

CHAPTER 4



RUMBO PERDIDO

Transgressive Journeys into Manhood

Chapters 1 through 3 of this book deal with the charged issue of citizenship for working-class men; this chapter and the next turn to closely related but analytically distinct questions about working-class men as gendered subjects.¹ We have seen that political citizenship in late Porfirian Mexico City (as in most places) was profoundly gendered. At the same time, the concept aspires to be—at least in its liberal incarnations—a gender-neutral designation given to those who belong to a nation-state and who accept all the rights and responsibilities that citizenship entails. Once we move out of the political realm into everyday life, however, the pretense of neutrality drops away and the gendered subject comes fully into view. This chapter and the next, then, reconstruct penny press efforts to constitute working-class men *as men* in the dialectical interplay between work and leisure and in the fraught nature of their intimate relationships with women.

The Civilizing Process

In his classic analysis of “the civilizing process,” sociologist Norbert Elias argues for a gradual but radical revolution in affect, manners, and bodily comportment that accompanied the rise of early modern and modern nation-states in the western European countries, colonies, and spheres of

influence.² For Elias, this revolution involved “the moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect.”³ Although the civilizing process began in the late medieval period as a marker of aristocratic refinement, it reached its apogee in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the ascendant European bourgeoisie sought to set themselves apart and above the less privileged members of the Third Estate.⁴ The bourgeois phase of this “civilizing process” was very much at work in fin-de-siècle Mexico City, personified by President Porfirio Díaz’s makeover at the capable hands of his second wife, Carmen Romero Rubio.⁵ The well-educated, well-mannered daughter of a prominent Mexico City family, “Doña Carmen” ensured that the president learned some English, dressed in the latest European fashions (whether civilian or military), carried himself like the distinguished leader of a modern nation, and appeared increasingly whiter in official portraits despite his well-known mestizo origins. Mexico City gossips even credited her with teaching the “crude” warrior from provincial Oaxaca not to walk into the full-length mirrors in the presidential palace—an improbable story that reflects in a startlingly literal way the role of the civilizing process in promoting detached self-awareness, a psychic state that European bourgeois culture considered the foundation of proper human social development. But not every disadvantaged mestizo who migrated to Mexico City from the provinces was lucky enough to acquire a Doña Carmen to supervise his education and manage his public image.

This chapter examines the ways in which early twentieth-century Mexico City satiric penny press editors exploited the productive tension between proper and improper behavior for working-class men. Their project confounded the conventional image of the well-behaved male citizen-subject by confronting middle-class notions of civic virtue with popular resistance to bourgeois prescription, which they saw as a form of class privilege rather than a marker of social superiority. In opposition to long-standing negative stereotypes of working-class behavior, penny press editors offered up positive (if sometimes patronizing) images of hardworking proletarians whose genuine patriot expression was all about energetic, exuberant, disruptive, even “scandalous” public behavior—however much that enthusiasm might trouble municipal authorities, for-

eign shopkeepers, or international capital. Bourgeois regulatory norms required that men demonstrate “character”—an ill-defined combination of propriety, probity, and property associated with European culture and racial superiority—in their public lives in order to emerge as legitimate political subjects. Workers could lay claim to none of these traits, and those few with reputations to lose and a bit of property occupied a tenuous position on the shabby fringes of decent society. Taken as discrete individuals, the classic liberal measure of social worth, working-class men had little hope of living up to bourgeois standards. Taken en masse, however, penny press editors could put forth workers as the true embodiment of “el pueblo,” a claim that the ruling class and the dominant bourgeoisie could no longer make in the face of their patent inability or unwillingness to deal with Mexico’s “durable inequalities.”⁶ The result was a “satire of sentiments” that mocked bourgeois masculine sensibility as pretentious and hypocritical, on one hand, and celebrated its working-class counterpart as unaffected and honest, despite (and perhaps because of) its inconsistencies and absurdities, on the other.

Street talk columns, written in the tortured vernacular of the streets, were a regular feature of the early twentieth-century Mexico City penny press. Staged as a conversation between two less-than-respectable workers—almost always men, almost always out of work—these columns allowed penny press editors to comment (through their worker mouth-pieces) on contemporary events and the vicissitudes of everyday life for Mexico City’s working poor. In most instances, this involved one of the two men recounting the previous day’s adventures as he wandered through the city searching for work, entertainment, food, drink, and women—in whatever order these attractions might appear. Embedded in these transgressive journeys through the capital’s well-traveled *rumbos* were subtle and not so subtle critiques of bourgeois notions of proper masculine behavior, which most press editors considered self-serving, moralistic, and unmanly.⁷ In contrast, they constructed loving portraits of Mexico City’s working-class men in all their unapologetic, irreverent, cynical, sentimental, picaresque glory. These men, editors implied, were the true sons of Mexico, ready and willing (given half a chance and a bit of instruction) to tackle the demons of nationhood. The strategy at work was a straightforward symbolic inversion: workers (*nostros los pelados*) emerged as real men, their middle- and upper-class counterparts (*los rotos y los catrines*)

as pretenders to manhood.⁸ More complex is the way this strategic inversion complicates our understanding of working-class Mexican masculinities, especially the persistent caricature of working-class Mexican men as irredeemably macho.

Contemporary social scientists have done quite a bit of work on the “protest masculinities” adopted by marginalized men in response to their subordinate position vis-à-vis what sociologist R. W. Connell and others have called “hegemonic masculinity,” the culturally dominant script for masculine behavior operative at any given historical time and geographical location.⁹ In most of these studies, protest masculinities are characterized by an array of “toxic” behaviors, including substance abuse, violence directed against themselves and others (especially women), and various other antisocial activities. As in Octavio Paz’s rewriting of late nineteenth-century Mexican criminological discourses on *pelado* culture, these marginalized men are often criminalized at the same time.¹⁰ What both Paz’s stereotype and most recent sociological literature ignore or downplay are the complexities of oppositional masculinities. Like their late nineteenth-century criminologist predecessors (and Porfirian elites), these scholars typically represent working-class men as members of an undifferentiated mass of improvident, apathetic, violence-prone nonsubjects, whose cultural unintelligibility (as discreet individuals), at least from the perspective of the *gente decente*, disqualifies them from full citizenship.¹¹

In response to the crude generalizations of bourgeois social critics, penny press editors used street talk columns to develop memorable working-class characters whose irreverent attitudes and questionable behaviors looked more like inspired, *individualized* responses to unfortunate circumstance than self-defeating, *generalized* resentment of their social “superiors.” As a means to this end, the narrative vignette (as a genre) provided context for the alleged antisocial activities of working-class Mexican men. If bourgeois social reformers could sometimes bring themselves to acknowledge that material deprivation and inadequate socialization might encourage or fail to discourage working-class criminality, penny press editors chose instead to focus on its production through discriminatory laws, regulations, and policing—practices that targeted the lower classes, especially men, while ignoring the shady dealings of more

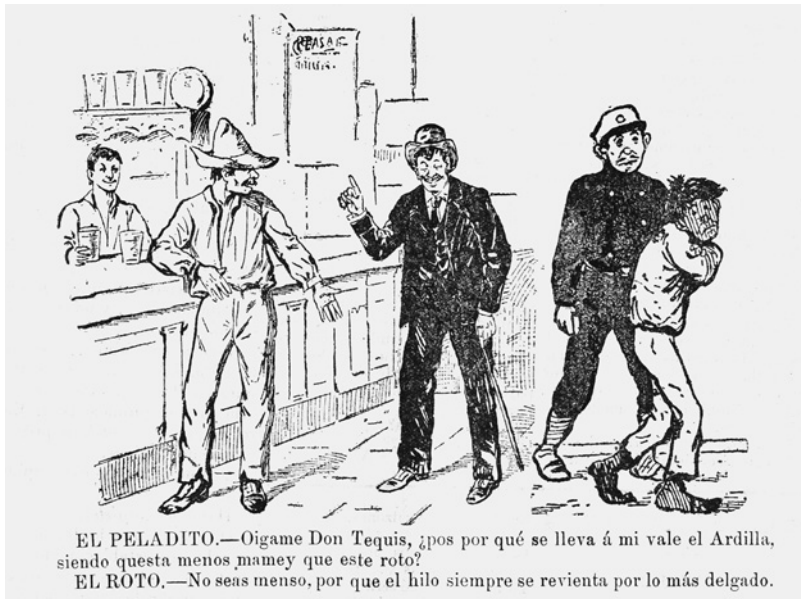


FIG. 4.1 Artist/Author Unknown, “El peladito . . .,” *El Diablito Bromista*, July 14, 1907. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

privileged social sectors (see fig. 4.1).¹² By locating (rather than denying) working-class criminality in the everyday lives of their protagonists, they shifted the blame for crime from the collective failure of workers to live up to their civic responsibilities to the collective hypocrisy of the Porfirian bourgeoisie, which ignored the needs of ordinary Mexicans, preached what it refused to practice, and produced the criminality it pretended to abhor.

This chapter listens in on two street talk protagonists, Pitacio and Chema, from *La Guacamaya*'s long-running column “Desde la estaca” (from the stake), as they tell each other about the trials and tribulations of their everyday lives in Mexico City.¹³ Through a close reading of three exemplary stories, it draws attention to the subtle interplay of linguistic games, narrative strategies, and ideological agendas that made street talk columns so popular with penny press readers—and make them so useful to the historian.

Before the stories themselves, let's quickly review how penny press editors used popular language to establish the social location of their protagonists and foster the class loyalties of their readers. As noted in chapter 3, street talk columns invite the reader to eavesdrop on a personal conversation between two working-class friends, usually but not always men, on a street in downtown Mexico City. Casual intimacy between the two protagonists is marked in several ways: the familiar form of address (*tú*, “you” singular); repeated terms of endearment (*hermano* and its variants: *mano*, *manito*, etc.); passing references to female partners and mutual friends; the sometimes explicit, sometimes covert, sexual banter typical of working-class male friendships in Mexico (and elsewhere); and appropriation of the inflections, rhythms, and vocabulary of popular speech through deliberate misspellings, improper word substitution, unconventional verb forms, fractured syntax, and use of slang and popular idioms, as well as big words that sound more “important” or more colloquial than their standard Spanish equivalents. These different linguistic strategies represent the closeness of the two men for the reader and construct an affective bond between interlocutors and reader that allows for open articulation of an otherwise “hidden transcript” of resistance to the Porfirian regime in particular and Mexican social relations in general.¹⁴ Although the exact makeup of the penny press’s diverse readership is impossible to determine—it was probably something of a mystery even to the editors—the evident popularity of the street talk columns, despite their elaborate linguistic games, suggests the formation of a distinct penny press “counterpublic” of those in on the joke, a counterpublic composed of everyone from well-educated artisans (the most likely audience) to illiterate street corner auditors.

Billiard-Playing Women and Vigilant Policemen

LA GUACAMAYA, “DESDE LA ESTACA,” OCTOBER 13, 1902

Like nearly every other street talk column, the story of the billiard-playing women and the vigilant policeman involves a chance (but not infrequent) encounter between two friends, Pitacio and Chema in this case, somewhere along a shared *rumbo*, probably in central Mexico City (see fig. 4.2).¹⁵ This column starts, as most do, with a salutation and a misunderstanding:



FIG. 4.2 José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, “Desplumaderos Modernos,” *La Guacamaya*, October 13, 1902. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

- ¡Pitacio! ¡Pitacio! Oye manito ¿pos que ya te volvites sordo?
- Asuétlame, asuétlame no me agarres, ¿no miras que se me hace tarde?
- Pos adonde vas, ya pareces eleitrico, ni sueñas la campana.
- Pos voy á la Academia antes que se me haga más tarde.
- Cómo, ¿pos que ya te golvites choco ó estás aprendiendo el inglés?
- No mano, no seas güey, voy á la academia de billar, que me han contado que hay allí unas jañas muy sazonas, que manejan el taco con mucha destreza, y juegan las bolas con mucha agilidad.
- ¡Hay Pitacio! ni se te ocurra semejante cosa, pos allí no es más que un verdadero robadero, pos te voy á contar lo que asuceede en esas casas de juego de nuevo cuño . . .



[—Pitacio! Pitacio! Listen to me my friend, are you going deaf?

—Let go, let go, don't grab me. Can't you see that you're making me late?

—Where are you going? You're acting electric [like an electric trolley car], and you're not even ringing the bell.

—I'm going to the Academy if you don't make me too late.

—What? Are you becoming a cop or learning English?

—No, man, don't be an idiot, I'm going to the Academy of Billiards, because they told me about some hot women there, who handle the cue with great dexterity and play the balls with great agility.

—Hold on, Pitacio! Don't even think about it, because it's truly a rip-off. Let me tell you about what happens in these fancy new gaming houses . . .]

After establishing that Pitacio is in a huge hurry and clearing up the confusion over which kind of academy he's attending, Chema, seemingly oblivious of his friend's desperate condition, begins to explain in some detail what Pitacio can expect at the Academy of Billiards, in addition to the much-anticipated *jaranas muy sazonas* (hot women)¹⁶:

llega uno allí y aluego, un jaño que está allí en la puerta le vitoquea á uno luego luego la fila . . . y si le ven á uno cara de maje hasta lo arrenpujan pa dentro, y luego que entra uno, se va uno incontrando como si estuviera en la prevensión de un cuartel con unas jaranas muy sazonas sentadas con su maüsser en la mano, (lease taco) esperando que les llegue lora pa lanzarse sobre las bolas y la mesa, pa decidir la suerte de cado uno de los jaranos que están haciendo el papel de . . . china, de china mano.



[you arrive there, and then a guy at the door looks you up and down, and then there's the line . . . and if they see you have an Indian-looking face, they push you inside, and then after you enter, you feel like you are in the entryway to a barracks with some hot women seated with Mausers in their hands (read: cues), waiting for the time to come when they launch themselves at the balls and the table, to decide the fate of each one of the guys who are playing the role of . . . suckers, of suckers my friend.]

The most important details of Chema's story, before the appearance of the *jaranas muy sazonas*, involve new modes of surveillance and crowd control—the scrutiny of doormen, standing in lines—and their intersection with old forms of discrimination against anyone with Indian features (*cara de maje*) who gets pushed rudely inside or just as likely escorted out of an upscale establishment like a billiards academy.¹⁷ When the *jaranas* first appear in the story, it's not as sexy young women but as barracks guards with rifles at hand, ready to throw themselves into combat, to “decide the fate of each one of the guys who are playing the role of . . . china, de china mano”—“*china*” being in this instance a euphemism for *chingado*, someone who is about to be fucked over.

At this point, the harried Pitacio is intrigued but wants to know more about the *jañas*; so when Chema continues in a similar vein—“unos ojales mano, que parece un toro á media plaza” (huge eyes, brother, like those of a bull in the middle of the arena)—he interrupts, eager to get to the sexy bits. An attentive storyteller, Chema obliges:

—Güeno, pos nos quedamos en la chaqueta, ques de seda muy fina y está muy desgogotada, pos poco falta pa que enseñen por los que lloran los chamacos, sus naguas también del mismo género, nomás que zanconas, que dejan ver unas piernas ¡ay! Mano . . . y luego que se acuestan sobre la mesa y alzan las patotas se ven unas cosas que ¡qué cosas! ¡huuyy mano!



[—Well, we were talking about the jacket, which is of fine silk and very low cut, so that it barely covers the things that babies cry for, skirts of the same type, no more than slips, that show off their calves, oh brother! . . . and then when they lie across the billiard table and raise their big legs, you can see some things . . . what things! whew brother!]

In this climax to the story's central vignette, Chema finally delivers the goods with a low-cut jacket that “barely covers the things that babies cry for,” short skirts by Porfirian standards “that show off their legs, oh brother!” and the thrilling moments when the young women lie across the billiard table, raise their big legs, and “you can see some things that . . . what things! whew brother!” But he quickly follows this invocation of desire—a decidedly “modern” desire linked to consumption and public

spectacle—with the cautionary tale of *un jincho* (rube) from around Tajimaroa who got so caught up in the “eicibición de piernas y bolasos, que le dejan las bolsas vacías, mano, y que eran de cuero” (exhibition of legs and ball shots he was left with his purses empty, brother, and they were made of leather).¹⁸ Even the “probes tortilleras” (poor tortilla sellers), Chema goes on, lost their *fierrada* (cash) betting on the game.

The sense of climax and release in this episode is heightened and satirized by Chema’s *albur* (wordplay) on the Spanish word *chaqueta*, “jacket,” a common euphemism for masturbation.¹⁹ The *albur* acknowledges that Chema is “jerking” Pitacio around: prolonging his departure, while at the same time inflaming his desire to get to the academy and see the *jaranas muy sazononas* for himself. Pitacio’s response—“prosigue pero no me hagas tan larga contesta” (keep it up but don’t give me such a long answer)—suggests he knows exactly what Chema is doing but is too caught up in the story to leave. After Chema satisfies Pitacio’s curiosity/desire, the anecdote about the *jincho* from Tajimaroa who gets his leather purses (a.k.a. scrotum) drained of money by the exhibition of legs and ball shots (*bolazos*) leaves little doubt as to the unproductive and fleeting pleasures to be had at the Academy. Having heard enough, a chastened, wiser (and vicariously satisfied) Pitacio supplies the story’s moral:

Peroye, yo no sé como se puede tolerar aquí en la Capital donde reina la moralidá y las güenas costumbres, se permita que[a?][c?]iencia y paciencia, lo asalten en las calles prencipales, tres ó cuatro jaranas de cu . . . tis sonrosado adicen los poétas y les dejen á uno las bolsas vacías.



[Well listen, I don’t know why such things are tolerated here in the Capital where morality and good customs reign, why it is permitted that one can be assaulted in the principal streets by three or four women with rosy cheeks (as the poets say), who leave one with empty pockets.]

Pitacio’s disheartened response exposes the hypocrisy of Porfirian efforts to create a Mexico City, “where morality and good customs reign,” presumably at the expense of working-class men like him and Chema, while permitting immoral “jaranas de cu . . . tis sonrosado” (with “cu . . . tis

sonrosado” probably substituting for “cu . . . los sonrosados” or “rosy butts”) to hustle gullible workers out of their hard-earned pay. Here the author adds a gendered dimension to his inversion of the conventional binary, lower-class criminal/upper-class citizen, in which sexy, unprincipled female billiard players stand in for Porfirian modernity’s allurements and false promises, which fan the flames of working-class desire only to drain workers of their money and manhood. In the official imagination and bourgeois prescriptive literature, working-class men were potential criminals and working-class women potential prostitutes; in this vignette the class location of criminality and sexual transgression has been cleverly inverted to reflect the indisputable truth that existing social relations for workingmen “leave them with empty pockets” or, as the *albur* implies, “with their balls drained.” The author, speaking through Chema, makes no attempt to deny the thrills to be had at the Academy of Billiards but clarifies the consequences for those in no position to profit from the game, except perhaps for a fleeting glimpse of “unas cosas ¡que cosas! ¡huuyy mano!” Once Chema explains the game, Pitacio loses interest, adding that “no quero que mientras son tunas ó no son tunas me vayan á dejar sin mi fierrada esos plagiarios del siglo xx” (scoundrels or not, I don’t want those twentieth-century frauds to leave me penniless).²⁰

Pitacio’s decision to cast off the chains of false consciousness provides a denouement of sorts, but the story doesn’t end there. As the two men finish their chat and Chema contemplates going to see his *jaña* when she gets off work so he can get some money, they notice an approaching policeman, “el choco ese que era matarista y nos vaya á machucar ó que diga, nos vaya á llevar a la sucursal del tabique” (the cop who was a murderous trolley car driver and who’s going to beat us or something like that, who’s going to take us off to the precinct house). Afraid of being harassed, beaten, or arrested for loitering, they head for a local shop “á hechar una copa de pugidos de machucado con lágrimas de matarista y gotas de eleitricidá” (to toss down a cup of moans from a beating with tears of a murderous trolley driver and drops of electricity). Building on the longer story that preceded it, this final vignette reminds the reader of the true nature of Porfirian efforts to make the capital a place “donde reina la moralidá y las güenas costumbres”: an ongoing assault on the everyday practices of lower-class men whose habit of hanging around on street corners ran counter to official initiatives to clean up the central city by

removing its unappealing (to elites and foreigners) and potentially dangerous *pelado* population. The offhand comment that the policeman was a former *matarista* (killer)—the popular term for trolley car drivers (*motoristas*) whose callous disregard for pedestrian safety was a recurring theme in the penny press—emphasizes the connection between these two seemingly distinct modernization initiatives (trained gendarmes and streetcars) and their negative impact on the everyday lives of the working classes.

An Obligatory Bath and the Death of Maximilian

LA GUACAMAYA, “DESDE LA ESTACA,” JULY 2, 1903

The previous “Desde la estaca” story juxtaposed the “tolerated illegalities” of privileged Porfirians and discriminatory policing directed at the everyday practices of the working classes.²¹ The following story of obligatory baths and patriotic exuberance provides a humorous context for working-class criminal behavior that exposes official concerns as overwrought moral panics through which authorities produce criminality out of simple, often deliberate misunderstandings.²² In official Porfirian reports (typically accompanied by statistics), trial transcripts, and mass media accounts, a range of bureaucratic, legal, and journalistic “experts” identified, categorized, and dissected the criminal acts committed by Mexico City residents. The context in which a given crime took place mattered to the extent that it supplied motive as well as mitigating and aggravating circumstances, the kinds of things authorities or the tabloid public might weigh as they passed judgment on alleged criminals. But these well-publicized cases garnered this attention to context precisely because of the notoriety of the crime or the criminal—in other words because the cases were *extraordinary*. In contrast, the everyday crimes of the working poor, although overrepresented by volume in official crime statistics, were of little interest to anyone but the criminals involved and the poorly trained gendarmes who struggled to keep things together in a rapidly expanding metropolis. Interesting or not, working-class crimes, compiled as statistics, “proved” the fundamental criminality of the capital’s lower classes. For these cases, despite their statistical importance, official and mass media sources provided no context at all. This situation the “Desde la estaca” author sets out to rectify.



FIG. 4.3 Artist/Author Unknown, “El baño obligatorio,” *La Guacamaya*, April 26, 1906. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

In this vignette, the salutary confusion that initiates the chance meeting between Pitacio and Chema raises the issue of obligatory baths, a misguided attempt on the part of municipal authorities to clean up the city’s lower classes by forcing them to bathe despite the difficulty and expense this usually entailed in a city with a paucity of clean water and grossly unequal distribution of resources (see fig. 4.3).²³ Pitacio initiates the encounter with a mangled popular idiom—“¡Agua le á mi Dios!” (Water him for me, God!) instead of the ubiquitous “¡Ayúdame Dios mio!” (Help me, my God!)—and a sacrilegious invocation of the feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24), a traditional day for ritual bathing that also marks the coming of the rainy season in central Mexico.²⁴ A few exchanges into the dialogue, an irritated Chema interrupts Pitacio’s convoluted joking about St. John, sheep, and sheepskin coats to remind him that “al que no se baña ese día lo bañan . . . pos oye manito, tú no te has bañado y ora te voy a bañar” (he who doesn’t bathe himself today gets bathed . . . so

listen, brother, you haven't bathed and now I'm going to bathe you). At this point Pitacio explains why he hasn't bathed and doesn't intend to: "Gueno, me pones algo en las de burro pa que no me mojes las orejas, porque como lotro día mi vieja tiró un juerte cañonazo, me reventó un güido y el doitor mia proibido que me moje las orejuelas" (Well, you'll have to put something in my ears so you don't get them wet, because the other day my old lady set off a strong cannon blast, broke my ear drum and the doctor forbade me to get my ears wet).²⁵

As it turns out, a couple of days earlier Pitacio's "vieja [como es] muy patriota, siacordó que era el aniversario de cuando restiraron á don Mar-similiano y á los traidores don Miramón y Mejía en el 'Cerro de las Es-quilas'" (Pitacio's old lady, being very patriotic, remembered that it was the anniversary of when they shot Don Maximilian and the traitors Don Miramón and Don Mejía on the "Hill of the Sheepshearers").²⁶ After tempting Pitacio with a plate of beans (*alverjones*), she convinces him to get out the old shotguns (*trabucos*) so they can celebrate the event: "y que aluego nos rolamos, pero á la medio hora empieza mi vieja á disparar y al rato hay viene la casera, los chocos, el Inspeitor y toda la guarnación" (and then off we go, but at the half hour my old lady begins to shoot and after a while here come the landlord, the cops, the Inspector, and the whole garrison). When Chema asks him why, Pitacio explains:

Pos nada, manario, estaban tan juertes los cañonazos, que todos creiban que era pronunciamiento; y cuando estaba más juerte la refriega [*sic*], que me atina uno de los ojales, que me adeja ciego, y que me revienta el güido, y en estado lamentable me llevaron á la Inspeición; allí me curó el doitor y me proibió que me mojara las orejas.²⁷



[That's obvious, my friend, the cannon blasts were so strong that everyone believed that it was an uprising, and when the recoil was strongest, it hit one of my eyes, which left me blind, and burst my ear-drum, and in that sorry state they took me to the Station House. There a doctor cured me and forbade me to get my ears wet].

On the surface, the vignette details a simple misunderstanding between Pitacio and his *vieja*, on one hand, and the authorities, on the other. But

the misunderstanding nevertheless generates two ostensibly criminal acts: refusing to bathe on obligatory bath day and shooting off guns in the city. In this instance and presumably many others, the context for the two crimes makes all the difference, since Pitacio and his *vieja* were in fact celebrating a patriotic holiday rather than thieving or fighting—the two public disorder crimes most often associated with the urban poor. There’s no doubt that their ill-considered reenactment of Maximilian’s execution was a serious public disturbance and that authorities might be a bit upset to discover that Pitacio kept guns at home (leftover perhaps from earlier mobilizations on behalf of the liberal cause and the great Benito Juárez), but patriotic excess could hardly be considered a moral failing even by conventional bourgeois standards. And Pitacio’s refusal to comply with obligatory bathing looks more like a personal sacrifice on behalf of *la patria* than a congenital lack of hygiene. Here, as in the previous story, the author’s point is not to deny that working-class men (sometimes women) committed criminal acts but to demonstrate the sometimes laudatory, almost always trivial, nature of their crimes, which were in any case more a product of simple misunderstandings or aggressive policing than the mutinous rumblings of the “dangerous classes.” The explanation satisfies Chema at least, and he offers to buy Pitacio a drink—“yo con mojar te el hocico estoy contento” (me, I’m content to wet your snout)—instead of forcing him to bathe.

The principal message about the authorities’ misrepresentation of working-class criminal acts is obvious enough—and not particularly threatening to the status quo either. Less obvious is the “hidden transcript” embedded in the initial exchange between Pitacio and Chema over obligatory baths, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, the lamb (*borrego*), and the sheepskin coat (*zalea*):

—¡Agua le á mi Dios! Y á San Juan que baje el dedo.

—Oye mano ¿qué te asucede que vienes dando esos gritotes tan desaforados?

—Pos qué mia de asuceder, oy es el día de San Juan y quero que baje el dedo.

—Pos pa mí que baje toda la mano, miace el mismo efeito que la baje ó que la suba; si me adijeras que lo iban á trasquilar, sería otra cosa.

—Oye manicio, díalo lo tanteas borrego.

—Pos te adigo eso, porque si no lo has vitoquiado bien, yo sí; ¿no miras que San Juan no será borrego, pero tiene su zalea?

—Hay nomás, valedor, sin meterse con la corte celestial.

—Oye Pitacio, no seas tan res . . . si te adigo de la zalea; yo no me meto con la santidad de San Juan, nomás con su zalea; sino ques un santo que me da alazo porque no consiente porquerías pos al que no se baña ese día lo bañan.



[—Water him for me, my God! And by St. John lower your finger.

—Listen brother, what's up with you that you're going around shouting like a madman?

—Well, what should be up with me, today is the feast day of St. John and I want you to lower your finger.

—Well then, I'll lower my whole hand, it's all the same to me if I raise it or lower it; if you told me you were going to shear it off, that would be another thing.

—Listen brother, now you're really squeezing the lamb.

—Well, I'm telling you this because in case you haven't been paying attention, I have. Don't you see that even if St. John isn't a lamb, he does wear a sheepskin.

—That's enough, my friend, no more mixing it up with the celestial court.

—Listen Pitacio, don't be such a sheep . . . if I tell you about the sheepskin; I'm not getting mixed up in the holiness of St. John, just with his sheepskin; besides, he's a saint that I venerate because he doesn't tolerate swinish behavior, and he who doesn't bathe himself today, gets bathed.]

The hardly coincidental connection between the feast day of St. John the Baptist, who preached spiritual purification through baptism, and obligatory baths to wash away the unhygienic sins of Mexico City's poor suggests a certain sense of humor or condescension (probably both) on the part of municipal authorities. Chema appears to have bought into the idea of forcing the unwashed masses to bathe, at least enough to threaten Pitacio with an unwanted bath.²⁸

For Pitacio, however, the problem has little to do with bathing per se and everything to do with authoritarian public health campaigns. This attitude explains his apparently hysterical insistence that Chema lower the finger, which is most likely pointed in his direction. In traditional Catholic iconography, St. John points at Jesus after his baptism and announces “behold the lamb of God,” thus revealing to the multitude the purified Christ, cleansed of sin in preparation for his public ministry. As the scene opens, Chema points at Pitacio, not as someone who has been cleansed but as someone in need of a bath. Pitacio understandably resents (perhaps fears) the public attention and reacts with righteous indignation fueled by a strong sense of betrayal.²⁹

Traditional iconography also depicts St. John holding a lamb and wearing an animal skin. Both images appear in the dialogue, with Pitacio introducing the image of the lamb (*borrego*) and Chema, the sheepskin (*zalea*). On the surface, the exchange seems little more than an excuse to play word games at the saint’s expense, but Pitacio’s evident seriousness hints at something more. In addition to its basic meaning, *borrego* is often used in Mexico to describe both an ignorant man who submits without protest to the will of others and a false rumor with a hidden purpose.³⁰ Thus Pitacio is not just playing with words; he’s also accusing Chema of being a “lamb,” of being perversely complicit in authoritarian decrees whose real purpose is to oppress the working classes in the name of hygiene—a classic case of “false consciousness,” in which an oppressed person takes on the attitude of the oppressor. Chema responds to the accusation by changing the subject from complicit lambs, which suggest a permanent character flaw, to removable sheepskins, a temporary condition that can be put on or taken off as the wearer sees fit. This indicates to his friend that he has chosen to support this particular decree of his own free will, presumably because he sees its purpose as beneficial or inconsequential, despite the dubious source, rather than because he’s deluded by official propaganda.

At the risk of finding sexual innuendo where none is intended (which would be rare in the street talk columns), it’s hard to imagine that the author and his readers would fail to notice the connection between Chema’s removable sheepskin and the traditional lambskin condom (*piel de borrego*), which is supposed to protect its wearer and his sexual partner from the unwanted complications of intercourse, whether reproductive

or pathogenic.³¹ In a metaphorical sense, then, Chema conjures up a prophylactic sheepskin to protect himself from Pitacio's accusation that his cooperation with the obligatory bath decree necessarily entails an embrace of corrupt bourgeois values and the rejection of his working-class loyalties. "Don't you see," he tells his friend, "that even if St. John isn't a lamb, he does wear a sheepskin."

To extend the sexual innuendo still further, the two textual references to shears, with regard to the possible severing of Chema's hand and Maximilian's execution site, taken in conjunction with a bible story that results in St. John's beheading at the behest of Salome, hint at the unsettling subject of castration—a worker losing his hand, a saint his head, a nation its ruler—a possibility that reinforces Pitacio's concern that Chema's cooperation with the authorities has somehow unmanned him. Prodded by symbolic castration fears or not, Chema's defensive tone is unmistakable, and the implication that working-class men were compelled to justify even relatively innocuous compliance with official demands reveals a much more serious problem for authorities than Pitacio's overzealous patriotism. This is hardly the precipice of insurrection, but it does suggest that many Mexico City workers actively resented and resisted Porfirian modernization in all its guises—and encouraged their fellows to do the same.

The story's curious final twist helps explain Pitacio's suspicions and Chema's defensiveness. As the two men finish up their conversation, Pitacio questions Chema about his suddenly prosperous appearance: "Pero oye, Chema, antes de todo, no me ha dicho con que número te sacates la lotería, pos que te veo hecho todo un roto ¿ya te nombraron ministro?" (Hey listen, Chema, you still haven't told me which lottery number you picked, since I can see that you've become a real *roto*. Have they appointed you a minister or what?) In response, Chema explains that his *jaña* had "pinched a briefcase" (*se trincó una papelera*) from the house of a *roto* where she worked and passed it to him along with some money (*jando*). Although it's not clear from Chema's account that the money was stolen—petty theft is a bit out of character—the use of *jando*, jailhouse slang for "money" or "loot," and his admission that he "took off, brother" (*me peló mano*) suggests a criminal act. Regardless, as he's rushing to the bank to stash the money, Chema runs into a buddy, Antonio García, who con-

vinces him that the money would be safer if he spent it on clothes, adding that “por tres locos, te pongo hecho todo un catrín” (for three bucks, I can turn you into a total dandy). Although hardly the most responsible choice, this isn’t quite as crazy as it sounds, since Mexico City workers routinely pawned clothes and jewelry to even out their erratic incomes. Thus Chema’s decision to spend the money on clothes and accessories, rather than demonstrate a lack of foresight and self-control, might well have provided a financial resource more dependable and flexible than money in the bank.³² The decision makes sense in other ways as well—especially in light of the city’s unwritten but regularly enforced sumptuary “laws.” As Chema explains:

yo pensé, si me canteo y me llevan al chero siquiera iré como gente decente . . . cuando miren que va llegando mi real y distinguida personalida, la guarida batirá marcha, mandarán hechar cuetes y ellos me recibirán con los brazos abiertos, creyéndome un alto personaje, como adicen los rotos, por eso ves que me merqué todo el aparejo que llevo encima.



[I figured, if I give myself away and get taken to jail at least I’ll go as a respectable person . . . when they see the arrival of my royal and distinguished personality, the guards will start playing a march, set off fireworks, and receive me with open arms, believing that I am a person of rank, as the *rotos* say, that’s why you see me wearing all this stuff.]

Although Chema and his *jaña* have probably broken the law by stealing from her *roto* employer—a fortune to them but likely of little consequence to her boss—the point of this final anecdote is to expose another of the pernicious inequities of the Mexican criminal justice system: its differential treatment of prisoners. In other words, Chema’s crime, if indeed he committed one, is an individual failing stemming from a lack of education and opportunity that pales in comparison to the systemic abuses suffered by members of the urban underclass once they come to the attention of municipal authorities.

Don Juan and the Ghost

LA GUACAMAYA, “DESDE LA ESTACA,” MARCH 19, 1903

With the exception of Pitacio's quick dinner with his *vieja* in the preceding tale, the first two “Desde la estaca” stories dealt with everyday life in Mexico City's public spaces. In those stories, social exchanges in public spaces presented challenges and opportunities for working-class men—challenges and opportunities they understood and responded to in explicitly gendered ways. Most involved class-related affronts to their masculine dignity, which they met with a provocative mix of symbolic inversion, self-deprecating humor, subtle satire, and outright mockery. In contrast, the following story of a ghostly visitation centers on the inner sanctum of the nuclear family: the home. This time the author directs his inversion, humor, satire, and mockery at the masculine pretensions of his protagonist rather than at the classic villains of Porfirian society—corrupt politicians, the decadent bourgeoisie, coercive urban administrators, hypocritical clergy, pushy policeman. By the story's end, however, the critical lens has shifted predictably back to discriminatory policing, persistent social inequalities, and the unmet promises of Porfirian modernization.

This encounter begins with Pitacio singing the enigmatic refrain of a popular song: “¡Upa! y ¡apa! / dicen los de Cuernavaca, / que el animal que del agua / nomas la pechuga saca.” (¡Upa and apa! / say folks from Cuernavaca / the animal that comes from water / shows no more than its breast.)³³ When Pitacio explains to a curious Chema that his stomach is “making like a trampoline,” his friend asks “pos que te sacates la lotería ó ha dado á luz, como adicen los rotos, tu jaña algún chamaco con cuatro cabezas?” (well, have you won the lottery or has your *jaña* given light, as the *rotos* say, to a baby with four heads?).³⁴ “Ni soca manario” (Don't worry about it, brother), Pitacio replies, “sino que Peláez el gordo, mia felecitado por la reaparición de ‘La Guacamaya,’ pos ya sabes manito, que diay saco los parraleños” (it's just that Peláez the Fatty has congratulated me on the reappearance of *La Guacamaya*, which as you know is how I make my living).³⁵

Although no surprise to a regular reader, the occasional reminder that Pitacio happens to be the *La Guacamaya* editor's *pelado* alter ego works to reinforce the paper's ties to a presumably working-class audience, many of whose members had inner *pelados* of their own. In this instance, it

also makes the revelations to follow, which focus on personal rather than societal inadequacies, all the more poignant, coming as they do from the generally self-assured and frequently self-righteous Pitacio. These revelations begin with his admission that

quiora que estaba sin chamba, los chilpayates, lloraban de jaspia y mi jaña me quería coronar, como si fuera rey de bastos, pus no sabes que lo pior es estar sin fierrada, pos hasta mis amigos me deconocían y tan luego como me visentiaban se pelaban, como si miubiera dado la peste bubónica.



[when I was out of work, my little kids cried from hunger and my woman wanted to crown me, as if I were the King of Wands, but you don't know the worst part of being without cash; it's that even my friends disowned me, and as soon as they saw me coming, they took off, as if I had bubonic plague.]

Pitacio's pitiful lament exposes his guilt and shame over his failure as the family breadwinner and his subsequent loss of prestige in the eyes of his *jaña*—hence the ironic reference to the King of Wands from the tarot deck, a potent symbol of romance, resolve, entrepreneurship, and masculine responsibility. Worst of all, he tells Chema, is the social shunning he suffers at the hands of friends and neighbors. On a practical level, social ostracism represents the loss of a crucial safety net for a sporadically employed worker like Pitacio or Chema. On a symbolic level, it deprives Pitacio of the public validation he needs to maintain his sense of masculine self-worth. In other words, while his *jaña's* opinion matters a great deal, his greatest concern is his public reputation as a dependable and honorable *man*. Despite Chema's reassurances—“siempre he sido tu cuate” (I've always been your buddy)—he is clearly devastated.

In an effort to distract his distraught friend, Chema tries a touch of sacrilegious teasing—“No me acuentas los de los espantos de la Amargura, como quedamos hoy hace ocho y ques lo que mas minporta” (Don't tell me about the horrors of Our Lady of Sorrows, since today we're at eight, and that's the most important thing)—in order to reawaken Pitacio's wounded masculine pride by reminding him of the seven sorrows stoically endured by the Holy Mother with the death of Jesus. The play

apparently works, and Pitacio begins what seems to be an unrelated story about a recent ghostly visitation:

pos has de tener que, muy reciente la chumbanba esa de los espíritus, y con todo lo que adijeron los periódicos esos grandotes, que me pongo muy retiasustado, y que en la noche, como lo liavía metido al bofeteo, que me pongo á calibar sobre los espeitros y que de repente, ¡¡¡uuuy!!! Mano que se me va parando el bulto de mi mujer por delante.³⁶



[well let me tell you, what with the recent gathering of spirits and all that's been said about it in the big newspapers, I'm really frightened, and at night, as I was pretty beaten down, I started thinking about ghosts, and suddenly, whew! Brother, standing there right in front of me is the figure of my woman.]

Aroused, Chema asks “haber, haber, como estuvo eso” (tell me, tell me, what was that like). Never one to resist a sexual innuendo, Pitacio responds by warning Chema not to interrupt “porque si no miaces mas larga la con-testa” (or you'll make my answer even longer).³⁷ Stage set, Pitacio continues his story:

—Pos como tiba diciendo, se me para el bulto de mi mujer por delante, me toca un pié, es decir, el único que me quedaba, y que voy alzando la fila y que voy mirando el espeitro flaco y escuálido de mi jaña en traje de Eva, antes que se mocara la manzana, y que le adigo: aparta piedra fingida, suelta suéltame la pata, ó te levanto una acta de comisaría, y luego se pone aserme jestos y le adigo: no creas que me causan terror vuestros semblantes esquivos, vuesta cara compungida, jamás ni muerta ni viva, humilarás mi valor. Tenías que aberme visto parodiando á ese señor que se arapaba muy revalentón y que se llamó D. Juan Tiñoso, pero yo con la cabeza metida debajo de la mula ques la que me sirve cialmuada, y aluego me adice mi jarana, no Pitacio, no tiasustes, que no soy de lotro mundo, pos soy su querida badana, que le vengo á decir, que no se quen; pero mian jalado los pelos . . . de la cabeza, y como me puesto tan erritada, vengo á que me arapes mi ración de armada pa ver si me pongo trobita y miagüito, por que no puedo dormir,

saco entonces la cabeza, me quedo vitoquiándola y le adigo, alma mía de tí quieres tan güena, y yo que tiavía confundido con ese fraile fantasmón que tray á todos mis parcias vueltos locos, ¿quieres tu ración de armada? pus toma, y que le voy arapando la botella que tenía junto á mi cantoncito, y que le mete muy recantiado, y quial ratón ya estaba tirada en medio de la pieza con patas en forma de aguja de grújula güeno, y que al día siguiente, voy despertando con unas ojerotas como las que se pintan las hermosas tiples de jacalón, pos toda la noche estube vitoquiando, espeitros y mas espeitros.



[—well as I was telling you, standing there in front of me is my woman, she touches my foot, the only one I had left [outside the covers], and I’m peeking out and I’m seeing the skinny, squalid ghost of my *jaña*, naked as Eve, the way she looks before she clears her throat, and I say to it: “depart false stone, let go, let go of my paw, or I’ll get a court order,” and then it begins to mock me and I tell it: “Don’t think that you can scare me with your fearsome looks, with your remorseless face, never in death or in life will you humiliate my valor.” You should have seen me imitating that gentleman with the swagger, the one called Don Juan Tiñoso, even though my head was stuck under the pad that I was using for a pillow. Then my *jarana* says to me: “No Pitacio, don’t be afraid, I’m not from the other world, I’m your beloved lambkins [literally, sheepskin], and I’ve come to say that I don’t know who, but someone has pulled the hair . . . on my head, and since they got me so upset, I’ve come for my ship’s ration, to see if you’ll give me a small slice [of food] and a tiny sip of water, because I can’t sleep.” Then I take out my head [from under the pad], and I’m there looking at her, and I tell her: “my soul of you who are so good, I had you confused with that ghostly monk who’s driving all my buddies crazy. Do you want your ration? Go ahead and take it, and I’m passing over the bottle that I had right next to me, which you’ll find pretty worked over, and that rat over there that’s thrown in the middle of the room with its paws splayed like the needles of a compass.” So the next day, I’m waking up with huge eyes like the ones the pretty music hall sopranos paint on themselves, since all night long I was seeing ghosts and more ghosts.]

Some elements of this tragicomedy of imagined haunting and mistaken identity are fairly straightforward, especially the fact that Pitacio and his *jaña* are desperately, if temporarily, poor. Details like the worked-over water bottle and the rictus-stricken rat are evidence enough. But Pitacio also confesses that he's using a "mula," the pad used by cargo carriers to cushion heavy loads, instead of a pillow, a detail that connects him to one of the most grueling and least appreciated occupations of the urban working class. Likewise, his "skinny, squalid" *jaña's* pitiful request for her "ración de armada," a notoriously skimpy ship's ration, provides a further clue to their impoverished circumstances. To add insult to injury, Pitacio's descent into poverty has both immiserated *and* unmanned him. The punch line about waking up with "huge eyes like the ones the pretty music hall sopranos paint on themselves" is one telltale sign of emasculation. But the contrast between the male ghosts that Pitacio fears and the female ghost he actually confronts is even more revealing.

Like most off-the-cuff references in "Desde la estaca," this one has a backstory. Don Juan Tiñoso [literally, Don Juan the Mangy] refers, in Pitacio's malapropic way, to Don Juan Tenorio, the infamous seducer of women and defier of social convention, well known in Mexico through the perennially popular stage play of the same name by Spanish playwright José Zorrilla.³⁸ In the opening scenes of Zorrilla's play, Don Juan is caught up in a competition with a fellow nobleman, Don Luis, over who can seduce the most women and kill the most men (in duels to restore their lost honor). Having come out on top, he ups the ante, betting that he can seduce two "unattainable" women—a novice about to take her vows to become a nun and a betrothed woman—over the course of the twenty-four hours. At the time of their latest bet, both men are engaged to different women, but when Don Juan's future father-in-law, Don Gonzalo, overhears the conversation, he breaks off the marriage and sequesters his daughter in a convent. Never one to back down from a challenge, the supremely arrogant Don Juan quickly seduces his rival's fiancée (through trickery) and kidnaps his former bride-to-be from her convent (which in the legal codes of the time would have been considered *rapto*, rape). Outraged by these affronts to their masculine honor, Don Luis and Don Gonzalo confront Don Juan, who has meanwhile fallen in love with his former betrothed, Doña Inés, and made a vow to reform. When the re-

pentant seducer begs the forgiveness of the aggrieved men, they accuse him of cowardice. Unable to withstand the insult to his manhood, Don Juan kills them both, resumes his rakish ways, and goes into exile to avoid punishment, thereby causing the death of his heartbroken beloved. On his return five years later, a disinherited Don Juan encounters the stone statues of his victims in a cemetery built on the ruins of his former house by his angry father. When they appear to move in response to his disruptive presence he defiantly announces: “No, no me causan pavor / vuestros semblantes esquivos; / jamás, ni muertos ni vivos, / humillaréis mi valor.” (No, you don’t scare me / with your fearsome visages; / never, dead or alive, / will you humiliate my valor.) These are the lines that Pitacio repeats nearly word for word at the spectral appearance of his naked *jaña*, along with a version of Don Juan’s terrified response—“¡Aparta, piedra fingida! / Suelta, suéltame esa mano” (Depart, false stone! / Let go, let go of this hand)—after the ghostly statute of his former father-in-law tries to drag him off to hell in a later scene.³⁹

According to his reconstruction of the previous night’s events, a malnourished, agitated Pitacio, attempting in vain to get some much-needed sleep, conjures up three traditional male archetypes—the family patriarch (Don Gonzalo), the monk (*fraile fantasmón*), and the rake (Don Juan). The first two figures reflect the principal “hegemonic masculinities” of the Mexican colonial era, which revolved around two distinct, sometimes oppositional axes: aristocratic notions of masculine honor and spiritual ideals of masculine renunciation.⁴⁰ In this context, Don Juan’s devil-may-care approach to life represents a privileged form of “protest masculinity,” which shares with stereotypical twentieth-century working-class machismo a predilection for instant gratification, misogyny, violence, and a deliberate rejection of social and moral convention. Troubled by the ghosts of respectable men, an honorable patriarch and a reproachful monk, Pitacio attempts to channel the cavalier bravado of the resistant Don Juan—although he’s forced to acknowledge to Chema that his efforts were only a “parody” and his head was tucked under his pillow the whole time.

Despite the masculine focus of Pitacio’s night fears, the specter that actually appears at the foot of his bed is not a traditional patriarch come to admonish his manly failings but the “skinny, squalid specter of [his]

jaña, naked as Eve.” This unexpected feminine apparition exposes the inadequacy of colonial-era masculine scripts for an ordinary working-class man who has neither the resources nor the inclination to sequester his *mujer* to prevent her seduction, especially when he can’t even feed and clothe her or the *chilpayates* (children). The haunting of Pitacio points to much more than outmoded masculine scripts. As sociologist Avery Gordon explains:

haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life. . . . Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves those experiences or is produced by them. What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely . . . haunting [is] precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any signs of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.⁴¹

Although it has little to say about the satirical aspects of Pitacio’s story (which we’ll get to in a moment), Gordon’s explanation of haunting captures its representational logic as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known . . . when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any signs of leaving.” In this case, contrary to Pitacio’s fears and expectations, his ghostly visitor turns out to be his own flesh-and-blood *jaña*, reduced to begging for a “ship’s ration” of food and water from her self-absorbed, self-pitying husband. Previously invisible but jolted awake by someone tugging at her hair, she intrudes on Pitacio’s anxious musings about his inability to “man up” to his responsibilities to make very real, if modest, demands on his resources and his conscience. And her suggestive phrasing—“*le vengo á decir, que no se quen; pero mian jalado los pelos . . . de la cabeza*” (I’ve come to tell you, that someone, I don’t know who, but they pulled the hair . . . on my head)—implies that the unnamed perpetrator might well be Pitacio, whose inability to provide for his family has figuratively

“yanked her chain,” or perhaps the fundamental unfairness of a social system that routinely fails its most vulnerable members.⁴²

Along with noting the connection between haunting and social violence, Gordon takes care to distinguish it from exploitation, trauma, and repression by insisting that haunting represents an instance “when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.” This sense of something-to-be-done (to end the haunting) certainly fits the authorial agenda in this particular column as well as the editorial spirit of the satirical penny press, with its relentless insistence on a fair shake for the laboring classes. Just what that something-to-be-done might actually be, especially about systemic social violence, is hard to tell. Pitacio’s pathetic offer of a nearly empty water bottle and a dead rat might temporarily placate his thirsty, hungry *jaña* but does nothing to address the larger social problems generated by endemic political corruption, economic instability, and social inequality—the true sources of their plight.

Short of social revolution—a “something-to-be-done” penny press editors never openly endorsed—the best response was laughter, a classic “weapon of the weak” that works to expose and mock the very things the social order prefers to keep out of sight and out of mind. Those things included the hidden-in-plain-sight structural causes for the masculine insecurities of out-of-work men and the social violence visited on poor women, the main subjects of this particular essay.⁴³ As Pitacio sings at the beginning of the vignette, “el animal ques del agua / nomas la pechuga saca” (the animal that comes from water / shows no more than its breast), a refrain which anticipates with metaphorical grace the “natural” limitations on social mobility for Mexico City workers, who could never seem to raise themselves out of the sea of poverty for more than a moment or two. In this context, it should come as no surprise that the vignette ends when Pitacio and Chema spot an approaching policeman and head off to a nearby bar to “hecharnos la salud de los espeitros” (toast the health of the specters). In Jacques Derrida’s commentary on the specters that haunt the work of Karl Marx, he argues that: “the conjuration [of the ghost] is anxiety from the moment it calls upon death to invent the quick and to enliven the new, to summon the presence of what is not yet there. This anxiety in the face of the ghost is properly revolutionary.” If this is so, perhaps Pitacio’s conjuration signifies a truly revolutionary spirit.⁴⁴

Some Final Thoughts on Protest Masculinities and the Civilizing Process

A close reading of the preceding “Desde la estaca” vignettes demonstrates the inextricable links between social critique and masculine subjectivity (the ways men see themselves and are seen by others as *men*) in the satirical penny press. Contrary to much of the literature on “protest masculinities,” which focuses on its misogynistic, dysfunctional, and antisocial aspects, the gendered response to social critique that emerges in these stories is sympathetic, reflexive, and nuanced. In the final vignette, for example, Pitacio’s *jaña* responds to his fatuous bluster à la Don Juan with a gentle “no tiasustes, que no soy de lotro mundo, pos soy su querida badana” (don’t be frightened, I’m not from the other world, I’m just your beloved lambkins). To which he responds not with violence or insults but a well-intentioned, if grammatically awkward, “alma mía de tí quieres tan güena” (my soul of you who are so good). In the second vignette, it is Pitacio’s patriotic *vieja* who initiates the patriotic salvo that earns them both a trip to the police station and Chema’s *jaña* who passes over the (probably) stolen money—acts of female agency that suggest egalitarian complicity rather than male domination. As a matter of fact, the only women who come under criticism in these three columns are the first vignette’s billiard-playing women, who use feminine wiles to cheat working-class men out of their hard-earned *fierrada*, and these women are either *rotas* or middle-class *chicas modernas* (modern girls) rather than the female companions of working-class men. So although the antics of Pitacio and Chema represent a form of “protest masculinity” presumably drawn from the real-life experiences of working-class men in early twentieth-century Mexico City, they are hardly the woman-hating, self-destructive behaviors of damaged men that elite critics and mainstream sociological literature lead us to expect.⁴⁵ For the “Desde la estaca” author and his readers, working-class masculinity might well be in crisis, but it was also a rich source of humor, especially when it crossed over into unsustainable macho posturing.

Penny press efforts to reimagine working-class manhood through a satire of both working-class and bourgeois sentiments brings us back to the ideological foundation of bourgeois political, economic, social, and cultural hegemony—the civilizing process. As noted earlier, for Norbert

Elias the civilizing process involves “the moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect.”⁴⁶ All of these so-called civilized traits—self-restraint, equanimity, patience, foresight—require a kind of self-awareness or reflexivity that bourgeois elites (like their aristocratic predecessors) have considered the special provenance of the educated upper classes, traits that might (but usually didn’t) trickle down to the unwashed masses. For the most part, social commentators of all stripes have accepted this trickle-down account of civilized behavior despite its blatant class bias and transparent ideological agenda.

Portraying the Porfirian bourgeoisie as cruel, corrupt, lazy, and unpatriotic and then inverting the terms of the debate by exposing the tolerated illegalities of the middle classes and downplaying the “crimes” of the lower classes might have generated some sympathy and perhaps even a quick fix or two from a reform-minded public official, but it failed to get at the ideological foundations of bourgeois hegemony those terms upheld. The “Desde la estaca” vignettes, however, sought to undermine those foundations by revealing—through a satire of bourgeois sentiments—that the class pretensions behind the civilizing process were unwarranted and even absurd. At first glance, Pitacio and Chema might come across as the poorly educated, ill-mannered, misogynistic, live-for-the-moment *pelados* caricatured in Porfirian-era official discourse and social commentary, but a closer look suggests otherwise. While neither man could hope (or would want) to display the effortless self-mastery and careful calculus of the bourgeois masculine ideal, their practical (and comical) mix of self-awareness, flexibility, and enthusiasm provides a much more supple and realistic model of reflexive behavior than the rigid, unrealistic, ideologically driven claims of their “betters.” In this instance, then, satire works to validate the sentiments of working-class men, however confused and ridiculous those sentiments might be. Their capacity for creative adaptation to changing circumstances makes them considerably more modern, too—at least if we accept the recent claims of social theorists like Anthony Giddens.

Giddens and others have noted that the concept of modernity—most often associated with the rise of industrial societies, market economies, nation-states, and mass democracy—is also intimately bound up with

notions of self-identity. On this view, traditional societies provide individuals with well-understood social roles or “identities,” while modern societies require that we figure things out for ourselves. “What to do? How to act? Who to be?” Giddens insists, “. . . are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity—and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.”⁴⁷ The answers to these focal questions emerge as we make sense of ourselves and our lives by developing and reworking our life stories. As Giddens explains it: “A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.”⁴⁸

The hallmark of the modern self, then, resides in its ability to develop and sustain a narrative that enables it to manage the inevitable “risks” that accompany rapid social change. As Giddens carefully notes, a successful narrative “cannot be wholly fictive” since it “must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.” Freighted with ideological baggage about personal integrity, self-control, and social status, conventional turn-of-the-century bourgeois narratives of the self lacked the requisite flexibility to respond effectively to external events. The hallmark of the ideal bourgeois man was his “constancy.” In contrast, the “Desde la estaca” vignettes are marked by the improvisatory nature of the life narratives they relate—in other words by the continual sorting of external events into the ongoing stories of its protagonists. While it would be foolish to assume that a typical Mexico City worker shared both the linguistic virtuosity and literary craft of *La Guacamaya*’s editor, working-class men did provide the inspiration for a new way of being in the world that would trickle *up* to the Mexican bourgeoisie in the “revolutionary” decades that followed, when the middle-class civilizing process engaged with working-class practical sensibilities to produce the modern self. And as chapter 5 shows, revolutionary ideas about “modern love”—glimpsed in the preceding “Desde la estaca” vignettes—had a similar and similarly surprising trajectory.