

Print Review 7



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jean charlot

The Sunday Afternoon

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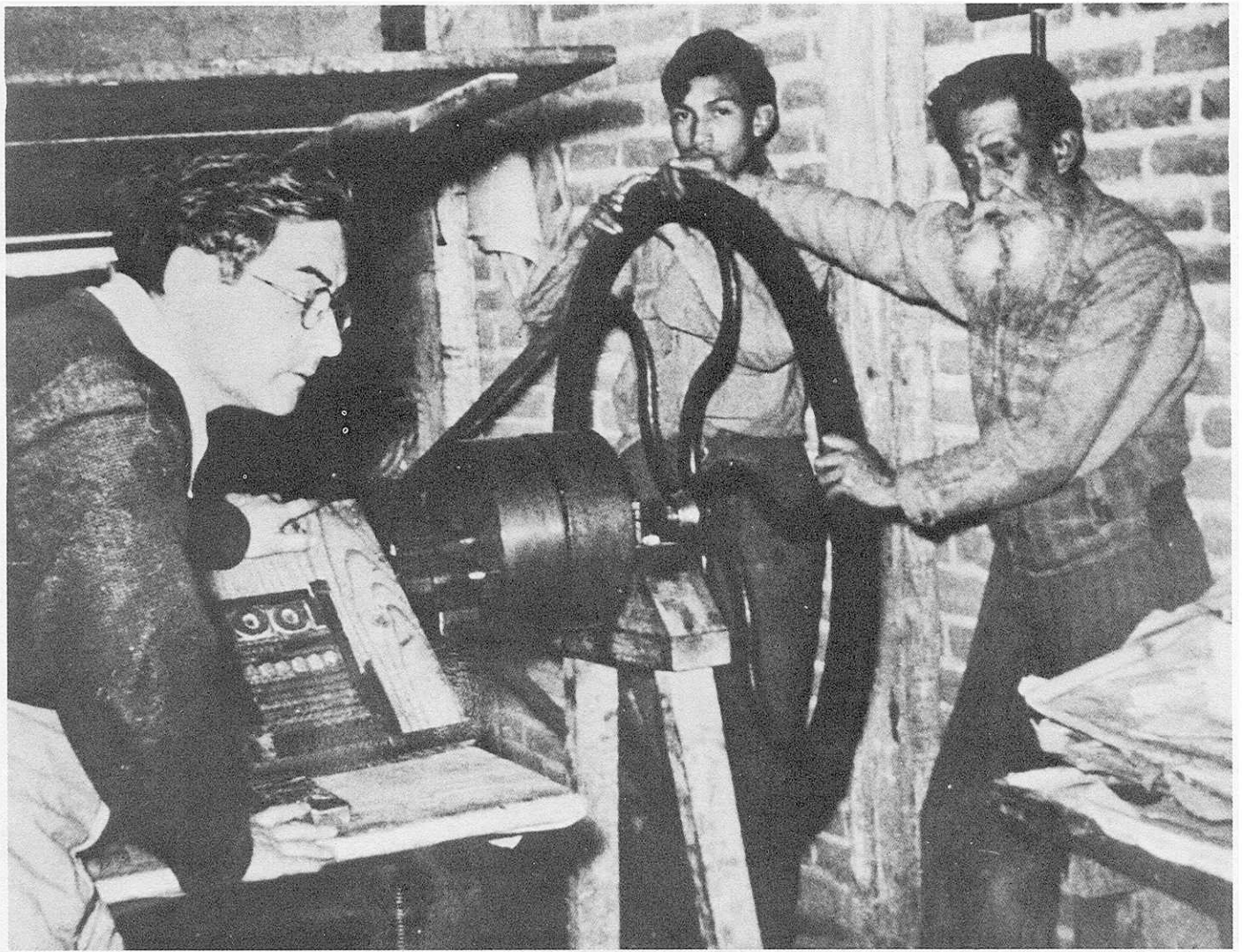


Fig. 1. The author and Don Blas Vanegas Arroyo at the press, 1947. Courtesy the author.

Jean Charlot

Notes on Posada

Engraver to the people. Guadalupe Posada's fame as a folk artist is by now assured. Yet it is no simple matter to give explicit meaning to the term in the context of the Mexico of his day. Understandably, each art critic, hypnotized by the folksy label, will pick out of Posada's vast and varied output what best matches his idea of a popular artist. In France, as a precedent, one thinks first of Images d'Epinal and of their master engraver, Francois Georjin.

To compare Georjin and Posada is instructive. There is an obvious parallel between their employers. In Epinal, the publishing house that Jean-Charles Pellerin started in the eighteenth century remains to this day a family concern. In Mexico, the firm founded by Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo in 1880 still flourishes at the hands of his grandson, Don Arsacio. Both publishers tailored their wares to fit the dreams and needs of the illiterate unwashed. Unless read or sung aloud, the typeset words would be meaningless. A major sales appeal was the graven image, boldly story telling, and at times brutally explicit.

Georjin and Posada themselves came of the same stock as their customers. Georjin's forebearers had been horse grooms, had driven highway coaches. One, a blacksmith, shod horses. Posada's father was a baker by trade, his relatives tanners or cobblers. José Clemente Orozco, to mock the social consciousness of rival muralists, once wrote, "Art for the People! Why attempt it? The People make their own art." Both Georjin and Posada illustrate the truth of this aphorism.

An economic factor—if lack of money may be spoken of as such—further links the two masters.

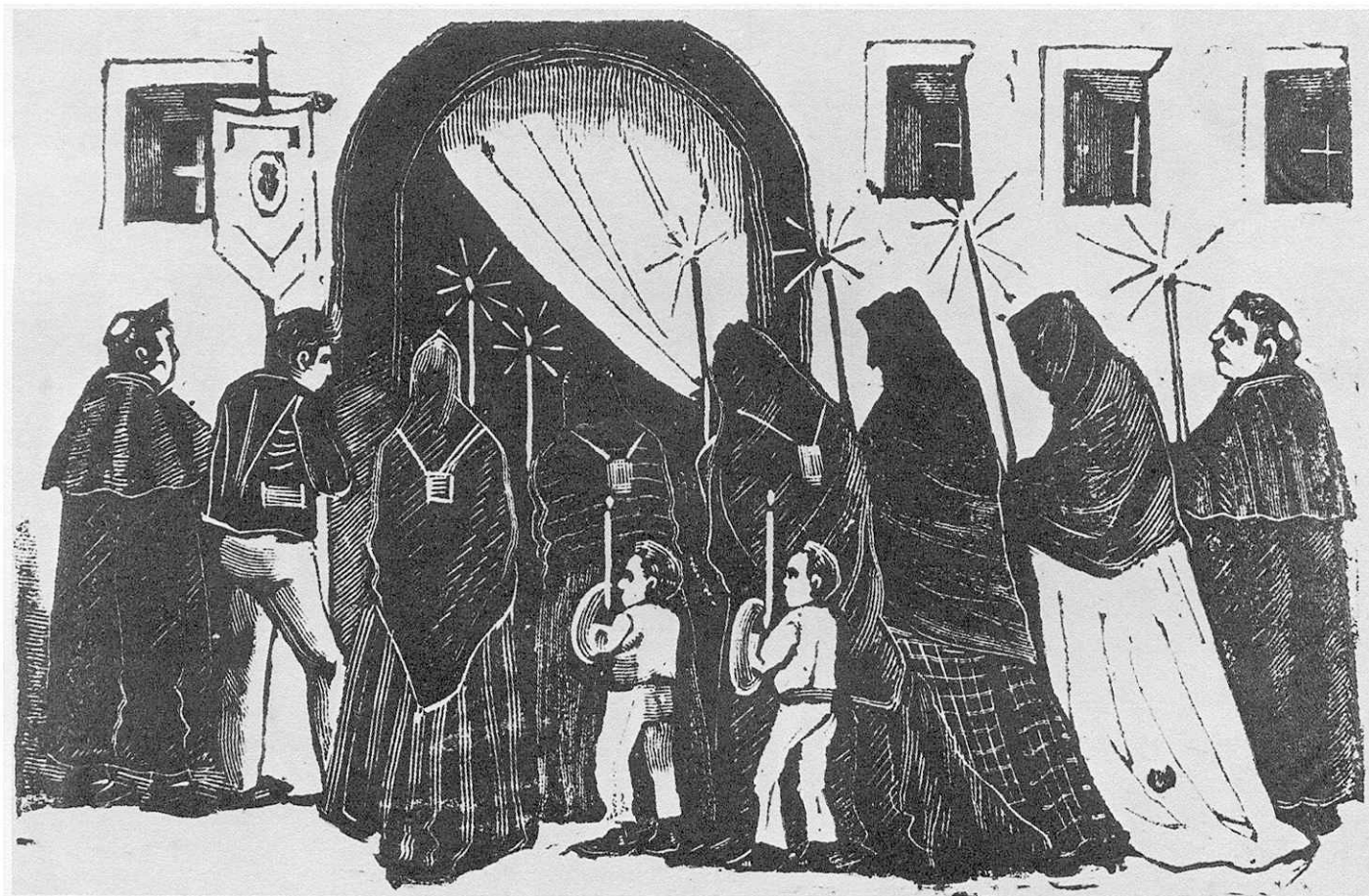


Fig. 2. Farewell to the Missionary Fathers. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.

The small profits from the small sums asked for their wares made the labors of each a one-man operation, the artist doubling perforce as artisan, the designer as engraver. As the art historian, by nature a bookish man, affirms, style is not only a thing of the mind. It is often born of the rapport between the doer, his tools and his material. Handling knife or burin daily brings a tactile respect for the individuality of each plank, be it pearwood or boxwood. Based on manual experience, each man created a style of his own.

Each was also a faithful spokesman for his people, but the similarities stop there, the people being truly dissimilar. Georgin remains the bland translator of the Napoleonic epic, at the very moment that it acquired an aura and became history. Posada dealt implacably with the present—a *patria* torn by an unrest that, throughout the last three years of his life, exploded into revolution.

The men themselves were dissimilar. Georgin, fretting at his artisanal chores, yearned to acquire the status of a fine-art artist. He studied the recognized masters of his day, David, Ingres, others.

In his later plates he fulfilled his conceit, but only to the discomfiture of his present-day admirers. He proudly signs his awkward "Apotheosis of Napoleon" *Georgin d. [elineavit]* as the designer, leaving to a certain *Thiebault sc [ulpsit]* the task of engraving it.

Posada, a more robust fellow, followed an inverse line. As a youth, in the provinces, he had learned how to prepare a lithographic stone and, caressing the tip of its grain with crayon, how to conjure a delicate range of grays. Only in his mid-years, when he moved to the Capital, did he replace this sophisticated technique with black-and-white images more in accord with the brutal milieu. Be it cut or etched, this later work is of such boldness that neither sloppy inking nor the violently colored sheets that publisher Vanegas Arroyo favored has diluted its message!

The style of his later works cuts all ties with the Georgin of *Images d'Epinal*. Another graphic master comes to mind, Honoré Daumier, whose work illustrates yet another facet of the term "popular." For half a century Daumier's litho-

graphed cartoons—and they number over 4,000—made generations of Frenchmen laugh and, at times, cry. Unlike Posada, Daumier worked for medium-priced periodicals that none below the bourgeois class could afford. A believer in democracy, for most of his life he worked against the grain of official politics, radically at odds with the upperdogs of his day. Hemmed in between the suspicions of official censors, who could and once did throw him in jail, and the bombast of the journalistic wits, whose verbose captions shackled the elan of his prints, Daumier saw himself as an artisan first, faced day after day with an ever-renewed task. Typically, he closes one of his letters by remarking that it is now time to go and grain his lithographic stones. Yet Daumier was accepted as a peer by the great masters of his day. His friendship with Corot comes to mind. Even critics spoke of him with awe as the Michelangelo of caricature.

Posada's works (which also number in the thousands), because they sold for a penny, were beneath the reach of the bourgeois pride. Only the poorest, those whom it would not be far fetched to call untouchables, laughed and cried

and pondered at the wonders they embodied. Unlike Daumier, Posada never knew the applause of critics or fine-art artists. For a short while he had enjoyed status teaching lithography in the State School of Leon de las Aldamas. Come to the Capital he found himself totally a loner.

The recognized Mexican artists of Posada's day were seasoned academicians. In their youth they had studied at the National Academy, founded in the colonial era as the Royal Academy of San Carlos of New Spain. Old, they had returned to the school to teach in turn what they had been taught. The noble building that housed the academy was but a block away from Posada's workshop, which resembled, with blatant lettering spread all over its facade, a plebian pub rather than a temple of art. Seasoned academicians, and fledgling academicians as well, quickened their pace as they passed it by.

Posada returned the slight. His sketch of an easel painter is captioned *Un pintor de antaño*, a painter of yesteryear. Extravagant long hair, ribbon tie fluffed so as to mimic a giant butterfly, brush pointedly pointed, the weakling is nestled inside a free form that sprouts waterlilies!

Fig. 3. In praise of Our Lord of Miracles. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.





Fig. 4. Calaveras of artisans. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.



Fig. 5. Suicide of an envidious rich. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.

In sharp and meaningful contrast, Posada once engraved his self-portrait. Clothed in leather apron and cap, as are the workers manning the busy presses around him, he hands to his employer, Don Vanegas Arroyo, a trial proof struck fresh off the press (Fig. 6).

If Posada never knew in life the applause of critics and recognized painters, fame crowned him nevertheless in a unique way. His work never sank into oblivion, only his name. As late as 1924, *El Machete*, the muralists' own newsheet, printed from the original plate one of his revolutionary scenes as an anonymous folk engraving! Posada would not have understood, he whose shop sign proclaimed his name in letters two feet high, but it was nevertheless an apotheosis of a sort. His voice and that of his people had merged as one.

Life and work. Of Posada's provincial beginnings I have no first-hand knowledge other than what his prints reveal and the pioneer researches of good men, Francisco Diaz de Leon and Alejandro Topete del Valle. More thorough shall be my treatment of Posada's doings in Mexico City, three generations of the family of Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, who published Posada's major works, having called me a friend. I leave it to the reader to redress the resulting unbalance.

Born in Aguascalientes in 1852, Posada was one of the six legitimate sons of Don German Posada, a baker by trade. In youth he apprenticed himself to Don J. Trinidad Pedroza, owner of a lithographic shop. Most of the output was commercial, consisting of *marbetes* and *fajillas*, i.e., personal and business cards, cigar-box covers, pharmaceutical labels, down to things most minute, school marks, match box decorations, cigar bands.

The teenager's first tasks would be manual, graining imported Bavarian stones for crayon work in halftone, smoothing them over for pen-and-ink black-and-white. Posada's first signed plates, political cartoons in soft grays, indecisively drawn but malicious enough, date from 1871. Pedroza, having backed an unsuccessful candidate, thought it prudent to emigrate. He exiled himself to Leon de las Aldamas in the State of Guanajuato, with his lithographic presses and lithographic stones, Posada in his train.

In Leon, the basic output was commercial (Leon had cigar factories). Pedroza branched into illustrations, mostly of periodicals, and entrusted Posada with the job. A delicate ink line, astonishingly gentle or even genteel, answers the requirements of provincial bourgeois taste. Fashionable ladies sporting false *derrières* are courted by mustachioed gentlemen in high collar



Fig. 6. The Vanegas Arroyo pressroom, with self-portrait of Posada. Relief etching. Courtesy the author.

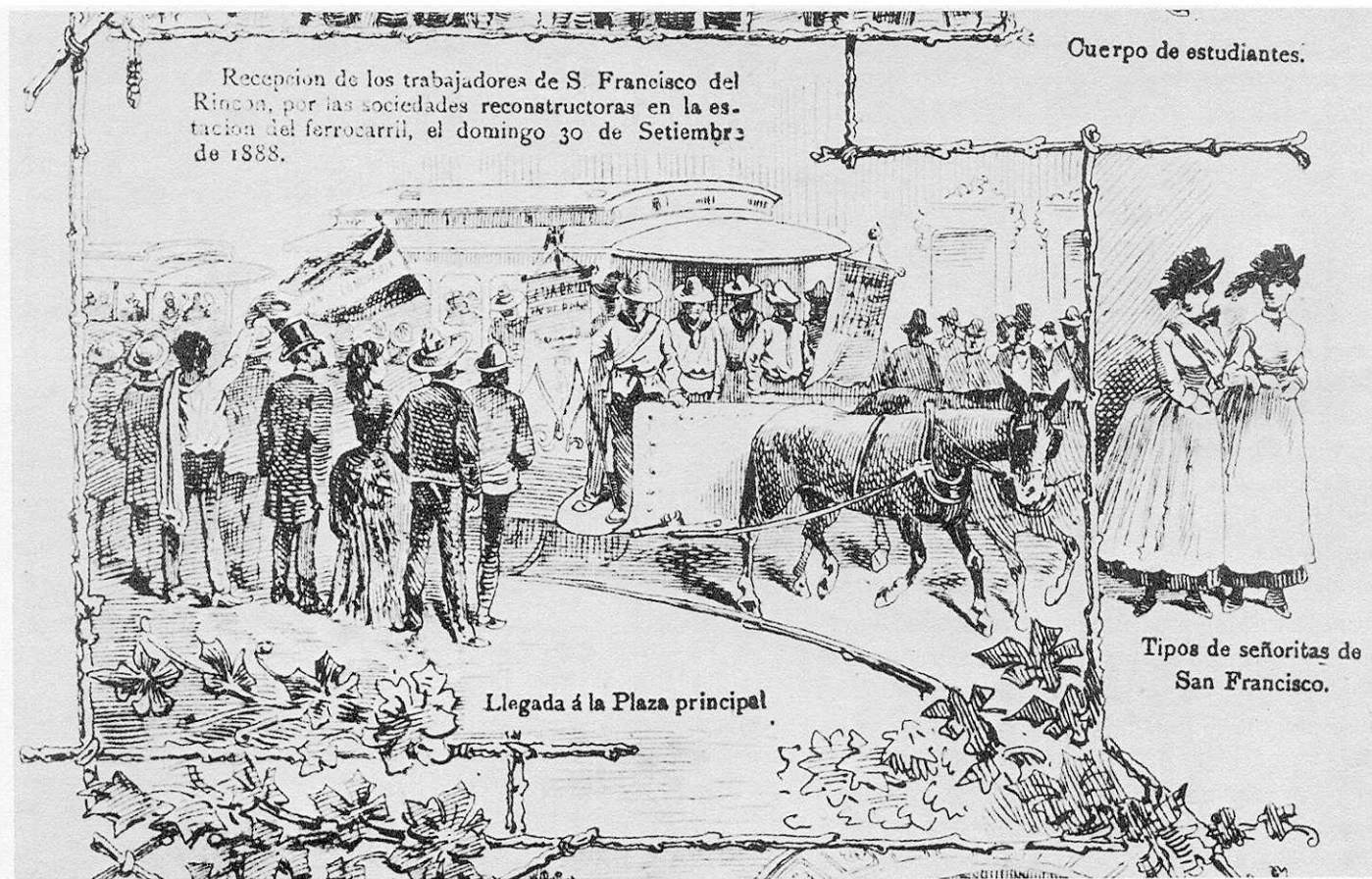


Fig. 7. Rebuilding the city of Leon, 1888. Pen-and-ink lithograph (detail). Courtesy the author.

and patent leather boots. Workers even are well scrubbed and their mood mild (Fig. 7). All this graced family magazines and ladies' almanacs. Now married and a father, Posada was teaching lithography at the State School. The inundations of 1888 brutally close his provincial period. Reminisced Doña Carmen, the aged widow of Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, summing up for me Posada's own memories, "There he was standing and the females of his family, caught in the raging waters, floated by screaming, 'Save us, Don Lupe, save us!' But what could he do?" Posada and son moved to Mexico City, there to meet his true vocation.

It is certain that the prints that made Posada famous were but a part of his stock in trade. His versatility was not unlike that of the Manillas, father and son, who had preceded him in the pay of publisher Vanegas Arroyo. The Manillas advertised their goods in plebeian periodicals, side by side with ads from carpenters and shopkeepers. Such an insert, dated 1892, reads:

Manuel Manilla and Son. This firm, that specializes in engravings, is located in the third booth at Nr. 12, Pulqueria de Palacio. [A street named after a far from English pub, kitty-corner from the National Palace.] We cut all kinds of designs in wood or metal, mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell, paint commercial signboards. We also electrotype stereotypes with utmost perfection, specializing in elevations and views of buildings. We carve seals in both rubber and metal, design stamps and monograms.

The mention of mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell suggests openwork patterns suitable for Spanish earrings and high combs, among other possibilities. As to commercial signs they meant more in the Mexico of that day than sheer lettering, for a number of trades demanded true mural paintings. Terms related to the craft enrich the language. "Pintura de pulqueria" adorned the workers' bars. "Pintor de brocha gorda" means, in the bourgeois vocabulary, a dauber, one who handles the thick square brush of the house painter. Come the mural renaissance, the group of fresco painters would proudly appropriate for

themselves the term, up to then mouthed as a social stigma.

It seems quite natural that Posada would have been asked to paint such murals, traditionally replete, as are his engravings, with plebeian subject matter. Even had he done so, the walls would long ago have been whitewashed or painted over. Exposed as they are to the street, none of these murals would have survived.

The only authentic record of a wall painted by Posada survives in a photograph taken about 1902, and that mural is sheer lettering. Posada poses in front of his workshop at No. 5, Calle de Santa Inés, installed inside a *cochera*, the carriage entrance of what had been, in colonial times, a private hotel. Nobly carved and arched but now disused and walled in, the façade leaves only a narrow opening for an entrance. Lettering is spread all over the remaining area, undoubtedly from the master's hand, partly embellished with his favorite curlicues, enlarged on this occasion from miniature to mural scale. The whole wall is but a blunt ad for his trade (Fig. 8).

At the top: "Illustrations for newspapers, books and advertisements." Under this, in letters two feet high, a proud "J. G. Posada" spans the whole width of the façade. Between the doors, wrought in a fancier layout: "Workshop of engravings," then, spilling right down from the dado to the sidewalk and rich in ornamental embellishments, "... and of lithography."

There is yet more to learn by scanning the photograph. On the jamb of the narrow entrance to the shop, a frame displays samples of works of quite another size and kind, visiting cards, business cards, a death notice set inside a wide black margin, a follow-up to the type of work Posada had done in the provinces. This side of his activities in the Capital has yet to be probed.

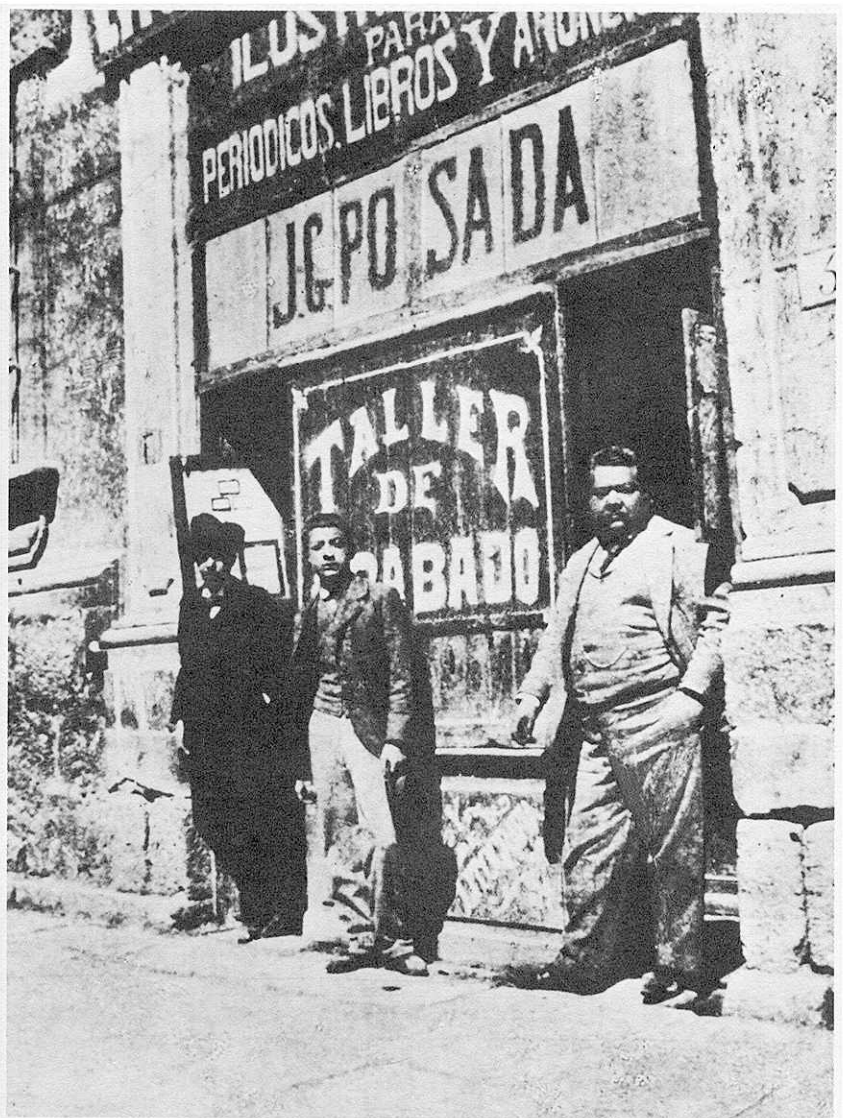
Come upon by chance, the one original painting of Posada's that I have ever seen was brushed on unprimed and unstretched canvas, fully signed, loosely nailed to a post, and floating in the wind, one among various banners depicting the attractions of a small itinerant circus. Its subject is the flood that occurred in the State of Guanajuato in the 1880s, the catastrophe that broke Posada's ties with the provincial town of Leon de las Aldamas and sent him to seek work in Mexico City.

That such an autobiographical drama was deemed a fit subject for a circus poster indeed pertains to a Mexico that still today, on the Feast of the Dead, splices lovingly death and laughter. The pennysheets for that occasion, illustrated with grinning, dancing skeletons, were indeed sure sales boosters for the firm of Vanegas Arroyo.

Once, at such a time, I found Doña Carmen seated as usual behind the counter. She was, however, in tears for there had been a death in the family. In an attempt to distract her from her grief I asked the reason for the unusual bustle in the shop. She wiped her eyes and explained, "Francesito, estamos preparando las Calaveras!" (Frenchy, we are readying the Skulls!).

Before brushing and cutting his designs directly on the plate, Posada, as do most of us, tried his hand on paper. On another visit to Doña Carmen, I found a young girl chatting with her of family matters. Doña Carmen presented her as a niece of Posada's. I inquired if she knew of any drawings that remained in the hands of his heirs. Affirmative answer. She had leafed through a

Fig. 8. Posada, at right, in front of his workshop, c. 1902. Courtesy the author.



number of Posada's sketchbooks, dealing mostly with street types and street scenes, some very comical, some very horrendous—thus Brueghel, sketching at fairs peasants and beggars *naer het leven*, from life. To my next question, "And where are these drawings now?" I received the stock answer, one that appears indecisive to foreigners but, for a Mexican, closes tight the door on all further inquiries, "Quien sabe?" Who knows!

Once established in the Capital, Posada clung for a while to the delicate pen line of his provincial days. Don Antonio, however, who wrote his *corridos* (verse) and his *relatos* (prose) in a local Spanish rich in words borrowed from Indian languages, demanded illustrations to match, clear and strong as pre-Hispanic hieroglyphs. For technical purpose, he preferred a match of sorts with the plates he owned of the Manillas, all of them burin cut. Posada followed Don Antonio's hints. Indeed, relief cuts remain visually legible in spite of the twin handicaps of haphazard pres-

sure and the cheapest paper. And soon the master was, in his designs, spilling human blood with the abandon of an Aztec sacrificer.

A gentler subject matter were the peddlers of pennysheets, an integral part of the workings of the shop. They are often depicted buying the sheets from Doña Carmen over the counter, then rushing out to the streets to cry their wares (Fig. 9).

Later on, after the Manillas faded from the scene, Posada invented a freer technique, designing on the plate with an acid-resistant ink before etching. As with wood or metal cut, this method allowed text and pictures to be inked and printed at one stroke. I illustrate both techniques with two plates of a single design, to make clear their differences. Basically, relief cut uses a white line on black. Black line on white is the rule for relief etching (Figs. 10, 11).

As distinct from technique, Posada's style also went through basic changes. For the sake of clar-

Fig. 9. View of the Vanegas Arroyo shop. Relief etching (detail). Courtesy the author.





Fig. 10. Most horrible assassination. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.



Fig. 11. Most horrible assassination. Relief etching. Courtesy the author.



Fig. 12. Madero on his way to take the presidential oath, 1911. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.

ity, perspective was discarded, scale used mostly for its symbolic value. Madero is drawn as a dwarf before he sat in the presidential chair, as a giant afterwards. In the entry of Madero into the Capital, the president is gigantic, with his wife his match. Smaller are the onlookers who cheer him. Smallest of all are the two well-trained coachmen, intent on keeping their place (Fig. 12).

Posada's son, perhaps fifteen years of age in the 1902 photograph, is said to have died before him. Towards the end, Posada lived alone. His manners, notwithstanding his genius, were neither better nor worse than those of his beloved plebeian models. Said Doña Carmen, with an awe tinged with respect, "All through the year Don Guadalupe would put aside in a home-made piggy bank small sums that grew to good money. Once a year he broke the bank and with that goodly sum bought a medium size barrel of tequila. He closed himself in for a week during which he saw nobody and nobody saw him. The week over he reappeared at the shop, ready to work and quite refreshed."

Posada's loneliness and his lack of social status become obvious at the time of his death,

January 13, 1913. The official certificate is attested to by three bachelor neighbors, of whom only one had been taught to sign his name. Posada received a burial of the sixth class.

Of states and related matters. To pursue the artist's thoughts through the successive states of a single print is one of the more delicate morsels for a cataloguer. In the case of Posada the search may lead to disappointment. True, relevant material is unusually copious, with the bulk of the original plates still available. Leafing through the illustrated pennysheets, gazettes, booklets, one follows the changes, at times drastic, through which many of the plates went in the course of time. Yet there is little there to throw light on Posada's aesthetics. Only a strong intimation that the master engraver at work was harassed by the requirements of headlines and deadlines.

La Gaceta Callejera, or Street Gazette, was hardly a time-keeping periodical. Don Antonio issued it when he felt like it. Gazette No. 7 is dated May 8, 1893. At noon that same day General Manuel González (who had been president of the republic for a short while, courtesy of his crony Don Porfirio Díaz) died at his country estate, the



Fig. 13. Death of General Manuel González. Metal cut, 1st state. Courtesy the author.

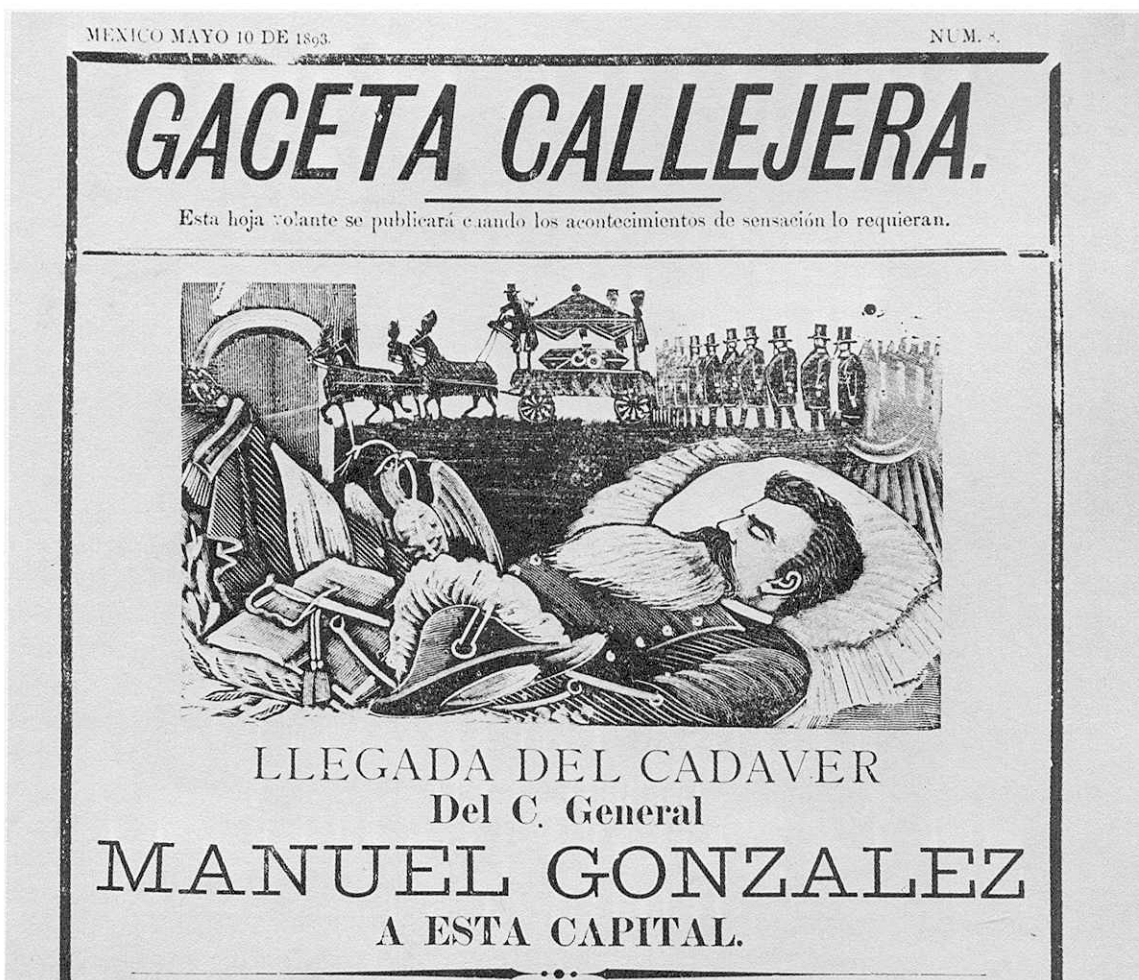
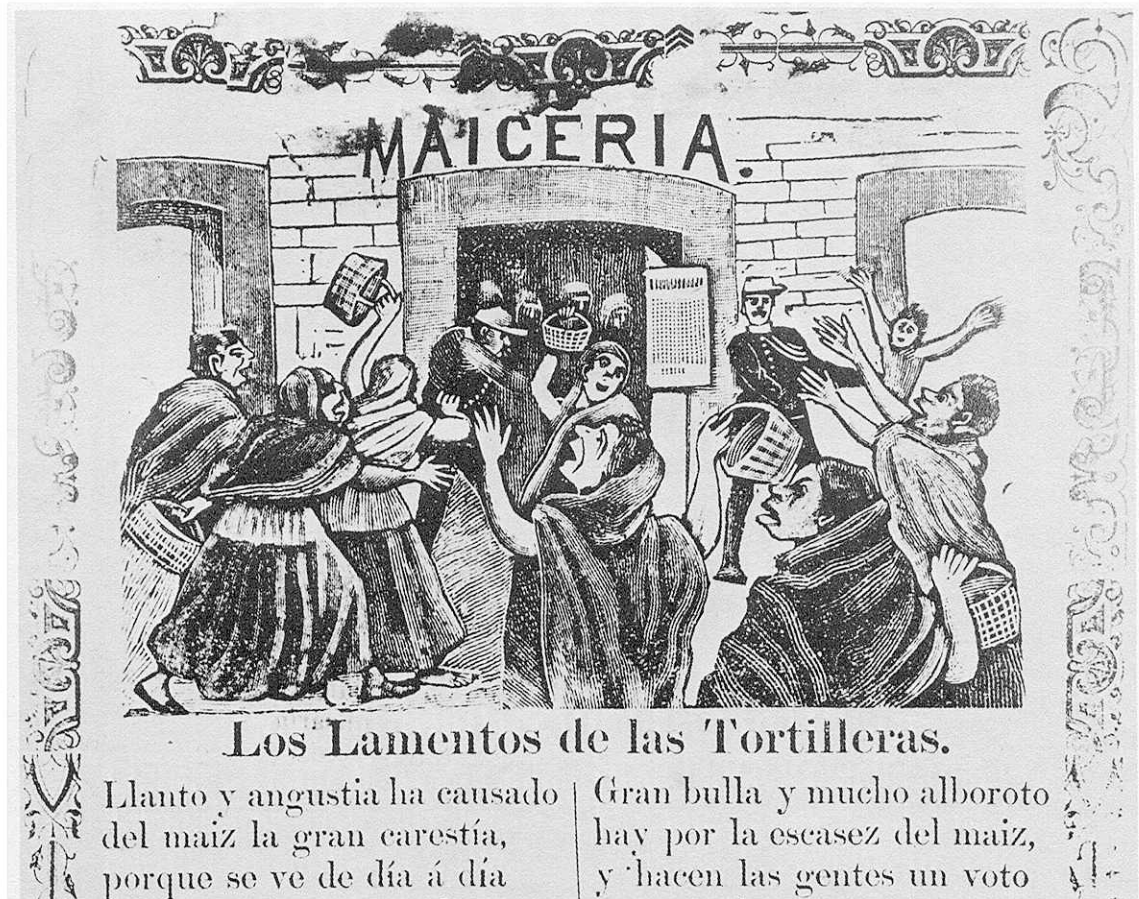


Fig. 14. Arrival of the cadaver of General Manuel González at this Capital, 1893. Metal cut, 2nd state. Courtesy the author.



Fig. 15. Terrible conflagration!! Metal cut, 3rd state. Courtesy the author.

Fig. 16. Lamentations of the *tortilleras*. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.



Hacienda of Chapingo. In a first edition of the unusually large metal cut, the general lies in state, his well-groomed corpse dressed in full uniform, with an eagle, the national symbol, perched on his plumed hat. The curtains of the death bed open onto a black void suggestive of the nether regions (Fig. 13).

A connected event proved well worth a special issue of the Gazette. Brought from its hacienda to the Capital, the corpse was to receive a most public and pompous burial on May 11. Gazette No. 8 is dated May 10. Already featured in No. 7, Posada's plate being stale, a novel sales appeal had to be improvised. Obviously time was too short to compose and cut a new plate. Don Antonio was in a quandary!

In the second state of the plate, out of the folds of the right curtain, issues in ectoplasmic fashion a Lilliputian mortuary cortege, its hearse dragged by plumed horses and followed by well-fed mourners. The vision fades out into the folds of the left curtain of the bed where the general, majestic in death, lies unmoved. Thus, spurred by the profit motif of his employer, Posada did his best, his admirable best, transforming a graphic report into a surrealist dream (Fig. 14).

With reuse of the plate as a goal, other examples are less spectacular, if equally instructive. In the Mexico City of that day, fires were a recurring drama much relished by the poor who could watch the spectacle for free. The cast was always the same, flaming building, firemen dousing it, hose in hand, a gaping gesticulating crowd of on-lookers. In the original state of this plate, over the door of the stricken emporium, Posada lettered its name, *Las Novedades*, novelties. Another fire, this time in a clothing store named *La Valenciana*. To keep up-to-date, Posada smoothed over the sign, leaving only the La of Las, with the remainder a blank. Thus a second state of the plate. Yet another fire, in a hardware store called *El Elefante*, the elephant. In this third state the sign is a total blank. From now on, the plate is fit to illustrate all future conflagrations (Fig. 15).

Popular demonstrations were endemic to Mexico City, often sparked by a rise in the price of foodstuffs. Corn flour is an indispensable ingredient in the making of *tortillas*, the bread of the people. A metal cut describes an uprising of women, wrapped in their *rebozos*, angrily waving empty market baskets under the noses of policemen. The locale is a specific one. A government poster lists the new inflated prices. Over the arched entrance, painted in large letters, *Maiceria*, the flour mill. Thus the first state (Fig. 16).

But uprisings multiply as the coming revolution

Fig. 17. *Calavera* touristic. Metal cut, 2nd state. Courtesy the author.



Pues su madre lo maldijo.

Sus amigos se negaron,
que no iban a trabajar,
pobre de José Lisorio,
su muerte quiso aplazar.

Encendieron, pues, las velas,
para empezar a bajar,
«Jesús dijo: me acompañe,
y la Cruz donde Emurió.»

Al bajar el segundo escalón
de allí fué donde resbaló,
y desde una altura tan grande
en el fondo se estrelló.



En el fondo de la mina
el cuerpo se destrozó,
y sólo un montón de huesos
de aquel infeliz quedó.

La compañía que llevaba

Pobre de José Lisorio,
su madre lo maldició
y por pegarle a su madre
Dios nunca lo perdonó.

Tomad ejemplo de esto

Fig. 18. Corrido de José Lisorio. Metal cut, 2nd state. Courtesy the author.



*Este milagro patente
Que asombrará á todo el orbe,
En Sonora sucedió*

casts its long shadow ahead. Women in *rebozos* wrathfully wave their empty baskets at butchers, greengrocers, lawmakers. All this must be illustrated. The telltale *Maicería* sign is erased, thus creating, thriftily tailored to fit sundry occasions, a second state of this unassuming plate, which shows Posada at his most plebeian.

Calaveras, skull-like portraits, often deal with the living, and in this resides their sting, a notion useful to understand what follows. General Manuel González, when he was president, had imposed against the wish of the people a new money, a nickel piece worth a cent and a half, baptized by them *tlaco*. Why not, for a change, fan the popular discontent by drawing a *calavera* of the *tlaco*, this newcomer? Posada seized the occasion. A skeleton, aping the Indian *cargador* who slings burdens on his back, carries to hell a giant nickel, onlookers expressing pleasurable awe at the feat. Thus the first state.

But the Feast of the Dead recurs annually and the pleasant print may well be reused in years to come, long after the nickel squabble is forgotten. A second state transforms, somewhat awkwardly, the nickel into a giant skull. It will be Don Antonio's job to make relevant, whether in prose or verse, this otherwise incomprehensible scene (Fig. 17).

The previous examples, be they art or less, scrupulously conform to the orthodox definition of graphic states, wrought as they are by the hand of the master engraver. Another series of changes is due rather to Don Antonio's thriftiness and commercial acumen. The original blocks were sawed in half, or at times quartered. As the need arose, unrelated fragments were joined to taste.

A simple example: The upper-left quarter of a plate is missing and its right edge clipped. The L-shaped remainder pictures a squatting peasant in white *calzoncillos*, clutching a scarf, his expression terrified, eyes fixed upwards focusing on what is now a void, the missing upper quarter of the image (Fig. 18). The caption for that state:

José Lisorio, a miner by trade,
Having behaved as a wicked son
Suffered a most painful end
Cursed that he was by his mother!

Before mutilation, the scene had a more consoling message. At the upper quarter Our Lady miraculously appears, while at the right edge armed cavalymen depart, their death-dealing task accomplished (Fig. 19). A long and tearful story tells how Romualdo Quiñones, having been left a cadaver by the firing squad, was brought back to life by Our Lady, to whom he had com-

Fig. 20. Ghosts most frightful. A composite plate. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.



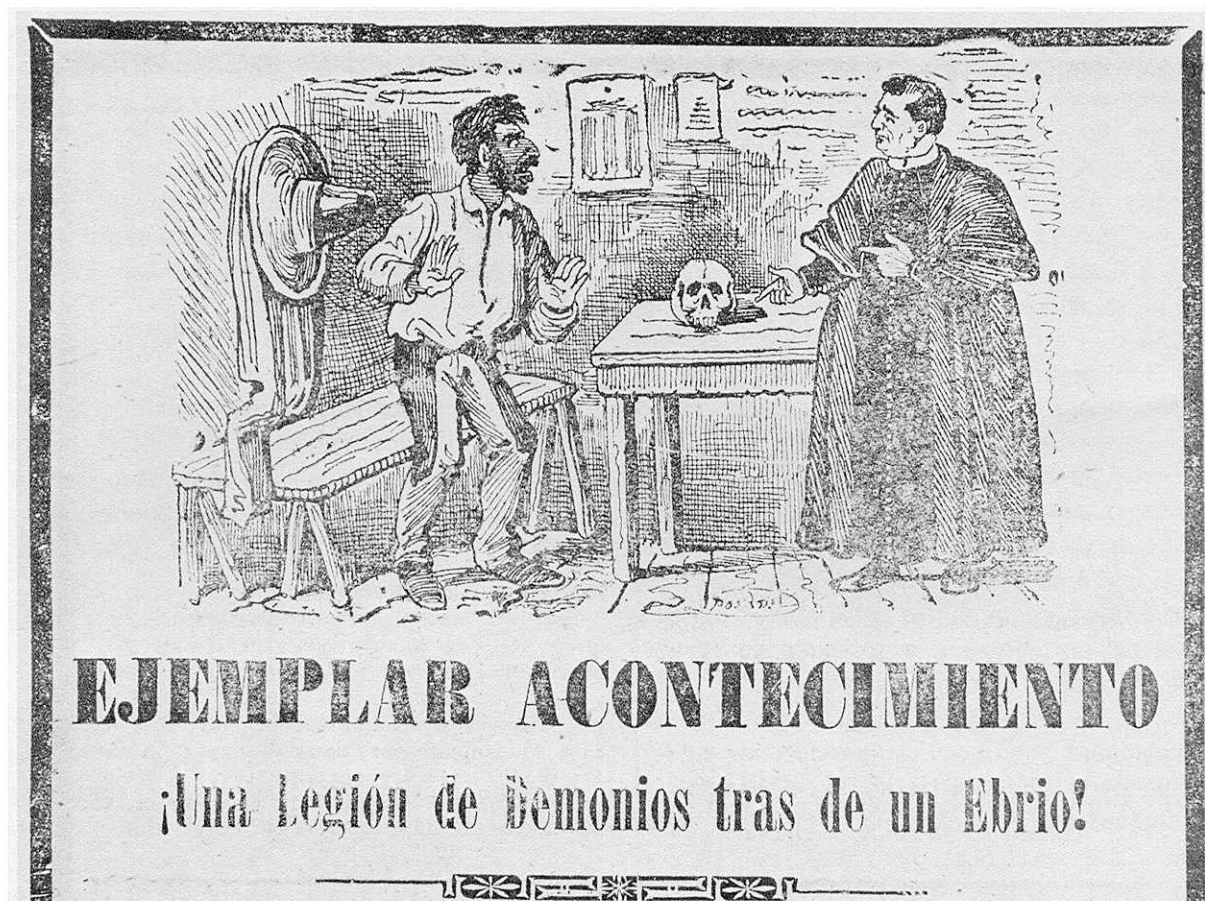


Fig. 21. An event worth pondering. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.

mended himself in his predicament. The puzzle of the scarf is solved: it is the one with which Romualdo's eyes were bandaged as he faced the firing squad.

A complex example: Two priests; one of them, in street attire, jumps hurriedly out of an open window. His companion, totally uninterested in this gymnastic feat, calmly expounds a point, both index fingers extended (Fig. 20). Illogically paired with this illogical scene, the following caption: "Ghosts most frightful haunt the towers of the Church of Loreto."

The plate is a composite, with a vertical seam visible through the width of the image. By chance, the elements that went into its making are still known. The jumping priest was, in the original state of the plate, shot at point-blank by a woman and understandably attempting an escape. The caption: "Horrible murder!! His housekeeper kills the curate of the Church of San Geronimo in the district of Otumba."

What of the priest on the right? Originally the scene illustrated the last moments of a high-wayman. A cleric visits him in prison, urging the

wretch to repent before he meets his maker. Casually set on the rustic table, a human skull underlines the point (Fig. 21). In the sheet I own, the block has already been reused, for the scene hardly matches the story: "An event well worth pondering. A drunkard is set upon by a legion of demons!"

Even less orthodox as graphic states than these examples are material defects due to a rough use and reuse of the plates by none-too-respectful pressmen. Having been greatly in demand, alas, some of the best plates have suffered most. Accidental damages, however, are valuable clues to help form a chronological sequence.

Posada and Daumier have this in common: both worked harried by the demands of publishers, their plates as soon as finished whisked away for instant publication. Few if any states of their prints reflect aesthetic considerations.

Too add zest to his famed catalogue of Daumier's lithographs, Delteil lists as states the variants of titles and captions. Following Delteil's steps, future cataloguers of Posada's graphics

would be wise to endorse this concept, one that would prove extraordinarily fruitful, as hinted in the preceding examples where changes in the text are involved.

The more routine the subject matter the more complex the task. Routine for Posada's Mexico that is. An example: death by a firing squad was a routine way of dying, its appeal to the buyers of pennysheets high. "The shooting of the criminal Esteban Leos, of the county of Pinos in the State of Zacatecas," occurred February 16, 1903. On September 8 of that same year took place "The shooting of Dionisio Silverio in Metepec."

Both pennysheets are illustrated. Dressed as ranchers, Esteban and Silverio look like identical twins bidding adieu to life with identical gestures. Naturally. For why should Posada engrave two plates when one would do as well!

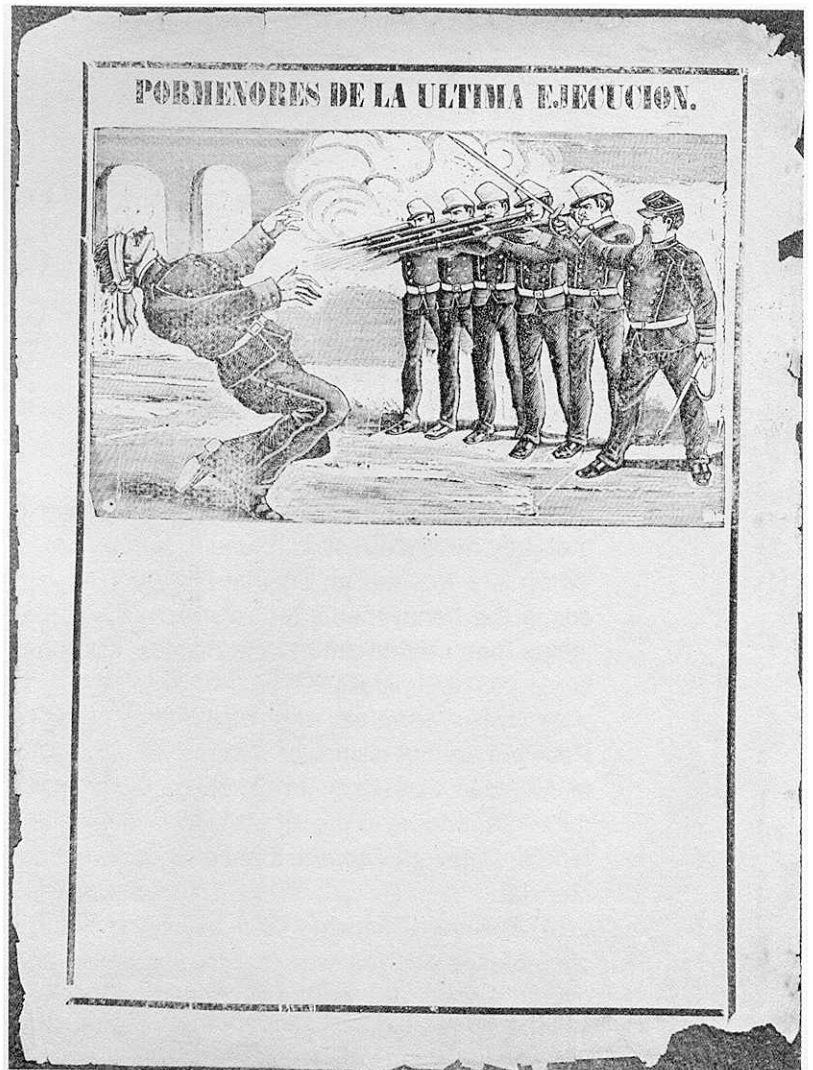
Only for condemned soldiers who died in uniform was another plate needed. That design is unusually large and dynamic. Don Antonio, knowing how implacable was military justice, expected much return from it. He printed the picture under the noncommittal title "Details of the latest execution," leaving a blank to fill in the successive stories, name of the condemned, date, place, and sundry horrendous details. So copious was the edition that, regardless of its appeal, some of the illustrated sheets remained on his hands awaiting a text that never came. In Posada's vast output, this is the only case of *avant la lettre* that I know! (Fig. 22).

Problems in Posada. An indispensable cog in the varied ventures of publisher Vanegas Arroyo, Posada combined the skills of graphic reporter and engraver. Both trades were a standard adjunct to publishing before the advent of photography and process devices. Hired draftsmen were sent where the action was, men as able as Constantin Guys, who covered the siege of Sebastopol, or Winslow Homer, who reported the Civil War. As soon as received, the drawings were turned over to the wood engravers, then published.

Such doings could hardly be expected from the firm of Vanegas Arroyo, where profits trickled home mostly in pennies. Posada worked both as a graphic reporter and engraver. True, as reporter he had not far to go, the revolutionary wave lapping at his very doorstep. Yet there were times when he could not fulfill the multiple demands of his twin jobs. At such times Don Antonio hired other men to do the graphic reporting. One of them, Manuel Rivas Regalado, was kind enough to retell for me, fifty years later, his tale.

In 1904, Manuel was eighteen years old, a student at the academy. His assignment took him to

Fig. 22. Details of the latest execution. Metal cut, *avant-la-lettre*. Courtesy the author.



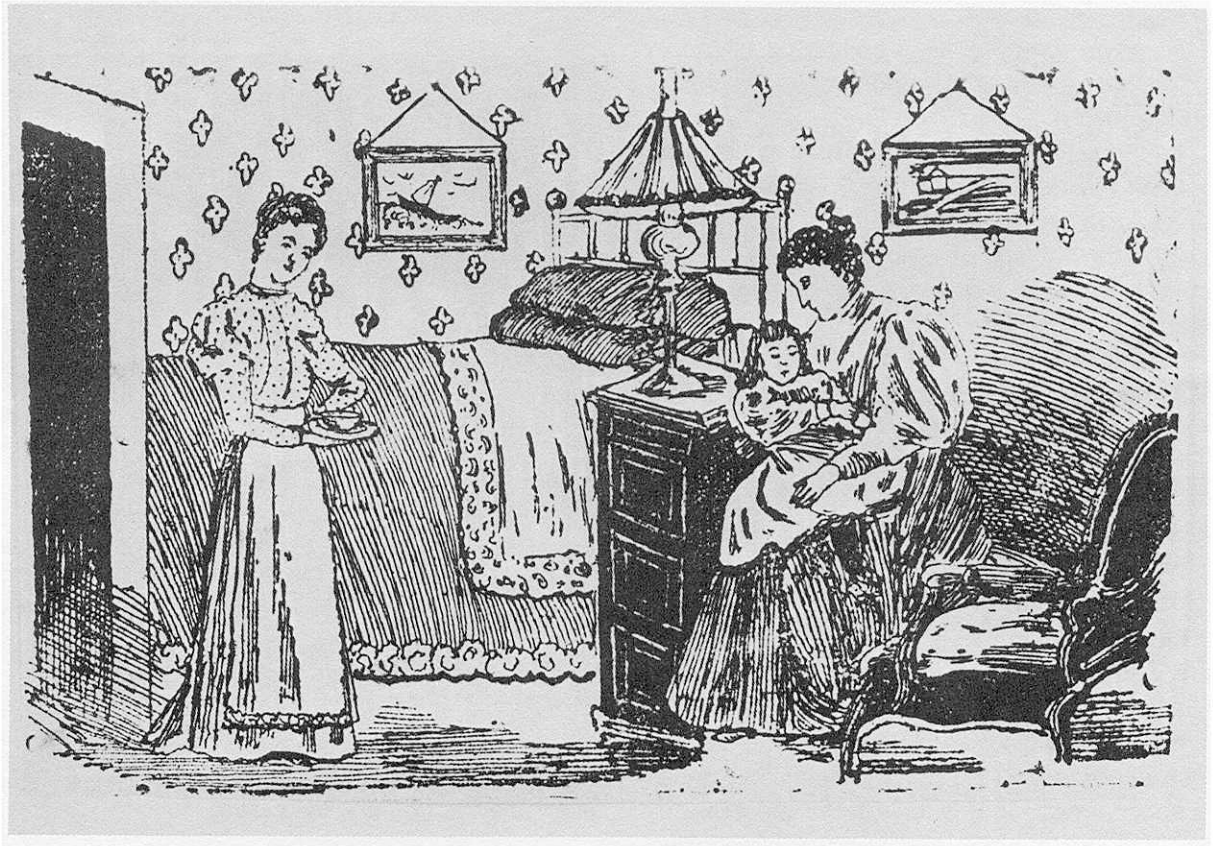


Fig. 23. J. Cortez, Interior. Relief etching. Courtesy the author.

the bullring. Should *La Gaceta Callejera*, Don Antonio's own newssheet, feature a matador skewered on the horns of the bull, how the sales would soar! No such luck on that day, yet young Manuel returned justly proud of his sketches—they were so lifelike. How unhappy he was, though, when he saw them published, botched, bearing the unmistakable stamp of Posada's sturdier hand!

Don Manuel's reminiscences are disquieting in that they raise a question bound to baffle purists: When is a Posada an original Posada? As one scans the pennysheets it becomes evident that lesser men orbited around the master. I list here some possible pitfalls.

a) Late Manillas and early Mexico City Posadas are not dissimilar. When I was art editor of *Mexican Folkways*, in October 1925 I introduced its readers to the art of Posada with a centerfold, *Calavera Tapatia*, that I now know to be a Manilla!

b) Awkward drawing and awkward cutting characterize this follower. Yet the dynamics and overall design are worthy of Posada. Coached lovingly by his father, I incline to see the hand of Posada's son, who died before reaching maturity.

c) Reluctant to admit ignorance, I baptized this fellow "The Master of the thin line." That was before I discovered his signature, in fact two signatures, in the large *Calavera of a chandler*: J. C. at the upper right and at lower center, J. Cortez. Not convincing when he imitates Posada, Cortez brings to family tableaux qualities that the greater master lacks, those of intimacy and peacefulness (Fig. 23).

d) Imported blocks, flotsam from defunct publishers. From Spain a bullfighter ready to deal the death blow. The woodcut exhibits masterly variations in the use of the white line. Definitely obsolete the *traje de luces*, the sequined uniform of the matador, suggestive of Goya (Fig. 24).

A satirical scene, wherein a gallant patiently waits, while an actress puts the last touches to her skimpy costume in front of a mirror. German because the sheep's head framed on the wall is a pun on *schaufkopf*, signifying a mutton-head (Fig. 25).

A printer's workshop, with children in lieu of adults. The typesetter is handed a folded paper marked in English, *COPY*. The whole oozes an early Victorian flavor.

American at a guess. A corseted belle, arms



Fig. 24. Unknown Spanish artist, Bullfight episode, early nineteenth century. Woodcut.



Fig. 25. Unknown German artist, Actress in her loge, mid-nineteenth century. Woodcut. Courtesy the author.



Fig. 26. Our Lady of the Lakes. Metal cut. Courtesy the author.

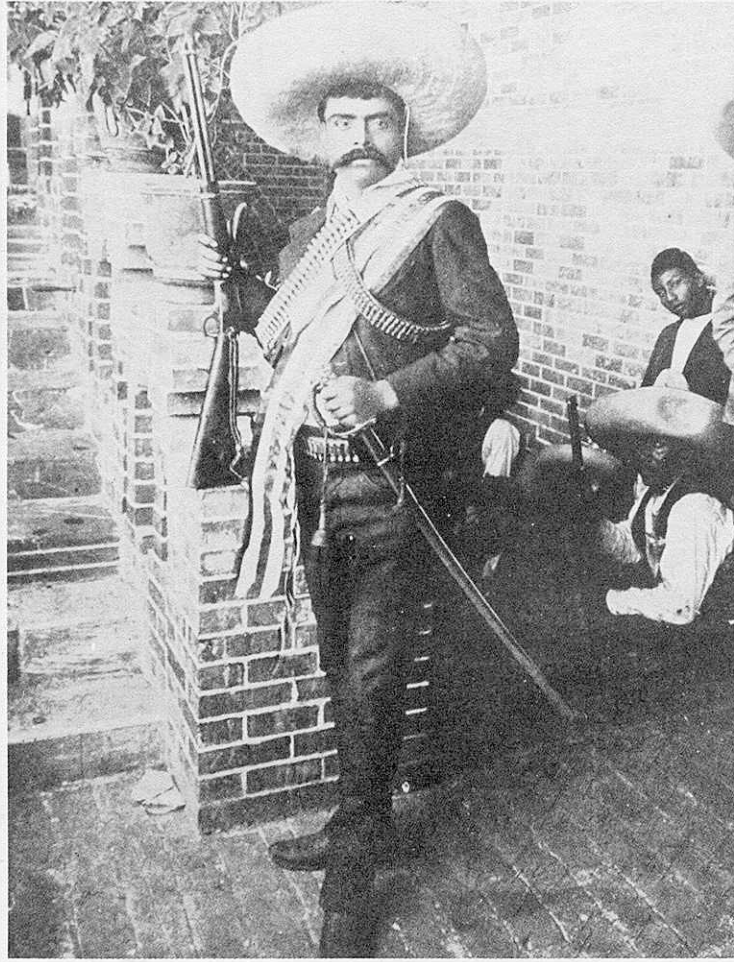


Fig. 27. Emiliano Zapata, 1911 (photo: Casasola).
Courtesy the author.



Fig. 28. Emiliano Zapata, 1911, Relief
etching. Courtesy the author.



raised, pins through her high hairdo a pin as long as a hatpin. The style is early Sears Roebuck catalogue.

American snobbish. A typical Gibson girl, c. 1890, sketched with a few whiplash strokes. In this case a process print.

Bent at his task, Posada had no qualms in borrowing from all sources. This should be understood of the religious subjects, their sales appeal depending on the *déjà vu*, the hallowed image memorized by generations of pilgrims. A Virgin of Guadalupe with variants, however minute, would have repulsed the devout. Black Christs, Santo Niños (the child Jesus dressed in a Fauntleroy velvet suit and plumed hat), Christs of Solitude scourged and bleeding, Posada, proud of his craft, signed them all, but solely as engraver (Fig. 26).

Late in life, Posada met the challenge of photography and the process print. The eye of

Fig 29. *Calavera* of Emiliano Zapata. Relief etching
and metal cut. Courtesy the author.

the camera and the eye of Posada were at odds. Of a photograph of Zapata he accepts only the essentials. Then, distorting that version into a *Calavera*, admits the revolutionary hero to the inner shrine of his private world (Figs. 27, 28, 29).

Don Antonio was eager for progress. People, even Posada's devotees, began to accept photographs as the norm. Posada's chores now included engraving from photographs or halftone process prints. *Copy of a magnificent gravure published in El Mundo Ilustrado* is the caption of a metal cut; a rather mishapen crowd scene. Or he includes the name of the photograph studio together with his signature. He signs *Taller de M. Ibarra. Posada d [ibu] o* on a relief etching of a bullfight scene.

Come the Revolution, Don Agustin Victor Casasola, a news photographer, took to the field together with a squad of helpers, as had Mathew Brady in the 1860s. His son, Gustavo, kept his father's archives intact. The impeccable pedigree

of Casasola's photographs is a firm basis for the classical *Historia Grafica de la Revolucion Mexicana* (five volumes).

One of Posada's most admired relief etchings "the hanged man" is a close translation of a Casasola photograph. In March 1914, Pancho Villa was besieging the town of Torreon, strongly defended by government troops. During the siege, one of his partisans, Trinidad Rios, called "El Chamaco," the boy, was caught in the act of burning a bridge. In death, he became the model for Posada's masterpiece (Figs. 30, 31).

Posada died January 1913. El Chamaco was hung March 1914. Troubled at the discrepancy, I asked Don Gustavo Casasola to double-check the date. Don Gustavo, taking this as a slur on the good name of his father, put his hand meaningfully to his belt where, in less orderly times, a pistol would have been strapped. End of the interview.

There is no doubt in my mind that the respec-

Fig. 30. Revolutionary episode, 1914 (photo: Casasola). Courtesy the author.



Fig. 31. Hanged man, relief etching. Courtesy the author.



tive dates of both the death notice and the news photograph are authentic. Is there any out from this logical impasse?

There exists by the hand of Don Antonio a

Posada epitaph, anticipatedly published in 1904 in his *Calavera de los Artesanos*, that hints at posthumous doings! Though it loses in translation, it remains a unique tribute:

You were an able engraver
But not even your skill
Could save you from a spill
Headlong into the grave.

Time to shake your torpor
And with the choicest burins
Engrave inside your grave
A few lines in your own
praise!

Notes

Abbreviations

- Atl, 1921 Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), *Las Artes Populares en Mexico, Libreria Mexico. "Cultura," MCMXXI, 2v.*
- Bibl. Nac. Biblioteca Nacional, housing the national collection of books.
- J. C. cat. The author's manuscript notes dating from the early 1920s, in view of a Posada catalogue never completed.
- J. C. coll. The author's collection of original publications of the firm of Vanegas Arroyo, consisting of pennysheets, broadsides, newsheets, playlets, booklets, etc.
- Hand-pulled Rubbings done by the author in the early 1920s, from the original blocks when *in situ* on the shelves of the Vanegas Arroyo's workshop.
- Hem. Nac. Hemeroteca Nacional, housing the national collection of periodicals.
- Historia *Historia Grafica de la Revolucion Mexicana, Por Gustavo Casasola. 1900-1960*, Editorial Trillas, Mexico, 1970.
- P., 1963 *José Guadalupe Posada, ilustrador de la Vida Mexicana*, Fondo Editorial de la Plastica Mexicana, 1963.
- P., 1964 Jean Charlot, *Posada's Dance of Death*, Pratt Graphic Art Center, New York, 1964.

Notes to Illustrations

- 1 The author and Don Blas Vanegas Arroyo at work on the Spanish language edition of *100 Original Woodcuts by Posada*. March 1947.

Engraver to the people

- 2 Hand-pulled, metal cut.
Atl, 1921, p. 53, reproduces it with the caption, "Tender and loving farewell to the Missionary Fathers."
- 3 Hand-pulled, metal cut.
J. C. cat., "Praises offered by a mat vendor and a *tortillera* (market woman who sells *tortillas*) to our Lord of Miracles." Not a street scene but a stage set. It illustrates a playlet (*coloquio*) to be acted by the devout in front of the church on days of pilgrimage.
- 4 Hand-pulled, metal cut.
Numerous editions with varying texts. J. C. coll. has a copy stenciled with carmin blotches in striking contrast to the whiteness of the bones.
- 5 Hand-pulled, metal cut.
J. C. cat., "Most frightening and terrible happening in the town of Silao, on the first days of the twentieth century. Suicide of an envidious rich man." 1901.

- 6 J. C. coll. Relief etching (detail).

Interior of the Vanegas Arroyo pressroom, with Posada presenting a proofsheets to Don Antonio. The small format (5¼ x 3½ in.) fits playlets and booklets. The text details the many wares in stock. Translation reprinted from P., 1964:

Founded in the XIX Century, in the Year 1880,
this ancient firm stocks a wide choice:
Collection of Greetings, Tricks, Puzzles, Games,
Cookbooks,
Recipes for Making Candies and Pastries,
Models of Speeches, Scripts for Clowns, Patriotic
Exhortations,
Playlets meant for Children or Puppets, Pleasant Tales,
Also the Novel Oracle,
Rules for Telling the Cards,
a New Set of Mexican Prognostications,
Books of Magic, Both Brown and White,
a Handbook for Witches.

Life and work

- 7 Hem. Nac. Pen-and-ink lithograph (detail). "La Patria Ilustrada," 1880. P., 1963, p. 299.
"Rebuilding the city of Leon. . . Welcome to the workers of San Francisco del Rincon by the Society of Builders. . . Arrival on the main plaza." At the bottom of the page, "Sketched from life by J. Q. [sic] Posada."
- 8 Posada with his son and Don Blas Vanegas Arroyo in front of Posada's workshop, No. 5 Santa Ines Street, c. 1902.
- 9 J. C. coll. Relief etching (detail). A pair with No. 6, same size, identical text. P., 1964:
Matriarch of the establishment, Mrs. Vanegas Arroyo sits behind the counter, in lace collar and high hairdo, with puffed sleeves and a wasp waist. She has just sold some broadsides to a flock of newsvendors. The urchins, shoeless, coatless, straw sombreros frayed at the rim, scatter into the street with armfuls of sheets, eager to cry their exciting wares. Two grown-up customers await their turn, one a country peddler, the other a city bureaucrat.
- 10 J. C. coll. Metal cut.
"Most horrible assassination in the city of Tuxpan on the tenth of the present month and year. Maria Antonia Rodriguez murdered her companion who had denied himself to her advances of illicit friendship."
- 11 Hand-pulled, relief etching.
J. C. cat.: same text as preceding illustration.
- 12 Hand-pulled, relief etching.
Madero on his way to take the presidential oath, 6 November 1911. The plate is a composite. Etched before the event, Posada's choice of a vehicle had been an automobile. As a horse-drawn carriage was used, coachmen were inserted.

Of states and related matters

- 13 J. C. coll. Metal cut, first state.
"Death of General Manuel Gonzalez in the hacienda of Chapingo on May 8, 1893, at 12:38 P.M." Dated May 8, 1893.
- 14 J. C. coll. Same plate as No. 13, second state.
"Arrival of the cadaver of the Citizen General Manuel Gonzalez at this Capital." Dated 10 May 1893.
- 15 Hand-pulled, metal cut, third state.
J. C. cat.: Text of second state, "Interesting news! Great alarm!! Terrible conflagration in the clothing store *La Valenciana*, located in the *Portal de las Flores*, the night of September 27, 1900."
- 16 V. Fosado coll. P., 1963, p. 275. Metal cut, first state.
"Lamentations of the *tortilleras*. Anguish and tears at the high raise in the price of corn."
- 17 Hand-pulled, metal cut, second state.
J. C. coll.: "*Calavera* touristic. Here is the *calavera* who circled the whole globe. Back home from such an extensive tour, it will sing for you its sights!"
At the bottom of the page,
This year, with woes on the rise,
Just three cents is my price.
- 18 J. C. coll. Metal cut, second state of the following number.
"Corrido of José Lisorio"
- 19 Vanegas Arroyo coll. P., 1963, p. 195. Metal cut, original state of the preceding number.
"Admirable miracle, unexplained marvel [due to] the intercession of most holy Mary of Remedies, enshrined at Cholula in the State of Puebla."
- 20 J. C. coll. Metal cut. A composite image.
"Ghosts most frightful haunt the towers of the Church of Loreto."
- 21 J. C. coll. Metal cut, reused in part in the preceding number.
"An event well worth pondering. A drunkard set upon by a legion of demons!"
- 22 J. C. coll. Metal cut, *avant-la-lettre*.
"Details of the latest execution."

Problems in Posada

- 23 Hand-pulled, relief etching.
"Interior," by J. Cortez.
- 24 Hand-pulled, woodcut.
Bullfight episode. First half of the nineteenth century.
- 25 Proofed by Don Blas Vanegas Arroyo. Woodcut.
Actress in her loge. German, mid-nineteenth century.
- 26 J. C. coll. Metal cut.
"To the most holy Virgin of San Juan of the Lakes."
- 27 Casasola news photograph, c. 1911. *Historia*, 1, p. 253.
Emiliano Zapata.
- 28 J. C. coll. Relief etching.
Emiliano Zapata.
- 29 J. C. coll. Relief etching and metal cut.
Calavera of Emiliano Zapata
This *calavera* showing its teeth
Thus talks back to Death:
"Don't boast yet. Lasso in hand
Will do for a first step!
"Achis, huarachis, guachis,
rattle in vain, rattlesnakes!
I dare you to bite
through my good leather breeches!"
- 30 Casasola news photograph. March 1914. *Historia*, II, p. 765.
"The chieftain Trinidad Rios, knicknamed the boy, hung by the Federals, having been caught putting fire to a bridge northward of Torreon."
- 31 Hand-rubbed, relief etching.
Hanged man.

Jean Charlot, artist, writer, and professor of art, is a noted authority on Mexican art. His numerous books include *Art from the Mayans to Disney*, *Art-making from Mexico to China*, and *Mexican Mural Renaissance*.