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PORFIRIO DIAZ IN MEXICO'S HISTORICAL BALLADS

By MERLE E. SIMMONS*

MEXICO'S ballad singers, known as *corridistas* or *trovadores*, have over the last three-quarters of a century left us a motley but extremely graphic picture of much that has transpired on the Mexican scene. Reflecting in every word and every line the closeness of their authors' relationship with the common people, the *corridos* (ballads) of Mexico's traveling minstrels—songs which have been and still are sung in market places and on street corners to crowds of sombreroed peasants who listen attentively as narratives about revolutionary battles, the exploits of popular heroes, or other more prosaic events unfold—afford the historian a unique insight into the workings of the popular mind. Profound interpretations and “facts” as such must, of course, not be sought in *corridos*, but truth as the man in the street or the farmer in his *milpa* saw it, however far such truth may diverge from that gleaned from other perhaps more reliable sources, is reflected in the songs of Mexico's balladeers; and upon popular beliefs of this kind may rest much that is enigmatic in Mexican history. In the brief study which follows we propose to single out for consideration one strong personality, Porfirio Díaz, the dictator-president who for over thirty years was the master of Mexico, and, while observing the role he plays in the ballads of popular singers, to assay the attitudes of the latter and their audiences toward him.¹

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1. The author has attempted a similar study of another problem in contemporary Mexican history in “Attitudes Toward the United States Revealed in Mexican *Corridos*,” *Hispania*, XXXVI (February, 1953), pp. 34-42.

Like that of any *caudillo*, Porfirio Díaz' rise to prominence was based primarily upon personal valor. His brilliant generalship in the war against the French in the 1860's had made him a national hero, and he used his popularity to good advantage in building his political career. Already in a *corrido* which records the execution of Maximilian the name of Díaz is linked to that of no less a figure than Benito Juárez, and the former is credited with having overthrown the imperial government:

Viva Juárez, mexicanos,
vivan los republicanos,
que nos dieron libertad;
y Viva, Porfirio Díaz
que a sus pies hizo rodar,
el infame gobierno imperial.²

(*El emperador Maximiliano*, in Higinio Vázquez Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos* [México, n.d.], p. 259.)

That the Mexican soldiers sang of Díaz' valor during the French war is proved by one strophe of the famous army song *La cucaracha*. The version which we possess is from the twentieth century, but a reference to Díaz and General Forey of the imperial forces undoubtedly dates from the period of French intervention:

Con lás barbas de Forey
voy a hacer un vaquerillo,
pa' ponérselo al caballo
del valiente don Porfirio.

(*La cucaracha*, in Vicente T. Mendoza, *El romance español y el corrido mexicano* [México, 1939], p. 553.)

More eloquent than this direct reference are the implications of an observation in one of the many ballads about Heraclio Bernal, a famous nineteenth-century bandit of Durango, where the *corridista*, in an effort to dramatize the bad man's bravery and daring, declares that "hasta don Porfirio Díaz/quiso conocerlo vivo." (*Heraclio Bernal*, in Mendoza, *El romance español*, p. 442.) Another version of

2. In citing texts of *corridos* we have scrupulously reproduced the spelling and punctuation of our sources, even to the point of copying obvious errors.

the same ballad reads: "Que el mismo Porfirio Díaz/deseaba agarrarlo vivo." (*Heracleo* [sic] *Bernal del estado de Sinaloa*, on a broadside of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo.)³ Díaz the president and statesman could have little interest in meeting a bandit from Durango, but Díaz the intrepid soldier well might be expected to have a great deal in common with another brave man. The *corrido* clearly implies that in the popular mind Don Porfirio had come to be the personification of virile valor, the yardstick by which other courageous men were measured. What greater tribute, then, to Bernal than to note that *even* Porfirio Díaz stood in admiration of his valor?⁴

Díaz the soldier-politician, however, soon became Díaz the statesman and peacemaker in the eyes of many Mexicans and foreigners. Peace came to Mexico for the first time since Independence as the war hero ruthlessly but effectively suppressed *caudillos* and bandits (as is recorded in many ballads about such bad men as Heraclio Bernal, Valentín Mancera, and others). Mexico had never known a period of such rapid material progress. Railroads were built, industry expanded, the capital filled with mansions which copied Parisian elegance, and foreign capitalists rushed to Mexico to seize opportunities for highly profitable investment guaranteed by the dictator's demonstrated ability to maintain political stability. But the Mexican *pueblo* shared little in the economic prosperity. Under the Díaz land policy the tillable areas of the country passed rapidly into the hands of a few *terratenedentes*, while the small farmer, stripped of his land, was compelled to become a worker on one of the large *haciendas* at

3. Antonio Vanegas Arroyo was Mexico's most outstanding printer of *corridos* and other popular literature from the 1880's until his death about fifteen years after the turn of the century. After 1901, however, he met strong competition from Eduardo Guerrero who, following Vanegas Arroyo's death, moved into first place among publishers of *corridos*, *romances*, and other popular poetry. Guerrero, now past ninety, still occupies his place of primacy.

4. A somewhat similar association of ideas occurs in a *corrido* on the death of another bad man, Valentín Mancera:

De México lo despedía
 Todo el Ayuntamiento,
 Y el Presidente decía:
 "A Valentín yo lo siento."

(*Versos de Valentín Mancera traídos del estado de Guanajuato*, on a broadside of Vanegas Arroyo.)

very low wages. Industrial workers fared no better as they found themselves obliged to work long hours at low pay and their efforts to organize and to strike were ruthlessly suppressed.⁵ Thus it is not surprising that the material progress of the Díaz period, which so impressed well-to-do Mexicans and foreign observers, seems to have left the *pueblo*, the common people, unmoved. The only *corridos* we have which reflect enthusiasm for this aspect of the dictator's regime are two songs which are obviously from the Capital. One expresses the *pueblo's* ingenuous enthusiasm for some recently inaugurated electric streetcars and ends with "vivas" for both the streetcars and Porfirio Díaz;⁶ the other, a composition which comments upon the training of army reserves in the first years of the present century, reveals that "progress" as a philosophical concept had not been without some influence upon popular urban thinking. In the enthusiastic response of Mexican youths to the call for regular Sunday morning drills, and in the public's large turnout to watch the marching of the reserves, the singer sees impressive evidence of growing patriotism among Mexicans.⁷

But if the masses in general give no evidence of having been impressed by the material "progress" which Díaz had brought Mexico, apparently they had not been long in perceiving that the hero of the war against the French was turning into a tyrant. As early as 1879 opposition to Díaz ap-

5. For an excellent brief exposition of the social and economic policies of the Díaz period, see Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and Its Heritage* (New York, 1928).

6. *Los trenes eléctricos*, in Higinio Vásquez Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, II (México, 1925), 296. The new streetcars were inaugurated on January 15, 1900.

7. Alabar todos debemos
 La idea del Reservismo
 Que vino á avivar el fuego
 Del natural patriotismo,
 Demostrando sobre todo
El progreso más eximio.
 ¡Que viva siempre exclamemos
 Nuestro Presidente digno!
 Y el Señor General Reyes
 Que hoy alienta al Reservismo.

(*Los reservistas de esta capital*, on a broadside of Vanegas Arroyo. The italics are not in the original.)

General Bernardo Reyes was named Minister of War on January 24, 1900, and the reserve program was inaugurated in April, 1901.

peared in Veracruz and was sternly suppressed by the governor, General Luis Terán, who promptly executed all those accused of anti-Porfirist political activities. The heroism of the conspirators against the dictator was duly recorded by an anonymous *trovador* who leaves no doubt as to where popular sympathy lay. Terán, the executioner, is condemned as an "infame gobernador" who for his cruelty "nunca tendrá rival," but Díaz himself comes in for most of the blame when the balladeer, in naming the nine martyrs and explaining the nature of the charges against them, declares:

Su delito fué atacar
a un tirano presidente,
que se mantenía en el puesto
odiado de toda gente.

Most significantly, the President himself is held personally responsible for the outrage. When objection was raised by one Juvencio Robles that the execution was inhuman, that the prisoners were entitled to a fair trial, Terán replied:

Ha ordenado quien lo puede
que se les mate en caliente,
y esta es la consigna real,
de Porfirio el Presidente.

(*Los mártires de Veracruz*, in Vázquez Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, p. 158).

Furthermore, from a time apparently not too long after Díaz became President comes a *corrido* which pointedly asks him why he has not kept the promises he made as a candidate:

—Porfirio,—te dice el pueblo,
—¿Por qué lo has engañado?
Que en el tiempo de Tejeda
Te viste tan agobiado.

Como en sueño lo *dijistes*,
Que si subías a la silla,
Luego al momento quitabas
Esa maldita estampilla.

Todas fueron ilusiones,
Nada de eso se ha cumplido.—

Por eso el pueblo te dice,
—Porfirio, ¿qué ha sucedido?

(*Porfirio Díaz*, in Vicente S. Acosta, "Some Surviving Elements of Spanish Folklore in Arizona," diss. [University of Arizona, 1951], p. 52.)

As the singer brings his *corrido* to a close he impudently suggests a course for Díaz to follow: "Ahora siéntate en el suelo/Para que otro suba a la silla."

As might be expected, further evidence of this kind is scanty, in part because the *pueblo* seem to have been genuinely indifferent to governmental affairs, in part because balladeers and printers were undoubtedly exercising prudent caution in criticizing the dictator. It is perhaps more than mere coincidence that the most violent attacks on Díaz and his government are found, not on printed broadsides, but in two compositions presumably from oral tradition.⁸

The date of the first of these is indefinite, there being no way to be certain whether it appeared early or late in Díaz' extended rule.⁹ But whatever its date, the indictment of the dictator incorporated in it is bitter and unvarnished. After a rambling introduction of two strophes in which the *corridista* expresses his desire to sing of the troubles which oppress Mexico, he declares:

Con que tomando por principio
al Ciudadano General Porfirio Díaz,
como la causa principal
de que las Leyes mexicanas se vulneren,
en el concepto de que él es el Presidente,
y nos gobierna hoy en el día
si me otorga la licencia
en alta voz voy explicarles lo siguiente.

The singer recalls to his audience how Díaz, in his *Plan de Tuxtepec*, garnered public support for himself through his

8. These texts come from the Archivo de Bellas Artes, Sección de Música, where they are contained in a large collection of *corridos* and other popular songs gathered by folklorists, teachers, and other investigators. There is a volume for each state and territory of the Mexican Republic.

9. The only clue to the date of the composition lies in a reference to the murder of General Trinidad García de la Cadena, which occurred in 1886. How long after this incident it was written is problematical.

promise of effective suffrage—a promise which the people hopefully expected to be fulfilled as soon as the country was pacified. But the President betrayed his trust in this and in other matters :

Pero el heróico Señor Díaz
sentado ya sobre las riendas del gobierno,
tomó las aguas de Leteo
y hecho en olvido sus promesas mencionadas
al fin que nada, nada nada le importaba
la indigencia de los pueblos,
si él ya estaba colocado
en el lugar que de antemano ambicionaba.

(*Historia Núm. 4*, in the Archivo de Bellas Artes, Sección de Música, in the volume for the state of Puebla.)

Opposition to Díaz has been throttled, declares the *corridista*, because “de una ley fuga este infame se ha valido/para quitarles la vida/a todo aquel que ante las leyes/Mexicanas reclamara su derecho.” In conclusion the poet appeals to the ghost of Benito Juárez again to take up the sword in order to free the nation from “esa opresión tan horrorosa/ en que nos han puesto los recursos de la infamia.”

An equally damning commentary on Porfirian justice, although Díaz is not mentioned personally, appears in the second composition, a *corrido* which relates the death in 1904 of one Juan Rodríguez, a humble man who was murdered when he tried to collect a debt of one hundred pesos from a rich landowner, Aurelio Saldaña. The *corridista's* comments upon the plight of the poor under prevailing conditions leave no doubts as to popular dissatisfaction :

Solo el que tiene dinero
goza de las garantías
el pobre vive sufriendo
una sufección impía.

En nuestra nación la paz
solo el rico la disfruta
y al pobre la ley de Anás
esa es la que a él le impone.

At one point in his narrative the singer declares :

Esta narración ya no la prosigo
 para que nadie se enfade
 ustedes sabrán que al perro más chico
 siempre lo revuelca el grande.

(*Historia Núm. 6*, in the Archivo de Bellas Artes, Sección de Música, in the volume for the state of Puebla.)

There is evidence, too, that as Díaz' rule came to a close the *pueblo* were acutely aware of the bad economic state of the country. In a very curious song which bears the amusing title, *A echar pulgas a otra parte*, a popular bard notes with alarm that fewer and fewer people have money and that business, foreign enterprises excepted, is in serious straits because of Díaz' policies:

Vemos en las mercerías
 Y en los cajones de ropa,
 No mas abriendo la boca
 A los cajeros de Diaz
 De todas las ferreterias
 y tiendas de abarrotes,
 Los dueños corren al trote,
 Pero el dinero va á escape
 Se va torciendo el bigote
 A echar pulgas á otra parte.

The *corridista* calls the roll of numerous trades and professions by way of noting that all are hard put to earn enough to stay afloat. Foreign enterprises, on the other hand, are prospering:

Las empresas mexicanas
 Están tiradas al suelo,
 Y las del extranjero
 Suenan como las campanas

(*A echar pulgas a otra parte*, on a broadside of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo.)¹⁰

Especially obnoxious is the debt which Mexico owes the United States and which seems to drain off the national resources into foreign hands. The *trovador* even fears that

10. This composition was sufficiently well received to call forth a second part which also appeared on a broadside of Vanegas Arroyo.

North Americans will soon be able to take over control in Mexico and dispossess Mexicans in their own country.¹¹

One other composition skirts economic problems very gingerly through the use of a devious metaphor whereby the economic suffering of the masses early in the century is attributed to the pampered appetite of a rabbit (apparently upper-class dandies) which can no longer live on a rabbit's normal diet but demands instead chocolate! Entitled *Señora, su conejito, ya no le gusta el zacate, sólo quiere chocolate*, this composition, which appeared on a Vanegas Arroyo broadside dated 1903, is in *décimas* and cannot be considered a *corrido* in the usual sense of the term. Its political importance, however, as a satirical expression of popular protest, which perhaps already was building up toward rebellion, is not to be ignored. Although neither Díaz nor the government is mentioned anywhere in the composition (only the upper classes with their elegant European tastes are censured), the implication of popular dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Mexico is clear.

While the evidence just presented is limited and cries for further confirmation,¹² it suggests strongly that Francisco I. Madero and other politicians who opposed the re-election of Díaz in 1910 probably had a solid foundation of real if somewhat ill-defined public unrest upon which to build their cam-

11. N[o] vale ser misionero,
Ni cura ni sacristan,
Los empleados vienen y van
Y mas se aleja el dinero.
¿Y la deuda americana?
Todo para el extranjero
¡Pobre Patria americana!
Pronto va á sepultarte,
El yanke dirá mañana:
A echar pulgas á otra parte.

12. The only other songs we have found which even hint at tyranny or a reign of terror are *Los desterrados a la Isla de Cavo Hueso* (on a Vanegas Arroyo broadside dated 1910), which merely ponders the fate of some criminals who are committed to prison on the island named, and *El desertor* (in Mendoza, *El romance español*, p. 550, and in many other places), which expresses something of popular dislike for the *leva* (conscription). Concerning economic matters, a few remarks come to mind from several *corridos* written about monetary changes early in the century when the old, familiar media of exchange were replaced by new coins. But these latter compositions are all humorous in tone, and while mild complaints are registered because money no longer buys much in a period of rising prices, it would be hard to read into these songs any indication of active unrest.

paign. Indeed, the famous Creelman interview in which Díaz in 1908 ostensibly granted other candidates permission to enter the political arena may have been prompted by the shrewd dictator's realization that his regime was losing public favor.¹³ Whatever his purpose in giving the interview, the President succeeded in firing the public imagination to such a point that his abrupt about-face in jailing Madero when the latter emerged as a dangerous opponent, and his suppression of *antirreeleccionista* activities, only made his situation less tenable. His reluctance to step down was duly recorded in a *corrido* which appeared shortly after the outbreak of revolution:

El veinticuatro del mes de mayo
en que don Porfirio nos ofreció
que renunciaba a la Presidencia
y no lo cumplió.

(*La campaña antirreeleccionista de 1910*, in
Mendoza, *El romance español*, p. 604.)

One of the most damning acts of the dictator in the eyes of the public was his bloody suppression of an *antirreeleccionista* group in Puebla where the leader, one Aquiles Serdán, and several other liberals were besieged in Serdán's house and murdered. The *corrido* which the incident inspired voices the indignation of the *poblanos*:

Hijos de Puebla, de rodillas ofrecedles
un homenaje con el más crecido afán,
a los obreros y estudiantes que como héroes
lentos de gloria sucumbieron con Serdán.

(*Laureles de gloria el mártir de la democracia Aquiles Serdán*, on a broadside of
Eduardo Guerrero.)

The President here is openly called a dictator¹⁴ and his re-election in 1910 is represented as a "burlesca reelección."¹⁵

13. The interview was published in the March, 1908, issue of *Pearson's Magazine* and reprinted in Mexico in *El Imparcial* on March 3, 1908. The text of the interview appears in Agustín V. Casasola, *Historia gráfica de la Revolución* (México, D. F., n.d.), I, 90-91.

14. Cuando Madero bajó a hacer su propaganda,
se adhirió en Puebla mucha gente a su favor,
los que sinceros exigían en su demanda
otro gobierno que no fuera el dictador.

15. Mucio Martínez cuando tuvo la noticia
hizo sobre ellos una cruel persecución,

The incident in Puebla occurred on November 18, 1910, just two days before Madero began his revolt on November 20. The *corrido* is the work of the famous Zapatista singer, Marciano Silva, and bears all the marks of being political propaganda written as part of the nation-wide rebellion headed by Madero. It is, so to speak, Silva's contribution toward popularizing grievances against the dictator in order to attract the *pueblo's* support to the groups who had opposed Díaz' re-election unsuccessfully in the political arena and were now carrying their opposition to the point of armed rebellion.

With Díaz' fall pent-up criticism of his government naturally burst forth violently. His tyranny and unwillingness to relinquish his dictatorial hold upon Mexico overshadowed for a time other aspects of the ex-President's personality.

La toma de Ciudad Juárez, which treats Madero's first great victory against the forces of the dictator, begins by condemning Díaz' duplicity in first encouraging political opposition and then jailing Madero:

Tiró la máscara el Señor Porfirio Díaz
y a Madero quizo con sus esbirros aprehender,
más don Francisco supo esta arteria
y de San Luis salióse, lográndose esconder.

Madero's eventual triumph offers the balladeer an opportunity to philosophize on the instability of Díaz' power and of political power in general:

Los hombres poderosos no olviden la lección
ni crean que en este mundo nunca acaba el poder,
que recuerden siempre a D. Porfirio Díaz
que un sopro del Eterno lo hizo a tierra caer.

*(La toma de Ciudad Juárez, on a broadside
of Eduardo Guerrero.)*

Compared to other *corridistas*, this composer was mild in his denunciation of Díaz; he even seems to feel a certain pity for the deposed dictator when he relates that "el Presidente Díaz salióse de esta tierra/para en país extraño tener

porque el gobierno clerical y porfirista
había triunfado en su burlesca reelección.
General Mucio Martínez was governor of the state of Puebla.

su triste fin." No such compassion is displayed by another singer who at about the same time berated Díaz for his resistance to Madero and his reluctance to give up the presidency:

Porfirio está retratado
con su águila y su letrero
y en el letrero diciendo:
"No pudiste con Madero,
con otros habrás podido,
porque eres camandulero!"¹⁶

Porfirio es responsable
de todita la Nación,
no quiso doblar las manos
que hubiera revolución,
no quiso entregar la silla
que le dolía el corazón.

(Madero, in Vicente T. Mendoza, *Cincuenta corridos mexicanos* [México, D. F., 1944], p. 30.)

Nor is any pity for the "tyrant" to be found in another ballad of the period as it reports that Madero "Vió a la Patria que estaba subyugada/en la más negra y cruel esclavitud." The revolutionary call to arms, the *corridista* declares, was answered by men from all parts of Mexico, and as the troops of Díaz fell back, the puzzled tyrant¹⁷ realized that he must yield to public opinion:

El tirano en su silla se extremece
una tregua concierta con Madero,

16. A variant of this strophe appears in a *corrido* discovered in New Mexico:

Porfirio está retratado
con su vida y su letrero
en el escrito decía
no pudieron con Madero
con otros habrán podido
porque eras camandulero
que los voltean al revés
todos somos maderistas
humildes como la voz.

(*Las mañanas de Madero*, in a collection of *corridos* in the library of the University of New Mexico.)

17. El tirano Porfirio no se explica
ni sabe que soldados ya oponer,
pues sus tropas regresan muy diezmadadas
por el hambre, las balas y la sed.

(*Canto a Madero*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

pues que sabe la lucha es infructuosa
cuando el pueblo se muestra ya altanero[.]

(*Canto a Madero*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

The most bitter indictment of Díaz is to be found, however, in a *corrido* inspired by Emiliano Zapata's capture of Cuautla on May 19, 1911:

Noble Presidente D. Porfirio Díaz
te fuiste para la Europa,
dejaste esta tierra regada, á fé mia,
con sangre de mil patriotas;
por tu cruel gobierno y tu tiranía
el pueblo al fin te despoja
de aquel gran imperio que en él ejer-
cías, contemplándolo un idiota[.]

Fuiste protector sublime
de los valientes hispanos,
y padraastro el más temible
de los indios mexicanos,
sin embargo, fuiste libre,
siendo responsable á tanto;
mientras más grande es el crimen
más gracia encuentra el culpado.

Sin duda pensabas que era heredita-
ria la silla presidencial,
y que de ella dueño te había hecho
Tejeda cuando venciste á la par;
del Sufragio libre también te burla-
bas y la ley electoral,
frente á las casillas ponías fuerza
armada, para al fin poder triunfar.

(*La toma de Cuautla por Zapata*, primera parte, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

The *trovador* proceeds to record Madero's rise, his success in gaining popular support, and the fighting which resulted from the attempt to meet his challenge with armed might. Díaz himself is personally blamed for the suffering and destruction which followed.¹⁸

18. Tú has sido la causa que muchas
familias se encuentren en la miseria;
huérfanos, afligidas viudas,
sin un albergue siquiera!

Nor did the *corridistas* soon forget Porfirio Díaz as a symbol of tyranny and oppression. When in 1914 Victoriano Huerta, one of the most universally hated despots in all Mexican history, fled to exile in Europe as Díaz had done three years earlier, balladeers were quick to note the parallel between the careers of the two exiles, and by way of scourging Huerta they dragged in his predecessor's name for more vilification. One, in relating Huerta's flight, declares:

Llorando su cruel destino,
allá estará ya reunido
con el tirano Porfirio,
triste, triste y afligido.¹⁹

(*El gallo juido y correlón*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

Another treats the same theme humorously, but more effectively, in pitiless satire:

pues dejas la Patria convertida en
ruinas con el furor de la guerra!
mi pluma no alcanza á escribir estas
lineas que requiere la tragedia.

Por tí fueron bombardeadas
muchas ciudades hermosas,
entre ellas la Heroica Cuautla
de Morelos tan preciosa,
tierra bendita inmolada
por la mano caprichosa
de aquellos que ambicionaban
la Reelección afrentosa.

(*La toma de Cuautla por Zapata, primera parte*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

We should note that the tone of this *corrido* is more lofty than most truly popular ballads; it is not a composition likely to be adopted by the *pueblo* and sung or recited around camp fires or in humble huts. There is nothing in it, however, which is incompatible with the style of a popular *trovador* in his more eloquent moments, and it is not difficult to imagine simple people listening with approval and wonderment as the *corridista* excoriates Díaz in a "learned" and pontifical manner.

19. This composition also contains a curious reference to Díaz which is unique in that it is the only comment in all the literature we have examined where the strong man's valor is questioned. In satirizing Huerta's flight to Europe, the *trovador* sets out to enumerate those who, like the latest tyrant, have been "juido y correlón." He declares:

Don Porfirio fué el primero
que se salió á la carrera,
pues vio que el señor Madero
le sonó la calzonera.

The strophe is probably more significant as revealing the *pueblo's* lack of respect for Díaz in 1914 than as a reflection of genuine belief in his cowardice. It is merely an attempt at humor, and no serious portrayal of his character is intended.

Y cuando a Europa llegó
ya lo estaban esperando,
Don Porfirio lo abrazó
y ya estaban platicando
cuando le fué preguntando
¿cómo te fué por allá?
y le respondió llorando
no me acuerdes, por mamá[.]

Asi estaban platicando
cua[n]do comenzó á llorar
y Porfirio, sollozando,
él se puso á lamentar,
se llegaban á acordar
de aquel hueso que perdieron
y Blanquet y los científicos
bramaban como becerros.²⁰

(*Tristes lamentos de Victoriano Huerta al despedirse de la silla, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.*)

Terrorism as a characteristic mark of the Díaz regime is recalled in a *corrido* which concerns the death of Emiliano Zapata. Madero's rebellion, the balladeer recalls, was directed against "Díaz y soldados malditos/que horrorizan a toda la nación." (*La traición de Guajardo, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.*)

Quite aside from the purely political abuses and the tyranny of which the ex-dictator stood accused, the people did not forget the economic abuses of the Porfirist regime: its failure to minister to the needs of the poor, its tendency to favor foreigners to the detriment of Mexicans, and the like. Already in one *corrido* a singer has complained: "Fuiste protector sublime/de los valientes hispanos,/y padrastro el más temible/de los indios mexicanos . . ."; and in other strophes of the same *corrido* equally damning charges appear. In assigning blame for the destruction of Cuautla the *corridista* declares as he addresses the city directly:

Clupa [*sic*] la imprudencia de tus nobles
hijos, que en un lenguaje altanero,
decían con frecuencia que el gran D.

20. General Aureliano Blanquet was one of the conspirators against Madero while occupying the post of commander of the government's forces in the state of Mexico. When Huerta fell, Blanquet went into exile.

Porfirio valía por veinte Maderos
 á esa sentencia se habían adherido
 los más valientes iberos,
 y otros individuos que por conve-
 niencia protegían aquel gobierno.

Creían los privilegiados
 porfiristas de esa tierra
 que el pueblo sería burlado
 otra vez como con Leiva,
 hoy los rifles en la mano
 tenían por votos la guerra
 y por casillas tomaron
 del Gobierno las trincheras.²¹

(*La toma de Cuautla por Zapata, primera parte*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

The same complaints about the same state of Morelos are registered in retrospect some eight or nine years later by a *corridista* who charges that a few *ricachones* were in control of the region prior to Zapata's uprising:

Fueron dueños del E[s]tado
 protegidos por Díaz y Corral;
 ya no daban al proletariado
 la Justicia, todo era impiedad,
 por millares de hectareas contaban
 los bandidos de nuestra entidad;
 fueron tierras y agua que al pueblo robaban
 en esa dictadura fatal.

(*La traición de Guajardo*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

Only a brief stroke, but nevertheless extremely graphic in conveying the swiftness and finality of the *pueblo's* uprising against Díaz (and incidentally an instance of the *corridista* at his literary best in narrating events and portraying personalities concisely and rapidly), are the following lines from a ballad written in 1923:

Cuando el pueblo supo que Madero
 era honrado, legal y valiente,

21. Patricio Leyva had opposed the Díaz candidate for governor of Morelos in the election of 1910. Emiliano Zapata and anti-Díaz groups supported Leyva, but the government's candidate was declared "elected" despite charges that the election was fraudulent.

al instante empuñó el acero
y Porfirio se fué para siempre.

(*La nueva rebelión*, on a broadside of
Eduardo Guerrero.)

With the passing of time, however, the memory of Díaz' stern methods were dimmed in the popular mind by more immediate problems and not infrequently by the abuses of other regimes. So it is that there is apparent in the *corridos* increasing serenity in the public's vision of the period of Díaz, along with a tendency to give the devil his due and concede that his rule was not entirely bad.

Even in the decade or so following his overthrow when, as we have seen, his name was almost universally anathema, an occasional remark by a *corridista* betrays the lasting and not entirely unfavorable impression which the dictator's forceful and colorful personality had made upon the popular mind. One balladeer, in relating the efforts of Porfirio's nephew, Félix Díaz, to become president, refers, albeit only in passing, to the former dictator as "Don Porfirio el prudente." (*La fuga de don Félix Díaz*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.) The description is a curious one which needs clarification; we do not recall having seen Díaz so described in any other place. Another *trovador* excoriates Victoriano Huerta the more effectively by finding something favorable to say about his two immediate predecessors, Madero and Díaz. As might be expected, most of his praise is for the former, but of Díaz he can report that at least he was an "hombre de opinión." (*Los crímenes del tirano Huerta, primera parte*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.) Again the characterization is only a passing remark and the singer does not elaborate.²² Further comment appears in an anti-Madero composition which, though mere political doggerel, should not be ignored completely. The strophe which is germane to our discussion reads:

22. Another instance where Díaz benefits from a comparison with the even more despicable Huerta is found in a *corrido* printed in English translation by John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (New York, 1914), p. 42:

If to thy window shall come Porfirio Díaz,
Give him for charity some cold tortillas;
If to thy window shall come General Huerta
Spit in his face and slam the door.

¿Y la paz no se perdió,
 Que, con su genio severo,
 Don Porfirio aclimató?
 ¿No fué el pueblo MATANCERO
 por Madero?

(*Todo por Madero*, on a broadside from the
 Imprenta 2a Calle de la Penitenciaría,
 Núm. 29.)

Although this composition is probably mere propaganda and not a reflection of popular attitudes or opinions,²³ it does undoubtedly mirror one widely accepted view of Díaz as a great peacemaker, a characterization which apologists for his regime have long nurtured.

As Mexico moved into the second decade of the Revolution, the attitude toward Díaz mellowed noticeably. Some of the reasons for this—disillusionment with the Revolution, increasing lack of confidence in its leaders, and many other causes of dissatisfaction—come out clearly in many *corridos* which we cannot discuss here. Let it suffice for the present to note that Díaz personally begins to be treated with more respect and deference than he had received at any time previously, even during his lifetime. A *corrido* suggestively entitled *Recuerdos de ayer*, which appeared probably in 1924, reflected the new psychological climate so well that its success justified the appearance of a second part.

The *corridista*, in his initial effort, recalls with nostalgia his first visit to Mexico City in the year 1900 when the Capital was at the height of its glory. He remembers his wide-eyed wonderment at the sight of the many impressive buildings,

23. Fortunately, the broadside is dated April of 1913, only two months after Madero had been assassinated and a time when Huerta was desperately trying by every means possible to consolidate his hold on the presidency. Also significant is the form of the composition, whose use of rhetorical questions for propaganda purposes is not a device of popular singers; at least we cannot recall having seen it elsewhere in ballad literature. For this reason, and also because of the ideas expressed, we believe that this is not the work of an artist of the people, but rather mere propaganda, of what origin we can only speculate, issued in an effort to strengthen Huerta's position. This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that the poem in question occupies only about two-thirds of the right-hand column of a sheet which contains in the left-hand column a *corrido* of markedly different tone on the death of Madero; and, significantly, the bolder of the two headings at the top of the page, *En memoria de Madero y Pino Suárez*, which extends across two full columns of the three which make up the sheet, obviously applies only to the genuine *corrido* wherein a singer discreetly expresses sorrow at Madero's death, albeit without displaying open indignation at his murder.

parks, and plazas of the brilliant metropolis; and he calls to mind the feverish activity which was rapidly providing the city with streetcar lines, drainage canals, paved streets, a new post office building, and a national theater. The brilliant Independence-Day festivities, with their parades attended by the cream of Mexico's aristocracy, are remembered longingly as the balladeer reflects gloomily upon Mexico's present exhaustion and paralysis brought on by fratricidal wars. With a call for the return of peace, the *corridista* ends his song which, without ever mentioning Díaz by name, is essentially an apology for his regime. (*Recuerdos de ayer, primera parte*, on a broadside apparently published by Eduardo Guerrero.)

Encouraged by the success of his *corrido*, and possibly emboldened by official tolerance of his defense of the pre-Revolutionary period, the *trovador* in the very first line of the second part of his composition identifies Díaz personally with the period he is evoking: "Allá in illo tempore de porfirianos díaz" After recalling at some length the low prices which prevailed in those happy days, the singer reminds his listeners that "todo era trabajo, todo era armonía"; that "todo era Progreso, Paz y Bendición, / porque una mano de hierro la [the nation] supo gobernar / y por más de treinta años fue el héroe de la paz." Though the *corridista* is careful to emphasize that he personally never was a *porfirista*, he points with alarm at the distressing economic decline of a nation which, as a consequence of civil strife, has retrogressed until the poor are literally dying of hunger. At this point the name of Don Porfirio comes up again as the balladeer proceeds to list by name all the men who have occupied the presidency during the turbulent Revolutionary period ("en unos catorce años nueve presidentes"). Then he poses a fundamental question:

Y, qué has progresado, ilustre nación?
 pues, lo que el soldado, carne de cañón . . .
 oh! in illo tempore tuviste progreso!
 y por este tiempo cuánto retroceso!

(*Recuerdos de ayer, segunda parte*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

To close his *corrido*, the singer prudently suggests that if Alvaro Obregón, the present chief executive, asserts himself and relieves Mexico's suffering, the nation should bless and acclaim him.

The ideas thus expressed in the two parts of *Recuerdos de ayer* were apparently in the air during the 1920's because other *corridos* echo them. A *Corrido a don Porfirio Díaz*, probably written in the late 1920's or early 1930's, honors the former chief executive by recalling the transformation which converted him from a "soldado rudo" into a brilliant general in the fight against the French and ultimately into a universally respected president and statesman. His ruthless methods of centralizing power in himself, dominating by force those whom he could not win by favors, are not glossed over; but the resulting stability and material progress which the nation enjoyed seem to some extent to justify his means. The balladeer attempts to be honest by admitting some of the dictator's faults, although it is noticeable that he is much less specific in enumerating these than he had been in listing Díaz' triumphs.²⁴ Nevertheless, these defects, the singer asserts, caused the people eventually to become tired of their president and laid the groundwork for the failure of Don Porfirio's efforts to retain power. The *corrido* ends with mild criticism of Díaz for having bequeathed the country ten years of war because of his refusal to step down gracefully.²⁵

Once again praise for Díaz, this time for his brave fight

24. El general Díaz tuvo faltas
que nos hicieron gran daño,
pues que se creyó inmortal
é hizo del Pueblo un rebaño.

La instrucción no prodigó
prolongando áun su poder,
sin ver qué ya estaba viejo
y todo fin ha de tener.

Ya después del Centenario
su gobierno se hizo inepto.
y al encontrarse impotente
nombró a Corral que era adepto.

(*Corrido a don Porfirio Díaz*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

25. Diez años de triste guerra
fué la herencia de dejo,
por no entregar el poder
en el destierro murió.

(*Ibid.*)

against the French, turns up in a *corrido* dedicated to Maximilian. The composition is from approximately the same period as the preceding ballad:

El dos de Abril en Puebla
 fué don Porfirio Díaz
 vencedor de traidores
 en la Puebla también.
 Su fama fué muy grande,
 su valor y energía,
 pues que la santa causa
 supo bien defender.²⁶

(*Maximiliano de Austria*, on a broadside of Eduardo Guerrero.)

The *pueblo* did not forget, of course, the injustices of the Díaz period. The organized *agraristas*, in particular, kept alive criticism of the ex-President. From the year 1929, more or less contemporary with the two *corridos* which we have just cited, come these lines:

Don Porfirio y su gobierno,
 formado por dictadores,
 nunca oyeron de su pueblo
 las quejas y los clamores.
 Siempre trabaja y trabaja,
 siempre debiendo al tendero,
 y al levantar las cosechas
 salió perdiendo el mediero.
 Nuestras chozas y jacales
 siempre llenos de tristeza,
 viviendo como animales
 en medio de la riqueza.²⁷

(*El agrarista*, in Mendoza, *El romance español*, p. 558.)

26. A variant of these strophes appears in the *Historia Núm. 2* which is to be found in the Archivo de Bellas Artes. The differences, however, are not of significance to our study.

27. This *corrido* smacks of inspired agrarian propaganda, although it is the work of two *corridistas* of the *pueblo*.

Another ballad from the late 1920's recalls the fight for land reform against Díaz and his henchmen:

La agrupación agrarista,
 Con voluntad muy resuelta,
 Se le opuso al dictador
 En valiente acción directa.
 Esta misma agrupación
 Ocasionó gran conquista,

As the Revolution has lost its initial vigor, however, and new generations have appeared on the scene, Díaz has continued to gain in public esteem.²⁸ Quite naturally his popularity has prospered primarily in the cities where conservative influence is strong and where many people still long for the glorious days of Don Porfirio. Partly because conservative groups have made his name a symbol of opposition to the Revolution, the political and intellectual left has been correspondingly vehement in its attacks upon Díaz, some of which have been made through *corridos* written by left-wing propagandists like Concha Michel, a "learned" singer who, in one of her compositions, denounces the ex-President in these terms:

El demócrata Madero
al pueblo favoreció,
tumbando a Porfirio Díaz
que a México envileció.
Poco a poco van cayendo
todos los que son tiranos,
hasta que el mundo se limpie
y quedan puros hermanos.

(*La ley proletaria*, in Mendoza, *El romance español*, p. 480.)

Whether such *corridos* succeeded in influencing popular opinion is problematical. Certain it is that they are mere propaganda, and, unlike the work of balladeers of the *pueblo*, they do not necessarily reflect popular opinion or appeal to patterns of thought already existing among the common people. Their purpose is, indeed, to make palatable to the *pueblo* political ideas which politician-poets not of that social group deem desirable.

Quitándole la careta

Al cacique porfirista.

(*El centro ejidal de Rancho Nuevo, Municipalidad de Ciudad Victoria, Estado de Tamaulipas*, in *Mexican Folkways*, February-March, 1927, p. 35.)

Furthermore, in the 1930's, at the time when Plutarco Elías Calles was exiled by Lázaro Cárdenas, a *corridista* seized the occasion to summarize the history of the Revolution which, according to him, ended "Treinta años de dictadura/del odioso porfirismo" (*Calles-Morones*, on a broadside apparently published by Eduardo Guerrero.)

28. It is significant that Porfirio Díaz as a motion picture character has in recent years demonstrated a box-office appeal surpassed only by a few top stars. Consequently Mexico has witnessed recently a veritable stream of nostalgic movies based upon the glorious period of Don Porfirio.

The most recent *corrido* concerning Díaz which has come to our attention fits into the general contemporary pattern of according the former President more honor than was customary during his first decade or so out of power. We first encountered the song in broadside form in 1945, but in the summer of 1950 it was still being printed and sold by Eduardo Guerrero. While it does not concern itself with Díaz alone, it vouchsafes him considerable attention in a general synthesis of Mexican history:

También otro hombre gobernó a nuestra Patria,
Porfirio Díaz, digno de honra y honor,
Huerta, Madero y el caudillo Zapata,
fueron autores de la nueva revolución.

True to his class, the *corridista* concedes that the poor derived benefits from the Revolution, especially from President Calles' efforts in the 1920's to take from the rich and give to the poor. But he notes that such policies have had serious national repercussions, and, after a moment's reflection, he concludes that Don Porfirio's government, although dictatorial, was better. The proof is to be found in the prestige which Mexico enjoyed among nations down to the end of the Díaz regime:

Todo esto es digno de ser agradecido,
pero ha causado miseria y gran dolor;
aunque de Hidalgo hasta con don Porfirio,
hubo dominio pero creo que era mejor.

En esos tiempos México era glorioso,
entre naciones su nombre resaltó;
nuestra bandera flotaba al cielo airosa,
por un anciano que libertad nos dió.

(Un recuerdo a mi patria, on a broadside
of Eduardo Guerrero.)