

CHAPTER 5



DON JUAN AND THE TROUBLED BIRTH OF MODERN LOVE

Todo el mundo cree tener la auténtica doctrina sobre él—sobre Don Juan, el problema más recóndito, más abstruso, más agudo de nuestro tiempo. Y es que, con pocas excepciones, los hombres pueden dividirse en tres clases: los que creen ser Don Juanes, los que creen haberlo sido y los que creen haberlo podido ser, pero no quisieron. Estos últimos son los que propenden, con benemérita intención, a atacar a Don Juan y tal vez a decretar su cesantía.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

The final anecdote in the preceding chapter hints at the ubiquity of the Don Juan figure in Mexican popular culture.¹ Spanish playwright José Zorrilla's soon-to-be world-famous play *Don Juan Tenorio* premiered in Madrid on March 28, 1844, and at the Teatro Nacional in Mexico City just a few months later.² Since its Mexican premiere, professional and amateur theater companies in cities, towns, and villages throughout the country have regularly staged the play, most often as the dramatic centerpiece of annual public celebrations for the Day of the Dead (November 1–2).³ It was certainly popular in Porfirian Mexico City, with regular theatrical performances and countless offhand references to Don Juan in the newspapers, social commentary, novels, poems, and songs of the time. If that weren't enough, film historians consider pioneer cinematographer

Salvador Toscano Barragán's 1899 adaptation of *Don Juan Tenorio* to be Mexico's first nondocumentary film.

Several of these sources targeted working-class audiences. For example, a popular Day of the Dead broadside (see fig. 5.1), produced by Antonio Vanegas Arroyo and illustrated by Manuel Manilla, proclaimed:

Aquí está don Juan Tenorio
De valor siempre notorio;
Pues aunque hoy es calavera
No lo babosea cualquiera.
Y es capas [capaz], si se le obliga
De meterse en la barriga
A medio género humano
Para hacerse el mundo miga.⁴



[Here lies Don Juan Tenorio
Of valor forever renowned;
For although today a skeleton
None dare spit on his grave.
For he is capable, if he's obliged
To stab in the belly
Half the human race
To make the world his crumb.]

Another widely distributed Vanegas Arroyo broadside for Day of the Dead, this one illustrated in the more fluid style of José Guadalupe Posada, strikes the familiar chord (see fig. 5.2). Here a skeletal Don Juan, with plumed hat, cape, tights, raised sword, and clenched fist, taunts his opponents (and the reader): "I am Don Juan Tenorio and make no mistake / I will make mincemeat of your *calaveras*."⁵ Although in the poem (as in the play), Don Juan's bravado eventually succumbs to the gentle pressure of Doña Inés's undying love, his aggressive assertions of masculine honor—highlighted by a visit to hell to take on the devil himself—provide the dramatic centerpiece of the text and the subject for Posada's striking image.

Penny press editors, too, made frequent reference to Don Juan and the infamous *tenorios de barrio*, neighborhood lotharios who seduced and abandoned vulnerable young women.⁶ With this kind of exposure, it

LA CALAVERA

DE DON
JUAN TENORIO



*Aquí está don Juan Tenorio
De valor siempre notorio;
Pues aunque hoy es calavera
No lo babosea cualquiera.*

*Y es capis, si se le obliga
De meterse en la barriga*

No será por vida mía,
Mientras esté yo presente,
Que nadie gana a valiente,
Al bravo don Luis Mejía,
Y si por acaso un día
Tú me asale, don Juan,
Fué por cogerte el alma
Del seno de una mujer,
Que con su dulce querer
Hiciste de mascapén.

Para ahora que libro estoy
De toda pasión burlada,
Con la punta de mi espada
A probarle luego voy,
Que si en su es lo mismo que hoy
Y que hallar sobre el camino
De tu estracán helado
Que quisiera haber traído.
Amistad, vida y honor
Confúzelo en tu loca destino.



*A medio genero humano
Para hacer el mundo miga.*

—No me provocas, don Luis
Pues aunque a y espoleto,
Junto te tuve respelo
Y la mano de un fraile,
Que si es un nuevo delito
En mi vida aventurera
No doy pena la alterera
Baxara de mi valor,
Pues será tu venecedor
Aunque sea yo calavera.

—Hasta ya de tanto hablar
Don Juan, yo no seputo,
Ver ante mi tal aborto
Y va te quiero mojar.
Si te quieren confesar
Tiempo te dare para ello,
A ver si te da un detalle
De cristiana costación,
Y lograrás tu salvación
Y entrar en el cielo.

—Calle tu lengua, Mejía,
Jus ahí está el Comendador,
Y a los dos hoy mi valor
Yo probaré mi hidalguía
Yo perdonaos quería
Mas provocas al león,
Míralo si luego rizada
Al confiar en la destreza
De mi brazo, y la esperosa
De mi fuerte costación.

—¿Lo ves? El Comendador
Ya muerto, yace a mis pies:
Ahora te llega tu vez
Y vas a morir igual!
¡Oh, ciegos, favor, favor!
Contra el infame homicida,
Que ha vuelto a cortar mi vida
Y a sepultarme en la tumba
Dando todo se derrumba
En región desconocida.

Calles de la Tercera de A. V. Arzobispo,
Sta. Teresa núm. 40—México, D. F.

PRECIO CINCO CENTAVOS.

FIG. 5.1 Manuel Manilla/Author Unknown, "La calavera de Don Juan Tenorio," Mexico City: Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, n.d. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99615907/).

Yo soy Don Juan Tenorio y sin Quimeras

HARÉ PLATOS DE VUESTRAS CALAVERAS.

Que el mundo me admiró por mis hazañas,
Encuentros, amorios y malas mañas.

Así es que mi calor es sempiterno,
Y no temo batirme en el Inferno.

DOÑA INES

¡Cálma! Ten calma don Juan,
Que estás en el Purgatorio
Y en fama de Tesorio
Aquí no te la dadas!
Corriste oja loco a fan
Por el mundo entre placeres,
Te hartaste de mujeres
Tan débiles como yo,
Mas la fama aquí sonó
Aunque sé tú no lo quieres.

DON JUAN

¡Oh! ¡Jefe de mi corazón!
Juntos fuérame de ti
Ficéste desde que te ví
Aunque perdí la razón!
La dulce satisfacción
De amarte fué mi locura
Y aun que en horrible tortura
Vivi yo desde tu muerte,
Al fin me toqué la muerte
De entrar en tu sepultura.

Desde entonces no se qué
Ficéste en mi fantasía
Y corri tras la alegría
Y hasta al Diablo desafié,
Que es un pedante, lo sé,
El tal Diablo en su bravura,
Pues no lo juzgues locura.
Al yo entrar en el Inferno
Me lo agarré por un cuerno
Y lo aventé á la losura.

Al ver éi mi atrevimiento
Luego me brindó amistad,
Y se portó con lealtad
En su noble ofrecimiento
Bebimos que fué un contento
¡Cognac, whiskey y aguardiente,
Y la diabólica gaste
Que en el inferno vivía
Nombréme desde ese día
Ministro del Presidente.

El Presidente es allí
Un diablo de grandes cuernos
El terror de los Averno
Como en el Mando yo fui
—No hay pues quien me tosa á mí.
Dijo una tarde, ya mono,
Y refudóme por el tono
Con que hablé aquel bastardo,
Le di un sendo puchazo
De mayor cuenta en alono.

Entonces se armó la bola
Aun con el mismo Luzbel,
Y yo hice bien mi papel
Pues le púé de la cola,
Junto á mí una diabla sola
Contempímela ocedía,
Y reconozco á Lucia,
La criada de Ana Pantaja,
Tuerta y de una pala roja
Que hasta la descuencaba.



—¿Qué haces tú aquí? preguntó
Aun por la duda asombrado
—Por usted me han condenado
Porque la liebre entregué;
Ana con usted se fué
A cesar... y al otro día
Llegó el bravo Luis Mejía
Bisacando á su prometida,
Y al no hallarla, á la otra vida
De uno estubo ella me envía.

Yo quisé gritar, fué vano
Don diablo me asustaron
Y una piedra me querieron
Y me asentaron la mano,
Y como si un cirujano
Quisiera el ojo sondear,
Así lo hicieron saltar
De mi calavera toaca,
Y desde entonces ni mosca
En mi ojo la podido entrar.



Pero el principal asunto
(Que me trae cerca de usted
Es este oficio en el que
Lo dicen punto por punto,
Que desde que usted es difunto
Aquí, pues, se le alojó;
Pero Luzbel! no temo,
En cuenta su ingratitud
Y que aunque aquí no hay virtud
De traerlo se arrepiñó.

Al echarme del Inferno
Á mi sepulcro volví
Á los muertos yo les di,
De nuevo un saludo tierno.
—Ya estoy aquí; del Averno,
He vuelto, pobres famados;
Ya veis, pues, que no hay pecados
Que me castiguen allí,
Don Juan pronto será
De muertos resucitados.

La misma espada que fué
Conmigo, veniste á vincularlo.
Al fin no puede dejarnos.
En paz, eso me lo sé;
No habrá calavera en puré
Que aterra su voz á alzar:
Quese al Pantasio venga á entrar
Vendrá á vérsela conmigo,
Yo soy, pues, un extranjero
A quienes deba respetar.

A mi voz, el esqueleto
En un bravo se levantó,
Y con su estoque me dió
Un golpe sin más respaldó:
—¡Así me gusta el espíritu!
—¡Ya encontré! ¡bueno verdad!
Gritó y en la fiara lid
Nos batimos muy dorevas
Sobre muchas calaveras,
Viendo entre ellas la del Cid.

Muchas veces escuché
De mi esqueleto en reñedor:
—¡Aquí está el comandante!
—¡Don Luis aquí está! —escuché
—¡Quedó también grité:
Si queréis seguir el jolgorio
Salid del hecho mortuario
Y arrod, pues, la polvora;
Daos prisa, que aquí os espera,
De nuevo Don Juan Tenorio.

Mil esqueletos vinieron
Sobre mí, más con mi espada
Me defendí y en la vida
Al fin pues me confundieron,
No sé de mí lo que hicieron
Pues que la razón pedí,
Y cuando yo volví en sí
De mi fatal paroxismo,
Sin explicarlo yo mismo
Entre tus brazos me ví.

Desde la hecho mortuario
Voltemos á esta mansión
Desde una asiguación
Se encuentra tu Juan Tenorio;
Las penas del purgatorio
Que son para el que te adora,
Aquí la piedad implora
De ese Dios que está en los cielos
Y aquí vivimos sin celos
Amándonos á toda hora.

Centron ya mi locuras,
Pues no encontré los ojos
En que me veo sin enojos
En mis tristes desventuras,
Al fin cesan mis torturas,
Cesó ya mi loco afán,
Ahora mirar á Don Juan,
En tratos de diversiones,
Y sabed: tuvo calzones
Para cualquiera patán.

A. E.

FIG. 5.2 José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, "Yo soy Don Juan Tenorio y sin Quimeras," Mexico City: Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, n.d. Jean Charlot Collection, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library (inventory no. JCC:JGP:C2).

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seems safe to assume that all but the most isolated Mexicans knew the Don Juan story well, had seen it performed several times, however poorly, and could even recite the most dramatic lines from memory, as Pitacio does in the story of Don Juan and the Ghost. The point is that when Mexican men and women, whatever their station in life, thought about manhood, they couldn't help hearing the defiant taunts of Zorrilla's legendary antihero.

In *Nightmares of the Lettered City*, Juan Pablo Dabove argues that the bandit, more precisely the bandit trope, functioned for nineteenth-century Latin America's *letrado* elite as the constitutive outside to the "modern" nation-states they struggled to forge for more than a century after independence. That is to say, the bandit "marks what needs to be excluded, subordinated, or suppressed" for the nation-state to come into being. At the same time, Dabove observes: "it also marks what escapes the material and symbolic control of the elite. It is what exceeds its paradigms. This excess denaturalizes the hegemonic identity [of the modern nation-state] and its mechanisms of representation, since it also shows the fissures that tear it."⁷

This chapter suggests that a similar dynamic characterized another symbolic struggle not unrelated to the birth pangs of nation building: one between a hegemonic identity and its constitutive outside. In this case, however, the hegemonic identity was modern manhood, in particular its approach to gender relations, and the constitutive outside was not a bandit but another kind of criminal, the notorious Don Juan Tenorio, serial seducer of women and serial killer of men, most often in *affaires d'honneur*.

The connection is not as farfetched as it might appear at first glance, even with regard to the manhood of decidedly nonelite men. While their "betters" likely considered working-class male attitudes toward women as barbaric as any bandit's, the satiric penny press depicted working-class men in early twentieth-century Mexico City as actively engaged in rethinking—modernizing if you will—their affective relations with the women in their lives. All the same, editors and contributors recognized that their worker-protagonists were hardly in a position to pretend to mastery of self and society after the fashion of the manly nation builders who sought to banish bandits to the hinterlands of national history. So while, they sought to imagine and represent workingmen's struggles to overcome atavistic impulses—associated in this case with the prickly arrogance of a fictional aristocrat (a telling reversal of the bandit trope)—for the sake of "modern love," they also recognized that workers lacked the authority

to plaster over the “fissures” in the facade of modern manhood. Rather than cover up these glaring contradictions, penny press editors and contributors embraced them with a sense of humor, compassion, and self-awareness that mostly escaped their bourgeois counterparts.⁸

This chapter looks at how the penny press challenged accepted views on working-class masculinity by satirizing traditional notions of manhood predicated on male domination of women and hinting at the possibility of modern “companionate” relations between working-class men and the women in their lives. The first section reviews historical critiques of irresponsible masculine behavior, a problem linked directly to *donjuanismo* (identified later in the twentieth century as “machismo”) for Mexican men of all classes. The second section examines the connections between *costumbrista* literature, which helped establish a sense of national culture (including “typical” gender relations) in the years following independence from Spain, and “foundational fictions,” popular nineteenth-century novels featuring heterosexual romances between lovers from disparate social classes, romances that served as a metaphor for national consolidation during the same period. The third section looks at penny press *romances callejeros* (street romances), a late romantic *costumbrista* poetic genre that exploited the tragicomic tension between normative and transgressive notions of proper gender relations. While most *romance callejero* poets imagined working-class gender relations as an ongoing battle between the sexes, the fourth section analyzes the unconventional romances of penny press contributor Canuto Godines, which feature strong female protagonists who force their male counterparts to treat them as true companions rather than household help, sheltered innocents, or sequestered symbols of masculine honor. The conclusion explores the implications of the penny press representations of working-class gender relations as transitioning from traditional relationships characterized by patriarchal domination to modern partnerships grounded in mutual respect.

The Specter of Don Juan

On one level, the enduring popularity of *Don Juan Tenorio*, the play and the man, produced a shared trope or symbol that transcended (and continues to transcend) the profound disparities of political power, economic

class, social status, and cultural attainment that have plagued Mexican society at least since the sixteenth-century conquest. At the same time, however, Don Juan and the *donjuanismo* that he allegedly inspires in men represent a serious social problem that some commentators have seen as the foundation of dysfunctional gender relations in Mexico and elsewhere. For example, in a 1951 collection of essays with the suggestive title *Don Juan delincuente* (Don Juan, Delinquent), Mexican criminologist Carlos Franco Sodi argued that

Queremos o no Don Juan está constantemente entre nosotros. Su tenaz presencia resulta un profundo problema para el médico y el pedagogo, el sociólogo, el jurista y el literato. Su perdurar a través de los siglos y en los pueblos todos, es la inquietante afirmación de que la humanidad de ayer, de hoy y de mañana lleva consigo, ignorado e irresoluto, el problema de los sexos y es también—su misma presencia fanfarrona—, un alarde y una viviente comprobación de su victoria sobre teólogos y moralistas, sobre profesores alarmados con sus cínicas hazañas y sobre juristas que, indignados, han pretendido amedrentarlo con el bíblico anatema del Código Penal.⁹



[Whether we like it or not Don Juan is always with us. His tenacious presence produces a huge problem for the doctor and the pedagogue, the sociologist, the jurist, and the man of letters. His persistence across the centuries and among all peoples, is the disquieting affirmation that the humanity of yesterday, today, and tomorrow carries with it, ignored and unresolved, the problem of the sexes and he is also—his very boastful presence—arrogant and living proof of his victory over theologians and moralists, over professors alarmed at his cynical deeds and over jurists who, indignant, have attempted to frighten him with the biblical curse of the Penal Code.]

Coming from the author of the modern Mexican Code of Criminal Procedure, a man about to become the nation's attorney general (1952–56), the accusation that the misdeeds of this “hateful rapist” represented the “perfect manifestation of manliness” to most Mexicans gives some sense of the depth of official concerns about the perennial problem of male irresponsibility toward women in particular and toward the social bonds that

ensure good citizenship in general—a problem that would soon come to be identified in popular and official circles as machismo. Crucial to Franco Sodi’s understanding of the problem was his insistence that *donjuanismo* was holding back social and moral progress by encouraging sadistic, antisocial behavior in men and masochistic tolerance of male philandering and violence in women. In other words, for a social reformer like the future attorney general, the construction of “modern” gender relations, based on mutual respect between the sexes, required that men and women give up their perverse obsession with the “elegant and always amiable” Don Juan. “Either we erase the Criminal Code,” Franco Sodi advised, “or we send Don Juan to the gallows.”¹⁰

Franco Sodi was hardly the first social commentator to denounce the pernicious effects of *donjuanismo* on Mexican social relations or allege that men and women alike were susceptible to Don Juan’s dubious charms. In a September 1908 commentary, the *El Diablito Rojo* editor—more moralistic than most of his colleagues—noted disapprovingly that

El pueblo mexicano tiene en grado máximo el espíritu donjuanesco de la raza hispano-azteca. Amar y reñir—como los gallos—es la característica del nacional legítimo. Sin que esto quiera decir que no sea trabajador y artista, patriótico y valiente . . . ¿Y qué decir de una ‘chorchita’ de jóvenes de ambos sexos, decentes de ropa, pero con audacia de calaveras? Con honrosísimas excepciones, allí todos son Tenorios.¹¹



[The Mexican people have the donjuanesque spirit of the Hispano-Aztec race to the nth degree. To love and to squabble—like roosters—is a truly national trait. This is not to deny that they are also hardworking and artistic, patriotic and brave. . . . But what to say about a “pack” of young people of both sexes, dressed decently enough, but with the audacity of *calaveras*? With a few very honorable exceptions, all are Tenorios.]

While acknowledging the virtues of the Hispano-Aztec race, *El Diablito Rojo* nonetheless despairs over the “maña erótica nacional” (national erotic custom) of verbally harassing women on the street. “In the Aztec capital—the center of culture—the donjuanesque mania is out of hand,” he grouched. “Here the dandy ‘flatters’ and the poor man ‘gropes.’ Each makes love after his own fashion, but both in the same ridiculously flirtatious way.”¹² To

make matters worse, despite suffering from endless verbal assaults on the part of Mexican men—which the author casts here as the product of an avivistic “Hispano-Aztec” culture—Mexican women seemed more inclined to play along than take offense. In a mock scenario constructed for readers, a young servant girl out on an errand responds to a proposition like this:

—¿Que húbole? ¿Sí, o no?

Ella baja la picaresca faz, muerde la punta del delantal, hace un hoyito en la tierra con el talón desnudo, y muerta de risa lanza un

—¡No!

que es un “sí!” más clara que un sí sobreagudo de la Patti.¹³



[—What do you think? Yes or no?

She lowers her mischievous face, bites the corner of her apron, digs a small hole in the ground with a bare toe [literally “claw”], and dying with laughter lets out a

—No!

which is a “sí!” clearer than a high C from la Patti.]

Only when Mexican women of all classes insist on the “respect due their sex” and the authorities start punishing offenders, he concludes, will the problem disappear.

In follow-up editorial for Day of the Dead, *El Diablito Rojo* revisits the theme. This time he shifts focus from the everyday cultural practice of *donjuanismo* to the troublesome figure of Don Juan himself.¹⁴ As he sees it, the problem is that everyone knows Don Juan: “Who hasn’t seen him? Who isn’t acquainted with him? Who doesn’t remember him?” Moreover, everyone loves him despite, perhaps even because of, his damnable flaws. Don Juan’s annual resurrection on Day of the Dead, the editorial observes: “is greeted with joy, with enthusiasm, with satisfaction. He’s a skeleton, a rake, but he has three virtues: he’s extremely rich, he’s brave, and he’s our friend.”¹⁵ All this adulation for a despicable criminal, “a gallows fruit . . . [who] kills thirty-four men and seduces seventy-three women, taking ‘a day to love them / another to have them / another to leave them / two to replace them / and an hour to forget them.’”¹⁶ Don Juan’s popularity, *El Diablito Rojo* argued, might be absurd, but it was nonetheless an unavoidable fact of Mexican life. In a comment prefiguring Franco

Sodi by forty years, he ends his tirade against the annual celebration of masculine misbehavior with world-weary resignation: “Well, long live the Tenorios; but let no one later invoke the [criminal] codes. That’s just the way it is.”¹⁷

Although *El Diablito Rojo* had nothing good to say about Don Juan, colleagues and competitors sometimes disagreed about his ongoing impact on masculine behavior. Just a year later, an *El Diablito Rojo* contributor lamented that the gallantry of the “legendary Tenorio” and the innocence of the virtuous Doña Inés had been replaced in contemporary Mexican society by the hypocrisy and crass self-interest of “los Calixtos, las Melibeas y las Celestinas.”¹⁸ “These days gentlemen don’t romance and seduce ladies, they deceive them,” he complained. “Tenorio didn’t steal their love, he took advantage of it. Then, Doña Inés was an immaculate maiden in a convent, idealistic and pure. Now, the Inéses are other men’s women.”¹⁹ For this social critic at least, *Don Juan’s* popularity was more a matter of mourning the death of chivalry than testimony to its antihero’s influence on contemporary mores: “the crowds go to see *Don Juan Tenorio*. On Day of the Dead. Because ‘Tenorio’ is dead.”²⁰ Whatever their take on Don Juan, critics and fans alike have cast him as the embodiment of traditional masculine values (however dysfunctional), in particular a heightened sense of personal honor and a willingness to defend it at all costs.

The Romance of Popular Culture

In contrast to the recurrent concerns voiced by social commentators like Franco Sodi and *El Diablito Rojo*, most penny press responses to Don Juan and *donjuanismo* evoked a playful nostalgia tinged with irony, satire, and parody rather than an endorsement of hypermasculine misbehavior. This nostalgic mode is especially apparent in another penny press feature, the *romance callejero*, or “street romance,” a short vignette written in assonant verse and set amid Mexico City’s vibrant street culture.²¹ A typical *romance callejero* chronicled in mock epic fashion the trials and tribulations of ordinary people: their leisure activities, love affairs, quarrels, betrayals, and violent (occasionally fatal) outbursts.

Despite the cavalier tone, quotidian subject matter, and humble venue, the *romance callejero* had a distinguished literary pedigree. In his extensive work on the emergence of popular nationalism in the mid-nineteenth

century, Ricardo Pérez Monfort argues that the introduction of *costumbrismo*—a Spanish romantic-era genre grounded in local “customs”—provided Mexican writers the perfect vehicle for constructing an imagined national community freed from the shackles of Spanish cultural dominance.²² The cosmopolitan character of elite society offered little that was unique to Mexico; so *costumbristas* turned instead to the heterogeneous popular culture of the country’s less privileged classes, which they put forth as the essence, for better or worse, of *lo mexicano* (Mexicanness). As Pérez Monfort explains: “‘The Mexican people,’ as the protagonist of novels and stories, presented itself in multiple ways. Language, costumes, customs, games, traditions, and fiestas played a central role. . . . And although it was this people that the [writer] presumed to mold, critique, or moralize; it was also in revealing its qualities and creativity that the narrator affirmed his nationalism and contributed to the creation of a ‘Mexican stereotype.’”²³

Literary excursions into popular culture have a long tradition in Spanish letters, one stretching as least as far back as the publication of the anonymous sixteenth-century picaresque novella *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and His Fortunes and Adversities).²⁴ Like the picaresque novelists, Mexico’s mid-nineteenth-century *costumbristas* and early twentieth-century *romance callejero* poets trafficked in such popular stereotypes as the ubiquitous *china poblana* and the *chinaco* that “purported to synthesize the physical and psychological characteristics of a social sector or cultural type.”²⁵ Similar too was a tendency to overrepresent social sectors and cultural types from the colorful margins of decent society. In the Mexican case this included groups, like *pelados* and *léperos*, that *gente decente* (decent folk) considered debased, deviant, and prone to criminal behavior. In their dubious company, readers ventured into “forbidden places . . . *pulquerías*, cantinas, brothels, dives and all the places that made up the underworld.”²⁶

Despite these shared generic conventions, two major differences distinguished nineteenth-century Mexican *costumbrismo* from earlier picaresque celebratory condemnations of popular culture. One was its eager embrace of the “customs” of the common folk as the symbolic core of *lo mexicano*, the signifier of the essential difference that set the new nation and its people apart from the metropole and the rest of Spanish America. Pérez Monfort notes that *costumbristas* often depicted the Mexican

people as in dire need of redemption—a condition they typically blamed on imperial abuse and neglect—but they nonetheless admitted even the much-maligned *pelados* as citizens of the sovereign nation constituted in their name. In other words, *costumbrismo* was a gesture of literary inclusion despite its occasional forays into social critique, while picaresque novels sought principally to shock and entertain readers with lurid accounts of life among society's outcasts.

Another major difference was the “strong flavor of nostalgia for a not so distant past” evident in most *costumbrista* writing, especially in later works like the penny press *romance callejero*. Distressed by the radical transformations in urban life noticeable as early as midcentury, especially in the capital, *costumbristas* wrote “against the grain” to evoke “México de los recuerdos” (Mexico in memories), where lower-class transgressions took on a folkloric patina that belied any serious dangers to the social order.²⁷ A central figure in this poetic endeavor was liberal *letrado* icon Guillermo Prieto (1818–97), whose much-admired *costumbrista* poetry, collected and published in 1883 under the title *Musa Callejera* (Street Muse), supplied *romance callejero* poets with a receptive audience, literary models, a bohemian tone, and a range of popular types.²⁸ By the late Porfiriato, however, *letrados* like novelist Federico Gamboa had dropped romantic-era nostalgia for the gritty, if still overwrought, naturalism of Émile Zola and other contemporary Continental writers. For Gamboa and many of his contemporaries, Mexican popular culture had lost its picturesque nation-defining allure. Their readers could still experience the vicarious thrills of a literary journey into the urban underworld, but in Mexican naturalist fiction the no longer quaint “customs” of its denizens threatened to erode the still vulnerable foundations of Porfirian progress.

In contrast, *romance callejero* poets stayed true to the mid-nineteenth century romantic aesthetic found in a writer like Prieto, just as in their political commentaries they went on espousing *puro* liberalism long after it had fallen out of favor among the ruling classes. To counter naturalists' literary assault on popular custom, *romance callejero* poets distilled the *costumbrista* nostalgia to its folkloric essence, dispensing with moralistic digressions and playing up local color. And if their “native” protagonists sometimes resorted to public violence to settle disputes or restore lost honor, working-class troublemaking never left the confines of the local *vecindad*, or *barrio*. A social problem perhaps but nothing the neighbor-

hood police couldn't handle (however badly); nothing to concern the upstanding residents of the capital's new class-segregated neighborhoods; nothing to threaten national development.

Important as *romance callejero* may have been to the penny press's uphill battle to promote working-class culture and downplay lower-class delinquency, its principal message to readers was altogether different. In *Foundational Fictions*, Doris Sommer examines the interplay of romantic love and patriotism in the nineteenth-century canonical novels that came to embody the patriotic aspirations of most Latin American nations. Despite profound national differences, Sommer argues, these novels represented "a common project to build [nations] through reconciliations and amalgamations of national constituencies cast as lovers destined to desire each other." To this transcendent end and "whether the plots end happily or not, the romances are invariably about desire in young chaste heroes for equally young and chaste heroines, the nation's hope for productive unions."²⁹

At first glance, the high-minded national allegories identified in *Foundational Fictions* have little connection to the humble *romance callejero* other than common roots in the nineteenth-century romantic *costumbrista* tradition.³⁰ Superficial differences aside, however, the notion that romantic love was the cornerstone of national consolidation is also implicit in the *romance callejero*, although in a less deliberate way that leads back to Don Juan as the constitutive outside to modern manhood and national consolidation. According to Sommer, foundational fictions were allegorical novels singled out by public officials, educators, and bourgeois readers as especially edifying for young future citizens because of the different ways they reconciled, through love, courtship, and marriage, the social divisions that had made forging the postindependence nation-state such a Sisyphean task.

Not all romantic-era national allegories, however, met official expectations. Take, for instance, a popular romance published in 1885 by another liberal *letrado* icon, Vicente Riva Palacio, with the title "El amor del chinaco" (The *Chinaco's* Love) and reprinted in 1904 by *El Diablito Bromista* under the heading "Romances nacionales." The poem tells the tragicomic tale of a *chinaco*, Encarnación Torreblanca, who has fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of a prominent local rancher.³¹ Encarnación is "valiant and fortunate," and the young lady "purer than an old woman,"

but her elderly father sets four conditions for their marriage: “That [Encarnación] not take too much pride in his bravery, prove constant in love, agree to *give up his friends*, and be unafraid to work.”³² To which the despondent young man responds: “It makes me so *angry* I’ll surely fail; what he asks is even more impossible than [the demands of] an old woman at her rosary.”³³

There can be no doubt about the allegorical elements at work in Riva Palacio’s poem. The first line gives us the hero’s name, Encarnación Torrelblanca, the “ivory tower incarnation” of chivalrous manhood, and three lines later we learn that this Mexican knight-errant is also “the mirror of the *chinacos*,” the renowned horsemen who fought so valiantly against the usurper Maximilian (many of them under General Riva Palacio himself). Unstated in the poem but taken for granted by most contemporary readers was the assumption that as a *chinaco* Encarnación would have been mestizo (mixed race) and from a humble background, circumstances that account for the father’s concerns about his future son-in-law’s prospects. Following Sommer’s criteria, the mismatched couple is ideally suited to an allegory about the joining together of antagonistic social classes through romantic love and marriage—just what we might expect from a prominent liberal ideologue like Riva Palacio. We are left instead with the petulant hero’s refusal to sacrifice his independence, his manhood, and *his friends*, all essential elements of his social identity as a *chinaco*, to take on the responsibilities and hard work of a respectable marriage, to say nothing of nation building. Riva Palacio acknowledges Encarnación’s matchless skill as a horseman, his heroism in battle, and his success with “las muchachas del barrio” (neighborhood girls), but these martial virtues are ill suited to the more daunting if less glamorous challenges of mature adulthood and responsible citizenship. The sly parting twist gives the poem much of its charm, both because it surprises the reader who expects a more conventional love story with a happy ending and because it rings true—in the real world good *chinacos* were unlikely to make good husbands and fathers. Thus the purpose of Riva Palacio’s national allegory is not to spin fantasies about romantic love and marriage as a cure-all for the country’s deep social divisions but to point out that deeply ingrained attachments to “traditional” masculine identities rendered such a solution “even more impossible than [the demands of] an old woman at her rosary.” Although “El amor del chinaco” predates the penny press

romances callejeros by at least fifteen years, takes place in a small rural town rather than the national capital, and features a dashing horseman rather than a humble laborer, the underlying message isn't all that different: the male protagonists of the *romances callejeros* are as ill prepared for modern manhood as any *chinaco*.

Romance in the Streets

The best *romance callejero* poets excelled at local color—at capturing in vernacular language the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of the Mexico City streets, not as they actually were but as they might appear to a recent migrant from the countryside, a bemused foreign visitor, or in the writer's childhood memories. In some cases conveying local color rather than contributing to the national allegory was the principal objective. For example, the anonymous poet (or poets) for several *El Diablito Bromista* romances offered up bohemian-inflected vignettes about popular fiestas, local characters, and overheard snippets of conversation that had little or nothing to do with romantic relationships or national dilemmas.³⁴ “El baile de la Petra” (Petra's Dance) starts off with fifty-eight couples “pressing hard up against each other to the sounds of the dance,” introduces the hostess and the band, proceeds to a detailed description of the available alcohol (“six buckets of pulque from Tlmapa, along with ten bottles of *to love you without hope*, and a vat of punch laced with cheap whisky and water”), recounts the antics of the drunk harpist, repeats a long series of humorous toasts in honor of Petra, and finishes back on the dance floor with the fifty couples who are still sober enough to continue.³⁵ In a similar vein, “El santo de la casera” (The Household Saint), chronicles the movable feast of Doña Chalco, which begins at the Plaza de San Lucas, a few blocks south of the Zócalo, travels about five miles southeast by street car to Ixtacalco, then back to the pleasure gardens at Tívoli de San Cosme, several blocks west of the Alameda. As befits the festive spirit of this urban adventure, the dramatic highpoint is an exquisitely detailed description of the birthday banquet.³⁶ Yet another romance chronicles the adventures (including food and alcohol) of a group of friends who journey downtown to the Callejón de la Nana to celebrate independence by *corriendo gallo* (literally, running the rooster), singing and playing their way through the city streets as roving minstrels in anticipation of

the annual *Grito*.³⁷ Although colorful urban characters, usually including a narrator/guide, have important roles to play in this subgenre of the *romance callejero*, the main protagonist is the city and the popular culture it inspires.

More typical were romances that allowed the reader to experience the urban milieu through stories about local types. One particularly gruesome vignette, “El muerto recusitado” (The Resuscitated Dead Man) records the final hours of a street vendor: “a poor devil without a home or family . . . one of those gypsies of lost Bohemia who always wake up hung over and with their guts tied in knots.” As the poem begins, the poor man suffers an epileptic fit that lands him in the morgue and then under the knife of the attending surgeon, who decides to cut him open for the edification of a group of medical students. Toward the end of the poem (and halfway through the autopsy), the victim revives and complains to the doctor: “Don’t chop me down while I’m still green, the field will dry up.” When the startled surgeon asks why he didn’t say something earlier, the fatally wounded man replies: “because the job was so fine, the boss such a gentleman [*charro*], that I didn’t even have to take off my boots.”³⁸

Another tongue-in-cheek romance about a classic urban type—this time a *garbancera*, “a pretty Indian maid . . . dark with soft skin and scarlet cheeks, very black and provocative eyes”—eavesdrops on a conversation in a local open-air food market between the girl and an older market woman that ranges from the high price of tomatoes to the *garbancera*’s intimate relations with her employer’s handsome son. In response to the maid’s confession of illicit love, her confidante admits to having had a similar affair in her youth with a “licenciado cuenta chiles” (miserly lawyer), congratulates the girl on having snagged a considerate young man, and advises that she “never fail to serve him his dinner, or whatever he takes, in bed.”³⁹ As both vignettes demonstrate, traffic in stereotypes can work to reinforce traditional social relations by suppressing the dark side of dramatic social inequalities. This suppression enables the story’s humor and makes otherwise shocking events—the surgeon’s cavalier decision to autopsy the epileptic street vendor, the domestic servants’ acceptance of sexual exploitation—seem like natural occurrences rather than causes for alarm or indignation. At the same time, however, this apparent dismissal of social inequalities also works to disguise serious social critique in ways that might escape the notice of an inattentive or incurious reader.

In the preceding vignettes, for instance, the final ironic twist—a generic convention intended to shock the reader into awareness of the fundamental strangeness of the situation at hand—derives from the protagonists’ cheerful acceptance of their appalling lot in life and its destructive effects on their relationships. So while the stories themselves contain no overt social criticism, the authors set up their readers to experience the strangeness of its absence, especially in a venue devoted to working-class issues.

In other instances, authors embedded tangible clues that might alert a savvy reader to the “hidden” meaning beneath the innocuous surface of the text. For example, in “Hay te van de canto” (Now You’re Taking It Too Far), the reader listens in on two street musicians, a female singer and a male organ grinder, as they bicker over turf, respective musical abilities, and personal failings. The singer is identified as

. . . una grulla
De aquellas de la Merced,
Que usan su tacón de hueso
Y su fachoso tupé,
Con las pilas de pomade,
Si no de cerdo, de res,
Y sus enaguas planchadas
Que hacen un ruido de tren
Más grande que Temamatlá.⁴⁰



[. . . a crane
One of those from Merced,
Who wears high heels
And a ridiculous hairpiece,
With piles of pomade,
If not made from pigs, then from cows,
And her starched petticoats
Which make more noise
Than the Temamatlá train wreck.]

And the organ grinder comes from the same underworld milieu as his interlocutor:

un coime de alquiler
De esos de cara cortada
Que versan mucho y bien
Y disparan su fierrada
En amarte con placer.⁴¹



[a gambler for hire
A typical scarface
Who is a great talker
And blows his dough
On giving you a good time.]

Given the personality types involved, the sarcastic bantering that makes up the bulk of the romance seems little more than the latest salvo in an endless war between the sexes: wronged woman rebukes irresponsible man, annoyed man derides nagging woman. The clue to the vignette's meaning lies in the opening lines sung by the *grulla*:

Macetita embalsamada
Con hojitas de laurel,
Qué bonitos son los bueyes
Cuando empiezan á querer;
Con palabras y canciones
Engañan á la mujer,
Y ya que la ven perdida
La van haciendo furriel.⁴²



[Sweet flowerpot infused
With little leaves of laurel,
How pretty bullocks are
When they begin to love;
With words and songs
They deceive the woman,
And when they see her lost
They treat her like dirt.]

The verse is a slightly mangled version of a popular folksong, and the sentiment expressed in these opening lines, with their not so subtle reference to the singer's sweet "maceta embalsamada" (literally, her perfumed flowerpot, figuratively her vagina), seems to support the resentments voiced by the singer later in the poem. However, a more complete version of the song, included in a 1905 Vanegas Arroyo broadside, has a surprise ending of its own:

Macetita embalsamada
Con hojitos de laurel,
Que bonitos son los hombres
Cuando empiezan á querer
Con cartitas y regalos
Consiguen á una mujer,
Y luego que la han perdido
La empiezan á aborrecer.

Un señor me dió un pañuelo
Como prenda de palabra
Para casarme con él
Y de engañarme trataba,
Pero se pegó buen chasco
Porque no soy tan dejada;
La basura yo la tiro
Porque me tiene mareada.

Macetita de mi vida,
De flores muy perfumada
¡Qué bonito es el amor
De la mujer que es honrada!
Yo tengo una macetita
En la que sembré un clavel
Para darselo á mi novio
Cuando me sepa querer.

El que sepa amar
Que compre una macetita
Y siembre luego en ella

Del amor una matita,
Que nunca se muestre ingrata
Ni aborrezca á las mujeres
Que al hombre que sabe amar,
La mujer siempre lo quiere.⁴³



[Sweet flowerpot infused
With little leaves of laurel,
How pretty men are
When they begin to love
With sweet letters and gifts
They snare a woman
And then when they have ruined her
They begin to abhor her.

A gentleman gave me a kerchief
As a token of his pledge
That he would marry me
And then he tried to trick me.
But I frustrated his plans
Because I'm not that desperate;
Trash, I throw it out
Because it makes me nauseous.

My beloved flowerpot
Infused with the scent of flowers
How pretty is the love
Of a woman who has respect!
I have a sweet flowerpot
In which I will plant a carnation
To give to my betrothed
When he learns to love me.

The man who knows how to love
Who buys a sweet flowerpot
And plants in it
With love a sweet sprig

Who never shows ingratitude
Nor abhors womankind
The man who knows how to love
The woman always cares for.]

The complete lyrics, like the first verse that begins the romance, reflect long-standing female grievances about male duplicity, especially the false promises—letters, gifts, tokens, pledges—of *los tenorios*. Hence the street singer's deliberate substitution of *bueyes*, or “bullocks” (castrated bulls), for *hombres* in the romance. In the second verse of the longer song, the narrator/singer shows no hesitation in throwing her *novio* out like “trash” when he tries to take advantage of her. The deliberate use of the subjunctive tense in subsequent verses suggests that she has lingering doubts about ever finding a good man (“que *sepa* querer”) even though the penultimate line of the poem, cast in the indicative mode, asserts that a woman will always care for a man who really knows how to love (“que *sabe* querer”), an emotion defined earlier in terms of gratitude, respect, companionship, and nurturance (the subject of the final section of this chapter).⁴⁴ So while the romance presents the dialogue between street singer and organ grinder as a somewhat equal exchange, the introductory song shifts the balance in the singer's favor by reinforcing the notion that deceitful men are the principal culprits in the degradation of women.

Despite the picaresque flavor of the *romances callejeros* and the enduring popularity of Don Juan, *tenorios de barrio* were most often cast as either banal villains or laughable buffoons. Cast as villains, they manage to seduce only the most vulnerable, naive, or greedy of women; as buffoons they serve as the target of women's scorn, as happens in the song “Macetita embalsamada.” In “El Rapto de Dorotea” (The Abduction of Dorotea), the villain Julian—identified as “de los tenorios modernos” (a modern *tenorio*)—seduces the foolish Dorotea whose new job as a factory worker has given her delusions of grandeur and prompted her to throw off her *novio*, a poor organ grinder named Cenobio.⁴⁵ According to the catty neighbor who narrates the romance, Julian seduces the naive young girl with love songs, offers to marry her, abducts her, and then gets her pregnant—a fact that the disgraced young woman tries to cover up by feigning stomach problems when it comes time to give birth. “Lo más claro es suponer,” the neighbor observes. “Que la enferma es Dorotea / Está muy

flaca, muy fea / Y ya no quiere . . . co . . . mer” (all one can suppose is / that the sick woman is Dorotea / she’s very skinny, very ugly / and no longer wants to . . . eat). In the Spanish text, the ellipsis produces a deliberate slippage between *co . . . mer* (to eat) and *co . . . ger* (to fuck), which suggests that the young woman’s inability to control her appetites for food, gifts, romance, and sexual pleasure is more to blame for her humiliation than Julian’s seductive powers.

Confronted with a strong-willed young woman, the *tenorio* in “La güera del cantero” (The Stonemason’s Blonde) has considerably less success. The romance opens with an elaborate forty-line spiel that begins thus:

Adios, pedazo de cielo
 Adornado de estrellitas,
 Encantadora del barrio,
 Pedacito de mi vida;
 ¿Dónde vas tan de mañana
 Y tan repechi tan linda?
 ¿No quiere que la acompañe
 Aunque sea por la orillita?⁴⁶



[Greetings, slice of heaven
 Adorned with little stars,
 Enchantress of the neighborhood,
 Light of my life;
 Where are you going so early in the morning
 So shapely and so pretty?
 Would you like me to accompany you
 Even if it’s just along the sidewalk?]

When the *tenorio* shows no sign of letting up, the young woman interrupts with “Pos oigasté, yo no puedo / Aunque usted me regocije” (listen you, I can’t / even if I liked you). When this brush-off fails to discourage further advances, she calls him a coward and threatens to tell her boyfriend, the stonemason, whom she characterizes as a *real* man willing to “beat the dust from death itself.” To which her harasser responds, “Dígale usted á su cantero / Que lo quiero en pulquería / Y lo he de vestir de charro / Con

paciencia y con saliva” (tell your stonemason / that I want to see him in the *pulquería* / and I’ll be dressed as a *charro* / with patience and saliva). The expression *paciencia y saliva*—from the adage “con paciencia y saliva se la metió el elefante a la hormiga” (with patience and saliva the elephant fucked the ant)—is intended as a threat but it’s unclear whether the *tenorio* is referring to his plans for the young woman or the stonemason or both. Regardless, the stonemason’s girlfriend dismisses it with a curt “Adios, mugre, hasta la vista” (good-bye, scum, see you later), and the *tenorio* retreats to a nearby *pulquería* to repair his wounded pride. Although the seduction succeeds in one romance and fails in the other, neither *tenorio* comes across as admirable or noteworthy since success or failure depended entirely on the character of the women rather than their prowess as men: Julian is able to seduce the fatuous Dorotea, but the self-styled *charro* is easily routed by a confident young woman.

Much more threatening to most *romance callejero* poets than the seductive capabilities of *tenorios de barrio* was the damage inflicted on sensitive, hardworking men by heartless, ambitious women. In their poems bad women generally come to a bad end, sometimes through their own devices. In “Romance callejero,” the feckless Secundina abuses the generosity of her boyfriend Melaquides, a hotel manager, until he can no longer afford to buy her fancy clothes, at which point she dumps him for what turns out to be a string of equally gullible men.⁴⁷ Eventually, however, her nemesis appears, a “jicarero bárbaro” (barbaric pulque seller) who beats her “Hasta que ya no pudiendo / Soportar tu amancebato / Le sambutió una chaveta / En el perol de los garbanzos” (until no longer able / to put up with his devotion / she stuck a knife / in his bean pot).

Although Secundina deals directly and violently with the consequences of her behavior, most duplicitous women incited violence in their male victims. The jilted man in “Así me gusta agarrarlos” (That’s How I Like to Grab Them) hides behind a tree until his former girlfriend and her new boyfriend appear. Having caught them in the act, he sinks a knife into his rival “con todo y mango” (up to the hilt), and the romance concludes with one man in the cemetery (Dolores), the other in jail (Hotel Wulfrano), and the woman “sigue por las noches dándose vuelo en el barrio” (goes back to walking the barrio streets at night).⁴⁸

The dramatic possibilities inherent in female betrayal narratives inspired more elaborate romances, and love triangles with male competitors

vying for the attentions of a beautiful but deceitful woman proved especially popular. The three-part serial “La Verbena de los Angeles” (The Los Angeles Fair) opens with two young lovers, Chano Pipa and Juana Brincos, all dressed up and headed to the Metropolitan Cathedral on the Zócalo to enjoy the annual fair for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁹ The poet lets the reader know that “Los ojos se iban tras ella: / él caminaba soberbio, / como diciendo á los bobos / ‘¡Uy! Majes, miren que cuero!’” (Eyes followed after her: / he walked haughtily, / as if saying to the fools / Hey! losers, this is my woman). By the second installment Chano and Juana have arrived at the fair, where they encounter Petronilo el “Ojos Negros” (“Black Eyes”), who gives Juana a look that causes her to turn “more yellow than death itself.”⁵⁰ When Pipa asks “¿Por qué tiemblas, pichoncita?” (Why do you tremble, little dove?), the brooding Petronilo offers his services as doctor: “Y los males de esta jaña / que se hallan dentro del pecho / aliviaré yo en el auto / con un gran medicamento” (And the evils that this woman / carries in her breast / I will cure right away / with a great medicine). Juana begs Pipa to take her away, but before he can react Petronilo informs him harshly that Juana

tiene el alma más cochina
 que el muladar más infecto.
 Las caricias que á usted le hace
 á mi tambien me las ha hecho;
 y como usted ha saboreado
 sus más requiriosos besos,
 besos que saben á dulce
 pero destilan veneno.



[has the most swinish soul
 in the most putrid of sties.
 the caress that she shares with you
 she has also shared with me;
 just as you have savored
 her most intimate kisses
 kisses that taste sweet
 but ooze poison.]

A stunned Pipa demands that Petronilo prove the accusations, and the second episode abruptly ends. A week later, in the romance's conclusion, the wronged man launches into one final harangue against the "black hearted" young woman before he "sinks his blade into the flesh of the unfortunate Brincos until he wets his fingers."⁵¹ Having brought the tragedy to its bloody end, the poet can't resist the impulse to moralize: "Jaranas, no seas taimadas, / sed fieles á vuestro cuero . . . / ;Que no os vaya á suceder / lo que á la jaña del cuento! (Women, don't be deceitful / stay faithful to your men / Otherwise things might turn out for you / as they do for the woman in the story).

The facetious moral, along with the suggestive names of the protagonists, give the romance an allegorical tone. The haughty Chon Pipa brings to mind the common phrase *pasarlo pipa* (to have a good time), making him the Mexican equivalent of a good-time Charlie; the fickle Juana Brincos "jumps" from man to man, and the phrase "quitar los brincos a alguien" (to take someone down a peg) deftly summarizes her unhappy fate; the implacable Petronilo el "Ojos Negros" likely gets his nickname from a popular Mexico City *danza* of the era, "Los ojos mexicanos," which notes the superficial virtues of blue and green eyes before concluding that only "los ojos negros son todo corazón" (only black eyes are pure of heart).⁵² The allegory here might center on romantic love, but this is no foundational fiction with a promise of reconciliation and hope. In this tale, "Ojos Negros," the only person capable of true love, is driven to murder, and the violence of his blow (like the stabbing "con todo y mango" in the previous poem) is so forceful that his hands end up covered in the victim's blood.⁵³ If the poet intended this romance about working-class gender relations gone awry as a national allegory, then the prognosis for Mexico would have been dire indeed.

Sense and Sensibility

Canuto Godines (a.k.a. Mimi)—the subtlest of the *romance callejero* poets and the only one who consistently signed his work—had a more sanguine take on neighborhood Don Juans, duplicitous women, and the war between the sexes.⁵⁴ While Godines shared his colleagues' disdain for *tenorios*, his preference for strong female characters rendered sexual predators less threatening to women, other men, and society at large than was

the case with most romance poets. For instance, in the romance about the stonemason's blonde, the reader never learns the determined young woman's name, and she succeeds in routing her harasser only after she invokes her tough boyfriend. The young women in Godines's romances don't require male assistance to fend off unacceptable suitors. At the beginning of "No Judas mejor Matraca" (Better a Matraca than a Judas), the reader meets "Lola La Quiriosa" (Lola the Coquette):

Que sin duda así la llaman
 Porque le gusta vestirse
 La verdad, con mucha gracia,
 Y además que tiene un cuerpo,
 Unos ojos y una cara
 Y un modito de sonreirse
 Que cualquiera se ataranta.⁵⁵



[Who no doubt gets that name
 Because she likes to dress
 To tell the truth, with a lot of style,
 And besides she has a body,
 Eyes and face
 And a way of smiling
 That would dazzle anyone.]

The description suggests that Lola is "asking for trouble," and she finds it in a smooth-talking leather tanner named Modesto, known as Pica Poco (it doesn't hurt much). Modesto courts Lola with sweet promises and knick-knacks (*cachibaches*) then waits until her mother goes off to mass to invite the young woman out on an unchaperoned date that starts with quite a bit of drinking and ends "in front of a squalid house," where an old lady "trembling with pleasure" waits to escort her in. No fool, Lola refuses to enter, berates Modesto for his dishonorable intentions, and when he attempts to force her to comply, she beats him bloody with the old woman's cane and goes off to rejoin her mother. The poet ends with a moral directed to male readers: "Se acuerda de Modestito, / Y al acordarse así exclama: / Señores, sí ustedes quieren / "¡No judas, mejor matraca!" (Re-

member little Modesto / and when you do, exclaim, / gentlemen, if you please, / “better a matraca than a Judas!”).

Another Godines romance with a tough female lead, “Pero de qué . . . ?” (But what then?), relates the thwarted seduction of Magdalena, “who is neither rich nor pretty” but has a small inheritance from her grandmother.⁵⁶ The local *tenorio* Julian, “who if he wasn’t exactly a worker still tried to look like one,” attempts to woo her with love songs: “¡Ay! Magdalena tú eres / Para mí, la rosa blanca / Cuyo aroma me enardece / Cuyo perfume me embriaga.” (Oh! Magdalena, you are / for me, the white rose / whose scent inflames me, / whose perfume intoxicates me.) Once he thinks she’s hooked, he starts pressuring her to sell off the inheritance, allegedly so that they can afford to marry. Although flattered at first by Julian’s attentiveness, Magdalena soon catches on, scolding her ardent suitor: “¡qué desgracia! / Que venda yo el estanquillo, / Que venda yo mis alhajas / Y con todo mi dinero / Que nos casemos ¡¡qué plancha!! / ¿Pero de qué? . . . si me quieres / Trabaja, chico, trabaja.” (What a disgrace! / That I should sell the kiosk / that I should sell my jewelry / and with all my money / that we should marry: How foolish!! / But what then? . . . if you love me, / work, boy, work.)⁵⁷

A third example, “Para que la cuña apriete” (For the wedge to stick), provides an interesting twist that hints at the larger social context in which Godines set his stories.⁵⁸ In this variation, the local *tenorio* is a guitar-playing gadabout named Gerundio, known as Fra Diablo (Brother Devil), and the object of his attention is a beautiful *garbancera* named Rosario, “la Chollo (the Godsend).”⁵⁹ As was the case with Lola in the earlier romance, Rosario likes to put on makeup and dress “coquettishly” when she goes out, taking on the appearance and manners of an elegant young woman rather than a *garbancera* and “the niece of uncle Chema Chinampero de Ixtacalco,” both references to her humble, probably Indian parentage.⁶⁰ Smitten by her beauty and style, Gerundio follows her around, trying to catch her eye with furtive glances and shy smiles. When he finally gets up the nerve (or so it seems) to speak with her, he pretends to be a bit tongue-tied: “Porque no soy de esos hombres / Cuyo lema es el engaño / Y á fuerza de urdir mentiras / Y á fuerza de usar alhagos [*sic*] / Seducen á las mujeres” (Because I’m not one of those guys / whose motto is deceit / and who by contriving lies / and by using flattery / seduce

women). Although Rosario has indeed noticed his efforts to attract her attention and has even responded with subtle signals of her own, she has also taken the precaution of checking up on her admirer, who turns out to have at least two mistresses and four children. “I know your history,” she tells Gerundio, “I know who you are because I’ve done some investigating; so don’t waste your time and don’t follow me again.” Although a few lines later the stunned Fra Diablo recovers his composure and goes back to plotting more seductions, the triumphant young woman has already left to visit friends in Mixcalco.

These three romances are remarkable in several respects. As noted earlier, Godines’s female characters are entirely self-sufficient, with no hint of male interference or support in either their daily lives or their interactions with *tenorios*. And even though all three women are initially attracted to their prospective seducers, once they discover the men’s true motives, they dump them quickly and without remorse, like the singer in “Macetita embalsamada” who throws her *novio* out like “trash” after he tries to take advantage of her. Even more striking is that the poet identifies two of the women, Lola and Rosario, as coquettes and comments at length on their clothes, shoes, makeup, and poise. Lola even goes out drinking alone with her *tenorio*, thus putting herself at considerable risk for abduction, rape, and life as a prostitute. Yet neither woman seems the least bit chagrined. All three women recognize the social stigma that comes with lost honor, and that awareness shapes their refusal to continue in the relationships once courtship starts to slide into seduction. But not one chides herself for past mistakes, promises to reform, or seeks out male protection.

Godines also tweaks the ubiquitous female betrayal narrative in ways that either vindicate the woman’s behavior or expose the double standard behind social stigmas. One of his earliest romances, the seven-part “Juventina” for *El Diablito Bromista*, introduces a young couple, Juventina and Pancho, who are deeply in love but frustrated because they lack the means to marry.⁶¹ Pancho promises that if Juventina agrees to become his wife: “I’ll work like a black man, and in less time than a cock takes to crow, I’ll take you out of service and you’ll have everything you need,” but as a meat hauler (*cargador*) at the slaughterhouse, he has little chance of following through. To make matters worse, Juventina’s ailing mother tells her that she has only a year to live. “What do you want me to do,” she asks

him, “become a domestic servant (*meterme de gata*)?” Meanwhile, her mother has hatched a plot with an old bald lawyer to dragoon Pancho into the military so that he won’t ruin her daughter’s life. When Juventina tells Pancho about the plan, he becomes despondent and starts drinking (and pressuring her to drink with him). Just as Pancho convinces Juventina to run away with him, her mother enters the bar followed by the lawyer and a policeman. In the ensuing row, the old man gets hit on the head and falls to the ground, “thick blood spurting”; the police drag Pancho to jail, and the two women escape. When the scandal dies down, the two women go to church, Juventina to pray for Pancho, her mother “to offer her rosary to the Virgin for the unintentional miracle that freed her daughter from that meat hauler.” Many years later, the epilogue tells us, the poet observes a detachment of soldiers marching down Reforma, “among them a young man, robust, strong, likable, beaming with noble pride . . . none other than Pancho, who still hadn’t forgotten his brown-eyed, blonde-haired *novia* with bare feet and dressed in rags.” Moments later, a fancy carriage passes by carrying three passengers: a beautiful, stylish young lady; a wrinkled, bald old man; and a white-haired old woman—Juventina, the lawyer, and her mother. “That completes the picture,” the poet concludes, “and I leave the comments to your conscience, dear reader.”

The story employs one of the standard tropes of female betrayal—a beautiful young woman who abandons a poor young man to improve her economic and social status by marrying a rich older man. In this instance, however, it’s Juventina’s mother who plots against Pancho. Although in the final scene Juventina seems pleased with the way things have turned out, she is loyal and loving to Pancho up until the arrest that results in his forced military service. And her crafty mother is never duplicitous: she doesn’t think Pancho worthy of her daughter and she does her best to get rid of him, but her machinations are hardly a secret even to the young lovers. Even poor Pancho appears to have thrived in the army.

In *Why Love Hurts*, sociologist Eva Illouz argues that aspirations to a modern lifestyle transform the “marriage market” by introducing sex appeal as an *independent* variable that confers status, especially on young women, who can use it to better their social position.⁶² While most societies consider sexy young women to be desirable commodities, the advent of urban consumer culture—evident here in Godines’s elaborate descriptions of

female fashion—made it much easier for a poor woman to look like a lady and use her sexiness to improve her social position through marriage at the same time that other changes in the urban landscape—including the mestizo provincial Porfirio Díaz’s own marriage into a respectable Mexico City family—made it easier for men to retain their status even when they married “down.”⁶³ So even though Juventina’s social advancement is arranged by a traditional broker, her ambitious mother, the poet portrays her and others like her as capable of crossing class boundaries with relative ease and marrying into a modern lifestyle grounded in consumption—the essential component of personal identity.

Young men fare less well in Godines’s romances. Pancho thrives under military discipline, but his churlish behavior in the bar, first with Juventina and later with his persecutors, suggests that her mother might have been right about his character. Even the far from innocent female lead in “¡Que pobre!” (How poor!), who leaves her *amasio* (lover) for a rich older man so that she can take care of her dying grandfather, comes across as infinitely more sensible than the self-pitying butcher she left behind, whose drunken antics have made him the *calavera de barrio* (neighborhood wastrel).⁶⁴ In “¡Adultera!” (Adulteress!), the poet relates an episode in the life of another unscrupulous woman, Lucrecia, the embodiment of a popular song: “Para chicharrón Texcoco / Para cajetas Celaya, / Para mujeres de pleito / Y hermosas, Guadalajara!” (For pork cracklings Texcoco / for caramels Celaya, / for women who are troublesome / and beautiful, Guadalajara!).⁶⁵ Lucrecia’s current lover is Prudencio, one of those tough guys:

Que porque traen su navaja,
 Pantalón muy ajustado,
 En el cuello una bufanda,
 El sombrero arremangado
 Y en el hombro una frazada
 Y escupen por el comillo
 Y fuman puros de á cuarta
 Parece que son la fiebre
 Que á todo el mundo le espantan.



[Who because they carry a switchblade,
 And wear skintight pants,
 A bandana round their neck,
 A wide-brimmed hat
 A serape over their shoulder
 Spit out of the side of their mouth
 And smoke thin cigars
 Seem like the fever
 That frightens all the world.]

When we first meet Prudencio, it is obvious that he's furious with Lucrecia over something she's done. That something turns out to be adultery; "your promises were lies," he tells her, "and now I'm here suffering because of your contempt, ungrateful one!" Confronted by her irate boyfriend, the young woman calmly retorts, "lo que se debe se paga" (you're paid what you're owed), and explains that when he abandoned her for another women, "el hambre subió a tal grado" (she got so hungry), that she went looking for man, picked up a stranger, got drunk, spent the night with him, and in the morning "no sé como pero amanecí con plata" (I don't how but I woke up with money). The shocked Prudencio responds with "¡Adultera! y así lo dices Lucrecia con tanta calma" (Adulteress! And you say it that way Lucrecia, so calmly); she answers back, "Pues si yo soy la culpable . . . (Well, if I'm the guilty one . . .). Although Prudencio finally confesses that he was the strange man in disguise—so Lucrecia hasn't committed adultery after all—and she lets him have the last word, the reader is left suspecting that the poised young woman knew about the ruse all along. Regardless, her apparent adultery ridicules the double standard in Mexican gender relations that tolerates male philandering while condemning women who "betray" their partners. And she's not afraid to make the point to her tough boyfriend's face.

Female toughness could even cross over into violence—against men. The first half of "De mala raza!!!" (Of a bad race!!!) is an ode to male toughness narrated by a crusty shoemaker, who blusters

Dicen que me han de matar
 Pero sin decirme cuando
 Pues vayan á la . . . ya saben [. . .]
 Y á mi no me espantan vivos

Ni muertos del camposanto,
Ni soy de los que se arrugan
A la hora de los trancazos.⁶⁶



[They say I have to die someday
But won't tell me when
Well they can go to . . . they know where [. . .]
As for me I'm not afraid of any man alive
Or dead in the graveyard,
I'm not one of those who worry
When it comes time for blows.]

The first dramatic highpoint comes when two *valentones de fama* (notorious tough guys) square off with knives over the love of a beautiful prostitute, Lola la “pisa flores” (flower stomper). The fight ends when one of the rivals falls to the floor with two stab wounds. Not content with the outcome, Lola takes out a razor, tells the fallen man “this is how it’s done,” and slashes his opponent just below the heart. Her victim falls to the ground dying in a pool of blood at which point another prostitute pulls out a hairpin and attacks Lola—a fight several policemen fail to quell. In the romances of Godines, then, women turn out to be tougher, more resilient, more determined, and more sensible (with the obvious exception of Lola) than their male counterparts. In allegorical terms, the problem with the national romance isn’t Mexican women.

In stark contrast to these strong young women, Godines paints even sympathetic men as weak-willed, self-pitying, quick to accept defeat, and too touchy to make rational decisions. Take for example poor Andrés in “Vaya un consejo!” (Here’s some advice!). As the story begins Andrés and his childhood sweetheart Concha are making plans to marry: “Que seré yo tu marido / Y tú mi reina, mi cielo, / Y viviendo los dos juntos / Viviremos muy contentos” (I’ll be your husband / and you my queen, my heaven, / and living, both of us together, / we will live very happily). Concha shares his sentiments, and they agree to talk with their parents the following day. But when Andrés arrives home, the caretaker informs him that his beloved mother is dying. The desperate young man runs to her house only to find her already dead. He kisses her forehead re-

spectfully, puts things in order, leaves the body with neighbors, and goes off to his job as a butcher in the local market, hoping to get an advance from his boss to pay for a decent burial. To compound his bad luck, an inspector from the Consejo Superior de Salubridad (High Council on Public Health) decides to shut down the butcher shop that day, and his apologetic boss has to turn down his request for a loan. Despondent, Andrés, “without thinking that the outcome would be disastrous,” goes into a nearby cantina and starts drinking. Hours later, he remembers his mother’s body alone on her bed and stumbles into the street only to fall down, split his head open, and get taken off to jail. Meanwhile, the concerned neighbors, including his *novia*, have taken up a collection to bury the old woman. When the tardy Andrés arrives at the cemetery, no one will talk to him, not even Concha. Although the poet’s final words blame Consejo bureaucrats for ruining the young man’s future, from the perspective of his neighbors and fiancée the real problem is a fundamental weakness of character—a flaw his hard work, devotion to his mother, and fidelity to Concha can’t overcome. Andrés isn’t a *tenorio* or a tough guy, but he isn’t much of man either, and that immaturity costs him his future happiness.⁶⁷

The bohemian flavor of Godines’s romances is part of their charm, giving them a lighthearted, live-and-let-live feel that takes some of the sting out of his damning critique of Mexican manhood. And he’s not too proud to mock his own male hypocrisy, as happens in “Pero . . . que zapatos!” (But . . . what shoes!).⁶⁸ The poet starts off by explaining to his friend Antonio, to whom he has dedicated the romance, about his obsession with beautiful women and then launches into an anecdote about an afternoon spent in a *pulquería* near Mixcalco.⁶⁹ As he enjoys a glass of good pulque (*de legítimo tlamapa*) and a cheap cigar (*torpedero . . . humilde*), he suddenly spots a young woman, ravishingly beautiful from her coiffure (*peinado*) to her stockings, “unas medidas más coquetas / Que ganas daban . . . ¡vamos! / Que ganas daban de veras / De tocarlas con los labios” (stockings so sexy / that they made me want to . . . wow! / they really made me want / to touch them with my lips). But when his admiring gaze descends to the woman’s feet: “¡Que terrible desengaño! / Eran sus pies muy pequeños / Pero tan viejo el calzado / Que exclamé con amargura: / Que zapatos! . . . ¡que zapatos!” (What a terrible disappointment! / Her feet were tiny, / but her shoes so old / that I exclaimed with bitterness: / What

shoes! . . . what shoes!). After he repeats the story out loud for a friend who has just come in, the young woman takes notice.

Descansó por un momento
Y viéndome de zoslayo
Me dijo así: ¿no le gusto?
Ni usted porque está chorreando
Y si tiene cinco gruyos
Pues ¡compreme los zapatos!



[She paused for a moment
And looking at me out of the corner of her eye
Told me this: You don't like me?
Don't just be spouting off
If you've got five bucks
Then buy me the shoes!]

Chagrined, the poet checks his pockets, comes up empty, turns to his friend, and says, “She’s right: who cares!” As the vignette makes clear, the author’s alter ego is neither a feminist nor a gentleman, but as in all Godines’s romances, the self-confident young woman dispatches her admirer/harasser with ease.

Godines’s penchant for juxtaposing strong women and weak men offers few opportunities to imagine what a good relationship might look like. But two of his romances hint at a workable solution to the war between the sexes—and both involve men reluctantly abandoning their traditional prerogatives. “El Aguila de Oro” (The Golden Eagle) begins with the poet’s alter ego excusing himself to his partner Concha for coming home drunk the previous night.⁷⁰ “It will be as you wish,” he tells her, “because you know I won’t contradict you. But hear me out. If I came home drunk last night, I’m going to explain why, and you can decide for yourself.”⁷¹ Having tried to soften her up a bit, he proceeds to tell her what happened—a long story involving a friend, Pancraccio, who invites him for a drink at a very elegant tavern (El Aguila de Oro) in Tacuba, where they get extremely drunk and have a great time. “What an idiot!” she replies, “you prefer to spend your money drinking, but what do I eat? You’re always telling me you love me, you love me, until you make yourself deaf.”⁷²

When he tries several times to get a word in, she ends the conversation with

Trabajar ya no te gusta,
Pretextos pones á todo
Y mientras yo, me refresco
Y gracias á lo que ahorro,
Tenemos cuartoucho
Por no poder pagar otro,
Y ya te lo dije en antes
Que de esta manera pronto,
Tú irás para la . . . China [chingada]
Y yo á vender tostado de horno.⁷³



[You don't like to work anymore,
You have excuses for everything
And meanwhile, I get some rest
And thanks to what I save,
We have a shabby room
Because it's all we can afford,
And as I told you before
If you keep this up,
You can go to . . . China [go fuck yourself]
And I'll go sell cornmeal biscuits.]

Fortunately for the poet, his friend Pancraccio shows up and convinces Concha that the excellence of the pulque, “de lo mejor es el colmo” (it's the best of the best), really was to blame. To prove it, he suggests that they take her along to “put an end to disputes and calm their stomachs.” Concha happily agrees and a little while later they're running through the streets of Tacuba “like three crazy people,” toasting the *Aguila de Oro* and its owner Don Julio Vázquez (to whom the romance is dedicated). Although an unsuspecting reader might be shocked at Concha's eagerness to join in the fun after berating her partner for his improvidence, the romance's final twist reveals that what was bothering Concha all along was drudging her life away while her partner enjoyed a night on the town with his male friends.

A second romance, “¡Qué viva la Independencia!” (Long Live Independence!), provides an even more explicit endorsement of companionate relationships.⁷⁴ The strong woman in this poem is Loreto: “Lo mejor de todo el barrio / Por su gracia, y su franqueza / Su patriotismo y su garbo” (The best in the whole barrio / thanks to her grace and her openness / her patriotism and her elegance). Although Loreto has learned from her beloved but recently deceased grandmother how to “live off her work,” she is thinking about marrying her *flaco* (boyfriend), “Jesús el carnicero, / Inteligente muchacho / Versador con todo el mundo / Y como amigo el más franco” (Jesús the butcher / an intelligent lad / on good terms with everyone / and the most trustworthy of friends). On the eve of Independence Day (September 15), three male friends drop by Loreto’s room to see if she wants to celebrate with them. They’re drinking tequila, toasting Hidalgo and the other Independence heroes, and preparing to go to the Zócalo for the annual *Grito* when a furious Jesús shows up, a knife in one hand and his coat wrapped around the other. Turning to Loreto, he demands to know “¿donde / Te marchas con esos vagos; / Rotos mierderos que comen / De lo que dejo en mi plato / Y no traen en su bolsillo / Para fumar ni un cigarro?” (Where / are you off to with these bums; / shitty good-for-nothings who eat / the scraps off my plate / and who don’t have in their pocket / even a cigar to smoke?). “I’m going to the Grito,” Loreto replies, “to have a wild time (*dar vuelo al hilacho*), to walk around with my friends, and then to sleep.” “And what if I forbid it?” Jesús threatens. To which Loreto responds, “Pues eso sale sobrando / Porque no eres mi marido / Para evitarme lo que hago” (Well, that would be going too far / because you’re not my husband / to be telling me what I can or can’t do). Jesús escalates his threat with “Y á los dos nos lleva el diablo; / Pero quieras que no quieras / Has de hacer lo que te mando” (And the devil take us both / but whether you want to or not / you have to do what I say). When Loreto refuses, he brandishes his knife. At this point one of the other men intervenes, chiding Jesús that Independence Day is a time to celebrate and reminding him that they all have knives. The angry lover pauses for a moment, contemplates his *novia*, and announces

pues bien, al ¡Grito!
 Así lo quieres, pues vamos;
 Pero antes déme el que tenga

De sus botellas un fajo
Y perdonen mis ofensas
Soy un loco! . . . estoy muy briago!!



[well okay, to the *Grito*!
That's how you want it, so let's go
But first give me a swallow
Of whatever is in those bottles
And forgive my offenses
I'm a crazy man! . . . really messed up!!]

Crisis averted and lesson learned, the happy group heads off for the Zócalo. Later, as the crowd celebrates the *Grito*, Jesús gathers Loreto in a warm embrace, and they head off into the streets with their companions singing and shouting “Long Live Independence! Long Live the Mexicans!” As with Concha in the previous romance, Loreto is annoyed not because the men are planning to spend the night carousing but because Jesús tries to exclude her from the fun. After he relents, their relationship—or so the poet leads us to believe—becomes stronger because he's willing to change his mind and include her in the adventure, to treat her as he would his male companions rather than as a subservient woman, to respect her “independence.”

Like most *romance callejero* poets, Godines preferred local idiosyncrasies to national allegories. Perhaps inspired by independence celebrations, he seems to have crossed over in this instance. The most obvious allegorical element is the romantic reconciliation at the poem's finale, which occurs just as the crowd erupts into cheers after the *Grito*: “Al escuchar tanto ruido, / Al ver tan soberbio cuadro, / Le dio Jesús á Loreto / Un estrechísimo abrazo” (On hearing such a roar, / on seeing such a proud sight / Jesús gave Loreto / the tightest of embraces). As in classic foundational fiction, the reader is presented here with a beautiful heterosexual couple whose emotional and physical bond promises to produce healthy, well-brought-up children—the foundation of a great nation. To reinforce the patriotic imagery, Godines layers on religious symbols, albeit with an incestuous twist. In this allegory, the redeemed Jesús is the “savior” of the nation of Mexico, and his soon-to-be wife Loreto, who takes her name

from Our Lady of Loreto, a manifestation of the Virgin Mary, represents the holy mother. Loreto is also the location of the Italian pilgrimage site for the Holy House in Nazareth where Jesus was raised, an allegorical reference that links the Loreto in the story to both motherhood and domesticity.⁷⁵ Just as nineteenth-century *costumbristas* used popular culture to construct national identity, Godines uses a working-class couple to embody—in themselves and their children—the future of Mexico.

Despite the similarity to classic national allegories, “¡Qué viva la Independencia!” is a foundational fiction with a difference. Godines’s romance makes no attempt to bridge social chasms of race, ethnicity, class, education, and the like through marriage and mestizo children. Instead it locates the working-class couple—presumably mestizo already—at the center of the nation-building enterprise. Once the perennial gender gap has been bridged through respectful and companionate marriage, he seems to say, the crucial step to national consolidation will have been taken, and other troublesome social divisions will either disappear or cease to matter.

Some Thoughts on Modernity and Companionate Marriage

Penny press editors could get quite sentimental and quite unrealistic about the transformative potential of solid working-class marriages. However, in the *romances callejeros*, wholesome sentiments and aspirations are leavened with a humorous appreciation of human failings, a tactic that works to breathe life and possibility into ideal forms. Only the most naive of readers would assume that Concha and the poet or Loreto and Jesús or Pitacio and his *vieja*, who celebrate the death of Maximilian together (see ch. 4), will live *happily* ever after. But the authors hint that a shared capacity for gratitude, respect, companionship, and nurturance—the virtues expressed in “Macetita embalsamada”—will strengthen their relationships, shape their identities, and make them better citizens. Moreover, these virtues mark the relationship as modern, defined in direct opposition to the traditional values represented by symbolic figures like Don Juan Tenorio and Doña Inés, whose troubled love can be resolved only in death.

The aptly titled “Romance modernista,” for example, recounts the story of the beautiful, chaste, sensible, industrious Ramona, who helps sup-

port her elderly father, a blind beggar.⁷⁶ Having reached maturity, she approaches an equally responsible, equally poor young man from the neighborhood, Fernando, and asks him his “intentions.” Although he has long admired Ramona, Fernando is dumbfounded by the question, since it is the first sign he has had of any interest on her part, but he quickly recovers by offering his hand in marriage.

Escucha linda Ramona,
Si tu te casas conmigo,
Te juro que has de ser otra,
Más no te ofrezco riquezas,
Automóviles ni joyas,
Porque no soy millonario,
Pero tendrás caricias de sobra,
Y si Dios nos da herederos,
Alegrarán nuestra choza;
Además, si hay araños,
Ni te metes á celosa,
Haremos una alcancía;
Si eres mujer económica,
Juntamos algunos fierros
Y ponemos una fonda,
Un estanquillo, ó taberna
Según se presten las cosas.



[Listen, beautiful Ramona,
If you marry me,
I swear that things will be different,
I can't offer you riches,
Automobiles or jewels,
Because I'm not a millionaire,
But you will have many things,
You will never lack shoes,
House, clothes and soup,
We'll go on walks,
You'll have caresses aplenty,

And if God grants us children,
They will gladden our hut;
Besides that, if there are no scuffles,
And if you stay steady,
We will get a money box;
If you're an economical woman,
We'll put together our coins
And open a small restaurant,
A kiosk, or a tavern,
Depending on how things fall out.]

As expected, after years of hard work, the couple realize their modest dreams: children, their own restaurant (which they name Don Cucufate, after the penny press in which the romance appears), and a respectable middle-class lifestyle, which allows Fernando to dress like a *diputado* (congressman).

“Romance modernista” lacks the bohemian charm of most penny press romances and perhaps for that reason makes the point about the virtues of companionate marriage with more clarity and force. And as the title indicates, the author considers this kind of romantic partnership quintessentially modern. The connection between loving marriages and modernity is not as surprising as it might seem at first glance. The editors’ introduction to *Love and Globalization* notes that recent scholarship has identified a “trend away from ‘traditional’ notions of family that emphasize the role of social obligation in the reproduction of kinship systems and toward globalizing models of family that are increasingly based on a ‘love’ that is chosen, deeply felt, ‘authentic,’ and profoundly personal . . . that increasingly privileges a notion of people using love both as an ideal for which to strive and as the means through which they constitute their families.”⁷⁷

For one of the editors, anthropologist Jennifer Hirsch, this shift happened in rural Mexican towns in the mid-1980s, as young working-class women and men began to see *confianza*—which they defined as “the development and maintenance of emotional and sexual intimacy”—as central to a successful marriage. In contrast, “couples who married in the 1950s and 1960s talked about marriage as a bond of obligation, held together by an ideal of respect and the mutual fulfillment of gendered responsibilities. . . .



FIG. 5.3 José Guadalupe Posada/Author Unknown, “¿Onde va Doña Manuela?,” *El Chile Piquin*, January 12, 1904. Courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Love, if it existed, was the result of living well together, but it was not necessarily the goal.⁷⁸ While there’s no reason to doubt the sincerity of Hirsch’s informants, evidence from the early twentieth-century penny press suggests that their insistence on a dramatic recent shift in attitudes toward marriage might be a bit ahistorical and far too neat. Certainly, the transition from traditional to modern understandings of love, intimacy, romance, and matrimony was under way several decades earlier in Mexico, at least for the urban working classes.

That leaves sex. As we’ve seen, *romance callejero* poets had a penchant for sexual innuendo, mostly in the form of suggestive ellipses and *albures* (word games) intended to promote snickers rather than suggest intimacy. Despite their reticence, however, we do get an occasional glimpse into the role of sexual pleasure in sustaining intimate relationships. Take, for example, the 1905 cover of *El Chile Piquin* (see fig. 5.3).⁷⁹ The central

image by José Guadalupe Posada depicts a plump working-class woman of indeterminate age and missing her front teeth talking to a scrawny working-class man with a scruffy moustache. The woman is on her way to market with apron and shawl and with a basket over one arm; the man looks like a *jornalero* (day laborer) with sandals, rolled-up pants, straw hat, and a pack of some sort on his back. She faces the reader, but her eyes are directed at the man, her right index finger pointing in his direction; he has his back slightly turned and listens attentively to what she's telling him. The accompanying text relates their conversation.

—¿Onde va Doña Manuela?

—Voy á la plaza Perfirio.

—Y usted nomás me camela,

—Es que l'amo con delirio.

—No seasté tan hablador,

—Y usted no sea tan bribona.

—(Que suave está el valedor.)

—(La jaña está muy sazona.)

—¿Te vas conmigo amor mío?

—Si Perfirio hasta el infierno.

—Pos ora si que me río

—de lo crudo del invierno.



[—Where are you going, Doña Manuela?

—I'm going to the plaza, Perfirio.

—You're just flirting with me,

—It's that I'm crazy about you.

—Don't be such a flatterer.

—And you, don't be such a tease.

—(How smooth this guy is.)

—(How ripe this honey seems.)

—Are you going with me, my love?

—Yes, Perfirio even into hell.

—Well now, I really am going to laugh
—at the harshness of winter.]

Perfirio might be a flatterer, but he's no *tenorio*: the exchange with Doña Manuela is perfectly balanced, compliment for compliment, innuendo for innuendo. The humor derives from the cognitive dissonance created by their frank expressions of mutual desire—especially the parenthetical “thoughts” that reveal the authenticity of that desire—and their decidedly unsexy demeanor. Moreover, Perfirio's final comment, about laughing at the harshness of winter with Doña Manuela to keep him warm, grounds the intimate tone of the exchange in the promise of bodily contact. If modern love is indeed tied to “the development and maintenance of emotional and sexual intimacy,” these two are headed in the right direction—even if neither looks the part. In fact, their ugliness serves both to heighten the comic effect of their mutual seduction and to mark them as *ordinary* working people, a representational strategy typical of penny press satire.

Absent from this affectionately satiric scene is the specter of Don Juan Tenorio in either of his penny press guises: the seductive *tenorio de barrio* preying on weak-willed women or the hypermasculine tough guy eager to pull out a knife at the slightest affront to his manhood. Doña Manuela might see Perfirio as a suave *valedor* (literally, a valiant guy), but she doesn't seem the least bit worried about his temper or intentions. So perhaps the *El Diablito Rojo* contributor who insisted that Mexicans went to see *Don Juan Tenorio* on Day of the Dead because “Tenorio is dead” was right after all.

A 1903 *La Guacamaya* street talk column includes this exchange between two *cotorras* (chatterboxes), one of whom has just attended the annual performance of *Don Juan Tenorio* with her *viejo* (old man):

—pos mi Viejo lestubo danda á la chamba todo el día y hasta en la noche me llevó á ver Don Juan Tiñoso, y por cierto que estubo muy rete chulo sobre todo aquello cuando el incomododor D. Gonzales, solo en su cochesito, y le adice á Don Juan: Aquí me tienes don Juan ora que vienen conmigo los que en vida jueron majes pa respirar por lomblijo.

—¡Huy! Mialma pos llamero se lo sabuiste de memoria.⁸⁰



[—well my Old Man was working all day at his job but later that night he took me to see Don Juan Tiñoso, and it was really cute especially when the discombobulator Don Gonzales, alone in his little carriage, says to Don Juan: “Here I am Don Juan and now all those who were suckers in life have to go with me to breathe through the navel.”

—Wow! My dear, now you really know it by heart.]

The joke revolves around the *cotorra*'s scrambled version of the Comendador's speech. Replacing *tenorio* with *tiñoso* (mangy) is a running gag that works as an editorial comment on Don Juan's reputation for manly elegance. Mishearing *comendador* (commander of a military order of knights) as *incomododor* suggests that he's someone who makes others uncomfortable—precisely his role in this scene—while it mocks his patriarchal authority. And the divine punishment that forces *majes* (gullible men who are cuckolded by their wives) to breathe through the navel for all eternity casts Don Juan as a cuckold, a role reversal that would indeed have humiliated the honor-obsessed aristocrat. These sly jibes at Don Juan's manhood, which emerge from an evening at the theater with her “old man,” give some sense of how working-class audiences might have engaged—and might continue to engage—the pervasive spirit of *donjuanismo*: not as a model for masculine behavior or gender relations but as an amusing foil against which to measure themselves as modern subjects.