paid to the more sensationalist side of the López 'story'. For example Elisa Lynch is referred to as his 'fair, foreign treasure' (p. 183), with the style at times bordering on the journalistic. Neither of these approaches quite works. The story is already gripping, while the effort to produce a more readable book results in awkward, stilted expressions, such as where Saeger refers to current perceptions of López in Paraguay in the following way:

> '*Professional historians and a significant number of able men and women know the truth. They fear giving the public an honest appraisal of López. Ambivalence characterizes the twenty-first-century view of him. Privately, competent historians have taken the measure of the cowardly López*' (p. 218).

Overall, the project has a clear, timely and interesting pitch; an accessible, fast-moving account of López which seeks to rectify alleged distortions of the truth, for a wider academic community. Unfortunately, the book does not quite deliver. Instead, we have a biography that is heavily partial in terms of analysis, light on contextual interpretation and both limited and repetitive in terms of argument. It is also weak in terms of style and expression, with non-standard referencing and little effort to produce any fluency, much less lyricism, in the text. The overall impression is that this is a missed opportunity and that the work would have benefited from a longer period of gestation and more ambitious aims. There is still much to be written about this era of Paraguayan history, and much archival and published evidence to be analysed and brought together – and some very able historians are doing just that. It is therefore a shame that this book should have evolved into a rushed, polemical, almost sensationalist work, rather than the considered, analytical and balanced biography that would have contributed to our understanding of the man and the era.

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Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. xxvii + 277, £22.99, pb.

Jürgen Buchenau's *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* is a well-crafted life and times of one of the revolution's most important figures. Focusing on Calles' political career and eschewing psychological analysis, Buchenau concludes that Calles was 'an authoritarian populist who defied easy characterization' (p. 204). His career reflected the contradictions of revolutionary populism, which flourished as a result of the revolution's lack of ideological clarity; it also, Buchenau argues, anticipated the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in more respects than historians have recognised.

Buchenau begins by exploring how Calles was shaped by life in Sonora, where the positivism taught in the schools and the modernising effects of US investment were critical influences. Calles failed in his early economic enterprises, but before the Porfiriato ended he managed to achieve local political office. He joined the opposition to the regime only when forced to choose sides. When the fighting of the revolution's first stage was over, Calles opened a store on the border in Agua Prieta. Appointed political boss, he was able to capitalise by smuggling in goods from the United States. The pillars of his programme were order, morality and public education (he had briefly been a school teacher, and the need to improve education became one of his few core political values). In 1912, he was drawn into military service against rebel Pascual Orozco, but demonstrated little ability on

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the battlefield. His skills were administrative instead. As the decade wore on, Calles learned how to position himself as a revolutionary, in a manner Buchenau describes as calculated. In 1914 and 1915, he had his greatest military successes, defeating forces aligned with Pancho Villa in Sonora and taking over the state government.

Between 1915 and 1919, Calles exercised power in Sonora and reinvented himself as an authoritarian populist. As such, according to Buchenau, he headed one of Mexico's most reform-oriented state governments. On the authoritarian side, he repressed those that opposed his initiatives. On many issues Calles sought to strike a balance, taming labour for US-owned copper companies, for instance, while also seeking to increase taxes on those companies and courting labour with paternalistic measures. In 1920, Calles and fellow Sonorans, Alvaro Obregón and Adolfo de la Huerta, took national power by force. In 1924, as Obregón's hand-picked successor, Calles reached the presidency after what Buchenau considers Mexico's first populist campaign. Through a combination of skill and luck, administrative ability, calculated advocacy of social reforms, and choosing the winning side, he captured the highest political post in Mexico.

Buchenau maintains that Calles' presidency had first a populist and then a repressive stage. With the help of labour leader Luis Morones, he built the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM), through which he brought his labour paternalism to the national stage. He also pushed for greater regulation of foreign oil companies. Other early initiatives included road building, land distribution and rural education. But again, the authoritarian half of the equation was visible, most vividly in the anticlericalism that precipitated the Cristero Rebellion (1926–1929). With renewed civil war came the second stage of his presidency, in which reform cooled. When Obregón sought to return to power in 1928, Calles helped crush his political competitors in a massacre that showcased his willingness to create 'order' through state violence.

Obregón was re-elected, but then assassinated before he took office, deepening the crisis of the late 1920s. Calles responded by creating a single revolutionary party. Ostensibly leaving political life, he subsequently used this party to wield power behind the scenes in a period called the Maximato (1928–1934). But Calles was not, Buchenau finds – in a careful weighing of his role during these years – as powerful as some have imagined. Rather, he participated in a system of shared governance in which he accessed political leverage from ongoing crises which were fuelled by the Depression. Meanwhile, his views drifted to the right, his main reform interest being 'socialist education'.

Buchenau locates the beginnings of the Maximato's decline, prior to the advent of the Cárdenas administration, which finally broke Calles' power in 1935. Indeed, in supporting the left-leaning Cárdenas for the presidency, Calles followed party sentiment rather than imposing his will. He was, Buchenau generalises, more often shaped by his world than the other way around. Buoyed by demands for renewed reform, Cárdenas revived revolutionary populism, taking Calles' methods to a new level and turning them against him. When in poor health, Calles questioned, foolishly, labour's right to strike, Cárdenas sent him into exile. Calles stayed out of politics thereafter, but his ongoing ideological drift was manifest in an admiration for fascism.

Buchenau's book is a balanced portrayal of one of the most controversial figures in revolutionary history. It is excellent in its depiction of the intricacies of Sonoran

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politics, and offers a valuable qualification of Héctor Aguilar Camín's arguments for Sonoran exceptionalism by placing those politics in a national context. Its coverage of Calles' activities on the national scene is judicious and convincing. It is a dispassionate work, remarkable for its objective tone and non-judgmental approach. But Buchenau's probably sensible decision to avoid psychologising has its costs. Indeed, the more one learns about Calles, the more one suspects that he was (and is) a good candidate for the couch. Psychological speculation might have helped fill some of the gaps in his early career, for which documentation is obviously scarce, but the big issue in this regard is his posture toward the church. It was not a case of bad luck when the Cristero rebellion undermined his reform programme, but rather a crisis mostly of Calles' own making. So why the self-destructive behaviour, which was also detrimental to the revolution? Buchenau concedes that much about Calles' posture toward the church was personal, but his reticence to explore that realm means he cannot offer a full explanation of this watershed event in his subject's career.

This consideration notwithstanding, Buchenau has provided us with a much-needed addition to the English-language literature, written in clear, accessible prose. It is essential for scholars of modern Mexico, and they can assign it to their undergraduates as well.

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Robert Howard Claxton, *From Parsifal to Perón: Early Radio in Argentina, 1920–1944* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), pp. xxvi + 224, $59.95, hb.

In 2007, a headline of the newspaper *La Nación* announced free Wi-Fi and full cellular phone communications in the underground subways of Buenos Aires. In practice, the cellular connections were clear and the technology seemed better than in most subways in North American cities. Robert Claxton would have nodded at the headline, knowing that 'Argentines have used communication medias, including radio, as much as people in western Europe or the United States have and to a greater extent than most other nations' (p. xxvi). We need to remember that in the early twentieth century Argentina had a highly developed telecommunications infrastructure, and was well ahead of most nations.

Beginning with the early stages of radio development during 1920–1944, *From Parsifal to Perón* is a unique book about how and why Argentine society developed commercial and non-commercial radio broadcasting, and how new radio technology influenced the social and economic tastes of radio listeners. Though Claxton begins the book with some interesting facts about Argentina's leadership in telecommunications in the twentieth-century, his story goes beyond giving us a simple history of early radio; he discusses the importance of radio as medium of information and national unity. In six chapters, plus introduction and conclusion, he examines the connections between radio, technology and nationhood, and the potential influence of radio on democracy.

In the introduction, Claxton guides the reader through colourful images of a modernising city and country that was ready to absorb and spread radio technology. It is easy to be drawn into these guided descriptions and the arguments of the book by the book's readability. And the images of technologically curious radio amateurs

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