ABSTRACT

"TODOS SON UNOS GESTICULADORES HIPÓCRITAS:" POWER, DISCOURSE, AND THE PRESS IN RODOLFO USIGLI'S *EL GESTICULADOR* AND POSTREVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

by Craig Joshua Verniest

This project examines the life, career, and controversies surrounding Mexican playwright Rodolfo Usigli and his play *El gesticulador*, a tragicomedy that satirized the hypocrisies of rule in Mexico following the revolution of 1910. Usigli emerged as one of the leading, if controversial, voices within Mexican theater during the 1930s and 1940s, writing politically critical plays based in his particular vision for a national theater tradition in Mexico. The height of the playwright's dramaturgical output corresponded with an elite class in the process of consolidating an institutionalized, "official" culture, homogenized revolutionary history, and political system dominated by an effectively single-party state.

Censored for almost a decade, Usigli's *El gesticulador* premiered on the stage of Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes under high praise and intense scandal, both reflecting and contributing to renewed debates concerning Mexico's political system, freedom of expression, and the changing "institutional" revolution. Following the play's staging, Usigli would ultimately go on to act as a coopted intellectual in the service of the state. Thus, I track Usigli's evolution alongside that of the single-party state, arguing that the playwright acts as an insightful example of the power dynamics informing the relationships between political and cultural elites in postrevolutionary Mexico.

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Dedication

For my parents, siblings, and all those who have helped shape my personal and academic formation.

Acknowledgements

For the completion of this project, I owe an endless debt of *agradecimiento* to the friends, family members, mentors, colleagues, and everyday interactions that supported me throughout the process of examining, researching, and writing on power in postrevolutionary Mexico. First and foremost, I owe much of my thanks to my adviser in the History department at Miami University, Elena Jackson Albarrán, for her constant support in constructing this project. Weekly conversations on all manner of topics related to Mexico and her advice pointing me down more and more paths of scholarship have further stoked both an intellectual interest in and personal love for Mexico as a society, culture, people, and history. I owe her a further debt of gratitude for her critical, but always supportive, challenges to my writing, pushing me towards continuously rethinking and reevaluating how I approached this project across its many stages. Similarly, many thanks are owed to my committee members, Drs. Andrew Offenburger and José Amador, for their reviewing and advising on the several drafts of my thesis, whose final state would not be possible without their insight.

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My undergraduate years at Seattle University constitute a formative period eventually leading me to Miami University and the topic of Usigli and postrevolutionary Mexico. Adviser Dr. Tom Taylor continuously pointed me towards the right paths,

challenging me to broaden my horizons even when my own hesitations could have pushed me in the opposite direction, while the mentorship of Dr. Marc McLeod founded the origins of my love for and fascination with the troubled, optimistic, and above all lively history of Latin America. Additional faculty in the History department at Seattle University, amongst them Drs. Nova Robinson, Theresa Earenfight, and Saheed Adejumobi, further honed my abilities as a learning historian. Chief of all, I owe special thanks to Dr. William Kangas and his dutiful instruction across several courses and senior projects, always calling for my peers and I to question our presumed and unconscious biases and critically engage with the perspectives our sources present. To him, I owe much of the early foundations of my beliefs on what a historian can and should do in our work.

Lastly, this project was birthed, in one way or another, out of a five-month study abroad stay in Puebla Mexico. The engaging instruction and emotional support of Jaime Perozo, Sonia Barrios Tinoco, and faculty at the Universidad Iberoamericana de Puebla, chief amongst them Guenther Petrak, cultivated a lifelong love for the Spanish language, literature, and all things Mexico, creating an experience that will stay with me forever. To my host family, Jesús, Rocio, Adrian, Luis, and Ivan Alonso Diego, *les llevaré en el corazón pa' siempre*. Daily interactions with classmates, friends from the Ibero, and everyday *poblanos* across the city's streets, restaurants, bars, *tianguis*, and *zócalo* became a crucial component of my formation as a scholar and person, and each and every *ser* I met during my time in Puebla I carry with me into the present. Finally, as described by a former neozapatista singer during one of my final days in Puebla, "*toda la estructura de la sociedad y la historia de México es una mezcla: una mezcla de esperanza para el futuro y tristeza para la realidad y las faltas de vivir actual*." This description of the spirit that seems to characterize Mexico's past, present, and future has stayed with me since, and I find it especially apt to this day, having stumbled upon a subject and persona like Usigli, with all the parallels such a dichotomous figure offers

Introduction

"¿Quién es cada uno en México? Dondequiera encuentras impostores,
impersonadores, simuladores: asesinos disfrazados de héroes,
burgueses disfrazados de líderes, ladrones disfrazados de diputados,
ministros disfrazados de sabios, caciques disfrazados de demócratas,
charlatanes disfrazados de licenciados, demagogos disfrazados de hombres.
¿Quién les pide cuentas? Son todos unos gesticuladores hipócritas."
César Rubio, *El gesticulador*

"Who is each of us in Mexico? Everywhere you encounter imposters,
impersonators, simulators: murderers disguised as heroes,
bourgeoises disguised as leaders, thieves disguised as congressmen,
government officials disguised as sages, tyrants disguised as democrats,
charlatans disguised as lawyers, demagogues disguised as men.
Does anyone hold them accountable? They are all hypocritical imposters.
César Rubio, *The Imposter*

"According to Usigli, he left to buy a newspaper. As he was crossing the vestibule, somebody spoke to him from behind, and upon turning around, he received two slaps to the face that made him fall to the ground. He yelled at his attacker, whom he did not recognize because of the savagery of the aggression, that he stop and they fight like men. Then on, he could see the face of Novo; but Novo didn't stop."[1] On the night of May 28, 1947, acclaimed playwright and author Rodolfo Usigli and his equally renowned compatriot Salvador Novo brawled on the vestibule of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, an incident that sparked a firestorm amongst Mexico City's press throughout the week of the confrontation. Several of the nation's largest publications, including

[1] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes," *El Universal*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.

El Universal, *La Prensa*, *El Nacional*, and *Excelsiór*, reported on the incident.[2] Originating in a verbal confrontation several nights prior, the verbal duel elevated to a physical one, in which, right before slapping Usigli twice in the face, Novo yelled out "One in the name of the Representatives and Senators and another in that of the Generals!"[3] Afterwards, Novo would write to several newspapers to justify his actions, calling Usigli a "paranoid, nervous wreck by reputation" and an "ungrateful man" willing to sell out his close friends in his plays if it meant netting him some favorable reviews and publicity in the press; Usigli, however, responded in turn, stating that "[he] could not be friends with someone with poor behaviors,"[4] effectively signaling the end to any friendship between the two from that point onwards.

Motivated largely by interpersonal differences between the two, not to mention their respective bombastic personalities, the verbal and physical duels between Novo and Usigli also take on revealing political and cultural dimensions and important understandings of the roles power dynamics, interpersonal relations, and informal means of control played in postrevolutionary Mexico,[5] particularly when considering Usigli's position in relationship to the

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[2] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes"; "El autor de 'El Gesticulador' Agredido por Salvador Novo," *El Universal*, 29 de mayo 1947; and "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones," *La Prensa*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.

[3] "Revuelo en el Mundo Teatral por el Incidente Entre Novo y Usigli," *Prensa Gráfica*, 29 de mayo 1947. In Centro de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (CITRU), Archivo Vertical, Folder "El gesticulador. 1947. Dir: Alfredo Gómez de la V."

[4] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes" and "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones." In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.

[5] Here, the historiographical issue of periodization rears its head. Following arguments made by historians like Alan Knight for when the Mexican Revolution is best considered to have truly "ended", I use the term "postrevolutionary" to refer to the period 1938-1968, when the PNR and PRI-dominated governments largely turned away from reform projects considered "revolutionary"—land redistribution, protection of Mexico's land and resource sovereignty, reforms particularly centered om enhancing workers and peasants' rights, wages, and access to government-provided resources, socialist education, and anticlericalism—towards industrial and capital development, reconciliation with the Catholic Church, collaboration with the U.S. government and U.S. corporations in defending U.S. business interests and adopting pro-Cold War, anticommunist rhetoric, and a greater focus on "stabilizing" former "radicalism" while improving the material and social opportunities for a growing, urban-based middle class and private business sector. Meanwhile, I refer to the decades between 1920 and 1938 using the terms "reconstruction" and "cultural revolution" periods, delineating what are largely seen as the three most significant projects of the state during this period: reconstructing and expanding the national government (i.e., state-building), social reform, and crafting a "revolution" in the arts, aesthetic, and cultural realms born out of the revolutionary upheavals between 1910 and 1920. Lastly, I refer to the decade between 1910 and 1920 interchangeably as the "revolutionary decade", "1910 revolution/revolution of 1910", or sparingly as the "revolution", avoiding both the loaded terminology of the "Revolution" or "Mexican Revolution" in an attempt to recognize how such terminology can carry an implication of dominant political elites' version of the revolutionary decade. When I do refer to the "Revolution" or "Mexican Revolution" with a capital "R", it is done so to analyze the particular narrative such terminology implies, as will be done in a fuller analysis in Chapter 1. Additionally, I treat the distinctly militarized

single-party state and its representative in the form of Novo. Within the case of this brawl, due to his activities as the head of the Department of Theater during the early years of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Arte*s* (National Institute of Fine Arts, or INBA), Salvador Novo acted in place of the single party state, a state well-known for employing a variety of repressive and conciliatory measures in determining popular media and cultural forms that would be presented under the aegis of the national government. In turn, in the case of the events leading up to the brawl, Usigli represented an intellectual distinctly critical of the postrevolutionary state, one who had sought and achieved government sponsorship for his play, despite *El gesticulador*'s critique of political corruption and political elites' revisionism of revolutionary history rampant after the end to the revolutionary decade in 1920. Written in 1938, censored for several years, and finally premiered on stage at the official theater in 1947, the struggle for staging *El gesticulador* and Usigli's evolving relationship with the single-party state from that point forward provides powerful insight into the manners by which power, discourse, and the press functioned in postrevolutionary Mexico.

Born in 1905, on the eve of the onset of Mexico's "great" revolution, Usigli would live through some of greatest events and transformations in the history of modern Mexico. Coming of age in the ideological and military crucible and "*fiesta de balas*"[6] of the revolutionary civil wars spanning 1910 to 1920, he would enter into professional careers as a playwright, author, and diplomat during the reconstruction and cultural revolution periods characterizing the 1920s and 1930s. Fully maturing as an artist in the waning years of revolutionary reform during Lázaro

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and popular mobilization periods of the revolution to have lasted between 1910 and 1920, due to the fact that many of my primary sources, chief amongst those Usigli himself, appear to hold the view that this is the period in which the revolution was indeed most a revolution, before a government and political order came about that by and large corrupted the original aims of the revolution. Such a conception tends to follow an older, somewhat standard narrative of when the revolution took place, and indeed one with several flaws, but which functions well enough for the purposes of this study—particularly given that they reflect the thoughts of the main primary source in consideration here—and whose flaws are relatively circumvented by using less loaded terminology like "revolutionary decade", "reconstruction" and "cultural revolution", and "postrevolutionary". Indeed, as Alan Knight argues, the "revolution", whether considered a wholesale revolution still undergoing under Lázaro Cárdenas or existing in its reconstruction phase during his presidency, can most likely be considered to have ended towards the end of Cárdenas' presidency, somewhere between 1938 and 1940, following the tentative consensus reached by many working historians.

[6] The phrase *fiesta de balas*, or "fiesta of bullets", was coined by author Martín Luis Guzmán in his classic novel of the revolutionary decade, *El águila y la serpiente*, describing both the rampant violence displayed by revolutionary bands during the civil wars between 1914 and 1920 and the general lawlessness and crime such a tumultuous atmosphere fostered. In Martín Luis Guzmán, *El águila y la serpiente*, ed. Ernest Richard Moore (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1943), 163.

Cárdenas' *sexenio*[7] (1934-1940), Usigli would continually call for a dual project espousing the need for a distinctly Mexican national theater tradition as well as the recommitment to revolutionary reform and the end to "demagoguery" during the centrist government of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) and the early years of Miguel Alemán's presidency (1946-1952). Following the successful if controversial staging of *El gesticulador*—typically considered his masterpiece—on the official stage of professional theater at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Usigli would largely turn to service in the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or SRE) in the decades after, serving as Enviado Extraordinario y Ministro Plenipotenciaro (Supplementary Envoy and Plenipotentiary Minister) and eventually Embajador Plenipotenciario (Plenipotentiary Ambassador) in Lebanon and Ambassador of Mexico in Norway between 1956 and 1972. Through his service in the SRE, Usigli worked to export Mexico's cultural revolution abroad, organizing productions of Mexican plays (including several of his own) while also tamping down his former politically themed works and dramatic output in general, in the process actively contributing to the legitimization of the postrevolutionary state on the international stage.

Contextualizing the Cultural Revolution, Reconstruction, and Postrevolutionary Mexico

With the formative years of both his career and young adulthood based in the cultural revolution and reconstruction periods, it is necessary to turn to two of the most well-studied issues of the decades following Mexico's revolution, both of which are central antecedents for this study: how cultural and political elites both collaborated on and diverged in constructing new visions of Mexican modernity, identity, and national unity, and the emergence of a dominant political party whose members would lead the national government during this period and beyond. Studies like Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent's classic *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis' collection *The Eagle and the Virgin*, Ricardo Pérez Montfort's *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano*, Elena Jackson Albarrán's *Seen and Heard in Mexico*, and Rubén Gallo's *Mexican Modernity* have examined the manners by which government reform programs converged with dynamic artistic and intellectual movements, appropriating, reshaping, and crafting traditional and amended cultural forms that forged a novel cultural nationalist discourse and a modern Mexican state. Here, the

[7] I.e., the six-year presidential term held by all Mexican presidents since 1934.

relationships between state and citizenry were reshaped and restructured through a myriad of education programs, government-sponsored radio and cinema industries, murals, festivals and other rituals, celebration of folkloric and popular arts, and other forms of media and mass communication. The frequently uneven extension of such programs also refashioned and produced new forms of clientelist dynamics between the state and its people, who themselves continually contested, accepted, and above all negotiated the intricacies of engaging with state-disseminated reforms and discourses. Similarly, the processes through which cultural and political elites envisioned a modern Mexico were oftentimes paradoxical and carried out by actors expressing disparate perspectives themselves.

The demands of national reconstruction also informed the emphasis on cultural and social reformation. The revolutionary decade, lasting between 1910 and 1920, saw a nation-wide process of social upheaval, civil discord, and mass violence, but which culminated in the emergence of a dominant political class—revolutionary generals Álvaro Obregón (president from 1920-1924), Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), and their allies in the national Congress and state governments[8]—and the need to unify a fractured national community. Frequent upheavals throughout the 1920s and continued dissonance both between and within revolutionary factions, along with pushback from conservatives, bourgeoisie interests, and U.S. economic relations, confronted a national government intent on consolidating control over Mexico's varied social classes and ethnic groups.

Academically trained intellectuals and skilled artists, inspired by revolutionary upheaval, new frameworks for understanding culture and identity, and international events like the Russian Revolution, WWI, and European avant-gardism, also emerged to head the government's projects for achieving social and cultural unification and give aesthetic form to their visions of Mexican identity and culture. Such visions included Diego Rivera's "socialist realist" artworks and their embodiment of "nationalist modernism," socialist politics, and the dominant narrative that saw the revolution as an organized popular movement that would bring about a new utopian future.[9]

[8] Many of which hailed from similar middle-class backgrounds, enjoyed complementary experiences leading armies during the revolutionary decade, and were compatriots from their fellow home-state of Sonora in the northwest of Mexico, foregrounding the role that personal relationships would play in the formation of the Mexican state over the coming years.

[9] Mary Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 21.

Likewise, José Vasconcelos' *raza cósmica* and its celebration of racial *mestizaje*,[10] an *indigenismo* movement that valued Mexico's indigenous past, and a concentrated celebration of Mexico's popular and folkloric communities and arts as representing true *mexicanidad* ("Mexicanness") advanced visions of Mexico's racial and cultural heritage that would unite the nation's people into a unified national community. Especially important for the realization of revolutionary cultural nationalism and reform programs were rebolstered government agencies centered on the arts and public education, headed by luminaries at the forefront of Mexico's arts vanguard. These included the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education, SEP) first and foremost,[11] especially during its time under Vasconcelos' direction between 1921 and 1924; SEP's Departamento de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Department), reconstituted into its own agency (INBA) during Miguel Alemán's tenure as president; the subdepartment for art education, under the direction of painter Adolfo Best Mauguard; the Department of Anthropology, headed by the "father of modern Mexican anthropology," Manuel Gamio; Alberto Pani as minster of Foreign Affairs (1921-1923) and minister of the Treasury and Public Credit (1923-1927); and countless others, including a number of playwrights at the head of the Fine Arts Department's subdepartment for Theater, additional departments within SEP, and other agencies within the growing state bureaucracy.

Numerous scholars have emphasized how the visual arts, including painting, photography, and films, crafted imagery that would form revolutionary cultural nationalism, and historians Mary Coffey, Desmond Rochfort, and Leonard Folgarait especially have shown that muralist movements contributed a compelling synthesis of the iconography that would be adopted into the institutionalization of official revolutionary cultural nationalism. This emphasis on muralism in particular and visual arts more generally stretches back to early intellectual reflections on Mexico's cultural revitalization during the 1920s and 1930s, chief amongst them

[10] Coffey, 6-7.

[11] As Albarrán states in *Seen and Heard in Mexico: Children and Revolutionary Cultural Nationalism*, the SEP was "arguably the most influential government bureau in the early twentieth century", an argument that is repeated in the emphasis placed on the SEP's educational, cultural, and arts programs and their focus on constructing norms of "revolutionary citizenship" across the historiography examining the cultural revolution and national reconstruction periods of the 1920s and 1930s. Educational expenditures also reached "an all-time high, averaging 10 percent of the budget from 1921 to 1940," with their "apex during the Cárdenas administration at nearly 14 percent", revealing the focus shown towards SEP programs and the weight the agency held within the state bureaucracy during the cultural revolution. In Elena Jackson Albarrán, *Seen and Heard in Mexico: Children and Revolutionary Cultural Nationalism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 31-32, 7.

Anita Brenner and her seminal works *Idols Behind Altars* and *The Wind That Swept Mexico; The History of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1942*. And yet, despite often being overlooked, theater during the cultural revolution and national reconstruction periods also directly contributed to the discourses and state-building processes surrounding national identity, culture and the arts, new aesthetic trends amongst Mexico's cultural elites, and conceptions of the national state and official party born out of the revolutionary decade and discord of the 1920s. As William Beezley's *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* argues, itinerant puppet theater in 19th century México formed one of those crucial unofficial, popular art forms that worked to shape popular memories post-Independence: enacting public performances that drew crowds of Mexicans eager for entertainment, puppet theater "relied on mnemonic devices that recreated specific accounts of the past. These images formed the improvisational lexicon used in discussing the popular, local versions of the nations and its citizens."[12] Theater following the revolutionary decade functioned along similar lines. Popular theater forms, chief amongst them the *teatro de revista*,[13] collectively termed the "*género chico*" by contemporary theater critic Armando de María y Campos,[14] frequently satirized revolutionary elites and the discrepancies between their actions and rhetoric. Meanwhile, the *revista* coexisted with a professional theater scene primarily devoted to reproducing European classics, albeit with revamped and innovative staging techniques that reflected contemporary debates over Mexico's growing advance into "modernity." Both *revista* and professional theater, therefore, helped to construct the discourse, vocabulary, and imagery available to Mexicans in their engagement with and understanding of revolutionary cultural nationalism, helping them to accept and frequently challenge dominant forms of nationalism.

Furthermore, expanded official sponsorship of the arts, along with the call for artists to guide the SEP's educational and artistic programs and domestic and international avant-gardism, informed the formation of numerous theater groups, private and state-supported companies, and

[12] William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 17-18.
[13] *Teatro de revista* refers to a form of popular theater—i.e., considered common amongst and emblematic of lower-class culture by contemporary cultural elites—that merged performances of music, dance, and politically-themed skits, similar to what English-speaking audiences might consider "music hall" or "vaudeville." In Benjamin T. Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976: Stories from the Newsroom, Stories from the Street* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 82.
[14] Armando de María y Campos, *El Teatro de Género Chico en la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Biblioteca del Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricas de la Revolución Mexicana, 1956).

theatrical seasons, particularly (in the case of this study) those of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, that produced divergent visions of content and technique related to the celebration of the popular arts or European forms. The Palacio de Bellas Artes,[15] constructed in March 1932 and inaugurated September 29, 1934, occupied a special position in both revolutionary and postrevolutionary theater and Usigli's career and his relationship with the state. Created as the official, state-sponsored site for professional, "high" Mexican theater, it carried the policy directives of "performing Mexican plays by Mexican actors, fomenting (professional) Mexican theater, creating new opportunities for populations who previously lacked the financial means to access the professional theater, and attracting new audiences accustomed to other theater genres and spectacles."[16]

Playwrights, directors, and commercial companies also expressed equally divergent conceptions of nationalism,[17] engaging with the cultural nationalism dominant at the time while still mostly preoccupied with performing European works, considering them more successful amongst Mexico City theatergoing audiences. This polyphony of actors formed competing definitions of a national theater that Usigli would become predominantly occupied with throughout the early and middle stages of his career. As will be seen later, Usigli centered his project pushing for a realist, professional, and distinctly Mexican theater tradition, one which he viewed as most necessary in "high," professional theater circles in Mexico City and beyond. Particularly, he argued for a national theater tradition that was self-reflective and interrogated the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of Mexican political, social, and cultural behaviors, one which was presented to audiences composed of upper-class social and political elites, a growing middle class, and working-class Mexicans in the most well-known of Mexico's theaters. His campaign for such a style of theater formed a unique project in the context of cultural nationalist and revolutionary nationalist discourses, as well as a contemporary national theater and especially

[15] For an insightful examination of the construction of the Palacio de Bellas Artes and how its architectural form—art deco—reflected both the desires of revolutionary nationalism and continued debates over what constituted desired gender (particularly) feminine forms, architectural and landscape planning (centered in the capital), and political designs in the time of revolutionary cultural nationalism, see Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900–1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).
[16] Jovita Millán Carranza, *70 años de teatro en el Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2004), 31.
[17] Socorro Merlín, *El nacionalismo de los autores dramáticos de la década 1920-1930* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Cultura, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli, 2016), 20-25.

middle-class-dominated audiences that were typically seen as ignorant of or uninterested in Mexican works.

Thus, hailing from a spectrum of ideological and aesthetic standpoints, cultural elites' conceptions of revolutionary history, *mexicanidad*, and correct forms of artistic production tended to merge with governmental and political elites' interests in legitimizing the new state born out the revolutionary decade. Historians like Thomas Benjamin and Ilene O'Malley have produced scholarship advancingng understanding of how the formation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party, or PNR), created in 1929 to unite all revolutionary factions and their interests into a single party, saw political elites connected with the official party consecrating and institutionalizing their dominant narrative of revolutionary history. In doing so, they crafted a homogenized narrative that washed out discord between the major factions, reified "*la Revolución*" as the latest in a long line of struggles reorienting Mexican society towards a utopian future, and styled the PNR-dominated government as par-none in its capacity to achieve revolutionary reform and national unification—even as many former revolutionaries worked to subvert such reform and demand depictions of Mexican culture sanitized of nuance.[18] After the establishment of the PNR, former president Plutarco Elías Calles moved into the background of national politics, playing the role of informal statesman and strongman adviser to a number of interim presidents during the period that would be termed the Maximato (1928-1934). During this period, the government's commitment to social reform and the dynamism of the earlier cultural revolution years is typically seen as dropping off, informed by economic recession caused by the Great Depression, the uncertainty of rule under interim presidents Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932), and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934), and a growing sense of authoritarianism under Calles' seemingly single-handed control over Mexican politics.

As the 1920s and the growing need for achieving national unification stretched on, respect for the complexities behind artists' divergent projects began to drop while elite politicians and heads of government ministries sought a consolidated vision of national culture

[18] Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) and Ilene V. O'Malley's *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

and identity, corresponding with a drop in government sponsorship for artists like the muralists.[19] Rivera's socialist realism found fluctuating but mostly strong support during the Maximato period and Lázaro Cárdenas' *sexenio* (1934-1940), when his murals corresponded with the distinctly socialist character of the national government and its desire to depict Mexico as progressing towards a proletariat-produced utopian future, while artists and intellectuals who continued to emphasize the nuances within or even criticisms of state programs sponsoring *mexicanidad*, *indigenismo*, and popular arts typically saw their perspectives ignored as state bureaucrats "institutionalized" the art forms and cultural tropes they saw as representing modern Mexico. As muralist historian Mary Coffey puts it, by the 1940s an institutionalized, "official culture" had emerged, produced, according to Roger Bartra, through the relationship "between the formation of a myth (identity), its insertion into institutional life (political culture), and the ideology that attempts to explain and direct the process (official culture)."[20]

The orthodox view of the Cárdenas administration tends to see his presidency as most radical and most committed to revolutionary reform of the 20th century,[21] a perception, while still ringing somewhat true, that has been effectively challenged as more recent scholarship has worked to reexamine both the president's own pragmatist streak and the limitations of Cárdenas' reforms.[22] During his *sexenio*, social reform flourished especially between 1935 and 1938, embodied in his administration's (early) commitment to secular, socialist primary education, land redistribution programs, support for labor strikes, and especially the nationalization of Mexican oil in 1938. However, Cárdenas' administration also had to mediate between the demands of powerful conservative allies in key state governments, opposition from the

[19] A drop that was at least partially motivated by instability in government funding caused by the Great Depression. In Coffey, 33-34.
[20] Coffey, 5.
[21] *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, 5; Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?", in *Journal of Latin American Studies 26*, no. 1 (February 1994), 73-74.
[22] Including Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith's *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); Joseph and Nugent's *Everyday Forms of State Formation*; Albarrán's *Seen and Heard in Mexico*; Adrian Bantjes' *As if Jesus walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998); Ben Fallaw's *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Mary Kay Vaughan's classic *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?"; and Amelia Kiddle and María Muñoz's collection *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), amongst many others.

influential Church and business sectors, regional and local interests that contested national government policies, and the sporadic, halting nature of achieving reform across a vast, diverse nation—thereby stressing what Nora Hamilton called "the limits of state autonomy."[23] Additionally, the corporatization of peasant, labor, and "popular" organizations, drawing them under the aegis of government sponsorship ostensibly to provide them a greater voice in the national government, also worked to curtail former opportunities and avenues for independent organization and resistance—administrations after 1938 frequently used corporatist structures to clamp down on government-affiliated labor strikes and peasant activism.

Converging with an emerging official culture was also the institutionalizing state, dominated by members of the official party at the national, state, and (for the most part) local levels of government and their dedication to preserving a single-party state that was only nominally democratic: the party had been renamed from the PNR to the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution, or PRM) in 1938 and finally to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) in 1946, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the institutionalization of both the official party and an effectively single-party system of political rule. Between 1929 and 1946, the official party honed its tactics (albeit sloppily) in election rigging, coalition-building to defeat opposition movements, assassinations and military force to enforce popular acquiescence, and drawing the support of influential labor and peasant organizations through state corporatism.[24] After 1938, while turning to a concentrated project of capitalist and industrial development that tended to serve Mexico's growing middle class and business elite, heads of the official party updated official rhetoric and their consolidated narrative of revolutionary history —now twisted to fit contemporary shifts—in order to continue to "unify the nation as never before"[25] and defend the official party as the inheritor of revolutionary transformation. This shift in the state's commitments to reform programs and the consolidation of a self-serving official culture led contemporary historian Daniel Cosío Villegas to announce that by 1947, "the revolution had been spent".[26] However,

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[23] Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1982).
[24] *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968*, ed. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 11.
[25] *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. by Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.
[26] Daniel Cosío Villegas, "La crisis de México," *Cuadernos Americanos 32*, no. 2 (March-April, 1947), 29-51.

Miguel Alemán's election and its symbolic and literal transition to a civilian-dominated government also sparked new questions, hopes, and anxieties over the state of Mexico's "democracy", modernity, and revolution. Thus, in the 1940s (and beyond), the institutionalization of official culture also merged with concerns over ensuring popular acceptance of the shifting focuses of the postrevolutionary state, including from both state-affiliated and independent artists and intellectuals.

However, a study of this period and the issues of narrative, competing discourses, and power also requires an eye to variation, difference, and understanding of power negotiations that avoids overemphasizing elite control or ignoring the ability of *los de abajo* to contest state power. Although an institutionalized official culture had emerged with an institutionalized ruling party, as Mary Coffey reminds us, government sponsorship fluctuated across time and with contemporary concerns during both the cultural revolution and postrevolutionary periods.[27] Thus, although a dominant set of tropes, art forms, images, and rhetoric considered "official culture" and "a common discourse of national belonging" had emerged by the 1940s,[28] government funding for various artists and competing visions of *mexicanidad*—even those consecrated into official culture like Diego Rivera—waxed and waned depending on the concerns, ideological posturing, and policies of different administrations, ministries, and bureaucrats. Furthermore, as Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov argue, "[the] cultural-political construct [of a shared national mythology] was shaped, resisted, and ultimately negotiated by a multitude of actors and interests, and lo mexicano came to serve counterhegemonic impulses as well as regime projects."[29] Mexicans across social classes, cultural realms, professions, and the public sphere[30] continued to debate, contest, and contribute to official culture and its alternatives. Through the early period of Usigli's politically satirical

[27] Coffey, 12-15.
[28] *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 8.
[29] *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 8.
[30] Here I use public sphere to denote Jürgen Habermas' idea of the public sphere as a space where a number of actors—government, press, and others—could openly engage in public debate, but more closely following a number of historians, chief among them Benjamin Smith, and their arguments that the public sphere in postrevolutionary Mexico did not function as the "emancipatory, rational arena" that Habermas thought the public sphere should be. Access to and debates in public spheres in postrevolutionary Mexico were constantly mediated and restricted through a number of factors, including geography, gender and age (women were typically excluded from participation and children almost entirely), financial demands, government censorship (formal and informal), and violence (both popular and government-sanctioned). In Benjamin T. Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976*, 8.

work, culminating in 1947 with the staging of *El gesticulador*, the playwright participated in contesting the state's official culture and methods elites employed for maintaining power, while also challenging the dominant narrative concerning revolutionary history.

Functioning with a similar eye to the everyday, polyphonic manners by which "rulers and ruled" negotiated culture, power, and the outlines of rule, the term "*dictablanda*" introduces an insightful description for understanding how the postrevolutionary political system came about and functioned, along with how tenets of this system undergirded both Usigli's critique of the state and his position in it. Historians Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith's innovative collection *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* argues that the PRM and PRI-dominated state between (roughly) the late 1930s and late 1960s is best described as a "*dictablanda*", a portmanteau of the Spanish *dictadura* (dictatorship) and *blanda* (soft) used to describe Mexico during this period as a "soft authoritarian" regime blending democratic and authoritarian elements.[31] Using Antonio Gramsci's alternative conception of hegemony as a "dual perspective" or balance between force and consent in the dominant social group's relationship with subaltern groups,[32] force and consent emerge as twin and crucial concepts within *dictablanda* Mexico: both were exercised in the constant, daily, and macro negotiations between rulers and ruled. Force, used by rulers and ruled alike to obtain acquiescence or achieve change, "was real, strategically applied, and successfully masked," while consent was "produced

[31] *Dictablanda*, vii-xi.

[32] As Gramsci argued, "[a] point which needs to be defined and developed is the "dual perspective" in political action and national life. The dual perspective can present itself on various levels…but these can all theoretically be reduced to two fundamental levels, corresponding too the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur…They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization, of the individual moment and of the universal moment ("Church" and "State"), of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy, etc." Gramsci's conception of the "dual perspective" was based in the particular struggle of European communist movements following the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern (1924), during which contemporary Grigory Zinoviev, recently ousted from his role as chairman of the Comintern, argued that the international revolution would develop along two paths (perspectives): "a possible slow and prolonged development" or at a much more rapid pace. Most importantly, the Comintern needed to be able to encourage and respond effectively to both developments, adapting to accelerated rates of development while also maintaining its position as the primary body of the proletarian revolution that "attracts the masses and trains them for revolutionary struggle" during prolonged rates of development. Gramsci adopted this framework into explaining both the general dual methods dominant and subaltern groups employed in constructing their particular relationship—the dominant's hegemony over the subaltern—as well as the dual path the Communist Party would need to take in order to achieve the international proletariat revolution: actively pushing the rapid development of the revolutionary struggle, through methods of propagandization and compelling the radicalization of the masses (force), and the "long game" of maintaining vigilance during the prolonged development of revolutionary revolution (consent). In Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 12-13, 124, 169-170.

by economic growth and a coalition-building distribution of resources, by political accommodation, and by culture."[33] Furthermore, Gillingham asserts that "regulation of resources was critical in building coalitions of consenters on the cheap because it lent Mexico one of the main advantages of a gatekeeper state: the counteracting of state weakness by the stabilizing, coalition-building tool of controlling access to capitalist markets."[34]

Thus, the character of rule in postrevolutionary Mexico was one which very much appears to have functioned—although not entirely, nor excluding additional characterizations and features—along *pan o palo* (bread or stick) lines: political elites achieved dominance through enforcing their control and their interests over subaltern groups (those under hegemonic control of a dominant group), but also needed to obtain compromises through engaging with the interests of subaltern groups, thereby maintaining their perpetuation of hegemony.[35] Meanwhile, subaltern groups could effectively challenge the dominant group's hegemonic hold (or at least demand their attention) through strategically negotiated employment of force and consent. Most important of all is understanding the central role negotiation played in constructing this *dictablanda* system. Rulers and ruled alike employed a number of means considered "formal" and "informal" in order to negotiate the very counters of control (*palo*) and the handouts (*pan*) of rule. These include the formal apparatuses of government—legal and police institutions, legislation, government policy, state programs and the services they provide, formal clientelism,[36] government censorship, and military force—and the ruled's access to and engagement with such apparatuses, as well as the informal measures of personal clientelist

[33] *Dictablanda*, x.
[34] *Dictablanda*, 14.
[35] In Gramscian terms, hegemony refers to the disproportionate influence a dominant group enacts over the social, cultural, and economic activities of a given society, in effect achieving social, cultural, and economic hegemony by obtaining the consent of the masses to such dominance through the dominant group's perceived prestige and capacity for leadership in the realms of cultural and economic production. Moreover, the dominant group achieves "direct domination" in the realms of politics through the "State and 'juridical' government," enforcing control through the various apparatuses of state power. Hegemony and domination are therefore practiced in two distinct, but intertwined, "superstructural" levels present in many complex societies: the "civil society," i.e., the "ensemble organisms commonly called 'private'," and "political society," or the State. However, although Gramsci appears to the two distinct, both hegemony and the formal control of the State over a given society work to reinforce the dominant group's position in said society. Furthermore, the issue of Gramsci's frequent interchangeable use of the Italian "*direzione*" and "*egemonia*"—both of which can be translated as "leadership"—also points to the reality that hegemony and State domination are strongly intertwined, if not close to, although not entirely, one and the same. In Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12-13, 55.
[36] I.e., state corporatism that further entrenched a clientelist and paternalistic relationship between the national government and the peasant, labor, and popular organizations that accepted incorporation into government structures.

relationships, bribery, the use of *pistoleros* and mob violence, both professional and street-level satire and humor, and self-censorship,[37] along with a host of other concessions.[38] That being said, and as Gillingham notes, Gramsci's dual perspective model of hegemony is not a full conclusion, nor is the question at the heart of understanding rule in postrevolutionary Mexico "whether Mexican elites achieved stability…through a balance of force and consent," but rather, "where that balance fell, how it was struck, and how it swayed from time to time and from place to place."[39] Therefore, this study attempts to treat the issue of Usigli's relationship with political elites with an eye to how force and consent mediated between the two groups worked to produce a balance, how the balance was achieved, and how that balance shifted across different points of Usigli's career.

Significant for understanding the nature of Usigli's actions in denouncing official party corruption and the sponsorship he eventually enjoyed in doing so, street-level satire and an element of permitted professional criticism across arts, press, and literary spheres undergirded the *dictablanda* system. PRIísta officials and politicians understood that permitting popular satire and a lesser modicum of political parody across Mexican films, cabaret acts, cartoons, newspaper columns, and theater performances undercut more formal, violent opposition.[40] In other words, humor directed at the government and a level of critical discourse displayed throughout the public sphere served to express popular frustrations in a relatively nonthreatening manner.[41] At the same time, members of the cultural elite and the press who voiced overt criticism—a concern that also grew with the institutionalized revolution's changing face—especially criticism of the presidency, government policy, and the foundations of the political system,[42] could find their

[37] The system of self-censorship becomes especially significant when considering the Mexico City-based national press in postrevolutionary Mexico, in which the nature of censorship of the press tended to fall on self-imposed lines, placing it mostly outside of the realm of formal, government censorship. The structures and tenets of self-censorship in the press had largely achieved a sort of coalesced system between the 1940s and 1970s, largely thanks to the relationships between press and political elites, before the exchange between growing press fracturing and political pluralization in the 1970s contributed to the eventual downfall of this system. This contrasted with the relative autonomy local and regional publications beyond Mexico City enjoyed during the same period, constituting a *cuarto poder*, or "fourth estate". Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976* and Chappel H. Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkely, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002).
[38] *Dictablanda*, 1-20.
[39] *Dictablanda*, viii-ix.
[40] *Dictablanda*, 3-4, 17-20.
[41] *Dictablanda*, 20.
[42] Lawson, 25-28.

works removed from state sponsorship and censored from distribution or display. World-renowned muralists José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros occasionally saw a lack of state funds for works deemed either too radical, too critical of cultural nationalism, or otherwise too divorced from the nationalist sentiments officials hoped to inculcate;[43] Martín Luis Guzmán's novels *El aguila y la serpiente* and *La sombra del caudillo*, which lambasted the corruption of revolutionary reform under generals Venustiano Carranza (1917-1920), Álvaro Obregón, and Plutarco Elías Calles, were originally published in Spain after the author had been forcibly exiled from Mexico; press laws were passed and repealed over the years that placed limits on what journalists and editors could cover, especially in the Mexico City-based nationally-syndicated press;[44] and Usigli and other playwrights who attempted to stage works considered "subversive" often found their performances censored through formal and informal means.[45]

Ultimately, drawing on the prior work of other historians, the *dictablanda* model does not view the PRM and PRI governments of the period as a monolithic, hegemonic force, but rather headed by a shifting, complex coalition of "radicals, reformers, moderates, opportunists and veiled reactionaries," along with a state bureaucracy with a diverse array of tasks at hand, that engaged in a lumbering, oftentimes contradictory mix of force, concession, and consent in achieving a frequently unstable system of rule.[46] Thus, the relationship between Usigli and the single-party regime during the postrevolutionary period developed as one marked ultimately by ambiguity in motives and mutual benefit, centered especially around the negotiations between sponsorship, censorship, and financial security. Roderic Camp has examined the factors contributing to intellectuals' service to the state in 20th century Mexico, finding the most effective and frequent to be: promises of greater financial security,[47] personal desires towards influencing national politics, views of service in the state bureaucracy as a moral obligation,[48]

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[43] Coffey, 13.
[44] Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 193-195.
[45] Smith, 94-104, 111-113.
[46] *Dictablanda*, 1-27.
[47] Given the nature of the intellectual sphere in Mexico, very few intellectuals could make a sustainable living outside of bureaucratic posts, an understanding of their socioeconomic standing in postrevolutionary Mexico Camp argues and which is displayed through Usigli's eventual shift to state endorsement and service in the diplomatic corps, as will be explored more in-depth in later chapters.
[48] I.e., by serving their country as powerful bureaucrats, intellectuals would be able to advance social, cultural, and economic changes necessary for Mexico's people.

personal relationships with fellow bureaucrats and politicians,[49] and last but not least, the self-aggrandizing hunger for personal power.[50]

Additionally, Camp's study pulls on the input of a number of Mexican intellectuals interviewed during the 1980s, seeing three broad types of intellectual extant during and after the postrevolutionary period: the independent intellectual, "uncompromised by the state or any single group" and "whose ideas are influential and considered by various institutions and individuals"; the "compromised" intellectual, "who represents the ideological interests of a political party or group"; and the official intellectual, working for the state regardless of administration but essentially ideologically "neutral".[51] Within this useful but generalist model, over the course of his career Usigli would fluctuate across all three categories, frequently serving in the state bureaucracy and occasionally aligned generally with the government's ideological aims, at other points distinctly opposed to its formal or informal ideology, and, finally, vocally supportive of the state to the point of ideological compromise. More appropriate for understanding how his relationship with the state evolved is Camp's model examining the factors that typically compelled intellectuals to service in the government, especially the appeal of non-ideological rationale.

The pull of state sponsorship functioned on similar lines: artists who consented to endorsing and constructing state-sponsored ideology would enjoy greater state funding, visibility, and venues sponsored by the state and its means for distributing media. In doing so, artists traded greater financial security, heightened visibility within elite networks, and access to a public to which they could showcase their work, for the constraints placed on them by state bureaucrats, enforcing a need to abide by the demands of official endorsement while largely (but not entirely) shunting off artists' capacity for expressing independent criticism of the state and its projects. In other words, artists and intellectuals sacrificed artistic and intellectual "honesty" for the advantages of financial security, opportunities for further funding, a larger or at least more influential audience, respect of their peers and upper-class elites, and the belief that they were contributing a public and moral "good." Usigli, both as an intellectual in the service of the state

[49] Of which bureaucrats especially were frequently fellow intellectuals, peers, and friends.
[50] Camp, 212-216.
[51] Camp, 212.

and an artist who frequently confronted the mores of sponsorship and censorship, acts as an example of the intertwined, negotiated relationships between artists/intellectuals and the state.

Parallel examples of this dynamic come in the cases of the aforementioned Diego Rivera and of Usigli's fellow theater performer and Mexico's famous film star Mario "Cantinflas" Moreno. Rivera generally found clearance to paint essentially state-edifying murals across Mexican government and education institutions through the use of state (particularly SEP) funds, and his work continuously aligned with the state's vision of national unification, frequently depicting Mexico as progressing towards a utopian future under the ostensibly revolutionary government. Rivera's murals lacked his peers Orozco and Siquieros' tendencies to criticize what they considered the government's failure to live up to the revolutionary reformism it claimed to espouse, but, conversely, Rivera enjoyed a special veneration as a leading symbol of Mexico's thriving arts scenes through his endorsement of and contributions to official cultural nationalism.[52]

Additionally, Jeffrey Pilcher's *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity* tracks the evolution of Moreno and his oft-adopted silver screen persona Cantinflas alongside the evolution of the official party and political rule over the course of the 20th century. Through Moreno, his filmography, and eventually his public activities as a PRI mouthpiece, Pilcher finds an astute reflection of Mexican audiences, the confusion of Mexican modernity, and the visible character of postrevolutionary governments.[53] Launching his career in the *carpa*[54] theaters popular throughout lower-class neighborhoods of Mexico City in 1930, Moreno began performing when *carpa* and *teatro de revista* shows frequently satirized the authoritarian character of the national government and the excesses of elite behavior during the Maximato,[55] displaying a political awareness Usigli would also adopt as he entered into professional theater circles during the same period. Politically conservative, Moreno would parody Cárdenas-era radicalism across several

[52] Coffey, 24-49; *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 43-56.
[53] Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), xv-xxvi.
[54] I.e., provisional tent theaters set up ad-hoc, especially in lower-class neighborhoods in Mexico City, as a cheaper alternative to the professional and *teatro de revista* traditions performed in theaters like the Teatro Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Teatro Lírico, Teatro Arbeu, Teatro de Esperanza Iris, Teatro de Virginia Fábregas, and Teatro Follies Bergère.
[55] Pilcher, 13-20.

shows, films, and interviews in conservative press outlets, before turning to endorsing wartime Mexican nationalism in several films and attempting to challenge Hollywood's hold over Latin American markets during Ávila Camacho's presidency.[56] While Alemán and his *amigos* clique began to amass vast wealth through their positions and further orient the national government towards programs accelerating capital accumulation and industrial development, Moreno also became wealthier, his films grew increasingly inclined towards endorsing bourgeois lifestyle, and the actor came under fire from critics for selling out the originally lower-class character of Cantinflas, much as the institutionalized "Revolution" had sold out revolutionary reform for private business growth and personal riches for political elites.[57] In the final decades of his career and still growing ever wealthier, Moreno fully became a mouthpiece for PRI officials and their corruption, and tramped out in international appearances as a symbol of Mexico's cultural artistry under PRIísta rule.[58]

Most insightfully, Pilcher uses Cantinflas' career trajectory as a complementary reflection of the trajectory of the PRI across the mid-century period into the latter decades of the 20th century, finding in Cantinflas a mirror for the heightened nationalism of the wartime years, the personal enrichment and changing face of the institutionalized "Revolution" accelerated by *alemanista* officials, and the PRI's increasingly deteriorated political stock following the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre and economic crises of the 1980s. In doing so, Pilcher maps both trajectories on top of each other, organizing a narratively fluid biography of Moreno that complementarily tracks the PRI's own development, changes in PRIísta policy and ideology across presidential administrations, and the manners by which transformations in both PRIísta policy and Cantinflas' career reflected the changing realities of Mexican modernity. I adopt Pilcher's framework for tracking Cantinflas and the PRI's parallel evolutions into my own analysis of Usigli and the PRI's development during this same period, finding a powerful narrative device for displaying broader political developments through the lens of a single individual and vice versa.

Through the comparative examples of Rivera, Cantinflas, and Usigli, one can gain a view of how artists and intellectuals who enjoyed varying levels of state sponsorship and work within

[56] Pilcher, 48-54, 94-96.
[57] Pilcher, 129-161.
[58] Pilcher, 206-209.

the state bureaucracy also a uncovered a plethora of manners by which they could claim a degree of independent expression and dissatisfaction with a paternalistic regime, symbolic of the ambiguity inherent to postrevolutionary rule. In doing so, they could earn themselves a modicum of popular clout as figures who denounced corruption and voiced the "true" feelings of Mexico's masses. Cantinflas enjoyed mass popularity, especially amongst lower- and middle-class audiences, for his parodies, first of the idiosyncrasies of elite behavior, then of *cardenista* radicalism, before turning to endorsing the PRIísta state throughout the latter half of his career. Similarly, Usigli was celebrated amongst his peers for achieving a state-sponsored denunciation of official corruption, after which he largely shifted to service as a representative of the government on the international stage. Meanwhile, much like its permission of prescribed satire and dissatisfaction in the public sphere, a regime concerned with preserving its ostensibly revolutionary image could utilize cooptation of dissident actors in order to signal its approval of critical discourse, thereby suggesting both its willingness to change and maintaining the softer façade of PRIísta authoritarianism.

Ultimately, the discrepancies and the ambiguities inherent within the *dictablanda* system are the screw upon which Usigli's relationship with the single party state turned: the playwright gave voice to an element of dissent considered radical by members of his intellectual, professional, and socioeconomic class, while also placing himself within and allowing himself and his work to be coopted by the same political apparatus that he had once condemned. Through this paradoxical dynamic, Usigli worked as both a critic of and more-or-less an agent of the regime. The nature of the intellectual professions during this period also propelled even critical intellectuals to work in the state bureaucracy, becoming coopted as professionals in service of the regime. Similarly, the PRIísta state of postrevolutionary Mexico frequently censored and limited access to the public sphere for critical voices, while also permitting them a modicum of space to display their criticism.

Finally, there are three fundamental concepts I will be treating as they relate to Usigli and his role as both a critic of and an agent within the PRIísta state. First, Usigli's generational identity and that of his peers, created through a childhood marked by revolutionary upheaval and mass civil discord, informed a distinctive relationship with the revolution and the political elites who inherited it. As the civilian, largely university-trained and middle-class nucleus of their

generation took hold as administrators and public officials, they would have a particularly notable impact on the PRI's trajectory in the decades following Miguel Alemán's election in 1946. Second, Usigli's position as an emerging artist during the burgeoning cultural revolution influenced his engagement with cultural nationalism, forming a unique type of nationalism that undergirded his conception of a theater project necessary for Mexico's masses. Third, the construction of discourse surrounding *El gesticulador* in the national press over the weeks and months following its premiere provide substantial insight into the ways public perception was mediated and managed between the press, artists and intellectuals, and public officials in mid-twentieth century Mexico.

Articles from fellow playwrights and theater critics worked to construct the personal and public characters of Usigli himself, crafting an image of a sometimes praiseworthy, other times scandalous playwright who either challenged the tenets of the single-party system or actively betrayed the reified "Revolution". The staging of *El gesticulador* and the responses it sparked in the Mexico City-based press took place in a unique moment in postrevolutionary Mexico, when the transition to Alemán's civilian-dominated government was still fresh and recent proposals towards opening up freedom of expression heralded new debates on the state of politics, official corruption, and the revolution. Debates provoked by *El gesticulador* and the government sponsorship it enjoyed contributed to broader discourses during the late 1940s on the legacy of the revolutionary decade and the government's ostensibly revolutionary character, revealing the crucial role negotiations concerning formal and informal censorship, the press, and state sponsorship played out between rulers and ruled within the *dictablanda* system of postrevolutionary Mexico.

Description: El Gesticulador, Metanarrative Themes, and Emerging Discourse

Usigli's *El gesticulador*, best translated to English as *The Imposter*, was first written in 1938, printed in Letras de Mexico in 1944, and experienced its first, explosive performance run in 1947, premiering in the Palacio de Bellas Artes on May 17 and concluding on May 31. Even within the first several days of its premiere, according to contemporary observers, the play had drawn both high praise and a mountain of controversy,[59] inflaming heated debates over the

[59] For contemporary observations of the first days of *El gesticulador*'s original performance season, see Armando de María y Campos, "Efemérides del teatro en México: estreno de 'El Gesticulador', de Usigli," *Novedades*, 20 de

play's meaning and its metanarrative commentary on contemporary politics. Equal parts tragedy, drama, and biting satire, the play follows male protagonist César Rubio, a former ideologue in the Constitutionalist camp, as he relocates his family from Mexico City to the northern, *serrano* border town of his youth, following the loss of his position as professor of the Mexican Revolution at a local university in Mexico City and his ostracization within the official party during the same contemporary period of reconstruction and revolutionary nationalism in which Usigli wrote it. His son Miguel, a university student and socialist dismayed with the current state of national politics, and his daughter Julia loathe César for his decision to move them from the city, while César's wife, Elena, disappointed with their loss of status but resilient nonetheless, plays the stereotypically self-abnegating Mexican woman.

Seemingly condemned to spend a life of drudgery isolated from the comforts of their urban life, one evening the family has a chance encounter with Oliver Bolton, a U.S. professor of history investigating the disappearance of revolutionary general César Rubio two decades prior, and who shares the same name and background as our protagonist. With his extensive, almost too-familiar, knowledge of the general's life, César Rubio embarks on a campaign of political aspirations masquerading—or, possibly, revealing his true identity?—as the supposedly-deceased revolutionary. It is through this amoral, fatalistic plunge into national politics that Rubio encounters, in full force, the maelstrom of corruption, deception, and hypocrisy plaguing Mexico's daily reality—here, every player wears a mask, and the truth is only yesterday's deception.

Both those involved in constructing the discourse surrounding the drama and Usigli himself note, throughout the number of responses and counterresponses published in Mexican national and local press during this period, that the main critiques and themes *El gesticulador*

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mayo de 1947; Antonio Magaña Esquivel, "Proscenio: Usigli, dramaturgo," *El Nacional*, 18 de mayo de 1947; "Bellas Artes: El gesticulador," *El Redondel*, 18 de mayo de 1947; Fernando Mota, "Se levanta el telón," *El Universal*, 19 de mayo de 1947; and Alí Chumacero, "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," *El Nacional*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pgs. 207, 208, 210, and 223. The majority of these reviews touch on the play's supposedly favorable reception amongst an audience hungry for such stark and revealing realism, one that reflects their political and social reality, demonstrating a view of the audience as having an incredibly amicable relationship with *El gesticulador* and its messages. Several, however, do note the negative reception of the play and the resulting controversy, which, according to the articles' authors, stem primarily from generals and politicians—two collectives who would find themselves lumped in with the corrupt political and military elite vilified in *El gesticulador*.

advances include: first, the inherently corrupt nature of Mexican politics and its system of government—particularly, the use of bribery and assassination as a common means to personal gain, as well as the decidedly non-democratic character of a legalized single-party system, and the political elite's use of *oficialista*[60] rhetoric to defend the government as "truly" revolutionary and representative of popular interests. Second, the official party's manipulation of a revisionist, state-sponsored history of the "Revolution." Third, the widespread proliferation of the practice of "Janus-faced" political masquerade, where public officials masked their motives and policies through *oficialista* rhetoric and performed as revolutionaries.[61] Usigli's disparaging commentary, praised by likeminded compatriots and lambasted by *oficialista* ideologues who rose to defend Alemán's government and the institutionalized "Revolution," led to conflicting interpretations over the play's essential character: was it the work of a reactionary conservative bent on slandering the legacy of Mexico's great revolution, or a harsh but-nonetheless-accurate critique of a political system all too focused on saving its increasingly deteriorating face?

The controversy sparked by *El gesticulador* also reveals clear divisions between the negative responses from "politicians and generals" and near-unanimous support from Usigli's fellow playwrights and intellectuals, thereby acting as a sort of macrocosmic metaphor for the altercation between Usigli and Novo and the ambiguous relationship between cultural actors and the state. Military leaders, bureaucrats within Alemán's administration, and journalists acting as voices of the party called *El gesticulador* "antirevolutionary," "An attack on the Revolution," and "reactionary"[62]—a play designed to foment lies and misinformation over the "true" history

[60] Essentially denoting rhetoric, discourse, and persons that espoused the official ideology of the party, legitimized its rule as representative of *el pueblo*'s interests, and defended the actions of party-affiliated public officials.
[61] Renata Keller uses the term "Janus-faced" to characterize the discrepancies between the Mexican government's foreign and domestic policies during the Cold War, particularly the mix between the national government's open support for the Cuban Revolution and Castro government, their behind-the-scenes dealings with the U.S. government working to undermine the nascent Castro government, and their pursuit of domestic policies clamping down on Cuban-inspired opposition and initiating the "dirty war" against leftist guerrilla organizations and radical peasant-labor activism. Keller drew this term originally from political scientist Robert Putnam's approach to understanding the entanglement of domestic and international politics, where domestic concerns often inform international policy decisions that might otherwise seem incongruous with a government's typical domestic policies, and vice versa. I use this term here to point towards the discrepancies between political elites' publicly-stated ideological and political views and the actual tangible policy decisions they made. Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9-10; Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Policies: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization 42*, no. 3 (July 1988), 427-460.
[62] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes" and "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones." In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220. Pedro Gringoire,

of Mexico's 1910-1920 revolution. On the opposite end, authors, newspaper editors, intellectuals, and contemporaries of Usigli lauded the piece, heralding it as the birth of a new, modern, realist, and distinctly Mexican drama, one which depicted the country's politics, daily life, and "national conscience" in harshly realistic terms.[63]

"Gesticulaciones": Identity and the Concept of "Generations"

Examining the case of Usigli provides an insightful look into the role that generational identity played in the relationship between Mexico's state and cultural elite over the course of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods. Usigli, Novo, and Alemán—the latter two not central but supplementary figures operating along the peripheries of this study—were members of the *hijos de la Revolución* ("Sons of the Mexican Revolution")[64] generation in Mexico, denoting children—and, more particularly, young boys—who came of age during the waning years of the revolutionary decade and its immediate aftermath. As such, they developed a particular relationship with and understandings of the revolution, ones distinct from older revolutionaries who participated in the decade-plus warfare and actively participated in the ideological factionalism that emerged throughout. Thus, I view Usigli's generational outlook as crucial for understanding the contours of his opposition to the foundations of the postrevolutionary system, as well as for how members of his generation would come to collectively view the revolution and understand its meaning for Mexico's national character. Their collective experiences also informed the manners through which cultural and political elites of Usigli's generation would go on to both take up and reject elements of the official ideology first developed by the revolutionary generation, as well as form new paths towards addressing social plights and contemporary anxieties when their generation assumed the mantle of rule following Alemán's election.

Furthermore, Usigli's class, geographic, educational, and national and ethnic background, as well as his personal character, all work to construct the context by which the author gained

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"Section 'Guide for the Reader' 'Guía Del Lector'," *Excélsior*, 10 de febrero de 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53.

[63] "Drama," *Mexican Life*, June 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223.

[64] A characterization coined by Ryan M. Alexander with his study *Sons of the Mexican Revolution: Miguel Alemán and his Generation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), centered on Alemán's rise to power and his particular cohort of university and professional friends (often termed *amigos*) who accompanied him into office.

both a cynical outlook and a position of status, fame, and controversy within theater and intellectual circles. It is this position of growing status in theater circles, along with his posts in the state bureaucracy, that ultimately earned him the contacts and sway requisite for creating what became an influential piece of theater. Usigli considered performance at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, with all its relevance as the most venerated site of professional theater in Mexico, as paramount for his dual projects advocating the need for a realist, professional, Mexican theater tradition and seeing such a style of theater performed in front of the elites of Mexican society. Furthermore, Usigli's position as an acclaimed playwright, particularly one who continually pursued the staging of his plays at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, created a situation in which the author increasingly wrestled with a personal moralism birthed out of his experiences of the revolution and a pragmatic need for financial support that could only be earned from federal sources—primary amongst them, INBA.

Sources and Methodology

The primary archive base consulted for this study is the Rodolfo Usigli Archive, housed in the Walter Havighurst Special Collections at Miami University. The purchase and transmission of the Archive to Miami University in 1995, facilitated most of all by Dr. Ramón Layera and the Usigli family, along with a donation made by Miami University alumni Phelps and Beverly Woods, made the provenance of the Archive at Miami University possible. The Rodolfo Usigli Archive constitutes the primary repository of archived materials related to Usigli's life and career, and as such, was an invaluable research asset for this study. The Archive contains documents, original and completed drafts of Usigli's plays, books, essays, prologues, epilogues, and articles written by Usigli himself, translations of works by other artists, correspondence, diaries, photographs, government memos, press reviews and articles, playbills, posters, invitations, awards, memorabilia, ephemera, scholarship written about Usigli, and many more materials, much of which was originally compiled by Usigli and his family. As such, the inclusion and organization of the materials contained in the Archive hold the mark of the playwright and his family, making it a valuable collection whose creation was guided by the albeit biased hand of Usigli and his family members. Most useful for this study have been several folders of correspondence shared between Usigli and fellow artists, politicians, bureaucrats, and diplomats the playwright regularly corresponded with; incomplete and

completed drafts of *El gesticulador* and its accompanying epilogue "Epílogo sobre la hipocresía mexicana," which facilitated both the analysis of these works and the ways in which their writing developed; and especially the Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, containing crucial press articles that reviewed the staging of *El gesticulador* in 1947 and the controversies that surrounded its performance.

Additionally, the Archivo Vertical of the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (CITRU) provided a valuable resource for further examining the press responses to *El gesticulador*, including performances in the decades following the 1947 premiere that help review how the play was updated to and perceived according to contemporary concerns. Housed in the Torre de Investigación at the Centro Nacional de las Artes' campus in the colonia Coyoacán in Mexico City, CITRU was created in 1981 following Rodolfo Usigli's death, and works as a center for researching, archiving, and producing scholarship on Mexican theater since Independence. CITRU is under the aegis of government agencies the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Centro Nacional de las Artes (CENART), and while the archival materials related to Usigli contained in CITRU's Archivo Vertical are scarcer than those housed at the Rodolfo Usigli Archive, the archive still presents a useful resource for Usigli investigations and studies of Mexican theater in general. The Fondo Especial Rodolfo Usigli, housed at the Biblioteca de las Artes also located in CENART's Coyoacán campus, contains materials Usigli possessed, including scholarly, journal, and newspaper articles, artistic works, and invitations and correspondence that help construct the artistic environment and mindset that Usigli occupied. The Fondo Especial Rodolfo Usigli, while not containing the original drafts of Usigli works that the Rodolfo Usigli Archive does, does hold multiple copies of Usigli's works, including his highly valuable *Teatro complete* volumes, as well as multiple pieces of the playwright's ephemera. Both CITRU and the Fondo Especial Rodolfo Usigli are managed and overseen by government agencies, INBA and CENART in particular.

Lastly, the Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) acts as the archival wing housing the diplomat records of Mexican embassies and diplomats from 1822 and 1987 for the SRE. As such, it holds the diplomatic portfolio of Usigli's time in the Ministry of Foreign Relations, including a large volume of correspondence Usigli

sent and received in his position as a diplomat. While largely unused for this study, consulting this study advanced valuable insight into the activities Usigli performed across his postings, the dignitaries and foreign officials he interacted with, and the manners by which he corresponded with peers and superiors in the SRE. The Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, similar to CITRU and the Fondo Especial Rodolfo Usigli, is managed and safeguarded by one of the largest agencies in the Mexican government. Ultimately, the content of each of the archives listed is largely informed by the body, government and otherwise, tasked with overseeing its management and organization, as seen by the materials and insight culled from each repository.

Examination of Historiography

For the past several decades, many historians of 20th century Mexico have contributed monumental studies on the construction of cultural nationalism following the revolutionary decade. Particularly insightful studies have emphasized the role the nascent national state played in fomenting Mexico's artistic and intellectual scenes over the duration of the 1920s and the 1930s, as well as highlighting the symbiotic relationship between influential government institutions—SEP first and foremost—and prominent cultural actors during this period. Here, historians like Mary Kay Vaughan, Ricardo Pérez Montfort, Elena Albarrán, Mary Coffey, Rubén Gallo, Gilbert Joseph, Daniel Nugent, and Rick López, amongst many others, have made significant advancements in understanding how disparate forms of art, music, dance, theater, film, and photography were popularized and condensed into a consolidated discourse representing *mexicanidad* during the cultural revolution and into the postrevolutionary period. This body of scholarship has also examined how artists, scholars, and public officials, as well as heads of industry, manufacturers, and actors "from below"— chief among them local artisans and distributors—contested, negotiated, and revised the development of an "official culture" and the state programs that undergirded it.

Vaughan and Albarrán especially have contributed crucial studies exploring the dynamics through which leading intellectuals at the head of the SEP formulated educational curriculum designed to instruct children, teachers, peasants, and other everyday Mexicans on how to engage with cultural nationalism and define themselves along cultural nationalist and proletariat lines. At the same time, those supposed as passive receivers of information adopted, reformulated, and challenged cultural nationalism in relation to local identities and cultures, transnational media,

and their own competing identities—religious, familial, class, ethnic, etc. Similarly, Nugent and Joseph's *Everyday Forms of State Formation* advances a useful framework for understanding state formation in revolutionary and postrevolutionary Mexico as guided by the state's position in deriving its power from "the centuries-long cultural process which was embodied in the forms, routines, rituals, and discourses of rule."[65] Pérez Montfort's *estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano* succinctly outlines the dominant tropes that emerged within cultural nationalist imagery and discourse, as well as alternative forms that challenged dominant discourse, while Coffey explains how this dominant discourse became official culture by the postrevolutionary period, also demonstrating how official culture evolved over decades into an institutionalized form through the exchange between muralism and its placement within the expanding realm of museums; the exchange between muralism and museums was not static however, as both elements informed and reflected the evolving nature through which audiences engaged with murals in museums and museums through murals.

Since the late 1990s, historians have also begun to correct both the former dearth of historiography on post-1940 Mexico and assumptions present in classic scholarship. Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov's *Fragments of a Golden Age* contributes useful studies examining how cultural nationalist discourse evolved and was shaped by a variety of state and non-state actors, media industries, and imported international cultural forms and consumer habits in postrevolutionary Mexico. Pilcher's aforementioned study on Cantinflas advances a useful parallel for understanding Usigli's own relationship with the postrevolutionary state, while Ryan Alexander's *Sons of the Mexican Revolution*, through a quasi-biographical study similar to Pilcher, advances crucial insight into the role generational identity played in forming the collective experiences and future actions of Alemán and Usigli's cohort as they came of age and assumed the mantle of rule. Alexander's study has also advanced novel scholarship expanding our knowledge on Alemán's role in bolstering Mexico's intelligence agencies during the early years of the Cold War, his engagement with U.S. foreign policy initiatives that both aligned the government with the U.S.' anticommunist stance while also carving out a separate path for Mexico's position on the international stage, and cementing the PRIísta state's reorientation to capital accumulation, industrial development, and urban growth, which would remain the

[65] *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 19.

government's primary directives over the two decades following his Alemán's presidency. To Pilcher and Alexander's studies, I owe much of my engagement with understanding vast historical developments through the lens of a single individual. Gillingham and Smith's collection *Dictablanda* has provided the most compelling scholarship for this study, advancing both a framework and numerous case studies for understanding the dynamics of force, consent, and negotiation in the relationships between rulers and ruled in 20th century Mexico. Similarly, Gillingham's *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, which tracks the dynamics of maintaining and contesting state power in Veracruz and Guerrero from the mid-19th century into the mid-20th century, has helped further expand both the framework and the dynamics of the *dictablanda* system, arguing that the PRIísta state functioned not in spite of but *because* of its contradictions, where both popular and state-executed violence formed a key commodity that could be traded for any manner of social capital, elections were rigged, won, lost, and ignored, and local *caciques* ruled as much as the party line.[66]

With the examination of press-based discourse constituting a central component of this study, several monographs and collections have contributed scholarship that forms the basis of my understanding of the manners by which the press and censorship functioned in postrevolutionary Mexico. The most useful of all, Benjamin Smith's *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940-1976: Stories from the Newsroom, Stories from the Street*, dutifully examines the tenets of censorship in Mexico, especially amongst the major Mexico City-based news outlets, arguing that most censorship in the 1940s fell under self-imposed lines. The nature of self-censorship in the postrevolutionary press was constructed through the convergence of political elites and press owners, editors, and journalists in their ideological orientations, class backgrounds, gender, and business interests, as well as journalistic principles like "presidentialism" and "transcendentalism" that undergirded how both journalists and politicians conceived of "professional" journalism. Several of Smith's chapters also provide examples of press coverage of contemporary events that directly tie in with the moment of press discourse surrounding Usigli's *El gesticulador*, while Smith also argues that regional and local press outlets, although mostly suffering a larger degree of informal, violence-based censorship from local government agents, enjoyed greater freedoms to express more critical thoughts on the state

[66] Paul Gillingham, *Unrevolutionary Mexico: The Birth of a Strange Dictatorship* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 133, 167.

of politics in postrevolutionary Mexico. Similarly, John Mraz's chapter "Today, Tomorrow, and Always: The Golden Age of Illustrated Magazines in Mexico, 1937-1960" argues how presidentialism and *oficialista* rhetoric appeared in conservative magazines, ones which first challenged *cardenista* radicalism through their photographic exposés on Cárdenas-era officials before becoming essentially *oficialista* outlets during the centrist and more repressive PRI governments of the 1940s and 1950s.

Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Smith's collection *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico* focuses the placement of press and government relationships in the framework of the *dictablanda* system across the revolutionary, postrevolutionary, and modern (post-1970s) periods, examining how national and regional press outlets, public officials, satirists, and both *oficialista* and dissident journalists have repeatedly contested and negotiated the boundaries of censorship, supported and prohibited public discourse, and the realms of knowledge and information exchange. Chappell Lawson's *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* and Vanessa Frieje's *Citizens of Scandal: Journalism, Secrecy, and the Politics of Reckoning in Mexico* also examine how the rise of an increasingly contentious rural press, the "*cuarto poder*" or "fourth estate", greatly influenced the fracturing of the PRI's hold over the press and the corresponding pluralization of Mexican politics during the 1970s that crescendoed with the election of a non-PRI president in 2000. While Lawson and Frieje's studies are less immediately useful for the period I focus on, they provide useful background context and understanding of certain basic foundations undergirding the relationship between the press and the state in PRI-dominated Mexico.[67]

Lastly, although theater is a somewhat underrepresented topic of study in the abundant historiography on cultural revolution-era Mexico and the formation of cultural nationalism, a multidisciplinary body of scholarship exists on both Usigli and theater in 20th century Mexico. Historians have tended to focus on art forms and artists with more immediately accessible products, as well as the more grandiose of public images, like muralism and its "*tres grandes*"—Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros—or cinema and its silver-screen-ready stars, the aforementioned

[67] *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico*, ed. Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin T. Smith (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018); Chappel H. Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkely, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002); and Vanessa Freije, *Citizens of Scandal: Journalism, Secrecy, and the Politics of Reckoning in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

Cantinflas and others like María Félix, Dolores del Río, Pedro Infante, and Jorge Negrete. However, conceptions of Mexican identity, culture, and the emergence of a modern Mexico out of the ashes of the revolutionary years were performed and debated just as strongly on the stages of the Palacio de Bellas Artes as they were in the murals of the SEP or Mexican cinema's *época de oro*. Here, studies like Jovita Millán Carranza's *70 años de teatro en el Palacio de Bellas Artes* and Socorro Merlín's *El nacionalismo de los autores dramáticos de la década 1920-1930* help bridge the gap between the scholarship on cultural nationalism and theater, while Usigli studies like Ramón Layera's *Usigli en el teatro* and *Rodolfo Usigli: itinerario del intelectual y artista dramático*, Peter Beardsell's *A Theatre for Cannibals*, and Guillermina Ibarra Fuentes' "César Rubio y Usigli en la hoguera de la crítica" have adavnced significant scholarship on Usigli's career, artistic technique, and the political controversies surrounding his work. In addition to several more articles examining the dramaturgical precedents to Usigli—including Guillermo Schmidhuber's "Díptico sobre el teatro mexicano de los treinta: Bustillo y Magdaleno, Usigli y Villaurrutia"—these studies provide crucial insight into the development of Mexican theater during the cultural revolution, theater's engagement with cultural nationalism, and Usigli's evolving position within Mexican theater over the course of the 20th century.

Millán Carranza's study examines the establishment of the Palacio de Bellas Artes and the various works, playwrights (both Mexican and international), seasons, companies (also domestic and international), and seasons that occupied the stage at the Palacio since its founding, while Merlín explores the various nationalisms displayed by theater movements and playwrights across the 1920s and into the 1930s, presenting a study that is particularly insightful for linking cultural nationalism to a growing Mexican theater scene. Layera and Beardsell, arguably the two most prominent Usigli scholars, contribute crucial studies examining the playwright's long career and the development of his national theater project—in the case of Layera's *Usigli en el teatro*, through the eyes of his peers and students—and both examine the staging and impact of *El gesticulador*, Layera through the use of testimonies from Usigli's contemporaries recounting their memories of the staging and Beardsell through examining several of the political antecedents that influenced the controversies surrounding *El gesticulador*. Lastly, Ibarra Fuentes provides a tight overview of the lead-up to, staging, reception, and controversies surrounding *El gesticulador*, a study whose insights have been especially valuable for my understanding of the struggles Usigli experienced in seeing *El gesticulador* staged.

My research is situated between the historiography of cultural nationalism, state formation following the revolutionary decade, and postrevolutionary Mexico, works covering theater during and after the cultural revolution, and Usigli studies. Most of all, this study attempts to further bridge these diverse, complex realms of scholarship. Pulling especially from recent, groundbreaking works that have expanded our understanding of the dynamics, nuances, and contradictions of life and rule in mid-twentieth century Mexico, I explore Usigli as an agent within and product of a distinctly *dictablanda* system, utilizing this previously unavailable framework to make a historiographical intervention unique to that of prior Usigli studies. And although Usigli and his particular class of peers fail to reflect the experiences of many or even most Mexicans during his time, I argue his career trajectories as playwright and bureaucrat provide a useful case study for understanding how a prominent member of a distinctly influential class of intellectuals responded to, contested, and formed relationships with systems of power, discourse, and rule across their lifetimes. Ultimately, under a "soft authoritarian", dynamic, and above all contradictory state, Usigli and the case of *El gesticulador* affords a view into the paradoxical nature of government sponsorship, cooptation, cultural elite behaviors, and the press in postrevolutionary Mexico.

Organization

This study will be divided into three main chapters, a brief epilogue, and a conclusion. Chapter 1 will foreground Usigli's development as a budding artist and bureaucrat during the reconstruction and cultural revolution periods, using his personal reflections and comparable examples of distinct generational groups influential in early-twentieth century Mexico to examine how Usigli and his peers related to their experiences as children during the revolutionary decade and how such experiences informed their development of a unique generational identity and relationship with Mexico's "great" revolution. This chapter will also briefly review the development of the single-party state and its consolidation—although not uncontested nor uniform—the construction of dominant cultural nationalist and revolutionary nationalist discourses, and the state of Mexican politics by the time Usigli wrote *El gesticulador*, in order to provide context for the subsequent chapters. Conversely, Chapter 1 tracks the development of Mexican theater, Usigli's emergence as a playwright, and his service in various government positions in relation to cultural nationalism and Mexico's single-party system.

Chapter 2 will examine the *El gesticulador*'s narrative, the critiques it leveled against the single-party state, *oficialista* rhetoric, and the corruption of revolutionary reform, ending with the struggles *El gesticulador* suffered under censorship and the final lead-up to staging at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. The analyses explored in this chapter are based in pieces Usigli wrote accompanying *El gesticulador*, "Epílogo sobre la hipocresía Mexicana" and "Doce notas" in particular, sources previously under-utilized both in their reflections on Mexico's contemporary political reality and their revelations of Usigli's relationship to dominant revolutionary nationalist discourse. Chapter 2 also examines continued concerns over the state of Mexican theater, as well as controversies during the lead-up to *El gesticulador*'s staging, expressed in previously unexamined newspaper articles. Chapter 3 will turn to exploring the press responses to and controversies surrounding *El gesticulador*'s staging, analyzing the particular moment in the development of PRIísta Mexico that produced both government sponsorship and attempts at informally censoring the play. A collection of articles that track the development of positive and negative interpretations of *El gesticulador* and its staging provide a review of the discourse surrounding *El gesticulador*, advancing a more cohesive overview of the manners by which press contributors constructed the discourse around Usigli's work, while responses directly criticizing officials in Alemán's government afford a view into the methods by which the Mexico City-based press was mediated through articles unexamined by prior scholars. Finally, the epilogue will end with Usigli's transition to a full-fledged bureaucrat, broadly tracking his life over the developments following the staging of *El gesticulador* that led him to becoming an *oficialista*-style intellectual in service of the PRIísta state.

Chapter 1: Usigli, the Birth of the Mexican State, and the Evolution of Cultural Nationalism, 1920-1946

"Un niño de una generación que vió morir seres humanos y arder cadáveres en las calles de la ciudad; que comió el pan ázimo y bebió el vinagre de la revolución; que no tuvo otra diversión ni escape romántico que la primera guerra mundial, y que, por esto, cree en la necesidad de la revolución como idea, tiene, cuando menos, derecho a opinar. Pero lo tiene, sobre todo, porque ha visto también a la revolución traicionada; porque ha visto subir la hez en la marea política, y porque ha visto la cultura y la vida del espíritu pospuestas diariamente por obra de los malos políticos y de los falsos revolucionarios."

Rodolfo Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos*, 1947

"A child of a generation that saw human beings die and cadavers burn in the streets of the city; who ate unleavened bread and drank the vinegar of the revolution; who didn't have any other diversion or romantic escape other than the first world war, and that is why he believes in the necessity of the revolution as an idea, and has, at the very least, a right to such belief. But he has it, above all, because he has also seen the revolution betrayed; because he has seen the dregs rise on the political tide, and because he has seen the culture and the life of the [revolutionary] spirit postponed daily by work of the worst politicians and the false revolutionaries"

Rodolfo Usigli, "Essay on the Current State of Dramatic Poetry," *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos*, 1947

Rodolfo Usigli was born November 17, 1905, in Mexico City, to Polish mother Carlota Wainer and Italian father Alberto Usigli, both recent immigrants to Mexico.[68] Early on, Usigli's life was marked by several tragedies: the future writer was left blind in his left eye when, within hours of his birth, a midwife dropped disinfectant into his eyes, marking a lifelong medical condition Usigli felt often alienated him from his peers and contributed to his long-term standing on the

[68] Ramón Layera, *Usigli en el teatro: Testimonios de sus contemporáneos, sucesores y discípulos* (Mexico, D.F.: Coordinación de Difusión Cultural Dirección de Literatura/UNAM/Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/CITRU, 1996), 14.

periphery amongst many of his personal and professional circles.[69] Additionally, within a few short years of his birth his father would pass away from a premature heart attack, leaving Usigli to come of age as a young man without a present father figure, raised, along with three other siblings, by a mother who worked cleaning the houses of wealthier families and operated a small neighborhood store out of their living room.[70] Most significantly, however, Usigli's early life saw the wax and eventual wane of arguably the greatest social transformation modern Mexico has undergone, and certainly one of the most consequential in the world history of the 20th century: the revolutionary decade of 1910-1920, commonly referred to as the Mexican Revolution.

Between 1910 and 1920, Mexico saw the mass mobilization of vast and diverse segments of the country's population, first in the early uprisings against president Porfirio Díaz's dictatorial Porfiriato regime and later on throughout the partisan in-fighting that continued between both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary factions after the overthrow of Díaz. Traditional peasants, rancher peons, cowboys, muleteers, factory workers, and miners, along with intellectuals and artists inspired by traditional liberal, Marxist, and anarchist ideologies, as well as soldiers, local and regional community leaders, schoolteachers, and countless others participated heeded participated in collective uprisings over the course of the decade. In doing so, they heeded the call for a number of factions responding to the dynamic atmosphere incited by mass upheaval and the battles between the traditional political, economic, and social order and their challengers. New leaders at the local, regional, and national levels died on the vine as quickly as they surfaced, and the endless warfare that crisscrossed the nation plunged Mexico's people into years of civil strife, characterized by political and economic instability, famines, disease, and widespread crime and poverty. From 1910 to 1920, it is estimated between one and two million Mexicans died as a result of long-term disorder, with hundreds of thousands more fleeing the country or dying as a result of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. Such was the daily atmosphere Usigli and millions of Mexicans lived through across the decade, poetically described by the author in the opening text to this chapter, and which would leave an indelible mark on Usigli and many others who experienced the revolutionary disruptions as children.

[69] Rodolfo Usigli, letter to Marte R. Gómez, March 14, 1960. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Box 4, Folder 44b.
[70] Layera, 14.

Towards the end of the decade, the leaders and allies of the Constitutionalist faction within the revolutionary camp began to consolidate a reconstituted political order, beating down or making tenuous deals with various factions, achieving the ratification of the Constitution of 1917, and seeing the first constitutional elections in years. After 1920, the "*caudillo* of the Revolution" Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and their Sonorista[71] faction continued the centralization of political order and government initiated under Constitutionalist head Venustiano Carranza, inducting a project of national reconstruction, political reconsolidation, and cultural rejuvenation that would span the next several decades. Obregón, Calles, and other former revolutionaries, along with prominent businessmen and heads of industry, powerful landowners, and leading intellectuals who either survived the disruption of Porfirian order or partook in its downfall, began to form a new revolution-made elite class. Political, intellectual, and cultural elites, empowered by their survival of the civil war and finding themselves poised to lead the new nation as it moved towards reconstruction, collaborated on disseminating a cogent, two-pronged project defending cultural nationalism and revolutionary credentialism. This project of forging a new nation looked to Mexico's recent revolutionary past, pre-Colombian roots, and rural and regional traditions in order to form a unifying national culture, while also legitimizing the reconstituted national state as a consolidated government capable of transporting the country into a new period of utopian modernity.

The tenets of such a grandiose project were constructed through the eventual formation of a single political party designed to represent the interests of all the major revolutionary factions, paired with a coherent ideology and elite, dominant discourse that revised and reified revolutionary history. To do so, political elites who ruled after 1920 repurposed narratives, public celebrations, and monuments concerning the "Revolution" into a self-authenticating discourse that drew conciliatory allies into the fold of the "Revolutionary Family." Cultural realms proved especially effusive for elite, official discourse, disseminated through the codification of revolutionary nationalist ideology into the framework of cultural nationalism. An emerging set of symbols and visual depictions that constituted cultural nationalism were expressed most readily in artwork and aesthetic forms the state espoused as representative of a distinctly Mexican type, known as and signified by the terms *lo mexicano* (essentially "that

[71] Sonorista signifies their hailing from the northwestern state of Sonora, from which Obregón, Calles, and many of their future allies in the national government and legislature joined the revolution.

which is Mexican") and *mexicanidad* ("Mexicanness"). Government agencies like the SEP and INBA played crucial roles in the formulation and execution of this project, in which the SEP in particular both extended funding to and was overseen by intellectuals and artists who would go on to establish the ideological principles, values, and images that constituted and undergirded Mexico's cultural nationalism. Thus, evolving conceptions and depictions of cultural nationalism formed a crucial arm to the project of national reconstruction and state consolidation, especially in the first two decades following the end to the revolutionary decade.

And yet, the processes of transitioning into a new period of modernity born out of the embers of the revolution did not remain static nor singular over the years, but rather transformed across time periods, presidential administrations, and transnational developments. Major events (both domestic and foreign), ideological differences, shifting concerns, and evolving goals compelled presidential administrations and the actors who responded to their policies to continually rework revolutionary and cultural nationalist frameworks, as well as the state's commitments to its citizenry and the paths envisioned towards political stability, economic growth, and social harmony. It is therefore necessary to examine the differences between successive administrations and especially the evolving goals of political and cultural elites over the time frame spanning the end to the revolutionary decade and the start of Usigli's struggle to see *El gesticulador* performed on the national stage. Given Usigli's position as an artist, intellectual, and bureaucrat within the national government over this period, he both actively participated in and was affected by the broad developments towards revolutionary and cultural nationalism and the reconstitution of the federal state. Particularly noteworthy, his later activity as a playwright directly criticizes the tenets and underlying political opportunism undergirding revolutionary nationalism, the single-party state, and the overall culture of elite Mexican politics. Thus, his relationship with the developments during Mexico's cultural revolution and national reconstruction thereby provide an insightful look into how the cadre of postrevolutionary cultural and intellectual elites formed both their ideological frameworks and their relationships with the political and military elite.

This chapter will unfold in several sections, starting with an examination of Usigli's generation through comparative examples of Usigli and future president Miguel Alemán's formative experiences during youth and young adulthood, as well as Usigli's reflections on his

experience during the revolution that help reveal several of the central principles he would take up throughout his artistic career. Then, I will move to the emergence of elite political culture, the systems of *caudillismo* and opportunism, and dominant political discourse surrounding revolutionary history during the years following the revolutionary decade, after which I will then shift to the development of cultural nationalism during the same period. In the fourth section I will turn to Usigli's particular place within Mexico's arts and theater scenes, examining how his belief in the need for a national theater tradition informed his eventual move towards producing a politically satirical theater, culminating with his masterpiece *El gesticulador*—the play many contemporary critics and theater historians consider as having established a distinctly national, realist theater tradition in Mexico. Finally, interspersed throughout the second, third, and fifth sections will be a chronologically based examination of the developments made during each successive presidential administration from 1920 to 1946. These examinations will show—albeit broadly—how each successive president and the state bureaucracy under their direction contributed to and transformed the development of cultural nationalism, revolutionary nationalist ideology, and dominant political culture as Usigli worked to become involved in those realms.

"Hijos de la Revolución": Sons of the Mexican Revolution and their Experiences

Born a few short years before Francisco Madero's pronunciation of the Plan de San Luis Potosí in 1910 and the ensuing mass mobilizations, Usigli and peers like Salvador Novo and Miguel Alemán would experience the early stages of revolutionary uprising as young boys. Their youth was thus shaped by the early overthrow of Porfirio Díaz, the fractioning of the revolutionary uprisings into Maderista, Zapatista, and Orozquista factions, and the counterinsurgencies of Bernardo Reyes and Felix Díaz, Madero's assassination and Victoriano Huerta's counterrevolution. They would enter adolescence and the *preparatoria* (high school) during the years in which the revolution stretched on and split into an increasingly divided civil war between Constitutionalists and the Conventionalist alliance of Villistas and Zapatistas. The latter years of revolutionary civil war saw the rise of the Constitutionalists as the de-facto ruling faction and Villistas' and Zapatistas' conversion into guerrilla forces, culminating with the Plan de Agua Prieta. Here, Sonorista generals Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Adolfo de la Huerta pronounced their uprising against then-president Venustiano Carranza's attempted imposition of civilian Ignacio Bonillas as president, assassinating Carranza and assuming the

mantle as the faction at the head of national politics. The heightened years of civil warfare, reaching its zenith in the Constitutionalist-Conventionalist divide of 1914-1916, and the stretching of an originally limited revolution into a seemingly endless cycle of civil disturbance and widespread disruption of daily life thus marked the most turbulent years of the revolutionary decade, thereby paralleling the already turbulent years of early adolescence for members of the Sons of the Mexican Revolution generation.

Examining Usigli as a case study of his generation, particularly for understanding this generation's experiences of the revolutionary upheavals of the 1910s and the consolidation of the national state and single-party system during the 1920s and 1930s, presents a valuable approach. Spanish historian José Ortega y Gasset has called generations "a dynamic compromise between the masses and the individual" and "the hinge on which history moves."[72] Ryan Alexander has argued that the Sons of the Mexican Revolution generational formation was augmented by the reality that many of them enjoyed similar life experiences: those who would form the nucleus of their collective identity were born and/or matured in the capital, from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, trained in the same schools and universities with similarly trained and likeminded faculty, and acquired their shared experience of revolutionary upheaval as adolescents.[73] Thus, Usigli's impressions both reflect and contrast with how his contemporaries thought about, related to, and years later, remembered the revolution. This generational formation would therefore play a crucial role in their development of a collective memory of the turmoil provoked by revolutionary upheaval, while also producing divergent responses to managing national issues once their cohort took power following Alemán's election in 1946. With the public staging of *El gesticulador*, Usigli gave his final push for revolutionary-inspired idealism, calling for critical political self-reflection and changes to the methods PRIísta officials employed for maintaining the official party's dominance. Meanwhile, Alemán and his *amigos* clique would take a distinct approach, informed by their more pragmatic response to what they saw as the revolutionary conflict's failures,[74] entrenching their particular blend of political opportunism, revolutionary institutionalization, and support for private, rather than public, development.

[72] José Ortega y Gasset, *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (Buenos Aires, Espasa-Calpe, 1955), 15; reprinted in Alexander, 16.
[73] Alexander, 19.
[74] Alexander, 31, 37, 44.

In his "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," written in the months following *El gesticulador*'s performance run, Usigli situates himself and his work in the historical narratives surrounding the revolutionary and postrevolutionary decades. The essay also worked to serve Usigli's contemporary interests: jubilant over the mostly successful staging, the positive responses it provoked amongst theater critics, and the new amnesty the play's staging (supposedly) marked for the playwright with the national government, Usigli used "Ensayo" to re-justify why he wrote *El gesticulador* and why he considered its sponsorship under Alemán's administration so relevant. Reflecting on Madero's overthrow of Díaz and the (brief) achievement of a liberal revolutionary ideal, Usigli writes, "triumphant and established, the clean and pure revolutionary idea had to confront, after the dictatorship, the peculiarly Mexican politics, born of betrayal and ambition…"[75] Espousing the view that Madero's simple, "pure" revolutionary ideal—"effective suffrage and no reelection"—constituted the most effective in the long line of revolutionary-born ideologies that followed, Usigli continues, stating "the harmonious figure, powerful and clean that raised a torch held high…became a monster formed of many arms, heads, and legs, until losing all human form and all ideological composure…each faction fought bloodily for primacy. My personal memories from infancy tell me to denounce most emphatically this dizzying struggle—which is still reflected amongst us—in that, having lost all way, the revolution became the wolf of the revolution."[76] Usigli's "memories"—no doubt continuously reworked over the decades spanning the distance between the events and his reflections—still point towards how certain members of his generation may have come to view and understand the revolution in relation to their lives. For those who lived through the revolution in Mexico City, especially during the heady years of 1914-1916, the daily repetition of revolutionary bands—Zapatistas, Villistas, Carrancistas, etc.—removing each other from and reoccupying the capital constituted a particular trauma, bringing with it the endless recycling of violence, currency instability and accompanying economic collapses, and food scarcity alleviated only by the meager portions that the few functional public schools remaining could muster.[77]

Similarly, Alemán and several sons of the Mexican Revolution who would go on to form the nucleus of the new generation of post-1946 political leaders experienced parallel experiences

[75] Rodolfo Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," in *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos* (Mexico: Editorial Stylo, 1947), 259.
[76] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 259.
[77] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 259-260.

during their formative youths. These would include friends made during Alemán's time at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory School),[78] friends which included figures like Gabriel Ramos Millán, Oscar Soto Maynez, Manuel Ramírez Vázquez, and Rogerio de la Selva, all of whom would join Alemán at the state and federal levels of government,[79] as well as close compatriots made after entering law school at the Universidad Nacional de México (National University of Mexico),[80] including one of Alemán's closest *amigos* Fernando Casas Alemán, the future chief of Mexico City. Although many of these friends and generational peers did not move to the capital until their late teens, they developed their own personal connections to the revolution in the provinces through family members joining revolutionaries and the frequent occupations of provincial towns by various revolutionary factions, while also experiencing the widespread food, supplies, and resource scarcities that devastated the nation.[81] Additionally, upon moving to the capital, they entered into preparatory school and university when education centers and the city at large were becoming the epicenter of national reconstruction, cosmopolitan (even bohemian) lifestyle, and the debates concerning how to conceive of and create a new national community.[82]

As a consequence of their preparatory and university educations and despite their relatively poor financial circumstances, Alemán, his "Grupo H" peers,[83] and the broader subsection of Sons of the Mexican Revolution trained at preparatory schools and universities in the capital came to constitute a cosmopolitan, middle-class literati, one who partook in and were trained by a long line of intellectual generations that stretched back to the educational and liberal reforms of the Reforma (1855-1876). The two most influential generations for the Sons of the Mexican Revolution were the *Juventud del Ateneo* and "Siete Sabios" (or 1915) generations of scholars.[84] These successive generations took up the mantle leading the nation's education systems, philosophies undergirding the development of arts, humanities, and cultural didacticism

[78] The nation's leading preparatory school since its founding under the Benito Juárez administration in the 1860s.
[79] Alexander, 25-26, 47.
[80] The Universidad Nacional de México was later granted autonomy under the Portes Gil administration in 1929, then rebranded the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM.
[81] Alexander, 19.
[82] Alexander, 19-20, 39.
[83] The name Alemán and his preparatory school associates assigned themselves, denoting a conception of group identity, devotion to each other, and their self-conception as an intellectual vanguard group contributing to the literary, aesthetic, and social debates of the time through a student publication called *Eureka*; in Alexander, 33.
[84] Alexander, 28-29.

programs, and even key ministry positions following the (relative) vacancies left by Porfirian *cientificos* and their positivist ideology during the revolutionary decade, and continued to guide dominant discourses surrounding national reconstruction, citizenry, and cultural and social hierarchies into the 1920s and 1930s. As such, members of the *Juventud del Ateneo* and Siete Sabios played a key role in determining the contours of ideological frameworks undergirding government policy and the evolutions of stylized visual, literary, and performance cultures. These included the dominant forms and accompanying aesthetic ideals by which government actors after 1920 would define national identity and citizenship: *mexicanidad*, *lo mexicano*, *indigenismo*, the nation's pre-Colombian roots and legacy of Spanish colonialism, and Mexico's revolution-born modernity.

Composed of leaders and luminaries like José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, Antonio Caso, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Martín Luis Guzmán, along with a younger but eventually equally as influential Diego Rivera, several members of the *Juventud del Ateneo* would occupy vaunted positions in both the national government and the literary and aesthetic movements of the early 20th century. The oft-cited José Vasconcelos played a paramount role in the development of programming, ideological foundations, and sponsorship for public works as minister of Public Education (1921-1924) during Álvaro Obregón's administration, as well as giving the most recognized voice to *mestizaje* superiority through his work *La raza cósmica* (1925), while Alfonso Reyes and Martín Luis Guzmán would become stalwarts of 1920s Mexican poetry and literature: the former recognized by Usigli and many of his contemporaries as one of the greatest Mexican writers in the Spanish language, the latter renowned for his searing novel *El águila y la serpiente*, which denounced *callista*-era corruption and what Guzmán considered Calles and Obregón's betrayal of the original revolutionary ideal.[85] Consequentially, the Generation of 1915, formed around the central Siete Sabios ("Seven Sages") in Alfonso Caso, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Manuel Gómez Morín, Antonio Castro Leal, Jesús Moreno Baca, Alberto Vázquez del Mercado, and Teófilo Olea y Leyva succeeded

[85] Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* and especially *La sombra del caudillo*'s thematic material and denounciation of Calles' regime in particular act as influential literary antecedents to *El gesticulador*. Usigli echoed many of Guzmán's sentiments concerning the factional in-fighting during the revolutionary civil wars, Obregón and Calles' overhanded tactics in suppressing revolts against the national government, and a growing trend towards political opportunism through the consolidation of both revolutionary factionalism and numerous *caudillo*'s regional realms of authority during the 1920s.

the *Juventud del Ateneo* as the intellectual nucleus of the new generation leading the charge in education, cultural and anthropological theories, and philosophies concerning the contemporary state of Mexico during the late 1920s and 1930s. Several members—Caso, Castro Leal, and Gómez Morín—acted as rectors at UNAM, and their political and ideological affiliations varied greatly: Gómez Morín would go on to found the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) in 1939, a conservative party that presented the most long-lasting and prominent electoral resistance to PRI rule, while Lombardo Toledano acted as head of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, or CTM), the state-affiliated labor union that would become the largest national union following Lázaro Cárdenas' corporatization reforms during the mid-1930s.

Thus, competing ideological and aesthetic differences amongst members of these influential generations ensured that those, like Alemán and peers, exposed to their teachings and writings across their education did not form a homogeneous intellectual background, nor a too-favorable idealization of the revolution and its leadership.[86] And similar to their predecessors, members of the Sons of the Mexican Revolution who would form the political and cultural elite in the coming decades conceived of themselves as a distinct generation and vanguard movement, one with the professional training, childhood memories, and pragmatic orientation towards revolutionary idealism that would inform their transition into powerful adults. Consequentially, their memories and pragmatic orientation in particular compelled them to seek ostensibly "practical" solutions to the problems and conflicts left by revolutionary upheavals.[87] Alemán and members of his cadre recognized the deficiencies at fault during the revolution, while their educational training, along with further lessons learned through participation in Vasconcelos' failed 1929 presidential campaign against PNR candidate Pascual Rubio Ortiz, ultimately taught them that to effect change, they needed to work within and with the structures of power.[88] Thus, rather than challenging such structures, Alemán's cohort would adapt to and embellish the systems of rule and party control developed over the preceding decades, as will be examined further in Chapter 3.

[86] Alexander, 30-31.
[87] Alexander, 36-37.
[88] Alexander, 44.

Usigli, however, while also familiar with the intellectual background his peers at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria and UNM enjoyed, did not get to experience the professional and socially constructive atmosphere such institutions afforded. Supported only by a single mother's meager earnings, his family suffered consistent financial crisis, and Usigli graduated from his local high school but never had the means to attend university—much less the vaunted UNM. An autodidact who eventually taught the next generation of theater scholars at UNAM, nevertheless Usigli's educational and social experiences post-high school differed from that of his wealthier or more well-connected compatriots as he entered the crucial years of young adulthood. As such, his respective experiences informed a distinct, more skeptical understanding of the revolution and processes of state and executive consolidation during the 1920s and 1930s than that of Alemán and his peers, while his eventual professions in theater, journalism, and state bureaucracy cultivated a radically different outlook on the measures Mexico needed to overcome her contemporary plights.

As Usigli points to at several points throughout his "Ensayo," during the waning years of the decade of revolutionary warfare and the following years of national reconstruction and state consolidation, the revolution appears to have turned its head on itself. A multitude of factions surged forth, battling each other "through theodolite and dynamite"[89] and competing for local, regional, and above all national supremacy. He recalls "friends from 1914 to 1920…those who made themselves what we would call scoundrels, who became destructive examples, who falsified ideas and values and took refuge in the political environment born of the Revolution. Some survive and have come to believe they were active Maderistas, others became profiteers, pimps, thieves, and corrupt officials who took bribes."[90] It is during the crucial years between 1914 and 1920 that Usigli finds the betrayal of an original revolutionary idealism, a betrayal marked and propelled most of all by "demagoguery:" i.e., former revolutionary leaders' subversion of proclaimed revolutionary ideals for the purpose of accruing personal power and enforcing the quiet acquiescence of the ruled, who would be deterred from confronting the demagogues. This demagoguery is found embodied in the perpetuation of personal *caudillismo*, revolutionary elites' style of personal rule through *la mano dura* ("iron fist") that demanded the

[89] Rodolfo Usigli, letter to Marte R. Gómez, March 14, 1960. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Box 4, Folder 44b.
[90] Usigli, letter to Marte R. Gómez, March 14, 1960. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Box 4, Folder 44b.

unwavering loyalty of their subordinates, and political opportunism, where the revolutionaries who emerged on top following the civil wars used their political offices and positions as military elites with loyal armies to enrich themselves and force political and economic outcomes favorable to their interests. As described by cultural critic and essayist Carlos Monsivaís, one of the most poignant voices for critical reflection on the Mexican Left during the latter half of the 20th century, elites based their defense of opportunism on the informal accord that "if you lend your services to the nation, it is only right that the nation reward you."[91]

Their formative years indelibly imbedded with the experience of constant upheaval, government turnover, occupation of the capital by competing factions, and the lack of certainty for what tomorrow would bring, sons of the revolutionary decade like Usigli and Alemán would form an intellectual and political generation distinct from that of their predecessors. Inheritors of the cultural revolution and the state consolidation processes of the 1920s and 1930s, the Sons of the Mexican Revolution would formally assume the mantle of national leadership with Alemán's election in 1946, introducing the conversion of the national government and state bureaucracy into one dominated by civilian technocrats while propelling the "Revolution" into its "institutionalized" phase. Conversely, Usigli found both the basis and the most insidious quality of revolutionary demagoguery during the period of state consolidation in the propagation of a collective lie "in the service of the most contradictory governments," or the "hypocrisy of the Mexican systematized into politics."[92] Although this characterization and the fuller breadth of its intricacies will be examined further in the following chapter, it suffices here to say that Usigli used his understanding of revolutionary demagoguery to point to one of the most powerful and frequent practices the national state and official party used to defend its legitimacy and cull the support of its citizenry: the rhetorical claims national leaders and political elites concocted to legitimize their style of rule. Their practice of a "dominant yet fraternal Revolutionary Tradition"[93] relied on a constructed discourse and manipulation of revolutionary history, memory, and myth that found its basis in a homogenized narrative of revolutionary struggle and

[91] Carlos Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*, trans. and ed. John Kraniauskas (New York and London: Verso, 1997), 12.
[92] Rodolfo Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 15. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."
[93] Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 21.

evolution into national harmony. To best understand the finer points of Usigli's criticisms against Mexico's revolution-born political system, and how this dominant discourse and narrative both influenced and found expression in the processes of nation formation, the following section will examine what historian Thomas Benjamin has termed the construction of "*la Revolución*".

La Revolución: State Reconstruction and the Building of Dominant Political Culture

As historians like Thomas Benjamin, Ilene O'Malley, and Samuel Brunk have shown,[94] the national government, elite class, and associated ideologues under the Obregón (1920-1924), Calles (1924-1928), and successive PNR and PRM (1929-1940) governments continuously refashioned revolutionary history, hero cults, myths, and collective memory into an official narrative and discourse appealing to a broad swath of Mexico's national community. Revolutionary-era ideologues relied especially on an existing Liberal metanarrative of Mexican history that portrayed the movements of forward-thinking Liberalism and "backwards" Conservativism as reified forces locked in an eternal battle for Mexico's future.[95] Through pamphlets, speeches, published essays, and articles in the press, ideologues (or *voceros*) presented the forces of the Revolution (*Revolución*) and the Reaction (*Reacción*) as the latest in the long line of Liberal struggle against Conservatism, first by Maderista *voceros* and then picked up by later factions once Madero's rule crumbled[96]. During the latter years of civil war, fighting and conquest for hold of the nation's future rule was taken up largely (although not entirely) between the most wide-ranging and well-numbered revolutionary factions. In the typical narrative, Zapata vs. Carranza and Villa vs. Obregón (who's prestige was on the rise in the Constitutionalist camp) provided contestation that extended into the realm of ideological posturing to Mexico's public. Each revolutionary camp styled itself as either the true inheritor of revolutionary idealism and/or the faction most capable of bringing stability, order, and progress to a fractured nation. *Voceros* for each faction played a major role during these years in constructing interpretation of the events unfolding within Mexico, historicizing the revolutionary uprisings along their own lines and creating a multiplicity of representations, understanding, and

[94] Including Benjamin's *La Revolución*, Ilene V. O'Malley's *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), and Samuel Brunk's *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
[95] Benjamin, 38, 40-46.
[96] Benjamin, 45-46, 49.

memory of the revolution.[97] The narratives produced by each faction were taken up by local populaces depending on the shifting camps whose rule they lived under, the advantages favorable alignment would bring them, and how well revolutionary appeals aligned with their localized experiences of upheaval, mobilization, and prior historical experience stretching back to the Porfiriato (and further).

With the Agua Prieta revolt in May 1920 and Carranza's quick overthrow, Obregón and Calles' governments and especially successive PNR and PRM governments placed *zapatismo*, *villismo*, and eventually *carrancismo* on a much more equal playing field, recognizing them more as a "family" of revolutionary struggle.[98] Throughout the 1920s, Obregón and especially Calles' administrations began to readily adopt and pull upon local hero cults, ceremonies, public celebrations, and civic action groups as representative of a collective, cohesive revolutionary struggle. Carranza's overthrow in 1920, traditionally styled as the end to revolutionary civil war and the beginnings of a consolidated effort towards national reconstruction, did not lead to widespread, immediate end to struggles over control of the national government and state apparatus. Numerous uprisings from both former revolutionaries and conservative groups continued to plague attempts at consolidation and unification.

Responding to steady factionalism and attempting to gain powerful allies, Obregón extended an olive branch of political representation to the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) through supporting their political party, the Partido Laborista Mexicano (PLM), and several of their legislative initiatives in Congress, while also gaining support from Zapatista intellectual Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama and his Partido Nacional Agrarista (PNA), thereby cutting off the party's potential contention to his administration's relative failures in fully realizing the land reform commitments made in the 1917 Constitution.[99] Obregón, through speeches, negotiations, and frequently favorable coverage in the press both styled himself and was portrayed by contemporaries and the press as a hybrid between *maderismo* and *zapatismo*. His supposed merging of the two movements lent Obregón and his affiliates in Congress further legitimacy as the inheritors of two of the revolution's greatest (if not universally loved) heroes,

[97] Benjamin, 49-63.
[98] Benjamin, 67-69.
[99] Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 94.

while also symbolically radicalizing the memory of Madero and taming the image of Zapata; thereby suggesting greater appeal for both figures—and Obregón—within the nation's collective memory.[100] The stylized image Obregón and his supporters crafted of the leader, one that presented him as disciple of *maderismo* and *zapatismo* while ignoring his earlier absence within both camps, as well as his coalition-building with powerful allies, advanced two methods Usigli would denounce in *El gesticulador* as representative of revolutionary demagoguery: political elites' self-styled portrayals as representatives of ideals they had originally ignored or fought against and the coalition-building measures elites employed to shunt opposition. As will be explored further later on, Usigli found in Obregón and his ally in Calles two shining examples of the style of demagoguery he ridiculed as plaguing the nation's full transition into a truly revolution-inspired political system.

Calles, politically weaker than Obregón, went further in establishing the basis of his government on the legacy of the revolution and as a radical, quasi-populist reformer.[101] Under his administration, the national government redistributed eight million acres of land to primarily indigenous *campesinos*—more than double that of Obregón before him—created credit banks for *campesinos* and their *ejido* style of collective agriculture, and pushed congressional support towards passing the Alien Land and Petroleum Law articles attempting to limit foreign ownership of agricultural estates and force especially U.S.-operated oil companies to pay greater concessions to the state.[102] Calles' quasi-populist positioning—Jürgen Buchenau has argued "the style and substance of Calles's policies, especially until 1926, contain important elements of populist leadership"—and his eventual shift away from such policies provided extensive fodder for what Usigli decried as elites' betrayal of revolutionary idealism. In 1926, Congress—dominated by *obregonistas* and a growing number of *callistas*—succeeded in passing the Calles Law, which reinforced the constitutional requirement for secular education, mandated the registration of Catholic priests with the national government, and permitted states to limit the

[100] O'Malley, 49-50.
[101] Jürgen Buchenau argues in his chapter "Plutarco Elías Calles and Revolutionary-Era Populism in Mexico" in Amelia Kiddle and María Muñoz's collection *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico* that the "style and substance of Calles's policies, especially until 1926, contain important elements of populist leadership", a style that Cárdenas would take up and develop further during his presidency (1934-1940), while also negotiating similar limits on populist politics that Calles managed, both doing so in a still a discordant nation (39). In *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, ed. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), 38-57.
[102] Joseph and Buchenau, 98-102.

number of clergymen allowed to operate in their state boundaries, thereby jumpstarting Catholic opposition that culminated in the Cristero Rebellion.[103] The national government's attempts to quell the Cristero Rebellion, shifting funds away from land redistribution and resource nationalism, along with important political developments propelled by the Cristero conflict, especially Obregón's assassination in 1928 and the move to establish an official "party of the Revolution," would therefore foreground antecedents Usigli later adopted into narrative elements in *El gesticulador*, which will be explored more in-depth in Chapter 2.

But above all, Calles created federal agencies and coopted citizens organizations and local traditions dedicated to venerating martyred revolutionaries, using speeches, public appearances, symbolic rhetoric, and the emerging muralist movement in order to reframe his and Obregón's administrations as a government born out of the revolution.[104] Inaugurating his presidential campaign at the site of Zapata's grave in the town of Cuautla, Morelos—a literal and symbolic hotbed of *zapatismo*—on the fifth anniversary of Zapata's assassination at the hands of Carranza's military, Calles gave a rousing speech during the procession towards Zapata's grave, asserting his opposition to continued resistance to revolutionary change from the "reaction," his commitment to the agrarian program set forth by Zapata in the Plan de Ayala, and the longstanding reforms future generations of *campesinos* would be able to enjoy as a result of Zapata and the agrarianism the national government espoused in his name.[105] Doing so, Calles and affiliated ideologues in attendance used popular appeals and the accompanying weight of their attendance to reframe these originally local, *zapatista*-dominated affairs into state-sponsored celebrations that revised Zapata's legacy into one representative of national honor and servitude, while also washing away their history as leaders in the Constitutionalist camp that had coordinated Zapata's assassination. Significantly, they enjoyed the support and organizing affairs of local *Zapatista* associations and heads like Soto y Gama, Gildardo Magaña, and Genovevo de la O while doing so,[106] showing *zapatistas*' willingness to work with the heads of national government despite their conflicted history for the benefits of state recognition, favorable commitments to reform programs, and influential representation in Congress, thereby pointing to

[103] Joseph and Buchenau, 102-104.
[104] Benjamin, 73-77.
[105] O'Malley, 51, and Samuel Brunk, "Remembering Emiliano Zapata: Three Moments in the Posthumous Career of the Martyr of Chinameca," *Hispanic American Historical Review 78*, no. 3 (August 1998), 465.
[106] O'Malley, 44, and Brunk, 465.

the system of negotiations between national heads of state and local and regional interests that would continually develop over the years. That the distribution of such benefits would be allocated primarily to the intellectual and military heads of *zapatismo* and other revolutionary movements in the form of high-up military posts, state governorships, and positions in the state bureaucracy and presidential administrations would also become a key component of this system.

Calles also introduced two components key to *obregonista* and *callista* projects revising revolutionary memory, unifying disparate factions, and legitimizing the nascent national state: the idea of *la Revolución hecha gobierno* and the revisionist narrative of the Revolutionary Family. *La Revolución hecha gobierno*, translated best as "the Revolution made government," advanced the idea that the reified "Revolution" had placed their faction and party in power in order to continue the societal transformation begun by the revolutionary movements, with the capitalized "R" used to denote their Liberal-inspired version of revolutionary history.[107] Through its propagation by the dominant political party in power, one that continuously beat back contenders for control of the national government, and which coopted prior dominant Liberal narratives of the 19th century, this narrative can be considered the national government and eventually the official party's "master" narrative of the revolutionary decade. That being said, it should not be confused as a hegemonic or single narrative—various factions, partisan collectives, and local and regional memories continued to contest the dominance of and subscription to the master narrative, and even rework its meaning in light of contemporary developments across the 20th century.[108]

Similarly, the concept of the Revolutionary Family was produced in another moment of intense need for unification and dissolution of the factionalist conflicts that plagued Mexico throughout the 1920s. Numerous developments across the decade inspired the need for such unification: the *delahuertista* rebellion in 1923 and Obregón's purges of the military leadership in response, the Gómez-Serrano revolt that attempted to challenge Obregón's reelection campaign and its violation of the revolution's sacred tenement of no reelection, the crucial loss of Obregón's guiding hand following his assassination in 1928, and the following year's Escobar

[107] Benjamin, 68, 73.
[108] Brunk, 458-463.

revolt, which enjoyed the support of *obregonista* military leaders and a quarter of the national army.[109] Meanwhile, the broader economic recession of the Great Depression deprived the government of much-needed funds for continuing its reform programs, all of which forced political and military elites to consider the need for further bonds in order to avoid the periodic revolts and government counterresponse that strained the nation's coffers and deprived many former revolutionaries of their lives. Indicative of the trend towards unification, in December 1928 Calles declared "…it is absolutely essential that we achieve revolutionary unification."[110]

During the following year, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was formed, ostensibly designed to achieve said unification and represent the interests of the major revolutionary factions and surviving, mostly military-made political elites. By 1931, the PNR had consecrated its pantheon for the Revolutionary Family, subsuming the cults of Madero, Zapata, Villa, and Obregón (and soon after those of the Flores Magón brothers and eventually Carranza) into the fraternity of revolutionary heroes and establishing a watered-down version of the revolutionary struggles. This narrative washed out the conflicts between the revolutionary camps and homogenized them into a singular struggle between "good" revolutionaries seeking the achievement of the Revolution and "bad" reactionaries—Porfirio Díaz, Victoriano Huerta—defending the Reaction.[111] Indeed, the Revolutionary Family even found its concrete, visible depiction encoded into Mexico City's landscape with the erection of the Monumento a la Revolución (Monument to the Revolution): inaugurated in 1938, the Monumento a la Revolución celebrated not "the glory of specific heroes, martyr, or caudillos…[but[on *la Revolución* itself."[112] With the establishment of the PNR, Calles moved into the background of national politics, playing a largely informal, behind-the-scenes role guiding the actions and decisions of successive presidents, including, initially, Lázaro Cardenas (1934-1940), that

[109] O'Malley, 29.
[110] Benjamin, 141.
[111] Benjamin, 127
[112] Benjamin, 132.

oscillated between direct overseer and mostly hands-off adviser,[113] during a period that has often been termed the Maximato (1928-1934).[114]

Returning to Usigli, it is the period of the Maximato and the consolidation of the dominant political faction's revisionist narrative of the revolutionary decade, along with the frequent revolts against Calles and Obregón's rule across the following decade, that the playwright viewed as most concerning for the state of the revolution and what he saw as Mexico's increasingly corrupted political reality. Reflecting decades later on the internal discord that continued throughout the 1920s, Usigli writes:

> I've witnessed the rise and the fall of Venustiano Carranza; de la Huerta's revolution with its shooting of generals, amongst them those who had more than one true hero; the painful *Callista* government, full of terrible internal conflicts; the constitutional amendment that would eliminate with a stroke of the pen the formula of No Reelection for that which so many unselfish Mexicans gave their lives; the assassination of General Obregón that, in one way or another, prevented the overthrow of the pure revolutionary ideal from being consummated; and, before him, the death of Francisco R. Serrano and his companions."[115]

Touching on the *delahuertista* and Gómez-Serrano rebellions, Usigli points to the frequent loss of revolutionary heroes, military leaders who could be considered true revolutionaries through their attempts to defend the revolution's democratic ideals put forth with the original uprisings between 1910 and 1913: effective suffrage and no reelection chief among them. He also denounces the tradition that emerged with the two dominant political factions of the 1920s—

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[113] As Jürgen Buchenau and Gilbert Joseph argue, "The idea of Calles as a strongman who held politics in his firm grip has often been exaggerated, to the point that he has been labeled a dictator who manipulated a string of puppet presidents. The reality is more complicated, as Calles's influence waxed and waned over time", *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution*, 105. Following their arguments, Calles appears to have acted more as a behind-the-scenes influence, one who primarily made decisions concerning and advised on matters of war and education during Portes Gil and Rodrgíguez's presidencies but otherwise left them to run affairs as president, while during Ortiz Rubio's term, he "took part in political deliberations on a daily basis" and even organized Ortiz Rubio's early resignation. However, although the reality of Calles as a behind-the-scenes dictator likely fails to ring true, many who lived during the period conceived of the former president as such, as will be seen later.

[114] Maximato, much like the term Porfiriato, denotes a period when a single strongman is considered to have held ultimate, almost uncontested power over the nation's politics. Maximato emerged as a term out of Calles' characterization as the *Jefe Máximo*, or "Supreme Chief", of the revolution following Obregón's assassination.

[115] Rodolfo Usigli, "El Caso de El Gesticulador," *El Universal*, 31 de mayo, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 224.

obregonistas and *callistas*—where they suppressed democratic processes through the increasingly personalist transition of power and wrote opposing revolutionaries out of the master narrative and Revolutionary Family.[116] Consequently, as seen in his thoughts from "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," Usigli viewed Obregón and Calles' governments as the ultimate perpetrators of demagoguery, that force which compelled the collectivization of lies surrounding revolutionary memory—*la Revolución hecha gobierno*, the Revolutionary Family—and their use to defend governments that were anything but "revolutionary."

As will be seen in Chapter 3, recognition of the rhetorical devices in *la Revolución hecha gobierno* and the Revolutionary Family also emerges in the press discourse surrounding Usigli's *El gesticulador* and its performances in 1947, further connecting Usigli's critiques of such narratives with actors in the public sphere equally incensed by the discrepancies between elite rhetoric and actions. Contemporary Oaxacan journalist Guillermo Villa Casteñada made similar conclusions concerning elite rhetoric, writing for the publication *El Chapulín* in his column "El dedo en la llaga" that "…the triumphant faction transform[ed] the power of the Revolution into the Revolution made power, that which equate[d] as much as to monopolize, exclusively for the benefit of the revolutionary family, the public activities of the country."[117] Villa Casteñada's language parallels that used by elites in their self-serving narrativization of the revolutionary struggle, while his comments on the "monopoliz[ation] of the public activities of the country" also points towards what Gillingham and Smith's characterization of the PRIísta system as a gatekeeper state. Whether considered optimistically or opportunistically, the state that emerged after 1920 used the legislative demands of the 1917 Constitution and the notion that the

[116] I use personalist here in the sense of the manner by which Obregón and Calles appeared to enforce the tradition of presidential succession following their personal selection, where Obregón selected his protégé to succeed him in the presidential chair and supported his 1924 campaign, while Calles and his followers in Congress were seen as pushing the 1928 amendment to the 1917 Constitution that would allow Obregón to run for a second term. The personal relationship and camaraderie between the two were the linchpin upon which this perception turned, and preceded the informal tradition of the *dedazo*, where presidents across the PNR, PRM, and PRI governments held an overwhelmingly—although not entirely—influential sway over who their successor would be. As will be seen later, scholars continue to debate the realistic extent of the practice of the *dedazo*: across various instances of the period I examine (1940 and 1952 especially), even though the president likely maintained final say in the decision, he was bound to input from former presidents, the "inner circle" of influence within PRM and PRI governments, and contemporary concerns that required a delicate, ears-to-the-street approach. Most likely, although extant, the *dedazo* failed to realistically function as the entirely personal decision it is often portrayed as.

[117] José María Bradomín, "With the finger in the wound: 'The Imposter'," *El Chapulin*, page 6, 10 de diciembre 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 54 "El Gesticulador, Newspaper Clippings, 1947."

government had emerged as the "Revolution" incarnate to expand its influence in agricultural production, landholding patterns, education, oil, and an endless number of economic activities, social dynamics, and cultural representations.

Embodied in *El gesticulador*, which will be examined in full in Chapter 2, Usigli operated with the framework of the *Revolución*-Revolutionary Family narrative, but attempted to enact a counternarrative, critique, and alternate discursive model for discussing the armed and reconstruction periods of the revolution. He wasn't alone in doing so: contemporaries in the *teatro de revista* scene, satirists Roberto Soto and Joaquín Pardavé especially, parodied CROM leader Luis N. Morones, his opportunistic streak, and the government's doublehanded treatment of union activism, as well as the idiosyncrasies of *cardenista* rule, in works like *Trapitos al sol*, *El desmoronamiento*, and *Rayando el sol* during the 1920s and 1930s.[118] Meanwhile, Orozco criticized revolutionary demagoguery and the whitewashed Revolutionary Family narrative of revolutionary history through works like *The Trench*, *The Rich Banquet While the Workers Fight*, *Catharsis*, and especially *Political and Ideological Exploitation*,[119] and Guzmán's aforementioned *La sombra del caudillo* portrayed Calles' personal hold over Mexican politics during the Maximato in clear terms.

Usigli's *El gesticulador*, however, arguably represents one of the most direct and realist denunciations of official discourse and elite manipulation of national politics at the time. He based his counternarrative and counter discourse in a more critical consideration of revolutionary factionalism, the betrayal of revolutionary leaders by both their subordinates and their contemporaries, and the election rigging and political assassinations that characterized elites' most salient methods for maintaining dominance. In the process, political elites constructed both the single party and the *dictablanda* systems. Former revolutionaries, now the dominant political class, repeatedly took recourse to such methods in perpetuating a level of local and regional *caudillismo* throughout the 1920s and 1930s, reflected in the official party's construction of dominance at the national level. Manipulation of favorable outcomes during presidential and state elections, a process which continued beyond the periods of national reconstruction and state

[118] Pilcher, 17-19, and Millán Carranza, 48. Reflective of the mostly greater freedoms artists enjoyed during Cárdenas' *sexenio*, *Rayando el sol* was even staged through state endorsement at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, running for several months between April and September 1937.
[119] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 45, 52-53, and Coffey, 33-34.

consolidation into the mid-century postrevolutionary period,[120] proved especially effusive for maintaining the official party's hold over the presidency and crucial state governorships. Conversely, Usigli also adopted a nationalist framework for his dramaturgical production, seeing a distinctly nationalist and critically self-reflective theater tradition as crucial for the evolution and survival of a truly democratic, representative political system[121]—regularly putting him in contention with government officials. To better understand his development of this ideal, grounded in the debates concerning national identity, history, and aesthetics that erupted with Mexico's cultural revolution, I will now turn to a summary of the central debates and movements that percolated throughout Mexico's artistic and cultural landscape as Usigli entered into his early creative period.

Cultural Revolution and Competing Conceptions for Mexican Identity and Modernity

Following historian Ricardo Pérez Montfort, it was during the 1920s—"the era of *caudillos*"—and especially during the Maximato that nationalism played a crucial role in political discourse, leading political elites to search for central figures, images, and tropes in both "high" and popular culture that could be considered representative of *mexicanidad*—literally "Mexicanness," or that which represented Mexican culture, identity, and the particular status of "being Mexican."[122] During this period, political elites and their intellectual counterparts at the head of key agencies—Vasconcelos, Best Maugard, Gamio, and Pani chief amongst them—looked across Mexico's diverse local and regional cultures, customs, and traditions for images

[120] To be certain, election manipulation did not end during the postrevolutionary period, but rather, reached a crystallization in methods and structure with the Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), Alemán (1946-1952), and Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) administrations. Under their presidencies, the PRI's electoral machine achieved near-unanimous, although not complete nor total, control over presidential, state, and municipal elections, a level of command that continued throughout the PRI's so-called "Golden Age" between 1940 and 1970, and which began to fragment and break apart with the political pluralization, press diversification, and emergence of increasingly effective oppositional movements during the latter third of the century. That being said, throughout the "Golden Age", Mexicans were able to effect a level of resistance to PRI-selected candidates at the municipal level, at times forcing the overturning of electoral decisions, effectively negotiating the replacement of unpopular mayors and members of municipal and city governments, and creating models for rambunctious competition in electoral primaries between candidates both within and outside of the official party. Gillingham's chapter "'We Don't Have Arms But We Do Have Balls'" in *Dictablanda* and chapters in *Unrevolutionary Mexico* insightfully examine the complexities behind local elections in postrevolutionary Mexico while also challenging the traditional narrative that the PRI machine achieved an authoritarian electoral juggernaut capable of ubiquitous consensus across presidential, state, and municipal elections.

[121] An idea reproduced across Usigli's "Epílogo de la hipocresía nacional" (1938), "Doce notas" (1943), "El caso de El Gesticulador" (1947), and "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática" (1947).

[122] Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo* (Mexico: CIESAS, 1994), 113.

that could be consolidated into a cogent synthesis of *mexicanidad*. Doing so, they sought to "unite" Mexicans across regions, urban and rural locales, socioeconomic conditions, racial identities, and cultural backgrounds into a homogenized vision of national community.[123] Furthermore, one of the central concerns of Mexico's political elite at the time was converting what they considered a largely rural, little-developed, and fractured society into a modern national union capable of competing economically, educationally, and culturally with the most advanced Western countries.[124] Doing so, they drew on Liberal and Porfirian-era narratives of national history and nation development, now with the notable twist of incorporating Mexico's indigenous and rural qualities into a fuller, if stylized, image of *el pueblo* ("the people") and *mexicanidad*.[125]

Initially, political elites in Obregón's government extended a level of recognition to and representation of the diversity inherent across Mexico's regions and cultures, embodied in instances like the centennial celebrations of Mexico's Independence with events like the Exhibition of Popular Arts and the Noche Mexicana. Through the Exhibition of Popular Arts and Noche Mexicana, leading intellectuals put on visual performances extolling a range of popular crafts, dress, performance, cuisine, and music. Such performances tended to fall on two lines: they extolled art forms and products intellectuals considered either representative of a creative spirit capable of being refined into "true" (i.e. high) art by trained elites, or praised what divergent intellectuals perceived as authentically indigenous, popular, and distinctly non-Western cultures, therefore the embodiment of a Mexico untouched by European-derived norms.[126]

The state's project towards constructing a cohesive cultural vocabulary of *mexicanidad* began to accelerate under Calles and successive PNR presidents as the decade stretched on and the continued disparities between revolutionary factions, regional memory, and local interests became more and more pronounced.[127] And yet, leaders in Mexico's upper-class intelligentsia and especially members of the social strata and regional cultures styled as *el pueblo mexicano*, along with conservatives resistant to the national government and ruling political factions,

[123] Montfort, 114-119; *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 6-9.
[124] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 9-11, 14.
[125] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 6-9; Montfort, 113-117.
[126] Rick A. López, "The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts: Two Ways of Exalting Indianness," in *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 23-42.
[127] Montfort, 118-119.

continued to contest, debate, and produce their own understandings of Mexican identity and interpretations of popular culture. Thus, "elites and popular culture [participated in a reciprocal interaction] in creating, disseminating, and appropriating symbols of national identity,"[128] indicating the role of negotiation inherent in interactions between rulers and ruled and "high" and popular cultures; an interactive process reflective of both cultural dynamics in general and the development of the *dictablanda* system described by Gillingham and Smith. Here, I focus particularly on state and elite attempts at producing a cohesive vision of Mexican identity, as it is this homogenized style of history, aesthetics, and artistic and cultural tropes ostensibly representing *mexicanidad*—i.e., official culture—that informs the direct context in which Usigli enters into Mexico City-based theater and art circles during the 1920s. That being said, models and instances for resisting and negotiating the boundaries of cultural nationalism, along with the frequently disparate manners by which elites constructed narratives of cultural nationalism, are pointed to when applicable, so as to assure that the process of creating cultural nationalism is not taken as the unified, collectively consented development elites idealized it to be.

During the cultural revolution, artists and intellectuals played an indispensable role in conceiving of, distilling, and distributing representations of Mexican identity through visual culture, literature, philosophical essays, newspaper articles, and emerging mechanisms of mass media and mass communication. Vasconcelos and Best Maugard, along with luminaries from the *Juventud del Ateneo* and 1915 generations like Dr. Atl, Alfonso Reyes, Antonio Caso and his younger brother Alfonso Caso, a young composer named Carlos Chávez (future head of INBA during Alemán's administration), and Mexico's burgeoning muralist movement all responded to the call for constructing a newly unified national culture.[129] Vasconcelos' *raza cósmica* and its praising of *mestizo* competed with an *indigenismo* movement that saw the nation's various indigenous groups and cultures as truly representative of Mexican culture and history, spearheaded by figures like Dr. Atl, Moisés Saénz, Francisco Montenegro, Diego Rivera, and Gamio's anthropological theories on pre-Colombian indigenous cultures.[130]

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[128] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 3.
[129] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 14.
[130] For an insightful (and captivating) study of *indigenismo*, the "ethnicized" construction of *mexicanidad*, and the enshrinement of folkloric, popular, and vernacular arts depicting *mexicanidad* as the new national ideal, see Rick A. López's *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

Both theories, along with other ideas advanced by fellow cultural elites, were informed by the artists' affiliation with a transnational, European-born avant-garde modernism and their status as cosmopolitan cultural elites, who obtained high-level positions in the national government and whose theories were the most respected by political elites responding to a need for a common, unified Mexican identity.[131] The cases of the Noche Mexicana, Exhibition of Popular Arts, and debates surrounding *mexicanidad* and *el pueblo mexicano* thus demonstrated a distinct aesthetic element involving ideas and theories concerning national identity and citizenship proposed both by domestic and international movements. As Rubén Gallo has shown, early 20th century technological advancements—in the realms of visual culture with photography, literature with the typewriter, music and mass communication with the radio, construction and architecture with cement, and public celebrations with the stadium—converged with social revolutions and intellectual movements both domestic and abroad, leading artists to produce utopian visions of the future outlined by new means for understanding and depicting material reality.[132] Figures like Tina Modotti, Rivera, Guzmán, Manuel Maples Arce, Juan O'Gorman and many more engaged, in contrasting fashions, with the new mediums around them, forming a discourse network that advanced divergent conceptions of modernity but which ultimately contributed to the "mechanization of cultural production" that centered mechanical technologies as a new aesthetic ideal.[133] Their practices also reflected the national government's attempt to modernize the country through social programs utilizing similar technological advancements,[134] including cement for transnational highways and urban expansion, vaccines and medicine technologies for hygiene programs, radio communications to speak directly with citizens across the vast country, and stadiums to hold political rallies and commemorate the nation's history.

As the 1920s stretched on, elites subsumed their cultural counterparts' competing conceptions into a streamlined narrative and practice of Mexican identity, equating indigeneity with rural, *campesino* populations that represented Mexico's authentic, agrarian roots in pre-Colombian history; *mestizo* identity as urban, middle class, educated, and technologically advanced; and tropes like the Bajío-born *charro* and *china poblana* of Puebla dancing the

[131] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 14.
[132] Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avante-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005), 1-23
[133] Gallo, 23-28.
[134] Gallo, 22.

likewise Bajío-born *jarabe tapatío* to *mariachi* music originating in states along the central-western coast, or the *tehuana* dress of the traditionally matriarchal culture located in the Tehuantepec Isthmus in southern Oaxaca, as representative of a cohesive national identity—i.e. "*lo mexicano*."[135] Doing so through exhibitions, celebrations, and state-sponsored mass media meant to legitimize the national government and its supposed unification of Mexico, elites attempted to sterilize the regional contexts, significance, and disputes of heterogeneous cultures. In their vision, these diverse groups would then transform into an economically competitive, socially unified, and politically subservient people through the three-pronged approach of cultural nationalism, benefits brought by state reform programs, and the government's control of access to local, national, and international markets.[136]

Revolutionary reforms included anticlerical legislation; secular—and between 1934 and 1940, socialist—education and its attempt at envisioning a uniform Mexican childhood by revolutionary ideologues;[137] renaming streets across municipalities, cities, and the capital after revolutionary heroes; the "hierarchization of Mexican music" under Chávez as head of the Department of Fine Arts in the 1930s;[138] hygiene programs and their attempts to create healthy, sober, and productive Mexican populations;[139] roads that would literally and symbolically unite the country's fractured regions; and the state's push for a thriving, if state-legitimizing, radio and cinema industries. Individual actors and organized collectives continued to resist reform programs and state-endorsed cultural nationalism, pursuing their own traditions, revising dominant narratives, and negotiating the extent to which they would engage with or reject government programs.[140] This relationship between rulers and ruled, along with evolving debates concerning national identity, culture, and a growing discourse on the revolutionary character of the national government, persisted into the postrevolutionary era.

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[135] Montfort, 118-121.
[136] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 8-15.
[137] Albarrán, 2.
[138] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 104.
[139] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 197.
[140] For example, in *Seen and Heard in Mexico*, Albarrán shows how children, contrary to education officials' typical and idealized conception of the Mexican child as a passive receiver of secular and socialist education, actively mediated modes of being and behavior between revolutionary- and Catholic-sourced education, domestic learning, emerging national and international mass media, and relationships with peers and adults, adding their own interpretations and twists to both discourses fed to them and the cultural artifacts and social organizations children themselves pursued.

By then, the set of dominant tropes revolutionary officials used to depict *mexicanidad* had long been consolidated, merging with Cárdenas' and subsequent administrations turn towards nationalizing that considered indigenous and *lo popular* (rather than "indianizing" the nation and making it folkloric).[141] From the 1940s onward, official culture was updated with evolving revisions of *mexicanidad* influenced by growing industrial development, urbanization, the middle class, and the PRI's cultivation of domestic and foreign capital. Thus, between 1938 and 1940, the cultural revolution and revolutionary reconstruction had largely ended, soon replaced by the "institutionalized" revolution. It is during these crucial transition years that Usigli wrote *El gesticulador*, a work informed by and which would criticize both the largely consolidated single party system and the stylized depictions of *mexicanidad* that failed to engage with the more idiosyncratic elements of national identity. Examined further in Chapter 2, Usigli considered hypocrisy to be a fundamental feature within Mexican identity, advancing both a break from the self-aggrandizing tropes of *mexicanidad* and a more critical reflection of Mexican culture that would form a prominent component of his theater project.

Theater in the Time of Revolution: Usigli and Mexico's Theater during the Cultural Revolution

In relating Usigli to the project of the cultural revolution and the construction of Mexican national identity, the arts, and state sponsorship in the years following 1920, I follow Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis's assertion that a "central issue [in the creation of national identity] is the relationship between the individual or institutional creators of national discourses and symbols and the popular cultures, or the belief and practices of the mass of citizens or subjects who make up the nation."[142] Throughout Vasconcelos' work both at SEP and as editor of the journal *El maestro*, he called upon artists and intellectuals to participate in the educational programs of the new state, advance the philosophical and pedagogical ideas of the nation's leading intelligentsia and incorporate such ideas into state-sponsored programs, and stimulate the country's cultural activities.[143] Additionally, Vasconcelos' ideas of cultural and racial *mestizaje*, in which Western-trained intellectuals would guide the artistic production and creative spirit of the popular arts, were also directed, albeit sparingly, towards SEP's Department of Fine Arts

[141] As stated by Cárdenas himself, "mexicaniz[ing] the Indians instead of indianizing Mexico." In López, *Crafting Mexico*, 11.
[142] *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 2-3.
[143] Merlín, 23.

programs in stimulating the theater.[144] Domestic vanguard movements, especially the literary groups the *estridentistas* and the *Movimiento 30-30*, and European movements like futurism also influenced Mexican playwrights to produce their own theater-focused vanguardism, generally splitting into two camps focusing on valorizing what they considered national theater or drawing inspiration from both contemporary and classical European theater.

Prominent examples of this general division include the group the Siete Autores and their company the Comedia Mexicana, which included playwrights and directors like Francisco Monterde, José Joaquín y Federico Gamboa, the brothers Carlos and Lázaro Lozano García, and María Luisa Ocampo, along with the support of functionary and playwright Amalia de Castillo Ledón at the Dirección de Acción Cívica.[145] The Siete Autores and the Comedia Mexicana directly responded to Vasconcelos' call for incorporating and portraying distinctly Mexican, popular arts-inspired themes into professional theater organizations, while different members within the organization aligned with either Vasconcelos' cultural nationalism or Calles' more populist, (increasingly) authoritarian, and anticlerical style of nationalism.[146] On the other side was the *Contemporáneos* group, composed of a mix of literary and theatrical figures like Salvador Novo, Xavier Villaurrutia, Celestino and José Gorostiza, Jorge Cuesta, Roberto Montenegro, Jaime Torres Bodet, Carlos Pellicer, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, and their organization of the *Teatro de Ulises* and *Teatro de Orientación* groups.[147] This group, inspired by Vasconcelos' call but inclined more towards European avant-gardism and a "universal" style of theater, competed in their respective visions for Mexico's professional theater scene, and several members would go on to occupy several prominent positions within the SEP and INBA during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. With Xavier Villaurrutia, Celestino Gorostiza, and Salvador

[144] Merlín, 23.
[145] Merlín, 75. Although theater, much like other artistic, cultural, and political spheres in revolutionary and postrevolutionary Mexico was still much a male-dominated realm, a growing number of female playwrights, actors, and owners of production companies directly and crucially contributed to the shaping of contemporary debates and the development of postrevolutionary Mexican theater. Prominent members include María Luisa Ocampo, Amalia de Castillo Ledón, performer, playwright, and owner María Tereza Montoya, renowned Porfirian-era actress-turned-owner Virginia Fábregas, playwright Concepción Sada, Margarita Mendoza López—a close friend of Usigli throughout his life—actress María Douglas—a future cast member of *El gesticulador*'s performances at the Palacio de Bellas Artes—and many more. De Castillo Ledón, also a close friend of Usigli's, in particular would go on to occupy significant roles in the national government's sponsorship of professional theater through her position as subsecretary of Cultural Affairs in the SEP in the 1950s, one of the first women named to such a high-level position in a presidential administration.
[146] Merlín, 74.
[147] Millán Carranza, 55.

Novo considered some of the most prominent and cutting-edge playwrights and poets of the era, they occupy a lofty status in the arts histories of this era, and would also become several of the artists Usigli maintained the greatest amount of interaction and competition with over his own vision for Mexican theater.

Other important companies and contemporaries of Usigli, especially during the 1930s, included the Compañía Dramática de Bellas Artes, a company dedicated to "dramatic and poetic" theater with a permanent residency in the newly formed Palacio de Bellas Artes and funded by the national government;[148] Virginia Fábregas and her Compañía Virginia Fábregas, a legend in Mexican theater stretching back to her early days at the Teatro Nacional during the Porfiriato; Alfredo Gómez de la Vega, future director of Usigli's *El gesticulador*; and María Tereza Montoya and her Compañía Dramática de María Tereza Montoya, which also produced the Bellas Artes staging of one of Usigli's first and controversial performances, *Medio Tono* in 1937. Both Gómez de la Vega and Tereza Montoya prepared the inaugural season of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, constructed in March 1932 and inaugurated September 29, 1934, with the purpose of performing Mexican plays by Mexican actors, fomenting (professional) Mexican theater, creating new opportunities for populations who previously lacked the financial means to access the professional theater, and attracting new audiences accustomed to other theater genres and spectacles.[149] The inauguration of the Palacio marked a new wave in government support for professional Mexican theater, opening up new lines for funding and access to the official stage for the new waves of dramaturges. And yet, European works, actors, playwrights, and companies continued to exert a disproportionate hold over Mexican professional theater, due to their lopsided international stature and the fact that the majority of audience members capable of attending professional theater performances were still middle class, significantly cosmopolitan in the media they engaged with, and tended to reject the popular arts of the rural and indigenous classes they frequently considered inferior.

The *teatro de revista* and *carpa* traditions, on the other hand, continued to be enjoyed by the working-class masses of the capital, both due to their cheaper ticket prices and their satirizing of attitudes and specific policies espoused by political elites, thereby giving voice to the

[148] Millán Carranza, 31.
[149] Millán Carranza, 31.

frustrations experienced by the urban poor. Stretching back to the *colonia*,[150] *revista* and *carpa* practices mocking political leaders and permitting audience participation while doing so reached their zenith during the Maximato, in which several *revista* shows emerged mocking union boss Luis Morones, the triple succession of PNR presidents and their perceived ineffectiveness, and *callista* anticlericalism.[151] The success of the *teatro de revista* may have even played a small role in influencing the Palacio de Bellas Artes' purpose for courting lower-class audiences, and throughout Cárdenas' presidency—frequently portrayed as one supporting greater freedom of expression and press than past presidencies[152]—several *revista* shows by the Compañía de Revistas Mexicanas Joaquín Pardavé and Compañía de Roberto Soto were staged at the Palacio.[153] The *revista* and *carpa* traditions and their willingness to stage politically critical plays informed one of the most distinct and novel elements of Usigli's style of nationalist professional theater, so much so that years later, he would state: "The *carpa* and the *revista* have always been the sole lively theater in Mexico."[154]

The pivotal year for Usigli's dramaturgical output came in 1932, during which the author began to write his first plays, conclude a monumental study of Mexican theater across the centuries, and make a decisive turn towards parodying the political incidents of the day. In his book *México en el teatro*, Usigli praised playwrights Mauricio Magdaleno and Juan Bustillo de Oro, founders of the "Teatro de Ahora" movement and veterans of the *teatro de revista*, for initiating politically dramatic theater in Mexico. The thematic material portrayed in Teatro de Ahora works directly inspired Usigli in his future writing, where the playwright considered a theater tradition critically reflective of the nation's politics essential for a thriving, distinctly Mexican theater. However, despite Magdaleno and Bustillo de Oro's successes in opening the path, Usigli still considered the art of professional drama in Mexico a relatively untapped well, especially one with a distinctly Mexican character: this would form the foundation of Usigli's

[150] I.e., the Spanish colonial period.
[151] Pilcher, 18-20.
[152] A characterization made in Millán Carranza, 44; Pilcher, 51; Andrew Paxman, "Changing Opinions in *La Opinión*: Maximino Ávila Camacho and the Puebla Press, 1936-1941," in *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico*, 85; and John Mraz, "Today, Tomorrow, and Always: The Golden Age of Illustrated Magazines in Mexico, 1937-1960," in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 117-118.
[153] Millán Carranza, 43-47.
[154] Rodolfo Usigli, "El Caso de El Gesticulador," *El Universal*, 31 de mayo, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 224.

call for a "national" theater tradition, which he pursued and developed in tandem with his vision of a theater tradition capable of reflecting the realities of Mexican politics. Also a cosmopolitan man who reflected some of his contemporaries' European affinities, Usigli merged his project for professional and nationalist Mexican dramatic theater with inspiration from playwrights like Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, the seventeenth century French satirist Molière, and especially the English realist George Bernard Shaw, with whom Usigli enjoyed a personal rapport developed after tracking the playwright down in the midst of wartime London.[155]

However, although drawing inspiration from European dramaturgy across his lifetime, since the inception of his career as a playwright Usigli maintained the need for Mexico to have its own national theater:[156] one that developed its own dramatic traditions, supported works by Mexican playwrights, and above all depicted the reality of life in Mexico in all its complexity. While Usigli would develop a unique theory of theater and push for, arguably more than any other of his peers, a theater tradition that was uniquely Mexican,[157] Usigli was not alone in this view: fellow playwrights, directors, and critics during his time continued to call attention to a perceived lack of effective, authentic theater in Mexico. Writing in a review of *El gesticulador*'s 1947 staging, critic Carlos González Peña states, "Count the premiere of "El gesticulador" by Rodolfo Usigli as one of the most important dates in Mexican theater… It has been difficult to bring to our stage a piece of such original and authentic distinction."[158] Similarly, contemporary articles "¿Existe el Teatro en México?," "La crisis teatral," and "Por fin: una Comedia Mexicana" point to the notion, repeated by various members of Mexico's theater circles in the

[155] Several of Usigli's plays, including *La familia cena en casa*, *Jano es una muchacha*, and his *Corona* trilogy Drew direct inspiration from George Bernard Shaw's works. In Peter Beardsell, *A Theatre for Cannibals: Rodolfo Usigli and the Mexican Stage* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), 24-25. Usigli was also a devout Francophile, seen in his early French-language play *4 chemins 4* (1932), fascination with Molière, and his Victorian-era style of dress.

[156] Beardsell, 13-24.

[157] As Beardsell argues, "the modern theater does not, of course, owe its existence to [Usigli] alone, but the general view acknowledges that his contribution was both unique—and in a crucial period—paramount." In Beardsell, 13. This view is repeated by theater scholars Yolanda Argudín and John B. Nomland in their works *Historia del teatro desde los rituals prehispánicos hasta el arte dramático de nuestros días* (Mexico, D.F.: Panorama Editorial, 1986) and *Teatro Mexicano contemporáneo* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1967), as well as Carlos Monsiváis in his chapter "Notas sobre la cultura mexicana en el siglo XX," in *Historia general de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas, 3rd ed. (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1981). In Beardsell, 221.

[158] Carlos González Peña, "El Gesticulador," *El Universal*, 29 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 218.

Mexico City press, that Mexico continued to suffer from a lack of a strong theater tradition across the cultural nationalist and postrevolutionary periods.[159]

Thus, with claims that were likely relatively controversial but not unprecedented, *México en el teatro* received many favorable reviews from fellow playwrights, essayists, and academics, putting Usigli on the map in national theater circles. By 1934, the playwright was teaching classes in theory and technique at UNAM and saw the first performances of works like *Estado de secreto* (1935) the following year. During this same period, his plays turn to directly criticizing politics and the style of rule during the Maximato, maintaining a critical and satirical edge rarely seen outside of the *revista* and *carpa* during the era.

For Usigli, Calles represented the clearest example of the opportunistic demagoguery and the subjugation of power to the personalist rule of the presidency. With some of his earliest plays like *Noche de estío* (1933-1935), *El presidente y el ideal* (1935), and *Estado de secreto*, Usigli harshly satirized Calles and his cohort of revolutionary *caudillos* and heads of state. In *Noche de estío*, during a blackout supposedly brought on by a communist seizure of a radio station, several cabinet members and a *caudillo* type known as "El señor General"—a clear allusion to Calles—converge on the minister of Finance's house.[160] Eventually, in the confusion brought on by the supposed communist overthrow of the government, the powerful leaders turn on each other, dropping their political and clientelist masquerade and letting loose with accusations against each member's respective betrayal of revolutionary idealism. Such scenes unveil a theme of what Usigli considered to be an innately Mexican tendency towards exposing of one's own hypocrisies, especially in politics, a theme treated even further in *El gesticulador*.

While *Noche de estío* deals with a more general quality of Mexico's political reality during the emergence and consolidation of the single-party system, *El Presidente y el ideal* hones in on a much more specific, contemporary issue: the transition between Calles' Maximato and president Lázaro Cárdenas' more radical *sexenio* (1934-1940).[161] Almost directly parodying

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[159] José Bergamin, ""¿Existe el Teatro en México?," *Todo*, 8 de febrero de 1943; Howard S. Philips, "Por fin: una Comedia Mexicana," *El Universal*, 8 de diciembre de 1937. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pgs. 180 and 100. Juan B. Climent, "La crisis teatral," *Mañana*, 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series III: Professional Life, Sub-series A, Box No. 21, Folder 1.
[160] Beardsell, 34.
[161] Beardsell, 38-39.

the power struggle between the aging but still influential Calles and the younger but keen Cárdenas, *El Presidente y el ideal* tracks the process by which the power struggle played out, starting with the Calles-figure's selection of the Cárdenas-style character for presidency and ending with the overthrow and exile of the "Jefe Máximo de la Revolución."[162] Usigli's depiction of the Calles-Cárdenas power struggle appears equally informed by his loathing of Calles as his belief in Cárdenas as the reformer Mexico's people needed. In a letter written in 1960 to his friend Marte R. Gómez, future minister of agriculture under Manuel Ávila Camacho and a prominent industrialist during his tenure as president of the U.S.-affiliated irrigation pump manufacturer Worthington de México S.A. de C.V.,[163] Usigli shared his thoughts on having heard of a supposed conspiracy orchestrated between Calles and José Vasconcelos to overthrow and possibly assassinate then-president Cárdenas, an act that flew in the face of Usigli's support for Cárdenas' administration and his ability to end the dreaded "Callismo and set Mexico on a new path for the future."[164] Clearly, the Maximato period and the early years of the PNR form an influential era in Usigli's creative output, as well as his ideological stance towards "*la Revolución*," the centralization of power in the hands of the "Supreme Chief", and the trappings of opportunism and the betrayal of revolutionary idealism that he viewed as characteristic of the Maximato.

In 1936-1937, Usigli reached another career landmark with the writing and staging of his play *Medio Tono*, this time directing his principle of critical self-reflection to satirizing the capital-based Mexican middle class and the idiosyncrasies of their behavior in rejecting their Mexican roots for European culture and commercial attitudes. Staged by the Compañía Dramática de María Tereza Montoya at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the play was met by a mixed critical response. Certain critics deemed its content, technical staging, or actors' performances lacking, while others considered it a respectable success, especially for a playwright still in the early stages of his career. One in particular, Vane C. Dalton in the article "At Last—A Mexican Play" for the publication *Mexican Life*, elucidates a theme that, merged with Usigli's idea of critical self-reflection, would form the ethos of Usigli's political comedies and find its fullest

[162] Beardsell, 39.
[163] Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), 209.
[164] Usigli, letter to Marte R. Gómez, March 14, 1960. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Box 4, Folder 44b.

maturation in *El gesticulador*: that of a distinctly Mexican-flavored realism. Calling *Medio Tono* the "first satisfactory Mexican play" and Usigli "the first valid Mexican playwright", Dalton argues that the play is so effective in its "[departure] from all local dramatic precedent", distinct from the Teatro Ideal, Roberto Soto's "folkloric" *teatro de revista*, and the "pseudo-sophisticated" works staged by the Teatro de Ulises and Teatro de Orientación groups.[165] Thus, Usigli and *Medio Tono* achieved a realism distinct from that of contemporary playwrights and time-honored Mexican theater traditions, which Dalton believed would make Usigli and likeminded "rebels" against tradition the creators of "civilized theatrical expression" in Mexico.[166] Hyperbole aside, similar claims would be repeated a decade later during *El gesticulador*'s staging, along with theater scholars' assertion of Usigli as the "the Apostle of Mexican theater."[167]

In 1940, following the prior year's staging of his *La mujer no hace milagros* and the distinctly negative reception it received amongst theater critics, Usigli also marked another significant development that would come to define his public perception across his long career: that of his frequently hostile disposition towards critics. In the article "El Teatro de Medianoche y la Crítica" published in *El Universal* on March 25th, Usigli denounced critics for what he a perceived as a conspiracy amongst critics to censor his work by avoiding reporting on performances staged by his Teatro de Medianoche company,[168] replaced instead by the press's turn towards attacking authors and actors who participated in the performance season. Stating his familiarity with the press's negative reception and even occasional censorship of his works, Usigli asserted the press's coverage was most unjustifiable and had the potential to damage their scheduled programming, and therefore called for the dismissal of critics who failed to cover the company's performances or attacked his peers.[169] Usigli ended his diatribe with the refrain: "It is

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[165] Vane C. Dalton, "At Long Last—A Mexican Play," *Mexican Life*, December 1937. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 100.
[166] Vane C. Dalton, "At Long Last—A Mexican Play," *Mexican Life*, December 1937. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 100.
[167] Layera, 13.
[168] Usigli's Teatro de Medianoche company was funded entirely by private donors, without funds extended by the SEP and its Departamento de Bellas Artes, an uncommon occurrence in professional theater in Mexico at the time.
[169] Rodolfo Usigli, "El Teatro de Medianoche y la Crítica," *El Universal*, 25 de marzo de 1940. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 146.

time that, in Mexico, we live in a professional fashion in art and a moral fashion in life," arguing that it was through the faults of such critics that Mexico continued to lack a true professional theater tradition.[170] And yet, despite his claims that "the people were with the Teatro de Medianoche," the performances were poorly attended and the company dissolved after its first and only season. For Usigli, Mexico continued to lack a professional, self-reflective, and thriving theater tradition, held back at least partially by, in his view, a disinterested public and an inadequate, oftentimes corrupt, circle of critics guided more by personal animosity towards certain playwrights (like himself) than authentically judging the merit of theatrical works.

Finally, Usigli began to work in positions in the national government during the waning years of the Maximato and throughout Cárdenas' administration. Between 1932 and 1935, he applied for service in the diplomatic corps, acted as director of dramatic programming at the SEP-operated radio station XFX,[171] and served in Cárdenas' Office of Press. In 1938 and 1939, Usigli acted as head of Theater at the Department of Fine Arts in SEP, charged with organizing all programming at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, while also acting as one of the main organizers for the *Semana Surrealista* (Surrealist Week) in Mexico City during July 1938. Here, Usigli organized events and translated several of the event's hallmark pieces, including Diego Rivera and French surrealist Andre Bretón's *Manifiesto por un arte revolucionario independiente*, calling for world governments to unite in their fight against rising fascism by supporting artists ostensibly revolutionary and independent. His work in various positions across SEP during the 1930s thus marked a major development in Usigli's relationship with the national government, one that would repeat over the following decades: despite often presenting a critical view of the state and official party in his dramaturgical and literary works, Usigli worked as an official and representative of the national government across various positions in the arts, education, and foreign relations ministries. By doing so, Usigli reflected the trend amongst Mexican intellectuals, both subservient and dissident, towards service in the state bureaucracy throughout

[170] Usigli, "El Teatro de Medianoche y la Crítica," *El Universal*, 25 de marzo de 1940. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 146.

[171] At the XFX station, "85-90%" of the material was dedicated to educational programs," coinciding with the *cardenista* government's *misiónes culturales* and *normales rurales* schools and their dedication to improving rural education. In "Interview between Harold Helvenston and Rodolfo Usigli for San Francisco radio station KFRC," October 3, 1934. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 71.

the 20th century, thereby actively or passively working to carry out programs that propped up the state's influence in the arts, public education, and maintaining amicable relations with foreign nations.

Politics and the Consolidation of the Mexican State Under Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho

Cárdenas' presidency is typically considered the most radical and most dedicated to fulfilling the demands made by revolutionary idealism and its codification into the 1917 Constitution. Articles 27, 3, and 123, along with the PNR's Plan Sexenal ("Six-Year Plan"), produced by Cárdenas' office in December 1933 in the midst of his presidential campaign, undergirded the Cárdenas administration's commitment to augmenting land reform programs—especially towards *ejido* communities— and the government's nationalization and protection of subsoil resources for "public use," secular primary education further reconstituted into distinctly socialist education under a 1934 constitutional reform,[172] and establishing further protections for labor rights that would "culturally and economically elevate the working masses of both the city and the countryside."[173] Under Cárdenas, the national government expropriated and redistributed almost 50 million acres of land (largely to *ejido* communities),[174] achieved the nationalization of Mexican oil, and refashioned the model of the ideal Mexican child into the *niño proletario* ostensibly intended to elevate a generation of young citizens into a collective solidarity productive for the national economy.[175] Arguably most significant amongst its reforms, the Cárdenas administration carried out the corporatist restructuring of Mexico's agrarian, labor, military, and "popular" organizations under reformed government ministries, accompanied by the reconstitution of the PNR into the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) in 1938. However, the president also held a distinctively pragmatic orientation, and his administration's reform programs were undercut by both contemporary crises, opposition from various sectors, local and regional interests that challenged their adoption and efficacy, and the many concessions the president himself made to achieve the successes he and *cardenista* reforms enjoyed.

While Usigli believed Calles' reign as the *jefe máximo* constituted the most relevant example of personalist rule and the subversion of democratic conventions, such a style of rule

[172] Albarrán, 8.
[173] Lázaro Cárdenas, *1933 PNR Plan Sexenal*, 6 de diciembre de 1933.
[174] Joseph and Buchenau, 127.
[175] Albarrán, 8-9.

continued during Cárdenas' *sexenio*, particularly in the state bureaucracy and in the realms of regional and state politics. Luis N. Morones and later Vicente Lombardo Toledano's personal holds over government-affiliated organized labor from the 1920s into the 1940s exemplify the manners by which state sponsorship and eventually corporatization was parlayed into personal enrichment for the heads of organizations who sacrificed more militant activism for alliances with the national government. Lombardo Toledano's subversion of independent labor activism in favor of government-affiliated labor, along with Cárdenas' crackdown on unauthorized strikes and labor demands deemed too radical,[176] presaged the development of *charrismo*, the carrot-and-stick system of "punitive sanctions and beneficial concessions" employed by *charros*—compliant union bosses oftentimes selected from above by heads of the national government—under Alemán's government, further challenging the image of Cárdenas' *sexenio* as one of unfettered progressive reform. It also reflects Cárdenas' frequent pragmatism throughout his term, especially in his shift away from left-leaning revolutionary reformism towards a more centrist and anti-progressive position during the final two years of his presidency. This shift would continue under his successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho.

Meanwhile, political dynasties established at the regional and state levels, such as Gonzalo N. Santos' long-standing reign in San Luis Potosí, the Ávila Camacho family's control in Puebla, Abelardo Rodríguez's hold over the politics and several media and commercial empires in Sonora and Baja California. and Cárdenas' family's rule in the greater Michoacán area, continued well into the 1950s (and beyond, in certain cases), showing that the existence of personalist *cacicazgos*[177] persisted long after the revolutionary decade and the emergence of an ostensibly uniform national party had supposedly brought an end to such social and political dictatorships.[178] The *cacicazgos* enjoyed by certain state governors and regional *jefes politicos* Cárdenas considered essential for either achieving his reforms or maintaining his power within

[176] Joseph and Buchenau, 134 and Alan Knight, "The End to the Mexican Revolution? From Cárdenas to Ávila Camacho, 1937-1941" in *Dictablanda*, 50.
[177] *Cacicazgo*, a term deriving from the Arawak term *cacique* (local chieftain), refers to the "clientelist regional fiefs" held by state governors and informal political bosses who exercised a powerful, personal level of influence over the political machinations of distinct states or regions spanning multiple states. A wealth of scholarship has emerged over recent decades arguing the persistence of *cacique* rule into the reconstruction and postrevolutionary periods, including *Dictablanda*, *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, and *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, eds. Alan Knight and Wil G. Pansters (London: Institute for Study of the Americas, 2006).
[178] Paul Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls: Popular Protest After the Mexican Revolution," *Past and Present*, no. 206 (Feb. 2010), 177-178.

the official party provided countless fodder for critics of the system to point to as the perpetuation of personalist, non-representative rule. They also complicate the characterization of Cárdenas' *sexenio* as one which saw the institutionalization of the official party, its guiding structures, and the consolidation of the PNR and national politics as a united party and uniform single-party political system. While the state reached a level of consolidation and stability under the PNR and PRM-dominated governments, Mexican politics remained inflected by significantly personalist leaders, whose personalities, ideologies, and personal interests represented an eclectic mixture that produced oftentimes divergent results, a contradictory political system, and a national government guided by disparate commitments.[179] Thus, personalist dominance of state and regional politics, mixed with the PNR's ossifying hold over both the national government and the dominant narrative of revolutionary history, remained persistent enough towards the end of Cárdenas' presidency that Usigli turned to a fuller critique of the systems of rule, electoral rigging, and manipulation of revolutionary memory with *El gesticulador*.

Cárdenas's shift to the political center, motivated additionally by the loss of U.S. demand for Mexican exports and the outflow of U.S. capital following the oil expropriation that propelled

[179] A challenge to orthodox narratives of Mexico's political unification, national reconstruction, and state consolidation under official party governments advanced in Gillingham's "Maximino's Bulls", *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, and Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez, Wil G. Pansters, and Gillingham's chapters "Strongmen and State Weakness", "Tropical Passion in the Desert", and "'We Don't Have Arms, but We Do Have Balls'" in *Dictablanda*. As described by Arthur Schmidt, two broad master narratives he terms the "Revolution to Evolution" and "Revolution to Demolition" schools characterize narratives surrounding Mexico's consolidation of the single party system and confluent economic and social development during the nation's "Golden Age" or "Mexican Miracle" period between 1940 and 1970 and the subsequent fracturing of the political systema and loss of sustained economic development between 1970 and 2000. U.S.-based social scientists and historians like Howard Cline, Stanley Ross, and the well-known Frank Tannenbaum contributed most to the early development of the "Revolution to Evolution" narrative, seeing through rosy-eyed lens a perceived shift to peaceful political transition, collective acquiescence and little-to-no contestation to the official party's authority from Mexico's masses, and strong economic development that reflected a supposedly harmonious, modernizing nation. Approaching from a different standpoint, but offering similar conclusions, the "Revolution to Demolition" narrative, embodied by historians like Enrique Krauze in his *Mexico: Biography of Power* and *La presidencia imperial: ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940–1996)* (Mexico City, 1997), sees the postrevolutionary system following Cárdenas' administration as an increasingly "Leviathan state" commanded by an "imperial presidency," where "Mexicans 'rotated around the presidential sun and his electoral machinery', and opposition was confined to 'almost imperceptible planets which orbited in the dark distance'." This view of postrevolutionary Mexico has since been criticized by historians like Schmidt, Gillingham, Nora Hamilton, Alan Knight, Ben Fallaw, and Claudio Lomnitz as placing an over-emphasis on the personal power held by the president as well as the over-presumed hegemony achieved by elites aligned with the single-party state. Both master narratives thus fail to take into account the level and presence to which common and elite Mexicans continued to contest state authority and fashion a relatively fractured, frequently unstable nation. As argued in Arthur Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 23-68, and Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 180.

the financial crisis of 1937-1938,[180] also formed a pragmatic attempt designed to mediate the rise of oppositional movements from both the Left and the Right. These included the growth in the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) throughout the decade, San Luís Potosí *cacique* Saturnino Cedillo's right-wing rebellion, and conservative and even fascist organizations in Gómez Morín's PAN, the Union Nacional Sinarquista (UNS), and the *camisas doradas* ("Gold Shirts").[181] This shift and the need to tame the opposition to earlier *cardenista* radicalism culminated in the election of Manuel Ávila Camacho, a bland centrist chosen exactly for his ability to placate conservative factions and the first president to publicly pronounce his Catholic faith in the postrevolutionary period. Ávila Camacho's declaration of faith possibly presented a point of contention for Usigli, who had "written leftist works censured by the Church"[182] and may have been incensed by the new president's open commitment to Catholicism and the manner by which it galvanized conservative Catholics. Two additional and important factors motivated the move to the center furthered under Ávila Camacho: his administration's belief in industrial development and capitalist investment as crucial for Mexico's move into a new era of modernity, as well as fears over fascist movements and Nazi agents' behind-the-scenes manipulation of Mexican politics with the advent of Nazi control over much of Europe and Mexico and the U.S.' entrance into WWII.

Thus, the move to the center was propelled by contemporary crises of the late 1930s and early 1940s and the president and prominent political elites' personal desires to reverse early radical *cardenismo*. This shift was also compelled by broader society-wide concerns over the rise of the militant, fascist Right—seen by many as incongruent with revolutionary idealism and the U.S.'s fight against Nazi Europe, although certainly not without its supporters in both elite and popular circles[183]—and the Soviet-style Left—too radical and upsetting for Mexico's status quo. And with the need to maintain the unity of both the Revolutionary Family and the nation came the push to maintain unity across other sectors. In June 1942, the national government, major business interests, and labor—including the CTM and CROM—signed the National Labor Unity

[180] Joseph and Buchenau, 132-133.
[181] Joseph and Buchenau, 136.
[182] Juan de Valencia, "No hay critica, exclama Usigli," May 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 230.
[183] By 1943, the ultraconservative, quasi-fascist UNS claimed over half a million members, many of which were former participants in the Cristero Rebellion; in *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution*, 136.

Pact, symbolically curtailing government-affiliated labor activism in support of quiet acquiescence to government and big business.[184] Ávila Camacho's Minister of Education Octavio Vejar Vázquez also oversaw the purging of socialist education and devout *cardenistas* from SEP programming and personnel, and early on in his term a military unit raided PCM offices, revealing Ávila Camacho's opposition to left-leaning parties, who most often converged around tacit endorsement of the administration to avoid further reprisal.[185] Thus, avenues for dissent with the government's actions and in its ideological repositioning were increasingly shunted off so as to produce the image of broad consensus, particularly in the context of a national government poised to enter the nation into WWII on the side of the Allies. As will be seen in the following chapter, Usigli chafed under continued censorship of *El gesticulador* and the further consolidation of the single-party system, including its now-established mechanisms for manipulating favorable political outcomes and the further shift away of revolutionary reform. As a response, he would air his grievances in a piece accompanying the publication of *El gesticulador*, revealing his unceasing discontent with the state of Mexico's political and social realities.

Conclusion

This chapter works to reveal key elements of Mexican politics and cultural realms as the nation emerged out of the chaos and civil disruption initiated by the revolutionary uprising of 1910, along with how Usigli responded to national developments as a maturing artist and bureaucrat. Usigli and members of the "Sons of the Mexican Revolution" generation underwent a collective experience of childhood and early adulthood disrupted by revolutionary-era turmoil, one also marked by the political disunity and frequent rebellions of the 1920s. This collective experience, along with the teaching under influential and eclectic members of the *Juventud del Ateneo* and Siete Sabios intellectual generations many middle-class, Mexico City-based sons of the revolution enjoyed, produced divergent approaches to treating national issues within their cohort once the generation assumed the mantle as heads of government, business leaders, and intellectual elites during the postrevolutionary era—seen in the contrasts between Usigli and his contemporaries in Alemán and Alemán's UNAM accomplices.

[184] Niblo, 121.
[185] Niblo, 96-97.

Additionally, elites aligned with the Sonorista camp and eventually the PNR revised revolutionary history and memory, constructing a dominant official discourse that legitimized their administrations as born out of the demand for continued revolutionary reforms. They also responded to factional discord through the establishment of the official party, culminating in the creation of the *la Revolución* and Revolutionary Family narratives. Meanwhile, the perpetuation of *caudillismo*, personalist rule at various levels of politics, and political opportunism informed Usigli's growing dissatisfaction with Mexico's political reality, undergirding his critiques of revolutionary "demagoguery" and the dissonance between elite rhetoric and practices voiced in *El gesticulador*. Development of cultural nationalist programs attempted to fashion a new, unified Mexican national community and modernity following elite, domestic, and international advancements in aesthetics, cultural ideas, and social programming. In response, local norms, along with the diverging goals evinced by the heads of government ministries and competing means of mass media and mass communication, continued to contest such programs. However, by the end of the Cárdenas administration, a cohesive vocabulary recognizable as the dominant representation of cultural nationalism had emerged—albeit one that would expand and evolve throughout the postrevolutionary period.

Lastly, competing models of "professional" and "popular" theater emerged as one of the sites where debates over cultural nationalism, national and universal aesthetics, and Mexico's new modernity took place. Contemporary transitions from the Maximato to the Cárdenas *sexenio* and finally to the Ávila Camacho administration and their mix of consolidating single-party control and continuation of personalist rule amongst essential governors and regional *caciques* provided the backdrop behind which Usigli entered into public service in a number of ministries and fully matured as a playwright, author, and biting political satirist. During this period, he would call for an idealized professional theater tradition that was critically self-reflective, realist, and which drew on contemporary and traditional Mexican experiences of politics and social dynamics, while also mixing Western theater traditions culled from Greek Antiquity and modern European and American dramaturgy. Ultimately, Usigli formulated a distinct brand of cultural nationalism and a political ideology based in revolutionary-inspired reform that espoused the establishment of a definitively Mexican theater along with a truly revolutionary and democratic government as dual projects walking hand in hand. This envisioning of national theater

culminated in his play *El gesticulador* and accompanying essays, examined more in depth in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: *El gesticulador* and the Long Struggle to Staging

"No puede el mexicano moderno vencer en sólo un giro del sol una conducta que se ha convertido en una segunda naturaleza desde hace siglos. Una naturaleza que, en realidad, es para el mexicano moderno la primaria. Nuestra historia política es elocuente en probar que los gobiernos de México han creído siempre que la verdad no es otra cosa que una mentira generalizada…De la esperanza, tesis de la revolución, y de la demagogia, su antítesis, sale, para seguir la todavía válida definición hegeliana, una síntesis: la esperanza de que la demagogia tenga fin un día."

Rodolfo Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos*, 1938

"The modern Mexican cannot, in a single rotation of the sun, overcome a conduct that has become second nature over the centuries. A nature that, in reality, is first nature for the modern Mexican. Our political history is capable of proving that Mexican governments have always believed that the truth is nothing else but a generalized lie…From hope, the thesis of the revolution, from demagogy, its antithesis, emerges, following the still valid Hegelian definition, a synthesis: the faith that one day demagogy will have its end."

Rodolfo Usigli, "Epilogue on Mexican hypocrisy," *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos*, 1938

"A People Without Theater Are a People Without Truth:" El gesticulador and the Beginnings of a Long Campaign

Written over the course of September 5 to November 4 in 1938, *El gesticulador* is, in Usigli's words, a "piece for demagogues, in three acts."[186] Thus, the play's main targets, indeed the very audience it means to speak to most, are set out from the get-go. To summarize its plot, the piece revolves around the main protagonist, César Rubio, a former professor of the history of the Mexican Revolution at UNAM.[187] As the play opens, Rubio has fallen out of favor with the

[186] Rodolfo Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript (Mexico, 1938), cover. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 3 "*El gesticulador*, TS Draft."

[187] And paralleling Usigli's own experience as a professor at UNAM.

university's rector and been forced to move to his hometown in an unnamed northern state along the U.S.-Mexico border. Bringing his wife Elena, son Miguel, and daughter Julia reluctantly along with him, the Rubios begin to settle into their new home. Thinking the change in scenery and lifestyle will benefit his family, Rubio is surprised to find Miguel and Julia dismayed with their new surroundings and Elena disappointed with their loss in status. Unexpectedly, the family is visited almost immediately by an American professor named Oliver Bolton, an expert in the Mexican Revolution looking to write his latest bestseller. Rubio and Bolton quickly hit it off, turning their attention to their shared interest in revolutionary history, and the burning question at the heart of both of their research: what happened to former revolutionary general César Rubio, disappeared in 1914, at the height of the revolutionary civil war, when the country needed him most?

After Rubio confesses to knowing what happened with the fabled general, Bolton offers to handsomely compensate him if he'll tell him the whereabouts of Mexico's possible savior; an offer too delicious to pass up, as Rubio reveals that he is, in "fact," the legendary revolutionary Bolton is looking for. With the reemergence of *the* César Rubio, party officials call upon Rubio to run for state governor, pitting him against his former boss—and, as is revealed later, former aide to the revolutionary César Rubio—General Navarro. After several months of intense campaigning, election day nears, bringing with it a showdown between Rubio and Navarro. His opponent reveals he knows the truth behind Rubio's deception, that the professor is not the real César Rubio, and demands that Rubio pull out of the race or be publicly defaced as a fraud—until Usigli's protagonist pulls the final trick out of his sleeve. Rubio acknowledges he is not the revolutionary general, but he also knows, beyond a shadow of doubt, the identity of the man who killed the revolutionary César Rubio: Navarro himself. Threatening to disclose Navarro's role in murdering Mexico's last chance at progress, Rubio leaves to vote in the polls, only to be gunned down by a hitman paid off by Navarro, who claims the public figure of César Rubio as his personal martyr and promising to carry on the ideals Rubio represented. In the final scene, Miguel confronts Navarro over the assassination, and the two characters argue, until Navarro informs Miguel that this was the way Mexican politics had always worked: since the final days of the revolution, those who would go on to govern Mexico had always eliminated their opponents before adopting their ideas as their own. Navarro exits, leaving Miguel to contemplate what he will do with the knowledge of his father's assassination. "The truth!" Miguel exclaims,

before rushing off into the unknown, "running from the shadow of his father that would follow him the rest of his life."[188]

El gesticulador's most insightful moments come in the moments between Navarro, Rubio, and Navarro and Miguel, illuminating Usigli's perception of Mexican national politics in the crucial decade following the PNR's consolidation as official party, as well as how the play proposes a counternarrative to the official master narrative. Moments filled with such tense, powerful back-and-forth, where each character attempts to dominate the other, to symbolically subjugate them to their will over the course of a conversation, one can see how they could be taken as piercing metaphors for the manners by which interpersonal power acted in postrevolutionary political relationships. In the climactic scene between César and Navarro, after Navarro threatens to publicly defraud César as an imposter of the real César Rubio, César responds by throwing his criticism in his face:

> I may not be the great César Rubio, but who are you? Who is each of us in Mexico? Everywhere you encounter imposters, impersonators, simulators: murderers disguised as heroes, bourgeoises disguised as leaders, thieves disguised as congressmen, government officials disguised as sages, tyrants disguised as democrats, charlatans disguised as lawyers, demagogues disguised as men. Does anyone hold them accountable? They are all hypocritical imposters?[189]

Navarro continues to prod Rubio's charade, claiming that none have directly adopted another's identity as fully as Rubio, and Rubio pushes back, stating:

> They all steal other people's ideas; they are all fake like the bottles that are used in the theater: the label says cognac but they're full of lemonade…It's part of the culture. It runs

[188] Rodolfo Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript, 78. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 4 "*El gesticulador*, MS + TS Draft." Additionally, Usigli had planned but never completed a sequel to *El gesticulador* titled *Los herederos*, set in the decades since *El gesticulador*'s finale during the technocratic age of the PRI in the 1960s. *Los herederos* originally featured the plot line where an older, more mature Miguel would attempt to run against the still-governor Navarro as an opposing candidate, but ultimately fall to the same imposturing as his father—showing that Usigli believed the civilian administrations that replaced their military-dominated predecessors continued to practice and transform the style of political imposturing and two-faced practices developed by revolutionary elites. In Beardsell, 62.

[189] Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript, 60. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 4 "*El gesticulador*, MS + TS Draft."

> through our history, something you know nothing about…You worked closely with all the political bosses in all the parties because you have done the same favors for all of them…Instead of squashing you like an insect, they have covered you with honors and money because you knew their secrets and did their dirty deeds…You and your kind have shown your ineptitude, have demonstrated that you are rotten to the core: all you can do is add to Mexico's shame and hypocrisy.[190]

In the penultimate scene, the family is informed that Rubio has been murdered at the hands of an assassin who, unbeknownst to everyone but Miguel, was paid off by Navarro. The former general then delivers a rousing speech calling for the memorialization of César as a revolutionary hero and the people's continued struggle in the name of his so-called "revolutionary ideals":

> César Rubio was killed by reactionary forces while defending our revolutionary ideals. I felt great admiration for him. I went to the polls to withdraw my candidacy in his favor…But, if I am elected, I will make the memory of our César Rubio, a martyr of the Revolution who fell victim to a fanatic, reactionary conspiracy, into the most cherished of all. The state capital will bear his name, we will build a university in his memory, a true monument to remind future generations…And the widow and the children of César Rubio will be treated as if he were the Governor.[191]

Miguel then confronts Navarro over his father's assassination, leading to an exchange that unveils key insights into the unwritten rules under which postrevolution politics functioned:

> (Navarro) Young man, listen to what the people are saying, and they watched the incident. The man who fired the shot was a Catholic fanatic. I have proof. My own men tried to catch him. (Miguel) And just to be sure, they killed him to destroy all evidence. You had my father murdered and then you killed the man who fired the shot, the same way you killed César Rubio… (Navarro) When you calm down, young man, you'll

[190] Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript, 61. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 4 "*El gesticulador*, MS + TS Draft."
[191] Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript, 74, 76. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 4 "*El gesticulador*, MS + TS Draft."

> understand where your real duty lies. I understand it, even though your father was my political opponent. Any man who sheds his blood for his country is a hero. And Mexico needs her heroes to survive. Your father was a martyr of the Revolution… (Miguel) I will find proof that my father was not a hero and you are a murderer. (Navarro) What proof? You'll have to prove one thing or the other. If you accuse me of being a murderer, some misguided people might believe you; but since you maintain that your father was a fraud, then nobody will believe a word of what you say. Young man, you are my best defense and your father was certainly a great man. I owe him the election.[192]

Thus, Navarro's speech and the exchange between the now-governor and Miguel, especially when acted out in a public space like the stage, provide a powerful critique of the ways in which the political elite who emerged out of the revolutionary decade assumed and maintained power, especially through methods like coopting the collective memory of and ideals of former enemies, paying homage to and memorializing their lives and deaths, and converting them into one-dimensional tropes for inclusion in the Revolutionary Family.

Intriguingly, the plot point in which Navarro compels his personal hitman to dress himself in Catholic crosses, murder Rubio, and in turn be gunned down by Navarro's henchmen, thereby leaving no trace of his connections to Navarro, parallels a real conspiracy charged against Plutarco Elías Calles over his supposed involvement in assassinating Obregón. On July 17, 1928, two weeks after having run for and won reelection as president of Mexico, Álvaro Obregón was assassinated by José de León Toral, a "devout Catholic and a sympathizer of the Cristeros,"[193] referring to the ardent Catholics, radicalized priests, and their sympathizers who attempted to combat Calles' anticlerical laws during the Cristero Rebellion. Soon after, suspicions emerged, particularly from the *obregonista* camp, that Calles was responsible for ordering the former *caudillo*'s assassination, either paying off Toral or having authorities use him as a scapegoat, thereby covering up the true circumstances of the murder;[194] this suspicion also played a significant role in compelling many *obregonistas* and members of the military to

[192] Usigli, *El gesticulador*, typescript, 75-77. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 4 "*El gesticulador*, MS + TS Draft."
[193] Joseph and Buchenau, 104.
[194] Joseph and Buchenau, 104.

join with the Escobar revolt the following year.[195] As of yet, no conclusive evidence has emerged to support this claim,[196] but it was certainly a conspiracy theory known to the Mexican public at the time. Intriguingly, it appears Usigli likely picked up on this conspiracy theory and codified it into the plot of *El gesticulador*, where Navarro asserts the assassination of César Rubio at the hands of a "Catholic fanatic" in order to clear his path to the governorship of opponents and open a future of political "service" free(er) from opposition.

In his "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana" ("Epilogue on Mexican Hypocrisy"), a prologue attached to *El gesticulador* written before the author even finished outlining the play,[197] Usigli writes, "Demagoguery is as responsible as militarism for the fact that Carranza would die for the same reason that years later Calles would become the "strong man" or "Supreme Chief." Thanks to demagoguery, Obregón came to transform the lie, the democratic faith that gave a banner and a slogan to the revolution, that is to say, that which revealed the revolution as a lie."[198] For Usigli, the development of personalist rule and the proliferation of opportunism amongst those who took the mantle of leading the country after 1920 ascribed the corruption of the original ideals that inspired the revolution, for which demagoguery was the main culprit. "Demagoguery, on the other hand, has deprived the revolution of its classification as a prolific transformative event and mutilated its evolution. Demagoguery, for example, has qualified many governments as revolutionary for publicity purposes, even though, headed by *caudillos* of the revolution, they were dark equivalents of backwards tyrannies that, in place of sincerely criticizing themselves as they were, instead covered themselves with the veneer of the revolution."[199]

Beyond the historical context of Mexico in the years since the end to the revolutionary decade of 1910-1920, Usigli allocates the reasons behind the hypocritical nature of

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[195] O'Malley, 29-30.
[196] Joseph and Buchenau, 104.
[197] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 1. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."
[198] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 15. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."
[199] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 15. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."

postrevolutionary governments to an innately Mexican quality of failing to "sincerely criticize themselves." The tendency to examine contemporary political and social problems and deduce their causes to supposedly "innate" Mexican qualities is frequent in both anthropological and sociological analyses of the era, and for which Manuel Gamio's *Forjando patria* and especially Samuel Ramos' *El perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México* are clear antecedents. Through Navarro's cooption of César Rubio's revolutionary image and his calls to memorialize Rubio as a "martyr of the Revolution," Usigli transported the notion of an innately Mexican hypocrisy into his analysis of Mexico's political reality during the postrevolutionary decades, where the "Janus-faced" discrepancies between revolutionary rhetoric and reforms during the Obregón, Calles, Maximato, Cárdenas, Ávila Camacho, and eventually Alemán administrations worked to feign a revolutionary nature for the national government while disguising elites' fallacies in producing tangible reform.

Usigli traces this lack of sincere self-reflection to the experience of European conquest,[200] in which the descendants of indigenous and mestizo peoples "learned to lie in order to protect themselves, or developed their natural incapacity for sincerely criticizing themselves, under [the] colonial regime." Such an analysis points towards such phenomena as the linguistic development of *albures*, a form of speaking by which those groups excluded from idealized nationhood and higher-class life—indigenous and *mestizo* peasants and urban poor—could disguise the true meaning of their words and subvert the power of colonial and postcolonial

[200] This understanding of Spanish conquest of what would become the Spanish-speaking Americas connects to and may have been somewhat inspired by the so-called Spanish Black Legend narrative, propelled initially by European opponents of Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries to accuse Spain of an overly abusive colonial system, even as the same European countries who demonized Spain and its colonies maintained their own colonies around the world. The Black Legend narrative thus provided a cultural scapegoat for actors within and outside of territories colonized by Spain to call attention to Spanish colonization as the root cause of fundamental issues within those territories. Thus, this narrative was extant at the time of Usigli's writing, and may have informed, to some extent, Usigli's thoughts expressed in "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana" and accompanying pieces: at several points in his "Doce notas," the author circles the notion that Mexico would be in a better contemporary position had it been conquered by the English-speaking British. That being said, the extent of the influence of the Black Legend narrative on Usigli's thinking was most likely minor at most. With the pieces accompanying *El gesticulador*, Usigli attempted to define what he saw as a fundamental component to Mexican identity and culture—hypocrisy—through tracing its roots back to the political, social, economic, and cultural systems set up during the *colonia*. And rather than demonizing Spain or the Spanish colonial system, Usigli, for the most part, simply points to the notion that inequalities caused by the institutional structures of the *colonia* heavily informed a long-standing legacy of truth fabrication within Mexican politics and social relations—a notion that is not without basis. After all, the institutionalization of racial hierarchy into colonial structures, enforcing a fabrication of truth surrounding conceptions of white Spanish racial superiority, continued to inform social, economic, and political disparities across racial groups well into post-Independence Mexico's history.

elites. Usigli deplored what he called "frayed *cantinflismo*," a clear allusion to *albures*, and what he saw as the "failure of [honest] diction",[201] a disgust with what he considered Mexicans' innate inability to express themselves honestly that he indicated further manifested in the political realm with revolutionary double-speak.[202] He also considered this trend toward *albures* and dishonest expression both in common social life and elites' rhetorical appeals to the public as further evidence for rationalizing the development of a professional Mexican theater.[203] And this tradition of self-disguise, internalized hypocrisy, and political masquerade is a central trend for the "Epílogo", "Doce notas", and the play they accompanied: indeed, one of the central points behind *El gesticulador*'s narrative is portraying this system's perpetuation into the present.

For Usigli, the colonial system comprised the "first official fabrication of truth in Mexico," a trend developed over the centuries where indigenous, mestizo, and creole groups were excluded from the benefits enjoyed by peninsulares[204] and which continued after independence under what Usigli called the hypocritical Iturbide, Santa-Anna, Juárez, and Porfirio Díaz governments. Iturbide, in his personalist attempt to become emperor after declaring Mexico independent; Santa Anna, in a similar design to become Mexico's eternal *caudillo*; Juárez, in the enforcement of Reform-era laws that worked to centralize power at the federal level and eventually counteract their proposed intent for expanding nationhood to those same groups excluded during the *colonia*; and Díaz especially, in his claims to "not oppose democracy in Mexico" after enjoying 34 years of dictator rule. And yet, rather than banished through the "transformative event" of the revolution, what Usigli considered a distinctly Mexican trend for fabricating the truth is perpetuated by the opportunism and demagoguery of postrevolutionary elites, in both politics and the new system for obtaining status and power developed following the revolutionary decade.

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[201] Rodolfo Usigli, "Doce Notas," in *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos* (Mexico: Editorial Stylo, 1947), 231. Interestingly, this diatribe against the practice of *albures*, although inspired above all by Usigli's criticism of the tendency amongst Mexicans to disguise their true intentions and true selves, does carry an element of classism, intentional or unintentional, against social and linguistic traditions of his lower-class compatriots. Usigli was, after all, a middle-class, European-descendant intellectual, one whose criticism of *albures* and *cantinfleando* was also motivated by his distance from the social groups who utilized *albures* for upending traditional power dynamics. Thus, although advanced by Usigli's vision of the changes Mexico needed for future improvement and the likely optimistic intent behind this vision, his criticism of lower-class social practices failed to recognize how such practices already worked to contest extant power dynamics.

[202] I.e., also the discrepancy between public rhetoric and tangible practice.

[203] Usigli, "Doce notas", 231.

[204] I.e., white Spaniards born in Spain.

Accordingly, "Demagoguery replaces reality, excites the inclination towards belief, and tends to precipitate the process of the collectivization of lies; but it isn't the instrument of one or the other [demagogue], but all of them."[205] Touching on the obfuscation of revolutionary discord in favor of the homogenized Revolutionary Family narrative and the attempt to collectivize the hero cults of Madero, Zapata, Obregón, and other revolutionaries, Usigli argued the most important of the collectivized lies was the individual lie that the revolution fought for a Mexico capable of democracy, an ideal originally put forth by Madero's call for effective suffrage. However, by the time of Cárdenas' government, this ideal had become demonstrably more of a self-delusion, due to the contradictory nature of opportunism and *caudillismo* embodied most during the Maximato. Thus, once again Usigli tied in political hypocrisy with what he considered a society-wide inclination for public masquerading, stating "…it happens that the Mexican man can enjoy an image of politeness by bowing deeply in the street while beating his wife in Mexico, just as the Porfirian dictatorship made Mexico an apparently prosperous and civilized country; Madero's government, a country apparently democratic; and the current government, a country apparently leftist, etc."[206] This statement particularly touches on two key connections for understanding the critiques Usigli levels in both "Epílogo" and *El gesticulador*.

First, his claim towards an innately Mexican affinity for public masquerade picks up a central theme in *El perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México*, an essay first published in 1934 by author and philosopher Samuel Ramos and who Usigli considered "the only critical philosopher that we've had this century."[207] Ramos' most important insights come in developing ideas similarly criticizing what he and Usigli considered Mexicans' inability to sincerely analyze and express themselves, found in both 19th century bourgeoisie Mexicans' attempted imitation of presumedly superior European culture—"in order to feel that his value is equal to that of European men"[208]—and the cultural type known as the *pelado*, or urban *mestizo* and indigenous

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[205] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 14. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."

[206] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 15. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."

[207] Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 10. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."

[208] Samuel Ramos, *El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1952), 53.

men who attempted to disguise their low self-esteem through macho, swaggering self-posturing and the use of both *albures* and physical violence to undermine the masculinity and sexuality of those they considered their opponents.[209] One of the most visible and eventually celebrated examples of the *pelado* type comes in theater and film star Mario "Cantinflas" Moreno's performances across his many theater and film appearances during the 1930s and 1940s, both elevating the trope to the national conscience while fueling the fire behind concerns over the proliferation of the *pelado*'s supposedly explosive and dangerous conduct in public. Thus, Ramos' analysis, while flawed, was considered especially erudite at the time for Mexico City's middle-class literati, and clearly influenced Usigli's own thoughts and his development of his critique of Mexican political and cultural hypocrisy in his subsequent works. Particularly, Ramos' statement that "The *pelado* is neither a strong nor valient man. The appearance that he shows us is false. It is a "camouflage" to mislead himself and all those he encounters…he lives in constant fear of being uncovered, distrusting [even] himself…and distrust[ing] all men who come near him…The *pelado* has two personalities: one real, one fictional"[210] emerges in Usigli's expansion of this self- and external deception to that of the publicly effaced posturing political elites displayed.

Second, Usigli's claim that Cárdenas' administration only "apparently" represented a leftist government. As examined in the prior chapter, Cárdenas employed a strategic mix of radical idealism designed to fulfill the reforms demanded by the 1917 Constitution and measured pragmatism in moments of crisis, a mix that extended beyond into his administration and his support for useful regional *caciques* who espoused ideological views and practices distinct from his own. Usigli enjoyed a firsthand view of this max of idealism and pragmatism through his positions in the state bureaucracy, and it is Cárdenas' pragmatism that the playwright took exception to. Usigli, who considered himself someone "who [had] always been on the left and

[209] The *pelado* constituted a great social concern, especially in Mexico City, during early 20th century Mexico, and numerous historiographical studies have examined both the type itself and especially Ramos' ideas that most prominently defined and criticized this type—the number of studies that have included Ramos' conceptualization of the *pelado* point to its continued relevance within the historiography of this period, while also suggesting how the *pelado* type worked to contest ossifying elite conceptions of *mexicanidad* during the cultural revolution and subsequent decade.
[210] Ramos, 56.

written leftist works,"[211] had turned out with thousands of Mexicans to celebrate Cárdenas' repudiation of U.S. oil companies' monopolization of Mexican resources;[212] however, he was also aware, more than most, of the political posturing and personal opportunism that persisted under and within Cárdenas' presidency. Especially through his service in the Office of Press and Radio, he gained an intimate understanding of the practical considerations and Janus-faced separation between official rhetoric and tangible policy that existed as one of the "open secrets" of postrevolutionary politics. Indeed, a 1935 article published by *El Nacional*, the largest state-backed newspaper in the 1930s, mentions Usigli as one of the delegates from the Secretaría Particular—the ministry focused on managing press and public relations—attached to one of Cárdenas' regular tours of the country,[213] through which the president became renowned for meeting with and engaging humbly with everyday citizens—a measure of populist engagement that also had its basis in ensuring popular support for his government.

Particularly concerning for Usigli, Cárdenas' blend of radicalism and pragmatism that allowed him and his administration to achieve significant reforms, parlay concessions for the Church and conservative state governors into stabilizing support his regime, and use the corporatist restructuring of powerful organizations to pull the reigns on state-supported activism also extended into the realms of artistic expression and censorship. Cárdenas' *sexenio* was and still is often considered one ripe for ample free speech and critique within the arts and the press: Cantinflas, for example, was able to parody the labor radicalism of Lombardo Toledano in the widely publicized "The Polemic of the Century: Cantinflas vs. Morones" and other *cardenista* policies in the politically-charged *teatro de revista* staged at the Follies Bergere theater, a performance that drew favorable responses in the press,[214] while magazines like *Hoy*, *Rotofoto*, and *Mañana* used photos to display "a distinct irreverence toward presidentialism."[215] However, the fact that Usigli's *El gesticulador* suffered official or unofficial censorship after Usigli

[211] Juan de Valencia, "No hay critica, exclama Usigli," May 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 230.
[212] According to Joseph and Buchenau, "more than 100,000 people participated in boisterous celebratory rallies, and thousands of telegrams, written by ordinary citizens who offered to pay for the expropriation, poured into the National Palace." In Joseph and Buchenau, 133.
[213] "En el tren presidencial: gráfico exclusivo de 'El Nacional'," *El Nacional*, 1935. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 72.
[214] Pilcher, 51-52.
[215] Mraz, *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 117-118.

finished its composition during the final two years of Cárdenas' presidency demonstrates the ambiguity and paradoxes behind this so-called era of freedom of expression.

Most likely, the play's criticism of the foundations of the postrevolutionary political system—one of those inviolable restrictions demanded in press reporting[216] and professional, state-sponsored theater at the time—as well as its direct implication that party officials would knowingly sponsor a candidate who committed assassination, election rigging, and symbolically murdered the "original" revolutionary idealism embodied by César Rubio, motivated the government to block its performance on a public stage. Additionally, the milieu of domestic crises that emerged during the final years of Cárdenas' presidency had weakened the president's national standing, likely compelling public officials to clamp down on critically voices; especially that of a former bureaucrat who served in a number of ministries, and whose criticism of the system was likely lent greater credence amongst his peers through his former positions in the national government. Indeed, after finishing writing *El gesticulador*, Usigli gave various readings in front of groups of his close friends and some of Mexico's most prominent playwrights and intellectuals—Xavier Villaurrutia, Agustín Lazo, Luis G. Basurto, Jorge Cuesta, and Rafael F. Muñoz, amongst others—who generally responded "officials in the Cárdenas administration won't permit its performance."[217] Thus began a long campaign to see *El gesticulador* performed on stage, and which would eventually take Usigli to the heights (and depths) of the fluctuations between state sponsorship and informal censorship.

Usigli and the Ávila Camacho Years

By the time of July 1943, Usigli had first completed *El gesticulador* almost five years prior, and still he had yet to see the play carried onto the stage. Usigli's satire had suffered continued censorship under the Ávila Camacho administration, blocked from staging on a public stage, especially that of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. However, in the same year he was finally able to publish *El gesticulador* in circulated print—first in chunks published weekly in the newspaper *El Hijo Pródigo*, then in full within the following year in *Letras de México*. The publication in *Letras* also saw the accompanying essay "Doce notas" ("Twelve Notes"), a piece

[216] Lawson, 25.
[217] Guillermina Ibarra Fuentes, "César Rubio y Usigli en la hoguera de la crítica," *Rodolfo Usigli ciudadano del teatro: memoria de los homenajes a Rodolfo Usigli 1990 y 1991* (Mexico City: CONACULTA, INBA, CITRU, 1992), 101.

similar to "Epílogo" in its further detailing and explanation of the ideas expressed in *El gesticulador*, now displayed against the context of the ultranationalism and war-time years under Ávila Camacho. Although *El gesticulador* had been censored by *cardenista* officials, the Cárdenas had at least aligned (relatively speaking) with Usigli's self-described leftist orientation and advanced policies that attempted to carry out the land redistribution, resource nationalization, labor protection, and secular education reforms demanded by the 1917 Constitution. Ávila Camacho, on the other hand, demonstrated quite possibly the antithesis to Usigli's political project: personally bland, a devout Catholic whose open profession of faith galvanized conservative Catholics,[218] a presidential candidate whose selection as the official party nominee's revealed the continuation of both the personalist transition of power and militarism, elected in one of the most blatantly manipulated elections of the 20th century, and whose subsequent actions in office further moved the nation away from both revolutionary reform and the realization of truly democratic processes. Ávila Camacho's administration also tended towards tightening control over the press and the arts after the more open period of expression under Cárdenas, due to both stricter enforcement of patriotic nationalism during wartime and the demand to maintain political equilibrium in the turbulent wartime atmosphere, while also rolling back on the progressive agenda characteristic of the earlier years of the former president's term.

Ávila Camacho's strident defense of a centrist position, further propelled both by fears of Nazi-fascist infiltration of Mexico, the push to tamp down on labor radicalism in order to maintain wartime production, and the growing incongruence between former revolutionary idealism and the new marriage between heads of government, big business, and their collective project towards capital development, compelled Ávila Camacho to "justify the suppression of political competition"—the president even stated "'in the face of the war to which Nazi-fascist aggression has driven us, internal controversies—no matter how respectable—must go silent'."[219] The SEP's purging of socialist education during the early years of the Ávila Camacho *sexenio*, raids on the PCM, and general opposition to the Left also further soured Usigli's disposition towards the Ávila Camacho government. The termination of socialist

[218] As noted in the previous chapter, the reemergence of the conservative, Catholic Right coincided with the rise of fascist and quasi-fascist organizations like the *camisas doradas* and UNS, which occupied the opposite end of the political spectrum to Usigli's left-leaning orientation.
[219] *Dictablanda*, 161.

education appears to have struck a particular chord, given Usigli's teaching at the UNAM during an environment more favorable to an intellectual with his views and his frustration with the state of university education that he voiced years earlier in "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana."[220] Hence the bitter tone Usigli espoused in "Doce notas" towards both censorship under Ávila Camacho's government and the state of Mexican politics during his term.

Usigli starts his "Doce notas," in a somewhat hubristic turn, by lambasting the Senate for what he considered a personal and professional slight in failing to deliver him the Premio Nacional de Letras (National Award for Literature) for *El gesticulador* five years prior. Responding to the Senate's requirement that a piece of literature demonstrate "revolutionary content" in order to be considered deserving of the national award, Usigli states, "A work cannot be Mexican precisely by being revolutionary and by coming to ruin a series of traditionally Mexican values… But the great achievement of the demagoguery in Mexico consists in having generalized a single lie into giving it the seal of truth—I refer to the revolution [of 1910-1920]—and in having hammered into all of the talking heads of our political scene the idea that something is Mexican only if it is revolutionary. And, as always happens, the sustained lie has come to create the bitter truth."[221] Touching once again on what he considered the hypocrisy inherent behind the self-justifying notion of "*la Revolución*" and *oficialismo*, Usigli also writes, "…the reality is that the Senate discussed the awarding of a national award of literature in 1938, but has never conferred it. And not for the lack of works, but for the lack of parties and, probably, for the lack of literary education,"[222] suggesting that the Senate knowingly refused to select a recipient for the National Award in 1938 because of his work's subversive nature, the potential scandal that could have erupted had *El gesticulador* not won, and the senators' supposed lack of critically-minded learning that prevented them from being able to fully

[220] Although the UNAM never had a pedagogical dictum towards socialist education, undoubtedly the support for socialist education initiatives at the primary level under Cárdenas ingratiated the president to Usigli; that being said, the playwright voiced discontent with the state of university salaries and a general lack of academic advancement, motivated in Usigli's view by the failure of revolutionary reform and the perpetuation of demagoguery, during Cárdenas *sexenio*. These thoughts were expressed in Usigli, "Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana," 19-20. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder "El Gesticulador, TS Draft of 'Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana,' 1938."
[221] Usigli, "Doce notas," 223-224.
[222] Usigli, "Doce notas," 224.

comprehend what he considered the truly revolutionary character of his play in criticizing the failures of Mexico's political system.

Second, Usigli criticizes the "only apparently democratic" nature of Ávila Camacho's government, writing, "In the communications from the official party to the press, in the offices and telegrams, interviews, agreements, etc., thrown as sand in the eyes of the public, it is spoken of the inviolable electoral, of the will of the people, etc., and all this will be known as fact *for eternity* in the annals of the party."[223] Such comments reflect the reality of the relationship between the press and national government during the 1940s, in which the journalists, editors, and owners attached to the nation's largest dailies centered in Mexico City tended to adopt and simply reproduce the lines fed them by the government's press offices and party correspondents—both in immensely popular publications like *Excélsior* and *El Universal* and the legitimately state-sponsored *El Nacional* and *El Popular*. Owners tended to come from the same postrevolutionary elite as the career politicians and capitalists who dominated politics and Mexico's industries, sharing similar upbringing and educational, gender, and ideological backgrounds, and many directors and contributors during the 1940s were distinctly centrist or right-of-center, aligning with the post-Cárdenas convictions endorsed by the national government.[224] Bribes, subsidization of paper through the state-controlled Productora y Importadora de Papel S.A. (PIPSA), and government loans for newspapers who favorably covered the state's actions further motivated close alignment with pro-government, *oficialista* narratives. The informal and formal methods the government employed for manipulating the press also merged with commonly-held notions of what constituted "good" or "responsible" journalism at the time, that being press coverage that maintained "overtly nationalist" and "transcendental" norms—i.e., cognizant of the broader social consequences and unease that reporting could stoke if it "incorrectly" handled government policies, reports on corruption, and especially crises that could upset the fragile complacency of Mexico's masses, journalists tended to report on government actions in a favorable, forward-thinking fashion.[225] Lastly, and most representative of the turn towards a pro-business, capitalist developmental outlook during Ávila Camacho's *sexenio*, press owners and editors tended to back policies that supported their own

[223] Usigli, "Doce notas," 224-225.
[224] Smith, 46-51.
[225] Smith, 44-45, 50-52.

business interests,[226] benefitting greatly from and touting the government's newfound support for big business that also allowed them to consolidate their press empires and expand into other ventures. Such a trend also reflected the personalist opportunism of the political sphere, further revealing the interplay between business and political elites in the postrevolutionary era.

The presidential election of 1940 which Usigli references was one of the most contested of the postrevolutionary era, and consequently, considered one of the most controversial and "clumsily rigged."[227] Supporters of Ávila Camacho and oppositional hopeful General Juan Andreu Almazán violently clashed at voting booths, and despite initial reporting declaring Almazán's victory the day afterwards,[228] PRM-dominated election officials eventually confirmed Ávila Camacho as the winner. The 1940 elections demonstrated the perpetuation of rigging election results as one of the primary methods employed by the official party in ensuring its chosen candidates achieved electoral victory. As Usigli puts it, "The elections were 'the most peaceful that have been seen', according to the announcer of a news bulletin before the unanimous laughter of an amoral public."[229] Mexicans from above and below in the postrevolutionary period were aware of the violence surrounding elections—consider the Topilejo Massacre in 1929, for example[230]—and even more so, knew that the official party rigged elections in favor of their selected candidates.[231] Further touching on what he viewed as the continuation of personalist and ideological corruption during the Ávila Camacho administration, Usigli also directly notes the new pro-business trend in the national government, pointing out "the presence of public officials in the inaugural ceremonies of the great private

[226] Smith, 47.
[227] Niblo, 87; *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 136.
[228] Niblo, 87.
[229] Usigli, "Doce notas," 225.
[230] During the 1929 presidential race between Ortiz Rubio and Vasconcelos, national publications with links to the party and its leaders published favorable articles promoting Ortiz Rubio while lambasting Vasconcelos, allied governors and *caciques* rigged electoral results in favor of Ortiz Rubio, and military force was called upon in order to break up the opposition, including the massacre of hundreds of Vasconcelos' supporters and subsequent cover-up in the town of Topilejo, located on the southern outskirts of Mexico City. The 1929 race can be seen as setting the tone for much of the future PNR, PRM, and PRI's tactics for ensuring electoral victory. As described in Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern México, 1810-1996*, trans. Hank Heifetz (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1997), 430, and O'Malley, 30.
[231] As reprinted in *Dictablanda*, 149: "Rubén Pabello Acosta, a journalist and state deputy, began his coverage of the 1952 presidential elections with 'the story…[of] a gringo who, wanting to boast to a poor Mexican of how in his country everything was done with mathematical precision, told him: 'In the US the winner is definitively known the day after the elections are done.' Our rustic fellow countryman immediately replied: 'That's nothing, mister. In Mexico we know who's going to win a year before the election is held.'"

industries; the encouragement of the private initiative, the respect of capital, and the slow descent that can be observed in the curve of power from the Mexican labor movement, are so many other inane fires burned by the government before the bright shadow—but not the body—of the democracy,"[232] representing a further turn away from revolutionary idealism.

Concerned as well with the failure of the opposition in preventing Ávila Camacho's election, Usigli writes "In any case, as Mexican politics are a trade for which it is not sufficient, for which, in reality, intelligence is completely unnecessary, the talented aficionados—amongst them some of the Siete Sabios of the Street of San Ildefonso—, models of integrity (another thing that, we can agree on, seems useless in politics), ceded the political stage to the professionals, those who they reviled and covered with moderately justified insults."[233] While describing the perpetuation of postrevolutionary elites' rule and their continual success in defeating opposition, thereby maintaining and furthering the system of single-party rule into the new decade, Usigli also touches on a significant development produced by the 1940 election: that of the emergence and eventual acquiescence of the influential *Siete Sabios*. Lombardo Toledano, founder of the CTM, early on announced his support for Ávila Camacho, displaying his officialist stance towards preserving the party and the nation's unity and (intentionally or unintentionally) moving his union to centrism.[234] Meanwhile, Gómez Morín's newly-formed PAN produced a decent opposition campaign and initially denounced the results of the election. Although most likely resistant to PAN's pro-Catholic stance and its proximity to the fascist Right, Usigli may have viewed the PAN as a necessary contender to official party rule and a suggestion of the push towards democratization—before Gómez Morin ultimately ceded the presidential and congressional elections of 1940 and 1942 without more protest than "insults".

To Usigli, the instance of the rise in oppositional movements and their eventual defeat in the 1940 elections once again revealed how effective the PRM and aging elites had become at constructing the system of elections, clientelism, and opportunist exchange that defended single-party rule and ensured outcomes favorable to their interests: "The other men, whose imposturing

[232] Usigli, "Doce notas," 225.
[233] Usigli, "Doce notas," 226.
[234] Niblo, 79-80; soon after Ávila Camacho's election, however, Lombardo Toledano would quit—or was arguably forced out of—the leadership of the CTM, a move motivated both by the administration's anti-union stance and his desire to pursue his personal transnational labor project, the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina; in *Dictablanda*, 52-53, and Niblo, 80-81.

is already old, do not do good politics; but they have done politics for many years; they have acquired the capacity of breathing within politics without poisoning themselves with the vapors that bid farewell [to lesser men/politicians]; they have accustomed themselves to a climate that, when it doesn't kill, it immunizes."[235] Despite the emergence of significant right-leaning oppositional movements like Almazán's conservative coalition, the PAN, the UNS, or relatively unqualified suspicions that Cárdenas would use the election controversy to override the principle of no-reelection and perpetuate his rule,[236] the inner circle of the PRM and labor heads like Lombardo Toledano had coalesced around ensuring that the PRM machine would carry Ávila Camacho to victory.

Usigli goes on to affirm, as he did in the Epílogo, that "the reason for why the demagoguery had triumphed so overwhelmingly in Mexico"[237] is the continued lack of a national theater tradition. To Usigli, music—theater's more primitive cousin—tamed the "wild beasts" of man, plying them with sweet melodies and enticing choruses, just as politicians' double-speak and rhetoric-laden speeches whipped crowds into a frenzy[238]—much like Navarro after murdering César Rubio. By contrast, theater was the most advanced of the arts according to Usigli, due to the fact that its spirit "is neither artistic nor poetic…[but] human:" more than music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture, which Usigli considered the five arts that preceded theater, theater's spirit, its instruments, and its subjects were human in nature.[239] Through the distinctly human quality of theater, expressed as much in its form—actors performing and interacting in front of an audience—as its content—depicting the wide range of dramatic and comedic, romantic and realistic elements that constitute the human experience—theater presents a unique form for representing social and political reality, especially in Mexico. According to Usigli, "the theory of theater as a punishment and public flagellation should open in countries like Mexico the same as an [open] wound. So that all of the repressions, silences, the ambitious inferiority of a race in process of creating itself, the lost sentiments, corrupted in the

[235] Usigli, "Doce notas," 226.
[236] Niblo, 87-88.
[237] Usigli, "Doce notas," 228.
[238] Usigli, "Doce notas," 228-229.
[239] Rodolfo Usigli, "Anatomía del teatro," *El Nacional*, 13 de abril de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 200.

dark heart of a nationality [stuck] between two shadows,[240] could, finally, breathe through the wound."[241] Thus, Usigli saw theater as the art form most capable of assisting Mexicans in confronting and critically analyzing the tendency towards self-disguise and hiding one's true self he viewed as endemic to Mexican culture.

As such, theater could work to expose the fallacies of both hypocrisy-laden rhetoric and revolutionary demagoguery. Through compelling elites and "an amorphous audience [composed of all classes]" to attend the theater, Mexicans would enjoy harsh, but truthful, depictions of the hypocrisies of their political system and social interactions in real time,[242] collectively participating in a space uniquely capable of gathering people across classes and ideological positions. This sort of audience engagement with the theater had its contemporary antecedents in the *revista* tradition, which Usigli had long-lauded as a "popular theater…without which there never would have been able to exist a legitimate theater:"[243] as noted in the Introduction and Chapter 1, *revista* satirizations of dominant political culture had frequently drawn strong audience participation from the predominantly lower-class audiences, influencing the formation of a collective understanding of elite corruption amongst Mexico City's lower-classes. Transported to the professional stage of theaters like the Palacio de Bellas Artes, and particularly in drawing in spectators that included the elites of Mexico City, Mexicans would engage, as part of a broader audience, face-to-face with representations of Mexican hypocrisy on the stage. In Usigli's rather optimistic view, elites, workers, lower-class participants in informal economies, and the middle class would then collectively reconsider the failures of the single-party system and form political unity. However, although the *revista* tradition represented a thriving example of politically critical and unifying theater in the popular realm, for the time being Mexico still lacked such an element in the professional theater realm. Thus, the continuation of demagoguery and lack of a truly Mexican democracy following Ávila Camacho's election converged with the continued absence of a critically reflective, realist, "truly" Mexican, and professional theater tradition that he believed capable of inspiring democracy in Mexico (and in another twist on

[240] I.e., the shadow of the legacy of racial *mestizaje*, the often-violent mixing of indigenous and Spanish peoples birthed through Spanish conquest.
[241] Usigli, "Anatomía del teatro," *El Nacional*, 13 de abril de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 200.
[242] Usigli, "Doce notas," 230-231.
[243] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 257.

contemporary fears, Usigli claimed nationalist theater tradition would also provide Mexico the remedy against U.S. imperialism).[244]

In his last note, Usigli returns to the central question of why *El gesticulador* had not yet been performed publicly in Mexico: "I was requested for a season of municipal theater in Bellas Artes in 1940; but the then-current municipal authority in that time—what was his name?—assumed that it wasn't possible to stage this play without staging another in which it were spoken poorly and clearly of the bourgeoisie pigs and of the repugnant capitalists."[245] His statement refers to the *cardenista*-era requirement for socialist revolutionary works that criticized bourgeoisie values and the oppression Mexico's peasants and workers suffered from upper-class businessmen, especially those from the U.S. He also states, "Next, I tried to make him see that a government of the revolution that were to unmask the bad revolutionaries is an exceptional government, and, above all, authentically revolutionary; but he responded that this reasoning could be valid in Switzerland, but not in Mexico,"[246] denouncing once again the lack of a national government and political system willing to openly recognize, examine, and criticize corrupt politicians and generals who used revolutionary rhetoric for their own personal gain.

Usigli ends the essay with considering how his play may be further censored and he may even be arrested under the recently-promulgated *ley de disolución social* ("social dissolution law"), stating that he isn't "suspicious of the committee that works in a ghostly way to judge the crimes of "social dissolution," for everything that I have written moves in the air of Mexico."[247] The social dissolution law, a rather broad piece of legislation enacted during WWII that gave authorities carte blanche to jail those considered "dissidents" by the state,[248] stated that any groups of three or more people convening in public locations like bars could be arrested if conversation overheard expressed explicit tones towards broad definitions of overthrowing or subverting the government and public officials' authority, especially if such conversation followed communist lines. Such legislation further demonstrated the lengths the Ávila Camacho administration was willing to go to ensure national "unity." Although Usigli appeared to believe the law wouldn't be used to further censor his push to publicly perform *El gesticulador*, the *ley*

[244] Usigli, "Doce notas," 230-231, 237.
[245] Usigli, "Doce notas," 243-244.
[246] Usigli, "Doce notas," 244
[247] Usigli, "Doce notas," 244.
[248] *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 5.

de disolución social further exhibited symptoms of Mexican elites' unwillingness to accurately and publicly criticize their indiscretions, leading the playwright to claim, "For Mexico to have its own theater, it needs to be willing to undress itself."[249] With the lack of a distinctly Mexican professional theater being the central symbol of the nation's democratic malaise, once he finally achieved staging of *El gesticulador* at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Usigli would claim he had finally "created a Mexican theater."[250]

The Final Push to Public Staging

Having enlisted in the diplomatic corps in 1934, Usigli served the final years of WWII abroad in the Mexican embassy in Paris. Although originally planned and even scheduled to visit the embassy in Moscow and study Soviet theater trends, a last-minute change from the Ávila Camacho administration sent him to Paris instead, where the author was able to work with and develop a long-standing friendship with likeminded intellectual Octavio Paz and meet and show legendary British playwright George Bernard Shaw his *Corona de sombra* work. Hunting down Shaw in the midst of air raids and blackouts of a war-torn London, Usigli finally earned a powerful meeting with the playwright, in which the Englishman expressed his belief in Usigli's ability to write intelligent, moving plays that could help establish a more prominent theater tradition in his country.[251]

Returning from France in 1946, Usigli appears to have been rejuvenated by time away from his country. Distanced from the nonstop murmuring of theater critics surrounding the lack of a truly Mexican theater (and to which, ostensibly, Usigli was part and parcel of the problem Mexican playwrights played in this failure),[252] Usigli reveled in the role he played in assisting Mexican diplomatic efforts in wartime Europe and the stimulating conversations he held with French intellectuals and especially Bernard Shaw. Soon after returning, he joined with Alfredo Gómez de la Vega, then-head of SEP's Department of Fine Arts' Department of Theater, a well-respected actor and director for over three decades who had directed the season that inaugurated

[249] Usigli, "Doce notas," 244
[250] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 251.
[251] Usigli would publish transcripts of his interviews with Bernard Shaw months later in the *Cuadernos Americanos* journal and again in the *Sábado* newspaper a year later, copies of which are contained on pg. 232 in the Usigli Scrapbook 1924-1947.
[252] Carlos Medina, "Por que no hay Teatro Mexicano," *Cartel*, 8 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 202.

the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1934.[253] Gómez de la Vega was the perfect match Usigli needed for undertaking the mission of staging *El gesticulador* in Fine Arts: given de la Vega's position, he could fight for the play's performance and most importantly be heard at the highest levels; he similarly believed in a strong Mexican theater tradition, particularly to reach the nation's youth;[254] and, perhaps most importantly, four years prior the director had read *El gesticulador*, which was apparently such a moving experience that it compelled him to promise Usigli he would perform *El gesticulador* at the first chance.[255] Having found his marching partner in Gómez de la Vega, the two set out on bringing *El gesticulador* to the stage.

Their path, however, was marred by scandals and controversies. In the final months of 1946, Usigli held an interview with the journalist Díaz Ruanova titled "La decadencia del teatro moderno," in which the playwright, amidst various other discussions surrounding the modern state of theater around the world, expressed his belief that Mexico was undergoing a period of theatrical stagnation. Contrasted with the heyday of a developing national theater during the 1920s and 1930s, this stagnation was embodied most by the failure of the "Contempóraneos" in continuing their innovative work from that earlier period, especially two of its most prolific members, Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia.[256] Novo, much more of an author, poet, and journalist than playwright, drew less ire than Villaurrutia—although Usigli still threw him the charge of having failed to deliver "fundamental or necessary ideas" during his period of activity, adding further fuel to the animosity that had developed between the two and would crescendo with their physical brawl during *El gesticulador*'s staging. Reserving his most pointed criticism for Villaurrutia, Usigli calls the playwright "a corpse, pretending to write lively works about our problems."[257]

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[253] Armando de María y Campos, "Alfredo Gómez de la Vega," *Novedades*, 17 de enero de 1958. Found on the Repósitorio de críticas, Reseña Histórica del Teatro en México 2.0|2.1, Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura. https://criticateatral2021.org/html/resultado_bd.php?ID=1372&BUSQ=gesticulador.
[254] Armando de María y Campos, "Alfredo Gómez de la Vega," *Novedades*, 17 de enero de 1958.
[255] Ibarra Fuentes, 102.
[256] Díaz Ruanova, "La decadencia del teatro moderno," *¡Oiga!*. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 196.
[257] Díaz Ruanova, "La decadencia del teatro moderno," *¡Oiga!*. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 196.

The interview apparently sparked such a debate within "literary and intellectual circles"—especially from Villaurrutia's "disciples," who threw many criticisms against Usigli himself and his recently published *Corona de sombra*—[258]that in a follow-up article published on December 7, Usigli attempted to clarify his remarks, in the roundabout manner of touting certain aspects to their literary production while doubling down on his honest criticism that would characterize his writings on his contemporaries. Calling Novo "one of the best journalists and possibly one of the most flexible writers in Mexico," Usigli then switched his tone, stating Novo was too frivolous in his writing to be conducive for intelligent thought, too disposed to placing his emotions over that of his interests, and, despite his ability to frequent bourgeoisie circles and thereby critically analyze their aspects, had found himself serving those same bourgeoisie and aristocratic interests "in a poor imitation of Proust."[259] And Usigli repeated this pattern with his remarks towards Villaurrutia, lauding his poetry while claiming his theatrical output suffered the lack of *mexicanidad* that could make Villaurrutia a great, national playwright—in a poor attempt to save face, Usigli argued he could say such things in the public sphere because of the close friendship he and Villaurrutia enjoyed. The controversy Usigli's remarks provoked confirmed the playwright's trend for being an honest but provocative critic, intentionally or inadvertently inclined to sparking the ire of his contemporaries—including many who considered him a close friend—that contributed to his frequent alienation and reputation for being a "difficult" person to work with. His penchant for scandal plagued the further development towards staging *El gesticulador* over the coming months, and his harsh remarks towards Novo and Villaurrutia likely contributed to the roles they would play in pushing Usigli to reconsider performing *El gesticulador* in the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

Furthermore, in the month before *El gesticulador*'s staging, a scandal emerged between Usigli and the National Actor's Association, concerning the playwright's remarks in his "Anatomía del teatro" section published in *El Nacional* that ostensibly claimed all theater actors in Mexico were drunks and all actresses homosexuals.[260] An article published in *Nosotros* by

[258] Díaz Ruanova, "Usigli confirma y aclara una entrevista," *¡Oiga!*. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 196.
[259] Díaz Ruanova, "Usigli confirma y aclara una entrevista," *¡Oiga!*. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 197.
[260] Ibarra Fuentes, 102.

Rosa Costra on May 17 summarizes the development of the scandal, in which rumors surrounding Usigli's supposed remarks compelled a meeting of the Actor's Association, during which the members demanded that they and the Association ensure that Usigli's works would never be staged in public again.[261] Cooler heads prevailed, however: Rodolfo Landa—real name Rodolfo Echeverría, brother of future president Luís Echeverría—a younger actor, member of *El gesticulador*'s cast, and future head of the Actor's Association rose in the assembly and questioned if any of the Association's members had read the article themselves—an oversight that his compatriots appeared to have failed to consider. Upon returning with a copy of Usigli's article—to which there existed certain suspicions of whether or not it was the real or a slightly altered version of the article—the actors and actresses were able to read that, rather than lambaste their personal and professional characters, Usigli had actually confirmed a belief in their talent and worthy work. The Actor's Association then decided that they would not boycott Usigli's plays, but request that the author ensure the payment of actors who remained uncompensated for their work on his recently staged *Corona de sombra*.[262] Later on, Usigli would state that he believed officials headquartered in INBA had moved "hidden forces" to create the issue with the Actor's Association, suggesting the possibility—albeit from a biased perspective—of a further method INBA officials and enemies in the national government may have employed to censor the play.[263]

The actors' assembly was convened in the weeks leading up to staging *El gesticulador*, during the aftermath of Usigli's recently performed *Corona de sombra*, which played an

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[261] Rosa Castro, "Cinematicas" section, *Nosotros*, 17 de mayo de 1947. In, *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 200. Upon reviewing the copies of the columna "Anatomía del teatro" contained in the Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, the claim that Usigli called all Mexican actresses homosexuals appears completely false, likely imagined in the heat of the moment, while the idea that he called all Mexican drunks is likely a misinterpretation of the line: "[the Mexican actor] is like a drunk worker who searches in his weekly salary a way to ensure, without complications nor inconveniences, his drink for the coming week." Harsh remarks, of which Usigli made many in regards actors, playwrights, and theater in Mexico in general over the course of his "Anatomía deal teatro" column, but not the overblown charges the scandal with the National Actor's Association threw against him. Rodolfo Usigli, "Anatomía del teatro," *El Nacional*, 27 de abril de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 200.

[262] Rosa Castro, "Cinematicas" section, *Nosotros*, 17 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 200.

[263] Rodolfo Usigli, *Anatomía del Teatro* (ensayo) (Ecuador: Revista de Poesía Universal, 1967), 9; and Ibarra Fuentes, 102.

influential role in the performance and controversies rocked by *El gesticulador*. As was the norm with Usigli's plays, the performance of *Corona de sombra* enjoyed a highly mixed response from critics, with several reviews lauding the play's dramatic, "antihistorical" treatment of Maximilian and Carlota's romance and attempted French empire in Mexico, berating its technical staging, actors' performances, and what they saw as an unrealistic portrayal of Maximilian and Carlota, or a mix of praise and criticism.[264] Although debates over the play's quality and technical and thematic effectiveness abounded in the mixed response from the press, suggesting *Corona de sombra* could have enjoyed a more prolific stay in theater circles had circumstances surrounding its staging at the Arbeu Theater been improved, the play was ultimately and undeniably a failure. *Corona de sombra* saw a single night of performance, either poor attendance or actors' unions incensed by the cast's lack of pay would ultimately force its cancellation.[265] Thus, Usigli neared the scheduled teatro mexicano season and *El gesticulador*'s premiere date with an awareness of his recent failure and a still-growing reputation for controversy, a reputation which would only reach greater heights on the stage at Bellas Artes, in the responses from Mexico City's publications, and behind closed doors in the offices at INBA and the Palacio Presidencial.

A final note: avenues for staging *El gesticulador* certainly existed outside of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the *teatro de revista* first and foremost. Salvador Novo would allude to this

[264] Reviews contained in the Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, tend toward this mix of praise and varying levels of criticism, including Max Aub's column "El teatro en México" in *El Nacional*, Francisco Monterde's column "Obras e interpretaciones" in *El Universal*, Antonio Magaña Esquivel's review "Proscenio: Dramaturgo y Director" in *El Nacional*, and Ciro Marques' article "Fracaso" in *Cartel*. Aub, Monterde, and Magaña Esquivel, writers or playwrights in their own right, tended toward positively reviewing Usigli's works across his career, including high praise for *El gesticulador*, while articles produced in *Cartel* would lambast *El gesticulador*'s political commentary and staging a month later (as will be see in the following chapter). Marques' article may have been the most critical in directly calling *Corona de sombra* a failure, however each reviewer tended to agree that Usigli's play presented an exciting, nuanced, and ambitious interpretation of Carlota and Maximilian's relationship and their failed empire in Mexico. They also advanced the view that *Corona de sombra* furthered Usigli's project in achieving a professional, dramatic, and national theater tradition in Mexico through portraying Mexico as the "hero" of his play's narrative. And yet, they also tend to agree the acting and especially the scenography suffered from a lack of professionalism and resources, and that the funding issues that plagued the play's production ultimately contributed to lukewarm audience attendance for the premiere; the indifference from audiences would ultimately cut the season short, along with the fact that the cast had not been paid throughout their work in rehearsing and performing *Corona de sombra*. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 201.

[265] While the other articles ignored or were unaware of this element, Marques asserts that "different actors unions" ensured that *Corona de sombra* did not see continued performance past the premiere, a claim backed up by the fact that the Actor's Association would demand Usigli and his Teatro del Nuevo Mundo society compensate the unpaid actors during the later scandal surrounding his supposed comments made in "Anatomía del teatro."

possibility, later commenting that he felt *El gesticulador* would have achieved greater success had it been performed in the Teatro Lírico.[266] Usigli's persistence in having *El gesticulador* performed at the state-funded official theater boils down to several converging factors. First, in order to achieve his project of a professional national theater tradition, Usigli needed his play performed at the premier site for professional theater in all of Mexico: the *revista* a decent alternative, especially in its long practice of satirizing contemporary political issues, but provided neither the reputation nor professional status that a performance at Bellas Artes would. Similarly, staging at Bellas Artes would finally grant him the symbolic weight of being considered, by the government, as a writer constituting a "distinctly Mexican" character. Third, in order to reach his intended audience for the play, the upper levels of administration and heads of government, and—if we extend Usigli the benefit of the doubt—potentially convince them of the errors in their past conduct, Usigli believed it necessary to stage *El gesticulador* in Bellas Artes, where then-president Miguel Alemán and cabinet members would be most likely to attend. Fourth, his persistence also rests somewhat on Usigli's own ego: he wanted the prestige earned by staging at the professional theater, or as negative reviews of *El gesticulador* would later suggest, to provoke further scandal that would inflate his established and still-growing reputation as a controversial playwright. Finally, and as will be seen in the following chapter, staging at Bellas Artes and the end to (formally) censoring *El gesticulador* on the stage came at a distinct moment in the history of postrevolutionary politics, when the election of a civilian president in Alemán and the transition to his civilian-dominated cabinet suggested a wave of democratization and support for freedom of expression that would soon follow. Thus, although it would take almost a full decade to do so, Usigli's persistence in seeing *El gesticulador* performed in a state-endorsed setting finally saw success.

Conclusion

Throughout the nine years spanning Usigli's writing of *El gesticulador* and the play's staging at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Usigli continually recommitted to his dual project of criticizing the nation's corrupt political structures and pushing for a critically reflective, realist, professional, and national theater tradition in Mexico. Through *El gesticulador* and accompanying essays

[266] "Teatro," *Tiempo*, 23 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.

"Epílogo de la hipocresía mexicana" and "Doce notas", Usigli continued to call attention to and voice dissatisfaction with the Janus model of revolutionary rhetoric and policy; the consolidation of the official party's hold over national and state governments and its mostly successful measures in rigging elections, defeating opposition movements, and ultimately constructing a single-party dominant system; the growing connections between political and business elites and the growing shift away from revolutionary reform; and the continued censorship of *El gesticulador*, reflected in the tightening controls on internal dissent in wartime Mexico. His play and its commentary on the state of Mexico's political reality was circulated throughout literary and theater circles, but had not been able to make the impact amongst politicians and Mexico City's theatergoing public he deemed necessary for achieving a national theater tradition; consequently, Usigli believed, the lack of a national theater tradition also belied the absence of truly democratic procedures in Mexico. As will be seen in the following chapter, the issues of censorship, Mexican democracy, and theater would come to the head when *El gesticulador* finally premiered on the stage in Bellas Artes on May 16, 1947.

Chapter 3: Press, Public Discourse, and Government Response to *El gesticulador*

> "En nuestra diara realidad César Rubio deja de ser el personaje hipotética del drama para convertirse en algo tangible en los hechos, real en los acontecimientos de nuestra turbulenta época; es su tragedia la tragedia del ideal revolucionario noble en el fondo, definido en principio, lleno de a[n]helos altos y de generosos impulsos de regeneración y libertad…pero casi en seguida traicionado por quienes en la lucha armada lo habían tremolado como insignia; de virtuado luego por los intereses de facción, mixtificado posteriormente por el convencionalismo de los demagogos…despojado ahora de su auténtico sentido nacional…"
>
> José María Bradomín, "Con el dedo en la llaga: El Gesticulador," *El Chapulín*, 10 de diciembre, 1947

> "In our daily reality César Rubio ceases to be the hypothetical character of the drama in order to become something factually tangible, real in the events of our turbulent era; his tragedy is the tragedy of the real, noble revolutionary ideal, defined in principle, full of high desires and generous impulses of regeneration and liberty…but almost immediately portrayed by those who in the armed struggle had waved it as a badge; made virtuous then by the factional interests, subsequently mystified by the convention of the demagogues…and now deprived of its authentic national meaning…"
>
> José María Bradomín, "With the Finger in the Wound: The Imposter," *El Chapulín*, December 10, 1947

El gesticulador premiered publicly on May 17, 1947, in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Located in the Centro Histórico district, the Palacio de Bellas Artes is positioned across from the Avenida Cinco de Mayo, where only a short walk will take you directly to the city's centuries-old *zócalo* and its fabled landmarks, including the Metropolitan Cathedral, the country's oldest Catholic church, constructed on top of the razed ruins of the Templo Mayor, and the National Palace, the center of national government since the colonial period. The drama ran for two weeks, with a final performance that ended a controversial and scandal-filled performance run with an auditorium packed to the brim and audience demand for an encore,

which Usigli, director Alfredo Gómez de la Vega, and the cast delivered graciously on the night of May 31. Upon the final curtain fall, *El gesticulador* had unveiled its capacity for controversy and division amongst an audience that consisted of critics, fellow playwrights and artists, theater connoisseurs from Mexico City's middle and upper classes, members of INBA's theater and arts programs, and members of the PRI's military and political elite. Furthermore, the negative response to the drama, particularly the calls of "anti-revolutionary" propaganda and demands for forced retirement, and the ensuing controversies work to provide powerful insight into the manners by which artists in postrevolutionary Mexico were able to effect a level of intellectual dissent towards the PRIísta ideology and official culture, as well as how such artists were pulled—and pushed—towards a symbiotic relationship that benefitted themselves and the political machinations they criticized. Especially during the crucial early years of the recently reconstituted PRI, in which the establishment of civilian-led Miguel Alemán's presidential administration signaled both hope for essential reforms of the single-party system and continued concerns over corruption and government censorship of public discourse, articles published in the national press reviewing *El gesticulador* provide a glimpse into how these concerns manifested in the public engagement with Usigli's satire.

Across both the favorable and the negative reactions to *El gesticulador*'s two-week performance run, key themes and commonalities emerge that reveal the extant political and cultural discourses in which Usigli situated his work. Chief amongst these are the allegations of corruption leveled against the official party's political machine, of the deception and fabrication of revolutionary history advanced through official party construction of "official history," revelations of a distinct "Mexican national conscience," and, most evident, themes of truth, lie, and hypocrisy. The prominence of these themes across a number of the reviews and responses published in the primarily Mexico City-based national press reveals the ways in which the play existed within and contributed to momentous debates circulating throughout Mexican civil society at the time. Adversely, negative criticism of Usigli's drama tends to fall along lines lambasting the piece as reactionary, "antirevolutionary", and a piece of conservative propaganda that denied the weight, value, and truth of revolutionary history. Intriguingly, criticism advanced by unfavorable reviews also tended to align with accusations made by aging revolutionary generals and up-and-coming technocrats adverse to what both groups agreed as violations of core tenets undergirding Mexican politics, arts, and journalism. Most prominently, these included

fundamental commitments towards venerating the "Revolution" and supporting the commonly-held understanding that artists and journalists would not bring attention to official corruption.

Thus, *El gesticulador*'s counternarrative contested official culture and the state-sponsored narrative of revolutionary history. Here, disparate conceptions of Mexico's past and contemporary history confronted elite discourse, in certain instances adopting the party line, while in others arguing for an alternative collective understanding of the revolution and the relevance it held for Mexican society. Its messaging and the responses it provoked also suggested concerns over the entrenchment of tactics employed by the official party for manipulating Mexico's political system and artists' and journalists' ability to openly comment on said system, most visible in the known proliferation of electoral fraud, assassinations, and a number of methods for influencing favorable press coverage. The performance in 1947 also acts as an insightful view into broader developments within Mexican politics, journalism, and the evolution of the *dictablanda* system at the time. Particularly, *El gesticulador*'s staging was both informed by and worked to reveal the progression of Miguel Alemán's recent election and the rise of his civilian-dominated administration; new commitments to greater press and artistic liberties he and members of his cabinet espoused; the effects such promises had on the national press and their attempts work out the boundaries of this new commitment; the limits of democratization and freedom of expression artists and journalists encountered; and, ultimately, manners by which power, force, and consent to rule were worked out in the relationships between political and cultural elites in Mexico during Alemán's *sexenio*.[267]

Lastly, *El gesticulador*'s stage run in Fine Arts reveals how authorities within INBA and Alemán's administration attempted to control the production, performance, reception, and influence of a popular, critical satire, utilizing methods reflective of those employed by the

[267] To recycle Gillingham and Smith's statement first used in my Introduction chapter, "…force was real, strategically applied, and successfully masked. It was also exercised by both rulers and ruled. It went hand in hand with a certain degree of consent: one produced by economic growth and coalition-building distribution of resources, by political accommodation, and by culture. The outcome was not stasis but rather something like a chemist's dynamic equilibrium, in which reactions move in opposite directions at broadly similar speeds:" in "Preface," *Dictablanda*, x. This understanding of the fundamental role of negotiation, both within the relationships between a variety of actors and between their use of force and consent in constructing said relationships between rulers and ruled, undergirds my analysis throughout this study, and especially within this chapter. Numerous examples will point to how Usigli, fellow journalists, intellectuals, and playwrights, and officials within the Alemán administration and state bureaucracy continually employed both consent and force in the staging of *El gesticulador*, its performance run, and the press coverage and government responses that ensued in the days and months following the play's premiere.

government in managing both the press and its citizenry at large. The blend of "soft" and "hard" coercion developed within the PRiísta system—of which the ambiguity and lack of centralized approach were central, if not the most crucial element to the system's effectiveness[268]—manifested in a milieu of formal and informal measures. These included: the widespread use of financial concessions and favoritism, bribery, the persuasive capabilities of personal relationships (including both friendships and relationships built more along clientelist lines, which oftentimes were one and the same), opportunities for employment in and the power afforded by positions in the national bureaucracy, and threats of personal violence, home invasion and destruction of property, all the way up the ladder to using hitmen for politically motivated assassination.[269] In the case of *El gesticulador*, personal and clientelist relationships within the national government played a crucial role in the administration's eventual crackdown on the play's staging, while general understandings within the national press of the expectations for favorable coverage demanded by the synergic relationship between journalists and functionaries, not to mention fundamental characteristics of the nature of the press in postrevolutionary Mexico, mediated both the positive and negative responses to *El gesticulador*.

Such characteristics include the notions of presidentialism and "transcendental" journalism: presidentialism denoting the almost endless extolling of the president's virtues, his service to the nation, and constant coverage of the president's activities, almost always in a positive light,[270] while transcendental journalism similarly signified a commonly-upheld understanding of "responsible" journalism that understood "the wider social consequences of the news" and therefore worked to portray events, especially government actions and policies, in an optimistic, forward-looking manner.[271] A comparison with the contemporary example of press coverage of the peso crisis and growing outrage with Alemán-era corruption a year later also shows how the administration's relationship with the press evolved into distinctly rougher coercion through threats of personal violence against dissident journalists, destruction of printing presses and offices used by the publication *Presente*, and even certain officials' subtle suggestion

[268] *Dictablanda*, 9-11.
[269] *Dictablanda*, 3-27.
[270] *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 125.
[271] Smith, 50-51.

of assassination towards several of the newspaper's most contemptuous members,[272] for which the case of *El gesticulador* acts as an important antecedent.

This chapter will unfold in multiple sections, starting with an analysis of press responses to the play and the manners by which they constructed a discourse around *El gesticulador* that placed it in broader debates concerning the function of arts, the well-being of Mexican "democracy," and the existence—or lack thereof—of free expression within Mexico as the nation moved towards a new period of modernity under Miguel Alemán. Developments between the national press, practices for enforcing formal or informal censorship, and a rise in confrontations over the state of freedom of expression during the early years of Alemán's presidency inform much of the events surrounding *El gesticulador*'s staging and press reception in May and the months afterwards, including the aforementioned conflict between Alemán's administration and the national press that evolved over the course of the following year. Lastly, I will end with a look at a letter Usigli sent to Alemán in July of 1947, which ultimately unveils Usigli's tacit acceptance of single-party rule and his commitment to service in the changing, but continuously authoritarian state.

Press Responses and the Debates Around El gesticulador

"And one fine day—May 17, 1947—it rose to the stage, in the Palace of Fine Arts, with the company of Alfredo Gomez de la Vega. And so the bomb was set off. An attack on the Revolution!"[273] Once Usigli and Gómez de la Vega succeeded in bringing Usigli's satire to the stage at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the response in Mexico City's national press was immediate, divisive, and both emerged from and expressed distinct ideological perspectives about the messages conveyed. In examining the discourse that surrounded the play's staging, the majority of articles expressed a positive view of one or several aspects of *El gesticulador*, including the technical performance and/or the thematic content. Of these positive reviews, multiple articles published in some of the nation's biggest newspapers, like *El Universal*, *El Nacional*, *Excélsior*,

[272] The examination of the Mexico City press' confrontation with the Alemán government in 1948 comes from Benjamin Smith's chapter "The Year Mexico Stopped Laughing: The Press, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico City" in his study *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940-1976*.

[273] Pedro Gringoire, "Section 'Guide for the Reader' 'Guía Del Lector: El Gesticulador'" *Excelsior*, 10 de febrero, 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53. "Teatro," *Tiempo*, 23 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.

and *Novedades*, as well as regional publications like *El Chapulín*, show how different newspapers within Mexico City and Oaxaca City reported on the drama's critiques of post-revolution politics and official obfuscation of revolutionary history. By and large, the authors' responses note the distinct value Usigli's play holds for exposing the corruption and hypocrisy inherent in the PRI's single-party domination of political rule, as well as the continued value the "Revolution" and its meaning hold for certain individuals engaged with the political and moral life of the country (and particularly the capital).

On the other hand, negative reviews certainly emerged over the course of the two-week performance run and afterwards. Articles published in *Tiempo*, *La Prensa*, *Cartel*, and *Esto* reveal ways in which certain journalists and editors engaged with the ideas advanced by Usigli, ultimately confirming their *oficialista* stance. Common themes here emerge in the authors' rejection of Usigli's commentary on official manipulation of revolutionary history, instead choosing to denounce Usigli and *El gesticulador* as being "antirevolutionary," charging Usigli with being a fatalistic pessimist incapable of finding the positive in the "Revolution," and lambasting *El gesticulador* for exhibiting a distinct lack of "professional" theater.

Armando de María y Campos, one of the most celebrated playwrights of the Siete Sabios generation, produced one of the first positive reviews of *El gesticulador*, applauding both its message and staging. De María y Campos published his review in *Novedades*, a theatrical review with a long-standing, well-regarded reputation within Mexican theater circles, lauding his younger counterpart as the "redeemer of Mexican theater" and describing the premiere on May 17 as one for the ages: "By the end of the first act, "The Imposter" had asserted itself as one of the greatest dramas written in Mexico; at the fall of the curtain at the end of the second act, the piece had penetrated so deeply into the public['s conscious], that the enthusiasm and a magnificent impulse of consecration and reparation overflowed irrepressibly in shouts and applause demanding the entrance of the author."[274] Additionally, "'El Gesticulador' is a

[274] Armando de María y Campos, "Efemérides del teatro en México: estreno de 'El Gesticulador,' por Usigli," *Novedades*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.

historical work of the Mexican Revolution, and all of its characters are real, it doesn't matter that this or that can't be identified."[275]

De María y Campos advances one of the main themes that emerge across the positive reviews of *El gesticulador*, that being the novelty of both the staging and subject matter and the skill with which Usigli treats them. According to an article published the day after the premiere in *El Redondel*, "'El gesticulador' is the Mexican play that has achieved the greatest success that we have seen in our many years of life" and "the most formidable of the [sic] speeches on the Mexican Revolution."[276] Or, in an article published in *Mexican Life* a couple weeks after de María y Campos' "Efeméridades," "It [*El gesticulador*] introduces a new type of Mexican play—a play dealing with Mexico in fearless and realistic terms, which projects a challenge and points a new way—the only plausible way toward the creation of a genuine Mexican theatre."[277] What emerges across the positive reviews is the notion that Usigli achieved a great, even novel success with *El gesticulador*; and not only that, but an entirely new theater tradition for Mexico, one that is realist in form and content and which avoids treating the "Revolution" in idealistic or revisionist terms, informed by the lived reality of a Mexico in the years following the revolutionary decade. In the words of the writer for *El Redondel*: "On the stage, [Usigli] presents us a series of "revolutionary" characters so loyally copied, that it seems they draw from real life, and they are presented to us not from without, but from within, all exhibiting that series of civic miseries that our leaders have come to embody."[278] For the typically middle-class intelligentsia who attended a performance of *El gesticulador*—much like most members of the Mexico City-based press—Usigli's drama did not simply present a view of the revolution and its successive developments, but rather, reflected the reality of politics and rule in Mexico. It also encoded character tropes, derived from realistic examples of party heads and state governors, into caricatures of everyday political figures Mexican audiences would easily be able to identify and

[275] Armando de María y Campos, "Efemérides del teatro en México: estreno de 'El Gesticulador,' por Usigli," *Novedades*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.
[276] "Bellas Artes: El gesticulador," *El Redondel*, 18 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 209.
[277] "Drama," *Mexican Life*, June 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223.
[278] "Bellas Artes: El Gesticulador," *El Redondel*, 18 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 209.

recognize. Thereby, *El gesticulador* further asserted its relevance for Mexican audiences, assuring their ability to relate to and understand the satire's themes.

Articles published in *El Nacional* and *Excélsior* continue the interpretation first presented in de María y Campos' review, but also more explicitly touch on the political message and circumstances surrounding *El gesticulador*. In the article "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," published in *El Nacional* on May 20 by author Alí Chumacero,[279] the writer claims *El gesticulador*'s staging at the Palacio represents "the most important literary event of the year," and writes, "In spite of the public, most of which are reactionary, 'The Imposter' obtained, under the calm direction of Alfedo Gomez de la Vega, an expression with dual meaning: one artistic (a product of the coherent coupling of the elements that contributed to making the reality, the truth, of the performed piece), and the second, important from another angle, the political meaning, in the fact that the Government of the Revolution sponsored a play where, very directly, it is alluded to."[280] Chumacero goes on to note the "social necessity" that *El gesticulador* performs, criticizing the procedures of Mexican politics and the ways in which political and administrative life are used for the preservation of power as part of a wider contemporary project of intellectual reexamination—best exemplified by the publication of Daniel Cosío Villegas' essay "la crisis de México" earlier that year in the journal *Cuadernos Americanos*.[281] He ends by stating "The public is dragged by the appearance of that Cesar Rubio to the point of naively collapsing in the deception that Usigli tends to him. The "identification" between the professor and the audience—there resides the theatrical miracle of 'El Gesticulador'—predicts the creation of a phantom pre-formed in the conscious—not of the people, who know little of this—of the men against the Revolution."[282]

Chumacero's analysis follows similar lines as other articles noting the political dimensions of Usigli's critique. However, the writer takes it a step further in identifying the mass

[279] One of Mexico's most awarded poets of the mid-20th century.
[280] Alí Chumacero, "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," *El Nacional*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223.
[281] Alí Chumacero, "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," *El Nacional*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223.
[282] Alí Chumacero, "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," *El Nacional*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223; Daniel Cosío Villegas, "La crisis de México."

public as "reactionary," implying counter-revolutionary tendencies, and his determination that the public exhibits the danger of experiencing the same "deception" that Usigli assigns to the character of César Rubio. Chumacero argues Mexico City's middle-class theatergoing public are in danger of expressing the same hypocrisy and "imposturing" as César Rubio: believing they are the "true" revolutionaries of the revolution, rather than the conservative beneficiaries of the legacy of mass mobilizations decades prior. In doing so, Chumacero parallels Usigli's—amongst other playwrights'—belief that Mexico City's typically middle-class audiences tended to oppose works by Mexican playwrights that explicitly treated the more idiosyncratic characteristics of Mexican life and society. Furthermore, Chumacero criticizes the capital's middle-class audiences for the status they enjoyed as the main recipients of the PRI's industrialization and capital accumulation growth programs, subsidized as they were through peasant-driven agricultural production.[283] Chumacero's article point towards the uptick in urbanization, economic growth centered on specialized, educated labor, and technocratic, civilian administrators that would constitute a new class of professional bureaucrats, social shifts accelerated during Alemán's administration and his emphasis on state-subsidized industrialization and private industry.

Similarly, the transformation of the party's demographic composition was reproduced in its ideological convictions: although peasants, worker cooperatives, and "ejido agriculture and its supplying of staple foods for the internal market permitted such economic growth"—growth and production that allowed Mexico to become a powerful, if brief, exporter state—the benefits of such expansion went to the urban-based, middle-class, well-educated elite who formed the heads of the PRI's economic modernization programs.[284] Thus, as Chumacero appears to argue, despite

[283] As Alexander Aviña states, "[post-Cárdenas presidential administrations] generally abandoned the ejidal-based model of rural development in favor of a capitalist modernization program that privileged industry and urbanization over the rural sector…Campesinos, in particular campesinas and their unpaid, unrecognized labor, essentially subsidized the accumulation of capital and industrial growth that stimulated the so-called Mexican Miracle"; from Alexander Aviña's chapter "'We have returned to Porfirian Times': Neopopulism, Counterinsurgency, and the Dirty War in Guerrero, Mexico, 1969-1976" in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 110. Similarly, in Gabriela Soto Laveaga's chapter "Searching for Molecules, Fueling Rebellion: Echeverría's 'Arriba y Adelante' Populism in Southeastern Mexico" from the same compilation, the author examines the strong growth the global steroid hormone industry and the large pharmaceutical conglomerates who shaped the industry had enjoyed since the 1940s, fueled almost entirely by the basic ingredient contained in most steroid hormones: barbasco, grown throughout the southeastern coasts of Mexico. However, despite the fact that Mexico "controlled the monopoly of steroid hormone production" and been recognized as "one of the centers of steroid research", the vast majority of the campesinos responsible for cultivating and delivering barbasco to the pharmaceutical conglomerates failed to see any of the immense profits the development of steroid hormones yielded. *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 95-96.
[284] *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 110.

the many changes wrought by the decade of collective uprising, those who enjoyed the benefits of the "Revolution" were no longer the largely rural and urban poor who made up the revolutionary masses, but rather middle- and upper-class elites who had gone on to coopt revolutionary rhetoric for their own benefit. The transformations within the official party and Mexico more broadly since the end of Cárdenas' presidency were therefore of great concern to several of the writers who responded to *El gesticulador*, acting as contextual scaffolding undergirding and influencing much of the discourse surrounding the play and its messaging.

Another thread that emerges across the press discourse surrounding *El gesticulador* is the positive perception expressed towards Alemán's administration for being the government to finally stage Usigli's poignant satire, reflecting the goodwill Alemán engendered as a nontraditional politician during his campaign and the early days of his *sexenio*. It also demonstrates the perpetuation of presidentialism, even across articles considered novel in their open acclamation for a play that criticized the legitimacy of Mexico's political system. Even as many of the contributors threw their weight behind a work that very directly lambasted foundational features of Mexican politics, journalists like Chumacero, Mauricio Magdaleno, Baéz-Camargo, and Antonio Luna Arroyo continued to praise the president for his permission of *gesticulador*'s staging, thereby preserving the press tenet prohibiting personal attacks against the presidency.

Mauricio Magdaleno writes in his article "El Gesticulador" from *El Universal*, "The regime, for its part—and I don't speak solely of the head, of the applauded president Alemán, but also mainly and rigorously of those who, like Carlos Chávez at the head of the Institute of Fine Arts, serve the presidential desire through an exceptional hierarchy—didn't only permit that this vividly critical drama of [our] age would become reality on the stage, but they sponsored it, conscientious of the patriotism that entails all noble truth in Mexico."[285] Magdaleno, as discussed in Chapter 1, was a veteran of the *teatro de revista* during the genre's more politically satirical heyday in the first three decades following the overthrow of the Porfiriato. His position as a multi-hyphenate artist (much like Usigli) with a similar thematic focus as Usigli, along with his status as a contemporary who occupied the same circles as Usigli, both lends his comments

[285] Mauricio Magdaleno, "El Gesticulador," *El Universal*, 27 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 54 "El Gesticulador: Newspaper Clippings, 1947."

further credence and works to reveal the similarities in perspectives shared by artists of similar age, background, profession, and gender.

Magdaleno's commentary on the regime "[functioning] through an exceptional hierarchy" reveals a commonly held conception of presidential power and the structure of government at the time, by which the president gave orders, which were disseminated out from the various ministries to their respective agencies and the bureaucrats charged with carrying out the actions demanded by the intent of the directive. In this case, Alemán personally cleared the performance of *El gesticulador* at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, which was then passed down through minister of Public Education Manuel Gual Vidal to head of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes Carlos Chávez, finally landing in the hands of head of the Department of Theater Salvador Novo. In this particular instance, the top-down structure of the national government was confirmed, a characteristic of the PRIísta state that certainly became even more prominent, even if it didn't always ring true, after the corporatization of Mexico's public sectors under Cárdenas and through comparable examples of Alemán's institutionalization of *charro* politics.[286]

[286] Scholars tend to agree Ávila Camacho's and especially Alemán's administrations twisted what was ostensibly the original intent behind Cárdenas' corporatist restructuring, shifting it away from a model by which peasant and worker unions and other organizations representing various industries could gain a greater voice and representation in the government and official party, to one where the president appointed heads of unions loyal to his interests, fully instituting *charro* politics. These include Ryan Alexander in his monograph *Sons of the Mexican Revolution*; Alan Knight in his chapter "The End of the Mexican Revolution?: From Cárdenas to Avila Camacho, 1937-1941" in *Dictablanda*; Jeffrey Pilcher in *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity*; Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, in the introduction "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940" to *Fragments of a Golden Age*; Stephen Niblo in *Mexico Since the 1940s*; and countless others. In Arthur Schmidt's chapter "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940" in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, he identifies authors like Bo Anderson, James D. Cockcroft, and Arnaldo Córdova as members of a trend in the historiography of mid-20th century Mexico inspired by Southern Cone studies who emphasized the power of the state, particularly in its "co-optive and coercive capacities" to "prevent change and to promote the conditions most suitable for capitalist accumulation" post-1940. While reductionist in its over-emphasis on the power of the Mexican state to control its citizenry, this movement along with the sheer number of historians who have advanced similar characterizations of the post-1940 political system have appeared to reach a strong consensus that Alemán and post-Alemán presidential administrations were at least undeniably authoritarian and repressive in their use of corporatist relations to suppress calls for change from state-connected organizations and representative bodies; and while the effectiveness of such approaches continues to be debated, it seems a historiographical certainty by this point that, more often than not, governments stretching from Alemán's and to Díaz Ordaz's resorted to the top-down structures of corporatist relations to bring dissident voices under the fold of PRIísta control. In an effective characterization of what more or less stood as the standard party line during the mid-20th century, historian Stuart F. Voss writes "'They [the popular classes] were to be solely beneficiaries, dependent upon an exclusive ruling group, acting through a growing institutional apparatus which alone determined and addressed their needs'," thereby shifting away from the representative model Cárdenas ostensibly aspired in corporatizing peasant organizations, workers unions, the military, and popular interests groups—a model in which such groups would supposedly

In the article "'Guía Del Lector: El Gesticulador'" from journalist Gonzalo Baéz-Camargo's (pen name Pedro Gringoire) regular column "Guide for the Reader," published in *Excelsior* on February 10, 1948, the journalist tackles the issues of censorship *El gesticulador* experienced for several years before it was finally performed, noting that it was considered "reactionary," "subversive," "a severe critique of the revolutionaries," all charges to which conservatives responded with glee.[287] He follows this up by describing the explosive reaction Usigli's drama entailed upon its first performance:

> And one fine day—May 17, 1947—it rose to the stage, in the Palace of Fine Arts, with the company of Alfredo Gomez de la Vega. And so the bomb was set off. An attack on the Revolution! So believe certain "revolutionaries". And they are found in the company of the minister of the Interior, and with President Alemán, and with other high-up officials. That should be prohibited! But the times had changed. Pérez Martínez had said that in Mexico the unorthodox would no longer be persecuted.[288]

Baéz-Camargo's comments parallel Magdaleno's in their praise towards Alemán for allowing *El gesticulador*'s performance at the Palacio, further asserting the presidentialist streak while also identifying Alemán's minister of the Interior, Hector Pérez Martínez, as one of the key officials pushing Alemán's program opening intellectual and artistic liberties in Mexico. Additionally, one of the more distinct elements to Gringoire's coverage is his identification of the positive reaction conservatives expressed to the reactionary charges *El gesticulador* suffered. At different points in Usigli's career, conservative organizations—particularly representatives of the Catholic church—both lauded and attempted to censor Usigli's plays themselves. In the case of *El gesticulador*, members of Mexico's Catholic clergy, contrary to past objections they'd raised

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advocate on behalf of themselves and their interests and, in turn, the government would listen and extend requested benefits—towards a model of control, where, rather than actively clamoring for their slice of the pie, such collectives were expected to patiently wait their turn. At least this was the case in standard elite thinking. Quote from Stuart F. Voss: "Nationalizing the Revolution: Culmination and Circumstance," in *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929*, ed. Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 301; originally found reprinted in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 29.

[287] Pedro Gringoire, "Section 'Guide for the Reader' 'Guía Del Lector: El Gesticulador'" *Excelsior*, 10 de febrero, 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53.

[288] Pedro Gringoire, "Section 'Guide for the Reader' 'Guía Del Lector: El Gesticulador'" *Excelsior*, 10 de febrero, 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53.

towards plays like *La familia cena en casa*, had welcomed what they viewed as a righteous exposé of the contradictions of revolutionary governments. Ironically, the support from conservative voices in the public sphere and the parallel counterresponse from *oficialista* sources calling *El gesticulador* "antirevolutionary" propaganda became so prominent that Usigli was forced to clarify in an interview that he was not a reactionary nor a mouthpiece for conservative Catholics.[289]

Lastly, the article "Con el dedo en la llaga: El Gesticulador," written by occasional columnist Guillermo Villa Casteñada under the pen name José María Bradomin and published in *El Chapulín* on December 10, 1947, emerged as a response to a later staging of *El gesticulador* produced at the Teatro Macedonio Alcala in Oaxaca City on November 29.[290] "Con el dedo en la llaga" takes arguably the most favorable view of *El gesticulador*, with Villa Casteñada using the majority of the article to praise Usigli's critiques of postrevolutionary politics and pan the PRIísta state and their "mythologization" of official history. Some of Villa Casteñada's most biting insights come in the form of his diatribes against the *oficialista* rhetoric and self-legitimizing discourse the official party employed. Rather polemically, he writes:

> In our daily reality César Rubio stops being the hypothetical character of the drama in order to become something factually tangible, real in the events of our turbulent era; his tragedy is the tragedy of the real, noble revolutionary ideal, defined in principle, full of high desires and generous impulses of regeneration and liberty, of deep understanding of the political and social problems, born of and for the people, but almost immediately betrayed by those who in the armed struggle had waved it as a badge; made virtuous then on by the factional interests, subsequently mystified by the convention of the demagogues, and, to make the picture complete, and now deprived of its authentic national meaning and poisoned with the opiate of the Marxist philosophy.[291]

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[289] Juan de Valencia, "No hay critica, exclama Usigli," May 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 230.
[290] Programa de mano, *El gesticulador*, premiere at the Teatro Macedonio Alcala, November 29, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 239.
[291] José María Bradomín, "With the finger in the wound: 'The Imposter'," *El Chapulin*, page 3, 10 de diciembre de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 54 "El Gesticulador: Newspaper Clippings, 1947."

Villa Casteñada, much like Usigli, invokes the view of an original revolutionary ideal, one that was true, of the people, and benevolent in its intent to reform the country for the better, but was ultimately betrayed by the faction that emerged in power after the revolutionary decade. His views parallel Usigli's belief that the revolution had been betrayed by the perpetuation of demagoguery in the decades since. Interestingly, in contrast with those on left (like Usigli) who viewed socialism as an inherent element of revolutionary reform, Villa Casteñada sees revolutionary idealism as having been deprived of its the authentically national character and meaning by the importation of Marxist ideologies, a critique of *cardenista* radicalism informed by Villa Casteñada's position as a teacher in the countryside surrounding Oaxaca City, where he witnessed what he considered Marxist cronyism amongst his fellow educators.[292]

A final revealing insight into Villa Casteñada's perception of Usigli's counternarrative comes with the lines "The Revolution, like Saturn, devouring its own children…Later, the triumphant faction transforming the power of the Revolution into the Revolution made power, that which equates as much as to monopolize, exclusively for the benefit of the revolutionary family, the public activities of the country."[293] Most significantly, he notes the transformation of "the power of the Revolution" (*el poder de la Revolución*) into the "Revolution made power" (*la Revolución hecha poder*), lambasting the official party's use of *la Revolución hecha gobierno* as a rhetorical tactic for legitimizing its style of rule. Villa Casteñada's review occupies a unique place in the positive responses to *El gesticulador*: a member of the regional press—"where the institutionalized power of the state was still weak"[294]—rather than the Mexico City-based national press, Villa Casteñada was able to go further than even the most scathing of his counterparts in the capital, criticizing the ideological foundations of the political system and eschewing presidentialism entirely. In contrast to other positive reviews, he does not praise Alemán for permitting *El gesticulador*'s staging, but rather, reiterates elements of Usigli's critique and continuously denounces official discourse, carving an outrightly hostile position towards core tenets of the capital-based PRIísta state and the structures forming its mostly

[292] Smith, 234.
[293] José María Bradomín, "With the finger in the wound: 'The Imposter'," *El Chapulin*, page 3, 10 de diciembre de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 54 "El Gesticulador: Newspaper Clippings, 1947."
[294] Smith, 224; as Smith argues in *The Mexican Press and Civil Society*, small, regional-based press offices operating outside of the purvey of the formalized press system and government censorship strong in the capital afforded such local newspapers a greater degree of freedom and security in their publications.

amicable relationship with the national press. By contrast, largely thanks to the Oaxaca City press' isolation from the capital's system of press relations and informal censorship and the state's inability to effectively monitor locally-distributed publications throughout regional press spheres, Villa Casteñada's article occupies likely the most outrightly critical place in the press discourse propelled by *El gesticulador*'s staging.

Opposing Voices

At the opposite end of the spectrum, an article that emerged in *Tiempo* on May 23 represented the camp of *oficialista* journalists and members of Alemán's government who called Usigli "antirevolutionary," "reactionary," *El gesticulador* an "Attack on the Revolution," and demanded the satire's retirement from the stage. The unnamed author claims *El gesticulador* "is at the level of the worst pamphlets that are published and the crude interludes that are served in the slum theaters to satisfy the false concepts of an audience poisoned by a disorienting and denominational press. This same author [Usigli] appears convinced by this press or, even worse, seems to coincide with this press, in an effort to distort the reality of the Mexican Revolution, of ignoring its achievements and denigrating its leaders."[295] For such *oficialista* ideologues like the author who penned this article, it would not be "...supposition that Usigli is an enemy of the regime, as much as he coincides with those who are. Therein lies, precisely, the danger of his angry satire: in which he adopts the false arguments of the Mexican Reaction, which comes unscathed from the altarpiece in which solely the revolutionaries are criminals, thieves, and illiterates."[296] Thus, the narrative, maintained both by elites incensed by the play's messaging and likeminded journalists, that Usigli's *El gesticulador* constituted an antirevolutionary, Reactionary-inspired piece emerged early on in the performance run. This narrative remained a mainstay in publications emerging across *El gesticulador*'s performance, revealing the continued relevance of the idea that proposing any critique of the institutionalized "Revolution" constituted an attack on the very basis of Mexican society.

In Spanish theater critic Ceferino R. Avecilla's article "El Gesticulador," published in *Excélsior* the same day as the *Tiempo* article, the writer—a political refugee from Spain's recent

[295] "Teatro," *Tiempo*, 23 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.
[296] "Teatro," *Tiempo*, 23 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.

civil war and Franco's fascist regime—compares Usigli's critique of postrevolutionary political reality with that of France and Spain, asserting that if Mexicans are not careful in protecting and elevating their recent revolution above critique, they will suffer the same fate as France and Spain did in "destroy[ing] their revolution[s]": the former, in its fall to Nazi occupation and creation of the Vichy regime, the latter, in allowing open debate and freer expression during the republican period that created circumstances eventually leading to the rise of the Spanish Falange and Franco's military dictatorship. Although he is primarily concerned with the "literary" and technical errors *El gesticulador*'s staging presented—errors that make *El gesticulador* a work of "generalizations and speeches", rather than the "action and dialogue" that constitutes real theater—he does claim that these errors lead *El gesticulador* into the terrain of politics and literature, rather than that of "true" theater. This effort to make clear, rigid distinctions between the realms of theater and politics also emerges as a theme across both positive and negative reviews of the press responses to *El gesticulador*, establishing it as a kind of tertiary theme in the discourse surrounding Usigli's satire.

It also works to reflect notions of contrasts between what middle- and upper-class critics tended to consider "high-class," professional theater of the style typically staged in the Palacio de Bellas Artes and that of the lower-brow, satirical theater of the *teatro de revista* and *carpa* traditions. Although *teatro de revista* and *carpa* performances were well-attended and popular, especially amongst the working- and lower-middle classes of Mexico City, socioeconomic prejudices and upper-class cultural elites' general tradition of avoiding politically critical material informed the classist and elitist conception that "good," "professional" theater in Mexico should avoid political themes, leaving those to the lower-class, less professional, and "inferior" theater traditions—traditions prone to the hoi polloi behaviors of scandal, "gossip," and rumor.[297] These conceptions, particularly given the crossover between playwrights, theater critics, literary intellectuals, and journalism during the postrevolutionary period, also parallel considerations of what constituted "professional" journalism as opposed to that of "unprofessional" journalism. Reporting that covered political scandals and corruptions and reprinted and used jokes, gossip, and rumors as journalistic evidence constituted "unprofessional" journalism, whereas "professional" journalism was nationalist, touted

[297] Smith, 50-51.

government programs and rhetoric, depicted Mexico as a people and national community constantly moving towards a brighter future, and avoided the "feminine" behavior of "gossiping" about the personal lives of politicians ("gossiping" which, under different terms of journalistic duties in settings other than postrevolutionary Mexico, would constitute justified and crucial investigations into behind-the-scenes corruption, personalist opportunism, and even the moral corruption of public authorities).[298]

Justo Rocha's article, "Máscaras y perfiles," published in *La Prensa* on May 19, similarly points to certain critics' perception of *El gesticulador* as an example of "bad" theater. Rocha's critique, disguised in vague, nationalist rhetoric, claims that Usigli appears to believe that only "falsity, simulation, lie, bitterness, hate, betrayal, [and] fraud" exist in Mexico, eschewing all that is positive in the country and failing to see "that Mexico exists, that it is there, more than ever and better than ever!"[299] Furthermore, the writer states: "We await to see the reaction of an 'authentic'–rather than favorable—audience in order to definitively judge the reception of the play," touching on the belief that the audience for *El gesticulador* had been loaded with biased theatergoers—particularly from theater students—to suggest a greater reception of and success for the play than would occurred without such behind-the-scenes manipulations.

The first claim in particular reflects much of the negative discourse and reporting covering *El gesticulador*, using the vague notion that the commentaries Usigli advances undermines national pride and belief in the political system in a manner that parallels how journalists understood their reporting of political events should be nationalist and promote the ostensible successes of the state, thereby serving to augment the public's belief in their government and national leaders. Inversely, Rocha utilizes the same rhetoric—rhetoric that the capital's literate middle- and upper-classes were intimately familiar with—to argue that Usigli failed to uphold his civic duty by not portraying the ruling class and political system in a similarly favorable light. That one of the owners of *La Prensa* "worked in the press office of Los

[298] Smith, 50-51.
[299] Justo Rocha, "Máscaras y perfiles," *La Prensa*, 19 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 210.

Pinos [the official office and residence of Mexican presidents since 1934]"[300] should not be ignored, giving the newspaper a distinctly *oficialista* twist.

Possibly the review that most directly alludes to the distinctions between "good" and "bad" theater and Usigli's failure to achieve the former comes in "¿El Gesticulador?, ¡Bah!: Usigli encontró la fórmula más cómoda, más antiteatral para obtener aplausos," by Carlos Medina, published in *Cartel* on May 29. Medina begins by comparing Usigli to well-known *teatro de revista* performer and movie actor Jesús Martínez "Palillo" Delgado, a skinny comedian celebrated for using his thin frame and sharp witticism for frequently satirizing the nuances of rampant political corruption and officials' disregard for the plight of Mexico's urban and rural poor. For the journalist, Palillo's performances in the Follies-Bergère theater work well for the working- and lower-middle class audiences that frequented the *teatro de revista* site, situated as they are in the lower, less professional theater and working, essentially, to "say what the public wants to him to say…what the public already says in the street."[301] With Palillo, one cannot expect more from him than reproducing, in parodic fashion, "what the people say amongst friends and family members": "he came from the people…he is a failed popular agitator," and that's all that one can and should expect from him. Due to his socioeconomic background and that of his audience, he won't produce "new theories" intended to make the people think or develop a greater appreciation for the foundations that undergird "professional" theater; in short, Palillo was a street performer elevated to a slightly grander stage, and his audience both reflected and demanded that orientation.

But for Usigli, particularly given his professional background and the stage on which *El gesticulador* was set—the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the most "professional" of theaters in Mexico City—to have performed a play that, to Medina, acted as nothing more than "a Palillo sketch" was tantamount to laziness and a distinct lack of professionalism. Medina goes on to assert that the function of theater, as its "fundamental condition," should be the deep depiction of characters, and in Usigli's play he finds nothing but poorly-drawn, surface-level parodies of real-world characters and events who represent nothing, like the allusion to Calles' supposed

[300] *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 231.
[301] Carlos Medina, "¿El Gesticulador?, ¡Bah!: Usigli encontró la fórmula más cómoda, más antiteatral para obtener aplausos," *Cartel*, 29 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 217.

involvement in Obregón's assassination or the protagonist in César Rubio, an imposter who Medina believes represents nothing more than Usigli himself.[302] And his critique parallels that of Avecilla and Rocha, finding that the political content of *El gesticulador* has nothing to do with modern-day Mexican theater. Lastly, Medina, in an ironic twist, recognizes the existence of "dirty *caudillos*, killers, betrayals, despicable vengeance, [and] organized theft" during and after the revolutionary decade, but claims that Mexico had developed a truthful, honest political reality, one that has allowed Usigli to depict his criticism center-stage at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.[303] Reflecting many positive reviews' belief in the new turn that Alemán's government represents, Medina instead argues that Usigli's commentary has become unqualified in the years since its writing, and due to this and its poor showing of what theater should represent, *El gesticulador* acts as an example of "bad" theater.

Ultimately, Avecilla's delineation between "good" theater and politically themed theater and other critics' similar manners for lambasting Usigli's play reflected and advanced several elements of the oppositional discourse surrounding *El gesticulador*. First, that Usigli and other artists should avoid criticizing the regime's official, self-legitimizing discourse, lest they destroy the revolution's credibility and decay the bonds of hard-won national unity. Second, generally understood notions of what constituted "good" and "bad" theater informed attacks against *El gesticulador*'s staging at the Palacio de Bellas Artes and the general discourse within artistic circles and the press concerning theater in postrevolutionary Mexico. Lastly, this manner of discussing theater paralleled conceptions of and discourse about "professional" and "unprofessional" journalism during the same period, particularly relevant for the press coverage and political controversies surrounding *El gesticulador*, given the significance of the satire's presence within both press coverage and highly-publicized controversies and the overlap between playwrights, theater critics, and journalists at the time.

However, an interesting theme developed in the counterresponses to the negative critiques leveled against *El gesticulador*. Found in Antonio Luna Arroyo's "Balance Teatral: A

[302] Carlos Medina, "¿El Gesticulador?, ¡Bah!: Usigli encontró la fórmula más cómoda, más antiteatral para obtener aplausos," *Cartel*, 29 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 217.
[303] Carlos Medina, "¿El Gesticulador?, ¡Bah!: Usigli encontró la fórmula más cómoda, más antiteatral para obtener aplausos," *Cartel*, 29 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 217.

propósito de 'El Gesticulador'," published in *Mañana* on June 14, and Usigli's own "El caso de El Gesticulador," published in *El Universal* on the final day of staging on May 31, both authors give voice to the belief that the negative press surrounding *El gesticulador* was performed primarily by critics who had come from Spain as refugees during the Spanish Civil War and therefore were motivated by their adherence to the government that afforded them asylum.[304] To this group of critics belong the aforementioned Avecilla and Rocha, and according to Luna Arroyo, they "control theater critic circles" and fail to understand, due to their recent relocation to Mexico, how *El gesticulador* "presents, in a reformative spirit, the blemishes of evil Mexican politicians."[305] Both Luna Arroyo and Usigli note how their "leftist" affiliations inspired by their adherence to the Spanish Republican cause and Cárdenas' adoption of Spanish refugees had confined those critics to unflinching support of the government. Luna Arroyo goes further, asserting that their lack of familiarity with the reality of Mexican politics—the "violation of the public vote through brigades of hitmen, as it has been done and as it is done in certain states of the Republic; [sic] control of the public treasury for personal enrichment, as hundreds of Mexican politicians have done; [sic] [and] creation of a single party infallible in the electoral struggles"—has prevented them a distinctly "Mexican" understanding of such issues, compelling their inability to see "'El Gesticulador' [sic] [as] a play of clean revolutionary meaning."[306]

Lastly, both Usigli and Luna Arroyo also claim that such detractors, rather than defending Alemán's government as they seem to believe, in reality oppose "the rejuvenating spirit that the government of Dr. Miguel Alemán postulates": "[*El gesticulador*] has its best defenders in the same government and in the discourse from Hector Pérez Martínez, Minister of the Interior, about freedom of expression in Mexico." Thus, Usigli and likeminded critics used nationalist rhetoric, the assertion that *El gesticulador* upholds an "authentic" revolutionary ideal, and support from within the national government to defend Usigli's satire and its public staging.

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[304] Antonio Luna Arroyo, "Balance Teatral: A propósito de "El Gesticulador," pieza para demagogos de Rodolfo Usigli," *Mañana*, 14 de junio de 1947; Rodolfo Usigli, "El Caso de El Gesticulador," *El Universal*, 31 de mayo, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pgs. 228, 224.
[305] Antonio Luna Arroyo, "Balance Teatral: A propósito de "El Gesticulador," pieza para demagogos de Rodolfo Usigli," *Mañana*, 14 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 228.
[306] Antonio Luna Arroyo, "Balance Teatral: A propósito de "El Gesticulador," pieza para demagogos de Rodolfo Usigli," *Mañana*, 14 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 228.

The illuminating parallels of nationalist rhetoric voiced by both positive and negative reviews in the press discourse demonstrate how both sides utilized available discursive models expedient for defending their positions towards both the new Alemán regime and older conceptions of Mexico's revolutionary history. Arguing a nationalist stance, albeit from distinct approaches, while simultaneously claiming their respective position enjoyed support from Alemán's government allowed Usigli and both *El gesticulador*'s supporters and detractors within the national press to openly align themselves with *alemanista* officials and signal their loyalty to the new government.

Government Responses and the Role of Scandal in El gesticulador's Performance

Key developments during the early years of Alemán's *sexenio* created the circumstances by which *El gesticulador* finally rose to the stage at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, allowing the debates it sparked in the national press to reach such heights. First, Alemán's reconstitution of the Department of Fine Arts within SEP into its own government agency, the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA), in 1946 signaled a new era in the government's commitment to sponsoring the arts in Mexico. Coupled with the confirmation of the first "teatro mexicana" season at Bellas Artes, such a move signaled a nationalist tilt to this sponsorship, suggesting a new commitment to supporting distinctly "Mexican" arts. Second, newly appointed minister of the Interior Héctor Pérez Martínez had delivered a speech several months prior to the staging at Bellas Artes affirming his commitment to allowing freer expression of arts that needn't conform to previous requirements for a "revolutionary" character. In Báez-Camargo's article, he spoke directly on the connections between this development and *El gesticulador*'s performance, likening the premiere at the Palace to a bomb being set off amongst certain "revolutionaries" present in the midst of President Alemán and minister of the Interior Héctor Pérez Martínez.[307] The prevalence of Pérez Martínez's speech advocating freer expression coupled with Báez-Camargo's examination of the character of those functionaries surrounding the president also advanced the notion that members within Alemán's cabinet disagreed with new commitments to freedom of expression, a notion that played out in the controversies that contested *El gesticulador*'s survival on the stage all throughout its two-week run. Public commitments to greater liberties in the arts and press, along

[307] Pedro Gringoire, "Section 'Guide for the Reader' 'Guía Del Lector'," *Excélsior*, 10 de febrero de 1948. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53.

with changes in government treatment of the national press, also created significant developments in the relationship between Alemán's administration and Mexico City's publications, which would play out over the next eighteen months in contests over the limits of censorship. Indeed, developments made during this brief but influential period would largely determine the nature of informal and formal censorship of the press during the 1950s and 1960s.

Lastly, although continuing the centrist trend initiated under Ávila Camacho, the third and final development Alemán's newly civilian-dominated government exhibited came in the very fact of the administration's suggestion, at least early on, towards moving away from stricter censorship, representing a clear break with the legacy of restricted civil liberties developed during wartime. Chumacero compared this reexamination of Mexican political processes during the first year of Alemán's presidency with Ávila Camacho's policies, known for a much harsher crackdown on political elements deemed "subversive" in the ultranationalist atmosphere fostered during WWII. Ávila Camacho's stricter censorship of the arts, persecution of the Mexican Communist Party, and passage of the "social dissolution" law ensured the regime's overtly authoritarian overture, which Chumacero called out when discussing "the infiltration of liberal intellectuals by the army during Camacho's presidency."[308] The multiple responses that applauded Alemán's government for what they saw as a remarkable moment of self-reflection and openness to critique thereby further construct a trend within the discourse around *El gesticulador* that sees the election of Alemán as marking a new path towards defending freedom of expression in Mexico—most recently exemplified by the state's newfound sponsorship of *El gesticulador* at the Palace of Fine Arts.

Thus, in the weeks preceding *El gesticulador*'s staging in 1947, Alemán gave the late greenlight for the play's inclusion in the teatro mexicano season.[309] Organized as a season to show off the distinctly national works of several of Mexico's greatest playwrights, *El gesticulador*'s inclusion also hinted that, after years of censorship, Usigli would finally earn the recognition, even if indirectly, that his work constituted a distinctly "Mexican" credibility. This desire stretched as far back as 1938, to when Usigli felt the Senate had snubbed him from being

[308] Alí Chumacero, "El triunfo de un dramaturgo mexicano," *El Nacional*, 20 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 223.
[309] Beardsell, 58.

awarded the National Award for Literature due to *El gesticulador*'s controversial nature; thus, the satire's final inclusion on the Palacio's stage, especially in the teatro mexicano season, signaled the official recognition Usigli had coveted for so long. However, despite support from the president and the minister of the Interior in clearing *El gesticulador*, officials within Alemán's cabinet and INBA director Carlos Chávez continued to protest the play's performances—and especially its staging at the state-sponsored theater. Chávez himself petitioned several of Usigli and Alfredo Gómez de la Vega's friends to assist them in convincing the two playwrights to pull the play from the bill, whilst rumors abounded that Chávez had pulled strings behind-the-scenes to instigate the scandal between Usigli and the National Association of Actors.[310]

Upon hearing of his cabinet's consternation towards the play's staging, Alemán ordered the ministers to attend the play,[311] and the list of invitations to *El gesticulador*'s premiere provides insight into who those officials who attended the play may have been. Most significantly, the list also suggests who within the administration and within the political elite may have felt "personally alluded to" by the play's commentary. Amongst the invitees include Alemán himself; several of Alemán's inner circle, or "*amigos*"— chief of Mexico City Fernando Casas Alemán, minister of the Mexican Treasury Ramón Beteta, and minister of Treasury Antonio Ruiz Galindo; other important members of the cabinet, including minister of the Interior Héctor Pérez Martínez, as well as several powerful officials and career politicians, such as former president Emilio Portes Gil, still an influential politician and one of the stalwarts of the official party for several decades following his term in the presidency; Jaime Torres Bodet, minister of Foreign Relations; Alfonso Caso, minister of National Assets, former teacher of Alemán and his *amigos*, and younger brother of Antonio Caso, founder of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* intellectual group; José Gorostiza, Director of Foreign Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Relations; Carlos Novoa, director of the Banco de México; Antonio Díaz Lombardo, Director of Social Security; Alemán's private secretary Jorge Viesca; and several other subdirectors and high-up officials across the various ministries.[312] Thus, the staging had been

[310] Ibarra Fuentes, 102; Beardsell, 59.
[311] Beardsell, 60.
[312] "Lista de invitaciones para el estreno de El gesticulador." In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 53. The list of invitations also included several of Mexico's most important and influential intellectuals of the

purposefully intended to signal to the most powerful in Alemán's recently appointed administration—along with, generally speaking, corrupt generals, congressmen, politicians, and party bosses—the errors of perpetuating political opportunism, official corruption, obfuscation of revolutionary ideals, and Mexico's single-party system. After ordering his cabinet to attend *El gesticulador*'s premiere, Alemán convened a meeting to discuss the controversy the play had provoked. During the meeting, Alfonso Caso and possibly Pérez Martínez defended Usigli and his right to continue staging the play, but overall the cabinet was opposed to further performances—most likely several, if not all, of the *amigos*, given their known and growing reputations for corruption—and eventually succeeded in persuading Alemán to reduce the play's performance run from three weeks to two.[313] Thus, further censorship of *El gesticulador*, after what seemed like a final success in overcoming opposition from government sources, presented a great slight to Usigli, whose production had seen lively crowds throughout its two weeks of performances, a trend sure to continue if the play had been kept on the bill for another week.

One of Usigli's close friends, Margarita Mendoza López, recalled the night when she, Usigli, and Alfredo Gómez de la Vega learned that *El gesticulador* would retire from the stage

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cultural revolution and mid-20th century eras, including such luminaries as Dr. Atl; Alfonso Reyes, one of the foundational playwrights of the early 20th century, co-founder of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, and a figure who Usigli and many of his peers idolized throughout their lives; Mario "Cantinflas" Moreno himself; Jacques Gelman and Santiago Reachi, two film producers who had founded the *Posas Films* studio with Cantinflas and two of the most influential film producers of Mexican cinematography's *Época de oro*; Dolores del Río, one of the most famous Mexican actresses of the *Época de oro* as well and an actress high in demand in Hollywood during the 1930s; the aforementioned Daniel Cosío Villegas, an intriguing if expected invitation given the similarities in the authors' recent works "La crisis de México" and *El gesticulador*; Miguel Covarrubias, an internationally-renowned painter of the early 20th century who created several well-known portraits of key figures in the Harlem Renaissance and published an influential book, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, on the Tehuantepec culture of southern Oaxaca in the early 1940s; Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, one of the more prominent leaders of muralism during the 1930s and a close friend of Usigli's for several decades; Jesús Silva Herzog, who, along with Cosío Villegas, acted as one of the most important intellectuals of the 1940s and who had founded the prolific *Cuadernos Americanos* journal in 1942, which itself had published "La crisis de México" and Usigli's interviews with George Bernard Shaw a few months prior to the premiere of *El gesticulador*; Seki Sano, another of the most prominent playwrights and directors of the postrevolutionary period and important in the development of Mexico's theater circles post-1920; Max Aub and Carlos Gonzalez Peña, two theater critics who had contributed several reviews of Usigli's plays over the years, including positive reviews of *El gesticulador* that praised the play's messages and technical performance; and of course Samuel Ramos, whose *El perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México* inspired much of Usigli's theorizing on the roles of "masquerading" and publicly performing aggressive masculinity in the political realm. Such a quantity of Mexico's literati and cultural icons reveals the interpersonal capital Usigli had been able to build during his decades of work in Mexico's theater and literary circles, as well as the style of audience the satire was intended for and the expected spectacle that *El gesticulador*'s performance was sure to provide. Ambassadors from Nicaragua and France were invited as well, also revealing the international networks Usigli had built up during his time in the Paris embassy.

[313] Beardsell, 60.

after the revised two-week schedule,[314] a switch in official treatment that Usigli appears to have considered a personal slight from his frequent antagonists, Salvador Novo and Carlos Chávez. The article "La Verdad en el Caso Usigli-Novo," published in *Claridades* on June 10 under the supervision of editorial director Miguel Bueno, further complicates the story. The article maintains, like other competing sources, that *El gesticulador* had originally been planned for only two weeks, much like the other two works selected for the teatro mexicano season, given changes in programming at the Palacio that had pushed back performances by Chávez's National Symphony and the National Opera until June 10—thereby fully freeing up another week for *El gesticulador* to continue on the stage at the Palacio.[315] However, the article also claims that Novo had informed Usigli and Gómez de la Vega that to do so would be "unfair to the other playwrights who had performed at the Palacio earlier in the season," tabling any further attempts at having the play's run extended. In response, Usigli ostensibly threatened to stage *El gesticulador* at another theater and inform the public his need to do so due to "Novo's stubbornness," a proposition which was confirmed in an article published in *El Universal* on May 30, wherein "the Institute of Fine Arts, directed by Mr. Carlos Chávez, believed it appropriate to indicate to the Company of the actor Gómez de la Vega the advisability of not [staging the play in another theater], so that it wasn't thought that the suspension of the theater season in Fine Arts constituted a 'restriction' on the part of the government, given the 'antirevolutionary' character that many critics attributed to 'El Gesticulador."[316]

Such a brusque attempt at challenging INBA heads' authority and their ability to manipulate the narrative surrounding *El gesticulador*'s staging "had a poor effect on Novo and Chávez,"[317] and it is likely here when the discussion turned to a heated exchange of insults between Usigli and Novo. Several days prior to the dispute, Novo had remarked "I enjoy the

[314] Layera, 66-67.
[315] "La Verdad en el Caso Usigli-Novo," *Claridades*, 10 de junio 1947, director Miguel Bueno. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[316] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes," *El Universal*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.
[317] "La Verdad en el Caso Usigli-Novo," *Claridades*, 10 de junio 1947, director Miguel Bueno. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.

play; but I would have preferred to see it performed in the Lírico Theater,"[318] comments apparently picked up and published by Martín Luis Guzmán, owner of *Tiempo*, in the same article deriding Usigli and *El gesticulador* as anti-revolutionary, pro-Catholic propaganda.[319] Given Guzmán's relatively anticlerical, but formerly-liberal turned conservative outlook, one which positioned him as one of those "right-wing writers [who] dominated the editorials and columns of the big nationals" during the 1940s and 1950s,[320] it is no surprise he endorsed Novo's comments. Prominent, right-of-center media heads like Guzmán tended to view the national government and emergent PRI as the rightful inheritors of the revolutionary mantle, and, by the time of a Mexico entering the early throes of the Cold War, found Ávila Camacho, Alemán, and subsequent presidential administrations to align neatly with their ideological convictions—not to mention their pockets.[321]

Already incensed by the harmful comments from the man responsible for helping stage his play—and now made public due to Novo's own carelessness—Usigli decided to retaliate when Novo and Chávez revealed his work would not return for a third week. *Claridades* asserts that Usigli called Novo "as useless as a second soprano," while the article in *El Universal* from May 30 shared their rather rambunctious duel revolving around the phrase "Palillo", most likely taking place in the span of the same conversation: "Novo said: 'you write theater appropriate for Palillo…' And Usigli responded: "For you, not even a toothless palillo [i.e., toothpick] does

[318] These comments were first published in the article "Teatro" from *Tiempo*, released May 23, 1947, but also reproduced in later articles "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes" and "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones."
[319] I.e., the aforementioned "Teatro" article.
[320] Smith, 49.
[321] Smith, 49, and Lawson, 28. As both Lawson and Smith note, by the end of the Ávila Camacho administration, heads of the official party had swung so firmly to the ideological center, that the government's push towards capitalist development and behind-the-scenes collusions with business elites tended to align much closer with the ideological convictions of the nascent media elite, which included the owners of print media, powerful editors, and many of the journalists positioned influentially at the most-widely circulated publications in the national press. These included figures like the aforementioned Guzmán; José Pagés Llergo, founder of the newspapers and magazines *Hoy*, *Mañana*, and *Siempre!*; Rómulo O'Farrill Sr. and Jr., father-and-son owners of *Novedades* from 1948 onwards and easily members of the nation's growing business elite; and many lower-level editors and journalists found throughout nationally-syndicated publications like *Excélsior*, *La Prensa*, and *El Universal*. Financial concessions, bribes, and government-subsidized paper to print media who maintained the presidentialist and transcendental expectations that served as cornerstones of mid-20th century journalism worked to further ensure the favorable, productive relationships between the national press and national government. Thus, "the culture of the *gran prensa* militated against open confrontation [with the government]," precisely were the two so intertwined ideologically and financially.

justice…' To that Novo replied: 'It's you who is a lesser Palillo!'"[322] This exchange provides rather intriguing insights at several levels.

First, the reference to well-known *teatro de revista* performer and movie actor Jesús Martínez "Palillo" Delgado. Such a reference paralleled a similar theme in the negative responses to Usigli, calling him the "Palillo of the Palacio de Bellas Artes" and Palillo as the "Usigli of the Follies-Bergère," an insult meant to degrade Usigli's qualifications as a professional, intelligent playwright.[323] Second, the juxtaposition of the reference to Jesús Martínez and the use of the term "palillo" used by both authors to refer to the other as a flimsy toothpick reflects Cantinflas' popularization of *cantinfleando*, using *albures* and a witty, overwhelming volume of wordplay to undermine opponents' authority, examined in Chapter 2. Novo and Usigli's *cantinfleando* with the term "palillo" and the double meanings it carried reflect the popularity of their peer's practice in everyday conversation, as well as Novo and Usigli's attempts to contest the presumed authority of the other and one-up their counterpart. Similarly, the exchange underscores the distinctly masculine-coded elements of the competition at play between both authors, where, at least for the moment, they attempted to one-up the other in an exchange of witty wordplay, rather than recourse to fists or other bouts of physical domination.

Nonetheless, despite avoiding physical confrontation (for the moment), practices of insults against a foe's stature, professional capabilities, and masculine qualities were common across Mexico's social spheres, from elites degrading their competitors' virility and physical prowess down to the proliferation of *albures* across lower-class speech. Thus, Usigli and Novo's verbal confrontation taps into a tradition by which public officials competed with their subordinates and clients for interpersonal dominance, one that particularly relied on interplays and allusions to conceptions of superior and inferior masculine qualities. Lastly, the confrontation also shows the ability of two well-honed comedians to duke out their personal

[322] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes," *El Universal*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.
[323] Carlos Medina, "¿El Gesticulador?, ¡Bah!: Usigli encontró la fórmula más cómoda, más antiteatral para obtener aplausos," *Cartel*, 29 de mayo de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 217.

issues in a manner reflective of their backgrounds, both honed in the satirical sparring of the press, literary, and theater spheres.[324]

And yet, despite their early success in avoiding physical confrontation, the exchange between Novo and Usigli did not remain confined to the domain of insults. "[At] 9pm in the vestibule of the Palace of Fine Arts, [sic] the writer Salvador Novo, head of the Department of Theater of the Institute of Fine Arts, gave a pair of slaps to the playwright Rodolfo Usigli, author of the play 'El Gesticulador.'"[325] In a letter written to the director of *El Universal*, Novo attempts to clarify his actions, stating "the argument originated in a discussion about the performances of his play" and that he had attacked Usigli due to the lack of tolerance and respect the playwright had shown him, akin to the same disrespectful nature with which he denigrates all those around him.[326] Accordingly, the reasons for the attack "[were] entirely personal." Such a statement parallels similar comments published that same day in *La Prensa*: "Usigli is a paranoid man, notoriously anxious…He knows that I [Novo] took part in ensuring the play be performed, but he is an ungrateful man. For a long time he was a friend of the López Figueroa family, and then he parodied them in *La familia se queda en casa*."[327] Touching on a common perception of Usigli as a difficult man to deal with, a reputation well-recognized across his friends and the press, Novo also attempted to recover his own reputation by claiming that, rather than had been reported elsewhere, he had not attacked Usigli from behind: "Unless Mr. Usigli has jaws installed in his back with which he stopped my fists, it is not known that I attacked him because of his play. Nor would it be but unusual for a person attacked from behind to meet the ground not with his mouth, but with his back, as the said playwright did." The disagreement over whether

[324] As Smith notes, "the worlds of satirical plays and print media overlapped considerably" during the postrevolutionary period: playwrights and actors like Usigli himself, Palillo, Cantinflas, Pedro Hagelstein, José Elizondo, and many others, including the numerous playwrights who contributed both favorable and negative reviews of *El gesticulador* examined above, worked as journalists, occasional columnists, and sometimes even editors for both Mexico City-based newspapers circulated throughout the country down to local publications distributed exclusively within a particular *colonia* or zone of the capital. In Smith, 85.
[325] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes," *El Universal*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.
[326] "Hablan los Actores del Incidente Habido Antenoche en Bellas Artes," *El Universal*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.
[327] "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones," *La Prensa*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.

Novo had hit Usigli from the back or face-to-face, besides the melodramatic debates it seems to have inspired, again ties in with the masculine competition at play between the two playwrights: to have attacked Usigli from the back would be a much more shameful and cowardly attack than slapping him in the face, while Usigli could be seen as a weak and lesser man if he allowed himself to get slapped in such a manner and hadn't retaliated in return.

Novo's comments in both *El Universal* and *La Prensa* also point to another controversy surrounding *El gesticulador*'s staging at the Palacio: whether or not Usigli had pushed to perform such a scandalous play at the state's most sacrosanct theater for the purpose of gaining political clout. As Novo claims, "He would have wanted that the play would have been retired and staged at another theater, or that some general's hitman would have attacked him. He loves the publicity." He also believes Usigli had spoken out about Novo's attack in the press for the purpose of drawing extra publicity to *El gesticulador*, saying "in communicating this incident to the press, Mr. Usigli sought additional publicity for himself as a victim which his insults and provocations to his country and our institutions have not yielded him, as he hoped, with neither the censorship nor suspension of the play in which he throws such insults and provocations." Clearly, for Novo and others like the writer for *Tiempo*, Usigli's primary motivation for staging *gesticulador* at the Palacio was the clout such scandals would (and largely did) draw him.

The competition between Usigli and Novo, seen in their insults, their fight, and their redressal in the press, also built on a history of strained relations between the two: Novo distrusted Usigli because of the disrespectful manner he felt Usigli treated close friends of his,[328] the brash, egotistical reputation Usigli had cultivated throughout their shared professional circles,[329] and Usigli's known tendency to make disparaging remarks towards Novo's character as a homosexual, a behavior shared by Usigli's friend and occasional collaborator Diego Rivera.[330] Usigli, meanwhile, felt Novo had used his position as head of the Department of Theater to cut short Usigli's burgeoning success. Thus, it appears most likely that Novo was motivated to attack Usigli due to their recent heated exchange and strained past. But the conflict between Usigli and Novo developed in relation to the wider competition within Alemán's

[328] "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones," *La Prensa*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.
[329] Layera, 49, 67.
[330] Pilcher, 60.

cabinet over the issue of viewing and censuring *El gesticulador*: as Novo notes in *La Prensa*, "In regards to the play, we [i.e. INBA and the Department of Theater] have received an endless number of complaints from politicians and generals, same here as in the Ministry of the Interior."[331]

During their fight on the vestibule in the Palace of Fine Arts, Novo yelled an intriguing set of sentences, words that placed him firmly on the side of those who had lodged complaints with his office: "One in the name of the Representatives and Senators…another in the name of the generals!"[332] It appears Novo may have tried to defend his actions by claiming his attack was in defense of the politicians and generals Usigli had "slandered". By claiming he attempted to avenge the honor of the party's elite, Novo could better engender himself to his superiors as the man who physically humiliated someone responsible for attacking them and their ruling credentials, while also defending his actions and buttressing himself against any potential backlash Usigli or others directed against him.

On the other hand, in a less likely but not entirely implausible scenario, Novo may have been directly or indirectly ordered by one or several members of the party to punish Usigli for what they saw as a transgressive message and a personal slight—possibly, if not likely, the same cabinet members who had just succeeded in pushing the president and Novo to forcibly retire *El gesticulador*. Such an assertion presumes a high level of behind-the-scenes maneuvering, and the more realistic likelihood that the case was motivated by their existing animosity makes it highly unlikely Novo had been directed or paid off to attack Usigli. And yet, comparable examples exist in which members of Alemán's cabinet sent *pistoleros* to beat up and threaten murder against journalists who criticized the president, while public officials had a long track record of using union-affiliated and other hired thugs to threaten and physically intimidate those who wouldn't submit to their authority.[333] Ultimately, while it may be impossible to definitively determine the cause of Novo's attack and the words he yelled while doing so, the case underscores the use of

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[331] "S. Novo y R. Usigli se Lanzan Acusaciones," *La Prensa*, 30 de mayo 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 220.

[332] "Revuelo en el Mundo Teatral por el Incidente Entre Novo y Usigli," *Prensa Gráfica*, 29 de mayo 1947. In Centro de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (CITRU), Archivo Vertical, Folder "El gesticulador. 1947. Dir: Alfredo Gómez de la V."

[333] Smith, 108-110 and 223, 244; Pilcher, 97-127; and *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 167-177.

personal violence and bullying in postrevolutionary politics: proliferation in the use of political hitmen (termed *pistoleros*),[334] enforcers hired to coerce uncooperative journalists,[335] and personal insults leveled against a rival's masculinity[336] all provide different, but comparable examples of this tradition of intimidation politics.

Novo's attack also inspired and fed fire to further developments in the press discourse responding to *El gesticulador* and the scandals it provoked: questions, if not outright criticism, over his hiring as *jefe* of the Department of Theater. In the article "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," published in *El Redondel* on June 1, 1947, the unnamed author sets out immediately his goals to both unearth the details surrounding the "cowardly aggression with which Salvador Novo made Usigli a victim" and explain "the disorder that reigns [free] in such an important government agency,"[337] referencing what they considered a lack of respectful conduct inherent at the upper echelons of INBA. Claiming to conduct an interview with an unidentified agent within INBA, this informant maintained that Novo was effectively running the show behind-the-scenes. In this situation, Carlos Chávez acted only as the public figurehead of the agency, whom Novo had ostensibly compelled to fire Gómez de la Vega from his former position as head of Department of Theater, as well as Carlos Puig from the role he had played in initiating much of INBA's projects when it was reconstituted as its own institution the year prior and Seki Sano from undersecretary.

The informant went on to assert that Novo now occupied two positions in addition to his role as head of theater: that of head of the Department of Television and head of the Department

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[334] Benjamin T. Smith's *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutonary Oaxaca* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), Pablo Piccato's chapter "Pistoleros, *Ley Fuga*, and Uncertainty in Public Debates about Murder in Twentieth-Century Mexico" in *Dictablanda*, and Gillingham's *Unrevolutionary Mexico* provide seminal looks into public officials' employment of *pistoleros* in manipulating elections, managing popular movements, and coercing journalists' compliance.

[335] See Benjamin T. Smith's chapter "The Year Mexico Stopped Laughing: The Press, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico City" in *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976* and Gillingham's chapter "Talking About a Revolution" in *Unrevolutionary Mexico* for analyses of how the Alemán administration counteracted press criticism through targeting subversive newspapers with attacks by secret enforcers and hired thugs.

[336] A practice especially common amongst the military elite, who frequently derided their opponents' masculinity while boasting of their own "virility" and "potency"; in O'Malley, 132-145.

[337] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.

of Literature, for each of which Novo had little to no "serious" experience.[338] Worse, Novo was supposedly earning a salary for each of his three *cargas*, ostensibly totaling the same as or higher than Chávez's earnings as director of INBA,[339] thereby committing the double sin of taking positions and salaries away from more qualified competitors and embodying concerns surrounding the opportunism—both real and suspected—that solidified during both Ávila Camacho and Alemán's *sexenios*. Here, bureaucrats in both the cabinet and government agencies occupied multiple positions, enjoyed overinflated salaries, and exploited their functions for bribes, control of the various ministries' management of the economy and state-affiliated sectors, and illicit exportation activities.

Understood contextually, the concern about Novo's triple appointment paralleled contemporary concerns over Alemán's *amigos*, including the aforementioned Fernando Casas Alemán, Ramón Beteta, and Antonio Ruiz Galindo, as well as Enrique Parra Hernández and Carlos Serrano—the former the manager of Miguel Alemán's finances, the latter the head of the Mexican senate, informal chief of the secret service, and collector of campaign contributions—and how they had gained their powerful positions.[340] Parra Hernández used his influential role to gain shares in state companies like the telephone service, manage contracts with the state-managed railroad service and build roadways, and export consumer goods like vanilla and cotton, while Pasquel used government contracts to import "all the state's construction materials," government subsidies to sell petrol in eéxico City, and deal in contraband cars imported through his customs stations along the U.S.-Mexico border. Meanwhile, Serrano and other officials, especially those in the DFS and police and importation agencies focused on prohibiting cross-border contraband, instead used their positions to facilitate and profit from narcotrafficking.[341]

For *El Redondel*'s unnamed "informant," the most egregious in the case of Chávez and Novo's conduct, besides physically assaulting Usigli, was the manner by which Novo was

[338] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[339] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[340] Smith, 86-87.
[341] Smith, 87-88.

awarded the *nombramiento* (appointment) to oversee the Department of Theater. Having formed a committee of works to oversee INBA's theatrical seasons that included Usigli and contemporaries Villaurrutia, Agustín Lazo, Francisco Monterde, and Max Aub—the latter two favorably reviewed *El gesticulador* during the May performance run—Chávez would go on to fire the committee members only a short time afterwards,[342] despite having already selected *El gesticulador* for the teatro mexicano season. According to the informant, it was after this heavy-handed development that Gómez de la Vega presented his retirement, to which Chávez requested he provide him a list of three recommendations for a replacement. However, despite Gómez de la Vega naming such obvious choices like Usigli or Villaurrutia, Chávez decided to appoint someone entirely unconsidered throughout the process, Novo[343]—possibly due to the unknown factors motivating Usigli and Villaurrutia's earlier firings from the works committee. Having accepted his new position, however, Novo does appear to have kept the formerly-cleared *El gesticulador* for the teatro mexicano season's programming docket.

And yet, once complaints started to emerge from generals and other politicians—according to the article, those "congressmen, generals, and revolutionaries so 'pure' they felt alluded to" by a play denouncing rampant corruption—the journalist claims Novo began to fear the potential backlash his department might suffer for staging the subversive *El gesticulador*.[344] According to the author, Novo then attempted to informally censor the play, including through suspending performances and blasting the audience with cold air.[345] Once such divisive measures failed, only then did Novo resort to attacking Usigli. While the authenticity of such claims are difficult to confirm, it is known that the controversies sparked by *gesticulador*'s performance did lead to strong backlash from elites, including the personal demands to Alemán that did see the eventual suspension of the planned third week of performances, and which would

[342] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[343] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[344] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.
[345] "Salvador Novo es Quien Maneja el Instituto de Bellas Artes," *El Redondel*, 1 de junio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 225.

certainly fed fire to beliefs amongst Mexico City's press that officials had tried to block the staging through informal means like those described. Furthermore, the case aligns with the reality of the manipulative, behind-the-scenes measures PRI officials recognizably employed in influencing outcomes in their favor—elections, favorable positions and contracts in and from the national government, and the informal nature of press censorship being several of the clearest examples. Novo's earlier support for staging *El gesticulador*, his self-admission of the "endless number of complaints" INBA had received concerning its sponsorship for the play, and his eventual attack on Usigli further suggest the possibility of his perceived attempts at blocking performances and his desire to do so in order to distance himself from being seen as Usigli's ally.

An article published in the "Entre Músicos" section of the same *El Redondel* over a month later, on July 20, by an author using only the initials "S.H." similarly touches on Novo's appointment as head of the three departments in INBA, calling him a prime example of the "invasions of questionable persons in bureaucratic positions, especially in those related to the arts" that "Mexico has suffered" in recent ages.[346] First, the author calls Novo an example of a select number of "female souls in masculine bodies"—alluding to Novo's character as an openly gay man—who "due to the same tremendous inferiority complex from which they suffer…react like certain hysterical women, and, as they generally suffer without the same sense of responsibility that only a well-defined sexuality can give, pay no mind hurting their opposites with nails or with pen."[347] Attacking a man's character through deriding his sexuality, both through alluding to what were traditionally considered "effeminate" traits and in questioning, if not outright insulting, his sexuality—especially that of a known homosexual man—was frequent in Mexican political circles during the postrevolutionary era, reflecting both traditional conservatism towards sexual dispositions alternate to that of the traditional *macho* type and an oftentimes successful ploy in delegitimizing one's opponent. In the comparable case of the actors' unions crisis of 1944-1946, Cantinflas, himself formerly known for playing transgressive

[346] S.H., "Entre Musicos," *El Redondel*, 20 de julio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 236.
[347] S.H., "Entre Musicos," *El Redondel*, 20 de julio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 236.

gender and sexual roles in films like *El signo de la muerte* and *Águila o sol*, used the openly homosexual character and cross-dressing style of Spanish actor Miguel de Molina to deride the actor's presence in Mexico.[348] In doing so, Cantinflas debased both de Molina's act and his character as "immoral" and a "foreign contamination" corrupting Mexican national identity and culture, thereby conflating *mexicanidad* with *macho*-style heterosexuality and traditional gender norms. Similarly, the author S.H. portrayed Novo as a corrupting influence on the conduct and the character of INBA as an institution, raising concerns about the quality of the agency and attributing them primarily to Novo's sexuality, which he saw as giving rise to Novo's behavior in attacking Usigli.

Not only concerned with Novo, the author proceeds to attribute INBA's supposed corruption and what he saw as an attempted monopoly on art in Mexico, one "sustained through public funding for the benefit of a select few," to INBA's director as well. S.H. claimed Chávez's position as director of the National Symphony and the unbalanced support he gave to symphonic performances over that of opera were emblematic of the egotistical, personalist behavior of the most prominent officials charged with overseeing INBA.[349] Such a blatant critique of powerful officials at the head of a government institution fits well with the explosive discourse that *El gesticulador*'s staging prompted and the developing circumstances in Mexico's press that predicated the "year of satire" in 1948, while also suggesting the power dynamics behind which a journalist could affect such harsh criticism. Minister of Public Education Manuel Gual Vidal is not called out across the articles criticizing the actions of INBA officials, despite his position as Chávez's direct superior, nor are other higher-up members in Alemán's cabinet named, despite their highly-suspected involvement in blocking *El gesticulador*'s performance. S.H.'s targeting Novo and Chávez as the prime examples of bureaucratic corruption suggests the notion that officials lower on the totem pole like Novo and Chávez were easier targets, presenting less opportunity for greater backlash from the government.

Furthermore, the author makes a point to align his critique in a nationalist, pro-Alemán sentiment, calling the president a well-known afficionado of the opera, praising Gual Vidal and

[348] Pilcher, 118-125.
[349] S.H., "Entre Musicos," *El Redondel*, 20 de julio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 236.

Antonio Ruiz Galindo's kindness in initially congratulating Novo for achieving his appointment as head of Theater, Television, and Literature, and ultimately stating: "Our independent judgement, far from constituting an act of disloyalty against the Government to which currently and fleetingly we serve, is a demonstration that the age, in Mexico, of mental eunuchs who tremble at the reality that their behavior could bring about personal consequences is over."[350] S.H. ended his article by reiterating his disdain for Novo's sexuality and the corrupting influence it presents in his official charge, stating, "It seems immoral to us that he would administer the head [of the Institute], from his three official positions, an author of jokes who not long ago used to pass through Madero Avenue dressed as a woman, with makeup, and who then has continued a hazardous career tainted by the most shameful and unspeakable adventures."[351] Thus, both articles published in *El Redondel* over the course of June and July raised great concerns in the discourse surrounding *El gesticulador* over the direction of INBA and the complexities behind INBA officials' roles in both supporting and later attempting to block the play's staging, attributing them to issues of personal character and "immoral" conduct. Meanwhile, criticisms of Novo's sexuality and personal character also align with comparable examples demonstrating how sexuality and gender expressions were often connected to conceptions of national identity and "moral" conduct in Mexico during WWII and the post-war era.

Ultimately, the issue of the *alemanista* government's treatment of Usigli and *El gesticulador*, wherein the president first cleared the performance before bowing to pressure within his administration to prematurely retire it from the stage, acts as a microcosmic example of political power in Mexico. Oftentimes, both in early scholarship on postrevolutionary 20th century Mexico and in popular attitudes, the presidency is treated as an unrivaled power, distorting its extent to near mythic levels of influence and control.[352] But in this instance,

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[350] S.H., "Entre Musicos," *El Redondel*, 20 de julio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 236.

[351] S.H., "Entre Musicos," *El Redondel*, 20 de julio de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 236.

[352] See, for example, classic examples in the historiography of postrevolutionary Mexico asserting this view of presidential power, Enrique Krauze's *Mexico: Biography of Power* and *La presidencia imperial: ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940–1996)*, as well as more recent scholarship's criticisms against such a view, including Gillingham's aforementioned critique in "Maximino's Bulls" and Claudio Lomnitz's 'An Intellectual's Stock in the Factory of Mexico's Ruins: Enrique Krauze's ''Mexico: Biography of Power''', in Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Alemán was beholden to members of his cabinet, men who had won their positions primarily through their personal relationships and networks of support they had built with the president—the president may have expected nigh-unwavering loyalty from his cabinet, but they also expected him to side with them when they felt they were being unjustly attacked. The fact that such members were able to convince Alemán to walk back on his previous decision shows that power did not just flow unilaterally from the top down, a point which aligns with historian Ryan Alexander's analysis of the circumstances surrounding a later crisis that afflicted Alemán and his administration: that of the presidential succession of 1952. Here, Alemán was besieged by powerful factions within the party, represented by former presidents Lázaro Cárdenas and Manuel Ávila Camacho, in his selection of the party's next presidential candidate, forcing Alemán to shift from his original support for his close *amigo* Casas Alemán to a more neutral candidate, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines.[353]

Furthermore, the fact that Usigli's play received support (at least initially) from the head of the national government for performance in a state-funded theater indicates the reality that the PRIísta system's strength could lie not in its harsh suppression of critique—although such methods were certainly employed when it was felt necessary. Rather, the system's durability, part of what allowed it to function effectively enough for so many decades, rested on its ability to coopt potentially subversive movements, actors, and discourses, often with the purpose of signaling government heads' (supposed) willingness to engage with critique and suggest changes in public policy.[354] Thereby, heads of state could divert their critics from becoming even more radical, and possibly even draw them into the fold of the party "family" itself.

The Alemán Government and the Wax and Wane of Free Expression

With the election of Alemán, the first civilian president to govern Mexico in over 30 years, as well as minister of the Interior Hector Pérez Martínez's claims that the country would soon see the end to official censorship and the reconstitution of much of the national bureaucracy with civilian, educated administrators certainly worked to suggest new transformations in the political traditions and power structures of post-1920 Mexico. Since Obregón's election over two decades prior, each successive president had been a former military officer active during the

[353] Alexander, 147-155.
[354] *Dictablanda*, 3-4.

revolutionary decade that joined with the powerful Sonorista faction and eventually the PNR and PRM governments. Alemán's election marked a break with several informal traditions within the official party, signaling the end to using revolutionary credentialism as a prerequisite for justifying one's right to authority, coupled with the president's move away from emphasizing revolutionary nationalist rhetoric in exchange for language suggesting "modernization and social justice" as the two goals of modern Mexico.[355] Surrounded by well-educated, close friends, Alemán and his cadre of "sons of the Mexican Revolution" further shifted the country and state apparatus away from revolutionary-era reform and towards rapid industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, and the replacement of older revolutionary-era military elites with younger civilian administrators savvy to the growth in a postwar state bureaucracy and the style of political stability and economic growth it demanded.[356]

Furthermore, the push to encourage freer expression was felt amongst the national press located in Mexico City, opening a new, but brief, period where journalists could occasionally publish more honest opinions of the postrevolutionary state. In 1940s Mexico, censorship tended to fall on self-imposed lines, wherein editors and journalists maintained dominant patterns of discourse, carried similar views as the political elite, and received cash rewards and subtle threats of violence or backlash to maintain a positive image of state and national governments.[357] Furthermore, a certain level of criticism, within limits, was even encouraged, in which press contributors and editors could subtly vent their frustrations and those of their readership, as long as such criticism didn't cross the line to scrutinizing "presidential authority, official corruption, and electoral fraud."[358]

But during the first eighteen months into the tenure of the reconstituted PRI, former state subsidization of and moneylending to big newspapers, along with informal bribes, began to drop

[355] The two lines characterizing Alemán's rhetorical claims and frequently repeated by PRI officials in their reflections on the changing nature of Mexico's needs under Alemán, as expressed in Luis's Estrada's 1999 satirical film, *La ley de Herodes*. The filmmaker's narrative repeatedly echoes the frequent label attached to the *alemanista*-era PRI as morbidly corrupt, reflected in the protagonist, actor Damián Alcázar's bureaucrat Juan Vargas, and his conversion from honest, if naïve, party member to full-blown opportunist, embezzling funds, accepting bribes, and threatening those who attempted to stop him. Thus, the repeated claims to "modernization and social justice" become nothing more than empty promises, just like Alemán's real campaign and presidential promises that spurred growth and development, but for an increasingly select few. *La Ley de Herodes*, DVD, Estrada, 1999.
[356] Alexander, 77.
[357] Smith, 45.
[358] Lawson, 25.

off,[359] and the lack of regular financial incentives combined with the promise of new journalistic freedoms compelled press contributors to more openly question the legitimacy of the single-party system, crossing the former line by questioning "core tenets of the political system."[360] These included one of the most important publications of the year, *Exclésior*'s reprint of Daniel Cosío Villegas' essay "La crisis en México" ("The Crisis in Mexico"), leading Cosío Villegas to claim the rhetoric, indeed the very "revolutionary" character of the institutionalized "Revolution" was dead by the mid-1940s. Interestingly, Chumacero and other commentators connect ideas presented by Cosío Villegas' essay to *El gesticulador* in their articles, further linking the two pieces. The responses to *El gesticulador*'s performance were thus spurred by a unique opportunity of the moment, most prominently the desire of various authors (especially those who were friends with and contemporaries of Usigli) to celebrate their peer's success, revel in the play's messaging, and more openly question the foundations of their not-so-democratic system, freed from the need to self-censor.

This supposed turn to greater freedom of expression preceded the crescendo of shrewder, even outright criticism of Alemán, his administration, and the frequent denunciations of official corruption during the year of 1948, a key period which Benjamin Smith calls "The year Mexico stopped laughing." During the first two years of Alemán's presidency, rampant, open corruption at the highest levels of government and the alienation of the military, unions, and Mexico City's public propelled the rise in critical, satirical reporting.[361] Alemán's *amigos*, recently elevated to the level of cabinet ministers, used their positions to embezzle government funds and personally enrich themselves, at a rate and level of visibility not yet seen even in Mexico's long political traditions of bribery and stolen funds. Breaking the relative "harmony" enjoyed between the national government, the press, and key sectors of Mexico's population during wartime, the *amigos*' public flaunting of their illicit wealth and abuse of power produced novel mainstream coverage of high-level scandal and corruption.[362] Meanwhile, Alemán's government managed to break relationships with three important elements within the PRI coalition. Influential elements in the military were angered following their replacement in the cabinet by Alemán's civilian technocrats, workers belonging to powerful unions were repulsed by Alemán's hardline stance

[359] Smith, 90.
[360] Lawson, 25.
[361] Smith, 88-91.
[362] Smith, 88-90.

against independent labor union activism, declining wages, and rising prices, and Mexico City's public became incensed by the devaluation of the peso that same year and the resulting skyrocketing in foodstuff prices.[363]

As a response, insults, rumors, jokes, and songs sang out across Mexico City's streets, bars, and restaurants, directly calling out the corruption of the *amigos* and even Alemán himself.[364] This explosion in politically themed humor within public sites effective at producing and disseminating such humor reflects the prominence of street-level satire under the *dictablanda* system. In this case, however, such expressions of popular dissatisfaction were even picked up and reprinted by Mexico City's national press, signaling a break away from the old system in which journalists and editors avoided directly challenging the most powerful officials, their corruption, and the presidency. Doing so, newspapers who picked up on the new satirical, critical turn "tied together diffuse dissatisfaction to create organized narratives, offered credibility to rumors, and popularized a cogent indictment of the Alemán administration."[365] In other words, the national press furthered a concentrated approach to contesting PRI officials authority and the legitimacy of their rule, using multivariant popular sources and giving a focused voice to collective discontent with the Alemán administration. Thus, national press outlets acted as a conduit for the broader public's frustrations while rejecting the PRIísta system's demands for presidentialism and transcendentalism amongst the press.

During the summer of 1948, big-name publications like *Excelsiór*, *La Prensa*, and *Tiempo* published articles criticizing Alemán's economic policies, the issue of rising prices, and what they saw as officials' lavish lifestyles while the normal Mexican citizen suffered. However, the most biting and dissident amongst the press was *Presente*, founded by former *Novedades* writer Jorge Piño Sandoval and a cabal of like-minded journalists incensed by the lack of a "clean" Mexico: Renato Leduc, Arias Bernal, and Jorge Ferretis, amongst others, as well as several female writers, including the comic actress Refugio "Cuca" Escobar and the poet Margarita Michelena, all drawn from the mutual worlds of journalism and theater.[366] They went further than most mainstream papers in directly naming and publicizing high-up officials and

[363] Smith, 90-91.
[364] Smith, 93.
[365] Smith, 95.
[366] Smith, 97.

their actions exploiting the power their government positions afforded them, all the way up the *amigos* line from Beteta, Casas Alemán, Ruiz Galindo, and Parra Hernández to the president himself. Meanwhile, Piño Sandoval also booked a theater revue at the Teatro Lírico to perform satirical plays based on the newspaper's coverage (one which was canceled at the last minute), thereby reflecting the trend in politically themed satirical theater during the mid- to late- 1940s embodied by works like *El gesticulador* and Palillo's shows at the Follies-Bergère.[367]

For their work attempting to expose the corruption inherent in the Alemán administration, the writers of *Presente* and other publications were met with a multi-pronged array of measures employed by Alemán's government to counteract the influence and circulation of the press' exposes. These included: the opening up of state-subsidized markets selling food for cheap prices, thereby placating the capital's middle- and lower-class crowds incensed by high food prices; a counter-campaign of state-sponsored propaganda in national weeklies that conflated the press' discourse utilizing rumors, jokes, and insults as equivalent to *murmuraci*ón ("gossip"), presenting such reporting as "feminine" and not (in their view) the legitimate journalism demanded of Mexico's honorable—and almost entirely male—press corps; the usual, albeit augmented, payoffs, bribery, and financial sanctions meant to exert pressure on the press to fall back in line with officially-sanctioned discourse; and numerous threats and several real attacks on *Presente* especially, including an attack that destroyed the paper's printing press and did "70,000 pesos worth of damage."[368] Due to the constant threats levied against them, several of the writers lived with the knowledge that their lives were constantly at risk and armed themselves accordingly. Additionally, in a letter published in *El Universal* the day after the attack, it was insinuated that the attack on *Presente*'s press shop was a self-motivated "auto-assault," using language that revealed a thinly-veiled threat from the regime indicating that Alemán's government was not beyond murdering the journalists and portraying their deaths as "suicides."[369] This threat reflected the common contemporary practice of *ley fuga*, where officials would shoot a prisoner and claim they had attempted to run, rampant and well-known to the Mexican public during the Porfiriato and which continued well into the postrevolutionary period.[370] Indeed, suspicions of *ley fuga* and officials following through on threats made against

[367] Smith, 102-103.
[368] Smith, 103-107.
[369] Smith, 107-108.
[370] Smith, 108-110.

critical journalists continued to persist during Alemán's *sexenio*. Fernando Sánchez Bretón, director of the magazine *La Semana Ilustrada*, was shot and killed by *pistoleros* plausibly hired by *alemanista* officials in *ley fuga* manner; gunmen shot up the house of Magdalena Mondragón, author of the satirical work *Los Presidentes Dan Risa*, probably as a signal for her to cut the book's distribution; and Piño Sandoval himself was most likely pushed from a second-story balcony by government thugs, who almost succeeded in killing the dissident *Presente* owner and further contributed the newspaper's eventual downfall.[371]

After 1948, as Smith concludes, satirical humor as a form of critiquing the failures and excesses of the national government and the officials who ran out increasingly disappeared from both the national press and the theater.[372] Journalists attached to the nation's largest publications learned the limits of what they could publish, the responses they could expect from the presidency and Mexico's intelligence and security agencies, and ultimately the system of journalist censorship and freedom of speech through the events of the first two years of Alemán's administration. Indeed, satirical humor overall became elevated to the level of elite humor, wherein insiders within the PRI's inner circle and journalists were the ones who joked about the hypocrisies apparent in the gaps between official rhetoric and official action—albeit behind closed doors,[373] far from the space of open debate and discussion within the national press. Conforming to the sign of the times, Usigli and other satirical playwrights and actors, like Cantinflas, also appear to have moved away from using theater as a space for satirizing the idiosyncrasies of political life and rule in Mexico. After two more relatively unsuccessful performances of *El gesticulador* at the Virginia Fabregás theater in Mexico City and Manuel Briosi y Cantini theater in Oaxaca City in October and November 1947, *El gesticulador* was not performed again in Mexico City until the early 1960s, and Usigli shifted to writing and staging works with a distinct lack of politically-themed satire, including his "antihistorical" *Corona* trilogy—arguably his next greatest project after *El gesticulador*.

Meanwhile, Cantinflas had long been considered a staple in Mexico's satirical tradition, parodying anything from *cardenista* radicalism to the arriviste behaviors of the political and social elite. But despite satirizing Alemán's presidency and his administration's rampant

[371] Smith, 110-111.
[372] Smith, 111.
[373] Smith, 112.

corruption with the 1952 play *Yo, Colón*, Cantinflas had also increasingly become a puppet affiliated with the regime: waiting until Ruiz Cortines had replaced Alemán in the president's chair, the play suffered limited success and poor reception amongst both critics' circles and audience attendance.[374] Many spat back against Cantinflas by pointing out his recent endorsements of Alemán's presidency and the official party as a whole—including acting as an election official during the 1952 elections, replete in PRI regalia—which were deemed especially hypocritical given the personal enrichment and nationalist aggrandizing Cantinflas himself enjoyed over the course of Alemán's *sexenio*.[375] Meanwhile, satirical magazines continued to disappear and formerly critical journalists became increasingly *oficialista*, including Piño Sandoval, Arias Bernal, and the former *revista* satirists Roberto Soto and Roberto Blanco Moheno.[376] Thus, satirical humor, as a method for criticizing a repressive and corrupt political system in both the press and the theater, had largely died as quickly as it had risen to national prominence.

The End to a Controversial Episode

Ultimately, although initially viewed as potential reformers of the nature of power and politics in postrevolutionary Mexico, Alemán and his affiliates perpetuated the opportunism shared by their older counterparts, used the top-down corporatist structures linking peasant and labor organizations to crack down on strikes and peasant mobilization,[377] and left office under widespread awareness that they had used positions of authority for personal enrichment and sold the nation out to foreign investment and upper-class economic interests. Better understood with knowledge of what would come, Alemán and his administration's support for free expression in the arts and press starts to pale, with official support beginning to wane almost immediately after Alemán's first two years in office,[378] also coinciding with the death of the cabinet's former champion of freedom for the arts, Pérez Martínez. In addition to the renewed, stringent censorship enacted against the capital's press during the summer of 1948, the government's attempt at passing a new *Ley de Derechos del Autor* ("Authors' Rights Law") during January of the same year represented a further attempt at restricting what Mexican journalists, writers, and

[374] Pilcher, 154.
[375] Pilcher, 147, 154.
[376] Smith, 111-112.
[377] Alexander, 91.
[378] Smith, 83.

artists were able to publish in written form, using the familiarly vague terminology of prohibiting works that contradicted "morality or public peace."[379] Intriguingly, an article published in *Excélsior* on December 28, 1947 avoided making any mention of the more restrictive elements of this law, instead portraying the law as an attempt at protecting authors' rights to intellectual ownership.[380] Although a limited example, the instance of this article's coverage of the Authors' Rights Law again reflects the "transcendental" expectations rampant within press reporting, emphasizing the positive elements to the government's new Authors' Rights Law over that of a shrewder consideration of all outcomes, constructive and detrimental, that such a policy could bring.

All in all, *El gesticulador*'s performance run at the Palace of Fine Arts provides revealing insight into the convergence of the arts and politics in Mexico during the early years of Alemán's presidency. New promises for freedom of expression and shifting ideological rhetoric suggested a new phase in Mexico's development towards a more open political system and more robust public sphere, while subversive works and scandals over formal and informal forms of censorship sparked continued debate over the extent of free expression and the perpetuation of corruption at the highest levels of government. This novel, albeit brief, period of official support for a notable modicum of political criticism in the press and on the stage saw its crescendo the year later, with outright denunciation of the president, his cabinet, and his policies amongst Mexico City news outlets, after which the *alemanista* government reinforced its methods for exercising control over the capital's press. Alemán's *sexenio* marked a crucial turning point in postrevolutionary Mexico: during his administration, the "Revolution" entered its "institutionalized" phase, revolving around updates to revolutionary rhetoric and policy that introduced industrial modernization, private development, and civilian-led rule as new components of the revolutionary project. As Paul Gillingham argues, "in the forties and fifties the language of revolutionary nationalism [sic] coexisted alongside [sic] a language of democracy, and another of development."[381] These amendments transformed the value of the "Revolution" as a site for building political capital, shifting its focus, as Chumacero and other

[379] *Diario Oficial*, 14 de enero de 1948; found reprinted in Niblo, 222.
[380] "Ley Sobre Derechos del Autor," *Excélsior*, 28 de diciembre de 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 54 ""El Gesticulador, Newspaper Clippings, 1947."
[381] *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 282.

intellectuals suggested, from the lower-classes and progressive reform to the middle class, a growing, intermeshed cabal of business, industrial, and political elites, and maintaining the now-status quo. On the personal level, *El gesticulador*'s staging and its defense within Alemán's government also marked a turning point in the Usigli's career, bringing him newfound popularity and success while also seeing new and eventually longstanding developments in his relationship with the postrevolutionary state and official party.

Within weeks after the final performance, Usigli penned a letter to President Alemán, petitioning him for annual funding from the national government for the purpose of organizing a semi-public non-profit society called the Theater of the New World, itself focused on supporting Mexican writers, directors, and actors and producing plays that treated distinctly Mexican themes like those covered in *El gesticulador* and other Usigli works.[382] Most significantly, Usigli makes repeated attempts to assure Alemán that this theater society will bring great benefit to the state, suggesting public officials' use of permanent and portable theaters for encouraging nationalist theater and using the coded, servile language he often employed when conversing with superiors in the national government:

> It moves me to request your busy, but untiring attention, the conviction of finding in your person the spirit of justice and the open and intact enthusiasm that are already the norm of your government… I believe it will be feasible to compile sufficient interests for the construction of a building with a theater and adjoining rooms for concerts, conferences, cinematographic exhibitions, expositions, and a library, of which will be available to the State during certain periods of the year… Once the permanent building is finished, the portable theater, property of the State, will travel periodically throughout the country with experimental companies, following the annual program of works put on by the organization… Allow me to anticipate, Mr. President, my deep thanks for your attention and agreement, and, I beg you, give me the honor of considering me your devoted servant and friend.[383]

[382] Letter from Rodolfo Usigli to then-President Miguel Alemán, June 27, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 1, Folder 37 "Alemán, Miguel (1947-1968)."
[383] Letter from Rodolfo Usigli to then-President Miguel Alemán, June 27, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 1, Folder 37 "Alemán, Miguel (1947-1968)."

Usigli's request appears motivated most likely by continued financial struggles, even after a success like *El gesticulador*, as well as the belief that Alemán's government had finally shown him the acceptance and recognition he deserved. According to an interview conducted with Juan de Valencia during one of the final days of performance, Usigli claimed that he made "'very little money'" through the staging of *El gesticulador*, whose "'profit remain[ed] reduced to four percent [of all total ticket sales].'"[384] Therefore, despite the critical success and support he enjoyed from peers, Usigli continued to experience significant struggle with making a living through his main profession, which in the future would compel him to seek economic security through the limited financially stable career opportunities available to Mexican intellectuals at the time. Additionally, branded as one of the leaders of Mexican theater through inclusion in INBA's teatro mexicano season, maybe Usigli had finally been brought into the fold of the esteemed, nationalist artists considered members of the Revolutionary Family. Thus, the reasoning behind Usigli's somewhat two-faced appeal to Alemán becomes clearer. However, his petition would be denied by one of the officials who displayed the greatest animosity towards his play: Carlos Chávez. In a letter written a month later responding to Usigli's request, Chávez affirmed that Usigli's request had been passed on from Alemán's office to Chávez's desk,[385] a decision motivated by his position in handling such affairs but which almost certainly must have felt like a personal slap in the face for Usigli.

Ultimately, Chávez concluded that INBA required more precise financial estimates for the costs of the operation, and the project never received clearance afterwards.[386] And yet, despite the nature of a still tenuous relationship with certain officials in the national government, the fact of Usigli's need for a stable, well-paying job—an ever-present concern in the lives of playwrights and other artists at the time—propelled the playwright into an even closer working relationship with the state over the decades to come, including in diplomatic postings in Lebanon and Oslo. Through such positions, Usigli would play a direct role in representing Mexico as a

[384] Juan de Valencia, "No hay critica, exclama Usigli," May 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series B, Box no. 55a, Usigli Scrapbook, 1924-1947, pg. 230.
[385] Letter from Carlos Chávez to Rodolfo Usigli concerning letter written to the President of the Republic, July 23, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 2, Folder 202 "Chávez, Carlos (1938-1951)."
[386] Letter from Carlos Chávez to Rodolfo Usigli concerning letter written to the President of the Republic, July 23, 1947. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 2, Folder 202 "Chávez, Carlos (1938-1951)."

modernizing nation on the international stage, marking a transition that parallels that of Cantinflas, himself going from humble beginnings in the *carpa* to acting as cultural ambassador for Mexico's cinema industry through several roles in Hollywood films.[387] Thus, heightened fame, financial opportunity, closer relationships with powerful elites in the state bureaucracy, and the many benefits employment and influence within the national government brought would foreshadow the final decades of Usigli's artistic and diplomatic careers. The final stage of his life shows an ironic, almost prescient twist on the fate of *El gesticulador*'s protagonist, where Usigli converted from a vocally critical artist to a tacit, even open, agent within the PRIísta state, paralleling the masquerading effaced by his own characters César Rubio and General Navarro.

[387] Pilcher, xxiv-xxv.

Epilogue: Usigli in the Service of the State

> "You worked closely with all the political bosses in all the parties because you have done the same favors for all of them…Instead of squashing you like an insect, they have covered you with honors and money because you knew their secrets and did their dirty deeds…You and your kind have shown your ineptitude, have demonstrated that you are rotten to the core: all you can do is add to Mexico's shame and hypocrisy."
>
> Rodolfo Usigli, *El gesticulador*, 1938

In the weeks following *El gesticulador*'s final performance at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Usigli would write his "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," published the summer of 1947 with a reprint of *El gesticulador*. Through his "Ensayo," Usigli praised Alemán's administration and the reconstituted PRI, recently cleansed of much of its former military leadership, as "mark[ing] the beginning of a new political and ethical conduct, representing the greatest defeat that the putrid official demagoguery has suffered."[388] He named then-minister of the Interior Héctor Pérez Martínez and especially Alemán as setting the trend for this new wave of ethical politics, in his view rejecting all requests to censor *El gesticulador* and fulfilling, at the highest order, their "functions as leader[s]".[389] Most insightful for what would come, Usigli ends his piece by stating "the behavior of public officials [Alemán and Pérez Martínez] that I suggested before shows clearly evident signs of a moral improvement that will improve Mexico's stature and possibly begin to cure it of its greatest defect, that being the Mexican [tendency to hypocrisy]…For the work that remains ahead of us, in order to serve Mexico, I will always give my voice and my theater."[390]

Years later, Usigli would note that he and many others were duped by the early promises and the initial belief in the reformative spirit that was thought to motivate Alemán's government,[391] a sentiment that would eventually sour as the months went on and Alemán and his compatriots revealed their enhancements to, rather than reformation of, methods for controlling critical artists, the press, the nature of official corruption and personalist opportunism

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[388] Rodolfo Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," in *El gesticulador: Pieza para demagogos, en tres actos* (Mexico: Editorial Stylo, 1947), 301.
[389] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 301.
[390] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 303.
[391] Beardsell, 61.

in Mexican politics. And yet, with Usigli's belief that he had finally "created a Mexican theater" through *El gesticulador*'s successful staging,[392] Usigli appears to have marked a new stage in his relationship with the PRIísta state, one compelled by the fame that the rambunctious performance run attracted from both critics and audiences, official recognition that his work constituted a distinctly Mexican character and served to represent the type of praiseworthy artistic value advanced by official cultural nationalism, and a continued need for financial security that only positions in the state bureaucracy would bring for intellectuals of his type. Even with funding through INBA to stage *El gesticulador* and a relatively successful commercial performance through a typically packed audience, a month after the end to performances Usigli's remarks in the interview with Juan de Valencia bely the financial concerns behind writing and staging plays in postrevolutionary Mexico. Avenues for commercial success were limited, tickets for shows at the Palacio de Bellas Artes were subsidized with the hope of culling a more diverse audience, and many playwrights, even the successful ones, struggled with making a profit off their works. Usigli had traded possible commercial success through a private company for the moral weight of the official stage, reducing the profits he may have enjoyed otherwise for a chance to speak "directly" to the elite in Alemán's administration. But state sponsorship also introduced a powerful counterweight to continued criticism from Usigli: by permitting Usigli to voice his critique on the official stage, *alemanista* officials signaled their openness to objections from below, their supposed willingness to change the government's former conduct towards censorship,[393] and symbolically brought Usigli and his vision for Mexican theater into the fold of the Revolutionary Family and the boundaries of official culture. Ultimately, his acceptance into official culture led Usigli to believe he and the state had finally achieved a realist, critically self-

[392] Usigli, "Ensayo sobre la actualidad de la poesía dramática," 251.

[393] As Gillingham puts it, "officialist culture did have two stabilizing effects. It helped generate boom and bust cycles of hope, with each incoming president presented as a more promising and genuine representative of the revolution…It also [sic] maintained a common set of assumptions and words for what politicians and the ruled generally agreed should be a reality of social justice, even as they disagreed on how to get there." This again aligns with "Gramsci's alternative conception of hegemony as a balance of force and consent," in the case of election cycles, official culture, and cooption of critical artists emphasizing more of the latter, thereby reaffirming the more democratic or open characteristics of the *dictablanda*'s "soft authoritarian" system. As shown by Usigli, it was the suggestion of democratization, promises towards and social reform, and his acceptance by the state that suggested a less-imbalanced hegemonic path—working towards peacefully drawing, rather than forcing, consent from below, and reorganizing structures of power so as to permit greater participation and leadership from below—under Alemán's government that ultimately helped bring about his submission to the PRIísta system. In *Unrevolutionary Mexico*, 282, and *Dictablanda*, viii.

reflective professional theater tradition for Mexico. Having done so, Usigli could finally turn to other projects, content—for the time being—with the final success of a job well done.

His dramatic output during the early years of the following decade reflects this transition. *El niño y la niebla* and *Jano es una muchacha*, dramas treating the psychological, social, and sexual mores of middle class desolation and under-age sex work in the context of rapidly urbanizing Mexico City, rather than the political satire of earlier works, saw great critical and commercial success. *El niño y la niebla* broke box office records, enjoying an eight-month performance run at the Teatro del Caracol that saw no less than 450 performances and earning the author 12,000 pesos and the theater over 200,000, while *Jano es una muchacha* enjoyed over 100 performances at the Teatro Colón, netting the theater over 225,000 pesos.[394] Clearly, Usigli was doing well with the transition in subject matter. However, personal financial security still presented an issue: Usigli had four children and a spouse to support by 1955, so in the following year, he began what would become a fifteen-year tenure in the diplomatic service, serving as Enviado Extraordinario y Ministro Plenipotenciaro and eventually Embajador Plenipotenciario in Lebanon between 1956 and 1961 and Embajador de México in Norway between 1962 and 1972. His years in the SRE formed a complicated time personally for Usigli, but produced developments that further cemented his role as an intellectual in service of the state: following Roderic Camp's model, during this time Usigli fully transitioned into a partisan, compromised intellectual, one who abided by the party line and built relationships that further consolidated his fold into the Revolutionary Family.

Through his time abroad in Beirut and Oslo, Usigli fulfilled the usual tasks of a diplomat, organizing events at the Mexican Embassy, mediating conflicts and disputes with foreign governments, meeting with foreign dignitaries—including representatives of newly independent nations in southwest Asia and Africa—and above all, representing Mexican cultural nationalism on the international stage. Renata Keller has argued that in the increasingly polarized world of the Cold War, the Mexican government pursued a Janus-faced program of international and domestic policies, where president Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) in particular publicly defended the recent Cuban Revolution and drew on Mexico's revolutionary history to connect Mexico to Cuba's recent social transformation and revive the memory—if not the policies—of

[394] Beardsell, 131, 222.

Mexico's revolution.[395] Meanwhile, the government maintained a relatively conservative policy at home, utilizing internal intelligence agencies and the military to undercut and repress growing radical movements that leaned on the government's public rhetoric to demand tangible commitments to social reform. Usigli directly participated in PRIísta attempts to maintain a revolutionary image abroad: by organizing events and performances that celebrated Mexican arts in front of foreign representatives, he reminded foreign governments of the cultural benefits Mexico's revolutionary history had brought the nation. He even organized several performances of *El gesticulador* in countries like the Soviet-controlled Poland and Czechoslovakia,[396] where the play's original critique was transformed into a narrative legitimizing the modern PRIísta state as one that had corrected its former corrupt and authoritarian behaviors.[397] In doing so, Usigli aided official discourse depicting the PRIísta state as a still-revolutionary body.

Meanwhile, during his time abroad Usigli became increasingly gripped by a personal depression that would follow him on-and-off until his death. Writing to his friend Amalia Castillo de Ledón in 1959, Usigli remarks, "Almost since I left Mexico, I've been going through a crisis that doesn't seem to end…without a new play, and without the energy to make it, where can I go…the great vacancies—Paris, Brussels, Rome—are for powerful politicians, ex-members of the presidential cabinet. A European capital that weren't so humid and that has strong theater would be my salvation, but…"[398] His thoughts reflect several developments in Usigli's career, relationship with Mexico, and position in the PRIísta bureaucracy. Throughout his time period, Usigli's dramatic production would drastically reduce in both volume and quantity: during the 1930s, the playwright had written no less than fifteen plays, many of them scathing political satires, but between 1956 and 1972 (the year he finished his final play, *¡Buenos días, señor Presidente!*), Usigli completed only 11 plays, even the best of which—*Corona de fuego* and

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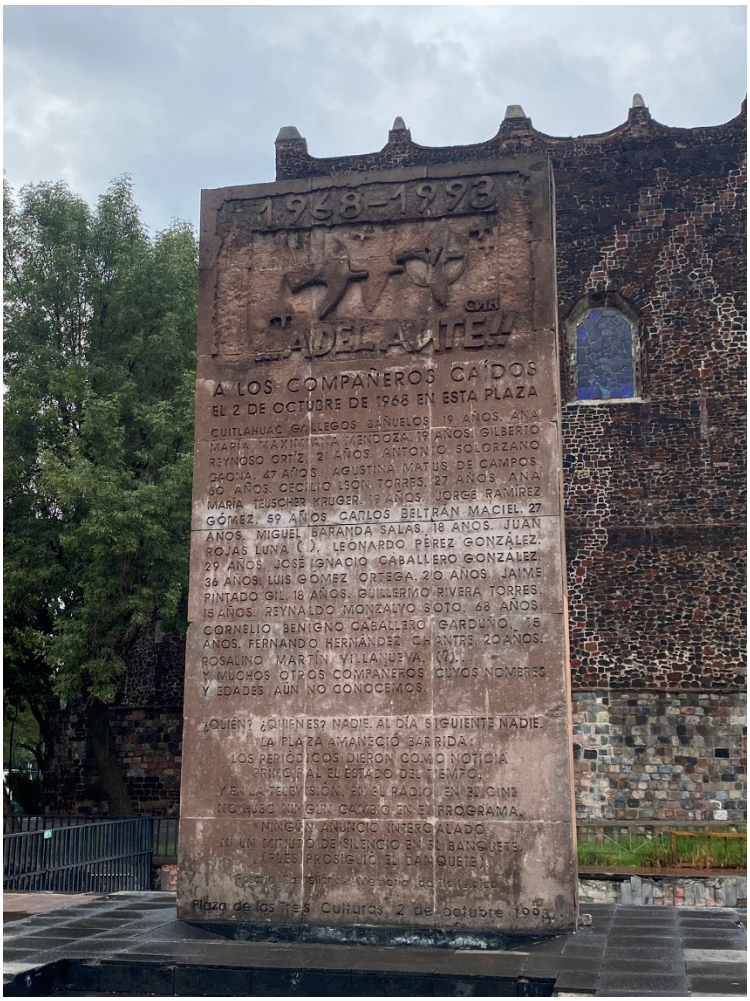
[395] Keller, 1-12.
[396] Introducción de *El gesticulador*, Embajador de México en Polonia, Eduardo Espinosa y Prieto en el Teatro Popular de Nowa Huta, Polonia, 16 de Octubre de 1962. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-Series A, Sub-Sub Series I, Box 5, Folder 59 "El Gesticulador, Newspaper Clipping + Introduction of Usigli in Chekoslovakin Presentation, 1962."
[397] A rather intriguing, tongue-in-cheek occasion, given the Soviet Union's own single-party system. The staging of *El gesticulador* in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia begs the question of how audiences received and engaged with *El gesticulador*'s narrative and if they saw any parallels between the Mexican case and their own political system.
[398] Rodolfo Usigli, letter to Amalia de Castillo Ledón on April 17, 1959. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 2, Folder 183b, "Castillo Ledon, Antonio (Chatillo) + (1957-1975) Amalia Gutierrez Caballero de."

Corona de luz—"tended to confirm the impression that his extended exile contributed substantially to the decline of his dramatic skills."[399] Isolated from his birthplace and the stimulant for his dramatic production, the decline in his dramatic quality paralleled a decline in the author's physical and mental health, produced also by the adverse environments of Lebanon and Norway. A growing sense of isolation from home also gave a rise to a personal feeling of disconnect from emerging generations of playwrights, leading the author to feel his work had been left behind by contemporary upstarts in Mexico's theater circles. This physical and intellectual disconnect would also inform his antagonistic relationship with a growing, increasingly radical student movement, representing a break with a new generation who pursued political and social gains distinct to that of Usigli's contemporary concerns.[400] Lastly, despite his growing inclusion in the Revolutionary Family's pantheon of nationalist artists, Usigli still lacked the political capital to be considered a full member of the Inner Circle of the PRIísta family—a state that would also play out in his future relationships with presidents Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) and Luis Echeverría (1970-1976).

In 1968, Mexico was selected to host the Olympic Games,[401] the first time a "developing" nation had been chosen to do so and expected as a watershed moment for the country to show off its successful modernization on the international and domestic stage. Two weeks before the Games were set to open, on the evening of October 2, hundreds of student protestors, radicals, and everyday citizens gathered in the Plaza de Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco borough in Mexico City, where military, secret police, and *granadero* (riot police) forces surrounded, fired upon, and murdered hundreds of civilians in the matter of a few minutes. Over the course of the night and day following, thousands more were rounded up and taken to military

[399] Beardsell, 21.
[400] The student movement of the 1960s presented, symbolically more than literally, a new "revolution," a new movement calling for a new period of social and political transformation distinct to that of the revolution of the 1910s (I use quotation marks here to denote that I do not attempt to make an argument that the student movement fully and literally constituted a revolution, but that it did present demands for a new era of social and political transformations akin in that regard only to the revolution of 1910). This "revolution" conflicted both with Usigli's older, now-outdated conception of revolutionary idealism and his contemporary position as an intellectual actively in the service of a PRIísta state that had, by then, continually distanced itself from the revolutionary nationalism of earlier decades while also combatting the students' demands.
[401] And for which Usigli played an active role in gaining Mexico's favor from Olympic International Committee members, laying "the social groundwork to create a favorable impression of Mexico in advance of Marte R. Gomez's international tour to pitch his country's bid." In "Twenty-Five Little Known Archives for Latin America The Rodolfo Usigli Archive of The Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University, Oxford, OH", by Katie Gibson and Elena Jackson Albarrán.

camps across the city, under suspicion of being or harboring "communist" agitators—some of which would be permanently disappeared over the following weeks. Reports in the press the following day were scarce, recounting "clashes" between students and the military, before finally producing a fluctuating death toll that eventually settled on 20 people killed—the party line voiced by Díaz Ordaz's spokesman, Fernando Garza, reflected in the official monument placed at the site of the massacre 25 years later. However, reports from contemporary observers place the death toll much higher, oscillating from 200 to as many as 1,500, with most historians agreeing the number likely rests somewhere between 300 and 500.[402]



[402] "The Tlatelolco Massacre: U.S. Documents on Mexico and the Events of 1968," in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 99*, ed. Kate Doyle for the National Security Archive (October 10, 2003). Located in https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/; "The Dead of Tlatelolco: Using the Archives to Exhume the Past," in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 201*, ed. Kate Doyle for the National Security Archive (October 1, 2006). Located in https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB201/index.htm.

Figure 1: Monument to the Tlatelolco Massacre, Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco, Mexico City, D.F.
Source: Personal Collection

The orthodox narrative of the Tlatelolco Massacre sees it as a *parteaguas* (turning point) in the PRI's control over Mexico, the moment in which the PRI's authoritarian control reached both its highest point and the beginning of its end: in popular memory, there is before Tlatelolco, and after Tlatelolco.[403] While this still holds somewhat true, especially for the effect Tlatelolco had on the middle class, international perceptions of Mexico's political rule, and the pluralization in Mexican politics that Tlatelolco helped foment, recent scholarship has worked to deconstruct one-sided view, placing Tlatelolco and the summer of student mobilization that preceded in a long lineage of popular mobilization, regional resistance, and violent crackdown endemic in postrevolutionary Mexico. Student unrest did not emerge in a single summer but rather stretched back at least a decade, while numerous groups had contested PRIísta rule for decades: Rubén Jaramillo's peasant-based resistance movement, centered in the heartland of Zapata's legacy, Morelos; Henríquez Guzmán's opposition movement to the PRI's candidate Ruiz Cortines in 1952; the railroad worker's mass strike in 1958-59; and frequent unrest in Veracruz and Guerrero especially used both official methods and concentrated violence to challenge local agents and demand reform, just as PRIísta actors responded with a mix of formal concessions and military force.[404] Guerillas Genaro Vázques and Lucio Cabañas and his Partido de los Pobres (PDLP), inspired by their experiences as *normalista* school teachers, had also formed powerful guerrilla resistance groups in the Guerrero countryside, and were joined over the months following Tlatelolco by students and other activists incensed by the bloodshed.

Students, alternative press, and guerrilla groups weren't the only ones to voice dissatisfaction with the PRIísta state, however. Octavio Paz, one of the leading intellectuals of mid-century Mexico and ambassador to India at the time of the massacre, resigned his post—citing the PRI's unjust and over-compensatory response to student unrest—and called upon

[403] For contemporary experiences of the massacre and the symbolic effect it had on Mexico, see Elena Poniatowska's classic account *La noche de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City, D.F.: Ediciones Era, S.A., 1971).
[404] Insightful scholarship covering these movements and the mix of informal and formal resistance, violence, repression, and concessions that emerged in their challenges to the PRIísta state includes, but certainly is not limited to: *Unrevolutionary Mexico*; *Dictablanda*; *Populism in 20th Century Mexico*; Jaime Pensado's *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Tanalís Padilla's *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Priísta, 1940–1962* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008); and Alexander Aviña's *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2014).

fellow intellectuals to do so as well. Many followed suit, symbolically denouncing the now undeniably repressive PRI—Usigli, however, did not, effectively ending the friendship he and Paz had once enjoyed. The two had met decades prior, through their service in the Mexican embassy in Paris during WWII, and shared years of frequent correspondence, with dozens of letters shared between the two discussing their shared interest in literature and the arts—in one letter, Paz praises Usigli's *El gesticulador* and its revelations on the nature of politics and their distinctly Mexican inclination towards imposturing.[405] Why then, given that many of his peers and close friends had denounced the PRIísta state, did Usigli remain on board?

In short, the pull of clientelism and inclusion in the Revolutionary Family appears to have been too strong for Usigli. In the years preceding and following Tlatelolco, Usigli shared a high volume of correspondence with Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría,[406] minister of the Interior at the time of Tlatelolco and frequently implicated as the official most likely in charge of ordering the massacre after Díaz Ordaz.[407] Adopting an always submissive, respectful, and friendly tone, Usigli congratulated the two on birthdays, lamented the fact when they and their wives got sick, and frequently reminded the two of his service as their "devoted servant and friend." He acted the part as the devoted public servant, the compromised intellectual, and a member of their "extended" Family. In the months following Tlatelolco, Usigli would suggest in an exchange with Paz that the government was justified in repressing the student movement because of the potential excesses of the mass protest,[408] a claim repeated years later with the publication of his final play, *¡Buenos días, señor Presidente!* Dedicated to Echeverría—Usigli's former pupil and friend during his time teaching at UNAM—*¡Buenos días, señor Presidente!* tracks an alternate history of Tlatelolco, where the government steps down and allows the student movement to take power, which dissolves into repeating the authoritarianism of former governments and forms a coalition party with members of previous regimes.[409]

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[405] Octavio Paz, letter to Rodolfo Usigli, December 21, 1949. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 10, Folder 10 "Paz, Octavio, Correspondence to Rodolfo Usigli."
[406] Including letters, telegrams, and other documents. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 3, Folder 103 "Díaz Ordaz, Gustavo" and Folder 124 "Echeverría Álvarez, Luis + Maria (1958-1975)."
[407] "The Tlatelolco Massacre: U.S. Documents on Mexico and the Events of 1968," in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 99***,** ed. Kate Doyle for the National Security Archive.
[408] Beardsell, 93.
[409] Beardsell, 94.

Voicing an open, tacit endorsement of Díaz Ordaz's administration and denouncing the student movement, Usigli's loyalty to the party and the Family would be further rewarded when Echeverría assumed the presidency. Returning to Mexico in 1972 and fresh off the publication of *¡Buenos días, señor Presidente!*, Usigli found an even closer relationship with Echeverría, who awarded him the state-sponsored Teatro Popular project. That same year, Congress bestowed him the highest award a member in his field could enjoy: The Premio Nacional de Letras (National Award for Literature), an achievement Usigli had sought for so many years since writing *El gesticulador.* After the ceremony, Usigli immediately wrote to Echeverría thanking him for the award, expressing his belief that he didn't deserve such an award (ever the tactful diplomat), and conveying his gratitude to the president for "this new and clear proof of [Echeverría's] faith in Mexico."[410]

[410] Usigli, letter to Luis Echeverría, November 10, 1972. In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Correspondence*, Series I, Box 3, Folder 124 "Echeverría Álvarez, Luis + Maria (1958-1975)."

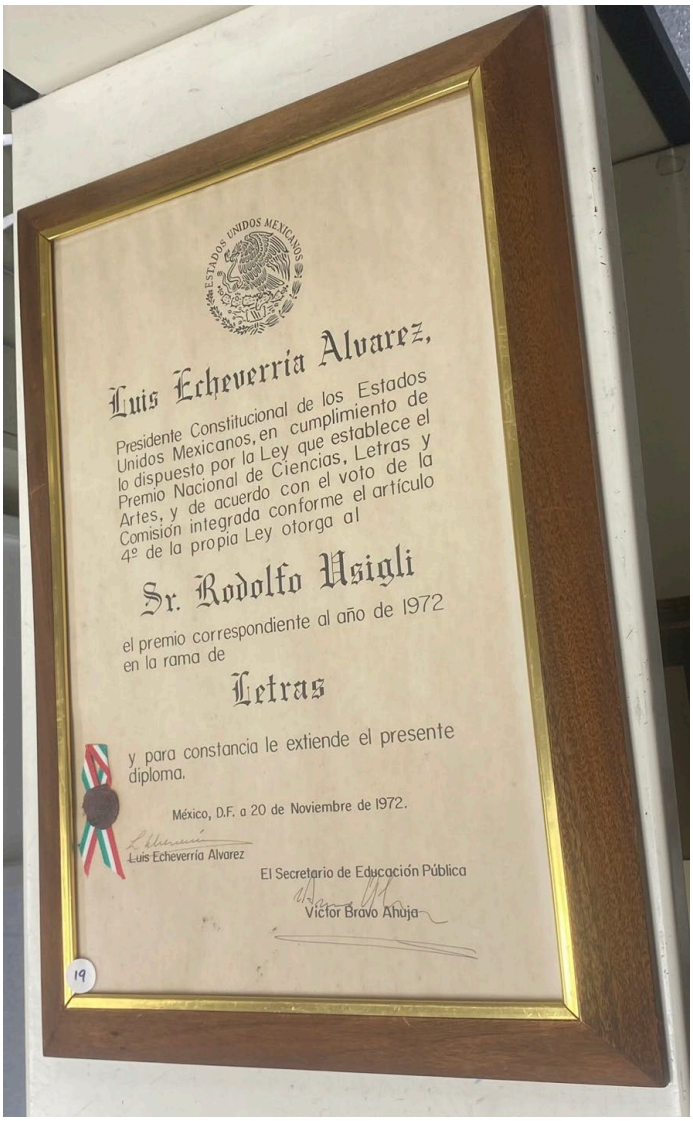

Figure 2: Premio Nacional de Letras, mounted in wooden frame, awarded by President Luis Echeverría Alvarez to Rodolfo Usigli November 20, 1972

Source: Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers, Series VIII Oversize Materials, Closed Stacks Drawer 1.

A neo-populist who fashioned a public persona as a quasi-Cárdenas, Echeverría presided over the nation and the PRIísta state as both looked to recover from the wounds left by Tlatelolco, promulgating new reform programs intended to address the issues of widening socioeconomic inequality, over-urbanization, and massive population growth. At the same time, Echeverría cleared the military to engage in a low-intensity war throughout the Mexican

countryside,[411] fully entering the state into its "dirty war," in which Mexican military, police, and secret police forces murdered hundreds of civilians suspected of organizing to overthrow the national government, bombed villages thought to harbor support networks for the guerrillas (in the state of Guerrero especially), and disappeared innumerable "dissidents" over the Pacific Ocean. His populist image—in this case, especially his monumental campaign tour and willingness to meet with officials and the public at all manners of hours[412]—is reflected in his relationship with Usigli, cordially responding to many of Usigli's letters and maintaining a close friendship throughout his term in office. Through their relationship, Usigli was fully incorporated into the Revolutionary Family.

Figure 3: Rodolfo Usigli with his son Alejandro meeting with then-president Luis Echevarría, 1970s
Source: Ibarra Fuentes, 100.

Meanwhile, *El gesticulador* had enjoyed a resurgence in staging through state sponsorship. After its spate of performances in 1947, *El gesticulador* does not appear to have

[411] *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 106-121.
[412] *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 15-27.

returned to the stage in Mexico City until 1961, where it was performed through INBA sponsorship at the Xola and Bosque theaters. Accordingly, it does not appear to have returned to INBA's docket of theater programming until the controversies around its original performances over 14 years prior had faded into distant memory. By that point, the play had become considered a classic of a now more venerated and compliant artist (Usigli) and the contextual weight of its critique, while still relevant, could be considered more applicable to a more distant period in the PRI's past.[413] Similarly, by that point, Usigli experienced a growing acknowledgement for his contribution to the development of Mexican theater, becoming an elder-statesman type: the official publishing house, Fondo de Cultura Económica, published two volumes of his *Teatro completo* compilation in 1963 and 1966, further crafting his image as a theater icon whose works now deserved to be studied in full.[414] Between 1974 and 1983, INBA awarded Usigli three times for the many performances *El gesticulador* had gone on to enjoy as a part of INBA's regular theatrical seasons: in 1983, he was awarded a plaque commemorating *El gesticulador* having achieved "200 performances in 20 cities across Mexico and Spain", as part of that year's theatrical season, staged by the Compañía Nacional de Teatro.[415] Over the years following, *El gesticulador* would continue to enjoy frequent reprisal under various directors, achieving a further resurgence in interest as a still-biting commentary of Mexican politics under the José López Portillo, Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas Gortari, and Ernesto Zedillo administrations, considered by many to be amongst the most corrupt presidencies in Mexico's history.

The day after Usigli's death on July 18, 1979, INBA announced that it would create a new agency named after the author, the Centro Nacional de Investigación Teatral Rodolfo Usigli, in its modern form the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral

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[413] A conclusion Usigli specialist Peter Beardsell also reaches in his study *A Theatre for Cannibals*, in which, along with a mix of continued foreign interest in *El gesticulador* across the 1950s—since 1947, the play had been staged abroad in places like Spain, Argentina, and a television version aired in the U.S. in 1953—and, conversely, a growing literary trend portraying and criticizing the corruption and idiosyncrasies of the PRIísta system, best exemplified by Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, first published in 1962, *El gesticulador* was eventually allowed to return to the stage, now considered "one of the landmarks in Mexican drama"; in Beardsell, 62. Additionally, a Mexican film version premiered in 1959 with renowned director Emilio "El Indio" Fernández in the director's chair and popular actor Pedro Armendáriz fulfilling the protagonist role, but which suffered poor reviews and the untimely death of Alfredo Gómez de la Vega.

[414] Beardsell, 21.

[415] "El Gesticulador, Plaques Awarded in Honor of Productions: 1974, 1980, 1983." In *Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries*, *Rodolfo Usigli Archive: Papers*, Series I: Works, Sub-series A, Sub-sub series I, Box No. 5, Folder 77.

Rodolfo Usigli (Rodolfo Usigli National Center for Theatrical Investigation, Documentation, and Information), or CITRU.[416] CITRU's establishment signaled the final stage of Usigli's career, from critical artist to intellectual in the service of the state, to member of the Revolutionary Family's pantheon of nationally-renowned artists, and finally, to a symbol of the PRIísta state's institutionalization and sponsorship of the arts.

[416] Angelina Camargo B., "En Homenaje al Desaparecido Dramaturgo, El INBA Creará el Centro Nacional 'Rodolfo Usigli' de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral," *Excélsior*, June 19, 1979; Roberto López Moreno, "Murió Usigli," *La Prensa*, June 19, 179; and Juan José Bremer and José Solé, "En Homenaje a Rodolfo Usigli se Crea un Centro Nacional de Investigación e Información Teatral," *El Heraldo*, June 20, 1979. In Centro Nacional de las Artes (CENART), Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), Biblioteca de las Artes, Fondo Especial Rodolfo Usigli.

Conclusion

This study has examined playwright, author, and diplomat Rodolfo Usigli through the multiple stages of his career, tracking his life as it developed in relation to the evolution of Mexico's single-party across the twentieth century. Chapter 1 examines Usigli and his generation's formation of a unique generational identity, informed by their experiences as children during the revolutionary decade, that would produce a collective memory but distinct approaches to engaging with the revolutionary reform, state formation, and cultural nationalist processes they would confront as they entered into adulthood and the early years of their professional development. This chapter also pulls from a wide range of scholarship to set up the context of state formation, national reconstruction, cultural revolution and its dominant cultural nationalist discourses, before turning to Usigli and fellow playwrights' engagement with elite discourses surrounding revolutionary legacy and cultural nationalism. This chapter ends with setting up political context in which Usigli would go on to write *El gesticulador*, along with his early formation of his particular vision for a professional, realist, and critically self-reflective national theater tradition. Chapter 2 then tracks Usigli's writing of *El gesticulador* and struggle to see his work staged at the Palacio de Bellas Artes across the Lázaro Cárdenas, Manuel Ávila Camacho, and Miguel Alemán presidencies, situating the censorship the play suffered within the centrist transition and trend towards more restrictive censorship displayed by the national government during the latter years of Cárdenas' presidency and the wartime context of Ávila Camacho's Mexico. Doing so places this study within the expanding scholarship that has emerged in recent decades more closely scrutinizing the period of transition between Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho's *sexenios* and marking the end of the revolutionary reform displayed by earlier governments within the key years between 1938 and 1940. Chapter 2 also works to explain the metaliterary critiques *El gesticulador* displays towards the nature of political rule, the methods used by dominant political elites to gain and maintain power, and the construction of a single-party state and accompanying official culture designed to legitimize the state, in addition to tracking literary antecedents that reflected how Usigli formulated a distinct, if not wholly unprecedented, conception of the nature of Mexican politics, social behaviors, and what he considered an innate propensity for hypocrisy.

Chapter 3, the most extensive of the four chapters, examines the complexities undergirding the issues of discourse, formal and informal censorship, and scandal that emerged over the course of *El gesticulador*'s staging at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in May 1947. This chapter finds crucial developments within the official party and the transition to a civilian-dominated government propelled by Alemán's administration informed the setting through which *El gesticulador* was finally cleared for performance through the state-sponsored, official theater. A crucial, if brief, period in which Alemán's government signaled the opening of press discourse and loosening of formal censorship of the arts provided a number of Usigli's peers and contemporary journalists an avenue for more openly debating the foundations of Mexico's political system. Positive reviews praised Usigli for what they considered an accurate and necessary denunciation of corruption, election rigging, official culture, and the lack of effective democracy, while also praising Alemán's government for initiating what they considered a shift away from the unethical, corrupt conduct displayed by former administrations. Meanwhile, negative reviews lambasted Usigli, adopting *oficialista* rhetoric to criticize *El gesticulador*'s commentary and thereby contributing to a moment of hotly contested debate over the nature of rule in postrevolutionary Mexico within the national press. Calls from members within Alemán's cabinet to see the play's performance run cut short resulted in strong and mostly confirmed suspicions that officials within INBA worked behind the scenes to informally censor the play, leading to the reduction of its staging from three to two weeks. Lastly, Chapter 3 situates the case of Usigli's *El gesticulador* and the press debates and controversies it produced within the broader context of the first two years of Alemán's presidency, a key moment in which heads of government oscillated from the more repressive policies displayed by Ávila Camacho's administration towards opening up the possibility of freer expression within Mexico's public sphere, before clamping down once again on the opportunities for open debate and expression within Mexican arts and press.

Finally, the epilogue tracks Usigli's move from a critical artist to a compromised intellectual fully aligned with the aims of the PRIísta state. Personal, clientelist relationships with heads of government—including two presidents—largely influenced Usigli's transition, along with a need for financial security that would be gained through a prominent position in the state bureaucracy, the sway and personal relationships with influential officials in the national government could bring, a personal motivation to see his work officially venerated as

representative of Mexican theater, and a growing isolation from his home country, developments back home, and younger generations of playwrights, artists, and students who emerged to take the mantle of both theater and resistance to the state's rule. Ultimately, the conditions of Usigli's evolving relationship with the PRIísta state and the case of *El gesticulador* provide revealing insights into the manners by which an important class of artists and intellectuals could be coopted into the state's fold, as well as the dynamics by which discourse, power, and the press functioned during key moments in postrevolutionary Mexico.

Furthermore, this study has attempted to examine extensively various realms in the history of twentieth century Mexico largely through the lens of Usigli's life and career, utilizing the Rodolfo Usigli Archive housed at Miami University especially to do so. Numerous opportunities for future scholarship utilizing this archive exist. Usigli, an extensive polyglot, kept a near endless number of the materials that crossed his desk, and the Rodolfo Usigli Archive houses an exhaustive wealth of records, documents, correspondence, personal writings and the writings of peers, scripts, financial records, government memos, and much more. Future studies would be well pressed to do use this archive for research in the vast realms of cultural, political, social, gender, and diplomatic histories of twentieth century Mexico.

In particular, studies examining expression of masculine identities and the formation of masculine relationships in twentieth century Mexico through the lens Usigli provides remain fruitful and unexplored. Usigli built his interpersonal relationships with fellow artists and public officials when the realms of theater, literature, intellectual activity, and government were dominated by men and typically coded for masculine participation—indeed, the single-party state that emerged out of the revolutionary decade was styled as a paternalist body, one that would address the needs of its citizenry as a father-type figure. The state bureaucracy, especially key agencies like SEP, SRE, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Treasury and Public Credit, the Ministry of Defense, etc. were all dominated by men well into the twentieth century, the press was male-dominant until at least the 1960s, and many of the artists and intellectuals considered luminaries in their fields were men. Thus, Usigli formed many of his most important and influential relationships with men, and his gender, class, generational, and professional identities informed a unique manner for relating to and speaking with his contemporaries—many of whom, like him, would hold important positions in the state bureaucracy. It would benefit

future studies investigating Usigli to take a particularly critical eye to examining how the masculine-coded spheres of arts, press, and bureaucracy informed how Usigli acted and interacted with men—and women—within these spaces, and especially how the clientelist relationships he formed were undergirded by the mostly masculine identities of those involved.

Recent scholarship over the past decade has begun to expand the knowledge available on this topic, but Mexican foreign diplomacy during the Cold War remains a relatively understudied topic. Usigli, a diplomat with relatively close relationships with presidents and other heads of government during this period, provides a useful case study for further expanding knowledge on this topic. Although mostly unexplored in this study, his activities organizing events celebrating Mexican arts, especially in Soviet Union-controlled countries, offer a useful perspective for examining the manners by which Mexican diplomats worked to export the nation's cultural revolution throughout the Cold War, and what specific means such activities worked to serve in specific countries, moments, and contexts. Similarly, several of Usigli's works were translated into English by U.S. scholars, and *El gesticulador* was adapted in the U.S. as a television show during the 1950s and has enjoyed several performances by U.S. theater companies since its writing—Usigli's work thus provides a possible avenue for examining how Mexican theater works were adapted in the U.S.

Also suggested but relatively unexplored in this study, Usigli acts as a shining example of the particular style of subservient, but petitionary language frequently utilized by Mexican bureaucrats when engaging with each other and their superiors. This manner of speaking manifested in his interactions with heads of government, especially presidents, and seems to have worked as a kind of unspoken dynamic when communicating with and making requests to superiors. Future avenues of study could examine how this style of speaking—which, despite his criticisms of it, reflects exactly the type of double-speak and dishonest speaking Usigli decried in *El gesticulador*—worked, especially in forming the style of clientelist relationships so prominent in postrevolutionary politics.

Similarly, Usigli held correspondence with an near endless number of fellow bureaucrats, heads of government agencies, and actors influential in Mexico's financial sectors and economic industries—a purvey of the Correspondence sections of the Rodolfo Usigli Archive reveal correspondence shared with ministers of the Interior, Treasury and Public Credit, Foreign

Relations, directors of Banco de México, and Marte R. Gómez, an influential industrialist particularly during Ávila Camacho's administration, amongst countless others. Future studies should pay close attention to the manners by which these relationships were built and maintained, and how such relationships may have worked as part of the *camarilla* system—a powerful component of the state bureaucracy and party system in postrevolutionary Mexico—and may have formed a further element influencing party loyalty amongst coopted artists and intellectuals.

Additionally, Usigli maintained relationships with officials—many of them both friends and enemies—in INBA, and the staging of *El gesticulador* formed a momentous occasion in the early history of INBA as its own government agency. Utilizing the Rodolfo Usigli Archive, future studies could further expand our knowledge on how INBA in particular worked to sponsor and foment both official cultural nationalism and more independent professional artists—such studies could prove crucial for expanding our knowledge on how cultural nationalism was institutionalized, contested, and reshaped by a mix of artists and INBA as a government institution beyond solely the cultural revolution period. There are also countless pamphlets and programs for SEP and INBA-organized theater seasons, literary, theater, and plastic arts, conferences, exhibitions, and other events contained in the Rodolfo Usigli Handbook, 1924-1947 and other folders throughout the collection, suggesting a gold mine for art and cultural historians interested in investigating early SEP and INBA programming.

Lastly, two topics utilizing the Rodolfo Usigli Archive remain especially prolific for study: labor unions and the 1938 Surrealist Week. Usigli was a member of both the Asociación Nacional de Autores (National Authors Association) and the Organización Latinoamericana de Teatro, and the Asociación Nacional de Autores especially occupied an important place in unions representing the arts, formed as it was by writers from the theater, literary, and cinema worlds. Future studies should examine Usigli's position in and relationship with the Asociación Nacional de Autores, and especially with the rise in studies examining the role of *charrismo* politics during after and Alemán's presidency, materials from the Rodolfo Usigli Archive may provide insight into how union activism from writers and playwrights manifested and was curtailed under the PRIísta state—this study's brief coverage of the rise and fall of the Author's Rights Law suggests a potential avenue for examining how writers may have contested a not-too-subtle attempt at

curtailing intellectual liberties during and after Alemán's presidency. Additionally, the Surrealist Week formed a monumental moment in both state organization of an event extolling cultural nationalism during Cárdenas' presidency as well as the broader, international significance of Surrealism during the interwar period. Art and cultural historians especially would find this collection useful, containing numerous copies and French and Spanish translations of Bretón and Rivera's *Manifeste Pour un Art Revolutionnaire Indépendant*/*Manifiesto por un arte revolucionario independiente*, Spanish translations of several of Bretón's conferences and works similarly advocating for the political orientations requisite of Surrealism, and other documents, artworks, and ephemera displayed during the Surrealist Week.

Ultimately, the Rodolfo Usigli Archive provides a wealth of material useful for historians from many different walks. As shown by this study, the Rodolfo Usigli Archive provides valuable materials for developing understanding of the dynamics of cultural nationalism, official culture, the press, and power in postrevolutionary Mexico. This study has centered state sponsorship of the arts, cooptation of intellectuals, and the relationships between political and cultural elites as its topics of study, using Usigli as a prime case study for expanding knowledge on the manners by which these distinctly influential social groups negotiated rule and consent within the *dictablanda* system that characterizes Mexico during this period. It has also shown that theater in Mexico, especially when used by critical artists like Usigli, could contest the power of official discourse and narrative, presenting alternatives that ripened debate and fostered further challenges to state power in the public sphere of Mexico City. Likewise, heads of government employed a myriad of methods for both forcing and attracting acquiescence to state power from dissident voices. And yet, with the range of materials and historical moments this study has attempted to cover, the Rodolfo Usigli Archive presents a vast number of opportunities for expanding our knowledge of twentieth century Mexico. Future scholarship would delight in using the currently under-utilized collection.

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