

The Media as an Image Maker/Breaker:  
The Case of Tina Modotti and Its Literary Representation

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(ABSTRACT)

This thesis examines the role the media played in shaping Tina Modotti's public image during the 1920s in Mexico and the representation of this image in the novel Tinísima by Elena Poniatowska. In Chapter I, the present study tackles also the issues behind the press attitude in relation to the Mexican political situation and the communist influence during the 1920s.

Chapter II provides a review of the existing literature on Modotti's life and her involvement in the Mexican Communist Party. It also includes a brief summary of the Mexican Communist Party's origins and development, since the political environment affected the approach of the press upon Modotti.

Chapter III focuses on social research through content analysis of press articles about Tina Modotti, which were published by the Mexican newspaper Excélsior in January 1929. The purpose is to analyze the language employed in these accounts in order to uncover a possible bias behavior on the part of the press when covering Modotti's case.

Chapter IV deals with the analysis of Poniatowska's novel Tinísima through a postmodern perspective. The connecting theme between this and the former chapter is based on the insertion of articles from Excélsior that function as latent and manifest intertexts in the novel. The objective is to study these insertions in order to interpret Modotti's public and private images within this literary framework. Postmodernism is a pertinent theory since it examines the transgressions of widely accepted views to uncover or demystify reality.

Finally, the conclusion in Chapter V links the use of the media as an image breaker to the Mexican social and political context in the 1920s, and suggests political reasons behind Modotti's mistreatment by the press. In addition, the literary representation of Modotti in Tinísima and the analysis through postmodernism provides strong support to this conclusion and points at the role of this novel as an image maker.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	1
Introduction	1
CHAPTER II	4
Tina Modotti's Life and Political Trajectory	4
The Assassination of Julio Antonio Mella	16
Political Background: Origins of the Mexican Communist Party (1917-1929)	19
CHAPTER III	21
The Written Media as an Image Breaker Examined through Content Analysis	21
CHAPTER IV	32
The Literary Representation of Modotti's Case in <u>Tinísima</u>	32
CHAPTER V	45
Conclusion	45
WORKS CITED	49
APPENDIX A	51
APPENDIX B	53
APPENDIX C	56

## Chapter I

### Introduction

The relationship between the media and any organized group or movement may decide the fate of the movement's goals. The media used as a tool or as a weapon is a powerful resource because it reaches a large population, which, in turn, influences a movement's membership. According to Paul L. Jalbert, "ideology is seen to be a routine feature of the social production of news stories which is congruent with political and economical interests, organized and unorganized. The mass media are seen to occupy a significant place as organizers of ideological production" (282). For this very reason, many groups choose the media as the main pillar of support to build a certain image of themselves or others.

In this thesis, I have chosen the case of Tina Modotti to determine how the media was used in 1929 as an image maker/breaker and the reasons for and aftermath of this usage. Modotti was a communist photographer accused as an accomplice in the assassination of a Cuban revolutionary, Julio Antonio Mella, murdered in Mexico the 10 January 1929. In 1930, Modotti was again accused of planning the failed attempt to kill the Mexican president Ortiz Rubio and later that year, she was expelled from Mexico for being a "pernicious foreigner" under Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution.<sup>1</sup>

My main goal is to study the bias of the Mexican press, particularly of Excélsior, when covering the Modotti's case, and also to uncover the possible causes and the consequences in relation to larger issues: the Mexican political situation, the accepted moral values of Mexican society, and the role of the Mexican Communist Party during the 1920s.

In order to achieve this goal I have chosen to study the topic using different approaches: social research through content analysis of newspaper articles, and literary interpretation through postmodernist theory applied to Elena Poniatowska's novel Tinísima. By content analysis I examine the press use of the language and the attitude and intentions of the communicators in relation to the case of

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<sup>1</sup> Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution was adopted in 1917, AIIt defined foreigners and their rights, stated that they could be expelled from the country by the president if their presence was considered >undesirable= and listed certain transactions in which they were forbidden to engage" (Constantine 144).

Modotti. By postmodernist theory I study the subversion of accepted patterns, such as stereotyping, in order to reverse the image spread by the newspapers and to rebuild a new portrayal of Modotti.

The analysis of the press focuses on articles published after the death of Julio Antonio Mella by the Mexican newspaper Excélsior. The dates range from 11 January through 16 January 1929. In addition, I have included accounts from American newspapers, such as, Washington Post and New York Times, to provide a counterview of Modotti's representation by the press. I have applied the methodology of content analysis at the sentence and paragraph levels to extract and infer the manifest and latent meaning of the texts. Although today these articles may seem sensationalist at first sight, we need to point out that the distance gained at the turn of the twenty-first century may as well influence our judgment. It was likely that the Mexican audience believed news from a "serious" newspaper in the context of particular social and political constraints in the course of the 1920s.

The literary analysis is based on the novel Tinísima for this is an extensive work on the life of Tina Modotti, which contains excerpts from Excélsior as latent and manifest intertexts. On many occasions literature has served as a vehicle to uncover or demystify partial truths, as in this case. Poniatowska reproduces Modotti's life using real accounts that include photographs, testimonies and newspaper articles, aiming to produce an artwork with the most realistic information possible (qtd. in García Pinto 175). However, she also filled in the gaps of the "missing" history through fiction in order to reconstruct the past. The use of the media within this literary framework is highly valuable for our study. Firstly, due to the fictional nature of Tinísima, it is not embedded into the rigorous constraints of history and thus gives way to a different interpretation of facts. And secondly, the distance in time from the moment when the events took place allows both the author and the reader to gain a better perspective of historical accounts.

I begin this thesis with a review of the existing literature on Modotti's life and political trajectory so as to compare and contrast what has been written about her to this date. This chapter is crucial as a background for the whole study if we are to understand how and why a certain image of her was forged. I have also included a brief account of the communist movement in Mexico since it is relevant for two basic reasons: Mella and Modotti were both working for the Mexican Communist Party at the time of the assassination, and Modotti's affiliation to the party was portrayed negatively in the actions later taken against her. In addition, it is widely believed that Mella was murdered because of his

communist ideas, and thus Modotti's mistreatment by the press clearly points at causes rooted in the Mexican political and social issues of the 1920s.

## Chapter II

### Tina Modotti's Life and Political Trajectory

The life of Tina Modotti has been reconstructed mainly through her photographs, the three Hollywood movies in which she acted, and testimonies from people who met her. The little written material she left has been interpreted on numerous occasions: the letters she wrote to Edward Weston, the preface to The Book of Robo (1922), a compilation of her husband's poetry and drawings, and a brief article describing her photography, which was published at one of her photographic exhibitions in 1930. Because so very little is known about her, the rest of the "story" has been generally inferred from these accounts; sometimes giving birth to books highlighting her work for the Communist Party, and some others rescuing her career as a photographer. Most often these works have created an aura of mystery around the figure of Modotti, which is easily exploited to attract the attention of the readers. Therefore, producing a review of Modotti's life without this extra "filling" results in a sketchy presentation of information, yet untamed by added opinions.

For the following review of Modotti's life, I collected information from very different sources: art books, newspaper articles, history books, and other secondary sources, in order to compare and contrast these different versions of Modotti. These pieces of information range from Tina's childhood to the moment of Mella's death, for this was the time of the fiercest press hunt of Modotti. The objective is to provide an overview of Modotti's life as a background to better understand her involvement with socialist tendencies and the Mexican Communist Party. This review sets the stage for the analysis of what was published about her in Excélsior, and also provides the grounds for the interpretation of Poniatowska's Tinísima.

Assunta Adelaide Luigia Modotti Modini was born in Udine, a town in the north of Italy, in the province of Venezia Giulia, on August 17 1896.<sup>2</sup> She was the second daughter and third child of Assunta Modini and Giuseppe Modotti. Tina had three sisters and two brothers: Mercedes, Yolanda, Giaconda, Benvenuto and Giuseppe. Tina's name was the short form of Assuntina and was the name by

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<sup>2</sup> As stated by Christiane Barkhausen-Canale, 17 August is the date on Modotti's birth certificate but her baptismal record found in Santa María parish in Udine shows 16 August as the birthdate.



which she was known for the rest of her life, except during the Spanish Civil War when she used María Ruiz and María Jiménez as *nomes de guerre* (Albers 18).

Udine was a prosperous city due to the production of fine cloth and it remained a strong Catholic enclave whose power elite, according to Sarah M. Lowe, “maintained social stability in the face of political change” (Modernism 17). Giuseppe Modotti was by all accounts a socialist who actively participated in demonstrations and meetings. He was, as his daughters later recalled, “a socialist and staunch supporter of union causes.”<sup>3</sup> The importance of socialism in the Modotti family is evident in the record of Tina’s own registry in the parish church of Santa María delle Grazie. One of the witnesses of Modotti’s baptism was Demetrio Canal, the director of the socialist newspaper L’Operatio, which began publication the same month Modotti was born (Modernism 18).

Giuseppe Modotti and his family moved to Austria probably looking for new employment opportunities, though as Lowe points out, Modotti’s family members were not “impoverished peasants,” but rather “skilled craftsmen with a radical orientation” (Modernism 18). Supporting this notion are the records that prove Francesco Modotti, one of Giuseppe’s brothers, to be a mechanical engineer and Pietro Modotti, like his niece Tina, a photographer who owned a studio in Udine.<sup>4</sup>

In Austria, Giuseppe Modotti worked in a bicycle factory in the town of Ferlach, outside Klagenfurt. The children received their primary schooling in German, which replaced their native Italian. According to Lowe, life in different locations during Tina’s childhood explains her natural ability to pick up languages. Modotti not only spoke Italian, German, English, Spanish and possibly French and Russian, but also translated in the first four for publications like El Machete (Mexico), New Masses (New York), Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (Berlin), and MOPR (Moscow) (Modernism 20).

The Modotti family probably suffered harsh conditions as Italian immigrants who were not completely assimilated into Austria’s cultural framework. There was discrimination, particularly against Italians and Slavics. Christiane Barkhausen brings up the topic in one of her interviews with two locals from Ferlach:

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Hooks discusses also the possibility of Giuseppe Modotti running afoul of the law to Austria because of his membership in Udine’s ‘Socialist Circle’ (10).

<sup>4</sup> See information regarding Giuseppe Modotti’s family and their professions in Hooks 12-13.

Los italianos, dicen, preferían estar entre ellos, al igual que los eslovenos que venían del otro lado de la montaña en busca de trabajo. No es que se les haya marginado, dicen, pero para su aislamiento hubo buenas razones: la barrera del idioma, las costumbres tan diferentes... Fue natural que cada uno quedara con los suyos, sí, fue una solución razonable... (39).

However, neither Barkhausen nor some other authors agree in this respect. Barkhausen herself affirms that “the common experience of exploitation and isolation, in which they could not possibly see anything ‘reasonable’ may have kept Slavics and Italians eyes open” (42). Furthermore, Lowe claims that Tina might have learned a lesson in class consciousness since she belonged to a group that was discriminated against. This is a key point upon which many scholars agree when studying Modotti’s later involvement with social causes through her political and photographic work. According to Vittorio Vidali, one episode that Modotti remembered was a May Day parade on her father’s shoulders, when she was a small child.<sup>5</sup> In Constantine’s Tina Modotti: A Fragile Life, Yolanda Modotti also recalls this instance as an important memory for Modotti.

At the turn of the century, it is clear that the economic situation and working conditions did not favor the Modottis. Thus, they moved back to Udine in 1905. This same year Giuseppe decided to leave his family and move to Pennsylvania where his brother Francesco lived. Two years later he moved to the West coast and opened without much success a photography business in San Francisco’s Little Italy neighborhood. Despite the efforts of Tina’s father, the family at Udine went through hard financial times. Tina and her elder sisters had to work at a cloth factory for long hours to bring food to the household.<sup>6</sup>

In 1912, Tina’s eldest sister, Mercedes, moved to the United States to reunite with her father. A year later, Tina traveled to meet them in San Francisco. She was then sixteen years old and declared herself a student when immigration officials asked about her occupation. There is no doubt that Modotti’s childhood in Italy left a trace of poverty and sacrifice visible in the photographic works she

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<sup>5</sup> Vidali’s words quoted by Mildred Constantine 24. Also quoted by Barkhausen 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Yolanda Modotti relates family’s difficulties at the time, while highlighting the dedication and strength of Tina when she was only fourteen in Albers 20.

later produced.

In San Francisco, Modotti started out working as a seamstress at I. Magnin, “a firm advertising itself as importers, manufacturers and retailers of ladies, children’s and infants’ wear” (Hooks 18). The garment industry, as well as mining and the railway, experienced unionization through the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in 1905. The aim of the union was “the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism,” as its founder William D. Haywood stated (Goldberg 41). The IWW worked together with the Socialist Party in order to reorganize social and economic forces by means of collectivism. The conditions in the textile industry were precarious as Goldberg affirms:

In the sweatshops and factories of the textile industry, nine and ten-hour days in weeks that included Saturdays and sometimes Sundays were common. Pay scales failed to match the cost of living, and families maintained a precarious existence by opening their home to boarders and sending children to work (43).

Immigrants were particularly suited to join the movement since they were part of the oppressed minorities: the homeless, the poor, people of color, the uneducated. The Italian presence in the unions was fostered by figures like Arturo Giovannitti and Joseph Ettor, who claimed, “if the workers want to win, all they have to do is recognize their own solidarity” (qtd. in Goldberg 50). The climate of strikes and demonstrations was not new for Modotti and one could surmise that her class consciousness was inevitably shaped by those events.

In the textile factory, Tina began modeling for I. Magnin’s newest designs and she also got involved in sewing costumes for theater productions. However, all scholars point out San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific Exhibition as a crucial event for Modotti’s artistic involvement. The exhibition was a proclamation of the vanguard tendencies in the arts. As Hooks affirms, “the exhibition of Fine Arts was truly more than a gathering together of great painting and sculptures. It was a school...” (21). It was here where Tina met her future husband, the painter and poet Roubaix de l’Abrie Richey. According to Lowe, Richey may have been an anarchist in light of a portrait taken by Edward Weston, in which he is wearing a black four-in-hand tie, which was the badge of anarchism. Moreover, Lowe affirms that, “to find a proof of a more ardent conviction in his stance against the US intervention in Mexico may be deduced from cartoons he published seven years later” (Modernism 35). The little that is known about

Robo, the short name for Richey, comes from Tina's collection of his poetry, paintings and short stories, published after Robo's death in 1922 under the title of The Book of Robo.<sup>7</sup>

Tina and Robo got married in 1917 and left San Francisco to live in Los Angeles. The Richey's house was a meeting point for artists and where, according to Vittorio Vidali, Modotti silently learned about Nietzsche, Freud, Tagore, Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky.<sup>8</sup> Modotti's exposure to the art world probably led to her interest in going on stage in several theater productions in the Italian colony. Several reviews appeared in the Italian newspaper L'Italia applauding her performances in plays like Morte Civile, Gli Spettri, and Disonesti (Albers 41). After these experiences, Modotti probably thought of developing her career as an actress since two photographs were taken by the photographer Arnold Schroder to promote and advertise her.<sup>9</sup> Soon, her first incursions in Hollywood movies revealed Modotti in a *femme fatale* role in The Tiger's Coat (1920). Likewise, Riding with Death (1921) and I Can Explain (1922) exploited Tina's physical appearance, adding roles of exotic and temperamental women. Though highlighting Modotti's performance, critics assessed the movies as mediocre resulting in Modotti's first and last cameo appearances in the Hollywood scene (Hooks 41).

The meetings at the Richey's house gathered an important part of Mexican influence through Mexican exiles like Rafael Vera de Córdova and Enrique de la Peña. Both artists escaped from the political turmoil in their home country. Ricardo Gómez Robelo was also a regular at Modotti's house. He was a former attorney general of the deposed regime of Victoriano Huerta. Robelo also produced poetry and translated the works of Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe (Hooks 38). Linn A. E. Gale also belonged to the Richey's circle of friends. Gale published a monthly magazine in Mexico City with editorials romanticizing Mexico. According to Donald L. Herman, "Gale, a member of the Executive Committee of one of the two communist parties which existed for a few years during the Carranza administration, attempted to explain why American intervention worked against the realization of communism in the country."<sup>10</sup> Robo contributed to Gale's Magazine with political caricatures

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<sup>7</sup> See details of the Modotti's prologue for The Book of Robo in Barkhausen 51.

<sup>8</sup> Vittorio Vidali quoted by Barkhausen-Canale 53.

<sup>9</sup> See references to these photographs in Constantine 34-35. Also in Lowe's Modernism 41.

<sup>10</sup> Herman 31. Barkhausen-Canale affirms that Gale's Magazine was the paper for the PCM, founded in 1919 though

reproducing, among others, Mexican victims under the power of banker-type individuals as symbols of Wall Street (Modernism 55).

Tina Modotti met the photographer Edward Weston in 1921, probably through one of the meetings at the Richey's home. Weston was already an established photographer of 35 years, married to Flora Chandler and running his own studio. Tina started modeling for Weston, and sometime after they began a romantic relationship. Weston still maintained his friendship with Robo and, by all accounts, the latter was aware of his wife's romance though he remained silent about it.<sup>11</sup> Tina and Weston exchanged love letters, especially during the first part of their relationship. Modotti entered Weston's circle of friends, meeting photographers like Dorothea Lange, Imogen Cunningham and Johan Hagemeyer.<sup>12</sup>

In 1921 Robo made his trip to Mexico seeking inspiration for his paintings, while Modotti stayed and worked in the movies Riding with Death and I Can Explain. Modotti planned to travel to Mexico with Weston and meet her husband there. Robo pictured Mexico as "the land of extremes. Great wealth and great poverty moved side by side but there is little that is devoid of its beauty."<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately the plan never came about since Robo contracted smallpox and died in 1922. Tina and her mother-in-law left for Mexico to bury him and Modotti stayed there for two months, making contacts through Gómez Robelo, who was now the chief of the Education Ministry's Department of Fine Arts (Modernism 60). These two months were probably the final influence in Modotti's decision to move permanently to Mexico.

She was devastated by the death of her husband and only six weeks afterwards terrible news came from the US: her father had died in San Francisco of stomach cancer. After these events she resolved to move to Mexico with Weston, who offered her the responsibility of taking care of his studio

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never recognized by the Communist International. The magazine was intended for the American leftists who lived in Mexico and the US. See Verdad 61.

<sup>11</sup> Apparently Tina and Robo's marriage was already deteriorated and Robo chose not to confront reality. See also Hooks 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Stark published in 1986 a book with private letters from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston. Unfortunately, Weston's letters are lost. See The Letters from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston by Amy Stark.

<sup>13</sup> Roubaix de l'Abrie Richey to Edward Weston quoted in Modernism 60.

and the possibility of learning the art of photography. For Weston, staying in the US meant a decaying marriage and a lacking of inspiration for his work. Mexico, however seemed a world of new opportunities. For Modotti, Los Angeles was a place full of memories and meant life without her husband and her father. Mexico, though was an opportunity to develop a career and a change of scenery. Hooks also claims as possible reasons for their trip that in the US “restrictive laws, Prohibition and the growth of the Ku Klux Klan [was] unbearable [for them]” (61). Another possible influence for Tina’s decision was the Mexican artist Xavier Guerrero whom she met in Los Angeles while he was arranging an exhibition of Mexican folk art. Tina also contributed to this exhibition.

Tina, Edward, and his son, Chandler, finally departed in July 1923 for Mexico. They arrived at the port of Mazatlán and from there they traveled to the town of Colima and then to Mexico City. All accounts coincide in highlighting the good impression both had of the Mexican people upon their arrival. They were impressed with the Spanish colonial constructions and the exuberance of the land but they also noticed the poverty of the people, which probably reminded Modotti of her own childhood.

Tina and Edward went to see Diego Rivera and his work. Tina served as an interpreter between both men since Weston did not speak Spanish, nor Rivera English. Rivera and other muralists belonged to the Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico. The medium for proclaiming the Syndicate’s aims was El Machete. According to Mildred Constantine, “they declared solidarity in the effort to overthrow the old, inhumane system and to recognize the spiritual vitality of the race. They sought to restore the peculiar ability of the Mexican to create beauty through indigenous Mexican art” (54). As Constantine recalls, the Obregón administration proposed a broad program in the arts, including a program of popular education. This was also a time in which women assumed a new place in society, gaining the right to vote and participate in government and business.

Weston and Modotti rented a house about forty minutes from the center of Mexico City, on El Buen Retiro Street, but soon they realized the difficulties in developing their photographic work so far from the city and without a telephone, since the place was beyond the reach of the existing telephone lines. They moved to Lucerna Street in Colonia Juárez, a well-off neighborhood that offered more opportunities for the photographers.

Weston and Modotti frequently held gatherings at their place, enjoying the company of artist friends like Diego Rivera and his wife Lupe Marín, and the painters “Dr. Atl” and “Nahui Olin,” whose

real names were Gerardo Murillo and Carmen Mondragón, and the couple Germán and Lola Cueto, both dedicated to marionette theater and painting. Another regular was David Alfaro Siqueiros. At the parties of the millionaire Oscar Braniff they also met the French painter Jean Charlot who was assisting Rivera with his murals.

Besides the bohemian life, there were gatherings of a more political content, especially those with Diego Rivera and Bertram and Ella Wolfe, both founding members of the American Communist Party. Also included in this group was Carleton Beals. Hooks supports that it was through the Wolfe's that Modotti and Weston entered into a "whirl of revolutionary politics" (86). They were also involved in the publication of El Machete together with Xavier Guerrero, Siqueiros and Rivera. El Machete was crafted clandestinely and distributed to the people in the early morning hours in the streets.

Tina also got involved with a group of intellectuals called the Estridentistas, founded by Manuel Maples Arce and Germán List Arzubide. The Estridentistas produced all art works, literature and plastic arts, emphasizing urban and machine-like objects and mixing the expressionist and cubist forms (Modernism 101). Tina kept on posing for Weston photographs and during 1924 Weston shot his famous nudes of Tina. However, economically they were in a bad situation and decided to move again to a lower rent place on Veracruz Avenue.

The romantic relationship between Weston and Modotti deteriorated during the time in Mexico. Both had other love affairs outside of their relationship and by late 1924, Weston decided to move back to the US with his son. Tina had produced good work over the year in Mexico and she even had some of her prints in a combined photographic exhibition with Weston that kept the attention of the local papers.

During the time Weston was absent, Tina remained with her friends, among them Frances (Paca) Toor, who became her closest friend. Toor was the editor of a magazine called the Mexican Folkways for which Tina contributed her photographs. Her production during this period is remarkable: "Calla Lily" (fig.1) and "Flor de Manita" or "El Manito" (fig.2) together with her portraits, for instance the one of the actress Dolores de Río (fig.3), which appeared in El Universal Ilustrado, and gained immediate recognition. It was also around 1924 when Tina got more involved in the Communist publication El Machete through Alfons Goldsmith, a German professor who founded a new Communist group. The Wolfe's were also working towards the formation of the Anti-Imperialist League of the

Americas, which was powered by the visit of the Soviet ambassador Stanislav Pestkovsky. Thanks to the Soviet help and the fact that the Mexican government established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, El Machete became the official organ of the Communist Party in 1925. Tina contributed mainly with her translations of Italian articles against fascism. Although, the Mexican government was permissive regarding Communist activism to a certain extent, Bertram Wolfe was expelled under Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution that year, a circumstance that Modotti herself suffered later in her life. At this point, Modotti expressed to Weston in her letters a conflict between art and life, or more accurately, between art and political action.<sup>14</sup>

At the Chapingo chapel, Tina posed for Rivera's murals, Virgin Earth and Germination and prepared an exhibition of photographs by Weston for his return to Mexico. Her political work links her to the International Red Aid, a Communist organization aiding those "oppressed by political forces, regardless of political affiliation" (Modernism 123).

Weston and Modotti started working for a project on Mexican art organized by Anita Brenner and sponsored by the National University of Mexico. The product was a book, Idols Behind Altars (1929). For this work both photographers had to travel to remote places in Mexico and sometimes face the difficulties of Cristero supporters suspicious of the photographers' work as government espionage (Modernism 133-136).

By mid 1925, Tina's photographs had turned into radical political and social denouncement. One example is "Workers Parade" (fig.4). Lowe explains this photograph as depicting "the very people for whom and in large part, by whom the cause was being fought. The photographer conveys the message of unity suggesting that the source of power to make political changes lies with the peasants" (Modernism 42).

Besides her work for El Machete, the International Red Aid, and the Anti-Imperialist League, Modotti got involved in the Hands Off Nicaragua Committee. In 1927, Tina Modotti finally joined the Mexican Communist Party (MCP), which stood against the government for its counter-revolutionary measures. Famous photographs like "Hammer and Sickle" (fig.5), "Worker Reading El Machete" (fig.6), and "Two Children" (fig.7) were produced at this time. These photographs are remarkable for

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<sup>14</sup> See Amy Stark 39-40 (letter 25.4, 7 July 1925).



the mixture of art and politics as a synthesis of the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican people. Furthermore, the innovation in these photographs rests on the fact that art was considered a bourgeois activity and here Modotti lowers her pictures to the level of the common people, the peasants and workers.

At this time Tina was working on photographic reproduction of the murals made by Rivera and Orozco. These are photographs of outstanding quality and innovation since she introduced elements from the architectonic context in which the murals were painted.<sup>15</sup> In her personal life, the relationship with Edward was over and she got involved with Xavier Guerrero whom she had met for the first time in the US. Guerrero was greatly involved with the MCP, devoting most of his time to political activism more than to ascetic concerns. The arrival in Mexico of Alexandra Kollonta, the second ambassador sent by the Soviet Union, posed another influence for Modotti's Communist ideas.

Tina's apartment was now the meeting point for gatherings of radical Communist leaders and Latin American exiles. She started organizing events like "the United Front for Sacco and Vanzetti," two Italian workers accused of murdering their superior. In the summer of 1927 Tina met Julio Antonio Mella, a Cuban Communist who had fled the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. At the Sacco-Vanzetti meetings she also met the Italian Vittorio Vidali, alias "Enea Someni." Starting with the execution of the two Italian workers, Tina devoted her energies to the MCP and the Communist cause. Xavier Guerrero was sent by the Party to the Lenin School in Moscow for three years. Modotti accepted this decision and even contributed to it with her savings. In exchange, Guerrero left his .45 Caliber pistol for her to sell in case she needed the money. Later in her life, these two facts were used as evidence against her in the case of the assassination of Julio Antonio Mella (Hooks 149-154).

Modotti embarked in Spring 1928 on her first "street photography" in the impoverished neighborhood of Colonia de la Bolsa. This series of photographs she called "The Contrasts of the Regime" and they all had ironic headings contrasting the extreme differences between the rich and the poor. From this series are "Elegance and Poverty" (fig.8) and "Worker Reading El Machete" (fig.6).

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<sup>15</sup> These pictures are kept today in the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas of México. They were shot at the request of the own artists. Today they are invaluable also because they were taken at the time the murals were painted, between 1927-1930. A compilation of this work is found in Marciela González Cruz Manjarrez Tina Modotti y el muralismo mexicano (1999).

After meeting Julio Antonio Mella at the Sacco-Vanzetti meeting they both worked together on El Machete and eventually fell in love. Mella was 23 years old and had founded the Anti-Imperialist League in his home country together with the Communist Party. In 1925, he was put in prison by the Machado government in Cuba. Mella initiated a hunger strike for eighteen days, attracting the attention of even foreign newspapers. Machado finally set him free. He left Cuba and arrived in Mexico in 1926 (Barkhausen 126-129). However, Tina did not become romantically involved with Mella until months later due to her romantic commitment with Xavier Guerrero.

Tina made several portraits of Julio A. Mella, but by all accounts, her best achievement was “Mella’s Typewriter” or “La técnica” (fig.9), of which Mella himself referred to the “keyboard which you [Tina] have socialized with your art.”<sup>16</sup> As Lowe points out:

The typewriter was an apt emblem of Mella’s historical contribution to Latin American radicalism: his written legacy has a crucial role in Cuba’s history. Not only are his articulations of Marxist ideas acknowledged as laying the groundwork for the revolution in Cuba, he is also recognized as the first to expose the exploitative nature of US imperialist policy in the Caribbean as a whole, and to link the Cuban bourgeoisie with capital interests to the north (183).

Furthermore, inserted in the typewriter there is a piece of paper revealing part of a citation by Leon Trotsky dealing with the relation between technique and art production.<sup>17</sup>

Tina struggled with the relationship she still kept with Guerrero and the commitment that Mella wanted. As all accounts point out, her attitude had now changed in the sense that she did not want to betray Guerrero, her companion and comrade. It seems that the involvement with the Communist Party and ideals was strong in affecting her personal relationships. At some point she decided to let Guerrero know about the new situation through a letter which was the “most difficult, most painful” she had ever written.<sup>18</sup> Guerrero replied with a telegram which read “received your letter. Goodbye. Guerrero.”

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<sup>16</sup> Julio A. Mella in a letter to Tina Modotti written from Veracruz on 11 September 1928. Modernism 164.

<sup>17</sup> Full citation: “Technique will transform itself in a more profound inspiration than that of artistic production, in time, it finds a sublime synthesis, the contrast that exists between technique and nature”. Quoted in Modernism 184.

<sup>18</sup> Reproduction of Modotti’s letter. Modernism 168.

Julio Mella moved to Tina's apartment, and they started living together. Several testimonies portrayed their relationship as one that fulfilled the expectations of both.<sup>19</sup> During this time Tina made another impressive portrait of Mella giving a speech (fig.10). According to Lowe, "Mella presenting a classical profile and photographed from a low vantage point, is resolute. The image has all the earmarks of a publicity shot, and it was this photograph that appeared in newspapers and journals around the world after his death; it is the portrait by which he is still remembered" (182).

Mella entered into bad terms with the Comintern for his resistance to total control by the Mexican Party and his plans to overthrow the Machado government in Cuba. In 1928, Vidali wrote to the Wolfe's that he[Mella] should subordinate the C[entral] C[omitee] of the Mexican Communist Party", to which Mella wrote a letter of resignation. There is speculation about what really caused Mella's attitude. Rafael Carillo, the president of the MPC affirmed that Mella had Trotskyist ideas, which he called "weaknesses" (Hooks 171). Mella's enemies were growing within the Communist Party, the Mexican government, and of course, the Cuban government, for being a popular orator and agitator. Barkhausen recalls a particular incident that further disfavored Mella. Somebody displayed a Cuban flag in the Club Hebreo where the owners of the hall prohibited any political display. Mella simply pulled down the flag, but this act was considered a dishonor for Cubans and it undermined his reputation in Cuba (156).

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<sup>19</sup> For testimonies see Adys Cupull Julio Antonio Mella en los Mexicanos (1983). It includes testimonies from Adelina Zendejas and Baltasar Dromundo.

## The Assassination of Julio Antonio Mella

Modotti and Mella were together the evening he was assassinated, January 10 1929. They were walking together along Abraham González Street in Mexico around ten in the evening when two men shot Mella from behind and then fled the scene in a car. Modotti was the main witness of the assassination and police interrogated her about the crime. However, police accused her as a possible accomplice and placed her under house arrest. Her house was searched and newspapers published private documents, letters, and photographs. Modotti's private life became open to public judgment and was distorted by the Mexican press. The attention of the case was deviated towards a crime of passion instead of a political crime. This caused the police to lose trace of the real assassins. As Diego Rivera recalled in one interview, "the serious part is that while they're trying to build up a case for the idea of a crime of passion, they're losing time in the investigation. And it is quite possible that with this method the remaining traces will be lost and the murderer will escape" (Excélsior 14 January 1929).

Modotti's unconventional relationships, foreign nationality and political activity were the basis on which the public opinion judged her as the murderer of Julio Antonio Mella. The press, especially the Mexican newspaper Excélsior, promoted this image through a sequence of articles with a highly biased content. After Mella's assassination, student demonstrations were held in Cuba and Mexico and the relationship between both countries became fragile. The Mexican government thought it more convenient to blame it on an individual with an isolated motive behind the killing, defining the murder as one of passion and not as a political crime. The reaction of the left was to instantly project an image of Mella as a new revolutionary martyr (Photographs 41).

The case was finally resolved by the end of January, and Modotti was freed from arrest, but the damage was done and the negative image of her spread. Accounts pointed to José Magriñat as the assassin, and though he was arrested, the Mexican government set him free and no one was ever charged with the murder. As Constantine states:

Pepe Magriña [sic] had been apprehended and imprisoned briefly as the agent-provocateur behind the assassination. The police had found the newspaper El Machete on Mella's body, as well as a paper bearing Magriña's address and

telephone number, but he denied that he had sought the rendezvous and that it was indeed Mella who approached him regarding the newspaper Cuba Libre. He was later released (139).

The Machado government of Cuba and the Mexican police might have been involved in the plot, for the case brought about the dismissal of the Chief Police in charge of the investigation and the rupture of diplomatic relations with Cuba, resulting in the withdrawal of the Cuban ambassador in Mexico (Constantine 139). Edward Weston himself had foreseen the possible outcome of the trial, as he wrote in one of the entries of his diary on 26 January 1929:

Startling news has come from Mexico. Tina is featured in the headlines of every paper, even in California papers, as the only witness to the assassination of a young Cuban communist, Mella. Indeed, she was more than a witness, the boy's beloved it seems, and walking with him when he was shot. The murder may cause a break between the Cuban and the Mexican governments. My name was brought in, but only as having gone to Mexico with Tina. Poor girl, her life is a stormy one (108).

After the trial, Modotti herself feared that she could be subject to the application of the Article 33 stated in the Mexican constitution. She wrote it in the P.S. of a letter to Edward Weston signed on 21 February 1929:

There is something I have been forgetting to tell you in my last letters - Things are very insecure here for the "pernicious foreigner." I am prepared for the worst - any day they may apply the "33" on us - I want to have all my things in shape as much as possible. What shall I do with all your negatives of orders? The only customer who has reordered once, has been O'Hea - the others have been lying idle all these years - Shall I send them to you? Please instruct me! (Stark 66).

Modotti's premonitions were correct. In the autumn of 1929, one of the most prominent figures of the Mexican arts and a salient activist of the Communist party, Diego Rivera, was expelled from the Party. He was accused of collaborating with the conservative government of Mexico, especially after accepting the post of director of the Escuela de Artes Plásticas.

At the same time, the Soviet Union lost sympathy for the Mexican communists. Diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Soviet Union were finally broken and the Communist Party was declared illegal. Herman recalls the following:

Diplomatic relations were broken with the Soviet Union. The offices of *El Machete* were closed, and the CSUM and the Communist Party were declared illegal (the party was thus illegal from 1929-1934). Many Communists were arrested and sent to the penitentiary of Islas Mariás. They were brutally treated and some were never heard from again (100).

The newly elected Mexican president, Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1929-1932), was the object of a failed assassination attempt on 5 February 1930, which was attributed to Mexican intellectuals. Modotti was accused of taking part in the conspiracy against the president and was arrested. Modotti sent a letter to Edward Weston on 25 February 1930, directly addressing the issue and her fear of being expelled as many other Communists had been.<sup>20</sup>

After spending 13 days in jail, Modotti was expelled from Mexico and deported. She refused to lay down her political ideas and was henceforth denied entry to the U.S. Unwilling to return to Italy because of Musolini's fascist regime, she left for Europe, arriving in Germany one month later in April 1930.

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<sup>20</sup> This letter is included in Appendix A since I consider it a direct source of information, which was not intended for publication at the time it was written.

## Political Background: Origins of the Mexican Communist Party (1917-1929)

The Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) was founded in 1919 following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Communism appeared in Mexico in a phase of consolidation following the Revolution of 1910. This antecedent grew from a base of native leaders influenced by anarcho-syndicalism who joined the rank and file of Communist activism. These leaders leant towards revolutionary action as a means for change instead of first choosing the legal political action (Herman 54).

The PCM started out as the Partido Socialista Obrero (PSO) founded in 1917, which was the first attempt to involve Mexican labor in politics. This attempt failed and was absorbed by the Socialist current during the years 1918-1919. The Marxist ideology came by the hand of El Socialista, a publication directed by a member of the Grupo Marxista Rojo. In addition, the Soviet Union pressured to found a Communist Party in Mexico. This provided the resources for the extreme leftist socialists of Mexico to start the party's activity.

In 1920, the PCM organized the Federación Comunista del Proletariado Mexicano, which sought integration in the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT). However, this attempt failed and the Comintern denied the party any Soviet support. In 1922 the PCM was headed by artists and intellectuals, such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who were also editors of the written press of the PCM, El Machete, together with Xavier Guerrero. The party then became involved in politics, backing a candidate for the presidency, Adolfo de la Huerta. De la Huerta in turn sustained the party economically in exchange for support from the Communists in the event of a possible revolt against him (Schmitt 9-11). Some dissension took place in the internal structure of the Party regarding the best candidate for the presidency of Mexico who would support communist revolutionary projects. At that moment the two candidates were de la Huerta and Calles. Eventually, the Calles-Obregón government gained communist sympathies.

In 1924 Mexico and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations and exchanged ministers. However, voices within the PCM still did not accept Calles, since he was believed to support US

imperialism. From that time to the present, the party sought to gain more influence within the working class. One of its tactics was to infiltrate the rank and file of the labor unions. When President Portes Gil gained power after the assassination of Obregón, communists saw a more positive atmosphere in which to pursue their goals.

The year 1929 brought an economic recession to the U.S. and therefore the Soviet Union assumed that capitalism was about to fail. In Mexico, two military generals, Aguirre and Escobar, provoked a crisis during which the PCM saw the possibility of the falling of the bourgeoisie and an open door through which communists could take power. The strategy of the PCM consisted of first supporting the government against the rebellion, and then overturning it. However, tensions within the party made the attempt a failure, which resulted in the expulsion of Siqueiros and Rivera from the PCM. The government closed down party offices and El Machete was forced to cease its work. In addition, communist members were arrested and expelled from Mexico and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were broken. The persecution of PCM members lasted until Cárdenas came to power in 1934.



### Chapter III

## The Written Media as an Image Breaker Examined Through Content Analysis

Tina Modotti was a frequent object of press attention after the death of Julio Antonio Mella. Her position as a direct witness placed her under suspicion as an accomplice in the assassination. This was the image Mexicans had in the following days of that 10 January 1929. Though Modotti's innocence was eventually proven, her public and private images were strongly negative after the news spread. This left lasting effects on the Mexican public and her reputation. This turn of events creates certain questions: How was this image forged? By whom? Why was such a campaign mounted against her person? In order to answer these questions there is a direct source of information available, that is, newspaper articles that concern this case.

The 17 texts included in this thesis come to a large extent from Excélsior<sup>21</sup>, as well as one from New York Times (text 16), and one from Washington Post (text 17). These were published in the days after Mella's assassination. Articles 14 and 15 were found in Archive<sup>22</sup> and the exact sources they were taken from are unknown. The texts from American newspapers are listed to provide a counterpoint in the treatment of the issue.

I analyze these texts through content analysis of which the purpose is, as Robert P. Weber

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<sup>21</sup> One of the Mexican papers which extensively covered the case of the murder of Mella was Excélsior, a paper founded by Rafael Alducin on 18 March 1917. The tendency of Excélsior changed over the course of time from Cristero positions to be the means of expression of a group of entrepreneurs whose aim was to put in the presidency General Aarón Sáenz. In the course of ten years, this abrupt change in the editorial led the Liga Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa, the civil arm of the Cristeros, to promote a boycott among advertisers and readers against the newspaper. Excélsior was bought by the private entrepreneurs with government funds, being the subject of political manipulation for whoever was in the government at the time. During the presidency of Ortiz Rubio the paper was controlled by his Ministry of Public Affairs at the same time that was attacked by the defendants of Calles. This is an evidence of how media can be an instrument at the service of the possessors of resources and members who offer the same affiliation and are able to promote ideas shared by the founders through the written word. (Granados 12)

<sup>22</sup> See Cited Works of this thesis.

points out, “to identify the intentions of the communicators, determine the psychological state of persons or group involved, detect the existence of propaganda, describe attitudes to the communications, reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions or society, and reveal the forms of social attention” (9).

Content analysis is a useful tool since inferences can be obtained from different levels: the sender, the message and the audience of the text. According to Weber, “Textual materials that survive over long periods often reflect an elite bias” (11). In our case, the reading of these texts corroborates this finding, for abundant literature has been written since 1929, shedding new light on the events and political context at the moment of their publication.

When creating a coding scheme it is necessary to define the recording units that are more suitable for the purpose of the analysis. In our case study, the purpose is to find all those inferences that promote an image of Tina Modotti. The excerpts provided in this paper date 11-16 January 1929. All of these articles give an account of Mella’s assassination on 10 January 1929. Since we are looking for particular information about Tina Modotti, the scope is reduced to only those articles about Modotti.

The recording options proposed by Weber include: words, that is, coding every word of the text to be analyzed; word sense, grouping words or phrases that constitute a semantic unit, such as idioms or proper nouns; sentences, assigning them either a positive, negative or neutral character; themes, identified with subjects, verbs and objects of sentences; paragraphs, though it entails a difficulty to achieve high reliability because they are large units, and finally, the whole text when this is relatively short, like headlines, editorials or stories (22-23).

For several reasons, in this study I will work with the sentence option, dealing only with newspaper headings. Firstly, headlines are pieces of information meant to be summary extracts of what the article contains. Secondly, these are the lines that draw the attention of the reader to the article and reader’s reaction to the text is obviously one of our concerns. Lastly, and related to the former, some readers only read the headlines to glean an idea of what is in the text. Most of these excerpts come from the same newspaper, Excelsior, and this helps to see the progression of Modotti’s image.

On another level, I have adopted the sentence option to go into further detail, extracting all the sentences dealing with Modotti herself and classifying them as positive, negative or neutral references. For even greater detail, I have chosen the word sense unit within these sentences. I will discuss how these sentences portray a stereotyped image of Modotti, as well as the particular stereotype involved and

how it is defined based on sociocultural assumptions.

The headlines of the articles are listed below using capital and bold letters to resemble the original as much as possible, since these features play an important role for the written communication from the reader's and producer's point of view.

Text 1: Headlines

**EL PERIODISTA CUBANO ANTONIO MELLA FUE HERIDO ANOCHE DE SUMA GRAVEDAD**

Cuando Paseaba por la Avenida Abraham González dos Individuos Dispararon Sobre él sus Pistolas  
AMBOS HICIERON BLANCO

La Cruz Roja Procedió a Recoger al Herido, que se Encontraba Gravísimo, Temiéndose que Muriera (Excélsior 11 Jan. 1929)

Text 2: Headlines

**HASTA AHORA LA POLICIA NO HA PODIDO DESCUBRIR A LOS ASESINOS DE MELLA**

Lo que Dijo el Estudiante Cubano Antes de Morir Consta en el Acta que Levantaron los Agentes Policiacos de la Sexta Comisaría

**LO QUE DICE LA SRA. MODOTTI**

Relata Cómo fué Muerto el Joven Mella, Aseverando que fué Agredido por la Espalda por dos Individuos que lo Estaban Esperando (Excélsior 12 Jan. 1929)

Text 3: Headline

**¿LA SEÑORA MODOTTI CONOCE AL ASESINO?** (Excélsior 12 Jan. 1929)

Text 4: Headline

**LO QUE DECLARA LA SRA. TINA MODOTTI** (Excélsior 12 Jan. 1929)

Text 5: Headlines

**TINA MODOTTI SE NIEGA A DECLARAR QUIEN FUE EL ASESINO DE JULIO ANTONIO MELLA  
CANDENTES DISCURSOS PRONUNCIARON LOS COMUNISTAS**

Con Motivo del Sepelio de Julio Antonio Mella hablaron Varios Oradores en Términos Violentos  
SEIS HORAS DURO EL DESFILE

El Cadáver del Estudiante Cubano fué Sepultado en Dolores y sus Cenizas se Llevarán Después a Moscú (Excélsior 13 Jan. 1929)

Text 6: Headlines

**La Artista Italiana Parece que Sabe Perfectamente Quién fué el Matador**

**IMPORTANTES DILIGENCIAS**

**Tres Personas Declaran que Mella, la Modotti y Otro Individuo, el Asesino, Iban Juntos por la Calle de González**

(Excélsior 13 Jan. 1929)

Text 7: Headline

**CAREOS MUY IMPORTANTES CON TINA Y LOS TESTIGOS** (Excélsior 13 Jan. 1929)

Text 8: Headlines

**TINA MODOTTI TIENE LA VERDADERA CLAVE SOBRE EL ASESINATO**

**A Pesar de su Aparente Ingenuidad ha Dejado Deslizar Frases que la Colocan en Situación Comprometida**

(Excélsior 14 Jan. 1929)

Text 9: Headline

**¿LA SRA. MODOTTI DARA LA CLAVE DEL CRIMEN?** (Excélsior 14 Jan. 1929)

Text 10: Headline

**AYER**

Por Marcos de Obregón

**Tina Modotti** (Excélsior 15 Jan. 1929)

Text 11: headlines

**TINA MODOTTI ANTE EL C. JUEZ DE LO PENAL**

**PARA LOS REVOLUCIONARIOS EL AMOR ES COSA SECUNDARIA** (Excélsior 15 Jan. 1929)

Text 12: headline

**TINA NO GUSTA RECIBIR NI DAR DINERO A HOMBRES** (Excélsior 15 Jan. 1929)

Text 13: headline

**UN RETRATO DE TINA MODOTTI**

Por RAFAEL CARDONA (Excélsior 16 Jan. 1929)

Text 14: Headline

**CUBAN REBEL IS KILLED IN MEXICO CITY**

Student Shot While on Street With Woman (Unknown source 11 Jan. 1929)

Text 15: headlines

**LOVE LINKED TO MURDER**

**Mexico Mystery Meshes Woman**

One Pasadena Art Student May Solve Death of Cuban Communist

Beauty Went to Republic With Californian, police Assert (Unknown source 12 Jan. 1929)

Text 16: headline

**ANTI-CUBAN RIOT IN MEXICO**

Demonstration Follows Shooting of Student Agitator (New York Times 11 Jan. 1929)

Text 17: Headlines

**CUBA IS DENOUNCED IN MEXICAN KILLING** [sic]

Stoning of Havana's Embassy Attempted After Street Assassination

ENVOY'S RECALL TALKED (Washington Post 11 Jan. 1929)

The first headlines that appeared in Excelsior dated the day after Mella's assassination denote a neutral tone in the assessment of the news. The words used to express the violence of the act are remarkable: "dispararon," "pistolas," "hicieron blanco." So are phrases with quantifiers pointing at the critical state of the injured, "herido anoche de suma gravedad," "recoger al herido," "se encontraba gravísimo, temiéndose que muriera." In this first account, Mella is treated as "el periodista cubano," whereas later in text 6, he will be addressed as "el joven estudiante cubano" or "el revolucionario cubano." This shift in the focus to the age of Mella and his current occupation shows an identification with that part of the population "the students" who are more likely to protest because they have less time and economical constraints. Presenting Mella as a communist equates him in certain instances to "agitador" and "revolucionario," plus, there is a precedent set here which is followed in all the subsequent articles addressing him as "el cubano," which states his status in Mexico as a foreigner.

In text 2, Modotti's name appears for the first time included in a juxtaposed structure: "Lo que Dijo el Estudiante Cubano [...] vs LO QUE DICE LA SRA. MODOTTI," suggesting two opposed versions of the event, that of the injured himself, which accounts for greater reliability, and that of a person who was with him at the moment of the crime.

In text 3, this implication is more explicit in the form of a question, "**¿LA SEÑORA MODOTTI CONOCE AL ASESINO?**" as well as in text 4, "**LO QUE DECLARA LA SRA. TINA MODOTTI.**" In text 5 it is completely assumed that Modotti is acquainted with the name of the assassin, "**TINA MODOTTI SE NIEGA A DECLARAR QUIEN FUE EL ASESINO DE JULIO ANTONIO MELLA.**" Intermingled with these headlines also appears the communist position in support of Modotti's innocence accounting for political reasons behind the murder instead of the theory of a crime of passion. The way Excelsior posed these protests again suggests violence: "candentes discursos," "hablaron varios oradores en términos violentos." Clearly communists are coded as violent disrupters of the social order.

In this particular instance the portrayal of Mella's funeral is also noticeable: "SEIS HORAS

DURO EL DESFILE,” “funeraria procesión yendo lentamente a pie,” establishing a parallel image with that of an Easter procession that mourns a martyr, who is in this case the martyr of the revolution.

In text 6 the subjectivity is even more plausible: **“La Artista Italiana Parece que Sabe Perfectamente Quién fué el Matador.”** The reference to Modotti as an artist, instead of, for instance as a photographer, implies a vague definition of her profession which recalls the preconception of artists as bohemians whose lives are typically disapproved by a large part of society. Also, stating that she is Italian brings back the issue of general disapproval of foreigners in Mexican society stated explicitly in its Constitution’s Article 33. Furthermore, it is said that she seems to know who the assassin is, and this fact is also reinforced with the adverb “perfectamente,” giving the impression that she knows something for certain but she is not willing to tell it. Interestingly enough, in this instance, the murderer is called here not “asesino,” as in the other occasions, but “matador,” a term used exclusively in the art of bullfighting. The whole sentence possesses an aura of mystery (she knows more that she wants to tell), art (she is an artist, bullfighting is an art and the assassin is a “matador”), and tragedy (she has Italian blood and brings tragedy with her). This image is also fostered in an opinion article published on 16 January **“UN RETRATO DE TINA MODOTTI”** (text 13), which we will treat in detail later on.

Text 8 states as a fact that Modotti not only knows the assassin but also the plot crafted against Mella: **“TINA MODOTTI TIENE LA VERDADERA CLAVE SOBRE EL ASESINATO.”** Actually, the police pursued the theory of a crime of passion so that the Mexican and Cuban governments would not become entangled in a political conflict. Supporting this theory, Excélsior added: **“A pesar de su Aparente Ingenuidad ha Dejado Deslizar Frases que la Colocan en Situación Comprometida.”** The suggestion is that her testimony is dubious because her own words compromise her. Again, “aparente ingenuidad” reflects that she knows more than she tells, that she is not ingenuous. This phrase implies that her innocence is just a façade.

Text 9 continues with the same assumption **“¿LA SRA. MODOTTI DARA LA CLAVE DEL CRIMEN?”** and text 11 promotes a stereotype of the revolutionaries as people whose political ideas are above everything. This inference taken from Mella’s diary serves Excélsior as a justification for the crime as one of passion. The paper suggests that Modotti had a motive to commit the crime because her love would never be above Mella’s political ideas.

The next headline in text 12, **“TINA NO GUSTA RECIBIR NI DAR DINERO A**

**HOMBRES,**” shows an image of Modotti as an independent woman. In Mexico in the 30s, the image of a “decent” woman was that of a wife dependent on her husband and unable to have her own source of income through gainful employment.

Texts 14 through 17 come from American newspapers. Text 14 presents Mella as a “Cuban rebel” and a “student” in the headlines, but contrary to the other accounts seen up to this point it only states “Shot While On Street With Woman.” The attention lies more on Mella himself than on Tina Modotti.

In contrast to this one, text 15 presents the assassination as “Love Linked to Murder.” The tone of the article is a more sensational one. The word “woman” appears linked to the word “meshes” and also suggests that Modotti has the key to solve the case. In the third headline, “woman” is substituted by “beauty” to give a more sensational approach and to increase the love-linked-to-murder plot. Accounts 16 and 17 offer another perspective focusing on the possible consequences for the relations between Cuba and Mexico. The device used to imply a large message is called synecdoche, which according to Paul L. Jalbert, “involves the substitution of one term for another within a prearranged hierarchy” (288). Thus, in text 17 “**CUBA IS DENOUNCED IN MEXICAN KILILNG**” [sic], it is assumed that Cuba stands for Cuban government, to be exact, the president Machado. In the same way, in text 16 “**ANTI-CUBAN RIOT IN MEXICO,**” “Cuban” refers to the government in particular, which is accused of the assassination. The substitution of the part for the whole gives a greater relevance to the news, extrapolating the terms to a wider audience.

Going into further detail, I have chosen to extract sentences and phrases which provide a direct reference to Tina Modotti. These instances are listed together for the purpose of a close analysis at the same time that a brief summary of the texts is provided in Appendix B to preserve the contextual unity.

Dealing with these texts we have to take into account that many times journalists add opinions and prejudice to stories through the use of generalities and quantitative adjectives. These adjectives apply judgment to the subject rather than describing something that can be objectively observed. Therefore, in dealing with the media as an image maker/breaker, it is worthwhile to pose basic concepts in relation to stereotypes. According to Enteman, “stereotype is closely associated with journalism as a trade [...]. Thus, a stereotype imposes a rigid mold on the subject and encourages repeated mechanical usage. Stereotyping converts real persons into artificial persons. We ignore the individuality of people

and we treat them as proxies for some group we have decided they should represent” (10).

Travis Linn points out that “stereotypical views of others are part of our shared culture. We participate in them even when we consciously reject them. It is this reality upon which the writers rely” (15). Ideal journalism, for Enteman, would not provide more than evidence and facts for the public to make its own judgment, but often this is not reality. We find intentional prejudgement in newspaper articles and this conforms to the realm of what is called discrimination. This same prejudgement and discrimination features in the present case study.

Taking a close look at the news as it was published we find the emergence of a stereotyped Tina Modotti from accounts that far from being pure facts are more subjective inferences. Here, I have listed all references appearing in the articles published by Excélsior in chronological order and other two references from an unknown American newspaper. Listing all of them together and underlining key words gives a clear idea of how the image is imposed upon the reader rather than extracted from objective facts.

“[...] ratificada por su amante, la señora italiana Tina Modotti.”

“La señora Tina Modotti [...] es originaria de Venecia, Italia, de treinta y dos años de edad, viuda, fotógrafa [...].”

“La señora italiana Tina Modotti [...] es de aspecto bastante agradable; sin ser bonita, es de las mujeres que atraen desde luego por su simpatía” (emphasis mine).

“[...] era su amante o su “compañera,” como ella a sí se designaba.”

“La figura doliente y llorosa de Tina Modotti, la artista italiana que figuró al lado del victimado en el instante trágico, presentaba relieve a la funeraria procesión [...].”

“[...] La señora Tina Modotti, que continúa negando conocer al asesino y sostiene la versión que hoy aparece como absurda, de que el ataque fué por la espalda [...].”

“Tales declaraciones [...] hacen creer que la señora Modotti conoció al asesino de su amante, al que llevaba a su lado hasta el momento del crimen.”

“[...] ella [Modotti] se impresionó de tal modo, que no pudo ver al asesino, ni hizo tal intención, sino que corrió tras de su amante, llegando a tiempo para recibirlo en sus brazos.”

“Tina se presentó vistiendo un traje estilo sastre, de color azul marino oscuro, una blusa azul celeste y un sombrero de fieltro color beige. Como dijimos en edición anterior, su tipo es sumamente



agradable: es delgada, peina de raya en medio con el cabello muy liso; tiene los ojos negros y expresivos y gusta de fumar.”

“Tina sentada junto al escritorio del jefe de las comisiones, medio ocultaba el rostro tras de un periódico que fingía leer, pero constantemente, en forma nerviosa, dirigía sus miradas hacia dos de los testigos [...]”

“Las miradas de la Modotti eran largas y profundas como tratando de examinarlos o queriendo recordar si los conocía. Es mujer inteligente [...] habla perfectamente el español y apenas si se le nota uno que otro acento extranjero, principalmente cuando pronuncia las erres.”

“[...] y se puso a reflexionar; la pregunta, al parecer la había desconcertado. Pero reponiéndose continuó [...]”

“La atractiva veneciana, de ojos negros y mirar profundo [...] la mujer que posee el secreto de la muerte de su amante.”

“Tina Modotti debe conocer de todos modos la causa o el origen; si fue político, creen que la italiana debe haber sido instrumento de los enemigos del comunista cubano.”

“La que fué [sic] amante de Mella es una persona muy inteligente; es una mujer que parece de acero revestido de carne; es impenetrable, hermética para todo aquello que no quiere o no le conviene decir. Si Tina Modotti se obstina en no decir la verdad, cremos que no habrá poder humano que la haga salir de su negativa, cuenta para ello, con su inteligencia y con la ingenuidad que sabe dar a sus ojos negros y al arqueado de sus pestañas.”

“La única que podría dar la clave y revelar quién fué el asesino es Tina Modotti.”

“Una pregunta que le hicimos ayer a la veneciana, nos hace suponer que Tina no quiere confesar [...]”

“Un momento se puso a reflexionar Tina; arqueó las cejas con ese gesto tan peculiar en ella y sin contestar a nuestra pregunta hizo una mueca como hablando consigo misma.”

“[...] súbitamente volvió de la abstracción en que se encontraba y sacudiendo la cabeza, como tratando de apartar una idea que la obsesionaba, agregó: ‘No sé por qué no lo haría’...”

“Tina Modotti [...] es inquietante, seductora, cautivadora, torturante [...] resulta la compañera ideal para la vida tropical [...] si todavía la queremos examinar más cuidadosamente, por medio del criterio técnico policial, ya no es una inocente adolescente, sino una aventurera peligrosa que sabe más de lo que le

han enseñado. Tina Modotti sabe, sin duda alguna, quién mató al cubano Julio Antonio Mella y por qué lo mató.”

“[...] vestía una falda corta negra, un “sweater” de color gris, muy ceñido, medias de color humo y un sombrero de terciopelo negro con un adorno de dos cerezas de plata. En su rostro notamos huellas de cansancio: quizás pasó una noche de insomnio.”

“Senorita [sic] Modotti is an Italian girl and a skilled photographer.”

“[...] signorina Tina Modotti, attractive young Italian art student [...] the police are seeking to establish whether Mella’s murder was of a political nature or a love tragedy in which signorina Modotti’s bohemian life and impulsive Italian temperament are involved. [...] She [Modotti] became Mella’s friend and is now the chief actress in what appears to be an international drama [...] Mella’s dying words, police say, were “Ask Tina, she knows all.”

“Tipo de mujer [Modotti] casi desaparecido y que sólo en Italia, tierra de la tragedia y del arte arraiga bien desde las viejas Repúblicas y de los principados. Tina Modotti, la “compañera” de Mella, lleva en su sangre el antiguo drama pasional y político de gueldos y gibelinos [...] Atractiva, sin la belleza lineal que amó tanto la vieja estética renacentista, dotada de esa suave y carnosa morenez [...] hija del Mediterráneo, esta joven semi-artista, semi-estudiante y aventurera [...] como mujer que gusta de los deliquios y las tortuosidades; la madeja de sus nervios; tejida con la nerviosa precisión serpentina [...] el drama va con ella, ha nacido con ella y morirá con ella [...] hablan desde la profundidad de su mundo interior las voces alteradas de veinte siglos de tragedia y arte [...] el crimen de moda se ha italianizado gracias a la figura de Tina Modotti [...] Sería intensamente interesante penetrar en el alma de esta mujer fina y flexible llena de experiencia y de mundo para anotar qué capacidades tiene, qué ambiciones la guían y en fin, qué naturaleza pasional posee” (Text 13).

All these extracts offer constant references to three true aspects of Modotti: that she was a woman, a foreigner, and an artist. These three aspects are explored from a perspective of what social psychologists called “symbolic interactionism,” that is, how people develop and portray their roles in society, how we are socialized, how we learn to act in socially appropriate ways and represent ourselves in socially acceptable “formats.”

Certainly, Modotti did not fulfill the acceptable models set by Mexican society and journalists found in these cultural assumptions the vehicle to portray a guilty Modotti. She was not a “respectable”

woman in the way any Mexican could picture her. She was not married, she had lovers, she posed nude for photographs and murals, she had a profession, and she was a communist. In a “macho” society, such as the Mexican, this contrasted with the preconceived image of the married woman, subordinated to her husband. Thus, references to Modotti’s physical appearance and way of dressing, as well as behavior patterns appeared deliberately related to the stereotype of the *femme fatale*: “su tipo es sumamente agradable: es delgada, peina de raya en medio con el cabello muy liso,” “tiene los ojos negros y expresivos y gusta de fumar,” “es una mujer que parece de acero revestido de carne,” “es impenetrable, hermética para todo aquello que no quiere o no le conviene decir, la mujer que posee el secreto de la muerte de su amante, cuenta para ello, con su inteligencia y con la ingenuidad que sabe dar a sus ojos negros y al arqueado de sus pestañas” (Excélsior).

According to Gunter Kress, there are forms that permit the newspaper a degree of distancing from the events that are reported. These forms can be linguistic units that express modality, such as modal auxiliaries, adjectives expressing certainty/uncertainty and verbs that express mental processes (134-135). A few examples of these are found in the texts, such as, “hacen creer que,” “al parecer,” “debe conocer,” “debe haber sido,” “creemos que,” “nos hacen suponer.” The use of these terms conveys ideological motivations and effects because the paper is able to present material as being more or less close to its own ideological position. These terms are mixed with conscious subjective judgments throughout the text.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Modotti was Italian played into the generalized view of Italians as people with strong temperaments and very passionate. As one of the reporters said, Modotti came from “the land of tragedy,” the land of vendettas. And surely all the references to her Italian heritage pointed to the issue of tragedy as something in her nature, something she could not avoid. Her life as an artist was identified with the disapproval of bohemian life. There was only one positive account which came from a foreign paper: “she is a skilled photographer.” All other references are highly negative.

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<sup>23</sup> See the text above with the references underlined. Emphasis mine.

## Chapter IV

### The Literary Representation of Modotti's Case in Tinísima

The purpose of this second part of the present study is to analyze Elena Poniatowska's novel, Tinísima (1992), from a postmodern perspective by focusing on those sections that deal with Modotti's representation in the press and the treatment of these in literature.

I have chosen this literary work since it is a comprehensive revision of Modotti's life, but also because it provides a different framework, the historical-fictional. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora, "by establishing an explicit dialectic between journalistic and novelistic discursive modes, they [the literary works] acknowledge and often embody multiple, simultaneous, conflicting versions of the world and ask their readers to make distinctions among those versions" (41). By means of this fictional-historical setting, the interpretation of reality expands into many more directions and thus, the reader is able to infer different "versions of the world" unknown or covered by other kinds of accounts, for instance historical.

The novel Tinísima relates to the real world through different types of intertexts, from entries in Weston's diaries and Modotti's letters, to newspaper articles, which are reproduced in the novel in full or in part. Some of these articles are excerpts from Excélsior that I analyzed in the previous chapter of the present study through content analysis. My aim is to study the role of the media in shaping Modotti's public image from this literary framework. Therefore, it is important to extract not only the interpretation of the author when dealing with these intertexts, but also to infer the possible motifs and political outcomes of the use of the media on Modotti.

I find the use of postmodernism a pertinent background theory since Poniatowska's work falls into the realm of what postmodernist critic Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction:"

In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative – be literature, history or theory – that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (*historiographic metafiction*) is made the grounds for its

rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past (Poetics 5).

Tinísima falls into this category since there is great emphasis on real accounts about Tina Modotti, and at the same time, fiction links these accounts into a comprehensive story. In a similar way, the history and art books consulted for the literature review in Chapter I cement the linking of facts by means of what Hayden White calls “constructive imagination,” that is, “to fill in the gaps in the record by a deduction of facts that *must have occurred*” (61). The difference between these history and art books and Tinísima lies in the fact that the latter belongs to the literary realm in which fiction is not only expected but an important piece in the interpretation of events. Therefore, Tinísima is not discussed in relation to its accuracy to fill in the gaps of the missing history. Rather, these fictional pieces of information are the source of study, for they expand and integrate the real accounts into a wider view thenceforth justified by its own fictional nature.

Tinísima crosses the boundaries of two genres, novel and biography, like Hutcheon describes, “the conventions of the two genres are played off against each other; there is no simple, unproblematic merging” (Poetics 9). This “problematic merging” creates an interesting challenge when studying the role of the media in relation to historical and sociological issues. Since, by definition, “postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts,” (Poetics 3) it is essential to analyze these “transgressions” so as to reveal them as meaningful units of interpretation.

In order to highlight the principal devices used to transgress the logical and chronological accepted order, I explore the construction of the novel as a whole. Then, the focus becomes the intertextual references to Excélsior during the days after Mella’s assassination and the usage of these references in Tinísima.

Elena Poniatowska took ten years to produce this work, which initially was intended to be a movie script for Gabriel Figueroa. Poniatowska did extensive research on Tina Modotti, interviewing people who met her in order to provide testimonies for her novel. She interviewed, among others: Vittorio Vidali, Fernando Gamboa, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, and Adelina Zendejas.<sup>24</sup> In an interview released in 1988, Poniatowska affirmed:

Here I have a thousand pages of interviews with people who knew Tina Modotti. It’s

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<sup>24</sup> For a complete list of names, archives and documents consulted by Elena Poniatowska see Tinísima 661-663.

turned out to be a very extensive work and much more complete, since Jesusa [Hasta no verte, Jesús mío] was only one voice and I never tried to check whether her anecdotes were true. The Modotti project is more complex because of the number of people who come into it. The task of reconstruction is much more difficult (qtd. in García Pinto 175).

In the same interview Poniatowska also claimed to be doing “a novel with the most realistic information possible”(175). Thus, it is clear that she intended to tell a story that resembled the real Modotti’s as much as possible.

In comparison with the review of the existing literature of chapter I of this study, Tinísima provides an accurate account of the events and dates. Moreover, several of the scholars writing about Modotti used the same testimonies and interviews that were lent by Poniatowska, since she is one of the pioneers together with Mildred Constantine investigating Modotti.<sup>25</sup> However, the fictional wrapping of Tinísima is the focus of this study, for it provides an interpretation of facts in the literary field, yet the novel is contemporary.

According to D’Haen “the familiar humanist separation of art and life (or human imagination and order *versus* chaos and disorder) no longer holds. Postmodernist contradictory art still installs that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning” (qtd. in Poetics 7). Poniatowska “subverts” this order from the very presentation of the book: thirtyseven chapters subdivided into sections separated by dates. The use of the date division leads us to think about two different types of documents, a chronicle, in which Modotti’s life is narrated by an omniscient narrator in the third person, and diary. All entries are dates except for one entitled “10 de enero de 1929 y los años por venir” (249), which separates the novel into two big parts: before and after Mella’s death. In either case, chronicle or diary, the transgression is manifest in this entry since the voice of the omniscient narrator stops in the previous entry and gives way, in this 10 January entry, to Modotti’s fictional character speaking from a first person “yo:”

[...] quise lanzarme a la lucha, empujar las pesquisas, darlo todo en mis

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<sup>25</sup> See references to Poniatowska’s documentation in Christiane Barckhausen-Canale, Margaret Hooks, Sarah M. Lowe and Patricia Albers’ works.

comparecencias con tal de que encontraran al asesino de Mella. Después el dolor cayó como un bloque negro. Hubiera querido prepararme para recibirlo, siempre se me adelantó. Amanecía en la almohada, era lo primero que veía al abrir los ojos (249).

This is not the only time Modotti's voice is heard in the novel, but this particular instance is certainly the most important, for this is the first appearance in the novel that is also inserted in the context of the most crucial event in Modotti's life: Mella's death.

When dealing with Carlos Fuentes' La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1962), Hutcheon points out that "the traditional verifying third-person past tense voice of history and realism is both installed and undercut by the others" (Poetics 10). Such is the case in Tinísima, where the disruption of the third voice gives way to a voice in the first person that keeps the attention of the reader. However, this voice is the fictional character created by Poniatowska, since there are no real accounts for these words in any of the literature reviewed.

Furthermore, subversion exists in the very entries of the supposed diary or chronicle, since there is a break in the chronological sequence in this first part of the novel. There are three different entries for the 10 January 1929, the date of Mella's assassination, but these are scattered through pages 9, 45, and 249. The entries in between go back and forth from 1923 to 1929 as a kind of flashback in Modotti's life, from her life with Robo to the times in Mexico with Weston, Guerrero, and finally Mella. The fact that there appear three separate accounts of the 10 January suggests the importance of this date as a point of inflection in Modotti's life: the breakage in the chronological sequence reflects the actual rip and alteration of real life.

As Hutcheon claims, "postmodern parody" offers "ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity" (Poetics 11). In our case, the irony lies in the fact that Modotti's life continued on sequentially unaltered, despite the assassination and the grief, while Modotti, the human being, was deeply altered by the chain of events, as Poniatowska has shown.

Hayden White argues that historians deal with "archivally based documentary realism" but only within the discipline of history. He also claims that, "there is a growing concern with redefining intellectual history as "the study of social meaning as historically constituted" (qtd. in Poetics 15). In this urge to study "social meaning as historically constituted," Poniatowska's novel includes something else than other, that is, images. At the beginning of each chapter a photograph illustrates and opens the

meaning of the text into many more directions. The photographs are related to Modotti and her times, regarding artistic, social and historical events. Hutcheon proposes that, “these postmodern text/image combinations consciously work to point the *coded* nature of all cultural message. They do so by overtly being re-visions: they offer a second seeing, through double vision, wearing the spectacles of irony” (*Politics* 123). Thus, we find for instance, the photograph “Campesinos leyendo El Machete” by Tina Modotti (*Tinísima* 34), a plate that conveys Modotti’s idea of photography as a combination of didacticism and art.<sup>26</sup> According to Gary Higgins, “for Modotti, photography became a medium for didacticism, to teach, exhort and proselytize ideals in accordance with her communist beliefs” (14). Moreover, for the reader the insertion of photographs in *Tinísima* is justified for it is in accordance with Modotti’s principles about art and life.

The richness of *Tinísima* is based upon this unlimited intertextuality: photographs, testimonies, letters, newspaper articles and so on. Poniatowska enhances and transgresses historical events with photographs and other intertexts charged with different meanings in the same way that, for instance, the Cuban novelist Cabrera Infante subverts the traditionally accepted version of history with his vignettes in *Vistas del amanecer en el trópico* (1974).

As we saw already, the structure of the novel conveys a transgression of the logical order of events. It starts in *media res*, precisely with the episode of Mella’s murder, and the assassination date is the first entry of the book, 10 January 1929. For this first chapter, entries for 10 and 11 January, the photograph inserted is Modotti’s portrayal of Julio A. Mella. Ironically, this image of vigorous life and expressivity is contrasted to the narration of Mella’s assassination. Furthermore, the police officer’s

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<sup>26</sup> The representation of the workers only visible by their hats is a theme repeated in other prints like “March of the Workers,” that Gary Higgins explains as follows:

Modotti’s love of people, which Beals [Carleton] observed, is evident in her usage of symbols: people flood the picture plane from top to bottom in a spatial compression that all but eliminates perspective. Her reductiveness extends to the character of the people too, their massed sombreros being the most visible element. With slight perspectival cues [...] Modotti allows some spatial context but largely forsakes the hierarchical ordering of traditional forms to convey the sense of *population* (Higgins 14).



words clash with the narration of Mella's death in the coldness of his account. Here, it is relevant to note that these were the actual words the police officer said as they were published by Excélsior on 12 January 1929. However, this insertion is not stated as such in *Tinísima*,

Con voz de subastador, el comisario enumera en medio del silencio:

Un pantalón negro.

Un saco negro.

Una combianción color morado.

Una camisa.

Un suéter café.

Unos tirantes.

Un abrigo color rata.

Un cinturón negro.

Una libreta roja, con lápiz.

Un periódico: *El Machete* (12-13).

When using intertextuality, Linda Hutcheon argues that “its usefulness as a theoretical framework that is both hermeneutic and formalist is obvious when dealing with historiographic metafiction that demands of the reader not only the recognition of textualized traces of the literary and historical past but also the awareness of what has been done – through irony – to those traces” (Poetics 127). In *Tinísima*, the mere references to the naming of things Mella wore or the bullet's trajectory in Mella's clothes, contrast with the superficial treatment of death. The irony is also plausible when it is later stated “Al mencionar cada orificio introduce su meñique por el agujero para mostrarlo y luego avienta la prenda sobre el escritorio, en un montón de desamparo” (13).

The entry of 10 January is a brief account that goes back to the moment Mella and Modotti separated while Mella met with José A. Magriñat. The following entries trace the events occurring in January 1929 back and forth like a disordered sequence of snapshots that reconstruct the assassination and the following days. The sequence resembles Modotti's interrogation by the police and the stream of images that might have gone through her head in an effort to remember what happened. These particular entries also contain textual insertions from Excélsior that contribute to the collage of images, news, and memories Modotti was experiencing after the killing. Here, it is pertinent to recall what Hutcheon

proposes regarding postmodernism and history:

And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that often enables this contradictory doubleness: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the reworking of the textual parts of both the “world” and literature. The textual incorporation of these intertextual parts as a constitutive structural element of postmodernist fiction functions as a formal making of historicity – both literary and “worldly” (*Poetics* 124).

In our case study, literary fiction reconstructs one part that is missing from history: the way Modotti was perceived by the journalists at the time of the interrogation.

Ellos la miraban de arriba abajo buscando sus muslos [...] las miradas de los hombres se colgaban pastosas en las comisuras de su boca [...] Más convincente que su alegato era su cuerpo, sus manos que siempre encontraban el gesto cuando su voz no hallaba las palabras y de pronto se estampaban sobre su falda evidenciando su vientre (61).

The attitude of Pérez Moreno, one of the journalists following Modotti’s case, is described by the narrator in the same terms:

Pérez Moreno ha tomado el caso con ardor. No deja de pensar en la forma de encender un cigarro, de echar para atrás la cabeza, de responder con fiereza, extraño brillo el de sus ojos negros [...] Todo le gusta de ella, su pelo fuerte, sus ojos, su cinturita, la curvatura de sus labios llenos (78).

Poniatowska’s interpretation using sexual references highlights the viewpoint of a Mexican machista society. The use of the stereotype “women are provocateurs” appears parallel to Modotti’s condition as foreigner, and thus the second stereotype reveals “Italians are temperamental.” Therefore, Poniatowska provides in this context the explanation for the intertext from *Excélsior* 13 January (text 7), found some lines below, “la atractiva veneciana de ojos negros y mirar profundo,” “Tina Modotti se presentó vistiendo un traje estilo sastre de color azul marino, con una blusa celeste y un sombrero de fieltro color beige.” Later in the novel, this fact is again brought up in another reference quoted from *Excélsior*, “vestía una falda corta negra, un suéter gris ceñido por un cinturón negro, medias de color humo y un sombrerito de terciopelo con un adorno de dos cerezas de plata” (78).

In Poniatowska’s opinion, the press judged Modotti just by her external appearance and the little information they knew about her. In this sense, the image portrayed in the press coincides with the

roles she played in the Hollywood movies released some years before in Mexico. Christiane Barckhausen-Canale refers to the last two Hollywood movies in the following terms,

En el catálogo del American Film Institute figuran los títulos de otras dos cintas en las que trabajó, nuevamente interpretando mujeres exóticas y temperamentales. Riding with Death y I Can Explain, se estrenaron en noviembre de 1921 y en marzo de 1922, respectivamente, y la mercantilización de su cuerpo y de su físico debe haber sido el último motivo para que Tina diera por terminada su breve incursión en el mundo cinematográfico de Hollywood (60).

Likewise, when referring to Modotti's first movie, Margaret Hooks affirms, "Weston commented after seeing one of the films, "the brains and imagination of our movie directors cannot picture an Italian girl except with a knife in her teeth and blood in her eye" (51). These two accounts coincide with Poniatowska's view regarding the fictional roles Modotti played in these movies and the link with the image the press spread.

Under the entry of 15 January, we find how Luz Adriana reads over the headlines of the major newspapers "Luz levanta la vista de *El Universal*" (Tinísima 62), but according to the real accounts the text belongs to an editorial written by Marcos Obregón and published in Excélsior<sup>27</sup> on 15 January. Poniatowska offers here an important interpretation based on the stereotype of the *femme fatale* that Modotti suffered since the days she acted in the Hollywood movies:<sup>28</sup>

Ser mujer descalifica a Tina. Producto en el mercado: la sopesan. Guajolota, gallina, ternera ¿De qué será su relleno? Se relamen. "Lo que acontece en el juzgado es fisiológico" piensa, "visceral." Todos la poseen, los tinterillos, el juez, los escribientes, los ujieres se le montan y no la van a soltar: Julio Antonio es un pretexto, es ella quien les interesa (Tinísima 62).

Tina was an easy target for the press to blame: she was a woman and a foreigner, even worse, a communist. The role of a woman like Tina Modotti in the Mexico of the 1920s was not "accepted" by that society, as

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<sup>27</sup> See article number 10 entitled Ayer. It is almost entirely cited in the novel except for the first and last sentence.

<sup>28</sup> See references in the previous chapter about the relation between Modotti's roles in Hollywood movies and her treatment by the press.

Lowe recalls in this reflection:

It has been argued that while the streets of the modern city gave rise to the public man – the flâneur of the *étranger* – a female counterpart – the flâneuse – is a social, even linguistic impossibility. Simply put, a woman of the street is a streetwalker, a prostitute. The experience of modern life – the fleeting sights, the anonymous encounter, purposeless wandering – was a visual experience that was virtually unavailable to women (64).

And Tina was not certainly the usual woman in the Mexican society of the 20s. She was an activist and an artist. Later in the novel, Poniatowska brings out the topic of non-accepted individuals in a society by acting differently. Furthermore, she suggests that the public eye justifies its conjectures by means of defining these individuals as “outcasts:”

Tina ha sido vista sentada en la banca de un parque y manoseándose con un hombre hará menos de quince días. Otro puede atestiguar de su conducta impúdica en un salón de baile. El tercero la miró desnudarse en la noche frente al Lago de Chapultepec. Un testigo anónimo asegura en una carta que al tener que viajar a Cuba encargó a Tina – entonces su amante – a su mejor amigo: “Cuídamela.” El amigo se acostó con ella (65).

All these references are related with episodes of the life of Tina Modotti pulled out of context and not necessarily coinciding with the truth. For instance, Poniatowska uses these impersonal voices and anonymous witnesses to critique drawing of conclusions from non-reliable sources. These “anonymous voices” also convey irony: how reliable is truth told by an unknown person? In the case of the third witness, the episode corresponds to a letter sent by Weston to Johan Hagenmayer when Modotti was going to visit San Francisco, but there is no evidence that something else happened between Modotti and Hagenmayer; it is just conjecture.

Poniatowska herself contests these accusations using the voice of the narrator, “quisiera decirles que baila mal, que a ella nadie la cuida, que es dueña de su cuerpo y de sí misma, que nunca nadie se ha aprovechado de ella” (65). The superimposed image is as obvious as the helplessness of the fictional Modotti to make clear that these issues, in any case, are neither related to the death nor do they help the search for the assassin. Likewise, Poniatowska establishes a connection between Modotti’s powerlessness and the force of the people, represented by the communist symbols, which is

paradoxically diminished against the force of the governmental press, “*El Machete* y la Hoz y el Martillo son volantes al aire al lado del poder de la gran prensa” (66). Moreover, this reference is also linked to a series of photographs by Modotti that appeared in the Communist newspaper, El Machete, which, as Higgins observed, “are examples of a direct symbolism, graceful and simplified, aimed at a Mexican audience whose illiteracy rate exceeded 80 percent” (14). Higgins is here pointing out an interesting observation: the people who read the newspapers were not the peasants but the bourgeois classes, which saw their power reinforced by the poor representation of the Communists through Modotti’s case. In relation to this point, Excelsior went further in the accusations and revealed the existence of nude photographs of Modotti and Mella. Weston’s nudes of Modotti were shot years before and found by the police in Modotti’s apartment. The photograph of Mella was shot in the sailing club he was attending when he was still living in Cuba. However, these revelations compromised them all to the public eye “nunca nadie se había fijado en ellas [las compañeras] de esa manera. Cierto que la camaradería de la lucha rompía cañones, las compañeras eran muy jaladoras, tenían hijos, ellas se hacían cargo, visitaban a los compañeros en la cárcel, pero la exhibición de Tina desnuda en los periódicos los encueraba a ellos [los comunistas]” (Tinísima 73). Thus, the portrayal of Modotti had deeper roots in diminishing the Communists as a whole, as Poniatowska points out.

The literary treatment of the attack on Modotti, the woman, follows the pattern described by Said, “when linked with satire [...] parody can certainly take on more precisely ideological dimensions. Here too, is writing working through other writing, other textualizations of experience” (qtd. in Poetics 129). Thus, Poniatowska explores the reaction of the readers of El Universal when seeing Modotti’s nudes exposed. Her crude analysis of the reaction to the articles and photographs points out the distraction of the readers to a superficial yet damaging image of Modotti while the public eye could forget about the real issue, the assassin of Julio A. Mella:

Todos podían meterle mano, se la pasaban el uno al otro, tan buena que daba para muchos, tenían derechos sobre ella – la llamada gran prensa se los había otorgado –; mira, mano, qué buena está la fuereña, y los manitos y manos se picaban las costillas, oye mano, con ésta sí quiero manito, mírale no más las tetas [...] Los lectores vivían una novela por entregas; junto con su café un pelo de su pubis se les quedaba sobre la lengua, tocaban con sus labios el interior de los muslos sedosos de Tina ¿cómo detener

la jauría? (74).

The press exploited Modotti's image to the extent of showing her like a prostitute and thus Excelsior gave support to the crime of passion conjecture. Furthermore, Modotti's image revealed her as a witness who lacked credibility in the public eye. In an article published in La Jornada on the centenary anniversary of Modotti's birth, Poniatowska recalls Modotti's behavior as falling below the "correct" pattern for Mexican standards in the 1920s, "Era singular que una mujer y un hombre vivieran sin estar casados, bajo el mismo techo; se autonombraban maestro y discípula [Weston y Modotti] y no le tuvieron el menor miedo al qué dirán. Vivir de esa forma no se acostumbraba."<sup>29</sup> Margaret Hooks agrees with Poniatowska on this point, but she argues that "no-one in hotels or elsewhere questioned why Tina Modotti and Edward Weston were living together or sharing a room" (72). This affirmation is not so clear when Mella's assassination occurred for as we have seen, Modotti was judged on the grounds of her "licentious life." Moreover, Poniatowska continues saying:

Menos aún se acostumbraba que la mujer anduviera sola por su lado, no se pusiera medias, fumara en la calle como chacuaco y saliera de noche sola, a los lugares de moda [...] Una mujer sola con cinco hombres en el Lírico viendo a las encueradas, ¿quién era esa desfachatada? Claro, era extranjera, como todas las que vienen a hacer en México lo que no les permiten en su país. Nuestra capital, a pesar de todo su Renacimiento, era provinciana y el peso de la religión caía inmenso. A las soldaderas de la Revolución, de la cual todavía se oían los disparos, se las llamaba "galletas de capitán," putas al servicio del ejército. Para que una mujer se diera a respetar en México, debía permanecer como la escopeta, cargada y en un rincón. Las que salían a la calle debían estar locas de remate. Anita Brenner o Frances Toor, claro eran fuereñas. Tina atraía todas las miradas, ofendía sin darse cuenta.<sup>30</sup>

In this sense, Poniatowska coincides with Sarah M. Lowe's approach as cited before.<sup>31</sup> Poniatowska uses what Hutcheon calls "discursive pluralizing" in order to focus the attention of the reader on the

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<sup>29</sup> La Jornada Online Aug. 1996. See Works Cited in this thesis.

<sup>30</sup> La Jornada Online Aug. 1996.

<sup>31</sup> See Sarah M. Lowe quotation on page 40 of the present thesis.

unheard voices, in this case the women. As Hutcheon argues, “what is ‘different’ is valorized in opposition both to élitist, alienated ‘otherness’ and also to the uniformizing impulse of mass culture” (*Poetics* 130). Therefore, Luz Adriana’s voice gains special importance in the novel. The reader re-reads the press articles through the voice of a female character, which contrasts with the male dominated environment in the production of the news (Pérez Moreno) and the interrogation of Tina (Valente Quintana). Again, Poniatowska introduces again a new excerpt from *Excélsior* as a reminiscence in the fictional text, that is, without quoting the source, “Luz lee en voz alta que Tina es una mujer de acero revestido de carne, que se obstina en no decir la verdad, que no la estorban ni los prejuicios ni los escrúpulos de antaño” (*Tinísima* 63). This entry corresponds to two different articles published by *Excélsior*, one on 14 January (text 8) and the second on 15 January (text 10).

The roles of Luz Adriana in speaking through her marginal voice is also reinforced by the solitude Modotti feels for being the “only” woman, as it appears in one of her dreams:

Tina mira entorno suyo, ¿es ella a quien se dirigen los jueces? es la única acusada en la llanura, y se percata, aterrada, de que es la única mujer. [...] Aquí no hay una sola mujer, la mamma no se ve por ningún lado, nadie, ni Luz Ardizana [sic], ni Mercedes, ni Elisa, la muchacha de El Buen Retiro, sólo ella, Tina, la desollada (*Tinísima* 110-111).

Poniatowska rescues the women lost in history and approaches their solitude in society. Furthermore, she uses Modotti’s dream to subvert the dominant order through parody, as Hutcheon explains, “Intertextual parody of Canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle class, heterosexual Eurocentric culture” (*Poetics* 130). Modotti feels judged by all men around her, starting with the press. In her dream, the figures of her father, Julio Antonio, Edward and the judge are carnivalesque individuals trying to decipher what she is made of:

El juez tiene la mirada traspasadora, atroz, como de Ezra Pound. Tina quisiera llamarlo pero no puede. Edward leyó sus *Cantares* y le dijo que sus ojos eran como lagos y como zorras.

- Puta desnuda. (...)
- ¿Mis entrañas, dónde tiraron mis entrañas?
- Tendrás que venir todos los martes al Juzgado, tu libertad es condicional, vendrás a

darnos tu palabra; a cambio abriremos el cajón donde guardamos tus menudencias.  
Ahora promete, Tina ... (Tinísima 110-111).

These instances contrast with the catharsis Tina experiences after leaving Mexico D.F. for Salina Cruz. In this rural area, the matriarchal society of the *juchitecas* takes her into a kind of regression to her maternal womb, “esto es como estar en el vientre materno” (112). Tina feels comfort around these women. The *juchitecas* lack the constraints of the male patterns imposed upon the *compañeras*. Thus, Modotti discovers a female environment that fulfills her much more, “a lo largo de muchos meses, ninguna compañera llegó a tratarla en el partido con esa confianza, y éstas entran en su intimidad con una impudicia que la tambalea” (114). But it is especially with the character of Na’Chiña that Tina finds the lost dignity over her ordeal with the press and the public opinion, “¿Y cómo veniste [sic] a dar aquí?” le preguntó NaChiña y Tina cerró los ojos y vio que había perdido algo. Devanó sus recuerdos precipitadamente, algunos en voz alta, otros piel adentro, para sí misma, unida a Na’Chiña en una rara complicidad (116-117). This complicity with Na’Chiña is found in the last entry on 10 January 1929, after a series of entries flying like a flashback of Modotti’s life. The voice of Modotti is not altered by the narrator this time. It is the fictional Modotti who addresses these women who took her out of her grief, “poco a poco las fuerzas regresaron. En Juchitán entre ustedes volví a dormir, a comer. Lo más difícil: comer. No podía dejar que la comida se pudriera en el plato. Como la vida. Me dijo usted Na’Chiña. A la vida hay que vivirla, si no se le pudre a uno adentro (249).

The circle of the first entry dated 10 January 1929 is completed with this one, in which is added “y los años por venir.” Modotti’s loss of Julio Mella together with the destructive portrayal of her are finally eased. But it is only through these women that Modotti can restore confidence and endurance. The postmodern “decentered” and “ex-centric” acquire new relevance in Poniatowska’s work. Thus, the continuity after the disruption takes place at the encounter with the *juchitecas* in an environment dominated by women, nature and the rural setting.



## Chapter V

### Conclusion

Modotti was a suitable target for the police and the newspapers to charge with the death of Julio Antonio Mella. The cultural assumptions and preconceptions of society unfortunately favored Modotti's fall into the realm of suspicious individuals. That was reason enough to condemn her.

The content analysis of Excélsior clearly points out three different stereotypes the newspaper used to impose a negative image on Modotti: the frivolous woman of unacceptable behavior for Mexican moral values at the time, the Italian origin as a birthmark inevitably linked to tragedy, and the communist membership as a trouble maker. These stereotypes coincide with Poniatowska's interpretation of the news as inserted in Tinísima. Furthermore, using a postmodern perspective the literary text unmasks and subverts these stereotypes to redeem Modotti from the unfair treatment of the media.

In addition, Poniatowska points out a special relevance in the exploitation of women as social misfits. In fact, this tendency of approaching topics from a male, white, and conservative perspective lies underneath many communications and literary works. Poniatowska reverses this very approach, found as well in Excélsior, by assigning more importance to female characters and topics in Tinísima. Moreover, Poniatowska explains Modotti's catharsis after the assassination from the grounds of a female environment, in clear opposition to the male's in the production and assessment of news.

Modotti's misfortune could be an isolated case of mistreatment on the part of the press, but the importance of this case rests also upon its political implications. Mella was not a simple young Cuban student but a communist, and a dangerous one, as far as the Cuban government was concerned. The situation regarding communism in Mexico in the 30s made it clear that the PCM represented a threat for the Mexican government. The media was just one venue to promote a bad image of the communists in Mexico. In fact, Modotti's references were not the only accounts published at that time in Excélsior. When Mella's diary was published, the newspaper made comments ridiculing the diary's ideological content. At the same time, the Cuban ambassador in Mexico proclaimed that the Cuban government did not have anything to do with the assassination and that relations between both countries were in good

shape.

Modotti was one of the communists expelled from Mexico only one year after Mella's assassination. At that time, Mexican public opinion still remembered Modotti as the "Italian communist Mata Hari." In addition, the PCM supported Modotti through the whole process, confirming her strong link to the party. Modotti's name was identified with that of Diego Rivera and the PCM, and thus the negative press on her also reached the Mexican Communist Party.

The political issue behind Modotti's case emerges as well in Tinísima. Poniatowska's analysis of Modotti's misrepresentation goes beyond the texts and tackles the attack of the Communists by the Mexican government. In the novel, the fictional character of Diego Rivera points out that the crime of passion was only an excuse to protect the real assassin, José Antonio Magriñá, who was sent by the Cuban government to kill Mella. He also adds that blaming Modotti was the best way to protect the relations between Mexico and Cuba and to deviate public opinion from the real issue:

- ¿ Está enterado, Pérez Moreno, de que los comunistas son víctimas de encarcelamientos y asesinatos? – se enfurece Diego Rivera - . ¿Desconoce la suerte que corren? ¿Por qué cree que el gobierno protege a Magriñá y enloda a Tina? - ¡No me vaya a decir que *El Universal* no recibe consignas gubernamentales! Todos los periódicos han acatado la orden de lavar a Magriñá y ensuciar a los comunistas. Al gobierno lo único que le importa son sus relaciones con La Habana y a ambos países les conviene la salida del crimen pasional. Más claro no puede ser. Según los periódicos, incluso el suyo, ni Machado mandó matar, ni Portes Gil encubre al asesino. Una aventurera extranjera, desvergonzada, como no han dejado de llamarla, ha provocado incomodidad internacional. Sí, señores, in-ter-na-cio-nal, porque Mella tenía estatura u-ni-ver-sal, perdimos un líder enorme... Pero como al canciller Genaro Estrada se le ha alborotado el gallinero diplomático, les da de comer los despojos de la Modotti para tenerlos contentos (Tinísima 100).

This particular instance is not quite fictional. Rivera made a similar argument that was published by El Machete, even by Excélsior, in the days following the assassination. However, journalists continued their attacks on Modotti regardless of Rivera's intervention.

The references to political forces behind the use of the media in Modotti's case further than

being discarded, are the most repeated by scholars like Margaret Hooks:

Quintana was notorious for his persecution of Communists and his aim, together with the right-wing sector of the administration, was to discredit the Mexican Communist Party. Tina was to be the scapegoat and by putting her on trial they would attempt that Communists were not only dangerous criminals lacking morality, but that their doctrine was fundamentally un-Mexican and expounded by exotic foreigners (Hooks 179).

Christiane Barkhausen adds the following, “Fue sobre todo, Valente Quintana, el jefe corrupto y xenofobista de los Departamentos de Seguridad, quien trató de empujar las investigaciones por un rumbo determinado: él suponía – o pretendía suponer – un crimen pasional, cometido por un amante celoso” (161). Furthermore, Barkhausen analyzes the case as an outbreak of larger consequences, “los acontecimientos de la noche del 10 al 11 de enero y la consiguiente campaña anticomunista fueron el inicio de una agudización dramática de la lucha de clases en México” (166).

In fact, by the end of 1929 this campaign against communists took a sharp turn with the expulsion and persecution of members of the PCM, Modotti among them. Barry Carr assures that the repression against communists was brewing already by the end of 1928, over the CROM (Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos), a union associated with the PCM (Carr 43). Carr affirms as well that the year 1929 was one of the worst for the PCM, since it was forced to move underground because of the governmental harassment between 1930 and 1934:

Following the Escobarista revolt of 1929, another military challenge to the authority of the central government (in which the PCM was falsely accused of aiding the rebels), the government of Emilio Portes Gil launched a series of attacks on the PCM and its members. Several leading Communists, including Guadalupe Rodríguez, the National Peasant League’s first Treasurer, Salvador Gómez, and Hipólito Landero, were killed after the Escobar rebellion was crushed. In June the offices of El Machete were closed, and three months later the paper’s printing plant was destroyed by government forces. Systematic harassment of Communists was also initiated with the arrest and temporary detention of Rafael Carrillo in May and the expulsion of a large number of foreign Communist exiles (mainly from Cuba) at the beginning of 1930. Finally, in January 1930, Mexico broke relations with the Soviet Union; they would not be resumed until

the mid – 1940s (Carr 45).

Modotti's case transcends the printed word into a deeper problem between the government and Communism in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s. Even after her expulsion from Mexico and her exile in various countries (Germany, the USSR, France, and Spain), Modotti was again attacked by the Mexican press upon her death in Mexico D.F. in 1942. *Excélsior* published several articles denouncing her death as a murder crafted by the Communist Party. In addition, the already-made image during January of 1929 came out again as a weapon to accuse the communists of killing one of their own for internal reasons. This time, the response to Modotti's mistreatment came from the hand of Pablo Neruda, who wrote a poem in her memory.<sup>32</sup> To his own surprise, the poem was actually published by several newspapers and the attacks on Modotti ceased.

The media is a powerful resource for any organization or group; it prevails over the course of time leaving traces difficult to ease. Its use as a tool of public image to obtain benefits over others is not something solely seen in the past. The common factor is the use and abuse of minorities to reinforce the classical European approach of male, white, and conservative views.

As it is demonstrated in the present study, the media was used in Modotti's case as an image breaker. Despite Communist resistance, the press imposed a negative image on Modotti that reached the public and private spheres. Moreover, it diminished the Communists as a whole by their identification with agitators and trouble makers. However, literary fiction plays with the duality of media as an image maker/breaker to subvert the accepted views. Poniatowska's *Tinísima* enhances the marginal, individual voices by placing the media in this historical-fictional context. Therefore, media is analyzed and used in the construction of a new image of Modotti and thus the image breaker role is reversed into an image maker.

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<sup>32</sup> See the mentioned poem in Appendix C of this thesis.

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## Appendix A

The following document is a letter sent from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston on 25 February 1930:

My dear Edward:

I suppose by now you know all that has happened to me, that I have been in jail 13 days and then expelled. And now I am on my way to Europe and to a new life, at least a different life from Mexico.

No doubt you also know the pretext used by the government in order to arrest me. Nothing less than “my participation in the last attempt to kill the newly elected president.” I am sure that no matter how hard you try, you will not be able to picture me as a “terrorist,” as “the chief of a secret society of bomb throwers” and what not. . . . But if I put myself in the place of the government I realize how clever they have been; they knew that had they tried to expel me at any other time the protests would have been very strong, so they waited the moment, when, psychologically speaking, the public opinion was so upset with the shooting that they were ready to believe anything they read or were told. According to the vile yellow press, all kinds of proofs, documents, arms, and what not, were found in my house; in other words everything was ready to shoot Ortiz Rubio and unfortunately, I did not calculate very well and the other guy got ahead of me . . . this is the story which the Mexican public has swallowed with their morning coffee, so can you blemish their sighs of relief in knowing that the fierce and bloody Tina Modotti has at last left for ever the Mexican shores?

Dear Edward, in all these tribulations of this last month, I often thought of that phrase of Nietzsche, which you quoted to me once: “What doesn’t kill me, strengthens me,” and that is how I feel about myself these days. Only thanks to an enormous amount of will power have I kept from going crazy at times, as for instance when they moved me around from one jail to another and when they made me enter a jail for the first time and I heard the slamming of the iron door and lock behind me and found myself in a small iron cell with a little barred skylight, too high to look out from. An iron cot without mattress, an ill smelling toilet in the corner of the cell and I in the middle of the cell wondering if it was all a bad dream.

Well it would be impossible for me to go into details about all the impressions and experiences of

these past weeks, some time I hope to relate them verbally.

Now I am on my way to Germany. Please drop me a few lines to this address: Chotopatoya, Friedrich Strasse 24-IV, Berlin S. W. 48 Germany. But don't put my name on the outside address; use two envelopes and put my name on the inside one.

They gave me only two days, after the 13 of jail to get my things ready; you can imagine how I left everything. Fortunately my friends all helped me so much; I can't tell you how wonderful they have all been to me.

I am still in a kind of a haze and a veil of irreality permeates over everything for me; I suppose in a few days I will be normal again but the shocks have been too brutal and sudden.

I trust all of you are well; receive a tender and loving embrace from someone who loves you very much.

Tina (Stark 69-70).



## Appendix B

Text Number / Source / Date	Keywords about Mella	Keywords about Modotti	Latent Content
Text 1: <u>Excélsior</u> 11 January 1929	- Señor Julio Antonio Mella. - Nacionalidad cubana. - Agredido a balazos - Estudios de abogado.	- Señorita Modotti. - Acompañante.	Neutral assesment of the news.
Text 2: <u>Excélsior</u> 12 January 1929	- Estudiante y comunista cubano.	- Amante de Mella. - Señora italiana. - Sabe quién es el homicida.	Negative image. Stereotype of Italian women. Accusations of her as a accomplice of the crime.
Text 3: <u>Excélsior</u> 12 January 1929	- El cubano.	- Señora Modotti.	Neutral.
Text 4: <u>Excélsior</u> 12 January 1929	- Desterrado cubano. - Líder comunista de los estudiantes.	- Señora italiana. - De aspecto bastante agradable sin ser bonita. - Amante de Mella. - "Compañera."	Negative. Reinforcing the former stereotype through accounts regarding Modotti's physical appearance. References to her communist affiliation.
Text 5: <u>Excélsior</u> 13 January 1929	- Estudiante cubano. - Victimado.	- Figura doliente y llorosa. - Artista italiana.	Neutral.
Text 6: <u>Excélsior</u> 13 January 1929	- Joven estudiante cubano.	- La Modotti. - Amante del occiso. - Continua negando conocer al asesino.	Negative. Assumption of guilt.
Text 7: <u>Excélsior</u> 13 January 1929	- Señor Julio Antonio Mella.	- Señora italiana. - Sumamente agradable. Delgada y de ojos negros y expresivos. - Miradas largas y profundas.	Negative. Impose of the <i>femme fatale</i> stereotype.
Text 8: <u>Excélsior</u> 14 January 1929	- Estudiante cubano muerto trágicamente.	- Artista italiana. - Atractiva veneciana de ojos negros y mirar profundo. - Amante de Mella.	Negative. Assumption of guilt based on a stereotyped vision of Modotti.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Persona inteligente.</li> <li>-Mujer que posee el secreto de la muerte de su amante.</li> <li>- Parece de acero revestido de carne.</li> </ul>	
Text 9: <u>Excélsior</u> 14 January 1929	- Julio Antonio Mella.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- La única que podría dar la clave y revelar quién fue el asesino.</li> <li>- La veneciana.</li> </ul>	Negative. Reinforce the former assumption. Subjectivity in the accounts.
Text 10: <u>Excélsior</u> 15 January 1929	- Julio Antonio Mella.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inquietante, seductora, cautivadora, torturante.</li> <li>- Mujer moderna a quien no traban los prejuicios ni estorban los escrúpulos de antaño.</li> <li>- Compañera ideal para la vida tropical.</li> <li>- Aventurera peligrosa que sabe más de lo que le han enseñado.</li> <li>- Sabe quien mató al cubano y por qué.</li> </ul>	Negative. Assumption of guilt. Discredit Modotti as a woman. Use of the word <i>compañera</i> (communist connotations) in a trivial context.
Text 11: <u>Excélsior</u> 15 January 1929	- Julio Antonio Mella.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- La italiana señora Modotti.</li> <li>- Continúa sin estar presa.</li> </ul>	Negative. The article assumes she is guilty and should be imprisoned.
Text 12: <u>Excélsior</u> 15 January 1929	- Julio Antonio Mella.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No gusta recibir ni dar dinero a hombres.</li> </ul>	Negative. Unaccepted vision of an emancipated woman in the context of Mexican society.
Text 13: <u>Excélsior</u> 16 January 1929	- Julio.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lleva en su sangre el antiguo drama pasional y político.</li> <li>- La “compañera.”</li> <li>- Atractiva, de suave y carnosa morenez.</li> <li>- Semi-artista, semi-estudiante, semi-aventurera.</li> <li>- El drama va con ella.</li> <li>- ¿Amaba realmente a Mella?</li> </ul>	Negative. Reinforcement of all stereotypes: <i>femme fatale</i> , “Italian Mata Hari,” and bohemian “semi-artist.”
Text 14: Unknown source 11 January 1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cuban Rebel.</li> <li>- Cuban student agitator.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Señorita Tina Modotti.</li> <li>- A girl.</li> <li>- An Italian girl and a</li> </ul>	Neutral.

		skilled photographer.	
Text 15: Unknown source 12 January 1929	- Youthful Cuban Communist.	- Beauty. - Attractive young Italian art student. - Bohemian life and impulsive Italian temperament. - The chief actress of the international drama.	Negative. Sensationalist account. Yellow press.
Text 16: <u>New York Times</u> 11 January 1929	- Cuban student agitator.	(No reference)	
Text 17: <u>Washington Post</u> 11 January 1929	- Cuban youth. - Secretary general of the Association de Nuevos Emigrados Revolucionarios de Cuba	(no reference)	-----

## Appendix C

The following poem by Pablo Neruda was published in several newspapers at the death of Modotti. It is included in his book Confieso que he vivido: memorias (1974).

### Tina Modotti ha muerto

Tina Modotti, hermana, no duermes, no, no duermes:  
tal vez tu corazón oye crecer la rosa  
de ayer, la última rosa de ayer, la nueva rosa.  
Descansa dulcemente, hermana.

La nueva rosa es tuya, la nueva tierra es tuya:  
te has puesto un nuevo traje de semilla profunda  
y tu suave silencio se llena de raíces.  
No dormirás en vano, hermana.

Puro es tu dulce nombre, pura es tu frágil vida:  
de abeja, sombra, fuego, nieve, silencio, espuma;  
de acero, línea, polen, se construyó tu férrea,  
tu delgada estructura.

El chacal a la alhaja de tu cuerpo dormido  
aún asoma la pluma y el alma ensangrantadas  
como si tú pudieras, hermana, levantarte,  
sonriendo sobre el lodo.

A mi patria te llevo para que no te toquen,  
a mi patria de nieve para que a tu pureza  
no llegue el asesino, ni el chacal, ni el vendido:  
allí estarás tranquila.

Oyes un paso, un paso lleno de pasos, algo  
grande desde la estepa, desde el Don, desde el frío?  
Oyes un paso de soldado firme en la nieve?  
Hermana, son tus pasos.

Ya pasarán un día por tu pequeña tumba,  
antes de que las rosas de ayer se desbaraten;  
donde está ardiendo tu silencio.

Un mundo marcha al sitio donde tú ibas, hermana.  
Avanzan cada día los cantos de tu boca  
en la boca del pueblo gloriosos que tú amabas.  
Tu corazón era valiente.

En las viejas cocinas de tu patria, en las rutas,  
polvorientas, algo se dice y pasa,  
algo vuelve a la llama de tu dorado pueblo,  
algo despierta y canta.

Son los tuyos, hermana: los que hoy dicen tu nombre,  
los que de todas partes del agua, de la tierra,  
con tu nombre otros nombres callamos y decimos.  
Porque el fuego no muere.

# Curriculum Vitae

Araceli Alvarez

- Work Experience:** Instructor of Spanish, Intensive Second Language Institute (ISLI) of Virginia Tech (July 2000).
- Instructor of Spanish, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Virginia Tech (Aug. 1998 – May 2000).
- Instructor of Spanish, Department of Modern Foreign Languages at Georgia College and State University (Sep. 1997 – June 1998).
- Education:** Master of Arts in History: Latin American Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (July 2000).
- Teaching Certification, University of Valladolid, Spain (Apr. 1998).
- Bachelor's Degree in English, University of Valladolid, Spain (June 1997).
- Honors and Awards:** Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Aug. 1988 – May 2000).
- Teaching Assistantship, Georgia College & State University (Sep. 1997 – June 1998).
- Scholarship, College of London, UK (July – Aug. 1996).
- Scholarship, Hull University, UK (Sep. 1995 – June 1996).