

# **REPRESENTATIONS:** **CARTUCHO BY NELLIE** **CAMPOBELLO**

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

While the entire country of Mexico was drawn into and forever changed by the Mexican Revolution, one must grasp the differing roles of the North and the South in order to understand the dynamics of the Revolution. Demetrio and his men are loyal Villistas in *Los de Abajo/The Underdogs*, yet they are from Central Mexico (Jalisco, Zacatecas, Aguas Caliente, Durango, and Nayarit). In the novel, Demetrio's soldiers distinguish themselves from Villa's northern troops, particularly in how they describe the wealth of the Villa's troops. Not mentioned in *Los de Abajo/The Underdogs*, many of Zapata's troops came from Morelos and its surrounding areas in southern Mexico. While Azuela offers us a picture of the Revolution through the eyes of those Villistas from Central Mexico, other sources provide accounts from other areas.

*Cartucho: Tales of the Struggle in Northern Mexico* by Nellie Campobello is an autobiographical account of her experiences of the Revolution in northern Mexico. Her novel is divided into three sections: Men of the North, The Executed, and Underfire, with each section made up of very short stories or descriptions of specific events or people. Originally written in Spanish, English translations are available.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Nellie Campobello, whose full and original name is Ernestina Moya Francisca Luna (1890-1986), is generally said to be the only female writer who contributed to the literature of the Mexican Revolution during the 1920s and 1930s. According to the publisher, she was "a prominent Mexican writer and 'novelist of the Revolution,' played an important role in Mexico's cultural renaissance in the 1920s and early 1930s, along with such writers as Rafael Muñoz and Gregorio López y Fuentes and artists Diego Rivera, Orozco, and others.

Her two novellas, *Cartucho* (first published in 1931) and *My Mother's Hands* (first published as *Las manos de Mamá* in 1938), are autobiographical evocations of a childhood spent amidst the violence and turmoil of the Revolution in Mexico. Campobello's memories of the Revolution in the north of Mexico, where Pancho Villa was a popular hero and a personal friend of her family, show not only the stark realism of *Cartucho* but also the tender lyricism of *My Mother's Hands*. They are noteworthy, too, as a first-person account of the female experience in the early years of the Mexican Revolution and unique in their presentation of events from a child's perspective."

## **PROCEDURE**

Using the excerpts included on the following pages, ask students to read Campobello's writing. As they read, ask students to note anything they learn that may help them understand what it was like to live through the Revolution, or anything about specific events or figures already discussed. If students read *Los de Abajo/The Underdogs*, ask them to compare and contrast Campobello's portrayal of the Revolution with Azuela's. Questions are provided at the end of each excerpt as well.

## **THE GENERAL'S VOICE FROM CARTUCHO BY NELLIE CAMPOBELLO (PAGE 71):**

Metallic and far ranging. His shouts, loud, clear, sometimes one after the other and vibrating. You could hear his voice from a great distance. His lungs seemed made of steel. Severo told me about it:

It happened in San Alberto, very near Parral. Severo had left Parral during a period of combat to pay a visit to his girlfriend, but being a civilian, he ran the risk of being taken for a spy. This was on his mind as he headed toward San Alberto, where General Villa also happened to be, accompanied by about five hundred men. When Severo got to his girlfriend's house, her family told him that, to avoid suspicion, he should start splitting wood in the patio. But Villa himself recognized that the young man was not from that town. After watching him for a time, he slowly walked up to him and said, "Hey, son, what's the latest news from Parral? You've just gotten here, haven't you?" Severo, quite surprised, answered quickly, "Yes, General, I've just come from Parral where the Villistas were fighting in the trenches. I got out as best I could, but it wasn't easy, because the firing was very heavy and the boys were in a bad way."

Villa's soldiers in San Alberto were under orders by the general not to approach the doors of the houses under any conditions, not even to ask for water. Almost all of them were camped around a field near town. They had already lit their fires and begun roasting meat for dinner.

When Villa heard what Severo said, he immediately let out a shout to his men. One of those shouts he would use in battle—vibrant, clear and moving, "We must go to the aid of our boys! The Changos have pinned them down, and they need us! Let's go!"

Severo said that when all those men heard the General's voice, they stood up as one, leaving everything behind, without even touching the food. They ran straight to their horses, and before you could blink an eye, they rode off in a cloud of dust.

"The Villistas were one single man. Villa's voice could unite them all. One shout from him was enough to mount his calvary." That's what Severo said, with the echo of the General's voice still ringing in his ears.

## QUESTIONS

- 1.** In what ways does this excerpt support the mythical version of Villa?
- 2.** How would you characterize Villa based on this short story?
- 3.** Is this version the same or different as the one portrayed by Azuela's soldiers in *Los de Abajo/The Underdogs*?

**"AGUSTÍN GARCÍA"  
FROM CARTUCHO BY  
NELLIE CAMPOBELLO  
(PAGES 11-12):**

Agustín García was tall and light skinned, with a short mustache, fine features, and a sweet expression. He wore leather pants and fur chaps. Slow moving, he didn't seem like a Villista general. When Mama saw him for the first time, she said, "That man is dangerous." He didn't know how to laugh, he spoke very little, and he saw a great deal. He was a friend of Elías Acosta; they drank coffee together. Elías used to laugh and talk, but Agustín García wouldn't say anything. That's how they were different.

One day Mama asked him how Villa's ambush of the Carranzista general, Murguía, had gone. He said they had used hardly any ammunition. "There were lots of changos, and we threw them over the embankments alive." Mama didn't reply. One of those who had died was a boy from our street of Segunda del Rayo.

The general said good-bye, as on other occasions.

At night you could hear a serenade and a voice that seemed familiar singing, "Lovely torrents are the currents that flow from the heart." And later, "I secretly love you. If only you knew." Something startled Mama, who couldn't rest easy after that. Two nights later Mama's fourteen-year-old niece, Irene, showed up at the house very upset. From outside came the noise of a crowd of men. Anxiously, Mama ordered Irene to climb into a fireplace and try to get up to the roof, from where she could get to the house of Doña Rosita, a friend of Mama's who had red hair. They were already circling the house. Mama began to sing in a loud voice. In came a man dragging his supurs, then another and another. "We have orders." They searched all over. Mama said, "Make yourselves at home." They walked in and out. Mama was calm, smoking a cigarette. García entered, tall, very tall, scuffing his feet. In his hand he carried a whip. Everything about him was relaxed. He tapped the whip against his right leg and looked attentively at Mama.

"These are your men," she said.

"They're not mine. I was just passing by and was surprised to see a number of horses here, so I came in."

“He sat down, crossed his legs, and began to roll a cigarette. The men saw him, said nothing, and started to leave one by one, without looking back.

“Nothing serious, I hope,” he said, laughing.

“Not really,” Mama answered calmly, “just soldiers games.”

General Agustín García had intended to carry Irene off, but instead he picked up the guitar and began to sing: “Proud dark-haired girl, I’ll not see your face again.” And, one foot swinging in the air he finished a cigarette and a cup of coffee.

## QUESTIONS

- 1.** What kind of leader is Agustín García?
- 2.** How is Agustín García like the leaders and soldiers in *Los de Abajo*? How is he different?
- 3.** What do you think would have happened to Irene if she had not been able to hide from Agustín García?
- 4.** How would you describe Mama? Is she brave? Explain.