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Gendered Defiance in Bates's Mexico Travelogue: Elena's Role in *The Burning Corn*

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Abstract

Aims: *This paper examines Ralph Bates's The Burning Corn as a subversive text that challenges colonial and patriarchal norms. It aims to investigate how Bates uses literary narrative to interrogate entrenched systems of power, particularly focusing on the intersections of gender, colonialism, and resistance. The study also explores how travel writing can evolve from neutral observation to a politically charged genre that critiques hegemonic structures.*

Methodology and Approaches: *Through the character of Elena, Bates reimagines the travel narrative, presenting a figure whose gendered resistance disrupts traditional power dynamics. Employing a feminist postcolonial approach, the paper analyses Elena's role within the broader context of post-Revolutionary Mexico. It also draws on ecocritical and Marxist literary theories to deepen the understanding of landscape, labor, and identity in the narrative, interpreting how physical and ideological spaces are negotiated by a marginalized subject.*

Outcome: *Elena's actions in post-Revolutionary Mexico position her not as a passive subject but as an active agent of defiance, questioning both colonial and gendered structures. Her character serves as a counter-discourse to the stereotypical representation of women in colonial travelogues, offering a nuanced portrait of resistance through personal agency.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *By doing so, Bates transforms the travelogue from a mere account of foreign landscapes into a potent critique of imperialism and patriarchy. The Burning Corn thus serves as a compelling exploration of identity, dominance, and resistance, offering new insights into the politics of representation in late 19th-century travel literature. Further studies may explore similar subversive roles in other travel narratives to enrich the understanding of gender and power in colonial discourse.*

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Travel writing has long been a penetrative lens through which authors see and often define foreign peoples and places, forming readers' ideas about the wider world. European travelers used their narratives as vehicles for power and they reinforced colonial hierarchies by recasting non-Western societies as exotic tableaux meant to validate European identity and advancement. This impulse to make the "Other" a mirror for Western development and reason was famously decried by Edward Said, under the umbrella of Orientalism. Expanding on Said, feminist scholars such as Sara Mills and Mary Louise Pratt have applied new travel-text analyses, unveiling the productive tension between the politics of gender and authority in imperial discourse.

As Mills demonstrates in *Discourses of Difference*, women writers tend to negotiate authority relations and a tone of rhetorical humility in their travel fiction to undermine colonializing perspectives through a subtly undermining conventional colonial viewpoints. European activism continued the imperialistic approach of its predecessors in travel writing, depicting non-Western countries as cultural collections that only offered the framework for European self-discovery. Under the rubric of *Orientalism*, Edward Said famously critiqued this narrative tendency, in which the "Other" serves as a foil to Western development and reason. Feminist critics Sara Mills and Mary Louise Pratt introduced a new paradigm for analyzing travel narratives so that imperial rhetoric was read through the lens of a complex interplay between gender and power. To pursue less obvious critiques of conventional colonial perspectives, women writers' travel fiction deployed relational authority structures and rhetorical humility, as Mills discusses in *Discourses of Difference*. Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" similarly recasts travel writing as a site of asymmetrical encounters in which co-optation and cultural negotiation complicate the colonizer–colonized divide.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity shows how identity is continuously shaped through repeated actions and behaviors within specific social and cultural contexts. Building on this idea, Chandra Talpade Mohanty challenges the tendency of Western feminism to impose universal assumptions about women's experiences, instead advocating for postcolonial perspectives that honor local, specific struggles. In this light, Katharine Lee Bates' *The Burning Corn* holds a unique place as both a piece of travel writing and a historical record from America's late 19th-century era of imperial expansion. Through the character of Elena, Bates highlights act of defiance against patriarchal norms in both American and Mexican societies. Elena's resistance becomes a kind of performance, carrying cultural and political significance that reflects

how identities were navigated and contested in that period. A critical reading of *The Burning Corn*, therefore, not only challenges the colonial logics embedded in the genre but also recovers an overlooked articulation of feminist agency in late nineteenth-century transnational contexts.

"Travel writing has long operated as a mechanism of empire," Edward Said reminds us in *Orientalism*, by serving as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). As he argues, such narratives "construct[ed] the non-Western world as static, inferior, and exotic" to legitimize conquest, a process he later unsettles in *Out of Place* by describing identity not as a "solid self" but as a series of "flowing currents" (Said 295). David Spurr extends this analysis in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, cataloguing twelve devices, surveillance, aestheticization, debasement through which Western travel accounts produced "the Other." Ali Behdad warns that even those who critique empire remain "parasitic" on its discourse: "there is no 'outside' to the language of empire" (Behdad 5). Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* reframes colonial encounters as contact zones where "intercultural and bidirectional dynamics" reshape both colonizer and colonized (Pratt 1992). Yet, as Debbie Lisle cautions, modern travel writing too often "fails to address the intricate and ambiguous power relations" at play (Lisle 9). In response, postcolonial authors like Amitav Ghosh (*At Large in Burma*, 1996) consciously reflect on their own complicity in exoticization, while Tabish Khair notes that the field remains "dominated by… white men (and, less often, white women) from Europe," marginalizing African, Asian, and indigenous voices (Khair 15).

At the intersection of empire and gender, feminist critics have illuminated how travel narratives also enforce and sometimes subvert patriarchal norms. Sara Mills observes that British women travelers "were unable to adopt the imperial voice with the ease with which male writers did," leading them to weave nuanced, "counter-hegemonic discourses" into their accounts (Mills 3). Kristi Siegel argues that "the genre of travel writing has the potential to embrace revisionist, critical and subversive narratives, political positions and innovative modes of representation," but that this potential has always been mediated by race, class, and colonial power structures. Early figures like Lady Mary Montagu prefaced her Ottoman letters with apologies for their "inappropriate" first-person style (Melman, *Women's Orients*), while Victorian explorers distanced themselves from colonized women to uphold their own credibility (Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*). Scholars such as Indira Ghose and Cheryl McEwan show how

imperial anxieties shaped women's mobility, and Jane Robinson and June Edith Hahner document how working-class and Latin American women were often "voiceless" in travel historiography. Twentieth-century writers from Beryl Markham whose *West with the Night* adopts an almost genderless proseto Alexandra David-Néel who redefines "home" as an internal space have pushed back against these conventions. Today, as Bénédicte Monicat notes in *Itinéraires de l'écriture au féminin*, a persistent "rhetoric of peril" still frames women's solo travel as transgressive.

Ralph Bates (1899–2000) was an English novelist, journalist, and political activist whose "revolutionary realist" fiction drew directly on his experiences in Spain and Mexico to illuminate the struggles of ordinary people under fascism and land reform. Bates's early success with *Sierra* and *Lean Men* led to the creation of *The Olive Field*, a work that marked his deepening engagement with Mexico and inspired subsequent titles like *The Fields of Paradise* and *The Undiscoverables*. In these texts, Bates moves beyond surface-level portrayals of laborers to craft narratives rooted in Mexican social realities. Yet, while he establishes himself as a perceptive storyteller of class tensions, his position as an outsider inevitably limits his ability to authentically capture local voices. His signature style a fusion of "revolutionary realism" and impressionistic, picturesque landscapes foregrounds class struggle but simultaneously risks reducing hardship to aesthetic spectacle. Bates's vivid depictions of olive groves and chiaroscuro-rendered mountain villages evoke sympathy for the oppressed, yet they also risk sentimentalizing suffering, revealing the inherent tension between artistic beauty and political critique in his work. At the heart of *The Burning Corn* lies a complex tension between subversion and constraint: while Bates attempts to foreground resistance through the figure of Elena, his portrayal remains filtered through a paternalistic lens that limits campesino agency and reinforces binary gender logics. Elena's journey through the Sierra Mountains and her quiet defiance embody performative resistance and gender fluidity in the Butlerian sense, yet her character is still framed within the traditional marianismo–machismo dichotomy. Bates's ambition to use fiction as a tool of ideological struggle is evident, but his narratives often default to simplistic oppositions champion versus victim offering solidarity without fully grappling with the nuances of power. Ultimately, Elena's political emergence gestures toward deeper forms of resistance, but the narrative remains constrained by the very structures it seeks to critique.

Ralph Bates uses *The Burning Corn* to tell a story where characters navigate physical spaces as well as social groups through movement to subvert oppressive

gendered colonial rules. Elena's purposeful movement stands as her rebellious way to challenge traditional patriarchal hierarchy and colonial systems trying to limit her freedom. As Judith Butler observes, the "subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection," a principle evident in how Elena navigates spaces traditionally denied to women (*Bodies That Matter*). From the earliest scenes, Bates positions Elena in spaces traditionally reserved for men, particularly the dangerous, unsettled wilderness of the Mexican jungle. When Nacho drives forward through the dense foliage, Elena does not remain behind but moves alongside him, undeterred by both the physical challenges and the implied social transgression. The narrator notes how "she followed him, stooping a little as he beat his way into the brilliant wall of the jungle edge" (Bates 563), a small but significant gesture of independence, placing her in active participation rather than passive accompaniment. Even when facing mortal danger, Elena refuses to remain an onlooker. During the puma hunt, despite Nacho's command to stay still, Elena intervenes, crying out and clutching at him: "Elena screamed and clutched at his arm" (561). Her refusal to remain detached in these perilous situations marks a defiance of Victorian ideals of feminine passivity.

Elena's mobility carries deeper implications when placed in the context of Victorian restrictions on female movement, particularly within colonial settings where women were expected to remain in the private, domestic sphere. In defiance of these expectations, Elena not only traverse's treacherous terrains but actively engages in revolutionary work. Nacho recalls seeing her once, seated at a sewing machine donated to a village collective, patiently teaching the mechanism to indigenous women for hours: "Six hours she had talked to them, and at last they understood, chiefly with the help of a girl of twelve years, who had spent most of her time in gazing into Elena's face or leaning against her, caressing her breasts with timid hands" (Bates 568). This moment is not merely one of feminine care but a powerful enactment of cross-cultural solidarity and political labor. The text continues, "Her dignity and calmness had been perceptible then; she had emerged from the anonymity of leeching patience, the burnt residue of her angers and jealousies, her pride and willful sensitiveness" (568). Elena's work here positions her in active service of the revolution, a role typically denied to women or framed within narrow domestic confines.

Bates also uses Elena's emotional control in moments of crisis to underscore her defiant autonomy. When Nacho, in a fit of frustration, physically lashes out at her during the puma encounter, Elena responds not with submissive fear but with firm practicality.

"We must find the path," she says quietly (563), prioritizing survival and purpose over emotional reaction. This is no isolated moment; throughout their arduous journey, Elena persists in moving forward, refusing to be slowed by Nacho's moods or physical hardships. Even when exhausted, she shoulders her own bundle, enduring the brutal conditions of the jungle. As the narrative notes, "Upon continuing, he made no remark when she shouldered her own bundle" (565). Elena's silent strength and resilience subvert the expectation of female fragility, marking her as a figure of defiance against both personal and social subjugation.

Throughout the text, Bates weaves parallels between Elena's movements and those of the indigenous villagers, suggesting a shared struggle against imposed restrictions. The villagers, too, reclaim their agency through secret movements, rituals, and traversals of contested lands. In one revealing passage, the schoolmaster Montes confides, "There's a great hollow, you remember? You must have passed through it yesterday. Well, they take flowers down… There's a temple or a sacred place or something in that style down there in the forest" (578). By navigating hidden routes Elena demonstrates her support for native resistance while colonial authorities lose their ability to control both traditional spaces and geographic locations. Nacho himself acknowledges the mystery and defiance of these movements when he notes that the villagers "come back with herbs and plants that don't grow at this height or anywhere near it, but down in the gorge" (Bates 578).

Elena's ability to move freely throughout the novel stands as a complex act of rejection against both male control systems and cultural institutions and authoritarian systems of control. Through literal and symbolic border crossing Elena fights against systems that try to force her into silence and immobility. The heroine expresses rebellion through her jungle travels and her revolutionary work as well as her ability to stay resilient despite threats. In moment of danger Elena persists in maintaining her existence instead of accepting displacement or erasure. As Nacho himself bitterly observes, "It was her patience, he knew, that had made her so good a revolutionary" (567). This acknowledgment serves not to domesticate Elena's strength but to highlight the political potency of her endurance. Elena's persistent crossings of jungle trails, of emotional boundaries, of social roles affirm the power of movement to destabilize authority. As Judith Butler later argues, "repeated gestures can destabilize normative identities" and in this text, Elena's mobility insists on new possibilities for female and collective agency in a world designed to suppress both (*Gender Trouble*).:

> We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both 'what' we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences." (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*)

Judith Butler's articulation of language as both action and effect finds concrete embodiment in Ralph Bates's *The Burning Corn*, where speech itself becomes a radical form of agency within oppressive colonial and patriarchal frameworks. Elena, one of the novel's central figures of resistance, exemplifies Butler's claim that language is not merely a tool of communication but an active force of doing of producing consequences in the world. Her assertive command of colloquial Spanish is not just stylistically distinct but politically charged. By speaking in a direct, unmediated manner particularly when confronting male authority Elena performs an act of linguistic agency that disrupts the expected scripts of female deference and submission.

This performance of language, as Butler theorizes, becomes both the means and the manifestation of Elena's resistance. Her words do not merely describe defiance; they enact it. In contrast to the fragmented or hesitant speech of male interlocutors, Elena's verbal clarity and confidence effect real shifts in power dynamics, positioning her as a subject who acts upon the world through speech. Thus, *The Burning Corn* illustrates Butler's assertion that language is "what we do" and "that which we effect," making Elena's voice a site where the personal becomes political, and the performative becomes transformative. In a moment of tense negotiation, Bates records Elena's practical command: "Companero Montes, may we have the school hall for our meeting tonight?" (Bates 581). The request, while framed within the collective lexicon of the revolution, is notably assertive strategically phrased to claim institutional space without hesitation or apology. Elena's language operates performatively, enacting her place within the revolutionary movement rather than merely reflecting it. Montes's surprised response, "Why, yes, Elena…" subtly reveals the gendered assumptions she unsettles: Elena's speech enters a space not conventionally reserved for women, and does so on equal footing with male revolutionaries. This moment directly echoes Judith Butler's claim in Gender Trouble that "every text has more sources than it can reconstruct within its own terms." Elena disrupts the revolutionary discourse through spoken words when she discloses previously unspoken truths about female power dominance in male-dominated systems. She uses language as power in her character to challenge ideologies that limit

progress in essential present-day circumstances. During the defense of the village school, when Nacho instructs her, "Elena, keep them down whatever happens" (Bates 588), we see her again embedded in a dynamic of trust and responsibility. Through her decisive performance in battle Elena proves her full membership in revolutionary work while demonstrating active ability and leadership skills. Here, language functions not as a secondary ornament of identity but as its enactment. Through her clear and concise crisis communications Elena shows how Butler describes textual boundaries as unstable mechanisms that allow unpredictable identities and actions into the narrative. Elena's voice rearranges the fundamental principles of revolutionary discourse beyond mere inclusion.

Bates also highlights Elena's informal, colloquial style as a method of inclusion and solidarity, bridging gaps between city revolutionaries and indigenous villagers. In moments of cultural negotiation, Elena moves between revolutionary Spanish and local discourse. The narrative suggests how her speech resonates with the villagers' own rhythms, gaining their acceptance more swiftly than her male companions: "The people like you, I think… and they love the senora Elena" (p. 580). This acceptance is predicated not on hierarchical deference but on Elena's mastery of a shared linguistic register that enables her to function as both participant and intermediary in a politically charged contact zone.

Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "autoethnographic text," wherein subordinated groups strategically engage with colonial discourse by incorporating and reworking both their own and the colonizer's languages, offers a powerful lens through which to understand Elena's linguistic behavior in *The Burning Corn*. Elena's speech rooted in the colloquial, rural Mexican Spanish of her community does not replicate dominant discourse but retools it from within. Her verbal style acts as what Pratt would identify as a "counter-discourse within the contact zone," one that reframes the terms of authority from a position of lived experience and cultural specificity. Whether requesting the school hall, organizing women, or issuing battlefield commands, Elena operates with a fluency that grants her legitimacy and immediacy. She has not inherited authority from elsewhere but created it through language while maintaining familiar linguistic practices with political meaning.

Elena's command of local language and her deep integration into the community enable her to exercise a distinct form of narrative and cultural authority that aligns with Sara Mills's argument that mastery of local discourse is foundational to narrative control.

In *The Burning Corn*, Elena does not merely observe the people and places around her; she speaks to and with them, often becoming the point of connection between disparate identities. A powerful moment unfolds when Elena teaches Indigenous women how to use a sewing machine: "Her dignity and calmness had been perceptible then... She had emerged from the anonymity of leeching patience" (Bates 580). This rhetorical and interpersonal fluency allows her to transcend passive femininity and embody relational power. Nacho's observation of the women's loyalty to her not to him emphasizes how her speech, anchored in humility and mutual respect, generates a kind of authority not granted by status but earned through relational engagement. Elena's ability to communicate and educate is both subversive and transformative, recasting the travel narrative as a platform for feminist agency.

Her linguistic presence becomes especially vital during the crisis in the village, where she not only comforts the women with her voice "Elena's voice could be heard as she tried to comfort them" (567) but also translates the emotional and linguistic gaps between Nahua speakers and outsiders. When a child cries "Notehueltiuh," it is Elena whom Nacho turns to for understanding, recognizing her as the one who can decode and explain the emotional and cultural significance of the word. In this moment, Elena becomes the narrative conduit through which resistance, pain, and solidarity are articulated. Her speech is not ornamental; it actively reshapes the interpretive lens of the travelogue. In doing so, Elena challenges both colonial and patriarchal expectations, redefining the female traveler not as a passive observer but as an active agent of cultural meaning and resistance. Through her vernacular fluency and emotional intelligence, Elena performs what Mills identifies as rhetorical humility and relational authority, positioning her as a counterforce to imperial dominance.

Judith Butler's insight that "learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself" (*Gender Trouble*) further clarifies what is at stake in Elena's speech acts. Through her linguistic choices Elena designs an insurgent yet intelligible way of speaking which liberates her from patriarchal standards that silence many women. Elena uses language which carries Butlerian performance power to make tangible changes in material reality as she restructures social connections. Through her pragmatic speech Elena goes beyond hesitation to enact actionable decisions which both restructure power dynamics and energize others into motion. Language enables Elena to use defensive tools for asserting her identity as well as offensive methods for social change. In this way, *The*

Burning Corn positions linguistic agency not as a secondary feature of resistance but as its very foundation. Through Elena, Bates dramatizes how the act of speaking can itself become revolutionary, destabilizing conventional gender and colonial hierarchies by demonstrating that power can be articulated from the margins and made legible on one's own terms.

Judith Butler argues that "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'pre-discursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (*Gender Trouble*). In *The Burning Corn*, Ralph Bates implicitly engages this idea through the character of Elena, whose gendered identity is not a fixed, natural essence but a product of repeated, culturally situated performances. Bates positions Elena as a figure of meaningful cross-cultural solidarity, not as a passive, naturalized feminine presence but as an active agent whose empathy and practical engagement with indigenous villagers subvert both patriarchal and colonial expectations. Rather than occupying a detached, eroticizing role typical of travel or revolutionary narratives, Elena immerses herself in the daily labor, struggles, and cultural expressions of the community, forging alliances grounded in mutual recognition and political purpose. In doing so, she destabilizes the supposedly 'neutral' and - notions of gendered identity, enacting instead a fluid, performative defiance against the intersecting structures of power that seek to define her.

One of the clearest moments of this solidarity occurs when Elena devotes herself to teaching village women how to use a sewing machine donated to their collective. Bates writes, "Six hours she had talked to them, and at last they understood, chiefly with the help of a girl of twelve years, who had spent most of her time in gazing into Elena's face or leaning against her, caressing her breasts with timid hands" (Bates 580). This intimate, tactile engagement reflects an emotional and social proximity between Elena and the indigenous women, dissolving the colonial distance that might otherwise exist between them. It isn't simply a transaction of knowledge, but a moment of shared labor and affection that situates Elena within the community, not above it. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, argues that meaningful solidarity is not about abstract identification but about grounded, reciprocal alliances forged through shared struggle. She describes reflective solidarity as an ethical interaction in which "'I ask you to stand by me over and against a third'(Bates

560)," emphasizing solidarity as a negotiated, situated act rather than a paternalistic gesture.

Bates implements this idea through Elena's story in *The Burning Corn* where the character proves herself to others through direct involvement instead of male validation for society's acceptance. Nacho, observing this with a mixture of jealousy and reluctant admiration, notes, "They had been in Quetzaltotomatlatlan only a day and the women had accepted her" (Bates 545). The pivotal change in balance leads Elena toward forming friendships not by wielding power but by connecting with another culture through equal and compassionate ties. Mohanty advocates the development of feminist partnerships based on mutual understanding and collaborative purposes that oppose the paternalistic dynamics which result from authoritarian rule from a superior position.

Elena expresses solidarity through her direct actions of empathy while actively participating in the culture around her. Elena demonstrates solidarity by offering hand-sewn clothing to an old woman after finishing dressmaking classes in that hunger-stricken community. The woman, stunned, murmurs, "Nobody ever gave me anything", and begins to cry, though "she doesn't even know how to weep" Nacho observes aloud, startled by the rawness of her emotion (Bates 577). Bates shows how Elena functions as an observer who shares in the deep sense of loss caused by the social and colonial injustice system. Elena appears in various symbolic settings through visual narrative as she interacts with village women while enjoying their meals and attending to medical needs and participating in cultural traditions. Nacho expresses his thoughts as he remembers how "My eldest sister is with the senora Elena." She was frightened" (56). As a protective figure Elena demonstrates solidarity by using both political statements and personal caring gestures to serve her people.

The character of Elena unquestionably displays autoethnographic authority as explained by Mary Louise Pratt due to her absorption of indigenous knowledge and traditions according to Bates's version of events. Rather than occupying the detached, observational stance of the colonial outsider, Elena actively participates in the life of the village-kneeling among the women, joining their labor, and listening to their stories. This embodied empathy marks a refusal of the distanced, voyeuristic gaze typical of imperial travel narratives. In this context, Elena's cross-cultural solidarity becomes more than symbolic; it is enacted through shared labor and reciprocal care. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the limitations of what she terms "(proto-capitalist) feminism concerned with 'women's advancement' up the corporate and nation-state ladder,"

arguing instead for alliances grounded in mutual struggle and community-based solidarities. Elena's integration into village life exemplifies what Mohanty elsewhere describes as "intersectional alliances that challenge both imperialism and patriarchal paternalism" (Bates's *The Burning Corn*), through Elena's character, frames solidarity not as an abstract moral posture but as a radical, material practice one built through emotional reciprocity, cultural immersion, and the collective work of survival and resistance.

The Burning Corn presents burning corn as a powerful metaphor which the author Ralph Bates uses to depict revolts against oppressive systems and gendered resistance. Through cultural roots Mexican people view corn as both nutritional source and traditional element but in this tale it acts as an indicator of fundamental change because burning fields symbolizes a rejection of both colonial governance and patriarchal oppression. The cornfield burning serves both strategic military purposes while acting simultaneously as a symbolic act of deliberate departure from past traditions. As the flames consume the milpas, Nacho reflects on the magnitude of loss: "The burning of the corn, more than the killing of six of them, had deprived them of courage, and they were once more a submissive and broken race". According to this observation the act of burning maize fields demonstrates a direct strike against both indigenous identity and the continued existence of their culture. Elena's involvement in the radical protest behavior links her to revolt as she progresses from being observed to becoming an active force of disruption. During the opening stage Nacho views Elena through an exotic lens but later critical events transform his perspective. The siege of the village transforms how Elena is perceived because she ceases to be defined by beauty or consumed by Nacho's ownership. Instead, she acts decisively, distributing weapons and tending to the wounded amidst the chaos: "Elena, you look after that!" Nacho ordered. 'Over there, by your window, Nacho,' Montes said. 'We shan't have to carry them across the room'" (Bates 567). In these scenes, the fire raging outside mirrors Elena's own inner defiance a force that resists both the immediate violence and the gendered constraints placed upon her.

Bates draws a striking connection between fire, revolution, and Elena's gendered agency. The fire becomes a metaphor for her suppressed anger, resilience, and ultimately her liberation from restrictive norms. In a moment of armed resistance, Nacho frantically calls out: "Montes' rifle," (540) Nacho yelled at Elena and frantically she held out the weapon, and grasped the revolver he thrust towards her. 'Fire low, bless you, my girl,' he shouted" (555). Here, Elena is no longer a passive figure in the male-dominated narrative

but a direct participant in the village's defense, wielding weapons and taking aim at the enemy a radical act in a context where women are typically confined to the background.

Narratively, Bates deliberately frames the story through Nacho's first-person perspective, a foreign traveler and artist whose initial view of Elena is filtered through cultural othering and masculine possession. Nacho's descriptions often aestheticize Elena's appearance, as in the scene by the river: "Standing thus her dignity was unapproachable and her body's loveliness serene and cold" (563). Yet, as the narrative progresses, the immediacy of violence and Elena's assertive actions challenge these reductive perceptions. Nacho himself begins to reevaluate Elena, noting the villagers' respect for her independent of his own presence: "The people like you, I think… and they love the senora Elena" (552). In this way the narrative exposes how the colonial traveler's perspective fails to capture Elena's complex character while demonstrating how age and cultural and gender biases form and then break down her character's complicated nature.

Through *The Burning Corn* the narrator follows Chandra Talpade Mohanty's recommendation to "trace capital's paths while seeking alternative destinations" by focusing women's revolutionary capabilities amidst colonial Mexico's social and political environment. The narrative shows Elena growing from being an idle character into an insurgent fighter while demonstrating a transformative path of gendered opposition against dominant power structures and social hierarchies based on race and social caste. The burning fields act as a double symbol for physical uprising and cultural destruction which indicate the downfall of repressive institutions. Elena fights through actions and words and spatial movements which restore her control over the contact zone. Bates constructs within Mohanty's decolonial space a revolutionary terrain which builds revolutionary understanding across traditional patriarchal and Eurocentric boundaries through feminist collective activism for liberation possibilities.

In conclusion, The Burning Corn positions Elena as a powerful emblem of authoritative female resistance, one that transcends the personal and enters the collective sphere of rebellion. Through her physical mobility and the reclaiming of language as both a personal and political tool, Elena forges meaningful connections with indigenous populations, disrupting the entrenched patriarchal and colonial structures that sought to dictate social and cultural hierarchies in revolutionary Mexico. The ritualistic act of burning cornfields serves as a potent symbol within the narrative — a rejection not only of traditional gender roles but also of the broader systemic oppressions rooted in colonial

domination and male authority. This ceremonial defiance becomes a catalyst for a larger, more inclusive resistance, positioning female agency at the heart of socio-political transformation.

Moreover, Bates's reading of this travel narrative compels contemporary audiences to interrogate the ways in which gender and power dynamics persistently shape, distort, and often obstruct cultural interactions. By moving beyond the text's surface as a historical or documentary account, readers are invited to uncover the underlying tensions and negotiations of identity, authority, and rebellion. The Burning Corn thus functions as both a narrative of personal emancipation and a critique of the mechanisms through which dominant powers attempt to silence subaltern voices. Ultimately, it underscores the enduring relevance of examining literary works through the intertwined lenses of gender, colonial history, and cultural resistance, revealing literature's capacity to contest, question, and reimagine the socio-political narratives of its time.

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