

Josephine Niggli's Letter to Family - June, 20th 1935

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ENG 618 – Research Methods
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INTRODUCTION

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The following edition is based on a letter written by playwright, novelist, and poet Josefina Niggli, addressed to her family on June 20th, 1935. The letter itself, written home to her family, recounts Niggli's experiences during auditions, a musical performance, and a school dance while at UNC Chapel Hill. Born Josephine Maria Niggli, it is worth noting that the spelling of Ms. Niggli's first name changed throughout her life. Although she does not use her own name when signing this letter in particular, other letters written during this time period (located in the Hunter Library Special Collections) show she was still using the name Josephine while studying at Chapel Hill. This edition is titled using this spelling in order to maintain historical accuracy. Some of Niggli's early works are published under the name Josephina and her later works use the name Josefina; additionally her death certificate lists her as Josefina Niggli. This name change signifies a move toward a more traditionally Spanish spelling, which is no surprise as Niggli always felt a strong connection to her Mexican birthplace as evidenced in her life and writing.

Born in Monterrey, Mexico in 1910 to a Texan father and a Virginian mother, Niggli nonetheless felt more drawn to the culture of Mexico than that of the United States. From a young age she was consistently encouraged by both family and mentors to pursue writing, for which she clearly had great passion and skill. After receiving her B.A. in 1931 she studied playwriting under the director of the San Antonio Little Theatre. She went on to study, write, and earn her M.A. at UNC Chapel Hill beginning in 1935 (during which time she penned this letter). From this period onward she wrote a multitude of well-received plays and novels centering on Mexican heritage and tradition. Her novels include *Mexican Village*, *Step Down*, *Elder Brother*, and *A Miracle for Mexico* and her plays include, but are not limited to, *Tooth or Shave*, *Sunday Costs Five Pesos*, and *Soldadera*. After a stint in Hollywood working as a screenwriter, she came to Western Carolina University to teach English and Theater from 1956-1975. Niggli died on December 17th, 1983 in Cullowhee, NC.

(An annotated bibliography for the sources of the above information, as well as for all information found for textual notes can be found after the transcription.)

EDITOR'S NOTE

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The following edition is formatted to simulate how it would appear if it were published in a print format. Its presentation combines aspects of a facsimile and a diplomatic edition. Digital scans of the original letters are placed directly next to transcribed versions. The edition is purposely structured in landscape orientation in order to fit these documents side-by-side and large enough for easy comparison. The line breaks in the transcriptions align with the end of the page and transition to the next line in Niggli's original letter. This was done to maintain the format and therefore to recreate the reading experience of the manuscript. Authenticity was the goal of many editing choices, including keeping any spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors in tact. Additionally, all writing idiosyncrasies were maintained. For example, Niggli usually signifies the word "and" with an ampersand looking character, therefore "and" is represented in the transcription with "&." However, occasionally Niggli opts to spell the word out and in these cases the word is transcribed as "and." Other represented peculiarities include underlining titles or plays and movies, but not always. For instance, the second time David Copperfield is mentioned it is capitalized, but not underlined. A final note on idiosyncrasies is her treatment of times. Sometimes they are represented purely with numbers, others they are followed by the word "o'clock," and once both methods are used. These writing quirks are all purposely preserved in this edition. Also to maintain accuracy, some words are tabbed over or right justified to appear where they do on the page in the original letter. Any notations included in the transcription that do not appear in the original letter are contained in brackets and italicized. This occurs minimally, to denote words that were either crossed out or indecipherable due to wear/damage of the document itself.

Niggli's handwriting is a neat cursive that separates between each word. Some of her writing conventions include crossing the ascender to the right of the ascender, long run on sentences when she is caught up in the movement of the narrative, and occasional dashes after dates, page numbers, etc. Her writing utensil appears to be a black fountain pen, which is smeared minimally on a few pages. The letter itself is in fairly good condition, written on two pieces of 11x7 stationary. The paper was folded in half to create a booklet style presentation creating smaller 7x5 ½ pages. Her method for writing on these is quite unconventional. She began by writing on what presents as the

cover page of this mini booklet, followed by the page to the right when the booklet was opened. After that she back tracked and wrote on the page to the left, or what appears to be the inside front cover and then finished by writing on the back of the booklet. This same process was repeated for the second piece of paper, which was then slid inside the first booklet. Although two of the pages are hand numbered, only the number 2 is chronologically correct; what Niggli numbers page 4 is actually page 5 when the narrative is followed. There is one final crease horizontally across all pages, which presumably was made in order to fit the letter into an envelope. The following edition represents each page as a separate scan to prevent confusion due to the disjointed format of the original document.

The only page with substantial damage is the last one. There are a few small holes at the center crease as well as on the top half of the document. A bit of staining on the bottom half of the letter is evident, but does not obstruct the writing. Additionally, it appears as if something adhesive was applied and then removed, taking the top layer of parts of the page with it. Due to this, some of the words are obscured and one in particular is entirely indecipherable. This has been noted using brackets as mentioned above. Footnotes were used instead of endnotes to more easily access supplementary information while reading. As far as information provided in footnotes is concerned, due diligence was applied to make notations for all unexplained people, places, and theater references. Spanish words are also defined to aid with comprehension. Unfortunately, no additional information could be found for many of the people mentioned in passing. As stated in the notes, the majority of them are presumably fellow UNC Chapel Hill students, but this could not be confirmed.

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Special thanks to the staff of WCU's Special Collections for providing scans of the original letters and to WCU Reference Librarians for assistance with research questions. Thanks as well to Heidi Buchanan, Research & Instruction Librarian/Associate Professor; Paromita Biswas, Metadata Librarian/Head of Cataloging; and George Frizzell, Special Collections Librarian for information regarding the history of changes in spelling for Niggli's first name.

TRANSCRIPTION

Thursday-
Dear Family-
I've got so much to tell you that I hardly know where to begin so I will begin at the beginning. Yesterday morning I made a straight line for the theatre to find out that I and a couple of other girls were retained for the first tryout of Iphigenia to attend the second. Of course I was thrilled to death. Afterwards I saw Darius Jackson & she said that Harry said (he's the director & her brother in law) that he much preferred my reading but that I was not tall enough, so my heart went back into my shoes again.

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I've got so much to tell you that I hardly know where to begin so I will begin at the beginning. Yesterday morning I made a straight line for the theatre to find out that I and a couple of other girls were retained for the first tryout of Iphigenia¹ to attend the second. Of course I was thrilled to death. Afterwards I saw Darius Jackson² & she said that Harry³ said (he's the director & her brother in law) that he much preferred my reading but that I was not tall enough, so my heart went back into my shoes again.

¹ Iphigenia is the shorted title referring to the play *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, written by Euripides around 414 B.C. In this tragedy, Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, opens by telling of her narrow escape from sacrificial death by her father. The goddess Artemis replaces her with a deer on the altar and sends her to the distant land of Taurus where she is made priestess. Soon after this she is reunited with her long lost brother Orestes who she almost sacrifices after he is caught attempting to steal a sacred statue. After learning of each other's true identities, the siblings plan to escape together and succeed thanks to the assistance of the goddess Athena.

² This is presumably a fellow UNC Chapel Hill student and classmate, but no corroboration could be found.

³ Despite the amount of information provided about Harry by Niggli, neither a last name nor verification of him being a professor at UNC Chapel Hill could be located after searching a variety of sources including census records, school yearbooks, and newspapers.

2-

At noon I saw him, and he said "Come to tryouts at seven-thirty." "But I've got to sing," I wailed. "That's all right, I'll let you go in time. By the way, Darius said you wanted to see The Scarlet Pimpernell. We're not doing much in class. Go see it." I could have fallen on his neck, because the movie only shows at 1:30 in the afternoon, and from 6:30 on in the evening. So I got to see my beloved Leslie Howard. I rehearsed at 5:00 with Frances Hülme, and then I came home, bathed & dressed, & went back to the theatre. Now

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At noon I saw him, and he said "Come to tryouts at seven-thirty." "But I've got to sing," I wailed. "That's all right, I'll let you go in time. By the way Darius said you wanted to see The Scarlet Pimpernel.⁴ We're not doing much in class. Go see it." I could have fallen on his neck, because the movie only shows at 1:30 in the afternoon, and from 6:30 on in the evening. So I got to see my beloved Leslie Howard.⁵ I rehearsed at 5:00 with Francis Hülme⁶, and then I came home, bathed & dressed, & went back to the theatre. Now

⁴ *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is a 1934 film directed by Harold Young. Set during the French Reign of Terror, the film follows Sir Percy Blakeney an aristocrat who is also secretly a part of the underground effort to rescue French nobles from the guillotine. The film is an adaption of the play and book both written by Baroness Emmuska Orczy in 1903 and 1905 respectively.

⁵ Leslie Howard is the actor who plays, Sir Percy Blakeney, the main character in the *Scarlet Pimpernel* (see above).

⁶ The Francis Hülme referred to in the letter is likely previous Western North Carolina native Francis Pledger Hulme (1909-1986). During his life Hulme published three books of poetry and worked as a professor at New Asia College, Hong Kong; University of York, England; and Warren Wilson College, Asheville.

comes the lucky part: The man
who speaks with Athena,⁷
the only one who speaks with
her, is the King of Thoas⁸
played by a man with a
voice between a clap of
thunder & the crack of doom,
and the two other contestants
for the role had high soprano
voices, so that when he
finished speaking they couldn't
be heard at all! Of course
my old fog-horn swarmed out
as usual so that it sounded
like we were having a
fog-calling contest. Harry
said I could go, and that I
would hear the final results
tomorrow (this morning).

Well, I went from there

comes the lucky part: the man
who speaks with Athena⁷, &
the only one who speaks with
her, is the King of Thoas⁸
played by a man with a
voice between a clap of
thunder & the crack of doom,
and the two active contestants
for the role had high soprano
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my old fog-horn swarmed out
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said I could go and that I
would hear the final results
tomorrow (this morning).

Well, I went from there

⁷ Here Niggli is referencing the role of Athena from *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (see footnote 1), for which she mentions auditioning and getting a second call back earlier in the letter.

⁸ King Thoas, king of Taurius, is a character from *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (see footnote 1) who Iphigenia tricks in order to escape with her brother.

to Graham Memorial (it looks
like Mount Vernon only it's
red) and I wore my red
chiffon with its black lace
cape, which made quite a hit.
Some little boy from New
York attached himself to me,
I think his name was Richard
Selfridge, but I'm not sure.
Then I dressed up in my
rebozo & sang "Así es el mundo",
"La Borrachita," and "Patito,
Patito." They told me afterwards
that they wanted me to come
back for another one, but I
simply dived out the door.
People seemed to like it,
but it sounded terrible
to me, and was I glad
when it was over. When I

to Graham Memorial⁹ (it looks
like Mount Vernon¹⁰ only it's
red) and I wore my red
chiffon with the black lace
cape, which made quite a hit.
Some little boy from New
York attached himself to me,
I think his name was Richard
Selfridge, but I'm not sure.
Then I dressed up in my
rebozo¹¹ & sang "Así es el Mundo,"
"La Borrachita," and "Patito,
Patito."¹² They told me afterwards
that they wanted me to come
back for another one, but I
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People seemed to like it,
but it sounded terrible
to me, and was I glad
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⁹ This is a building on the campus of UNC Chapel Hill that opened in 1931 as the school's first Student Union. It has since been renovated to house the James M. Johnston Center for Undergraduate Excellence (JCUE).

¹⁰ This is likely a reference to George Washington's plantation home and burial place located in Fairfax County, Virginia (see appendix for photographic comparison of the two buildings).

¹¹ A shawl or long scarf covering the head and shoulders, traditionally worn by Mexican women.

¹² "La Borachita" is a Spanish song originally written by Mexican composer Ignacio Fernández Esperón (also known as Tata Nacho). The other two songs mentioned are also Spanish songs, however research did not turn up any definitive answers as to the original artists.

4-

came out decently dressed
Infant Richard asked me if I
wanted to go up and dance.
Of course I wanted to go, but
I didn't know any boys, so
I didn't think it would be
such a success. Still, I
wanted to go & there was
Richard, and he didn't look
like much, still he was of the
male sex so I said O.K.

Of course he turned
out to be one of those dancers
that loves to do beautiful
steps (long & swooping) which
is just my meat, so we
swooped & halfway down the
room Frances cut in because
he wanted to swoop, and
anyway he liked the red
dress. We hadn't reached the

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Infant Richard¹³ asked me if I
wanted to go up and dance.
Of course I wanted to go, but
I didn't know any boys, so
I didn't think it would be
such a success. Still, I
wanted to go & there was
Richard, and he didn't look
like much, still he was of the
male sex so I said O.K.

Of course he turned
out to be one of those dancers
that loves to do beautiful
flips (long & swooping) which
is just my meat, so we
swooped & halfway down the
room Frances¹⁴ cut in because
he wanted to swoop, and
anyway he liked the red
dress. We hadn't reached the

¹³ No information could be found for this name in yearbooks or other school records, but he was likely a fellow UNC Chapel Hill student.

¹⁴ Again, no information found, see above note.

corner until a voice said
"Con permiso" and it was a
Cuban boy who has been trying
to meet me since I arrived.
We shrieked Spanish at
each other & did a danzon,
so I really felt as though
I were back in Monterey.
Then somebody else cut in,
and by the time the evening
was over I danced with the
entire map of North Carolina
and part of Tennessee. I had
the grandest time! Along about
eleven the Cuban Miguel
brought up ~~the Spanish~~ a
tall (I think he's taller than
Hite Harper) boy named
Fred Aldred, and he asked if
I would like some punch. By

corner until a voice said
"Con permiso"¹⁵ and it was a
Cuban boy who has been trying
to meet me since I arrived.
We shrieked Spanish at
each other & did a danzon,¹⁶
so I really felt as though
I were back in Monterey.¹⁷
Then somebody else cut in,
and by the time the evening
was over I danced with the
entire map of North Carolina
and part of Tennessee. I had
the grandest time! Along about
eleven the Cuban Miguel
brought up [crossed out word] a
tall (I think he's taller than
Hite Harper¹⁸) boy named
Fred Aldred,¹⁹ and he asked if
I would like some punch. By

¹⁵ Spanish for "Excuse me."

¹⁶ Danzón (spelled with an accent mark, but Niggli does not use one in her letter) is the official musical genre and dance of Cuba.

¹⁷ As mentioned in the introduction, Monterey, Mexico was Niggli's birthplace. Although she was sent away from Mexico at the age of three due to the Mexican Revolution, she spent much of her childhood traveling back and forth between Monterey and her new home in San Antonio, Texas.

¹⁸ See footnote 13.

¹⁹ See footnote 13.

that time I was ready to drop
as I had been dancing steadily
for over an hour & a half
without once sitting down, &
~~he asked~~ we went down,
and he asked if he might
take me home, and I said yes,
so I didn't get to bed until
one o'clock, & that bed felt
grand to me. He asked me
for a date today, but I said
no, as I wanted to see - yes,
you've guessed it - David
Copperfield so we're going
walking Saturday afternoon.

This morning I was up
at my usual time: 7:00
o'clock. I don't have a class
until ten, but that way I can

that time I was ready to drop
as I had been dancing steadily
for over an hour and a half
without once sitting down, so
[crossed out word] we went down,
and he asked if he might
take me home, and I said yes,
so I didn't get to bed until
one o'clock, & that bed felt
grand to me. He asked me
for a date today, but I said
no, as I wanted to see - yes,
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Copperfield²⁰ so we're going
walking Saturday afternoon.

This morning I was up
at my usual time: 7:00
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²⁰ *David Copperfield* is a 1935 film that follows the tumultuous life of the title character from the death of his mother and abuse suffered from his stepfather as a child, to the refuge he finds living with his kind Aunt Betsy, and finally to the complicated love he finds as an adult. It is based on the Charles Dickens novel, *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, & Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to Publish any Account)*, originally published in 1850.

get in an hour's library work
before class. I have a permanent
desk in the library which makes
it very nice.

Then I went to the theatre, &
my fog-horn had won the
prize. I am now a goddess, if
you please. I went to see
David Copperfield this afternoon,
- when I came out I couldn't
realize that I was in Chapel
Hill. This evening I went to
rehearsal, and now I am
going to bed, and so

Goodnight from
Pallas Athena.

(Between the hours of 7:30 & 8:00
P.M. only.)

Thanks for the clippings. They
were certainly interesting.

June 20/35-

get in an hour's library work
before class. I have a permanent
desk in the library which makes
it very nice.

Then I went to the theatre, &
my fog-horn had won the
[illegible]. I am now a goddess, if
you please. I went to see
David Copperfield this afternoon,
& when I came out I couldn't
realize that I was in Chapel
Hill. This evening I went to
rehearsal, and now I am
going to bed, and so

Goodnight from
Pallas Athena.²¹

(Between the hours of 7:30 & 8:00
P.M. only)

Thanks for the clippings. They
were certainly interesting.²²

June 20/35

²¹ "Pallas" is an epithet that was given to the Greek goddess Athena after she killed a giant goat of the same name who tried to rape her. Niggli signed the letter with this name instead of her own in reference to her newly required role in the play as the goddess.

²² The note that appears perpendicularly scrawled in the right hand margin indicates the date the letter was written. It is in another hand and done with a different writing utensil. Similarly written dates appear other letters in the Hunter Library Special Collections; presumably this was written by a staff member for record keeping purposes.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- - -

Buchanan, Heidi and George Frizzwell and Paromita Briswas. "Niggli Spellings." 23 November 2015. Microsoft Word file.

This document was attached as a part of an email correspondence with Hunter Librarians to determine why Niggli's first name was spelled a variety of ways across the library database.

"Commencement [1937]." *UNC Chapel Hill*. 8 Jun. 1937. *North Carolina Digital Heritage Center*. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

This is a program pamphlet from UNC Chapel Hill's Graduation Commencement in 1937. It was used to confirm that Hulme and Niggli both attended Chapel Hill during the same time period.

Cuyás, Arturo. *Appleton's New Cuyás English-Spanish and Spanish-English Dictionary*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966. Print.

This Spanish-English dictionary was used to define Spanish words and phrases Niggli uses throughout the letter.

Dickens, Charles, and Nina Burgis. *David Copperfield*. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 1999. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

This edition of David Copperfield provided summary info about the text used in a footnote.

Dugan, Sally. *Baroness Orczy's The Scarlet Pimpernel: A Publishing History*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

This book discusses the many iterations *The Scarlet Pimpernel* has gone through as a text (print, stage, etc.). It was used to get summary info about the source text for the film Niggli references.

Euripides. *Trojan Women. Iphigenia among the Taurians. Ion*. David Kovacs, Ed. *Loeb Classical Library 10*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

This is a book that has a translation, summary, and editorial notes for three of Euripides' plays. It was used to write a footnote of summary for *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

"Facilities." *Honors Carolina*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Web. 6 December 2015.

This website was used to find out information about the Graham Memorial Building on Chapel Hill's campus.

"Francis Hulme" *UNCA D. Hiden Ramsey Library Special Collections*. UNCA, 17 Sept. 2008. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

This resource was provided by a WCU reference librarian as a suggestion when no results turned up when searching for the Francis Hülme mentioned in the letter. This alerted me to the change in search results when using different characters in the spelling of his name (Hülme versus Hulme).

"Iphigenia in Tauris (1935)." *Archive of Performances of Greek & Roman Drama*. University of Oxford, 2105. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

This website is an archive and databases that keeps records on dates of performances of Greek and Roman dramas. It was used to find out about when Chapel Hill performed the play.

"Mount Vernon". *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 06 Dec. 2015.

This encyclopedia entry was used to find the location, photo, and information surrounding the Mount Vernon mentioned as a comparison to the Graham Memorial Building.

Neruda, Pablo. "To Emiliano Zapata with Music by Tata Nacho." *Canto General*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losanda, 1971. Print.

This was used to find information about "La Borachita," a song that Niggli mentions singing for an audition.

"Pallas, In Classical Mythology." *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition. Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

The abstract from this encyclopedia was used to figure out why Niggli used Pallas before Athena in her signature.

"rebozo, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 6 December 2015.

The dictionary was used to find the definition of rebozo, which did not appear in the Spanish-English dictionary.

Shirley, Paula W. "Josefina Niggli (13 July 1910-)." *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook: 1980*. Ed. Karen L. Rood, Jean W. Ross, and Richard Ziegfeld. Detroit: Gale, 1981. 279-286. *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook Series*. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

This biographical entry was used to provide a history of Niggli's life.

Spearman, Walter. *North Carolina Writers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Library, 1953. Print.

This literary magazine provided the first connection between Niggli and Hulme, as they both have publications listed within it.

"U.S., School Yearbooks, 1880-2012". *Ancestry.com Operations*, Inc. 2010. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

This yearbook was used to attempt to find what years Hulme attended UNC Chapel Hill.

APPENDIX



Graham Memorial, UNC Chapel Hill



Mount Vernon, Fairfax County, Virginia