

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# La Pata de Cabra, Satire and Free Speech in Nineteenth-Century Mexico City

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(Received 20 November 2018; revised 12 July 2021; accepted 16 July 2021;  
first published online 13 January 2022)

## Abstract

The article examines how *La Pata de Cabra* (*The Goat's Hoof*), an over-the-top fantastical Spanish *comedia de magia* (magic play), came to figure centrally in serious debates about Mexican politics and society between 1845 and 1857. The article explores the play's popularity and its resonance in the press – it spawned at least half a dozen satirical newspapers – to argue that satire became a critical political language and form of expression that broadened and sustained debates in an era marked by volatile and often heavily restricted press freedoms. The article's focus on the *La Pata* phenomenon brings two fields of study, theatre and the press, into productive and necessary conversation.

**Keywords:** satire; Mexico; nineteenth century; politics; print culture; theatre

As war with the United States loomed in late December 1845, a satirical biweekly newspaper, *Don Simplicio*, appeared in bookshops and printing shops and on street corners in Mexico City. Conjured up by Guillermo Prieto and Ignacio Ramírez ('El Nigromante', or 'The Necromancer'), two of Mexico's most brilliant minds, the newspaper offered biting critiques of society's ills, leaders' failures and governments' shortcomings. The editors took aim at army officers, clergy, magistrates, bureaucrats, wasteful spending and the ruinous state of Mexican society.<sup>1</sup> Prieto and Ramírez's self-deprecating and sharply critical tone became one of the newspaper's hallmarks, as did the emblematic frontman they used to launch their attacks. Featuring on the masthead, this figure wore a top hat, leather trousers and a *huácaro de indianilla*, a short, military-style jacket with tails (see [Figure 1](#)).<sup>2</sup> He sported a *panza de usurero* (usurer's paunch) and rode a donkey

<sup>1</sup> *Don Simplicio: Periódico burlresco, crítico y filosófico, por unos simples*, series 1, vol. 1 (1845). The paper's masthead read 'D. Simplicio' until its 'third epoch', beginning 1 July 1846; thereafter it was known as 'Don Simplicio'. I have used the full form with 'Don' throughout.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* See also Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Vocabulario de mexicanismos: Comprobado con ejemplos y comparado con los de otros países hispano-americanos. Propónense además unas adiciones y enmiendas a la última edición (12a) del diccionario de la Academia* (Mexico City: La Europea, 1899), entry 'Guácaro', p. 236.



Figure 1. The masthead of *Don Simplicio*, c. 1845–6

Source: Microforms collection, Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie, IN

backwards, brandishing a whip in one hand while steering the animal by the tail with the other. Below him, whipped into submission, lay a drunken soldier and a cleric (with the face of a cat) – symbols of still-powerful corporate bodies and legacies of Mexico’s colonial past. The frontman’s visual and figurative centrality begs at least two questions. First, who was he? Second, why had Prieto and Ramírez decided to use him to engage in debates about society, politics and the nation-in-formation – a nation that some contemporaries feared might simply dissolve?

The figure was none other than Don Simplicio (Mr Simpleton), the unlikely protagonist of the city’s most popular play, *Todo lo Vence Amor, o La Pata de Cabra* (*Love Conquers All, or The Goat’s Hoof*) by Juan de Grimaldi. *La Pata de Cabra*, as it became known, was a fantastical, over-the-top *comedia de magia*, a genre combining stage tricks, illusions, complex machinery and fantasy, and it took the city by storm following its 1841 debut. Audiences revelled in the *comedia de magia*’s wacky song-and-dance numbers and spectacular stage tricks. They also found irresistible the extra-terrestrial travels and serial misadventures of Don Simplicio, the play’s bombastic, cowardly leading man who invoked familiar tropes from Spanish Golden-Age literature.<sup>3</sup> Within a week of its opening, one theatre critic

<sup>3</sup>David Thatcher Gies, *Theatre and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Spain: Juan de Grimaldi as Impresario and Government Agent* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 73.

wrote that his cheeks hurt from laughing and claimed that the *gracioso* (buffoon), Don Simplicio, alone made it worth attending.<sup>4</sup> Several years later, Prieto speculated that the play had been staged at the New Mexico Theatre at least 30 times.<sup>5</sup> Writing in 1850, another critic observed that it was the city's most frequently staged play and one that 'everyone had learned by heart'.<sup>6</sup> The play's unprecedented box office success led to calls to change its name to *La Pata de Plata* (a reference to Mexican-minted silver coins, or *pesos fuertes*, in demand globally) or *La Pata de Oro* (gold).<sup>7</sup> *La Pata de Cabra's* popularity on stage is only part of the story. Off stage, the play spawned at least half a dozen satirical newspapers, whose editors included, in addition to Prieto and Ramírez, prominent men of letters (*letrados*) José María Rivera, Juan de Dios Arias and Niceto de Zamacois.

Given the tumultuous context – in the 1840s and 1850s Mexico suffered a disastrous war with the United States (1846–8) and careened into civil war a decade later (1858–61), following years of intensifying political polarisation – it might seem surprising that *letrados* turned to Grimaldi's farcical play to engage in serious debates about the nation.<sup>8</sup> However, a review of newspaper titles published between 1845 and 1857 – *Don Simplicio*, *El Hijo de D. Simplicio*, *La Pata de Cabra*, *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, *La Patita* and *El Burro de D. Simplicio* (*Don Simplicio's Son*, *The Goat's Hoof*, *Don Simplicio's Sword*, *The Little Hoof* and *Don Simplicio's Donkey*) – shows editors centring the play in public discourse in the midst of this uncertainty. Such titles were designed so that readers could easily identify editors' objectives, ideologies and interests at a glance.<sup>9</sup> The *La Pata*-inspired newspaper editors reimagined exchanges, scenes and characters from the play to deliver blistering critiques of public officials, institutions and political customs. They did so in part to insulate themselves against prosecution in a period

<sup>4</sup>Yo [pseudonym of Manuel Payno], 'Los pretendientes de café', *El Siglo XIX* (3 Jan. 1842), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Los Gemelos [pseudonym of Guillermo Prieto], 'Revista teatral', *El Siglo XIX* (28 Nov. 1848), pp. 2–3.

<sup>6</sup>El Sota – Apuntador [unknown pseudonym], 'Revista teatral', *El Siglo XIX* (9 Jan. 1850), p. 3. All translations from Spanish are by the author.

<sup>7</sup>*El Universal* (10 Dec. 1848), p. 3. Contemporary sources do not always give author's names. For a poster advertisement using this language, see Centro de Estudios de Historia de México-CARSO, Mexico City, Fondo Impresos Armando María y Campos, Programas de Teatro, Serie 5, Legajo 725 (available at <http://www.cehm.org.mx/Buscador/VisorArchivoDigital?zjd=/janium/JZD/LXI-1/5/725/1/LXI-1.5.725.1.jzd&fn=88386>; last accessed 2 Nov. 2021).

<sup>8</sup>The complexity of this period defies easy categorisation. For a sample of monographs that have greatly enhanced our understanding, see Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835–1846: 'Hombres de Bien' in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Will Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals, 1821–1853* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Pedro Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845–1848* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1996); Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *La intervención norteamericana, 1846–1848* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1997); Carmen Vázquez Mantecón, *Santa Anna y la encrucijada del Estado: La dictadura (1853–1855)* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986). Reflective of the period's complexity and gaps in historical understanding is the subtitle ('The Forgotten Years') to a 2019 edited volume: Pedro Santoni and Will Fowler (eds.), *Mexico, 1848–1853: Los años olvidados* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>9</sup>Lilia Vieyra Sánchez, 'Significado y tradición: Los nombres de los periódicos del siglo XIX', in Miguel Ángel Castro (ed.), *Tipos y caracteres: La prensa mexicana (1822–1855)* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas, Seminario de Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XIX, 2001), p. 59.

when press freedoms were subject to a tangle of legal and constitutional regulations and the whims of those in power. The editors were also negotiating the bounds of free speech. In satirising the popular play, they sought to broaden the terms and spaces of public debate, sustain dialogue and strengthen democratic discourse. Their efforts helped make debates and democratic discourse more resilient in tempestuous times.

Free speech preoccupied public men in nineteenth-century Mexico, who understood the idea not only as a right but as central to liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the freedom to publicly express one's opinion was to many constitutive of other tenets of liberalism such as popular sovereignty and electoral democracy. Fractious contests over what could be said and written produced an impressive body of laws, decrees and polemics; and the periodical press was a particularly important space of negotiation.<sup>11</sup> This article, in tracing the ways editors reimagined the play through their satirical newspapers, shows how a vibrant world of political debate was constructed and functioned. Though it focuses on Mexico City, it engages with a growing body of scholarship that explores strategies individuals adopted to stake their claim in public debates and the body politic in nineteenth-century Latin America.<sup>12</sup> Its examination of free speech in the nineteenth century also reverberates in our present, for, as Pablo Piccato has argued, 'Much of the concern about what we call citizenship today (representation, participation in public life, claims of individual rights and obligations) was formulated through the nineteenth century and up to the early post-revolutionary years as, fundamentally, the ability to express one's reason – an individual's demand to be part of public opinion.'<sup>13</sup>

Editors' decisions to use *La Pata de Cabra's* fantastic world to express their opinions in public highlight how the worlds of the press and the stage overlapped. They also underscore an important idea: scholars must pay more attention to the dynamic relationship between print culture and performance. Those who study the press often cite the satirical newspapers spawned by *La Pata de Cabra*. For instance, a renowned compendium of nineteenth-century newspapers classifies *Don Simplicio* as 'one of the best examples of Mexican satire'.<sup>14</sup> *Don Simplicio's* pages contain satirical poetry, dialogues and more traditional editorials without direct reference to the play. But a reading that fails to account for the ways Prieto and Ramírez embedded language, imagery and characters from the stage to deploy layered critiques results in incomplete comprehension. Because satire works insofar as audiences can peel back its layers and decipher (at least some) of its multiple

<sup>10</sup>Pablo A. Piccato, 'The Public Sphere and Liberalism in Mexico from the Mid-19th Century to the 1930s', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (31 Aug. 2016), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.266>, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>12</sup>Selected volumes include Hilda Sabato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999); Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Celso Thomas Castilho, *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup>Piccato, 'Public Sphere and Liberalism', p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Miguel Ángel Castro and Guadalupe Curiel (eds.), *Publicaciones periódicas mexicanas del siglo XIX: 1822–1855* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000), pp. 152–5.

referents and meanings, such a reading leaves the reader unable to fully grasp the newspaper's irony or its broad appeal.<sup>15</sup> Scholars of theatre, on the other hand, focusing on the origins of a 'national' theatre, have overlooked the Spanish drama's popularity and its incorporation into national and political discourse in Mexico.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of the phenomenon that emerged around *La Pata de Cabra* brings these two fields of study – theatre and the press – into productive and necessary conversation.<sup>17</sup> In particular, this analysis reveals how the two fields converged at mid-century to enable the development of a unique form of public political discourse centred on satirical renderings of the city's most popular play.

This article's focus on the intersections between the press and the stage offers insights into the study of political expression in at least three intertwined ways. First, by examining journalists' attempts to negotiate press freedoms, this article reveals important efforts to make debates and democratic discourse more resilient. It builds on recent scholarship, arguing that negotiating the bounds of what could be said or written mattered more to politicians and intellectuals than protecting the right to vote.<sup>18</sup> Second, the *La Pata* phenomenon demands that scholars of the press and print culture more carefully examine the nineteenth-century stage. Theatre offered a storehouse of symbols that journalists invoked and refashioned to inflict scathing critiques. Indeed, as one literary scholar has argued, theatre became a lens through which mid-century intellectuals interpreted the world.<sup>19</sup> In selecting a well-known play, satirists spoke to a broad audience, including those who might not have been active consumers of the city's burgeoning print culture. They also wrote with a robust aural culture in mind, expecting debates to spill over into cafés, reading rooms, workshops, popular establishments and street corners where newspapers were read aloud.<sup>20</sup> Third, an analysis of the *La Pata* phenomenon highlights satire's power as a political language and potent

<sup>15</sup>Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>By contrast, the play's influence in Spain's capital is well known. See David Thatcher Gies, *Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *Theatre and Politics*; and "Inocente estupidez": *La pata de cabra* (1829), Grimaldi, and the Regeneration of the Spanish Stage', *Hispanic Review*, 54: 4 (1986), pp. 375–96. That Grimaldi's play resonated in Mexico is not surprising. Spanish acting companies frequently toured in Mexico, and they brought repertoires with them. For how Spain featured prominently in public debates in Mexico, see Tomás Pérez Vejo, *España en el debate público mexicano, 1836–1867: Aportaciones para una historia de la nación* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>This article joins a growing body of scholarship examining theatre as a forum for national (political) debate in Latin America. See among others Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba, 1840–1895* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); E. Gabrielle Kuenzli, *Acting Inca: National Belonging in Early Twentieth-Century Bolivia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); and Celso T. Castillo, 'Performing Abolitionism, Enacting Citizenship: The Social Construction of Political Rights in 1880s Recife, Brazil', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 93: 3 (August 2013), pp. 377–409.

<sup>18</sup>Piccatto, 'Public Sphere and Liberalism', pp. 1–2.

<sup>19</sup>Margo Glantz, 'Memorias de mis tiempos, de Guillermo Prieto, representatividad de una realidad teatral', in Miguel Ángel Castro *et al.* (eds.), *Repertorio de Guillermo Prieto: Homenaje en el centenario de su muerte, 1897–1997* (Mexico City: CONACULTA, 2006), pp. 79–98.

<sup>20</sup>For Mexico, Martha Celis de la Cruz, 'La circulación de impresos en México durante la época independiente', in Celia del Palacio Montiel (ed.), *La prensa como fuente para la historia* (Mexico City: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2006), pp. 59–71. In Latin America, Marcel Velázquez Castro (ed.), *La república de papel: Política e imaginación social en la prensa peruana del siglo XIX* (Lima: Universidad de Ciencias y

discursive weapon.<sup>21</sup> Written satire flourished in the 1840s and 1850s amid political tumult and volatile press regulations, forming an expansion of public debates in those decades.<sup>22</sup> *Letrados* capitalised both on satire's ambiguity and on the play's popularity to bolster public debate. Delimiting how and why journalists turned to satire, and to Grimaldi's play in particular, to shape public opinion, define the contours of free speech and make public debates more resilient forces a reconsideration of the broader impact of the satirical press in Mexico.<sup>23</sup> Satire was not simply a commentary on the political landscape. It was also productive of it, as an analysis of the *La Pata* phenomenon shows.

This article is divided into three acts, in the spirit of the subject under study. The first summarises Grimaldi's play, situates it in the politico-historical context of mid-century Mexico and explains how the phenomenon that developed around the play changed the political lexicon. The second section, through a close reading of three of the satirical newspapers spawned by Grimaldi's play – *Don Simplicio*, *La Pata de Cabra* and *La Espada de D. Simplicio* – expands upon the first, exploring how journalists reimagined the play to engage a broad public in pressing political debates. The concluding section argues how understanding Grimaldi's play, and editors' creative satirisations, unlocks a deeper understanding of the period.

### Act I: Satire and the Play in a Time of Crisis

At its simplest, *La Pata de Cabra* was a moralistic boy-meets-girl love story that fitted the romantic mould then in vogue in Mexico.<sup>24</sup> The play narrates the tale of a beautiful maiden, Leonor, who falls in love with the rogue (*pícaro*), Don Juan, just before she is to wed the false nobleman, Don Simplicio. The tension over whom she will marry drives the plot, which Grimaldi embellishes with all manner of stage tricks, sets, scene changes and mythical creatures. In the play's opening scene, as Don Juan is about to commit suicide, two pistols magically fly out of his hands and discharge harmlessly. Cupid appears and after more stage effects – the moon and water turn red, thunderclaps are heard and lightning strikes a cauldron holding a goat – he presents Don Juan with a goat's hoof, the talisman that will ensure his happiness and his marriage to Leonor. In Act II, Don Simplicio pursues the lovers, who have fled, balconies move between levels, constables are suspended in mid-air and portraits take up arms against Don Simplicio. As Act II closes, Don Simplicio's hat becomes a hot-air balloon and carries him into

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Humanidades, Fondo Editorial, 2009) and William Garrett Acree, Jr, *Everyday Reading: Print Culture and Collective Identity in the Rio de la Plata, 1780–1910* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup>For how Ignacio Ramírez's satirical poetry in *Don Simplicio* sought to create a new political language, see Pablo Piccato, 'Poesía y política en el México republicano: Una lectura de Ignacio Ramírez en *Don Simplicio*, 1845–1847', *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, 58 (2019), pp. 29–74.

<sup>22</sup>Eliás José Palti (ed.), *La política del disenso: La 'polémica en torno al monarquismo' (México, 1848–1850) ... y las aporías del liberalismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998) and Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms*.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Buffington, *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man: The Mexico City Penny Press, 1900–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2015) and Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón, 'Satire and the Lie of Politics: *El Mono* (México, 1833)', *Revista Tiempo Histórico*, 20 (2020), pp. 17–35.

<sup>24</sup>My analysis of the play is based on Juan de Grimaldi, *La pata de cabra*, ed., intro. and annotated by David T. Gies (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1986).

space. In Act III, the play becomes even more surreal and otherworldly. Vulcan (a figure modelled on the Greek god Hephaestus), Cyclops and a magician make their stage debuts. The play reaches a climax in Cupid's palace when Leonor weds Don Juan in the presence of Don Simplicio, Don Lope (Leonor's tutor, who arranged the marriage to Don Simplicio) and the *crème de la crème* of ancient mythological society. In the play's final exchange, a proudly defiant Leonor asserts, 'You will surely now be convinced, my dear tutor, and you too, my stubborn suitor, that love conquers all.'

Mixed in with the magic and mythical beings, Grimaldi's play featured an improbable – and very funny – protagonist in Don Simplicio. When Don Lope introduces Leonor to Don Simplicio, presenting him as 'one of the most distinguished noblemen from Navarre', Leonor looks Don Simplicio up and down before guffawing. Soon thereafter, the audience hears the protagonist's full name for the first time: Don Simplicio Bobadilla Majaderano y Cabeza de Buey. The first part was a riff on the words simpleton (*Simplicio*), dunce (*bobo*) and bird-brained (*majadero*). The second was a play on the surname of famous Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca ('Cow's Head'; compare Don Simplicio's 'Ox's Head'). Don Simplicio's foolishness is highlighted when he remarks to his mute sidekick, Lazarillo, after stumbling over his proposal to Leonor, 'Good sir, I think I made a favourable impression.' Grimaldi peels back Simplicio's false bravado and bombastic rhetoric to expose his cowardice as the play moves forward. When Don Juan jumps out from behind a mirror to challenge Don Simplicio to a fight, the false nobleman hides behind servants, while proclaiming, 'Hold me back, boys. Hold me back so I don't kill him!' By play's end, Simplicio accepts defeat and Leonor weds Don Juan.

However zany, Grimaldi's play teemed with satire. Figures representing authority and power (Don Simplicio and Don Lope) were mocked and defeated. Chivalrous behaviour was shown to be hollow and self-admiring. Leonor's defiance, Don Juan's mockery of his social superiors, the incongruence between honour and status and noble titles, and the calling into question of conventions of masculinity upended social conventions, gender norms and power structures. No scene from the play better captured its satirical overtones than Don Simplicio's observations from his trip into outer space. As Act III opens, Don Simplicio comes crashing back to earth. He tells the search party that has come to find him, headed by Don Lope, about his conversations with the lunar people (*lunáticos*), a pun on the alternative meaning 'lunatics':

Imagine that everything there is the reverse of here. Lovers are constant, spouses are faithful, merchants don't cheat you, officials speak using good manners (*con buen modo*), soldiers don't swear ... In the way they eat, in the way they dress, even in their public entertainments, the *lunáticos* prefer national things to foreign ones ... Literature is honoured there. All men with talent are rich and all rich men are talented. Journalists speak impartially about things they can judge, and they remain quiet about things they cannot judge. Polemics are carried out in a measured way. Everything's upside down, my friend, everything's upside down.

Simplicio's reporting on the moon's topsy-turvy world signalled to audiences the exchange's ironic tone. His observations also resonated with theatregoers in Mexico

City, who delighted at the suggestion that the *lunático* government knew how to conduct business better than their own and that *lunático* society was more genteel. The prelude to that scene – at the end of Act II when Don Simplicio drifts into outer space suspended from a balloon – was so memorable that impresarios invoked it decades later in theatre posters (see Figure 2).

Full of farce, satire and slapstick, *La Pata*'s whimsical world sent theatregoers into a frenzy. Among the hundreds of romantic dramas, French melodramas, Spanish comedies and operas staged in the city during the 1840s and 1850s, none was as popular as Grimaldi's play. The facile explanation for the play's resonance is that it offered an escapist pursuit. *La Pata de Cabra*'s nutty, bizarre world was so unreal that it helped spectators forget about the challenges of politics and daily life. Humour can indeed act as a powerful salve in times of political disaffection.<sup>25</sup> There was, however, a figurative and discursive parallelism between the worlds of the play and that inhabited by mid-century theatregoers that made Grimaldi's play work – and work well – for a long time. Journalists found in the stage apt metaphors to explain contemporary politics. For instance, one wrote about President Mariano Arista's 1852 address to the National Congress in his weekly theatre column, describing the speech as a melodramatic mimetic monologue. In the column, the journalist predicted 'that we will see things [in political drama] as outrageously entertaining as that scene in *La Pata de Cabra* when Don Simplicio's hat turns into a hot air balloon'.<sup>26</sup> Impresarios adopted similar language, advertising Grimaldi's play, in the playwright's own terms, as a *melo-mimo-drama, mitológico-burlesco, de magia* – a mythological, burlesque and comic melodrama that imitated reality – giving audiences some idea of what they could expect.<sup>27</sup> The farce mid-century residents lived was not populated by mythical creatures, but these seemed no more fantastical than the waves of insurrection, foreign wars, regional separatist movements, presidential ousters, loss and sale of national territory and squander of treasury resources that happened during these decades.

The angst and uncertainty felt by many created favourable conditions for satire. As one historian described it, this was a period of profound disillusion (1835–47) followed by despair (1847–55).<sup>28</sup> Destructive rebellions in the capital (1840–1) stoked fears of anarchy and social dissolution.<sup>29</sup> These fears opened a path for military leader, caudillo and six-time President Antonio López de Santa Anna's return to power in what is known as the *dictadura disfrazada* (1841–4).<sup>30</sup> The optimism that reigned at the end of the 'disguised dictatorship' faded quickly. A series of unpopular decisions by then-President José Joaquín de Herrera's *moderado*

<sup>25</sup>Alison Dagnes, *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Humor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Francisco Zarco, 'Crónica de teatros', *El Siglo XIX* (31 Jan. 1852).

<sup>27</sup>Poster located in evidentiary files for case between Manuel Moreno and Pedro Tello de Meneses in 1855. Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal, Box 306, 1855, unnumbered file folder.

<sup>28</sup>Fowler, *Age of Proposals*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup>Michael P. Costeloe, 'A Pronunciamento in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: "15 de julio de 1840"', *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 4: 2 (1988), pp. 245–64.

<sup>30</sup>Costeloe, *Central Republic*, pp. 184–212.





**Figure 2.** Theatre poster for *La Pata de Cabra* (the play), 1870s  
 Source: Centro de Estudios de la Historia de México-CARSO, Mexico City, Impresos Armando María y Campos, Programas de Teatro, Serie 10, Legajo 1379

(moderate federalist) government during 1845, including the attempted recognition of Texas's independence, united dissident factions and ultimately led General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga to launch a successful rebellion – the 'Plan and Manifiesto of San Luis Potosí' – against Herrera in December. Paredes's government, installed on 4 January 1846, failed to achieve its promises to bring order to the treasury and to operate efficiently.<sup>31</sup> It lost considerable support when the general's secret commitment to a monarchist conspiracy organised by Spanish Minister Salvador Bermúdez de Castro became public.<sup>32</sup>

Mexico's inability – or unwillingness – to set aside factional rows continued into the war with the United States. As US troops advanced toward Mexico City in January 1847, National Guard units in the capital rose up against the government of the *puro* (radical federalist) Valentín Gómez Farías in the 'Polkos Rebellion' (in deprecating reference to the rebels' support for US President James K. Polk). Street fighting paralysed the city, led to Gómez Farías's ouster, and was followed by a violent nine-month occupation by US forces.<sup>33</sup> Separatist uprisings in Tabasco and Yucatán further highlighted the state of disunity. Those events, combined with the loss of more than half of Mexican territory following the 1848 signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo peace treaty, dealt a huge blow to national morale. In the wake of defeat, conservative statesman Lucas Alamán lamented that Mexico since its independence (1821) had moved 'from infancy to decrepitude without ever

<sup>31</sup>Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, 'Political Plans and Collaboration between Civilians and the Military, 1821–1846', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 15: 1 (1996), pp. 32–5.

<sup>32</sup>Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *México, Gran Bretaña y otros países* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), pp. 187–92.

<sup>33</sup>Everard Meade, 'Truth and Reconciliation in Front of the Firing Squad: Trials and Execution in Post-War Mexico', in Santoni and Fowler (eds.), *Mexico, 1848–1853*, pp. 189–215.

having experienced the vigour of youth'.<sup>34</sup> *Moderado* Mariano Otero reportedly blamed Mexico's defeat on the lack of a national spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Political polarisation heightened in the war's aftermath. Struggles between *moderados*, *puros*, conservatives, monarchists and *santanistas* (supporters of Santa Anna) intensified. These divisions were formalised through the creation of the Conservative Party and the Santanista Party in 1849. The failure of successive *moderado* Presidents Herrera (2 June 1848–15 January 1851) and Arista (16 January 1851–5 January 1853) to establish a stable constitutional government, revive the economy, address social grievances, resolve church–state tensions and introduce enduring reforms exacerbated tensions.<sup>36</sup> An uneasy alliance between the military, conservatives, *puros* and *santanistas* that returned Santa Anna to power for the sixth and final time (20 April 1853–12 August 1855) dissolved quickly. By late 1854, Santa Anna's rabid anti-liberalism and repression had lost him considerable support, including from loyalists.<sup>37</sup> The resistance movements that emerged through the Plan of Ayutla (1 March 1854) eventually forced Santa Anna from power, but they also pushed the country closer to civil war. In the following years, *moderados* and *puros* fought amongst themselves and with conservatives to dictate the country's future, instituting laws and decrees in the late 1850s and early 1860s that separated church and state, granted the state power to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs and divested the church of property and wealth. Tensions spilled over into outright violence in early 1858, starting a three-year civil war that claimed at least 8,000 lives.

Fractious negotiations over free speech and a series of frequently changing regulations governing freedom of the press contributed to the era's instability.<sup>38</sup> Political authorities issued press laws to balance protecting individual liberties with securing political control, though the latter most often won the day.<sup>39</sup> A brief overview of press legislation during and after Mexico's war with the United States reveals how quickly and dramatically regulations could change. In 1831, the government of Anastasio Bustamante suspended press juries (groups of citizens of good standing who judged the merits of alleged violations and meted out punishments), which had been established in 1821. Later that decade, federal district governor, José María Tornel, banned the *voceo*, the practice of reading newspapers out loud in public; this instance marked at least the third time such a ban had been put in place since 1824.<sup>40</sup> In early 1846, President (and General) Paredes met with opposition editors and threatened them if they disturbed the peace with their writings.<sup>41</sup> Paredes issued two new decrees when the editors failed to comply;

<sup>34</sup>Eric Van Young, 'In Mexico there are no Mexicans: Decolonization and Modernization, 1750–1850', Public Lecture, Mexican Studies Group at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Vanderbilt University, 19 Jan. 2016.

<sup>35</sup>Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 353.

<sup>36</sup>Santoni and Fowler (eds.), *Mexico, 1848–1853*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup>Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2007), p. 311.

<sup>38</sup>Corinna Zeltsman, 'Defining Responsibility: Printers, Politics, and the Law in Early Republican Mexico City', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 98: 2 (April 2018), pp. 189–222.

<sup>39</sup>Piccato, *Tyranny of Opinion*, pp. 33–42.

<sup>40</sup>María del Carmen Reyna, *La prensa censurada durante el siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), pp. 22–9.

<sup>41</sup>Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms*, p. 110.

the second, declared in April, imposed a blanket moratorium on criticism of authorities. Officials raided newspaper offices and printing shops, shutting down presses and jailing many editors, including Prieto and Ramírez.<sup>42</sup> On 14 November 1846, provisional President José Mariano Salas declared a *reglamento* (ruling) that in large measure protected press freedoms; while the new law expanded what were considered abuses of the press, it nullified existing restrictions and re-established press juries, increasing their size.<sup>43</sup> In 1848, *moderado* President Herrera reconfigured the November 1846 press law, expanding the definition of defamation to include satires and invectives. This law led to the arrest and imprisonment of journalists Francisco Zarco and Antonio Pérez Gallardo, who had accused Herrera's minister of war, Arista, of acting unpatriotically during the US–Mexican War.<sup>44</sup> On 22 September 1852, Arista, facing growing unrest and open rebellion, passed a law that prohibited freedom of the press. That restriction was overturned six weeks later, only to be reversed on 25 April 1853 by the Ley Lares, Mexico's most severe press law. The Ley Lares silenced opposition to Santa Anna's rule and led to the closure of over 40 newspapers.<sup>45</sup> On average fewer than six newspapers were published per day while the law was in effect (until August 1855).<sup>46</sup>

Journalists deployed satire in part to navigate this fraught tangle of regulations and extra-legal harassment over free speech. They also did so to express dissatisfaction with the instability, hypocrisy and general lack of national unity they observed, and to call their contemporaries to action.<sup>47</sup> Satirists criticise the existing social or political order in an effort to improve society, not merely to express indignation. Believing, with Gilbert Highet, that 'most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anesthetized by custom and dullness to resignation', '[The satirist] wishes to make them see the truth – at least that part of the truth they habitually ignore.'<sup>48</sup> Satirists do this by forcing listeners/readers to reconcile the incongruity between incompatible scripts, between the real and the humorous.<sup>49</sup> Audiences in turn experience humour (satire, irony and parody) at the intersection of these scripts, when they realise – then process – the discrepancies between what is written and what is intended, or between what is and what could or should be.<sup>50</sup> When done well, the rewards to the reader/listener are twofold: 'the pleasure of an aesthetic

<sup>42</sup>Costeloe, *Central Republic*, pp. 289–90.

<sup>43</sup>Manuel Dublán and José María Lozano, *Legislación mexicana o colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la república* (Mexico City: Imprenta del Comercio, 1876–1904), vol. 5, pp. 189–95.

<sup>44</sup>Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, 'Francisco Zarco: La libertad de expresión', *Revista de la Universidad de México*, 93 (2011), p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>Fowler, *Santa Anna*, p. 297.

<sup>46</sup>Gerald C. McGowan, *Prensa y poder, 1854–1857. La revolución de Ayutla, El Congreso Constituyente* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1978), pp. 18–20.

<sup>47</sup>For similar sentiments motivating classical Roman satirists see Rubén Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', in Rubén Quintero (ed.), *A Companion to Satire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 18–19.

<sup>49</sup>Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson Press, 1964).

<sup>50</sup>Salvatore Attardo, 'The Semantic Foundations of Cognitive Theories of Humor', *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 10: 4 (1997), pp. 395–420 and Rachel Giora, 'On the Cognitive Aspects of the Joke', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 16: 5 (1991), pp. 465–86.

experience coupled with the reasonable hope that a stable political order may be attainable'.<sup>51</sup>

In Mexico and Latin America more broadly, both written and performative satire had enjoyed a long history. Satire appeared in lampoons (*pasquines*) that criticised colonial authorities, in the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and in the limericks of eighteenth-century Afro-Mexican José Vasconcelos ('El Negrito', 'The Little Black Man').<sup>52</sup> It infused marionette performances in elite homes and in public spectacles which featured the immolation of papier mâché effigies.<sup>53</sup> During the early decades of the nineteenth century, satirical expression surged. Satire filled the pages of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's novels and inspired political caricatures like José María Torreblanca's *El Mono Vano* (*The Vain Monkey*).<sup>54</sup> It featured in puppet theatre productions, where characters serving as social critics mocked political, religious and social authorities.<sup>55</sup> A more public, carnivalesque expression of satire took root in annual Holy Week Judas burnings. Such events temporarily inverted the social order, as effigies of Judas Iscariot – and hated political figures – were destroyed.<sup>56</sup>

Satirists in mid-century Mexico drew upon a wealth of cultural references to expose bitter truths. Many had read classical works from Greece and Rome and the writings of Enlightenment thinkers. Ramírez reportedly knew from memory classical Greek and Roman texts, possessed a profound understanding of Voltaire and based many of his own writings on the ideas of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham.<sup>57</sup> Satirists immersed themselves in the worlds of literature, poetry and drama. They were also keenly aware of deeply rooted, popular, performative satire. In reimagining Don Simplicio's character (and Grimaldi's play more broadly), the satirists considered in this article sought to produce intense irony and elicit a good laugh by suggesting that a foolish, irrational cultural persona could lead the country more adeptly than the individuals who had actually taken the reins. To be sure, these journalists-cum-satirists were concerned with bolstering their status as some of the country's most combative and important political figures.<sup>58</sup> But their enterprise extended beyond the politics of humiliation or self-fashioning.

The editors of the *La Pata*-inspired newspapers sought not only to speak truth to power but also to make public debates more resilient through satirisations of Grimaldi's play. By capitalising on the play's popularity, they aimed to broaden engagement among their readers/listeners, including those less attentive to politics.

<sup>51</sup>Edward Allen Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 38.

<sup>52</sup>Teodoro Torres, 'Humorismo y sátira' (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2014 [Mexico City: Editorial Mexicana, 1941]), pp. 61–7. See also Julie Greer Johnson, *Satire in Colonial Latin America: Turning the New World Upside Down* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 64–72 and William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>53</sup>Beezley, *Mexican National Identity*, pp. 44–5 and 101.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 26.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>56</sup>William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*, 2nd edn (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 89–124.

<sup>57</sup>Laura Ibarra García, 'Las ideas de Ignacio Ramírez, *El Nigromante*: Su significado en la historia del pensamiento mexicano', *Iztapalapa: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 72: 1 (2012), p. 155.

<sup>58</sup>David R. Maciel, 'Don Simplicio y el "Nigromante"', *Relaciones*, 2: 2 (1981), p. 116.

Though this argument – about satire’s ability to broaden engagement – draws on findings from more recent empirical scholarship on the effects of political satire, evidence from mid-nineteenth-century Mexico points to a similar conclusion.<sup>59</sup> As this article reveals, satirical renderings of Grimaldi’s play expanded the political lexicon in an era when political ideas circulated widely due to new technologies that enabled larger print runs.<sup>60</sup> By the late 1840s, Don Simplicio had become linguistic shorthand in the press. Prieto and others adopted it as their pen name. In the mid-1850s, Zamacois, the conservative Spanish-born journalist and editor of *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, delivered critiques as ‘slaps’, channelling the scene when Don Simplicio mocks a portrait then slaps the figure before it comes to life and disarms him. *Puro* journalists Arias and Rivera offered their own brand of satirical invective, or *pati-cabriología* (‘goat’s hoof-ism’), peddled by a goat-journalist – a creature they imagined into existence through their newspaper, *La Pata de Cabra*. More generally, satirists used the play to stir up and sustain debates about ‘forbidden’ topics. They reimagined scenes and characters to shine light on two-faced politicians, the Catholic Church’s hypocrisy and the country’s lack of unity, its numerous constitutions and political customs that hindered the nation’s development.

## Act II: The *La Pata*-Inspired Satirical Press

Grimaldi’s play spawned at least six satirical political newspapers in Mexico between 1845 and 1857, four of which were published in the capital. *El Hijo de D. Simplicio* was printed in Orizaba from 1849 to 1851.<sup>61</sup> Following the toppling of Santa Anna’s dictatorship in 1855, Arias and Rivera published *La Pata de Cabra* six days per week from August 1855 to February 1857 while Zamacois’s *La Espada de D. Simplicio* ran 100 editions from November 1855 to March 1856. The fifth, *La Patita*, a so-called ‘descendant’ of *La Pata de Cabra*, was published for only a few months between May and September 1857.<sup>62</sup> Gerardo Yeliat published the sixth, *El Burro de D. Simplicio* (August 1857–April 1862), in Tlaxcala.

The appearance of *La Pata*-inspired newspapers formed part of a broader florescence of written satirical expression in the 1840s and 1850s. Editors dedicated columns to the discussion of satire.<sup>63</sup> They published satirical weeklies and serialised newspaper columns like Juan Bautista Morales’s *El Gallo Pitagórico* (*The Pythagorean Rooster*, 1842–4). A number of these publications drew inspiration from the stage. There was, for instance, *D. Juan Tenorio* (1849–50?), a newspaper that backed Bernardo Couto’s candidacy in the 1850 presidential election and whose title invoked Spanish playwright José Zorrilla’s caricature of the libertine Don Juan.<sup>64</sup> There was also *El Diabolo Verde* (*The Green Devil*), an anti-monarchical

<sup>59</sup>Dannagal G. Young, ‘Theories and Effects of Political Humor: Discounting Cues, Gateways, and the Impact of Incongruities’, in Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 877–8.

<sup>60</sup>Santoni and Fowler (eds.), *Mexico, 1848–1853*, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup>Mention of this newspaper in *El Siglo XIX* (31 Aug. 1850 and 20 May 1851).

<sup>62</sup>Mention of this newspaper in *Diario de Avisos* (20 May 1857 and 5 Sept. 1857).

<sup>63</sup>‘Sátira’, *El Siglo XIX* (7 Nov. 1844), p. 4.

<sup>64</sup>Michael P. Costeloe, ‘Mariano Arista and the 1850 Presidential Election in Mexico’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 18: 1 (1999), pp. 57, 61.

weekly published in Querétaro (November 1849–April 1850) dedicated to instructing Queretanos on electoral rights and understandings of the law.<sup>65</sup> *El Diablo Verde* took its name from a *comedia de magia* that competed with Grimaldi's play and featured collaborations from Rivera and Arias, future editors of *La Pata de Cabra*.

Scholars have convincingly argued that attempts to draw clear boundaries between literary pursuits and political writing are ahistorical enterprises.<sup>66</sup> The newspaper editors-*cum*-satirists considered in this article operated across multiple fields. As 'poet-legislators', they embraced public life, mixing politics and literature, journalism and legislative action, armed conflict and oratory.<sup>67</sup> Prieto, for instance, held political posts, wrote for literary magazines, penned theatre chronicles and *costumbrista* sketches (sketches of manners and customs) and gave rousing public speeches. He even took up arms during the 1847 Polkos Rebellion.<sup>68</sup> Ramírez, 'El Nigromante', was a writer, poet, lawyer and public official, who served twice as education minister and once on the Supreme Court.<sup>69</sup> Arias was principally a writer. He founded 14 newspapers, including *La Pata de Cabra*, and contributed to many more.<sup>70</sup> He also served as a deputy to the 1856 constitutional convention and as secretary of state for Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada's government. While Prieto, Ramírez, Arias and others engaged in multiple modes of writing, the *La Pata*-inspired satirical publications allowed them to commingle politics and theatre, poetry and editorials, farce and reality.

From *Don Simplicio*'s first edition in December 1845, Prieto and Ramírez fashioned reputations for delivering incisive critiques. Across 110 issues spanning 17 months (December 1845–April 1847), the newspaper adopted a seriocomic and self-deprecating tone to address constitutional reform, press freedoms, taxes, laws, elections, pronouncements, the rise of monarchism and war with the United States. *Don Simplicio*'s format was similar to contemporary newspapers; most editions led with an editorial and included sections for news, letters to the editor, trade or commerce (*parte mercantil*) and public entertainments. However, by blending and juxtaposing real news and satirical expression, Prieto and Ramírez blurred the boundaries between the real and the seemingly absurd.

<sup>65</sup>Castro and Curiel (eds.), *Publicaciones periódicas*, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup>Elisa Speckman Guerra, 'Las posibles lecturas de la República de las Letras. Escritores, visiones y lectores', in Belem Clark de Lara and Elisa Speckman Guerra (eds.), *La república de las Letras. Asomos a la cultura escrita del México decimonónico*, vol. 1: *Ambientes, asociaciones y grupos. Movimientos, temas y géneros literarios* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), pp. 47–72. For the Iberian world, Gabriel Paquette, 'Romantic Liberalism in Spain and Portugal, c. 1825–1850', *The Historical Journal*, 58: 2 (2015), pp. 481–511.

<sup>67</sup>Piccato, *Tyranny of Opinion*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>68</sup>Begoña Arteta, 'Guillermo Prieto', in Antonia Pi-Suñer Llorens (ed.), *Historiografía mexicana*, vol. 4: *En busca de un discurso integrador de la nación, 1848–1884* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996), pp. 35–53. Boris Rosen Jélomer, 'Prólogo', in Boris Rosen Jélomer (ed.), *Obras completas de Guillermo Prieto*, vol. 26: *Cartas públicas y privadas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), p. 22.

<sup>69</sup>Salvador Moreno y Kalbtk (ed.), *Diccionario biográfico magisterial*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1994), pp. 89–90.

<sup>70</sup>Jorge A. Ruedas de la Serna (ed.), 'Juan de Dios Arias', in *La misión del escritor. Ensayos mexicanos del siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 1996), pp. 295–305.

They thus capitalised on the incongruity – and especially the irony – readers experienced when they encountered the unexpected. For instance, *Don Simplicio*'s first edition closed with an announcement. In the space reserved for notices about upcoming theatrical performances, it read

PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENTS  
NATIONAL THEATRE  
Tonight. – New Comedy:  
'Imminent Conflict. Yankees in Matamoros  
and Mexican troops in San Luis'<sup>71</sup>

Not all of *Don Simplicio*'s satire was so grim. In a mid-January 1846 issue, Prieto and Ramírez situated an urgent and serious editorial about constitutional reform alongside an article whose tone was more waggish; in that article, titled 'The Future Constitution!', the editors proclaimed: 'We don't want a federation, or centralism, or monarchy, but rather riots.'<sup>72</sup> The irony was multi-layered, emerging not only from the incongruence between the excitement connoted by the article's title and the gloomy tone of its content but also in readers' understanding of the editors' actual aversion to anarchy.

Prieto and Ramírez's jocularly belied a fearlessness to confront powerful generals and political figures. In their first edition, the editors issued a fictional *pronunciamiento* (pronouncement) in response to the Plan and Manifiesto of San Luis Potosí (15 December 1845) put forward by Generals Paredes and Manuel Romero. Pronouncements like this one were an accepted, if extra-constitutional, way of conducting politics and bringing about political change;<sup>73</sup> they were also frequent, with some 1500 declared nationwide between 1821 and 1876.<sup>74</sup> Aside from provoking the ire of Paredes and Romero, the difference in tone between the generals' plan and the 'Pronunciamiento de Don Simplicio' was stark. Whereas the San Luis *pronunciamiento* claimed to speak for the will of the nation (as nearly all pronouncements did), Don Simplicio's began, 'Compatriots, the plan I have proclaimed is not the expression of the national will, for the simple reason that I don't know what the national will is, and, I confess, I doubt such a thing even exists ...'<sup>75</sup> The self-deprecating tone of the parodic *pronunciamiento* laid a foundation for the editors' long-running social critique. Poking fun at the ubiquitous 'political custom' of the pronouncement and the mania for public office-holding (*empleomanía*), Prieto and Ramírez wrote, 'Live off the fatherland. Get a job, marry without means, and make pronouncements annually. These are pleasures only a Mexican can understand.'<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup>*Don Simplicio*, 1: 1 (Dec. 1845), p. 8.

<sup>72</sup>'La futura Constitución!', *Don Simplicio*, 2: 5 (14 Jan. 1846), pp. 3–4.

<sup>73</sup>Will Fowler (ed.), *Forceful Negotiations: The Origins of the Pronunciamiento in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p. viii.

<sup>74</sup>Database: 'The Pronunciamiento in Independent Mexico, 1821–1876', <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/pronunciamientos/> (last accessed 8 Oct. 2021).

<sup>75</sup>'Pronunciamiento de Don Simplicio', *Don Simplicio*, 1: 1 (Dec. 1845), pp. 3–4.

<sup>76</sup>*Don Simplicio*, 3: 42 (21 Nov. 1846), pp. 1f.

As evidenced above, part of *Don Simplicio's* appeal came from the editors' inventiveness. Prieto and Ramírez embedded criticisms within familiar religious and literary forms like psalms, poems, dialogues, chronicles and theatrical skits. For example, in one edition, they replaced the standard editorial, or 'Ass's Bray', with a satirical 'Simplician' psalm that asked why God had given Mexicans so much in abundance yet had been so economical with judgment.<sup>77</sup> In other editions, Prieto and Ramírez invoked for readers memorable scenes from the play, especially Don Simplicio's trip to the moon. The editors reimaged these scenes to critique Mexico's inefficient customs collection system, its deplorable transportation infrastructure and the weakness of law and order.<sup>78</sup>

*Don Simplicio's* editors frequently used stage language and imagery to tap into the surging popularity of theatregoing; the number of theatres in the city grew four-fold between 1840 and 1860.<sup>79</sup> In March 1846, Prieto and Ramírez packaged a critique of General Paredes's failed monarchist plot as a fable to be enacted on stage.<sup>80</sup> In the fable, the 'wise' cats (the president and his followers) created an elaborate ruse to catch rats (republicans), only to have their brilliant trap revealed. Prieto described this plan and trap in vivid detail as if it were a complex piece of stage machinery. A board connecting the structure's wooden support pillars formed a narrow path that led to an aromatic European cheese. A trapdoor hid a boiling cauldron of water into which the rats would fall to their deaths. Because foreign cheese (forms of government like monarchy) made them sick, none of the rats fell into the trap. But the machine's inventor, General Paredes, continued to insist the machine worked, and he sent his helper to his death in a final *golpe teatral* (theatrical coup de grâce). Written in verse, the fable ended: 'Look for another way to betray the nation, oh monarchist faction!; it was because of a lazy stagehand (*maquinista*) that the trap (*la tramoya del ratón*) was laid bare.'

The men's attempt to turn the real world upside down through satire was not without risk. Soon after the fable was published, General Paredes ordered a crackdown on press freedoms that landed Prieto and Ramírez in jail for several months – an act the editors satirised in an image that was the sole item on the newspaper's front page on 25 April, depicting Don Simplicio temporarily toppled from his donkey while the other figures from the masthead celebrated (Figure 3). In a bold rebuke, Prieto and Ramírez re-opened the newspaper on 1 July 1846 with the publication of a fictional new play.<sup>81</sup> The play's protagonist, Don Simplicio, declares: 'I've broken my ribs! But I've triumphed!', echoing the line shouted by Grimaldi's protagonist upon his return from the moon. When questioned by another character as to what he had triumphed over, Don Simplicio states 'fear'. After their imprisonment, Prieto and Ramírez published *Don Simplicio* three times per week until April 1847, when the newspaper closed permanently. Despite the closure, both men remained central figures in public life. In addition

<sup>77</sup>'Salmo simpliciano', *Don Simplicio*, 3: 31 (14 Oct. 1846), p. 1.

<sup>78</sup>'Viages [*sic*] de tío Tristán a la luna', *Don Simplicio*, 3: 1, 3, 6 and 9 (1, 8, 18 and 29 July 1846).

<sup>79</sup>Lance Ingwersen, 'Mexico City in the Age of Theater, 1830–1901', unpub. PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2017, pp. 112–21.

<sup>80</sup>'Cuento disfrazado de fábula', *Don Simplicio*, 2: 21 (11 March 1846), p. 2.

<sup>81</sup>'Escenas simplicianas: Drama en cuatro columnas y menos de tres trancos', *Don Simplicio*, 3: 1 (1 July 1846), pp. 1–3.





Figure 3. The masthead of *Don Simplicio*, 25 April 1846. Don Simplicio is shown toppled from his donkey, as the newspaper's editors were briefly jailed.

Source: Microforms collection, Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie, IN

to writing poetry and plays, Prieto served in the National Congress for decades and in the cabinets of four presidents, and was director of the postal service.<sup>82</sup> Ramírez founded and wrote for other newspapers, created the National Library while serving as a minister in Benito Juárez's cabinet (1861) and worked as a magistrate on the Supreme Court until his death in 1879.<sup>83</sup>

Partisan lines had hardened considerably by August 1855, when *puros* Rivera and Arias published the satirical daily *La Pata de Cabra* (see Figure 4). In addition to a demoralising war with the United States, the nation had endured two years of anti-liberal rule by Santa Anna – effectively silencing the opposition press and severely curtailing press freedoms through the *Ley Lares*. Because of these transformations, Grimaldi's play retained its relevance. Satirisations even intensified, judging by the number of *La Pata*-inspired newspapers published between 1855 and 1857. An analysis shows that the rhetoric contained in the newspapers did not

<sup>82</sup>Malcolm D. MacLean, 'Guillermo Prieto (1818–1897), a Forgotten Historian of Mexico', *The Americas*, 10: 1 (1954), p. 79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/978103>.

<sup>83</sup>Felipe Meneses Tello and María de los Ángeles Avelar Mayer, 'Libros y bibliotecas en la vida sociopolítica de Ignacio Ramírez, El Nigromante', *Bibliographica*, 3: 2 (2020), pp. 101–4.

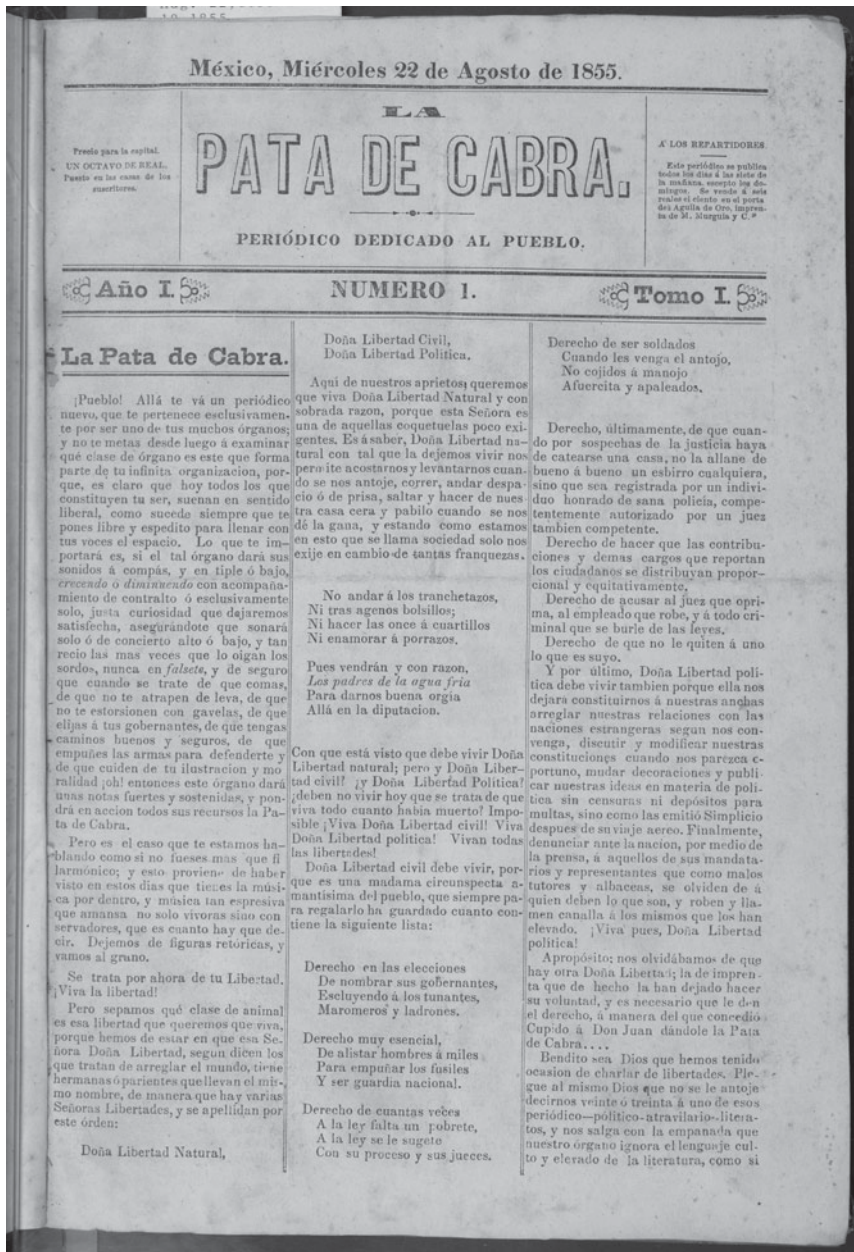


Figure 4. *La Pata de Cabra* (the newspaper), 1855  
 Source: Courtesy of DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, University Park, TX

México, Miércoles 22 de Agosto de 1855.

LA

# PATA DE CABRA.

PERIÓDICO DEDICADO AL PUEBLO.

Año I.      NUMERO 1.      Tomo I.

**La Pata de Cabra.**

¡Pueblo! Allá te va un periódico nuevo, que te pertenece exclusivamente por ser uno de tus muchos órganos; y no te metas desde luego a examinar qué clase de órgano es este que forma parte de tu infinita organización, porque, es claro que hoy todos los que constituyen tu ser, sueñan en sentido liberal, como sucede siempre que te pones libre y espedito para llenar con tus voces el espacio. Lo que te importará es, si el tal órgano dará sus sonidos a compás, y en tiple ó bajo, crecendo ó disminuyendo con acompañamiento de contralto ó exclusivamente solo, justa curiosidad que dejaremos satisfecha, asegurándote que sonará solo ó de concierto alto ó bajo, y tan rico las mas veces que lo oigan los sordos, nunca en falsete, y de seguro que cuando se trate de que comas, de que no te atrapan de levas, de que no te estorsionen con gavelas, de que elijas a tus gobernantes, de que tengas caminos buenos y seguros, de que empuñes las armas para defenderte y de que cuiden de tu ilustración y moralidad ¡oh! entonces este órgano dará unas notas fuertes y sostenidas, y pondrá en acción todos sus recursos la Pata de Cabra.

Pero es el caso que te estamos hablando como si no fueses mas que filarmónico; y esto proviene de haber visto en estos dias que tienes la música por dentro, y música tan espresiva que amansa no solo vivoras sino con servadores, que es cuanto hay que decir. Dejemos de figuras retóricas, y vamos al grano.

Se trata por ahora de tu Libertad. ¡Viva la libertad!

Pero sepamos qué clase de animal es esa libertad que queremos que viva, porque hemos de estar en que esa Señora Doña Libertad, según dicen los que tratan de arreglar el mundo, tiene hermanas ó parientes que llevan el mismo nombre, de manera que hay varias Señoras Libertades, y se apellidan por este orden:

Doña Libertad Natural,

Doña Libertad Civil,  
 Doña Libertad Política.

Aquí de nuestros aprietos; queremos que viva Doña Libertad Natural y con sobrada razon, porque esta Señora es una de aquellas coquetuelas poco exigentes. Es á saber, Doña Libertad natural con tal que la dejemos vivir no pero te acostarnos y levantarnos cuando se nos antoje, correr, andar despacio ó de prisa, saltar y hacer de nuestra casa cera y pabido cuando se nos dé la gana, y estando como estamos en esto que se llama sociedad solo nos exige en cambio de tantas franquezas.

No andar á los tranchetazos,  
 Ni tras ajenos bolsillos;  
 Ni hacer las once á cuartillos  
 Ni enamorar á porrazos.

Pues vendrán y con razon,  
*Los padres de la agua fria*  
 Para darnos buena orgia  
 Allá en la diputacion.

Con que está visto que debe vivir Doña Libertad natural; pero y Doña Libertad civil! y Doña Libertad Política! ¡deben no vivir hoy que se trata de que viva todo cuanto habia muerto! Imposible ¡Viva Doña Libertad civil! Viva Doña Libertad política! Vivan todas las libertades!

Doña Libertad civil debe vivir, porque es una madama circumspecta amantísima del pueblo, que siempre para regalarlo ha guardado cuanto contiene la siguiente lista:

- Derecho en las elecciones
- De nombrar sus gobernantes,
- Excluyendo á los tunantes,
- Maromeros y ladrones.
- Derecho muy esencial,
- De alistar hombres á miles
- Para empuñar los fusiles
- Y ser guardia nacional.
- Derecho de cuantas veces
- A la ley falta un pobrete,
- A la ley se le sugete
- Con su proceso y sus jueces.

Derecho de ser soldados  
 Cuando les venga el antojo.  
 No cojidos á manajo  
 Afuercita y apaleados.

Derecho, últimamente, de que cuando por sospechas de la justicia haya de catearse una casa, no la allane de bueno á bueno un esbirro cualquiera, sino que sea registrada por un individuo honrado de sana policia, competentemente autorizado por un juez tambien competente.

Derecho de hacer que las contribuciones y demas cargos que reportan los ciudadanos se distribuyan proporcional y equitativamente,

Derecho de acusar al juez que oprima, al empleado que robe, y á todo criminal que se burle de las leyes.

Derecho de que no le quiten á uno lo que es suyo.

Y por último, Doña Libertad política debe vivir tambien porque ella nos dejara constituirnos á nuestras anchas arreglar nuestras relaciones con las naciones extranjeras segun nos convenga, discurrir y modificar nuestras constituciones cuando nos parezca oportuno, mudar decoraciones y publicar nuestras ideas en materia de política sin censuras ni depositos para multas, sino como las emitió Simplicio despues de su viaje aereo. Finalmente, denunciar ante la nacion, por medio de la prensa, á aquellos de sus mandatarios y representantes que como malos tutores y albaceas, se olviden de á quien deben lo que son, y roben y llamen canalla á los mismos que los han elevado. ¡Viva pues, Doña Libertad política!

A propósito: nos olvidábamos de que hay otra Doña Libertad; la de imprenta que de hecho la han dejado hacer su voluntad, y es necesario que le den el derecho, á manera del que concedió Cupido á Don Juan dándole la Pata de Cabra...

Bendito sea Dios que hemos tenido ocasion de charlar de libertades. Plegue al mismo Dios que no se le antoje deciros veinte ó treinta á uno de esos periódicos—pólicio—atravillados—literatos, y nos salga con la empanada que nuestro órgano ignora el lenguaje culto y elerado de la literatura, como si

A LOS REPARTIDORES

Este periódico se publica todos los dias á las diez de la mañana, excepto los domingos. Se vende á seis reales el ciento en el portada de Aguilar no. Oro, imprenta de St. Juan y C. P.

become markedly more instrumental and adversarial, as Elias José Palti has argued.<sup>84</sup> Instead, Rivera, Arias and Zamacois (editor of *La Espada de D. Simplicio*) sought to make public debates more resilient amid acute political polarisation by appealing to readers'/listeners' familiarity with the play.

Arias and Rivera sustained debates through a biting form of satire they called 'goat's hoof-ism', delivered by an anthropomorphised goat. In the paper's second edition, published on 23 August 1855 in the midst of a cycle that saw factions make pronouncements in San Luis Potosí, Nuevo León and Mexico City, Arias and Rivera channelled Grimaldi's play through a dramatic scene they entitled 'Don Simplicio on the Moon Meditating Reforms for Mexico'. The scene opened with, 'What a stupendous thing! Here on the moon, soldiers stand at the vanguard of democracy, because of which the public loves them. The moon's president solicits the will of the people ... and *agiotistas* [usurious lenders] have their wings clipped like bats so they cannot fly away.'<sup>85</sup> The criticism of Santa Anna's most recent dictatorship, infamous loan sharks and the central role soldiers had played in a recent slew of *pronunciamientos* was clear. In the future Mexico imagined by the newspaper's editors, soldiers followed the law, politicians listened to the people and lenders put patriotism over profits.

Arias and Rivera railed against the republic's lack of nationalism and they questioned the patriotism of its inhabitants and leaders, just as Ramírez and Prieto had done a decade before in *Don Simplicio*. On 24 September, with debate raging about who should permanently assume the presidency following Santa Anna's forced resignation, *La Pata de Cabra* staged in its pages a public auction at the national palace entitled 'Nation for Sale to the Highest Cash Bidder'.<sup>86</sup> The auctioneer received not a single bid for 'that beautiful place full of illusions that after 11 years of fighting won its independence, a candid place full of vigour and civic virtue, possessing the elements of happiness'. The following month, with no more certainty over who would replace Santa Anna, Arias and Rivera published a fictionalised theatrical skit in which a character cast as president claimed, in a mixture of prose and verse, 'It is difficult to govern a nation where there's no public spirit, where people join together like leeches in a pot because they were put there ... where there's no patriotism / and only selfishness / where bureaucrats rob / with vile pretensions.'<sup>87</sup>

*La Pata de Cabra* ruthlessly criticised politicians, especially the exiled Santa Anna. In a *faux* independence celebration staged in the newspaper's pages on 11 September (instead of the usual 16 September), Arias and Rivera pilloried the patriotic committee (a the group of citizens charged with organising independence day celebrations) for failing to celebrate the day when the 'illustrious fugitive, His Most Serene Highness, Don Simplicio Bobadilla, Santa-Anna, Majaderano, Cabeza de Buey y Mano de Gato ... that hero of a hundred battles' had defeated invading

<sup>84</sup>Elias José Palti, *La invención de una legitimidad: Razón y retórica en el pensamiento mexicano del siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), pp. 264–5.

<sup>85</sup>Gacetilla de La Pata de Cabra. Escena sin número: Don Simplicio en la luna meditando reformas para México', *La Pata de Cabra*, 2 (23 Aug. 1855), p. 3.

<sup>86</sup>'Remate nacional al mejor postor y al contado', *La Pata de Cabra*, 29 (24 Sept. 1855), pp. 1–2.

<sup>87</sup>'La familia improvisada. Drama de política y editorial de magia', *La Pata de Cabra*, 48 (16 Oct. 1855), pp. 1–2.

Spanish forces at the Battle of Tampico in 1829.<sup>88</sup> This satirical passage packed a heavy punch. It mocked Santa Anna's self-proclaimed title ('Su Alteza Serenísima') and his self-importance; when president, Santa Anna insisted that independence be celebrated on the date he defeated Spanish forces in 1829 rather than on the date of Father Miguel Hidalgo's call to arms in 1810. It also compared him to Don Simplicio and thus to Grimaldi's cowardly stage character. Its charge of 'Mano de Gato' (Cat's Paw) laid bare the allegations of rampant corruption, and even treason, that plagued the former president. It likely invoked for readers Santa Anna's 1853 Venta de La Mesilla (Gadsden Purchase) of 45,000 square miles of land in present-day Arizona and New Mexico, for US\$ 10 million, which he had squandered by spring 1854.<sup>89</sup>

Reflecting the hardened ideological positions of the post-war era, Arias and Rivera were sceptical of *moderados* like Ignacio Comonfort. Even though Comonfort had supported both the heterogeneous alliance to overthrow Santa Anna (organised through the Plan of Ayutla) and the interim government of *puro* general Juan Álvarez, Arias and Rivera worried whether Comonfort could rein in his *puro* ministers and a *puro*-dominated Congress. They also doubted his ability to overcome the vested interests and corporate bodies that had influenced his predecessors; Comonfort was deeply unpopular with conservatives, army officers and priests.<sup>90</sup> In October 1856, *La Pata de Cabra* published a caricature of Comonfort, depicting him as a political tightrope walker (*un maromero político*) trying to balance the demands of *puros* and conservatives.<sup>91</sup> The editors' suspicion would prove well founded when Comonfort's attempted self-coup against his own government backfired in late 1857 and early 1858, throwing the country into civil war.

Arias and Rivera directed much of their vitriol at the conservative press. In editorials, they accused *La Verdad* of telling lies and spreading hearsay while they charged that *La Sociedad* was run by *gachupines* (a derogatory term used to refer to Spaniards) and read by corrupt conservative political opportunists.<sup>92</sup> However, none received more critical attention than monarchist-leaning Spaniard Zamacois's *La Espada de D. Simplicio*. By 17 November 1855, when *La Espada de D. Simplicio* first appeared, its creator had established a reputation as a prolific writer, sharp intellect and keen observer of customs. Zamacois wrote poetry, plays and *zarzuelas* (operettas). He also authored a 20-volume history of Mexico and wrote two entries for *Los mexicanos pintados por si mismos* alongside fellow contributors Rivera, Arias and Ramírez.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup>'El 11 de septiembre: Festejado por La Pata de Cabra con toda su compañía', *La Pata de Cabra*, 19 (12 Sept. 1855), pp. 1–2.

<sup>89</sup>Fowler, *Santa Anna*, p. 308.

<sup>90</sup>Escuela de comercio. Gran Quemazón', *La Pata de Cabra*, 101 (17 Dec. 1855), p. 1.

<sup>91</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 35 (1 Oct. 1856). The caricature is reproduced in Helia Emma Bonilla Reyna, 'El Calavera: La caricatura en tiempos de guerra', *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 23: 79 (2001), p. 119.

<sup>92</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 181 (18 March 1856), pp. 1–2.

<sup>93</sup>*Los mexicanos pintados por si mismos. Tipos y costumbres nacionales, por varios autores* (Mexico City: Impr. de M. Murguía y comp., 1854); Judith de la Torre Rendón, 'Niceto de Zamacois', in Pi-Suñer Llorens (ed.), *Historiografía mexicana*, vol. 4, pp. 549–72; Vicente Quirarte, 'Niceto de Zamacois, entre la historia y

In the pages of *La Espada*, Zamacois offered a conservative counter-narrative. The newspaper's motto, 'The sword is the best form of reason', produced irony on at least two levels. On one level, it was a jab at liberals' claims to hold dominion over reason. On another level, it tapped into readers' and audiences' knowledge of Don Simplicio's morbid fear of confrontation. Indeed, few things illustrated the stage character's cowardice better than the sword rendered useless in his trembling hands. Zamacois's deployment of the sword as a figurative weapon, then, should be read as a reimagining of its power. Wielded in the right hands (read: conservative), it could, for once, serve as a formidable weapon.

Zamacois directed his attacks in *La Espada* at liberal newspapers and public figures. In its prospectus, he promised to 'unmask *La Pata de Cabra's* intellect when it lacked judgment' – a promise he fulfilled, especially in a bitter week-long exchange in early February 1856 when he criticised Arias and Rivera for excessive grammatical mistakes.<sup>94</sup> Zamacois lambasted *El Monitor Republicano* and *El Siglo XIX*, the city's liberal dailies, for unleashing *borregos*, or false news stories.<sup>95</sup> Beyond rival newspapers, *La Espada* aimed its attacks at public figures, the city council and the government of *moderado* Comonfort through original lyric poems entitled '*cintarazos*', or slaps – invoking the scene from the end of Act II in the play. Zamacois was especially critical of liberal governments' failure to pay salaries and pensions in the months following Santa Anna's ouster. In a contrived dialogue between an ex-employee of the treasury and his mother-in-law, she offers the following advice: 'I'm nothing more than a poor woman but I think to become minister of the treasury one needn't read more than four books to understand perfectly the country, its resources and riches, its needs, etc. and ... not paying anyone and receiving much [in taxes], well, anyone can serve as minister.' The dialogue ended in a couplet that read: 'He who pays badly and overcharges / Has much money left over.'<sup>96</sup> Zamacois followed up this thinly veiled critique with a full-fledged assault days later, condemning the injustice of the decision by former *Don Simplicio* editor Prieto, now treasury minister, to lay off some public employees and reduce the salaries of others.<sup>97</sup>

In spite of their divergent views and heated exchanges, the editors of *La Pata de Cabra* and *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, and indeed of all the *La Pata*-inspired satirical newspapers, shared a commitment to take on the ridiculous through Grimaldi's play, even if they disagreed sharply on what was ridiculous. For example, Arias in an 1856 editorial criticised the Comonfort government's passage of the Ley Lafragua, a press law that made it easier for authorities to track down anyone who violated its provisions.<sup>98</sup> The new law suspended press juries, forbade political caricature and forms of satirical expression that 'incited disobedience of the law or the authorities' and required authors to sign their names under what they wrote.<sup>99</sup>

la ficción', in Pablo Mora and Ángel Miquel (eds.), *Espanoles en el periodismo mexicano siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), pp. 57–64.

<sup>94</sup>'Cintarazos. Receta', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 1 (17 Nov. 1855), p. 2.

<sup>95</sup>'Borregos', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 99 (12 March 1856), p. 2.

<sup>96</sup>'Diálogo a media voz entre un ex-empleado y su suegra', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 2 (19 Nov. 1855), p. 2.

<sup>97</sup>'El ministro de hacienda y los empleados', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 5 (23 Nov. 1855), p. 1.

<sup>98</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 115 (2 Jan. 1856), pp. 1–2.

<sup>99</sup>Dublán and Lozano, *Legislación mexicana*, vol. 7, p. 633.

In the editorial, Arias informed readers that the goat-journalist had metamorphosed into a human as a result of the provisions of the new law. He then wondered how the government could prohibit the use of ridicule when its own dealings were, in fact, absurd. Perhaps trying to deflect attention from an accusation that was sure to attract unwanted attention, Arias followed up with a claim that was light-hearted and self-deprecating: 'Because of the new law, [the editor of] *La Pata* has been guaranteed that no one will ridicule the name of this newspaper, no matter how absurd it is.'<sup>100</sup>

Conservative and *puro* journalists alike abhorred the Ley Lafragua.<sup>101</sup> Zamacois criticised the new law's provisions in multiple editorials.<sup>102</sup> In the end, however, the law substantively altered *La Espada's* content; Zamacois ceased publishing his original satirical verses and he toned down critiques while gauging the new law's enforcement. In mid-March 1856, 'convinced that the current press laws do not allow our newspaper to publish anything of interest', Zamacois suspended publication indefinitely.<sup>103</sup> *La Espada's* demise in the wake of the Ley Lafragua was not unique. Enforcement resulted in the closure of more than a dozen newspapers in Mexico City and Guadalajara between January and November 1856, though *La Pata de Cabra* was not among them.<sup>104</sup> Similarly to other newspapers, the peddlers of *pati-cabriología* became more cautious.<sup>105</sup> Caustic editorials became infrequent, and at times the editorial section disappeared altogether, as the focus turned toward theatrical productions, operas and other diversions.<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, debates and critiques that appeared in the press reverberated because of long-standing journalistic practices. Zamacois's *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, for example, republished articles from conservative newspapers like *La Sociedad* and *El Ómnibus* and liberal ones such as *El Monitor Republicano* and *El Heraldo*. Most returned the favour. The conservative *El Ómnibus* reprinted editorials and poetry from Zamacois's newspaper on a weekly basis, while *El Monitor Republicano* republished editorials and poems from *La Pata de Cabra* bimonthly. A decade earlier, *El Monitor Republicano* reprinted material from Prieto and Ramírez's *Don Simplicio* biweekly, including each of the satirical paper's scathing, non-satirical editorials or 'brays'.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>100</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 115 (2 Jan. 1856), pp. 1–2.

<sup>101</sup>McGowan, *Prensa y poder*, pp. 135–6.

<sup>102</sup>'La libertad, y las garantías sociales', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 40 (3 Jan. 1856), p. 1; 'Las leyes y los gobiernos', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 41 (4 Jan. 1856), pp. 1–2; 'El nombre del autor en los artículos', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 42 (5 Jan. 1856), pp. 1–2.

<sup>103</sup>'Suspensión', *La Espada de D. Simplicio*, 100 (13 March 1856), p. 2.

<sup>104</sup>McGowan, *Prensa y poder*, p. 136.

<sup>105</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 173 (8 March 1856), p. 1.

<sup>106</sup>*La Pata de Cabra*, 193 (2 April 1856). Editorials had not appeared for at least a week when no. 193 was published.

<sup>107</sup>'Primer rebuzno: El porvenir del ejército', *El Monitor Republicano* (2, 6, 9 July 1846), p. 4; 'Segundo rebuzno: ¿Cuál será el porvenir de la república?', *El Monitor Republicano* (13 July 1846), p. 4; 'Tercer rebuzno: ejército' (19 July 1846), p. 4; 'Cuarto rebuzno: Los departamentos fronterizos', *El Monitor Republicano* (24 July 1846), p. 2; 'Rebuzno', *El Monitor Republicano* (27 July 1846), p. 1; 'Rebuzno al Señor General Bravo', *El Monitor Republicano* (2 Aug. 1846), p. 4; 'Rebuzno trágico', *El Monitor Republicano* (10 Aug. 1846), p. 1.

Rising literacy rates and editors' familiarity with the city's aural culture broadened and strengthened debate, too. A commission formed in 1845 to study the state of public instruction found that the expansion of literacy in the city had been 'rapid, visible and glorious ... and that literacy now reached diverse classes within the city'.<sup>108</sup> Waddy Thompson, US Minister to Mexico (1842–4), noted similar trends. He recalled in his memoir that all the servants he encountered could read. He also remembered having 'often observed the most ragged *leperos* [drifters], as they walked down the streets, reading the signs over the store doors'.<sup>109</sup> While these anecdotes are merely suggestive of higher-than-assumed literacy rates, an individual's ability to read text independently was only part of such a calculation. Ideas and debates in the press circulated widely through read-aloud practices. Contemporary visual depictions such as José A. Arrieta's 1851 oil painting '*Tertulia de pulquería*' show reading aloud to be a collective and social act; in Arrieta's painting, six men and a woman congregate at a table in a popular establishment drinking *pulque* while engaging boisterously in a discussion of contemporary newspapers and broadsides.<sup>110</sup> Such practices enabled and widened engagement in politics and public life.<sup>111</sup>

We should thus abstain from drawing hasty conclusions about newspapers' impact based on stubborn beliefs about widespread illiteracy or circulation rates: sales may have ranged from 200–500 for the biweekly *Don Simplicio* and up to 8000 for the daily *La Pata de Cabra*.<sup>112</sup> Satirists understood the power of the press to shape public debates. They also knew how the written word circulated, and they built these understandings into the design of their publications. Weaving together dramatic sketches, poetic verses, songs, short stories, editorials, letters and epigrams – forms that lent themselves to public readings – these serio-comic newspapers were at once whimsical and didactic, humorous and critical. Editors captured listeners' and readers' attention by writing with flare and style. Some, it seems, were quite successful. Writing in the early 1880s, statesman, soldier and literary figure Vicente Riva Palacio noted that Arias and Rivera's *La Pata de Cabra* was so popular that it was remembered fondly decades later.<sup>113</sup>

### Act III: The Conclusion, or Seriously Joking

*Don Simplicio* became a great cultural symbol of mid-nineteenth-century Mexico City. That much is clear, but important questions remain. How, for instance, can

<sup>108</sup>Anne Staples, 'La lectura y los lectores en los primeros años de vida independiente', in Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (ed.), *Historia de la lectura en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/Ediciones del Ermitaño, 1988), p. 103.

<sup>109</sup>Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), pp. 152–3.

<sup>110</sup>Painting reproduced in María José Patricia Rojas Rendón, 'Los impresos poblanos efímeros. Una mirada a "Tertulia de pulquería", de José A. Arrieta, 1851', *InMediaciones*, 13: 2 (2017), p. 51.

<sup>111</sup>José Ortiz Monasterio, 'La revolución de la lectura en el siglo XIX en México', *Historias*, 60 (2005), pp. 51–75.

<sup>112</sup>Alejandra Sánchez Archundia, 'Desde la Asnópolis. Narraciones de la nación "desde abajo": *Don Simplicio* (1845–1847)', unpubl. thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011, p. 54; *La Pata de Cabra*, 78 (20 Nov. 1855), p. 1.

<sup>113</sup>Cero [Vicente Riva Palacio], *Los cerros: Galería de contemporáneos* (Mexico City: Francisco Díaz de León, 1882), p. 181.

we explain Don Simplicio's rise from bumbling stage character to symbolic avenger of political and social ills? What effect did the *La Pata* phenomenon have, and how does its examination deepen our understanding of Mexico's mid-nineteenth-century history?

The unrivalled popularity of Grimaldi's play explains in part Don Simplicio's rise to prominence. Following its 1841 debut, the play was staged dozens of times that decade. By the early 1850s, Grimaldi's play was regularly given at the city's principal playhouses as the half-price Sunday matinee, patronised by families and more popular audiences. The play was staged frequently at second-class playhouses as well. By 1880, productions of Grimaldi's play in Mexico City numbered at least 120, and likely far exceeded that, considerably outpacing any other production.<sup>114</sup> Audiences clamoured for the play because it offered something for everyone; in David Gies's words, '[the play's] strength lay in that it had (in abundance) ... flashy spectacle, local color, stage tricks, topical humor, puns and jokes, knock-about comedy, wonderful acting, a fast-moving plot and suspense'.<sup>115</sup> Impresarios capitalised on theatregoing trends and tastes. They advertised the extravagant costs of a particular production's *mise en scène*, including newly painted sets and elaborate stage machinery.<sup>116</sup> *La Pata de Cabra's* resonance radiated beyond the playhouse stage. Music from the play featured in open-air concerts in the Alameda, one of the city's largest public parks, and bookshops sold copies of the script.<sup>117</sup>

Don Simplicio also became an avenger of social and political ills through the efforts of satirists who reimagined him as a stand-in for corruption, incompetence, greed, pretension and unfulfilled promises. Their satire contributed to this transformation by facilitating the play's movement between the playhouse, the press and the public imagination. On-stage productions sustained interest in and shaped the way audiences understood and engaged with satirical renderings in the press and public life, while satirisations in periodicals injected new meanings into on-stage performances. Indeed, the *La Pata* satirists were so successful at inserting the play into public debates that non-satirical newspapers followed suit. For instance, in 1850, *El Siglo XIX's* editors lambasted the conservative *El Universal* for alleging that the former's editors never wrote about issues pertaining to the public interest. '*El Universal* that fills its columns with bland declarations; *El Universal* which dodges serious polemics', the editorial thundered, '*El Universal*, which offers promises, and like Don Simplicio, and never fulfils those promises ...'<sup>118</sup> Such references appeared in public debates for decades.<sup>119</sup>

Why, then, did satirists try so hard for so long to sustain these debates through Grimaldi's play? Moreover, how effective were they? Answering these questions requires a closer examination of satire. Scholars consider satire as both an art

<sup>114</sup>Calculations from author's database of approximately 2800 productions staged in Mexico City from the 1820s to 1880.

<sup>115</sup>Gies, 'Inocente estupidez', p. 395.

<sup>116</sup>Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna*, vol. 2: 1851–1857 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), p. 120.

<sup>117</sup>*La Hesperia* (27 Aug. 1842), p. 4.

<sup>118</sup>'El Siglo XIX, y El Universal', *El Siglo XIX* (16 April 1850), p. 3.

<sup>119</sup>Examples include 'Los descontentos', *La Orquesta*, 10 (3 Feb. 1875), pp. 1–2 and 'El Plan de Tuxtepec y sus promesas', *El Combate* (31 Jan. 1878), p. 2.



form and as a persuasive discourse. They also see its essence as humanitarian; satirists criticise because they believe things can be better and they want them to be so.<sup>120</sup> The first goal of the satirist is to convince others to listen and care sufficiently. The second and considerably more difficult goal is to inspire others to challenge the existing order. But even if people are compelled to act, what role does satire play in this compulsion?

The question about satire's persuasive capacity – is it an agent of influence or simply a reflection of public opinion? – has been and continues to be a subject of intense debate.<sup>121</sup> Humour's polysemic nature makes finding evidence of satire's persuasive capacity challenging, for the experience of humour depends upon audiences' ability to reconcile incongruity, and each individual brings different understandings to the text. A century and a half later, it is all but impossible to know precisely who consumed the satirical newspapers considered in this article. As scholars of the public sphere have argued, gender, class, cultural difference and literacy all factored into access.<sup>122</sup> It is even more difficult to discern how the public read them and how specific satirisations shaped individual opinions. What does seem clear, though, judging from the play's resonance, is that the audience was broad.

Research on contemporary satire, especially as it relates to the relationship between satire, political participation and democratic discourse, offers a useful lens for measuring satire's impact. This research reveals that political humour in general, and satire in particular, can increase audiences' political attentiveness, learning and rates of discussion.<sup>123</sup> Though they did not say so explicitly, it seems the *La Pata* satirists understood this: they could broaden and sustain public debates across society by drawing on the play's popularity. Prieto, Ramírez, Arias, Rivera and Zamacois turned to satire not only to forge reputations and avoid prosecution but also 'to invigorate public debate, encourage critical thinking, and call on citizens to challenge the status quo'.<sup>124</sup> Satire offered a mode of critique uniquely fit for the circumstances. It was, as a journalist from the era described it, 'the only viable genre in a context where everything is absurd'.<sup>125</sup> The satirists considered here hoped – and expected – to find a receptive audience for their satire and their visions for a better society.

In mid-nineteenth-century Mexico, satire formed a critical weapon in the written arsenal. Journalists and public figures used it to proffer radical critiques while strengthening dialogue and democratic discourse. Satirical renderings of Don Simplicio and *La Pata de Cabra's* whimsical world worked because Grimaldi's play was so well known. They also worked because contemporaries saw parallels

<sup>120</sup>Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, 'The Satiric Mode of Feeling: A Theory of Intention', *Criticism*, 11: 2 (1969), pp. 117–18.

<sup>121</sup>Young, 'Theories', pp. 875–6.

<sup>122</sup>Pablo Piccato, 'Public Sphere in Latin America: A Map of the Historiography', *Social History*, 35: 2 (2010), pp. 165–92.

<sup>123</sup>Young, 'Theories', pp. 877–8.

<sup>124</sup>Sophia A. McClennen and Remi M. Maisel, *Is Satire Saving Our Nation? Mockery and American Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 192.

<sup>125</sup>'Reflexiones sobre el teatro y las costumbres actuales', *El Universal* (12 Nov 1848). Cited in Palti, *La invención*, p. 184.

between Grimaldi's over-the-top show and the at times farcical (real) world of mimetic insurrectionism and political coups d'état. Reflecting on the relationship between theatre and politics in 1848, Prieto had quipped, 'Between us Mexicans, few things are more frequent or more accepted than *pronunciamientos* and magical comedies.'<sup>126</sup> And no *comedia de magia* was more popular than *La Pata de Cabra*.

An approach to the study of nineteenth-century Mexico that pays closer attention to intersections between politics and the playhouse transforms our understanding of this period, for culture and politics intertwined to produce phenomena like those which emerged around Grimaldi's play. The task of reconstructing cultural imaginaries, while painstaking, is necessary if we want to better grasp how *letrados* harnessed popular cultural symbols to shape, sustain and broaden political debate. Scholars of satire posit that 'political comedy, satire, and parody all provide important narrative critiques that enable democratic discourse and deliberation'.<sup>127</sup> Satirists, then, offered individuals opportunities to analyse and interrogate power and politics rather than remain subjects of it. In Mexico and throughout Latin America in the nineteenth century, they drew heavily on the world of theatre. By cloaking acerbic critiques in *La Pata de Cabra*'s absurd world, satirists probed and challenged the bounds of what could be said and written. They enticed their readers to do the same by inviting them to imagine different possibilities. At times, they were met with fines and imprisonment. At others, when administrations restricted press freedoms, they toned down their rhetoric. Nonetheless, many persevered, fighting to sustain dynamic, contentious debates in the midst of armed insurrections, foreign invasions and civil war.

**Acknowledgements.** I am grateful to the many people who read this article and offered feedback. I want to thank in particular the reviewers and editors from the *JLAS*; your comments, suggestions and questions strengthened this article in ways big and small. I also want to acknowledge Edward Wright-Rios, Frank 'Trey' Proctor, and especially Celso Castilho for their generous and incisive comments on previous drafts. I owe a debt of gratitude to Paula Covington at Vanderbilt University and Terre Heydari, Joan Gosnell and Katie Dziminski at the DeGolyer Library (Southern Methodist University) for helping me track down extant copies of some of the satirical newspapers examined in this article. Finally, I would be remiss not to thank Lauren Ingwersen, whose patience and understanding has allowed me to extend nap times, work late into the evening and periodically hide away from our two loving and energetic children to finish this article.

### Spanish abstract

El artículo examina cómo *La pata de cabra*, una exagerada y fantástica comedia de magia española, vino a ser central en los debates serios acerca de la política y sociedad mexicanas entre 1845 y 1857. El artículo explora la popularidad de dicha comedia y su resonancia con la prensa (se extendió al menos en media docena de periódicos satíricos) para argumentar que la sátira se volvió un lenguaje político crítico y una forma de expresión que amplió y sostuvo debates en esta era marcada por una libertad de prensa volátil y con frecuencia fuertemente constreñida. El enfoque en el fenómeno de *La pata* hace converger dos campos de estudio, el teatro y la prensa, en una conversación productiva y necesaria.

<sup>126</sup>Los Gemelos, 'Revista teatral'.

<sup>127</sup>Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones and Ethan Thompson, 'The State of Satire, the Satire of State', in Gray, Jones and Thompson (eds.), *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 32.

**Spanish keywords:** sátira; México; Siglo XIX; política; cultura editorial; teatro

**Portuguese abstract**

O artigo examina como *La pata de cabra*, uma fantástica *comedia de magia* espanhola, passou a figurar de maneira central em debates sérios sobre a política e a sociedade mexicana entre 1845 e 1857. São analisadas a popularidade da peça e sua repercussão na imprensa – gerou pelo menos meia dúzia de jornais satíricos – de modo a sustentar a argumentação de que a sátira se tornou uma linguagem política crítica e uma forma de expressão capaz de ampliar e apoiar debates em uma era marcada por uma liberdade de imprensa volátil e muitas vezes restrita. O foco do artigo no fenômeno *La pata* traz dois campos de estudo, o teatro e a imprensa, para um diálogo produtivo e necessário.

**Portuguese keywords:** sátira; México; século XIX; política; cultura impressa; teatro