

Felipa Velázquez: An Anarchist Poet

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May 1st is celebrated nearly everywhere in the world as International Worker's Day. However, we don't always remember that the day was chosen because, in 1886, a group of anarchists held a strike in Chicago, USA., to demand better working conditions. The strike ended in tragedy just three days later, which was the origin of the Chicago Martyrs. May 1st is, then, a holiday of anarchist origins.

That said, it is amazing that a teacher, Mexican poet, and an anarchist, was born that same day, only four years earlier. Felipa Velázquez Ozuna (sometimes written "Osuna") was born in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, the daughter of Modesto Velázquez and Manuela Ozuna, both of them peasants. She married Canuto Arellano in 1905 with whom she had eight children: Trinidad, Manuela, Ana María, Francisca, Felipe, Miguel, Soledad, and Narciso. Unfortunately, she became a widow in 1924 and saw herself forced to be in charge of the family. She decided to move to Mexicali where, in the words of the historian Gabriel Trujillo, "a particular trait of her sensibilities became manifest: her interest in poetry and theater."

In Mexicali, Felipa joined a peasant organization that sought to defend the land from businesses such as The Colorado River Company. Hence, on May 1930, she was detained and sent to prison in the Islas Mariás with her eight kids, where she was sentenced to for seven months. When she was freed, she returned to Mazatlán, where she passed away in 1949 from a stroke at the age of 67.

Felipa's Poetic Work

Thanks to the efforts of Rubén Trejo and his anthology, *Las magonistas*, I've been able to access four poems written by Felipa, as well as four more works in different styles. The first poem, titled "Towards the Fight",¹ was published in the anarchist-leaning paper, *Sagitario*, in December 1926. Within this poem, Felipa explains her reasons for joining the proletarian struggle with determination and zeal,

"I abhor evil,
Curse tyranny,
Love fraternity,
Despise the bourgeoisie."

"Towards the Fight" is a poem that deems 1920s Mexican society as one based on exploitation, where the bourgeoisie exploits the workers for their own benefit. Although it was believed by then that, when the Constitutionalist Revolution triumphed, the conditions of all the Mexican people had improved, Felipa's poem shows us that this was not so. Later she writes the following,

¹ *Hacia la lucha.*

"But as it is my duty
To keep enlightening you,
Although mine is a woman's voice,
I keep on preaching the idea.
Because this occasion lacks
Shaking the use,
That we make in voting
When we choose a hangman."

With this, the Sinaloa poet tells us the little confidence she has in the electoral system, a system that, moreover, she could not participate in because she was a woman. And it is curious, likewise, how she herself stresses her own condition of woman, but as a woman who fights and who seeks to inspire other people so that they struggle too.

"For You, Woman!",² published in the newspaper *¡Avante!* on November 1928, follows the theme of woman's role in the struggle for liberty and leaves the author's anarchist position clear,

"Fight, then, for your emancipation;
Be brave, woman, be not stunned,
For your rights as woman
You are free as man.
And defend your duty as well,
Bring your son, your husband, your brother,
To embrace them in fraternal clasp;
And joined in sweet harmony,
We shall form an eternal rope,
Where we all hold hands
Let us walk towards anarchy."

Why Remember Felipa?

We woman have been erased and hidden from history, science, art. Our presence has been blurred, but we have managed to find and rescue ourselves to reconstruct our history. Felipa Velázquez was one such woman who dedicated her life to fight to social justice and woman's rights. Felipa's poems were rebellious, filled with love for humanity and combative fire, capable of inspiring us almost a hundred years later,

"Rebel!, dear people,
Abolish tyranny
Know I'm by your side,
That your sorrow are my own."

Felipa's work reminds us that the fight is not just with guns and rifles, but also with our words. Poetry, like any artistic expression, can be just a powerful a weapon.

² *¡A ti mujer!*

I wrote this text so that, with any luck, we could remember not just the origins of the holiday this May Day, but also remember a *sinaloense* anarchist poet who dared fight with her hands, body, and words.

Poems

Hacia la lucha³

Voy por el mundo gritando
Y al pueblo mi voz elevo
Y sólo voy predicando
La idea que en mi mente llevo.

Siento el deseo más ardiente
De salvar la humanidad
Y con ánimo ferviente
Trabajo por la igualdad.

Yo aborrezco la maldad,
maldigo la tiranía,
Amo la fraternidad,
Desprecio a la burguesía.

Aprecio a los productores
Con sincera estimación,
Por que son los redentores
Que sustentan la nación.

Aborrezco a aquel bribón
De clase parasitaria,
Que medra a la explotación
De la clase proletaria.

Por éso yo voy gritando
Con una antorcha encendida,
Al dormido despertando
E iluminando su vida.

Ya el obrero poco a poco
Se irá poniendo en acción,
Para apagar ese foco
Que se llama explotación

El hombre desea ser libre
Por que libre debe ser,
Y sabe que es imposible
De esclavo permanecer.

Pero como es mi deber
Seguirles iluminando,
Aunque es mi voz de mujer
, Sigo la idea predicando.

Porque falta ésta ocasión
Sacudirnos ese yugo
Que hacemos por votación
Cuando elegimos verdugo.

Towards the Fight

I go through the world yelling
And to the people raise my voice high
And I am just expounding
The idea I carry in my mind.

I feel the desire most ardent
To save humanity
And with spirit fervent
I labor for equality.

I abhor villainy,
Curse tyranny,
Love fraternity,
Despise the bourgeoisie.

I cherish the producers
With sincere esteem,
Because they are the deliverers
That nourish the nation.

I abhor that scoundrel
Of the class of parasite,
Who nurtures the exploitation
Of the class proletariat.

That is why I go around yelling
With a torch ablaze
The slumbering I awake
And their life illuminate.

The worker now, bit by bit,
Will set into action,
To extinguish that light lit
Called "Exploitation".

Man desires to be free
Because free he should be,
And he knows it's impossibility
To remain under slavery.

But my duty it is then
To keep illuminating them,
Although mine is a woman's voice
I keep on preaching the dream.

Because what lacks in this occasion
Shaking off those chains of oppression,
That we by voting make
When we a hangman elect.

For we consciously must
Correct such grave a transgression,

And I yell to humanity:
"If happy we wish to be,
Let us demand equality
That by right have we.

The task of the worker
Will be emancipation,
Waiting not for a Creator
to grant us His benediction."

¡Rebélate, pueblo amado!⁴

Despierta, pueblo, despierta,
de ese sueño tan profundo,
que la lucha ya está abierta
al enemigo del mundo

Ese burgués insolente
que no tiene corazón,
goza viéndote obediente
a tan cruel explotación;

Y aunque tu energía se agote
por mala alimentación,
sin pisca de compasión
él te esclaviza y te explota.

Porque sólo has recibido
un salario reducido,
que no cubre la mitad
de tu gran necesidad.

Tú produces a porfía,
tu sudor baña la tierra,
pero él, lo gasta en un día,
después te lleva a la guerra.

Te da un torcido camino
despreciando el verdadero,
te hace creer que es tu destino
llevándote al matadero.

Pueblo: no dobles las manos
deja ya esa humillación,
porque jamás los tiranos
te verán con compasión.

Rompe esas duras cadenas
que te tienen maniatado,
alíviate ya las penas,
y castiga a ese malvado;

A ese león entronizado,
que ha sido tu gran verdugo
que siempre te ha encarcelado
y pone en tu nuca el yugo.

Deja de ser obediente
a los lacayos bribones;
¡rebélate!, eres valiente,
no respetes ya galones.

Oye, pues, lo que te digo:
ya no elijas Redentores

Rebel, Dear People!

Wake, people, wake,
from this sleep profound
that it is now the time to fight break
against the enemy of the world around

That insolent bourgeois
who has no soul,
He enjoys watching you oblige
to such cruel exploitation;

And although your energy withers
due to malnutrition,
without a shred of compassion
he enslaves and exploits you.

Because you have received
a smaller salary,
that does not cover even partially
a single great need.

You produce obstinately,
Your sweat the planet drenches.
But he spends it immediately
and later sends you to the trenches.

He gives you a twisted journey,
the real one neglected,
to make you believe that your destiny
is to be lead to death.

People, don't fold your hands
leave now this humiliation,
because never have tyrants
looked at you with affection.

Break that harsh captivity
that keeps you chained,
soothe yourself of these misery,
and punish the depraved;

That lion enthroned,
who has been your Great Garroter
who always has you imprisoned
and on your neck placed the iron collar.

Cease being manipulable
to lackeys learned in tricky craft;
Rebel! You are indomitable,
respect no rank.

Heed, then, what to you I say:
Elect no Redeemers

¡A ti mujer!

Tú, mujer, que sumisa perduras
soportando las mil amarguras,
siempre atenta a la voz de un pastor,
y atrofiada a la vil tiranía.
¿Qué no sientes agudo dolor
y deseas rebelarte algún día?

¿Por qué sufres, mujer resignada
la cadena que tanto te oprime,
que de pies y de manos atada
al yugo, tu libertad suprime?
¿Por qué no te rebelas? ¡Dime!
Si es que el hombre te humilla inconsciente
¿por qué enturbia tus ojos el llanto?
Alza altiva y serena tu frente
y no llores, mujer, tu quebranto
es tan sólo fatal torbellino.

Ven; no pierdas tu tiempo en el duelo,
que a tu lado se encuentra el camino
por do puedes hallar tu consuelo...
Ven: que aquí te llaman tus hermanos;
ven a unirte con tus compañeras; ve el
ejemplo de aquellas, que ufanas,
han luchado por ser libertarias,
y han querido morir, las primeras
como hijas nacidas de parias...

Piensa que al ponerte en acción
a romper la cadena opresora,
dejarás esa horrible opresión
en que vives, mujer, hasta ahora.

Lucha, pues, por tu emancipación;
ser valiente, mujer, no te asombre,
pues tus derechos como mujer
eres libre también como el hombre.

Y defiende también tu deber,
trae a tu hijo, a tu esposo, a tu hermano,
a estrecharlos en fraterno abrazo;
y unidos en dulce armonía,
donde asidos todos de la mano
caminemos hacia la anarquía.

To You, Woman!

You, woman, who endures low,
Bearing a thousandfold sorrow,
Always heeding the priest speaking,
And atrophied to vile tyranny.
Do you not feel pain piercing
And desire to rebel eventually?

Why do you suffer, woman resigned,
The chain that you're by so oppressed,
That has you tied by the feet and hand
To the yoke, your freedom repressed?
Why do you not rebel? Tell me!
If man humiliates you thoughtlessly,
Why do your eyes cloud weeping?
Raise your head high and serene
And don't cry, woman, your grieving
Is simply a lethal whirlwind.

Come, lose no time in the fray,
For by your side is the path
By which your pain allay...
Come, your brothers beckon you here;
Come join your *compañeras*; see
Their example, that you flaunt,
They have fought to be anarchists,
And have wished to die, the ones in front,
As the daughters born of heretics...

Mind setting about action
To break the chain oppressive,
You will leave that horrid oppression
That you have lived, woman, til present.

Fight, then, for your emancipation;
Be brave, woman, be not reverential,
For your rights as woman
You are free as man.

And defend well your duty,
Bring your son, your husband, your brother,
To embrace them in fraternal clasp;
And joined in sweet harmony,
Where, all holding hands,
We walk towards anarchy.

El Credo⁵

Creo en la naturaleza todopoderosa, creadora del Universo y de todo cuanto existe: montañas, valles, vegetaciones y ríos; creo en el estudio, único medio de salir de la ignorancia y la obscuridad; creo en la inteligencia de los sabios, y el desarrollo de la ciencia, única hija de la Anarquía, que fué concebida por obra del espíritu o cerebro de los soñadores, que fueron calumniados, perseguidos y sacrificados; padecieron bajo el poder de los esbirros, burgueses y obispos, descendieron hasta el abismo del más inmundo calabozo, y después subieron al patíbulo y se sentaron en la silla eléctrica con la sonrisa en los labios, satisfechos de decir verdad, y dentro de poco tiempo vendrán sus cenizas a juzgar a todos los malvados y dar a cada uno su merecido según sus obras. Creo en el espíritu de los hombres fuertes que harán temblar a los tiranos; creo en la Santa madre Anarquía que no perdonará a los cobardes; creo en la comunión de los hartos y en la debilidad del estómago de los pobres.

Creo en la resurrección de los esclavos a una vida libre, y en la vida perdurable de eterna felicidad, y la emancipación humana. Amén!

Felipa Velázquez.

The Creed

I believe in nature all-mighty, creator of the Universe and everything existing: mountains, valleys, plants and rivers; I believe in studying, the sole means of leaving ignorance and obscurity behind; I believe in the knowledge of the wise, and in the development of Science, Anarchy's only daughter, who was conceived by the act of the spirit or minds of dreamers, who were slandered, persecuted and sacrificed; they suffered under the power of henchmen, bourgeoisie and bishops, they descended into the most sordid dungeon, and later rose to the gallows and sat in the electric chair with a smile on their lips, satisfied with speaking the truth, and before long their ashes will come to judge every villain and give each their due according to their actions. I believe in the spirit of strong men that will make tyrants tremble; I believe in our Holy Mother of Anarchy who doesn't forgive cowards; I believe in the communion of those fed up and in the weak stomach of the poor.

I believe in the resurrection of the slaves into a free life, and in ever-lasting life of eternal joy, and in human emancipation. Amen!

Felipa Velázquez.

⁵ "Avante!", N°13, II Epoca, September 19, 1928. <https://www.libradorivera.com/Periodicos/Librado%20Rivera/Avante/1928/Avante%2013%20Epoca%20II%201928.pdf>

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