

## *Décimas Dedicated to Santa Anna's Leg*

*Anonymous*

*The ornate funeral ceremonies that General Santa Anna ordered performed in 1842 for his leg, which was lost fighting the French at the Battle of Veracruz in 1838, are often seen as the culmination of that caudillo's vainglory and megalomania. After being amputated, the leg spent four years buried at Santa Anna's hacienda, Manga de Clavo, in the state of Veracruz. When Santa Anna resumed the presidency in late 1841, he had the limb dug up, placed in a crystal vase, and taken amid a full military dress parade to Mexico City, where it was buried beneath an elaborate monument in the cemetery of Santa Paula. The funeral involved cannon salvos, speeches, and poems in the general's honor. As recounted by Guillermo Prieto in the previous selection, irreverent crowds in 1844 demolished the monument, dug up the leg, and played games with it.*

*Such events provided grist for broadsides known as décimas, predecessors of the popular topical ballads known as corridos. Décimas were often satirical in tone, and they represented a variety of viewpoints. The following décimas present divergent viewpoints on the matter of Santa Anna's leg.*

*1.*

*Why should anyone criticize  
If a funeral is performed  
for the foot, arm, or hair  
of an illustrious General?*

*Passions always tarnish  
merit with malevolence  
and really do not wish  
true merit celebrated;  
So answer quickly  
and with confidence:  
Why should we not honor  
merit in the lifeless limb*

of a great and heroic caudillo?  
*Why should anyone criticize?*

To make this fitting obsequy  
 to a sacrificed limb—  
 not to the man, but to what he has given  
 fearlessly for the Fatherland—  
 it would be unjust,  
 ungrateful, foolish and disloyal  
 to claim it is not lawful and right  
 that a lone foot have  
 a tomb or mausoleum,  
*that a funeral is performed.*

Did Artemisia not hide  
 the ashes of Mausolus<sup>1</sup>  
 in her breast and believe this  
 the only remedy?  
 She did her duty.  
 So today Mexico erects  
 a tomb reaching to the sky,  
 covering with ardent hope  
 a jewel of History,  
 and giving glory  
*to the foot, arm or hair.*

There is a maxim which states  
 a cherished principle:  
 If one kisses the hem of a robe  
 it is because of the Saint who wears it;  
 thus, it is not for the foot itself, on the contrary,  
 though traitors may complain,  
 that we say, for good or ill,  
 "Viva!" and be assured  
 that the people are grateful  
*to an illustrious General.*

II.

*Nothing in life is permanent,  
 God alone remains,  
 so the things of this world  
 are here today and gone tomorrow.*

If we search through all of history  
 we will not find a single soul  
 whose triumphs and glory  
 last for all eternity.  
 Even so, our memory  
 of great heroes is eternal;  
 though no one can be constant  
 in their conduct or their lives  
 for until death arrives,  
*nothing in life is permanent.*

Such may be said of Santa Anna's foot  
 which was placed in Santa Paula  
 with such solemn  
 pomp and majesty;  
 and today the Mexican populace,  
 after rising in rebellion,  
 full of enthusiasm and zeal,  
 took the foot from the sepulchre;  
 so it is clear that on the earth  
*God alone remains.*

At that hour and moment  
 the foot's owner was far away;  
 but around here his FOOT was  
 walking around with the rebels.  
 It is certain that no one  
 felt any pain from this;  
 but I believe  
 that such an unthinkable act  
 could only have been done by  
*the things of this world.*

At other times this foot  
 was earnestly respected;  
 but that was when its owner  
 still held us in subjugation;  
 today the people have treated it  
 like a dirty old bone,  
 because the nation  
 no longer wishes to stand for it;

because, in the end, good and evil  
*are here today and gone tomorrow.*

*Note*

1. Mausolus: Persian satrap who ruled over Caria from c. 376–353 B.C. Known for his personal aggrandizement, he designed a splendid tomb for himself which his wife, Artemisia, built after his death. He thus gave his name to the mausoleum. *Ed.*