

## INTRODUCTION

Working-class Mexican men have hard lives. On that point at least, most everyone agrees. In a pioneering 1901 study of the “genesis” of crime in Mexico City, for example, lawyer-cum-sociologist Julio Guerrero expressed concern for the poor *jornalero* (day laborer): “moral instincts extinguished in the dark night of misery and an intimate acquaintance with cold; dignity spent in fruitless pursuit of work; the future turned into expectations of jail; and his suffering and desperation into a forced vagrancy, that many times ended with pulque or tequila.”<sup>1</sup>

Even self-styled defenders of the working class couldn’t resist portraying their protégés as miserable drunks. A 1904 issue of *La Guacamaya*—“whip of the bourgeoisie, staunch friend of the working class,” and the most popular of Mexico City’s penny press weeklies—featured a front-page illustration that could have served equally well for Guerrero’s gloomy assessment (see fig. 1.1).<sup>2</sup> Appearing under the title “La resurrección de Lázaro” (The Resurrection of Lazarus), the image depicts a prone, still groggy worker roused by an erect, scowling policeman with raised nightstick. The poem beneath reads:

Se encontraba medio muerto  
Lázaro José Trujillo  
A consecuencia del pulque  
que en la tarde había bebido,

# LA RESURRECCIÓN DE LAZARO.



Se encontraba medio muerto  
Lázaro José Trujillo  
A consecuencia del pulque  
que en la tarde había bebido,

cuando llegó un tecolote  
con el ceño muy fruncido  
y despertando al borracho  
con las palabras de Cristo

y dándole garrotazos  
de esta manera le dijo:  
LAZARO. LEVANTATE Y ANDA ...  
Por ébrio sin domicilio

**FIG. I.1** José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, “La resurrección de Lázaro,” *La Guacamaya*, March 17, 1904. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

cuando llegó un tecolote  
con el ceño muy fruncido  
y despertando al borracho  
con las palabras de Cristo

y dándole garrotazos  
de esta manera le dijo:  
Lázaro. Levántate y anda . . .  
Por ebrio sin domicilio.



[He was found half dead  
Lázaro José Trujillo  
Thanks to the pulque  
He had drunk that afternoon,

When a cop arrived  
With furrowed brow  
And waking the drunk  
With the words of Christ

And striking him  
In this way said to him:  
“Lazarus. Arise and walk . . .”  
For being drunk and homeless.]

*La Guacamaya* editors might share Guerrero’s apparent concern for the plight of a benighted worker like the homeless Lázaro.<sup>3</sup> But the similarity ends there. On page 2, the editors included a letter addressed to “the workers” with this expression of solidarity:

Yo como vosotros he enervado mis fuerzas y agotado mis energias en los talleres para llevar, primero á mi querida madre y más tarde á nuestros idolatrados hijos el pan que nosotros los obreros amasamos con el sudor de nuestra honrada frente.<sup>4</sup>



[Like you I have drained my strength and exhausted my energies in the workshops in order to bring, first to my beloved mother and later to our idolized children, the bread that we workers knead with the sweat of our honored brow.]

While Guerrero too worried about the enervation of Mexican workers (and in similarly overwrought prose), he never pretended to share in their predicament. Nor did he find it amusing. And what are we to make of the decision of a penny press rival, *El Diablito Rojo*, to front the 1900 Independence Day issue with the image of a worker toasting *la patria* with a glass of pulque in one hand and a newspaper in the other (see fig. 1.2)?<sup>5</sup>

Although more sympathetic than those of most of his peers, Guerrero’s views on working-class men reinforced centuries-old stereotypes about their alleged lassitude, improvidence, promiscuity, and weakness for games of chance, intoxicating substances, and interpersonal violence. It can hardly come as a surprise, then, that the sentimental education for



Tomo I

MÉXICO, LUNES 17 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1900

Número 25

Semanario Joco-serio Independiente y feroz.

FOR EL PUEBLO Y PARA EL PUEBLO

En la Capital UN CENTAVO

En los Estados DOS CENTAVOS

¡VIVA LA LIBERTAD!

¡Viva la Independencia!



¡VIVA EL DERECHO!

—¡Por mi Patria! La invencible  
tierra hermosa mexicana,  
que los brazos tiene abiertos  
para toda empresa honrada;  
Por Hidalgo, por Morelos,  
por los hombres de su talla,

que pagaron con su vida  
nuestra dicha y nuestra calma.  
Para todos esos héroes,  
la gratitud de las almas,  
y el solemne juramento  
de morir en la batalla,

y defender esta tierra  
tan hermosa y codiciada,  
contra todos los tiranos  
que pretenden amargarla  
¡Que viva la Independencia  
¡De la prensa y de la Patria!

**FIG. 1.2** Artist/Author Unknown, “¡Viva La Independencia!,” *El Diablito Rojo*, September 17, 1900. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

working-class men favored by elite social engineers sought to counter workers' loss of "moral instincts" with a range of modern institutions—schools, barracks, penitentiaries, and the like—designed to instill self-discipline and propagate up-to-date views on everything from politics to gender relations. While penny press editors often joked about the *vicios* (vices) of working-class men, they were up to something quite different. The sentimental education they proposed not only foregrounded the absurdity of bourgeois solutions to working-class problems; it sought, through social satire that mocked working-class and bourgeois sentiments alike, to construct for its protégés a way of being in the modern world that was every bit as complicated and contradictory as their day-to-day lives.

Historians—myself included—have written quite a bit about late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century disciplinary projects aimed at the Mexican working classes. But we have had less to say about the psychological impact of these projects on workers other than to note that they resisted as often as and as best they could under very difficult circumstances. This study thus seeks to fill in a small but crucial piece of a much larger puzzle through a reconstruction of an alternative sentimental education for working-class men produced by and through Mexico City's thriving penny press—a sentimental education that was less patronizing, less coercive, more realistic, and more comprehensive than anything proposed by the authorities. As we might expect, it was more nuanced as well.

In order to convey the scope and nuance of this ambitious endeavor, I arrange this book in five chapters. The first three chapters address different aspects of working-class patriotism and the fraught issue of working-class (male) citizenship. The final two chapters shift focus from male citizenship to masculine subjectivity—the way penny press editors sought to make sense of working-class men *as men*—as reflected in their work, leisure, and relationships with women. Before we enter the complex, curious, and contradictory world of the satiric Mexico City penny press for workers, however, the rest of this introduction provides some essential background that should help us understand the stories to come.

## Macho Men and Masculine Scripts

*Machismo*—the nearly universal term used to describe aggressively masculine behavior—is likely Mexico’s best-known contribution to world language.<sup>6</sup> Although applied to male culture in general, by nearly all accounts machismo’s most notorious practitioners are working-class Mexican men. For example, Octavio Paz’s definitive work on national character, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, casts the mestizo lower-class man as Mexico’s dysfunctional male archetype: the mixed-race son of a denigrated (raped) Indian mother and a despised (rapist) Spanish father, Paz’s *macho* resorts to a dizzying array of public and private “masks” to disguise his profound alienation and a consequent predilection for violence directed against himself, other men, all women, the world.<sup>7</sup> Derived from the work of turn-of-the-century Mexican criminologists and sociologists, including Guerrero, the macho, as codified by Paz and others, appears in social science literature as the masculinity of choice for “traditional” working-class men. This is so even in Matthew Gutmann’s sympathetic ethnography *The Meanings of Macho*, where a carefully historicized machismo appears as the outmoded masculine script against which contemporary working-class men construct their own modernity.<sup>8</sup>

The ubiquitous deployment of the working-class macho stereotype by mass media, politicians, policymakers, social scientists, and anthropological “informants” obscures a complicated historical terrain. This book seeks to shed light on that terrain by reconstructing the complex, shifting, and contradictory ideas about manhood, especially working-class masculinity, in circulation in early twentieth-century Mexico City. By examining alternative masculine scripts at work or under construction in the capital’s satiric penny press for workers during the first decade of the twentieth century, it challenges the reduction of working-class masculinity to the macho—much as Gutmann’s ethnography does for the late twentieth century. Further, it argues that the penny press’s satire-driven sentimental education for the working man, which directly engaged the contradictions of modernity in ways that bourgeois notions of manhood never did, played a defining role in the development of modern male subjectivity in Mexico and across the Mexican diaspora.

## The Working Classes in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico City

Any historical investigation into changing notions of manhood in early twentieth-century Mexico City must begin with an attempt to recover the specific historical conditions that shaped working-class masculinity. Those conditions had changed dramatically by 1900. The intricate web of causes, effects, and articulations behind these changes is too complex to do justice to here, but the essentials look something like the following.

By 1900, Mexico's longest-serving president, Porfirio Díaz, had dominated national politics for over twenty-four years; he would continue to do so for another eleven. (In recognition of his dominating presence, historians refer to the 1876–1911 period as “the *Porfiriato*.”) When he first seized the presidency in 1876, General Díaz promised to restore order to Mexico after more than six decades of political turmoil, including the wars for independence, two foreign invasions, several bloody civil conflicts, innumerable *pronunciamientos* (political uprisings), and endemic banditry. As President Díaz's reelection started to become routine, the “indispensable caudillo” and his acolytes reassured supporters, skeptics, and agnostics alike that the ongoing restoration of order by a strong central government was providing the secure foundation for a vibrant national economy, which would soon produce a modern society composed of industrious, patriotic, and peace-loving citizens, who could then be trusted to participate responsibly in a free democratic process.<sup>9</sup>

By the turn of the century, Porfirian modernization efforts had begun to have a significant impact—not all of it positive—throughout Mexico, especially in the capital. For a variety of reasons, ranging from land enclosures to incipient industrialization to expanding railroad networks (financed by foreign capital), Mexico City experienced a huge influx of migrants throughout this period, most of them from outlying rural areas and nearby states. This influx caused the city to more than double in population, from 230,000 in 1877 to 471,000 by 1910.<sup>10</sup> As migrants flooded in, the middle and upper classes deserted the central districts for newer residential areas along the capital's showcase boulevard, the Paseo de la Reforma. At the same time, housing shortages drove up downtown rents and forced many poorer residents into less reputable neighborhoods, like the notorious Tepito and the working-class barrios that sprang up around the new penitentiary in San Lázaro. The class differentiation



that resulted from these demographic and geographic shifts, although incomplete and permeable, encouraged the development of a working-class consciousness of sorts grounded in shared social spaces and shared cultural practices (like reading the satiric penny press).<sup>11</sup>

Conscious of itself or not, the Mexico City working class was hardly the industrial proletariat envisioned by Marxist theorists. Although the number of factory workers rose nearly 355 percent between 1895 and 1910 to around 10,500 people, they represented only 4 percent of the city's workforce; nearly a third of that workforce was female. While many more did comparable labor in small and medium-sized workshops, Mexico City workers employed in manufacturing actually declined as a percentage of the workforce: from 37 percent in 1895 to 33 percent in 1910 (although the overall number of workers in manufacturing grew substantially). In fact, the bulk of the capital's labor force was unskilled; the majority worked in sweatshops or service jobs. Moreover, by 1910 women represented 35 percent of the capital's waged workers, with over 35,000 of them employed as domestic servants, more than three times the number of male and female factory workers. Workers' wages ranged from 10 centavos a day for children to 1 peso for most routine factory work to 2 to 5 pesos for semiskilled mechanics. Women were invariably paid less than men.<sup>12</sup>

But the Mexico City working class included a sizable and influential contingent of skilled craft workers, many of them self-identified artisans. And literacy rates for the general population were a remarkably high: 50 percent for the Federal District by 1910, despite the presence of large numbers of illiterate rural migrants. (The national literacy rate was closer to 20 percent.) As early as 1873, a report on eligible jurors for one city district (Cuartel Mayor 6, northwest of the city center) indicated that nearly 40 percent of its more than 1,200 adult male artisans knew how to read, including 100 percent of the printers and typographers.<sup>13</sup> To further complicate the "class" question, the literate and better-paid end of the proletarian spectrum often blended imperceptibly into Mexico City's financially precarious petite bourgeoisie.

This was especially true in an industry like printing, which had benefited tremendously from a spate of technological innovations that significantly increased productivity and quality in the newspaper trade. Bolstered by the rise of mass dailies, beginning in 1896 with *El Imparcial*, skilled printers re-



mained among the best-paid craft workers.<sup>14</sup> Those with more traditional talents benefited less: journalists struggled with notoriously low salaries, and artisans, like master printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, faced an exhausting daily scrabble just to make ends meet.<sup>15</sup> Class status for members of this group was fluid rather than fixed, circumstantial rather than predetermined. Even the status-obsessed reporter protagonist of the Porfirian novelist Emilio Rabasa's *El cuarto poder* (The Fourth Estate; 1888), admits that "we worked as scribes, not as writers; we weren't artists, but workers."<sup>16</sup> From this marginally respectable sector of Mexico City life—nominally *gente decente* (decent folk) but self-identified as working class at least when it suited their purposes—the satiric penny press drew its editors, writers, printers, illustrators, and much of its audience. It was principally their struggles with the changing conditions of male subjectivity that were recorded in its pages.

### The Satiric Penny Press for Workers

The Mexico City satiric penny press has a historical importance that belies its relatively brief appearance (roughly 1900–15), uneven quality, and erratic publication record.<sup>17</sup> With mastheads that openly proclaimed working-class loyalties—*La Guacamaya* (The Squawking Parrot), "newspaper of gossip and good humor, agile and a teller of truths, not puffed up or snobby, scourge of the bourgeoisie and defender of the Working Class"; *El Diablito Rojo* (The Little Red Devil), "of the people and for the people"; *El Diablito Bromista* (The Little Joking Devil), "organ of the working class, scourge of the bad bourgeoisie, and bogeyman of bad government"—the satiric penny press provided a forum for working-class issues, contributed to the formation of working-class consciousness, and facilitated the imagining of a Mexican national community grounded on the honest, productive, and patriotic toil of Mexico's working classes.<sup>18</sup> In exchange, authorities allowed editors to criticize political corruption, crony capitalism, and exploitation of the working class so long as editors did not personally attack President Porfirio Díaz or espouse overtly revolutionary ideas.

These qualities set the satiric penny press apart from the mass dailies like the government-subsidized *El Imparcial* and the pro-Catholic *El País* that dominated the Mexico City newspaper business during the late

# BIBLIOTECA AL AIRE LIBRE



Los hijos del pueblo atorándole a la leitura.

—Mira, mamá, lo que dice el faceto PERIQUITO: que ya se trincó un tandero un vale de por Tepito.

—Mira á mi hijo, que bien lee, parece un subvencionado.

—No, hijito, mejor pelado, San Dimas, no San José.

—Y á quién se debe, criatura, que leas bien, y violentito?

—Al chistoso PERIQUITO, pues me agrada su lectura.

Trae versitos, notas ciertas, chismarajos, historietas; anda por todas las puertas, y conoce bien las tretas.

—¿Las tretas de los malditos, de los rotos pretensiosos, que nomás son titeritos faroleros y chismosos?.....

—No, mamá, yo no hablo de eso, me refiero al peladaje, al pueblo que en su coraje, aun preso quiere más queso.

—Haces bien, hijo querido, estima á tas semejantes, y aborrece ese partido de locos y de farsantes.

Trabaja, sí, con empeño, sé honrado por donde quiera, y jamás la faltriguera de tu honradez sea el diseño.

La ropa es el espantajo de este mundo maldecido; sé pobre..... pero querido; sé obrero, y ama al trabajo.

El trabajo al hombre honrado, lo enaltece, lo redime, y es digno de que se estime por ser su nombre sagrado.

FIG. 1.3 José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, "Biblioteca al aire libre," *El Periquito*, August 8, 1895. Rafael Barajas Durán (el Fisgón), *Posada mito y mitote*. La caricatura política de José Guadalupe Posada y Manuel Alfonso Manilla (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009), image 129, p. 186.

Porfiriato. Penny press stalwart *La Guacamaya* might claim as many as 29,000 copies sold for its hottest weekly editions but could not begin to approach *El Imparcial*'s daily sales, which had soared to well over 100,000 by 1910.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the satiric penny press—purchased, borrowed, shared, stolen, or read aloud on the shop floor, in the *vecindad* (tenement) patio, or in the local *pulquería* or *cantina* (bars)—circulated widely among Mexico City workers and sometimes even among their provincial counterparts.<sup>20</sup> An 1895 print from *El Periquito*, for example, carries the title “Biblioteca al aire libre” (Open-Air Library) and depicts a group of working-class men (including a policeman) listening as the paper is read aloud and discussed (see fig. I.3).<sup>21</sup> The mass dailies used up-to-date news, sensational crimes, sports coverage, and homey advice columns to attract readers of all classes, but only the penny press actively promoted working-class concerns and openly encouraged reader submissions on everything from strike information to poetic sentiment. Moreover, unlike the government subsidized *El Imparcial* (which also cost a penny), the satiric penny press relied entirely on daily sales to finance operations, a constraint that forced editors to pay special attention to the everyday concerns of their mostly working-class readership.<sup>22</sup> Probably for the same reason, they were less inclined to propagandize than papers sponsored by workers’ organizations like *El Hijo del Trabajo*, *El Socialista*, *La Internacional*, *La Voz del Obrero*, and *La Revolución Social*.<sup>23</sup> The continued popularity of penny press stalwarts *La Guacamaya*, *El Diablito Rojo*, and *El Diablito Bromista* suggests that successful editors understood and represented working-class concerns quite well—at least as far as their readers were concerned—whatever their own class status, which was never more than petit bourgeois in any case.<sup>24</sup>

The satiric penny press for workers has many obvious virtues: eye-catching graphics (Posada was a frequent contributor), acerbic political and social critique, and—in contrast to the didactic tone of many newspapers directed at the working classes—a wicked sense of humor. It is also loaded with stories, vignettes, and poems, many of them submitted by loyal readers. To contemporary scholars, the juxtaposition of social critique and literary pretension is a bit unsettling and most prefer to focus on graphic images or political analyses and to ignore the fiction and poetry. This sensible strategy has produced some thoughtful work on Posada’s artistic innovations and on working-class political culture.<sup>25</sup> Still, it

leaves important questions about the penny press's representations of other aspects of working-class life unanswered.

### Working-Class Politics

To frame these unanswered questions, let us begin with the as yet unsettled scholarly debate over working-class politics. Indeed, labor historians have given us three distinct perspectives on the politics of Mexico City's working classes at the turn of the century. In the aftermath of the 1910 Revolution—the decade-long struggle to unseat Porfirio Díaz and to resolve the succession question after his surprisingly quick departure—scholars began to sort through a confusing tangle of prerevolutionary labor organizations and movements for traces of an incipient radicalism they assumed must have contributed to that epochal event. They uncovered those traces in a nineteenth-century anarchist tradition that would find its revolutionary voice with the 1900 appearance of *Regeneración*, the mouthpiece of the opposition *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (Mexican Liberal Party) and its founders, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón.<sup>26</sup> As for the radicalism of working men themselves (rather than that of their organizers), historians noted future president Álvaro Obregón's successful 1915 recruitment of Mexico City workers associated with the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) into “red battalions”—militia units mobilized and deployed by the constitutionalist faction under “First Chief” Venustiano Carranza to fight against the rival insurgent forces of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.<sup>27</sup>

Other historians looked at the broad spectrum of Porfirian working-class organizations and came away with a much different view of workers' politics. In an important early article, Rodney Anderson argued that most industrial workers were not radical internationalists but liberal patriots “who took their inspiration from what they believed to be *Mexican* ideals, originating in their own Liberal tradition, not from any of the more militantly class-conscious European ideologies.” For most workers, Anderson added, “there was no reason to believe that the liberalism of *La Reforma* had failed but rather that its promises had been subverted by powerful foreign and domestic interests.”<sup>28</sup>

Other historians of Mexico's urban working class have supported Anderson's assessment of its politics. “Given half a chance,” Alan Knight

notes, “the organized working class opted for unionism and reformism (sometimes camouflaged under revolutionary rhetoric); only when it was brusquely and brutally denied the chance did it entertain risky thoughts of revolution.”<sup>29</sup> In his study of Mexico City workers in the revolutionary period, John Lear argues that during the first decade of the twentieth century they forged a unique brand of “popular liberalism”—a working-class ideology that “equated the [liberal] struggle against tyranny in the political sphere with that in the workplace . . . [and that] selectively drew from liberal doctrine and invocations of past national struggles and heroes to condemn the role of monopoly and foreign capitalists and to reclaim the participation of the workers in local and national politics.”<sup>30</sup>

While recognizing the power of popular liberalism to shape working-class politics, Mexican labor historians have been more inclined to acknowledge the influence of European socialist thinkers like Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier and to stress the role of artisans (as opposed to industrial workers) in formulating a distinctly Mexican brand of socialism.<sup>31</sup> Carlos Illades, for example, observes that prominent late nineteenth-century working-class newspapers like *El Socialista* (1871–88) and *El Hijo del Trabajo* (1874–84) and their affiliated organizations enthusiastically touted European ideas about the importance of social harmony, cooperation, and association. At the same time, he argues, Mexican socialists reworked these imported notions to suit local circumstances by integrating liberal imperatives like individual autonomy, democratic participation, and social equality, which made it much harder to mobilize and control workers organizations than had been the case under the colonial-era trade guilds. To distinguish themselves from more radical socialist, anarchist, and communist groups, many of these mainstream socialist workers organizations insisted on staying out of politics—at least with regard to the endorsement of political candidates—and echoed Fourier’s proposal for an alliance between capitalists and workers in the battle against the unproductive members of society: politicians, functionaries, clergy, idle rich, and idle poor.<sup>32</sup>

One of the central sites for the development of working-class politics in the decade before the Revolution was Mexico City’s flourishing satiric penny press. As expected, the political views of penny press editors, contributors, and (presumably) readers fall well within the parameters of popular liberalism/liberal socialism. In her pioneering study of penny

press politics, María Elena Díaz concluded that “The political discourse of these penny journals . . . approached all the classic issues of nineteenth-century democratic liberalism, but gave these a popular twist. . . . Indeed, the republican notion of sovereignty residing in the people acquired literally a popular meaning: more and more ‘the people’ were defined as the popular and labouring classes.”<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, she points out significant political variation among the three most successful papers, *El Diablito Rojo*, *La Guacamaya*, and *El Diablito Bromista*, with *El Diablito Bromista* the most radical (generally supportive of strikes), *El Diablito Rojo* the most conservative (generally opposed to strikes), and the more “commercial” *La Guacamaya* somewhere in the middle.<sup>34</sup> But these editorial differences were variations on common themes: authoritarian subversion of traditional liberal values, bourgeois exploitation of workers, distrust of foreign capitalists, and the need to redeem the oppressed working class. Editorial differences aside, Díaz concludes that the penny press fostered a “rather vigorous sense of working-class consciousness,” firmly rooted in “the principles of democratic liberalism.”<sup>35</sup> In an exhaustive study of José Guadalupe Posada’s political cartoons—many of them featured in the satiric penny press for workers—Rafael Barajas Durán argues that “Posada reflects a characteristic position of the urban proletariat and other poor classes of the period: he defends liberal ideology, he advocates for the poor and working classes, he denounces the abuses of patrons, and, while he stays loyal to Don Porfirio, he criticizes some aspects of his government.” As Barajas Durán explains, “the Posada of the workers’ press is something of a popular artist-agitator . . . but he is a long ways from being a radical revolutionary.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite their disagreements, labor historians from all sides of the working-class politics question seem to agree that some form of class consciousness, whether radical, liberal, or socialist, had begun to emerge among Mexico City’s workers by the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Díaz, Lear, and Barajas Durán contend that the satiric penny press played a central role in its emergence by articulating a popular/socialist version of liberalism with broad appeal for urban workers, an appeal compelling and comprehensive enough to constitute workers as a distinct “public” with shared interests and a sense of themselves as a community of readers and listeners.<sup>38</sup> Convincing as they are, these conclusions fail



to explain *why* the satiric penny press for workers was so popular in late Porfirian Mexico City.

The answer to that question lies in a dramatic reimagining of the relationship of the state, civil society, and the “people”—mirrored by a dramatic reimagining of the relationship between writers and their readers—that had begun to coalesce, especially within the Mexican intelligentsia, during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Central to this reimagining was the formation of a public sphere predicated on the notion of a “universally accessible conceptual space where private citizens came together to discuss matters of common interest, on the assumption that reason, the only requisite, was evenly distributed, and that their voices would have an impact on public opinion.”<sup>39</sup> Although the Mexican public sphere was dominated by bourgeois voices and characterized by exclusions, historian Pablo Piccato argues that its presence nonetheless meant that “multiple actors addressed the state and civil society, assuming (as a key part of their notion of citizenship) that they could be involved in dialogues in the public sphere . . . and that in it all rational voices counted.”<sup>40</sup> Among these multiple actors were a number of “unexpected citizens”—including penny press editors and contributors—whose “vernacular use of the norms and laws” around citizenship challenged elite efforts to limit access to the public sphere.<sup>41</sup>

### Seeing Like a State: On the Legibility of Working-Class Men

Participation in the public sphere came at a cost. By the late nineteenth century, working-class men in Mexico City had become the principal targets of three disciplinary projects: the first endorsed and sometimes enforced (albeit in a haphazard way) by a liberal authoritarian state, the second envisioned and sometimes carried out (through the auspices of the state) by elite social reformers, the third promoted and sometimes essayed (albeit in a modest way) by socialist-inspired workers organizations. Because many elite social reformers were also public officials and even presidential advisors, the difference between the first two disciplinary projects—policy initiatives proposed and carried out by the Porfirian state, on one hand, and reform proposals generated and debated in the public sphere, on the other—can often be difficult to discern (as it was for penny press editors at the time), but since elite reformers envisioned



much more than the state was willing to take on, the distinction is important to maintain.

Differences aside, all three projects drew inspiration from classic nineteenth-century liberal notions of self-help, individual autonomy, and personal character—qualities seen as “natural” to the bourgeoisie but considered rare in the working class, especially in working-class men. Government officials, social reformers, and socialists alike believed that these qualities could be transmitted to the working class through training, education, and moral example. Once acquired, these quintessentially *modern* traits would transform recalcitrant, unruly, lazy, self-indulgent, irresponsible working-class men into good citizens in the public sphere, productive workers in the marketplace, and responsible sons, husbands, and fathers in private life. Although government officials focused on improving public order and labor productivity, liberal social reformers on promoting middle-class values, and socialists on fostering responsible collective action, the three groups shared an abiding distrust of traditional working-class culture, most especially working-class notions of manhood—usually defined in terms of “vices” like drinking, gambling, philandering, spousal abuse, parental negligence, fighting, and idleness—which they considered a serious obstacle to material, social, and spiritual progress for the working classes and, by extension, for the nation.

Because the Porfirian regime ended in revolution, historians tend to forget its revolutionary roots—and to dismiss as self-serving and hypocritical the progressive agenda that provided the ethical rationale for authoritarian governance. Although less radical than subsequent generations of revolutionary social engineers in Mexico and elsewhere, Porfirian progressives nonetheless shared their faith in the high modernist ideology that swept across western Europe and the Americas after 1830 or so. In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, anthropologist James Scott defines high modernism as “a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of the social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.”<sup>42</sup> This “supreme self-confidence” in scientific progress and rational planning characterized Mexican social engineers

both before and after the Revolution. Like their revolutionary successors, Porfirian social reformers, including Díaz's technocratic advisers, the self-styled *científicos* (men of science), sought to use the power of an authoritarian state "to bring about enormous changes in people's habits, work, living patterns, moral conduct, and worldview."<sup>43</sup> This was of course much easier said than done, given the ideological constraints of nineteenth-century laissez-faire liberalism and the practical difficulties involved in implementing even relatively straightforward (and much needed) infrastructure projects like modern drainage and transportation systems. Despite these very real obstacles, however, Porfirian social engineers made concerted efforts—albeit with limited success—to transform Mexico City workers into hygienic, industrious, well-trained proletarians and informed, loyal citizens.<sup>44</sup>

At the heart of high modernist social reform is the bureaucratic compulsion to produce a "legible" population "with precisely those standardized characteristics that are easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage."<sup>45</sup> The transformation of illegible traditional societies into legible modern ones required that the state intervene in the everyday lives of its citizens. As Scott explains: "A thoroughly legible society eliminates local monopolies of information and creates a kind of national transparency through the uniformity of codes, identities, statistics, regulations, and measures."<sup>46</sup> Although state-driven efforts to render society legible, and thus manageable, generally take into account the entire population, including second-class citizens like women and children as well as non-citizens like immigrants and refugees, the target of its most coercive interventions are the (often racialized) lower classes and particularly working-class men.<sup>47</sup>

Efforts to render the people legible meant, as Scott notes above, the elimination of "local monopolies of information." In the case of Mexico City workers, these local monopolies of information included working-class cultural practices, especially the (presumably) illicit use of public spaces and the impenetrable local speech or *caló* that authorities worried might serve as a cover for criminal activities. As the term itself suggests, legibility relies heavily on visual cues in order to make sense of a complex, previously obscure social world, not just through ethnographic forays into the urban labyrinth by intrepid social reformers or bohemian flaneurs but also through the encouragement of proper (legible) behavior

via public education and law enforcement practices. Thus those who refused to visibly conform to these new expectations by spitting on sidewalks, dressing improperly, squatting on street corners, hanging around outside bars, and so on could expect to be reprimanded, fined, and perhaps even jailed by police. While the new rules of comportment proved difficult to enforce despite daily police harassment, working-class men and women certainly understood (and often resisted) official efforts to eliminate these visible affronts to public order, which they interpreted as an assault on their persons and on their cultural practices.<sup>48</sup> This sense of resentment and resistance extended to most sectors of the previously segmented laboring classes—although the poorest suffered most—and spawned a uniquely Mexican brand of liberal populism that set a newly emergent working class against a corrupt, exploitative, and hypocritical bourgeoisie.<sup>49</sup>

Scott focuses his analysis on high modernist projects undertaken by authoritarian states, but the Díaz administration was not the only party vested in making working-class men more manageable. Even though elite social reformers served as spokesmen for the high modernist principles that underlay the regime's bureaucratic initiatives and often used their government positions to attempt to put those principles into play, their larger project was far more radical than anything the Porfirian state apparatus could have accomplished, limited as it was by political realities, class loyalties, inadequate institutions, and lack of resources. For example, public health advocates (*higienistas*), like the well-respected Dr. Luis E. Ruiz, director of the National Academy of Medicine and a member of Mexico City's Superior Sanitation Council, proposed a comprehensive public health campaign that ran the gamut from adequate drainage, sewers, city parks, and uncontaminated water supplies to clean people, households, markets, and streets.<sup>50</sup> Initiatives such as drainage, sewers, parks, water, and the like, that depended primarily on financial resources, technical expertise, and political will were within the state's means, at least for some sectors of the city. Other aspects of the *higienista* public health campaign, especially initiatives to enforce personal and household cleanliness, demanded a wholesale transformation of the material circumstances and cultural practices of the urban lower classes. These efforts failed miserably, even with the nominal support of an authoritarian state, and were mercilessly ridiculed in the penny press (see ch. 4).

A new generation of “scientific” criminologists and penologists faced similar challenges. Supported by statistical evidence of Mexico City’s notoriously high crime rates, they had little difficulty convincing the Díaz administration to build a new penitentiary, improve police practices, and revise the criminal code. But as happened with comprehensive public health reform, the government lacked the capacity (and probably the desire) to address the structural causes of the crime problem, especially the alleged degeneracy of the lower classes. Sociologist Julio Guerrero warned against the danger posed by “unhappy men and women who lack a normal, secure means of subsistence,” arguing that “they have lost all control of their lives; their language is of the tavern; they live in sexual promiscuity, they inebriate themselves daily . . . they quarrel and are the principal instigators of scandal . . . from their bosom petty thieves are recruited and they are the hidden perpetrators of serious crimes.”<sup>51</sup> His distinguished colleague Miguel S. Macedo even called for a modification of “our entire social structure” in order to address the problem.<sup>52</sup> This radical proposal from the Porfiriato’s most influential penologist and a prominent member of the president’s cadre of *científico* advisors vividly demonstrates the distance between the idealistic vision of elite social reformers as articulated in the public sphere and the state policies that they were charged with developing and implementing. As state functionaries, they gathered data, provided expert analyses, formulated policies, and built institutions—all crucial components of high modernist statecraft. But outside their bureaucratic offices, they articulated a high modernist social reform agenda that transcended the mundane needs of the state. Their desire to transform unhygienic, criminally inclined lower-class men into modern proletarians was no more nuanced than statist demands for a legible working class, but it would prove far more influential in the ideological struggle to redeem working-class masculinity. It too was a target of penny press satire.

By the 1870s, socialist-inspired working-class organizations had also turned to high modernist ideals in their efforts to promote a legible working-class culture grounded in scientific principles of hygiene, labor productivity, specialized training, and responsible collective action. While more vocal than their elite counterparts in their critique of the exploitation suffered by previous generations of workers and strongly opposed to state-sponsored disciplinary strategies, such as the *leva* (forced

conscription), Mexican socialists nonetheless envisioned a wholesale reform of working-class culture that closely resembled the recommendations of elite reformers like Ruiz and Macedo.<sup>53</sup> In other words, despite their insistence that the worst aspects of Mexican working-class culture were the direct result of centuries of exploitation and abuse rather than a sign of inherent (perhaps biologically inherited) deficiencies, socialist organizers advocated its reform, supported state efforts to rehabilitate workers, and developed educational programs designed to promote modern values like thrift, sobriety, and industry in their constituents. Only a radical reformation of working-class cultural practices, they argued, could redeem workers in the eyes of their employers, *gente decente*, and the state.

Despite the failure to realize even a small fraction of their ambitious goals, high modernist attempts by the Porfirian state, elite reformers, and socialist organizations to inculcate “modern” practices in the city’s working classes had a profound impact on the way many Mexicans, including workers themselves, understood working-class culture. Projects aimed at rendering populations more legible to the state and the dominant classes require that social engineers develop schematics and categories that simplify a situation which would otherwise be impossibly complicated and thus unmanageable. Even when done with the best of intentions, these high modernist simplifications inevitably misrepresent, distort, or obscure the complex cultural practices they hope to rationalize. And when authorities attempt to put high modernist reforms into practice, they often produce disastrous results by disrupting the deeply embedded, “traditional” attitudes and behaviors that had previously governed social relations, whether in the countryside or urban neighborhood.<sup>54</sup> These disruptions in turn produced the conditions for the formation of populist movements—liberal populism in the case of Mexico—as previously segregated working-class groups (*jornaleros*, proletarians, artisans, etc.) joined forces to oppose the assault on their distinct cultural practices.

### Bodies That Matter: Subjectivity and Citizenship

Penny press editors and contributors also understood that high modernist reform projects, whatever their provenance, presented a serious challenge to human subjectivity—the ways in which individuals make sense

of themselves and others make sense of them.<sup>55</sup> In *Bodies That Matter*, feminist/queer theorist Judith Butler develops an account of the formation of “culturally intelligible” subjects that provides three important insights into the impact of high modernist disciplinary projects on human subjects.<sup>56</sup> First, she argues that *representation is central to subject formation*. “The domains of political and linguistic ‘representation,’” she insists, “set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject. In other words, the qualifications for being a subject must be met before representation can be extended.”<sup>57</sup>

Butler’s contention that the domains of political and linguistic representation predetermine the criteria of subjectivity and that subjects must meet those criteria before they are extended representation is something that penny press editors and their collaborators understood only too well. Hence, their obsession with challenging the conventional representation of Mexican working-class men as an undifferentiated mass of improvident, apathetic, violence-prone nonsubjects, whose unintelligibility (as discreet individuals) disqualified them from full citizenship. In place of this negative stereotype, they offered up the positive image of a hard-working, energetic, responsible worker-patriot. At the same time, penny press editors and collaborators also grasped the coercive foundation of high modernist projects whose “regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility, and place” and its implications for working-class men.<sup>58</sup> Further, they understood that marginalized subjects, working-class Mexican men in this instance, were especially vulnerable to the cruder forms of subordination precisely because their “continuity, visibility, and place” in Porfirian society was so precarious—because workers’ participation as rights-bearing citizens was sporadic (discontinuous), often ignored (invisible), and mostly relegated to the social margins (displaced). But they knew too that regulatory power was only as strong as the domains of political and linguistic representation that perpetuated it. And they knew those domains to be vulnerable to challenges.

Second, Butler’s account of *the subjection process begins with the gendering of the subject*.<sup>59</sup> She rejects the possibility of a recognizable self that might exist prior to its gendering, noting instead that “*regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence*

of the subject, indeed . . . the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility.”<sup>60</sup> This formulation has important implications for citizenship. If, as Butler avers, coherent subjects with recognizable social identities emerge only through “the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality,” then the classic liberal concept of citizen—the most coherent of modern political subjects—is gendered from the start and liberalism’s signature phrases like “the rights of man and citizen” and “all men are created equal” mean precisely what they say.<sup>61</sup>

The gendered nature of liberal citizenship is obvious in penny press efforts to validate working-class men as *men*. Editors and contributors (almost all of them male) went out of their way to praise working-class women as workers, wives, and mothers but made little or no mention of working women’s political or civil rights. Their frequent misogynistic attacks on bourgeois *feminismo* and its emasculating effects on bourgeois men suggest that this glaring omission was no accident but reflected deeply held patriarchal attitudes.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, as we will see, the penny press sentimental education of working-class citizens was all about manhood, premised as it was on the notion that writing working-class men into the national narrative and altering the conditions that determined their subjectivity would transform them from despised *pelados*—a term used disparagingly by Porfirian elites to identify members of the lower classes—into valued citizens in their own eyes and in the eyes of the *gente decente*.<sup>63</sup>

Third, Butler’s theory directly *links subject formation to language*, the battlefield of choice in the penny press linguistic struggle against the regulatory power of bourgeois norms and the Porfirian state.<sup>64</sup> Two aspects of Butler’s argument about the constitutive properties of language are of special interest here. The first, her understanding of language as “the condition of possibility for the speaking subject,” highlights its role in the production (and subjugation) of intelligible subjects. This role is especially evident in censorship, a “condition of power” with which penny press editors had an intimate and painful acquaintance. Butler contends that censorship seeks to establish “implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject,”



a move that ties the social recognition essential to subjectivity to predetermined acceptable speech.<sup>65</sup> Although her abstract language might seem worlds away from the harsh realities of Porfirian authoritarian governance or the daily struggles of working-class men, Butler's explanation of the way that subjects are constituted "through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse" and her acknowledgement of the risks involved in refusing "to embody the norms that govern speakability" express the tangible concerns of penny press editors, who fought a daily battle with government censors over the "domain of the sayable."<sup>66</sup> Given the stakes, it is little wonder that they routinely used the word *psicología* (psychology)—a snide reference to the legal rationale behind press censorship—in political cartoons to condemn government efforts to regulate speech.<sup>67</sup>

Another useful aspect of Butler's argument about the constitutive properties of language, her contention that the "historicity [of language] includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks," is its emphasis on historical changes in the linguistic criterion of subjectivity. This historical emphasis not only acknowledges that "the norms that govern speakability" have changed over time, it also insists on the inevitability of future changes as the apparently mindless iteration of regulatory norms crosses over into "insurrectionary speech." Butler's contemporary example is the radical resignification of the word "queer" by the gay community. Her description of the resignification process, however, works just as well for other contested labels: "The name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a sense of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intention of the call . . . a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change."<sup>68</sup> Seen in this light, the penny press redeployment of *pelado*, a "word that wounds," as an instrument of resistance in their struggle against the conditions of subjectivity dictated by Porfirian bourgeois culture is revealed as "insurrectionary speech . . . a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change."<sup>69</sup> This insurrectionary speech held out the possibility of a radical reversal of established hierarchies—a reversal in which *nosotros los pelados* (we the *pelados*) would become *nostros el pueblo* (we the people).<sup>70</sup>

## Masculine Scripts and Working-Class Subjects

For working-class men in late Porfirian Mexico City, the repercussions of this radical reversal of established hierarchies went far beyond the issue of political inclusion. It also sought to reshape other central aspects of their lives, such as their understandings of work, leisure, and interpersonal relations with other men and with women. Thus chapters 1 through 3 address the linkages between working-class politics, manhood, and citizenship, while the following two chapters explore the less public—but no less political—side of working-class male subjectivity. The different aspects of the penny press sentimental education for workers that emerge in each chapter necessarily involve two intertwined initiatives: the rehabilitation of working-class culture and the reeducation of working-class men.<sup>71</sup> Rehabilitation required critical engagement with bourgeois norms of respectability and the production of working-class alternatives. Reeducation meant shaping, articulating, and transmitting those alternatives for working-class men. Both initiatives sought to transform workers' sense of themselves and their relationship to the nation—but in a much more subtle, much less unilateral way than the high modernist projects of state officials, liberal social reformers, and socialist organizers. Instead, the Mexico City satiric penny press sought to validate different aspects of working-class culture by exploiting the productive tension between the redemptive projects of the Porfirian state, elite reformers, and socialist-inspired workers organizations, on one hand, and the everyday trials and tribulations of working men, on the other. In this way, penny press editors and contributors offered up a sentimental education for workers that was an education more realistic about their situation, more responsive to their concerns, more respectful of their distinctive culture, and every bit as modern as anything the competition could propose.

The first chapter looks at penny press efforts to construct and disseminate an alternative national history intended to undermine the legitimacy of the official story. This counternarrative involved appropriating and re-signifying liberal icons like Hidalgo and Juárez as working-class heroes whose vision of an egalitarian, democratic Mexico had been subverted by self-serving, power-hungry elites. The second chapter takes a close look at the construction of a distinctive working-class cult around Benito Juárez and penny press efforts to turn the controversy over Francisco

Bulnes's critical biography of the liberal hero into a belated martyrdom sanctifying the former president (who died in bed) and highlighting his differences with the Porfirian regime. The third chapter examines penny press attempts to insert working men into Mexican history as active participants whose past and present sacrifices entitled them to all the rights of "man and citizen" and thus effect the symbolic transformation of marginalized workers from *pelados* into *el pueblo*, the Mexican "people." On the surface, this transformation involved the relatively straightforward task of writing working-class men into the national narrative as vigorous, heroic participants in the struggle for nationhood rather than as the downtrodden, disloyal *populacho* (rabble) depicted in official historiographies. A closer look reveals a more complicated and much more revolutionary attempt to remake the subjectivity of working men in order to render them legitimate political subjects entitled to all the rights (and duties) of full-fledged citizenship. Taken together, the first three chapters illuminate the rhetorical strategies of a liberal populism that sought to bind working men together as patriotic Mexicans and put them forward as the "people," the collective heart, soul, and backbone of the imagined national community.

With chapter 4, the focus shifts from issues of patriotism and citizenship to the re-creation and reconstruction of working-class attitudes toward work and leisure. Work-related satire in the penny press exposed productive tensions between proper and improper male behavior—improper behavior that confounded the conventional image of the citizen-subject by confronting civic virtue with popular resistance to bourgeois prescription, which appears not as a natural quality of the *gente decente* but as a form of class privilege. Moreover, these satires represented working-class men (and sometimes women) as more self-aware, more adaptable, and better attuned to the changing times than their bourgeois counterparts, characteristics that social observers, then and now, have considered essential to modern subjectivity—a telling reversal of conventional historical interpretations (and Porfirian bourgeois attitudes), which have insisted on a top-down "civilizing process," as proper sentiments trickle down from the bourgeoisie to the lower classes.

Chapter 5 explores the shifting landscape of male honor, female shame, and a new kind of relationship based on romance, love, and intimacy rather than the older ideal of mutual respect and gender-specific

responsibilities. To become modern lovers, working-class men needed a traditional male role model against which to construct their new, more “companionate” selves. Don Juan Tenorio, notorious seducer of women and killer of men, proved the perfect foil. Ubiquitous in Mexican popular culture then and now, Don Juan epitomized all that was wrong with traditional male scripts with his arrogance, impetuosity, misogyny, cruelty, and callous disregard for the well-being of others (male or female). For penny press writers, local *tenorios* were figures of fun, ridiculed for their absurd seductions and their prickly tempers. And while they also made fun of themselves and their clueless peers, more often than not this affectionate fraternal satire of working-class sentiment came out of their clumsy efforts to accommodate (rather than deceive and dominate) their female partners. As with working-class attitudes toward work and leisure, this modern approach to gender relations, described as an awkward negotiation rather than an inherent trait, puts working-class Mexican men at the forefront of a phenomenon that contemporary sociologists and anthropologists have labeled the “transformation of intimacy.”<sup>72</sup> Altogether, these five chapters seek to unpack penny press strategies that extolled, joked about, and sought to produce the virtues of working-class men: patriotism, hard work, resilience, humor, loyalty, and hard-earned respect for their female partners. These strategies position workers as more self-aware, flexible, and companionable—as more *modern*—than their bourgeois counterparts. A brief conclusion hints at a few suggestive continuities in working-class masculinities.

### Recalcitrant Subjects, Recalcitrant Sources

The Mexico City satiric penny press for workers is a remarkable primary source. As the chapters that follow show, it provides a wealth of cleverly wrought, often unexpected detail on early twentieth-century Mexico City popular culture, in particular its obsession with working-class masculinity. At the same time, for historians, this author included, it poses challenges of several sorts.

The challenges related to deciphering ephemeral texts intended for a working-class audience with a shared cultural background and often written in the tortured (if brilliantly reproduced) local vernacular led to long hours spent tracking down obscure references and poring over

dictionaries of Mexican slang. Arduous work to be sure but straightforward enough. Challenges related to lack of information on the identity of penny press editors, the makeup of the penny press readership, and the influence of the penny press on working-class culture were less easily resolved. For the most part, these questions of identity and influence stem from the fact that we know little about the editors of the satiric penny press beyond what we can glean from their work. Even world-renowned illustrator José Guadalupe Posada remains an enigma, although in his case historians have managed to patch together basic dates, bureaucratic records, anecdotal references, and a grainy photograph into something like a credible biographical sketch. Thus, although penny press editors often self-identify as proud members of the working class, we have no way of proving, disproving, or qualifying their claims. And that means we have no definitive way to determine how much of their interpretation of working-class culture derives from lived rather than observed experiences.

At the same time, while their exceptional literary talents make it difficult to argue that penny press editors and contributors were *typical* Mexico City workers, it would be remiss (and patronizing) to deny their claims to working-class status for that reason. As noted earlier, Mexico City artisans, especially typographers, printers, and illustrators, had unexpectedly high literacy rates. Most historians agree that they retained a strong sense of their special position within and above the unskilled working classes, even after decades of declining social status and political clout.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, evidence suggests that this combination could produce “organic intellectuals” with first-rate literary skills. For example, Illades argues that working-class newspaper editors in the 1870s and 1880s were “modern, organic intellectuals [who] articulated working-class discourse in two directions, serving both as vehicles and intermediaries for dialogue within their class and with the State. In the first capacity, they spread and synthesized the dispersed experiences of artisans and workers. . . . In the second, they were able to present the demands of the workers to government officials in a coherent fashion.”<sup>74</sup>

This was true of the next generation of worker advocates as well. One of Mexico’s most prominent organic intellectuals, labor activist Jacinto Huitrón, cofounder of the influential Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) during the first years of the Revolution, was born a

shoemaker's son and apprenticed as an ironworker as soon as he finished primary school. Despite these decidedly working-class origins, Huitrón's popular history of labor activism in Mexico recounts a long list of the books and poems (many of which he could still recite from memory) that he had read as a young man and devotes several chapters to the Porfirian working-class press.<sup>75</sup> An even better example is the printer Fernando Celada, the so-called minstrel of the proletariat, whose poetry on inspirational topics like noble workers and founding fathers was regularly published in the mainstream and penny presses and won him considerable acclaim among all classes of Mexican society.<sup>76</sup>

In *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, Jacques Rancière chides labor historians for their cavalier dismissal of the nonrevolutionary literary aspirations of worker intellectuals. The literary texts and diaries produced by nineteenth-century Parisian workers, he observes, made it clear

that workers had never needed the secrets of domination explained to them, as their problem was quite a different one. It was to withdraw themselves, intellectually and materially, from the forms by which this domination imprinted on their bodies, and imposed on their actions, modes of perception, attitudes, and a language . . . to take back the time that was refused them by educating their perceptions and their thought in order to free themselves in the very exercise of everyday work, or by winning from nightly rest the time to discuss, write, compose verses, or develop philosophies.<sup>77</sup>

Although grounded in the experiences of urban French workers in the revolutionary 1830s and 1840s, Rancière's insight that many self-taught, working-class intellectuals had literary aspirations that often superseded their political activism helps explain apparent incongruities in the otherwise puzzling mix of politics, social satire, stories, and poetry (in more or less equal parts) offered up by Mexico City penny press editors and their contributors. While it is possible that some editors and contributors were the wayward sons of the educated petite bourgeoisie, the Parisian scenario in which worker intellectuals "wrenched themselves out of an identity formed by domination and asserted themselves as inhabitants with full rights of a common world" seems the more plausible explana-

tion. Moreover, Rancière's claim that their "discreet and radical" acts of literary self-liberation would prove in the long run more revolutionary than the overt political activism of labor organizers finds considerable support in the pages of the Mexico City penny press (and in this book).

A closely related challenge with regard to using the penny press as a historical source is that we can only speculate about the relationship of editors, collaborators, and their readers. Certainly, editors addressed themselves directly to fellow workers, even if their attempts to shame or solicit support from public officials suggest that they aspired to attract a broader secondary readership. Moreover, frequent letters from disgruntled factory workers (some of them women), describing abusive bosses and poor working conditions, support the idea that many penny press readers were indeed proletarians in the classic Marxist sense. That doesn't mean, however, that editors, contributors, or their readers were *typical* Mexico City workers.

In a self-deprecating image from *La Guacamaya*, Posada depicts editor Fernando Torroella performing all the tasks associated with writing and editing the newspaper (see fig. 1.4).<sup>78</sup> In the central image, Torroella is dressed not in the overalls or white cotton clothing associated with unskilled workers (including those in the penny press) but in a respectable suit, vest, collared shirt, and bow tie. The caption reads

Aquí está el Director del semanario,  
Agente, Responsable y Redactor,  
él solo se lo guisa y se lo come  
y hace veces tambien de corrector.

El soporta á la cruel Psicología  
Y en una cosa se parece á Dios:  
que son varias personas muy distintas  
y un solo y verdadero redactor.



[Here is the Director of the weekly,  
Agent, Manager, and Editor,  
he alone cooks it and eats it  
and at times he corrects the proofs.



# Actual Cuerpo de Redacción



Aquí está el Director del semanario,  
Agente, Responsable y Redactor,  
él solo se lo guisa y se lo come  
y hace veces también de corrector.

El soporta á la cruel Psicología  
y en una cosa se parece á Dios:  
que son varias personas muy distintas  
y un solo y verdadero redactor.

**FIG. 1.4** José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, “Actual Cuerpo de Redacción,” *La Guacamaya*, August 23, 1906. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

He tolerates the cruel Psychology  
and in one thing resembles God:  
that they are various, very distinct persons  
and the one true editor.]

The image and caption evoke a certain categorical confusion reminiscent of Illades’s description of late nineteenth-century artisan intellectuals who served “both as vehicles and intermediaries for dialogue within their class and with the State.” Torroella’s sympathies might lie with the oppressed, uneducated working classes, but he clearly understands and represents his own status as *gente decente*. We know from the work of Mexican labor historians that Mexico City artisans, disturbed at the steady decline in their status over the course of the nineteenth century, made concerted and repeated efforts to distinguish themselves from the capital’s unskilled laborers, especially recent migrants from the countryside. By 1900, after decades of sporadic employment and eroded privileges,

that distinction may have been lost on employers, government officials, and the middle classes, but it persisted among skilled artisans, even as they embraced their new proletarian status for purposes of political solidarity.<sup>79</sup> As we will see, this ambivalence about social status and working-class culture—sometimes sympathetic, other times contemptuous—permeated penny press efforts to rehabilitate working-class men and supplied the catalytic spark for most penny press satire. It also suggests that penny press editors and contributors spoke most directly to the specific attitudes and concerns of Mexico City’s long-suffering artisan class rather than to those of the much larger and more amorphous working class, despite editors’ repeated expressions of pan-worker solidarity.

Ambivalence about social status was hardly the sole province of penny press editors. In his analysis of “combat journalism” in Porfirian Mexico City, Pablo Piccato argues that “the lofty standards of journalists, as men of honor, collided with the negotiations in which, as producers of cultural and political goods, they engaged in order to advance their reputations and careers.”<sup>80</sup> Although only a select few managed to escape genteel poverty, prominent combat journalists could and did aspire to public reputations as men of honor, a precarious status they often defended in duels, sometimes to the death. But if penny press editors bickered amongst themselves on occasion, perhaps in imitation or mockery of their more status-conscious peers, they rarely engaged in the risky, if potentially reputation-making, attacks on public figures and fellow journalists that resulted in violent *affaires d’honneur*.<sup>81</sup> And despite a shared appreciation of homosocial spaces like bars, cantinas, and *pulquerías*, penny press editors appear never to have broken through the social barriers that separated them from bourgeois bohemian journalists-turned-novelists such as Federico Gamboa (before he became a prominent diplomat), Heriberto Frías, and Emilio Rabasa or from the modernist poets who edited the avant-garde *Revista Moderna* (Modern Magazine), including Rubén Campos and the prickly Salvador Díaz Mirón, who allegedly dismissed the Mexico City proletariat as producers of “cherubs for the barracks and angels for the brothel.”<sup>82</sup> For the most part, penny press editors and contributors wrote for a different kind of audience—less privileged, less full of itself, less Eurocentric—composed of literate artisans, workers, and petits bourgeois like themselves. Moreover, while penny press writers also wrote and even obsessed about masculine honor, they

did it mostly in a self-mocking tone that made clear just how petty the stakes could be for men of their “inferior” social position.

Another related challenge to using the penny press as a primary source is that we have no reliable way to determine whether or not it represents an *authentic* working-class perspective. This may be a moot point if by “authentic” we mean a perspective shared by most Mexico City workers. As noted earlier, the Mexico City working class bore little resemblance to an industrial proletariat, even though labor historians agree that workers shared a sense of class consciousness, at least according to the loose definition provided by E. P. Thompson, who famously argued that “class happens when some men as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.”<sup>83</sup> The shared experience of collective oppression and a shared sense of common interests might well produce class consciousness, but shared experiences and interests don’t necessarily translate into a homogenous or egalitarian working-class culture, especially in those places, like Mexico, that mostly lack a large-scale industrial workforce.

Indeed, the Mexico City working classes ran a wide gamut, from unskilled, illiterate *jornaleros* (day laborers) to well-trained, innovative artist-artisans, like José Guadalupe Posada. So while *El Chile Piquín’s* editor went to the trouble to dedicate his paper “to the proletarian class, to the working class, to which we have the honor of belonging” and Antonio Negrete, editor of the short-lived *El Papagayo*, identified himself as a factory worker in poems written for other newspapers, for the most part penny press editors, contributors, and readers seem unconcerned about the authenticity of the editorial voice.<sup>84</sup> Further, even though penny press political editorials expressed special solidarity with the humblest of workers and though underemployed or idle *jornaleros* appear as regular protagonists in much of its fictional social commentary, it is doubtful editors saw unskilled workers as their primary readership. Instead, they sometimes channeled the personas of their backward brethren in order to mark themselves (and their readers) as modern subjects capable of self-awareness, self-improvement, and self-esteem despite their humble circumstances. In this instance, satire often proved a double-edged sword, on the one hand, ridiculing illiterate, superstitious, gullible work-

ers while lauding their wit, resourcefulness, and endurance and on the other setting educated, rational, discerning workers apart while mocking their pretensions, probity, and self-pity. This was especially apparent in the penny press “satire of sentiment,” which took aim at the affective aspects of both working-class and bourgeois cultural practices, something high modernist projects took very seriously, the former as a condition in desperate need of reform, the latter as a model of healthy social relations. As a result, penny press efforts to reenvision working-class masculinity—whether intended for ordinary workers, educated workers, the *gente decente*, social reformers, or government officials—revel in a sense of ambiguity, nuance, and contradiction largely absent in other historical sources from the period. It is these traits, so antithetical to high modernist disciplinary projects, which gave penny press engagements with working-class masculinity their distinct character and ensured their enduring popularity in Mexican popular culture.

Truth be told, the authenticity problem, which has haunted labor historians at least since Karl Marx’s brilliant histories of the French Revolution, is something nineteenth-century English penny press satirist William Cobbett liked to call a “red herring”—a logical fallacy deployed by partisans, including historians, in their ideological battles over the moral right to speak for the working class *as a class*. In other words, as is the case with so many “natural” attributes (femininity and masculinity or race and ethnicity, for example), authenticity of class is produced and maintained through discourse. As the sociologists would have it: “authenticity is social construct.” And as a social construct, authenticity plays a crucial role in the construction of subjectivities, especially in the production and maintenance of marginalized subjects like working-class men who must struggle to become legible to themselves, to others, and to the state. To search, as many labor historians do, for the authentic working class doesn’t just miss this important point; it also reproduces a high modernist logic that seeks to distill the complications and contradictions of class consciousness into a manageable (reified) thing, more accessible to political manipulation and scholarly inquiry. Seen in this light, the satiric penny press for workers is not so much an interpretive quagmire for historians as it is an ideal (though certainly not definitive) source for getting at the messy realities of working-class consciousness in late Porfirian Mexico City and beyond. Or to paraphrase Torroella’s poem

on the editorial trinity, the satiric penny press reveals a working-class consciousness that is various, distinct, and the one true thing—all at the same time. This, I think, is what working-class consciousness *really* looks like.

In *Sentimental Education*, Gustave Flaubert sought to write “the moral history of the men of my generation—or, more accurately, the history of their *feelings*.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the revolutionary times (1848), Flaubert’s protagonist, Frédéric Moreau, is too caught up in self-exploration and bohemian lassitude to have much interest in epochal events. As the author explains: “It’s a book about love, about passion; but passion such as can exist nowadays—that is to say, inactive.” Penny press editors would have had no trouble recognizing Frédéric as a prototypical *catrín* (dandy) sleeping off his debauchery while working men celebrated national independence. They too understood the modern obsession with desire and its debilitating effect on the fatuous sons of the bourgeoisie, a generation or two removed from their forefathers’ revolutionary moment. But the sentimental education for the working man portrayed in their pages was something altogether different, something altogether unexpected, something altogether more radical. The nature of that unexpected radical difference is the subject of this book.