THE NEW MEXICAN GAME OF *VALSE CHIQUIAO*

Rubén Cobos

One of the most interesting forms of entertainment among the Spanish-speaking folk of rural New Mexico is that of exchanging verses at a dance. This is done in the game known as *valse chiquiao*, or simply *chiquiao*,¹ and takes place as a novelty interlude at almost any country dance. Unfortunately, the *valse chiquiao* is now being pushed aside in favor of other forms of entertainment and is gradually being forgotten, especially by the younger folk.

The name *valse chiquiao* is derived from two New Mexican words: *valse*, for waltz, and the adjective *chiquiao* < *chiquiado*, from the verb *chiquiar* (*chico*, child + *-iar*, to treat like a child, to pamper, to coax). The term *chiquiao* points to the nature of the game in which one of two participants (a dancing couple) allows herself or himself to be coaxed on to dance.

After the dancers have enjoyed an hour or so of regular dance pieces, the *bastonero*, or master of ceremonies, announces a *valse chiquiao*, and places an ordinary chair (the New Mexican *silleta*²) in the middle of the dance floor. The musicians then play a slow waltz and the *bastonero* looks among the dancers for a prospective couple to start the game. When he spots the couple of his choice he addresses the dancers in verse:

1. De estos dos que andan bailando
si mi vista no me engaña,
anda bailando la reina
con el príncipe de España.

Of these two young people dancing
If my eyes do not deceive me,
One must be the queen herself
Dancing with the prince of Spain.

He then asks the young lady to occupy the *silleta* and motions to her escort to start the game by coaxing his partner from her chair. The young

man's entreaty must be expressed in verse and must be complimentary enough to gain the desired objective: to get the occupant of the chair to give it up so that the dance may continue. Throughout the dancing of the waltz the bastonero keeps on stopping the music and may call on as many as a dozen young ladies to take the silleta and afterwards, when the young women have had their chance at being coaxed, he may call on as many young men to sit down and, in turn, be coaxed by their lady friends.

The game of valse chiquiao is intended to amuse those present with the wit, quality (or lack of quality) and variety of the verse exchanged, as well as with the manner of delivery on the part of the participants. Sometimes, for example, a willing swain gets stage fright and will forget his lines to the delight of the audience and the embarrassment of his date.³

The following stanzas are some of the favorite opening quatrains of the chiquiao.

2. Estrellita reluciente
perla fina de la mar;
levántate de ese asiento
que otra se quedará⁴ sentar.

Little star shining so bright
Loveliest pearl of ocean blue,
Won't you now yield your place
To another fair as you?

3. Con licencia de la gente
dos abrazos te he de dar;
como soy hombre prudente
huerita,⁵ ven a bailar.

With everybody's permission
I'm going to give you an embrace;
Won't you come and join the fun
With your happiness and grace?

4. A orillas de una laguna
prendí una vela al momento;
si quieres bailar conmigo
levántate de ese asiento.

Candlelight that led my way
Through the woods beside a lake;
Won't you give in to my plea
And come dancing for my sake?

If the young lady refuses to give up her chair, the young man may try a little harder:

7. Eres bella como el sol
hermosa como la luna;
hay estrellas en el cielo
pero como tú ninguna

You're as lovely as the moonlight
Or like sunshine on the dew;
There are countless stars above
But, my dear, none like you.

Or he may recite:

8. Esta sala está medida
con cien yardas de listón;
en cada esquina una rosa
y en medio mi corazón.

This hall looks very charming
In its lovely decoration;
In its center I can see
The object of my affection.

However, if the young lady likes the verse just recited, she may arise and answer:

9. Vamos bailando bonito
hasta que amanezca el día;
una rosa americana
y una rosa de Castilla.

Come and dance until dawn
Let us dance once again,
Lovely American rose
Dancing with one from Spain.

Sometimes, the occupant of the *silleta* is on the dance floor against her will, that is, she may be dancing with her partner only through mere courtesy. Under these circumstances a girl may refuse to give up her place and so exasperate her escort that the latter may resort to disrespect.

10. En la puerta de mi casa
 está un árbol de cirguela;
 no te chiqueyes⁶ conmigo,
 chiquéyate con tu agüela.

Right outside my doorstep
 We have a tender plum tree;
 Don't play hard to get, my dear,
 Don't play hard to get with me.

If the girl feels like being cutting in her remarks to the young man, she may retort:

11. ¡Quién hubiera pensado
 que contigo iba a bailar,
 para haberte retratado,
 sapo del calabazar!

Had I known an ugly toad
 Was to have this dance with me,
 I would have taken your picture
 And what a picture it'd be!

Occasionally, someone has his or her feelings hurt with the sarcasm of the verse or with the reproof of a partner's looks or personal appearance, as in the quatrain just cited, and an aware bastonero may call off the chiquiao in order to avoid any trouble that may arise as a consequence.

For the most part, as we have seen above, the verse used in the Chiquiao is complimentary only to the point of achieving a desired objective; however, the participants may exploit the opportunities offered by the game to convert it into a perfect means to a wonderful end; that of openly declaring their love for one another:

12. Quisiera ser pajarito
 pero no de los azules;
 para ir a estarme contigo
 sábado, domingo y lunes.

I wish I were a wren,
 Or better still, a jay;
 Then I could be with you
 All hours of the day.

The following quatrains are all essentially love poetry and are recited mostly by young people engaged to be married, by newlyweds, or by husband and wife:

13. La ausencia para el amor
es lo que el aire pal fuego;
si es chico se apaga luego,
si es grande, arde mejor.

Absence is to love, my love,
As air to that flame out yonder;
'Tis away from you I know
That "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

14. Rubio color de lirio,
boquita de azúcar inglés;
si ese amor es mío,
muéstramelo de una vez.

Goldenrod and lily white,
My love so pure and fine;
If your love, then, be my love
Tell me so but lose no time.

15. Bonita flor de Castilla,
blanca flor de garambullo;
a dondequiera que tú vayas
mi corazón será tuyo.

Lovely rose of old Castile,
Whiter than chokecherry flowers,
Wherever you may go, my love
You won't find a love like ours.

A suitor may actually propose with an appropriate quatrain such as:

16. Cupido me lo ha mandado
que solecite tu amor,
para casarme contigo
todo cabe en una flor.

Cupid, god of love
Has asked me to propose;
As a token of my love
I now offer you this rose.

or:

17. ¡Qué bonito estás creciendo
como una mata de trigo;
ya me estoy aparejando
para casarme contigo.

Your are blossoming, my dear,
 Like the wheat at harvest time;
 I am anxious to be with you
 Just to ask you to be mine.

His proposal may be accepted with a kiss to seal the bargain:

18. Ojitos negros
 color café;
 dame un besito
 de buena fe.

Little brown eyes
 Bright as the stars above
 Come, give me your kiss
 True token of love.

or he may be turned down unceremoniously:

19. ¡Qué bonito estás creciendo
 como una mata 'e mostaza;
 ya me estoy apreviniendo
 para darte calabazas.

I am blossoming, 'tis true
 But to me you're just a clown,
 And without further ado
 I'll just have to turn you down.

In classifying the verse used in the game of valse chiquiao one can say that most of it falls into one of the following categories: (1) amatory verse which includes most of the complimentary verse treated above (Verses 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18); (2) verse of scorn with which either one or both of the participants scorns the other (Verses 10, 11, and 19); and (3) documentary verse mentioning some aspects of the game of chiquiao, such as the address of the bastonero to the dancing couples or the effort of one partner to get the other to give up the silleta (Verses 2, 3, 4), or the placing of the occupant of the chair in the middle of the dance floor (Verse 8), or yet still the custom of decorating the hall with "*cien yardas de listón*" (Verse 8). In addition to these categories we can add a fourth class: humorous verse, no examples of which have been included, but which is often expressed at these functions by a participant in high "spirits."

As to the form of the verse used in this game, most of it consists of four octosyllabic lines with assonance in the second and fourth lines.⁷

Another common stanza form, the sixain, uses six lines with assonance in the second, fourth, and sixth lines.

As it has already been pointed out, it is most unfortunate that such a quaint practice of exchanging poetry at a dance should be given up; however, the valse chiqueiao, along with other manifestations of New Mexican Hispanic folklore, must give way to newer forms of popular expression. As far as the modern young New Mexicans of Spanish ascendancy are concerned, the *valse chiqueiao* is hardly understood; it is far too old fashioned when the "old ones" engage in it, and must definitely be supplanted. These young New Mexicans would much rather dream away in rhythm and blues or come to life with some jitterbug or bop!

NOTES

¹ The *chiqueiao* is also known as the *valse de la silleta*, or *valse versia*. The latter term alludes to the practice of reciting verses.

² New Mexicans prefer to use the word *silleta*, diminutive of *silla*, for chair and reserve the word *silla* to refer to the riding *silla*, or saddle.

³ According to some of the informants, the young people of the village get together on the afternoon of a particular dance and go over as many as two or three hundred quatrains as a safeguard against all possible situations that evening.

⁴ *Quedrá* is the New Mexican form for the standard Spanish *querrá*.

⁵ *Huerita*, diminutive of *huera* is a Mexicanism now widely used in New Mexico instead of the Spanish *rubia* for blonde.

⁶ The New Mexican verb *chiqueiarse* is equivalent to the standard Spanish idiom *hacerse de rogar*, to like to be coaxed.

⁷ A.M. Espinosa has an extensive article on the New Mexican *versos in Hispania*. XVIII (1935), 135-150.