

MEXICAN BANDITRY AND DISCOURSES OF CLASS

The Case of Chucho el Roto*

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Abstract: Scholarly literature has often characterized the popular bandit Chucho el Roto (1835?–1885) in terms of his legend as Mexico's urban Robin Hood, yet no study has attempted to discern how this legend took root and changed over time. This investigation brings together historical documents and literary texts about Chucho el Roto from the 1880s to the 1920s to analyze changing cultural perceptions of social class tensions in Mexico. It finds that Chucho provided a vehicle for both lower and upper classes to critically reflect on the morality of dominant society and to unite behind the resiliency and dignity of the oppressed working class. While the earliest literary text from 1889 criticizes Chucho for refusing to submit to dominant social norms and accept his place in the socioeconomic hierarchy, two post-1910 novels celebrate Chucho's banditry as a socialist-inspired political rebellion that resists assimilation into dominant political paradigms, including that of revolution.

On May 12, 1873, Jesús Arriaga escaped for the third time from Mexico City's Belén prison with little fanfare.¹ Over the following twelve years,

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1. Chucho's three escapes from Belén are mentioned in an 1881 report criticizing security conditions of Mexico City prisons. See the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN): Gobernación § 2a 881(5). Antonio Padilla Arrollo's (2001, 223) study of the Mexico City prison system also mentions an escape by Chucho el Roto reported in March 1876.

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including his 1884 imprisonment in San Juan de Ulúa prison and subsequent death in 1885, a legend would take root about him as a generous urban bandit who stole from the rich without resorting to violence. Commonly known by his nickname “Chucho el Roto,” he has been memorialized as a friend to the disadvantaged classes in films, novels, radio shows, tourist attractions, and even restaurants donning his name. Chucho el Roto, as he is recognized today, represents the triumph of fairness and honor over the corruption and greed associated with the ruling elites; he embodies the spirit of what Eric Hobsbawm has termed a *social bandit*. Yet the earlier texts about him did not create a uniform significance for Chucho’s relationship to the poor, to wealth, or to Mexican society in general.

This article explores the malleable cultural significance of Chucho el Roto before, during, and after the Mexican Revolution by examining discourses of class found in a variety of texts about him: newspaper and arrest reports from the 1880s, an 1889 play, a 1916 novel,² and a serialized novel published between 1922 and 1923. I argue that these first known texts about Chucho reveal distinct interpretations of the antagonistic relationship between upper and lower classes in modern Mexico through unique portrayals of Chucho’s personal identity, his association with the lower classes, and his struggles against the powerful. The earlier, pre-revolutionary texts suggest that law and crime were constructed in public discourse as a moral dichotomy.³ The 1889 work, a play by Juan C. Maya titled *Chucho el Roto, o La nobleza de un bandido* (Chucho el Roto; or, The nobility of a bandit) functions as a hegemonic narrative to condemn the brutishness of crime and to promote an idealized image of the existing society characterized by decent families living in law-abiding communities.⁴ But, it does so in a sort of dialogue with counterhegemonic discourses circulated in mainstream newspapers that celebrate Chucho’s nonviolent banditry for representing lower- and upper-class opposition to the abuses and corruption associated with the existing political order. The two anonymously authored, post-1910 novels *Chucho el Roto, o La nobleza de un bandido mexicano* from 1916 and *La verdadera y única historia de Chucho el Roto: Compilada según las memorias de su consejero y secretario Enrique Villena* (The true and only story of Chucho el Roto: Compiled from the memories of his adviser and secretary Enrique Villena) from 1922–1923 echo this counterhegemonic probandit sentiment with a more politicized portrait of

2. Others have attached different dates to this novel, but the earliest copy I have located (in the Biblioteca Nacional) is copyrighted 1916.

3. Vague references to other early works include Bernaldo de Quirós (1959, 344n3), on a two-part novel by Alfonso López Flores; Carballido (1983, 253), on a five-act play with an unknown author; and Moisés Viñas (2005, 55 and 142), on an unretrievable 1919 film about Chucho el Roto and a 1921 film that follows the basic plot of the 1916 novel.

4. All translations herein are mine.

Chucho that contests and confuses the dividing line between the rich and poor through the bandit's unique ability to cross back and forth across it at will.⁵ Moreover, rather than position the rebelliousness of banditry as a precursor to the Mexican Revolution, these two novels create a self-described socialist-leaning discourse in defense of the oppressed urban working classes that is simultaneously critical of revolutions as solutions to the poor's problems.

Investigations into Mexican banditry have repeatedly invoked Chucho's public image to debate the impact of banditry in late-nineteenth-century Mexico. In 1981, Paul Vanderwood published his landmark investigation into the rural police force and its foes, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development*, with a second edition in 1992. His extremely well-documented and insightful study revealed the basic knowledge about Chucho's cultural fame and established a foundation for debates about the historical relevancy of popular banditry that would follow. Vanderwood discussed favorable newspaper reports about Chucho from around the time of his death and concluded that idealized images of Chucho's banditry "seemed to express an independence that many Mexicans sensed they had lost or had never enjoyed" (1992, 90). Yet Vanderwood argued that the highly subjective, even fictionalized stories about Chucho ultimately "underlined the real and uncrossable gap between rich and poor" (90) without producing any kind of solution for the rural or urban poor (96). Moreover, Vanderwood criticized bandits for ultimately reinforcing "the system that has excluded them" through their efforts to get "a share of the proceeds of that system" (xxx) or otherwise working their way "inside the political power structure" (xxviii). Vanderwood's pragmatic reasoning underlies the thrust of Richard Slatta's 1987 edited volume *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry* (to which Vanderwood also contributes) in its general dismissal of the notion that the crimes of banditry, or even the myth of banditry, could have amounted to a political force during the late nineteenth century.

Hobsbawm is typically credited with attaching a political or social component to banditry through his discussion of social bandits, who have been scrutinized in the academic literature as theoretical and cultural images rather than agents of tangible change in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review* (LARR) hosted a spirited debate on this topic, beginning with Gilbert Joseph's 1990 review of opposing positions on the usefulness of Hobsbawm's social bandit model.⁶ This prompted a series of responses

5. The 1916 text has been attributed to Fernando Ferrari, but the earliest locatable Chucho el Roto novel by Ferrari is dated 1935. It can be found in the Fondo Reservado of the Biblioteca Nacional. While Ferrari's 1935 text shares similarities with the 1916 version, including some exact passages, they are otherwise decidedly distinct.

6. See also Dabové's excellent review of the debate (2007, 17–25).

that appeared in *LARR* the following year. The debate often dwelled on the use of literary and especially folkloric sources to understand the relationship between the peasantry and bandits, and it ultimately stagnated on the inability of those sources to reveal their actual (rather than discursively constructed) relationship. Conspicuously omitted in those discussions were literary analyses of the texts under question and an inquiry into how discourse about banditry changed over time. These omissions likely account for the topic's resurgence among interdisciplinary scholars who focus on literary representations of historical bandits.

Whereas Slatta (1987, 3) asserts that understanding the impact of banditry would require "distinguishing myth from social reality," recent studies by Juan Pablo Dabove (2007), Robert McKee Irwin (2007), Chris Frazer (2006), and Max Parra (2005) explore the ambiguity between the myths and realities of banditry to better grasp this historical, cultural and literary phenomenon as a politicized symbol.⁷ These investigators unhinge narratives about bandits from the bandits themselves and thus call into question the construction of banditry's meaning to derive a range of interpretive possibilities for what is ultimately a highly ambiguous signifier. Moreover, the broad historical range of these literary approaches challenges Hobsbawm's (2000, 27–28) largely accepted premise that social banditry occurred in premodern societies as a prepolitical form of dissent. Nineteenth-century bandit literature can certainly be analyzed as representative of historical tensions associated with the onset of modernization, especially as those tensions played out in peasant communities.⁸ And yet discourse about banditry did not halt at the outskirts of the cities or once crimes attributed to banditry had tapered off. Literature and legends about banditry extend into urban contexts and into highly politicized, modern times, and this contextual breadth challenges the banishment of the symbolism of banditry to the margins of modern political legitimacy.

In reference to the mounting studies about relationships between banditry and rural communities, Pablo Piccato (2001, 133) points out the lack of attention to the symbolism of modern, urban crimes whose "connections to social and political movements are less apparent." Piccato's challenge is to study theft by the urban poor "not merely as a predatory offense, but also with regard to the social reactions it triggered" (133). This can be aptly applied to the case of Chucho el Roto in that he is recognized

7. While Parra (2005) does not explicitly study bandit discourse, his work contributes to the methodological shift of using literary sources to discuss the unique position of Pancho Villa, Mexico's quintessential bandit-revolutionary.

8. Frazer's (2006, 109–116) analysis of Luis Gonzaga Inclán's *Astucia* provides an excellent example of bandit discourse as resistance to modernity. As a contrast, Dabove's (2007, 204) analysis of *Los bandidos de Río Frío* illustrates a symbiotic relationship between banditry and modernity in that banditry "is a raw, savage form of modernity."

as an urban bandit whose struggles with the law triggered intense reactions from both lower and privileged classes at the beginning of the period of rapid modernization generally associated with Porfirian order and progress. Whereas banditry is usually posited as a symbol for peasant communities struggling against the modern elite classes, Chucho gained notoriety within Mexico City and surrounding urban hubs not as an impoverished rebel in the shantytowns, but rather as a literate and skilled carpenter living, working, and stealing within the realm of the city's more affluent citizens.⁹ He thus fuses the romanticization of rural banditry with the more symbolically tenuous relationship between urban criminality and the urban working classes.¹⁰

Chucho's case indeed calls for a radically distinct place for banditry in class-based struggles than the rural social bandit figure would allow. The emergence of a middle class in late-nineteenth-century Mexican cities, or at least the pronounced stratification of the large lower class (Di Tella 1973, 81), contradicts the image often conveyed in studies about bandit myths of an acute antagonism between only the top and the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. Moreover, recent studies about class and power relations in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico City by John Lear (2001), Piccato (2001), and Sylvia Arrom (2000) describe Mexico City as a complex site of notable wealth and pervasive poverty in which the elites sought ways to physically and ideologically segregate the socioeconomic classes, and yet the rich and poor inevitably overlapped and intermingled in shared urban spaces (Arrom 2000, 283–284; Lear 2001, 20–21; Piccato 2001, 57). Chucho illustrates that historical context by traversing the socio-economic divides through his relatively advantaged working-class identity, which facilitated his notorious mobility to and within the affluent spaces that he planned to rob. Less acknowledged, but equally relevant to his relationship to urban conflicts, was his mobility between cities along the railroad line from Veracruz to Querétaro, despite the railroad's promise to help the government maintain law and order.¹¹ Although it is impossible to ascertain whether Chucho deliberately used the railroad to

9. Aside from newspaper, legal, and literary references to Chucho's ability to read and write, his signature appears in the 1884 arrest report from Querétaro.

10. *El Tigre de Santa Julia* is an example of another renowned Porfirian-era criminal, but, unlike that of Chucho el Roto, his criminality was not portrayed as symbolically representative of lower-class interests but rather as illustrative of the Porfirian-era belief that the lower classes were barbaric and must be reformed (Buffington 2000, 33). Accordingly, del Castillo (1997, 41–42, 43, 46) refers to the Tigre's generally fearsome demeanor, presumed collusion with the police, and admitted violent crimes (including murder) as part of the popular legend about this criminal but not as indicative of the symbolic potential of his criminality on behalf of the lower classes.

11. The first train to run from Mexico City to the port of Veracruz was in 1873, and the additional Querétaro line became operational in 1882.

his advantage in his crimes or to evade arrest, the cross-country trail of evidence against him can be construed, at least symbolically, as a parody of Mexican progress, in that the public seemed to find amusement in the pervasiveness of his crimes rather than a pretext to demand increased control over the urban poor.

ARRESTING CHUCHO EL ROTO

Chucho el Roto was a recognized, popular bandit when Joaquín Mendizábal, the chief of police of the state of Veracruz, arrested him on August 17, 1881 (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881a).¹² Although Chucho was arrested in Orizaba, it was believed that he had deposited other stolen money in a *casa de comercio* in his hometown of Puebla,¹³ and that he enjoyed a “multitude of relationships along the entire line from [Mexico City] to Veracruz, where he lived for a year and a half with another name and in disguise” (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881c). In this 1881 arrest in Orizaba, the police captured Chucho in the house where he was working as a carpenter and suspected that he was plotting to rob the cigarette factory that operated out of the house. According to a newspaper report, the famous fugitive and his three gang members seemed to lead a double life by making friends with locals in neighborhood bars and cafés while also stockpiling weapons to “defend themselves against an arrest” (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881b). The authorities found items linking Chucho to a previous theft in the area and speculated on his role in other unsolved crimes (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881b).¹⁴

The information reported about Chucho’s identity following his arrests is peppered with inconsistencies, which contributes to his mysterious image. After the 1881 arrest he was described as being around forty years old and short in stature, with black hair and a black beard (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881b). However, when he was apprehended in Querétaro in 1884, the newspaper *El Siglo XIX* (1884b) would make him fifty years old with a medium height of almost five feet seven inches (one meter, seventy centimeters). The 1884 arrest report from Querétaro makes him slightly taller at five feet eight inches (one meter, seventy-three centimeters), and confirms that Chucho reported his own age as fifty, but later describes him as forty-nine.¹⁵

12. The state governor later rewarded Mendizábal with a “well-deserved” horse (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881e).

13. Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (BNAH), Querétaro Series, roll 28, leaf 9.

14. The other crimes included a kidnapping of two priests.

15. BNAH, Querétaro Series, roll 28, leaves 9, 58.



Figure 1 Photo from 1884 arrest report.

The Querétaro arrest report would also add the racially inflected observation that he had a dark complexion (*color moreno*), even though his mug shot and legendary ability to pass into privileged spaces by disguising himself with elegant clothing might suggest otherwise.

Chucho's nickname, "el Roto," which refers to people from the lower classes who dress in upper-class clothing, was subject to interpretation within distinct literary texts. For example, the disapproving 1889 version of Chucho el Roto shows how the nickname can be used disrespectfully when Chucho's gang members criticize their leader's upper-class fashion sense as an implicit insult against them (Maya 1889, 8–9). In contrast, the 1916 version explains that while Chucho may have been criticized in upper-class venues like the press, his friends used the nickname "el Roto" as an affectionate gesture to describe their well-dressed leader as a harmless and honorable man (Anonymous 1916, 48). Finally, the 1922 version

explains that Chucho consciously dresses well because he recognizes that society often mistrusts people who are poorly dressed (Anonymous 1922, 19–20).

Chucho's penchant for disguising himself was noted in his 1881 arrest when the Orizaba newspaper *El Reproductor* reported that he was arrested in working-class clothing but found with "elegant suits and fine gloves" to alter his appearance as he pleased (cited in *El Monitor Republicano* 1881b). Despite likening Chucho to a dehumanized plague in its congratulations to Orizaba for ridding itself of this dangerous criminal, the Mexico City newspaper *El Monitor Republicano* (1881c) refined Chucho's portrait by describing him as "a very educated individual, not at all vulgar." In contrast to the sinister description of one of Chucho's gang members, Francisco Varela, who reportedly had "a vulgar build" and a look that revealed his "criminal instinct," Chucho was more sympathetically described as "quite robust" and "kind looking at first glance" (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881b, citing *El Reproductor*). Moreover, Chucho reportedly defended his companions by insisting that they were not accomplices and that they did not even know he was a "famous bandit" who was "so sought after by police everywhere" (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881b, citing *El Reproductor*). Even his bandit identity was softened as the Mexico City newspaper conveyed Chucho's own perspective about his actions: "He is relaxed, and he says that for him robbery is not a crime, but rather 'an arduous career' [*una áspera carrera*]; his hand has never been stained by blood, because in the robberies that he has committed and directed, he has always vowed not to kill" (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881c). In an implicit contrast to Chucho's nonviolent profile, it was later reported that Chucho so feared being murdered by the rural police officer assigned to transport him to Mexico City that he was willing to pay up to two hundred pesos for someone to accompany them (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881c). The officer, Pedro Ocampo, would later publish a firsthand account of his pursuit of Chucho that led him from Veracruz to Puebla to Mexico City to Orizaba. He confirms that in the 1881 arrest Chucho feared the *ley fuga*, a brutal tradition of freeing prisoners only to shoot them down as they attempted to escape, and that Chucho claimed to have committed sixty nonviolent robberies by that time (*El Nacional Dominical* 1931a).¹⁶

Positive representations of Chucho in the press seemed to resonate in both high and low culture. For example, it was reported that some prank-

16. Ocampo's account is dated November 1891, despite being published in 1931, and it provides other specific information about Chucho's addresses, aliases, stolen goods, disguises, and companions from 1879 to 1880. The article includes a photograph of Ocampo and would seem to be written by Ocampo himself. Yet his memories include errors in the dates and circumstances of Chucho's death, and the continuation of the article narrates Chucho's participation in a bloody train robbery in Mexico City, which appears to be fictionalized (*El Nacional Dominical* 1931b).

ster had posted signs on various street corners in Orizaba that read “freedom to Chucho el Roto or death to Joaquín Mendizábal” (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881d). After being transported to Mexico City and meeting with Governor Ramón Fernández, *El Monitor Republicano* (1881c) commented that “Mr. Fernández became an admirer of him, through his conversation, his explanations about his conduct and how he defended himself with original reasoning.” Chucho was even said to have marked specific articles of the penal code to better argue his case (*El Monitor Republicano* 1881c). This apparent rapport contrasts with the governor’s administrative request (which was eventually denied) that Chucho be sentenced to the San Juan de Ulúa prison because of his stated (and later fulfilled) intentions to escape again from Belén.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Chucho’s story was constructed in the press as that of a charismatic, clever man who, despite being a criminal, found sympathizers from the street corners to the governor’s office. While the prankster supported him to critique the arresting police officer, perhaps representing a more generalized frustration with the law enforcement system’s treatment of the poor, the governor appeared to support Chucho for surpassing class-based expectations of a bandit through his civilized and educated demeanor. It is this upper-class slant to Chucho’s public persona that would resurface most fervently after his final arrest.

On May 28, 1884, just three months after a play titled *Diego Corrientes, o El bandido generoso* (Diego Corrientes; or, The generous bandit) was performed at the Teatro Iturbide, Jesús Arriaga was apprehended while posing as a coffee seller in the city of Querétaro (*El Siglo XIX* 1884b).¹⁸ According to the arrest report, he had rented two houses in Querétaro, where he was living under the alias José Vega with his companion of six years, María Bermeo, and he helped support a daughter named Delfina living in Mexico City.¹⁹ The police chief, Rómulo Alonso, arrested Chucho after he arrived home from the performance of an English opera at the Teatro Iturbide, and *El Correo de Lunes* (1884a) would later report that Chucho joked that his love for the arts led to this arrest. Chucho, Bermeo, and an accomplice named Guadalupe Fernández were ultimately charged with robbing a local *casa de comercio* after the police found cash, goods,

17. AGN, Gobernación § 2a 881(5).

18. The Dramatic Company of Amado M. Méndez performed the play in February (Rodríguez Familiar 1973, 1:187). Shortly after his arrest, *El Correo de Lunes* (1884a) likened Chucho to Diego Corrientes, an eighteenth-century Andalusian bandit memorialized as generous.

19. BNAH, Querétaro Series, roll 28, leaf 58. There was speculation in the press that Chucho was financing his daughter’s education, and even that he intended to send her to school in Brussels. Chucho reportedly denied this claim, and mentions of repatriation seem to serve as a gauge of Chucho’s loyalties (or disloyalties) to Mexico and to bolster his cultured image (*El Correo de Lunes* 1884a; *El Monitor Republicano* 1885; *El Siglo XIX* 1884a, 1884b).

and tools presumably used to carry out the theft in one of Chucho's residences. Later, three other women working as *lavanderas* were arrested as suspected accomplices.²⁰

The ensuing public outcries on behalf of Chucho and against the abuse that he and Bermeo suffered at the hands of their captors (*El Monitor Republicano* 1884) can be explained as a symbolic protest against the repressive system on behalf of the lower classes, despite the strong likelihood that Chucho never operated in solidarity with the popular classes or altered Mexico's unequal balance of power in any way. Yet newspaper coverage of his case detached him from a lower-class identity by focusing on those traits that tended to distinguish him from (rather than forge solidarity with) the criminalized and the impoverished. *El Correo de Lunes* (1884a) portrayed Chucho with a bourgeois and even modern sensibility by comparing him to a new type of "modern thief" who has been "transformed by individuality" and can be characterized as "sociable, cultured, elegant" and capable of "mingling in all centers of society." Rather than the *nota roja* crime section, this highly romanticized description of Chucho as a "buen ladrón" comes from a regularly printed column designed to profile important Mexican citizens; an article about the esteemed public intellectual Ireneo Paz, coincidentally no stranger to bandit discourse himself, would follow on August 18, 1884. The lengthy coverage of Chucho includes descriptions of this renowned bandit as patriotic and independent, as an aficionado of the theater and crime novels, and as a good candidate for becoming a priest or congressman (*El Correo de Lunes* 1884a). Other papers concurred on Chucho's upstanding morality, especially citing the nonviolent nature of his crimes (*El Monitor Republicano* 1885; *El Siglo XIX* 1884b) and *El Diario del Hogar* sympathetically sent him to his grave with well wishes: "Séale la tierra leve" (may the earth weigh lightly upon him) (cited in *El Monitor Republicano* 1885).

Chucho died of dysentery on October 29, 1885 (*El Monitor Republicano* 1885, citing *El Diario del Hogar*) after being sentenced by Mexico's Supreme Court to Veracruz's San Juan de Ulúa prison fortress.²¹ Shortly thereafter, the Mexico City newspaper *El Tiempo* (1885a) demanded an inquiry into his case to determine whether the authorities were actually guilty of beating him to death, but only a week later the same paper briefly confirmed that Chucho's illness indeed had caused his death (*El Tiempo* 1885b). This unpleasant and understated demise may communicate a sense of tragic

20. BNAH, Querétaro Series, roll 28, leaves 14–18, 29–34. See also Rodríguez Familiar's accurate description of the 1884 arrest report (1:201–204, 205–206). I am thankful to Sosa Padilla (2000) for references to Rodríguez Familiar's collection of historical documents, the arrest report's location in the BNAH, and the existence of Chucho's photo.

21. I thank Linda Arnold for providing access to her search engine of the AGN's Supreme Court archive. For documents related to Jesús Arriaga, see Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, Tribunal Pleno, 1884, file 303-2; 1885, file 392.

inevitability for lower-class recalcitrance in Mexico's age of order and progress. Yet Chucho's position as an eternal victim in both life and death created a vehicle to symbolically interrogate the dominant society's patterns of abuse against the urban poor. Moreover, both advantaged and disadvantaged Mexicans could embrace this symbol because the target of its implicit criticism was located in the corruption of the ruling authorities rather than the inequality of privilege. The lower classes could identify with him for the mistreatment he suffered (or feared) at the hands of the authorities and judge him positively as someone who stole with nonviolent means and family-oriented objectives. The upper classes could identify with him in that he was described as they might have liked to see themselves: independent and individualistic, clever and cultured, daring and defiant. In both cases, Chucho represented the best of Mexico's liberal society by uniting the intertwined but disconnected social classes against that which all could oppose (corruption and abuse) and in favor of that which all could support (freedom and fairness).

Chucho's final two arrests situate his most celebrated criminal activities during the presidency of Manuel González (1880–1884), which could reflect the widespread perception that González was “the most corrupt and least able of [Porfirio] Díaz's protégés” (Katz 1991, 71). In that public reports of Chucho's arrests implicitly positioned him as the moral victor against corrupt agents of state authority, they might have boosted Díaz's bid to succeed González and restore respect to the nation's highest office. Yet the newspapers that published positive reports about Chucho did not necessarily support Díaz's reelection (see, e.g., *El Correo de Lunes* 1884b). Moreover, the politically critical symbolism of banditry would continue throughout the Porfiriato as other bandit figures, such as Heraclio Bernal (d. 1888) or Santanón (d. 1910), stood out against the perceived illegitimacy of Díaz's regime. Literary representations of banditry published during the Porfiriato would also call attention to the role that corruption within dominant society would play in propelling marginalized individuals into a life of crime, such as Manuel Payno's *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (The bandits from Río Frío, 1889–1891).²²

The following analysis of three literary texts about Chucho show that this bandit's image persisted during the Porfiriato and, after Díaz's fall from power, continued as a vehicle for resistance against dominant society's abuses and socioeconomic inequality. Each text portrays Chucho as a symbolic mediator between the wealthy and the poor with distinct impulses: the 1889 play seeks to convert the generous bandit's sense of moral superiority into a rejection of the criminal lifestyle; the 1916 novel reverses the moral dichotomy between the wealthy and the poor by revealing the

22. See especially Dabove's (2007, 201–204) discussion of the transition to banditry by the characters Evaristo and Juan Robreño.

criminalized as honorable and the *gente decente* as complicit with, if not direct contributors to, the indecencies and injustices of the state; finally, the 1922–23 *novela de folletín* constructs Chucho as the model urban combatant whose contagious, proletarian class consciousness reflects the potential to transform the capitalist value system stunting the nation's moral and socioeconomic potential.

**CHUCHO EL ROTO, O LA NOBLEZA DE UN BANDIDO:
ENSAYO DRAMÁTICO EN DOS ACTOS Y PROSA (1889)**

The elusiveness of Chucho's identity has been heightened by the often-anonymous authorship of works about him. However, the first known literary text about this urban bandit was handwritten in 1888 by the playwright Juan C. Maya with the title *Chucho el Roto, o La nobleza de un bandido: Ensayo dramático en dos actos y prosa*. A printed version was copyrighted the following year that included a sketch of Jesús Arriaga that would seem to be modeled after the earlier photograph (see figures 1 and 2).²³

Maya's play was performed in Mexico City in January 1889 at the crowded Teatro Hidalgo as well as the Teatro Arbeu (*El Partido Liberal* 1889) and was well reviewed by various newspapers. The reviewers include some critical asides by mentioning the prolonged public condemnation of Chucho's treatment in San Juan de Ulúa (*La Voz de España* 1889) and by reporting instances of police brutality against theatergoers trying to elbow their way in to the show (*El Nacional* 1889; *El Tiempo* 1889).

Plays about Chucho were also performed in Querétaro's Teatro Iturbide in 1891 (Rodríguez Familiar 1973, 2:115–116), in Chihuahua's Teatro de los Héroes from 1903 to 1910 (Montemayor Juárezgui 2003, 34–36), and in the Teatro Aurora of San Antonio, Texas, in 1911. The play performed in San Antonio was written by Antonio Fuentes and performed by the Carlos Villalagín Company, and a playbill from the 1911 performance indicates that it shared key characters with the 1916 novel about Chucho: Matilde, Dolores, Diego de Frizac, and Lebrija.²⁴ This might arouse curiosity about Fuentes's possible involvement with the novel, which was coincidentally published in San Antonio, but this investigation has not found any authorial link between the two texts. Regardless of their specific content, the numerous theatrical performances reveal a broad circulation of

23. I am grateful to Patrick J. McNamara for pointing me to the copyright record for Maya's play. The 1888 handwritten version of the play can be found in the AGN, and the 1889 printed version can be consulted in the Carlos Villalagín Dramatic Company Collection (series 1, vol. 82) in the University of Texas at Austin's Benson Manuscripts Collection.

24. More information on the Villalagín company can be found in the online collection at the University of Texas at Austin, and the 1911 playbill can be found in Ramírez (1990).



Figure 2 Drawing from 1889 play.

Chucho's image through this genre during the last two decades of Díaz's presidency.

Maya's play reflects the focus of the earlier newspaper reports in its search for a moral clarity in the bandit figure. However, whereas the newspaper accounts upheld Chucho as a cross-class pillar against which to judge governmental abuses of authority, Maya's play depicts the fundamental incompatibility between this well-intentioned criminal and the society that excludes him. The play establishes several ingredients of the foundational plot that has been constructed about Chucho over time: he has a lover, a daughter, and a small gang; he considers himself a noble bandit because he does not use violence and he feels solidarity with the urban poor; and he is eventually captured and sent to San Juan de Ulúa. However, the conclusion of the play distinguishes it from other accounts

in that Chucho abandons his criminal lifestyle to restore his dignity and forge an honorable life with his family. This uniquely negative representation reflects what could be considered a top-down discourse of the period by depicting the tension between society and a marginalized individual, and the process by which that individual internalizes a value system that requires a rejection of his own identity.

Chucho is portrayed as a product of his social conditions in Mexico City with continuous allusions to a past traumatic event that propelled him into crime. That mysterious event is later revealed as a need for revenge against vicious men that robbed and destroyed the house that he shared with his mother. His mother later dies, and Chucho's reaction is to rebel against society as a thief (Maya 1889, 21). The dominant society, however, is never depicted as a worthy target of Chucho's criminal actions, and the play's turning point thus revolves around Chucho's realization that he is the one that needs to change.

In this play, being an honorable bandit for Chucho means never threatening "the virtue of an innocent woman or invalid, the home of a common family, or the life of any person" (14). However, his criminal lifestyle has joined him with less scrupulous men, his gang members Arcadio and Marcelo, who see his moralizing as hypocritical and financially limiting (8). Arcadio eventually physically attacks Chucho, who is then forced to confront the culture of greed and violence into which he has immersed himself. This causes him to recognize the errors of his ways through an urgent need to "live for my home, the tranquil family life," which will require "redeeming myself, purifying my criminal past" (18). To this end, Chucho asks forgiveness from God; his late mother; his wife, Isabel; and their daughter, Angela. The young family decides to flee from the police by first taking the train to Veracruz and then starting a fresh life in Italy (22). Before they can escape, however, the police barge into his home and charge him with crimes that he already regrets having committed (27). The play concludes with a distraught but resigned Chucho about to be taken to San Juan de Ulúa, imploring Isabel to keep his purified image alive with their daughter by washing his criminal past from her memory (29).

Through this rather simplistic plot the spectator distinguishes the shadowy line between "noble bandits" and "common thieves" (14), but the difference between the categories collapses when Chucho must distance himself from criminality altogether to uphold his respectable values. While society is portrayed as an unjust place in which vagrants and other good people are found suffering (10), the moral thrust of the story is that acting out against that social context will result only in one's demise. To succeed, a disadvantaged person must instead live honorably in accordance with conventional social values and respectable legal institutions; a

noble bandit is the one who ultimately realizes this and tries to become “fit for the society that despises” him by critiquing and changing himself (23).

CHUCHO EL ROTO, O LA NOBLEZA DE UN BANDIDO MEXICANO (1916)

The earliest known edition of *Chucho el Roto, o La nobleza de un bandido mexicano* was published anonymously by San Antonio's Editorial Quiroga in 1916. This revolutionary-era text continues the 1889 play's emphasis on the opposition between criminals and dominant society in Mexico City, but the novel intertwines those antagonistic positions through the bandit's forbidden love affair with an upper-class woman, Matilde de Frizac. The result is an illegitimate daughter, Dolores, who can be considered a cross-class parallel to the mixed-race offspring of Hernán Cortés and Malinche. This comparison illuminates the novel's reversal of the Conquest's archetypal, gender-based power dynamic in that the dominant role that Cortés established is now played by the wealthy Matilde; Chucho, like Malinche, originates as a talented servant but evolves into a rejected lover. Rather than forge solidarity between Mexico's rich and poor, Dolores, at least initially, illuminates the impossibility of dissolving class-based boundaries and prejudices in the present society. By the novel's end, however, Dolores comes to fulfill the promise of a new, more unified Mexico by integrating an idealized blend of upper-class means and a predominantly lower-class sense of civic and moral responsibility toward the poor.

This novel's plot is most commonly associated with Chucho's enduring identity and has provided the material for countless other novels and films about the legendary bandit; however, there is no evidence to suggest that it is based on any historical referent. The principle components have been described in numerous academic and popular sources as the bandit's recognized legend: Chucho falls in love with Matilde while working in her father's house; Matilde becomes pregnant but rejects Chucho to maintain her elite social status; Chucho kidnaps their daughter; Matilde's family uses its influence to pit the dominant society against Chucho, including the government (29), the police (39), the judicial system (51, 52), and the press (48, 53, 63–65); Chucho is jailed in Belén for the kidnapping and develops a plan with other inmates, including El Rorro, La Changa, and Lebrija for launching a crime spree to function as a class-based rebellion; after escaping from prison, Chucho forms a criminal gang with his former inmates to teach a lesson to the exploiters; the rural police force eventually captures Chucho and turns him in to the chief of police, Joaquín de la Piña y Pizarra; the police chief as well as Matilde and Dolores come to respect Chucho because he is nonviolent, true to his word, and devoted to his family; Chucho heroically survives a beating ordered by the San Juan de Ulúa prison warden but then dies in his daughter's arms from

the prison's harsh conditions; in an epilogue we find Dolores and Chucho's sister caring for poor children in the Frizac family's hacienda; and the young Arriaga vows to take over Chucho's struggles for the poor in Mexico City.²⁵

This decidedly more complex version envisions Mexico City's urban spaces as formally segregated but effectively entangled between rich and poor. Within this context Chucho functions as a mediator between the polarized social classes by rising above his presumed class destiny through his artisan skills, by defying class-based boundaries with clever disguises, and by reframing the moral dichotomy associated with Mexico City's rich and poor as he unveils the upper class's malicious criminalization of the dignified and struggling working classes. The first chapter narrates the rich and poor fluidly moving through spaces that appear to segregate idle millionaires in one neighborhood, bustling commerce in another, and the diverse lower classes in another (9–11). Yet the boundaries among those spaces are portrayed as porous from the novel's first few pages, when Chucho passes undetected into the Frizac home and takes the four-year-old Dolores to live with his mother and sister in their poor neighborhood.

Dolores is welcomed into the humble Arriaga family, whose severe financial struggles had inspired Chucho to gain valuable and relatively rare skills working with fine woods (*ebanista*) (20, 29). Although portrayed as a highly tenuous socioeconomic position that later found Chucho decline into a desperate state of poverty (31–32, 37–38), being an educated and skilled artisan initially differentiates Chucho from the uneducated and unskilled poor. In particular, it created the opportunity to work at the Frizac home, where his affair with Matilde began. This contact zone between the affluent and a commoner renders visible an unquestioned attraction but also opposing value systems between these representatives of their distinct classes. The wealthy are confirmed as profoundly immoral when Matilde discovers she is pregnant and scandalously suggests ending the pregnancy rather than risk her honor by marrying a working-class man (22). She is repeatedly described in criminal terms as a would-be murderer (22–23), and, accordingly, Chucho's subsequent crime of kidnapping Dolores is positioned as a morally superior act. Chucho reasons that Dolores should not be raised with the Frizac's values, as these would cause her to reproduce the unjust, classist attitudes at the origin of the novel's central conflict (24, 133). In contrast, the Arriaga women transmit

25. The role of women in the banditry of Chucho el Roto, as in this representation of Dolores as following in her father's footsteps or based on the knowledge that María Bermeo and three women working as *lavanderas* were considered accomplices in Chucho's crimes in Querétaro, merits further consideration in future studies into Mexican banditry and discourse about it.

values of generosity, kindness to the poor, and nonviolence (34). The hope that Matilde and Chucho's affair could unite Mexico's wealthy and poor thus deteriorates into an impasse in which the protagonists retreat to the spaces that correspond to their class, crossing boundaries only to seek revenge and incite conflict against the other.²⁶

The Frizac family organizes a widespread persecution of Chucho, which leaves the poor father feeling powerless and victimized by corrupt authorities that serve at the pleasure of the millionaires (33, 39, 45, 46). Once Chucho is jailed, however, the dank spaces reserved for the criminalized reveal a vibrant coalition of friends who share food, jokes, and companionship (47, 60–63, 72–73). Ironically described as “a school for crime” for once-honorable men (62, 63, 65), Chucho finds that Belén has also filled up with political prisoners who were sentenced for conspiring to overthrow the president (56, 66, 87),²⁷ including the young lawyer Rafael Barragán, who becomes Chucho's close friend and key supporter. Within this now cross-class space of self-defined social rebels, Chucho's initial respect for conventional hard work (20, 103) becomes overshadowed by a perceived need for money and power to defend themselves against the unjust social barriers that the elites have constructed against the poor (40, 49, 68–69, 69–70, 89).

Whereas the campaign against Chucho is described as “criminal” (65), the inmate's budding theories of “incipient socialism” (69) and his plan to enact revenge by stealing from the wealthy are framed as carrying out “justice” (69). He argues that poor families have “the right to common comforts and we men have the duty to grant them to them” (104). Moreover, Chucho believes that the accumulation of money will serve the poor, helpless, and incapacitated: “We will obtain equilibrium between the social classes, avoiding the stagnation of wealth to achieve its distribution among the proletariat” (105). Echoing this generically socialist posture, the press would later call his movement a bloodless “war . . . against capital” (116), and Chucho himself would consider his war “against the State, against property, against the Government” (138) with the objective of creating “more equality between the rich and the poor” because “the land belongs to everyone and its fruits should be shared equally” (138).

Chucho's ideology and actions purport to flatten out socioeconomic differences in Mexico, and he literally removes himself from his own class-based identity to directly combat inequality across the physically segregated spectrum of wealth. After escaping from prison, he escapes his own

26. A humorous contradiction to this general antagonism arises when Matilde's father is sighted in a lower-class neighborhood, having an affair with Pepa the *atole* seller (74).

27. The president is unnamed, and the only specific reference to the novel's historical context, anachronistically situating him in the Porfiriato, appears in a letter from Chucho vaguely dated 189— (138).

class-based identity by disguising himself as an affluent outsider (*fuereño*) with nice clothes and capped teeth (85–86). In this form, he is able to move fluidly between his former poor neighborhood and an elegant restaurant, and the newspapers later confirm that Chucho can wander freely because so many people support and protect him (115). His ingenious disguises—including a water carrier, a soldier, a priest, a butler (*un criado de librea*), a diplomat, a bishop (118–119), a woman (the narrator draws a distinction between being once disguised as a “mujer” [123] and once as a member of a group of “indias” [137]), a deaf person (137), and a mute (145)—would eventually allow him to cross boundaries of class, gender, and ethnicity.

Although he is eventually betrayed, captured, tortured, and martyred, Chucho’s message about justice and honor in urban society is portrayed as influential among both the rich and the poor. In contrast to the 1889 play’s transformation of Chucho’s character, which culminates in his begging for forgiveness from his poor wife for his criminal lifestyle, the 1916 novel exposes Matilde’s transformation when she asks for Chucho’s forgiveness as he lies on his deathbed in the San Juan de Ulúa prison, fourteen years after Dolores’ birth (148). The police chief is similarly transformed by Chucho’s honorable and family-oriented ways. Whereas he once would have killed the bandit like a dog (144), he now struggles against those authority figures determined to destroy Chucho (147, 151). The novel thus achieves its most nationalistic message by imagining an egalitarian society in which the poor and wealthy can use zones of cross-class contact to help and respect one another. Moreover, it bases the horizontal bonds of fraternity that Benedict Anderson describes as the essence of an imagined community on predictable values of honor and family, but in this case such bonds reside in the lower classes and can be transmitted up the socioeconomic hierarchy. On a political level, the novel further portrays how those cross-class values are channeled into subversive actions that benefit the poor and combat exploitation while deliberately stopping short of revolution.

The novel’s message might seem to echo the 1910 revolution’s struggles against political corruption and the polarization of resources, and yet it conveys an explicit critique of revolutions for contributing to those problems. In the midst of carrying out a rash of thefts, Chucho reflects: “Some workers have approached me to ask if they can join my ranks. I accept them, but I fear taking many people because of the commitment that this entails. I do not want to be the head of a revolution . . . I know that revolutions are bad and that they don’t give beneficial results to the humble: they enrich those who come to lean on the poor with more force than those who exploited them before” (139).

The novel thus recasts the urban poor as conscious of themselves as an underprivileged class, as ubiquitous social actors who have influence across the social spectrum and as undeceived by empty promises of mor-

ally compromised leaders. Most incisively, it carves out a sustained space for banditry that insidiously infiltrates the wallets, minds, and hearts of Mexicans from all walks of life without ever transforming into that which it opposes.

LA VERDADERA Y ÚNICA HISTORIA DE CHUCHO EL ROTO: COMPILADA SEGÚN LAS MEMORIAS DE SU CONSEJERO Y SECRETARIO ENRIQUE VILLENNA (1922–1923)

The plotline of the 1916 novel is typically discussed as the historical foundation behind Chucho's legendary identity, yet this multivolume, anonymously authored *novela de folletín* from Mexico City's *El Mundo* newspaper makes the most emphatic biographical claim as the "true and only story of Chucho el Roto."²⁸ Martín Luis Guzmán was the general editor of *El Mundo* until his public resignation on December 5, 1923, just three months after the novel's final pages appeared. The novel's many illusions to the continuation of its plot, and thus its somewhat abrupt ending on September 3, 1923, has fueled (unsubstantiated) speculation about Guzmán's role in the novel's creation (Carballido 1983, 254).²⁹ The newspaper's overt concern for the working class at the very least suggests that Guzmán would have approved of the novel's generalized criticism of the exploitation suffered by the working classes. On the day he resigned, Guzmán issued a front-page statement with brief remarks that revealed his concern for the jobs and well-being of those working-class members of the staff but not his reasons for stepping down. The following day, Francisco Carpio took over the position with a statement of intent for the newspaper to continue "being the defenders of the working classes" and working "to raise the spirit of the middle class." However, Carpio's statement distances itself from the previous leadership by declaring to take a "serene road that allows for the free judgment of the personalities of our politicians and the acts of our governors."

The more sophisticated narrative structure of the 1922–1923 novel provides a unique perspective on this renowned bandit. Chucho's story is told

28. The novel is made up of two series, the first with at least two volumes and the second with two volumes. This investigation focuses on volumes 1 and 2 of the first series and makes reference to the novel's final installment, volume 2 of the second series, which began on June 29, 1923, with the subtitle "The Marriage of Chucho el Roto." To simplify references but still acknowledge the gap in the source, I will cite the last tome as volume 4. I am grateful to librarians at the Biblioteca Nacional for allowing me to take digital photos of the bound versions of volumes 1 and 2. I am also thankful to Ernesto González for photographing the unbound version of volume 4 from the AGN's Hemeroteca.

29. Carballido's 1983 play includes a brief bibliographical review of previous literary works about Chucho el Roto. His play creatively synthesizes previous plotlines, including romantic interests with both Matilde de Frissac and Consuelo Sámano (Carballido has changed the spellings from the original novels).

by one of the novel's fictional characters, a core member of the small gang who was considered Chucho's "secretary, confidant or advisor" (1:39). Enrique Villena is an educated, self-described old man in his seventies (1:112) writing from his contemporary vantage point in the early 1920s. Through his limited perspective and occasionally faltering memory, he relates the origins of Chucho's gang in 1869 and several major crimes that Chucho orchestrated between 1871 and 1873.³⁰

Villena introduces the reader to Chucho as a young man in his late teens (2:167) (although the real Chucho would have been in his early thirties), detached from a family story other than having a working-class background described as neither rich nor poor (1:13). We learn early on that Chucho will eventually marry an internationally acclaimed blind violinist, Consuelo Samano (1:27), with whom he will have two children (1:143), including a son named Enrique (1:12). Yet the narrator describes Chucho as afraid of women and their power over men (1:119–120) and foreshadows that the gang loses strength and focus when the members become heads of families (2:150); perhaps fittingly, the novel concludes with Chucho and Consuelo leaving for their honeymoon in 1873. While Chucho describes himself as being mainly in the locksmith trade with additional woodworking skills (1:15), the narrator never depicts him in a working-class role. Instead, he shows Chucho using his vast trade skills and administrative genius to confront the "powerful and their police" on behalf of "the humble" as their "avenger" (1:13).

In comparison with the previous two texts' depiction of Chucho's relatively localized impact, the 1922–1923 novel aggrandizes the role of banditry by discussing Chucho's crimes in terms of a measurable shift of national wealth. The narrator claims that the gang's crimes spanned more than two decades, and while Chucho initially aspired to commit thirty significant heists per year (2:102), they ultimately committed a total of forty-seven important robberies and eighty-two trivial ones (2:23). They earned a total of more than six million pesos (2:66), only 5 percent of which they kept for themselves—the rest they redistributed "in charity and donations and institutes of beneficence" (1:66). In particular, Chucho established a "legitimate" organization called *Asociaciones de Beneficencia Unidas* (2:147), which is funded by his crimes to develop poorhouses (*asilos de mendigos*) and distribute aid to needy children (1:124, 2:7).

Arrom's study of the Mexico City poorhouses through 1871 characterizes the original motives of such beneficence organizations as often detrimental to lower-class Mexicans, in that they sought to isolate and, in many cases, criminalize the poor. Yet she concludes that an "analysis of the Poor

30. For examples of his limited perspective, see 1:79–80, 1:63–66; for examples of his faltering memory, see 1:159, 172, 2:76, 164.

House experiment in practice reveals how little control the government exercised over the urban populace" (2000, 4), and at any rate, by the 1860s, financial crisis had severely impeded the program's services (227). Within that context of crumbling public welfare services, Chucho singles out *casas de beneficencia* and *casas de trabajo* as constructive ways to serve the poor. Moreover, his own institution operates outside of governmental control and is ideologically linked to "Roberto Owen, [Charles] Fourier, [Henri de] Saint Simon" (2:186) and others of the same political trend.

Aside from this specific reference to various utopian socialists, Chucho's ideological profile is revealed throughout the novel as uncommonly informed by socialist rhetoric, if not philosophy. Yet mainstream access to socialist ideas should not be too surprising in the novel's historical context. John Hart's (1987) analysis of anarchist movements in late-nineteenth-century Mexico finds that such ideologies found voice through "working class newspapers" during the early 1870s (53), the first of which, *El Socialista*, was founded in 1871 (47). Their influence was short lived, however, as Hart clarifies that in the following decade, Díaz's government significantly dismantled such publications as well as the working-class socialist organizations that supported them (27). This postrevolutionary novel thus returns its readers to the promises of pre-Díaz social reform by recalling Chucho's early banditry in terms of class-based struggle and organized beneficence.

This narrative is historically situated in the final years of Benito Juárez's presidency, and it concludes at the beginning of Porfirio Díaz's rise to power. Throughout this period Chucho is positioned as an alternative model to dominant society's corruption and common criminals' brutality.³¹ Yet Juárez is not only spared Chucho's social criticism but also portrayed as a direct collaborator in the gang's redistribution of wealth. The first heist involves acquiring a Guarnerius violin for Consuelo Samano to play a concert that Chucho arranges in the Teatro Nacional (1:71). Chucho, also portrayed as an accomplished violinist, has a private audience with Juárez in the presidential palace to secure his support for using the concert's proceeds to benefit the poor. The novel's tribute to Juárez as a "great patriot" (1:97) can be read as an implicit critique of Díaz: by the time the novel was published, these two figures had been constructed as legendary hero and villain, respectfully, in Mexican political history. And the novel's final pages critically allude to Díaz's active role in Chucho's

31. See, e.g., Chucho's reaction to meeting a former bandit from Rio Frío, whom he describes as barbaric, sinister, and savage, while his own gang's superiority is distinguished by its "high ideal and white glove methods" (1:66). See also the description of other "vulgar bandits" in Mexico City that are inferior to the "adventuresome spirit" of Chucho's gang (1:157), including a brief reference to the savage Gray Car Gang (2:23).

eventual persecution and arrest, which was motivated by the discovery that Chucho was distantly related to Díaz's wife (4:353).³² These highly fictionalized references to Chucho's connection to two Mexican presidents serve to depict Chucho as intimately intertwined with even the highest levels of Mexican society. However, the presidents' relative unimportance in Chucho's criminal behaviors and philosophies clarify that Chucho's perceived nemesis is not a specific political target but rather general social inequality and exploitation (1:13, 141).

Chucho's revenge against society is motivated solely by his own perception that the accumulation of wealth in Mexico has resulted historically from the legacy of colonialism (1:66–67, 99, 120–121, 2:36–37) and from capitalist exploitation (2:89). He argues that a wealthy individual might not be guilty of stealing from the poor but that historical injustices have placed the wealth of the nation into the hands of a few (1:144). He considers it his role not to judge such an individual but rather to do something to change the reality in which all live. As opposed to considering his crimes a moral punishment, Chucho views them as an opportunity to allow his "victims" to face up to the marginalization of the poor (described in terms of the poor indigenous and the extremely destitute) in which they intentionally or unintentionally participate (1:147).

Although this novel uniquely portrays Chucho as a young single man solely motivated by the abstract desire and institutionalized means for social justice in Mexico, it echoes the previous version's desire to flatten out social-class differences by penetrating and interconnecting all layers of Mexico City's socioeconomic hierarchy. As in the 1916 novel, Chucho carries out his goals by relying on disguises, uncommon intelligence, and networks of alliances throughout Mexico City (1:117) and across the country (1:113). In addition, in the 1922–1923 novel, the tacit interpenetration of the social classes is found in one of the gang's main bases of operation, a brothel run by the narrator's aunt. Initially exploited as a place to sell concert tickets, the brothel, via its wealthy male clients, eventually becomes the primary way to gather information about families that will become targets for the robberies (1:113–114, 2:104). In each heist Chucho aspires to remain invisible to the police, often to his victims, and even to his gang members by dividing up the crimes into many specialized tasks. In this way, very few of the participants could ever reconstruct how any robbery was accomplished (2:67), and the police lack an identifiable target at which to aim their investigations (1:156–157, 171, 2:56–57). In short, this novel extracts the bandit from the most basic forms of society—family, community, and a class-based profession—to construct him as an irrepressible economic force and ideological leader rather than a vulnerable human actor trying to settle a score.

32. For other criticisms of Díaz, see 2:88–89, 2:104–105.

Chucho's ideological stance is most explicit in a robbery committed against Mexico City's national Monte de Piedad pawnshop, in which Chucho hides himself in a sofa brought into the shop to be pawned.³³ He emerges from the sofa after the establishment has closed and, instead of being captured by the night watchman, successfully converts him into a member of the gang. The watchman has not slept in his home for eleven years, and Chucho convinces him that his poor working conditions represent a sort of enslavement. Moreover, Chucho explains to him that the majority of wealthy people are crooks (if only) for not paying a true wage for people's work and for convincing them that such is the natural order (2:177).

As in the previous novel, Chucho's struggle to change the power dynamic between the wealthy and the poor may suggest that this novel positions Chucho's banditry as a precursor to the revolution. Yet, as in the previous novel, revolutionary struggle is framed as exploitative of those enlisted to fight (2:138, 185) and destructive to the nation as a whole (1:65). Moreover, revolutions are depicted as a rural rather than urban phenomena (1:36, 2:89), or in other words, out of Chucho's realm.³⁴ Although Chucho's antirevolutionary stance occasionally reads as dominant propaganda for maintaining order over "la bola" (2:54–55), his insidious criminal rebellion against the polarization of wealth undoubtedly positions him as symbolically challenging the hegemonic aims of the ruling classes.

The robbery of the wealthy Monalte family exemplifies Chucho's rebellious but antirevolutionary perspective by narrating the gang's infiltration of a rural carpenter's family in San Andrés Chalchicomula. Chucho plans to rob the Monalte family by gaining knowledge of a secret box to be constructed by the rural carpenter and designed to protect the wealthy family's riches as they travel by coach from Mexico City to Veracruz. From there, the Monalte family will move to Europe to spend abroad the profits earned in their Mexican fincas (1:127). This robbery thus promotes a nationalistic side to Chucho's banditry in that the family earned its wealth by aligning with the French during the intervention in Mexico a few years earlier (1:125–127). While the origin of the Monaltes' wealth is considered corrupt and antinational, the rural carpenter's life is described as the true site of Mexican national culture (2:14, 25). The bucolic lifestyle is celebrated for its good food, drinks, and friendships (2:10–13), but the novel also exposes how revolutions have led to suffering in the provinces (2:28) and the enrichment of some at the expense of the majority (2:97). Chucho argues that this will only change "when the people become convinced that revo-

33. The novel states that the crime occurred in 1870 but was not attributed to Chucho in the press until 1873 (2:181).

34. This reflects Lear's (2001, 5) blunt assertion that "all historians agree that the Mexican Revolution definitely was not a revolution of urban workers."

lution is not the only way to get ahead" but, until then, revolutions will continue to cause "the impoverishment of the country and its discredit abroad" (2:29). The rural carpenter's indirect and unwitting collaboration in this bountiful heist thus functions to integrate the *pueblo* into Chucho's potent alternative. The gang's actions represent the symbolic triumph of patriotism, justice, and socioeconomic progress for Mexico's lower-class majority, both rural and urban, but via banditry rather than revolution.

CONCLUSION

In all these texts about Chucho el Roto, from newspaper articles to diverse literary works, we can discern an array of efforts to illustrate a socioeconomic and moral map of Mexico's modernizing society. Although bandit discourse has often been interpreted as oversimplifying that map to depict the extreme upper and lower classes in an ideological battle over who is to blame for inequality and crime, the case of Chucho el Roto finds only one text, Maya's 1889 play, that upholds that polarized image of the rich and the poor. In contrast to Chucho's legend as a generous bandit, Maya portrays dominant society as the default victor in this struggle for moral dominance, in that Chucho comes to recognize the greed, violence, and immorality that characterize his own poor culture and criminal lifestyle. The play's sole message is that, regardless of poor people's circumstances, it is never right for them to steal.

All of the other texts portray a more positive, romantic side to Chucho's banditry, which results in a far more complex discourse of Mexico's class configurations. For example, the newspaper articles from the 1880s challenge the notion that criminals were vulgar, uneducated, and dangerous by lauding Chucho's cultured, professional, and peaceful demeanor. This contributes to a more comprehensive portrait of the urban poor, a class designation that could include the extremely destitute to relatively secure artisans. By situating Chucho as a capable, working-class individual who fell victim to dominant-class abuses after indulging in a relatively inoffensive life of crime, the newspaper reports divorce him from the stereotype of morally flawed, poor criminals. Moreover, they reposition his bandit identity in a socioeconomic and moral middle ground as a model of what could happen to any Mexican at that time of political and economic uncertainty, be it his wily successes or his brutal, unjust demise.

The final two literary texts, both published after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, drive home the symbolic, political usefulness of Chucho's case. The unknown authors fictionalize Chucho's personal story to portray the urban poor as conscious social actors inspired and empowered to combat socioeconomic inequality on their own terms. They imagine the urban rich and poor as intimately interconnected both physically and morally, but barriers remain in the form of the elites' fear of los-

ing their privilege and the lower class's fear of becoming victims to their socioeconomic vulnerability and a system skewed against them. In both texts, Chucho's ability to commit crimes against the wealthy in their own protected spaces, as well as his drive to use those crimes to benefit the downtrodden, illuminate the permeability of social class barriers and the potential for their collapse.

The two novels differ, however, in their depiction of Chucho's relationship to those he aspires to aid. In the 1916 novel, Chucho's personal and financial turmoil finds his identity embedded within all levels of the social spectrum, from his affair with Matilde to his working-class successes, his extreme financial and legal hardships, and his political awakening. In contrast, the 1922–1923 version portrays Chucho as an intellectual and political class of his own, more likely to be practicing the violin or debating socialist philosophies than struggling to make ends meet at a job. His perspective on the poor is more political than personal, yet his diverse efforts to redistribute wealth and power illuminate the array of underprivileged social circumstances that demand a solution, from the destitute to needy children and alienated workers. In both novels, Chucho's solution involves empowering the poor to dismantle elite privilege, which must be held accountable for Mexico's inequality.

These post-1910 texts would seem poised to position Chucho's rebellion in relationship to the promises of the revolution. Yet neither uses Chucho to further the notion that Porfirian-era rebellion was a precursor to the great popular uprising that was the revolution. On the contrary, they look backward to a time before the revolution to bring back that non-revolutionary space of dissent that was banditry. Rather than celebrate popular rebelliousness as integral to the revolutionary spirit, these texts implicitly critique the Mexican Revolution as a historical moment that erases the position of outsidership through the dominant classes' appropriation of dissent and rebellion as part of the logic of the postrevolutionary state.

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