

Arrieta's Poblans

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The city of Puebla figured prominently in the imagination of prominent Liberal writers such as Guillermo Prieto, Manuel Payno and Ignacio Altamirano. Smaller yet more conflictive than the national capital, bastion of the Catholic Church but also the first highland city to witness newly arriving European tastes, fashions and technologies, the nineteenth-century dialogue between tradition and modernity was more starkly visible in Puebla.¹ From the early 1840s Mexican writers and artists sought to identify the “national” in the customs and costumes of everyday life.² Guillermo Prieto confessed that Mexico City’s cultural complexity defied his efforts to describe the capital’s types and customs:

What I struggle to characterise, but with little success, is the physiognomy of that society, made up of entire sections whose relations to each other, seen close to or from afar, seem completely ill-matched....like small shards of glass that form unexpected and precious shapes in a kaleidoscope, so those various elements form shapes, with the difference that in the

¹ Coral Vicente Colmenares, Arte e Identidad La Pintura Poblana del Siglo XIX (Puebla: Educación y Cultura, 2010), pp.13-14, 92.

² Montserrat Galí Boadella, Historias del bello sexo La Introducción del Romanticismo en México (México: UNAM, 2002), p.504; María Esther Pérez Salas, Costumbrismo y Litografía en México: un nuevo modo de ver (México: UNAM, 2005), and, “Nación e imagen. La Litografía en busca de una identidad: 1837-1855”, in Nicole Giron, Ed., La construcción del discurso nacional en México, un anhelo persistente (siglos XIX y XX) (México: Instituto Mora, 2007), pp.167-214.

kaleidoscope that I have invented, the shapes that appear are monstrous, deformed and opposed to any logical and rational description.³

Puebla, by contrast, was more easily readable to these writers, offering clearer and simpler templates for their “cuadros de costumbres”.

Seat of Mexico’s oldest, wealthiest and most extensive bishopric, regarded as the most “Peninsular” of Mexican *altiplano* cities, Puebla was perceived, perhaps unfairly, as a Conservative bastion.⁴ Liberals knew that the fate of the Liberal revolution and the nation rested on struggles fought out there. Indeed Puebla was literally blasted into the 19th Century in a succession of twelve sieges between 1832 and 1867, many lasting several weeks, which left the city traumatised and its outer barrios in ruins.⁵ Puebla was also the first Mexican city to undergo industrial transformation and the onset of mechanised industry during the 1830s. In successive visits between 1843 and 1870s, Prieto, Payno and Altamirano reflected on how ‘progress’ was changing Puebla; in manners, dress, customs, patterns of consumption, recreational and associational life, politics and religion.⁶

³ “Lo que lucho por caracterizar y no acierto como, es la fisonomía de aquella sociedad heterogénea, formada de secciones completas, pero sin relacionarse con las demás que formaba conjunto a lo lejos y de cerca se componía de lo más disímulo....como las cuentas sueltas de vidrio forman imprevistas y preciosas figuras en un caleidoscopio, así las forman estos elementos enumerados, con la diferencia de que en este caleidoscopio que yo finjo, las figuras que aparecen son monstruosas, deformes y rebeldes a toda descripción lógica y racional”, Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mi Tiempo* (Puebla: Cajica, 1970), p.241.

⁴ Guy Thomson, “The End of the ‘Catholic Nation’: Reform and Reaction in Puebla, 1854-1856”, in *Malcontents, Rebels and Pronunciados. The Politics of Insurrection in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* ed. William Fowler, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011)

⁵ Francisco Javier Cervantes Bello, “Guerra y Iglesia en Puebla, 1780-1863”, in Pilar Gonzalbo Arizpuru and Anne Staples, ed., *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México. Bienes y vivencias. El siglo XIX*, Vol. IV (Mexico: FCE, 2005), p.298.

⁶ Manuel Payno pioneered the *costumbrista* vogue for Puebla in “Un viaje a Veracruz en el invierno de 1843”, published in *El Museo Mexicano* in 1843, and served as a deputy for Puebla on several occasions during the 1870s. Prieto describes his first visit to Puebla in 1849 in “Ocho Días en Puebla. Impresiones profundas de viaje arquitectónico, sentimental, científico y

Helping these Liberals understand Puebla as a laboratory of modernity was José Agustín Arrieta (1803-1874), a local academic painter who developed a line in popular street portraiture during the 1840s. Prieto and Payno visited Arrieta's studio, promoted his work in the capital and venerated him after his death in 1874 as an artist of the people. Arrieta's *costumbrista* portraits achieved what Prieto and Payno aspired to achieve in their writing; a direct and sympathetic engagement with the people set within a didactic, moralising and nationalistic rubric.

More could be said about how Payno and Prieto used Puebla to illustrate the 19th Century dialogue between tradition and modernity, or about their impact on Mexico City's reception of Arrieta, whose work, along with that of fellow *poblano costumbrista* painter, Manuel Serrano, began to be exhibited at the Academy of San Carlos in the early 1850s.⁷ But in this paper I will examine instead a recurrent character in Arrieta's painting; the decoratively dressed, *hispano-mestiza* working woman referred to variously in his titles and the literature of the period as "Poblanas" or "Chinas". Upright, defiant and independent, often targets of seduction and harassment, Arrieta's Chinas are set in kitchens, *zaguanes*, taverns, streets and market places. The paper seeks to explore the moral anxiety expressed in Arrieta's depiction of these independent working women, in relation both to his own life and personality (about which very little is known) and to Puebla's changing urban context over the first three quarters of the 19th C.

estrambótico de 'Fidel'", published in *El Siglo XIX*. Returning again in 1854 (exiled by Santa Anna) Prieto was elected deputy for Puebla in the Congreso Constituyente in 1856-57. He returned again in 1879 to establish Mexico's first Escuela Normal, pondering in eight letters addressed to "Nigromante" (Ignacio Ramírez) published in *La Edición Literaria de la Colonia Española* how Puebla had changed over the middle decades of the Century. Prieto's 1879 letters to Ignacio Ramírez are reproduced in Francisco J. Cabrera, ed., *La Vida en Puebla Crónicas de Fidel* (Mexico: Editorial Libros de México, 1987). Ignacio Altamirano visited Puebla by train in 1869 to attend the celebrations accompanying the opening of the Puebla-Mexico City railway, a visit that inspired *Julia*, a short story telling of a young student's rescue of a *poblana* maiden from convent life during the Summer of 1854, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *Crónica de las Fiestas de Septiembre en México y Puebla, 1869* (Puebla: Gobierno, 1987).

⁷ Xavier Moyssén, "Manuel Serrano, un pintor costumbrista del siglo XIX", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* Vol16, No.64, pp.67-74.



Plate 1. “José Agustín Arrieta, 1803-1874”⁸.

Arrieta was born in 1803 in Santa Ana Chiautempan, Tlaxcala, into a family of “Spanish” (*criollo-castizo-mestizo*) weavers and muleteers established in this largely Indian woollen weaving town since the start of the 18th Century.⁹ The

⁸ “Anónimo”, Homenaje Nacional José Agustín Arrieta (1803-1874), (México: INBA, 1994).

⁹ Efraín Castro Morales, “José Agustín Arrieta, su tiempo, vida y obra”, in Homenaje Nacional José Agustín Arrieta (1803-1874) (México: INBA, 1994). See also Pedro Angel Palou Pérez,

family moved to Puebla in 1806 where, between 1814 and 1818, José Agustín attended the newly founded Academy of Agriculture and Practical Arts (also known as the Academy of First Letters and Drawing) established in July 1813 as a free night school by enlightened cleric José Antonio Ximénez Cuevas.¹⁰ Here he studied under painter Salvador del Huerto (1740-1819) who helped train a talented generation of artists including Manuel López Guerrero, José Manso y Jaramillo, Julián Ordoñez, Salvador del Huerto, Manuel y Mariano Caro and Lorenzo Zendejas. Arrieta returned to teach at the Academy during the 1840s and ended his life teaching painting and drawing to the children of Puebla's *Hospicio de Pobres*.¹¹

In contrast to Mexico's nearly extinguished Academy of San Carlos, Puebla's Academy prospered – on a modest scale - during the 1820s and early to mid 1830s, and again during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Teaching girls, boys and adults, the Academy of Drawing formed part of a grander project promoted by two *poblano* bishops - Antonio Joaquín Pérez Martínez (1814-1829) and Francisco Pablo Vázquez (official Mexican envoy to the Holy See between 1824 and 1831 and bishop from 1831-1847) - to reshape the city as a model of enlightenment, industry and moral revival, a project that included a neo-classical makeover of the Cathedral and many parish churches. During the 1820s and 30s Arrieta was kept busy painting *retablos* and portraits of saints, virgins (including at least four of the Virgin of Guadalupe), prominent churchmen and

Identidad de Puebla, esencia de mexicanidad: José Agustín Arrieta, (Puebla: Gobierno, 2002); Elisa García Barragán, José Agustín Arrieta Lumbres de lo Cotidiano, (México: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1998); Francisco Cabrera, Agustín Arrieta. Pintor Costumbrista (México: Edición del Autor, 1963); Clara Morenos Cortés, El Pintor Agustín Arrieta (México, Tesis de Licenciatura, UNAM, 1978); Vicente Colmenares, Arte e Identidad La Pintura Poblana pp.100-108

¹⁰ Vicente Colmenares, Arte e Identidad La Pintura Poblana, pp.23-30; Montserrat Galí Boadella, "Laminas y tratados franceses en la Academia de Bellas Artes", in Javier Pérez Siller and Chantal Cramaussel, eds., México Francia: memoria de una sensibilidad común, siglos XIX-XX (Puebla: UAP, 1998), Vol.II., pp.365-393

¹¹ Francisco Pérez Salazar, Historia de la Pintura en Puebla México (México, UNAM, 1963), pp.39-40, 105-111.

members of Puebla's republican political elite. He also participated in enlightened associations such as the *Academia Médico-Quirúrgico* and the *Sociedad Patriótica para el Fomento de las Artes*.



Plate 2. José Agustín Arrieta, “La Magdalena”, 1845 (Courtesy of Col. Museo y Galerías José Luis Bello).

Although church patronage dwindled following the political conflicts of the early 1830s the neo-classical makeover of Puebla's churches continued to provide work for Arrieta until the Reform Wars. Private patronage also recovered during a short but startling period of recovery and expansion of Puebla's industrial base during the later 1830s and early 1840s. In particular, Peter Joseph Lang (1797-

1856), German import merchant turned textile manufacturer, appreciated Arrieta's tavern, street and market scenes, several of which ended up in his native Worms.



Plate 3. José Agustín Arrieta, "Escena popular de mercado (Dama)", Oil on canvas, 75 x 93 cm, (Colección Banco Nacional de México).

José Lang, accompanied by his *veracruzana* wife, María de la Luz Pérez y Sarabia (1807-1842) and carefully trimmed poodle, may be observed to the front right of "Escena popular de mercado (dama)" (**Plate 3**) which, although undated, must have been painted before 1838 when José Lang sent María de la Luz to Europe (together with their children and two indigenous servants) for reasons of

ill health.¹² Social portraiture, along with still lifes (*bodegones*), favoured among Puebla's bourgeoisie for decorating their dining rooms, became Arrieta's stock in trade from the early 1840s until the end of his life.

Apart from patronage from a well established German merchant-manufacturer, the European taste for the picturesque must also have influenced Arrieta to broaden his repertoire from religious iconography and elite portraiture to *costumbrista* street, market and tavern scenes.¹³

Lang formed part of the German community of the eastern tableland and would surely have known political exile Carl Christian Sartorius (1796-1872), who settled Mexico in 1824 (a year after Lang's arrival) to farm near Huatusco (Veracruz), eventually founding a German colony. Sartorius's travel account "Mexico about 1850" is richly illustrated by Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858) whose "Poblanas y tortilleras en el portal de un Mercado" (1832-33) confirms that the German artist visited Puebla during his brief sojourn in Mexico between 1831 and 1834.¹⁴ Carlos Nebel's "Poblanas" of the same date suggests that the Poblana, in this case smoking and attracting suitors, was already favoured as a Mexican national type among foreign painters by the early 1830s (**Plate 4**). Nebel's "Poblanas" are reproduced in numerous travelogues over subsequent decades, such as in George Kendall's Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé

¹² Erdmann Gormsen, "Tres pinturas de Arrieta en Heidelberg, Alemania", Estudios y Documentos de la región de Puebla-Tlaxcala I, 1969, 61-70.

¹³ From 1823 until his death in 1856 Lang lived next door to fellow manufacturer and future governor Juan Música y Osorio, Juan Del Valle, Guía de Forasteros (Puebla, 1852), pp.27 & 130. Música y Osorio was also a patron of the arts, establishing in 1844 a lottery to fund Puebla's Academy of Drawing which had for fifteen years been languishing without adequate backing.

¹⁴ When Arrieta's unsigned paintings were "discovered" in Heidelberg in mid 1960s they were at first believed to be the work of Rugendas. Sartorius was a close friend of Carl Ludwig Sand, assassin in 1819 of conservative writer and politician, August von Koyzebue, E Gormsen, "Tres pinturas de Arrieta"; C Sartorius, Importancia de México para la Emigración Alemana (México: Tipografía del Editor), 1852.

Expedition (1844) where they have become “Mexican Girls, Costumes of the Poblanas”.¹⁵



Plate 4. Carlos Nebel, “Poblanas”, (1829-34)¹⁶.

Taste for the picturesque was by no means exclusive to Europeans. During the 1860s distinguished *veracruzano* doctor and art collector Rafael Lucio Nájera (1819-86), based in Mexico City, acquired several paintings by Arrieta.¹⁷ And

¹⁵ George Kendall, Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition, Comprising a Description of a Tour through Texas, and across the Great Southwestern Prairies, the Comanche [sic] and Caygüa Hunting-Grounds, with an Account of the Sufferings from Want of Food, Losses from Hostile Indians, and Final Capture of the Texans, and Their March, as Prisoners, to the City of Mexico. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844, 2 Vols.)

¹⁶ Carlos Nebel, Viaje pintoresco y arqueológico sobre la parte más interesante de la República Mexicana, en los años transcurridos desde 1829 hasta 1834, (México: Librería de Manuel Porrúa, 1963).

¹⁷ Castro Morales, “José Agustín Arrieta, su tiempo, vida y obra”, pp.105-7.

after the artist's death, Puebla's collectors vied to possess work by the now nationally renowned painter recognising that Arrieta's work both embodied their distinctive regional culture and verified the existence of a pole of academicism beyond Mexico City's Academy of San Carlos.¹⁸

Arrieta's costumbrista paintings reflect the social consequences of Puebla's post independence economic decline and interminable military conflicts. The spaces he selects are streets and markets, taverns (*vinatarías*), *pulquerías*, *zaguanes* and kitchens. These are populated by the entire social spectrum: itinerant and squatting Indians, beggars and invalids, children, Chinas (*mestiza* cooks, servants, street traders and tavern keepers), artisans, soldiers, yeomen farmers (*rancheros*, *charros* and *chinacos*), dressy young men (*catrines*), top-hatted gentlemen, silk-shrouded and corseted ladies. Absent from Arrieta's social portraiture is Puebla's large and influential clergy. Also unrepresented are spaces that one would expect such as Puebla's innumerable churches, convents and workshops, or the modern factories that were sprouting up around the city. Arrieta affords us only distant glimpses of the countryside, although the rural is present in the indigenous petty dealers (always seated or in the distance) and decoratively dressed *rancheros*, often presented as defenders of the virtue of the Chinas. The highpoint in Arrieta's popular portraiture was the late 1840s and early 1850s – before the Reform wars and the European intervention - after which he returned to religious themes and elite portraiture. However, his interest in the popular and the everyday continued in his *bodegones* which minutely document the material life of Mexico's second city, displaying a wide range of temperate and tropical flora and fauna, food and drink, crafts, national and imported manufactured goods.

Rather than attempt an overview Arrieta's *costumbrista* work or explore its reception, I will reflect in this paper on his purpose in placing Poblanas as the

¹⁸ Francisco J Cabrera, El Coleccionismo en Puebla (Mexico, Edición del Autor, 1988), pp.11-49.

central characters in his social portraiture, driving the narrative engagement. During the first half of the 19th Century, the Poblana or China, much like the Tehuana (the long skirted and bejewelled Zapotec woman of the Isthmus) during the early 20th Century, was as close to the Mexican national type as any competing image of Mexican womanhood. In Un viaje a Veracruz (1843) Payno defines the China in the past tense:

not the dirty and ragged woman of a tramp (lépero) but a working woman (“mujer del pueblo”) who lived free from having to serve anyone and in certain comfort at the expense of a husband, or a lover, or from the work of her own industry. She belonged to the mestizo race and was distinguished by her tidiness, the beauty of her figure further enhanced by an extremely lively, provocative and picturesque costume, as well as by her graceful and uninhibited walk. If today one of such CHINAS were to appear in the streets, she would draw people behind her and run the risk of being taken by a gendarme to the police station. After having disappeared from Mexico, Chinas remained for a time in Puebla, and that is why they were given the name of *poblanas*. Nowadays this type is only seen in prints, or in wax, rag or clay figures. She tends to reappear on the scene when national dances are attempted: but with necessary alterations of costume.¹⁹

¹⁹ “...no era la mujer del lépero, sucia y desharrapada sino una mujer del pueblo que vivía sin servir a nadie y con cierta holgura a expensas de un esposo, o de un amante, o bien de su propia industria. Pertenecía a la raza mestiza, y se distinguía generalmente por su aseo, por la belleza de sus formas, que realzaba con un traje pintoresco, harto ligero y provocativo, no menos que por su andar airoso y desenfadado. Si hoy apareciera en las calles una de aquellas CHINAS, se llevaría tras sí a la gente, y correría peligro de que un gendarme diera con ella en la inspección de policía. Después de haber desaparecido de México las Chinas permanecieron algún tiempo en Puebla, y de ahí les vino el nombre de *poblanas*. Actualmente sólo se ve ese tipo en estampas, o en figurillas de cera, trapo o barro. Suele aparecer en la escena cuando se trata de ejecutar bailes nacionales: pero con indispensable adiciones del traje”, cited in Francisco J. Santamaría, Diccionario de Mexicanismos (México: Porrúa, 1978), p.391.

Hence, by the early 1840s (just a decade after Rugendas and Nebel had drawn her), and at the moment that *costumbrismo* emerged in Mexican literature and painting, the classic flirtatious, cigar smoking China, even in Puebla, was a thing of the past. Chinas seem to have flourished during the 18th Century but to have disappeared during the first years of Independence in the face of tougher policing, economic decline, stricter social mores and the confinement of “decent” women within the bourgeois household. However they remained as a distinctive provincial type associated with the mestiza women of Puebla although by the 1840s they were referred to more often as Poblanas than Chinas.

Frances Calderón de la Barca, New England wife of Spain’s first Minister to Mexico, would have been unaware of the courtesan associations of the classic *ancien régime* China when she arrived in Mexico in December 1839. Indeed, the “Poblana peasants” she describes upon reaching the Puebla tableland seemed such obvious national types that, upon arriving in Mexico City, she resolved to honour the Mexican republic by attending the New Year fancy dress ball in Poblana costume. Given the historic importance of her husband’s mission this must have been intended as diplomatic gesture, a symbolic end to thirty years of war and conflict with the mother country. The care and detail of her description of a Poblana’s dress further suggests the importance she placed on this gesture.

The dress of the Poblana peasants is pretty, especially on fête-days. A white muslin chemise, trimmed with lace round the skirt, neck, and sleeves, which are plaited neatly; a petticoat shorter than the chemise, and divided into two colours, the lower part made generally of a scarlet and black stuff, a manufacture of the country, and the upper part of yellow stain, with a satin vest of some bright colour, and covered with gold and silver, open in front, and turned back. This vest may be worn or omitted, as suits the taste of the wearer. It is without sleeves, but has straps; the hair plaited in two behind, and the plaits turned up and fastened together

by a diamond ring; long earrings, and all sorts of chains and medals and tinkling things worn round the neck. A long, broad coloured sash, something like an officer's belt, tied behind after going twice or thrice round the waist, into which is stuck a silver cigar-case. A small handkerchief like a broad ribbon, crossing over the neck, is fastened in front with a brooch, the ends trimmed with silver, and going through the sash. Over all is thrown a reboso, not over the head, but thrown on like a scarf; and they wear silk stockings, or more commonly no stockings, and white satin shoes trimmed with silver.

This is on holidays. On common occasions, the dress is the same, but the materials are more common. At least the vest of silver is never worn; but the chemise is still trimmed with lace, and the shoes are satin.²⁰

After seeking advice from her *poblana* acquaintances in the capital on how to dress "à la poblana", Frances Calderón prepared for the party. Meanwhile, a full cabinet - including the Ministers of War and the Interior – was convened to convince her to abandon the idea. For the wife of the first Spanish Minister to be impersonating a Poblana was considered too scandalous, particularly the Poblana's habit of revealing ankles and not wearing stockings.²¹

For Arrieta, much in the spirit of Frances Calderón, the choice the Poblana as a subject, first in portraits (**Plates 5**) and later in his *costumbrista* paintings, was both a democratic and a patriotic statement. Far from scandalous, Arrieta's Poblanas are morally upright. Indeed his social portraiture fits well with the didactic moralising – *morigeración* or inculcation of good behaviour – that

²⁰ Frances Calderón de la Barca, *Life In Mexico* (London: Dent, 1960), pp.45-46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 76-77. For the social pressure on women not to display their feet and ankles during the 1830s and 40s, Monsterrat Galí Boadella, *Historia del Bello sexo. La introducción del Romanticismo en México* (México: UNAM, 2002), pp.222-33

permeated Puebla's public life and echoed across the city's pulpits during this period.²²

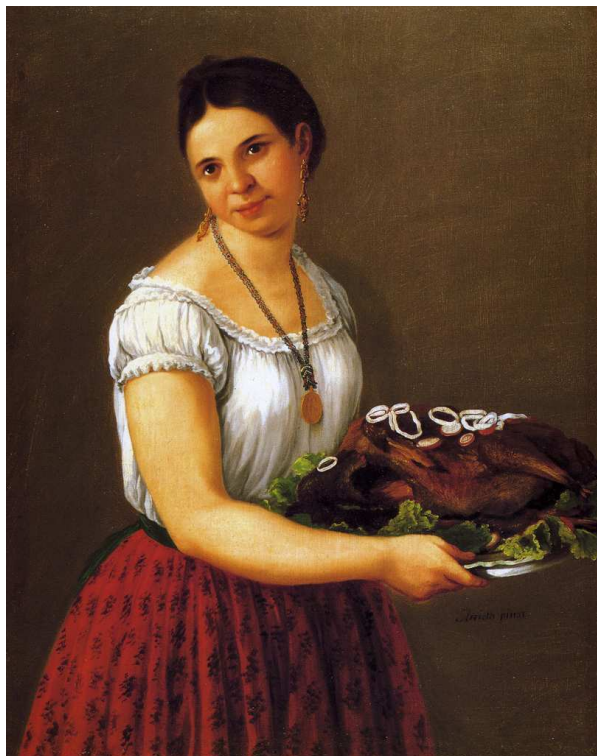


Plate 5. José Agustín Arrieta, "China poblana", n.d., (Private Collection²³).

²² Donald Stevens has suggested that Bishop Pablo Vázquez and his clergy retained a greater confessional hold over their parishes during the 1830s and 40s compared with their counterparts in Antequera de Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí and, especially, Mexico City, where the hold of priests over parishioners had lapsed since the 18th Century (in contrast to the strict moral surveillance exercised by the Sulpician order over Montreal's parishioners), Donald F. Stevens, "Lo revelado y lo oscurecido: la política popular desde los archivos parroquiales," in Brian Connaughton, Carlos Illades and Sonia Pérez Toledo, eds. *Construcción de la Legitimidad Política en México* (Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1999), 207-27, "Temerose la ira del cielo: los Conservadores y la religiosidad popular en los tiempos de cólera," in Humberto Morales and William Fowler (eds.), *El Conservadurismo Mexicano en el Siglo XIX (1810-1910)* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1999), 87-103, and, "Eating, Drinking, and Being Married: Epidemic Cholera and the Celebration of Marriage in Montreal and Mexico City, 1832-1833," *The Catholic Historical Review* 92, No.1 (January 2006), 74-94.

²³ Despite every effort being made it has not been possible to trace the owners of this image to ask permission to reproduce it. The owners are asked to contact the editors about appropriate crediting or any other issues related to its use.

The difference was that in Arrieta's paintings the clergy is nowhere to be seen. Biblical references are evident, however, in otherwise secularised scenes of everyday life. In "China y Dos Locos" (**Plate 6**) a saintly China carrying a lunch basket appears to have answered the prayers dedicated to "The Shadow of Señor San Pedro" which the beggar is holding in his hand.



Plate 6. José Agustín Arrieta, "China y dos Locos", n.d, (Private Collection²⁴).

²⁴ See footnote 23, p14.

Arrieta depicts Chinas as unaccompanied, self-reliant working women, identifiable by their florid shawls and skirts and by their visibility in public spaces. Their dress bears some resemblance to the loose republican garb of the 1810 and early 20's and contrasts sharply with the dark, corseted, Victorian livery favoured by elite women by the 1840s. Chinas traditionally had worn (and, as Frances Calderón observed in 1839, still wore at fiestas) heavily embroidered and sequined blouses and shawls and much jewellery. Post-independence austerity and sobriety, combined with a taste for cheaper calicoes evident in flower printed scarves and skirts, had simplified their attire with only faint echoes of the ancien regime courtesan remaining in their visible ankles and small feet (from the 1830s elite women hid their ankles and feet). Arrieta's Chinas also belied Victorian modesty by exposing their arms, shoulders and necks. Yet they are not coquettish, even if they are frequently the targets of male seduction.

Clearly identifiable by their dress, Arrieta's Chinas are always engaged in some kind of exchange, dialogue or violent encounter; buying, selling, resisting soldiers' embraces, shielding themselves from an abusive partner, ignoring unsolicited advice whispered by toothless old ladies. Their gaze is often beyond the scene or directed at the viewer. Even if they are not placed centrally in the picture, Arrieta's Chinas are always central to the narrative.

Arrieta deploys the same, limited team of actors to perform fairly consistent roles in his social portraiture. Chinas display, apart from the rare alcohol-induced slippage (See Figure 2, *Tertulia de pulquería*, in Deborah Toner 2010, *Arara No.8*, p.4: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/arhistory/arara/pdfs/toner.pdf>), moral fortitude or calmness in the face of danger and misfortune (Plates 3, 7, 8-9,10 & 6). Old women are portrayed as malign influences (Plates 7, 11) (Arrieta shared Payno and Prieto's contempt for widows and elderly women).²⁵ Soldiers are

²⁵ Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, 1985), pp.137-140.

generally bad and rapacious (**Plates 7, 8**). Top-hatted and black cloaked *catrines* are either lecherous or simply neutral observers of the popular scene (**Plate 3**). Elite ladies are afforded some dignity, although their aristocratic detachment - safe within their battleship-like dresses - dramatises the danger confronting the Chinas (**Plate 3**). Artisans and beggars (**Plate 6 and Figure 2, *Tertulia de pulquería*, in Toner 2010**), although beset by poverty and misfortune, display a dignity, individual character and truculence that suggests Arrieta's identification with this "jacobino" group (in **Figure 2, *Tertulia de pulquería*, in Toner 2010**, Arrieta, in the act of removing his hat, stands at the back right, detached from a raucous artisan parliament). Children are presented as semi-wild and lacking moral guidance (**Plate 7**). Finally, *rancheros* are depicted as defending the honour of beleaguered Chinas (**Plate 9**), holding forth in taverns (**Plate 12**) or receiving the Chinas' preferred attentions (**Plate 11**).



Plate 7. José Agustín Arrieta, "Escena popular de mercado con soldado", n.d., (Courtesy of the Museo Nacional de Historia, INAH, México).



(above) Plate 8. José Agustín Arrieta, "El requiebro", n.d. (private collection²⁶);

(below) Plate 9. José Agustín Arrieta, "Intervención", n.d. (private collection²⁷).



²⁶ See footnote 23, p14.

²⁷ See footnote 23, p14.



Plate 10. José Agustín Arrieta, "Cocina poblana", n.d., (Courtesy of Museo Nacional de Historia, INAH, México).



Plate 11. José Agustín Arrieta, "La pensativa", 1851, (Private Collection²⁸).

²⁸ See footnote 23, p14.



Plate 12. José Agustín Arrieta, "Interior de una pulquería", n.d., (Courtesy of Museo Nacional de Historia, INAH, México).

What, then, was Arrieta attempting in his social portraiture? What accounts for the moral outrage evident in so many of his paintings? When announcing the publication of the first of his "Cuadros de Costumbres" in 1845, Guillermo Prieto defined his objective:

If our prime aim is, as I believe it should be, social moralisation, if the real spirit of a regenerating revolution must be a moral one, portraits of customs acquire a supreme importance in placing before the eyes of the common people, albeit beneath a smiling veil of happiness and among the

foliage of a wise criticism, this shocking picture of confusion and disorder which we witness today.²⁹

Prieto's view of *cuadros de costumbres* as moralising manifestos for "the common people", those suffering most from the disorders of mid 19th century Mexico, fits Arrieta's social portraiture well.

We know very little about Arrieta's life; his family, social and political milieu or religious beliefs. His father, a barber surgeon, was deaf from birth. He was the seventh of nine children, and the only one to survive infancy. In 1826 the young artist married María Nicolasa Lorenza Varela y Molina, a nineteen year old *poblana* who bore four children over the next six years, none of whom survived infancy. María Nicolasa figures in several of his street paintings. Devastated by her death in 1869 José Agustín moved to an apartment on the roof of the state congress, from which he received a pension as concierge.³⁰

Arrieta's social portraiture reveals his moral anxiety about a city afflicted by half a century of violent political conflict and crisis afflicting its artisan industries. Decline hit women's employment in textiles particularly harshly. From occupying an estimated fifteen thousand mainly women on eve of Independence, cotton and wool spinning had collapsed by early 1820s.³¹ In "La Hilandera", written two

²⁹ "Si la primera de nuestras necesidades, como yo creo, es la de la morigeración social, si el verdadero espíritu de una revolución verdaderamente regeneradora ha de ser moral, los cuadros de costumbres adquieren suma importancia aunque no sea más que poniendo a los ojos del vulgo, bajo el velo risueño de la alegría y entre las flores de una crítica sagaz, este cuadro espantoso de confusión y desconcierto que hoy presentamos", cited in Carlos Monsiváis, 'Guillermo Prieto: Cuadro de Costumbres', in Boris Rosen Jélomer, ed., Guillermo Prieto Obras Completas, II, Cuadro de Costumbres 1 (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993), p.33.

³⁰ Castro Morales, "José Agustín Arrieta", pp.35-106.

³¹ Guy P.C. Thomson, Puebla de los Angeles: Industry and Society in a Mexican City, 1700-1850 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1989), pp.99, 218-26.

years after his first visit to Puebla in 1843, Payno spoke of spinners in the past tense:

Women dedicated themselves out of choice to this occupation, and earned through it an honourable subsistence. The plate (**Plate 13**) which accompanies this article gives a correct idea of the spinner. Tidily dressed, in their curious national costume, they have represented up to a certain point a privileged class, due to their law-abiding customs and constant laboriousness and rare skill in manufacturing.³²



(left) Plate 13. “La hilandera”, 1845, (see footnote 32); (right) Plate 14. “Lino”, 1849 (see footnote 33).

³² “Las mujeres se dedicaban de preferencia á esta ocupación, y ganaban con esto una honrada subsistencia. La lámina que se acompaña á este artículo da una idea cabal de una hilandera. Aseadas, con su curioso traje nacional, han formado hasta cierto punto una clase privilegiada, por sus costumbres morigeradas y su constante laboriosidad, y su rarísima habilidad en las manufacturas”, M.P., “La Hilandera”, Revista Científica y Literaria (México, 1845).

Attempts during the 1830s by the enlightened bishop Pablo Vázquez to foster linen spinning and weaving as a solution to women's unemployment – promoted in the press at the time as a moralising activity for widows and wives³³ – were unsuccessful (**Plate 14**).³⁴ Puebla's single women were further imperilled by the closure of several asylums for unprotected women operated by religious orders and private entrepreneurs throughout 18th and early 19th centuries.³⁵ Hence Arrieta witnessed the complete destruction of Puebla's principal source of female employment obliging *poblanas* to seek their subsistence in streets, taverns and markets.

Puebla suffered a more profound and traumatic post independence economic decline than Mexico City, prompting a flight of many males to the “barrio de los poblanos” in Mexico City and into the army. Censuses reveal higher levels of widowhood and a greater gender imbalance in Puebla than in Mexico City, particularly the weaving and artisan barrios, the city remaining a major source of recruitment into the regular army throughout the thirty years following independence.³⁶ Hence, Puebla's women had mostly to fend for themselves; retreat into a protected private sphere – the 19th century bourgeois ideal – was as an opportunity available only for the few. Silvia Arrom and Marie Francois have shown that the Hospicio de Pobres and the Monte de Piedad in Mexico City catered mainly for socially endangered members of the capital's middle and upper class, and not for the poor or the propertyless.³⁷ Puebla's Hospicio, in any case, was too heavily indebted during the 1840s and 1850s (having sunk its

³³ “El Lino”, El Album Mexicano (México: Cumplido, 1849) Vol.1, pp.566-8.

³⁴ Thomson, Puebla de los Angeles, pp.272-3.

³⁵ Josefina Muriel, Los Recogimientos de Mujeres (Mexico: UNAM, 1974), pp.148-75.

³⁶ Thomson, Puebla de los Angeles, pp.160-87; Arrom, The Women of Mexico City, pp.98-153.

³⁷ Silvia Arrom, Containing the Poor: The Mexico City Poor House, 1774-1871 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Marie Eileen Francois, “Welfare for Middle-Class Housekeepers: Mexico's ‘Monte de Piedad’ in the Nineteenth Century”, Paper presented at the International Economic History Conference Helsinki, August 2006, and, A Culture of Everyday Credit, Housekeeping, Pawn-broking and Governance in Mexico City, 1759-1820 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

capital fund in a failed project to establish a paper factory) to be able to offer significant support the adult female poor, attending mainly to orphans and foundlings.³⁸

Following the abolition of guild restrictions in 1813, women's share of employment in the artisan trades and retailing experienced no significant increase in Puebla, as in the capital.³⁹ Indeed, with the collapse of the traditional textile industry, followed by its mechanisation, opportunities for women's employment deteriorated appreciably. The 1852 Guia de Forasteros shows significant female management in the food and drink sector: many of the thirty three *vinaterías*, 120 *pulquerías*, thirty nine *lecherías*, eighty four *figones* (small restaurants) and 310 *casillas* (selling tobacco) would have been operated by women. Women still worked in textiles: the forty *riveteadoras* finishing hats were probably female, as were all four makers of rag dolls (Chinas modelled in rag were an early Mexican souvenir item). In education eighty five "amigas" (school mistresses working from their homes) were responsible for the care and education of 2338 girls and over 500 boys.⁴⁰ But most women who, due to widowhood or poverty, were obliged to support themselves, were confined to areas of employment not listed in the Guia de Forasteros such as street and market selling, laundry, sewing and domestic service.

Conclusion

Arrieta presents Puebla's Chinas as embattled and unprotected in the face of numerous dangers, much like the Mexican Republic. He was concerned above all with the plight of decent middling women, much as were the directors of

³⁸ Thomson, *Puebla de los Angeles*, pp.272-3.

³⁹ Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City*, pp.154-205.

⁴⁰ Juan N. del Valle, Guia de Forasteros de la capital de Puebla, para el año de 1852 (Puebla: Imprenta del Valle, 1852).

Mexico City's Monte de Piedad and the Hospicio de Pobres. Indian women are always background figures who, apart from selling and purveying food from their seated positions on the ground, hardly enter the narrative (**Plates 3, 7, 12**). Arrieta's Chinas embody *hispano-mestiza* moral resistance and entreat national regeneration.

In their self defence Arrieta's Chinas deploy a range of facial expressions, bodily strategies and social alliances. One strategy is to seek the protection of the *ranchero*, much celebrated as a national archetype during this period.⁴¹ Arrieta's representation of the *ranchero* as a possible guardian of the Chinas' honour and his depiction of soldiers as almost always idle, arrogant and abusive are measures of Mexico's war weariness by the early 1840s. Puebla's anti-militarism was dramatised on 3 Dec 1844 when several popular barrios, tired of forced military recruitment, rose up in rebellion against the Santa Anna government, seconding Paredes y Arrillaga's Plan de Guadalajara. Leading the *plebe* was one Francisco Pastrana, "mounted on a dark horse", who succeeded in lassoing a bust of Santa Anna perched at the top of a high column. Attaching the rope to his ornate saddle he succeeded in toppling the dictator's head into the river Alcececa from where he hauled the bust to the Plaza Mayor to be stoned by the *plebe*. Although not a *ranchero* but an urban tailor, a native of Puebla's Barrio de Santa Cruz, Pastrana was described as "much taken to mounting fine horses and dressing as a charro".⁴² Pastrana's action tallies with Arrieta's depiction of the *ranchero* as a redemptive force.

⁴¹ Domingo Revilla, "Costumbres y Trages Nacionales Los Rancheros", El Museo Mexicano (México: Cumplido, 1845), Vol.III, 551-9; "Rancheros" La Ilustración Mexicana (México: Cumplido, 1851) Vol. I, 129-131; a *ranchero* gazes confidently and possessively across at a China on the frontispiece of Los Mexicanos pintados por si mismos (1854), Pérez Salas, Costumbrismo y Litografía, p.300 .

⁴² "Muy afecto a montar buenos caballos y a vestir de charro", Antonio Carrión, Historia de la Ciudad de Puebla de los Angeles (Puebla: Cajica, 1970) Vol. II, pp.291, 316.

Although Arrieta generally placed his Chinas at the centre of his *costumbrista* narratives, on one occasion the artist himself took centre stage. In “Interior of a Pulquería” (**Plate 12**), Arrieta - in *charro* dress - holds forth, his tongue loosened perhaps by the small glass of pulque served by a China standing, as if to bolster his authority, close behind him.⁴³ Next to the artist a friend sits in a mood of extreme concentration. Sitting across the table in the foreground a *ranchero* and a soldier face each other on the same bench, locked in an argument which Arrieta appears to be moderating. Behind the soldier hovers a priest selling indulgences, ignored by all. Seated across the table from the priest Indian slumps in stupor, oblivious to the animated debate. Squatting on the ground, an Indian woman passes a plate of *chalupas* – in national colours - to the outstretched hand of the *ranchero*.

⁴³ The bacchanalian symbolism of this painting is analysed by Deborah Toner, “Xochitl’s Bar: Pulquerías and Mexican Costumbrismo”, *ARARA* (Art and Architecture of the Americas), No.8, 2010, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/arara/pdfs/toner.pdf> .