, international class resorts with developmentalism and modernity. The resulting pattern during the last quarter century reflected a vision held by state actors housed in FONATUR and SECTUR. That vision was characterized by planning, by large-scale developments, and by export-orientation. In addition to putting forth their own vision of what tourism in Mexico should be, state actors also worked in a manner that fostered their own imagined view of what development constituted. At the most basic level they promoted growth; public sector funds poured into the industry, especially in the early and mid-1970s, in order to provide the necessary infrastructure for such projects.

Indeed, the state’s tourist imagination required that it also take the lead in marketing tourism abroad through advertising campaigns and by establishing promotional offices (118)—two principal media that would help to construct the tourist gaze. Currently, careful attention and planning permeates every level of Mexican tourism. The tourism industry in Mexico has become much larger and dynamic, as well as more organized and “capitalist” (Cooper Alarcon 163, Clancy 122).

37 By the early 1980s, the "traditional" Mexican tourist centers were drawing less than a third of international arrivals, and for many foreigners, the Mexico they came to know was based on a tourist experience at Cancun or one of the other beach resorts.
Conclusion

Modern tourism and travel in 20th century Mexico can thus be understood according to four key touristic moments. Each episode captivated the tourist gaze and shifted its attention from previous points of interest to new ones. Each episode also drew different kinds of travelers to Mexico. The first episode, from 1876 to 1911, was the Porfiriato, under dictator Porfirio Díaz. Rails were set down and Mexico’s tourist infrastructure developed, as Diaz welcomed visitors and foreign investment into a modernizing Mexico. The second episode, the Revolution, dismantled the Porfiriato and thwarted capitalist-driven tourist interests as travelers retreated from Mexico and peered cautiously at Mexico’s Revolution from abroad. For certain radicals who did venture into Mexico, Mexico became a terrain of political possibility. After the Revolution, Mexico began a process of reconstruction that produced the third episode, a moment of avid transnational artistic and cultural exchange between the U.S. and Mexico. Mexico’s nationalist, artistic renaissance of the 1920s and 30s ignited the enormous vogue of things Mexican in the U.S. After WWII, mass tourism increased exponentially not just in Mexico but globally, arriving in Mexico in the 1960s. In the late 1960s, the state took an active and comprehensive role in developing a tourist infrastructure and in redirecting tourism to new sites. In each touristic episode, literary travelers, and the tourist literature they produced, dispersed and anchored in the tourist imagination Mexico’s many infernally paradisal traits, as they made attractive Mexico’s many tourist sites. By the 1970s, the Mexican state also made use of these traits and sites, as it took an active role in developing, advertising, and marketing tourist Mexico.
Chapter 2

Maria Cristina Mena and Katherine Anne Porter, Modernist Women Writing for a Tourist Gaze

I. Women Writing (and Traveling in) Mexico

One afternoon the pueblo resounded with foreign phrases and foreign laughter in foreign voices. As a flock of birds the visitors kept together, and as a flock of birds appeared their chatter and their vivacity to the astonished inhabitants. American fashion, they were led by a woman. She was young, decisive, and carried a camera and guide book. Catching sight of Petra at the door she exclaimed: “Oh, what a beautiful girl! I must get her picture…"

Maria Cristina Mena, “The Gold Vanity Set” (1913)

Nobody touches her, but all praise her gray eyes, and the soft, round under lip which promises gayety, yet is always grave, nearly always firmly closed: and they cannot understand why she is in Mexico. She walks back and forth on her errands, with puzzled eyebrows, carrying her little folder of drawings and music and school papers. No dancer walks more beautifully than Laura walks...

Katherine Anne Porter, “Flowering Judas” (1930)

In the early 20th century, Americans became more and more interested in touring in Mexico. Two women writers—Maria Cristina Mena and Katherine Anne Porter—joined the stream of travel writers who shaped how those tourists perceived, traversed, remembered, and narrated to themselves and others Mexico. With their depictions of

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38 I am borrowing this phrase from Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon’s Feminist anthropology study, *Women Writing Culture* (1995)—itself a response to a masculinist tradition of travel writing, in the field of anthropology, as transparently asserted by James Clifford and George E. Marcus’s *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). Clifford and Marcus extol the experimental blurring of genres (the lyrical, creative bent of fiction and the objective, scientific bent of traditional anthropology) in recent anthropological writing that exposes its partial and literary nature. Gordon and Behar argue that, in fact, earlier women anthropologists had already practiced and been criticized for this type of writing. They publish *Women Writing Culture* as a direct response to Marcus and Clifford’s exclusion of women in *Writing Culture* to debunk their claim that women were not included because they had failed to successfully combine a Feminist and experimental approach in their writing.
Mexico, these two authors added to previous literary constructions of Mexico as an infernal paradise and a site of rich, transnational, artistic exchange. As they displayed the touristic spaces of Mexico City and its folkloric provinces, they created the impression that Mexico was a transgressively gendered place—a place also defined by an incisive female traveler’s, or female travel writer’s, perspective and presence. Mena and Porter depicted the woman traveler in Mexico as she became a more and more familiar sight in the 1910s and 1920s. In their short stories, they represented the woman traveler as a startling figure who disrupted, with her very presence, preconceived notions about women and Mexico. Significantly, they wrote for an audience whose gaze was already turning curiously to regard the presence of women travelers and artists/writers.

In fact, the woman traveler was a spectacular figure that helped to define the “American fashion” of modern travel and its touristic gaze, as the passage from Mena’s “Gold Vanity Set” suggests. And so it is fitting, as we read in this passage, that the flock of tourists arriving in a little Mexican town is led by a woman identified with the “New Woman” type obviously familiar to Mena, who lived in the States in the teens and twenties. “Miss Young” and the foreignness of her fellow tourists take the astonished inhabitants by surprise, and Mena utilizes the town’s astonishment to introduce a Mexican response reacting to the tourists’ presence. As a new woman traveler, Miss Young is young, decisive, and properly equipped and acquainted with travel. Excited and fascinated, she looks at the alien world she encounters as if its details were hers to collect, as evidenced in her desire to capture the lovely Indian peasant girl with her camera. In fact it is Mena, a Mexican woman writer, who characterizes and locates Miss Young and ironically captures her in her prose. She pictures Miss Young as an agent of modernity
who brings things American to Mexico, like the camera, picture-taking habits, new woman ways, and tendency to objectify the other that is Mexico.

Like Mena, Katherine Anne Porter similarly stages the spectacle of the woman traveler in transit through Mexico and, more particularly, how it is that her presence is registered by others. In the passage from Porter’s “Flowering Judas,” it is not Laura who gazes. Rather, a gaze is fixed on Laura and sustained like a collective native thought that hovers in the air as she cuts across the city landscape: “and they cannot understand why she is in Mexico.” And although Laura is also equipped with the tools of the New Woman and is appropriately active in society as a teacher, she is a more complicated figure than Miss Young and fragile in her singularity. She is feminized by her students, the community, and the international male revolutionaries with whom she is involved in her political activities as on the one hand, alluring, sensual, and graceful, and on the other as rigid, unyielding, untouchable, and repressed. Indeed, what her male compatriots “cannot understand” is why Laura has not taken a lover. Captured in a moment of vulnerable perplexity, as the foreign object of a native gaze and a male gaze, Laura manages to resist on-lookers’ stereotypes and expectations—perhaps also resisting the presumptions of the American audience reading about her in the States. Porter reminds the reader that the spectacular figure of the woman traveler is also sexualized and treacherously embodied.

Like the carefully crafted appearances of their characters in Mexico, Mena’s and Porter’s appearance on the touristic travel writing stage was highly visible and carefully negotiated in both the U.S. and in Mexico. Mena and Porter represented themselves to an American audience as strategically as they represented the woman traveler in Mexico.
Moreover, as the examples above reveal, Mena and Porter successfully drew from their female traveler’s sensibilities and infused their representations of women with a startling mobility to “unfix” and “move” them across otherwise typical and limited frames of interpretation.

In this chapter, I will explore how Mena and Porter depicted Mexico for an American tourist gaze—as they engaged two literary traditions: U.S. touristic travel writing about Mexico and modernist women’s travel writing. To situate them in this way, I will first sketch the multilayered complexity of the transnational, modernist context in which their writing took place—a context that was largely informed by the intertwining of these two traditions. Indeed, sketching the first tradition will allow me to continue to trace how Mexico has been constructed by the foreign travel writer in ways that create the desire to visit Mexico, and that make visible the second tradition—a tradition of women travelers that is usually obscured by a male tradition of expatriate writers\(^\text{39}\) and by the Feminist recycling of the Victorian lady traveler\(^\text{40}\). In other words, by looking at Mena and Porter together, in the context of travel writing about Mexico, it will become possible to see (abroad, in Mexico) and to conceive of a modernist tradition of women travelers that is usually passed over in histories of travel writing. Above all, we see what happens to “Mexico” as a result of the intervention of these women travel writers’ critical perspectives and the kinds of gendered performances of travel they depict in their writing. Mexico is refigured as Mena and Porter illuminate the gender politics that also define its

\(^{39}\) Two great examples are Malcolm Cowley’s *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934, 1956, 1976), its multiple printings a sign of its popularity, and Paul Fussell’s *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980).

\(^{40}\) According to Maureen Mulligan’s “On Selling Women’s Travel Writing: The Stories Behind the Stories,” the icon for the first half of the 20th century continues to be the Victorian lady traveler of the previous century. Mulligan reveals that 19th century women travelers are first recycled (in the form of reissued publications and anthologies) in the 50s, according to the conservative values of the moment, and then again, most intensely and radically, in the 80s and 90s.
travel scenes. As Mena and Porter also question the role that Mexico is to play for the woman traveler and travel writer, they reveal that Mexico proves not to be, after all, the site of mobility, escape, or enchantment it appears to be—even as women pursue their interest in traveling in and constructing Mexico in this way.

II. Women Writing in Two Traditions: A Tradition of Touristic Writing About Mexico and a Modernist Tradition of Women Writing

To write about Mexico was a clever and pivotal move for both Mena and Porter, and they uniquely undertook the task. Mexican exile Maria Cristina Mena, had fled to New York as a girl of 14 in 1907, sent by her family to escape the violence of the Revolution. By her early 20s, she was representing her native country in prominent U.S. literary circles and magazines, as Americans peered cautiously at a Mexico at war. Between 1913 and 1916 Mena was writing for magazines like The Century Magazine and carrying her readers through the thick of the Mexican Revolution. In her time she was the only author of Mexican descent to be published in well-known literary magazines that had a wide circulation in the U.S. (Garza-Falcón 133), and she became recognized as “the foremost interpreter of Mexican life.”

Porter first traveled to Mexico in November 1920 via Greenwich Village, where she had been living in 1919-1920. She was thirty years old, three times married and divorced, childless, rootless, and trying to support herself with freelance writing (Unrue 616). A change in luck and timing was about to set her career on course. She arrived in Mexico City on the eve of President Alvaro Obregón’s inauguration. It was a very auspicious moment. Obregón’s presidency would mark a new period of stability for Mexico conducive to the continuation of safe travel and the flowering of a rich, dynamic

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41 One of Mena’s short stories, “A Son of the Tropics,” published in 1931, is introduced in The Household Magazine as “A story of revolution by the foremost interpreter of Mexican life.”
transnational exchange. In fact, Porter was encouraged to travel to Mexico by two
Mexican artists, musician “Tata Nacho” and painter Adolfo Best Maugard, already in
New York who conveyed to her that wondrous changes were about to take place in
Mexico. And so, quickly securing jobs to write for both Mexican and American
newspapers and magazines that catered to an American audience, Porter put herself on
the scene ready to wield her pen just as Mexico was on the brink of a post-Revolution
artistic renaissance that would dazzle the American imagination. Like Mena, Porter
would help to inspire “the enormous vogue of things Mexican” in the U.S. (Delpar 1992).

Two traditions created the ready audience and a “place,” or market, for Mena’s
and Porter’s writing as women travel writers. First, as I laid out in Chapter One,
Americans were eager to read about Mexico, as they looked around the world for
potential destinations for travel, capitalist investment, scientific research (archeological,
anthropological, and geographic), and artistic, anti-modern inspiration. Many were
already publishing insights from their Mexican travels for an audience that was
increasingly fascinated with travel and the exotic. Thus, publishing in some of the same
literary magazines, Mena and Porter quickly engaged an already existent and much larger
body of touristic travel writing about Mexico. This is the tradition that I identify as U.S.
touristic travel writing about Mexico. At the same time, women in the U.S. were entering
more rapidly than ever before very public professional, political, and popular spheres.
Their new pursuits involved geographic mobility, including travel. Mena and Porter
joined other women anthropologists, journalists, and fiction writers, participating in what
we may regard as a modernist tradition of women traveling and writing.
Let me clarify what I mean by a “modernist” tradition of women’s travel writing. Mena and Porter were perhaps not recognizably modernist in literary style, like contemporaries Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf, whose lack of punctuation, disruption of syntax, or stream of consciousness bring a modernist style more quickly to mind. Still, Mena’s and Porter’s mobility was nonetheless informed by the same conditions and their work reacted to the same themes that defined modernism. These included: the accelerated pace of new technologies, the disenchantments of modernity, an interest in “the other,” shifting sexualities and gender roles, artistic experimentation, and voluntary displacement, or travel, abroad. Mena is an interesting case that I include in this category precisely because of the conditions that informed her work. Certainly, she was not traveling and writing in Mexico in the same way as Porter; she traveled from Mexico to the U.S. and stayed. But she was part of the transnational flows of artistic travel, if of an earlier wave, that spotlighted Mexican artists in modernist circles—in Mexico and in the U.S.—and entered their productions in the list of “things” that were inspiring an interest in Mexico. Also, she was writing for a market created by American travelers and American travel interests in Mexico. Finally, although located in the States, she became one of the interesting, creative female figures that the same American audience came to associate with Mexico (see chapter one).

In this wider touristic and modernist women’s travel writing context, Mena and Porter were not unique in their interest in writing about Mexico nor did they stand out as anomalies as women travel writers. Rather, Mena and Porter turned to Mexico and writing about Mexico at a key historical moment, a moment when primarily as a result of its greater, artistic and revolutionary touristic aura, Mexico became particularly attractive
to highly singular women travelers. By “highly singular,” I mean select and ambitious, professional and usually privileged, white or light-skinned. I also use the term to point to the fact that contrary to the figure of the solitary, male traveler that I discussed in Chapter One (the iconic literary exile), women often tended to travel alone rather than in an intense social coupling; however, like the men, the women also adopted an individualist stance. It is here where I want to focus the reader’s attention in this chapter, because it is precisely this category of the traveler that functioned to set up Mexico as a place where the traveler might also escape restrictive gender politics that had begun to shift at home.

As the woman traveler strove to build a career and to transcend (or at least, continue to corrode) more conservative gendered values at home, she made visible similar countercultural currents around her that also came to define Mexico for her and her audience. Whether working in, or to promote, Mexico’s transnational arts scene or political or bohemian activities, she became one of the figures that helped to signify Mexico as a provocatively gendered, counter-cultural setting. To understand how this was possible, I turn to the conditions that first defined her and served to motivate her travels.

III. The Woman Traveler Arrives in Mexico

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42 Fussell names “solitariness” as a kind of male ambition during the traveling that took place between the wars, but that as a pattern was really rather extraordinary. This is one of the most interesting observations of his book: “Travel-writers in the preceding tradition, before the war, had tended to go alone, like Stevenson in Spain, Doughty and T.E. Lawrence in Arabia, Rupert Brooke in Tahiti. And so do travel-writers in the postmodern tradition, like Paul Theroux. It is between the wars that we find these teams, either social or erotic, like Byron and Sykes, Auden and MacNeice, Auden and Isherwood, Isherwood and Heinz.”

43 According to Maureen Honey, this individualist stance did have its downside. It furthered the disintegration of a collective Feminist activism, especially after women’s suffrage was achieved and Feminism lost its concrete, rallying goal. Also, the pressure for women to enter into camaraderie with men was accompanied by an upsurge in homophobic attacks on women’s friendships and lesbian relationships. In her study of women’s magazines, these get undermined, if not written out, in women’s fiction as they are replaced by heterosexual relationships.
A woman’s travels began, of course, at home. In the U.S., women were becoming more active, public, and independent, and were making their appearance felt on the political, professional, and popular stages. The first could be seen in political activity around women’s suffrage, women’s issues, and cultural reform; the second in a new generation of teachers, nurses, journalists, and social workers; and the third, in the emergence of the ‘new woman,’ one of whose avatars was the ‘flapper.’ The “new woman”—a woman who left the home for the factory, a career, and the marketplace—in particular, was a sociological fact by 1910 (Sochen ix). And, she was restless. As Maureen Honey documents in her study of popular women’s magazines that featured the New Woman:

The woman of action could not stand on a pedestal, immobile, for she was too curious about life beyond home and marriage. Heroines of this period are frequently described as “restless” and anxious to flee the circumscribed orbit of parental authority in order to make their way in an urban environment bustling with change and possibility. They are in geographical as well as other kinds of movement, frequently abandoning small town communities for metropolitan areas. In doing so, they are rejecting settled, family-oriented life on the margins in favor of open-ended individual effort within the heart of modern society. (12-13)

Thus, as a result of women’s liberating gender politics, the technological and vehicular advances (planes, trains, and automobiles), and capitalist expansion of early 20th century modernity, women were more inclined, and equipped, to go out into the world to demonstrate their activity and talents. And, if in the early 20th century, folklore and anthropology were among the first academic fields to become accessible to women, travel writing, like anthropological work, opened a space of opportunity—and a market—for young, ambitious women writers. Travel writing could be seen as the professional

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path that seeded and followed from a woman’s hunger for journeys. In that writing she
could play to address the popular interest in ethnographic portrayals of other worlds.
Moreover, to do travel writing women had to travel. The first professionalized the
second, “prov[iding] women an acceptable occasion to record, describe, catalog, analyze,
reflect on, and report what they had seen, what they had learned, and what they had had
to do in order to see and to learn” (Smith 19).

Perhaps the woman traveler was particularly suited to rendering visible Mexico’s
cultural excitement and explosive unruliness because these were features that she could
promote quite spectacularly, since she was a spectacle herself. Promoting these traits in
Mexico also allowed her to take a dynamic and adventurous role in writing about them.
She might, for example, take a performative stance in her work. This was certainly true
for Porter, as we see upon her arrival in Mexico. In a long newsy letter, dated December
31, 1920, Porter regaled her family with her many adventures in her first seven weeks in
Mexico.

She had drunk champagne with the newly elected President Alvaro
Obregón in Chapultepec Castle, attended a ball “in company with the
greatest labor leader in Mexico (Luis Morones),” on Christmas day met
Felipe Carrillo Puerto, the future governor of Yucatán, attended bull-
fights, and participated in archaeological digs. And she had plans to
be connected “by a small thread” to the governing process; to write a
book on Mexico “fortified by letters from editors and publishers like
Scribner’s and Macmillan”; to bring out in a few weeks the first edition of
The Magazine of Mexico, financed by wealthy Americans; to write, with
friends, a revolutionary textbook in English; to teach ballet in the Institute
of Social Studies; and to fly over and take pictures of the recently active
volcano Popocatepetl. (Walsh, 1991: 635)

As she depicted Mexico, this highly singular woman traveler also took shape in the
tourist gaze. Her activities were political, social, and artistic—and they showcased an
altogether glamorous, diverse, and dynamic arena of agency. She also successfully
combined the ethnographic, journalistic, and even commercial threads that informed her work and that captivated her audience. Of course, like any foreign traveler, she was an agent of modernity (MacCannell 1976)—infiltrating and glaringly visible; as a woman traveler, she stirred and shifted the gendered conditions that marked her path. Mexico was a fitting, provocative place a woman artist or writer to construct as she traveled in her disruptive ways and reported back home how disruptive this other place allowed her to be. She might use her experiences and “[her] narratives to reimagine [herself] away from the spectacles of femininity constraining [her] at home”—and to define a career (Smith 20).

Of course, in the early 20th century, the phenomenon of women traveling was nothing new. As Sidonie Smith tells us in Moving Lives, even “though travel has generally been associated with men and masculine prerogatives, even though it has functioned as a domain of constitutive masculinity, women have always been and continue to be on the move” (x). But if it was nothing new, several factors and traits, made women traveling in the early 20th century different from those western women who had traveled before. These are differences that we may trace from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. First, although women travelers still traveled for a variety of

45 It was a kind of mobility that “Miss Katherine Anne Porter” certainly embodied. That she reinvented as she introduced herself in a Mexican newspaper, as “a young writer of much charm and promise…just arrived in Mexico from New York…”—and exaggerated her previous accomplishments to get a job at the same newspaper—signaled the boldness of her ambition. As Thomas F. Walsh has documented, Porter claims to have collaborated with the Mexican artist, Adolfo Best Maugard, “in the production of several Aztec-Mexican pantomimes, several of which have been taken by Pavlova for her dances,” that she had written extensively for the magazine Asia, and had also been “music and art critic in several of the largest New York magazines.” Porter had published only one story in Asia and there is no record that she had been a music and art critic. See Walsh, “‘That Deadly Female Accuracy of Vision,’”p.635-643. What makes Mena an interesting figure in this context is that she was able to use her exotic status in the U.S. to “travel” its literary circles and secure a writing career.
reasons, by the latter part of 19th century, they were also “generally ambitious of adventure and knowledge and anxious about bourgeois constraints” (Smith 15).

If traveling men of the mid-and late nineteenth century sought to escape the unmanning of mass industrialization and repressive sexual arrangements, certain traveling women sought to circumvent dependent and infantilizing bourgeois femininity. To do so, they took their identities and their discontents on the road… An ensemble of cultural influences identified with modernity led to the emergence of this new kind of traveler, the woman of some independent means and some independence of mind who was just as eager as certain men of the time to expand her horizon of knowledge and her arena of agency through travel. (Smith 16)

By the late 19th century, this woman traveler had also become a public icon. As Smith cites, quoting Catherine Barnes Stevenson, “by the latter part of the 19th century, women travelers began to be singled out as exemplars of the new freedom and prowess of women” (3, xi).

By the early 20th century, women travelers were also freer of former expectations and constraints. They no longer had to undertake missionary or philanthropic work, necessarily, to maintain their claim to acceptable (bourgeois) femininity; a professional endeavor, such as travel writing, journalism, or anthropology was enough to justify her adventures abroad. Nor did they have to primarily focus on the social arrangements, domestic relations, and the activities and lives of other women (Smith 18-19). Ironically, as in the case of anthropologist Margaret Mead, taking on such properly feminist interests might work against her. Lastly, women travelers no longer resisted engaging--in their travels or in their writing--the exoticist tropes or eroticized encounters that were formerly the exclusive terrain of male travelers. Rather, as we will shortly see, such “encounters” also came to define the spectacle of the woman traveler.
What is most crucial is that by the early 20th century, women’s changing mobility, both social and in terms of travel, was making the terms of identity for women more fluid than before. As Smith establishes in Moving Lives, in the early 20th century, new kinds of vehicular technologies (planes, trains, and automobiles) also informed mobility with their charged meanings, and consequently produced new kinds of gendered mobilities (Smith xiii). There were now new ways to be mobile and female, each instance carrying its own complexities and possibilities. Women’s accelerated movement across unfamiliar terrain informed an altered way of seeing their surroundings and of seeing themselves, affecting, in turn, their way of depicting “the play of identity and its discontents” (Smith xii). New narratives were generated to go along with the emergence of new kinds of identities for women—including the identity of woman traveler (Smith xii). Thus, more than ever, in the early 20th century, women burst upon previously masculinist travel terrains and moved, dynamically and with accelerated impact, across travel landscapes now also made exotic and provocative by their presence and mobility. As Smith emphasizes, all of this was nothing new; it was the speed and variety of modes of mobility that were new, and in this transnational context and mestizo modernist moment, it is what women’s narratives depicting travel/travelers can tell us about the play of identities of its subjects—as well as the coded interplay of U.S. and Mexican cultures—that matters.

**Women Travelers in Mexico**

It was in such modes of explosive mobility that figures like the notoriously sensual, Italian photographer Tina Modotti, the practical Mary Doherty, and the adventurous Alma Reed wandered into Mexico and became associated with “the
enormous vogue of things Mexican” (Delpar 1992). As I established in chapter one, such ‘things Mexican’ included Mexico’s socialist politics, labor and peasant movements, its hybrid mestizo arts and muralism, indigenous crafts and ruins, lively transnational artistic exchange, and bohemian circles. It was a golden time: “Mexico was Paris with a Spanish accent—houses covered with bougainvillea, the pulquerias filled with young lefties, huge political murals, garish tchotchkes” (Brenner 4). All these things informed Mexico’s exoticism for modern artists/travelers; and some of its women travelers, like Modotti and Reed, helped to further Mexico’s eroticism and romance. For example, amateur archaeologist and journalist Reed possessed a great interest in Mexico, took part in early archaeological digs at the Mayan sites of Uxmal, Chichén-Itzá, and Palenque, and reported on the marvelous discoveries for the New York Times. She also met and fell in love with one of Mexico’s most progressive leaders, the (married) governor of Yucatan, Felipe Carrillo Puerto. In her honor, he commissioned Luis Rosado Vega to compose “La Peregrina,” meaning pilgrim or traveler, which remains a classic Mexican song, and Alma Reed became a legend.46 Other women travelers included Elizabeth Borton de Treviño; Frances Toor, and Frances Flynn Paine.47 Alongside this series of singular women travelers--and also alluring to an American audience--existed a curious cluster of foreign women writers who came to claim Mexican voices and whom we might also

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46 Reed continued her work after Puerto’s assassination and wrote two biographies of Mexican muralist Jose Orozco. See Gunn, 80.
47 Precisely because of Mexico’s attractiveness, women writers like Alma Reed were sent to Mexico by their editors to write stories for magazines, and thus began their Mexican travels. This was the case for Boston Herald journalist Elizabeth Borton de Treviño. Borton de Treviño also fell in love with a Mexican, “the son of a fine old Mexican family (somewhat reduced in circumstances by years of revolution),” and remained in Mexico as “an American bride in Monterrey” to eventually become a “gran señora,” a great lady and authority on Mexico. See Ryan, 319.
consider women travel writers similar to Mena. These include Josefina Niggli and Anita Brenner.

From Reed to Niggli, women writers’ politics of identification with Mexico clearly spoke to their mobility as economically and racially privileged subjects. Theirs was a mobility in part made possible by cultural appropriation and a transnational erotics. Here I stop to point to the second term, “transnational erotics,” because it is central to this dissertation and to any travel and tourism context. I use it in the way that anthropologist Sherry Ortner advances in her study of a later group of adventurous Western women travelers (of the 1970s) in the context of Himalayan mountaineering.

48 Josefina Niggli was born in Monterey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Her father was a Swiss Anglo manager of a cement plant that employed most of the people in her village of Sabinas Hidalgo where she lived 1920-1925. Niggli’s mother, Goldie (Morgan) Niggli, was a violinist of Irish, French and German descent. Also sent out of Mexico (in 1913) to San Antonio to escape the violence of the Revolution, Josefina Niggli carried with her intense memories of her childhood in the Mexican village—its people, its history, its Revolution, and its folklore. She drew from these memories to write a series of interrelated stories about a Mexican American who returns to his roots, Mexican Village (1945), and a novel about the conflicts in a wealthy Monterrey family, Step Down, Elder Brother (1947). Although her birth certificate spelled her name “Josephine,” she changed it to “Josefina,” and, strikingly, became identified as an early writer in a Mexican American literary canon. See Gunn, 87 and the Handbook of Texas Online.

49 Anita Brenner is the author of two impressive and colorful works on Mexico’s art and Revolution, Idols Behind Altars (1929) and The Wind That Swept Mexico (1943). She also edited a later magazine for tourists, Mexico This Month from the early 50s to early 70s. She was born in 1905 into a Jewish immigrant family in Aguascalientes, Mexico. Brenner’s family moved back and forth from Mexico to Texas during the Revolution, and in 1916 settled permanently in Texas. But Brenner thought of Mexico as her beloved homeland. In fact, Brenner studied at the National University, renewed her ties with Mexico, and traveled and lived there throughout the rest of her life. She became a vibrant literary bridge between Mexican artists and culture and the U.S. Brenner was also very conscious of her Jewish heritage and also took active note of the haven that Mexico became for Jewish immigrants and how quickly they adapted to Mexico. Curiously, although her Mexican ties are in many ways stronger than Josefina Niggli’s, Brenner is not typically considered Mexican or Mexican American. In 1972 she was awarded the Aztec Eagle, the Mexican government’s highest honor to a foreigner. Brenner refused it on the grounds that she was Mexican by birth. See Brenner, 4-14.

50 To have traveled in Mexico or engaged its transnational circles did not appear to be enough to legitimize these women travelers’ connections to Mexico. Indeed, they emphasized more intimate ties, whether having affairs with Mexican men, posing for artists, cleaning Diego Rivera’s paintbrushes in his studio, or recalling folkloric tales of their encounters with Mexicans (including their indigenous or mestiza nannies) and the Revolution. The Revolution became an interesting locus for either entering deeply into Mexico’s politicized art scene—or for justifying having left Mexico and taking on the category of exile. The rivalry that existed between these women speaks to their great race towards authenticity and authority, as evidenced by Porter’s thorny critiques of both Brenner and Reed, as well as Anita Brenner’s placement of Tina Modotti on her “Actively Both” (“Friends” and “Enemies”) list. These tensions also define the category of women travelers in Mexico.
(Ortner 1996). Principally, the term refers to the notion that encounters and transactions in borderlands, such as the contact zones produced by travel and tourism, are always gendered and eroticized—both in practice and in the imagination. Parties in borderlands meet as gendered beings with gendered fantasies, anxieties, and desires. As Ortner highlights, these encounters are shaped not only by Western and foreign gender categories but by Western and nonwestern gender politics—that is, the politics between Western women and Western men, and the politics between nonwestern women and nonwestern men, that exist even before contact. The conditions at home that served to motivate women travelers is an example of the “politics” that also informed their subsequent encounters in and with Mexico. Indeed, according to Ortner, it is such distinct politics and cultures that come into play in the interactions between Westerners and nonwesterners that give the whole process an extraordinary dynamism and complexity (182,184). I will have more to say about the transnational erotics occurring between the U.S. and Mexico in this touristic moment when I interpret Mena’s and Porter’s stories, since both authors highlight this erotics of culture, as they highlight the woman traveler in tourist Mexico. What I want to establish here is that such politics and erotics informed women’s travels.

I find it striking that even as Mena’s and Porter’s writings and particular mobilities reflect so many of the themes that also define their contemporary women travelers, neither has been read in this context. This is primarily because what I am calling a modernist women’s tradition of travel writing is vaguely formulated and rarely identified, even in women’s travel narratives studies. But in fact, in a specific moment...
of their careers, the politics of Mena’s and Porter’s writing can be better understood—and
the two can be placed together—if read in an early 20th century tradition of women
traveling and writing. This is a tradition that can be cast as encompassing an interesting
array of women ‘travelers’: the politicized public woman on her lecture circuit; the
expatriate modernist woman writer traveling and seeking her literary fortune; the woman
anthropologist carrying out fieldwork abroad; the New Woman. These women existed
contemporaneously and perhaps inspired one another. Other such ‘travelers’ would
include Mabel Dodge, Ruth Benedict, Zora Neale Hurston, Gertrude Stein, and Margaret
Mead. Such figures make clear that the modernist woman travel writer was ambitious,
rebellious, usually politically-minded and artistic. Because of the eroticised terrains
through which she traveled, or her sexuality (that she was a woman among men; that she
had lovers), she was often a sexualized figure. She was also often notorious, and perhaps
strategically so, if simply because as Diana Trilling suggests, “If you were a woman—and
an intellectual—in the 1930s, it was very difficult…You had to keep yourself at the level
of celebrity or you just ceased to exist” (quoted in Brenner, 13). And perhaps, like Mena

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52 We may see such an overlap and coexistence, for example, in the figure of anthropologist Ruth Benedict,
who as one of her early projects set about writing a book about New Women of three historical moments;
ventured to the pueblos of the Southwest to undertake folkloric fieldwork; was encouraged by fellow
anthropologist Elsie Clews Parson’s conviction that new women defy categorization; and found inspiration
in the modernist fiction of Virginia Woolf as she wrote Patterns of Culture (See Parson’s profile in Women
Writing Culture). Porter also ventured like the women anthropologists of her day, into Native American
territory, but further south in Mexico, in Teotihuacan, accompanied by Mexican anthropologist Manuel
Gamio (Alvarez and Walsh, 106). And, like the New Woman daughter-in-law character in her Southern
story, “The Journey,” whom Grandmother describes as “beginning to run wild, asking for the vote, leaving
her home and going out into the world to earn her own living,” Porter herself was an early suffragist and
did indeed leave her home and go out to earn her own living—in New Woman style (Stout 500).

53 The earlier ‘new’ women travelers anticipate the appearance of a figure like Margaret Mead, “the most
famous anthropologist of our century,” who “for many of her female contemporaries…was an exemplar of
the New Woman of the 1920s and 1930s, the ‘ultimate liberated woman.’” See Mead’s profile in Women
Writing Culture.
and Porter, the new woman traveler also represented such women and their travels (if not herself and her own travels) in her writing.

Of course, the existence of such women writers and travelers raises an inevitable question: what is the effect of representing such women in travel writing? If the woman traveler is all of, or often, the things that I have described—ambitious, rebellious, politically-minded and artistic, sexualized, notorious, and disruptive—what happens when she is highlighted in stories that depict travel? What effects do the presence and perspective of the new woman traveler have on the politics of travel that occur in these stories? This is the question that I ask as I regard Mena’s and Porter’s stories about travel and tourism in Mexico.

IV. Mena’s and Porter’s Mexican Stories

I now turn to an analysis of three coupled story sets by Mena and Porter. In each of these stories, the traveler characters are tourists and they, as well as the Mexican characters, are in the thick of the extraordinary cultural milieu that is generating the enormous vogue of things Mexican in the States. As we will see, often this milieu is informed by the intersections of U.S. modernism and mestizo modernism, and the stories can be read as featuring typical tourist attractions that make Mexico alluring to the tourist gaze, even as Mexico continues to figure as an infernal paradise. Significantly, women—both Anglo women travelers and Mexican women—are also featured, and they are featured very strategically. Mena and Porter deploy their women characters as upstarts or triggers to create crises through which the authors bring under scrutiny the gendered politics that also inform cultural encounters and tourist scenes in modernist Mexico. More precisely, what we discover in these stories is that as Mena and Porter critique
toward typical touristic representations of Mexico and reveal the gender politics that define them, they also question Mexico’s role for women travelers and the modernist woman travel writer, a category that includes the two writers. More specifically, we see that in these stories, Mena and Porter target women’s interest in traveling in and constructing Mexico as a site of mobility, escape, and enchantment.

**Women Traveler’s Mobilities in Mena’s and Porter’s Infernally Paradisal Mexico: “Flowering Judas” & “The Gold Vanity Set”**

I begin with two stories in which Mena and Porter feature the woman traveler’s mobility in Mexico: “The Gold Vanity Set” and “Flowering Judas.” Significantly, “The Gold Vanity Set” does not begin with the arrival of the tourists and the woman traveler “Miss Young.” It begins by relating how Petra, the lovely Indian girl that Miss Young is fascinated by, grows up, and achieves her place in the Mexican town as wife of a local musician and waitress at the local tavern. Through Petra, Mena lays out the simple life of the Mexican town that the tourists’ arrival will disrupt. The story then follows the social repercussions that occur when Petra appropriates a gold vanity set that Miss Young leaves behind in the tavern. It is through the crisis that unfolds when Petra steals Miss Young’s vanity set that Mena pulls Miss Young into the life of the town and transfigures her mobility.

Fascinated with the gold vanity set, Petra takes it and hides it on the roof wrapped in a dry corn husk, covered with a stone. She then experiments with it when she is alone. It transforms her. First, she realizes that her beauty is different than she had imagined: “her eyes—how much larger they were, and how much brighter!” and her cheeks were much paler. Indeed, as a Mexican beauty, who is more mestiza than indigenous, Petra anticipates the future Mexican movie star, Dolores del Río who Americans will also find
beautiful. Petra is transformed again when she mimicks the woman traveler and applies
the rouge: “With a nice discretion partly influenced by her memory of the brilliant cheeks
of the American señorita of the brave looks, the black box [camera], and the golden
treasure.” As Petra accentuates her features, she becomes a kind of new woman herself.
More confident and alluring, she anticipates the 1930s popularized “New Woman,
Mexican style”—a mestizo modernist woman who will wear, rather seductively, a
traditional Mexican blouse, shawl, and long Indian skirt, but whose hair—often short and
bobbed, makeup, manicured fingernails, high heels and cigarette in the fingers of her
hand will mark her as a modern woman (Hedrick 176).

When Petra’s husband wakes from a drunken nap and sees her by the light of
antique iron lanterns, he is inspired to serenade her in a way that he hasn’t since the time
of their courtship. He vows to never strike her again. The sky thunders, lightning strikes,
a volatile storm erupts, feeding and echoing the intensity of Miguel’s emotions and of his
promise. Mena punctuates this dramatic change in the intimate politics of one of the
town’s iconic couples with magical realism; it is an almost supernatural occurrence.
Since it is a change that Petra has prayed for, she offers the gold vanity set to the Virgin.
In this way, this modern thing takes on a fetishistic aura and finds its place with other
local fetishes at the Virgin’s altar. By depicting the tendency to interpret modern things
in this way, Mena features Mexicans/Mexico as rural, savage, just broaching modernity,
and irrational in its attempts to assimilate that modernity.

By emphasizing Petra’s loveliness and ability to manipulate the vanity
set, Mena also features Mexico as Indian, curious, magical or folkloric, adaptable and
clever. Mena racializes Petra as she casts her as the mestiza beauty that she is, imbuing
her with all the qualities—beautiful, enchanting, gothic, and barbaric—that makes
Mexico an infernal paradise:

tall and slender, as strong as a wire, with a small head and extremely
delicate features, and her skin was the color of new leather. Her
eyes…wonderful, even in a land of wonderful eyes…large and
mysterious, heavily shaded with lashes which had a trick of quivering
nervously, half lowered in an evasive, fixed, sidelong look when anyone
spoke to her…irises …amber-colored, but always looked darker. Her
voice was like a ghost, distant, dying away at the ends of sentences as in
fear, yet with all its tenderness holding a hint of barbaric roughness.

Petra also carries the erotic charge in the tale and is the object of desire for the
men who frequent the inn as well as the tourists; when she passes, all eyes follow. Mena
uses Petra to captivate and direct the tourist gaze and to magnify a Mexican femininity
even as the “new woman” traveler arrives in Petra’s town. Petra is also the catalyst for
the crisis of the tale—a crisis that affects even Miss Young.

Until then, Miss Young has been taking part in typical tourist activities: staying at
and dining at the patron’s hacienda, experimenting with local liquors at the town’s tavern,
taking pictures, and superficially taking in the townsfolk and life she sees around her.
Now she is suddenly subject to the patron’s interpretations of the innocent, childlike,
deceitful Indians as he embarks on an investigative pursuit to recover the vanity set. Miss
Young must endure what appears to her as a kind of medieval torture when he bursts into
the tavern, assaults Petra’s husband to get at Petra, and Petra breaks down violently on
the floor, confesses the truth—and still refuses to return it. The tables turn when Miss
Young no longer leads the tourists’ experience but is led by Petra, along with everyone
else, through the town to the Virgin’s altar at the local chapel.

In a story about the tourist ‘invasion’ of this small Mexican town, the crises that
occur, and the uneven ways that each culture interprets the other’s difference—Petra is the
solution. She is able to make use of the novelties brought by the Americans and to improvise in a way that transcends the town’s initial confused and abashed response to the tourists—and she spares the town from the disgrace of theft. Interestingly, the American woman traveler is never described physically but is featured instead as a recklessly transient and intrusive presence. She is modern and vivacious but also a kind of loud and obnoxious blur. Realizing that her vanity set has become a glittering trinket at the local virgin’s altar, Miss Young is obviously struck and to a degree moved, but only then is she willing to accept her loss and dismisses it rather superficially. Earlier she is puzzled and remarks unconvinced, “Well, I just love the temperance clause, but does she want to keep my danglums to make sure of this Manu elo staying on the waterwagon?” Now she capriciously exclaims: “Well, if it saves that nice girl from ever getting another beating, the saint is perfectly welcome to my vanity set.”

The woman traveler in “Flowering Judas” is also a curious and disruptive presence. She is beautiful and publicly active in Mexico City’s revolutionary milieu, yet remains a strangely thwarted figure. She is a teacher, affiliated with the local labor union leader who has secured her job, and she delivers messages for him to other labor rebels in hiding and in the local prison. She travels dark places and bright ones as well. At the school, for example, her students “crowd about her with smiles on their wise, innocent clay-colored faces” and decorate her desks and chalkboard with notes and flowers. At night however she returns to her home for dinner to find herself serenaded by the powerful, grotesque, and corrupt labor leader. He is as ridiculous in his vanity and sensitivity as he is potentially dangerous, and he is laying siege to Laura every night in his attempts to seduce her. And so it is that such things as the figures and clandestine
political activities that imbue Mexico City with its underlying thrill and revolutionary excitement also lure the traveler into the dangers of corruption and seduction. When this occurs, Mexico City is transformed into an infernal paradise that provokes in the traveler a sudden desire to flee. Indeed, “sometimes [Laura] wishes to run away…to fly out of this room, down the narrow stairs, and into the street where the houses lean together like conspirators under a single mottled lamp, and leave Braggioni singing to himself” (92).

In Porter’s story it is Braggioni who embodies for Laura Mexico’s excess and potential for corruption. His presence strains the very space of their encounter and transforms it in almost surreal ways. His body language is obscene. He balances his paunch between his spread knees… His mouth opens round and yearns sideways, his balloon cheeks grow oily with the labor of song. He bulges marvelously in his expensive garments. Over his lavender collar, crushed upon a purple necktie, held by a diamond hoop: over his ammunition belt of tooled leather worked in silver, buckled cruelly around his gasping middle: over the tops of his glossy yellow shoes [he] swells with ominous ripeness, his mauve silk hose stretched taut, his ankles bound with the stout leather thongs of his shoes. (92)

And he stares at her with “true tawny yellow cat’s eyes.” Clearly this is a highly delicate situation for Laura; her independent, untainted status is at stake: “if she could avoid it she would not admit even to herself the slow drift of his intention,” even as she realizes that she “owes her comfortable situation and status to him.” She must be clever; “she must resist tenaciously without appearing to resist” (91).

If Braggioni is corrupt, Laura is also flawed. Porter takes great pains to demonstrate that in other instances as well, healthier ones, she is unable to really participate in the passions of the life that surrounds her. She is a rigid, constrained, contradictory figure. She dresses in severe clothing that contains her voluptuous figure, even as it hints at her curves and long legs. She is cold with her students, and the reader
learns that on a trip to Cuernavaca, she meets a dashing young revolutionary soldier on a horse who is impressed by her and who attempts to court her just as a knight would a lady, perhaps even as his equal, but she resists him.

Such details inform Laura’s character as the tale focuses on her immediate predicament and pits her against the powerful Mexican labor leader. They help to explain why he wishes also to make her understand his disillusionment in Mexico’s politics and as a result, his corruption. She, like him, is already experiencing disillusionment and detachment and beginning to fall. This however gives Laura the idea with which she shrewdly finds a way to annoy him and send him back to his wife. She mentions the death of a fellow revolutionary who, overwhelmed by his sense of abandonment, has recently committed suicide in his cell.

Laura’s ability to outwit Braggioni and protect herself is quickly overshadowed, when the reader learns that Laura is also implicated in this man’s death. In an attempt to comfort him, it is she who has given him the sleeping pills he has used to kill himself. Interestingly, the story ends with Laura dreaming. In the dream, the dead revolutionary comes to her, addresses her as “Murderer,” and informs her that he will take her to a “new country” “far away,” a land of death. He takes her to a Judas tree in an infernally paradisal landscape, and calling her, “poor prisoner” offers her the fruit, or flower. Laura eats of the Judas tree that the body of the dead revolutionary has become.

She saw that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light, but she ate the flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst. Murder! said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood. Laura cried No!

Thus Laura finds herself in the infernal paradise that is literary Mexico—a place that is like a dream and a land of death, and also a psychological terrain that is as treacherous as
it is poetic. She realizes that she has also fed from Mexico’s ideals, to fill her emptiness, and betrayed these ideals by benefiting from them while those who strive to protect them suffer. As she wakes screaming and trembling, the story ends with a jarring, volatile effect, for her ideals have also been devoured by the infernally paradisal dream and in Mexico she is dislocated without them.

In “The Gold Vanity Set” and “Flowering Judas,” Mena and Porter demonstrate that the fluid mobility that the Anglo woman traveler attempts to achieve in Mexico is complicated in ways that the woman traveler might not expect. In “The Gold Vanity Set,” Miss Young plans to pass only superficially through the provincial Mexican town just as she intends to capture Petra only fleetingly with her camera. Instead, she gets embroiled in the drama that occurs when Petra steals her vanity set. Ironically, Mena casts Miss Young’s mobility, a mobility that for the New Woman is supposed to be transformative, as only superficially so—even as she is pulled past the surface into the life of the town. In “Flowering Judas,” Laura’s mobility is compromised in part because of her personality but also, because she is a woman and consequently, sexualized and desired by men. She is intercepted by the male figures who attempt to court her. Laura’s mobility is thwarted most profoundly when she is stripped of the idealism that accompanies her experiences in Mexico and that makes her mobility meaningful. The question that follows is: if the woman traveler’s mobility is in some ways thwarted, can she still find escape in Mexico?


In “That Tree” and “The Education of Don Popo,” Porter and Mena narrate two women travelers’ experiences when they attempt to escape in Mexico from a life that has
begun to suffocate them at home. In both stories, the women travelers seek romance. Like “Flowering Judas,” “That Tree” is another dark and intimate, multi-layered tale. Porter features an American couple in Mexico and stages their battle of the sexes, even though as the story begins, it seems foremost to be about the making of an American writer--yet another expert on Mexico. But immediately, the reader learns that he sets about making a career and name for himself, only after his wife leaves him, and that it is their final separation and the effects of the ravaging turmoil between them that leads to this turning point in his life. Remarkably, Porter does not hesitate to take the reader into the painful and excruciating drama of their failing marriage; the story begins with the very scene of her leaving.

She had left him, really, packing up suddenly in a cold, quiet fury, stabbing him with her elbows when he tried to get his arms around her, now and again cutting him to the bone with a short sentence expelled through her clenched teeth; but he felt that he had been, as he always explained, kicked out…and it had served him right.

Porter puts the reader in the midst of the couple’s heated domestic troubles, as the husband recreates them, while telling his sordid marriage/career tale to the journalist sitting next to him at a café. By magnifying these tensions, Porter expresses the degree to which the husband’s career move is a way for him to repair his wounded masculinity. At the same time, she conveys the erotics of culture that exists between this American man and American woman, which they bring with them to Mexico, and that helps to also explain why they are in Mexico in the first place.

The journalist and his wife first travel to Mexico separately and, seemingly, very much in the tradition of other travelers in the modernist moment. When they first arrive, they are engaged but single and like typical travelers share the desire to lead a new and
more interesting life. He has the dream of sitting under a tree, “that [elusive] tree,” that
symbolizes for him a life of poetry and freedom; and he decides that in this extraordinary
historical moment, “Mexico is the country for [him].” His fiancé, Miriam, follows him
after a three year courtship because, after reading his letters, she also longs to share his
life in Mexico.

She spent three mortal years writing him how dull and dreadful and
commonplace her life was, how sick and tired she was of pretty little
conventions and amusements, how narrow-minded everybody around her
was, how she longed to live in a beautiful, dangerous place among
interesting people who painted and wrote poetry, and how his letters
came into her stuffy little world like a breath of fresh mountain air, and all
that. (74)

It is she who gives him the notion that she is a sweet bird trapped in a cage, that
he might free her, and that “once freed, she would perch gratefully on his hand” (75).

Miriam is an example of the thwarted new woman and speaks in many ways to
the new woman traveler featured in this chapter. She has a career—she is a teacher—but
is frustrated with the provincial constraints of U.S. culture and thinks that she can find an
escape in marriage and a life abroad, in Mexico in particular, that promises extraordinary
things. The failure of her joint venture with her husband is foreshadowed (interestingly,
in retrospect) in Porter’s dark, comedic, and incisively gendered way. After Miriam has
depicted herself as a caged bird to her fiancé, he sends her a poem about a caged bird set
free, dedicated to her, and she “forg[ets] to mention it in her next letter” (75).

Apparently, his masculinity and sense of heroism are flattered and then squelched.

It is precisely this effect that Miriam has on the male narrator and why he depicts
her as a depressed and lacerating presence. In fact, she turns out to be the desperate bird
she wished not to be, as she thrashes frantically about their simple Mexican house and
carries out her wretched chores. This is definitely not the life she imagined. She expected “to settle down in a modern steam-heated flat and have nice artistic young couples from the American colony in for dinner Wednesday evenings” (74). Obviously, she expected for him, and through him, to be associated with the more exclusive American colony of expatriates in Mexico, whereas as an aspiring poet he associates instead with Mexican artists. Worse, as a poet living according to the bohemian fashion of the day, he has also defaulted on his responsibilities as dictated by middle-class American values. After he loses his job as a teacher with the turnover of the local political administration, he becomes a full-time poet, and they settle into living off her savings and the Christmas and birthday checks sent by her father. Miriam will not/can not assimilate this alternative lifestyle, and so she assaults him and scathingly calls him, “Loafer! and Bum!, ” “Parasite!” and “Ne’er-do-well” (67).

Unsurprisingly, the narrator claims that by the time Miriam leaves, the ceaseless conflict between them has “damag[ed] him seriously,” for she had ignited a staggering internal conflict that also ravaged his dream of becoming a poet in Mexico. Here, his rage is far less important than his ability to exclaim that he hated her “as he hate[d] no one else,” because “she was abominably, obscenely right.” Thus it is through the male journalist’s own words that Porter arrives at the erotics of culture that is driving these Americans, as a couple and as individuals, away from and back to the U.S.

Miriam had become an avenging fury, yet he could not condemn her. Hate her, yes, that was almost too simple. His old-fashioned respectable middle-class hard-working American ancestors and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam’s side. He had felt he had broken every bone in him to get away from them, and live them down, and here he had been overtaken at last and beaten into resignation that had nothing to do with his mind or heart. (77)
Porter brilliantly pits American domesticity and its accompanying values against the modernist dream of travel, poetry, and a freer life in a foreign country—as she reveals that in fact, the two things are incompatible.

Ultimately, not unlike Braggioni’s masculinity in the previous tale, the journalist’s masculinity proves to be at once preposterous and exceedingly vulnerable. It also swings drastically depending on whether he is with an American or a Mexican woman. For he also discloses that before Miriam arrives, he has an affair with a Mexican woman, “an Indian girl who posed for a set of painters he knew” and that they live very comfortably and colorfully on his salary as a teacher. Even more than Mena’s Petra, Porter’s Indian girl character proves to be incredibly shrewd and even more adaptable than he. If he is aware that their liaison is temporary, so is she. She is also very much in line with Mexico’s corresponding mestizo modernist lifestyle of the moment in her modeling activities and liaison with this foreigner. Indeed, she is on her way to being “taken up by one of the more famous and successful painters, and becoming very sophisticated and a ‘character.’” Even when she leaves, she leaves shrewdly. She uses the excuse that she is “going to get married honestly,” takes all the furniture with her, and a baby whose paternity he only fleetingly and nonchalantly considers. Although he is aware that she has gone “away very cheerfully, too cheerfully, in fact, with another man,” he approves the script that she has offered him because it is convenient. He is freed (of her) in time for Miriam’s arrival, but the reader gets the sense that it is really she who is cutting loose from him.

With Miriam, however, the journalist suffers “the most utterly humiliating moment of his whole blighted life.” It occurs one day at a café when they are dancing
and one of a group of generals gets up suddenly and draws a pistol. Everybody in the place sees it at once and acts accordingly—everyone, except Miriam.

The point was, every right-minded Mexican girl just seized her man firmly by the waist and spun him around until his back was to the generals, holding him before her like a shield, and there the whole roomful had stood frozen for a second, the music dead. His wife Miriam had broken from him and hidden under a table. He had to drag her out by the arm before everybody… He had thought he couldn’t survive to pick up their things and get her out of there.” (70)

Once home, “he trie[s], for hours that night and on and on for nearly a year, to explain to her how he felt about it,” but Miriam could not or would not understand.

Sometimes she said it was all perfect nonsense. Or she remarked complacently that it had never occurred to her to save her life at his expense. She thought such tricks were all very well for the Mexican girls who had only one idea in their heads, and any excuse would do to hold a man closer than they should, but she could not, could not see why he should expect her to imitate them. Besides, she felt safer under the table. (71)

To her husband it seems that “All those Mexican girls were born knowing what they should do and they did it instantly,” and that Miriam’s instincts were out of tune. But Miriam has her own instincts, self-sufficient and practical instincts, according to an American new woman logic, and Mexico’s erotics of culture fail to impress her. She refuses to participate even if it is for the sake of bolstering her husband’s grieving masculinity.

Many other ‘things Mexican’, or performances of things Mexican, as well as “things American male modernist” come directly under scrutiny through the lens of Miriam’s domestic dismay. Her husband’s literary delusion of becoming a poet, the integrity of his Mexican artist friends, the integrity of American writers in Mexico, and the artistic life that foreigners attempt to have in Mexico also prove to be preposterous. Again, he admits that she is right, for he turns out to be “a lousy poet, after all” and his
artistic friends do prove to be “waiting for the main chance” as they each take up the first easy opportunity to live well and prosper. He himself angrily critiques the journalists, or “newspaper bums,” “the drunken illiterates the United Press seemed to think were good enough for Mexico and South America,” and discloses that, “They were always getting mixed up in affairs that were none of their business, and they spent their time trying to work up trouble somewhere so they could get a story out of it” (70). Above all, even years later, when he has become “quite an important journalist, an authority on Latin-American revolutions and a best seller,” he is aware of the specious politics that make him a success: “his sympathies happened to fall in exactly right with the high-priced magazines of a liberal humanitarian slant which paid him well for telling the world about the oppressed peoples.” And tellingly, he reveals that on “the strength of that” he had gotten remarried and accumulated three failed marriages.

But Porter also refuses to spare Miriam’s own insensitivity, failure to see beauty, lack of creativity, and rigidity. She fails to appreciate Mexico’s truly colorful and artistic beauty, and it is the domestic space in which she is trapped that betrays her and reveals her own shortcomings. She is prim and clean and beautiful in her own way, but although she is also extremely powerful and insightful and has a wicked tongue, she does not own her sexuality. In one of the most piquant sequences of the story, and in what appears to be a critique of her husband’s own notions of his role in liberating her sexuality, Porter critiques Miriam’s own frigidity. Miriam turns out to be as “devilishly inconsistent” as her husband declares. Moreover, the reader cringes to hear that Miriam stays in this unhappy relationship for “four years and one month and eleven days,” even though by the time she leaves, she has become “shabby and thin and wild-looking.” And still--at the
end of the tale, the writer discloses to his companion that she has written to him asking him to take her back and that he has just sent her money for her travels to Mexico. They are going to try again. Even in Mexico one cannot exist without the other.

In such ways, Porter fully dramatizes the explosive domestic politics between the husband and wife, as their aspirations and expectations are severely tested in this Mexican setting, away from the U.S. She carries out a fierce and incisive critique of American masculinity, and its reliance on an American femininity that will brace and flatter it, even as she also critiques an American femininity that relies on marriage and the exotic for fulfillment and escape.

Similarly, in Mena’s “The Education of Don Popo,” the reader learns that the true context of the young woman traveler’s freedom-seeking and rather loose behavior is not really Mexico and its gendered codes of conduct, but her divorce and the politics around it in the States. Miss Cherry’s flirtations with the young son of an upper-class Mexican family prove to be a superficial distraction for her that boosts her self-esteem and, ultimately, helps her draw back her husband. In fact, her performance, like any travel performance, is a masquerade. Mena discloses early on that Miss Cherry is pretending to be single and younger than her age, and that she allows herself to be seduced into the fantasy of romance that the town’s folkloric rituals and upper-class Mexican family customs display. The glee that she feels in having the freedom to both take part in them and disregard them at her whim is made apparent in several instances, such as when she accompanies Don Popo to the serenata—a concert and promenade in the plaza, in which, as Mena explains, the young women walk in one direction and the men in the other. Watching from the terrace, Miss Cherry feels an irresistible desire to go down and
become merged in that moving coil—according to her own distinctive style: “she did beg the privilege, however unprecedented, of promenading with a young gentleman at her side, and showing the inhabitants how such things were managed in America—beg pardon, the United States” (51).

That night, Miss Cherry is completely transported by Mexico’s erotics of culture, as expressed in its folkloric ways and young Don Popo’s courtesies. Mena very precisely constructs the spectacle that exorcises Miss Cherry’s troubles and releases her from her own societal constraints. It is a spectacle fit for the tourist gaze.

With a deep breath she expelled everything disagreeable from her mind, and gave up her spirit to the enjoyment of finding herself for a little while among a warmer, wilder people, with gallant gestures and languorous smiles. And the aromatic air, the tantalizing music, the watchful fire that glanced from under the sombreros of the peons squatting in colorful lines between the benches—all the ardor and mystery of that unknown life caused a sudden fluttering in her breast, and almost unconsciously she took her escort’s arm, pressing it impulsively to her side. His dark eyes flashed to hers, and for the first time failed to flutter and droop at the encounter; this time it was her own that lost courage and hastily veiled themselves. (51)

That the surrounding scenes are inscribed with the signs of upper-class privilege and the drastically uneven relations of power in Mexico that make such spectacles possible hardly fazes her. On the contrary, these signs also give Mexico its all-encompassing charm. She belongs to the corresponding upper class in the States and it is part of her class privilege to regard the signs of peasantry and poverty as quaint and picturesque.

It is after all the larger transnational class context of the tale that explains why she is in Mexico—and why she is welcomed in Mexico’s otherwise exclusive upper-class circles. She is accompanying her mother on a diplomatic and commercial visit to the United States, because her father is currently in negotiations with the patriarch of the Mexican family. A transnational economic exchange is occurring between the
commercial elites of the U.S. and Mexico—and it is a mutually beneficial exchange. The “admirable Señor Montague Cherry of the United States” is “manipulating the extension of certain important concessions in the State of which Don Fernando [is] governor, and with whose operations his Excellency [finds] his own private interests to be pleasantly involved” (47). Thus we find ourselves situated in the first touristic moment of the twentieth century that I identified in chapter one, the Porfiriato, as Miss Cherry and Don Popo enter into another kind of transnational exchange.

Just as Miss Cherry is reinvigorated and her jilted American femininity redeemed by her romantic Mexican adventure, young Don Popo receives an education—as the title of the story suggests. He is indoctrinated in American ways by the Americans’ visit, the English language he practices with them, and the modern commodities that are gathered for the sake of their comfort. The list is long as Mena enumerates the many items brought “on the backs of men and beasts” and gathered in magnificent qualities: “American canned soups, ready-to-serve cereals, ready-to-drink cocktails, a great variety of pickles, and much other cheer of American manufacture” (47). But Don Popo is especially initiated in American ways by this American woman and her erotics of culture. Miss Cherry takes him past the fantasy of “this living woman with hair like daffodils, eyes like violets, and a complexion of coral and porcelain” to the shrewd and less proper, more opportunistic, creature that she really is (49). Certainly his masculinity weathers the mockery she makes of their romance and his upright courtesies when he learns that she is married—technically divorced, but in his mind, married. In terms of its upper-class propriety, his masculinity is even reinforced. He truly suffers a blow when he sees Miss Cherry dance their promised waltz with the handsome American gentleman who is
her ex-husband, and flees. But when Miss Cherry decides, “if I find that Popo alive, I am going to kiss him for all I’m worth” and offers this last kiss, he refuses, choosing to assert instead his higher sense of integrity. Also, she is an ex-wife in the process of being courted by her divorced husband, and as Miss Cherry later explains (to her ex-husband), “You see, they don’t play ‘Tag! You’re it!’ with marriage down here.” Popo draws the line.

Just as Mena critiques Miss Cherry’s pretentious femininity as constructed by her class, dress, looks, and performances, she critiques Don Popo’s masculinity as well. Like Porter, Mena launches a double critique of corresponding masculinities and femininities. Indeed, at the beginning of the story, ‘Don’ Popo has to beg his mother to let him switch from stockings to pantaloons—and although he is only 15 years of age, he is encouraged to imagine his role on a grand scale (48).

Separately and in council the rest of the family impressed upon Popo that the honor of the house of Arriola, not to mention that of his native land, reposed in his hands, and he was conjured to comport himself as a true-born caballero [a Mexican gentleman]. With a heavy sense of responsibility upon him, he bought some very high collars, burned much midnight oil over his English “method,” and became suddenly censorious of his stockinged legs…[!]

One of the most amusing things that occurs in the tale is that young Don Popo is exposed to an American who is the epitome of American masculinity when Miss Cherry’s husband comes looking for her in Mexico. This very handsome American gentleman is another grand production:

A thousand conscientious draftsmen, with that national ideal in their subconsciousness [sic], were always hard at work portraying this particular type in various romantic capacities, as those of foot-ball hero, triumphant engineer, “well-known clubman,” and pleased patron of the last collar, cigarette, sauce, or mineral water… Extremely good-looking, with long legs, a magnificent chin, and an expression of concentrated manhood, he had every claim to be
Also amusing, or reflective of Mena’s own amusement, is that requisite to his
wholesomeness is that he have “a proper reverence for the female of the species, and an
adequate working assortment of simple emotions easily predicable [sic] by a reasonably
clever woman” (58). Indeed, by the end of the tale, it is obvious that Miss Cherry has
successfully manipulated her small affair with Don Popo to make her ex-husband
anxious. Meanwhile, Don Popo has truly become a Mexican gentleman and is now
properly equipped to represent his future interests in a transnational U.S.-Mexican
economy and all the “things American” that such negotiations may entail.

In “That Tree” and “The Education of Don Popo,” Porter and Mena address the
woman traveler’s interest in constructing Mexico as a site where she might escape her
life, and more specifically, the gender politics, that constrain her at home. Each
demonstrates that in fact the gender politics that define the woman traveler as she begins
her travels continue to define her wherever she goes. Just as these gender politics serve
as a motivation for her travels and inspire the impulse to escape, they are what complete
her; she cannot exist without them. Mena and Porter also demonstrate that the U.S.
gender politics that accompany the woman traveler to Mexico also interact with Mexico’s
gender politics, informing the overall erotics of culture in unpredictable ways. The
erotics of culture enacted in these borderlands spaces of travel impact the woman
traveler’s femininity and experience in Mexico--as well as the masculinities and
experiences of the American and Mexican men “she” comes into contact with.
Ultimately, Mexico’s romance turns out to be a fantasy that she herself betrays. When
the romance is stripped of relationships in Mexico, what becomes of the enchantment that
Mexico holds for the woman traveler? This is the question that I ask as I follow Mena and Porter to two enchanting sites they construct for their women travelers.

**Enchanting Sites: Mena’s “Son of the Tropics” and Porter’s “Hacienda”**

It is remarkable and fitting that Porter’s and Mena’s last Mexican stories, published several years after their respective series of Mexican stories, are set on haciendas, since the hacienda is one of Mexico’s most typical and enchanting tourist sites. Both Mena and Porter critiqued rich haciendas and their owners as obstacles to revolutionary change; and haciendas were indeed targets of revolutionary change. Where land redistribution went into effect, the land given to peasants was usually expropriated from large haciendas. These stories in particular are again critiques—of Mexico’s feudal politics but also of Mexico’s construction by the foreigner as an enchanting tourist site. I suggest that these stories also speak to Mena’s and Porter’s more personal and final sentiments regarding Mexico as a revolutionary site and as a site of possibility for the woman traveler.

Mena’s tale begins with the travels of an elite Mexican family to their Hacienda in the countryside. Dorotea is the woman traveler in the tale and a young woman who is seeing the hacienda for the first time. The patriarch, Don Rómulo, is there to investigate why the hacienda’s revenues have been shrinking. Mena immediately places the hacienda in its imperialist, colonial context, by way of its rituals, structure, and its effect on the hacendado’s daughter. A big, but half-hearted show is put on to greet the hacendado and his daughter, with a mounted escort, a band, fireworks, and an arch of

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54 As I explained in chapter one, the hacienda expresses the feudal politics of rich Mexican hacendados and the colonial politics of capitalist Americans who became investors and owners of mining and other haciendas in Mexico. But for the tourist, the hacienda also provokes nostalgic longings for an earlier, colonial lifestyle or a more quaint and picturesque past.
camellias. Dorotea is enchanted by the hacienda and its feudal air: “Everything delighted her, even the feudal promiscuity within the ramparts of her ancestral home, which recalled to her a walled town in Brittany” (137). Indeed, the reader learns that the hacienda is built like a low-lying “stronghold,” has a “titanic gate built for sieges,” and that the pueblo that lies just beyond is in direct contrast, composed of “straggling huts.” These details do not disturb Dorotea; instead they work together to tug at her “blood” and to ground her. The Hacienda is, after all, her birthright, and she, “who had often felt herself a foreigner in her native land, was stirred for the first time to the roots of her race instinct” (137). Again, with her incisively gendered gaze, Mena makes visible as she critiques the corresponding masculinity to Dorotea’s elite femininity. The great class servitude that exists on the hacienda is also captured in the homoerotic relationship between the patriarch and his elderly servant. And one may see Mena’s amused, gendered critique in her depiction of the delicate ritual they take part in as the patriarch slowly wakes--with the aid of his awakener, a tray of sherry-gelatine, and the kind words of his overseer, who reaffirms his generational allegiance to his “feudal lord.”

The story quickly moves into its crisis when the next morning the young woman rides off, on her English saddle no less, to see the nearby landmark mountain, “the Chair of the Devil,” and her father realizes that she is in danger. For he has just been informed that a band of revolutionary rebels is lurking in the outskirts of the hacienda. He goes in search of his daughter, is also captured, and is going to be killed, until he informs the young rebel that he, the hacendado, is his father. Mexico’s revolutionary fate quickly becomes a matter and crisis between men, when, whereas the hacendado is actually excited to learn that he has a son, and an heir for his hacienda, the young man, Rosario, is
humiliated to learn that there is tyranny in his own blood. The tragedy is all the greater in
that fitting his destiny, Rosario is cast as a truly heroic figure. Mena compares him to
Hercules; he is tall and strong, had “an easy bearing, and his face, the color of unroasted
coffee, was cut in precise lines, strong and yet sensitive, while the inward fire of his will
was projected outward through a pair of amber-hued eyes, impetuous and dauntless”
(146). He is teaching himself to use a typewriter as he transcribes works that speak of
great Greek and Roman heroes and that inspire the speeches with which he rallies his
followers. Of course he now learns that he is the fruit of the hacendado’s affair with “the
little daughter of [his] nana, the one who was always singing,” his own nanny’s daughter.
Retrospectively, Rosario gathers the stray details of his past that set him and his mother
apart more favorably from the other peasants on the hacienda and is crushed by the truth
of his origins.

Written in her trademark and often critiqued, quaint or even fairy-tale like style,55
Mena’s story is a colorful tale with a tragic end, and one can see how it is open to
critique. She tells a tale of a colonial hacienda with all its elaborate, hierarchical
customs, that romanticizes its Creole origins and reproduces the traits that foreigners also
find enchanting. However, if one looks to the future of Mexican literature, in many
ways, “Son of the Tropics” anticipates the dark and tragic tale of another son of the

55 Women scholars such as Amy Doherty, Tiffany Ana López, and Gloria Velásquez Treviño are quick to
point out the tendency to misread Mena’s work even in the context of Chicano literature. As an “early
Chicana writer,” she is often read by early Chicano literary critics within a masculinist Chicano literary
tradition that tends to classify the work of early Chicana writers as nostalgic and assimilationist (Velásquez
Treviño 1988). Even when her folkloric storytelling ability and resistance on behalf of Mexicans are noted,
her work is measured against more masculinist standards. For example, Amy Doherty points out that while
it is significant that Mena is mentioned in Raymond Paredes’s chapter on “The Evolution of Chicano
Literature,” his commentary suggests that overt confrontation is traditionally more highly regarded than
Mena’s coded interplay of cultures. Doherty and López argue that it is precisely this subtly coded interplay
of cultures that Mena so keenly offers.
Mexican revolution—Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. Also the bastard child of an hacendado and a soldier in the Revolution, Artemio Cruz survives, only to carry out his destiny as a truly alienated, corrupt and corrupting figure—a thug in the new post-revolutionary regime. Only at the very end of the novel are Cruz’s humble plantation origins in Veracruz revealed; he is, after all, a tragic figure, also a son of the tropics and a lot like Rosario. In this sense, one may read the ending that Mena gives her tale as highly poetic. As the gathered townspeople watch Rosario climb the mountain and prepare to detonate an explosive to end his life, they witness what is truly a communal tragedy. Unable to reconcile or transcend his origins, Rosario commits suicide, taking the innocent ideals and promises of the Revolution with him.

In Mena’s tale, Mexico’s construction through the hacienda as a site of enchantment halts, or disavows, Mexico’s revolutionary future. Significantly, the ending does not convey Dorotea’s, the Mexican woman traveler’s, reaction or what will become of her. She is very aware that Rosario is her father’s son and her half-brother, but with Rosario’s death, her future becomes negligible; it is subsumed by the truly mestizo, revolutionary figure’s death. From similar elite origins, perhaps Mena aligned with Dorotea and revisited her origins in Mexico through Dorotea; like the elite daughter Mena traveled to the hacienda to claim her birthright. In this sense, this story suggests that lacking Rosario’s mestizaje, Dorotea’s fate registered for Mena as a kind of excess, an excessive trace, of the old regime (the Porfiriato)—and that this is one of the reasons

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56 *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is published in 1962.
57 Unfortunately, little is known about Mena’s life, except that she came from an elite position in Mexican society. Born in Mexico City, April 3, 1893, she was the daughter of a Spanish mother and Yucatecan father of European descent. Her politically powerful and socially prominent father was a partner with several Americans in a variety of businesses during the last two decades of the Porfiriato. Mena was educated at an elite convent school in Mexico City—Hijas de Maria, and later at an English boarding school. From Simmen 39, as documented in Doherty, xii.
why Mena could not see a future for herself in Mexico. Mena preceded the kind of reinvention and performativity that would define upcoming female Mexican artist figures like “new woman, Mexican style”/new mestiza, Frida Kahlo, as they actively created a space for themselves in Mexico. Mena instead became a writer in the U.S., married, and stayed in the U.S.

Although many scholars have remarked upon Porter’s “Hacienda,” they rarely, if at all, comment on the fact that it is written in the astute and highly amused perspective of a woman traveler/writer in Mexico who accompanies the male character filmmakers to their film site and keeps track of the many spectacles they take part in, in a tourist Mexico that is comprised of many spectacles—and is in this way constructed as enchanting. This is a crucial detail because it makes for Porter’s continuing gendered critique of tourists, writers, and tourist Mexico. It is this perspective that distinguishes Porter as it situates her more critically among other writers and artists—both foreign and Mexican—in Mexico.

In fact, the story begins with the woman writer’s careful scrutiny of the very nervous, highly efficient, and easily outraged filmmaker, Kennerly, after a comedic first line: “It was worth the price of a ticket to see Kennerly take possession of the railway train among a dark inferior people.” Worth noting as well, is that they boarded this second-class coach that so offends Kennerly’s sensibilities by mistake, thinking it was the higher class coach, since “Now that the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone…the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures.” After the Revolution, such visible markers prevail to transform remaining hierarchies and proclaim the changes in Mexico.
Unlike Kennerly, the Mexican passengers travel in “quiet ecstasy,” deeply appreciative of the great modern machine as its “engine, mysteriously and powerfully animated, draws them lightly over the miles they have so often counted step by step” (136). They remain undisturbed by Kennerly, for by now Kennerly’s neurotic presence hardly makes a surprising impression.

And they are not troubled by the noisy white man because, by now, they are accustomed to him. White men look all much alike to the Indians, and they had seen this maddened fellow with light eyes and leather-colored hair battling his way desperately through their coach many times before. There is always one of him on every train. They watch his performance with as much attention as they can spare from their own always absorbing business; he is part of the scene of travel. (136)

Kennerly, however, appeases his troubles, by repeating to himself that he will redeem his fastidious suffering when he writes a book about it. Recalling yet another appalling experience in Mexico, as he keeps track of this new experience, Kennerly exclaims, “It’s these Mexicans”--“as if it were an outrage to find them in Mexico,” the narrator adds. But at least, “he was keeping notes and was going to write a book about it some day” (139). Porter is very aware, as are her traveler characters, that tourist Mexico is also a great market for books and that one can count on a book’s success as a consolation prize for one’s trying travels in this trying land. Thus, it is amusing to realize that it is the woman traveler who is making use of the spectacle that is Kennerly, just as it is Porter who writes about Kennerly as she also participates in this market.

Since the woman writer is obviously amused by Kennerly’s fastidious performances as are the Mexicans around him, one way that the story can be read is as a highly conspicuous running commentary about the foreign men that are also spectacles in tourist Mexico—and by which, in a twisted way, the woman traveler is also entertained.
Time and again, Kennerly, or the other men of this tale, are astutely remarked upon or upstaged by either the women or the Mexicans around them. Not even the hacendado is immune to the women’s or Indians’ mockery. Porter directs one of her most astute plays on gender at him. For instance, don Genaro is completely thrown when his jealous wife disarms his macho sensibilities by taking his place with the young actress in the film, with whom he is having an affair. All is well, even when she threatens “to cut her throat, to stab her, to poison her.” He simply runs away to the Capital for a couple of days to let things cool off. But when he comes back the first sight that greets his eyes is his wife strolling with his mistress, and he learns that the actress refuses to leave his wife even to film. It is worth quoting at length.

Don Genaro, who prided himself on his speed, was thunderstruck by the suddenness of this change. He had borne with his wife’s scenes because he really respected her rights and privileges as a wife. A wife’s first right is to be jealous and threaten to kill her husband’s mistress. Lolita also had her definite prerogatives. Everything, until he left, had gone with automatic precision exactly as it should have. This was thoroughly outrageous. He could not get them separated, either. They continued to walk and talk on the terrace under the trees all morning, affectionately entwined, heads together… They remained oblivious to the summons of the embattled males: Upensky calling for Lolita to get into the scene at once, don Genaro sending messages by an Indian boy that the master had returned and wished to see Doña Julia on a matter of the utmost importance. (144)

Porter ingeniously succeeds in trumping the homo-social bonds that reinforce male authority, in both Mexican and American social contexts, by staging Doña Julia and Lolita’s unforeseen feminist alliance and perhaps lesbian dalliance.

Porter’s hacienda story can also be read in its tourism context as speaking directly to the politics of the hacienda’s construction as a traditional site that cradles “things Mexican.” For indeed, the criteria with which it is chosen as a film site is the same criteria that makes the Hacienda a captivating tourist site. As the crew of travelers arrive,
the filmmakers remark to the woman writer, “so picturesque, all this…we shall be
accused of dressing them up.” Of course, “they had chosen it carefully…it was really an
old-fashioned feudal estate with the right kind of architecture, no modern improvements
to speak of, and with the purest types of peons.” The great irony of the Hacienda is that
in many ways it has not really changed. Its pulque economy is still active and fueled by
the ceaseless hard work of the peasants, which the woman writer also documents
carefully, day and night. In this sense, the Hacienda testifies to the failure of the
Revolution that was supposed to have done away with such feudal structures. The only
thing that appears to have changed is that the hacendado has lost his power to the new
caciques who have risen from the Revolution, as evidenced by the fact that Don Genaro
cannot convince, without bribing, the local authorities to release his young worker. And
still, a crew of Mexican artists and censors is there to ensure that the hacienda and
Mexico are properly portrayed in the film as authentically and folklorically Mexican.
The Mexican state also has a stake in the hacienda being properly represented as the
enchanting, revolutionary spectacle it is supposed to be. Indeed, the hacienda is trapped
in time--by its economy and by the modernist artists and state interests that will to keep it
“unchanged” and “untainted.”

In fact, the hacienda quickly loses its charm as its guests also get caught in its
inertia and begin to suffocate. As Porter’s story ends, the woman traveler/writer is
reassured that if she stayed, she would see the stirrings of change. However, it is clear
that she is leaving and that nothing will keep her there. Interestingly, the woman
protagonist’s refusal to stay is also rarely commented upon in analyses of this story and
similar works. Here, she declares, “I could not wait for tomorrow in this deathly air” and flees. She refuses to stay in this trap of an hacienda.

In both Mena’s and Porter’s hacienda stories, we see that the Hacienda becomes a trap for Mexico’s revolutionary potential as it continues to be a trap for the peasants who continue to be subject to its oppressive conditions. As such, the hacienda acquires, in both tales, a deathly air—“the almost ecstatic death-expectancy which is in the air of Mexico”—that speaks to the foreigner’s both thrilled and horrified construction of infernally paradisal Mexico but also to the hacienda’s ability to contain life and thwart revolutionary possibilities. Mena’s and Porter’s haciendas speak to the foreigner’s construction of enchanting Mexico and reveal that it is a construction that is tyrannical and “fixed.” Significantly, even the enlightened women characters align with the other travelers in Mexico who eventually feel the impulse to flee. By placing both the elite Mexican woman traveler and the Anglo-American woman traveler in the hacienda, Mena and Porter reveal that the hacienda threatens to suffocate the woman traveler by challenging, on a symbolic level, what is most precious to her, her mobility. Mexico’s construction as an enchanting site ultimately overwhelms even the travel writer who attempts to dismantle it.

Conclusion

Generating stories inspired by their trans-cultural mobilities and unique formations as women “travelers,” Mena and Porter published in prominent literary magazines that took an interest in featuring their stories about Mexico. Situated in the

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58 She recalls D.H. Lawrence’s protagonist, Kate Burns, in Quetzalcoatl. In this first version of his Mexican novel, Kate gathers her things in a hurry, determined to leave, and refusing to take part in the male character’s new mythic movement as consort, the new Malinche, to the Mexican general. Interestingly, in his second draft, Lawrence forces her to stay. In reading the two versions, I found this discrepancy amusing and telling.
larger transnational politics—and the erotics of culture—that informed the touristic interest in Mexico, Mena and Porter came to inform their work with a sharply gendered perspective. Interestingly, Porter elsewhere identified this perspective as: “that deadly female accuracy of vision that cannot be deceived. That would believe if it could, and knows it cannot do so” (Walsh 636).59 Porter uses this phrase when describing a female character that to her is thoroughly modern and whose gaze is female and clear-sighted and unwillingly gullible in a way that defines her modern perspective—and with which she regards not just her world but also men. It is a modernist woman’s gaze60 and it is this gaze that Porter and Mena used to illuminate—and disrupt—the gendered politics of tourism and travel in their Mexican stories. For Porter and Mena, deploying this gaze meant dismantling women’s fantasies and hopeful constructions of Mexico. Perhaps when their own idyllic expectations were dismantled and they had exhausted Mexico’s possibilities—like their women characters—Porter and Mena also had to leave Mexico.

Of course, after Mena and Porter’s generation, the woman traveler would continue to seek Mexico and explore its possibilities, even if it required that she shapeshift to meet its changed conditions. This we see in the next chapter when the woman traveler reemerges in later representations of tourist Mexico by Tennessee Williams. I turn, then, to representations of tourist Mexico as produced through a very interesting male gaze and follow the ways in which Williams continued to construct Mexico as a transgressively

59 Biographer Thomas F. Walsh pulls this phrase from one of Porter’s first book reviews while writing in Mexico to characterize her perspective; it is a review of W.L. George’s Caliban.
60 Forged in her travels, this modern female gaze will remain a trademark of Porter’s work. She will carry it from her Mexico stories into her Southern stories, such as the “The Journey,” in which the daughter-in-law regards her husband “with calm, humorous, level eyes, as if she had already got him sized up.” See Stout, 500.
gendered place, in part by taking up the woman traveler and transforming her to fit the new travel scenes that Mena’a and Porter’s earlier women travelers helped to bring about.
Chapter 3

The Beach and the Exile: Transgressively Gendered Spaces in 

*The Night of the Iguana*

...and even supposing that they [her fears] could be put into language and so be susceptible to the comfort of telling—who was there at the Costa Verde, this shadowless rock by the ocean, that she could turn to except the two young writers who seemed to despise her?

“The Night of the Iguana,” 1948

*And so, as kinsmen met a night,*
*We talked between the rooms,*
*Until the moss had reached our lips,*
*And covered up our names.*

Emily Dickinson, Epigraph to the Play, 1961

*Why do you always come here to crack up, Shannon?*
*It’s the hammock, Maxine, the hammock by the rain forest.*

*The Night of the Iguana, 1961*

A very distinct, peculiar, and surprisingly unnoticed traveler arrived in Mexico at the very moment when the flow of tourism and the themes that inspired tourism slowed. Visiting first in 1941, Tennessee Williams returned to Mexico in 1947 to escape the public acclaim that accompanied his first great success, *The Glass Menagerie.*

Williams traveled to Mexico because travel in Mexico was cheap. But he also came to Mexico as a literary traveler following the touristic paths of D.H. Lawrence and Hart Crane. These earlier travelers had visited Mexico City and its outskirts--Chapala, Taxco, Tepoztlan—sites that helped shape *Quetzalcoatl,* or *The Plumed Serpent,* and “The

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61 Williams narrates his escape to Mexico in the essay, “On a Streetcar Named Success.” He mentions that he settles for a while in Chapala to work on a play called *The Poker Night,* which later became *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Chapala is the setting for D.H. Lawrence’s Quetzalcoatl.
Broken Tower.” Lawrence and Crane were great literary influences on Williams’ work and major figures in the tradition of travel writing that depicts Mexico as an infernal paradise.\textsuperscript{62} It makes sense then that when Williams introduced Mexico in his writing, by way of the gypsy-like woman who wanders the streets of New Orleans in \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}--or more centrally, as the setting in \textit{The Night of the Iguana}--he cast Mexico as a fitting background for modern man’s spiritual plight. But Williams broke with his predecessors when he veered away from the typical tourist sites and made the primitive beaches of Acapulco the setting for his major Mexican production.\textsuperscript{63} In this chapter, I look at Williams’s most recognizably “Mexican” work, \textit{The Night of the Iguana}. Whereas in previous travel moments,\textsuperscript{64} Mexico City and its provincial and folkloric countryside figured prominently, the beach and the off-the-beaten path beach resort now become featured sites of Mexican tourism as William takes his readers to tropical Mexico—and redirects the tourist gaze.

\textit{The Night of the Iguana} is a travel narrative set in 1941 that had several, remarkable iterations. It began as a short story (1948) and became a play (1961). The play can be traced to another travel narrative in the form of a personal essay that explains the “summer of discovery” that inspired it. Shortly after the play premiered, \textit{Night} was produced as a John Huston film (1963). As we will see in the next chapter, the film \textit{The

\textsuperscript{62} In their travel narratives (both formal works and informal descriptions of their travels), Lawrence and Crane depict Mexico as a primitive, colorful place—that is sometimes dark and even macabre or sinister. Hart Crane’s suicide on his return from Mexico put him on the list of travelers who have died or disappeared in Mexico, figuring Mexico as a land of death. As I discussed in chapter one, all these traits inform Mexico’s construction as an infernal paradise.

\textsuperscript{63} In the story, Miss Jelkes knows that she can return to Mexico City but stays in the rustic hotel in Acapulco, where the story takes place. In the play, the group of tourists do pass through Mexico City and traverse the typical tourist circuit that includes “the floating gardens at Xochimilco, Maximilian’s Palace, Our Lady of Guadalupe, the monument to Juarez,” and “the relics of the Aztec civilization” (Williams 92), but that they do is a background detail. The play begins as they arrive in Acapulco and is set at the Costa Verde Hotel.

\textsuperscript{64} Previous travel moments/scenes, as featured in this dissertation, are the Porfiriato, the Revolution, and 1920s, 30s modernist Mexico.
Night of the Iguana would become in itself a tourist spectacle, one that would continue to define a new Mexican tourist site as it put a tiny spot of the Mexican Riviera on the tourist map. In this chapter, we see how Williams first opened up this new site, the beach, as a liminal travel space where the tourist is freed to flirt in and with a marginal setting. In this chapter, I discuss how Williams represented eccentric traveler types and their intriguing and rather scandalous travel performances in this new tourist space.

Featuring the beach as a tourist site, Williams anticipated the new direction that Mexican tourism would take. As I noted in chapter one, in just a few years the Mexican central government would take up this sun, sand, and sea tourism as an answer to the country’s struggling trade and development needs. In 1968, the Banco de Mexico would make public a three year study and unveil its plan to systematically develop four new “poles” or beach resorts—Cancun, Ixtapa, Los Cabos, and Huatulco—as a way to dramatically expand Mexico’s tourist infrastructure and attract thousands of new tourists. These four sites would at first be chosen for their distant, primitive, and exotically marginal locations. In this sense, Williams’s off-the-beaten-path beach resort can be read as a symbolic segway to Mexico’s new beach resorts and explosive new status as a site of beach tourism. Since it is the site of Williams’s production that is most central to the poetics of the play and to Williams’s contribution to the themes that inspire tourism in Mexico, I begin by pointing to two features. These features define Williams’s travel narratives and their crucial setting at the “Costa Verde Hotel”: the choreography of the space and bodies that interact to create the poetic space that is the hotel and the role that gender plays in this choreography of space and desire.
Configured theatrically, the space of the hotel and Williams’ corresponding construction of tropical Mexico as its background provide the stage, literally and metaphorically, for his characters’ extravagant, exilic performances. Named after the hotel at which Williams stayed in his travels in Acapulco, Mexico, the “Costa Verde Hotel,” or “Green Coast Hotel,” serves as the same setting for *The Night of the Iguana* story (1948) and play (1961). Each plot pivots on the symbolic occurrences and cathartic effects of a storm, a rather apocalyptic night, and the release of a captive iguana. But the setting of the hotel is especially important; Williams’ spiritually shipwrecked travelers can be brought together in this hotel, serendipitously, to find release and redemption in each other. The hotel is a rustic resort perched upon a cliff overlooking the sea, with a hammock on a verandah and the rainforest as its backdrop. The hammock swinging between the earth and sky offers a respite from life’s ceaseless change and chaos, as it momentarily shifts the balance between escape and darkness in the infernal paradise that is the North American artist/writer’s Mexico. The hammock, rainforest, and sea are key to William’s exilic setting, as is the design of the hotel: a series of separate cubicles that open onto a common verandah. The rooms represent the separate cubicles of the self that the characters must venture out of if they are to resolve their isolation and alienation. Although the plot of *Night* changes dramatically from story to play, each tale relies on constructions of the space of the beach resort as a liminal site in which travelers are freed to experiment with and pursue inclinations that would otherwise be held in check—at “home” or in a more mass tourist setting.

As the travelers morph and circulate through the Costa Verde Hotel with their clashing anxieties, sexualities, curiosities, and touristic interests, they expose the
transformative ways in which tourists inhabit and create spaces. Tourist spaces are not simply encountered and experienced visually; they are “lived, given anxiety, encountered” (Crouch 23). That is, tourist spaces are performative sites. They are constructed as they are inhabited, negotiated, and embodied: the tourist/traveler “metaphorically produces landscape (sometimes also transforming landscape materially, even if temporarily), refigures pre-figured context and content, and makes space” (Crouch 28). More simply, places and experiences are physically and poetically grasped and mediated (Haldrup and Larsen, 2). As a playwright Williams appears to have an intuitive understanding of the dynamics of tourist space. He engineers his character’s movements and sets them about flirting with space, as they take full advantage of the hotel’s exilic and seductive possibilities. In the story, we see the lost and lonely protagonist woman traveler Miss Jelkes brazenly encroach upon the two male travelers’ preferred work, rest, and leisure quarters as she insists on their company, lets her boundaries slip, and draws tantalizingly closer to discovering the secrets that they share. Similar dynamics of space occur in the play. The lusty widow Maxine pursues Shannon, the sexy tour guide, and insists that he take her husband’s former room. Charlotte, the precocious young woman traveler charges into Shannon’s room, and the repentant, seduced celibate picks her up and throws her out. Hannah, the compassionate, enlightened traveler, peers warily from her cubicle as Shannon is chastised by angry, sexually repressed Miss Fellowes, and then braces to come to his defense. Meanwhile, the elderly grandfather’s poet’s words are heard flowing falteringly from his cubicle as he strives to find an ending to his last poem, now that he has reached his last destination--this hotel by the sea, “the cradle of life.” As Williams’ characters enact the changing
scripts of various traveler types, including mass tourists, individual exiles or isolated artists, we see that travel, like the identities of the travelers, is a series of performances and that these particular performances are contingent on the liminal setting in which they take place.

In following the characters’ performativity of the tourist space that is the hotel, one can also see that spatialized gender politics play a major role in defining this marginal, seaside travel destination as a transgressive site. The woman traveler reappears to accent Mexico’s transgressiveness and liminality. She is identified with Mexico as she inhabits masculine space and confuses feminist and masculinist travel traditions. For example, the singular female protagonist of the story “Miss Jelkes” recalls the Victorian lady and New Woman travelers. As her interests compete corrosively with those of the paired male travelers in the story, she serves as the catalyst behind the tensions that provoke a crisis and change in the masculinist tradition of travel that she has interrupted. “Miss Jelkes” transforms from the story to the play where she is refracted into several characters. But it is the women travelers in the play who continue to incite the volatile sex battles that drive Williams’ strange travel tales and that redefine the racy politics of the beach. And, in Williams’ staging of his eccentric characters, we see a virtual parade of changing and emerging male and female traveler types. In the play, for instance, we witness the demise of the gentlemanly traveler, as he is replaced by the stray, tormented figure of the male traveler represented by the defrocked priest. We also see in the female characters the emergent women traveler types and icons that will also define popular tourism in Mexico: the young woman traveler set loose in the tropics; the lady tourist
traveling en masse; the enlightened female traveler; and the vibrant expatriate divorcée or widow set upon making a new life in Mexico.

By placing his travelers in a liminal space in which they can act out their desires and tensions, without restraint, Williams puts a choreography of space and desire into play in infernally paradisal, tropical Mexico. As the travelers’ identities and desires are expressed and achieve coherence and affirmation, the dilapidated hotel that first appears to mirror the travelers’ stray and tattered states becomes a coherent place and refuge. To understand why this resolution appears to be the crux of The Night of the Iguana story and play, I begin with Williams’ exilic travels in Mexico and the “summer of discovery” that inspired The Night of the Iguana and its unique setting at the Costa Verde Hotel.

I. “A Summer of Discovery”: Tennessee Williams, Mexico, & The Seeds of The Night of the Iguana

Although rarely described as such, The Night of the Iguana is very much a travel narrative, inspired by Williams’ first travels in Mexico and by his own experiences as a traveler. More specifically, a very direct series of Mexican associations, springing from a travel experience he later called “A Summer of Discovery,” informed his Night of the Iguana productions. In an essay that appeared with this title in the New York Herald Tribune (Sunday, December 24, 1961) just prior to the Broadway opening of The Night of the Iguana, Williams describes the “discovery” that inspired the play he produced 20 years later-- a discovery about the modern condition of exile and its possible resolution, cast in the specific terms of tourism and travel. Williams’s discovery also informs the “Night of the Iguana” story, which preceded the play. In this account of Williams’s
travels, we are able to trace how his travel experience in Mexico led to *two* productions about vulnerability, desire, turning points, and the performativity of travel.

Tennessee Williams’s first travels in Mexico—and the summer that inspired *The Night of the Iguana*—had little to do with any ideological inclinations toward Mexico. They had more to do with money. In 1940, Mexico was what Williams could afford. In his retrospective view on that fateful summer, Williams seems aware that he is taking part in a transitional moment that feels like something of an end and identifies his own anachronisms in a world that is being quickly reconfigured for him. The global effects and realities of WWII take shape for him, as he witnesses adventurous travel giving way to real politicized and psychic displacements. Here as well, we discover many things about Tennessee Williams the traveler and the tradition of travel in which he is immersed. It is also possible to identify the fascinating autobiographical traces that reappear in *The Night of the Iguana* productions.

Williams’s *New York Herald Tribune* essay tells us that travel is, even as it begins, a series of performances. Williams describes his transaction with the travel agency that arranges his transportation as a kind of “audition” for a part in a trip to Mexico. This “share-the-expense” travel agency requires Williams to present himself before another traveler:

A preliminary meeting and interview would be arranged in the office of the agency which was located in the lobby of a rather seedy midtown Manhattan hotel. It was about as embarrassing as applying for a job, perhaps even more so, for a man who is offering you a job can turn you down with some polite little dissimulation as, “I’m looking for someone with a bit more experience in this type of work.” But if you were turned down by a car-owner at this agency, you knew it could only be because you had failed to make an agreeable or trustworthy impression. (137-8)
Luckily, Williams catches the attention of a bride who appears “more accustomed to …nervous young men” and she persuades the groom to take him along. And so, Williams is matched with “a fantastic young honeymoon couple”--an interesting detail in Williams’s travels because it points to the transnational erotics of the time: “The bridegroom was a young Mexican who had come up to New York to visit the World’s Fair, then in progress, and had encountered and almost immediately married a young blonde lady of ambiguous profession whom he was now preparing to take home to meet his parents in Mexico City” (Williams 138). He didn’t speak English, she didn’t speak Spanish, and Williams comments that they didn’t speak the same language in more ways than one. She being of “ambiguous profession was worried that his well-to-do parents in Mexico City might not be as easily deceived” and confides in Williams. The couple’s role is simply to deliver Williams to the YMCA building in Mexico City and after that he never sees them again. But we shall see that the bold act of an Anglo woman traveler attaching herself to a Mexican male will become a prominent theme in Mexican tourism as the mid 20th century unfolds, and that it is, as in this particular example, an eroticized tourist performance.

Williams narrates that once in Mexico City, he quickly realizes that he is not cut out for its high altitude and so sets out for Acapulco. Because he does not like the first hotel in which he stays, he decides to look for other accommodations nearer the beaches. This is how he comes upon the Costa Verde hotel.

And that’s how I discovered the background for my new play, The Night of the Iguana. I found a frame hotel called the Costa Verde on the hill over the still water beach called Caleta and stayed there from late August to late September. (140)
Williams describes this time as a desperate period in his life, but in retrospect, declares optimistically that “it’s during such times that we are most alive and they are the times we remember most vividly, and a writer draws out of vivid and desperate intervals in his life the most necessary impulse or drive toward his work” (140). He recounts that he soon becomes engrossed in his writing and a play (not yet Night). His sickly symptoms and death wish begin to vanish.

His daily program is the same as he has always described it. In the mornings he would charge his nerves with strong black coffee, go to his portable typewriter set on a card table on a veranda and work until he was exhausted. Then he would run down the hill to the still water beach for his swim. After his morning routine, he would seek people. It was also important to Williams to have the company of others.

Williams remembers that summer as the one when he got along best with people; they seemed to like him. With melodramatic flair, he explains:

…”and I would attribute this condition to the fact that I expected to be dead before the summer was over and that there was consequently no reason for me to worry about what people thought of me. When you stop worrying what people think of you, you suddenly find yourself thinking of them, not yourself, and then…you have a sort of crazy charm for chance acquaintances such as the ones that were staying with me that crazy summer of 1940, at the Costa Verde in Acapulco. (142)

Indeed, this crazy charm for chance acquaintances is one of the fantasies or motivations that inspires travel, and especially the holiday on the beach.65 It is referred to as “serendipity” in travel writing. Thus, it is in September, “the summer when, sick to death of [himself],” Williams “turns to people most truly,” that he “discover[s] a human heart as troubled as [his] own” (142)—and arrives at his greater discovery.

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65 Whereas vacationing in the countryside is imagined (by the Western mind) as a solitary endeavor (Crouch).
The human heart that Williams refers to is that of another young writer, a writer of magazine fiction, who has just arrived from Tahiti because he feared that the war, which was then at a climax, might cut him off from the magazines that purchased his adventure stories. This crucial detail locates Williams’s travels in the historical moment in which they occur and signals the rupture that this moment, World War II, brings for the traveler. His friend has become an exile of a different sort, in Mexico. Tahiti is not his home, but in Tahiti “he had found that place which all of us spend our lives looking for, the one right home of the heart” (143). But the global effects of the war are in the process of reconfiguring travel in a way that is severing the modernist impulses behind it, like the individualist search for a less constraining and more authentic and inspiring base abroad where one can find and “write” adventure. Adventurous travel is being displaced, and unsurprisingly, exiled from his artistic base, Williams’s companion has grown increasingly despondent having reached the point at which he can no longer write. Rather poetically, Williams will compare him to “a dying beast.”

In that summer’s spell, the friend and Williams are able to find solace in each other. As Williams describes, they spend the evenings in adjacent hammocks on the verandah, drinking rum-cocos, and discussing and comparing respective heartbreaks, more and more peacefully as the night advances. Precisely in this way, they are the models for the two male characters in Williams’ short story “The Night of the Iguana.” Already, Mexico, for Williams, offers both respite and redemption: its tropical storms performing a cathartic show and “spectacular” relief.

It was an equinoctial season, and every night or so there would be a spectacular storm. I have never heard such thunder or seen such lightning except in melodramatic performances of Shakespeare. All of the inarticulate but passionate fury of the physical universe would sometimes
be hurled at the hilltop and the veranda, and we were thrilled by it, it
would completely eclipse our melancholy. (143)

Storms figure greatly in Williams’s work and in both “The Night of the Iguana” story and
play, and as we see here, they have literary associations that connote apocalyptic turning
points that carry within them the hope of redemption.

Unfortunately, when the equinox wears itself out by late September, the two
travelers are sent back to their gloomy introspection. Williams has been living at the
hotel on credit and growing more and more anxious, visiting the bank daily, waiting for a
check that never arrives. He has not realized that he failed to properly inform his agent,
Audrey Wood, of a change in address. He assumes that the Theatre Guild has lost all
interest in him. And his friend, “still unable to scribble a line that he didn’t scratch out
with the groan of a dying beast, has no encouragement for [him].”

He felt that it was quite clear that we had both arrived at the end of our
ropes and that we’d better face it. We were both approaching the age of
thirty, and he declared that we were not meant by implacable nature to go
past that milestone, that it was the dead end for us. (144)

Their apocalyptic gloom is aggravated by the presence of another historical marker
marching across their travel landscape.

Our gloom was not relieved by the presence of a party of German Nazis
who were ecstatic over the early successes of the Luftwaffe over R.A.F.
When they were not gambling euphorically on the beach, they were
listening to the radio reports on the battle for Britain and their imminent
conquest of it, and the entire democratic world. (144)

Interestingly, this is the age at which Katherine Anne Porter first traveled to Mexico to begin her career,
and Williams is just a few years from writing The Glass Menagerie.
These “Nazis” will also be present in *The Night of the Iguana*, in much the same way, heightening the “travelers’” (not the tourists’) sense of political unease and spiritual dislocation, but not in the film, because it is set in the early 1960s\(^{67}\).

Williams’s and his friend’s stay at the Costa Verde Hotel comes to its inevitable end when the hotel manager tells Williams that his credit has run out. He must leave the next morning. That last night the two friends lie in their hammocks and have “rum-cocos until the stars of the Southern Cross, which was visible in the sky from our veranda, began to flit crazily about like fireflies caught in a bottle” (144). Later that night his friend actually considers death and very quickly and clearly becomes the model for “Shannon,” the male protagonist in *Night*. In his challenge to Williams, the friend invokes the infamous “long swim to China” that Shannon also attempts to take and is his last “strike” before being tied up in the hammock. But it is also this night that helps to define Williams for Williams and to align Williams with the future elderly grandfather poet character, “Nonno.” Nonno, who is the elderly Southern Gentleman in the play on the verge of passing away, is ranked, as Hannah explains, as “a minor lyric poet,” and is also based on Williams’ grandfather. As it turns out, all are in some way “unregenerate romanticists,” sensing in the face of post WWII mass tourism that they are on the verge of becoming extinct.

… He said I was just being “chicken,” that if I had any guts I would go down the hill with him, right then and now, and take “the long swim to China,” as I was no more endurably situated on earth than he was. All that I had, he told me, was the uncontrolled emotionalism of a minor lyric

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\(^{67}\) It is nonetheless striking that John Huston will choose one of the actors for his film, Deborah Kerr, because he will recall having seen her perform with incredible poise in a London theatre during the Blitz—an evocative detail if one considers her stabilizing role as “Hannah” (personal interviews with William Reed in which he shared his taped interviews with John Huston). Even for Huston the play will be rooted in its WWII moment.
talent which was totally unsuited to the stage of life as well as the theatre
stage. I was, he said, a cotton-headed romanticist, a hopeless anachronism
in the world now lit by super fire-bombs. He reeled out of his hammock
and to the veranda steps, shouting, “Come on, you chicken, we’re going to
swim out to China!” (Williams 144-5)

This detail evokes the horror of a modern world now rent by mass destruction and
irrevocably situates The Night of the Iguana in its historical moment, 1941, which it will
keep despite not being finished or produced until twenty years later.

Williams does not take the long swim to China; he chooses to stay in his
hammock. Apparently, neither does his friend.

…and if he went swimming that night, it wasn’t to China, for when I woke
up in the hammock, and it was daylight, he was dressed and packed and
had found an elderly tourist who had a car and was driving back to Texas,
and had invited us to accompany him in his car free of charge. My friend
hauled me out of the hammock and helped me pack for departure. (145)

Williams’ friend dramatically declares that this old man is in the same boat as they are
and that if they happen to miss a turn through the mountains and plunge off the road
down a chasm, it would probably be the best thing that could happen to them. Acapulco,
like Puerto Vallarta, is backed by the Sierra Madre mountains--another detail that will
make Puerto Vallarta a perfect substitute for the play’s original setting. It is here that
another striking detail in The Night of the Iguana is born, for when the party of three
reach “the most hazardous section of the narrow road through the mountains,” the other
young writer asks to take over the wheel and “like a bat out of hell… [takes] those
hairpin turns through the Sierras”—just as Shannon will when he whisks his troop of lady
tourists up to the Costa Verde Hotel in a rickety tourist bus. It is an amusing detail that
Williams recalls with his trademark sense of humor, but at the time, the experience is also
terrifying. The group survives the friend’s “flirtation with the dark angel” (146).
Like his sense of humor, Williams’ eye for the poetic flow of life is also a trademark in his work and a tool that he uses for structuring his narratives. Accordingly, he concludes his tale by pointing to its poetic resolution: it is this summer that produces the seeds for The Night of the Iguana. Here we clearly see the peculiar state of “exile” that Caren Kaplan has described—exile as defined by the individualized, solitary, homeless circumstances of the singular traveler (Caplan 1996).

The Night of the Iguana is rooted in the atmosphere and experiences of the summer of 1940, which I remember more vividly, on the emotional level, than any summer that I have gone through before or after—since it was then, that summer, that I not only discovered that it was life that I truly longed for, but that all which is most valuable in life is escaping from the narrow cubicle of one’s self to a sort of veranda between the sky and the still water beach (allegorically speaking) and to a hammock beside another beleaguered being, someone else who is in exile from the place and time of his heart’s fulfillment. [my italics]

Twenty years later, finding this resolution will be the crux of the play--this time replayed, or carried out, by a woman traveler and a male traveler, “Hannah” and “Shannon.” The veranda between the sky and the still water beach will reappear in the play, and Hannah will reach out to Shannon across “broken gates between two people… even if it’s just for one night only…” to help him survive a rough night. And, although figured as “allegorical,” the veranda and hammock between the sky and still water beach will be perpetuated as an ideal tourist space in Mexico for a particular kind of traveler—the traveler who desires not only escape from a modern experience that is ruptured, but also a connection with others in a similar state as a form of affirmation, and even redemption.

At the end of “A Summer of Discovery,” Williams also mentions that at one point in the composition of his play, it has an alternative title, Two Acts of Grace, “a title which referred to a pair of desperate people who had the humble nobility of each putting the
other’s desperation, during the course of a night, above his concern for his own” (147). He concludes, “Being an unregenerate romanticist, even now, I can still think of nothing that gives more meaning to living” (147).

II. “This Shadowless Rock By The Ocean”

The first version of Tennessee Williams’ *The Night of the Iguana* can hardly be characterized as “two acts of grace.” It reads instead like “Goldilocks and the Two Bears.” And yet, it turns out to be the fruitful progenitor of a remarkable series of reincarnations: a play, a film, and ultimately, a discovery narrative of a tourist space. In fact, before it became the play that inspired the now classic John Huston film, which in turn “put Puerto Vallarta, Mexico on the map,” *The Night of the Iguana* began as a very different narrative. It began as a short story about a woman traveler, an artist who takes lodging at the very same Costa Verde Hotel, and who in her loneliness intrudes upon two fellow travelers. Here we find the counterparts to Williams and his companion in his 1940 Mexican travels. In Williams’ “Summer of Discovery” account, however, there is no mention at all of a woman traveler, nor of the story that features her and precedes the play. She is an unprecedented figure.

Although “Miss Edith Jelkes,” the woman traveler, makes a completely unexpected appearance, she insists on asserting her presence. She is curious, and in her longing for companionship, becomes desperate as interloper until she is clearly stalking the two male friends. At first, it seems interesting and curious that Williams, the traveler and playwright, must stage an encounter with this woman, first, and travel across the homoerotic narrative landscape that she disrupts, in order to arrive at the transformed context and characters of his play. Also curious is that Williams does not abandon his
bothersome creation but chooses instead to transform her. In the story, in fact, Miss Edith Jelkes is a painful and somewhat embarrassing version of what Miss Hannah Jelkes will be in the play. Twenty years later, Miss Jelkes redeems herself, or Williams redeems Miss Jelkes, as noble “Hannah.” In this way, Miss Jelkes functions as Williams’ harbinger of transformed travel scenes to come.

In fact, Miss Jelkes’ appearance and transformation reflect a changing politics of travel and changing traveler types, as well as the disruptive role that gender plays in changing scenes of travel. She highlights the volatile eruption of the woman traveler onto a previously masculinist travel arena—as well as her transformation across time. In this sense, she recalls not only the Victorian lady traveler but also the New Woman traveler discussed in chapter two. She inherits qualities from both, for although singular and spinster-like, and a highly proper and skilled traveler like the first, Miss Jelkes is also bold, daring, obsessive, and inquisitive, like her more immediate precedent, the New Woman. In her obsession to know what it is that binds the two male travelers together and in her insistence to be an artist colleague among them, she allows herself the will to knowledge of a variant of the new woman--the woman anthropologist or artist who dares to travel far and alone as she sets out to develop her craft, and who insists on a camaraderie with the men who share her interests and field. What is amusing here is that the narrator highlights every instance of Miss Jelkes’s sense of wonder and scandal.

On a broader level, Miss Jelkes’ appearance in Williams’ tale speaks to the changing politics of contemporary travel scenes. Her transformation demonstrates that as *The Night of the Iguana* “travels” in its different iterations across travel scenes and historical moments, it also transforms, literally across genres, each time representing a
changing American experience of travel. In the next segment, we will see how a new travel scene is presented in the play and in the subsequent chapter, the film. Here, the story is a sketch of a modernist context of travel—or of a context of travel that is riddled with modernist themes as WWII begins. It is also a fascinating bridge, or contact zone, between modernist and earlier travel traditions. More precisely, the story stages a scene of transformation as one travel tradition—that of the “spinster,” or Victorian/singular lady traveler—literally crashes into another—travel as a practice that is predominantly male. Significantly, as with Miss Jelkes, the traveler’s identity is in part defined by the traveler’s sexuality.

Thus, it is not only Miss Jelkes’ sexuality that is at stake, but also that of the male characters. Their very visible homosexuality in the story must be written out when Williams writes the play, to conform to post—WWII America’s homophobic social politics and constraints as gay culture is driven underground (Chauncey 1992). Even in the story, the writers keep separate rooms out of a sense of propriety, because even in Mexico, Williams’s representation of male-male desire is troubled. Nevertheless, bits of the male couple’s background and history begin to filter through and Miss Jelkes learns many things about them. The younger man is recently divorced from “Kitty” and appears terribly concerned over some problem which the older man is trying to iron out for him. The younger man is volatile and throws tantrums on the beach like a child or shouts “For God’s Sakes!” or “What the Hell are you talking about!” The older man lifts his voice briefly telling him not to be a fool. It seems that “some argument [is] going on interminably between them.” In such instances, one may read the male characters’ lingering, personal unease as a symptom of “the impact of society’s often limiting
approach to non-conventional romantic options” (Peters 111). Williams’s work thus acknowledges homosexual desire—and allows it to fuel the story’s sense of intrigue and wonder—but also begins to reflect “the (overwhelmingly negative) perceptions of homosexual intimacy” that will mark “American attitudes of the late 1940s and ‘50s” (Peters 118). At the same time, the presence of the two male travelers is one of the elements that define’s the Costa Verde hotel’s liminality.

Having wandered into a liminal, homosocial setting, Miss Jelkes, the woman traveler/artist, finds herself in a fascinating “fix.” A highly experienced traveler, she has finally come upon a scene in which she cannot fit. Williams goes into great detail to establish the kind of traveler that Miss Jelkes’ is and to describe her predicament. She is very much a Southern belle and powerfully reminiscent of Streetcar’s Blanche. She is “delicately made,” with great translucent gray eyes, cloudy blond hair, and a style of dress that matches her “unearthly” type. She is, however, a woman traveler who knows how to capitalize on her ability to move fluidly across tourist spaces. “Whenever she came into a restaurant or theatre or exhibition gallery, she could hear or imagine that she could hear a little murmurous wave of appreciation” and moreover, this “was important to her”; it had become “one of her necessary comforts.” She obviously has traveler skills: she knows how to strike up acquaintances, has “a fresh and witty way of observing things,” and the many places she has traveled have “supplied her with a great reservoir of descriptive comment and humorous anecdote.” Finally, she is a painter. She is not brilliant but has a gift and is combining her painting with travel and the making of new friends in new places. Still, Miss Jelkes is also caricatured, for Williams introduces her
with the line, “Miss Jelkes was outwardly such a dainty teapot that no one could guess she could actually boil.”

The two men, however, are also caricatured--as is the relationship between male travelers. Introducing them through Miss Jelkes’ eyes, the narrator amusedly places them into one of the traveler “scripts” with which she is familiar, one pointing to the wartime front that allows men to travel together:

Because of the troubled youth and wise counselor air of their conversations it had first struck Miss Jelkes, in the beginning of her preoccupation with them, that the younger man might be a war veteran suffering from shock and that the older one might be a doctor who had brought him down to the Pacific resort while conducting a psychiatric treatment.

When no evidence surfaces to confirm Miss Jelkes’ speculation, it appears that perhaps there is a stronger, more immediate, travel tradition underlying the male coupling—a tradition that Williams also appears to highlight in his tale.

To frame this tradition, I turn to another travel history, Paul Fussell’s *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*. In “See it with someone you like,” Fussell alludes to Peter Fleming’s *One’s Company* (1934) as he names “solitariness” as a kind of male ambition in play during the travel that took place between the wars, but that as a pattern was really rather extraordinary. Fussell notes that Fleming’s “ambition of solitariness” during his journey to China was extraordinary enough to provide the catchy title for his travel book as well as to generate his final chapter--which Fussell reads as “an over-elaborate justification of traveling alone” (117). Fussell notes that Fleming traveled alone because his ideal partner Roger Pettiward was not able to accompany him68;

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68 Consequently, Fussell includes, Fleming made the mistake of picking up a non-stop talker, learning “abundantly what Hemingway learned from his French auto-trip with Fitzgerald: Never go on trips with
Fleming and Pettiward informed one of the most notable traveling couples of the age, “a pair of comical critics set down in the midst of absurdity” in *Brazilian Adventure*.

Fussell uses the Fleming vignette to introduce one of the most interesting observations of his book.

Travel-writers in the preceding tradition, before the war, had tended to go alone, like Stevenson in Spain, Doughty and T.E. Lawrence in Arabia, Rupert Brooke in Tahiti. And so do travel-writers in the postmodern tradition, like Paul Theroux. It is between the wars that we find these teams, either social or erotic, like Byron and Sykes, Auden and MacNeice, Auden and Isherwood, Isherwood and Heinz… (118)

The list continues and is long. Fussell emphasizes the “romantic” nature of these traveling friendships, the nature of which he incisively suggests with a “highly-charged” thank you note from Connelly to his traveling companion, Noël Blakiston, after their 1927 Sicilian travels. In this note, Connelly thanks Blakiston “for contributing to the most sustained ecstasy of my life… I shall never be able to travel with anyone else again… --for I on honey dew have fed and drunk the milk of paradise…. O Noël!” (119).

As if to clarify, Fussell follows this note with a quote from a letter by Connelly to Blakiston written 36 years after their travels, in which he pronounces, “The Sicilian expedition ends the age of romantic friendship because it is so perfect that it could not go forward unless we lived together… and we weren’t homosexual” (118-119). In “Norman Douglas’s Temporary Attachments,” Fussell notes how crucial companionship was to writing, as it was to Douglas’s books, including *Alone* (1921) and *Together* (1923). For Norman Douglas these attachments tended to be pederastic, although “--not all of them sexual—“ Fussell clarifies. Fussell implies that many of Douglas’s attachments, as well as those among other male travel writers during the inter-war period, were clearly erotic.
The coupled male travelers in Williams’ story evoke this male interwar travel tradition. Like Fussell, Williams is amused by the apparent integrity of the myths that this travel tradition masks and is interested in wittingly undermining it. And so, in Williams’ tale the male writer is also caricatured as a traveler type—as is the singular, alienated modernist writer and artist that he invokes. He is represented by the older man to whom Miss Jelkes is attracted, who she discovers is a famous writer.

She had seen [his name] time and again on the covers of literary magazines and as the author of a novel that had caused a good deal of controversy a few years ago. It was a novel that dealt with some sensational subject…associated in her mind with a strongly social kind of writing which had been more in vogue about five years past than it had since the beginning of the war. However the writer was still not more than thirty.

A caricature of his character begins when Miss Jelkes’s notes that there is “something a little monkey-like in his face as there frequently is in the faces of serious young writers.” It is an intellectual look that reminds Miss Jelkes of—of all things—“a small chimpanzee she had once seen in the corner of his cage at a zoo, just sitting there staring between the bars, while all his fellows were hopping and spinning about on their noisy iron trapeze.” She recalls being so moved by “his solitary position and lackluster eyes” that she longs to give him peanuts. But after returning with peanuts, she sees that “he had evidently succumbed to the general impulse, for now every man Jack of them was hopping and spinning about on the clanking trapeze and not a one of them seemed a bit different from the others.” The attraction she feels for this writer is put on the same plane as the pull she feels toward an alienated monkey in a zoo. In this way, the narrator undermines the power that the male writer has over Miss Jelkes and hints that the male writer’s exiled singularity is only fleeting.
Indeed, the older writer has a companion, the younger writer, making Miss Jelkes the irrelevant and unattractive figure in this travel scene. Miss Jelkes must thus lay “siege” on the coupled writers in order to integrate forcefully among them. This siege occurs in the form of a territorial battle as Miss Jelkes changes her painting, bathing, and lounging routine in order to encroach more immediately upon the two men and the spaces they inhabit at the Costa Verde hotel.

Albeit twisted, it is also a wondrous fix, because in order for Miss Jelkes to enter the intriguingly sexualized, homoerotic, homo-social travel space—that they define as the tale proceeds, she must also experience the expansive stretching of her own boundaries—very much in line, after all, with the transformative consequences we might expect from such a liminal setting. Significantly, the beach is one of the sites where this “stretching” occurs, as the beach becomes an eroticized terrain and Miss Jelkes becomes very aware of the men’s bodies. The older writer wears “next to nothing, a sort of brilliant diaper of printed cotton, twisted about his loins in a fashion that sometimes failed to even approximate decency,” but because it is he whom she likes and because he has “a slight and graceful physique and an unconscious ease of movement” his immodesty is less offensive. The younger man, however, is “massively constructed,” and recklessly flaunts the glaring sensuality of his masculinity. His torso is “burned the color of an old penny and its emphatic gender still further exclaimed by luxuriant patterns of hair, sun-bleached till it shone like masses of crisped and frizzed golden wire.” Worse, he has the audacity to change in and out of his swimming trunks “as if he were standing in a private cabana.” Although Miss Jelkes “ha[s] to acknowledge that he owned a certain sculptural grandeur …the spinsterish side of her nature was still too strong to permit her to feel anything but a
squeamish distaste.” She complains to the Patrona and asks if the Patrona can require that the younger man “at least keep the dorsal side of his nudity toward the beach.” But in Mexico, such squeamishness is ridiculous and the Patrona instead proceeds to translate Miss Jelkes’ complaints and to shout them to the waiters and the cook. It is her behavior that is singled out and scorned as an unwelcome intervention. Terribly hurt and humiliated, Miss Jelkes packs that night to leave the next day, but is then too upset the next day to undertake the journey.

Still, Miss Jelkes commits similar transgressions and is repeatedly rebuffed, until, almost hysterical, she prepares to leave for good—when a captured iguana becomes the catalyst that is badly needed to relieve the situation. It is introduced as the Mexican phenomenon that it is—a lizard that “Mexicans regard as suitable for the table” and that is often seen “outside the huts of villagers, usually hitched to a short pole near the doorway and continually and hopelessly clawing at the dry earth within the orbit of the rope-length, while naked children [squat] around it, poking it with sticks in the eyes and mouth.” The narrator’s description here points to Mexico’s primitive savagery and its duality as an infernal paradise—a duality that thrills as it horrifies the traveler. Consequently, that night, Miss Jelkes discovers with a cry of horror the iguana that the Patrona’s son has tied to the base of a column under the hammock-verandah just beneath her room—and quickly takes advantage of the situation. She uses the iguana as a reason to approach the two writers who are lying in their hammocks at their end of the verandah, and uses the iguana also as an excuse to move in next to them so that she may spy on them and finally learn “the mystery” of their nightly conversations. It is a mystery that

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69 In the play, we will see the Mexican Patrona morph into “Maxine,” played by Ava Gardner in the film, to reappear as patroness of this liminal beach resort space.
has “tantalized her for weeks”; “Now she would be able to hear every word that passed between them unless they actually whispered in each other’s ears.”

Using as a pretext the horror of hearing one of God’s creatures scratching away at the stranglehold beneath her, and the impossibility of sleep with all its commotion, Miss Jelkes secures a kind of triumph, asserting at least territorially her status as co-inhabitant and fellow traveler/artist at the Costa Verde Hotel. She hastily puts her things away and lies “flat on her back with her arms lying rigidly along her sides and every nerve tingling with excitement over the spontaneous execution of a piece of strategy carried out more expertly than it would have been after days of preparation.” There is silence--until she hears the younger writer pronounce the word, “Goldilocks!” and the unrestrained laughter that follows. Dismayed, she listens to them walk away to the beach.

As Miss Jelkes finds herself alone again at the hotel, Williams reconstructs the traveler’s perilous and pathetic state when in isolation. Miss Jelkes ruminates about how awful it is to be this sensitive, to make such a fool of herself in her frantic need to find some comfort in people. She wishes that she were a writer and that she could say things that only Picasso could put into paint, and she wonders if “her sense of the enormous grotesquerie of the world” is communicable to any other person—as she fears “the list of neuroses that might fasten upon her.” The narrator Williams constructs her predicament at this Mexican resort, as she reaches for a sedative to stave off her feverish “production of fears,”

fears that could not be put into words because of their all-encompassing intensity, and even supposing that they could be put into language and so be susceptible to the comfort of telling—who was there at the Costa

70 Here, she sounds like Tennessee Williams and recalls the relationship with his art that he has defined (Williams, “Person to Person”). His sickly symptoms and drug use also resonate as do his earlier, overly brash attempts to establish connections with people (which he also talks about in Where I Live).
Verde, this shadowless rock by the ocean, that she could turn to except the two young writers who seemed to despise her? [my italics]

Senselessly crying herself to sleep, “hearing even at this distance the efforts of the captive Iguana to break from its rope and scramble into the bushes” –realizing too that she is exiled on “this shadowless rock by the ocean”–Miss Jelkes has become like the captive iguana.

Of course, part of Miss Jelkes’s desperation stems from her frustrated sexual curiosity and the yet inarticulate intimation that it is in part her sex that excludes her from the men’s company. When Miss Jelkes wakes up, it is “still a while before morning,” the moon has disappeared from the sky and she is lying in blackness, except for the tiny cracks of light coming in from the room next door. She realizes that the two writers are there together. Again, she is drawn by her curiosity.

If she could have risen from bed and peered through one of the cracks without betraying herself she might have done so, but knowing that any move would be overheard, she remained on the bed and her mind was now alert with suspicions which had before been only a formless wonder.

She overhears the men discuss her eavesdropping and how they laugh as they contemplate her talking again to the Patrona and discuss the Patrona’s own desire to get rid of her. The narration takes on a teasing, sensationalized quality. Suddenly, Miss Jelkes finds herself knocking at their door, “carefully keeping her eyes away from the lighted interior.” She declines the invitation to come in and when the younger writer comes to the door, they finally have it out. She accuses him of cruelty; he accuses her of spying. He mutters “a shocking word” and shoves past her onto the door. He repeats it more loudly and storms away. This quick violence is its own kind of relief, and as we
saw in “A Summer of Discovery,” nature replicates it and marks a further turning point as a storm begins to brew.

The violence just past had calmed Miss Jelkes a little. She found herself uncoiling inside and comforting tears beginning to moisten her eyes. Outside the night was changing. A wind had sprung up and the surf that broke on the other side of the landlocked bay called Coleta could now be heard.

It is here—finally—that Miss Jelkes has her moment with the older writer as they face each other by the door.

Miss Jelkes is invited in. Although she is “not at all properly dressed”—neither is he—she enters, and we gather something new about this writer as she notices that “under the naked light bulb and without the dark glasses his face looked older and the eyes, which she had not seen before, had a look that often goes with incurable illness.” The figuration of diseased and destructive homosexuality aligns with mid-twentieth century homophobic discourses of sexuality (Peters 113), but may also refer here to the ailing and faltering modernist traveler. Miss Jelkes also notices that he too takes sedatives.

Relieved to have finally hit upon a connection, Miss Jelkes laughs with a real gaiety, but he only responds with a faint smile and stands “at the screen door like a worried child awaiting the return of the parent.” He drifts from her again and again, but although she offers to go, she does not want to leave him. She feels herself on the verge of saying those incommunicable things. Instead, finally, faltering, she dares to ask, “Your friend--” … “Is he the--right person for you?”

It is a quick and surprisingly candid exchange, one that perhaps could only occur in such a liminal setting. He answers her straightaway that he is attracted to Mike because “Mike is helpless and [he] is always attracted to helpless people.” She ventures to ask, “But you…How about you? Don’t you need somebody’s help?” He answers,
“The help of God! Failing that, I have to depend on myself.” She insists: “But isn’t it possible that with somebody else, somebody with more understanding, more like yourself--!” He bluntly responds, “You mean you?”

Miss Jelkes is “spared the necessity of answering,” because the storm suddenly unleashes its great violence outside the screen door. Interestingly, it is described very much like her: “The storm that had hovered uncertainly on the horizon was now plunging toward them. Not continually but in sudden thrusts and withdrawals.” But it is also described as a giant bird that is God-like, that lunges up and down on its terrestrial quarry, “a bird with immense white wings and beak of godlike fury,” but with “something frustrate” in its attack, as if its attack came from “a thwarted will.” Again like Miss Jelkes, it is as if it “did not know where it was striking,” even as Miss Jelkes wonders what it means, “when suddenly the writer leaned forward and thrust his knees between hers.”

The story reaches its startling climax, quite literally, as the writer assaults Miss Jelkes. Now it is he who “thrust[s] at her like the bird of blind fury” while trying to draw up her skirt and tearing at her bosom. The writer’s assault reminds the reader of the connection between violence and desire that exists in other Williams’ plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*: “only through intense physical contact, often painful contact, are emotional connections forged” (Peters 110). The writer’s assault and Miss Jelke’s “fierce little comedy of defense,” also expresses the two characters’ unresolved sexualities. This violence relieves Miss Jelkes, but interestingly, it breaks the writer. Precisely then, the young writer returns and is very angry to see the older writer sobbing. He asks him several times, “What is it?” ---“senselessly but angrily,” while shaking his
older friend who cannot stop crying. As Hannah pushes the older writer to the point of breakdown, the story may be another “articulation of homosexuality that reveals the downfall of the queer character—a character who reaches this downfall, who is even destined towards this downfall—because of society’s limitations and scorn of male-male intimacy” (Peters 111). 

Miss Jelkes, however, has reached a transcendent turning point. Finally, she comes to understand, “I don’t belong here,...and suiting action to thought,” slips quietly out the screen door (not my italics). Outside the storm ceases its fury: “The white bird had gone away and the Costa Verde had survived its assault.” She discovers that the iguana was also set free by the storm and wonders if it was freed by an act of God or if “only Mike, the beautiful and helpless and cruel, had cut the Iguana loose?” Imagining how grateful it must be breathing now, the narrator expresses how grateful she is too, “for in some equally mysterious way the strangling rope of her loneliness had also been severed by what had happened tonight on this barren rock above the moaning waters.” Lying on the cool bed, she feels “again the spot of dampness [on her dress], now turning cool but still adhering to the flesh of her belly as a light but persistent kiss.”

Her fingers approached it timidly. They expected to draw back with revulsion but were not so affected. They touched it curiously and even pityingly and did not draw back for a while.

Miss Jelkes transcends her former prudity and sensual revulsion and finally feels connected through such intimacy to the older writer.

71 See Peters, “Peters does not review “The Night of the Iguana”; he reviews “One Arm” and “Desire and the Black Masseur,” but his comments certainly appear relevant. Peters makes the important point that “for many writers of the postwar decades, stories of same-sex attraction are inevitably stories of disappointment and disaster, implying the strong cultural fear of male homosexuality in their contemporary worlds” (111).
In the story version of *The Night of the Iguana*, the Costa Verde hotel becomes a transgressive space in which desire can follow its circuitous paths—because it simply cannot be contained—and sexuality hovers as a kind of question. Perhaps it is a question in relation to dislocation and the desire to share “incommunicable things,” and perhaps central to this question—and space and time—is a need for companionship that transcends sex. This is certainly the case for Miss Jelkes, but in the tensions between them and in the breakdown of the older writer, it also seems to be the case for the two men. “Mexico” in the way that Williams constructs it—as tropical, deviant and apocalyptic—offers itself as a fit setting for this kind of story. It is simultaneously savage and tolerant and gothic. As “this shadowless rock by the ocean,” or “barren rock among the moaning waters,” Mexico invokes and sustains the characters’ terrible dislocation and desire even as it breaks it down to the core.

In this way, the story speaks to the realization of erotic attraction and freedom abroad—and particularly in Mexico—and highlights the transformative potential of travel beyond strictly heterosexual terms. But it also recalls that the terms of this realization were once highly masculinist. In *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan alludes to the late 19th century European male flâneur and the brothel to suggest that although the realization of erotic freedom has not been limited to tourists alone in the history of Western travel experience and writing, perhaps it is the democratization of such elite masculinist privileges that arouses the male critic’s ire (Kaplan 55). Here, this ‘democratization’ does not appear to arouse Williams’ ire. Although intrusive and destructive, the presence of the woman traveler introduces a greater expansiveness to the experience of travel as a mode of contact and connection. A turning point is reached.
Modeled on Tennessee Williams and his companion in 1940, the two male travelers cannot stay at the Costa Verde Hotel forever. This travel scene is coming to its end; it has been disrupted by the arrival of Miss Jelkes as by the historical circumstances closing in on it.

III. Traveling On: Exiles in the Quickly Modernizing World

The play, *The Night of the Iguana* (1961), is set like Tennessee Williams’ first Mexican travels in 1940, and like the story of the same title, in the very same rustic seaside resort perched upon a cliff and has the rainforest as its backdrop. Written in 1961, however, it expresses some of the cultural anxieties of the 1950s as well as the onslaught of post WWII mass tourism. In this way, it straddles historical moments (the early 1940s and early 1960s). To reflect the changed sexual politics of its travel scene, the plot and characters morph in fascinating ways.

The key change has to do with the gendered dynamic that determines the balance between the principal male and female travelers; between them the crisis of the play will unfold. In the story, a woman artist traveler intrudes upon two male travelers; in the play, a male tour guide is ‘surrounded’ by women travelers. His tour group (of lady tourists) drives him crazy and nearly costs him his job. In an amusing twist of fate, he arrives at the Costa Verde in a feverish state, expecting to deflect his ladies’ complaints and to find solace in its owner, his old fisherman friend, Fred, only to learn that Fred is dead and that he must now contend with Fred’s wife, Maxine. Maxine, in turn, wishes to catch him as her lover, just like the young woman in the tour group who has already seduced him. Sparks fly as Shannon attempts to disentangle himself from these women. Juxtaposing the play with the story, we see that whereas in the story, a single woman traveler had to
contend with two men, in the play, Fred’s death has dissolved the pair, leaving the
remaining male traveler to contend with the demands of tourist women. The tables are
now turned and we encounter a very different battle of the sexes.

Complimenting this key change, earlier characters from the story also transform
in significant ways. As if she has traversed the story’s travel scene and learned its
lessons, “Miss Jelkes” now transforms into “ethereal, almost ghostly” “Hannah,” with the
same last name. Hannah is noble and far more enlightened than the original Miss Jelkes.
The very minor character in the story, the Mexican Patrona, turns into “bigger than life
and twice as unnatural” Maxine, the hostess of the Costa Verde hotel. The homosexual
male travelers also transform, in a different way; their homosexuality is passed on to
“Miss Fellowes.” As the leader of the Texas girls’ schoolteachers, or Shannon’s troop of
lady tourists, Miss Fellowes is a representative not of the singular artist traveler (as were
the male travelers) but of the mass tourist. Moreover, whereas the previous homosexual
colors were “out,” Miss Fellowes is sexually repressed and in denial about her
attraction for Charlotte. Rigid and aggressive, she figures as “a bull elephant on a
rampage.” Tennessee Williams, the traveler, featured in “A Summer of Discovery,”
appears to refract into Shannon, the defrocked minister tour guide, who is looking for
answers and a way to regain his sanity, if not redemption, in places abroad and into
Nonno, the elderly minor lyric poet. Nonno is Hannah’s grandfather. Having arrived at
the sea to complete his last poem, he is literally on the verge of extinction like the
outdated and “unregenerate romanticist” that Williams has believed himself to be. These
refractions and mutations are liminal transformations that speak to the shifting anxieties
of the moment and to Mexico’s place as a space abroad where they might be acted out and resolved.

The eclectic array of characters also speaks to the changing face of tourism with the arrival of mass tourism in Mexico and elsewhere. Tennessee Williams assembles a crew of travelers that playfully highlights different kinds of tourists: globetrotting adventurers who make their way by their talents and wits (Shannon, the defrocked minister tour guide; Hannah, a sketch artist; and Nonno, the elderly poet); the young Western schoolgirl on the loose in the Tropics (Charlotte); a lusty, bohemian, expatriate woman innkeeper (Maxine) who keeps two young Mexican diving boys as house servants and lovers (reminding us of the transnational erotics of travel); and mass tourists (manifested as a group of fussy women travelers—schoolteachers of a female college in Texas). Initially the play appears to stage another kind of battle (besides the battle of the sexes) as it follows “the traveler” into a scene of travel in which he or she must coexist with the tourist. In this sense, the lady travelers are the mass tourists; Maxine, Shannon, Hannah, and Nonno are the “travelers”—and the tourists and the travelers clash. Since Williams is still invested in the continuing plight of the travelers and the mass lady tourists are distracting and in the way of his bringing the travelers together, the ladies must get written out. The battle between the travelers and the tourists is the conflict that will allow Williams to rid the Costa Verde hotel of the tourists and return it to its status as a liminal, transformative site. To understand this dramatic thrust, we must first run through the details of the play.

A group of fussy women tourists—schoolteachers of a female college in Texas—arrives in a coastal Mexican town, transported by tour bus. They are led by “Shannon,”
Blake’s Tours minister tour guide. Shannon is not the typical minister tour guide. He is clever and sexy and has a tendency to veer away from itineraries and travel brochures to take his tourists to “real” places, even the underworlds of places. Chaos has occurred because Charlotte, a precocious young female tourist, has relentlessly pursued Shannon until landing in his bed at a previous stay, and her jealous chaperone, Miss Fellowes, has placed a call to the agency to report him. Shannon is on the verge of losing his job. Thus, upon arriving at their preferred hotel—“a completely modern, air-conditioned hotel on a delightful plaza with excellent food and service”—a desperate Shannon takes control of the bus and violently whisks them away, climbing a treacherous road to a rustic seaside resort perched upon a cliff with the rainforest as its backdrop. Shannon hopes to distract the ladies with its beauty and to prevent Ms. Fellows from receiving her phone calls because he believes there is no telephone service there. Miss Fellowes is furious. She refuses to stay at an inn that makes “a room at the ‘Y’ look like a suite at the Ritz.”

Shannon is greeted enthusiastically by lusty Maxine, owner of the resort. Shannon learns that Fred, her fisherman husband and his old friend is dead. Maxine wishes to catch Shannon as a replacement, even though she also has two Mexican diving boys on the premises that serve as her assistants and lovers. In fact, her “house-boys” are in themselves signs of mass tourism, in that they are formerly the famous cliff-divers of Acapulco, one of the trendy seaside resort’s most popular tourist attractions. Shannon convinces Maxine to let the group stay.

Meanwhile, Nantucket spinster and sketch artist, Hannah, and her elderly poet grandfather, Nonno, arrive penniless, convince Maxine to let them stay for a night as well, and interject their poignant presence in the messy ordeal. Nonno has convinced
Hannah to continue their travels to Mexico and the sea—“the cradle of life”—in the hope that there he can finish his final poem.

As it turns out, there is telephone service at the hotel, Miss Fellows receives a call from the States and learns that Shannon is a “defrocked” minister. After a gritty confrontation between Miss Fellowes and Shannon, Shannon is fired, and the lady tourists depart. Humiliated, Shannon remains behind to contest a night of “fever” and madness. Because he has threatened to throw himself into the sea and take the long swim to China, he is tied up in his treasured hammock on the veranda like the iguana that has been captured below. Hannah—and Nonno’s moving poem—will help to see Shannon through.

The battle of wills that ensues between Shannon and Miss Fellowes is a useful focal point at which to resume my analysis of the play’s staging of the battle between the travelers and the tourists because it is precisely the discrepancy between Shannon’s and Miss Fellowes’ tourist expectations and limitations that forms the perfect foil for their impassioned disagreement. Their clash of wills is really about Miss Fellowes’ repressed desire for Charlotte and Shannon’s inability to contain his passionate and impulsive nature. But his nature is also in part what defines Shannon as a traveler as opposed to a mere tourist. Shannon is reckless but brilliant. He has the ability to “see”—and the irrepressible desire to present—Mexico and the other places he traverses with a more perceptive eye, and of course, a greater tolerance for the extraordinary. He rails, however, against the very different interests of his tourists. For example, when Charlotte requests that Shannon take her on a tour to places in Mexico City not witnessed by ordinary
tourists, it is only as a pretext to seduce him, and Miss Fellowes accuses him of taking Charlotte through seedy places--and of contaminating her with fleas.

Unsurprisingly, Shannon’s diversions are not always welcome. At the Costa Verde Hotel, Ms. Fellowes fumes at Shannon and complains that all the girls have dysentery. The ladies stay for a bit to have lunch and explore the waters in a glass-bottom boat, and one expresses her sadness to leave such a lovely place. But ultimately, Mismaloya is not a fit resort for this kind of tourist, of whom even Hannah expresses, “I don’t like those ladies any more than you do, but after all, they did save up all year to make this Mexican tour, to stay in stuffy hotels and eat the food they’re used to. They want to be at home away from home, but you… you indulged yourself, Mr. Shannon. You did conduct the tour as if it was just for you…” Hannah understands the tourists’ right to the travel of their preference and purchase. Of course, Hannah is like Shannon.

Shannon’s and Hannah’s inevitable having to give way to Miss Fellowes and her group’s right to a vacation in the style of their choosing aptly expresses the grudging encounter between “the traveler” and “the tourist.” Intellectuals of the time lamented the metamorphosis of the traveler into the tourist and the difference between them. Williams appears to be quite taken by it. The play carefully sustains the different preferences, tensions, and cultural anxieties that plague at least two kinds of tourists—the more worldly and spirited traveler and the superficial, mass tourist. It is, after all, with

72 Daniel Boorstin defines this new tourist traveler in his book *The Image* (1962), discussed in Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 226. Here is an excerpt: “Where the old-style traveler was ‘active,’ searching for different people and new knowledge the modern tourist is ‘passive’: He expects interesting things to happen to him. The guided tour guarantees excitement without risk. One never encounters the natives, just one’s fellow passengers. Normally, the tourist is isolated from the landscape he traverses… the airplanes that… stock the same magazines… the international hotel chains with their identical interiors differentiated only by an inoffensive bit of ‘local’ atmosphere… sightseeing buses, the obsession with taking pictures and buying postcards, all conspire to transform the external world into a movie set, and travel itself into a montage of illusions…”
such distinctions that Williams is able to separate the travelers from the tourists so that the travelers may speak to a greater issue at stake—how to survive panic and alienation, or as he has said elsewhere, “how to live beyond despair and still live” (Williams 105). For example, in contrast to the lady tourists, Shannon and Hannah are able to comment upon the loneliness of travel—even in a crowd, what constitutes “home,” and the “impermanence of things lately” in a quickly modernizing present. These are issues that plague the traveler and not the tourist.

And so the mass lady tourists are proven to be unfit for the Costa Verde hotel and get written out, leaving the travelers—Hannah, Shannon, Nonno, and Maxine—to survive a stormy tropical night together. They are very much and very painfully at the end of their ropes. The panicky “night” of the Iguana is thus a rather apocalyptic night—and the setting for the key scenes of the play. Interestingly, Maxine, the spitfire sensualist and hostess of the hotel is among the travelers and challenges Shannon even as she courts him. I highlight the battle of the sexes between Maxine and Shannon in the next chapter. Here, I move to the crisis of the play as Williams does, which like in the story, ultimately takes place between two travelers. Thus, Maxine gets cast aside (repeatedly) so that it is Hannah who accompanies Shannon once he is tied up in the hammock. She makes poppy seed tea for him, herself, and Nonno as she attempts to talk Shannon through his “fever.” Significantly, whereas Maxine provokes Shannon with her coarseness and audacity, the classy and more reserved Hannah soothes him with her presence. But Hannah turns out to be very much a woman, after all, in a way that upholds Maxine’s maxim, “A man and a woman have got to challenge each other.” Hannah takes advantage of Shannon’s “tied up condition” to set him straight on his ways with women along with his self-indulgent
breakdowns at the Costa Verde hotel. As a result, on that perilous night, when Shannon is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and Hannah is exhausted from her travels and from caring for her ailing grandfather, they move past their pretenses. They talk about many things: Shannon’s crisis of faith, the kind of priest that Shannon might be despite his skepticism about God, their sexual histories, Hannah’s relationship with her grandfather, and their relationships with their “spooks,” or the personal demons that haunt them. Williams reveals that for Shannon and Hannah travel signifies not only movement abroad, or a kind of modernist exile, but “subterranean travels [as well], … the journeys that the spooked and bedeviled people are forced to take through … the unlighted sides of their natures.”

As the play sustains these fragile and more complicated figures, it recalls Williams’ early Mexican travels. The key protagonists are like Williams. They are vulnerable expatriates, who are self-conscious of their contradictory role in a difficult, modernizing world. Significantly, one of the ways in which Williams travelers are contradictory is that they are now deeply implicated in the industry that tourism has become, if simply because to survive economically, they must now use their talents to cater to tourists. Even Maxine is aware that she is using her “talents” as a hostess/bartender to make the hotel attractive to tourists, even as she is aware that her talents are transitory: “I’ve got five more years, maybe ten, to make this place attractive to the male clientele, the middle-aged ones at least.” This understanding serves to bond the travelers, even as their panic heightens when the lady tourists (their source of income) leave. Shannon tells Hannah, “My God, you’re a hustler, a fantastic cool hustler” and Hannah answers, “Like you, Mr. Shannon.” Although Williams maintains the uneasy
binaries that traditionally distinguish “true” travelers and tourists—soulful v. superficial, art v. commerce, “real” places v. “pseudo-spaces,” etc.—he demonstrates that, as Caren Kaplan contends, such distinctions have become more difficult to maintain as tourist and traveler infrastructures have become almost inextricable (Kaplan 1996).

And still—the travelers appear to be rooted in and performing a modernist sensibility. There is the poignant detail that while sketching Shannon, Hannah recalls that “when the Mexican painter Siqueiros did his portrait of the American poet Hart Crane he had to paint him with closed eyes because he couldn’t paint his eyes open—there was too much pain in them.” Their traveler precedent—the modernist artist in Mexico— is in this way re-invoked to help situate the travel scene and to define Shannon, Hannah, and even Nonno and Maxine as travelers who are artistic, sensual, and spiritual, but also tormented within. They continue to search the world for an authenticity and meaning that can help repair the fragmentation and alienation that they feel in a quickly modernizing, globalizing present. Aptly, this changing world is represented in touristic fashion when Hannah explains,

We go back to a hotel where we’ve been many times before and it isn’t there anymore. It’s been demolished and there’s one of those glass, brassy new ones. Or if the old one’s still there, the manager or the Maitre D who always welcomed us back so cordially before has been replaced by someone new who looks at us with suspicion.

The reader can gather that the traveler is regarded suspiciously because, as he is replaced by the tourist, the traveler now figures as out of place and rather queer.

But the play celebrates that its protagonists are still exiles in the quickly modernizing world; it creates a space where the travelers can find and reaffirm one another. The hotel and verandah between the sky and the still water beach from
Williams’s 1940 Mexican travels reappear to (re)construct this space. And, Hannah’s reaching out to Shannon across “broken gates between two people… even if it’s just for one night only… on a veranda outside their … separate cubicles” serves across many levels as the resolution of the [Western] traveler’s nightmare—dislocation, strandedness and fear—with the traveler’s dream: a moment of meaning between interesting people in an alien world. Thus, although characterized by its easy-going, almost bohemian sense of travel, and Williams’ wry and wild sense of humor, the play upholds its protagonists’ impulse to “reach out across broken gates” between people for courage, answers, and even a kind of grace. Hannah’s efforts to help Shannon construct the Costa Verde Hotel as the kind of space in which such encounters can happen.

In turn, Williams (and later Huston in his film reproduction of the play) reconstructs tropical Mexico as a fantastic space in which apocalyptic electrical storms can bring Shannon nearer to his God, ugly tied up iguanas can symbolize man “trying to get past the end of [his] god damn rope,” and a brief tropical night suspended against the sweltering heat can deliver the hope—like the hammock hanging over the rainforest—that there is a place “out there” where one can at times simply “stop.” It is all about foreigners, and although written as “allegorical,” the veranda and hammock between the sky and still water beach in Mexico is perpetuated as an ideal tourist space for a particular kind of traveler. Tropical, rustic, and off-the beaten path, this kind of resort is posed as “the place” to escape modern unease—as it is also presented as a place where a passing artist can finish his final work.

In such ways, I William’s play acts as a telling travel narrative in the way that it follows the traveler into a changing scene of travel that is overwhelmed by mass tourism
and signs of globalization. The hotel and Williams’ text serve as literary “contact zones” in which earlier representations of travel and travelers, including those from the Victorian and Gilded Age—the spinster or singular lady traveler, the (Southern) gentleman traveler filter across a modernist stage or script of travel into newly emergent representations (Pratt 1992). The characters of the play can also be read as different components of Tennessee Williams the traveler as the first characters, the story characters, refract into new variants. As the travel narrative itself travels to new genres, we see the benefits of a play and its infinite variations. We also see the foreign writer’s propensity to cast Mexico as a place that can provoke liminal, almost carnivalesque, caricatures and performances. This propensity we will continue to see as we study the changes that John Huston makes as he adapts the play and tweaks its gender politics to create the film version of *The Night of the Iguana*. The gendered inversions of the film will get cast on the beaches of a particular seaside resort, bringing the “modern beach” to the Mexican Riviera.

**Conclusion: Into the Beach**

To segue into my next chapter on the touristic manifestations of the film, I want to offer what I think is the origin of one of the play’s most liminal characters, Maxine—because her place of origin provides us with insights into how Williams production is also situated in the broader history of the beach. Through Maxine we can arrive at the modern beach that will be transported to Mexico. We may regard Maxine, as Shannon does, as the “black widow” hotel proprietor—or the patroness of the Costa Verde Hotel, a liminal inn. I want to suggest that Maxine also stems from Tennessee Williams first
Mexican travels in Acapulco in 1940 and that although he attempts to elude her, she sneakily slips back into his travels’ future iterations.

In fact, when Tennessee Williams first arrives in Acapulco, the Costa Verde hotel is not the first hotel at which he stays. Initially, he arrives at another hotel, one that makes enough of an impression on him that he also describes it in “A Summer of Discovery.” Indeed, in that reminiscence, Williams claims that the “steaming hot squalor” of the place drives him to look for other accommodations, nearer the beaches. Perhaps he constructs this first hotel and then walks away from it as a rhetorical strategy - to convey to his readers that his new play, The Night of the Iguana, is a step away from deviance. But perhaps, the inn also spooks him away.

It is a “fantastic hotel,” he recalls, despite the fact that it is near the central plaza, and it is fantastic in the way he describes it. The reader quickly gathers that it is fantastic in part because it is a space inhabited by the carnivalesque. Its garden is inverted by jungle, its protruding proprietor must squeeze through the doorways, and its patio is site for a further spectacle performed every morning. Appropriately, its proprietor is also something of a drag queen.

All the rooms opened onto a large patio-garden containing parrots, monkeys, and the proprietor of the hotel, who was so fat that he could hardly squeeze into a room at the place. Much of his time was devoted to cosmetic treatments which were administered in the patio. Every morning a very lively young barber would arrive to touch up the proprietor’s hair with henna and give him a marcel wave and a cold cream facial. Since the dyed, waved hair was quite long and the proprietor spoke in a falsetto voice and was always clad in a bright silk kimono, I wasn’t quite sure of his sex till I heard him addressed as Señor something-or-other by one of his employees. (Williams 140)

Whether the proprietor is Mexican or foreign, “he” is the perfect antecedent to Maxine; he is literally “bigger than life and twice as unnatural.” Moreover, we can read
Tennessee Williams’ description of the inn as a moment in which the foreigner’s experience of a Mexican coastal resort coincides with one version of the world-wide seaside resort as it has been constructed by the fascinating, and always Westernized, developments of tourism. In this version, the seaside or waterfront is deviant, temptingly incarnated, and liminal. It is also gender-bending. And the seaside has a history, informed by several trajectories, by way of Britain, the Mediterranean, and the post-colonial tropics. Most simply, as John Urry informs us in The Tourist Gaze, the modern beach originates when, in the mid-19th century, a medicalised beach is replaced by a pleasure beach, and the pleasure beach quickly becomes “a liminal zone, a built-in escape from the patterns and rhythms of everyday life” (Urry, 31; Shields, part 2). Urry and Shields, in turn, tell us that

Such a zone had a further characteristic, of carnival, as the beach became noisy and crowded, full of unpredictable social mixing, and involving the inversion of social hierarchies and moral codes. In the classic medieval carnival, the grotesque body was counterposed to the disciplined body of propriety and authority; in the 19th century holiday carnival the grotesque body was shamefully uncovered and open to the gaze of others. (31)

Let us now look to see how similar liminal performances associated with the modern beach manifest themselves in the film and on the ground, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, when The Night of the Iguana is filmed on location.
Chapter 4

Exploring the Back Spaces of Tourism:
John Huston’s Production of The Night of the Iguana and the Construction of Puerto Vallarta as a Tourist Site

There is no place where a wife is so much wanted as in the Tropics; but then comes the rub—how to keep the wife alive.
--Another Richard Burton (1821-1890) from Wanderings in West Africa

One Man, Three Women, One Night, The Night of the Iguana, Never—Since Man Has Known Woman—Has There Been Such a Night!
The Night of the Iguana Film Trailer, MGM 1964

I thought you were sexless but you’ve suddenly turned into a woman. Know how do I know that? Because you—not me—are taking pleasure in my tied-up condition. All women, whether they face it or not, want to see a man in a tied-up situation. They work at it all their lives, to get a man in a tied-up situation. Their lives are fulfilled, they’re satisfied at last, when they get a man, or as many men as they can, in the tied-up situation.

After The Night of the Iguana, Huston continued to return...settling finally by the sea at Las Caletas, “a place thought of as an island because it faces the sea and its back is to the jungle.” It was a place very much like the early Puerto Vallarta. There were no roads to it and the nearest village was about half an hour away by jungle trail. In a sentiment tinged with imperialist nostalgia, he expressed in his biography, “No one—other than an old man who passes there on an occasional trip—between Las Caletas and Vallarta seems to give a damn what happens to the place. He would like to see it torn down and given back to the iguanas. The old man is me of course.”

73 This quote comes from a conference paper, “The ‘Fantastic’ Characters and Spaces of Tennessee Williams and John Huston’s The Night of the Iguana and 1950s and 60s Tourism in Puerto Vallarta.” I cite John Huston in “Going to Live By The Sea.” See Homenaje a John Huston, last entry. It is taken from John Huston’s biography, An Open Book. I also cite Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” Culture and Truth, 68-87. Rosaldo is concerned with a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed. By using a pose of innocent
As a travel narrative, *The Night of the Iguana* appeared to take on a life of its own after Tennessee Williams’s production of the play. Inspired by themes of tourism and travel, it spawned surprising touristic manifestations when John Huston decided to produce Williams’s play as a film. That he filmed it in a tiny and previously “undiscovered” Mexican fishing village, on the edge of an emerald-blue bay backed by green, palm-covered mountains (as it is so often described), added to its appeal. Also adding to its appeal was the film trailer cited above. Inspired by Williams’ exilic tendencies and liminal desires, Huston tweaked *The Night of the Iguana* to highlight its sex battles and borderland erotics. Adding further to the film’s appeal, as we see also in the epigraphs above, the woman traveler vigorously re-emerged, this time on the screen, more highly sexed and truly “larger than life,” inciting mythic sex battles, even as she modeled newly emerging travel identities. Just as in Williams’s play, she emerged in multiple forms: as the precocious and seductive young woman traveler, the tolerant, adventurous spinster, and as the middle aged expatriate with an extravagant lust for life—all on the loose in the tropics of Mexico and this time represented by such extravagant film icons as Sue Lyon, Deborah Kerr, and Ava Gardner. Powerfully packaged, the film and its scandalous celebrity publicity captivated the tourist gaze and became a catalyst for other tourist productions, including the figurative and literal construction, in relation to the film, of a small resort on the Mexican Riviera named Puerto Vallarta. It became the place where all of this outlandish commotion occurred. In this chapter, I study the film

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\(^{74}\) Despite the obvious appeal of the work’s outrageously gendered politics, Huston appears to have also been drawn to the work’s more soulful elements: “The theme of *The Night of the Iguana* is of loose, random souls trying to account for themselves and finally being able to do so through love. The old man, when he read the poem, expressed the feeling of the whole work, the night of the old man’s death. It was that and the execution and the demonstration of it which attracted me to the play. Very moving. Despite its audacious sexual politics, it was with this emotional thrust as well that the film continued to project Williams’s exilic tendencies and to captivate particular kinds of travelers. See Pratley, 143.
and its touristic manifestations on the beaches of Puerto Vallarta as the “after-productions” of Wiliams’ *The Night of the Iguana*.

To identify and approach these after-productions, I want to make use of the concept of “front spaces” and “back spaces,” as used by tourism scholars and as first considered by Dean MacCannell, author of *The Tourist* (1976), a seminal book in the field of tourism studies. I want to use it in a continued attentiveness to the constructedness of tourist sites and tourist spaces. For instance, in chapter three I examined the ways in which Williams’s characters deployed the spatial dynamics of the Costa Verde Hotel in their performances of exile and desire, taking this dilapidated hotel on a cliff at the edge of the sea and transforming it into—or constructing it as—a poetic and exilic space for wayward travelers. Here, in chapter four, I sketch out the ways in which tourist productions are “staged” so that certain associations and facades get cast over places transforming them into consumable tourist spaces. In short, I move now to an account of how the tiny fishing village in which *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed was constructed before the eyes of the world as a tourist site that invited travelers to fantasize about it as a glamorized, eroticised space of travel.

Borrowing from sociologist Ervin Goffman, MacCannell uses the idea of “front spaces” and “back spaces” to examine the staging of authenticity at tourism sites. Because the modern tourist actively seeks the authentic in other places, the staging of authenticity is crucial in the production of tourist sites. Authenticity corresponds to a sense of reality and truth in every day life. In modern life, where the intimate ties and social relations that ensure a sense of reality have been severed or abstracted by industrialization and modern technologies, a sense of authenticity can only be established
through a series of facades and prefabricated encounters that promise that something authentic lies within. The façade, then, is the “front space”—the spectacle that is the tourist site. The “backspace” is the behind-the-scenes glimpse, stage, or encounter that expresses the inner workings of the site. The “backspace” is where the authenticity of the place lies. To simplify this paradigm, we may think in terms of an “outside” production of a place consisting of numerous front spaces in the form of touristic sites, stories, or spectacles and an “inside” composed of back spaces. These back spaces are also the locally inhabited spaces where actual residents and a preexisting sense of place abide. It is important to understand that these front and back spaces occur as a series of stages or facades in which reality and authenticity are mystified so that they appear forever out of reach. Otherwise, the façade would appear as the front or illusion that it is. The tourist wishing to engage the authenticity of a place will always be proceeding further and further into its back spaces.

Contemporary tourism scholars have corrected MacCannell’s theory by adding that one must also include the ways in which tourists actually embody these front and back spaces and self-consciously inhabit, see through, or transform them once they are in them. “Post-tourists,” or post-modern tourists, for example, might approach these sites quite aware that they are fabricated and that as guests, they are actively taking part in the play of place and performance that produces them (Feifer 1986). In this sense, he or she is prepared for the ironic interplay of constructed experiences (Coleman and Crang 5), and amused or intrigued by it all, may gladly play the role of tourist and even regard the play or production of such places and the interrelations involved, between outsiders and native locals for instance, as what is really authentic about the experience. But also it is
in these back spaces, that local inhabitants, or the natives visited upon, actively participate in this encounter, with their own agency, as they return the tourist gaze. Local inhabitants too may redirect if not correct the tourist experience. The other principal correction to MacCannell’s theorizing is that this front space/back space model for understanding tourist sites is also an outside/inside paradigm that rests on the notion that there can be a self-contained, uncontaminated inner culture within, which once made vulnerable, is at the mercy of outside influences. These corrections, however, do not take away from the usefulness of the front space/back space paradigm and will certainly become apparent as definite factors in the tourism dynamic in the examples that I present. Certainly, we will see that in the back spaces of the tourist spectacle that Puerto Vallarta becomes, local writers and histories tell a larger local travel history that includes whalers, the Black Ships of the Orient, pirates, mining and banana plantations. These histories recognize the permeability of the region simply as a result of its seaside location and existence as a natural port.

In this chapter, then, I want to use MacCannell’s theory to identify a series of after-productions that were either inspired by or reactions to The Night of the Iguana. First, to continue to understand the politics of The Night of the Iguana as a text and a traveling travel narrative that allows us to trace changing travel scenes--and the changing sexual politics of travel that define them-- I identify Huston’s production, or film version, as a first after-production as well as “front space.” This after-production includes a portrayal of tourists and travelers and their exilic and eroticised adventures at the Costa Verde Hotel in a little town called Puerto Vallarta. It is projected on the screen and in the imagination. Williams’s original production of his travel narrative, the play, is one of the
film’s “back spaces,” and the changes that Huston makes are typical of the machinations and manipulations that occur in the “behind the scenes” work of the tourism industry. Thus I begin with a first series of after-productions of *The Night of the Iguana*: the changing sexual politics of the text and how it constructed a site of borderland erotics—by placing provocative women traveler icons on the beaches of Puerto Vallarta.

I then turn to a second series of after-productions, the travel space “discovered by” *The Night of the Iguana* and its “back spaces.” For indeed, in Puerto Vallarta we find the interesting dynamic in which the “discovery” and touristic transformation of a once very isolated space is attributed to the production of a film based on a literary text, John Huston’s film version of Tennessee Williams’ *The Night of the Iguana*. Here I discuss the place images of Puerto Vallarta that began to circulate quite spectacularly at a specific moment, 1963, across international media scapes (American, Canadian, and European) with the gossipy celebrity publicity that accompanied the production of the film. These place images contributed to the rumors and stories about this little point on Mexico’s Pacific coast and helped to construct it as the place where *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed and where its eccentric and glamorous characters and celebrities frolicked. With these images came the declaration or announcement that *The Night of the Iguana* had discovered Puerto Vallarta. Thus I explain how the film became a discovery myth of this place and I refer to the ways in which this myth continues to be perpetuated today.

But there are also many “back spaces” to the front space or image of Puerto Vallarta as the place where *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed. These back spaces are crucial because they house the “inside” responses—or the response of “insiders,” the actual inhabitants of the place to the staging of the place they inhabit as a spectacle for
tourists. Here, I return to the notion that tourist spaces are embodied and experienced in multiple ways by both tourists and “natives.” I return also to the corrections that tourism scholars have made to the front space/back space paradigm especially in relation to the return gaze and the ways that it is mobilized. Indeed, we see that at times locals express their disagreement with tourist claims in performative ways through gestures, protests, or pointed local tours. We see that they also assert alternative historical narratives and travel histories to the tourist myths that are generated. And I include a symbolic example to show that sometimes, tourists themselves stumble upon ruins or traces that serve as symbolic windows into disruptive travel genealogies, windows which appear when least expected—and that make possible the unveiling of more deeply lived histories which have been diligently recorded by locals in their own remembrances and chronicles of their native place. Histories by local Mexicans and early travelers to Puerto Vallarta who have become residents of Vallarta reveal that the tourist gaze returned (back on the tourist) has always been a powerful counter-discoursive response to the film’s compelling touristic legacies. It also becomes apparent that like the tourist gaze, this return gaze is also embodied, performed, and asserted in both brazen and subtle ways.

To demonstrate the way in which the tourist gaze is returned, I have chosen four back spaces as examples that are both typical and fascinating. The first is a brief, alternative history of modern tourism in the region that I have pieced together based on published histories by local Mexican residents and early American travelers already familiar with Puerto Vallarta before the filming. Then I take up a rather surprising back space to the images of the film-- the “literal construction” of the Costa Verde Hotel in Mismaloya, a lovely cove 6 miles from Puerto Vallarta. That the hotel had to be built
from scratch and the tourist bus and actors in the film transported by sea on a panga
because no roads or hotels yet existed in Mismaloya is expressive of the way in which the
film projected an image of this little town as a tourist stop before it had the infrastructure
or capacity to host mass tourists. The third back space example is traced through a relic
from an even earlier travel moment, a dilapidated hotel, the “Hotel Delicias” that sat near
“Los Muertos” beach in the late 50s and 60s when tourists began to arrive. I read it as a
window into the “back space” that is an earlier American presence and site in the region,
The American Montgomery Banana Plantation Company, which ties modern tourism to
an imperialist and capitalist lineage of travelers in the region. Fourth and last, I describe
an actual contemporary tour of Puerto Vallarta, the “Tropical Tour,” that begins by taking
its guests directly into a back space of Puerto Vallarta, the local neighborhood and suburb
of “El Pitillal.” The tour stops here to show guests where the workers that sustain the
tourist industry reside so that they may see “the other side of the tortilla,” the other side
of touristy Puerto Vallarta.

Let us begin, then, with the first after-production of Williams’ play, John
Huston’s film, The Night of the Iguana, and the travel performances it inspired on the
beaches of Puerto Vallarta.

I. A First Series of After-Productions: Sex Battles, Women in the Tropics, and the
Eroticised Mexican Beach

Sex Battles in The Night of the Iguana, the Film

When in 1963, John Huston produced The Night of the Iguana as a contemporary
film, the most dramatic changes again occurred in relation to gender. As we have seen,
in the story a woman traveler intrudes upon two male travelers. When in the play, the
male friend whom Shannon seeks at the Costa Verde Hotel turns out to be dead, earlier
homosocial affiliations give way to a battle of the sexes. In the film, these sexual politics give rise to a disagreement between men—the director and the author. That the woman traveler continues to be an unruly phenomenon who provokes even as she resists male reactions, can be seen in the way that she becomes a point of contention between Williams and Huston-- while once again upstaging the male traveler and redirecting the impact that the work’s sexualized intrigue will have in its various after-productions.

Tellingly, Huston decides that Williams has been unfair to Maxine’s character and that he will redeem the lusty widow who wishes to keep Shannon at her hotel, in part by changing the ending—to let Shannon, whom she this time loves sincerely and not as a black widow spider, remain with her at the Costa Verde Hotel.

I had seen the play and liked it, with reservations. I was a great admirer of Tennessee Williams. Tony and I wrote the script and we changed the finish. It seemed to me that Tennessee had wrenched it around to suit his own philosophy of the spiderlike qualities of womankind when Maxine Faulk (the role Ava Gardner played) consumed her lover, as it were. He thought about it, we had a difference of opinion. No quarrel or anything of that kind, but he maintained his opinion. Finally, I accused Tennessee of twisting his characters to his own purpose and he didn’t deny this. I said it in defense because I liked the girl and I didn’t see any reason for an unhappy ending. In fact, it was a distortion. (Pratley 142)

Maxine becomes a more central figure and a redeemed figure as Huston highlights the scandalous love triangle that is expected to define the film’s intrigue and make it a hit.

The film indeed becomes a classic, but its sexual politics have a very different effect than intended by Huston. As is evident in the declaration of the film trailer in the opening of this chapter, the triangulated intrigue captured in the filming of one night in a tropical hotel is expected to define the film’s attraction and impact. Yet, after the film, the most compelling image that remains in popular culture— and locally in Puerto Vallarta—is that of Maxine dancing on the beach at night with her Mexican houseboys--
her lovers. The dancing Maxine, in turn, is refigured by Charlotte/Sue Lyon dancing spontaneously, alone, and seductively at the local Mexican bar. Despite the scandal and intrigue evoked by the image of one man wrestling to extricate himself from the attention of three women, the women travelers upstage the male exile. The film misses its anticipated impact when it is the women’s sexual politics that become most compelling, and Maxine and the lady travelers steal the show.

In Puerto Vallarta this image of Maxine/Ava helps to define a new generation of Western women travelers in Mexico. These are audacious women travelers who are not afraid to recruit local Mexican male escorts—“lancheros” (boatmen) or “beach boys”—to serve as their traveling companions. Because the play is originally set in Acapulco; and because, even in the film, Maxine brings her beach boys to Puerto Vallarta from Acapulco where they were former cliff divers; we may assume that this “tradition” begins in Acapulco, Mexico’s first major international beach resort. Nevertheless, it is certain that it also takes strong hold in Puerto Vallarta and becomes especially visible after the film.

**Borderland Erotics On the Mexican Beach**

The Mexican beach became a stimulating cultural terrain that we may read as a site of borderland erotics—a term that I used in chapter two to explore some of the gender politics that modernist women writers were already exploring in the context of travel in the teens and 20s. Again, I borrow the concept of “borderland erotics” from American anthropologist Sherry Ortner and her essay, “Borderland Politics and Erotics. Gender and Sexuality in Himalayan Mountaineering.” In this study of Western women travelers in the 1970s, Ortner advances the notion that encounters and transactions in
borderlands--such as the contact zones produced by tourism--are always gendered and eroticized, both in practice and in the imagination. Parties in borderlands meet as gendered beings with gendered fantasies, anxieties, and desires. These encounters are shaped not only by Western and foreign gender categories, but also by Western and nonwestern gender Politics—that is, politics between Western women and Western men and between nonwestern women and nonwestern men, that exist even before contact. For Ortner, these distinct politics and “cultures” come into play in the interactions between Westerners and nonwesterners, and give the whole process an extraordinary dynamism and complexity (Ortner 182,184).

It is a changing politics between western women and western men—by which I mean, North American women and North American men—that plays out in Williams’s play and Huston’s film, in the battle of the sexes represented. This politics is elaborated further in the changes and gendered displacements that occur between the play and the film. In the film, Shannon is removed from the grittier confrontations that occur between him and the women at the Costa Verde Hotel. In fact, the film retreats from many of the challenges that occur between the sexes in the play. And it is not a coincidence that these challenges are especially played out between Shannon (Richard Burton) and Maxine (Ava Gardner)—two very provocative sex symbols. Challenges between the two manifest most acutely in Maxine’s persona and sexuality and Shannon’s retorts. Maxine dresses revealingly and uses sensual body language. Shannon scolds her for it, declaring with a sadistic grin: “Maxine, honey, whoever told you that you look good in tight pants was not a sincere friend of yours”; and “Maxine, your ass—excuse me, Miss Jelkes—your hips, Maxine, are too fat for this verandah.” Because Maxine takes her Mexican
“house-boys” as lovers, Shannon calls her a “whore.” In the play, when Maxine makes her striking declaration, “I know the difference between sex and love,” Shannon recoils; in the film, he can’t be subject to such a declaration. Yet, Maxine dares to ask Shannon in both play and film—why he takes younger women, as she makes a second startling declaration: “a man and a woman have got to challenge each other.” Holding fast to a double standard, Shannon simply cannot control his passionate impulses and fails to regard Maxine as an equal.

The film, then, “edits” Maxine’s challenges. She makes her startling declaration about sex and love instead to Hannah. And in the film, it is Maxine not Shannon, who tells Hannah brightly, “‘By God, you’re a hustler, aren’t you, you’re a fantastic cool hustler.” Thus, Shannon fails to recognize even Hannah’s scheming ways. Nor does Huston allow Maxine to perceptively compare her two male objects of attraction, Shannon and the Mexican diving boys, as Williams does very obviously in the play, when Shannon “paces restlessly down the verandah” and:

Maxine divides her attention between his tall, lean figure, that seems incapable of stillness, and the wriggling bodies of the Mexican boys lying on their stomachs half under the verandah—as if she were mentally comparing two opposite attractions to her simple, sensual nature. Shannon turns at the end of the verandah and sees her eyes fixed on him. (64)

To be fit as Shannon’s match in the film, Maxine is cast as a more vulnerable, tender woman. She is ready to give up her lovers for the man she truly loves, Shannon, espousing a notion of romantic love that reforms and redeems her. She is also ten years younger.

Yet, in the film, what makes the image of Ava Gardner as she frolicks with her Mexican beach boys so infuriating to Shannon—and so compelling to the greater
audience—is not the audacious but tender vulnerability she portrays or the sexual intrigue between American women and Mexican men that her image appears to project, but instead, its ability to capture the tensions that this image provokes (and so aptly encapsulates) between American women and American men. Certainly in the film, Maxine’s and even young Charlotte’s unruly, scandalous behavior upset Shannon. Even Fred (while still living) chooses to look away and not confront Maxine about her lovers. Since he is impotent (and easygoing), as Maxine relates, he turns instead to fishing.

Female Icons and Their Captivating Eroticisms

Although it is not in the purview of this dissertation, I want to stop briefly to suggest some of the ways in which one might come to understand why the image of a woman traveler like Maxine/Ava Gardner had the potential to become a compelling icon. First, one might find it useful and interesting to contextualize The Night of the Iguana (play and film) as a 1960s production entering into dialogue with other representations of women and perhaps even women travelers. For instance, if one were to consider this eccentric film’s representations of explosive, complexly sexed women (ranging from highly sexed to sexless to repressed) with powerful personalities to be at one end of a spectrum, the women subjects of a work like Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique, a literary hit in 1963, might be at the other end of the spectrum. After all, The Feminine Mystique is about desperate, “shut-in,” middle-class, suburban housewives who are barely learning (again, post WWII) how to venture out of their homes and circumscribed lives. In the face of such frustrated female representations, one can already begin to see that the women of The Night of the Iguana were a cultural force because they offered an alternative set of female possibilities. Juxtaposed against suburban, middle-class
housewives, Maxine, Charlotte, and even Hannah supplied new counter-cultural female icons with an exciting range of complexity and allure; they were each, in their own way, single, daring, mobile, and adventuresome. The film’s productive force is further compounded if one considers the provocative overlay of powerful film icons—Ava Gardner, Elizabeth Taylor, and Sue Lyon—that also fuels its female eroticism. Here, one also realizes that these icons signal to, even as they are fueled by, earlier film icons—tough, independent, savvy actresses, ‘divas,’ like Dietrich, Garbo, Hepburn, Harlow. One would then be prompted to look at feminists’ analyses of women film icons beginning in the 1930s and 1940s to trace why it is that the brilliant battle of wits (the ceaseless sparring between women and men) in these earlier productions turns into the battle of the sexes that we see in reflected in a later production like *The Night of the Iguana* (and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, among others), in which the release of powerful female icons appears to signify the undoing of the male character. Why is it that in earlier films, the masculinity of male characters (as represented by actors like Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable) remains in tact? Whereas by the time one reaches films like *The Night of the Iguana* male characters like Shannon (Richard Burton, no less) become, as he puts it, “all tied up”—signaling to an all out crisis of masculinity. Interesting questions emerge that suggest that the woman traveler of the later 20th century appears to be a female icon with a multifaceted past, that she is situated in a shifting gender politics that spans the earlier 20th century (and that includes the New Woman and earlier film icons), and that she is a product of an intriguing and contradictory historical trajectory.
As a result of John Huston’s film, the contentious gender politics first expressed by Tennessee Williams’s story and play, continued to shift, and were spectacularly cast in still contentious ways on the beaches of tourist Mexico. Again, like the construction of the Costa Verde hotel, this construction was all about foreigners, an American erotics of culture figured through the terms of tourism and travel, and in this way let loose, to be sorted out, abroad. In this particular context, the immediate tensions (between American women and American men) captured in *The Night of the Iguana* reflect the effects produced by western women travelers in the late 1950s and in the 1960s as they begin to shake up and challenge the gender categories that define them at home. As Sherry Ortner reminds us, a transformation of gender politics was not simply occurring within the confines of the U.S.; it was occurring transnationally, as patterns of sexual liberation and feminism were going global (she is careful not to confuse the two). In this sense, travel and places abroad offered the West a mode and “a space” in which to work out its anxiety about such changes—especially if such behaviors on the part of women could not yet be enacted at home. It is interesting to me that this was happening in Puerto Vallarta in the early 1960s, even before the 1970s Feminism that Ortner uses as a point of departure for her study; in Mexico we can see the gendered dynamic that will also fuel the disruptive ways of the women travelers of Ortner’s study. As a site of borderland erotics,

75 In my exchanges with locals in doing research, I talked with local Mexicans and Americans who knew of certain women travelers, like Liz Ruby, who had already raised their families in the States and had come to Mexico to live a new and different life, independent of any husbands. They had creative interests as well and sponsored something artistic or beneficial in the community. I was able to talk with such a woman, Silver Alexander, who in some ways deemed herself a kind of radical as she also recalled the obstacles and rumors that snared her projects and stay. What seemed to recur in my conversations with early American travelers to the region (who stayed and became expatriates) and Mexican locals is that two types of Anglo-American women travelers made their presence especially felt: the women who used local Mexican “beach boys” or “lancheros” as escorts, as they let loose in this beach resort and the more independent older women who stayed and adapted to a new life in Mexico.
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico is like the Himalayas in Ortner’s study, offering a similar kind of remote and liminal setting for women’s more adventurous behavior (than accustomed in the U.S.), and it was just next door.

As Ortner also suggests, feminism also occurred elsewhere and did not simply originate in the West. Mexican women in Puerto Vallarta were also staging their own revolution as part of the first generation of women to pursue an education and jobs—mostly as teachers, office personnel, and service workers. Many would leave the space that is Puerto Vallarta to travel to the North, or the U.S. By way of their own migrations and borderland encounters first in touristic Mexico and then in the States, they would become highly mobile “travelers” as well, but of a very different kind. They became a traveling pool of laborers and cultural translators in the transnational migration from Mexico to the United States, and belonged to a wholly different category--not one of leisure, but of immigration and struggle. These Mexican women “travelers” represented a strikingly different counterpart to the woman traveler represented by Maxine/Ava Gardner; they represented the migrant laborer.

As I leave this section, I want to return to the notion of front spaces and back spaces as I regard the image of dancing Maxine/Ava Gardner one last time and read it as a window into the future of Mexican tourism. As I have shown, the image of Maxine/Ava dancing on the beach at the Costa Verde Hotel is a fascinating symbol of shifting 1960s gender politics in American travel abroad and in American culture at home. I want to suggest that one can also read this image as a window into the future, one that also props the 1960s beach as a “back space” to a future “front space,” or tourist spectacle: the young, unruly, and sexually transgressive beach of the 1990s. A vivid
example that comes to mind is MTV’s “The Real Cancun.” Indeed, as I watch MTV’s brazen representations of women travelers, I am also reminded of Charlotte, Shannon’s precocious young lover, played by Sue Lyon just after Lolita. The two beaches—the 1960s beach and 1990s beach—can also be juxtaposed so that they occur along a spectrum in that each represents how Mexico markets itself to tourists in the 20th century. In this sense, the isolated setting in the movie poster image of Ava splashing around with her Mexican cabana boys on the primitive, natural beach is at one end of the spectrum and signifies tourism “off the beaten path” or even what we know today as eco-tourism. But the behavior captured by the image (Ava’s dancing and frolicking with men) also points to the other end: the mass tourism of young people on the loose (and quite sexually) in Mexico’s mass resort beaches during Spring Break. It seems a kind of celebratory image as the woman traveler continues to be liberated over time, and yet--it’s crucial to note the ambivalence that these spectacles create for all women travelers. If one looks closely at the Ava Gardner movie poster promoting The Night of the Iguana and considers the details of the story, one becomes aware of a very different sexual politics; Maxine is not dancing in the movie poster, but fighting off the beach boys to get away. As a window into the future of Mexican tourism, or a backspace to a future spectacle, this image of Ava Gardner carries with it an uneasy warning for women: the behavior depicted in this highly gendered and eroticized spectacle can also lead women into potentially dangerous situations.

II. A Second Series of After-productions: The Travel Space “Discovered by” The Night of the Iguana and Its Many “Back Spaces”

Place Images of Puerto Vallarta as The Place Where The Night of the Iguana Was Filmed
I now switch gears to point to a very different series of after-productions fueled by the play and film—this time, afterproductions that occur in reaction to Puerto Vallarta’s “discovery” as a tourist site. The afterproductions in this section occur as a different series of backspaces to the front space, or spectacle, of Puerto Vallarta projected by John Huston’s film; they are the backspaces that prop up against the front space spectacle that captures how Puerto Vallarta was discovered and constructed in relation to the film. As I related in the opening of this chapter, in Puerto Vallarta one finds the interesting dynamic in which the “discovery” and touristic transformation of a once very isolated place is attributed to the production of a film based on a literary text. It is a surprisingly concrete example of the way in which literary travel constructs tourist spaces—and in this way, it is a kind of discovery narrative. According to this tourist myth, *The Night of the Iguana* inspired the first great boom of tourism in Puerto Vallarta, and today travel books and local tourist programs continue to perpetuate the claim that the key catalyst in placing the tiny town of Puerto Vallarta “on the [traveler’s] map” was the 1963 filming of *The Night of the Iguana*.

By directing the tourist gaze to this particular site on Mexico’s Pacific coast, the film, its alluring setting and content, and the dazzling celebrities and publicity that brought it to life did help to construct this place in the popular imagination and to anticipate it as a future tourist site. Puerto Vallarta was fantastically constructed before the eyes of the world—in two ways. First, the irresistible cast—including Richard Burton, Sue Lyon, Deborah Kerr, and Ava Gardner—inspired a dazzling publicity campaign that accompanied the production of the film, as did the scandalous love affair

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76 See, for example, John Noble et al. (eds), *Mexico*, 8th ed., 471. It also states, “Tour groups began arriving not long after the film crew left, and they have been coming ever since.”
between Burton and Elizabeth Taylor that continued to take place in Puerto Vallarta during the filming. The international press also found it exciting to discover Huston’s latest site as he followed his typical impulse to film his pictures in unusual, almost secret locations. Place images of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, began to circulate excitedly across global media scapes. Fantastic representations of glamorous movie stars poised in precarious love triangles in this unexpected, at times god-forsaken, place sparked the imagination of travelers. And, an aura of steamy tropical romance quickly cast itself over this “Mexican fishing village” on the edge of a marvelous bay. Second, with the film’s depiction of a touristic little town with a tourist infrastructure that did not yet exist, Puerto Vallarta was “fantastically” represented by the film not as it really was, but in anticipation of what it would one day become as a tourist site. Puerto Vallarta, Mexico suddenly became a place that could be traveled to—in the tourist imagination, if not quite yet, in actuality.

**Back Spaces To This Image of Puerto Vallarta as a Tourist Site**

The popular discovery narrative is quickly challenged, however, when one reads *The Night of the Iguana* from a tourism perspective and begins to look at early histories by Americans and Mexicans in Puerto Vallarta to track the early scenes of tourism and change. As we have seen, the relationship between the play, film and their depictions of local tourism is not as easy-going as the tourist narrative claims. The tourist literature celebrates that the film is based on a Tennessee Williams play, but says surprisingly little about the fact that both play and film had quite a lot to say about different kinds of travel

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77 The behind the scenes documentary featurette, *On the Trail of the Iguana*, remarks greatly upon the special effect that the atmosphere of Puerto Vallarta and Mismaloya had on John Huston and his actors during the making of the film. *On The Trail Of The Iguana*. Featurette. (1964) Turner Entertainment, 2003. Available Online: [http://www.turnerclassicmovies.com/Multimedia/Popup/0,,9882,00.html](http://www.turnerclassicmovies.com/Multimedia/Popup/0,,9882,00.html)
and travelers and the transformations they provoke. In fact, although the film in particular helped to package and demarcate spaces--like the modern, air-conditioned hotel at the center of town versus the rustic and marginal, seaside hotel--for a new tourism in Puerto Vallarta, it presented mass tourists and their indulgent and superficial priorities in a critical light. The discovery narrative claims that the film created a first tourist boom in Puerto Vallarta as if Puerto Vallarta was ready and able to host this sudden wave of tourists. As we will see, a clearly defined travelers’ scene existed before *The Night of the Iguana* and the local infrastructure seriously limited a dynamic change in tourist development. Of course, it is such distortions that make possible the spectacle, or front space, that the film’s setting becomes: a small, tourist-ready, tourist-friendly, primitive yet also celebrity-glamorous, undiscovered Mexican fishing village. This is the “front space” that is cast on Puerto Vallarta. As we will see, it is propped against several back spaces.

**Back Space I: A Tourism History of a Travel Space That Already Existed in Puerto Vallarta**

A first “back space” to the place-images of Puerto Vallarta projected by the film is the travel space that already existed when *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed. A mingling of voices, both native and outsider, makes possible the brief history of early modern tourism to Puerto Vallarta that I construct here. This history makes clear that foreign tourists “discovered” “PV” a full decade before *The Night of the Iguana*.

According to a local historian, Catalina Montes de Oca Contreras, modern tourists began to appear in the early 1950s and “were easily glimpsed in the solitary streets and beaches wandering without any sense of direction. They tried to converse but could only do so with half a tongue and sign language with the people they encountered in their path."
The only luxury hotel that could host them was the Paraiso" (Montes 232). Soon word and curiosity spread, and young Mexican locals began to accompany them, to provide trips by sea in motorized canoes to nearby secluded beaches, and to organize hunts, fieldtrips, and fishing. To the visitors everything seemed beautiful: the houses with red tile roofs, the cobblestone streets, and the traditions of the town. They took glad memories with them along with the desire to return. Many did so for many years; some became neighbors and rented rustic houses (Montes 232).

The Hotel Paraiso was built, along with other small hotels like the Hotel Rio, Hotel Rosita and Hotel Oceano, in anticipation of a first wave of tourism to Vallarta that was sparked in 1951 when the local government celebrated Puerto Vallarta’s centenary. Artists, politicians, reporters and camera people arrived by plane or ship. The festivities were well publicized and Puerto Vallarta began to be promoted by way of newsreel previews at movie screenings (Munguia, personal archive).

By the late 1950s, Puerto Vallarta did have a (modest) tourist infrastructure. The famous boardwalk or “malecon,” mail service, and “Gringo Gulch” itself already existed. Gringo Gulch is the Anglo quarter comprised of elegant villas. In terms of modern amenities, potable water was available, along with a limited telephone line. Electric light arrived in early 1958. Mexicana Airlines had picked up the Mexico City-Guadalajara-“P.V.” route since 1954 and in 1963, the first large jet would land for the first time. Mexicana Airlines also offered packages to Puerto Vallarta from Guadalajara, so that one could buy a three-day two-night stay with six meals at one of the four local hotels for $24 USD (20 EUR).78  Thus, although Puerto Vallarta was nearly inaccessible by road, commercial planes could fly tourists in on certain days of the week. And although there

were few hotels, wealthy travelers could fly in on private charter planes and rent fine homes with maid service, cooks, shoppers, and drivers provided.\textsuperscript{79}

The typical day of tourist activities had been set. Tourists usually spent their day on the beach or pursuing outdoor activities. At dinnertime everyone would head back to town, shower, get dressed for the evening, and meet at the Hotel Oceano for cocktails. After dinner, many would meet at Los Jardines [The Gardens] in the plaza. Everyone carried flashlights because until 1958 the town generator supplied light only from 7pm or dark until 10pm. Then the lights came down all over town and came up again for 30 minutes so that one could finish the task at hand. After dominoes and a few tequilas or a night of dancing one would find one’s way home.\textsuperscript{80}

A female resident, cited in an American’s travel narrative, \textit{A Mexican Odyssey}, eloquently describes Puerto Vallarta as the idyllic tropical space that early travelers like to remember:

\begin{quote}
It was a small, beautiful, and quiet town… there was almost no traffic to speak of… At the end of the day, you could watch people taking their baths in the clear waters of the Cuale River, which you could wade or cross by walking over a hanging bridge made out of sticks to get to Los Muertos Beach where there were only two restaurants… Vegetation was so lush that one of the main attractions in those days, besides going to the beach, was going horseback riding along trails deep into the mountains up the river admiring beautiful waterfalls and ponds where you could dive and swim… The night life was special. There were few places to go dining or for a cocktail, besides the ones located in the few hotels… On the beach and on the streets one could listen to romantic music strung from the guitars of the wandering troubadours… Everything had to be done under the light of candles. It was a cozy ambience and everybody in Vallarta knew everybody. In the mornings you could breathe in the sweet air from the mountains and bask in the tropical sun at the beach with a “coco loco” by your side garnish-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} Luisa Shea, personal interview, 21 March 2004. Luisa Shea was interviewed in Pasadena, California. Luisa Shea worked for an American who managed rental homes for tourists in Puerto Vallarta.

\textsuperscript{80} Bud Acord, personal interview, 27 April 2004, in Puerto Vallarta.
ed with colored flowers and enjoy broiled pieces of fish on a stick.\textsuperscript{81}

I quote this passage at length because it offers a depiction of Mexico, or this small fishing village in Mexico, as a primitive, magical, tropical paradise. Interestingly, these are traits that also define the foreign literary traveler’s construction of Mexico as an infernal paradise. The author of this depiction is Mexican.

More tourists certainly began to arrive after the publicity that \textit{The Night of the Iguana} focused on Puerto Vallarta, but Puerto Vallarta had a limited capacity to host them. Houses and apartments were built for tourists to rent and simple but lovely local hotels existed, but the great investors who could build large luxury hotel complexes did not dare invest in plots of land that were \textit{ejido}, or national property. The limited urban infrastructure along with local land restrictions made the kind of tourist boom and the kind of tourist associated with \textit{The Night of the Iguana} impossible. There was no reliable highway, no international airport, no piers or ports to better accommodate cruise ships, and electricity was limited. It was not until the 1970s, with the inaugurations of new means of access into Puerto Vallarta and a drastic change in land laws, that a new onslaught of tourist development began. As a local American journalist so aptly put it, “Condominium development would be added to hotel construction. The \textit{casas} [homes] built for clients would become grander villa-mansions. [And] airport projects and mega undertakings like the Marina complex would replace movie set construction.”\textsuperscript{82} It is this

\textsuperscript{81} Silvia Reed, forward to her husband’s book, William Reed’s \textit{A Mexican Odyssey}. Silvia Reed is Mexican and she arrived in Puerto Vallarta in 1960 from Mexico City. Her uncle was the owner of the Hotel Rio, one of the first hotels in Puerto Vallarta. It appears in Huston’s film as the Blake’s Tours bus is driving through town.

\textsuperscript{82} Ed Hutmacher, “This Beautiful Place: A Tribute to Guillermo Wulff,” \textit{Vallarta Voice} Dec. 2002. These details are also documented in Carlos Munguia’s \textit{Panorama Histórico de Puerto Vallarta y de la Bahía de Banderas}. See works cited.
development that would make possible the tourist boom that travel books associate with The Night of the Iguana.

**Back Space 2: The Literal Construction of the Costa Verde Hotel in Mismaloya**

One might say that in 1963 there really was no “back space” to the front space depicted by the film. In fact, one of the truly fascinating features of Huston’s The Night of the Iguana is that it anticipated a type of tourist infrastructure—able to meet the demands of “modern” tourists with more “fitting” accommodations to please them, including tour buses and package deals—that in 1963 had not yet arrived in Puerto Vallarta. This can be further demonstrated by a study of the film’s principal setting—Mismaloya beach—and the production feats required to place the Costa Verde Hotel in its isolated cliff side setting.

In 1963 only a tiny local community existed in Mismaloya, hardly serviceable for such a production. The *entire backdrop* and infrastructure for the film had to be constructed from scratch, including the hotel, a bar, a restaurant, dressing rooms, a pier, water and sewage systems, roadways, and bungalows for a permanent crew of 125. The actors had to be transported daily from Puerto Vallarta’s Los Muertos Beach by boat because there was *no road* from Puerto Vallarta to Mismaloya. This means that the infamous Blake’s Tours bus could only get there by water as well, on a *panga*, or motorized raft. There was no reliable road into Puerto Vallarta itself, except for a local highway that a visitor/writer describes in 1961 as “not a road at all but the sort of a trail a dinosaur’s tail might leave over the mountains, down into the ravines and across the rivers.”

Mainstream passenger buses began to run in 1963; but the local rivers

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83 “Report to Members,” Islands in the Sun Club, 15. This article came from a copy in Carlos Munguía’s archive. The author’s name was not cited.
overflowed during the rainy season so that buses had to get pulled out of potholes and mud by tractors and passengers had to wait until the next day, if lucky, for the water level to fall (Montes 255). Even in town, taxis had to be carried on pangas with planks across them as they crossed the river back and forth to the airport (Reed, iii). During the rainy season travel by road was nearly impossible. By modern standards, Puerto Vallarta was a very isolated region—approachable only by sea or by air. Looking back, locals today like to remark with amusement that Puerto Vallarta and the nearby towns were very much like Gabriel García Márquez’s town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

It is certain, then, that there were no tour buses to Mismaloya at the time Williams narrates his play and there was no telephone with which to report a misbehaving tour guide. Mismaloya’s isolation, however, was important for making it the primitive, picturesque place that it truly was and perfect for the kind of setting that Tennessee Williams called for. It was a perfect replacement for William’s original setting, for although Williams desired to reconstruct the Acapulco beach that he had experienced in 1941, by 1961 he had to admit, “this is decidedly not the Puerto Barrio of today. At that time—twenty years ago—the west coast of Mexico had not yet become the Las Vegas and Miami Beach of Mexico. The villages were still predominantly primitive… and the still-water morning beach… and the rain forests above it were among the world’s wildest and loveliest populated places” (Williams 5). Unwittingly, Williams would contribute to a similar transformation.

When the project of *The Night of the Iguana* came along, Mismaloya and Puerto Vallarta had already been picked out as promising tourist spots on the Mexican coast. The film provided the perfect opportunity to promote them. John Huston and his
producer, Ray Stark, desired to participate--by taking part in a local deal to construct the film’s sets in a permanent and more attractive way than originally conceived so that they might provide the basic infrastructure for a future resort village once the film was completed. This deal was made with local civil engineer Guillermo Wulff who had suggested Mismaloya to Huston at a cocktail party in L.A. with this very project in mind. Wulff was one of several ambitious entrepreneurs who had found their way to Puerto Vallarta from other parts of Mexico or the States. Ultimately, Huston and Stark pulled out of the deal leaving Wulff near bankruptcy and the set abandoned. However, when Burton and Taylor, and later Huston, decided to stay in the area after the filming, the *The Night of the Iguana*’s importance to the site and to Puerto Vallarta was cast into the future, making Wulff very successful and marking Mismaloya’s identification with the film in a lasting way.84

In a tourism industry that now fuels nearly ninety percent of the local economy, *The Night of the Iguana* continues to be one of Puerto Vallarta’s key attractions. This can be seen in Mismaloya’s ongoing identification in tourist literature as the site where the famous movie was filmed and that one can visit on a local boat tour. However, in line with Foucault, one can also observe that at every point at which this tourist myth’s power is asserted, it is also met with resistance. Locals disrupt such tourist claims, and they do it self-consciously and in a variety of ways. This critical awareness leads us to further ways in which the back space of Mismaloya is deployed by the tourist industry--but also by its native inhabitants.

84 Several sources confirm this ill-fated investment including Ed Hutmacher’s article, “This Beautiful Place” based on his personal interviews with Guillermo Wulff (see xxvii) and my personal interview with John Huston’s ghostwriter for *An Open Book*, Mr. William Reed.
For instance, Mismaloya is still advertised as “a quaint location where the Mismaloya creek meets the sea,” even as fancy hotel complexes sit encroached like giants upon the tiny, moon-crescent beach. The resort is called “The Jewel of Mismaloya.” Nearby, higher on the hillside, tourists continue to arrive at the entrance to the Night of the Iguana restaurant and set. As they approach the restaurant, tourists stop to read a monument that is placed there to explain the film’s immersion in Mismaloya’s colorful history of Indians, pirates, and travelers. Huston appears as a great figure—in colonial, legendary fashion—somewhat like Hernan Cortés confused as Quetzalcoatl. He is “the tall, white bearded movie director” who arrives with a talented and tempestuous cast to film Tennessee Williams’ play and clears the way for a brazen modern romance:

It was here that Burton and Taylor lived perhaps the greatest love story of their day. Their passion on and off screen echoed around the world. Reporters and tourists descended upon this cove in droves and Puerto Vallarta hasn’t been the same since.

Clearly, it is another instance in which the Night of the Iguana discovery myth is repeated and the repercussions of its “discovery” celebrated: “reporters and tourists descended upon this cove in droves and Puerto Vallarta hasn’t been the same since.” The myth is cast as a romanticized colonial legend that explains the foreign occupation of a place. It unabashedly places the film’s director and crew of celebrity travelers—and the tourism that subsequently followed them—in a transparently colonial history. The reporters and

86 Interestingly, travel books now also remark upon the fact that Mismaloya Beach has been “taken over” by this large hotel complex, named “La Joya [The Jewel] of Mismaloya,” which has “spoiled the pristine nature of the jungle-fringed cove.” Today the beach is only slightly less crowded than beaches in town. See, for example, Gabriele, Anthony, ed., A Let’s Go Travel Guide. Mexico, 426. or Laura Kidder and Jennifer Paull, eds., Fodor’s Mexico 2004, 433.
tourists are like the Spaniards and the pirates; except that they descend upon this place in “droves.” The tourists who continue to arrive on this very spot are in this way also indoctrinated into this history of travelers. That Puerto Vallarta is each time changed forever, by each episode of travelers, is declared as cause for celebration. How does one contest such a myth?

It appears that the locals of Mismaloya contest this discovery myth in the same way that it claims their place—territorially. In the hills directly above the entrance to the Night of the Iguana set, twenty-five local Mexican families mobilized to protest a government order for their removal from their homes. They drape banners expressing their will to stay and their critique of local efforts to oust them. They place these banners on a fence that surrounds their local elementary school and that sits directly along the highway—just a few yards from the entrance to The Night of the Iguana restaurant and set. These banners are visible to tourist buses and tourists’ cars as they drive by on one of Puerto Vallarta’s loveliest and most scenic coastal highways—and the one traversed daily by tours like the Tropical Tour and the Canopy Tours which take tourists up into the hills and into the jungle. And, the native ejido community members continue to inhabit their homes, to run the elementary school, and to refuse to sign their communal land over for touristic use—a major feat since expropriation of communal lands has been a common step in the construction of master planned beach resorts like Huatulco in Oaxaca (and a step facilitated by N.A.F.T.A.). Further along the coast in the island of Yelapa, another prominent tourist stop, the native indigenous community took

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87 On a visit to take pictures of Mismaloya in April 2004, I noticed the banners of protest placed all across the local community buildings that border the highway. A local resident and representative of the Mexican Mismaloya community informed me that the twenty-five families had refused the monetary offer for their removal.
to surrounding and entering “gringo” homes, armed. Early travelers still recall with
dismay and terror the “Indians” who squatted on their lands.⁸⁸ These are examples of the
ways in which locals also deploy tourist sites and vigorously perform their resistance.

I can include two other ways in which the film site and monument history are
resisted. First, in Puerto Vallarta proper, local Mexicans still recall with impunity and
glee that after the Night of the Iguana film site was abandoned, they rowed over on their
canoes and ransacked any useful or interesting items that remained⁸⁹. These young
people burst upon and ransacked one of the film’s back spaces--the very space that the
film’s celebrity director and actors inhabited. This is an earlier act of local resistance or
refusal of what the set was to signify to local tourism--and of the sanctified aura
surrounding the film’s production. Second, more contemporary local writers and
historians have recorded and narrated Puerto Vallarta’s native history in ways that correct
the tourist fairy tales placed on monuments such as the one just described. Examples are
local historian, Carlos Munguía Fregoso, and local fiction writer, Eduardo Gomez, who
have written the history of the region with a broad sense of its histories of travel and a
witty postcolonial analytical eye that exposes tourism’s colonial fantasies. Their histories
also include, with more accurate research (both archival and oral) and detail, a long line
of travelers to the region that includes lost whalers, the Black Ships of the Orient, pirates,
and as we will shortly see, those who came with the Montgomery Banana Plantation
Company—which, interestingly, is not mentioned in the monument described above.

Indeed, recalling one of the corrections to MacCannell’s front space/ back space

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⁸⁸ One can read of such incidents in William Reeds, A Mexican Odyssey.
⁸⁹ My uncle, Federico Sanchez, was among the group of young people who ransacked the site. Like
Munguia and Gomez, he also became a writer (although an electrical engineer by profession) and has
written three books elaborating the histories of the region.
paradigm, we might use Munguia’s and Gomez’s research to “interrupt a story already coalesced…with a revisionist counternarrative against the notion of an isolated, bounded, homogenous ‘culture’ that was suddenly opened to the winds of change without ever knowing what hit it” (104). Indeed, the Americans were not the first foreigners to visit the bay or utilize its natural resources.\footnote{The history of pirates and explorers in the Bay is fascinating. Very briefly, Munguia informs us that around 1600 an astillero was built in Mismaloya which was used for ships that embarked on explorations of California. When local workers discovered that pearls existed in Los Arcos, nearby Arcs in the sea (an attraction for tourist ships today), they hired Indians to dive for pearls instead of dedicating themselves to building ships. Two English pirates, Cavendish and Tomley also visited this site. In addition, Munguia has in his possession several maps of French origin from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, one of which is dated 1709 and attributed to a French captain named Lefondat, who, traveling from China, called in the Bay for water, wood, and viveres. At the turn of the century, the Bay’s location put the region in an advantageous position. It benefited from its nearness to Mascota because of the city’s importance due to the peak of mining activity. The port was almost the same distance from the port of San Blas as the port of Manzanillo and participated although on a minor scale, in the national and foreign commerce that occurred across these ports. They were, after all, on the ship route between San Francisco and Panama. See Munguia’s Testimonio Vallartense, p.11, 12, 111, 112.}

**Back Space 3: The Hotel Delicias**

Tourists’ colonial fantasies open the door to past imperialist enterprises and colonial realities whose ties to present-day tourist enterprises have been forgotten. The following is a particularly keen example that opens the door to an earlier 20\textsuperscript{th} century Anglo-Mexican colonial borderlands in the very same region of which we speak. This brief account I am able to piece together with the help of Carlos Munguia’s and Eduardo Gomez’s works.

When asked about the hotels and places that decorated the early tourist landscape, bemused early American travelers and local Mexicans often point to the “Hotel Delicias.” It was a stray and picturesque relic on the beach of “Los Muertos.” By the late 60s, it was no longer a hotel in service. Sometimes, homeless people could be found sleeping...
there. It was also known as a former, and not very discreet, house of assignation. One can begin to sense the symbolic play surrounding the Hotel Delicias.

It is as if the Hotel Delicias has made an uncanny impression, because in fact, as one of the few remaining buildings of the American Montgomery Banana Company of the 1920s and 1930s, the Hotel Delicias was a relic of an earlier travel scene and precursor to the “early” tourism of the 50s and 60s. It served as one of the hotels owned by the Montgomery Banana Company, which was an offshoot of the infamous United Fruit Company. After the company disbanded, the hotel was used as a site for local fiestas such as the Fiestas Patrias, or national holidays, and the coronation of the queen. Curiously, by the mid-60s, it was moved from Ixtapa to Puerto Vallarta, where it was used again as a hotel, but of a different kind--a house of assignation and a sleeping place for vagrants (in this way, it is also a fitting symbol for the erotics of travel that also defines the two settings). Transported from its original site further inland to Puerto Vallarta’s Playa de Los Muertos, or “Beach of the Dead,” just in time to be glimpsed upon by the first tourist visitors, the Hotel Delicias may be read as a poetic link between the colonial plantation and quaint seaside setting that defined the region to foreign travelers in two distinct moments. It is in this way, that in Puerto Vallarta, this half-abandoned ruin and relic served as a window into an earlier travel scene and a time when it was built to serve primarily American interests.

Although Anglo-Americans did comprise a major segment of the early tourism to this point on the Mexican Pacific Coast, it was actually three decades earlier when they first arrived in large numbers to this bay area and became acquainted with this isolated, tropical place. Again, this presence was centered further inland, in what remains today
the nearby town of Ixtapa. They were accompanied by foreigners from different parts of
the world and by Mexicans from other parts of the Republic, including the mountainous
outskirts of Puerto Vallarta. Just like the tourism industry of today, the banana plantation
economy drew migrant laborers from the surrounding areas of Mexico. The Hotel
Delicias is thus a perfect bridge between two distinct travel scenes and the influx of
travelers that each brought to the region.

Between the mid 1920s and mid 1930s, a strange and interesting juxtaposition
occurred in this coastal town of Ixtapa, Jalisco, Mexico. The American Montgomery
Company arrived to grow banana trees, and for a time, an American “colonial” lifestyle
existed alongside the very rustic and isolated life of itinerant farmers. It is an unexpected
and little known fact that the vast network of early 20th century banana plantations across
Central American stretched this far north and into Mexico—or that an enterprise like this
one might exist in post-Revolution Mexico on the eve of agrarismo, or land redistribution
to Mexican peasants. But it was as a result of the presence of this plantation that a
curious contrast came to exist between things associated with the Anglos and things
associated with an agrarian way of life or even the bustling port life of the nearby Bay of
Banderas and Puerto Vallarta. The Anglos’ modern living quarters, conveniences, and
efficient exploitation of a principal crop came to exist alongside cachimbas (rustic
lanterns) floating in the night, palm-thatched homes, rancherias, seasonal harvests of key
crops, infernal mosquitos and dehydration, folkloric creatures out and about, and so on.
When the company disbanded ten years later, stray “gringos,” ruins, and legends remained. The Hotel Delicias was among these artifacts.¹¹

A testimony by a local resident, cited in Gomez’s *Echo de Caracoles*, relates the plantation infrastructure that the Anglos set up. The reader will notice that it is an infrastructure very similar to that of the United Fruit Company as described by Eduardo Galeano in *Open Veins of Latin America* (106). Galeano considers such infrastructures imperialist, capitalist structures. Hotels mark their curious presence as part of this infrastructure.

It built a colony of wood homes, with stoves, with running/potable water, electric lighting and bathrooms with showers. The elegance of the homes and their comfort contrasted with the poverty and galleons in which the workers and their families crowded themselves. This nucleus of a population counted on two hotels. Within the colony there was a tennis court encircled by chain link fencing, a hospital for minor treatments, and a fort of adobe and clay roofing, which garrisoned the squad of soldiers that protected the interests of the Company. Work shops were established: metalshops, carpentry and mechanics, to maintain the two little trains that passed carrying the banana from the fields to the docks at the Boca de Tomates. The Gringos also brought an electric generator plant and the first ice factory of the region. It built warehouses to store seeds, work machinery and tools and coffins, because many died. So many people came to work here, that it was impossible to lodge everyone and there were not a few who lived in palm-thatched leaf tents or beneath trees (Gomez 144-146).

The company also built a large beautiful hacienda style house with trees named “El Naranjal” (the orange grove). It owned a tiny airstrip for a company plane that awed local residents as it flew overhead, introducing them to the airplane. The company also hosted fancy dances that the company Americans used to attend at a nearby hotel. The flirtations of Company men with local women have been documented by Eduardo

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¹¹ I am synthesizing material from Gomez’s *Echo de Caracoles* and Munguía’s *Testimonio Vallartense*. My personal conversations with both authors and here, especially with Gomez, also helped me to frame this history.
Gomez. As mentioned, the company of Montgomery brought with it some workers from different parts of the States—and world—and sometimes they brought their women, but the tropical heat usually chased them away. This is a notorious episode in the local history and indeed, for years, the heart of Ixtapa was also referred to as “la colonia” (“the colony”) and the time in which the Company resided, as “La Bonanza” (“the Bonanza”), (its peak ranging roughly from 1925-34) due to the fact that the company brought on a period of economic progress and demographic growth.

The Company’s ten-year residence also served to acquaint the Mexican inhabitants of this region with Anglo-Americans, an American lifestyle, as well as modern amenities. Thus, by the time that Americans begin to arrive as tourists 30 years later, locals such as my grandmother, a long-time resident of Ixtapa, had already been introduced to their presence, language, and preferences. Moreover, with the extended stay of one of the Company overseers, McClellan, with connections in Texas and California, a possible grapevine was established for other Americans to hear of Puerto Vallarta and to want to travel here.

We must consider this history another “backstage” to the narratives of modern tourism in Mexico both before and after the filming of *The Night of the Iguana*. From this backstage, earlier traveler tales are generated by locals today—tales that relate the calamities and capriciousness of the landscape: the river that changed its course when the Americans built their fancy bridge over it; the cyclone that wiped out the plantation in its early years; the heat that chased away the Company’s women; and the winds or mythic magnetic rock that crashed planes. Such tales set a pattern, or what one might call a
predisposition, for articulating histories that resist foreign attempts to make claims on the region of Puerto Vallarta.

Thus we see that a series of “back stage” presentations continues to prop up the spectacle of tourism in Puerto Vallarta even today. Like the examples described in relation to Mismaloya and the Night of the Iguana film set and monument, some back spaces and the narratives that accompany them seem to be in line with tourism’s imperialist origins and interests. Others, like the historical tales, just described in relation to the Montgomery Banana Plantation Company actively resist tourism’s claims of discovery. At times, contentious narratives and performances in the back spaces of a tourist destination do allow for local corrections and interventions in the way that the tourist is experiencing Puerto Vallarta. I conclude this chapter with a fascinating example of such an intervention as I narrate one of today’s tours of Puerto Vallarta.

Backspace 4: “The Other Side of the Tortilla”

In a self-conscious and pointedly strategic backstage performance, local Mexican tour guides leading contemporary bus tours of Puerto Vallarta actively debunk the film’s glamorous discovery myths—as well as other tourist misconceptions. The “Tropical Tour”\(^{92}\) has an itinerary of stops that includes: the “colonia,” or neighborhood, named “El Pitillal”; “downtown” Vallarta; shopping in “Old Vallarta” east of the Cuale River (also known as “the Romantic zone”); the “Mismaloya-Iguana Set”; a raicilla distillery (where a variant of tequila is produced), as one turns into “the jungle”; and a “Jungle River Resort Lunch” up at the waterfall and site where The Predator was filmed. But this tropical tour begins with “El Pitillal,” a working-class Mexican suburb. As the bus

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\(^{92}\) I participated in this tour as a tourist in late September 2006. As of spring 2007, this tour is actively running and the first stop continues to be El Pitillal.
passes the dusty, raucous streets and not very picturesque, urbanized storefronts, tourists are directly informed that they are brought here so that they may see “the other side of the tortilla.” The tourist guide informs tourists that this is where the working people of Puerto Vallarta live—“the working middle class of Puerto Vallarta who work for you in the hotels and tourist industry and make a living from your tips.” Tourists learn that the average rent is about 800 pesos, or $80 U.S. and that workers get benefits/life insurance—social security and hospital benefits—when working. The tour guide also makes it clear that “everybody” has to work in Mexico. When the bus stops, tourists are invited to walk into church, and even though a funeral mass may be occurring, the tour guide assures her group that the town is aware that it is a tourist site and is perfectly “ok” with tourists walking in and out at all times. Still, tourists walk about awkwardly, like children. During the ride into Puerto Vallarta proper, the tourist zone, the tour guide also dispels bad stories about Mexico and ironizes stereotypical warnings that tourists often receive before embarking on their trips into Mexico. She challenges the caution that water, vegetables, and ice cubes in Mexico are dangerous to consume is not necessarily true she says because the city takes great care to disinfect its produce and the water in this part of Mexico is purified and is rated the second cleanest in Mexico after Guadalajara. She suggests that tourists get sick because they drink too much tequila at night, and incorrectly blame it on the water the next day. She notes that crime is very low in Puerto Vallarta, since everyone has jobs because of tourism and the laws are much stricter and the jails much worse than in the States. Prisoners are given no food; families have to feed prisoners every day.
When the tour finally arrives in Mismaloya on its way up into the jungle, the group does not take the time to walk down to the Night of the Iguana set. Instead the tour stops at the look out point along the highway so that the tourists may look down the mountainside to Mismaloya below. Despite the tremendous resort encroached upon the tiny beach, the tourists are taken by the lovely sight: a string of white buoys decorates the blue water like a necklace, and tourists can be seen lying on the beach, engaging in water sports, or hanging from a parachute. They also learn that the resort is actually composed of time-shares. The tour guide then points out the Night of the Iguana set and Iguana pole across the way. By then, however, she has already dispelled the myth that Puerto Vallarta was “discovered” when the famous movie was filmed there. She has also mentioned the other films that were also set in Puerto Vallarta: The Blue Lagoon, Crocodile Dundee, The Predator. The quick way in which the tour group is then whisked away from the look-out point to “the jungle”—the tropical forest in the hills above Mismaloya and the next attraction on the itinerary—punctuates this tour’s dismissal of the The Night of the Iguana’s claim on touristic Puerto Vallarta.

It is in such ways that the battles to interpret and reinterpret Puerto Vallarta’s history as a tourist resort continue, as tourists are asked to learn about Mexico a little more accurately, as time goes by. Through a series of backspaces that prop up against the front space spectacles of Puerto Vallarta, and a native reclamation of those backspaces, tourist myths and tourist experiences are corrected. To tourists, it becomes clearer that local Mexicans are reflexive about their role as service workers who maintain foreigners’ tropical vacations-- even as they, if transient tourists today, dream about one day spending their winters or retirements in such a setting. Meanwhile, for local Mexicans, it
continues to be clear that the tourist gaze is a pretentious, colonizing gaze that charts as it surveys how it might exploit, reconstruct, and occupy a space—even as it directs the tourism that makes possible a way for them to maintain their livelihood today.

**Conclusion**

As a travel narrative, *The Night of the Iguana* appeared to take a life of its own after Tennessee Williams’s production of the play, when John Huston produced it as a film and filmed it on location in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. The film *The Night of the Iguana* generated a series of tourist spectacles that began as the product of two literary travelers’ touristic imaginations. These tourist spectacles were inspired by themes of tourism and travel and included: another representation of the marginal seaside Mexican resort; eccentric traveler performances and disruptions by explosive women travelers; and “Puerto Vallarta” as the site “discovered” by John Huston’s film, steeped in an aura of steamy tropical adventures and romance. But behind these spectacles “back spaces,” or the more authentic spaces of Puerto Vallarta that preceded and existed despite the film’s claim on the place, opened up. In these back spaces, local Mexican residents and earlier American travelers articulated, as they continue to articulate, their responses to the tourist myths and tourist attractions that accompanied the film. As a result, Puerto Vallarta continues to be a highly constructed and contested Mexican tourist site and an example of how the modern, or the liminal, deviant, eroticised beach, was transported to Mexico—by way of a literary imagination. I now turn to the final chapter of this dissertation, in which we see that the beach has become simply a working piece of Mexico’s larger touristic landscape. In Harriet Doerr’s *Consider this, Señora* and Ana Castillo’s *The...*

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93 John Huston produced several films based on works about Mexico by literary travelers including *The Night of the Iguana*, B. Traven’s *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (also filmed in Mexico), and Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano.*
Mixquiahuala Letters, the beach now comes into play with the artist colony, the summer school, the hacienda, the “Babylonian city,” and Mexico’s provinces, as tourist Mexico becomes a palimpsest that offers multiple and shifting sites through which the tourist can experience Mexico.
Chapter 5

The Post-Tourist’s and Mexican-American Woman’s Travels: Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Harriet Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora*, and María Novaro’s *El jardín del Eden*

Mexico. Melancholy, profoundly right and wrong, it embraces as it strangulates.

-- Ana Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*

That night at ten o’clock, Ursula Bowles, recent widow, mother of one, longtime object of a man’s whole love, almost but not quite ready to die, stepped out of her house into the starry night. She smelled wet leaves, wet earth, jasmine, animal dung, smoke from a charcoal fire. She heard a church bell strike, a man shout, a woman laugh. A night bird sang two notes. A burro brayed…

Speaking aloud, she addressed the dark.

“I was right to come.” She said. “Yes”

--Harriet Doerr, *Consider This, Señora*

In the Mexican settings of Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) and Harriet Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora* (1993), travelers wander across a country that has become a touristic palimpsest: a shifting arrangement of tourist themes and tourist sites that allows the traveler to mix and rearrange tourist experiences in myriad combinations (Cooper Alarcón 178-180). Typical sites from previous touristic episodes--Mexico City, quaint colonial provinces, rustic seaside resorts, and haciendas--reappear as the palimpsest expands to include mass tourist sites like the contemporary summer school, a “Babylonian” city, “modern” seaside resorts (Acapulco and Cancun), and the artist colony (San Miguel de Allende). Each site represents a different way to experience Mexico and to be a tourist. Infinitely malleable, Mexico has become a tourist destination.
that offers tourists the chance to project, select from, and experience a diverse array of tourist fantasies. Mexico in these works is again many things simultaneously—exotic, artistic, excessive, ancient, modern, mysterious, sinister, magical, gothic (haunted), and deadly—and we see that the traits that inform how Mexico and its tourist sites figure for the tourist continue to speak to a tradition of writing that depicts Mexico as an infernal paradise. These sites and themes come together as key components of the greater touristic palimpsest that Mexico becomes after the 1960s arrival of mass tourism.

As we read Castillo’s and Doerr’s experimental novels and make our way to the end of the 20th century, we see that the traveler has arrived at the beginnings of a postmodern travel terrain. Although the immediate signs of globalization—the internet; cell phone; high-tech, accelerated circulation of place images; and massively mediated tourist sites—are missing from these narratives, we see that their innovative styles are nonetheless expressing the emergence of a postmodern sensibility and aesthetic (Urry 1-2, 2001; Russell 3). In their attention to a proliferating set of sites, highly accessible and diversified travel, a tourist gaze that is mediated by multiple perspectives, and the intersecting gaze of native residents, Castillo and Doerr are already responding to the dramatic and complex ways in which the world is changing. In fact, their experimental narratives exhibit a post-tourist playfulness (Urry 7, Russell 11). One might say that in these novels, the “post-tourist” has arrived in the shape of women travelers who are daring, vulnerable, and self-conscious. For as Maxine Feifer explains, the most notable characteristic of the “post-tourist” is that

the post-tourist is self-reflexive: not a time traveler when he goes somewhere historic; not an instant noble savage when he stays on a tropical beach; not an invisible observer when he visits a native compound. Resolutely “realistic,” he cannot evade his condition of an outsider. But, having embraced that
condition, he can stop struggling against it and...then he can turn it around (Feifer 271).

Or, as John Urry elaborates, “the post-tourist knows that ...tourism is a game, or rather a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience” (Urry 100). In these works, we see that both travel writer and tourist have grown self-conscious, experimental, and reflexive as they attempt to grapple with the more sophisticated cultural play of tourist encounters in the midst of a globalizing tourist landscape.

In this chapter, I read Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora* as postmodern travel texts. To bring them into a more globalized context of postmodern travel, at the end of the chapter, I briefly consider a film that brings representations of travel and travelers like Castillo’s and Doerr’s further into “the swirling counters of the emergent global order” (Urry 7). María Novaro’s *El jardín del Eden* places the American woman traveler in a U.S.-Mexican borderlands, and often in the same spaces with migrating bodies from Mexico’s countryside. In this way, her work follows the American woman traveler as she enters into a swirling vortex of global tourism that is in part defined by dramatically increased movements of differently displaced populations (the migrant, the refuge, and the tourist), who often coincide in overlapping spaces of transit (Urry 2). More pointedly, Novaro’s film reminds us that the traveler’s Mexico is also a real and metaphoric borderland and that uneven cultural crossings and transgressions take place not only on the part of “illegal” Mexicans in the U.S. but also by the tourist in Mexico. Like the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, tourist Mexico becomes a site of uneven flows of capital, commodities, and traveling bodies.

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In these three works, we see that the woman traveler is consistently highlighted; again, as a disruptive figure that highlights the gendered and cultural politics of travel at work. To meet the changed scene, new women traveler types emerge and serve as the major protagonists, transfiguring earlier, singular women traveler icons. In Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Tere, a Chicana, travels to her ancestral homeland and meets Alicia, a young white artist from the East Coast whose ancestry is also colored by traces of Spanish gypsy blood and the childhood memory of a lullaby sung in Spanish. As they become friends and travel together, they are strategically paired, realizing that their safety and survival depends on their sticking together. In Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora*, two women travel to Mexico with very different intensions. Susana Ames, a woman in her early 30s, escapes to Mexico to paint and begin a new life after her divorce, while elderly widow Ursula Bowles returns to Mexico, the place of her childhood, to die. Although Susana and Ursula arrive as singular travelers, building a home and becoming part of a community of expatriates becomes key to their having more stable and poignant experiences in Mexico. In *El jardín del Edén*, Novaro depicts a Chicana’s, Elizabeth’s, and an Anglo American woman’s, Jane’s, travels and experiences in Mexico, as she depicts also their Mexican counterpart’s, a young Mexican widow’s, Serena’s, attempts to navigate a new life in Tijuana after moving there with her children. Novaro regards Elizabeth, or Liz, with her broken Spanish and awkward attempts to reclaim her Mexican roots through Chicano art more sympathetically than she does more superficial and reckless Liz, who is inspired to write about the Mexican women and the places she sees.

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95 I refer to the singular women traveler types featured in this dissertation thus far, including the Victorian lady traveler, the New Woman traveler/modernist travel writer, and Tennessee Williams’s and John Huston’s enlightened women traveler, sexualized young woman tourist set loose in the tropics, and vibrant woman expatriate in Mexico.
Novaro’s more critical portrayal of the white woman traveler in this way differs from both Doerr’s and Castillo’s casting of their protagonists as more enlightened, post-tourist types; Novaro casts Jane instead as the innocent, reckless imperial nostalgist. But Novaro also contrasts Liz’s and Jane’s travels with Serena’s more constrained mobility to mark their very different and more privileged status. Despite their different politics of representation, all three authors/artists express that women travelers’ identities are intersectional—multifaceted, adaptable, and shifting—as they are also contingent, on the acceptance or rejection they face during their travels. At the same time, the three authors/artists demonstrate that the touristic palimpsest functions differently depending on the traveler’s identity and other factors, like the traveler’s class, marital status, attractiveness, and race, that come into play in the way in which a woman’s travels are either aided or impeded. Castillo and Novaro demonstrate that not all travelers have equal access to, or the same mobility across, Mexico’s touristic borderlands.

What is different or new about these texts as travel narratives, and what makes them “postmodern,” are the more unstable and mediated ways in which their authors capture how new kinds of travelers—principally the highly visible Mexican American woman traveler and the enlightened post-tourist Anglo American woman traveler—experience a palimpsestic, mass tourist Mexico. To represent travelers’ more complicated physical and cultural mobilities, the travel narrative shifts and changes. One sees sharper and more nuanced framings of the characters’ cultural encounters and a different kind of narrative drift. One also sees in all three texts that the presence and perspective of native Mexicans is almost always present as another way to “track” and correct, both poetically and cynically, the protagonists’ travels and transformations. In
Castillo’s and Doerr’s works, a male gaze also follows and interprets the woman traveler. Doerr’s women protagonists are subjected to the questioning thoughts of both Anglo American and Mexican male characters, while Castillo’s protagonists become prey to a predatory, cross-class Mexican male gaze. To capture such intersecting perspectives, at times, characters are suspended in moments that capture the intersection of multiple gazes; are displaced so that they can regard themselves and how they register in the local scene; or are fragmented across jarring scenes that express how their frames of mind and presumptions are destabilized. Realist or modernist styles and leanings give way to postmodern ones, as the prose and structure of all three texts become fragmented and poetic.

To take the reader/viewer across Mexico in ways that complicate the more superficial and privileged tourist’s fast and easy encounters with Mexico, all three authors/artists experiment with form. Castillo’s text is an epistolary novel designed after Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. It is a “game,” designed to allow the reader to align and read the Chicana protagonist letters in different orders, assembling the overall narrative according to the reader’s sensibility and three possibilities: “For the conformist,” “For the cynical,” or “For the quixotic.” Although the novel is not simply about the two young women’s travels but also documents their evolving friendship, growth as women, relationships with men, and trying adventures in both Mexico and the U.S., its form is a fitting one for the shifting touristic palimpsest that Tere and Alicia travel when in Mexico. At the same time, the epistolary narrative form expresses Tere’s and Alicia’s experiences on a more intimate and reflective plane. It is also a more perplexed plane, as questions and flashbacks haunt the narrative and Tere attempts to make sense of their travels.
sometimes years after they have happened. The narrative perspective of Doerr’s text shifts across the different Anglo American and Mexican characters thoughts as it tracks the play of authenticity, performance, encounter, and place that constitutes tourism as a practice. Although Doerr’s narrative is structured as a more straightforward chronological novel, her narrative builds towards interspersed moments and passages in which the narrative perspective expands to highlight cultural intersections and resolutions. Novaro’s framing techniques change as she depicts Liz’s and Jane’s encounters with Mexican women and Jane’s and Serena’s different encounters with the patrolled borderlands landscape. Novaro also invites other “texts” with an infernally paradisical and touristic bent, like street and vendor signs, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, or glimpses of Guillermo Gómez Peña’s *Border Brujo*, to intervene and expand upon the film’s borderland setting. In such ways, all three narratives adjust as the protagonists confront multiple perspectives and definite snags and detours in the itineraries they have planned.

In this chapter I read these works by following the woman travelers’ trajectories and experiences as they wander across a touristic palimpsest. I begin with Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, proceed to Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora*, and then read *El jardín del Edén* as Novaro’s critical response to the North American woman traveler (both Anglo American and Mexican American) in Mexico.

**Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters***

Tere and Alicia first meet at a summer institute in Mexico City, and it is there, at their very first destination, that their understanding of their place in tourist Mexico is illuminated and corrected. As I depicted in chapter one, the summer school is a tourist site that can be traced to the modernist episode of tourism in Mexico and the enthusiastic
transnational artistic and cultural exchange that defined it. According to this tradition, Tere and Alicia attend the North American institution in Mexico City to study Mexico’s culture and language. But when she arrives, Tere is shocked to realize how different it is from what she expected. Through Tere’s reactions, Castillo illustrates to her readers the superficial tourist trap that this site has become.

My shock bored a 3 inch hole into my native spirit, expecting to study with and under brothers and sisters only to find California blonds and eastern WASPS, instructors who didn’t speak Spanish…All this made worse by the general attitude that no one had any objective but to undergo an existential summer of exotic experiences. (24)

Finding herself in the midst of young white women travelers and American instructors, Tere declares the school “with the heavy Aztec name to be just a notch above fraudulent status” (24). As a woman of color versed in Anglo culture, Tere understands the terms of this experience right away and that it is designed for white Americans and not for her. She also realizes that she can only be read in terms of the typical foreign student.

Didn’t they tell anything by my Indian-marked face, fluent use of the language, undeniably Spanish name? Nothing blurred their vision of another gringa come to stay as I nodded and shook hands during introductions and took my seat. (25)

Despite the signs that mark her as different and despite her resistant performances, including the defiant way she looks at her fellow students, talks, and eats (like a Mexican), Tere fails to register as a woman of color traveler. One young white participant, Alicia, is able to “see” Tere with her artist’s eyes. As the two more cynical participants in the program, the Chicana and undaunted artist, align.

A fieldtrip excursion to the provincial town of Mixquiahuala, that Tere identifies as a definite highlight in their summer, serves to ground Tere’s and Alicia’s travels in a more traditional and picturesque Mexico as it sets up the binary between authentic and
“tourist” Mexico that will continue to operate in the way the young women experience Mexico’s different sites. Infernally paradisical, Mixquiahuala is indigenous and evocative of pre-conquest Mexico but also colonial. It has the Toltec ruins of Tula and the heritage of elite families who continue to perform colonial traditions. Alicia and Tere participate in a familiar kind of tour into the back spaces of Mexico that takes the visitor into a more authentic Mexico as it highlights Mexico’s mixed traditions: “The experience, in short, took [them] back at least to the time of colonial repression of peons and women who hid behind shutters to catch a glimpse of the street with its brusque men.” The authenticity of their experience more authentic is heightened when they are hosted by a local elite family and exposed to local venues. It is an invigorating experience. The two young women breakfast outside in the brisk air and hike along a muddy river that cuts through the heart of Mixquiahuala and reveals a picturesque, primitive scene as “native women washed, beat clothes against polished stones; Indian children with streaks of blond hair bathed and splashed carefree,” and “at the arch of the crude bridge, a rustic cross tied with the vines of trees, marked abrupt death” (26).

Mixquiahuala functions as the antithesis to the summer school in Mexico City, even as Mexico City itself figures also as more authentic and safer than many of the other places Tere and Alicia will visit. With “its ceaseless activity, the constant, congested traffic of aggressive drivers, monuments lit up brightly as if to bring in ships out of the fog,” it is the modern city and what is left of bohemian, revolutionary Mexico-- as signified by its peñas.

… peñas, student-oriented coffee houses with child-size tables and chairs, patrons with knees at their chins listened as romantic, handsome youth beltèd out protest songs with lungs that carried the treble of volcanoes, lyrics of lava, penetrating as obsidian daggers. (26)
In Tere’s letters, Mexico City is a place that is revisited time and again, at least in her imagination, and that she sometimes sees as “the ancient Tenochtitlan, home of my mother, grandmothers, and great mother…an embracing bosom, to welcome me back and rock my weary body and mind to sleep in its tumultuous, overpopulated, throbbing, ever pulsating heart” (98). Tellingly, Mexico City is where Tere hopes to live for a time, but is too depleted and dejected by her travels to ever do.

By contrast, the summer school figures as an exclusive site where Tere and Alicia continue to see that they are excessive and invisible. It is a traitorous site made worse by the fact that they are rejected most obviously by the Mexican artisan instructor in the program. Alicia intimidates him with her knowledge and artistic ability. Tere is too familiar.

He hardly stopped his heart’s thumping over the Texan who drawled about her rich daddy and another statuesque blond with no talent but who enraptured him each time she repeated, ‘No hablo espanol. I’m from New Jersey.’ i, with the dark hair and Asian eyes, must’ve appeared like the daughter of a migrant worker or laborer in the North (which of course, I was). I was nothing so close to godliness as fair-skinned or wealthy or even a simple gringa with a birthright ticket to upward mobility in the land paved with gold, but the daughter of someone like him…” (26-27)

Tere and Alicia disrupt the fantasies and exoticist desires that the summer school offers also to the Mexican male whose self-esteem is tied up in this venture. And Tere, in particular, commits the transgression of making the laboring immigrant in the U.S., the counterpart to the leisure tourist in Mexico, present in the same tourist space.

As Tere writes about this rejection, the realization that she and Alicia must experience their travels in Mexico differently from other young women tourists registers
as a kind of violence. Questions riddle Tere’s narrative, tugged loose from the irregularities in the two girls’ travels. Such questions haunt Tere as she writes to Alicia:

> if we were filled with vivacity for scooping up life, enjoying it to the fullest. Why was peace of mind so intangible? The other women who stayed at the hostel—the sixteen-year-old blond from California whose parents were to meet her on their yacht in Mazatlán at summer’s end, the one with the face of an Ivory soap commercial, who was to marry her child-hood sweetheart after college—were they happy because they had no need to question irregularities in the way they were treated? Had they survived the summer in Mexico by not becoming part of its heart-wrenching/spirit-drenching madness? (29)

Through Tere’s questions and reconstructed experiences, Castillo exposes the hierarchy of class, looks, race, and privilege that also operates across the touristic palimpsest and determines how tourists will be treated.

But even as Tere and Alicia learn to decipher the palimpsest, they continue to hope that they too can enjoy certain tourist fantasies. This is how they travel to Acapulco. The girls are able to distinguish between “their Acapulco” and the Acapulco that tourists get to enjoy, a palimpsestic Acapulco comprised of a dazzling series of tourist attractions:

> …a different Acapulco, one of skydiving, gliding thru the air, waterskiing, dancing to rhumba music on marble terraces, English-speaking guides and colorful, bargain-filled markets…. Our Acapulco was of Mexicans who were black and kinky-haired with shackled history, grease-covered mechanics, people who watched us slyly with unsympathetic notions of our vagabonding… (33)

Although this distinction also serves to “darken” their Acapulco and cast over it an infernal aura, it does not detract them. Instead, Tere and Alicia skip tourist Acapulco and head over to an hacienda, “an unoccupied hotel newly purchased by the ambitious Tabascan whom [they’d] befriended at a Dairy Queen” (32). It is a very rustic setting that Alicia and Tere find extremely romantic despite its dusty rooms, linenless beds,
“uninspiring cobwebs and roving tarantulas,” in part because “one had a breathtaking view of the bluest sea for an immeasurable expanse, an orange sun that dove slowly into the horizon at dusk” (32). Also, although it had no running water or electricity, they found it fun to find their rooms by candlelight and “were glad to sleep there rather than the alternative of a rogue possessed beach” (32). It is a fitting site for a last adventure. For Tere, Acapulco is the last site she hopes to experience as a woman traveler before returning to a life of marriage and poverty in the States. In Mexico, she has become, just as the rhythm and structure of her prose expresses, “the flicker, flame, butterfly ablaze, [a] husband’s bride who wanted to fly in search of mythical rainbows beyond the rain” (28). Of course, her adventures are disrupted when her husband travels with her to Acapulco having arrived in Mexico to reign in his unruly wife and bring her home. For Alicia, Acapulco becomes the site where she attempts to live a fantasy of transnational romance in her very own “paradise niche overlooking the sea and embraced by the sky,” the exilic site made emblematic by Tennessee Williams in *The Night of the Iguana* (35). Having fallen in love with the hacienda and its Indian caretaker, she stays after Tere leaves, only to learn when her lover’s wife arrives on the hacienda with their kids, that Acapulco is also defined by “Adáns who wondered what it would be like to make love to the infamous North American white woman so transcendental that a wife from the village should’ve been inconsequential” (33). In fact, Tere’s and Alicia’s “first summer’s odyssey” ends as their fantasies are shattered.

But it is on their second travels to Mexico that the young women travelers realize how sinister and predatory “Mexico” can be, even as they learn to masquerade and shift the palimpsestic tourist paradigm in their favor. Tere is now separated from her husband
and has been evicted from her apartment. “Homeless,” she chooses Mexico as the site of an adventure that will ground her.

No aimless rambler, or total free spirit that could be blown in the wind’s preferred direction, I searched for my home, be it a cave alongside a barren cliff, a ranch of chickens and pigs, a city with a multitude of familiar faces confused as hungry as me. (52)

Explaining her choice, Tere also shares that by then she has developed an interest in folk medicine and in nourishing “the Indian” in her. Tere also chooses Mexico because she is a literary traveler; “books and curiosity gave [her] substantial reason to seek the past by visiting the wealth of ancient ruins that recorded awesome, yet baffling civilization” (52). Like a literary traveler she imagines her trip as an exilic, artistic journey among ruins.

Alicia joins her “in the new adventure,” again taking the role of artistic traveler, because “the idea of the journey that would lead from ruin to ruin” offered “her creativity new dimensions” (52). But as Tere reconstructs these second travels in her letters, we learn that the girls also travel according to an itinerary of visits with men, since Tere also plans stops with male friends and hosts, for the sake of stretching their money. These stops include a visit with the families of a teacher and a medical student, both whom have a romantic interest in Tere, and a stay at the hacienda of a wealthy Mexican who takes Tere as his live-in lover, pretending to have serious intentions. The girls’ travels get complicated, since each of these stays has its own messy politics: Alicia is resented by the boys, the girls are resented by the boy’s families, and the girls become prey to Tere’s fiance’s network of male friends when they leave his hacienda, encouraged to travel to Veracruz. As the previous quote about “their Acapulco” foreshadows, it is also with strangers, or the stray men observing their travels, that the girls become questionable and vulnerable. As a result of the girls’ entanglements with men, this “journey” turns so dark
and has such destructive effects on the young women’s psyches that although given a name, “Mexico Revisited,” their experiences become an “entanglement” in the young women’s memory that they can only vaguely refer to for years.

Central to these second travels are the two points on their trajectory that Tere refers to as “The Yucatan Saga” and a detour through “the City of Babylonia.” In both instances, we see that the narrative shifts its perspective to enable Tere to recount the girls’ travels. In letter 21, Tere takes the third person to occupy a more objective perspective as she describes her and Alicia’s unnerving stay in a seaside town when the peso depreciates overnight and they are unable to exchange their travelers’ checks and get stuck there. As they arrive on the ferry and are first approached “by a dozen urchins wanting to carry their bags” and to “direct them to the best place to stay, eat, swim,” the scene is very reminiscent of Lorna Dee Cervantes’s “Oaxaca, 1974.” In this poem, the Chicana protagonist looks for Mexico, “all day in the streets of Oaxaca” as the children in the streets taunt her and call to her “in words of another language.” As her “brown body,” continues to search the streets “for the dye that will color” her thoughts, Mexico responds with “gags,/Esputa!/on this bland pochaseed.” Castillo depicts a similar situation, as Tere relives and narrates the girls’ moving across the seaside setting and the male gaze turns upon them, transforming the paradisal setting into an infernal one.

The sea was sapphire, a fluid orchard. Sea birds swooped and skimmed along its surface. Men, whose gold-capped teeth caught glimmers of sun as they gave pitches for a great day at the Garrafón, swallowed the women with their black unfriendly eyes. No one heard the women speak. They didn’t smile. Behind a wall of opaque glass, they were left alone but were watched from a distance, followed. Boys called to them. “Hey, gringas! Oye, chula!” The men who leaned against entrances to the souvenir shops snickered, elbowed each other and whispered, threw obscene kisses in the air. (70-71)
Using this displaced perspective, Tere depicts the girls’ dress, visual presence, and activities on the beach, while capturing the local Mexicans’ thoughts—and the local Mexican women’s indifference—as they watch the two girls, apparently familiar with this type of tourist: “It is obvious that they’re foreigners and typical of the youth of the day, travelers rather than tourists. It isn’t surprising that they stop at the first shabby motel they pass” (71). The prose also captures the girls’ beauty and intimacy and Tere’s Chicana identity.

One picked up a dead branch and lingeringly drew something in the Sand. She drew a snake. S. She draws another snake. S. Two snakes. S.S. She was obsessed with snakes. The snake woman, Coatlicue. (72)

But the prose also works to capture the dangerous situation that the girls fall into as time begins to pass and the men have circulated the rumor that the girls have paid for a sea excursion with sex.

Back in their room, they feel that the night has eyes, a voyeur, Behind drawn curtains, cracks in the salt-eaten door. It went on like this, Alicia, you know, another day, another night. The drunken men on the beach, whose voices were heard gaining on us. Still unable to cash our checks without money, we slept on hammocks in a hut where land crabs, blood-sucking mosquitos and any natural or unnatural creature of the earth may have come to strangle our necks. (74)

Tere ends the letter by telling Alicia, “I don’t want to go on with this story. You know the rest” (74). And we see that this is a different kind of narrative drift that works also to create distance in order to preserve the narrator’s mental integrity as she recalls a treacherous and destabilizing experience.

Indeed, Tere writes that even as she and Alicia arrive at a tropical city that “seemed to be in comparison to the other towns of our journey an extroverted and ultramodern metropolis,” they had grown timid and preferred to be inconspicuous, wary
that their presence suddenly discovered might cause their new surroundings to vanish (75). It was “a city in the tropics like so many situated by the sea, famous for its beautiful beaches, yet [they] wanted no part of it…only to be rid of Babylonia with its vestiges of doom with every encounter.”

There was hardly a word exchanged between us. Months of miles of moving continuously away from the familiar had worked their evil on our minds and emotions. (75)

In Letter 23, the narrative shifts again, fragments, and turns choppy as Tere expresses why this city has come to register for them with such doom: the girls escape Alicia’s near rape while she dances at a nightclub. Castillo stylizes her prose to capture the men’s attempt to dismember Alicia; it reaches operatic intensity as Tere musters the little power she has to defend Alicia.

It happened quickly. They were anxious to have you, chew you up, one would have the legs, the other a breast, devour and throw your bones into the ocean, never to be heard of again. Another stupid desperate gringa, foreign scum. It happened quickly. One grabbed your arm, the other pulled at your waist to drag you backstage. Without knowing i would do it, I flung at them. LEAVE HER BE! SON OF A BITCH! trembling with rage, LEAVE HER ALONE OR… The spell was broken.

As Tere and Alicia continue to travel and weaken, the prose shifts again to express a mobile, hypnotic trance and near hysteria.

When Tere and Alicia return to Mexico on these second travels, they meet their “destiny at every stopover, pueblo, city, café, on any bus, street, at the coast, peninsula, and central plateau” (65). The list seems endless. For Tere, destiny figures as a confrontation with society’s strict gendered norms, for “society has knit its pattern so tight that a confrontation with it is inevitable” (65). In this sense, what each site illuminates for Tere and Alicia is their “greatest transgression”—that they traveled alone-
and the consequent vulnerability, rejection, and assault that this transgression exposes them to.

The reason it was so blatantly painful, to the point that it made you cringe at the sound of the male voice, was that we had abruptly appeared in Mexico as two snags in its pattern. Society could do no more than snip us out. How revolting we were, susceptible to ridicule, abuse, disrespect. We would have hoped for respect as human beings, but the only respect granted a woman is that which a gentleman bestows upon a lady. Clearly, we were no ladies. (65)

Although Tere and Alicia develop “antennae” that “went up and zoomed in on every move, each phrase to decipher whether foul play might be in store,” they discover that “having to remain on guard because [they] were women travelers…is draining” (77). In two instances, Tere describes the exhilaration the girls feel as they outwit the men they come into contact with. In one, the prose mimics a game of chess as Tere debates her “liberated” status with a young man who attempts to outdrink and seduce her, and in the other, the two girls masquerade as the good collegiate daughters of Mexican middle class society to escape the sexual intentions of the distinguished “friends” (of Tere’s “fiancé”) who offer them a limo ride to Mexico City. But ultimately, for Alicia and Tere the fact that women necessarily travel differently aware of their bodies, their sex, fearing catcalls, and rape, having to resort to the wearing of men’s clothes and masquerade (Behar and Gordon --) registers as a drastic truth with apocalyptic consequences. Indeed, in another letter, Tere describes a broken down Alicia as “the carrion that vultures in Mexico had discarded.” The implicit resolution to Tère’s and Alicia’s suffering and disgrace as expressed in Tere’s narration and in Alicia’s artistic responses to her letters is that the young women transform their painful experiences into art. And this is how we arrive at the Chicana protagonist featured in María Novaro’s El jardín del Eden. She is the valiant
artist who travels to Mexico to ground her identity and transform her cultural insecurity, pain, and vulnerability into art. And, we can arrive at her Anglo-American counterpart and friend first through Harriet Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora*.

**Harriet Doerr’s *Consider This, Señora***

A housing development in the quiet Mexican town of Amapolas, or Poppy Fields, is the central setting of Doerr’s novel. A ruin, the crumbling hacienda belonging to Don Enrique Ortiz de León, the descendent of a “Castilian ancestor of his who had stepped just behind Cortés onto Mexican soil,” is figured, along with what will be Susanna Ames’s house, as the heart of this development (2). Each new house is constructed in time to receive each new resident that arrives. In this way, the new development is figured as “home” to an exilic expatriate community, even as it is marked by the comings and goings of its residents and their acquaintances to other sites, like San Miguel de Allende, Cancun, the ruins of the Yucatan, and the fictional colonial province of Santa Prisca, as part of a greater touristic palimpsest.

The emergence of this new housing development in the town of Amapolas is highly crafted by Doerr. It is defined in part by the passing of the historic property from the Mexican hacendado to the American property holder in Mexico. Don Enrique is no longer able to hold on to his estate, due to his inability to pay the property taxes. Apparently, he is not asking a steep price, for Bud, the American who has arrived in Amapolas to make a bid on the property, regards the sale of the ten acres of land as “a steal.” The development of Amapolas is also defined by Bud’s and Sue’s competing male and female sensibilities, and initially Don Enrique’s as well, for when Sue visits Amapolas and decides to buy a home there, she falls into a partnership with Bud, since he
has already begun negotiations on the only existing tract of land available for purchase. Bud and Don Enrique are rather amused by Sue’s interest; “they believed they were in the presence of a helpless female” and regard her with a patronizing male perspective. As a Mexican gentleman, Don Enrique grows concerned on her behalf when he learns that Bud and Sue are not previously acquainted and even feels the impulse to intercede and ask that she stop and think about her getting involved in a business venture with a stranger. But Bud, practical and in need of a business partner, does not let her sex get in the way of their partnership.

This Susahnahahmes [sic], Don Enrique supposed, was in need of a man. Perhaps one her own age, or—better—an older man, one who understood business and the law.

Bud retained his original impression of her. When he and Sue Ames [as he thinks of her] had met for the first time, by coincidence, in the property agent’s office, he noticed her looks and her reckless attitude toward land and concluded then that all she needed was shaping up. (3)

At the same time, although both he and Sue are in Mexico “for the sake of new surroundings, to get away,” their sensibilities could not be more different (1). Bud is fleeing taxes in the States, is impatient and uncultured, and seeks a profitable investment and a way to make a living in Mexico. Fleeing a divorce in the States, Sue seeks “space, silence, and an extended interval of time,” expansive views, and to “at last be let alone” in a place that “neither her friends nor her family in California could be aware of…remote as it was from any airport and from both coasts” (5). Unlike Bud, who sees Mexico with a business imagination, she sees it with an artist’s eye and sketches building plans as an artist would (21). This is how the book gets its title. Don Enrique regards her sketches and says, “Consider this, señora…You are transforming Amapolas into something more beautiful than it is” (4)
Predictably, Bud decides that the hacienda is in the way and that he wants to get rid of it. But for Sue, it is already a definitive marker in the landscape that lends it history and meaning, and she fights him to keep it. She suggests that they give it back to Don Enrique, “the walls that are left, and the stone fragments, and the land they’re on” (22). Interestingly, Doerr casts this fight in a way that allows for a play of perspectives in the interpretation of the scene, as she does with many scenes in her narrative, by inviting a Mexican perspective. Here, we witness the scene through Patricio, who does not understand English but fills in the narrative just the same, as a local Mexican observer would, in this case, with the particular masculinist and Mexican cultural perspective that Doerr grants him.

…The young North American señora allowed her voice to rise and the North American señor, who was known in the village as El Chaparro [shorty] because he was short, paced back and forth and shouted. The quarrel was so intense that at times Patricio expected the señor to strike the señora, as many men in Amapolas, under the same circumstances, might have struck their women. Then all at once the señora lifted a calm hand as though she had divine power and spoke the necessary words. As suddenly as it began, the argument ended, and the two, without exchanging another word, drove off, she in her yellow camioneta and he in his dusty pickup.

This much Patricio saw. Later, in the village, he would say, “The young señora has rejected the señor. She is beautiful and he is… well, you have seen him.” (23)

With such intersections of multiple perspectives, Doerr recreates the encounters and divergences that occur as a result of the Americans’ presence.

Serendipity, another mode of interconnection, plays a great role in Doerr’s narrative. “Coincidence is everything,” begins the chapter about the Easter weekend in which Sue leaves to Santa Prisca to spend a few days away painting. She is leaving Amapolas when she remembers to turn back to remind her watchman to water a tree, runs
into Bud, and that is how he catches her to inform her that he wants to clear the hacienda from the property. Sue wins the argument over the hacienda by agreeing to sell at least one empty lot during her weekend in Santa Prisca. Coincidence and serendipity continue to function for since it is Easter weekend in Santa Prisca, there are no rooms in the hotel in which she wishes to stay, another American woman happens to overhear her at the hotel counter, offers her her room, and stays next door with her lover, Paco. This is how Sue meets Fran. On this trip they become friends and by the end of her stay, Fran informs Sue that she will take a lot for herself and another for her mother, Ursula, as well.

It is also in Santa Prisca where Sue purchases the recycled parts with which she will build her home, including shutters from “the windows of a house of assignation in the town,” and a door that “that used to be at the entrance to the jail” (40). Sue purchases these parts from an “ancient, seamed, and toothless” person at a “windowless shed.” But when he lights the single bulb, she sees in “the faint light…a treasure house of doors and shutters, all old, all works of art, propped six deep against streaked adobe walls” (40). And she is taken by the hinges and lock of the door, even as the old man informs her of their origins and remarks of the door, “Who can count the unfortunates who heard it close behind them?”(40). Doerr thus interjects a more critical perspective than Sue’s, subtly revealing Sue’s aestheticising sensibility as her artist’s eye unflinchingly transforms poverty and ruin into lovely building materials and her home is guiltlessly constructed with the stray parts of other dis-membered ruins.

This is how the development in the town of Amapolas is founded: through serendipity and in the shadow of the ruins of an hacienda that will poetically ground the
new development, even as it is bought cheaply by the American, the next foreigner in a lineage of invaders of Mexico.

In this way, the future of the mesa was assured. The *hacienda* would stand again, its back to the hill, its restored façade confronting the newly built houses of aliens. It was here in its shadow, that Sue intended to spend the rest of her life. (44)

We see that Sue’s returning the hacienda to Don Enrique and his enthusiastic decision to rebuild it is supposed to achieve a kind of resolution, as Doerr pulls together stylistically, the disparate interests, presences, historical trajectories, and fates that will create the development. As she ends the first chapter, the poetic rhythm of Doerr’s prose captures synchronizing trajectories as the Americans’ lives also fall into the natural rhythms that define Mexico:

> As soon as dark came, night animals began to occupy the four *hectáreas* of long flat ground above the village. Each creature followed a purpose of its—to eat, to mate, to dig a burrow, or simply to run from north to south by moonlight. Heedless of approaching change, they traced the lengths of walls and paths to come. They paused in doorways not yet raised, circled trees not planted. Their footprints webbed the dust of unmarked building sites. (19)

Thus the central setting of the novel is established as is the kind of work that Doerr’s constructions and prose will perform in this travel narrative.

Interestingly, despite the enlightened play of perspectives, poetic constructions of tourist spaces, and “connections” that define Mexico for Sue and it seems Doerr as author, Doerr’s Mexico continues to be infernally paradisical. Sue sees “connections” “everywhere” that figure with Mexico’s excess. Defined by its excess and poetic interconnections, Doerr’s Mexico is as infernally paradisical, as that of the previous authors discussed in this dissertation. A direct example is the chapter titled, “Truckloads of Tuberoses,” which begins with a line that recalls that “Sue Ames had noticed Mexican
excess as soon as she drove across the border.” Excess marks Mexico’s distinction from the U.S., immediately upon crossing into Mexico, as it sustains an effusive gathering of contradictory traits.

First, the plethora of junkyards lining the road south… Then a hundred miles of desert. Then a hundred miles of grazing land. Then the sudden green of fields where corn and chiles shared the furrows under steep mountainsides of darkening blue.

The Mexican sky was excessive too, she believed. Wider than others, it stretched over people who appeared no fonder of life that death, as they darted on bicycles between trailer trucks and buses and hurried hand in hand, whole families strong, across divided freeways. (93)

The poetic power and enlightened play of perspectives that Doerr brings to her narrative do not enough to resist the enchantments that the infernal paradise construction also lends her narrative. There are instances in which Doerr falls into the trap of perpetuating Mexico’s savage and fatalistic barbarism.

One of these instances occurs in the interweaving of elderly Goya’s story with Ursula’s. A stray visitor, Goya whimsically appears as an uninvited but not unwelcome guest on Ursula’s property. “Dragging her goat behind her, enter[ing] Ursula’s gate without a word and in silence shuffl[ing] to a bench on the terrace,” she sits in the sun (53). Goya thus enters the narrative as a colorful character, even as we learn that “the shawled, bent old woman, whose gnarled hand shot out from her layers of garments as quick as a garter snake to accept” Ursula’s soft drinks and cookies, lives in “a blue house no bigger than a lean-to on the upper shore of the lake” and is poor and alone (53).

Although Goya does not speak English, Ursula has conversations with her. She learns from Goya’s nods to the cemetery that her children and grandchildren are deceased and Goya becomes a regular visitor. Then, “one September afternoon,” Ursula learns the reason she leads a goat and Goya’s tragic story from Patricio. The reader is warned that
it will probably be a typical, tragic Mexican story when Doerr notes, “This is the moment for me to stop this story, Ursula warned herself. It is bound to be disturbing” (55). Of course, she continues to listen to the story of how Goya’s last grandchild perished when he went in search of the goat that Goya had secretly gotten rid of because he was such a nuisance. In typical colorful, dramatic and barbarous, Mexican storytelling fashion, Patricio relates that,

although warnings were posted on this road, the truck, without reducing speed, first passed one that said, DANGEROUS CURVE 500 METERS, then one that said, DANGEROUS CURVE 250 METERS, and finally, without slowing down, came to the one where the child sat, that only said, DANGEROUS CURVE, and here the accident occurred… “The day after the child was buried,” he told the widow, “Goya went to the farm where she had left the goat and paid the owner to have it back.” Patricio turned from the doorway. “She ties it to her so that it cannot run away.”… “I see,” said the widow Bowles. (57)

In such instances, Doerr’s highly effective mimicry only serves to reinforce Mexico’s stereotypical, infernally paradisal traits in a way that perpetuates their power to enchant the reader.

At the same time, just as in the case of Goya and Ursula, in the course of the novel, local Mexican and American characters are interconnected and drawn close to express how much a part of the life of the town Bud’s and Sue’s tract of houses becomes. These characters include the priest, Don Enrique, Sue’s housekeeper lovely Altagracia, her brother and Sue’s watchman, Patricio, Bud, Sue, Fran, Ursula, and a foreign musician. Indeed, as a result of their encounters and the intertwining of their disparate lives, each of the foreign characters achieves coherence and their life a poetic resolution in Mexico. Ursula dies in Mexico, but not before becoming an integral part of the community and completing her “return” by visiting the town in which she grew up and distributing her
savings to the descendants of the Mexicans who formed part of her childhood. After playing a single note ceaselessly for weeks, the foreign musician is freed from what seems to be a traumatic spell when on the night of a local fiesta, local musicians recognize the note and play its song, releasing the musician to play through hours and hours of a rainfall that breaks the local draught. Even Bud is transformed and redeemed through his marriage to the lovely and magical Altagracia and an unforeseen attachment (at least for him) to his land. And, of course, the Mexican characters are also impacted through what are for the most part, poignant, positive connections with the foreigners who arrive and make a life in their town.

Curiously, the one character that does not really transform is Fran. Ursula’s concern for Fran’s misguided search for meaning, a career, and love, and the consequent tension between mother and daughter, is a central subtext that runs through both women’s stories. Although the two women reconcile as Ursula dies, Fran continues to be a passing presence at Amapolas and a woman who cannot find security without a man. She is also cast as the writer figure in the novel, but one that is superficial and reminiscent of the writers that toured Mexico during the Porfiriato. The travel guide that Fran researches and writes in Mexico turns out to be, to the surprise and dismay of her mother and Sue, a superficial book of lies, or picturesque half-truths. The narrator relates that unsurprisingly, “in the States,” Fran’s book, “Your Mexico sold briskly…people liked the title, the red-and-orange jacket, and Fran’s picture, taken a year earlier, when she first learned that Paco loved her” (101). In Mexico, it is what drives Paco, her Mexican lover, away. Fran appears untroubled and unaffected as he turns the pages and cites instance after instance in her book that is not right, even as Paco asks himself how this woman
who knows so well how to please a man in the bedroom and in the kitchen...allow herself to be deceived? He looked down at Fran’s face on his shoulder and noticed a faint line across her brow, another between her eyes. And at this moment, he realized she was growing old and soft-headed, all at the same time. (109-110)

The next morning he drives away for good, but not before leaving an irrevocable impression of Fran. For when he tells her, “When writing of Mexico, the truth is exciting enough,” his commentary carries weight, since he works for the state’s tourist industry, surveying sites like Cancun and discovering future tourist locations. And still, Fran continues to drift across Mexico rather recklessly, leaving the care of her mother’s ashes to Sue, even as she finds another man, an older and more sober man and an archaeologist, to be her companion. She never becomes an enlightened figure, or a singular woman traveler, just as she never becomes a true resident of Amapolas like her mother or Sue. But in this way, Fran is a perfect segue to the figure of the woman traveler that María Novaro represents in *El jardín del Eden*. We see that in her film, this is the figure of the Anglo-American woman traveler that Novaro takes up and responds to, critically.

**María Novaro’s *El jardín del Eden***

In María Novaro’s film, *El jardín del Edén*, two women travelers, Serena and Jane, arrive in Tijuana at the same time. With Serena’s simultaneous arrival, Novaro immediately interjects the Mexican migrant’s presence and mobility in the experience of “travel” that will be depicted in her film. Recently widowed, Serena is beautiful, sad, and a young single mother. She arrives with her children at a concrete apartment that has been described to her as pretty and spacious. It has graffiti on the walls and the windows open to a view of the hills and the cluttered, precarious neighborhood. At times her new home also offers a view of INS SUV and helicopter vehicles patrolling the area, and we
watch as Serena closes her curtains at night to the scene of INS runs below. Although
Serena has no plans to cross into the U.S. she lives in a heavily policed border zone, and
the U.S.’s interests in maintaining its border make the U.S. an active presence in her life.

Jane is shown making her way through the streets with her duffle bag as she arrives. She
has come looking for her brother who has been living in Mexico and to visit with her
Mexican American friend, Elizabeth (Liz). Jane speaks a little Spanish, is practicing, and
is very reminiscent of Maria Cristina Mena’s “Miss Young.” She is bright and excited
and everything seems lovely to her. Novaro casts her as a big, beautiful, wide-eyed blond
with a cheerful personality. Elizabeth is already living in Tijuana and the rhythm of her
life appears set. She is shown at a studio working on an exhibit of Chicano art, studying
alternative videos at home, and visiting with the Mexican woman who babysits her
daughter. Elizabeth is cast as an awkward figure, in some ways more awkward than Jane
and Serena. She falters when she speaks Spanish and her pronunciation is sometimes
very bad, while in English she has a Chicano accent. Because she appears tormented by
her cultural deficiency, one can read her as marked by both her Spanish and English as
exposed and as falling short of her identity. Liz is also a mother. She has a little girl
named “Guadalupe” who she nicknames “Lupita” after her saucy Mexican babysitter,
Juana, criticizes her mutilated pronunciation and says that “Guadalupee” just does not
work. Perhaps realizing that she needs and deserves criticism, Elizabeth bears Juana’s
criticism painfully but also patiently, as she continues to practice her Spanish and
research her art. We see that she is relieved that Lupita is talking and playing in Spanish
with Serena’s daughter. Liz appears to take comfort in her daughter’s acculturation.

These three women’s lives intertwine as Novaro’s narrative begins.
The Mexico that these women must navigate is the border city of Tijuana. Novaro highlights the film’s setting, as the narrative film begins, with shots of the tin fence running along the hilly desert. Texts are scattered throughout the film narrative, serving as signs that help to define the border as both a physical and metaphorical site. Often these texts are visual images, like briefly glimpsed signs or ads. These signs construct Tijuana, Mexico but also the other side of the border, as an infernal paradise. We see that Mexican hotels are named “Hotel Paraiso” and “Hotel Velador” and when her characters successfully cross into the U.S., they stay at the “Garden of Eden Motel.” Similarly, a large building called “El Eden” is shown in the city night along city streets marked by nightclubs, traffic, and commerce, transforming Tijuana into another version of Castillo’s “Babylonian city.” Liz sits watching Gomez Pena’s Border Brujo and the viewer sees and hear bits of his monologue, beginning with the phrases with which he defines Mexico as “a paradise in fragmentation.” There is also a sense of humor and a pointed touristic awareness at play. Indeed, in Novaro’s text, a playful post-tourist mentality operates also among the Mexican migrants. A provisional lunch place is named “Comedor Ilegal,” or “Illegal Diner” and another, “Always on Vacation.” In this way, the city of Tijuana is propped against a border that is sometimes a fence, sometimes a beach, sometimes a row of hills, while Novaro juxtaposes its touristic and migrant functions. Tijuana is thus constructed as a site of many crossings and transgressions—illegal, as signified by the many migrant men scattered along the beach border, but also legal as signified by the presence of Elizabeth and Jane in Mexico. When marked by texts associated with Elizabeth and her work, the border speaks also to cultural crossings and returns. Novaro’s camera focuses in on the documentaries that Liz is studying, in
which Chicanas are interviewed about their cultural identities, revealing the blind spots, insecurities, and transgressions that accompany their attempts to reclaim their heritage. At other times, texts that speak to the border stem from Mexican women’s art, texts that express Mexican women artists own grappling with their indigenous ancestry and mestiza identities, like Graciela Iturbide’s photographs and Frida Kahlo’s painting, “The Two Fridas.”

As the three women’s travels are framed by this textual commentary, the women are also balanced and illuminated by the male characters, principally Jane’s brother, Frank, and a Mexican migrant, Felipe. Jane is surprised to learn that Frank has stopped writing and now appears to be studying gray whales. When, Jane tells her brother that she wants to be a writer, he is amused and suggests that she be a tour guide instead. He scoffs when she says that she can be like “that writer…who wrote about all the women in Egypt” and also write about the places she sees. When she admits that she’s a little confused, he offers no guidance. But in the next scene we see that Jane is serious about wanting to write about Mexico and that this is how she is going to experience Mexico—as a writer looking to write about exotic, lovely, and extraordinary things. In this silent scene, Novaro depicts Jane writing avidly in her journals with two other texts in the frame: Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and a dictionary open to the word “paradise.” Jane stops to read the definition and to think about it. Through this juxtaposition of scenes, we see the passing on of roles, as Jane, the woman traveler, takes up the career and tradition of writing that the male traveler, her brother, has now abandoned.

Liz and Jane meet Felipe, a Mexican migrant, when he is walking up the road and Jane notices that they have a flat tire. Jane flirts with him and asks for his help even
though Liz says she can handle it. They take him out to lunch and he explains where he is from and why he has had to leave his town to go looking for a job. When Liz asks Jane what he said, Jane answers that she has “no idea” but that he is wonderful, her typical response to everything in Mexico that delights her. Felipe asks the young women if they tourists, and they decisively answer, “No!” Liz explains that she is in Mexico doing an exhibit on Chicano art and alternative videos, and the viewer can see by the dazed and perplexed expression on Felipe’s face that he does not understand such work. Jane explains that she is a writer, to Liz’s surprise, since this is the first time she hears the news. Felipe then teaches Jane that the flower she picked on the side of the road makes men crazy, and she excitedly responds, “Fantastic!”—to which Felipe responds, “she’s a little crazy isn’t she?” A distinction between Liz and Jane is thus made. Liz is not the playful flirt that Jane is, but Novaro also conveys that Liz really has no interest in learning about his migrant experience. Felipe will become Jane’s lover, helping her to really live her Mexican experience, but his existence will remain marginal and irrelevant to Liz’s individualistic, artistic pursuits in Mexico. Serena, Felipe, and the other migrants thus serve as commentary on the Mexican American’s and Anglo American’s at times intrusive, at times superficial or indifferent travels, as does, interestingly, the Anglo American male who has become a silent, singular, and disoriented figure in Mexico.

The male characters (Felipe and Frank), migrants (Serena and the men waiting to cross), and textual commentary also serve to put into relief perhaps what is conveyed most pointedly by the film—the many cultural transgressions that are committed by the tourist as part of the experience of travel. What is interesting about the way that Novaro depicts these transgressions is that they occur between Jane and Liz just as they occur
between the two women travelers and Mexico. Jane fails to “get” that Liz is not Mexican, just as she fails to get Liz’s art and attempts to find her voice in Mexico—as expressed in the last opening epigraph of this chapter. Novaro poetically foreshadows this problematic feature of their friendship when the two girls first greet each other in Liz’s studio. A painting of Frida Kahlo’s eyes and daunting eyebrows hangs on the wall behind them, and Kahlo appears to gaze warily in their direction as they embrace and Liz exclaims that finally Jane has arrived. Later, we see that even in Mexico, Liz has to continue to correct Jane and remind her that she is not Mexican and that her identity is different from the other Mexican women that Jane meets.

More powerfully, Novaro depicts multiple transgressions as they intersect. We can see this especially in the touring figure of Jane. In one instance, Jane wanders the nearby beaches with Felipe, sees all the men scattered on the beach, and asks what they are doing. When Felipe answers that they are waiting “for their moment,” she exclaims that she likes that expression, and that she too is waiting for her moment, as if one’s “moment” expresses one’s “break” or “destiny.” Felipe exclaims his surprise and begins to correct her when we see the two turn to watch INS vehicles that stop a group of men as they attempt to cross. It is then that Jane realizes the scene she has wandered into and that she has transgressed by attempting to separate a very literal expression of crossing from the very material circumstances it is expressing. In another instance, Jane wanders into the kitchen of a seafood restaurant on another part of the beach. Three young Mexican women in indigenous dress chatter in their dialect and giggle as they work in the kitchen. Jane can’t resist and has to interact with them. Especially drawn to one who she finds beautiful, we see in another scene that she takes her to meet her brother. She
introduces Margarita as she tells her brother that she is going to write about her and her
town. She then asks if her brother can give her a job as a housekeeper, which appears to
be the trade that Jane hopes to offer Margarita. Her brother listens skeptically and refuses
to participate in her “hairbrained schemes,” calls her “damn irresponsible” for taking
Margarita there, but surrenders and agrees to get her a job with the “gringo” couple next
door. At the same seafood restaurant, Jane introduces Liz to one of the Indian girls/cooks
and says that she is also Mexican. Novaro positions the camera to capture Liz’s slight
awkwardness as she gets up to shake hands with the Indian cook. Although Liz later
calls on Jane for telling people that she is Mexican when she can’t even speak Spanish,
Jane dismisses the distinction by saying that the young Indian girl can’t speak Spanish
either (even though her speaking in her Indian dialect is an entirely different dynamic). It
appears that of the two American friends, it is Jane who can simplify and transgress
cultural boundaries more easily, a fact Novaro highlights when Jane smuggles Felipe
across the border in the trunk of the car, failing to catch the border guard’s suspicion
since she is the lovely picture of a young white woman returning from a short trip in
Tijuana. But Liz also transgresses. To distract Liz, Jane shows her a picture of Iturbide’s
photographs and asks Liz, “which is you?” Liz picks the photo of a woman with iguanas
on her head and says, “This is me. And I wish I could take those iguanas off my head”—
in this way, reading herself into the image of the indigenous woman. Novaro also hints
that the giving her daughter a name she cannot pronounce, the name of the virgin patron
saint of all Mexico no less, is a kind of transgression that even Liz is aware of. We also
see that Liz too makes use of Margarita in her art. Margarita becomes the model for the
indigenous Frida Kahlo and sits with Liz who takes the part of the criolla Frida Kahlo in
a reenactment of the image of “The Two Fridas.” Since we have not seen a friendship form between Liz and Margarita, the viewer can gather that Liz too has wandered rather superficially into Margarita’s life, for the sake of her art.

As the film ends, neither Liz nor Jane appear to successfully adjust their travels in Mexico as a result of new insights gathered thus far. After Felipe leaves her, Jane returns to Mexico and sees Liz again. Liz is preparing to leave to Oaxaca and Jane is seeing her off at the bus terminal, when an Indian girl appears with a long cage on her back full of birds. To express Jane’s fascination, Novaro captures the girl in slow motion, as the young woman looks around and a little boy stares at the birds wonderstruck, similar to the way that Jane stares at the lovely girl. Registering Jane’s appreciation of the picturesque sight, Liz looks at Jane and they exchange smiles that convey a continuing friendship that is sustained by their mutual appreciation for Mexico.

Conclusion

In The Mixquiahuala Letters, Alicia and Tere travel across an extended touristic palimpsest that includes the summer school, Acapulco, the marginal seaside hacienda, colonial provinces with their plazas and quaint customs, the city in the tropics “with its beaches, mambo on moonlit terraces, and outdoor cafes,” and an itinerary of ruins. Depicting the girls’ travels as an infernal descent as they travel “down, down, for days and nights, among the chickens, rancid food, odors of unwashed bodies, bus after bus until at last, ‘they’ arrived at the Yucatán Peninsula” (66), Ana Castillo demonstrates that touristic Mexico is also treacherous, as it exposes vulnerable women travelers to very real rejection, indifference, danger, and estrangement. In Consider This, Señora, Harriet Doerr focuses on the poetic intersections and syncretisms that occur among travelers and
between travelers and local Mexicans to add poignancy to the travelers’ experience. She poetically constructs a rather utopic expatriate community that expresses her travelers’ more enlightened attempts to reconstruct their lives. Amapolas provides a stable base for their highly privileged tourist adventures in Mexico, but it also reminds the reader that Americans’ travel in Mexico rests on U.S. capitalist investment in Mexico. In *El jardín del Edén* Maria Novaro represents the Anglo American and Mexican American women travelers by placing them on a literal border, highlighting their cultural crossings and transgressions as they also tour and try to make a life in Mexico. As she turns her camera on the two travelers and carries out her own framing of their longings and contradictions, she appears to repatriate the Mexican American woman traveler, even as she refuses to redeem the Anglo American woman traveler (Torres 121-128). Castillo and Novaro also remind us that like the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, tourist Mexico is a policed terrain. Although their criticisms vary, all three women authors/artists offer more nuanced and critical representations of the woman traveler. As they focus on this figure, they also expose the limitations and exclusive orientation of the greater touristic palimpsest that “Mexico” becomes as it begins to transform into a globalized, postmodern travel terrain.
Conclusion

Literary Spaces of Travel and the “Future” of Mexican Tourism

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This dissertation ends where in many ways it began: with me as a woman traveler in Mexico wandering off the beaten paths of a massive seaside resort into a literary space of travel. This space is a real place: the Hacienda Jalisco, a bed-and-breakfast inn and museum located in the mountainous outskirts of Puerto Vallarta. Puerto Vallarta, or “PV,” as it is called today, is the very popular seaside resort that I featured in chapter 4—a tourist site made spectacular by the actors, characters, and director of The Night of the Iguana. The Hacienda Jalisco is a distinct tourist site in a much smaller setting in the tiny colonial mining town of San Sebastian. It is also a poetic space and experience shaped by historical and folkloric tales, travel in Mexico, an expatriate American owner, and real adventure (since getting there is an adventure). It is a re-constructed site informed by literary associations tied to American and foreign authors’ literary constructions of Mexico as an infernal paradise. It is as enchanting and exilic as it is (at times, literally) dark, cut off from civilization, and potentially suffocating. It is also highly contradictory. It is a perfect example of a literary space of travel.
The hacienda in many ways inspired this dissertation and put into relief its many themes: different kinds of travelers, infernally paradisal traits, tourist sites as constructed sites (physically and metaphorically), and tourist sites as literary spaces of travel. For this reason I find it fitting to take my readers to the Hacienda as I end the dissertation. Just as the featured writers of this dissertation—Maria Cristina Mena, Katherine Anne Porter, Tennessee Williams, Harriet Doerr, and Ana Castillo—placed their characters in exilic off-the-beaten-path settings, I want to place my readers in such a setting. I will depict my stays at the Hacienda in a way that demonstrates how the reader/traveler might experience this site as a literary space of travel that is also a “palimpsestic” site in the greater touristic landscape of present day Mexico.

As a touristic palimpsest, the Mexican hacienda is a transformative site with multiple valences. It has been captured in stories or works about Mexico in this way. In Mena’s “Son of the Tropics,” the hacienda is a feudal place that produces the handsome and heroic revolutionary rebel who is the son of the hacendado’s nanny’s daughter. When he discovers that he is the bastard son of the hacendado, he refuses to assimilate his origins (and his future) and kills himself instead. In Porter’s story “Hacienda,” it is a pulque factory transformed into an artistic site when it is picked by foreign-film makers as the perfect setting for their film because it is as picturesque, enchanting, feudal, and barbaric as revolutionary Mexico. In Castillo’s The Mixquiahuala Letters, it is the liminal, eroticised site where Alicia retreats with her Mexican lover, even as the summer ends and her time to return to the States arrives. “Enchanted by the haunting beauty of the deserted hacienda, the virile lover of skin like polished wood, and the hypnotic sea”—she refuses to leave until her dream turns into a nightmare. In these instances the
hacienda transforms in infernally paradisal ways from a promising, idyllic site to a site that is traitorous and deadly. As an actual tourist site, the hacienda allows guests to choose from its different narrative possibilities—whether colonial, exilic, artistic, or eroticised—and to shift across the various identities and travel experiences that are associated with each. A guest can experience the aristocratic lifestyle of a colorful, colonial setting, or be an exile, an artist, or a more sensual traveler.

But the hacienda is only one of the sites of the greater touristic palimpsest that is Mexico, just as the Hacienda Jalisco is simply another “back space” of mass tourist PV. Thus to survey this greater touristic scheme, after the Hacienda, I take my readers to PV. This “survey” is drawn from insights gathered during a driving tour that I took with my mother, a native of the region, in the spring of 2007. The tour allowed me to observe the astonishing changes that have occurred in the last three years, especially along the little beach towns of the “North Shore”—as it allowed me to see characteristics of the local tourist scene. On the tour my mother exclaimed, “My God, it’s all a great American colony!” which reminded me of the beginnings of tourism—the great foreign capitalist investments that occurred during the Porfiriato. The huge cruise ships in the Marina (like the “Princess”/loveboat) became floating tourist colonies; as did the new Starbucks “Peninsula” along the downtown highway, an island with American shops and restaurants (like “Chilis”) and an elegant outdoor moving escalator; as did, in yet a different way, the new exclusive (often gated) luxury communities being built in the hills just behind the beach towns of the North Shore. It was also on this trip that I was struck by the dusty

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96 Because the Hacienda draws its present owner and guests from the waves of tourism that have passed through PV and is defined in promotional literature in relation to PV, it is also part of PV’s greater theme park offerings.

97 This tour took place March 27-April 1, 2007.
‘darkness’ of the area and realized yet another way in which Mexico transforms into an infernal paradise. At the end of April, dirt flies everywhere, covering the green of the tropical vegetation and literally darkening the town’s colonial seaside charms. Besieged by dirt, tourists who travel in this dry season must move through hot and dusty surroundings and experience tourist sites to a greater degree, through the collection of signs—markers, props, descriptions—that signify what the sites they are there to discover and explore are supposed to mean. Since the sites are visually tarnished by all the dirt and the tropics are parched (waterfalls stop; creeks and rivers dry up; the jungle thins), tourists experience local attractions metaphorically.

As we gather such examples of existing traits, sites, and constructions that define PV, we will also attain a sense of the way in which the ‘future’ of 20th century Mexican tourism is unfolding now. PV will be our case study of greater tourist Mexico. I begin, then, with the Hacienda Jalisco.

**The Hacienda Jalisco Inn**

The Hacienda Jalisco Inn is a very different tourist site than the mass and swinging tourist theme park that is the seaside resort of PV. First, as a former headquarters for an American mining company, it is a kind of heritage site. At first glance, its heritage value is defined by its architecture; its mining structures still intact; its isolated, mountain setting; its proximity to the Spanish colonial mining town of San Sebastian; its creek and forest; kerosene lamps; ghost tales; and museum display of company ledgers and mining artifacts. Its heritage value is *also* defined by the hacienda’s ability to invoke the fanciful legacy of American literary travel in Mexico, a legacy that invites guests to mix aristocratic, colonial, and even gothic fantasies with a
desire for exile from the modern world. The hacienda’s more recent history as a ruin that is discovered, reconstructed, and called back to life by an American expatriate forms part of this legacy. The Hacienda has been run by the same American expatriate who reconstructed it in the early 1970s, and he represents to many of the guests the kind of American traveler who visited PV in its primitive beginnings and stayed. He takes pride in the very smart and interesting guests that he gets, since they are somewhat like him. They are of a “higher class.” They visit the Hacienda to discover something new and out of the mass tourist way and to get away from all the commotion in Puerto Vallarta. They wish to take a step back in time or away from the modern world.

For me the hacienda is also a poetic space and experience that is shaped by the folkloric tales that surround it, my friendship with the owner, and the memory of bumpy, curvy climbs and descents on a risky, unpaved mountain highway—unexpected, real adventure. Traveling to the hacienda was a respite from the congested and noisy streets of Ixtapa and Puerto Vallarta, where I stayed and did most of my tourism research while in Mexico. It was also at the Hacienda that I was able to catch my breath and find some of the signposts—the themes, sources, details—that would illuminate my research path. I find this very amusing, since the hacienda lacks electricity and at night is lit by petroleum lamps that illuminate one’s way in the dark; I was given a flashlight--and still, I stumbled in the dark. The Hacienda was also the first place where I ventured to travel alone again in several years since my 20s. Of course, as a visitor at the Hacienda, I also became part of a tradition of foreign literary travel in Mexico. As a Mexican American woman traveler—a bicultural traveler, influenced by family ties and Mexican literature—I came to the hacienda to write about American literary travelers’ encounters with Mexico.
A Guest at the Hacienda Jalisco Inn

I first traveled from Puerto Vallarta to the Hacienda very much as the owner did, his first time, 30 years before. In 1962, he and friends drove up the jungle-like, winding mountain roads in a jeep. Back then the road was far more precarious and wild. They had to stop and chop or push their way up the Sierras, and it might take a whole day to get there. But got there they did, and it was on that trip that “Bud,” as the owner is nicknamed, first discovered the hacienda-- “just sitting there,” in the overgrown brush. As he recalls: “It hadn’t been lived in for years. Of course, all the doors and windows were gone--but the structure was there. It was beautiful…a jolla, a jewel… [and] the piece of property, absolutely magnificent…”

An interview with Bud Acord during my research of early waves of tourism in PV led to an invitation to the Hacienda. He offered to come by for me on his way back from Puerto Vallarta, since Ixtapa is just along the highway. This is how I also went up in a kind of jeep: a huge and dated, bumpy, rusted burgundy SUV. It pulled up at my grandmother’s house with four men in the car: the driver, the “houseboy,” a lawyer guest, and Bud. I can still recall the steely look of dismay on my grandmother’s face when they

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98 I first met the owner when I showed up at an American woman expatriate’s house near Los Muertos Beach to interview her about her mother, a first and very iconic expatriate American woman in Vallarta. The daughter, an expatriate, like her mother, greeted me warmly but told me that she was just not up to the interview that day—but that she had a guest who had been in Puerto Vallarta a long time and who I might find interesting to talk to. He was a good friend of this first expatriate lady, who had passed away, and was sitting in the back of her daughter’s house. It was a nice surprise since his was one of the names that I got on the many little pieces of paper with tips that I received after I gave a short talk at the local writer’s guild meeting, in which I read a conference proposal to write about The Night of the Iguana and the beginnings of tourism in the region. Luckily, he agreed to a tape-recorded interview on the spot. It turned out to be the perfect interview. He had “been there” during the early wave of tourism, well placed in the intimate circle of first Americans in Vallarta, and present during the filming of The Night of the Iguana. John Huston became a friend and visited the Hacienda and I would soon see the pictures and letters relating to Huston decorating the hacienda’s museum--as I would learn that the room where he had preferred to stay had been named, “The John Huston Room.”
picked me up, Bud yelling to her, “No preocuparte [sic] señora...,,” and commenting as we waved and drove away, “what a suspicious looking woman.”

To be safe, before traveling up to the Hacienda, I checked out Bud and the town of San Sebastian with relatives and friends in Ixtapa and the expatriates I knew in Puerto Vallarta. All assured me that I would be fine as long as I was with him. In Ixtapa, the reservations were about something else entirely: “the Hacienda… it’s really isolated”; “it’s haunted!” This warning was followed by tales of how the hacienda was pitch dark at night with no electricity and extraordinarily remote, situated as it was away from town, through forest and cornfields, and tucked away in a niche, at the edge of “una barranca” [a gorge], that made the hacienda seem like Dracula’s fortress perched on a steep, jagged cliff. Since the new, paved highway had not been in any way finished, San Sebastian seemed far more remote than it seems today just a few years later. I was warned that I could not simply walk into town if I changed my mind, that nobody would hear me in that dark, hidden place, and that I should check out the local hotels once I got there in case I decided that I preferred to stay somewhere else. I was also told that San Sebastian was like a ghost town and that visiting and walking its streets would be like “being back in time.” It sounded so much like the strange and precarious town of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Paramo* or even the windy (as in shrill, wind-scraped), macabre town of his short story, “Luvina.” Juan Rulfo was on my mind since I was familiar with his novel and short stories, and a local Ixtapa writer had just shared his poem with me dedicated to Rulfo’s protagonist, the local cacique’s forced lover, “Susana.” He had recited it to me several times as if I were Susana, substituting my name in her place! Of course, all the drama stirred up by the place was also funny and magical. It enveloped the Hacienda and town
of San Sebastian in a literary, folkloric, and autoethnographic aura that began to define it for me before I even saw it.

What I recall of my first visit to the Hacienda is getting there with caked hair and clothes full of dust; my skeleton jostled by the mountainous dirt road; resting on a bed with the door wide open and the balmy breezes playfully wandering in; and a pleasant dinner in which I sat with the owner, a local writer who wandered in from town, and the lawyer in the Hacienda’s lovely courtyard. We talked about politics, movies, and education. I felt appreciated and safe, as a person, as the only woman among men, even having neglected to change for dinner. Of my first trips in general what I recall is my enchantment with the trees rustling just beyond the balcony verandah, the ruined grounds, the deep, sage-colored agave fields on a nearby mountain slope, the stone bridge, and the creek trickling by below. The hacienda is nestled in its setting and hidden from view until one reaches the premises. As one descends the mountain road into San Sebastian, one sees from a distance the impeccable, relatively new tiny black airstrip first. At the sight of the dirt road into San Sebastian one sees a gate, opens it, follows a narrow dirt path that cuts through overgrown cornfields and finally reaches the original walled, pebble-stone path. As one arrives at a bend, the hacienda suddenly appears below, tucked away just past the lovely stone bridge. I have watched as tourists arrive and gasp at the sight as they hike down the path.

There is no electricity at the hacienda, which means no T.V., no telephone. But there are books and magazines scattered everywhere. I loved sitting upstairs on the balcony that surrounds the upstairs of the main house where guests stay, and looking out into the canopy of trees, especially at dusk, and I loved my talks with the owner,
especially at night. I also recall the fancy multi-course dinners that seduced even me and
got me to think about things like dinner parties and dinner etiquette. At night I was
charmed by the ghostly feel of the hacienda and the shadows cast by the gas lamps.
Being there brought home for me that tourist spaces are not simply experienced visually,
but experienced in highly poetic and sensually embodied ways.

As a result of my own seduction, I was able to see that the Hacienda’s
enchantment lies in the way that it allows its overnight guests to inhabit and move across
its spaces. The rooms are simply decorated and spacious, double room suites with
spacious Mexican tiled bathrooms, and big, wooden doors on either side, that open to
balcony verandas with sitting spaces and hammocks. Overnight guests can move freely
about as if the Hacienda was their home, unlike tourist visitors who are not given access
to the upstairs. Included in a guest’s stay is an aristocratic dining experience. Breakfast
is preceded by coffee on the balcony veranda, coffee that is grown at a local plantation
and milled in town. At the fancy multi-course dinner, the guest is seated at a carefully set
table in the lovely courtyard; and Juan, the “house-boy,” as he is often referred to by
guests in the guest books, appears at one’s side with a napkin over his arm and offers
wine for the guest to taste and approve before he or she is served. The beautiful salads
prepared by Pablo, the house cook, are prepared with avocados and fruits and vegetables
from the hacienda garden. And if he is there and in the mood, the expatriate himself, will
wander over from his little house at the end of his guests’ dinner to chat about his life in
Mexico.

When night falls, the Hacienda is enveloped in darkness until the moon rises and
the forest and grounds begin to glow. A bonfire and fireplaces can be lit, but it is very
chilly. In the dusky dampness, guests smell Mexico and the “old” Hacienda as they move across the brick and stone and up the creaking wood staircase and across the wide wood planks and tile and through the glowing spaces by the light of the lamps. It is an interesting experience for guests to undress and wash their faces by lamplight. Even if they do not hear the local ghost tales of the lady of the house who haunts the Hacienda, guests are invited by the shadows to imagine spectral presences from the past.99

I stayed several times at the Hacienda and with every visit I came to feel more comfortable with the owner, even though I was never sure at first why he took to me. It was extremely helpful in my local exchanges and for my research in general that my mother and grandmother were from the region.100 It seemed that he was impressed by the historical trajectory that connected me to my mother’s rustic, tropical beginnings near Puerto Vallarta, to his own hometown of Los Angeles (he comes from one of the old families of Los Angeles and keeps a Blue Society Register), to a college education back East, to carrying out a dissertation in PV. Recognizing my Amherst education, he said, “I knew you were one of us.”

At first, I agreed to write things for him related to the Hacienda in return for my stay, but that quickly fell away, even as he became key to my research and the Hacienda

99 I was scared at night and struck by the chill. The temperature is much cooler than in PV and in the evenings, drops drastically. After saying goodnight to the owner, I would catch a quick glimpse of the starry skies and run back through the downstairs rooms of the main house with a flashlight, blowing out the gas lamps behind me, step quickly up the creaking stairs, and across the wood planked floors. Coming from my parent’s tiny house in L.A. just a block from a major highway, I was not used to such open spaces or such silence. I slept with the gas lamps on. I tried unsuccessfully to keep Bud’s pet dogs by my side and listened closely for Juan’s whistles as he returned from his nights in town. Many women guests, especially, have commented to the owner or to Pablo and Juan that they heard footsteps or felt movement at night. Of course, in Mexico, ghosts also appear in daylight.

100 The names of my mother’s family are well known in the region, and it was my mother’s father’s sister, Pachita, who owned the pub in Ixtapa where many native travelers would stop on their way down to PV. Ixtapa is also well known from the time of the “Bonanza” when the American banana plantation company lured many Mexicans from the mountain towns down to the Coast.
an anchor for my tourism studies. Each time, he would point things out in his museum and put out books for me on the picnic table outside his little house for me to find in the mornings. These books connected to my dissertation: biographies of Tennessee Williams, books by modernist authors like Gertrude Stein, books about John Huston, articles on the hacienda, antiques and relics from the mining era, articles on early travelers to Mexico--like the article on William Spratling in the museum, “An American in Mexico.” The owner seemed to align with artists and writers in Mexico. He re-introduced me to Harriet Doerr’s Mexican novels and gave me a magazine interview of her. He has a letter from Harriet Doerr hanging in two places in his museum and likes to talk about how aptly she “gets” in her novels the traveler’s experience and love of Mexico. In fact, from a similar upper class background as Doerr, he is also very much like the characters in her novels. Each time Bud flagged an important new detail or source. He’d say, “this is important; it’s something that you should know.” When he was in his black moods, since he drinks and smokes, I would think of him as a “cantankerous Cancer,” but he always welcomed me back along with friends and family that I brought to visit the Hacienda. I also appreciated him because, typical of the first travelers in the area, he learned Spanish; tried to become part of the life of his Mexican and not strictly Anglo, surroundings; made it a point to learn some of the history of the region; and carefully tracked the new developments and changes in the town of San Sebastian. I could tell that he was artistic and intuitive in the way that he rebuilt and decorated the Hacienda, despite his not

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101 The next year I presented a paper on the Hacienda Jalisco at an anthropology conference, using it as another excuse for returning.
102 Interestingly, it was hard for him that locals did not grant him the authority or awareness that he thought he had achieved as a member of the community. Locals all know him as the eccentric, reclusive, but courteous owner of the Hacienda. To me he remained an eloquent, difficult older man who could also be endearing. He has a great laugh and a sexy sparkle in his eye when he is happy.
being an architect or engineer or having original sketches of the buildings. Bud took the ruins that were the Hacienda and in the course of twenty years, reconstructed it in the vision of his dream of a bed-and-breakfast in a town that might one day be to PV what the artist colony of San Miguel de Allende is to Mexico City. He waited more than twenty years for tourism to arrive. When it began to trickle into the hacienda, he carefully kept a record in his guest books and shared visitors’ comments proudly.

Of course, the Hacienda and local town of San Sebastian are not perfect touristic paradises, not even for the brief and wandering tourist guest that I was. The Hacienda helped me to understand—well—how Mexico might be experienced as an infernal paradise. Indeed, the Hacienda brings to life the “infernal paradise” constructions that I have depicted in this dissertation. The hacienda suggests that infusing the infernal paradise mythic construction is a logic that sustains and proliferates simultaneous contradictions as it makes for the fantastic re-membering of dis-membered places, or ruins. Indeed, the hacienda successfully sustains incredible contradictions, seamlessly invoking multiple periods and realities. Although early in the century the mining company’s generator powered and lit its grounds and that of surrounding buildings, it now falls into darkness. It maintains the enormous patio and ovens and chimneys as well as other ruins of this once rigorous processing mining hacienda—a marker, after all, of American capitalist expansion in Mexico and high scientific achievement—even as it allows the tourist to sit in the inner courtyard and reflect as if he or she was Kate Burns.

103 San Sebastian is a tourist town that is in fact reminiscent of earlier artist colonies, of the 1920s and 1930s. It has a local coffee shop, small family restaurants, an Italian restaurant in a lovely orchard and courtyard, and a local museum with many family heirlooms, and artifacts from the mining period. The local tavern, “Tasca,” is open on weekends and with its bar, overturned wine barrel tables with stools, candlelight, and jazz music is picturesque and rather bohemian. Writers do visit and stay occasionally and more transient tourists enjoy local life in the plaza, after taking a tour that narrates the town’s history and highlights the mining period, the mining process, and local mines.
sitting in the patio of her “Spanish colonial house” in D.H. Lawrence’s Mexican novel *Quetzalcoatl*. The museum contains turn of the century lamps, weights, tools, British cider and French soda bottles, alongside Hollywood memorabilia, and the framed letter from Harriet Doerr—showcasing a series of artifacts in which capitalist colonizers, celebrities, and the literary traveler or artist/writer are kindred to the very same tourist space. Even Bud, who is part of the late 1950s, early 1960s pre-Hippie flow of travelers to Mexico, straddles a mythic reality. He is like the modernist writers of the 1920s and 1930s: singular, alienated travelers who sought an escape toward the primitive, an escape into art, an escape into Mexico. He escaped from 1950s corporate American culture and “disappeared” in Mexico.

The sound of airplanes flying overhead; the knowledge that Puerto Vallarta, “civilization,” is only a 12 minute flight away (or 1½ hours by highway); the coolness of this place in comparison to the tropical heat below; all the books in English scattered everywhere about this middle of nowhere place; the hacienda’s “darkness,” *all* these characteristics help to heighten the Hacienda’s surrealism while reassuring the tourist that he or she will get out* after a night or two. For after a night or two, the guest can begin to feel that the Hacienda is a kind of time trap, caught in inertia, and suffocating in its silence and isolation. Feeling suffocated, I ran away from one of my visits, when I began to hear stories of local drug running, incest among local families, and previous killings by local caciques. For if one also thinks about the political and economic circumstances that have surrounded the Hacienda, one can begin to feel that it is a kind of inferno.
Palimpsestic “PV”

Of course, the time that I felt the urge to flee, I flew out on one of the tiny planes chartered by a local tourist company, “Vallarta Adventures.” The main point of access to and return from the Hacienda, after all, is Puerto Vallarta; it is only minutes away by plane. And, San Sebastian and the Hacienda are sites of the larger touristic palimpsest that is Puerto Vallarta, that the tourist can simply step into and out of, when she or he is through with the particular adventures they have to offer.

What does this touristic palimpsest entail? It entails many sites and activities plotted along an extended coastal terrain. Puerto Vallarta is no longer simply “Old” and “New Vallarta” and its local beaches. Whereas before a local river used to divide it, creating a lovely riverside that divided “Gringo gulch,” local markets and the “Romantic Zone” of Old Vallarta from newer Vallarta, today the tourist landscape is divided by the state boundary between Jalisco and Nayarit, several miles away. Today PV is marketed with ‘New Vallarta,’ or “Nuevo Vallarta,” also referred to as ‘Vallarta Nayarit’ because of its location in the state of Nayarit, which joins the state of Jalisco. In fact, Nuevo Vallarta might be located anywhere, since it is a private, gated complex of major master-planned resorts that do not rely on anything native really, except for local labor and the local beaches. Still, it works in combination with PV, as explained by Inside Vallarta, a local tourist brochure:

Puerto Vallarta and nearby Vallarta Nayarit are a wonderful blend of old and new. Once a small fishing village, Puerto Vallarta is more historic, with colorful plazas, churches, cobblestone streets, many restaurants, and fine resorts. Banderas Bay is perfect for all kinds of water activities. Vallarta Nayarit is a newer, growing resort with golf courses, marina, and water sports.
Tourist activities include a long list of diverse possibilities: art galleries; shopping; discothequing; dining in the many chic restaurants; promenading on the “malecon” or boardwalk; folkloric performances (“traditional Mexican fiestas”); swimming; ship tours (like the pirate ship cruise, “Pirates of the Bay,” which takes place “on a faithful replica of a 15th Century Spanish galleon”); snorkeling; sport-fishing; whale watching tours; tequila tours (tequila is not native to the area); bungee jumping (off a cliff heading towards the jungle); air tours; bird-watching; hiking; horseback riding (“on the beach, in the mountains or in the jungle”); dirt-biking; surfing (on the North Shore); canopy tours (just like those in Costa Rica, brochures claim); golf; and, taking us full circle, “trips to little towns in the hills where time has stood still,” like San Sebastian.

Referred to as “Multi-Faceted Vallarta” in the local tourist bureau’s brochure, PV is definitely palimpsestic and infernally paradisal, for above all, it offers “a magical combination of the traditional and the modern.” Mexico’s “magical” qualities and its ability to exist in contradiction and simultaneously be “traditional”/“ancient” and “modern” construct it as an infernal paradise. And in an infernally paradisal way, PV’s sites and activities comply with Mexico’s ultimate marketing goal: to portray Mexico as infinitely malleable, a place that can be, in the industry’s catchphrase, “everything you ever dreamed of,” or to paraphrase one of the Infernal Paradise architects/authors, Malcolm Lowry, a place onto which the tourist can project anything he or she might desire104 (Cooper Alarcón 179).

104 In this way, “PV” confronts the tourist industry’s principal challenge. For as economist Thomas Clancy notes, what is interesting about tourism, is that unlike many manufacturing industries, tourism involves consumption at and of the site itself. In addition, tourists frequently desire to consume sites just once, especially in the sand and sea segment: going to a seaside resort is often enough for many U.S. citizens. Clancy looks to Urry in The Tourist Gaze who discusses this tendency by considering tourist motivation from the standpoint of semiotics. The fundamental motivation and activity of individual tourists is to
Local tour companies like “Vallarta Adventures” and “TANI Tours” replicate this shifting, palimpsestic model of tourist Mexico. For example, TANI tours include: the “Tropical Tour,” “Jungle Trio,” “Discover San Blas,” “Beach Combo,” and “Hidden Mexico.” Each tour name has a subtitle: “The perfect way to get to know P.V.”; “You too can be Arnold Schwarzenegger [referring to the film, *Predator*]; “Nature, history, beaches, and more…”; “The best combo in Puerto Vallarta”; and “Las Palmas.” The tours thus mix different sites and motifs that have become central to Mexican tourism: the beach; identifications with films (*Predator* and *The Night of the Iguana*); traditional/folkloric Mexico (“lo Mexicano” or “things Mexican”); hidden Mexico; colonial sites/attractions usually associated with the Spanish colonial period (here, the port town of San Blas with a Spanish fort built in the early 1600s to defend against pirates); and the jungle, which I associate with the new interest in eco-tourism and attractions like the canopy tours. Words like “hidden” and “discover” point to the tourist interest in discovering the latest sites and discovering Mexico in general. At the same time, there is a nod to the mythic origins of tourist PV and its original discovery: The “Jungle Trio” explains that “Mismaloya,” the first stop of the tour, is “where the movie that put Puerto Vallarta in [sic] the map (“Night of the Iguana”) was filmed in 1963.”

This palimpsestic model is also performative. The “Canopy Tour El Eden” is a perfect example. First, with its location and name, the tour sets up the thematic terrain collect and consume signs, attached to which are meanings. Once these signs have been collected, however, there may be little reason to return to a given site. See Clancy, 116.

105 Significantly, unlike the nearby towns of Ixtapa and el Pitillal, Las Palmas is not a worker town. It is removed from the now developed highway that is bordered with a University, soda and other factories, gas stations, and housing developments. This is why it serves as an example of a more traditional provincial town.

106 The tour represented took place on March 28, 2007. The name of the tour is the name of the company that runs it. There are now at least 3 other canopy tours heading up to the Sierras in different places and
that the tourist is invited to traverse and participate in, in the imagination. The location is, after all, at the *Predator* movie set, and Schwartzeneggar’s helicopter perches on a rocky cliff. The site is also a restaurant bar and grill by a waterfall at a spot named, “El Eden,” or “Eden.” The *Predator* lurks in this “Eden”; tourists are reminded of this when the driver points into the woods as the bus reaches its destination and says “that is where the Predator lurks.” Second, the tour itself is more of a performance than an actual “tour.” For there is no tour of the jungle or its ecosystem, as one might expect, even as tourists zigzag across its canopy of trees multiple times. Tourists are invited to swing like “Tarzan” and imagine they are being “chased by the Predator.” There is also a lot of screaming and cheering, since a camaraderie begins to build among tourists after so many canopy flights (there are 11 or 12 flights altogether and quite a bit of uphill hiking from one launching point to another; the tourists collect after each ride and travel to the next in groups; and it takes about an hour to complete the “tour”). Moreover, during the initial instruction session, there is a lot of teasing and tapping into transnational race politics and a masculinist erotics of culture. There is a lot of male posturing between Mexican men and North American men, since the majority of the guides (who launch and catch the tourists) are male and have a very pointed sense of humor. The instructors use lines like “I know you don’t trust Mexicans but today you have to”; “I would let you die, but because today is Wednesday, for $25 I can save you.” The same instructors assure the ladies that they, of course, are gentlemen and will rescue a lady. But in return, she must remember to say, “Thank you for saving me, Papi! [daddy!].” During the training the women are asked to shout their thanks back to the instructors, and they do use these lines some do claim to take tourists on an eco-tour that introduces them to the local wildlife. Of course, as I described earlier, some of these areas get covered with dirt and it’s very hard to breathe.
during the tour. This example of the canopy tour exposes palimpsestic PV’s promise to the tourist that he or she will be able to fully engage in the performative nature of tourism, and that it will add to the meaning and fun of the tourist experience. Indeed, after laying out PV’s possibilities, the local tourist brochure invites and encourages the tourist to explore the sites and activities that PV has to offer and to “make this holiday an unforgettable one”—while reminding the tourist, “but in order to do so, you have to go out there and as they say, ‘Just Do It!’”

With such examples—the listing of attractions in the local PV tourist brochure and the TANI tours and “El Eden” Canopy Tours—we are also able to glean how the Infernal Paradise tradition of travel writing about Mexico has provided the tourist industry with blueprints for designing sites that respond to literary cues and take advantage of tourist expectations and fantasies. We can see the workings of this palimpsest in actual tourism as multiple themes and attractions are placed upon this tourist terrain and rearranged, all the while fueling such tourist slogans as “the magic never leaves you” or “everything you ever dreamed of.”

As we leave this “dissertation,” it is no surprise to learn that as Michael Clancy notes regarding the future of Mexican tourism at the end of his study of Mexican tourism, Exporting Paradise (115), diversification has been the watchword for tourism in Mexico since the 1990s. Nor is it surprising to see that state activities in the 21st century continue to speak to the different themes and components of the Infernal Paradise tradition—the blueprints of modern Mexican tourism—by centering on three ambitious projects. These projects accompany continued work on Huatulco in Oaxaca, the last of the five state planned “poles,” or master planned seaside resorts that I reviewed at the end

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of chapter one. These projects, begun under the 1990s government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari according to his 1989 5-year plan, call for modernization and growth of tourism in Mexico. The first, “Colonial Cities,” promotes quaint, mid-sized cities with historical associations in Mexico’s interior. The second, “Mundo Maya,” is a project involving four other Central American nations, funded in part by the European Union, which promotes ancient ruins in southern Mexico (Clancy 115). As Clancy notes, Colonial Cities and Mundo Maya target history-oriented tourists and promote attractions unique to Mexico and/or Central America; the second, in particular, explicitly attempts to attract European tourists (115). The third and most ambitious project has been the ongoing series of “Megaprojects” (Clancy 115-116). They are mini-poles that emphasize diversification in an era of growing competition. They target campers or sport fishing, but the bulk are oriented toward especially affluent tourists. Several contain slips for up to 1,000 yachts, golf courses, luxury hotels, and condominiums. Many are mini enclaves with little or no connection to surrounding communities. We might call them “tourist colonies.”

These upscale, capital intensive and highly exclusive projects speak to the early American tourist colonies in Mexico. Several are adjacent to existing resorts, but others are in undeveloped areas.

In “new” PV/Nuevo Vallarta, development continues to explode as projected plans for two new airports (one for private planes), a new marina (for private yachts), and the expansion of the old airport begin to take place; canopy tours expand and zigzag

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108 We can also see that the two projects harken back to the moment of “the enormous vogue of things Mexican” in the 1920s and 30s when the indigenous combined with the colonial to constitute the “things Mexican” [lo Mexicano] that fascinated the tourist gaze.

109 These can be traced to the Porfiriato

110 Clancy notes that projects associated with Mundo Maya and the Megaprojects have come together to aid the development of the so-called Riviera Maya during the 1990s. The area, which spreads south from Cancún some 70 miles is linked to exclusive resorts, ecotourist sites, and Mayan ruins. See Clancy, 116.
across old and new jungles and ‘eco-tourist’ settings; and golf courses replace beaches. As the local tourist brochure proudly reports, “over the last three years alone, [PV] has added new ultra-modern multi-million dollar villas and condominium towers, supermarkets and shopping plazas, and the range of alternative activities and world-famous restaurants- it offers its visitors has expanded as well.” Moreover, the relatively new and spacious highway travels north and has a series of “desviaciones” or exit detour ramps to the different beach towns along the north shore in Nayarit. These little towns offer further off-the-beaten-path destinations for mass PV and Nuevo Vallarta, including tranquil Punta Mita; colorful, surfer community Sayulita; and San Francisco, or San Pancho” with billboards forecasting exclusive, luxury communities. The “future” of Mexican tourism has arrived in PV in the form of mini-poles.

As we come to the end of this dissertation, we see that the “future” of 20th century Mexican tourism, as forecast by scholars and writers like Michael Clancy, Daniel Cooper-Alarcón, and Bob Shacoshis– is present and visible in Puerto Vallarta, even as the region continues to develop. Mexico has become a touristic palimpsest informed by previous experiences, motifs, sites, and performances that sustain new ones in malleable and multiple ways. As it strives to continue to be just beyond the tourist’s expectations, tourist Mexico is more than ever palimpsestic—and as a series of infernal paradise sites, “Mexico” remains thrilling and highly performative.

111 I am referring to the Inside Vallarta brochure, here, the March 2007 issue.
112 Shacosshis is author of “In Deepest Gringolandia.” He points to, in modern tourism, “Otherly fantasylands erected up the mountains and down the coasts of the Third World or the developing world or the post-colonial world—the hot dark-skinned nations that still bear the shape of Empire’s boots across their sweaty backsides. Now, where the Kiplings and Conrads once poked around, hundreds of millions of white people spend billions of dollars each year for the exotic tickle of the five-day, four night excursion into the mythological but much diluted, faraway but perfectly scrubbed heart of darkness.” Quoted in Cooper Alarcon, 151.
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