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**Derision and Desire: The Ambivalence of Mexican
Identity in American Literature and Film**

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Para mis padres,

Aurora y Abelardo Alonzo

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**Derision and Desire: The Ambivalence of Mexican
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Concentrating on twentieth-century literature and film, the dissertation reads representations of Mexican identity in terms of the ambivalent points of repulsion and attraction which they reveal, rather than as simply “negative” or “positive” stereotypes. Drawing upon Homi Bhabha’s analysis of stereotypical discourse, I interrogate the stereotype’s limits in the Mexican subject’s multiple representational postures. The stereotype’s anxious repetitions demonstrate the impossibility of a fixed or original identity and expose the stereotype as part of a representational apparatus. Acknowledging the necessity of Chicano/a critiques of stereotypical discourse begun in the sixties, I depart from the insistence that stereotypes only negatively determine subjectivity and propose that seemingly negative depictions express desire as well as derision.

The study places literature and film in conversation because, from its inception, the cinema has relied upon literature for its narrative and stereotypical tropes. Furthermore, by placing literature and film in comparative tension, I demonstrate the contradictions produced by “negative” stereotypes. I focus on the “greaser,” *bandido*, and “bandit revolutionary,” characters who appear in 1800s conquest fiction and endure in contemporary novels and films. In chapter one, the Mexican is a subject of admiration in Stephen Crane’s short stories, and a subject of derision and desire in D. W. Griffith’s early Westerns. Chapter two links the United States’ response to the Mexican Revolution and the consolidation of the Western film genre as determinant events in the hardening of stereotypical discourse from 1910 to 1920. This hardening, nonetheless, is belied by an ambivalent relation to the Mexican subject, as the Western cowboy mimics the Mexican *vaquero*.

Chapter three submits that the “bandit revolutionary” in 1930s to 1950s film signals repulsion and attraction, depending on the U.S. imaginary’s psychic and ideological projections. From the perspective of Mexican American literature, Américo Paredes’s *The Shadow* (1955), responds to the cinema’s facile categorizations of Mexican identity. Chapter four positions Sergei Eisenstein’s film, *Qué Viva México!* (1932), and Katherine Anne Porter’s short story, “Hacienda” (1935), within an alternative poetics of Mexican identity representation. The concluding chapter, which examines Jim Mendiola’s film,

Come and Take it Day (2002), proposes contingency and hybridity as the defining elements of Chicano/a identity. Together, the texts I analyze exemplify the importance of seeing beyond negativity in racial representation.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	xi
Introduction	
Stereotypical Ambivalence in the Representation of Mexican Identity	1
Chapter One	
From Derision to Desire: The Greaser in Stephen Crane's Mexican Stories and D. W. Griffith's Early Westerns	36
Chapter Two	
Greaser Bandit and Bandit Revolutionary: The Conflation of Mexican Identity Representation, 1910-20	83
Chapter Three	
Stereotype, Idealism, and Contingency in the Revolutionary's Depiction	124
Chapter Four	
Alternative Revolutionary Poetics: Eisenstein and Porter in Mexico	167
Chapter Five	
Hybridity and Contingency in Contemporary Chicano/a Cinema	231
Bibliography	261
Vita	276

List of Figures

Figure 1.	
Final frame of the “Fiesta” episode, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i> (Courtesy of International Film Exchange, Ltd., 1979)	200
Figure 2.	
First frame of the “Maguey” episode, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	200
Figure 3.	
María’s smile in the “Maguey” episode, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	207
Figure 4.	
Porfirio Díaz’s stern countenance in “Maguey,” from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	207
Figure 5.	
First frame of the “Eyes” sequence in “Maguey,” from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	209
Figure 6.	
Second frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	209
Figure 7.	
Third frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	210
Figure 8.	
Fourth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	210
Figure 9.	
Fifth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	211
Figure 10.	
Sixth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	211
Figure 11.	
Seventh frame of the “Eyes,” sequence, from <i>Qué Viva México!</i>	212

Introduction

Stereotypical Ambivalence in the Representation of Mexican Identity

En Sanjo you'd see him
sporting a dark topcoat
playing in his fantasy
the role of Bogart, Cagney
or Raft.

. . . .

An Louie would come through—
melodramatic music, like in the
mono—tan tan taran!—Cruz
Diablo, El Charro Negro! Bogart
smile (his smile as deadly as
his vaisas!) He dug roles, man,
and names—like “Blackie,” “Little
Louie . . .”

from “El Louie,” by José Montoya

Louie Rodriguez, the subject of Montoya's poem, stands as an exemplary figure of hybridity and cultural exchange. With *pachuco* style and affect as his only discriminating criteria, Louie incorporates American and Mexican popular cultural forms, principally film, to create mixed and multiple identities. Louie celebrates the roles of his favorite actors and characters, who make up the palette for his subjective formation, allowing him to live “like in the / mono [movie].” Louie's ability to incorporate characters exemplifies the contingency of cultural identity in the U.S. In Renato Rosaldo's analysis, Louie is a “playful persona whose whimsical fantasies join together old things in new ways. His distinctive

cultural practices personify a certain Chicano gift for improvisation and recombination The result is not identity confusion but play that operates within, even as it remarks, a diverse cultural repertoire”(215-16).¹ Montoya’s line, “He dug roles, man,” demonstrates the pleasure to be derived at the site/sight of the subject’s representation, even when that representation carries potentially negative determinations, as in the formation of stereotypes. Montoya’s poem initiates a dialogue between American and Mexican identities on the one hand, and between film and literature on the other. The formation of identities and the productive intersection of film and literature in the articulation of said identities make up the principle concerns of my dissertation.

Derision and Desire argues that the representation of Mexican identity may be productively read in terms of its ambivalent or contingent status. Acknowledging the importance and necessity of Chicano/a critiques of the stereotype begun in the sixties and seventies by such writers as Raymund Paredes and Arthur Pettit, I depart from the insistence that stereotypes only negatively determine subjectivity. For instance, as recently as 1993, Rosa Linda Fregoso, in her exemplary study of Chicano/a cinema, *The Bronze Screen*, takes as given that “[n]egative representations about Chicanos originated during the first moving pictures”(xvii, italics mine). While this assessment is incontrovertible, to stop at the recognition of a “negative” representation does not tell the whole story.² Drawing upon Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial analysis of stereotypical discourse, I

propose that rather than seeing images as “positive” or “negative,” we examine instead the ambivalent points of revulsion and attraction within representations of Mexican identity. By emphasizing the ways in which the stereotype’s anxious repetitions reveal the impossibility of a fixed or original identity, Bhabha helps us understand that the stereotype is a construct, part of a representational apparatus. The stereotype must repeat itself to establish certain “truths” about the ethnic subject, but its repetitions produce a multiplicity of meanings or truths, which cannot all equally stand within the stereotype’s logic. Revealing the stereotype’s multiplicity finally enables “a transgression of [its] limits” by the very subjects who are “at once the object[s] of desire and derision” (*The Location of Culture* 67). Indeed, because the stereotype cannot reliably point to the subject’s identity, it is possible to read it in a “contradictory way”(70). Interpreting the stereotype in a contradictory or resistant fashion permits the subjects of its determinations to escape its often derogatory reasoning.

My theoretical perspective reads cultural identity as emerging out of lived cultural practices rather than from predetermined cultural essences. This is an insight that contemporary post-Chicano/a Movement thinkers have made; Renato Rosaldo, for instance, notes the “demise of self-enclosed, patriarchal, ‘authentic’ Chicano culture,” accompanied by a playful “improvisation and recombination” of diverse traditions (*Culture and Truth* 149, 215). By distinction, the unique contribution my dissertation offers is that the contingency of Mexican-American

cultural identity is not necessarily a new phenomenon, as Rosaldo implies. In fact, we see its expressions in the early work of Américo Paredes, and even in the work of non-Mexican writers such as Stephen Crane and Katherine Anne Porter. In literature, therefore, these writers respond to the ambivalence of ethnic representation by demonstrating that contingency is its complement.

In order to focus my analysis, I concentrate upon the representation of one particular figure, the Mexican male in three significant cinematic and literary incarnations: I examine the Mexican as greaser and bandit, as revolutionary, and as “bandit revolutionary.” The villainous Mexican male appears as early as 1840s conquest fiction, but his enduring presence is owed to the concurrent emergence of the cinema in the U.S. at the turn of the century and the eruption of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. The Revolution, then, constitutes the point of departure from which I initiate a dialogue between film and literature, and it will lead me to alternative readings of film stereotypes. The Revolution is important for historical as well as formal and aesthetic reasons. The historical causes of the Revolution, as James Cockcroft has argued, include the continuance of a dependent, neo-colonial relationship between U.S. business interests and the government of Mexico (85-114). Due to its failures, the Revolution exacerbated the relationship of dominance and subordination between Anglo-American culture and Mexican culture on both sides of the border. This relation of dominance, as José Limón recognizes, “bears some similarities to classic examples of world

colonialism”(“Tex-Sex-Mex” 614), and this colonial relation is borne out in the ways that stereotypes are used to pejoratively define the Mexican threat. In the realm popular culture, the revolution and its figures form the iconic material from which cinematic stereotypes of greasers, bandits, and revolutionaries take their inspiration.

Contrary to expectations, however, my examination of the Mexican Revolution and the stereotypical deployments of its figures does not merely decry the deprecatory subjectification of the Mexican, though this does not escape notice. Instead, I look at contradiction, slippage, and ambivalence in Mexican identity representation. Beginning with turn-of-the-century adventure stories and silent-Westerns, I challenge accepted assumptions that early representations of the Mexican are simply stereotypical and “negative.” My recognition of ambivalence thus makes way for the re-imagination of a previously elided Mexican—and, by extension, Mexican-American—history and identity.

Homi Bhabha introduces the idea of ambivalence in “The Other Question,” as he discusses the production of the stereotype in colonial discourse. He argues that if “[t]he object of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction”(70), then the stereotype is a key apparatus of dominance utilized by the colonial administration. Yet Bhabha undermines the now conventional understanding of the stereotype as

it has been conceptualized since Gordon Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). This view holds that stereotypes “are primarily images within a category invoked by the individual to justify either love-prejudice or hate-prejudice”(189). Allport’s view, in other words, gives the stereotype a strict binary quality: it is either an exaggeration of all that is deemed “positive” in an object or, in our contemporary way of understanding the stereotype, it is a representation of all that is “negative” in an object.

Bhabha begins his discussion of the stereotype by likening it to the idea of “fixity,” a fixity clearly present in Allport’s either/or construction. In order to sustain dominance, the colonial discourse is dependent “on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness”(66). In Bhabha, “fixity” is a form of representation that permits the Manichaeian oppositions between the white Self and the colored Other: the colonizer is awarded the qualities of good and the colonized the qualities of evil, and this construction demands that the polarity between Self and Other remain fixed in place. Because the appearance of movement or variance in the representation of Self and Other can only subvert the possibility of colonial domination, fixity becomes an obsession. While “fixity” implies rigidity and static qualities, it also implies a fix-ation or fear that must endlessly be repeated in order to reassure itself, and it is in its repetition that fixity marks its impossibility: “[f]ixity, as the sign of cultural / historical / racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of

representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition”(66). Bhabha therefore draws a homology between the idea of fixity and the idea of the stereotype: both concepts move between “what is ‘in place’, what is already known, and something that must anxiously be repeated.” Thus, the stereotype, as a form of knowledge that must continuously be repeated, “can never really, in discourse, be proved”(66). And it is here, in its impossible fixity, that Bhabha sees the stereotype as an ambivalent and vacillating form of discourse.

What is most useful in Bhabha’s analysis is that he reads in the stereotype the possibility of a “*productive* ambivalence” in “that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision”(67). In Bhabha, ambivalence operates in two ways. Initially, it “is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization”(66), and thus makes possible the subjectification of the colonized Other. In its ambi-valence, ambivalence makes possible continuously changing representations of a supposedly unchanging, fixed Other. But ambivalence also contains an internally subverting function, signaled here by Bhabha’s use of the modifier “productive”: he reads in the stereotype a “*productive* ambivalence” because “such a reading reveals . . . the boundaries of colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of that otherness”(67).

We may take Bhabha's productive reading of the stereotype's ambivalence as the point from which to initiate a conversation on Mexican stereotypes in Anglo-American films. In my analysis, I employ the term "stereotype" without necessarily implying that it contains a derogatory connotation, though it often does. Stereotypes, as Allport recognizes, may be "positive" or "negative." Nevertheless, it is necessary to move away from the notion that stereotypes are either positive or negative because such judgements presuppose established standards of positivity or negativity, a "real" reality against which to compare stereotypes. I agree with Bhabha when he notes that the "analytic of ambivalence questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination . . . the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse"(67). The question of *plausible processes of subjectification* is an important one because it asks the Chicano/a spectator to judge images not against an essential and unwavering past identification, but in the context of present (but also possibly past), changing, and future subjective formations.

To judge the stereotype in relation to a presupposed Chicano/a reality or "truth"—what Bhabha calls a "prior political normativity"(67)—sets up a binary between positive/negative, real/unreal images that inverts the original Manichean

dialectic of the stereotype. If, initially, white equals good and colored equals evil, then the inverted dialectic states that white equals evil and colored equals good. Like the original dialectic, the inverted dialectic depends on “fixed” notions of identity, and these notions are locked in unchanging past traditions. While a reference to past traditions has specific tactical purposes, past traditions cannot entirely account for present and future articulations of subjectivity. If tradition is necessarily renewed by the present circumstances of culture, then the polar and insistent negation of the stereotype fails to make this renewal possible. To negate the stereotype against a transcendent realist standard does nothing more than reproduce the stereotype, albeit in an inverted form—we simplistically move from “hate-prejudice” to “love-prejudice.” As Bhabha illustrates, the stereotype, “as the primary point of subjectification . . . for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture”(75). My argument, then, is that both colonizer and colonized are subjectified within the stereotype’s “desire for an originality,” perhaps especially more so when we resort to arguments about positive or negative stereotypes.

The positive or negative reading of stereotypical images, what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call “stereotypes and distortions” analysis (178), or “image” analysis (220), demonstrates a marked tendency toward a demand for realism.

Shohat and Stam thus support Bhabha's insights as they bring us to media images such as film.

Much of the work on ethnic/racial and colonial representation in the media has been "corrective," devoted to demonstrating that certain films, in some respect or other, "got something wrong" on historical, biographical, or other grounds of accuracy. While these "stereotypes and distortions" analyses pose legitimate questions about social plausibility and mimetic accuracy, about negative and positive images, they are often premised on an exclusive allegiance to an esthetic of verisimilitude. (178)

While viewers and critics are "invested in realism because they are invested in the idea of truth, and reserve the right to confront a film with their own personal and cultural knowledge," too strict a demand for realism assumes that the experiential perspective from which a realist critique is launched is itself "unproblematic, transparent, and easily accessible"(178). The demand for realism also confuses the idea of realism as a cinematic strategy—the production of an "illusionistic 'reality-effect'"—with realism as a cinematic goal "compatible with a style which is reflexive and deconstructive"(180). Shohat and Stam point us to alternative (i.e., non-realistic) modes of representation in the ideological production or contestation of the real. An unnuanced insistence on the image as positive or negative, as realistic or unrealistic—listing the negative stereotypes in a film, for example—ignores an analysis which takes into account the "orchestration of

ideological discourses and communitarian perspectives”(180) within, as well as outside, film narrative.

Moving beyond a thumbs up / thumbs down perspective on the question of realism, Shohat and Stam develop the possibility for a Bakhtinian analysis of film which

reformulates the notion of artistic representation in such a way as to avoid both a naïve faith in ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. . . . Human consciousness and artistic practice, Bakhtin argues, do not come into contact with the ‘real’ directly but rather through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. Literature, and by extension, cinema, do not so much refer to or call up the world as represent its languages and discourses. (180)

By moving away from an analysis of positive and negative images to an analysis of ambivalence within stereotypical images, I make a similar discursive move.

Additionally, by putting literature and film in dialogue with one another, I show how one allows us to contradictorily read the other. Bhabha’s own analysis of the stereotype follows a loose Bakhtinian approach, what Robert Young calls

“Bakhtinian hybridization” in *White Mythologies*(146).

For Bhabha, Orientalism does not simply amount to a representation which may or may not correspond to ‘real’ conditions He takes seriously Said’s claim that Orientalism is a ‘discourse’, and therefore utilizes the technical apparatus of discourse analysis. Orientalism may be

a representation but it also takes part in an entire discursive field, any consideration of which, he argues, must include the question of enunciation, that is, of who is speaking to whom. It cannot be assumed that representations are just static entities which may or may not correspond to the ‘real’—because they must always also form part of an address, whether written or spoken, with a specific addresser and addressee. (142)

Shohat and Stam agree with Young’s analysis and implicitly point to the congruence between Bhabha and Bakhtin when they note that the latter

rejects naïve formulations of realism . . . without abandoning the notion that artistic representations are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social Indeed, for Bakhtin art is a historically situated “utterance”—a complex of signs addressed by one socially constituted subject or subjects to other socially constituted subjects. (180)

Shohat and Stam also broaden the sense of the moment of enunciation: “the privileging of the discursive allows us to compare a film’s discourses not with an inaccessible ‘real’ but with other socially circulated cognate discourses forming part of a continuum—journalism, novels, network news, television shows, political speeches, scholarly essays, and popular songs”(215). As I argue below, the question of enunciation, which is also the question of address and addressee,

is tied to the strategy of reading and contesting the ambivalence of stereotypical discourse.

Following Shohat, Stam and Bhabha, one of my aims is to open a conversation about U.S. film which critiques the “traditional reliance on the stereotype as offering, *at any one time*, a *secure* point of identification;” my goal is to examine the possibility that “*at other times and places*, the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way, or, indeed, misread”(Bhabha 69-70). By offering contradictory readings of Mexican-American stereotypes, we may articulate Mexican-American identity formations that are not limited—as in the inverted dialectic—by an absolute negation of Whiteness, nor, for that matter, by an essentialist conception of Mexican-ness.

Bhabha provides several examples of the stereotype’s ambivalence, but he does not delineate oppositional strategies for subverting the stereotype. In the discussion that follows, I theorize upon and supply practical examples of such contradictory and subversive readings. Bhabha is concerned in “The Other Question” with proposing “in a very preliminary way, that the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis as well”(70). A close investigation of this and other essays reveals a set of related psychoanalytic concepts that open a space for subverting stereotypical representation. Because

the stereotype is an “arrested, fixated form of representation”(75), it locates the subject in an impossible fixed point of origin which may be so identified because it seems timeless—even as it subtly changes over time. A reading of the ambivalence within the stereotype is a reading that destabilizes the stereotype’s ability to deprecatorily define. Significantly, although not necessarily, the contradictory reading is applied by precisely those subjects who have been “fixed” by the stereotype.³ Although there is a long history of resistance to stereotypical representations—see, for instance José Limón’s 1973 “Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance”—stereotypical subversions as forms of resistance are less well-documented.

Stereotypical subversion is made possible by the psychoanalytic process of subjective “splitting,” a central concept in Bhabha’s analysis of colonial relations. Splitting, in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, is the site of the subject’s coming to conscious being by way of a primal separation.

The birth of the subject involves a traumatic separation from the maternal matrix. The gap between mother and child deepens when the name of the Father intervenes. By barring a return to the mother, the father makes the infant’s loss irrecoverable. The incest taboo promulgated in the name of the Father effectively castrates the son. . . . In Lacanian calculus, “\$” designates the split subject produced by primal repression. Never identical with itself, the faulty subject is haunted by an unknowable Other.

An “outside” that is “inside,” this Other hollows out the place of desire.

(Taylor 101)

Splitting marks a crucial moment in subjective self-awareness. It is a problematic yet necessary moment of pain and separation that leads to individuation, troubled though that individuation may be.

Bhabha employs the idea of splitting in his analysis of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, a text in which he sees an analogous primal scene in sites of colonialist racial differentiation and discrimination. In one of these “myths of origin of the marking of the subject within the racist practices and discourses of a colonial culture,” Bhabha recounts the instance when a

white girl fixes Fanon in a look and word as she turns to identify with her mother. It is a scene which echoes endlessly through his essay ‘The fact of blackness’: ‘Look, a Negro . . . Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened.’ ‘What else could it be for me’, Fanon concludes, ‘but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood.’

(qtd. in Bhabha 75-76)

Like the moment of subjective splitting, this instance of colonial splitting draws the subject apart, but in a more violent manner. The second instance of splitting Bhabha analyzes is perhaps more significant for the object of my study. Bhabha recounts the moment in Fanon when “the child encounters racial and cultural stereotypes in children’s fictions, where white heroes and black demons are

preferred as points of ideological and psychical identification”(76). The significance of the second instance of splitting is that it occurs in the precise encounter between the colonized Other and cultural representation. The Other is given a complex choice: identify with the “black demon” whose physiognomy is like yours, or, more probably, reject blackness, hence yourself, and identify with the “white hero,” whom you definitely do not resemble. Either choice splits the colonial subject.

Significantly, Bhabha draws a strong analogy between, in the first instance, subjective splitting at the scene of maternal separation and sexual prohibition, and, in the second instance, colonial splitting at the scene of racial discrimination and stereotype production. This analogy links the concepts of gender and race in a manner that may richly complicate our readings of stereotypes. Bhabha goes so far as to argue—as he does in the homology between the stereotype and the concept of fixity—for a “reading of the stereotype in terms of fetishism,” for which he provides “both a structural and functional justification”(74). Structurally, fetishism, “as the disavowal of difference, is the repetitious scene around the subject of castration”; functionally, fetishism is “always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness / similarity . . . and the anxiety associated with lack and difference”(74). This oscillation between affirmation and negation of sexual/racial difference produces

“multiple and contradictory belief,” and makes “that threatened division”(75) or splitting all the more powerful.

My argument, then, is that splitting opens the way for the strategy of subversive reading. If the “role of fetishistic [and stereotypical] identification . . . is to provide a process of splitting,” it also then provides “*multiple / contradictory belief at the point of enunciation and subjectification*”(80 emphasis mine). The above statement is a key connection between the process of splitting and the possibility of contradictorily and subversively reading the stereotype, for splitting is not just a sundering of the subject, it is also a doubling, a multiplying of the subject. Note Bhabha’s emphasis on enunciation. Robert Young argues that “the question of enunciation demonstrates the operation of a subject already. Enunciation directs attention to ‘the repertoire of conflictual positions that constitute the subject of colonial discourse’”(Bhabha qtd. in Young 142). In other words, that “point of enunciation and subjectification” implies the presence of a possibly active and resistant subject. I argue in my project that the subject of colonial discourse—the Mexican as stereotypical “bandit revolutionary” in the following example—is a conflicted, split subject, and it is its splitting that contains the possibility of multiple enunciatory positions, by way of performance in this case. Bhabha’s analysis, however, does not conceptualize subversion in an active fashion—at least not in “The Other Question.” He notes that in “this crucial splitting of the ego,” the subject is an “effect of stereotypical discourse:

the subject is primordially fixed and yet triply split between the incongruent knowledges of body, race, ancestors”(80). The use of the passive voice implies a subject who is acted upon, not an active subject.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the stereotype’s easy categorizations and alignments of, for example, white/colored and good/evil, are “disturbed by the representation of splitting in the discourse”(81). This disturbance is apparent in one particular instance in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, a collection of essays and dialogues among artists and cultural theorists in which Bhabha participates. In one of these dialogues, participants discuss the Hottentot Venus, the nineteenth-century African woman who was put on display throughout England in order to ‘prove’ the essential animality of Africans. Renée Green, a visual artist whose art comments on the Hottentot Venus, states:

I was trying to figure out the way in which a body could be visualized, especially a black female body, yet address the complexity of reading that presence without relinquishing pleasure or history. I used a clinical engraved image of the Hottentot Venus, a combination of texts by critics of Josephine Baker and a nineteenth century traveller’s text. . . . These elements in combination were intended to stimulate viewers into imagining in-between spaces: in-between what is said and what is not said

and ways of being that didn't quite fit into what seemed to be the designated categories. (146)

I see in this appropriation of the Hottentot Venus's image an effective strategy of subversive reading and historical reclamation. Green takes the iconic text of the Hottentot Venus, and through a series of re-articulations alters the possible understandings of this particular black body.

In this same dialogue, Bhabha expresses his interest in "the way in which the work of Renée Green and Lyle Ashton Harris . . . tried to both play and turn that image around. I wanted to understand how this might have come out of different understandings of that icon"(150). Harris responds that his interest is

in returning to the idea of the body, and asking the body to speak with a vengeance. *Venus Hottentot 2000* [another appropriation of the image] is a collaboration between myself and artist Renée Valerie Cox. This reclaiming image of the Hottentot Venus is a way of exploring my psychic identification with the image at the level of spectacle. I am playing with what it means to be an African diasporic artist producing and selling work in a culture that is by and large narcissistically mired in the debasement and objectification of blackness. (150)

Green, Bhabha and Harris read the image of the Hottentot Venus otherwise. As a repository of colonialist stereotypes of the Other, the Hottentot Venus demonstrates a certain "fixity," but she also demonstrates ambivalence. In an

interview with W.J.T. Mitchell, Bhabha argues that “there are certain regimes of sense, discourse, governmentality, and polity that function in and through the ambivalent social relations created in the social and discursive act of splitting.” He adds that both colonizer and colonized are “constituted through splitting,” but that the “split doesn’t fall at the same point in colonized and colonizer.” Crucially, this differential split “allows . . . the colonized the strategy of attempting to disarticulate the voice of authority at the point of splitting”(82). The moment of disarticulation is coterminous with the moment when the Other recognizes him- or herself in the stereotype.

In subverting the stereotype’s ambivalence, a new understanding takes place, and it brings with it a new subjective formation, which is what Green is after when she imagines “ways of being that didn’t quite fit into what seemed to be the designated categories.” Significantly, she does not elide given histories and “knowledges,” but takes these and renovates them through creative juxtapositions. What begins as a negative moment of splitting, moves to recognition, subversion, and finally, renewal.

Stuart Hall calls cultural renewal an “imaginative rediscovery” of cultural memory and identity. Green’s cultural reclamations are forms of “imaginative rediscovery” because in any “*re-telling* of the past,” there is necessarily a creative act of “*production* of identity”(222). Hall contrasts the idea of imaginative rediscovery with the realist tendency that concerns itself with tracing back exact

essences or origins; this tendency seeks to un-cover the “real” cultural formations that the stereotype has missed. Imaginative rediscovery differs from the kind of activity that attempts to “excavate, bring to light, and express”(221), in a reflexive fashion, “true” and “authentic” cultural formations. Imaginative rediscovery contains an active sense that the search for authenticity does not; it represents a sense in which cultural identity “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being.’” Hall acknowledges that “[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories”(223). At the same time, however,

like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (223)

Hall’s statement is important for two reasons. First, “rediscovery” and “reclamation” do not signal the recovery of an essential identity that exists in the past; they acknowledge the mediating role of history, as well as the possibility of transforming those past identity formations that seem essential and unchanging. Second, Hall’s statement succinctly calls attention to the congruence with Bhabha. This congruence revolves around anti-essentialist notions of culture:

Bhabha's "productive ambivalence" helps us unhinge the "fixity" of the stereotype, while Hall's "imaginative rediscovery" gives us access to dispersed, and sometimes obliterated, marginal histories.

I self-consciously use the pronoun "us" to signal an array of subject positions: "us" as ethnic subjects, as critical spectators, as cultural critics, and as artistic producers. Our subject positions depend, in part, upon "our positions of *enunciation* . . . though we speak . . . of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless, who speaks and the subject who is spoken of are never exactly in the same place"(Hall 220). This displaced positionality intensifies when someone else speaks for us, as in the Hollywood narratives that speak for the Mexican subject. This is the subject position Bhabha calls "the space of that otherness"(67). The series of related concepts I have thus far introduced allow us, as those Other spectators, to speak precisely from a space of otherness in transformative ways.

Shohat and Stam point to that Other spectator's resistant reading as one dialogical avenue through which alternative readings of film texts may emerge: "spectators themselves come equipped with a 'sense of the real' rooted in their own experience, on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representation. In this sense, the cultural preparation of a particular audience can generate counter-pressure to a racist or prejudicial discourse"(182). Like the literature and film I place side by side, the spectator is another member

of the broad constellation of discursive exchanges which allow us to think about Mexican American subjective formation. It is our initial response as spectators that may allow us to “look beyond caricatural representations to see the oppressed performing self;” subsequent viewings of stereotypical representations may permit us, “in a kind of double consciousness,” an enjoyment despite what we “know to be misrepresentations”(182). This enjoyment recalls the pleasure in Louie’s appropriations of cinematic representations in “El Louie.” It is through a double consciousness and critical enjoyment we see the stereotype’s ambivalence.

We can now place the spectator’s subversive readings and subsequent cultural renovations of Mexican identity representations in relation to contemporary identity formations. My first example of subversive reading derives from a private context—although representation, we should recall, is always public. I vividly recall that as a child I spent many Saturday afternoons watching American Westerns with my father. As is well known, it was the usual practice in the Western to use Mexican actors to play Native American characters, perhaps because by that time there were very few Native Americans in urban California, perhaps because there was a cheaply available workforce of Mexicans to play bit parts. On Saturdays my father and I watched these films, and upon the first appearance of the Indian, my father would customarily say, “*el es mexicano*,” he is a Mexican. The statement was usually uttered in a non-judgmental, purely observational tone, but the consistency of its utterance served as a positive

reminder of the Mexican presence, specifically in Hollywood, and more generally, in the U.S. While affirming this disguised Mexican presence behind the stereotyped image of the Indian may seem naïve, I think my father was pointing less to the representation than to the corporeal presence of the Mexican actor. My father well understood that in the Hollywood Western, the Mexican appears as bandit or fool, so pointing to the Mexican “Indian” was a way for him to note that Mexicans could play other roles, albeit similarly denigrated ones. A Mexican playing an Indian was, for my father, proof of the quality of Mexicans’ acting skills. My father was saying, in other words, that *mexicanos* are not the content of the stereotyped images held of us.

At the level of subversion, my father’s affirming of the Indian on the screen was perhaps an affirmation of our oftentimes deeply repressed indigenous identity. While the stereotyped image of the Indian “splits” the Native American spectator, my father, because of his own repressed Native American identity, could have easily distanced himself from the Indian. Yet, instead of disavowal, these images produced avowal. The recognition of the suppressed Mexican beneath the image of the Indian contains a double and reversing avowal which points to an even greater possibility for Hall’s “imaginative rediscovery” of subjectivity: the deeply repressed Indian subject appears on the surface of the screen while the Mexican subject is recognized behind the surface, on the body of

the actor. Reading the Mexican in the Indian, then, allows Mexicans to imaginatively reclaim their indigenous heritage.

The above anecdotal history of reception demonstrates the myriad private ways in which public representations of Otherness may be read. My father was taking his resistant knowledge of the Mexican stereotype, re-reading the stereotype of the Native American, and affirming the fleeting presence of his Mexican-ness, beyond the stereotypes of the Mexican bandit and of the Indian that were given him. This was one way my father misread the stereotype; another way he did so was by taking the side of the Indian, no matter how un-heroic his representation. My father's critical stance contained a "different historical and (mass) cultural vision" of his place in American culture. This vision is one which creates a "space for an alternative narrative of what can now be called the ethno-racialized cultures of displacement"(J. Saldívar, *Border Matters* 7). My father's own displacement, of course, occurred in his immigration to the U.S., and a second displacement occurred when he found himself relatively erased on screen. His subversion of the stereotype, therefore, provided the means by which he could re-inscribe his "alternative vision" within dominant American discourses.

Contradictory readings may take on different forms; My father's are those of the Other's encounter with the stereotype's "fixity." Yet another example of subversion begins from the point of enunciation, when the Other is forced to enunciate itself in a deprecating fashion. This occurs in John Huston's *Treasure*

of the Sierra Madre (1948), where the Mexican bandit/revolutionary appears. *Treasure*'s subversions serve as a second introductory example of my object, theory and method.

By the time the image of the bandit appears in this film, its stereotype in American cinema has already undergone several alterations. As Charles Ramírez Berg tells us, the popular image of the bandit appears early in the twentieth century, in "silent 'greaser' films . . . but his appearance continues in a long list of Westerns and adventure films"(83). After the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, the stereotypical bandit iconography as we understand it today begins to dominate: the bandit is recognizable by "the unkempt appearance, the weaponry and *bandolero* bullet belts, the funny-looking sombrero, the sneering look"(8). What occurs in some Westerns set in the 1800s, is the "historically inaccurate and anachronistic"(9) insertion of an image whose historical origin is the 1910s. More to the point, this is an image whose revolutionary import is completely evacuated by the negatively-valenced criminal stereotype of the Mexican *bandido*.

The bandit makes a cameo appearance in *Treasure*, and he comes at us with full stereotypical—and actual—guns blazing. He shows up, predictably, to take all he can, whether it is money, gold or guns. In the most memorable scene of the film, Gold Hat (Antonio Bedoya) and his band of cutthroats stumble upon Fred C. Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart) and company as they prospect for gold.

Initially, Gold Hat claims he and his group are *federales*, the Mexican army, in search of vaguely alluded to insurgents. When Dobbs asks to see their badges, Gold Hat scowls and famously responds, “Badges? We ain’t got no badges. We don’t need no badges. I don’t have to show you any stinkin’ badges.” And with this, the shooting starts.

The film uses the stand-off for comic relief, and the stereotype of the bandit is the joke’s central core. While I agree that *Treasure* is not merely “another Hollywood foray into stereotypical Mexico” because it “depicts a fairly broad sampling of Mexican society” and ultimately constitutes “a critique of U.S. imperialism in Mexico”(Ramírez Berg 101), the notion of the bandit as comic buffoon persists. In a discussion concerning the stereotype’s endurance, for example, Ramírez Berg “question[s] whether *any* use of such an oft-repeated and well-known stereotype can exist without in some ways serving to reinforce it”(86). One reason stereotypes are used is because they contain a “valued narrative economy . . . they require little or no introduction or explanation”(46). In *Treasure*, the implication of the stereotype’s narrative economy is that the viewer already knows the bandit’s story, already knows that he is treacherous, unintelligent and a buffoon. The bandit is, in other words, the joke we are already in on. The film humorously depicts Gold Hat: he is shown in tight close-up with sweaty, dirty brow, a large *sombrero*, and full mustache. He grimaces, he laughs loudly, he opens his mouth wide and leans back. His features and actions are

distorted. He wears a bandoleer. Humorously, Gold Hat is shot through his hat, an action that in Freudian terms symbolizes castration—and subjective splitting.

The stereotype's persistence—its continuing “fixity”—contains, at the same time, a countervailing impulse, and ambivalence. What fascinates me in the bandit's appearance is that his stereotype builds and builds until it can no longer sustain its distortions. In part, Bedoya's individual performance reveals the ambivalence. Ramírez Berg sees actors such as Lupe Velez and Gilbert Roland as examples of Latinos “who have resisted stereotyping, resisted as much as they could while being caught within the grip of Hollywood's stereotypical filmmaking conventions”(102).⁴ Bedoya's acting produces similar results, but I would add that it is the spectator's ability to critically read the stereotype that makes the circuit of subversion complete. In the film, the bandit is not merely a mean, grotesque, and comic figure. This bandit stares straight at the camera and defies the signifying system's attempt to fix him as an inferior figure. His laughter is especially subversive, for it seems aimed at the very audience who may be comfortable with his fixed inferior status. Bhabha writes that “in the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always an alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject”(81). In his close-ups, Gold Hat returns the colonial gaze, and his laughter is as defiant as it is comical. In this scene, three separate subversions occur. First, the Mexican

actor's ability to inhabit himself outside the stereotype starts the circuit of critique. Then, the Mexican spectator's recognition of Mexican subjectivity outside the stereotype's fixity furthers it. Finally, the destabilizing stare of the Mexican subject escapes colonialism's administrative apparatus, creating a space for "creative rediscovery."

Gold Hat's anti-colonial posture also has its correlate in contemporary Mexican-American social movements, where we see a transformation of the bandit's comic speech. The unforgettable "We don't need no stinkin' badges"—Mel Brooks riffs on this line in *Blazing Saddles*—was recently taken up as a slogan by civil rights groups in California in their protest against anti-immigration measures. In response to the government's demands for "proper" identification from all Latino/as, American citizens included, the group held up signs that read, "We don't need no stinkin' badges." The phrase, therefore, uttered by a comical, stereotyped figure, acquires political dimensions through a complicated series of re-readings.

As these examples show, my dissertation follows José David Saldívar's imperative as he delineates the project of Chicano/a cultural studies.

Chicano/a cultural studies . . . must begin to place greater research emphasis on the ways in which *our* lived memory and popular culture are linked—on how the postmodern shocks of electronic mass media create a crisis of "absolutist" paradigms of national culture and [how] collective

memory frames the production and reception of commercial culture. To paraphrase [Fredric] Jameson and [George] Lipsitz, while new technologies certainly lend themselves to new forms of exploitation and oppression. . . , they also have utopian uses as new forms of resistance and struggle. (35, italics mine)

The *our* in the Saldívar's statement is significant because he is talking specifically about Chicano/a lived memory and popular culture. My dissertation expands what it means to say *our*. Jameson and Lipsitz's argument is not limited to the way "we" use "new technologies," nor, for that matter, to only new forms of exploitation. Their argument may be expanded to the ways in which dominant cultural products themselves tend to imprison us. The production of ethnic stereotypes, for example, continues to define Mexican-Americans in denigrating ways. Because these dominant cultural productions exploit us, they may also be reworked and used, if not to set us free, then certainly to demonstrate our irrepressible presence in American culture.

My project reads the ambivalence of film stereotypes, and "re-discovers" forms of memory that are useful for Mexican-Americans. My proposed practice is important because the stereotype gives us entry into film texts in a way that permits critique, as past "images" criticism has done, but also in a way that allows us to reclaim the images and overlay them with more productive readings. I also bring Mexican, Mexican-American, and Anglo-American literature—what we can

now call an inter-American or Greater Mexican⁵ literature—in dialogue with film; I see in such a dialogue yet another possibility for the production of cultural memory. Delineating the interactions between film and literature permits an unfixing the stereotype. If, as Ramírez Berg indicates in conversation, the stereotype is an iconic shorthand for the repressed and disfigured histories of the ethnic subject, then the dialogues between film and literature may help us rewrite these erased histories so as to allow us to imagine a more complicated Mexican subjectivity. Literature, as a form of cultural memory, can help us counter the stereotype's fix-ations. The following chapter outline describes the ways I bring film and literature together in order to fully theorize the ambivalent character of stereotypes and the contingent quality of Mexican-American identity.

In chapter one, "From Derision to Desire: The Greaser in Stephen Crane's Mexican Stories and D. W. Griffith's Early Westerns," I examine Mexican representation at the turn of the century. Crane's adventure stories have long been alleged to reproduce the worst of the nineteenth-century dime novel traditions. In contradistinction, I argue that Crane's stories demonstrate an indirect regard for the Mexican in their negation of Anglo-American heroic conventions. At certain moments, furthermore, Crane shows manifest admiration for the Mexican. For Griffith, the Mexican is a subject of both derision and desire. In such films as *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908), Griffith presents a subject—derogatorily identified as the greaser—who is at once villainous and heroic in his actions. Unlike his

unremitting assaults upon African-Americans several years later in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Griffith makes room for the greaser's redemption, as Jose the greaser recalls his Catholic values and rescues a woman in the final scenes of the film. The movie, however, is not without its contradictory ideological practices, as the Mexican must be repatriated to his country in order to make space for the Anglo-American hero in the West.

In chapter two, "Greaser Bandit and Bandit Revolutionary: The Conflation of Mexican Identity Representation, 1910-20," I link the United States' response to the Mexican Revolution and the consolidation of the Western film genre as determinant events in the "hardening" of stereotypical Mexican representation during the period 1910-1920. Though the Revolution inspired many American writers to reassess Mexican character, its vilification by right-wing forces—business interests, media conglomerates, the Hearst newspapers—ensured that the Mexican would appear during the teens as a villainous bandit. Simultaneously, the emergence of the Western hero in film required the creation of a character against whom this hero could fight. Hollywood simply borrowed from the dime novels of the eighteenth century to recreate the stereotypical Mexican bandit. Notwithstanding this hardening, I also contend that this period is not without an ambivalent relation to the Mexican subject, as the Western cowboy mimics an earlier Mexican *vaquero*.

Chapter three, “Stereotype, Idealism, and Contingency in the Revolutionary’s Depiction,” examines the films *Viva Villa!* (1934) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952), and once again suggests that the “bandit revolutionary” signals both attraction and repulsion, depending on the ideological needs of American political discourse. From the perspective Mexican-American literature, Américo Paredes’s novella, *The Shadow* (1998 [1955]), responds to the easy categorizations of Mexican identity by displaying deep distrust for the Mexican hero of the Revolution. Paredes proposes that Mexicans and Mexican Americans cannot rely on the myth of a transcendent, heroic subject of history, since the Revolution’s failures make this subject untenable. Furthermore, *The Shadow* represents its revolutionary subject as an effect of capitalist modernity’s production of a “mimic man,” a subject so profoundly shaped by the discourses of modernity that its revolutionary potential is evacuated.

Chapter four, “Alternative Revolutionary Poetics: Eisenstein and Porter in Mexico,” examines Sergei Eisenstein’s film, *Qué Viva México!* (1932), and Katherine Anne Porter’s short story, “Hacienda” (1935). I position Eisenstein’s film within an alternative representational poetics of Mexican identity representation, distinguished particularly against *Viva Villa!* and *Viva Zapata!* While the problematics of ethnic stereotypes has always plagued American film, Eisenstein’s engagement with revolutionary politics allows a historically nuanced treatment. Porter’s short story, for its part, satirically critiques American romantic

visions of Mexico, even as she pokes fun at Eisenstein's misadventures in Mexico.

Chapter five, "Hybridity and Contingency in Contemporary Chicano/a Cinema," fast-forwards to the present moment of Mexican American self-representation in Jim Mendiola's *Come and Take it Day* (2001). Unlike the Chicano/a cinema of the 60s and 70s, with its concerns for defining an essential identity in resistance to Anglo-American stereotyping, and unlike much of the 80s cinema, with its interest in participating in mainstream culture, *Come and Take it Day* proposes hybridity and contingency as the defining elements of Chicano/a identity. The film critiques contemporary media images of ethnic deviance—the present-day equivalents of *bandido* stereotypes—but it does not posit the transcendent Chicano/a hero as antidote. Instead, *Come and Take it Day* intertextualizes Paredes's "*With His Pistol in His Hand*" and imagines a Chicano/a unburdened by the demand to uphold a cultural essence but still capable of critiquing discourses that deprecatorily define the culture.

Throughout my study, the theoretical perspective of ambivalence informs my reading of key literary and cinematic texts. These texts exemplify the importance of seeing beyond the one-dimensionality of ethnic and racial representation—whether in a "negative" or "positive" sense—to the presence of complex and contradictory understandings of culture. Additionally, placing literature and film in comparative dialogue does not so much open the discursive

field as it acknowledges that different representational forms are always in conversation.

¹ As a classic poem of the Chicano/a Movement, “El Louie” has a long history of critical inquiry and debate, as Rosaldo notes in his discussion of Montoya’s poetics. In *Culture and Truth*, Rosaldo is among the first Chicano/a critics to depart from the nationalist, “classic norms” of Chicano/a criticism, “which asked him [Louie], on the one hand, to be a more elevated figure and, on the other, to embody the values of the pristine, authentic culture”(215). Other writers who, with different perspectives, concentrate on notions of hybridity in “El Louie” include José Limón in *Chicano Poems, Mexican Ballads*, and José David Saldívar in *The Dialectics of Our America*.

² See Raymund Paredes’s *The Image of the Mexican in American Literature* (Diss. UT, 1973), Blaine P. Lamb’s “The Convenient Villain: The Early Cinema Views of the Mexican-American (1975), and Arthur Pettit’s *Images of the Mexican in Fiction and Film* (1978) for examples of analyses that read the representation of Mexican identity in binary terms of negative and positive.

³ It is also usually the case that the stereotype is read as “truth” by those for whom its distortions are already considered “facts.” Note, however, that I am not here indicating a dichotomy between the “mainstream” and the “marginal” spectator, wherein the latter possesses a critical knowledge that the former cannot access; neither spectator has a monopoly on oppositional reading, and both are susceptible to passive acceptance.

⁴ Shohat and Stam acknowledge Donald Bogle’s analysis of African-American actors’ resistant performances in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*. Bogle “emphasizes the resilient imagination of black performers obliged to play against script and studio intentions, the capacity to turn demeaning roles into resistant performance”(*Unthinking Eurocentricism* 196).

⁵ Américo Paredes develops the term “Greater Mexico” in *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero* where he defines it as “all the areas inhabited by people of a Mexican culture—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense”(qtd. in Limón, *American Encounters* 215). I expand the meaning of the term “Greater Mexican literature” by including Anglo-American texts that significantly engage with Mexican culture in the U.S. and Mexico.

Chapter One

From Derision to Desire: The Greaser in Stephen Crane's Mexican Stories and D. W. Griffith's Early Westerns

Introduction

During perhaps the most climactic and disturbing moment in D. W. Griffith's *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908), the narrative presents the lynching of the central character, the "greaser" in the film's title. A member of the lynch party ties a noose around the Mexican's neck and another secures the rope to the branch of a tree. In the next horrific instant, the mob raises the Mexican, and he is left hanging from the tree. Because of its verisimilitude, the scene is shocking, even to modern day viewers. Fortunately for the Mexican, a woman intervenes on his behalf, and he is saved from a fate that befell many innocent real-life Mexicans on the western frontier.¹ *The Greaser's Gauntlet* seemingly confirms Arthur Pettit's analysis of the Mexican's representation in early American film: that the Mexican, like his nineteenth-century dime novel predecessors, "remains a subject—someone to be killed or mocked, seduced or redeemed by Saxon protagonists"(132). Pettit's critique of Mexican stereotypes contains the binary quality that sees stereotypes as only positive or negative, yet the conclusion of *The Greaser's Gauntlet* challenges such a binary critique of the stereotype in an important way. The greaser is not vanquished; instead, he goes on to perform the

story's most heroic deed. Thus, Pettit's argument fails to explain the contradictory moments in film when the Mexican is spared total denigration, when film narrative simultaneously expresses repulsion for and attraction toward the Mexican subject. Such an argument does not account for what Homi Bhabha calls the ambivalence of stereotypical representation.

This chapter draws upon Bhabha's analytic of ambivalence for a reading of Mexican identity representation in two short stories by Stephen Crane and in several early films by D. W. Griffith. Rather than contending that representations of the Mexican in Crane and Griffith are merely stereotypical and derogatory, I read in their depictions a wavering, sometimes derisive, sometimes admiring attitude toward the Mexican subject. Crane's turn-of-the-century stories demonstrate an indirect regard for the Mexican in their refusal to make the Anglo-American the definitive victor over his Mexican rival. Crane reveals a sense of equality between Anglo and Mexican combatants at odds with the dime novel tradition. Crane's evenhanded treatment of the Mexican and Anglo displays ambivalence toward the Anglo-American, specifically in myths about the Western hero. Thus, Crane engages the positive figuration—the positive stereotype—of the Anglo male and subverts it. In the second half of the chapter, I focus on the emergence of the “greaser” film stereotype in the films of D. W. Griffith from 1907 to 1910, and argue, against the likely weight of Chicano/a critical opinions, that the greaser constitutes not the reproduction of dime novel stereotypes but an

ambivalent form of racial discourse. Griffith's inconsistent appraisal of the Mexican suggests that Anglo-America's relation to ethnic minorities in general and Mexicans in particular encompasses contradictory feelings of derision and desire. Once again, my interpretation of Mexican identity representation draws from Bhabhan ambivalence, for "such a reading reveals . . . the boundaries of colonial [and racial] discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits"(67).

Because film relied heavily upon popular literature for its narrative and stereotypical tropes at the turn of the century, an assessment of the early cinema requires a comparison with its literary precursors. Juxtaposing Griffith with Crane in particular is appropriate because these men were nearly contemporaries: Crane wrote his Mexican stories at the end of the nineteenth century, at a moment when writers were beginning to question the heroic themes of the Western adventure story; Griffith, for his part, began his career at the beginning of the twentieth century, and among his earliest movies are precursors to film Westerns. Each, therefore, engages with the Western adventure story at a pivotal moment in its development. Furthermore, Crane and Griffith take up the representation of the Mexican in an idiosyncratic fashion, breaking with the expectations of the Western genre: Crane departs from an established tradition while Griffith confounds an emerging genre before its conventions are established. Although they maintain canonical status within their respective art forms, each has been criticized for his depiction of ethnic identities. In Crane's case, such critiques not

only lack nuance but also misread his evaluation of the heroic codes of conduct practiced by Anglos and Mexicans alike. In Griffith's instance, critiques of his racist cinematic practices are well founded, but do not account for the contradictory moments when Griffith admits the Mexican's humanity. Placing Crane's stories and Griffith's films in comparative tension demonstrates that "negative" stereotypes of Mexican identity are never strictly negative. The ambivalent re-articulation of the Mexican in Griffith and the Anglo in Crane reveal that these subjects are constructed using similar stereotypical operations, that the derogation of one subject requires the exaltation of the other. In the following analysis, I briefly survey the literary precursors of the greaser stereotype in dime novels to better understand its reworking in Crane's Mexican stories and its entry into film. Crane's critique of dime novel conventions delineates the boundaries of Anglo-American self-representation, while Griffith's wavering engagement with the greaser gives us access to the earliest formation of film stereotypes before their full development in later Westerns.

Literary Antecedents: The Greaser in Dime Novels and Pulp Fiction

In *With the Ears of Strangers* (1963)—revised as *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* (1977)—Cecil Robinson provides one of the earliest assessments of the literary representation of Mexican identity. Robinson argues that the influence of Mexican culture on Anglo-American literary production "has been from the early nineteenth century an unavoidable presence

in westward-moving America”(ix). Robinson’s choice of words is telling because, although his description suggests Mexico as a literary muse, the reader quickly learns that Mexico has literally been “unavoidable,” an impediment to the progress of “westward-moving” white Americans. According to Robinson, the earliest instances of stereotype production appear in the fiction relating to the conflict between Mexican- and Anglo-Texans over the fate of Texas. In this literature “the archetype of the hero as frontiersman,” required “Mexican villainy was an essential ingredient”(18). Robinson also recognizes “the rabid racialism and mounting ferocity against the ‘greaser’”(26). As Arnolde De León notes in *They Called Them Greasers*, this is the period when the term “greaser” gained broad usage as a derogatory term for the Mexican (16).

The Image of the Mexican in American Literature (Diss. UT, 1973), by Raymund Paredes, also follows the “development of the image of the Mexican in American literature”(iii). Paredes traces the historical thread further than Robinson, and contends that Anglo-Americans inherited their unfavorable views of the Mexican from the attitude the English held toward Catholic countries, such as Spain and Italy. Paredes makes clear, however, that the “most important consideration in forming Anglo-American attitudes about the Mexican” was not Catholicism but race: “American writers were particularly disturbed that the Mexican was the product of miscegenation between Indian and Spanish forebears”(vii). Among the writers Paredes treats is Zebulon Pike, an American

explorer of New Spain who kept a journal during his 1807 expedition. Pike's "dour pronouncements on the state of Mexican life were much imbued with the prejudice of Anglo-American Hispanophobia. He considered the Spaniards extraordinarily cruel"(74). Pike's view of the Spanish would later apply to the Mexicans, whom Pike considered "a biological catastrophe. He dismissed the whole population of New Mexico . . . as being cruel, treacherous, cowardly, lazy, and addicted to swindling"(86). From Pike's time henceforward, the Mexican's miscegenated racial make-up would help form Anglo-American attitudes.

Timothy Flint's *Francis Berian; or the Mexican Patriot* (1826), the earliest American novel with a Mexican setting, is "the story of the triumph of Protestant American morality in the face of hypocrisy, treachery, and intolerance"(140). This novel does not yet feature the Mexican in full stereotypical mode; instead, it concentrates on the upper classes of New Mexican society, and narrates the title character's romantic involvement with a Spanish *señorita*, and his role "in the Mexican independence movement"(143). Although Mexicans are not presented in a completely derogatory fashion, the novel must present Mexican males as "invariably cruel" and incompetent in order to highlight Berian's inherent Anglo-Protestant superiority (148-49). Thus, the novel functions "as a model for dozens of Mexican 'romances' to come"(150).

Robinson and Paredes's studies concur that narratives about the Texas Revolution of 1836 and the Mexican War of 1848 produce the most unfavorable

literary depiction of the Mexican, and, as Robinson adds, the “feverish nationalism created by the conflicts with Mexico together with the general public interest in the westward movement created a market for a special kind of popular literature which soon deluged the country”(27). In this literature, the “‘greaser’ provides an apt foil for the projection of . . . an inflated [American] self-image”(28). The figure of the Mexican greaser, then, emerges out of the need for the Anglo-American to define himself as the morally and physically dominant inhabitant of the Texas territory and the West.

I have made reference to Arthur Pettit as an early critic of Mexican characterization in both literature and film. Pettit documents the genesis of literary stereotypes and their subsequent transformation into the film medium, and Crane is among the writers he alleges participate in the denigration of the Mexican. Pettit notes that in conquest fiction, “the concept of Anglo-Saxon superiority and Mexican inferiority. . . . is sustained by constant repetition of tried and tested positive American projections of themselves juxtaposed to negative projections of the Mexican as opposition”(xx). Titles such as Anthony Ganilh’s *Mexico Versus Texas* (1838) and James Wilmer Dalman’s *The Lone Star: A Tale of Texas* (1945) say much about these stories ideological positioning.

The cultural antagonism between Anglos and Mexicans determines the criteria for the “ ‘Tex-Mex’ formula scoundrel” in the dime novel, which includes: “the fictional need for villains who offer maximum contrast to the

heroes; the actual presence of some difference in skin color between the two ethnic groups; the unabashed racial bigotry that characterized the United States between the first years of manifest destiny and the outbreak of the Civil War” (23). As a subset of racial bigotry, we add a sense of cultural superiority, which assumes that Anglo-American cultural institutions are inherently superior to the institutions of other peoples. The dime novels of the era contain Mexican characters such as “arrogant hidalgos, lazy peons, evil bandidos, sexy señoritas, and loose-principled priests, all of whom offer unfavorable contrast to the chaste and enterprising Protestants” (26). Among these characters, the most prevalent are the greaser *bandidos*, whom Pettit notes “are burdened with a formidable set of easily identified, ethnic, stereotyped features,” including “long, greasy hair coiled under huge sombreros, scraggly *mustachios* . . . tobacco-stained fingers and teeth, and grotesque dialect and curses. Above all, the Beadle [publishing house] bandidos are characterized by complexions shading from pitch black through dark brown to orange, yellow, olive, and gray” (39-40). By 1859, these negative characterizations are fully established and incorporated by the writers of the Beadle and Adams publishing house, widely recognized for introducing the dime novel (Robinson 27).

The most often used descriptive words for the Mexican in dime novels are “coward” and “greaser.” In *Bernard Lile, an Historical Romance* (1856), Jeremiah Clemens repeatedly employs the word “greaser” to describe Mexicans:

“[t]he people are greasy, their clothes are greasy, their dogs are greasy, their houses are greasy—everywhere grease and filth hold divided dominion”(214). Paredes argues that the Mexican is so reviled that “if one surveys the dime novels of the last third of the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the Mexican—and not the Indian—is the most contemptible figure in western popular fiction”(171). By 1885, “the dark-complected Mexican *mestizo* had become a stock figure in western paperback fiction. He functioned as the ultimate villain, leering out from behind his grimy *serape* and invariably clutching his deadly *cuchillo*”(180). Both the late year and the image of the *serape* upon which Paredes focuses are significant, for Stephen Crane would transform the image of the *serape* into something other than the expected stereotype to which Paredes alludes.

Stephen Crane and the Mexican

I have thus far presented a doleful picture of the Anglo’s estimate of the Mexican in nineteenth-century dime novels and adventure fiction, and critics contend that this denigration continues into the twentieth century. In his analysis of turn-of-the-century Western fiction, Pettit argues that “[u]nlike the Beadles and Buntlines, whose Saxon heroes again and again imposed North American order on Mexican chaos, the twentieth-century pulp tales have their pecking order established not only from their first page, but even earlier—in the minds and emotions of their readers”(111). Pettit argues, in other words, that early twentieth-century pulp tales cater to the racial biases of their readers. More

recently, in a discussion about the representation of Mexican sexuality in Western fiction, José Limón observes that if “the Mexican woman in her full eroticization has critical meanings and possibilities beyond the stereotype,” the Mexican male, with “none of the exotic sexuality, the freer play of the erotic given the figure of the Mexican woman, he is a rhetorical construction that exemplifies the term ‘stereotype’ in its most negative sense”(136). He concludes that in the case of the “rhetorical construction of Mexican men, there is no ambivalence, no rhetorical quarter given; nor . . . has this unambivalence attenuated in our own time”(137).

To a significant degree, these analyses correctly assess the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary landscape. Recall, for example, Clemens’s *Bernard Lile*, which typically refers to the Mexican greaser as a “born thief” who “would murder his brother for a *peso*, and betray any thing but his priest for half the money”(215). Yet we must also recognize that some degree of affinity exists between Anglo and Mexican combatants. Limón writes that “in the context of the Anglo male’s symbolic desire for the Mexican woman, we can now see between these two men a psychological relationship of difference but also of identity, aggression, and mutual narcissism”(136). I would add that identity occurs not only in his desire for the Mexican woman, but also in the Anglo’s recognition and grudging admiration—narcissistic or otherwise—of something of himself in the Mexican. We see this vacillation between recognition and negation—this ambivalence—in even the most dyspeptic representations of the Mexican, even in

Bernard Lile, when the narrator indirectly accepts that in the battle of Palo Alto, the Mexicans “are said to have fought bravely as well”(213).

At the turn-of-the-century, Stephen Crane’s short stories about the West and Mexico recognize the Mexican’s equality with his Anglo-American rival. Yet if we are to accept Raymund Paredes’s arguments, Crane’s Western stories enact a Darwinian struggle between Anglo and Mexican and express a familiar contempt for the doomed Mexican. In “Stephen Crane and the Mexican,” he writes that this “scenario is common in Crane’s western stories; the relationship between Mexican and Anglo must inevitably disintegrate into violence,” and it is usually “the Mexican who starts the trouble. He is a meddler, a persistent agitator. He reeks of violence and brutality—qualities which are very much a part of his way of life” (32). According to Paredes, the “surest proof of how cheaply Crane values the Mexican is that in his stories, the Mexican never ‘holds steady,’ but collapses and disintegrates, his doom assured” (37). Paredes’s article, published in *Western American Literature* in 1973, established the critical consensus on Crane, that he reinforces the negative stereotype of the Mexican as villain. My own reading of Crane’s work fundamentally disagrees with Paredes’s assessment. Crane is less concerned with deriding the Mexican than with deflating the myth of the Western hero, which he achieves through an unprejudiced depiction of Mexican characters.

Unlike Paredes, I read a greater degree of play, discrepancy, and respect for the Mexican in Crane's stories, particularly in "One Dash—Horses" and "The Three White Mice," in which Crane questions the dime novel's vision of the cowardly and villainous Mexican in contrast to the heroic Anglo. In his critique, Paredes concentrates on moments when the Anglo's life is threatened by Mexican adversaries. He measures Crane's regard for the Mexican by the way the Anglo and Mexican cope with their fears as they face each other. The "crucial difference between Crane's Mexican and Anglo" is that the Anglo "responds to a challenge or threat with courage, reacting coolly and weighing his options, working quickly to stay alive"(34). The Mexican, on the other hand, typically recoils in fear.

"One Dash—Horses" recounts the near-death experience of Richardson and his servant, José, during their travels in Mexico. The two men encounter trouble one night at a lodging house, when Mexican bandits enter Richardson's sleeping quarters and threaten to steal his gun and saddle. Richardson, though, faces the Mexicans in seemingly stoic manner. In his analysis, Paredes contends that Richardson "responds to the Mexican threat with a calm insolence, totally in control of his senses, while on the other hand, his companion José, death thundering at his heels, is 'turned into a raving maniac'"(Crane qtd. in Paredes 34). A closer examination of this story, however, reveals that Richardson does not act with stoic heroism; rather, he seems catatonic with terror. Additionally, it is not Richardson's cool response to danger but José's efficiency and

watchfulness that saves Richardson from certain death. In the initial encounter between Richardson and the Mexican bandits, Richardson is woken by a guitar, and hears a Mexican gruffly telling his companions that if the American does not hand over his pistol, saddle and money, “I will kill him! . . . if he will not give them, you will see!”(15) Unlike the hero of *Bernard Lile*, Tom Simpson, who unflinchingly confronts numerous greasers, Richardson “felt the skin draw tight around his mouth, and his knee-joints turned to bread. He slowly came to a sitting posture This stiff and mechanical movement . . . must have looked like the rising of a corpse in the wan moonlight”(15). As he responds to the threat, the “tumultuous emotions of Richardson’s terror” render him incapable of understanding Spanish and demonstrate the extent of his fear (16).

Crane’s first visual depiction of the Mexican seems to follow the stereotypical tropes of the dime novel, and its visceral impact gives the reader pause: “the red light of a torch flared into the room. It was held by a fat, round-faced Mexican, whose little snake-like mustache was as black as his eyes, and whose eyes were black as jet. He was insane with the wild rage of a man whose liquor is dully burning at his brain. Five or six of his fellows crowded after him”(16). This description of the Mexican, undoubtedly stereotypical, helps us understand why critics of racial representation have responded so strongly to Crane. We have before us the Mexican *bandido* in all his un-ambivalence. But

for all the negativity that we may read in the Mexican's portrayal, we should not lose sight of Crane's representation of the Anglo "hero" as well.

As the Mexican enters, Richardson sits "very straight and still, his right hand lost in the folds of his blanket"(16). The reader knows that within the folds of the blanket lies the pistol to which he clings. The bandit does not see the pistol, but he suspects it is nearby, since this is the object he covets. Although the Mexican threatens and curses, Richardson remains still, "staring at the fat Mexican with a strange fixedness of gaze, not fearful, not dauntless, not anything that could be interpreted. He simply stared"(16). Richardson is, in other words, frozen beyond fear by the situation. Crane infuses the narrative with humor in showing the Mexicans confused by Richardson's response.

Ah, well, sirs, here was a mystery. At the approach of their menacing company, why did not this American cry out and turn pale, or run, or pray them mercy? The animal merely sat still, and stared, and waited for them to begin. Well, evidently he was a great fighter; or perhaps he was an idiot. Indeed, this was an embarrassing situation, for who was going forward to discover whether he was a great fighter or an idiot? (16)

Some critics read the Mexicans' indecisiveness as a sign of their fear before the brave American. Cecil Robinson, for instance, claims that the Mexicans back down as Richardson holds the revolver in front of them: "for all their drunken rage, as the American held a gun on them and stared coldly in their

direction, they kept back. Not one of them was quite drunk enough to want to be the sacrificial victim that would be required if the American was to be overpowered. The deadlock was finally broken with the sound of giggling girls”(192). Robinson assumes that Richardson “stare[s] coldly” at the Mexicans, but the American is in fact immobilized by sheer terror. As the lead Mexican delays pouncing on him, “this pause was a long horror [for Richardson]; and for these men who could so frighten him there began to swell in him a fierce hatred”(17). Though he feels hatred, he does not act but only longs “to be capable of fighting all of them”(17). Additionally, it is not that the Mexicans are not “quite drunk enough”—they are thoroughly inebriated—as much as they are calculating and waiting for Richardson’s response. Finally, the Mexicans are not deterred by the gun pointed at them since they cannot in fact see it—because it lies under the folds of a blanket. Since it is the gun they have come to steal, the reader must assume they know it is at hand.

A classic interpretation of the Mexicans’ depiction following the positive/negative binary would see their actions as simply negative. A reading of the stereotype’s ambivalence, on the other hand, examines the specific deployments of the Mexicans’ characterization in relation to the supposedly superior Anglo-American. In the agonizingly long moment when Richardson awaits the Mexicans’ attack, José stirs, and the bandits begin beating and berating him. As they bully Richardson’s servant, they “continually turned their eyes to

see if they were to succeed in causing an initial demonstration from the American.” Clearly, they are testing Richardson to determine if he is brave enough to come to José’s defense. Though he holds the gun under his blanket, Richardson merely looks on “impassively”(17). Thus, Crane’s Mexicans are not simply bullies, but experts in the arts of provocation and intimidation. The Anglo is not stoic, but incapable of mastering his fear. This reversal is clearly at odds with critical expectations and assumptions.

The stereotypical inversion extends yet further. While the Mexicans return to their drinking and carousing, the Anglo hero experiences the unlikely emotion of longing “to run”(18). At dawn, Richardson and José finally manage their escape. Both men exhibit nervousness and fear, but it is José who keeps his wits. We learn, for instance, that while Richardson makes all kinds of loud noises with his clanging spurs, José capably “had his own saddle girth and both bridles buckled in a moment. He curled the picket ropes with a few sweeps of his arm.” Richardson, on the other hand, is still too shaken for quick and effective action. His fingers “were shaking so that he could hardly buckle the girth. His hands were in invisible mittens”(20). This unexpected characterization is at variance with Paredes’s claim that Crane’s Yankee, “under the threat of death operates with a detached efficiency; the Mexican, his mind turned to mud, becomes a pathetic fool. Through his bravery, the Anglo achieves nobility; the Mexican, in his shameful cowardice, falls to contempt”(34). This particular scene suggests the

opposite, as the Mexican moves with an “efficiency” and a “nobility” that eludes the Anglo.

In his treatment of Richardson’s false courage and lack of judgment, Crane again uses humor and adds irony to undercut the efficacy of the Anglo hero as Richardson and José flee from their attackers. For instance, when Richardson looks upon José, he sees a weaker man:

Riding with José was like riding with a corpse. His face resembled a cast in lead. Sometimes he swung forward and almost pitched from his seat. Richardson was too frightened himself to do anything but hate this man for his fear. Finally, he issued a mandate which nearly caused José’s eyes to slide out of his head and fall to the ground like two coins. “Ride behind me—about fifty paces.” (21)

Richardson’s want of judgment lies in his assumption that he is riding with an inferior. Thus, although José seems the bigger coward, Crane uses his forced position in the rear guard to show Richardson’s feigning bravery and his need of the Mexican’s protection. “Richardson had resolved in his rage that at any rate he was going to use the eyes and ears of extreme fear to detect the approach of danger; and so he established his servant as a sort of an outpost”(22). Yet Richardson could have served as outpost just as well, since he has embodied “extreme fear” from the beginning of the story. Crane, therefore, refuses to idealize the Anglo at the expense of the Mexican in his depiction of the

relationship between the two cultures. Jamie Robertson has more generally observed that in the myth of Western heroism, “Crane was attracted to the West, but he never succumbed to the dream world of the dime novelist. . . . His heroes participate in the convention of popular Western fiction that individual courage gives meaning to life, but that convention is always ironic”(243). As Robertson recognizes, “Richardson sincerely believes the Eastern-manufactured conventions of the Western myth. . . . All of the clichés of the Western are here, including the inferior Mexican, but they are Richardson’s clichés, not Stephen Crane’s”(247-48). Applied to this story, Crane’s deflation of the Western myth means that the Anglo is not so easily the Mexican’s superior. At story’s end, José once again proves to be the more capable of the two men when Richardson loses the trail and is “recalled to it by the loud sobs of his servant”(22). As the Mexican bandits catch up and give final chase, it is José, “terror-stricken, who at last discovered safety” when he spots the Mexican rural police force just over a ridge, rides to them, and saves his and Richardson’s life (23-24).

Although an initial reading of “One Dash—Horses” may lead a reader to believe that Crane’s characterization of the Anglo-American is, as Paredes suggests, “more attractive than [that of] his lackey, José” (35), careful analysis reveals that Crane felt empathy and respect for the Mexican. Although narrative space concentrates on the figure of the Anglo, we see small instances of admiration for the Mexican, as when José prepares for a night of rest.

José threw two gigantic wings of shadow as he flapped his blanket about him—first across his chest under his arms, and then around his neck and across his chest again—this time over his arms, with the end tossed on his right shoulder. A Mexican thus snugly enveloped can nevertheless free his fighting arm in a beautifully brisk way, merely shrugging his shoulder as he grabs for the weapon at his belt. (14)

The narrative viewpoint is objective here. We do not see José from Richardson's perspective but from the perspective of the narrative voice. The movement of the Mexican in this description connotes a speed and finesse, an efficiency and grace that recalls nothing of the slovenly greaser.

Stephen Crane's travels in the West and Mexico during the period in which he wrote his Western stories allowed him to glimpse how Mexican people of all classes lived on a daily basis. Crane could have come away with an impression of Mexico like that found in *Bernard Lile*, where an American "whose ill fortune has made him for any number of days, a sojourner in the city of Metamoros [sic], can have no difficulty in tracing the origin of the term 'greaser'" (214). Crane, however, sees this intercultural assessment of a different people as part of the ill-informed "arrogance of the man who has not solved himself and discovered his own futility" ("The Mexican Lower Classes" 435). Forewarning the future readers of his Western fiction—and readers of dime novels and adventure fiction—Crane determines in his Western sketches (written

as dispatches for American newspapers) that it “perhaps might be said—if any one dared—that the most worthless literature of the world has been that which has been written by the men of one nation concerning the men of another”(436). Thus, Crane exhibits an awareness of the myopic perspective of Anglo-American cultural imperialism.

We may take Crane’s precautionary statement as a guide for reading “The Five White Mice,” which treats the encounter of the New York Kid, the San Francisco Kid and their friend, Benson, with three Mexican men in a dark Mexico City street. The crucial moment in the story picks up the three men on their way home. Benson and the San Francisco Kid are inebriated, and the sober New York Kid acts as their escort. As they make their way along the street, they come upon three men, and Benson bumps into one. The Mexican is offended by the American’s carelessness and tempers rise, but the tension is broken when the New York Kid brandishes a pistol, and the Mexicans are sent on their way. Because the story ends with the Mexicans’ defeat, critics have read “The Five White Mice” as yet another instance of Mexican denigration.² The story, however, demonstrates Crane’s attraction to the codes of honor and ritualistic behavior which he sees in the Mexican’s masculinity. In one of his dispatches from Mexico City, for example, Crane comments upon the city’s bullfighters, who are “a most impressive type to be seen upon the streets They are always clean-shaven and the set of the lips wherein lies the revelation of character, can easily

be studied. They move confidently, proudly, with magnificent self-possession. People turn to stare after them”(“The City of Mexico” 431). In this dispatch, Crane joins Ernest Hemingway in his fascination for the figure of a heroic Mexican masculinity, which also appears in the Mexicans of “The Five White Mice.”

The story’s tension lies in the disturbance of masculine codes of honor when the Mexican’s grievances are not acknowledged by Benson, the drunk American. “The Mexican wheeled upon the instant. His hand flashed to his hip. There was a moment of silence during which Benson’s voice was not heard raised in apology. Then an indescribable comment, one burning word, came from between the Mexican’s teeth”(46-47). Benson’s failure to provide an apology insults the Mexican’s code of honor. With his hand on the pommel of his knife, the Mexican asks if “the señor want fight?”(47) The New York Kid immediately tries to move his friends away, but the San Francisco Kid, himself very drunk, affirmatively answers the Mexican’s challenge. Subverting the stereotypical conventions of the drunk Mexican, Crane presents the Americans’ drunkenness as leading them to act recklessly. The New York Kid reluctantly joins the fray, and he too stands with his hand at his hip, but his coat conceals a revolver. Crane freezes this moment in the narrative to provide an intimate glimpse of the New York Kid’s admiration for and fear of the Mexican.

This opponent of the New York Kid was a tall man and quite stout. His sombrero was drawn low over his eyes. His serape was flung on his left shoulder. His back was bended and in the supposed manner of a Spanish grandee. This concave gentleman cut a fine and terrible figure. The lad, moved by the spirits of his modest and perpendicular ancestors, had time to feel his blood roar at the sight of the pose. (48)

Despite knowing he is better armed than the men he faces, the “Eastern lad suddenly decided that he was going to be killed”(48).

The reader would expect the Anglo to act bravely and without hesitation at such a decisive moment, but instead the New York Kid’s hand is only “tremoring on the trigger”(50). Realizing that they are outmatched, the knife-carrying Mexicans finally show their own fear. “The fulsome grandee sprang backward with a low cry. The man who had been facing the ’Frisco Kid took a quick step away. The beautiful array of Mexicans was suddenly disorganized”(50). Paredes sees this as a moment in which Crane shows the Anglo’s contempt for the Mexican’s “cowardice because it is hidden behind colossal pretentiousness”(34). More accurately, however, Crane demonstrates that the Anglo and the Mexican stand as equals in their capacities to experience fear and in their attempts to hide it with feigned courage:

The cry and the backward steps revealed something of great importance to the New York Kid. He had never dreamed that he did not have a complete

monopoly of all possible trepidations. The cry of the grandee was that of a man who suddenly sees a poisonous snake. Thus the Kid was able to understand swiftly that *they* were *all* human beings. *They* were unanimous in not wishing for too bloody combat. There was a sudden expression of *equality*. (50, emphasis mine)

While some readers may understand Crane's use of "they" as applying only to the Mexicans, the addition of "equality" implies that all the men present are equal in their experience of fear.

Finally seeing that he has the upper hand, the New York Kid "pounced forward and began to swear. . . . He was bursting with rage because these men had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable. . . . And after all there had been an equality of emotion, an equality: he was furious"(51). The way in which Crane frames the New York Kid's thoughts suggests that one man's bravery increases in direct proportion to the other's fear. Crane shows that Anglos and Mexicans alike struggle with controlling these impulses. In the story's ending there is little to suggest the Mexican's lack of bravery, and nothing that implies the Anglo's contempt. The New York Kid is furious, but he is furious because the Mexicans "had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable"—that is, they had not previously evinced that they were as emotionally vulnerable as the New York Kid. Thus, the New York Kid is angry that he lacked an understanding of the "equality of emotion" all the men feel.

In a typical dime novel, when the Mexican greaser sees the Anglo draw his weapon, he runs. In "The Five White Mice," the Mexicans and Anglos act according to the rituals of a duel. Realizing that they are literally outgunned, the Mexicans step backward, but they do not turn their backs on the Americans. Their leader acknowledges defeat, but he does not lose his dignity. He speaks to the New York Kid "in a tone of cynical bravado" and asks, "Well, señor, it is finished?" To this the New York Kid responds, "I am willing"(51). And most significant of all, they bid each other good night as each group of men disappears into the Mexico City streets. This final exchange implies, once again, that Crane places these men shoulder to shoulder, thus subverting the dime novel convention of heroic Anglos and cowardly Mexicans.

Crane's Mexican fiction enables a different reading of the Mexican and Anglo than the typical dime novel. His critique of the inflated myth of the Western hero, along with his treatment of the Mexican as the Anglo's equal, permits a questioning of the stereotypes that sustained the relation of dominance between Anglo and Mexican during the nineteenth century. Significantly, Crane's ironic reversal of these stereotypes provides us the critical lens with which to examine the American cinema, which was just emerging as Crane's stories were being published. If Crane's stories demonstrate a manifest subversion of Mexican stereotypes in critical opposition to dime novel conventions, then D. W. Griffith's early Western movies stand somewhere in

between, evidencing a latent desire for the Mexican, even as these films deride the Mexican “greaser.”

From Dime Novels to Early Westerns: The Greaser in D. W. Griffith’s Films, 1907-10

Thus far, I have argued that Stephen Crane presents a Mexican subject who stands his ground against the Anglo-American dime novel hero, contrary to ethno-critical interpretations of the seventies and eighties. In American film, D. W. Griffith is regarded as one of the utmost practitioners of racist cinematic practices, and this identification is well deserved. Notwithstanding this incontrovertible assessment—especially with respect to Griffith’s treatment of African Americans—Griffith may nevertheless be positioned beyond the either/or binary of the conventional critique of the stereotype. Mexicans appear in several of Griffith’s early films set in the West, and in the title of one film, Mexican identity is explicitly and derogatorily foregrounded. In spite of the liberal use of the word “greaser” to identify Mexican characters, the presence of *Mexicanidad* in Griffith’s early Westerns encompasses contradictory points of attraction and repulsion.

Griffith started making Westerns for the Biograph Company in 1907; only a year later, Mexican characters began to appear regularly in his films. Because copies of Griffith’s early movies are extremely rare—prints are currently housed at the Library of Congress, where I first saw the films I discuss in this chapter³—

critics have only a tenuous understanding of these films' racial politics. Arthur Pettit and Raymund Paredes engage with the Mexican's depiction during this period, but their studies rely on secondary accounts of the films they critique. In *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film*, Pettit argues that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the US cinema "simply follow[s] patterns established" by its nineteenth-century fictional antecedents (132). Raymund Paredes, for his part, contends that by 1910, "filmmakers had faithfully translated the literary formulations of Mexican villainy into a visual medium; significantly, the depiction of the "bad Mexican" in American culture had been extended beyond literary boundaries" ("The Image" 207). Pettit and Paredes make a twofold claim. First, they point to a long tradition of denigrating representations in dime novels and adventure fiction. Second, they call attention to an uncritical adaptation of these depictions into a cinematic language. While their claims correctly assess much of the literary and cinematic production at the turn of the century, they inadvertently participate in an either/or binary that declares representations may only be positive or negative. Their critiques do not take into account the complexity of ethnic representation, moments in which literary and cinematic texts express a simultaneous derision and desire for the ethnic subject.

Additionally, Paredes correctly identifies 1910 as an important benchmark in the depiction of Mexican identity. The year 1910, however, may be more clearly understood as a contradictory turning point for American film, very

different from the positive reassessment then occurring in literature. As I argue in chapter two, 1910 marks a retrenchment in the stereotypical representation of the Mexican, caused the American film industry's opposition to the revolution and by the establishment of the Western film hero. Pettit and Paredes's arguments, therefore, are more difficult to apply to films produced before 1910.

Derision and desire coexist in the emergence of the "greaser" stereotype in Griffith's work from 1907 to 1910. During this period, Griffith directed at least seven films whose Mexican content runs the spectrum between sympathetic and hostile representations, depending on a particular film's narrative imperatives. Such films include *The Fight for Freedom*, *The Tavern-Keeper's Daughter*, *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, *The Red Girl*, and *The Vaquero's Vow*, all from 1908, and *The Thread of Destiny* and *Ramona*, both from 1910. It is instructive to note that, with the exception of *The Thread of Destiny*, the ultimate fate of Mexican characters in these Griffith films is deleterious; characters either die or vacate the narrative space to make way for the Anglo-American hero. Still, the greaser stereotype constitutes not merely the reproduction of dime novel stereotypes; it is an ambivalent racial discourse. Griffith's films place the Mexican subject in multiple representational postures, and allow us to see the stereotype's "effectivity," its "repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence," according to Bhabha. A reading of Mexican identity representation in terms of the analytic of ambivalence allows us to see the limits of stereotypical

discourse and the complex relation of attraction and repulsion between the Anglo subject and the Mexican who is the object of stereotypical fixation. This complex relation reveals the impossibility of simplifying any culture to the imperatives of the stereotype and demonstrates the limitations of the positive/negative critique which has traditionally responded to stereotypical production.

It is difficult to imagine that the director who created *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) may be read “ambivalently,” as I have proposed. One of *Birth*’s commentators, Clyde Taylor, notes that the film constitutes “an incomparable racial assault,” one of those “national allegories in which the definition of national character simultaneously involves a co-defining anti-type”(15). We could assume that the Mexican fares no better in Griffith’s representational universe, and if we were to read the July 24, 1908 issue of the *Biograph Bulletin*—a promotional playbill—these critics’ assertions would seem to be borne out. The *Bulletin* introduces the main character in *The Tavern Keeper’s Daughter* (1908) as “the fairest flower that e’er blossomed in the land of the golden sun.” Then, it ominously introduces her antagonist as “one of those proletarian half breed Mexicans, whose acidulate countenance was most odious, particularly to the girl”(qtd. in *Griffith Project* vol. 1, 71). Yet despite all indications to the contrary, the Mexican constitutes not a “co-defining anti-type,” he is not wholly odious, but he is a far more complicated and ambivalent figure. Several of Griffith’s early Westerns suggest a strong fascination with Mexican character that

goes beyond the simple race hatred which critics ascribe to Griffith in the case of African American characterization.

The Fight for Freedom treats the story of Pedro and Juanita, a Mexican couple who must escape a lynch mob when Pedro kills a man who cheated him at poker. When the sheriff gives chase, Pedro kills him and Juanita is jailed in Pedro's stead. During the course of their escape, Juanita is killed and Pedro captured; Pedro is "bound and carried back to prison to meet his inevitable [demise]," according to the July 17, 1908 issue of the *Biograph Bulletin* (qtd. in *The Griffith Project*, vol. 1 63). In a brief critical commentary, Patrick Loughney observes that "though the title suggests sympathy for the wrongly accused Juanita, little of that sentiment is actually apparent on the screen. The story is set in a Texas border town and the villains are Mexicans" (*Griffith Project* 64). While we cannot dispute that *The Fight for Freedom* presents little "sentiment" in favor of Juanita, we should also not mistake the representation of her constant suffering as a lack of sympathy. In the film, Juanita's goodness is signaled by her stalwart defense of her husband, and her willingness to risk her life for his safety. Loughney writes that Griffith's narrative typifies the first silent features because it is "spare and fast moving, with no effort of time . . . spent on character development" (64). This means that we can only deduce the film's attitude toward its characters by their actions, not through characterization. If this is the case,

then the film ultimately sympathizes with Pedro and Juanita, for every action they take is in defense of their lives.

The statement that “the villains are Mexican” also bears closer examination. Pedro seemingly embodies the dime novel greaser: he angers quickly and takes murderous action when he discovers the cheater. He also kills a sheriff. In the context of the “Western” setting of the film, however, Pedro is no different from his Anglo-American counterparts. In the opening scene of the movie, for example, Pedro and two other men sit at a card table, and their demeanor indicates equality. Interestingly, all the men are dressed similarly, so there is little “ethnic” differentiation between Pedro and his counterparts (Juanita, on the other hand, is clearly marked “Spanish” or “Mexican” by her style of dress). When Pedro discovers that another man has cheated in the card game, events transpire quickly, and the viewer is hard-pressed to assess guilt. When all three men begin to shoot—with three by-standers joining the fray—the action takes place within the context of a Western action film. The narrative does not attempt to single out any of the men, thus naturalizing the violence as part of the Western setting. Pedro, therefore, is no more a villain than the other men at the saloon. By distinction, the posse that hunts down Pedro and Juanita do not convey an empathetic or heroic image, for they kill an innocent woman, an action seen as taboo even in dime novels.

The Fight for Freedom leaves the viewer with a query that it refuses to answer, namely, whose “fight for freedom” is this? The *Biograph Bulletin* states that it “almost makes us question the justice of fate that the innocent should suffer for the crimes of the guilty”(63), but it never tells us who is innocent—Juanita or the sheriff—nor who is guilty—Pedro or the lynch mob. Although we can deduce that the Biograph Company masks the film’s sheer spectacle and sensationalism with a title that connotes respectable entertainment and moral instruction, we must nevertheless allow for the possibility that audiences may have “question[ed] the justice of fate” in a way favorable to Pedro and Juanita.

The Tavern-Keeper’s Daughter and *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* inaugurate the thematic of the bad Mexican redeemed, a premise Arthur Pettit has also recognized. “In the films the lustful greaser is sometimes allowed to reform, usually by saving the Anglo heroine from defloration”(134). Thus,

early silents add a new element to the existing set of stereotypes. In conquest fiction and great-house novels, Beadles and pulps, color determined character, particularly for males. Now we meet for the first time the Mexican male of low blood but good heart. His is an unenviable lot, as he is doomed to wander between the longed-for world of the Anglo and the stigmatized world of the Mexican, held forever in a middle position between Saxon heroes and greaser villains. (135)

The Tavern-Keeper's Daughter is a remarkable example of the surprising change of heart in a greaser caught in a “middle position” between the Anglo and Mexican worlds, although his desire is only for the Anglo woman. As I have noted, the story takes place in California, and treats the plight of a tavern owner and his daughter. The sensationalistic fashion in which the *Biograph Bulletin* describes the conflict that catalyzes the plot bears repeating: “Among those who frequented this rustic hostelry was one of those proletarian half breed Mexicans, whose acidulate countenance was most odious to all, particularly the girl”(qtd. in *Griffith Project*, vol. 1 71). In this typical fear-of-miscegenation plot the Mexican makes unwanted advances, is rejected, and subsequently returns with rapacious intentions. The Mexican reveals his “cruel, black nature” and his behavior is that of an “infuriated beast.” But at the moment when this “brute” is poised to commit the awful act, “he is attracted by the childish prattle” of a baby. “His heart is softened by the pure, innocent chatter of the child, and he drops on his knees before the crib and prays to God to help him resist his brutal inclinations”(71).

I have quoted from the *Biograph Bulletin* extensively because in the silent era before the introduction of inter-titles, such a promotional publication strongly shaped an audience's understanding and interpretation of a film's narrative and ideological structure. For instance, without the aid of this publication, the audience might not have interpreted that the villain is a “half breed Mexican,”

since his costume is more “Western” than “ethnic”—although we should note that the kerchief on his head is a marker of his Mexicanness.

The language of the *Biograph Bulletin* synopsis naturalizes the Mexican’s psychology. An insatiable desire for the White woman is part of his “cruel, dark nature” and he must beg God to deliver him from his “brutal inclinations.”

Although the titillating language of the bulletin is reprehensible, the film nevertheless stops short of having the greaser commit an act that would be unacceptable to its emerging middle class audience. *The Tavern-Keeper’s Daughter*, then, reveals several ambivalent aspects of early film. First, the film displaces a prurient, pornographic desire to witness the spectacle of rape. This displacement occurs through the convenient location of this desire in an ethnic Other, as well as in the final and safe prevention of this same act. Second, this film reveals Anglo-America’s ambivalent relation to those ethnic subjects it came to dominate. The film is most probably set in post-1848 California, and although the Mexican is dangerous, he has already been defeated, his lands taken. What remains is for Anglo-American values to take hold, and the paternalistic, almost revival-tent denouement produces the salvation the Mexican requires. Third, it is crucial that the Mexican contain within himself the possibility of Christian salvation. This means that, even as we consider the Protestant aversion to Catholicism, the film implicitly recognizes the commonality of the Anglo’s and Mexican’s Christian faith.

The plot structure of *The Greaser's Gauntlet* follows a similar pattern as *The Tavern-Keeper's Daughter*, but with significant additions. Initially, the title character of *The Greaser's Gauntlet* is not a despicable personage; according to the *Biograph Bulletin*, Jose is a "handsome young Mexican" who "leaves his home in the Sierra Medra [sic] Mountains to seek his fortune in the States"(qtd. in *Griffith Project*, vol. 1 75).⁴ He travels to a border town where a new railroad line is being built. In the convoluted story, Jose is accused of stealing from another man and is subsequently saved from hanging by Mildred, who discovers that a Chinese servant has taken the money. Mildred saves Jose a moment before he is to be hanged, and Jose expresses his gratitude by presenting her with the embroidered wrist of a gauntlet. The embroidery is of a cross sewn onto the gauntlet by Jose's mother, who gave it to him as a reminder of his Catholic values and heritage. Jose "swears that if she ever needs his help he will come to her," with the gauntlet symbolizing "a token of his pledge"(76).

Working against the interdiction of romance between an ethnic male and a white female, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* requires the attraction between Mildred and Jose for its narrative coherence. From their earliest encounter, when Mildred walks into a saloon with her fiancée, Mildred and Jose are fascinated by one another. With many people in the room, the two stand facing each other, and Jose removes his hat in salutation. Mildred simply keeps her eyes level with his and smiles. As she leaves, she turns to look at Jose one last time. It is through this

short encounter that Mildred intuitively Jose's "goodness" and innocence, even before she discovers the Chinese servant's guilt. Thus, although the couple exchanges neither romantic words nor overt gestures, the *Biograph Bulletin* describes Mildred as "pleading" his innocence because she "really believes him"(76). The *Bulletin* makes her conviction sound innocent, but from their first encounter onscreen, we see an intense attraction. Later in the narrative, when she has just saved Jose from hanging, Mildred and Jose stand alone, facing one another as Jose offers her the glove. The moment is charged by their unspoken fascination for each other. As Jose gives Mildred the glove, and "as she takes it her eyes sink deep into his heart, enkindling a hopeless passion for her," while she "promises to always keep his token with her"(76). That *The Greaser's Gauntlet* should use the attraction between a White woman and a "greaser" to maintain narrative tension goes against the conventions that the film Western would establish only a few years later. In *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914) and *An Arizona Wooing* (1915), for instance, the greaser makes unwanted advances upon the White female, only to be repulsed by the hero.

Although Mildred and Jose demonstrate mutual attraction, Mildred is engaged to another man, the head engineer, Tom Berkeley. The main villain of this story, as it turns out, is not Jose, but Bill Gates, the assistant engineer who also has an intense desire for Mildred. Time passes, Mildred and Tom marry, and Jose, for his part, "takes to drinking and goes to the depths of degradation"

because he “cannot obliterate the sweet face of the girl”(76). One day, Bill encounters Mildred and becomes “insultingly persistent,” but Tom arrives in time to thwart him. Gates becomes infuriated, “swears vengeance and going to a low tavern for help comes upon Jose, drunk of course, and with him and another greaser, they waylay Tom’s carriage”(76). The men kidnap Mildred and take her back to the tavern. Jose, who is now Bill’s lackey, initially does not recognize Mildred because he is too inebriated. It is at this point in the story that the gauntlet reappears and makes possible Jose’s redemption.

There upon the floor is the cross embroidered wrist of the gauntlet, which Mildred has dropped. . . . Jose seizes it and the truth at once dawns upon him. ‘Oh, God! What have I done? Yet it is not too late to undo it.’ So with the ferociousness of a wolf he leaps at the throat of Gates and after a terrific battle, drops him lifeless to the floor, as the husband and friend burst into the room. The tables are now turned and Mildred has a chance to thank him for his deliverance. Jose at the sight of the cross, makes a solemn resolution which he immediately fulfills—to return to his dear old mother in the mountains in whose arms we leave him. (76)

In the film, Jose does not send Gates “lifeless to the floor,” but spares the man’s life at Mildred’s behest. Thus, Jose is twice redeemed, first by his mother’s cross, then by Mildred’s intervention.

Jose undergoes a spectacular redemption in *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, one that reveals the conflicted relationship between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans in particular, and between Anglo-Americans and other ethnic subjects in general. On the surface, Griffith's vision of the Mexican in this film seems paternalistic: the Mexican is presented as essentially good but in need of moral guidance. He cannot act from his own volition; instead, he is led astray by the evil Bill Gates and later redeemed by the saintly Mildred. A more nuanced reading, however, uncovers the latent meaning of the Mexican's redemption. Jose is clearly Catholic, and the gauntlet signifies his adherence to his faith. We can read Jose's redemption, then, as evidence of the strength of his religious values. Therefore, he does not require a paternalistic guidance, but can draw upon his own Catholic resources. Whether or not Griffith intended this, there is an embedded recognition of the Mexican's Christian faith, and recognition, on a perhaps deeper level, of common values between the Anglo-American and the Mexican.

Consistent with the film's paternalism is its refusal to accept the Mexican on the American land. By making Jose an "immigrant," *The Greaser's Gauntlet* elides the history of Spanish and Mexican settlement in the southwestern United States before the Anglo-American's arrival. Jose is thus made alien in a land that fellow Mexicans had long inhabited. At the end of the film, he must return to Mexico to his mother, for there is ultimately no room for his cultural values in the American West. The film positions Jose's chivalry and faith above the amoral

drunkenness that pervades the lower sectors of this Western town, but it is ultimately the moral strength of people like Mildred's husband, Tom Berkeley—a strength symbolized by his role as an engineer and builder of the railroad—that will claim the West for the Anglo-American nation.

The film is more problematic with respect to other ethnicities, specifically, Chinese Americans. If we recall, Mildred saves Jose from lynching when she discovers that a Chinese waiter is responsible for the theft. Thus, it is only by replacing one despised ethnic subject with another that the film is able to deliver the greaser from harm. In this way, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* reenacts the historical machinations of Anglo-American railroad companies during the construction of railroad lines in the Southwest. With the availability of cheap Mexican labor along border towns, the preferred labor pool consisted of Mexicans rather than Chinese, and the film expresses this change by placing the Chinese waiter below the greaser in its racial hierarchy. Notwithstanding the film's seeming stereotypic complicity with US dominance, I would still maintain that ultimately the film's ambivalence subverts this complicity.

One source of the film's more ambivalent representation is the way *The Greaser's Gauntlet* merges technical achievement with ethnic representation: it is the first American film to employ the cut-in within a narrative framework, and it does so in the lynching scene in which Mildred saves Jose. As a camera technique, a "cut-in" produces "an instantaneous shift from a distant framing to a

closer view of some portion of the same space”(Bordwell and Thompson 478). Not to be confused with a “close-up,” a cut-in has the effect of enlarging—in either medium- or close-up shot—an important detail within the frame. Tom Gunning provides a detailed analysis of this significant moment in his study, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*. Gunning describes and comments upon the sequence of shots immediately after Mildred saves Jose from the lynching and they stand facing one another.

After this dramatic climax, the filmic discourse takes an unusual turn. We cut in to a shot which frames Jose and Mildred beneath the tree, but from a much closer camera position The full figures of the actors appear in this shot, from head to toe This cut-in creates a spatial relation between shots that had not appeared in any of Griffith’s films to this point. Rather than presenting an entirely new space, the closer shot enlarges a part of a space already established. In contrast to the earlier monolithic and neutral presentation of the bar scene, the camera seems to respond to the action within the frame, moving closer to emphasize it. (78)

Gunning notes that although the cut-in is “not a Griffith invention,” this film marks the first use of a cut-in to present “a detail essential to the story”(78).

I call attention to Griffith’s use of the cut-in in *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* because, as in his use of the close-up in another film, *Ramona* (1910), this is an instance in which “technical ‘innovations’ are a means of ideological encoding

that have been used in highly precise ways,” as Chon Noriega has argued with regard to the latter film (“Birth of the Southwest” 217-18). Furthermore, the cut-in in the case of *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* produces a racial encoding of startling dimensions. Griffith’s use of the cut-in confounds critical expectations because one would assume that Griffith, infamous for his racist attack upon African-Americans in *The Birth of a Nation*, would employ this narrative technique to highlight the purported deviousness of the Mexican, or to focus on the negatively-valenced racial difference between these two figures. This is what I expected coming to the film when I read a short description of the cut-in. Instead, as Gunning elaborates, the “exchange between Mildred and Jose . . . carries emotional overtones of gratitude, unspoken love, and devotion which affect later narrative development. The cut-in brings us closer to the human figures at an emotional moment. . . . it transforms the actors from distant figures to recognizable characters with visible faces and expressions”(80). Surprisingly, Griffith’s use of the cut-in brings the viewer closer to the racial difference between Jose and Mildred but not in a denigrating manner. The fullness of character the cut-in produces means that in this particular moment Jose the greaser escapes the one-dimensionality that we have come to expect. Despite Griffith’s conflicted relationship with American ethnicity, the movie gives the Mexican a human complexity. Additionally, as Gunning also hints, the detail shot of Jose bestowing the gauntlet upon Mildred adds a historical dimension to his

character, since the presentation of the gauntlet forms a “narrative armature” linking Jose, his mother, and Mildred (80). The importance of this linkage in terms of ethnic analysis is that it gives Jose a history and a connection to an ethical universe that the typical film greaser does not enjoy. The effect is to further humanize the Mexican.

I have thus far argued for the ambivalent and contradictory relationship, particularly in Griffith’s films, between early American film and ethnic representation. In *The Red Girl* (1908), Griffith again expresses paternalistic sympathy for an ethnic subject, the native American Red Girl in the film’s title. Not unlike *The Greaser’s Gauntlet*, however, *The Red Girl*’s sympathy toward the native American heroine requires that another ethnic subject be placed in the role of the villain. This time, Griffith chooses a Mexican woman as the scoundrel, and she is particularly evil. The unnamed Mexican sets the story in motion when she sneaks into Kate’s hotel room and steals her gold. In her escape, the Mexican woman convinces the Red Girl and her “half-breed” husband to hide her, but she then betrays the Red Girl by seducing her husband. The “Mexican Jezebel” convinces the half-breed to kill the Red Girl. “To this end they plan a torture. Binding her hands and feet, they take her to a large trunk of a dead tree, which overhangs the river and there they hang her” (*Biograph Bulletin*, qtd. in *Griffith Project*, v. 1 94). Eventually, the Red Girl frees herself, helps Kate find the thief, and the Mexican woman is arrested. Like *The Greaser’s*

Gauntlet, in which the Chinese servant serves as a scapegoat for the tacit acceptance of the Mexican, *The Red Girl* places the Mexican woman in the role of scapegoat, and she makes possible a symbolic reconciliation between Whites and native Americans. In its depiction of the Mexican woman, the film veers toward titillation that is only explainable as an attempt to shock audiences into returning to theaters. In the film's most sensational scene, the Mexican woman ambushes a sheriff's deputy, shoots him, slaps him, and then kicks him, all the while laughing at her victim's fate.

In its antipathy and misogyny toward the Mexican woman, *The Red Girl* shows the uneven characterization of Mexican identity in Griffith's films. Only sixteen months later, in his production of *The Thread of Destiny* (1910), Griffith would return to a favorable presentation of Mexican identity. *The Thread of Destiny* is the most sympathetic of the early Griffith films which treat Mexican characters. The film treats a young couple, Frances Deland and Pedro Juan Moreno y Calderon, who meet and immediately fall in love. The intertitles describe Francis, played by Mary Pickford, as "a delightful bit of American girlhood." Curiously, the film shows an awareness of the constructed nature of stereotypes, for it notes that Pedro is "a Spanish aristocrat to his countrymen—only 'another impudent greaser' to the white settlers." Between their affections stands Buck Larkin, who insults Frances, and is easily defeated by Pedro. Buck turns the townsmen against Pedro by accusing him of cheating at cards, but in the

end Pedro and Frances escape and get married. When the townsmen see them again, Buck attempts to stir up another posse, but miraculously the sight of a married couple “awakens the boys to their better selves,” and they leave Frances and Pedro alone as the narrative concludes (21).

The Thread of Destiny is worthy of note for several reasons. First, the narrative explicitly treats an intercultural, if not interracial, relationship. Second, Pedro is clearly the male protagonist of this movie, and he is shown as physically and ethically superior to Buck and the townsmen, who are depicted as rabble-rousing gamblers. Third, the film’s antagonist is a white American. Finally, the Mexican survives through the last reel without meeting a violent end. Though I have called attention to *The Thread of Destiny*’s sympathetic portrayal of the Mexican, we see traces of its unease with racial representation in its attempt to distinguish Pedro as a Spanish aristocrat. The film’s inter-titles emphasize his class position, and his costume is highly ornate. The film is thus pulled in several directions at once: it elevates the Mexican greaser to the status of upper-class Spaniard in order to make the bond between the Mexican and a white woman acceptable to its audience.

One question we may ask as we watch these movies is why does Griffith choose to populate his films with so many ethnic subjects, be they native-, Chinese-, African-, or Mexican American? Part of the reason is that these figures represent Other-ness, and they thus provide the visual spectacle required to attract

early filmgoers. Additionally, these ethnic subjects offer a titillating yet containable threat. Scott Simon comments that the “number of Mexicans populating Griffith’s early work suggests they were more than an excuse for eye-catching set design and exotic costuming. Mexicans could be assumed to be hot-blooded and violent, never terribly far from crimes of passion”(Griffith Project, v. 1 114). These viewer assumptions notwithstanding, we cannot ignore the instances in which, for some Mexican subjects, Griffith gives ethnic representation a degree of complexity and stirs the viewer to identify with ethnic characters. These early films exemplify the ambivalent qualities of stereotypical representation, that they demonstrate that we need to expand our vision beyond the positive/negative binary, to now understand that amidst and through even the worst stereotypes the American imagination expresses simultaneous derision and desire for the Mexican.

Yet questions remain in regards the marked differences between Griffith’s representations of Mexicans and Native Americans and his representations of African Americans. One possible reason for this difference is the racist political agenda Griffith pursues in *The Birth of a Nation*, which necessitates the completely dehumanized figures he produces. *Birth* instantiates White fear of an empowered African America, which was very palpable to conservative Whites in the post-Reconstruction era. Recall, for instance, the scene in the statehouse, in which Blacks are shown taking charge of state politics. Within the Western genre

at this moment, on the other hand, ethnicity is less threatening and, at this time at least, the American West is the only setting in which a Mexican or Native American may be viewed. As Gregory Jay has noted, a “pervading myth about the final days of the Indian spread throughout U.S. culture” at the turn of the century (8). Perhaps the sense of guilt for an accomplished conquest also applied to the Mexican, who had lost his lands in the US-Mexico War of 1848, although it appears that the eruption of the Mexican Revolution and the emergence of the Western hero reinstated the Mexican as threat, as I argue in the following chapter.

A second and more plausible reason for the variety of representation with respect to Mexicans and Native Americans may have to do with the youth of the Western genre in the years 1907-10. Gunning observes, for instance, that the “hallmarks of Griffith’s early Westerns . . . contrast a great deal with the genre as it developed later.” One major difference, Gunning points out, is that “the emphasis on a masculine and ethical Western hero remains absent” in Griffith (*Griffith Project* , v. 1 94). As the Western genre established itself in the second decade of the twentieth century, actors such as Broncho Billy Anderson, William S. Hart and Tom Mix came to symbolize the White, masculine, and ethical hero to which Gunning refers. These heroes defined themselves—and by extension, the American character—against an anti-type that came to be played by the Mexican villain.

Griffith and Crane stand at seemingly opposite ends of the trajectories of their respective art forms, yet they produce similarly ambivalent results. Griffith's inconsistent appraisal of the Mexican suggests a film genre in its early stages, still to establish its conventions of greaser villains and Anglo heroes. Crane's ironic stance vis-à-vis the Western hero places him outside of and near the end of the dime novel tradition. Griffith's Mexican is alternately untrustworthy, rapacious, and cowardly, but also brave and noble. The Mexican's contradictory representation in Griffith enables us to see the limits of stereotypical discourse. Crane, on the other hand, consciously avoids depicting the Mexican as a stereotypical greaser or bandit, and he evinces deep unease for the transcendent Anglo hero. Critics who have concentrated exclusively on José's servility or the grandee's treachery have overlooked Crane's admiration for José's competence and his respect for the grandee's code of honor. The appearance of Mexican identity in Griffith and Crane, finally, confirms the strong fascination that the American imagination has held for Mexican culture, and suggests that the unequal relation between the two cultures has provided the ground upon which the U.S. has defined itself.

My alternative and ambivalent reading of literature and film stereotypes suggests, more broadly, that ethnicity generally and *Mexicanidad* specifically have always been a fundamental constituents of American identity. The Mexican presence in American culture has appeared not only in the oppositional and binary

relationship between the Anglo and the Other but also in the more complicated relation of attraction and repulsion between these two figures. Provocatively, because Anglo-America has dominated the production of the discourse on identity, various ethnic subjects have often been relegated to the “negative” position—the Chinese in *The Greaser’s Gauntlet*, the Mexican woman in *The Red Girl*—depending on the ideological imperatives of the particular discourse. In chapter two, for instance, I propose that the figure of the greaser or bandit, in its conflation with that of the Mexican revolutionary, occupies the negative position between during the 1910s. Yet despite this stereotypical hardening, a reading of the stereotype based on Bhabha’s notion of ambivalence allows us to see the continuing fluidity of the stereotype, the lack of fixity that permits the ethnic subject to subvert its negative determinations and uncover its constructed character. The stereotype’s ambivalence suggests, finally, that ethnic subjects must affirm their undeniable presence in the American imaginary in a far greater range of texts than was previously understood.

¹ In *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, David Montejano documents that between 1915-1917, at the height of tensions between Anglos and Mexicans, the lynching of Mexicans rose markedly (122).

² In “Unraveling the Humanist,” Stanley Wertheim criticizes Crane for depicting the Mexican as “degenerate, menacing, and violent, yet ultimately cowardly” (70).

³ I visited the Library of Congress in the fall of 2001. I would like to thank Charles Ramírez Berg for helping me acquire copies of these films.

⁴ Unlike the “José” of “One Dash—Horses,” the “Jose” of *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* carries no accent in his name. I have not explored to what extent Crane insisted on “José,” but evidently the writers of the *Biograph Bulletin* saw no need to include the customary accent over the final syllable.

Chapter Two

Greaser Bandit and Bandit Revolutionary: The Conflation of Mexican Identity Representation, 1910-20

Introduction

The preceding analysis of D.W. Griffith's early Westerns confirms the fascination for the Mexican subject embodied in American film from its earliest beginnings. I argue in this chapter that by the second decade of the twentieth century, the Mexican Revolution would auger a retrenchment of denigrating stereotypes that are nevertheless characterized by ambivalence. With its "comprehensive spectrum of violence," the Revolution "established Mexico as the last fictional frontier, a barbarous land offering endless possibilities for killing bandidos and seducing señoritas"(Pettit 120). As a "fictional frontier," the struggle provided a new ground for the largely negative representation of Mexican identity.

The revolution affected the representation of the Mexican in three distinct ways. Initially, we see a strong correlation between the journalistic response to the revolution and the advent of newsreels during the silent film era. American political and business interests expressed their fear of the revolution through these media. Journalistic photographs and newsreel images of the Mexican

revolutionary gave Hollywood filmmakers the iconic material from which to construct a degraded picture of Mexican identity. Films of the era transformed the Mexican from a sometimes-redeemable greaser to a dangerous bandit revolutionary. Next, the conflation between bandit and revolutionary specifically manifests itself at the iconographic level of dress, as the early greaser or bandit is transformed and collapsed into the bandit revolutionary. Third, at the same time that the Mexican Revolution erupted, the Western was solidifying its position as the genre *par excellence* of U.S. cinema. The period 1914-20 sees the creation of what Richard Slotkin calls the Western “myth-hero,” whose apotheosis requires an antinomial figure, namely, the Mexican villain.

It is ingenuous, however, to interpret the period in question from the conventional positive/negative binary which I have already critiqued. My argument for the Mexican’s wavering depiction holds that ambivalence is at the core of racial stereotypical representation, even in its most “negative” form. In chapter one, I analyzed ambivalence within specific films by D. W. Griffith. In the present chapter, I look at the ambivalence of stereotypical representation over the next decade. Ambivalence in this case takes a different form; it does not appear within particular texts but presents itself in the representational patterns of many texts over a period of time. Many of these texts, in fact, tendentiously adhere to the either/or binary that equates Anglos with good and Mexicans with evil. Nevertheless, the revolutionary period does not pass without displaying such

ambivalence toward the Mexican, as the Western film hero emerges out of mimicry of the Mexican *vaquero* and the Mexican “good badman” established in Griffith’s Westerns.

Throughout the chapter, the discursive retrogression which I reference stands in contrast to what Helen Delpar has claimed as the “enormous vogue of things Mexican” in the U.S.’s relation to Mexico. Delpar notes: “forces were at work in both countries after 1900 that would produce a flowering of cultural relations in the 1920s”(7). The increasing cultural rapport to which Delpar alludes, however, only makes its way into film later in the century, after having appeared initially in literature and the plastic arts. For this reason, throughout the chapter I compare the filmic discourse with literature, specifically Jack London’s short story, “The Mexican,” in order to get a better sense of the retrenchment of negative stereotypes these films instantiate. London’s story, which critically assesses the U.S. view of the Mexican revolutionary, stands at the forefront of the positive reassessment of the Mexican that would take shape later in the century. By situating London as a critical voice within the denigrating discourse about the Mexican revolutionary, I also make a case for literature’s ability to counter and influence mass media’s racial representations.

The U.S. Print Media, Hollywood, and the Revolution

Kevin Brownlow has argued that the motion picture industry “has never acknowledged the role it played in the [Mexican] revolution”(87). Nor, for that

matter, has Hollywood recognized the extent to which jingoistic political views of the era shaped the representation of Mexican identity during the revolution.

According to Alfred Charles Richard, by the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, no other Latin American country would occupy “more North American screen time than Mexico. In silent film days more than five hundred films used it as a focal point. . . . It is not too much to say that the convenience of an enemy so easily found just across the border aided the rapid growth and development of the film industry”(xxiii-xiv). Mexico’s upheaval threatened U.S. interests and increased the perception of Mexicans as lawless bandits, and the assassination of Francisco Madero in 1911 “began more than four and one half years of almost continuous confrontation between the two nations. Before the inevitable interventions, it was a war of words and images in which the press and motion pictures played a significant and active role”(xxiv).

As the Mexican Revolution was coming to a close in 1920, the *New York Times* evidenced the resultant American view of the Mexican: “to the average American the Mexican today is an insurgent or bandit or, at any rate, a conspirator against his own government”(qtd. in Delpar 5). Because the movies, Westerns in particular, reinforced such an assessment, the *Times* statement highlights the ideological conflation occurring during this period: the Mexican as an insurgent *and* a bandit, or, worse yet, as a bandit revolutionary. We see, then, the Mexican stereotype coalescing into the now classic Mexican bandit revolutionary who

appears in such wide-ranging films as *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and *The Three Amigos* (1987). Thus, if Griffith's pre-1910 Westerns demonstrate a degree of ambivalence in their representations of the Mexican male, between 1910 and 1920 the Mexican stereotype hardens significantly.

American opposition to the revolution's different fighting groups was frequently expressed in newspapers, as Mark Anderson documents in *Pancho Villa's Revolution by Headlines*. Newsreels and documentaries, in turn, amplified newspaper sentiments. *Juarez After the Siege* (1911), *A Trip Through Barbarous Mexico* (1913), *The Tampico Incident* (1914), and *Villa—Dead or Alive* (1916) satisfied the movie-going public's hunger for news about the revolution. That Hollywood filmmakers were swayed by newspaper headlines and newsreels is evident in the films they produced. A survey of film titles made during the revolutionary period indicates the kind of interest the revolution generated: *Across the Mexican Line* (1911), *The Mexican Spy* (1913), *A Mexican Defeat* (1913), *At Mexico's Mercy* (1914), *Captured by Mexicans* (1914), *A Mexican Spy in America* (1914), and *Under Fire in Mexico* (1914) are among the most suggestive, but many more were made (Richard, *Hispanic Image*).

William Randolph Hearst was among the most adamant opponents of revolution in Mexico. As is widely known, Hearst owned a newspaper empire—including the *San Francisco Examiner*—but also vast land and natural resources

in Mexico (Brownlow 90). Hearst's property incurred attacks from Francisco Villa's forces, so his economic interests were directly threatened. "Hearst instructed his newspaper editors to launch a full-scale attack upon Mexico, representing her as a potential enemy of the United States and urging the government to send in troops to restore order"(90). A typical *Examiner* analysis of the Revolution's leaders appeared on December 14, 1913, attacking Venustiano Carranza and Villa: "Carranza and his general [Villa] are all tarred with the same stick. They are simply organized brigands"(qtd. in Anderson 91). The Hearst-Selig News Pictorial was among the first to present documentary images of the Revolution, but with the addition of Hearst's slanted views: "the way to impress the Mexicans is to REPRESS the Mexicans"(qtd. in Brownlow 91-92). Hearst's news conglomerate, furthermore, was not the only news and media outlet critical of the revolutionary movement. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* also opposed the revolution, and printed regular editorials condemning the various factions involved in the fighting (Anderson 55). American newspapers concentrated on three perceived aspects of the Mexican character in their depictions: backwardness, racial limitations, and moral decrepitude (123). These themes are consistent with the views of the greaser expressed by dime novels during the nineteenth century, but they focus on the Mexican's stereotyped propensity for violence, and thus express the unease the revolution occasioned.

The correlation between the press's characterization of the revolution becomes readily apparent when we consider that some news syndicates, principally Hearst, also owned film-making operations. Additionally, many of the best-known early studios—Kalem, Pathe, Selig, and Mutual among them—produced newsreels that fanned the public's interest in events in Mexico. The earliest newsreels covered the revolution in straightforward manner. In *Juarez After the Siege* (Kalem 1911), filmgoers watched the aftermath of a battle between revolutionary and federalist forces, with apparently little editorial comment from intertitles (Richard 42). Pathe Newsreel #22, *Del Rio, Texas* (1911) showed "ranchers driving cows across the Rio Grande to save them from the Federalista and revolutionary troops"(Richard 73). Although the picture makes no overt condemnation of the revolutionary upheaval, it differs from *Juarez After the Siege* in its implication that the revolution would disrupt life along the border for Americans.

As interest in the revolution grew, so did the length and sensationalism of the films covering it. In 1913 the trade publication *The Moving Picture World* advertised the documentary *A Trip Through Barbarous Mexico*, promoting it as a "five thousand foot masterpiece that will appeal to the masses"(March 13, 1913 1142). Indicative of the ambivalence that pervades the U.S. relation to Mexico, the advertisement promised viewers "Mexico as she really is today, mingling its

beauties and its terrors.” The main antagonists of the conflict are featured in bold type, in the style of a boxing match advertisement, “Madero versus Diaz”(1142).

Two events in particular affected the U.S. perception of the Mexican character. The first incident was the 1914 confrontation at Veracruz between Mexican army troops and U.S. Marines sent troops to occupy Veracruz in opposition to the Huerta dictatorship (Bazant 143). In response Pathe filmed *The Tampico Incident* (1914), a newsreel in three parts that, according to an uncredited source, depicted how “Veracruz prospers under the firm kindly rule of the American occupation”(qtd. in Richard 133). The second event, Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico in 1915, had the greatest effect on the U.S. stance toward the revolution. Larry Langman writes that when “the U.S. intervened on the side of President Carranza, whom Villa opposed, the revolutionary bandit responded by raiding American border towns and killing several U.S. citizens”(328). We see the immediate U.S. film response in Pathe’s Newsreel #30, *Somewhere in Mexico* (1916), in which the ad notes U.S. flyers braving “the treacherous air currents of the Mexican desert looking for Villa’s bandits”(qtd. in Richard 183). Among the most damning of the newsreels is *Villa—Dead or Alive* (1916), which exhorted American preparedness in the face of Villa’s attacks upon the United States (Richard 199).

Evidence of newspaper and newsreel impact on Hollywood may be found in the dramatic increase of negatively-valenced film titles during the revolutionary

period, especially the years 1914 through 1916, when relations between the U.S. and Mexico were at their most vexed. During this period, Hollywood depictions of the Mexican begin to vitrify and take on an antinomial quality, with the victorious Anglo in a struggle against a duplicitous, violent Mexican. In *A Mexican Defeat* (1913), a Mexican army captain tries to frame an American couple, and he displays lecherous intentions toward the woman. The couple outwits him and narrowly escapes across the border (97). A year later, with tensions between the U.S. and Mexico growing and with the increased danger to American business interests, films such as *At Mexico's Mercy* (1914) and *Captured by Mexicans* (1914) introduced audiences to the trope of the bandit revolutionary. In *At Mexico's Mercy*, a revolutionary general “demands part of the payroll as tribute for allowing the [American] mine to continue operations.” Richard notes that the general “is portrayed more as a bandit than a revolutionary”(112). Similarly, *Captured by Mexicans* blurs the distinction between bandit and revolutionary, as Pedro “and a band of Mexican rebels” steal a horse and kidnap an American before they are themselves captured by the *federales* (MPW, April 4, 1914 98). Films that continue the conflation of bandit and revolutionary include *Under Fire in Mexico* (1914), which *The Moving Picture World* calls “a powerful story of guerilla cruelty and American heroism,” and *The Americano* (1915), in which, according to the same trade magazine, “bandit soldiers” attack an American oil company (qtd. in Richard 136, 139).

One of the most salient examples of the newspaper and newsreel influence upon Hollywood is William S. Hart's *The Patriot* (1916), a film whose "background . . . was no doubt inspired by the activities of Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution" (Langman 328). Another film, *The Insurrection* (1915), defended the U.S. occupation of Veracruz "by the revelation of Mexican plans to attack the [U.S. naval] fleet" (Brownlow 101). These historical events had already been taken up by the leading newspapers, and in the hands of the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *LA Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, the interpretation of these occurrences influenced Hollywood's depiction of the Mexican as villain.

To be sure, there are instances in which Hollywood took a less hostile approach to the Revolution, as when the Mutual Film Corporation signed a \$25,000 contract with Pancho Villa for exclusive filming rights to his battles, resulting in *The Life of Villa* (1915) (although this film is not without sensationalist aims). Still, as Christopher Frayling notes, Mexico in Hollywood's eyes is rarely seen either sympathetically or with historical accuracy; instead, Mexico "has provided a suitable backdrop for footloose American heroes. . . . Hollywood film-makers saw the events south of the border as a great opportunity to capture some real-life action footage" (*BFI Companion* 186). The year of Villa's raids, 1916, marks a nadir in the U.S. response to the Mexican subject. *Liberty*, which *Moving Picture World* calls a "startlingly realistic drama of warfare along the Mexican border," envisions Mexico as a tyrannical country and

the U.S. as the defender of the cause for liberty (qtd. in Richard 179). *Patria*, a multi-part serial funded by Hearst, imagines Mexico and Japan plotting to undermine the U.S. Finally, in *Taint of Fear*, a young man proves his bravery by participating in the capture of Lopez, a Mexican bandit modeled after Pancho Villa (184, 189).

Was 1910, the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, a watershed year for the representation of the Mexican in film? Is it possible to argue that pre-1910 Westerns exhibit a degree of ambivalence that post-1910 Westerns do not? The Griffith films I discuss in the previous chapter seem to lead to this conclusion. These questions are difficult to pose, never mind answer, especially because prints of many of the films under consideration are very rare or not extant, and we have only their advertisements and brief plot reviews as evidence of their content. Although other factors influenced the representation of the Mexican after 1910—for instance, the solidification of the Western as a genre, as I discuss below—between 1910 and 1920, the Revolution heavily tilted the balance of Mexican representation in a negative direction, and the tremendous number of titles produced during this period provides a damning insight on the period.¹ Richard documents that between 1914 and 1916, one hundred seventy-six films were produced in which Mexican characterization was a significant element, and Pancho Villa appeared in thirty-six of these. “Once called a ‘revolutionary’ . . . he was typed a treacherous and bloody bandit in the daily press and in the

movies”(xxvi). Furthermore, Arthur Pettit notes that of “the fifteen films with Mexican settings released between 1913 and 1916, five . . . simply show the U.S. Army in pursuit of bandit-‘rebels,’”(135). That these five films deal with “bandit-‘rebels’” indicates the negative assessment of both the Mexican and the revolution, as well as the ideological conflation of the bandit and the revolutionary.

Dress as Marker of Villainy and Sign of Bandit/Revolutionary Conflation

We have encountered the ways in which the journalistic media’s attitude to the revolution affected Hollywood’s treatment of Mexican identity, both in terms of the number of films produced and in the increasingly hostile attitude toward the Mexican. Iconographically, the revolution also altered the screen Mexican’s style of dress, for the Mexican’s costume reflects the ideological transformation from greaser bandit to bandit revolutionary. Raymund Paredes argues that by 1910, “filmmakers had faithfully translated the literary formulations of Mexican villainy into a visual medium”(207). While Paredes’s claim may hold true in terms of characterization, the style of dress in these films does not undergo the changes that evidence a growing hostility toward the Mexican until a few years after 1910. At least three distinct costumes are used to racially distinguish between the Mexican and the Anglo-American.

The Greaser’s Gauntlet (1908), discussed in the previous chapter, serves as an early example of the style of dress used to depict the Mexican before the

Revolution. Jose, the greaser of the title, is attired in the costume of a Mexican *charro* or *vaquero*. In addition to the actor's brown-face, the Mexican character can be differentiated from his Anglo-American counterpart because instead of a Stetson, he wears a round, *charro*-styled sombrero; rather than denim pants, he wears epaulet-trimmed leather pants. Like in other films of this early period, the "celluloid Mexican dresses the dandy, with broad sombrero, gaudy jacket, intricately embroidered trousers, and tooled leather belts"(Pettit 133). By contrast, the "Saxon hero wears ordinary Levi's, plain shirt and boots, with only his white Stetson to mark his status"(133). A sharper differentiation between villain and hero appeared several years later, in *An Arizona Wooing*. "Mexican Joe," who lusts after an Anglo woman and pays dearly for it, wears an even larger sombrero. Unlike Jose, Mexican Joe wears heavy, greasy brown-face that further distinguishes him from the hero.

Although the *charro* style predominates in early silent Westerns, films such as *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914) introduce a second mode of dress. Here, the greaser—listed in the credits as "the half-breed"—wears a Stetson, denim pants, and a Western shirt, much like his Anglo counterpart. The similarity in costume makes the differences between the Anglo hero and the greaser villain harder to discern, though the ethnic difference is transferred to class difference, apparent in the character's dress. Broncho Billy wears a distinctly formed, light-colored hat, and a form-fitting shirt. The half-breed, by way of contrast, wears a

ragged, somewhat deformed black hat, and a loosely fitting patterned shirt. The differences in dress between Broncho Billy and the half-breed are subtle—we should keep in mind that as a cowboy, Broncho Billy is a working-class hero—but their effect is to give the half-breed his lowly caste. Additionally, it is clear by the Mexican's actions and the inter-title descriptions that he occupies the role of the badman. Whether they are dressed as *charros* or cowboys, the Mexicans in *An Arizona Wooing* and *Broncho Billy and the Greaser*, films made after 1910, are irredeemable villains. Unlike Jose in *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, made before 1910, Mexican Joe and “the half-breed” express neither guilt nor a change of heart as a result of their actions.

The Mexican Revolution introduced the third and most strongly differentiated mode of dress: the revolutionary iconography produces a stronger differentiation between the Mexican greaser or bandit and the Anglo-American hero. As Charles Ramírez Berg writes in *Images and Counter-Images*, the *bandido* stereotype in Hollywood films is iconographically recognizable by the “unkempt appearance, the weaponry and *bandolero* bullet belts, the funny-looking sombrero, the sneering look”(8). The *bandido* Ramírez Berg describes is the one with whom contemporary film-goers are so familiar, but he is a differently attired personage than the bandit of the earlier greaser films. The updated Mexican bandit wears a larger, “funny-looking” *charro*-style hat; his most significant accouterments are the bandoleers across his chest, making him not

only far more threatening, but also more easily discernable. Ramírez Berg reminds us, “most men who dressed like this were not bandits—they were rebel soldiers who fought in Mexico’s Revolutionary War”(9), yet what has occurred in American Westerns is the collapse of two distinct figures—the bandit and the revolutionary—into a single iconographically recognizable figure.

Because many early Westerns do not survive, we cannot exactly determine when the iconographic conflation of bandit and revolutionary began, but we can guess that *The Life of Villa* (1915) is an important marker. Villa was known first as a bandit, and the movie emphasizes this point. “The dramatic section concentrated on the story of Villa’s sister, raped by a Federal officer. Villa . . . killed the officer and took to the hills as an outlaw. When the revolution broke out, he linked his bandit army with the rebels”(Brownlow 102). As a bandit and rebel, Villa captured the imagination of Hollywood and the news media—for good and ill. Henceforward, his image was so dominant that nearly all representations of Mexican characters in Westerns would be modeled after him.

The Bad Man is perhaps the first film to fully consolidate the visual elements of bandit revolutionary, though it did not appear until 1923. Holbrook Blinn plays Pancho Lopez, a character “more a jester than a villain—a half-menacing, moustache tweaking clown who boasts that he kills a gringo for breakfast and spouts bad verse delivered in a greaser accent”(Pettit 137). As one might deduce, Pancho Lopez is modeled after Pancho Villa. Unexpectedly, this

badman is not entirely a villain, but a throwback to the good-hearted greaser. “Pancho Lopez . . . recognizes Jones, an American, . . . as the man who had earlier saved his life. When Jones has problems paying the mortgage to his ranch, the bandit helps him by robbing a bank and turning over the money and some cattle he has stolen to Jones”(Langman 17-18). I discuss the ambivalent nature of this film’s representation of Mexican identity in the final section of this chapter, but what is important to realize presently is that the Villa-derived representation of the bandit revolutionary became the dominant depiction of the Mexican in the Western genre. The conflation of bandit and revolutionary has meant that we cannot think “bandit” without associating the descriptors “treacherous” and “cowardly,” and without picturing the sneering look, the dirtiness, the large sombrero, and, the most important link with the Revolution, the bandoleer belts across the chest.² Because the stereotypical image of the Mexican greaser or bandit long precedes the image of the revolutionary, nearly every American film about Mexican revolutionaries also carries associations with banditry. Even when the Mexican revolutionary acts heroically, but he is usually indiscriminately violent.

Establishment of the Western Hero, Emergence of the Mexican Villain

As early as 1911, *The Moving Picture World* complained that the Western had become predictable and stagnant: “always the same plot, the same scenery, the same impossible Indians, the wicked half-breeds, the beautiful red

maidens”(qtd. in *Treasures from the American Film Archives*, vol. 1).

Pronouncements about the Western’s exhaustion, as Edward Buscombe notes, “were to be repeated at regular intervals over the years”(BFI Companion 24). In truth, however, the Western genre would not establish itself until the appearance of what Richard Slotkin calls the “myth-hero” during the 1910s, the same period as the Mexican Revolution. According to Slotkin, the “cultural structures through which” such a figure emerged “were established between 1914 and 1920 in the work of the most important silent-Western star, William S. Hart”(243). The “myth-hero” is the center of the genre, for he is the highest representative of Anglo-American values, and he is the embodiment of the “Myth of the Frontier.” That American film established the Western hero at this precise moment is significant for Mexican representation, for this is also the moment at which the film industry conflated the Mexican revolutionary with the bandit. If the early Western positions the Mexican as the nemesis the hero must overcome, then this binary placement is further emphasized by the threat that the Mexican Revolution instantiated in Hollywood’s imagination.

In *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992), Slotkin advances the thesis that the “Myth of the Frontier” has proven foundational in its power to influence “the life, thought, and politics of the nation”(4). As a “mythic expression of ideology”(5), the Myth of the Frontier functions as “a set of symbols that is apparently simple yet capable of varied and

complex uses; that serves with equal facility the requirements of progressives and conservatives . . . that is rooted in history but capable of transcending the limitations of a specific temporality”(4). The Myth of the Frontier, in other words, serves as a flexible explanatory narrative for the ideological assessment of a historically diverse set of national circumstances, but especially American identity. The Western’s ability to concretely express national concerns, its direct “connection to the characteristic images, characters, and references of frontier mythology,” enables a reading of American identity in relation to its most persistent Other, Mexican identity (25).

William S. Hart’s founding vision for the Western most strongly positions itself vis-à-vis Mexican identity, for he constructs the paradigmatic Western hero in opposition to this particular ethnic subject. My assessment challenges Slotkin’s, who recognizes the Mexican as only one of many of Hart’s adversaries. “Hart’s opponents are only rarely Indians, who might have been construed as Noble Savages. More often, his opponents are figures reminiscent of the dangerous classes and human ‘scum’ of the metropolis: cardsharps, brothel-keepers, and racketeers, many of them half-breeds or ‘Mexicans’”(245). In the teens, Hart set a pattern that would continue into the 1960s and beyond. While Hollywood’s relationship with the Native American would continue to be deeply troubling, Hart’s main opponents were not Indians, but greasers, half-breeds,

bandits, and bandit revolutionaries. As the following examples suggest, Mexican identity came to signify the negative Other to Anglo-American heroism.

Three films starring and directed by Hart exemplify the necessity of creating a Mexican villain in order to establish the Anglo-American male as the Western's preeminent hero. *Hell's Hinges* (1916) is a particularly apt example of the wholesale transference of villainy to the Mexican—or Mexican-ness, in this case. *Hell's Hinges* has attained the status of classic among silent Westerns, especially in consequence of its release as part of the *Treasures From the American Film Archives* series of preserved movies. It is an unusually bleak Western about a badman who is redeemed by helping to annihilate a town stained by sin. Interestingly, the film does not directly treat Mexican identity, since no half-breed, greaser, or bandit shows up to antagonize the hero. The absence of a greaser notwithstanding, the film establishes a covert racial dichotomy in its differentiation of the story's hero, "Blaze" Tracy, from its villain, "Silk" Miller. An early inter-title describes "Blaze" Tracy as the "embodiment of the best and worst of the early West. A man-killer whose philosophy of life is best summed up in the creed, 'shoot first and do your disputin' afterward.'" As the inter-title makes clear, initially Tracy is no hero. His redemption, however, may be possible only if his adversary is established as wholly despicable. To this end, the film characterizes "Silk" Miller as mingling "the oily craftiness of a Mexican with the deadly treachery of a rattler, no man's open enemy and no man's friend."

The film establishes a narrative structure based on these oppositions early on, and thus suggests two points. First, the plot makes clear that in 1916 the mere association of a character with Mexican-ness is enough to establish his villainy. Second, and more importantly, the plot sets up the necessary antinomy from which the hero emerges, and this antinomy is built on racial difference. Slotkin assesses the situation similarly when he recognizes that the “script gives this image of an urban-western corruption [embodied by “Silk” Miller] racial overtones”(247). Slotkin concludes that the “only thing that has been validated by the story is the hero’s character itself, now raised nearly to the status of a moral principle: Virtue, goodness, and right are to be found wherever there is a man like Blaze Tracey—intensely ‘masculine,’ proud, self-willed, strong, hard-headed, capable of effective violence—and White”(250). While Slotkin emphasizes the hero’s whiteness, he does not fully acknowledge the extent to which the Anglo-American attains myth-hero status through the degradation of a subject who is specifically Mexican.

In *The Aryan* (1916), Hart plays Steve Denton, a former miner turned outlaw who leads a band of Mexican renegades on attacks against westward-moving settlers. Hart’s character is “redeemed when a young girl from one of the wagon trains comes to his camp to plead with him. She risks herself among the Mexican renegades, confiding implicitly in the fact that Denton is an ‘Aryan’ and as such instinctively bound to protect all women of his race”(250). *The Patriot*

(1916) follows the same thematic structure. In this film, Hart's character, Bob Wiley, joins the revolutionary Mexican forces of "Pancho Zapilla" after unscrupulous politicians steal his mine claim, betraying his loyalty to America. As I noted earlier, the film's plot is based on Pancho Villa's attacks on Columbus, New Mexico. When the band prepares a raid on the United States, Wiley has a last-second change of heart that restores his patriotism.

In the end, Wiley is recalled to patriotism by the 'racial' appeal of a child who reminds him of his own dead son. Hart thus uses the terms of the Western to address the issues of social justice and abuse of power from which modern revolutions arise; and through those terms he is able to acknowledge the fact of injustice while discrediting revolutionary solutions by linking them with the racially alien and criminal Mexicans.

(251)

Slotkin's analysis demonstrates Hart's role in establishing the myth-hero of the West. "Through Hart, the Western genre-hero achieved broad acceptance as a historically 'authentic' and morally valid representation of a specifically 'red-blooded' version of American character"(251). Yet Slotkin falls short of connecting the achievement of a 'red-blooded' and 'White' American hero with the solidification of the Mexican as the arch-villain. *Hell's Hinges*, *The Aryan*, and *The Patriot* address key themes within Anglo-American identity—heroic

redemption, whiteness, and nationalism—and they take up these themes by tacitly or overtly positioning Mexican-ness as the evil the Western hero must overcome.

In other Westerns, the Mexican displaces conflicts within Anglo-American communities by taking on the main role of villain. This is the case in *An Arizona Wooing* (1915). The plot for this movie is based on the struggles between cattle ranchers and sheepherders on the Western range. Tom Mix plays Tom Warner, a sheepherder threatened with severe harm if he does not take his flock far away from a cattle ranching community. Unfortunately, he is in love with an elder cattleman's daughter. Conveniently, "Mexican Joe" also loves the girl, and kidnaps her, intending to force her into marrying him. Tom, who had been tied up by several cattle ranchers and then cruelly jeered by "Mexican Joe," informs the girl's father of the situation. The man releases Tom, who then rescues the girl, and "Mexican Joe" is carted off-screen to meet a certain end. The Mexican, thus, acts as an odd scapegoat—no pun intended—for the conflict between cattle ranchers and sheepherders. The film ends with peace between the two groups as it introduces fans of the Western to another of the genre's early stars, Tom Mix.

We can further argue, with support from Richard Flores in *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*, that some early American films with Mexican characters follow the same racist logic as films with African-American characters. It is not an accident, as Flores points out, that

the film *Martyrs of the Alamo* (1915) closely parallels *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). In fact, Christy Cabanne, the director of *Martyrs*, assisted D. W. Griffith in the production of *Birth*. Both *The Birth of a Nation* and *Martyrs of the Alamo* depict blacks and Mexicans as violent and sinister. Additionally, both films place special emphasis on African-American and Mexican rapacity, and thus rely upon the familiar Anglo-American fear of miscegenation. In Cecil Robinson's words, the "abhorrence of miscegenation has been called the one enduring American taboo and while the feeling against it is most strong in terms of alliances between Whites and Negroes, it carries over to include the mating of Whites with dark peoples other than Negro"(75). *Martyrs of the Alamo* justifies the taking of the Texas territory from Mexico by representing the sexual-racial threat that the Mexican posed. Through the film's logic, the Mexican is presented as a danger to the emblem of Anglo-Texas civilization, the Anglo-Texan woman.

The Mexican, thus, occupies a cluster of interrelated positions during this period. He is the ultimate villain for the White hero to defeat, he is a scapegoat for other conflicts in the West, and he is the rapacious sexual threat to White womanhood. Above all, though, the Mexican is a bandit revolutionary, and this ideological conflation continues well past the end of the Mexican Revolution, culminating in what Slotkin calls the "Mexico Western" sub-genre. Slotkin provides a rationale for the consistent appearance of this figure in a long line of Westerns, and provides an analysis of the ideological uses of the Mexican

Revolution. Slotkin argues that during the first half of the twentieth century, Mexico served as a metaphoric “ideological symbol” for the working out of U.S. policy toward Latin American revolutions (409). In my analysis, Mexico has performed a far more complicated psycho-social function: the American perception of Mexican identity has powerfully shaped this nation’s self-conception. The U.S. relation to Mexican identity is characterized by open disavowal in order to produce difference, but the relation, as I argue in the next section, is also characterized by sublimated identification. In other words, the U.S. relation to Mexican-ness remains deeply ambivalent.

The Western’s Ambivalence

Throughout this chapter I have elaborated on the increasing fixity of Mexican identity representation during the period 1910-1920, yet this hardening belies the ambivalence that American film expressed for the Mexican. We cannot ignore, for instance, the number of films that indicate an attraction toward this ethnic subject. *An American Insurrecto* (1911) and *A Prisoner of Mexico* (1912) express support for the revolutionary movement—although they have no faith in the Mexican’s efficacy, since they feature American heroes winning battles on behalf of the rebels (Richard 33, 48). In *The Mexican Revolutionist* (1912), the main character, a Maderista rebel, is favorably presented (70). Other films, such as *The Mexican’s Gratitude* (1914), recall the possibility of redemption found in Griffith’s early Westerns. We also find films that openly champion the Mexican

cause. *The Life of General Villa* (1915) imagines Villa's "final victory over the Federal Army and his proclamation as President of the Republic of Mexico"(Brownlow 102). *The Mexican* (1914), directed by and starring Tom Mix, "suggests the innate prejudice of some whites toward all Mexicans and may be considered an early example of a social problem film"(Langman 288). Mix plays a Mexican who, after being persecuted and fired from his job, saves the life of a child and is then given back his job for his heroics (288). Finally, in *Rio Grande* (1920), the Mexican heroine "becomes a school teacher who preaches understanding between Mexicans and Americans"(376).³

Still, the films of greatest significance for my study are those in which the Mexican villain appears most consistently, in the numerous Westerns of the period. While many of the films I have examined range from positive to merely uncertain portrayals of Mexican identity, the greatest ambivalence lies in those films in which the Mexican appears as villain. Derisive representations may be read as potentially ambivalent because they emerge from a genre, the Western, whose constitutive quality is ambivalence, as Jim Kitses helps us understand. In his foundational study, *Horizons West*, Kitses describes the ideological oppositions embodied within the idea of the West. Expanding upon the work of Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land*, Kitses asks: "Is the West a Garden of natural dignity and innocence offering refuge from the decadence of civilization? Or is it a treacherous Desert stubbornly resisting the gradual sweep of agrarian progress

and community values?" Kitses concludes that this "ideological tension," a sometimes undecidable or double-valenced opposition, cuts through the genre: "this ideological tension has meant that a wide range of variation is possible in the basic elements of the form"(10). The major opposition of the Western is that between the Wilderness and Civilization; subsumed by this, Kitses includes the oppositions Individual/Community, Nature/Culture, and West/East, among others. Yet he cautions that this schematic "over-simplifies in isolating the attitudes: a conceptually complex structure that draws on both images is the typical one."

If Eastern figures such as bankers, lawyers and journalists are often either drunkards or corrupt, their female counterparts generally carry virtues and graces which the West clearly lacks. And if Nature's harmonies produce the upright hero, they also harbor the animalist Indian. Thus central to the form we have a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre.

(11)

In other words, the mythic structure of the West constitutes oppositions that stand simultaneously, that blur and contradict each other, that are marked by ambivalence.

The "ambiguous cluster of meanings" fits the genre's hero appropriately, for he often figures as the bulwark between civilization and the wilderness. Thus, he necessarily straddles both worlds: he must know the ways of the wilderness in

order to successfully fend off its threats against the establishment of civilization. In fact, it is often the case that the hero desires to escape from the strictures of civilization. Therefore, it is not surprising that an early Western film hero such as Broncho Billy Anderson on numerous occasions played the “good badman.” The image of Anderson as a good badman is especially significant in light of the fact that during “the crucial formative years” of the genre he “was by far the most coherent and attractive character on the Western screen”(Buscombe, *BFI Companion* 25). William S. Hart followed a similar route; he played a badman, “still essentially a cowboy figure,” but “one who has strayed outside the law”(29).

The theme of the badman who becomes good brings the Western hero in strikingly close proximity to the Mexican villain and exposes an ambivalence expressed as mimicry. Recall that in Griffith’s Biograph Westerns—*The Tavern Keeper’s Daughter* and *The Greaser’s Gauntlet*—it is the Mexican who begins as the badman and is later redeemed. Anderson and Hart copy this formula, but they displace the Mexican from the position of possible redemption. The plot structures of Hart’s films in particular prove to be highly provocative. He often played a ‘bad man’ of one kind or another—an outlaw, gambler, or just a hard customer—who finds redemption through the love of a good woman (or a pure young girl). The formula was used over and over, with minor variations. Sometimes the hero would be unjustly accused of crime;

sometimes he would be a genuine criminal who redeems himself through some charitable act. (Slotkin 244)

Recall that in *The Tavern Keeper's Daughter* it is the greaser who finds redemption when he gazes upon the face of an innocent child; in *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, the drunk and violent Jose sees the face of the woman who saved his life and in turn he saves hers. The plot structures of Hart's Westerns transfer the possibility of redemption from the Mexican subject to the Anglo-American hero. Hart's Mexican antagonists have no option but to play the villain through the final reel. The transference of redemptive action from Mexican to Anglo marks not only the increasing rigidity of the Mexican stereotype, but also the representational closeness between these two figures, and it is a sign of the deeply ambivalent character of Mexican identity representation.

In a sense, then, the Mexican is the original "good badman" whom the Anglo-American hero comes to mimic. Homi Bhabha discusses colonial mimicry as the third-world subject's imitation of European cultural forms. Although mimesis and transformation of the colonial subject remains incomplete—and thereby holds a subversive possibility—Bhabha nevertheless concludes that mimicry "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge"(85). The kind of mimicry that adheres in the Western also functions as a strategy of power, but it is reversed: rather than the Mexican mimicking the Anglo-American, it is the Anglo who makes use of the theme of

redemptive heroism from the Mexican, producing a form of power that operates through displacement.

The level of mimicry extends yet further. The Mexican is in a very real way the original cowboy—the *vaquero*—of the West. If the Native American is the first inhabitant of the West, it is not the Anglo who comes afterward, but the Spaniard or Mexican. When the Anglo cowboy arrives on the scene, he imitates the *vaquero*'s ways—and appropriates the survival instincts of the Native American. The Anglo imitates the *vaquero*'s dress, and he adopts the names that the Mexican has given to the objects of the West. When we consider the number of Western cultural artifacts with Spanish names, it is as if the Spaniard/Mexican and not the Anglo is the West's "American Adam," to borrow from R. W. B. Lewis's use of the term in a different context.

We begin to see, then, the degree of ambivalence the Mexican's presence produces. We also recognize the anxiety vis-à-vis Anglo-American identity formation the Mexican induces because, as Kitses explains, the Western is deeply preoccupied with American identity: "[w]hat we are dealing with here, of course, is no less than a national world-view: underlying the whole complex is the grave problem of identity that has special meaning for Americans"(12). In the world of the Western, therefore, it is not the Indian with whom the Anglo is predominantly concerned, but the Mexican. Native Americans were already displaced once the Spanish, Mexicans and Anglos began encroaching upon their land. The

antagonist then, is the Mexican, with whom the Anglo has a great deal in common, as Américo Paredes has noted: the “colony of Nuevo Santander was settled much like the lands occupied by westward-pushing American pioneers, by men and their families who came overland, with their household goods and their herds”(“*With His Pistol*” 8). As the first conqueror of the native land, it is the Mexican who must necessarily be demonized and differentiated as much as possible if the Anglo is to position himself as the true “myth-hero” of the West. Paredes relates that by the 1870s “the Indian danger was past, [so] it was possible to idealize the Plains savage. But the ‘Mexican problem’ remained”(21). The result has been the creation of stereotypes about the Mexican, such as the “Anglo-Texan legend,” which holds that the Mexican is, by his miscegenated nature, prone to cruelty, thievery and cowardliness (Paredes 15-16).⁴ These are qualities over which no single race holds a monopoly, but which have been attributed to the Mexican in order to make the Anglo unassailable.

As a symbol of American identity, the Western hero is white, as Slotkin and Kitses recognize. Yet the real cowboy of the Western range upon whom the hero is based came from different backgrounds, as Fredrick Pike notes: “at least one-tenth of ‘American’ cowboys were Hispanics, generally mestizos. Blacks and mulattoes comprised about a fifth. Already at the turn of the century, though, many Americans had conveniently forgotten this racial mixture lest it tarnish an increasingly mythologized being”(137). If survival on the range depended on

confraternity, regardless of race, endurance in Western novels and on the Western screen depends on racial differentiation.

True difference, however, is never fully achieved, and, from a diachronic standpoint, the wide variance of Mexican identity representation during the revolution only highlights the ambivalent relation between the Anglo-American and the Mexican. *The Bad Man* (1923) exemplifies this vexed relationship. The film's very title speaks to the representational closeness between these two figures. "Badman" recalls the kind of character made famous by Broncho Billy Anderson and William S. Hart. In this case, though, the badman is Pancho Lopez, a Mexican bandit modeled after Pancho Villa. To add to the confusion, this badman is not so bad, for although he is a cattle rustler, he does not forget the debt he owes to the Anglo-American rancher from whom he has stolen. When Lopez recognizes the rancher, he helps the man recover his losses and later helps save the Anglo's love interest. This badman never stops being bad—he is a thief and a killer—but his heart is good and he acts heroically (Langman 17-18).⁵ The film was so popular studios remade it twice, in 1930, with Walter Huston as the badman, and again in 1941, with Wallace Beery (not coincidentally, of *Viva Villa!* fame) playing the lead. In *The Bad Man*, we observe a second order of mimicry: Pancho Lopez mimics Hart's badman mimicking the Mexican badman of *The Greaser's Gauntlet*. Racial representation thus makes a full circle, further

highlighting the often indeterminate and always multi-valent nature of the stereotype.

Jack London and the Literary Representation the Revolutionary

The period of the Mexican Revolution coincides with a significant hardening of the stereotypical representation of the Mexican subject, as the considerable body of films produced during the era strongly suggests. This same period, however, witnessed a serious literary reconsideration of the Mexican. Raymund Paredes has argued that the revolution inspired a transformation in the depiction of the Mexican in American literature, and, “[m]ost importantly, the long despised *mestizos* and Indians were regarded with an unprecedented compassion”(R. Paredes viii). Writers such as Charles Macomb Flandrau in *Viva Mexico!* (1908) and John Kenneth Turner in *Barbarous Mexico* (1910) criticized the Díaz regime and accused the U.S. of participating in the peon’s enslavement. In fiction, Willa Cather’s *Song of the Lark* (1915) depicts the Mexican in a more hopeful manner (Paredes 278). Paredes’s assessment of the literary reconsideration of the Mexican is important to keep in mind because the literature presents a public record of the oppositional voice to the mass cultural perceptions as defined by the movie industry. Additionally, though its entry into the public discourse on Mexican identity is more gradual, literature’s influence on the discourse is also more enduring. Therefore, although many fewer contestatory

literary works were produced as compared to denigrating films, they achieve a far greater impact upon the discursive field.

Jack London's short story, "The Mexican" (1911) appeared at the inception of the Mexican Revolution, and it is the most significant early literary response to the idea that the Mexican was a bandit revolutionary. London, whose radical politics were by then well-established, stands as a contradictory spokesperson for the Mexican rebel. In "The Mexican," he idealizes not only the revolutionary movement, but also the main character, Felipe Rivera. By in 1914, however, he would vilify the revolution and the "half-breed" Mexicans fighting on its behalf. Writing for *Colliers*, London calls the revolutionary a member of the "half-breed class that foment all the trouble, plays childish with the tools of giants, and makes a shambles and a chaos out of the land"(qtd. in Anderson 138). This statement, as Charles Crow has recognized, constitutes part of London's bigoted legacy: "Even at his best, his fiction was warped by misguided ideology, often of the most embarrassing racist kind"(46). Andrew J. Furer has argued, however, that it is London's "admiration for the spiritual and physical power to be found among those whom popular opinion . . . held to be inferior that persists through all the contradictions of his racial views"(171). In stories such as "The Mexican," London exalts the ethnic subject as one whose "spiritual and physical power" should not be underestimated, nor regarded at the level of base stereotype.

“The Mexican” opens with a statement about its protagonist, the young Felipe Rivera, that could well apply to Hollywood’s attitude toward the Mexican revolutionary: “Nobody knew his history”(70). As the story unfolds, London simultaneously rejects the stereotype of the bandit revolutionary and creates an idealization of the primal, almost animalistic power of the Mexican. London writes, for instance, that to his comrades, Felipe Rivera is “something forbidding, terrible, inscrutable. There was something venomous and snakelike in the boy’s black eyes”(70). Another revolutionary sees him as a “power—he is the primitive, the wild wolf, the striking rattlesnake, the stinging centipede”(73). While these visions parallel a different stereotype about Mexicans, that they are primitive and close to the earth, it is a far cry from the indiscriminately violent bandit revolutionary. And although Rivera is compared to a snake on two occasions, there is nothing “sneaky” about his representation. The story, in fact, admires the main character’s revolutionary dedication, albeit in overblown language: “He is the revolution incarnate. . . . He is the flame and the spirit of it, the insatiable cry for vengeance He is a destroying angel moving through the still watches of the night”(73).

Although London gives way to idealism in his depiction of the Mexican, he also demonstrates an acute knowledge of the U.S. government and media’s thwarting of the revolutionary movement. The reader learns, for example, that the U.S.-based junta Rivera joins is busily involved raising funds and writing letters,

“appeals for assistance, for sanctions from the organized labor groups, requests for square news deals from the editors of newspapers, protests against the highhanded treatment of revolutionists by the United States courts”(71). London is one of the few American writers—along with Ambrose Bierce—to critique the government and newspapers’ response to the Mexican Revolution, and he does so from a position of critical awareness.

London’s critical appraisal of US institutions, we should recognize, comes not as a consequence of an attraction for the ethnic subject but because he championed workers, underdogs, and anarchists. London demonstrates his allegiance to the lower classes when he exuberantly imagines their toppling of the Díaz dictatorship.

The border was ready to rise. One Yankee, with a hundred I.W.W. men, waited the word to cross the border and begin the conquest of Lower California. . . . the Junta in touch with them all and all of them needing guns, mere adventurers, soldiers of fortune, bandits, disgruntled American union men, socialists, roughnecks, Mexican exiles, peons escaped from bondage, whipped miners from the bullpens of Coeur d’Alene and Colorado who desired only the more vindictively to fight—all the flotsam and jetsam of wild spirits from the madly complicated modern world. (74)

London’s defense of the peon, then, results from his support of the subaltern classes—as they are lead by a single Yankee. While we should maintain this

framing in mind, it does not diminish the positive rearticulation of the Mexican revolutionary that London achieves.⁶

London's most significant contribution to the depiction of the revolutionary is in his reversal of four distinct aspects of its cinematic stereotype: that the revolutionary is a bandit, that he is without revolutionary commitment, that he is inferior to the Anglo ethically and physically, and that he is underhanded and sneaky. As the story opens, the revolutionary junta seeks monetary support from various workers' unions. The story characterizes the junta's activities as legitimate and above board. For his part, Rivera also raises funds for the revolution, contributing what little money he earns for the cause. While his compatriots view the source of his contributions with a great deal of suspicion—after all, he is only a kid, dressed in tatters and half-starved—we later learn that he has acquired his money honestly, by winning small-time prize fights. Furthermore, through prize fighting—this time against Danny Ward, the champion—Rivera plans to contribute the much-needed five thousand dollars the junta needs to continue the struggle.

London portrays Rivera's commitment to the revolution by contrasting it against his opponent's selfish desire for money and leisure. "Danny Ward fought for money and for the easy ways of life that money would bring. But the things Rivera fought for burned in his brain"(81). While Ward thinks only of his own material gain, Rivera cannot but mentally relive the death of his parents and other

Mexican people who died at the hands of the *federales*. In the moments before the fight begins, as he awaits Ward's arrival to the ring, Rivera recalls the "death-spitting rifles that seemed never to cease spitting, while the workers were washed and washed in their own blood"(81).

Most films about the Mexican Revolution—whether for or against the struggle—imagine the Mexican as the Anglo's ethical and physical inferior. Even movies supporting the revolution show the Mexican in need of the Anglo hero's aid. London, by contrast, renders Rivera as self-possessed and determined. As the bout is to begin, we get a picture of Rivera as "more delicately coordinated, more finely nerved and strung than any of them. . . . The atmosphere of foredoomed defeat had no effect on him. His handlers were gringos and strangers"(80). London shows Rivera as capable of understanding the Anglo view of the Mexican, and standing above it. When Ward finally arrives for the fight, the physical differences between the champion and the man whom Ward has labeled a "little Mexican rat" are palpable (82). We also get a sense of the fight audience's perceptions of the differences between the two boxers when the Rivera disrobes for the fight.

A groan went up as Spider Hagerty peeled Rivera's sweater over his head. His body seemed leaner because of the swarthy skin. He had muscles, but they made no display like his opponent's. What the audience neglected to see was the deep chest. Nor could it guess the toughness of

the fiber of the flesh, the instantaneousness of the cell explosions of the muscles, the fineness of the nerves that wired every part of him into a splendid fighting mechanism. All the audience saw was a brown-skinned boy of eighteen. (83)

London shows that the physical differences between the two men are racially overdetermined, and he recognizes that the Mexican's ethical and physical strength cannot be established by his swarthy skin.

Finally, London refuses the stereotype of the sneaky Mexican by depicting Danny Ward as the unfair fighter. As the fight begins to turn in Rivera's favor, Ward "stalled, blocked, fought parsimoniously, and strove to gather strength. Also he fought as foully as a successful fighter knows how. Every trick and device he employed"(86). Rivera, for his part, fights cleanly, and must endure not only Ward's tactics, but also the unfairness of the Anglo referee. London's reversal of the Mexican and Anglo's efficacy in this case has its antecedents in London's sports reporting, as Andrew Furer has noted. In an article relating the bout between James Jeffries, who was white, and Jack Johnson, who was black, London recognizes the superiority of Johnson, regardless of the color of his skin. Furer writes that London "inverts the era's stereotypical oppositions of civilized white man and savage black man—he declared that Johnson's abilities were those of a scientific boxer while Jeffries' were those of a primitive fighter: 'Jeff is a fighter, Johnson is a boxer'"(qtd. in Furer 169). In "The Mexican," London

similarly reverses stereotypes of the Mexican's underhanded tactics. He declares that Rivera boxes honorably and according to the rules—like a scientific Jack Johnson—while Ward cheats throughout the fight—like a primitive James Jeffries.

In the end, Rivera outlasts Ward and attains his goal of supplying guns for the revolution. Rivera stands alone; there are “no congratulations” for him (89). He faces the unbelieving crowd of *gringos* in anger and defiance—there is no cowering and no hiding from the enemy as in the bandit revolutionary films of the era. Rivera looks before him as “the hated faces swayed back and forth in the giddiness of nausea,” and he recalls his purpose. “The guns were his. The revolution could go on”(89). Again, the Mexican protagonist stands before the Anglo-American, dignified and victorious, in a completely different stance than the greasers or bandits of the era, who themselves rarely made a film's final reel.

I have included Jack London's short story in my analysis of Mexican identity representation during the revolutionary period not because there is ambivalence in Felipe Rivera's rendering—London's Mexican is one-dimensional in his conduct, purpose, and ideology—but because this subject's representation stands in sharp contrast to the negatively fixed yet constantly wavering quality of the Mexican's depiction in film. The revolution, as I have argued, proved to be the ground upon which the bandit or greaser of the dime novel and early films was conflated with the revolutionary. Notwithstanding the hardening of the

Mexican's representation, ambivalence appears in the Anglo cowboy's mimicry of the Mexican *vaquero* and in the Anglo good badman's displacement of the Mexican good badman.

The recycling of the good badman in a film such as *The Badman* (1923, 1930, and 1941), in which the good badman is once more a Mexican, signals yet again the oscillating and ambivalent quality of racial representation. In these films, as in *Viva Villa!* (1934) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952), which I examine in the next chapter, depictions of the Mexican are mixed—sometimes showing attraction and sometimes showing repulsion—and depend on the given tenor of America's perception of itself and its Others. In the next chapter, I return to the conflation of bandit and revolutionary in my analysis of *Viva Villa!* (1934) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952). *Viva Villa!* is particularly germane to my analysis because its conflation of bandit and revolutionary has a lasting influence on future cinematic representations of Mexican identity.

¹ Several other overlapping and mutually reinforcing factors very likely influenced the stereotypical discourse during the years 1910-20: the onset of the revolution impelled a dramatic movement of refugees into the United States; consequently, the U.S. response to this mass migration was broadly xenophobic, and included exclusionary laws and discriminatory attitudes (Vélez-Ibáñez 57-87). Some of the revolution's refugees did in fact look "to spread their revolutionary ideologies," and were a thorn on the side of American businesses in the West (Pike 238). The beginning in 1915 of *Tejano*-led seditionist movement in South Texas augmented American fears that revolution would spread from Mexico into the U.S. While the increase in the Mexican population and the threat of renewed warfare on Texas soil were no doubt cause for Anglo alarm, these factors were very likely subsumed by the broader threat of revolution and chaos in Mexico. In my research, I have found no films that directly register immigration or internal revolution as threats, although we can guess that a film such as *Martyrs of the Alamo* (1915) unconsciously registered these fears as it served to reinforce the sense that Texas was rightfully and irrevocably Anglo land.

² The bandoleers across the chest are so iconically menacing that they are unconsciously integrated in the characterization of contemporary Mexican villains. In Robert Rodriguez's *Desperado* (1995), Navajas (Danny Trejo) wears a bandoleer of throwing knives across his midriff. The character sports a heavy mustache and displays a constant snarl; on his chest he prominently displays a tattoo of a woman—perhaps a *soldadera*—wearing a *charro* hat. These icons of the revolution magnify the bandit revolutionary threat in a contemporary setting.

³ *Rio Grande* suggests the wholly different treatment the Mexican female receives in American film, as compared with the Mexican male. She signifies exoticism and sexual allure; as a “figure of forbidden sexuality,” she constitutes a different form of ambivalence, as José Limón elaborates in *American Encounters* (111).

⁴ The Western's ambivalence toward the Mexican is so deep that it extends to the scholarship on the Western. With the possible exception of Slotkin, Western scholars refuse to see the presence of the Mexican subject. Kitses, for instance, mentions only the Native American as the Anglo hero's antithesis. In Michael Coyne's *The Crowded Prairie*, a similar lack of vision holds true. Recognizing that “the strand of American identity Westerns addressed and constructed was white and male,” Coyne comments on the Western's failure to address ethnicity: “Westerns marginalized the Indian because they were only marginally *about* the Indian. Equally, there are very few Blacks in the Westerns, and fewer Black heroes”(4-5). Though he is prepared to argue that the Western only “marginally” takes up Native American and African American identity, Coyne elides that the Western has often been about Anglo-American identity *in relation* to Mexican identity.

⁵ The Mexican government's threatened boycott of derogatory American movies in 1922 also influenced the change in characterization, although not as significantly as the revolution. See Helen Delpar's “Goodbye to the ‘Greaser’: Mexico, the MPPDA, and Derogatory Films, 1922-1926.”

⁶ This passage is strikingly similar to Américo Paredes's utopian vision of a border uprising in the closing pages of *George Washington Gómez*, in which the title character imagines, in a more ethnic embodiment, “an enormous, well-trained army that included Irishmen and escaped American Negro slaves” that would “defeat not only the army of the United States but its navy as well”(282).

Chapter Three

Stereotype, Idealism, and Contingency in the Revolutionary's Depiction

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the Mexican Revolution caused an intensification in the American cinema's negative representation of the Mexican. At the same time, the movies also heightened the attraction for the revolutionary subject. I have noted that by the end of the revolution, Hollywood produced *The Bad Man* (1923), in which the Villa-like protagonist, Pancho Lopez, takes up the "good badman" role made famous by Broncho Billy Anderson and William S. Hart. By the early thirties, the threat that the revolution would spill into the U.S. had mostly passed, and Hollywood returned to its manifest fascination for the revolutionary figure. This fascination, like so much of the Mexican's representation, is double-valenced.

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of the Mexican's ambivalence to the films *Viva Villa!* (1934) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952) and Américo Paredes's novella, *The Shadow* (1955). In the two films—both Anglo-American productions—the bandit revolutionary is a figure of attraction and repulsion: *Viva Villa!* articulates its central character following the classic norms of stereotypical representation, even as the film presents him as the hero; *Viva Zapata!* operates in a more complex manner, as its protagonist, although a Mexican, paradoxically takes the

role of an “Americanized” hero. Finally, Paredes’s *The Shadow* also functions at a complex ambivalent level, but from a distinctly critical Mexican/Mexican American perspective. The novel seemingly responds to the previous films’ facile categorizations of Mexican identity by displaying deep distrust for the Mexican hero of the revolution, proposing instead that we cannot rely on the myth of a transcendent, heroic subject of history, since the revolution’s failures make this subject untenable. Paredes’s novel, which examines the subject’s ideological displacement in capitalist modernity, creates a questioning and haunted “mimic man” who destabilizes the fixed unexamined stereotypical assumptions in *Viva Villa!* and the idealistic reproduction of an Americanized Mexican in *Viva Zapata!* Ironically, this Greater Mexican novel reveals that Mexican identity is ultimately contingent.

Pancho Villa: Peon, Bandit, Soldier

Jack Conway’s *Viva Villa!* (1934), starring Wallace Beery, dramatizes the life of Francisco Villa, the Mexican revolutionary who used guerilla tactics to fight the governments of Díaz, Carranza, and Obregon. Based on Edgcomb Pinchon’s *Viva Villa! A Recovery of the Real Pancho Villa, Peon . . . Bandit . . . Soldier . . . Patriot* (1933), the film makes Villa the hero of Mexico’s emergence as a democratic society. *Viva Villa!* is important in the history of Mexican identity representation because it was, to this point, the most publicly viewed instance of the United States’ ambivalent fascination for the stereotyped Mexican

subject. Additionally, the film establishes a model for future representations of Mexican identity, for it succinctly encapsulates the conflation of revolutionary and bandit.

According to Sander Gilman, the stereotypical construction of the Other originates from an early psychological impulse to create categories of difference between the self and the object world (18). In his study of the production of stereotypical discourse in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European texts, Gilman makes two important points that help us understand the ambivalent nature of stereotype production. In our relation to the Other, Gilman writes that we “can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving to hating. The most negative stereotype always has an overtly positive counterweight. As any image is shifted, all stereotypes shift. Thus stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid”(18). Second, in his discussion of the European vilification of blackness, Gilman notes that we cannot “deny that the black was [also] perceived as an attractive sexual object in fin-de-siècle Vienna”(110). These often contradictory feelings for the Other create the necessity of mutable stereotypes, and these two factors point to the always ambivalent character of stereotypical construction.

In his analysis of the European fascination with and construction of stereotypes about the Other, Gilman identifies three “basic categories of difference [that] reflect our preoccupation with the self and the control that the

self must have over the world,” and he adds that because “the Other is the antithesis of the self, the definition of the Other must incorporate the basic categories by which the self is defined”(23). Our “sense of mutability, the central role of sexuality in our nature, and our necessary relationship to some greater group” constitute the categories by which the self/Other are defined(23). Gilman uses the terms “illness,” “sexuality,” and “race” to concisely describe the operation of these three categories in the definition of the other. Although Gilman limits his analysis to European literature and culture’s representation of Jews and Blacks, his examination of stereotypes through the fundamental categories of illness, sexuality, and race remain very consistent when applied to the American cinema’s representation of Mexican identity, particularly in the case of *Viva Villa!*

From its beginning, *Viva Villa!* envisions its hero through the seemingly stereotypical categories of illness, sexuality, and race, even as it champions the cause for which he fights. The movie, in fact, opens with a primal scene that is to scar Villa psychologically and shape his revolutionary posture toward the *hacendado* ruling class. In the scene, Pancho as a boy witnesses his father’s brutal lashing and death at the orders of an hacienda owner. The event pushes Pancho to madness and revenge as he kills the *hacendado* and flees to the mountains to lead the life of a rebel and bandit. Thus, from its opening scene, the film links the Mexican Revolution with Villa’s psychic damage. As Gilman notes, illness is a phenomenon perceived to exist outside the self, and is structured

as outside or Other to the self. “We have the ‘healthy’ and the ‘pathological’ self. Likewise, concepts of mental illness . . . recapitulate the ‘realist’ definition of illness as dichotomously opposed to ‘health’”(24). For Villa, to be mentally unstable is to be alien or Other than the American audiences watching him.

The next scene further establishes Villa’s pathological behavior. Many years pass and the next scene shows Villa’s forces attacking the town of La Concepción, where several *campesinos* have been accused of stealing and are unfairly tried and executed. Villa enters the court in the aftermath of the trial and holds the judge and other government authorities at gun-point. He then proceeds to try his own case against the government’s men. Propping the dead peons on chairs, Villa uses them as jury and asks for their verdict. His form of justice is more quick and severe than that of the judge before him, as he orders the men shot where they stand. The several acts of violence which initiate the narrative serve to construct Villa—as well as the Mexican oligarchy and the revolution itself—following a model of pathology.

At different moments, the film affirmatively presents Villa as a well-meaning man who loves his country and his people, a man whose acts of violence are enacted because of his revolutionary commitment. This favorable framing notwithstanding, Villa’s violent acts often occur unexplainably and randomly, not so much emerging from revolutionary zeal as from instinctive and irrational urges. Villa angers quickly and resolves any conflict with the use of

overwhelming force. He does not respect the rule of law and steals when the need arises. In one particularly disturbing instance, Villa murders a bank clerk for no particular reason other than that Villa is unfamiliar with banking practices. The constant and inexplicable use of violence marks Villa as pathological and Other in relation to the American audience watching this film.

Villa possesses other uncontrollable behaviors and desires. He behaves in a loud and uncouth manner and exhibits a voracious appetite for food and drink. But his most unrepressed desires are for woman and sex, which the film codes as Villa's penchant for getting "married." Therefore, *Viva Villa!* introduces an uncontrollable sexual appetite as the second category of difference between its hero and its audience. As Gilman writes, one "major category which pathology is often associated with is human sexuality," and the "sexual dimension of human sexual experience is one of those most commonly divided into 'normal' and 'deviant'"(24). In the definition of the self, "sexuality and the loss of control associated with it must be projected onto the Other. Fantasies of impotency are projected onto the Other as frigidity, fantasies of potency as hypersexuality. . . . Sexual norms become modes of control. . . . The analogy between the 'ill' and the 'perverse' is ubiquitous"(24-25). *Viva Villa!* therefore posits that Villa's pathology extends beyond his uncontrolled violence to his hypersexuality.

The film's representation of Villa's excess sexuality places him outside the norms of American values, yet it is a representation ambivalently expressed as

a simultaneous anxiety about and desire for sexual plenitude. In the film, Villa's rampant libido appears as the most striking marker of difference between him and his Anglo-American heroic counterparts. Wherever Villa goes, he meets a woman with whom he seeks sexual congress, and the film makes humorous light of this insatiable thirst. In his first contact with the opposite sex in the film, for example, he gathers as many women as he can find at a *cantina* so that he can choose whom he'd like to "marry." When Johnny Sykes, a reporter, learns that Villa is to marry Rosita, Sykes responds with naïve excitement. Second-in-command Sierra, however, knows better and remains unimpressed. Sierra tells Sykes in a dead-pan manner, "that's what he likes, he likes to get married. He gets married all the time." To this, Villa responds with child-like innocence, "that's the way I was brought up, religious." The film invites its audience to laugh at Villa's ingenuousness, lack of moral understanding, and want for sexual inhibition.

Richard Slotkin has argued that the "most significant difference between the Mexican and the American versions of the social bandit is expressed through the metaphor of sexuality"(414). The distinction lies in that the American hero, no matter how violent he may be, no matter how far outside the norms of society he may exist, remains monogamously devoted, or at least potentially so; Slotkin calls this a "redemptive link to middle-class and domestic values"(414). The Mexican revolutionary bandit's sexuality, on the other hand, "is rampantly

macho, the erotic expression of the willful violence that makes him an effective revolutionary fighter”(414). This distinction, based on a lack of sexual morality, is an important one because it links with the earliest marker of difference attributed to the greaser in silent films. Recall that in *The Tavern Keeper's Daughter* (1908), a film I discuss in chapter one, the plot involves the rapacious desires of a greaser for the Anglo-American woman. Both in this early film and in *Viva Villa!* the Mexican's sexual excess is threatening, especially to the realm of domesticity, represented by the white female.

Villa's hypersexuality threatens the “domestic values” the film attempts to finally champion—and it is his rapaciousness, in fact, that is his final undoing, for he is murdered by the man whose sister he earlier attempts to rape. Yet part of the stereotype's ambivalence lies in its being simultaneously scandalizing and tantalizing for American audiences. Slotkin alludes to this contradiction when he recognizes that audiences “could excuse, even enjoy, the radical violence of ‘Villa's’ methods, because they were identified with the alien mythic space called ‘Mexico’”(415). Mexico, then, acts as the space within which American ideologies are tested while American fantasies and desires are given free play. Anglo-American audiences are able to vicariously enjoy Villa's violence and sexual exuberance while seemingly adhering to their middle-class and domestic values. The oblique enjoyment derived from this representation is not dissimilar from the pleasure derived by readers of the dime novel, who consumed the sexual

licentiousness of the Mexican woman while remaining morally outraged and racially removed from the action.

The double-valenced elements of attraction and repulsion contained in Villa's sexuality produce yet another contradictory layer of meaning, one involving the simultaneous preproduction and blurring of the socially inscribed boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. While I concur with Slotkin that Villa represents a "rampantly *macho*" sexuality, I would aver that Villa's sexuality carries an obverse element that parallels the erotic attractions of the "sexy señoritas" with whom adventurous cowboys were wont to have sexual congress in nineteenth-century dime novels (Pettit 26). Villa's behavior oscillates between the domineering and the acquiescent, and thus exhibits behaviors coded as either masculine or feminine.

The reproduction and blurring of the difference between traditionally defined masculine/feminine boundaries potentially threaten definitions of American and Mexican masculinity, and, at the same time, potentially put definitions of masculinity in productive play. The first site we may find a challenge to masculinity is in Villa's body itself, made corpulently evident in Wallace Beery's performance. In Rabelaisian fashion, Beery's Villa constantly threatens to overspill his corporeal borders, and I would add that with this, he pushes against the very borders of a self-contained—in an Anglo-American sense—masculinity. Recall Hart's brooding "good bad-man," Gary Cooper's

Virginian, and later, Clint Eastwood's man-with-no-name, who maintain consummate control of themselves, always in preparation for the unexpected. Beery's Villa, on the other hand, may appear powerful and manly, but his inability to control his passions for destruction, food and women implies an unmanly Otherness.

We see, furthermore, an ambivalent masculinity in Villa's relationships with the two other principle characters in the film, Francisco Madero and Johnny Sykes. Villa's relationships with these two men are predicated upon emotional dependence and bodily touching that replicate parent-child and traditionally defined masculine-feminine relations. The narrative logic of *Viva Villa!* requires that Villa as an uncontrollable and implicitly feminized force somehow be contained. The film deploys Francisco Madero and Johnny Sykes to perform this task. Madero and Sykes represent the masculine side of the relationship because they possess "reason," a characteristic that has traditionally been coded as male.

When Villa meets Madero, he is smitten by his bold idealism, although Madero is not too impressed by Villa's bandit ways. When Madero castigates him for making war as a bandit and not a soldier, Villa delineates their differences: "I don't think you know much about war. You know about loving people. But you can't win a revolution with love, you've got to have hate. You are the good side, I am the bad side." When Madero insists on proper conduct, Villa storms out like a sullen child. Then he returns, more subdued, and tells

Madero, “All right. You tell me once again, what was the orders?” There is laughter, the men embrace and Villa asks, “You like me?” with the voice of a child seeking his parent’s approval. Villa’s innocence “is a further mark of difference, one which can be found in classical antiquity. The Other is like the child, different from the mature sensible adult”(Gilman 113). Although it is true that Villa’s tremendous violence affirms his masculinity, his child-like response to Madero softens him and makes him appear more feminine and more Other.

Villa’s relationship with Johnny Sykes, reporter for the *New York World*, is even more complex. As a journalist, Johnny becomes Villa’s mouthpiece, and the illiterate Villa comes to depend on Johnny for everything from writing letters, to writing about Villa’s heroism in battle, to performing civil ceremonies whenever Villa has a whim to marry. Johnny becomes similarly dependent on Villa to win battles in order to be the first to scoop the sensational news. Sykes even becomes demanding, expecting Villa to take the town of Santa Rosalia—despite terrible odds—because he incorrectly reported that Villa had attacked and taken it. This incident is particularly provocative, because we see Villa in an un-revolutionary, un-masculine framing. In the scene, Villas emerges from a bathtub wearing a long blanket wrapped around him like a dress. With Sykes standing next to him lecturing him on the necessity of taking Santa Rosalia, the coding of the two men follows the pattern of a heterosexual couple. While we cannot go so

far as to argue that the moment is homoerotically charged, Villa certainly seems less of a “man” than Sykes.

In another similar scene, we see Villa and Sykes after Villa’s first liberation of Mexico. Madero has ordered Villa to disband his army and go home. Faced with the prospect of losing Johnny, upon whom he depends for “fixing up” the narrative of his battles, Villa despondently begs Johnny not to leave him. Johnny comforts him: “I’d rather be with you than anybody I know. You know how I feel about you.” Villa tells Johnny that he needs him, and Johnny responds, “How do you suppose I feel running out on ya?” As Johnny leaves, Villa grabs his arm and Johnny has to break free. Again, the moment is not so much homoerotically overdetermined as it is homosocially ambivalent as the two men play lovers about to be parted. Hence, if, as Gilman argues, the distinction between a perceived “normal” and a “deviant” sexuality is an instrument of defining and controlling the Other, then the “aberrant” characterization of Villa’s sexuality—still deeply embedded within his revolutionary manliness—defines him as powerfully Other in relation to the Anglo-American hero and the American audience consuming his image.

The third category of Otherness that *Viva Villa!* instantiates, not surprisingly, is that of race. In the production of Villa’s racial Otherness, the film completes the conflation of the bandit and revolutionary. We may once again draw upon Gilman’s theorizations on the production of stereotypical categories

for an understanding of Villa's racial alterity. One mechanism of creating in-group/out-group distinctions is through the category of race: "we search for anatomical signs of difference such as physiognomy and skin color. The Other's physical features, from skin color to sexual structures as the shape of the genitalia, are always the antithesis of the idealized self's." Here, Gilman makes a compelling connection between the categories of race, sexuality and illness: "sexual anatomy is so important a part of self-image that 'sexually different' is tantamount to 'pathological'—the Other is 'impaired,' 'sick,' 'diseased.' Similarly, physiognomy or skin color that is perceived as different is immediately associated with 'pathology' and 'sexuality'"(25). Villa's excessive corporeality bespeaks the associations of race, sexuality, and illness. Because a mainstream film could not overtly point to the Mexican's genitalia as a sign of racial/sexual/pathological Otherness, we may interpret Villa's girth as standing in for this ultimate sign of difference. Villa is a large man with a bulging stomach. In addition, his facial expressions are extreme, displaying either a menacing grimace or jovial smile. In close-up, the glisten of sweat or grease is never absent. His hair is uncombed, his mustache is long. Finally, Villa wears a large sombrero and a single bandoleer across his chest. These may also be seen as metonymies for his deviant racial and sexual Otherness.

These physical and psychological representations of difference are crucial because, as Richard Slotkin recognizes, *Viva Villa!* "was an extremely successful

film whose images and narrative formula shaped all future treatments of Mexico and the Revolution. The combination of *bandido* style and populist politics in Beery's Villa became [the] standard Hollywood interpretation not only of Villa but of Mexican revolutionaries"(414). Slotkin's assessment is useful but it ultimately misses the stereotypical structures that denote Villa's difference. Finally, any analysis of stereotypical construction that does not also recognize the ambivalent nature in the Other's construction elides the stereotype's most critically subversive element. The veiled construction of Villa's racial, sexual, and pathological Otherness certainly calls attention to the American fascination and need for Mexican identity in all its manifestations.

My analysis of *Viva Villa!* has suggested that the movie is a classic example of stereotypical construction. Yet even "classic" stereotypes operate in ambivalent fashion. Gilman recognizes, in the entirely different context of nineteenth-century European literature, that one strain of modernism "condemned the exploitations of the black as sexual object and used this condemnation to veil the authors' fascination with the sexual difference of the black"(120). Similarly, although *Viva Villa!* endorses the Mexican revolutionary Other, the film reproduces categories that ensure Otherness and suggests a fascination with the very same categories of Mexican Otherness it produces. My analysis is in agreement with Bhabha's position on stereotypical ambivalence, which maintains that it is "possible to understand the *productive* ambivalence of the object of

colonial [and stereotypical] discourse” as it is contained in the stereotype. The stereotyped subject of colonialism is an “‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity”(67). The revolutionary bandit stereotype in *Viva Villa!* may therefore be read in terms of the underlying Anglo-American desires (and anxieties) it puts on display, and allows an interpretive transgression from the space of Otherness.

Viva Villa! also constitutes the first and most significant example of the conflation of the revolutionary and the bandit. The film demonstrates that Anglo-American films that treat Mexican identity do so only insofar as the Mexican subject functions as a heuristic for other American concerns. When necessary, then, the Mexican appears as a degenerate bandit. The film’s logic requires that Villa, while at times heroic, must fail in order to preserve notions about American democratic exceptionalism, as I argue about *Viva Zapata!* in the next section.

Emiliano Zapata: Peon, Revolutionary, “American”

While *Viva Villa!* is the most prominent conflation of bandit and revolutionary, *Viva Zapata!* (1952) transformed the representation of Mexican identity by deemphasizing banditry and stressing revolutionary idealism. This transformation, however, depends on the continued need to center Anglo-American values within the representation of the Mexican, for Zapata is made the mimic man of American values. Directed by Elia Kazan and written by John

Steinbeck, *Viva Zapata!* bears some resemblances to its predecessor, *Viva Villa!* Like *Viva Villa!* Kazan's film is adapted from a book by Edgcomb Pinchon, *Zapata, the Unconquerable*, from which Steinbeck's screenplay borrows only marginally, according to Robert Morsberger ("Steinbeck on Screen" 281). If we consider *Viva Villa!* the first important American film about the revolution, then *Viva Zapata!* comprises "the culminating film of the small genre that dealt with the Mexican Revolution as a historical phenomenon in its own right" (Slotkin 420). *Viva Zapata!* also resembles *Viva Villa!* in that in both films Mexico and the revolution function as "thought-experiments" for the working out of American ideology vis-à-vis ideas about revolution (Slotkin 418). First and foremost, then, *Viva Zapata!* is a film about Anglo-America and its values. It appears immediately after the U.S. triumph in World War II, its defeat of the Nazi dictatorship, and its victory against Stalin in the Berlin Airlift. The film coincides with a historical moment that witnessed "a new and highly sophisticated form of 'American exceptionalism,' which—when fully developed in the 1960s—would constitute an 'Americanist' ideological program," as Slotkin argues (421-422). *Viva Zapata!* constitutes "a positive political statement that would distinguish the essential values of American liberalism from both Stalinist Marxism and right-wing conservatism and that would claim for those values a 'revolutionary' or liberating world mission" (421).

Significantly, inasmuch as *Viva Zapata!* deals with American exceptionalism, the film must still engage with the Mexican Other in order to claim America's uniqueness. But rather than reproduce *Viva Villa!*'s anxious categories of difference, *Viva Zapata!* attempts an odd rapprochement with Mexico by representing Emiliano Zapata as a mimic man of American values. Thus, colonial mimicry, as the instrument of hegemonic control which I discussed in chapter two, sees its full articulation in *Viva Zapata!* for we witness in this film the reproduction of a figure that is almost Anglo, but not quite.

The salient analysis of the concept of mimicry, as I have noted in the previous chapter, appears in Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In this text, Bhabha explains the workings of mimicry in a colonial situation. Although the U.S. relation to Mexico does not adhere to classic colonialism, the relations of power between the two nations have often replicated the conditions and attitudes of imperial domination. Bhabha recognizes mimicry as an apparatus of power that controls the colonial population by employing native colonial administrators who are educated in the values of the Western imperial power. Bhabha calls these subjects "mimic men" who are "the effect of a flawed colonial mimeses, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English"(87).

In its representation of Emiliano Zapata, *Viva Zapata!* reaches an aporia between its desire to depict Zapata as embodying American values and the impossibility of identifying with the Mexican Other. As Bhabha notes,

colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (86)

In the case of *Viva Zapata!* the Mexican revolutionary is palatable only if he is capable of being “Americanized,” but this “Americanized” Mexican always appears slightly different, as “the representation of a difference” that is ultimately rejected. His disavowal is predetermined and necessitated by the discourse of American exceptionalism.

Kazan and Steinbeck’s film stars Marlon Brando as Emiliano Zapata, Jean Peters as Zapata’s bride Josefa, Anthony Quinn as his brother Eufemio, and Joseph Wiseman as Zapata’s advisor and revolutionary ideologue, Fernando Aguirre. In *Steinbeck and Film*, Joseph Millichap identifies the screenplay of *Viva Zapata!* as one of Steinbeck’s greatest post-war literary successes, and he

notes that despite the film's limited theatrical release, "it has become something of a cult film, popular with television late-show viewers, college film classes, and Chicano groups"(123). While we may dispute the film's popularity Among Mexican Americans, Kazan does a credible job directing, and Brando received a nomination for Best Actor, and Quinn was awarded an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor (Morsberger "Steinbeck on Screen" 282).

Furthermore, unlike *Viva Villa!* this film takes the historical record into more careful consideration. I agree with Morsberger, for example, that although some reviewers "faulted the film for simplifying or distorting history . . . simplification is a virtue here. Steinbeck cuts through the complexities of campaigns and the incredible intricacies of political intrigue to get at what he sees as the essence of the events"("Steinbeck's Zapata" 219). *Viva Zapata!* concentrates on representative events in Zapata's life to give a sense of the revolution's progress, as well as a sense of Zapata himself. Additionally, the film relies far less than *Viva Villa!* on stereotypical representation to convey Mexican character: "Zapata's people are not the vulgar stereotypes of Mexican bandits in the typical Hollywood movie"(Millichap 124). Zapata himself is presented as strong, honest, and selfless.

However, although the main representative of Mexican identity escapes the denigration of the stereotype, he does so only by becoming Americanized. Furthermore, we encounter a continuing enmity toward the Mexican when we

compare the representation of Emiliano Zapata with that of his brother, Eufemio Zapata. The source of the film's uneven representation lies with its prevailing need to work through American ideological positions in relation to revolution and in relation to the Other. In this context, Zapata becomes a thought-experiment for American values, as Slotkin argues: "Zapata offers an 'exception' to the rule of revolutions—Mexican and otherwise—which sees as inescapable the pendulum swing between upheaval and dictatorship. Although he is identified as 'Mexican,' many of the values that make Zapata exceptional are drawn from the conventional vocabulary of the American Western"(422). Zapata, in other words, is not so much "Mexican," but "American" in the tradition of the Anglo-American Western hero. He differs from the stereotypical revolutionary bandit because the film requires that he inhabit the space of Anglo-American values. Zapata, therefore, is among the mimic men who are "authorized versions of otherness"(Bhabha 88).

Eufemio, on the other hand, is a bandit in the tradition perfected by Beery in *Viva Villa!* Notwithstanding the recognition Anthony Quinn received for his performance, his character, in Joseph Millichap's words, "has been hardened by conflict and betrayal until he cynically exploits the revolution for his own gain. In the film, he is connected with Pancho Villa, who in turn is presented with some of the Wallace Beery stereotyping that Hollywood grafted onto the historical reality of Mexico's other popular revolutionary hero"(126). Millichap somewhat

forgives Eufemio's negative characterization, for he sees it not as an inherent quality of his Mexican identity but as a result of the Revolution's violence. War, however, does not transform Eufemio; instead, the film presents him as the stereotypical revolutionary bandit even before the revolution begins. Eufemio exhibits loud and boisterous behavior, he refuses to follow any but his own rules, his violence has no equal, and he lusts after women constantly. Eufemio's violent libido is significantly on display throughout the film. When we first see him with a woman, he sits with her in a *cantina*, leering at her and caressing her chin. When he gets too rough, she pushes him away because he is a threat. A second time, we see Eufemio dancing with a *soldadera*. They dance innocently until he suddenly and forcefully kisses her. The woman, once again, separates from him violently and he laughs. Near the film's end, Eufemio, takes up residence with a peasant's wife, apparently by force and baldly in the presence of her husband. This is undoubtedly a rape scene, and like Villa in *Viva Villa!* Eufemio's sexual insatiability and social transgressions eventually cause his death.

The most salient difference between the Americanized Emiliano and the stereotypically Mexican Eufemio remains, in fact, their respective abilities to control their sexual appetites. Brando's Emiliano, unlike the real Zapata, stays devoted to one woman, Josefa. Kazan and Steinbeck "draw a distinct line between Zapata and Villa as revolutionary types. Villa's rampant male sexuality and Strong Man tendencies are assigned to Zapata's brother, Eufemio"(Slotkin

423). Thus, while Emiliano remains monogamous and behaves decorously in his courting of Josefa, Eufemio loves many women at once and takes them when he pleases. Slotkin reminds us that “Zapata’s ‘freakish’ (according to Eufemio) fidelity to one woman thus gives this revolutionary the most important caste-mark of the middle-class American and of the Hollywood romantic hero”(423-34). In this sense, the coding of the two brothers reverts to classic categories of difference. Emiliano is a “good” Mexican because he is cast within American values; Eufemio is a “bad” Mexican because he is characterized as oversexed, violent, pathological, Other.

By presenting Emiliano Zapata’s monogamy as “freakish”—for a non-American at least—the film normalizes Eufemio’s very “Mexican” sexual appetite. The naturalizing of Mexican libidinousness is expressed in a scene when Eufemio puzzles over Emiliano’s love for Josefa. He tells a nodding counterpart about Emiliano’s slow courtship of Josefa: “He should have stolen her if he wanted her. . . . I have loved with all my heart one hundred women I never want to see again, and he is still after this one. It escapes me.” The film does not condemn Eufemio’s wantonness; it does, however, respect every man’s right to his property—*Viva Zapata!* after all, is ultimately about a man’s need for land—and it is for this reason that Eufemio is finally punished. An angry peasant murders Eufemio because he has forcefully taken the man’s wife as his own. In *Viva Zapata!* then, woman is as much property as is the land. In one instance, a

campesino comments that “land is like a woman.” When the revolution is won, Eufemio rewards himself by taking an hacienda that was to be partitioned. When Emiliano visits him to force him to give the land back, Emiliano finds Eufemio drunk, a terrorized woman at his feet. Eufemio tells Emiliano, “I took what I wanted. . . . I took their wives too.” Eufemio then stands, grabs the woman and takes her into another room. It is then that the husband takes action and kills Eufemio. Significantly, Eufemio dies not merely because of his “rampant male sexuality” but also because he has taken another man’s property.

Although markedly different from *Viva Villa!* in terms of the representation of its hero, *Viva Zapata!* nevertheless follows some of the same stereotypical conventions as its predecessor. Emiliano Zapata is a strong and just man, unlike the dictators Díaz and Huerta, unlike the weak president Madero, and unlike his own brother. Yet Zapata is different precisely because he is so unlike any other Mexican. He is “exceptional” in an American sense, and his strength comes from his likeness to Anglo-American heroes. Eufemio, conversely, is placed to stand in for every other Mexican, and it is within this context that his over-sexualized masculinity is acceptable in the film. Not surprisingly, the “Americanized” Zapata is played by an iconic American actor, Marlon Brando, while the “Mexicanized” Eufemio is played by an ethnic actor, Anthony Quinn.

Like *Viva Villa!* before it, *Viva Zapata!* withholds the Mexican representational freedom, and it is unable to imagine the Mexican as an agent of

his or her own history. While in *Viva Villa!* Francisco Villa remains trapped within his pathological violence, hypersexuality, and racial alterity, in *Viva Zapata!* Emiliano Zapata is a genuine hero in the Anglo-American vein, but despite his adherence to American democratic values, Zapata is himself gunned down at the end of the film. Although his death signifies the coming to freedom of the Mexican people, the film shows no real promise that Mexico will be free. The years between the making of *Viva Villa!* and *Viva Zapata!* witness a transformation in the representation of Mexican identity, but we see, nevertheless, a continued reliance on a tradition that goes back to nineteenth-century dime novels. Critics praise Steinbeck for thoughtfully giving Zapata a fullness not seen in previous representations of Mexicans, yet we should be wary of this assessment. While Steinbeck gives Zapata a complexity that Wallace Beery's Villa does not achieve, Steinbeck still carried his own stereotypical conceptions of Mexico, a country that represented "everything modern America was not; for him Mexico possessed a primitive vitality, a harsh simplicity, and a romantic beauty"(Millichap 95). We can make a similar assessment about Kazan's directing. While Kazan deserves recognition for the historical faithfulness which he brings to the film, we cannot ignore the instantiation of mimicry that characterizes Zapata's representation. The depiction of a nuanced Mexican identity, of course, constitutes neither Steinbeck nor Kazan's main concern. Partially because *Viva Zapata!* was filmed during the McCarthy witch hunts, we

may read it as an attempt by these two artists “to make a positive political statement” about “the essential values of American liberalism”(Slotkin 421). As a result, *Viva Zapata!* operates by way of the supreme irony of articulating American identity through a sublimated fascination with the Mexican revolutionary.

Paredes’s Critique of Mimicry in *The Shadow*

Américo Paredes wrote *The Shadow* (1998 [1955])¹ shortly after returning from journalistic service in World War II and during the period of Kazan and Steinbeck’s idealistic representation of the Mexican revolutionary. Growing up in South Texas, Paredes was no stranger to cultural conflict and failed revolutions, as his ethnographic work (“*With His Pistol in His Hand*”, 1958) and fiction (*George Washington Gómez*, 1992) richly elaborate. Still, having only recently returned from Japan, where, as José Limón writes, “he covered the post-war trials of Japanese generals accused of atrocities and became . . . suspicious of American racist motives,” Paredes was perhaps more acutely aware of “past and present Anglo social domination” than at any other time in his life (*Dancing* 78-79). Read from this perspective, *The Shadow* evinces deep pessimism with regard to revolutionary idealism in the wake of an “advancing Anglo-American capitalist political economy and culture,” both in Greater Mexico and throughout the world (85).

The Shadow takes us from the Anglo-American representation of the Mexican to Mexican self-representation, and from mimicry as an effect of the unconscious assumption of American preeminence to mimicry as an object of cultural critique. *The Shadow* diagnoses the structural and subjective effects of Anglo-American capitalism on the people of Greater Mexico both north and south of the border, and provocatively, it evidences the complicated causal links between an American-centered process of world-economic expansion and the Mexican Revolution, events which figure prominently in the narrative.² As the constitutive events of Greater Mexico's emergence into modernity, the global capitalist economy and the revolution powerfully shape the Mexican's subjective and ideological formation. *The Shadow* examines the individual's problematic movement between traditional ways of life, defined by an indigenous heritage, folk beliefs and communal values, and the discourses of capitalist modernity, defined by rationality, individualism and notions of progress. The novel formulates the subject's movement into modernity as mimicry, or, more accurately, as the interpellated acceptance Western modes of thought. In the novel's main character, Paredes produces a "mimic man" who, as Bhabha notes in a different context, expresses a "desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry," but only achieves "partial representation"(88). The form of "authenticity" that is desired is that of Western rationalism as determined by the processes of capitalist modernity.

Set some twenty years after the Mexican Revolution in a northern Mexican communal farm, *The Shadow* narrates its central character's uneasy passage between worlds: Antonio Cuitla is a former rebel leader who disavows his indigenous roots and revolutionary ideals in favor of a perceived rational subjectivity, a subjectivity shaped by capital's uneven entry into Greater Mexico. The novel begins as Cuitla, president of the *ejido* or communal farm of Los Claveles, oversees his men's work from atop his horse. The men are behind schedule due to delays caused by land disputes between the former *hacendados* and the *ejidatarios*, but also between Cuitla and his former friend and comrade-in-arms, Jacinto Del Toro. The former *hacendado*, Don José María Jiménez, has managed to keep the best of the pre-agrarian reform land, and plots—and succeeds in the case of Del Toro—to have both revolutionaries killed. On the day Don José María has Del Toro assassinated, Antonio Cuitla is himself on his way to confront and kill Del Toro. But on his way to the other's ranch, Cuitla meets what he initially believes to be a ghost or shadow. Momentarily frightened, Cuitla fires his gun, and discovers that he has killed Del Toro's murderer, an outsider from Monterrey named Gerardo Salinas. As the novel progresses, Cuitla is consumed by the guilt of the murder he was to commit, and he is haunted by the shadow of his former friend.

As my synopsis implies, *The Shadow*'s ambiguous title is appropriate, for the spectral figure allegorizes the dying away of the revolution's communitarian

ideals and Greater Mexico's folk traditions; the ghost also represents life under the lengthening shadow of global capitalism as the Mexican economy is transformed from an oligarchic to a communal to an agribusiness system of land management. Most importantly, however, the shadow signals the individual's troubled entry into modernity. Paredes creates a protagonist, Antonio Cuitla, whose intense desire to participate in Mexico's modernization occurs at the expense of his traditional culture. As president of the *ejido*, Cuitla interacts closely with previous and current power elites, and he emulates what he perceives to be their rationality. As a former revolutionary, Cuitla is one of Bhabha's "appropriate objects of a colonialist chain of command, authorized versions of otherness," which means he is admitted into the structure of governance only insofar as he accepts its rationalist and modernizing discourse (88).

Cuitla expresses his attempted mimicry of modern rationality through a disassociation from his indigenous heritage. Like most Mexicans, Cuitla is a *mestizo* with "that hewn appearance of limb and features sometimes found in mestizos who have much Indian ancestry"(2). Yet Cuitla feels himself above the "Indians" of Los Claveles. For instance, "[e]xcept for the kerchief, Antonio Cuitla's clothes were in the American style: yellow drill trousers, heavy shapeless shoes, and a blue work shirt. . . . His shirttails, gathered outside his belt and tied in a knot over his navel, were another concession to the customs of his native village"(2). Cuitla struggles to subordinate his Indian side in order to mimic what

he perceives to be another kind of rational subjectivity represented by the “American style” and by Don José María Jiménez, the fair-skinned, blue-eyed former owner of the *ejido* land. Don José María convinces Quitla that being Indian means being barbaric, superstitious, and infantile: “There is something childlike about the primitive mind It is a mind, in some respects, in the first stage of innocence”(6).

Nowhere is the repudiation of the Indian side of himself more evident than in the moment that catalyzes the narrative, the instant when Cuitla witnesses the ghostly shadow stirring in his path. On his way to the parcel of land worked by his chief political rival in the communal farm, Jacinto Del Toro, his former friend and comrade, Cuitla intends to kill Del Toro and claim self-defense. As murderous thoughts cross his mind, something on the road interrupts his progress: “He saw it for an instant out of the corner of his eye. He jerked his head toward it, as the horse stopped short. The sorrel shrank back, back and down, as though gathering itself for one tremendous leap”(9). A moment after first glimpsing the shadow, Cuitla regains self-composure. He berates himself for being taken in by the shadow: “Fool! Frightened by nothing, like a superstitious Indian. A man like him, who had read books and seen other countries. It was not for him to go around seeing shadows on the road”(11). Cuitla struggles with his “superstitious Indian” impulses, and believes that a man who has read and who has traveled—a learned, rational man—should not be so easily frightened.

Convinced that the thing he saw is not a ghost, and that he in fact startled his own horse by pulling too hard on the reins, Cuitla regains his rational self-assurance: “[a]nother man wouldn’t have thought the matter out, and he would have given superstition one more point to stand on Some day all men would be reasonable, and such things would not be. But, meanwhile, Antonio Cuitla was greatly relieved that he, at least, was a reasoning man and had thought the matter out”(13). Cuitla sees his subjectivity following a rational “Western” trajectory in which the subject comes to greater consciousness of itself. Cuitla, however, does *and* does not see a ghost, for the shadow acquires an overdetermination of meanings. The “thing” stirring in the bushes is Gerardo Salinas, the stranger hired by Don José María to kill Cuitla and Del Toro; simultaneously, the shadow becomes the ghost of Del Toro. Like many of the characters in Paredes’s novels and poetry, Cuitla is a subject caught “between two worlds,” as the title of his poetry collection implies (1991). On the one hand, Cuitla is a *mestizo*, he has inherited indigenous and folk traditions which respect the supernatural. On the other hand, Cuitla attempts to emulate a “reasoning man.”

In addition to eliding his indigenous identity and folk beliefs, Cuitla also attempts to do away with the folk genres with which gave voice to the revolutionary spirit and which provide the grounding for the communal life of the *ejido*. One of these genres is the *corrido* or ballad which was vital for narrating

the revolutionary struggle. To justify his intended murder of Del Toro, he will tell the *peones* that his actions were in self-defense, quoting the words from a song, “*La defensa es permitida* [self-defense is justified].” In Cuitla’s view, his fellow farmers “talked and thought in terms of songs and tales. Like children.” Unlike them, he “had put those songs away a long time ago. They were childish, a waste of time”(6). If Paredes’s earlier work on the *corrido* in “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” demonstrates an “antisubjectivist” impulse “because in ballads of border conflict . . . he locates sources of meaning, not in individual subjectivities, but in social relations, communication, and cultural politics,” then Cuitla’s rejection of traditional folk ballads symbolizes his renunciation of community and his attempt to become a rational, individualistic subject (J. Saldívar, *Border Matters* 40).³ By placing Cuitla in the position of radical doubt and by undermining his assumed rationality, Paredes re-inscribes the “antisubjectivist” impulse in a way different than in “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”. Paredes, in other words, questions the Mexican’s mimicry of Western individualism.

Cuitla’s consistent denial of his inherited beliefs and rituals instantiates itself in his inner conflict with regard to the ghost’s authenticity. Cuitla considers that his friend Del Toro “would have known” that Cuitla was in danger of being killed by the outsider who also killed Del Toro: “*He* knew and he was warning me.” But then Cuitla reminds himself that this idea is also absurd. Of course there could be no ghost warning him. After all, Cuitla is “an emancipated man,

free in body and mind. . . . He did not believe in those dark things that haunted men's minds. He had cast such things away as he had thrown aside the round straw hat and the cotton drawers"(45). Time and again his judgment regarding the ghost's reality and the his beliefs' validity falters. He is caught between competing ideologies—in this case, rationalism versus superstition—as he attempts to adopt one while not completely succeeding in disavowing the other.

By placing two belief systems—the bourgeois individualist and the traditional folk communalist—against each other within one person, the novel lays bare the mimicry that is forced upon the Mexican subject. The clashing impulses within Cuitla signify a struggle for dominance between belief systems, one ascendant and the other waning. While Paredes would not deny that forms of belief evolve, he would insist that residual forms of belief are especially useful when they allow a community under attack to cohere (Williams 122-23). In *The Shadow*, the community of peons is under attack, and in completely rejecting—rather than adapting—his inherited belief system, Antonio Cuitla denies any possibility of communal collaboration against the former *hacendado*'s encroachment. By subverting the tenability of Cuitla's move into a reasoning, non-superstitious subjectivity, *The Shadow* questions the validity of the individualistic discourses that appear as U.S. capitalist modernity becomes dominant.

Simultaneously, *The Shadow* hints at another idea vis-à-vis the individual and the community in the face of a world in flux: it inquires into the status of traditional modes of belief in a historical moment that threatens traditional patterns of culture. In Antonio Cuitla's case, the particular beliefs he adopts prove destructive to his community's needs (Cuitla parallels Guálinto Gómez, the protagonist of *George Washington Gómez*). Ironically, Cuitla himself understands the power of different ideological formations, such as the communitarian ideals of the revolution. "It had been a relatively easy task to dispossess the old communal owners, to make them turn over the land to men working under a different kind of communal arrangement, one backed by a political philosophy the old one had lacked"(42). In the past, Cuitla acquired a "political philosophy" based on a "communal arrangement"—he became radicalized as a migrant laborer—and he has taught it to his men. While his views have changed, members of the *ejido* seek coordinated action after the outsider Gerardo Salinas murders Del Toro. Cuitla, however, has acquired a new philosophy, one which more closely mirrors the emerging capitalist order, and he rebuffs them: "Stop talking nonsense"(43). The scene illustrates Cuitla's mimicry of discourses of modernity, beginning with anti-capitalist, anti-oligarchic ideologies, but then acquiring more rational and individualistic belief patterns which he borrows from the *patrón*-turned-capitalist Don José María.

Don José María, as symbol of an ascendant commercial class, becomes Cuitla's model for his entry into modernity. Don José María, who has retained the best land for himself, befriends Cuitla and the members of the *ejido* for political reasons: "He became their friend. He visited the colony of Los Claveles frequently and talked about the aims of the Revolution"(26). Cuitla naively accepts Don José María's feigned interest in revolutionary ideals and defers to his superior understanding of agrarian codes. For Cuitla, there are "few men like Don José María, who understood the agrarian law and wanted to see the peon rise and become a man"(43). Cuitla desires to be like Don José María, a "man who understood" his growing sense of alienation. "How often had he wished that life had been different, and that Don José María and he had been born in the same village"(45). Cuitla's aspirations, then, are for the ideals of the *patrón* and other ruling elites, and this explains his paternalistic attitude toward his men. "They are Indians without shoes, how can they know? They love the land, but they were born too soon. It is up to me to know for them, for their children's sake. It is my burden and my pride"(3). In other words, it is his role as father to take care of his children, the shoeless *indios*. Thus, Cuitla emulates the paternal view of the Indian-as-child from Don José María.

The condescending attitude toward the Indian, of course, goes back centuries, but what is provocative about Cuitla's combination of racial prejudice, insistence on rational thought, and rejection of folk traditions is that it resembles

the ideology of what Alan Knight calls “Mexico’s ‘modernizing elite,’” for whom “racialism justified . . . rational economic exploitation”(167). Interestingly, these “modernizing elites” themselves borrowed from European positivism for their ideology. Cuitla’s mimicry, therefore, is enacted as a copy of a copy. Finally, Cuitla’s mimicry of Don José María—he tells the former *hacendado*, “I feel toward you like a brother”—is an acceptance of class hierarchies and takes place at the expense of revolutionary and communal ideals (82). The production of Antio Cuitla as a “mimic man” occurs not through the subject’s desire for modernity but as an effect of capitalist modernity’s penetration into Greater Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Capitalism, therefore, creates the desire for modernity, and the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein sheds analytic light upon the production of this desire.⁴ In his delineation of the processes of “incorporation” which the capitalist world-economy undertakes, Wallerstein identifies a

contradiction which the populations of each successively incorporated zone faced. Should the transformations that were occurring in their zone be conceived as changes from a local and traditional “culture” to a worldwide modern “culture,” or were these populations rather simply under pressure to give up their “culture” and adopt that of the Western imperialist power or powers? Was it, that is, a case of modernization or Westernization? (164)

Wallerstein's question seems rhetorical, for undoubtedly cultures incorporated by the capitalist economy face the continual pressure to both modernize—this is the case with the communal farm and the former *hacendado*—and Westernize—this is the case with Cuitla and the former *hacendado* in *The Shadow*.

James Clifford makes a similar—although less Marxist-inflected—observation about the processes of subjectification in his discussion of the “predicament of ethnographic modernity” in the encounters between Western and non-Western cultures (3). When he writes about “all of us” (in the West) being “caught in modernity's inescapable momentum,” Clifford recognizes that

Something similar occurs whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination. “Entering the modern world,” their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly “backward” peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it. (5)

Cuitla is one of those peoples who must confront the transformation between tradition and modernity, and his mimicry of a modern rationality is an instance of yielding to the new but not inventing it. Paredes's novel represents his struggle

between the old and the new as one of the painful consequences of the emergence of the world-economy in Greater Mexico.

In the novel, the dominant capitalist world-economy ushers not only a transformation in the means of production and exchange, as well as a revolution in the global division of labor, but it also introduces new ideologies and counter-ideologies that have profound effects on the subject's self-understanding. As one constitutive process of modernity, capitalism has rationalized the means of production and at the same time advanced rational, scientific thought; it has inaugurated the concept of individual wage labor while it has helped change the concept of the free individual. *The Shadow*, considered in relation to Clifford's analysis of traditional cultures' resisting or yielding to the West, configures resistance as nearly impossible, and the novel's representation of the stages in Antonio Cuitla's subject formation allows readers to see the ideological binds of a capitalist modernity in Greater Mexico.

Initially, the novel demonstrates that one of the strongest counter-ideological responses to capitalism is revolutionary socialism. We learn, for example, that Antonio Cuitla's migration to Texas as a farm laborer also brought him to a radical political consciousness. It was in Texas that he received a revolutionary education. Having rejected religion, he was

proud and cynical so that the others called him atheist and were afraid of him. . . . It was in Texas he first heard men talk of revolution, men of his

own sort, talk about striking off their chains, and of the imprisonment of starvation. Yes, he had got most of his education in Texas. In the cotton fields and the coal mines. . . . Texas had a lot to teach the Mexican peon turned migrant laborer, who looked across the border for a new kind of life. (62)

The evolving world-economy creates migrations of labor, that in turn effect a revolutionary response from those seeking to break the chains of capital's "imprisonment and starvation." Through strange circumstance, the revolution sees its birth—partially at least—in the cotton fields, coal mines, and prison farms of Texas, and many of the Revolution's leaders come of age there.

Cuitla's education as a revolutionary is his first step into a modern subjectivity. This revolutionary subjectivity dialectically links with the expansion of capital, so it owes its florescence to capitalist modernity. As he reacts to forms of peonage—whether feudal or capitalist—Cuitla acquires a political ideology that takes him through the revolutionary period. In this first movement, Cuitla continues to adhere to the values and folk traditions of his native village, although he rejects religious doctrine even before his migration to Texas. Later, Cuitla will reject the communitarian ideals of the revolution and accept ideologies more closely allied with the emerging capital order. To repeat Wallerstein, *The Shadow* represents the evolution of a character "under pressure" to relinquish his culture "and adopt that of the Western imperialist power"(164).

Another instance of capitalist modernity's shaping of the desire for mimicry may be found in its reorganization of labor. The narrative relates that Antonio Cuitla, Jacinto Del Toro, and even Gerardo Salinas are part of this reorganization. Salinas, the man hired to murder Del Toro, is an outsider from the northern industrial city of Monterrey. Cuitla learns this when he examines the contents of the man's wallet after having killed him. Cuitla discovers that Salinas was en route to the Texas cotton fields, then under intense agribusiness development. "Besides a few Mexican bills, there was the photo of a girl; a guitar string . . . a small pink medallion . . . and a clipping from a Mexican newspaper. The clipping was about the coming cotton season in Texas and the need for pickers, the high wages being offered"(61). Cuitla recalls that he also "had gone to Texas when he was young, after his father died and he ran away for the first time from the village where he was born"(61). In the movements of these men, the novel charts the migration of labor between Mexico and Texas, illustrating capitalism's organization of its resources. The world economy structures its labor force by producing lack, opportunity, and ultimately the need for survival that is inseparable from a production of the desire for things modern and Western.

The main character of *The Shadow* certainly embodies, to reiterate James Clifford's analysis of the clash between tradition and modernity, one of those peoples "[s]wept in the destiny dominated by the capitalist West" who "no longer invent local futures"(5). The representation of this subject formation points to a

very tenuous relation to the traditions of resistance which characterize contemporary interpretations of Chicana/o literature. Yet it is precisely the subject's *relation* to the contradictions of capitalist modernity that *The Shadow* asks us to investigate. I agree with José David Saldívar (1997) when he writes that, in addition to "understanding . . . the dynamics of empire," Paredes's modernist aesthetics evince "a desire to produce what Paul Gilroy (1993) calls a counterculture of modernity"(50). For Gilroy, the counterculture of modernity is not merely an aesthetic movement, but "a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics"(38-39). The counterculture of modernity refuses the very separation between tradition and modernity, and reinvents traditions in the face of change. The ghost in *The Shadow* recuperates an elided history and places it in the present, thus making it possible for the subject to stand in critical relation to the processes of modernity.

Finally, the importance of the ghost in relation to the notion of mimicry should not be overlooked. The ghost disrupts Cuitla's assumption of a rational subjectivity by acting as the double and un-incorporable Other of traditional Mexican culture. Because Cuitla cannot rid its presence, his mimicry of the discourses of rationalism and the *patrón* reveals the "*menace* of mimicry" as a "*double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority," as Bhabha has argued. The ghost, therefore, corresponds

to a “double vision that is a result of . . . the partial representation/recognition of the colonial subject”(88). *The Shadow*’s ghost, then, appears as the corrective that constantly ruptures Cuitla’s attempt to mimic a Western rational subjectivity and continually reminds him of his crime against the community. The novel inquires upon the individual’s difficult entry into modernity, and it asserts that such an entry cannot occur without a continued and uneasy haunting by past traditions. Rather than a negation of tradition, *The Shadow* demands its acknowledgement, and it asks that we come to terms with the presence of our inherited beliefs as we adapt them to new circumstances in our transition between worlds. As the haunting interplay between rationalism and folk belief, individual subjectivity and community, forgetfulness and historical memory, and, certainly, modernity and tradition, the spectral figure represents a counterculture of modernity, a radical critique and alternative mode of resistance to an ascendant capitalist formation. The novel makes possible an analysis of the structural connections between the development of agribusiness capitalism, the eruption of the revolution, and the displacement of workers, and it places these events in a global context. As it weaves a story of subjective transformation from traditional to modern forms of thought *The Shadow* demonstrates, finally, that Greater Mexico’s social and subjective emergence into a capitalist-dominated modernity is a troubled and unfinished phenomenon.

In representing the emergence of a mimetic and conflicted Mexican subjectivity as the consequence of the uneven cultural and economic transformations in Greater Mexico, *The Shadow* departs radically from accepted notions of a unified Chicana/o subject in resistance to Anglo-American hegemony. Renato Rosaldo, whose analysis of Chicana/o narratives in *Culture and Truth* charts a historical shift away from such univocal representations, categorizes Paredes as an early instance, a “now . . . dated . . . idealization of a primordial patriarchy”(150). Rosaldo’s point of reference, in this instance, is the heroic Mexican American figuration in Paredes’s “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”. “Once a figure of masculine heroics and resistance to white supremacy, the Chicano warrior hero now has faded away in a manner linked . . . to the demise of self-enclosed, patriarchal, ‘authentic’ Chicano culture”(149). *The Shadow* anticipates Rosaldo’s argument, since it provides no such unified figure of resistance. The novel’s “hero,” Antonio Cuitla, represents a warrior “faded away” in Greater Mexico’s post-revolutionary transformations between tradition and modernity. Thus, this tenuous formation demands that critics view Chicana/o identity as contingent and always changing in relation to an evolving modernity. Jim Mendiola’s recent film, *Come and Take it Day* (2002), suggests that contemporary Chicano/a filmmakers are coming to terms with the contingency of Chicana/o identity, and I investigate this film in the concluding chapter. Before I discuss Mendiola’s film, however, it is necessary to make one more stop in

Mexico—via Soviet Russia and Texas—to examine Sergei Eisenstein’s and Katherine Anne Porter’s alternative revolutionary poetics of Mexican identity.

¹ Paredes wrote *The Shadow* around the fifties, and he notes in the preface that he attempted to publish it on several occasions, without success. In 1998, Arte Público Press published the novel as part of its “Pioneers of Modern U.S. Hispanic Literature” series.

² Additionally, the novel uncovers the complicated causal links instantiated by the emerging capitalist world-economy and the revolution. These consequences include: the reorganization and displacement of the Mexican labor force on both sides of the border; conflict and contradiction between exploited workers in the country and the city; and world-capital’s attenuation of agrarian reform and communitarian movements in the wake of the bourgeoisie’s consolidation of power. For a complete discussion of the novel’s social analysis, see my article, “Américo Paredes’s *The Shadow*: Social and Subjective Transformation in Greater Mexico” (*Aztlán* 27:1 Spring 2002, 27-57).

³ “La defensa es permitida” is, ironically, quoted from “The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,” the *corrido* which forms the basis of Paredes’s classic study, “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” (1958).

⁴ My argument in this section is loosely inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s vision, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, of capitalism’s deterritorializations and reterritorializations of subject peoples. As Robert Young notes, Deleuze and Guattari’s description of “the operations of capitalism as a territorial writing machine seems not only especially suited to the historical development of industrialization, but also describes rather exactly the violent physical and ideological procedures of colonization, deculturation and acculturation, by which the territory and cultural space of an indigenous society must be disrupted, dissolved and then reinscribed according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power” (169-70).

Chapter Four

Alternative Revolutionary Poetics: Eisenstein and Porter in Mexico

Introduction

Viva Villa! and *Viva Zapata!* as I argue in the previous chapter, exert great influence on the subsequent popular cultural perception of Mexicans. Friedrich Katz writes that although *Viva Villa!* “grossly underestimated Villa’s intelligence . . . and oversimplified the complex Mexican Revolution,” it still “received a tremendous welcome in the United States and in Europe and helped to popularize the Mexican Revolution”(792). While international audiences enthusiastically received *Viva Villa!* during the mid-thirties, in Moscow the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein had a different perspective. Eisenstein had recently returned from Mexico in disgrace, after failing to complete his epic about Mexico, *Qué Viva México!* Having been discredited by Stalinist cultural intellectuals, he would not make a film for several years. We can imagine with what mixture of enthusiasm and disappointment Eisenstein viewed *Viva Villa!* for years later, he would observe that the film character of Villa was a “Rabelaisian monster created on the screen by Wallace Beery”(Immoral Memories 193). What is telling about Eisenstein’s assessment of Beery’s “Rabelaisian monster” is that it allies

Eisenstein with the Mexican national reaction against *Viva Villa!* Unsurprisingly, as Katz avers, *Viva Villa!* elicited “sharp criticism from many Mexicans”(792).

Eisenstein’s response to *Viva Villa!* suggests the kind of allegiances he made throughout his career. His writings on film, his memoirs, his artistic output, and *Qué Viva México!* (1931 [1979]) in particular, reveal a Marxist intellectual committed to the workers’ revolution and cognizant of the histories of class and race oppression in his country and throughout the world. His sensitivity to the subordinate classes is notable because it emerges, not because Eisenstein was forced to follow a strict Communist party line under Stalin, but in spite of that party line. Stalin’s firm grip on Soviet thought constituted its own form of domination, and it shaped Eisenstein’s view of subaltern groups, as I propose in my analysis of *Qué Viva México!* in this chapter.

Qué Viva México! stands in sharp distinction to the films of the previous chapter for two other important reasons: it does not rely on the dime novel-derived tradition of ethnic stereotypes. The film is not an American creation, and although it was, in 1931, not completed according to Eisenstein’s intended plan, it remains an important document *within* the circuit of an American discourse about Mexican identity representation. Within this discourse, it eschews Hollywood stereotypes in favor of direct conversation with Mexican history and art, as well as contemporary commentaries on Mexican culture, and the people of Mexico themselves. The problematic of ethnic stereotypes has always plagued American

film, but Eisenstein's engagement with the discourse of Mexican identity—reflecting his interests in revolutionary politics and avant-garde filmmaking—is far more historically nuanced than Hollywood's. Although Eisenstein is himself at times reductive and stereotypical—especially in his scripting of *Qué Viva México!*—the film's images and montage powerfully speak to the contemporary viewer, and differentiate Eisenstein's representation from the “greaser” films of the early teens and the bandit revolutionary films of the thirties through fifties.¹ Furthermore, Eisenstein inspired a fictional response to his Mexican film from Katherine Anne Porter. A student and admirer of Mexican culture, Porter observed that while Eisenstein's project was laudable, his desire to represent the revolution's transformational power blinded him to the peon's continued suffering. Porter's short story, “Hacienda,” critiques Eisenstein's idealism, while it satirizes American misconceptions about Mexico. Together, *Qué Viva México!* and “Hacienda” form a composite response to the greaser and bandit revolutionary films examined in the previous chapters.

Eisenstein, Mexico, and Subalternity

Eisenstein's interest in Mexico emerged by happenstance early in his career. In *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, Inga Karetnikova recounts that a young Eisenstein “was asked to design sets and costumes for the play *The Mexican* [based on Jack London's short story] at the Proletcult Theater in Moscow in October 1920. Eisenstein, however, expanded his designer duties and

was actively involved in directing”(5), and thus began his fascination with Mexico. Over the years, Eisenstein’s attraction to Mexico would grow as he acquired “incidental impressions and random facts from history, politics, and literature, and from photographs and prints he saw by chance”(5). Later, Diego Rivera’s visit to Moscow in 1927 would heighten his interest in Mexico (10). “The Mexican” appealed to Eisenstein’s “zealous idealism,” a characteristic which, according to Karetnikova, he shared with “the entire generation of Soviet avant-garde of the early 1920s.” These artists “saw in the Bolshevik revolution a continuation . . . of the same innovative, rebellious impulse that inspired their artistic works”(6).

Karetnikova attributes Eisenstein’s enthusiasm for revolutionary subjects to a sense of guilt stemming from his “nonproletarian, upper-class background . . . with all the refined culture given to him purely by the fact of birth”(7). While this assessment may be correct, it glosses over Eisenstein’s personal experiences of subordination, which created a strongly felt sense of allegiance to dominated groups. We see a possible instance of his experience of subjection in Herbert Marshall’s preface to *Immoral Memories*, Eisenstein’s autobiography. In the preface, Marshall alludes to the complex identities Eisenstein may have been “hiding” while living under Stalin’s rule: “Outside he was a Soviet Russian; inside, according to some, he was a Christian. According to others, he was a Jew; to yet others, a homosexual”(vii). It is not necessary to delineate the Soviet

attitude to these identities during Eisenstein's time. If, as Marshall concludes, it "was difficult to know what he was fundamentally"(vii), then Eisenstein was certainly capable of seeing the world from the position of an Other, and not merely out of a sense of bourgeois guilt.

Eisenstein wrote *Immoral Memories* in the aftermath of Stalin's reign, so he avoids any possibly dangerous confessions about his religious faith or sexual orientation. He recalls, however, an indirect instance of the alienation and subordination experienced by specific social groups. Drawing upon a memory from childhood, he recounts that his ethnic prejudices prevented him from developing many friendships. He coyly writes: "I was a terribly exemplary boy, madly diligent in my studies, and none too democratic in my choice of acquaintances"(17). To his self-analysis of prejudicial behavior, he adds that

the children expressed even more openly than in society the national enmity between the different ethnic groups to which their parents belonged I belonged to the colonizing group of Russian bureaucrats, toward whom both the native Latvian population and the descendents of the first of their conquerors, the Germans, felt equally unfriendly. So from my school desk I didn't succeed in making any genuine friendships. (17)

From an early point in his life, Eisenstein keenly understands of the ethnic and class differences that divide people. He calls himself a member of the colonizing group, but even within this group, he stands at considerable difference from other

Russians because he identifies with those who have been conquered. In retrospect, the ability to imagine the experience of those less fortunate than him is not surprising, given the identities he may have “hidden,” and given the stifling political atmosphere of the Soviet Union under Stalin.

Although it is difficult to determine Eisenstein’s particular interest in Mexico and its revolution, his commitment to subordinated classes—specifically, the proletarian masses—expresses itself in all his works. His most celebrated film, *Potemkin* (1925), deals with the mutiny of exploited sailors on a Czarist battleship, as well as the citizens of Odessa who support them. In the film’s most famous episode, the “Odessa steps” sequence, a large crowd of unarmed citizens, children among them, is rifled down by Czarist troops. Eisenstein writes in *Notes of a Film Director* that “the scene on the Odessa steps became one of the most important in the film. . . . that one particular episode became the emotional embodiment of the whole epic of 1905 [during the first Russian Revolution]”(27-28). The subject of a people’s revolt against its oppressors carried over to his Mexican film, and his experience in Mexico, in turn, would stay with him for the rest of his career. “Even in the 1940s, while working on *Ivan the Terrible* . . . Eisenstein would suddenly draw figures of peons or details of the Mexican landscape along his drawing of Russian churches”(Karetnikova 4).

By the time Eisenstein traveled to the U.S. in the spring of 1930, he carried a “burning desire” to see Mexico, as he writes in *Immoral Memories*

(194). Yet he may never have attempted the film had not his original intention to make several films for Paramount Studios completely collapsed. He had expressed great optimism only a year earlier to an American journal—*The Dial*, an early exponent of modernism—in regard to the possibility of working in states: “I anticipate the greatest cinema co-operation with America. With a joint total of America’s possibilities and Soviet Russia’s fever to produce, we should be able to achieve something extraordinary”(Richman 314). This pronouncement would prove to be a gross overestimation of his filmmaking success in the U.S. Paramount Studios, with whom he was under contract, rejected at least three film treatments he submitted, including an adaptation of Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*. “The studio was initially enthusiastic, but the ardor quickly cooled. The picture, David O. Selznick asserted, ‘cannot possibly offer anything but a most miserable two hours to millions of happy minded Americans’”(Bordwell 19). Selznick’s statement, in retrospect, proves ironic, for in 1930 the nation had just entered the Great Depression, and the movie industry was about to get caught up in the Red Scare that purged many left-leaning writers and directors—including Eisenstein himself—out of Hollywood.

Eisenstein’s story ideas were rejected by Paramount’s executives, certainly because they did not conform to the perceived entertainment criteria of “happy minded Americans,” but more importantly because the studio’s producers were inimical to Eisenstein’s critique of American individualism and the U.S.

capitalist system (Bordwell 17). In addition, the studio deemed his proposed methods too unorthodox. For example, he did not ascribe to the Hollywood star system that required a major star to carry a film; Eisenstein favored using non-actors for his films. *Notes of a Film Director* provides Eisenstein's perspective on his failed attempt to direct *An American Tragedy*. He humorously explains that the "collision" over this story occurred because he and the "front office" could not agree on the guilt or innocence of the main character, Clyde Griffiths. Eisenstein maintained that Griffiths was not guilty, a position which the studio heads considered "a monstrous challenge to American society"(98). In a mock-serious tone, Eisenstein recreates his conversation with Paramount producers: "We explained that we considered the crime committed by Griffiths the sum total of those social relations, to whose influence he was subjected at every stage of his unfolding biography and character, during the course of the film"(98-99). The producers' retort demonstrates their own "happy minded" attitude, and serves as the punch-line to the story:

"We would prefer a simple, tight whodunit about a murder. . . ."

". . . and about the love between a boy and a girl," someone added with a sigh. (99)

This example illustrates the vast differences in philosophical approach between Hollywood and Eisenstein: the former wanted "simple, tight" stories with

romance thrown in, while the latter sought to uncover the contradictions of American society.²

The incident that finally caused Paramount to lose confidence in Eisenstein occurred “when extremists headed by the anti-Semitic Major Pease . . . denounced Eisenstein, in a nation-wide propaganda campaign, as a subversive agent of Moscow”(Geduld and Gottesman 12). The smear tactics succeeded, and “Paramount executives recognized the campaign as a potential threat to the public image of the film company. The political campaign together with the growing disillusion with Eisenstein persuaded Paramount that the Russian director would have to go”(12). After Paramount broke ties with Eisenstein, the U.S. government put pressure on him to leave the country by revoking his work visa (Bordwell 19). It was at this point that a “long-cherished idea came to mind. He called on Charlie Chaplin and explained his desire to make a film in Mexico about the life and culture of the Mexican people—a film that would be free of the shackles of Hollywood”(Geduld and Gottesman 14). Chaplin, with whom Eisenstein had become well-acquainted, could not fund Eisenstein, but he got him in touch with Upton Sinclair.³ Subsequently, Sinclair put together a small sum of money for Eisenstein and his assistants, Grigory Alexandrov and Eduard Tisse, to make a film in Mexico.

The Russian filmmakers never completed the film. Although the circumstances remain murky, film historians agree that despite support from

leftist intellectuals in the United States, and despite accommodation from the Mexican government, Eisenstein was unable to complete his film chiefly because Upton Sinclair, his main financial backer, lacked the organizational and film-production knowledge to fulfill the requirements for making a film (Geduld and Gottesman 24-25). Sinclair provided inadequate production assistance, hiring his inexperienced brother-in-law to oversee day-to-day operations, and putting together only a very modest budget. Eisenstein may have overcome these encumbrances had not one additional factor intervened—an increasing disfavor within the Soviet Union’s cultural agencies. Stalin’s coming to power initiated a consolidation of cultural institutions in the direction of a Communist ideology that demanded realist and propagandist art. Under Stalin, the formal experimentations for which Eisenstein received renown were forbidden. In addition, Eisenstein’s stay in Mexico was more prolonged than anyone had expected, and this created suspicions of a possible defection. Therefore, when the film’s production met with continued delays, and when the film’s budget faced overruns, Stalin and the American branch of the Soviet Film Agency, Amkino, delivered the following telegram to Sinclair: “EISENSTEIN LOOSE [sic] HIS COMRADES CONFIDENCE IN SOVIET UNION STOP HE IS THOUGHT TO BE DESERTER WHO BROKE OFF WITH HIS OWN COUNTRY STOP”(qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 212). Amkino then withdrew its financial support, and Sinclair, who himself had run out of funding sources by this point, halted the film’s production.

The loss of funding meant that Eisenstein could not complete the film. More importantly, it also meant that he must return immediately to the Soviet Union, given that the U.S. had withdrawn his visa. The unedited film footage, which had been shipped to developing labs in California, stayed in the U.S. As producer responsible for the money of various investors, Sinclair saw himself forced to sell the unedited footage, part of which was used by Sol Lesser to create *Thunder Over Mexico* (1933), and later by Mary Seton (a friend and biographer of Eisenstein) to make *Time in the Sun* (1939). It was these two films that American audiences watched.

Eisenstein himself would never obtain access to his film. It was not until 1979 that Grigory Alexandrov, Eisenstein's assistant director in Mexico, put together *Qué Viva México!* in approximation of Eisenstein's vision. Alexandrov's presentation of the film follows Eisenstein's rough outline. The script for the film was published in 1951 by Vision Press as *Que Viva Mexico!* (without accent marks). The film was to consist of four episodes or novellas, plus a prologue and epilogue. Of these, only the fourth episode was not completed. According to the published script, the film's sequence was to consist of: the Prologue, "Sandunga," "Maguey," "Fiesta," "Soldadera," and the Epilogue. Alexandrov's version switches the order slightly, placing "Fiesta" before "Maguey." Though small, this change is significant, for it places the most intense episode, "Maguey," immediately before what would have been the revolutionary triumph of

“Soldadera.” In my analysis, I reference Alexandrov’s reedited *Qué Viva México!*—and the 1951 text, when necessary—because it is the most complete document of Eisenstein’s plan, and because Alexandrov’s first-hand interactions with Eisenstein lend this version legitimacy. I do not discuss *Thunder Over Mexico* or *Time in the Sun*. *Thunder Over Mexico* takes only the “Maguey” episode as the central story, and while Seton’s *Time in the Sun* closely follows Eisenstein’s notes, it is unavailable for viewing.

Qué Viva México!

It may seem odd for a study of the historically situated discourses between literature and film to examine a movie that was never completed. However, *Qué Viva México!*’s power lies in its recovery of a Mexican subjectivity that was, during this historical period, shaped almost exclusively by the generic conventions of the Western. Furthermore, *Qué Viva México!* elicits critical and artistic responses from contemporary writers, despite the attendant irony of not having been completed until long after the death of its director. Katherine Anne Porter, for instance, may or may not have seen any version of *Qué Viva México!* yet she was present at its filming, and she provides an incisive critique of the Anglo-American colonialist gaze, a satirical retelling of Eisenstein’s adventures in Mexico, and an unromanticized analysis of the post-revolutionary situation. We cannot, therefore, ignore the double irony attendant in a film so far outside the

circuits of American cultural exchange. It took nearly fifty years to complete and it is not “American,” yet it exerts great influence within these circuits.

Eisenstein’s understanding of and appreciation for Mexico is, contradictorily, at once sophisticated and crude. While his writing often absurdly reduces Mexico, his camera-work is more inclusive of the nuances of its culture groups, allowing them to speak and express the multiplicity of Mexican identities. In *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, David Bordwell supports my earlier analysis of the director’s cultural and political sympathies: “[l]ike many leftists, Eisenstein was impressed that Mexico had created a socialist revolution in 1910. He had met Diego Rivera in Moscow and was stirred by the monumental art of the muralists, who combined modernist techniques with indigenous popular traditions”(19). Eisenstein’s enchantment with Mexico and its people was such that he envisioned *Qué Viva México!* expansively, wishing to create “a panoramic survey of the nation’s history and culture”(19).

Eisenstein expresses his ambitions for his movie in *The Film Sense*, and employs the image of the *serape* as metaphor for Mexico’s cultures and history.

Do you know what a “Serape” is? A Serape is the striped blanket of the Mexican indio, the Mexican charro—every Mexican wears. And the Serape could be the symbol of Mexico. So striped and violently contrasting are the cultures in Mexico running next to each other and at the same time being centuries away. No plot, no whole story could run

through this Serape without being false or artificial. And we took the contrasting independent adjacence of its violent colors as the motif for constructing our film: 6 episodes following each other—different in character, different in people, different in animals, trees and flowers. And still held together by the unity of the weave—a rhythmic and musical construction and an unrolling of the Mexican spirit and character. (251)

If these words can be taken as a blueprint for the film, then at first glance Eisenstein seems to simplify Mexico to a basic symbol, the *serape*, which constitutes a metonymic shorthand through which Eisenstein understands the country. In American Westerns, the *serape*-clad Mexican usually appears as part of the mise-en-scène, and the *serape* itself is a marker of an inferior culture. Unknowingly, Eisenstein reproduces a popular stereotype to describe what he sees as the multiplicity of Mexico's cultures.

Although Eisenstein's writing on Mexico evidences limited understanding—expressed by the reduction of the culture to *serapes*, *indios* and *charros*—we may read Bhabha's "productive ambivalence" in the *serape*'s image. While this article of clothing inaugurates a representation of the Mexican as "the ultimate villain, leering from behind his grimy *serape* and invariably clutching his deadly *cuchillo*" (R. Paredes, "The Image" 180), it also veils Mexican identity, leaving a space for reinterpretation. Therefore, the *serape* also potentially contains the means of resistance. Recall, for instance, Stephen Crane's

admiration for a *serape*-clad Jose in “One Dash—Horses.” In Sergio Leone’s *Fistful of Dollars* (1965), Clint Eastwood’s character unexpectedly conceals two guns under his *serape* as he confronts the bounty hunters (although he is not Mexican). The layered-ness of the *serape* points to its double meaning: it may represent Mexican “sneakiness,” but it also points to more empowering possibilities. While Eisenstein fails to see the original representational reductiveness of the *serape*, he demonstrates an underlying sense that no single image, word, or narrative could do justice to Mexico’s complexities “without being false or artificial.” This statement suggests Eisenstein’s sophisticated understanding of the simplifications to which images may be subjected. He is not so much unconsciously reproducing stereotypes in the usual denigrating American mode as he is calling attention to the limitations of all representational forms, implicitly working through the ambivalence of these forms.

The 1979 version of *Qué Viva México!* opens with Grigory Alexandrov, aged and somewhat watery-eyed, sitting in a film vault with film stills and pictures of Eisenstein on the walls. The scene has a nostalgic quality. Alexandrov speaks Russian, and his words appear in English subtitles. He looks directly at the camera, and relates that during the period that Eisenstein, Eduard Tissé, and he traveled to Mexico, the muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco “were our guides and teachers.” In this introduction, Alexandrov confirms and echoes Eisenstein’s description of the

serape. The film was to be “a colorful symphony of Mexico,” one in which the country’s “tragic story could be told without actors or scripts”; it was “to consist of several parts, some close to being documentary and some acted.” Each of the six parts would be inspired by and dedicated to a different artist, as Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow recount in *Eisenstein at Work* (64).

Mary Seton’s description of *Qué Viva México!* also recalls Eisenstein’s writing in *The Film Sense*. Seton notes that he “found in different parts of the country, and among different races of Indians, [that] the whole history of Mexico still existed in the preservation of customs or traditions, and that, therefore, he was able to record a ‘living history’ instead of a history reconstructed from written histories”(90).⁴ This observation notwithstanding, Alexandrov’s introduction, as well as the Prologue and the first novel, “Sandunga,” make clear that the film is itself not free from the impulse to romanticize and simplify. The film’s tendency to exalt the primitive and the tragic, however, does not imply that it stereotypes in the same ways as *Viva Villa!* and *Viva Zapata!* While *Qué Viva México!* does not avoid these fallacies—nor does its static representation remain unproblematic—the film achieves a representation of a Mexican identity that is complex and situated in history. We see this complexity most prominently in the historical awareness of “Maguey,” the most climactic novella of the movie.

The descriptors Alexandrov uses in the introduction, “tragic” and “colorful symphony,” invoke a romantic relationship with Mexico, and the Prologue and

“Sandunga” continue it. The words that open the Prologue, for example, idealize the Mexican Indian.

The time of the Prologue is eternity.

Stones. . . . Gods. . . . People.

A land of sacred ruins and huge pyramids.

Men and women with the features of their ancestors.

A kingdom of death where the past dominates the present.

In total bondage to the idea of death.

These words, accompanied by shots of indigenous Mexican faces and pyramids, establish a culture that is static, unchanged by a modernity that has encroached upon it. The Prologue’s cinematography has a quality of still photography that further adds to the sense of a culture frozen. Eisenstein’s attempt to imagine a pre-conquest Mexico necessitates the shooting of indigenous faces against the backdrop of ruins, lending the images the characteristic of portraits. His propensity to idealize the Mexican *indio* has two sources. The Prologue was inspired by Siqueiros’s unfinished fresco, “The Worker’s Burial” (1925), and it is perhaps the Mexican muralists’ own idealization of the Indian that Eisenstein mimicked. Additionally, the painting’s status as a painting—unmoving and iconic—gives the Prologue a frozen quality.

The first novella, “Sandunga” pays tribute to the matriarchal culture of “Tropical Tehuantepec.” Eisenstein was astonished that in Mexico there could be

a region “that has a matriarchal society next to provinces that almost achieved Communism in the revolution”(*Immoral Memories* 260). In *Eisenstein at Work*, Leyda and Voynow relate that this novella would be dedicated to Jean Charlot, the Paris-born painter who influenced the Mexican mural movement (67). Like the Prologue, “Sandunga” follows a similarly static representation, “the ‘story’ almost disappeared in the event shown . . . the compositions became horizontal and passive”(67). The opening shots of this episode show a people living in the tropics, surrounded by animals. Shots of women show them in a semi-nude state, reminiscent of Paul Gauguin’s paintings of Tahitian women. Karetnikova observes that “[i]n seeking out the most expressive Mexican landscapes for filming . . . Eisenstein in many ways resembled Gauguin, who opened Tahiti to European art”(29). Additionally, like Gauguin, Eisenstein is fascinated with Mexico’s perceived exoticism. In “Sanunga,” the voice-over narration states:

Here time flows slowly.

The way of life remains unchanged for centuries

A slow, semi-vegetative existence.

A way of life that has not changed for centuries.

The shots that accompany the narration appear severely posed. Eisenstein’s style of montage favors the juxtaposition of images, rather than action or movement, and it is the sense of stillness that gives the images an idealized quality.

Eisenstein shot the Prologue and “Sandunga” early during his stay in Mexico, and the inability to create movement out of pure juxtaposition may be due to his being overwhelmed by a different culture upon his arrival. Previously during his career, while shooting *Potemkin*, Eisenstein had used the montage of still images and effectively produced a sense of action. In one well-known instance in that film, he takes three shots of lion statues in different poses, and by strategically arranging them, he creates a sense that the lion is waking into action.⁵ Unlike *Potemkin*, the early episodes of *Qué Viva México!* do not create active juxtapositions of images. The shots are generally long, adding to the episodes’ feeling of stasis.

The second episode, “Fiesta,” which Alexandrov inverts with “Maguey,” is the closest Eisenstein approaches the stereotypes of Hollywood. The script, for example, introduces the episode by noting the very “Spanish” character of this particular episode.

The atmosphere of this part is of pure Spanish character. . . . All the beauty that the Spaniards have brought with them into Mexican life appears in this part of the picture. . . . Spanish Architecture, costumes, bull-fights, romantic love, southern jealousy, treachery, facility for drawing the gun, manifest themselves in this story. (script 59-60)

Eisenstein here subscribes to the stereotypical Western conceptions of Spanish character. If we recall Raymund Paredes’s analysis of English visions of Spain

and Italy, Eisenstein's views of Spanish culture as emotionally volatile, easy to anger, and consumed by passion, replicate English and American attitudes toward Hispanic cultures ("The Image").

While some of the descriptive language of *Qué Viva México!* leans toward simplification and stereotype, the images express a diversity that no Hollywood film before or after it has approached, for the Prologue, "Sandunga," and "Fiesta" display deeper and distinct aspects of Mexican life and history. Without privileging the documentary style of the film's images, we may conclude that its blending of the documentary form with fiction, as well as its use of Mexican citizens as the actors of their own narrative, take us far from the exaggeration and one-dimensionality of films such as *Viva Villa!*

The contemporaneous critical responses to *Qué Viva México!* reveal its impact on Anglo-American ideas about Mexican identity. Edmund Wilson was among the few critics who had the opportunity to see the advance rushes of Eisenstein's film. Writing for *The New Republic* in November, 1931—when Eisenstein was close completing the film—Wilson expresses great enthusiasm for the film.

As you watch in silence . . . you get a new idea of the plasticity of the films as a medium and you are ready to believe that Eisenstein has indeed produced the first real artistic masterpiece of the movies. For Eisenstein is able to work to an extent to which no director not Russian works . . . with

the raw materials of life; and he succeeds in absorbing these . . . into his artist's imagination in a way that no Hollywood director has ever been able to do. (321)

When the film was released as *Thunder Over Mexico* two years later, the leftist magazine *Survey Graphic* noted the film's power to represent the Mexican as never before. Acknowledging the outcry over Sol Lesser's editing of *Thunder Over Mexico* without Eisenstein's approval, the writers of *Survey Graphic* imagine the film that might have been:

the public witnesses a realistic motion picture of the Mexican people, a film in which its attention is directed to the lot of the peon under Diaz.

There are superb suggestions of the peon's cultural background

[Eisenstein's] picture as described would have been a rare experience.

What is shown is a motion picture made exceptional by camera work and the direction of natives as actors—the first to introduce film audiences to Mexicans as human beings and not merely colorful properties of a romantic play. (559)

Edmund Wilson and *Survey Graphic's* comments implicitly acknowledge the tension between the script for the movie and its actual images. While the script simplifies and defines narrowly—sometimes replicating the generic conventions of the literary Romance and the film Western—the images speak of a difference

in characterization beyond the “colorful properties” of a stereotypical Hollywood movie.

Furthermore, Eisenstein’s public statements regarding the making of *Qué Viva México!* evidence a far more sophisticated awareness of the complexities of Mexican culture than the script reveals. Upon reading Wilson’s reviews of the rushes, for instance, Eisenstein criticizes Western visions of primitive cultures. In a letter to *The New Republic* excoriating Wilson for viewing an artwork still in progress, Eisenstein also critiques him for his misguided ideas concerning Eisenstein’s project in Mexico. In his November 4, 1931 preview, Wilson writes that Eisenstein had left Communism’s “rigid political creed” and “was having a free hand for the first time in his life.” He adds that the director was “entranced with the Mexican scenery, so different from the bleak gulf of Finland”(321). Subsequently, on December 9, Eisenstein acerbically responds: “it seems presumptuous to suppose that our Mexican picture is an escape into the realm of ‘complete liberty,’ exoticism and ‘entrancing scenery.’” Put off that Wilson should characterize his interest in Mexico as merely a form of escapism or even exoticism, Eisenstein adds, “[w]e are no longer little boys who run away from home to see Indians stick feathers in their hair or cannibals pass rings through their noses”(100). While Eisenstein admits that “in order to approach new forms of cinema expression, an occasional experiment with quite new, unusual and even

completely opposite material, is necessary, his letter implies that he is aware of the dangers of exoticizing or orientalizing another culture (100).

In current critical debates concerning ethnic representation in the cinema, *Qué Viva México!* has garnered only limited and rather cursory examinations. In two recent articles, Laura Podalsky and Joanne Hershfield explore, respectively, Eisenstein's conception of Mexico as primitive and his use of Mexican imagery as "an exotic backdrop for self-exploration" (Hershfield 66). Before moving on to a close reading of the third episode, "Maguey," I examine these two essays because they embody the representative critical uses to which Eisenstein's Mexican film has been put, and because they help frame my own critical perspective.

In "Patterns of the Primitive," Laura Podalsky initially makes a case for the uniqueness of Eisenstein's "vision of the primitive" because it "differed from that of his Western European contemporaries. . . . Eisenstein was the only one among these artists who came from a society that had experienced a recent revolutionary change as violent as Mexico's." Unlike other European modernists, "[f]or the Soviet film-maker, exploring the primitive in post-revolutionary Mexico implied tracing the process of an organic evolution toward a socialist state" (27). Podalsky observes that it is unfortunate that the dominant critical interpretation of his vision is characterized by a "blithe acceptance of Eisenstein's designation of Mexico as primitive." The manner in which Eisenstein's views have been received "reflects an uncritical participation in the discursive practice of linking

‘primitivism’ and Mexico that had begun decades earlier, responding both to a widespread intellectual and artistic fascination with the primitive and to the appeal of a specific moment in Mexican history, the revolution”(26). The simplistic ascription of Mexico as primitive, Podalsky further argues, belies Eisenstein’s understanding of Mexico “as a complex society, as a place in which primitive and modern society coexisted”(30). This short-sighted assessment contradicts the historically layered structure of his film. Initially, then, Podalsky seemingly recovers Eisenstein from too “blithe” a restriction to a primitivism that is interested only in “break[ing] out of the stifling aesthetic and political structures of European society”(30). Instead, Eisenstein’s primitivism is more concerned with social evolution and historical layeredness.

In distinguishing Eisenstein’s understanding of the primitive from its actual reception, Podalsky explains that Eisenstein was influenced by the evolutionary models of Sigmund Freud and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who believed that the study of primitive cultures held the key to comprehending modern societies (26). Unlike Lévy-Bruhl, however, Eisenstein did not believe primitive forms of thought belonged only to primitive people, as these forms could also be found in the minds of modern men. Additionally, Eisenstein “criticized Lévy-Bruhl’s theory for becoming an excuse for colonialism”(30). By emphasizing Eisenstein’s belief in the evolution toward modern socialism, and by emphasizing his complex understanding of primitivism—Mexican and otherwise—Podalsky

forwards an interpretation of Eisenstein that differentiates him from the kind of modernist thinking that uncritically celebrates the primitive. She also calls attention to his sharp response to Edmund Wilson's insinuation that Eisenstein was in Mexico to "see Indians stick feathers in their hair."

What is curious and contradictory about Podalsky's assessment of Eisenstein's primitivism is that, despite an initial attempt to differentiate him from his European contemporaries, she concludes that in *Qué Viva México!* he "ultimately reduced rather than celebrated" Mexican culture (37), making special note of Eisenstein's enigmatic statement upon his arrival in Mexico, that "Mexico is primitive. It is close to the soil"(qtd. in Podalsky 26). As examples, Podalsky points to his unexamined and derivative linking of the feminine with the primitive in "Sandunga" and the uncompleted "Soldadera," and she concludes that Eisenstein "was picking up strategies for representing the primitive that were and are common"(32). Noting the possible influence of D.H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), Podalsky suggests that Mexico presented the promise of renewal and connection with primal sensuousness: "[b]oth Lawrence and Eisenstein envisioned Mexico as a place of release and renovation in which logical thought became subsumed to feeling For Eisenstein, this represented the possibility of freeing the individual spectator from the constraints of logical thought"(34).

While we can agree with the statement that Eisenstein "was picking up strategies for representing the primitive that were and are common," we need not

go any further than Mexico's intellectual traditions to find strategies for representing the primitive that are similar to European modernism. Eisenstein, as I have noted, was influenced by the Mexican muralists, whom Podalsky herself recognizes as chief proponents of Mexican indigenous culture in the post-revolutionary moment (27). Eisenstein, then, does not so much follow the currents of Europe as he goes to the sources of Mexican primitivist thought, in Mexico. Therefore, while Eisenstein's use of primitive imagery may be critiqued for simplification, romanticism, or even inaccuracy, it is imperative to see the precise Mexican historical circumstances out of which Eisenstein's conception of the primitive emerges.

Ironically, some Mexican intellectuals saw nothing necessarily "primitive" in Eisenstein's representations of Mexico. During the filming of *Qué Viva México*, for instance, the Mexico City magazine *Ilustrado* praised his work:

In order to attain greater accuracy in this Mexican work, Eisenstein has . . . collaborators . . . who provide the Mexican touches, especially in the treatment of our present life. They protect the picture against mystifications, in order that there be none of those wardrobe 'charros' so conspicuous in the American motion pictures. (qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 91).

The writers for *Ilustrado* go on to add that Eisenstein, "a sincere admirer of Mexico, is trying to carry the message of our race to other lands, where we have

been misunderstood and misrepresented in the past”(91). Clearly, then, some Mexicans who saw what Eisenstein was doing did not perceive a reductive primitivism in Eisenstein’s understanding of Mexico, but an amplification of Mexican identity that answered to previous misrepresentations.

In “Paradise Regained: Sergei Eisenstein’s *Que viva México!* as Ethnography,” Joanne Hershfield proposes to see the Russian director’s “sojourn in Mexico. . . as a form of ethnographic fieldwork”(56). She concludes that Eisenstein’s ethnography is finally self-serving: Mexico becomes the backdrop for his theoretical and personal explorations rather than the site for an analysis of Mexican culture and history. “While Eisenstein may have been paying homage to Mexican postrevolutionary art in *Que viva México!* the film’s structure and its compositions are grounded in his evolving theories of a political and intellectual cinema”(58). If we agree with Hershfield’s claim that Eisenstein’s project is self-centered, her analysis also implies that a film cannot simultaneously prove personally revealing *and* culturally or socially instructive.

Hershfield’s analysis agrees with Podalsky’s in several respects. Both critics concur that Mexico functions as a laboratory for Eisenstein’s theories of cinema. Insofar as *Qué Viva México!* “represents an encounter between Self and Other”(66), Hershfield suggests that Eisenstein simplifies Mexican culture to a primitive and idealized state in the interest of facilitating his self-exploration. “Sandunga” exemplifies Eisenstein’s reductionism, as the episode

symbolizes the end of “the romance of Tehuantepec” and the “romantic” era of Mexican history. Eisenstein again reduces a number of complex and relatively advanced societies to the realm of an isolated and rural aboriginal culture living in a mythical paradise. . . . His Indian “types,” childlike, ignorant, and sensual, meant to symbolize the mythical indigenous Mexican prototype, bear little relation to the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups living in Mexico in 1519 when the Spaniards arrived.

(62)

This critique, however, does not account for Eisenstein’s own understanding that no one narrative can tell the history of the multiple cultures of Mexico. Thus, we may more productively assess Eisenstein’s film if, contra Hershfield, we see “Sandunga” as a representation of one among many cultures, not as a reduction of many diverse cultures into one. Additionally, Hershfield’s use of the words “ignorant” and “childlike” to describe Eisenstein’s representation of the people of Tehuantepec is itself provocative because “Sandunga” presents these people much like the director found them; they pose in native costume, and no descriptive words or actions accompany their representation. Hershfield’s analysis projects her own valuation of these images as “ignorant” and “childlike,” and assumes that any representation of indigenous peoples is negative.

Hershfield writes that Eisenstein’s goal in “Maguey” is to use “this tale to serve as an allegory of the rise of a revolutionary class consciousness of the

Mexican peasantry and to lay out what he sees as the basis for the Mexican revolution—the ‘rape’ of the peasant class by the ruling class”(63). She implicitly critiques Eisenstein for the allegorical use of individuals to stand in place of the larger collective, as well as for his use of men and women “dialectically along the sexually gendered axis,” wherein the man is active and the woman passive (64). Yet Hershfield sees no need to explain why the use of allegory is a problematic cinematic strategy, nor does she consider the historical context of an active/passive representation of men and women.

In the unfinished “Soldadera” episode, as well as in the Epilogue, Hershfield critiques Eisenstein for historical blindness regarding the Revolution’s aftermath. Hershfield argues that if these episodes were to exemplify the revolution by the peon class, followed by the peons’ advent into peace and modernity, then Eisenstein fails to recognize that the Revolution did not improve the lot of indigenous people, which was to be one of the chief subjects of his film.

The Indians of Mexico were neither the proletariat of Europe that Marx envisioned in his thesis of social and class revolution nor the peasants of the classic Russian serfdom in whose cause the Bolshevik revolution was waged. Eisenstein’s mythical Indian, who personified for the director the hypothetical links between past, present, and future, barely even existed in Mexico in the 1930s. (65-66)

Hershfield's critique, ironically, subjects itself to a different brand of historical blindness, or rather, historical far-sightedness. It is only possible to critique Eisenstein of failing to recognize the shortcomings of the Revolution some seventy years after the fact, when we have almost definitively assessed its shortcomings. Eisenstein himself did not have this advantage.

If, as Hershfield concludes, Eisenstein "transformed Mexico into an erotic other in order to play out his theories of cinema and explore the previously unconscious workings of the self," and "the terrain of the Other became . . . an exotic backdrop for self-exploration"(66), then we can only surmise that *Qué Viva México!* has nothing to say about the historical interactions of Mexico's cultures, nor about the social contradictions that caused the Mexican Revolution. My argument about the episodes "Maguey" and "Soldadera," however, is that *Qué Viva México!* tells us a great deal about Mexico, its people, and its history, and it does so in critical terms.

The 1979 reconstruction of *Qué Viva México!* differs from the original script in one important respect, as I have already noted. Rather than following the script's episode sequence, (I) "Sandunga," (II) "Maguey," (III) "Fiesta," (IV) "Soldadera," Alexandrov places "Fiesta" before "Maguey" in his arrangement. Thus, "Maguey," the most narratively coherent and ideologically pronounced of the episodes, immediately precedes the "Soldadera" episode, which Eisenstein did not complete. There is no available explanation for this change, but it is a crucial

new juxtaposition of the episodes that explicitly treat the revolution and its precursory moments.

Although we cannot know Eisenstein's final intent for the editing of his film—nor is authorial intent germane to my analysis—it is undeniable that Alexandrov's new positioning make Eisenstein's principles of “dialectical montage” far more effective. In the argument that follows, I explicate the concept of dialectical montage and make a case for its relevance within “Maguey” and “Soldadera.” Eisenstein's use of this method in these episodes permits a politically and historically complex articulation of Mexican identity, especially in relation to revolutionary change.

David Bordwell provides a concise explication of Eisenstein's concept of “dialectical montage” in *The Cinema of Eisenstein*: dialectical montage “operates fully when one image is put into interaction with another”(129). Eisenstein borrows this idea from “the Engels-Lenin view that every phenomenon, natural or social, constitutes a tense field of opposed forces pressing toward a synthesis at a higher level.” From this understanding, it follows that “art is a dialectical interaction of organic and rational form, and that it seeks to ‘reveal the contradictions of being’”(Eisenstein qtd. Bordwell 128). The social causes of the Revolution—the enslavement of the peon, for one—serve to demonstrate in dialectical fashion the “contradictions of being” Eisenstein seeks to represent.

In montage theory, the idea of dialectical conflict allows Eisenstein to take “the Constructivist belief that factors composing the individual image can be considered as dynamic elements flung together in tense juxtaposition.” The juxtaposition of images within the frame may produce various kinds of tensions, which include “conflicts of line, of plane, of volume, of lighting, of tempo or movement.” Eisenstein then advances “to the level of emotion. Here conflicts between shots yield those associations that Eisenstein believes to be central to cinema’s impact”(129). The final level of montage “moves sharply toward concept and metaphor.”

This category is fairly roomy. It includes cutting between two diegetic events, as when in *October* shots of soldiers huddling in a trench are intercut with shots of a cannon lowered off an assembly line. . . . [It] includes instances that depart from the story world altogether. . . .

Eisenstein insists that such montage remains ‘dialectical’ in producing emotion-laden concepts as a synthesis out of conflict. (130)

In its most revolutionary form, dialectical montage takes two images or events, and elicits an *emotional* or *metaphorical* synthesis. Bordwell, however, expresses reservations regarding the application of dialectical montage. “At the philosophical level, Eisenstein’s use of dialectical concepts is highly questionable” because “conflict is simply applied too broadly to be of much explanatory value”(130). Taking this caution into account, the concept of

dialectical montage may yet yield important insights into Eisenstein's representation of Mexican culture in *Qué Viva México!* if applied selectively. At key moments in the narrative, the categories of emotional montage and metaphorical montage produce "emotion-laden concepts as a synthesis" of the conflicts they represent.

An instance of dialectical montage appears in the transition between the episodes "Fiesta" and "Maguey." The closing sequence of "Fiesta" narrates the adulterous affair between a bullfighter and a woman of high social standing. The lovers rendezvous at Chapultepec park, and make a romantic getaway on a gondola at Lake Xochimilco. "Fiesta" closes with the lovers on the boat, the gondolier ferrying them to a furtive point on the lake. We see in the final frame the festively decorated gondola (Fig. 1); in the near distance appear other gondolas and a dense cover of trees. Finally, we read the translated voiceover: "Mexico. Tender and lyrical. And also cruel." The image then changes from innocuous bourgeois adventure, to a shot of a peon's feet (Fig. 2). The shot is in close-up, and it lasts only two seconds before the film cuts to several still-quality shots of peons leaning against a hacienda wall. Let us stop for a moment, however, on the peon's sandaled feet, whose diagonal composition and textured details must be noted. Compositionally, the image constitutes a series of diagonals. The viewer notices the diagonal placement of the feet, the slant of the *serape*, which nearly touches the left ankle but rises above the right one; we also

see the crisscrossing of the weathered sandal straps. The feet themselves are dusty, the nails deformed, and the soles of the shoes conform to the shape of the feet, as if the peon has worn these sandals continuously for years.



Fig. 1. Final frame of the “Fiesta” episode, from *Qué Viva México!* (Courtesy of International Film Exchange, Ltd., 1979)



Fig. 2. First frame of the “Maguey” episode, from *Qué Viva México!*

As my description intimates, an intense aesthetization occurs in the formal composition of the peon's sandaled feet. Even my use of the word "sandals" connotes a modernist association with aesthetics and leisure, concepts to which this image, combined with the shot of the gondola, powerfully calls attention. I shall, therefore, call these shoes by their proper name: the peon wears *guaraches*. This word aptly calls attention to the lived difference between peon existence and the life of the upper-class lovers of "Fiesta."

Yet calling these shoes by their singularly distinctive name, *guaraches*, does not go far enough in taking the image outside of a purely modernist aesthetics. It is necessary to take two further steps, which involve reading the ideological contradictions out of which the gondola/*guaraches* emerge. I have already hinted at the first context of these *guaraches* by calling attention to their aesthetic qualities. These shoes prospectively—because of their historical placement—remind us of Fredric Jameson's analysis of a different pair of shoes, seen in Van Gogh's painting "A Pair of Boots," which Jameson calls "one of the canonical works of high modernism in visual art"(6). Arguably, Eisenstein has entered the film canon as the major contributor to Russian formalism and modernism, so the link here is highly apropos. Eisenstein's image of the peon's shoes may substitute Van Gogh's painting in Jameson's ideologically contextualized reading of this modernist work of art. Like "A Pair of Boots," the

image of the *guaraches*, as I have suggested in my description, if not to be read merely at “the level of sheer decoration,”

requires us to reconstruct some initial situation out of which the finished work emerges. Unless that situation—which has vanished into the past—is somehow mentally restored, the painting [and the film image] will remain an inert object, a reified end product impossible to grasp as a symbolic act in its own right, as praxis and as production.

This last term suggests that one way of reconstructing the initial situation to which the work is somehow a response is by stressing the raw materials, the initial content, which it confronts and reworks, transforms, and appropriates. In Van Gogh [and Eisenstein] that content, those initial raw materials, are . . . to be grasped simply as a the whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to its most brutal and menaced, primitive and marginalized state. (7)

Eisenstein’s image has an advantage over Van Gogh’s in that it exists in dialectical montage with other images whose combinations go very far in giving the reader “that content” that Jameson must inject into his interpretation of “A Pair of Boots.”

We thus arrive at the second step in our necessary de-aesthetization of the peon’s *guaraches*. This step involves reading the dialectical features of

Eisenstein's montage, and permits the social conflicts and contradictions in the transition from the gondola of "Fiesta" to the *guaraches* of "Maguey" to emerge. Mexico is in one moment "tender and lyrical," and in the next "also cruel." The juxtaposition of gondola and peon's shoes presents a significant instance of dialectical montage in *Qué Viva México!* The tension between gondola and *guaraches*—the former representing the life of ease, upper-class indolence, and the latter signaling endless toil and poverty—is precisely the social conflict that moves the peasants to rebel, and which the film asks the viewer to consider. Alexandrov's perceptiveness in changing the episode order to "Fiesta" then "Maguey" proves Eisensteinian.

The close-up of the *guaraches* is an example of metaphor; more specifically, it is an example of synecdoche. Unlike the close-up of Pancho Villa in *Viva Villa!* that introduces the revolutionary as cruel and dirty, the close-up of the peon's *guaraches* is not used to denote racial difference and inferiority; rather, this close-up synecdochically suggests the experience of an entire class of people who are, until this moment, not represented in American film. The *guaraches* close-up functions similarly as the close-ups in another of Eisenstein's films, *Potemkin* (1925), as Eisenstein has written.

[One] feature of this film was that close-ups, which usually served as explanatory details, became the parts capable of evoking the whole in the perception and feelings of the spectator In one of my articles I

compared this method of treating close-ups with a figure of speech known as synecdoche. I think both depend on the ability of our consciousness to reconstruct (*mentally and emotionally*) the whole from the part. (emph. mine, *Notes* 28).

These shoes, mentally and emotionally, allow us to imagine the Mexican peon's hardship. Because the film presents two very distinct images—the gondola and the *guaraches*—the viewer sees the social conflict that created the suffering all the more clearly.

“Maguey,” which at about thirty-four minutes in length constitutes the longest of the four novels, opens at “the beginning of the 20th century, during the reign of dictator Porfirio Díaz.” The story takes place in the Hacienda Tetlapayac, and tells of the peon's oppression under the dictator Porfirio Díaz and *hacendado* rule. Like the previous episodes, “Maguey” uses individuals allegorically, asking the viewer to extrapolate from subjects to masses. In the story, Sebastian and María, two peons on the plantation, are betrothed. As is the custom on the hacienda, Sebastian takes María to the master to announce their marriage. The visit to the master, however, turns tragic when a guest rapes María while Sebastian unknowingly waits at the entrance of the main house.

The events that follow Maria's rape signal the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Mexico. Sebastian and his fellow peons plot revenge, and on that same night, they steal guns from the *hacienda* and set a stable on fire.

Then, they escape into the maguey fields and a battle between the *peones* and *hacendados* ensues. In the fighting, the master's adventurous niece is shot, after herself having shot one of Sebastian's friends. When they are captured, Sebastian and the other peons are subjected to the most extreme retribution: they are buried shoulder-high and then stomped by men on horseback. The story ends with María sobbing at the side of her dead fiancé.

A close reading of the "Maguey" episode, a reading which pays close attention to the juxtaposition of its elements, demonstrates again the importance of Eisenstein's concept of "dialectical montage" in his overall filmmaking endeavor. Eisenstein's aim, we recall, is to show Mexico's emergence as a modern nation, cognizant of "the ways of peace, prosperity and civilization" (*Que Viva Mexico!* 74). As this new Mexico emerges, its people also enter modernity with a "victory of life over death, over the influences of the past." Eisenstein thus links the peons in the *hacienda* with the natives in the Prologue and of "Sandunga": these people share a common struggle and they are the actors of their own history. "Faces that bear close resemblance to those who held [a] funeral of antiquity in Yucatan, those who danced in Tehuantepec, those who sang the Alabado behind the tall walls, those who danced in queer costumes around the temples, those who fought and died in the battles of the revolution" (77). While Eisenstein's use of the descriptive phrase "those who danced in queer costumes around the temples" betrays a degree of orientalist

objectification, a close examination of the image montage in “Maguey” reveals the degree of humanity and dignity he awards the Mexican peon.

“Maguey” presents several important instances of dialectical montage. I call the following example the “Porfirio Díaz / María” sequence. When Sebastian and María initially make their way to the hacienda to meet the master, they partake in a brief moment of joy and innocence. Sebastian and his brother, Felicio, observe a pappier maché bull that is affixed with fire-works, apparently to be used in some later festivities. Echoing the bullfights in “Fiesta,” the brothers play out a fantasy in which one is the bull and the other the *matador*. This brief scene is rich with meaning. On the one hand, the two boys mimic the heroism and glamour of the bullfighter, a subject position which lies far beyond their station. On the other hand, the scene foreshadows Sebastian’s death because he plays the bull.

María watches them and giggles a young woman’s laugh, and the camera comes in for a tight close-up of her smiling face (Fig. 3). The scene then suddenly cuts to a portrait of Porfirio Díaz dressed in military finery (Fig. 4). His mustachioed face is serious, austere, powerful. The sharp contrast between the close-up of the woman and the dictator, again, creates tension, a portent of what is to befall the unknowing woman and her fiancé. The close-ups, again, may be seen as synecdoche or allegory for two classes of people. The juxtaposition of

these faces asks the viewer to consider the violence that one commits upon the other.



Fig. 3. María's smile in the "Maguey" episode, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 4. Porfirio Díaz's stern countenance in "Maguey," from *Qué Viva México!*

The most powerful example of dialectical montage in the film is the “Eyes” sequence. Unlike the two previous examples, which juxtapose two disparate images to destabilize narrative logic and impel the viewer to think “dialectically,” “Eyes” is a series of seven shots that are narratively interrelated. The “Eyes” sequence occurs when, after learning of María’s tragedy, Sebastian confronts her rapist, the *hacendado*’s guest. He attempts this without success, for he is unceremoniously thrown down a flight of steps by the hacienda men. The sequence which then follows is emotionally charged, and sparks the peasant rebellion against the *hacendado*, and by consequence, against the whole hacienda system.

We see, in the first frame of the sequence, an over the shoulder shot of three of the *hacendado*’s men as they guardedly watch a group of peons in the far distance (Fig. 5). Then, the film presents a shot of the three men, tightly within the frame; they have a look of consternation (Fig. 6). The third through fifth shots are arresting. First, we see a tight close-up of a peon’s face, his eyes intense and narrowed (Fig. 7). An extremely tight close-up of a peon’s eyes follows; again, the eyes show a concentration of emotion, perhaps anger (Fig. 8). Then, we witness a peon wearing a large hat, his face half covered with a *serape* (Fig. 9). We see only the eyes and forehead creased in anger. The sixth shot shows a *serape*-clad peon moving up the steps, as if to charge (Fig. 10), whereas the final shot of “Eyes” shows the three men of the hacienda, stepping back, clutching their

guns (Fig. 11). In the last moments of this sequence, the three men hold their ground, but by this time they have already seen the potential of the peon's revolt.



Fig. 5. First frame of the “Eyes” sequence in “Maguey,” from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 6. Second frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 7. Third frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 8. Fourth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 9. Fifth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 10. Sixth frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*



Fig. 11. Seventh frame of the “Eyes” sequence, from *Qué Viva México!*

The “Eyes” sequence is the most important sequence of the film because it concentrates on the faces of men moved to action by injustice. These are not the helpless *campesinos* nor the unthinkingly violent *bandidos* of Hollywood films. These men look serious, measured, determined. These peons, all of whom are non-actors, forcefully speak to us. At this point there is little directorial mediation, the peon’s look has escaped representational limits.

The outcome of this novella is anything but happy. The episode ends with Sebastian and his friends stomped to death by the *hacendado*’s horses. In the closing frames of the episode, María grieves beside Sebastian. Then, in a series of shots that parallels the “Eyes” sequence, we again see the intensely focused eyes of several peons as they mourn their friends’ death. The ending of

“Maguey,” with the peons bearing witness to the *hacendado*’s injustice, indicates that the peon’s will is not broken, that the beginning of the revolution is at hand.

The uncompleted “Soldadera” episode was to be about the revolution that ensues once the peon’s realize their power. Unlike “Maguey,” which may be described as a tragedy and only suggests repressed revolutionary potential, “Soldadera” would have returned to Eisenstein’s romanticism about Mexico. Its inspiration was José Clemente Orozco’s fresco, “Las Soldaderas” (1926). “Another source was a large collection of historical photographs of the Mexican Revolution”(Leyda and Voynow 69). The only available footage of this episode is a short battle scene. Alexandrov narrates the remnants of this episode with the help from Agustin Victor Casasola’s photos of the Revolution. “The Mexican people at arms were the heroes of this story.” The episode’s main actor would be the *soldadera*, who “was to have been the symbol of Mexico itself.”

Though the episode partakes of the inevitable romanticization of a revolution which, from the contemporary standpoint, failed to bring about a significant social transformation, “Soldadera” would have been a signal representation of Mexican women. Its gender politics, admittedly, would have been retrograde by today’s measure. Historically, the *soldaderas* followed the men during the fighting, providing companionship and fixing their meals. Nevertheless, their historical significance is undeniable, and the representation of Mexican women in this episode would have differed greatly from the usual

Hollywood treatment of Mexican women as sex objects. In a letter to Upton Sinclair, Eisenstein describes his goals for this novella: “The triumph of the revolution with subsequent celebration thereof, and the womans [sic] emancipation and final happiness, will end the story”(qtd. in Geduld and Gottesman 150). The women of “Soldadera,” therefore, would have been vital actors in the revolution and afterwards.

It bears repeating that in 1931 Eisenstein was too close to the events in question—and too invested in the idea of revolution—to see the revolution’s limited success. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent reflect that the “emphatic and committed character” of the early artistic responses to the revolution, created “when the social revolution was at high tide and the regime’s revolutionary myth was just beginning to crystallize, certainly must frame (and mitigate) our criticism of it”(6). Their observation also applies to *Qué Viva México!* For all its vacillations between near exoticism and romantic idealism, the film comes closer to retrieving an “irretrievable [subaltern] consciousness”(Spivak 28) than perhaps any other American film. For proof, we need only take one more look at the “Eyes” sequence looking back at us.

Porter in Mexico

It would be easy to conclude this chapter by championing Eisenstein’s filmmaking as the final word on the Mexican subject’s revolutionary agency, were it not for Katherine Anne Porter’s travels to Mexico during the making of

Qué Viva México! Porter briefly visited the Hacienda Tetlapayac during Eisenstein's filming of the "Maguey" episode, and what Porter discerns as Eisenstein's misconceived vision of revolutionary Mexico—a vision at odds with the social conditions she witnessed while on her visit to the hacienda—forms one of the subjects of her short story, "Hacienda" (1934). Porter is rare among American writers for her portrayals of Mexican characters who are free of stereotypes. Raymund Paredes has commented that "[p]robably no American writer knew revolutionary Mexico more intimately," and no one has "satirized the illusion of romantic Mexico" so well ("The Image" 265, 266). In contrast to Eisenstein, who only visited Mexico for the first time in 1930, Porter made several trips to Mexico beginning in 1920, and she knew the country well. She famously considered Mexico her "familiar country"(qtd. in Walsh xiii). Porter's perspective on Mexico, therefore, contains a greater depth of experience that allows her to achieve a historical veracity that eludes Eisenstein. If Eisenstein conceives his film as expressing the coming triumph of the revolution, then Porter uses "Hacienda" to deflate this illusion. Like in much of her work, a "central theme" of the story "is the betrayal of the revolutionary spirit"(Paredes 269).

Eisenstein's film—because of its concern for representing the Mexican subject's revolutionary potential—demonstrates a hopeful view of the Mexican nation's entry into modernity. Porter, on the other hand, remains cynical about the Mexican ruling class's willingness to give power to the peons and about

Americans' recognition of Mexicans as something other than filthy, corrupt, and violent. Unlike Eisenstein, who was constrained by his own idealism and by the Mexican censors who oversaw the filmmaking of *Qué Viva México!* in "Hacienda" Porter chronicles the continuance of the oppressive social conditions which Eisenstein claims the revolution dismantled. In this sense, Porter shows the danger of replacing the "negative" stereotype of the greasy bandit with a "positive" figuration of the courageous revolutionary, for both images fail to explain the actuality of social conditions in Mexico. My aim in this discussion of Porter is not to juxtapose Eisenstein's and Porter's portrayals of the Mexican character as if the latter acts as a corrective of the former. Rather, I see an analysis of "Hacienda" as providing a different but parallel perspective on Mexican identity. The power of Eisenstein, despite an excess of idealism, lies in his ability to starkly render the social contradictions that led to revolution, particularly as he concentrates on Mexico's indigenous people. Porter also examines the revolution, but she focuses her powers of perception on its aftermath. Unlike Eisenstein, who is deeply invested in depicting progress, Porter fearlessly criticizes various sectors of the ruling classes, including the revolutionary elite, for failing to effect change on behalf of the peons.

Another importance of reading Porter's "Hacienda" alongside our viewing of *Qué Viva México!* lies in that the story allows a glimpse of the superstructure upon which the film is built. Porter based "Hacienda" on an article by the same

title that appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1931. In the article, she was highly critical of the hacienda-based peonage system that had remained unchanged after the revolution (Walsh 157). The short story she would write has become a ‘making of *Qué Viva Mexico!*’ It provides commentary on the social conditions the film depicts, points to the idealism of the Eisenstein group, and critiques the political constraints—government censors, artistic “consultants,” propagandists—that Eisenstein endured in making the film. Unlike Eisenstein’s film, which treats the different phases in the historical evolution of the Mexican people, “Hacienda” narrows its field of vision on the contemporary structure of power in Mexico and on American perceptions and influence in Mexico. In *Qué Viva Mexico!*’s “Maguey” episode, the hacienda represents a period in Mexico’s feudal past, done away by the revolution. In “Hacienda,” the peon’s enslavement continues in the post revolutionary period, with *hacendados* replaced by opportunistic revolutionaries.

Told from the first-person perspective, “Hacienda” recounts the visit of an unnamed American writer to a Mexican hacienda where Russian filmmakers are shooting a movie under the aegis of an American producer. Though Porter changes all the names, it is clear that she is commenting on Eisenstein’s making of *Qué Viva Mexico!* Porter takes the artistic liberty of changing the names of the characters and of telling the story in elliptical fashion, leaving out many factual details.

The story opens at a train station, where the American writer is joined by the American producer, Kennerly, and the Russian filmmaker, Andreyev. These characters correspond with Hunter Kimbrough, the film's business manager in Mexico, and Grigory Alexandrov, the film's assistant director and editor after Eisenstein's death (Eisenstein appears only tangentially as the character Uspensky).⁶ The train becomes the ideal site for Porter's incisive commentary on Americans' ideas about Mexico and its people, as well as an opportunity to critique the post-revolutionary situation in that country. As an advent of modernity in an unmodern nation, the train serves as a point of contact between people of widely different origins. The story's first sentence ironically comments on the American's boorishness and sense of superiority among the Mexicans: "It was worth the price of a ticket to see Kennerly take possession of the railway station among a dark inferior people. Andreyev and I trailed without plan in the wake of his gigantic progress"(184). In physically separating the other characters from Kennerly, Porter signals her own ideological distance from the view of Mexicans as an inferior people. In Kennerly's experience, the Mexican train porters are "bandits" with "filthy paws," ready to steal one's possessions. "Eight months spent as business manager for three Russian moving-picture men in Mexico had about finished him off. . . . 'It's these Mexicans,' he said as if were an outrage to find them in Mexico. 'They would drive any man crazy in no time'"(190). The American's view of Mexicans as a "dark inferior people"

draws upon an earlier imperialist view of Africa. This homology becomes clear when the narrator, in a sentiment attributable to Kennerly, states that “it was a miracle they hadn’t all died or had their throats cut. Why it was worse than Africa”(191).

In the same opening section, Porter scoffs at the notion that Mexico has seen any real progress as a consequence of the revolution. “Now that the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico, the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures”(184). In other words, while the change of a thing’s name implies the betterment of social conditions—for instance, the re-designation of a “third-class” railcar to “second-class”—the writer’s experience tells her that life has not improved for the average Mexican. Of course, if you are an American travelling by train, “you may at a great price install yourself in the stately plush of a Pullman, isolated and envied as any successful General from the north”(184-85). As the story progresses, Porter argues that it is the revolutionary and political leaders, along with the former hacendados, who have most benefited from the country’s transformation.

The narrator of “Hacienda” recognizes that she and the Russian filmmakers share political and artistic sensibilities, but she also maintains a critical distance from the Russians’ inclination to romanticize the Mexican. For example, she observes Andreyev’s sensitivity toward the Mexican when she

contrasts Andreyev's and Kennerly's attitudes toward the Mexicans on the train. While Kennerly treats Mexican people as if they are obstacles standing in the way of his comfort, Andreyev engages them as fellow human beings. In the scene at the train station, Kennerly bullies his way into the rail car, while Andreyev "came after, stepping tenderly over large objects and small beings, exchanging quick glances with many pairs of calm, lively dark eyes"(186). Later, when the three arrive at the hacienda, the writer sees Andreyev's interaction with the peons. He sings for them in a Russian-accented Spanish and they laugh at him. Rather than becoming alienated from them, however, he laughs along with them. "All the Indians shouted with joy and delight at the new things his strange tongue made of the words. Andreyev laughed too. This laughter was an invitation to their confidence"(205). Unlike Kennerly, Andreyev does not see the Mexicans as bandits trying to steal his money, but as fellow human beings with whom he can share a moment of mirth and whom he is not afraid to look in the eye.

As favorably as she looks upon the Russian filmmakers, Porter also remains wary of their desire to apotheosize the Mexican character. While on the train Andreyev shares photographic stills from the planned film with the narrator. "Andreyev went on showing me pictures from that part of the film they were making at the pulque hacienda. . . . The camera had seen this unchanged world as a landscape with figures, but figures under a doom imposed by the landscape. The closed dark faces were full of instinctive suffering, without individual

memory”(194). As they examine the photographs, the narrator comments that the “camera had caught and fixed in moments of violence and senseless excitement, of cruel living and tortured death, the almost ecstatic death expectancy which is in the air of Mexico”(195). Reading these passages, it is difficult to determine to whom these views belong. While it may be tempting to assume that Porter is participating in the romanticization that the Mexican subject was undergoing during the twenties and thirties—Raymund Paredes implies as much when he comments that Porter “liked her Mexicans best . . . true to their primitive instincts”(“The Image” 271)—as the scene unfolds it becomes clear that these sentiments are more accurately attributable to the Russian filmmakers. We finally realize that Porter is delicately criticizing the Russians’ idealism as the narrator and Andreyev continue looking at the photographs.

We turned over the pictures again, looked at some of them twice. In the fields, among the maguey, the Indian in his hopeless rags; in the hacienda house, theatrically luxurious persons, posed usually with a large chromo portrait of Porfirio Díaz looming from a gaudy frame on the walls. “That is to show,” said Andreyev, “that all this really happened in the time of Díaz, and that all this,” he tapped the pictures of the Indians, “has been swept away by the revolution.” This without cracking a smile or meeting my eye. (198)

Andreyev speaks without a trace of irony, as if they are examining photographs from a movie set or from a long-past era, with the Mexican peons pictured in costume. The truth is that they are neither looking at actors nor old photographs, but at actual people for whom the tyranny of the Díaz dictatorship has not been “swept away by the revolution.” Upon the travelers’ arrival at the hacienda, the reader learns that the peons are still held in bondage.

The disparity between the supposed changes the film depicts and true conditions in Mexico become immediately obvious to the writer when she arrives at the hacienda. The Hacienda Tetelpayac adheres to the system of peonage the revolution was to overthrow, and she observes a way of life that remains unchanged. “The hacienda lay before us, a monastery, a walled fortress. . . . An old woman in a shawl opened the heavy double gate and we slid into the main corral”(206). Awaiting her inside are the master and mistress of the great house. Don Genaro, a “tall, hard-bitten, blue-eyed young Spaniard,” whose family maintained the hacienda for several generations, continues to lord over the land (211). Although one of the aims of the revolution was to redistribute land held by families such as Don Genaro’s, this has not occurred on the Hacienda Tetlapayac. It is highly ironic, therefore, that the Russian filmmakers are filming the revolution’s triumph in a place where it has completely failed.

Don Genaro’s power is sanctioned by the post-revolutionary government, which has sent soldiers to the hacienda in order to help guard against a recent

agrarian revolt. A necessary encumbrance for the don, the soldiers lay “sprawled in idleness eating their beans at don Genaro’s expense. He tolerated and resented them, and so did the dogs”(222). Don Genaro maintains ties with Velarde, a revolutionary general who has profited greatly from his role in the conflict.

General Velarde

was the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico. He owned two pulque haciendas which had fallen to his share when the great reparation of land had taken place. . . . he controlled the army; he controlled a powerful bank; the president of the Republic made no appointments to any office without his advice. He fought counter-revolution and political corruption daily upon the front pages of twenty newspapers he had bought for that very purpose. (213)

For Porter, the aims of the revolution have been corrupted by the personal ambitions of the revolutionary generals and political leaders. Furthermore, long before the phenomenon is identified, Porter discerns the institutionalization of the revolution, as when government officials take pains to ensure that the filmmakers portray only the revolution’s positive side. The government

wanted to improve this opportunity to film a glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution; and the Russians found themselves surrounded and insulated from their material by the entire staff of professional propagandists. . . .

Dozens of helpful observers, art experts, photographers, literary talents, and travel guides swarmed about them to lead them aright . . . if by chance anything not beautiful got in the way of the camera, there was a very instructed and sharp-eyed committee of censors whose duty it was to see that the scandal went no further than the cutting room. (199-200)

Porter's claim that the filmmakers do not exercise complete artistic freedom has been corroborated in the collected correspondence between Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair, *The Making and Unmaking of Que Viva Mexico!* Working under the supervision of the Mexican government, the filmmakers in the story are required to make a film that is sympathetic to the revolution. The government's final say in "the cutting room" over the meaning of the revolution shows the extent to which the revolution's ideology has become institutionalized.

Although Porter implies that Eisenstein's artistic ideals were compromised, she did not have the opportunity to see the film in its nearly completed form. Had Porter viewed *Qué Viva México!* she might have recognized that one of its main goals, like that of "Hacienda," is to shed light on the social contradictions upon which Mexican society rested during the revolutionary period. Porter may have also recognized that her own writing contains an Eisensteinian quality, for she positions images in a manner very similar to Eisenstein's "dialectical montage."

The powerful juxtaposition of images occurs in a scene reminiscent of the gondola/*guaraches* sequence, when the writer meets the don's wife, Doña Julia, who lives luxuriously on the wealth created by the hacienda's production of *pulque*. Like the Jamesonian moment of social contradiction that Eisenstein creates as he situates the gondola next to the peasant's shoes, Porter illustrates the hacienda's tremendous social inequities when she compares Doña Julia's idle life with the peon's toilsome existence. As she tours Doña Julia's great house, the writer notes the intermingling of two smells, perfume and *pulque*.

Doña Julia and I passed through her apartment. . . . It was puffy with silk and down, glossy with bright new polished wood and wide mirrors. . . . The air was thick with perfume which fought with another heavier smell. From the vat-room came a continual muffled shouting, the rumble of barrels as they rolled down the wooden trestles to the flat mule-car standing on the tracks running past the wide doorway. The smell had not been out of my nostrils since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood; this sound and this smell belonged together, and both belonged to the intermittent rumble of barrels and the long chanting cry of the Indians. On the narrow stairs I glanced back at doña Julia. She was looking up, wrinkling her little nose "Pulque!" she said. "Isn't it horrid?"(221)

The perfume, the silk, and the polished wood signal Doña Julia's life of ease, while the *pulque*'s "thick vapor," the sound of barrels, and the cry of the peons illustrates the peons' endless labor. Porter writes that the sound of work and the stink of *pulque* are inseparable; similarly, this scene demonstrates that the hacendado's leisure comes at the expense of the peon's slavery. The *pulque* is figuratively and literally the "rotting . . . blood" of the Mexican peon. The proximity of these two smells—Porter vividly has the *pulque* wafting upward to meet the perfume—is an indication of the undeniable causal link between *pulque* production and perfume. The luxuriant smell of the perfume is made possible only by the putrid smell of the *pulque*, and the latter odor signals the peon's seemingly unending labor: "The field workers were leaving for the maguey fields, driving their donkeys. They shouted, too and whacked the donkeys with sticks, but no one was really hurrying, nor really excited. It was just another day's work, another day's weariness"(222). For her part, the lady of the house does not see that the creation of her wealth and leisure depends on the enslavement of the Indians and production of the *pulque*, with all its cloying smell.

Robert Mellin argues in "Unreeled: A History of Katherine Anne Porter's Filmic Text, *Hacienda*," that Porter approximates an Eisensteinian style of montage in the bibliographical or physical positioning of the different parts of the story. Recalling Porter's statement in "The Mexican Trinity" that Mexico is composed of "many opposing forces," Mellin claims that Porter "deliberately

focused on preserving the chaos—the dis-integration—of the social landscape” through the bibliographic instructions she gave the original editors of “Hacienda” (50-51). Mellin concentrates on Porter’s organization of the story’s disparate sections as an instance of “adapting the film technique of montage to the printed page”(51). My own analysis does not disagree with Mellin’s, but it pays closer attention to the manner in which images *within* individual episodes of the story operate dialectically, without regard to bibliographical features. Porter’s critique of the social disparities in Mexico attains great power when images are set side by side within a scene, as in the perfume/*pulque* episode I have discussed.

“Hacienda” sadly concludes with the sense of stasis with which it begins. While the “blessed revolution” may have changed the names of “third-class” trains to “second-class,” the life of a peon remains as in the days of Porfirio Díaz.

At sunset the men driving the burros came in from the maguey fields. The workers in the vat-room began to empty the fermented pulque into the barrels. . . . The chanting and counting and the rolling of the barrels down the incline began again for the night. The white flood of pulque flowed without pause; all over Mexico the Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; don Genaro and his fellow-hacendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and

ambitious politicians in the capital would be stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas themselves. It was all arranged. (229)

Eisenstein's film, even in its unfinished state, ends with the promise of change. The last shot of the "Maguey" episode is of a peon's determined eyes in the face of oppression. Porter, who spent three years in Mexico in the course of a decade, sees the possibility for change differently. In "Hacienda," Porter does not present strong portraits of the peons' faces because during her visit she only saw the drudgery of their day-to-day lives. In "Maguey," *pulque* drinking briefly appears as a catalyst for revolutionary action. In "Hacienda," *pulque* is part of the machinery of the peon's enslavement.

I have framed Eisenstein's *Qué Viva México!* as an alternative vision in the representational politics of Mexican identity because the film stands in sharp contrast to the stereotypes of bandit revolutionaries created by American films. The problem with Eisenstein's vision, as I have commented, is its tendency toward idealism. His idealism—and government censorship—led Eisenstein to insist that the revolution positively transformed Mexican society, to hold the illusion that the wrongs of the past were erased in Mexico's emergence as a modern nation. Looking back at the social circumstances to which Eisenstein was responding, the absence of a true social transformation in Mexico contributed to the film's incomplete quality. We are fortunate, therefore, that Katherine Anne Porter traveled to Mexico during the shooting of the film's most important

episode, and that she was able to discern what Eisenstein could not. Porter saw that Eisenstein was operating within a romantic fiction over Mexico's revolutionary potential. While Porter had faith in the Mexican's ability to persevere—one need only read the “María Concepción” to realize Porter's allegiance to the Mexican spirit of survival—she well understood that the entrenched structure of power could not so easily be overcome. Yet notwithstanding Eisenstein's idealism, we cannot deny that Eisenstein and Porter's importance to Mexican identity representation rests on their commitment to presenting the social contradictions that shaped Mexico, and on their refusal of the generic conventions imposed by dominant American perceptions of Mexico.

¹ It is necessary to briefly differentiate between three practices of artistic production: script writing, film directing or shooting, and montage or editing. Eisenstein wrote the script collaboratively with his cameraman, Eduard Tissé, and his assistant director, Grigory Alexandrov. We can safely credit him in the main duties of directing. Credit for the montage, which in Eisenstein's poetics is the most important aspect of filmmaking, belongs to Alexandrov, who re-edited the film according to Eisenstein's notes. In my discussion, I reference Eisenstein as the “creator” of the film, but this is only shorthand that takes into account the collaborative nature of filmmaking. The importance of *Qué Viva México!* lies less in determining who made it than in charting the important dialogues it makes possible, as I hope my discussion shows.

² Eisenstein comments in *Notes of a Film Director* that Dreiser “was the first to salute all that had been brought to his work by our treatment” (105). In a letter dated September 1, 1931, Dreiser tells Eisenstein that “[n]othing grieves me more than their [Paramount's] refusal to let you make the picture. . . . Have you any idea that *An American Tragedy* could ever be filmed in Russia? I wish it might be” (qtd. in *Notes of a Film Director* 105).

³ It is likely that one of the bases of the friendship between Eisenstein and Chaplin was their ideological leanings. Chaplin's films championed the underclass (*The Kid*, 1921) and critiqued an over-mechanized, industrial culture (*Modern Times*, 1936). Eisenstein was so taken by Chaplin that he devotes an extensive portion of *Notes of a Film Director* to discussing several of Chaplin's films.

⁴ Inga Karetnikova writes that Eisenstein's views on Mexico were strongly influenced by Annita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* (1929). “Brenner wrote about the Indians and the Spanish conquest. She wrote about Mexican traditions and beliefs. . . . Eisenstein was fascinated by Brenner's view of Mexican culture as accepting the Spanish traditions but also preserving the past, hiding the Indian idols behind Catholic altars” (13).

⁵ David Mayer puts together an instructive study of *Potemkin* in *Eisenstein's Potemkin: A Shot-By-Shot Presentation*, which includes shots from the film with descriptions of the action. Here, the much-studied example of the lion receives extended treatment.

⁶ Gettsman and Geduld's *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair: The Making and Unmaking of Que Viva Mexico!* provides valuable insight on the troubled relationship between the Russian film crew and Hunter Kimbrough, the film's business manager.

Chapter Five

Hybridity and Contingency in Contemporary Chicano/a Cinema

“How to start. . . . Well, okay, I guess it all started that first day of summer—the movie got that part right, at least.”—Nena (Maria Candelaria), in *Come and Take it Day* (2002)

Introduction

How to start? And how to end? These are always important questions, for beginnings and endings exert a strong influence upon a reader’s relationship to any narrative, including a study such as my own. If the dissertation necessarily begins with early twentieth-century “greaser” films produced by Anglo-Americans, then it must conclude with twenty-first century Chicano/a self-representation. While I have focused predominantly on literary and cinematic production during the first half of the twentieth century, I close my project with a discussion of a contemporary Chicano/a film, Jim Mendiola’s *Come and Take it Day* (2002), because this text expresses the contingent and hybrid quality of Mexican American cultural identity at the same time that it critiques continuing representations of Mexican American deviance in the dominant media.

If several of the Anglo-American texts I have analyzed participate in the production of stereotypical ambivalence disguised as fixity, then it is also the case

that Mexican American texts often reproduce an essentialist subject in the face of the contingency of lived culture. Chicano/a Movement films of the seventies, for instance, express an unwavering Chicano/a subject locked in battle with the Anglo oppressor. Yet notwithstanding the initial tendency toward fixity and essentialism, contemporarily we find notable exceptions. In a similar manner that, during different periods, Stephen Crane expresses ambivalence toward the Anglo hero and Américo Paredes points to contingency in his critique of the transcendent revolutionary subject, Chicano/a film in the present moment affirms that identity is contingent, dependent on specific socio-cultural conjunctures.

In this chapter, I examine contemporary Mexican American identity formation as represented in Mendiola's *Come and Take it Day*. Unlike Chicano/a cinema during the 60s and 70s, with its concerns for defining an essential subject in resistance to Anglo-American stereotyping, and unlike much of the 80s and 90s cinema, with its interest in participating in mainstream culture, *Come and Take it Day* proposes contingency and hybridity as the defining elements of Chicano/a identity. The film scrutinizes contemporary media images of ethnic deviance—the present-day equivalents of the *bandido* stereotype—but it does not posit the transcendent Chicano/a hero as antidote. Instead, *Day* intertextualizes Paredes's "*With His Pistol in His Hand*"—and several other texts—and imagines a Chicano/a unburdened by the demand to uphold cultural essence but still capable of contesting discourses that deprecatorily define the culture. Thus, *Come and*

Take it Day exemplifies the importance of seeing beyond a perceived fixity in the representation of race and ethnicity.

A Brief and Argumentative History of Chicano/a Cinema

As I have noted, Chicano cinema emerged during the late 60s, as part of the Chicano/a Movement for civil rights and, from its beginnings, it stood in opposition to dominant Anglo-American culture. The developmental trajectory of Chicano/a cinema, I want to propose, exhibits four distinctly identifiable but sometimes overlapping phases, with *Come and Take it Day* signaling a recent move toward a contingent cultural expression that nevertheless continues the practices of oppositionality and critique so important within the tradition.

Rosa Linda Fregoso broadly defines Chicano cinema's chief function as "the documentation of social reality through oppositional forms of knowledge about Chicanos" (*Bronze Screen* xxiv-xv). From its inception, Chicano/a cinema has engaged the politics of identity formation, expressed opposition to forms of oppression, and sought solidarity with other revolutionary cinemas, mainly Latin American New Cinema (xv). While the notion that Chicano/a cinema embodies "oppositional forms of knowledge" provides a basic understanding of Chicano/a filmic practice, it can also be misleading, for oppositionality assumes that Chicano/a culture is ideologically opposed to Anglo-American culture in every instance. The Chicano/a Movement, with its revolutionary calls for a transformation in U.S. society's treatment of Mexican Americans, influenced this

perspective. Thus, as Chon Noriega notes, filmmakers “published the initial studies on Hollywood’s Chicano stereotypes . . . and offered ‘Chicano cinema’ as the alternative in a series of manifestos”(“Between a Weapon” 144). The resulting cinematic expression, therefore, contains a binary quality that negates all things Anglo-American, despite its engagement with American culture. As Noriega recognizes, “it was anxiety over ‘Gringo’ influences that led Chicanos to seek models in the Mexican and Cuban revolutions”(145).

A character of oppositionality, then, describes only one dimension of Chicano/a cinema. Because of its location in the U.S. economic frame, and because of Chicano/a culture’s interaction and interchange with American culture, Chicano/a cinema expresses oppositionality *and* rapprochement.

From the start . . . Chicano cinema has had to mark out a space for itself between a weapon and a formula, between the political weapon of New Latin American Cinema and the economic formula of Hollywood. Too often, however, these two practices are seen as mutually exclusive, rather than as the thesis and antithesis of a cinematic dialectic at work in the Americas. (149)

Critics and filmmakers, because of the need to maintain solidarity with the Chicano/a Movement, have often elided the relationship with a broader American culture that Chicano/a artistic production—cinematic or otherwise—expresses.

The Chicano/a elision of the engagement with American culture is

understandable—Mexican Americans have long suffered discrimination in U.S. society and continue to experience denied entry in the American culture industry¹—but contemporarily we are beginning to understand that Chicano/a artistic production in the U.S. articulates hybridity rather than purity, contingency rather than essentialism.

Mexican American culture translates the notion of hybridity as *mestizaje*, the term for the historical blending of indigenous and Spanish cultural elements that were initiated over five hundred years ago. During the 60s and 70s the “end result of the concept [of *mestizaje*] was a neoindigenism that sought an alternative to European and Anglo American influences”(Noriega 150). Consequently, critical accounts of Chicano/a culture that emphasized resistance to American culture tended to do so at the cost of fixing Chicano/a identity within an unchanging indigenous matrix. Contemporarily, perhaps because of the gains made to secure civil rights and full citizenship, Chicano/as are more confident in acknowledging the blending that occurs when cultures meet. “In recent years, border artists . . . have used *mestizaje* not as retreat to ‘pure’ origin . . . but as a way to deconstruct the notion of a dominant culture”(150). *Mesitza*je/hybridity expresses cultural change without the loss of cultural specificity.

We may witness this transformation in Chicano/a self-conception by briefly examining two films from the first phase of Chicano/a cinema: Luis Valdez’s *I Am Joaquin* (1969), regarded as the first Chicano/a film; and Sylvia

Morales's *Chicana* (1977), the feminist response to *Joaquin*. These films, as Noriega points out, "frame the cultural and national period and together delineate its historical, political and aesthetic vision," and "set forth a worker-based ideology and cultural identity that are rooted in a pre-Columbian mythopoetics and the 500-year history of *mesitzo* resistance"(156). In other words, these films express an essentialist conception of culture.

In *I Am Joaquin*, Valdez adapts and visually narrates Corky Gonzales's Chicano/a Movement poem of the same title. The film uses camera movement to bring still-photographs to life, and combines music with Valdez's reading of "I Am Joaquin." Valdez chooses journalistic photographs of the Chicano/a Movement, stock photography of urban plight and pollution, and historical photographs from Mexican history to tell an agonistic story of the Chicano/a experience in the U.S. Because Valdez reads the poem in a defiant monotone, the viewer is left with a sense that Mexican American culture is statically resistant to Anglo-American culture (the poem also imparts this sense of stasis). *Joaquin*, therefore, marks an early insistence on fixity in the construction of Chicano/a identity.

Sylvia Morales's *Chicana* attempts to debunk the overvaluation of the Chicano warrior hero instantiated by Valdez's masculinist aesthetics, but it simultaneously relies on a mythic construction of Chicana identity. I agree with Rosa Linda Fregoso that *Chicana* "critiques all forms of domination," but her

claim that the film's "epic account refuses the tendency to idealize the Aztecs and offers instead a critical revision of our lineage" is belied by *Chicana*'s romantic invocation of the matrilineality of indigenous Mesoamerican cultures ("Chicana Film Practices" 172). The film makes a much stronger argument for Chicanas' vital contributions to the Chicano/a Movement and to the endurance of Chicano/a culture. *Chicana* critiques masculine expectations of woman's place in the domestic sphere, and in this respect it de-essentializes woman's subjectivity. Unlike the seriousness of Valdez's reading in *Joaquin*, Morales "brings to the film a keen sense of irony and satire, as is evident in the opening sequence, which subverts commonsense assumptions about Chicana passivity and subservience"(172-73). But while *Chicana* unhinges the Movement's strict masculine/feminine axis, it re-essentializes Chicana identity in its reliance on originary notions about Aztec matrilineal society.

We should not, of course, lose sight of *Chicana*'s significant contribution to Chicano/a cinema. It establishes a Chicana cinematic discourse that is "markedly counter-aesthetic" because it critiques "two kinds of discourses: the dominant culture's, which has distorted the Chicana subject; and the aesthetic discourse of Chicano males," which has often refused to give Chicanas a voice (171). Nevertheless, any counter-aesthetics must be watchful of not reversing and re-inscribing its object of critique. While *Chicana* offers a "counterdiscourse to

man-centered versions of Chicano history”(Fregoso, *Bronze Screen* 18), it too closely mirrors *I Am Joaquín*’s mystification of Chicano/a subjectivity.

As I have noted, films made at the height of the Chicano/a Movement attempt to present an essentialized culture because one of the Movement’s greatest concerns was to affirm Chicano/a culture in the wake of Anglo domination. By 1981, as Noriega points out, “the early period of Chicano cinema had come to an end as the filmmakers became experienced professionals and broader industry contacts were established”(145). The year 1981 marks another important milestone in Chicano/a cultural production, for at this moment film begins to articulate a more contingent Chicano/a identity. In 1981 Luis Valdez released *Zoot Suit*, the first Chicano/a directed Hollywood film. *Zoot Suit* begins the second period of Chicano/a cinema and stands at a midpoint between the essentialism of the Chicano/a Movement and the contingency that is to characterize later cultural productions. Thus, Valdez, who has directed independently and within Hollywood, bridges the transformation between essentialist and contingent expressions of identity.

Narrated in musical form, *Zoot Suit* is the story of the 1942 Sleepy Lagoon Trial, in which Mexican American youth were convicted of murder. The story is told against the backdrop of the Zoot Suit riots in Los Angeles, when American sailors violently attacked Mexican American youth for what was perceived as an un-American fashion statement—the wearing of the colorful and excessive zoot

suit. In both form and content, *Zoot Suit* embodies a hybrid cultural formation: it takes a Chicano/a play and adapts it to the American musical, and it explores the contours of an emergent Mexican American youth culture during the 1940s.

Not all critics have labeled *Zoot Suit* a hybrid production. Fregoso, for instance, argues that the film's "production of cultural identity is grounded in an 'archaeology'" (*Bronze Screen* 36), a term she borrows from Stuart Hall. In "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," Hall delineates two modes in the formation of cultural identity: the first, based on an "archaeology," unproblematically recovers identity based on static and past configurations; the second formation, which Hall privileges, is based on an "imaginative rediscovery" of identity, which is grounded in the present circumstances of culture, even as it acknowledges the influence of past traditions on the formation of identity (Hall 220-36). Fregoso argues that *Zoot Suit* recapitulates an outmoded and over-masculinized Chicano identity. *Zoot Suit*'s "[p]achuco is essentially all of the identities of the revolutionary subjects envisioned by cultural nationalism: he encapsulates the fusion of the pinto, the Aztec warrior, and the pachuco. Moreover, Valdez configures cultural identity as an inward journey to the deepest realms of the subject" (*Bronze Screen* 36).

Although the film tends to essentialize masculinity, its representation of Chicano/a identity cannot be relegated to a reductive "archaeology." The subject of *Zoot Suit* is, after all, Chicano/a youth culture in rebellion against the Mexican

nationalism of a previous generation. Additionally, the film depicts a cultural moment dominated not so much by “originary” inclinations as by hybrid articulations: the *pachuco* borrows the zoot suit fashion from African American youth culture, while he blends American big band swing—with its own cultural antecedents in African American jazz—with Latin rhythms. Therefore, if *Zoot Suit* explores Aztec mythology, it does so not to recapture an unattainable past, but to acknowledge the residual influence of this mythology on cultural formation. Furthermore, the film’s purposefully uncertain ending—we are left to ponder the protagonist’s fate—reveals that the future of Chicano/a identity is always open and waiting to be written.

Robert M. Young’s *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) is the first motion picture to tell the story of Gregorio Cortez’s legendary resistance to the Anglo-Texan authority at the turn of the century. Notably, Américo Paredes’s “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” (1958) is its textual inspiration, though the film has been severely critiqued for completely silencing the hero to whom Paredes gives voice (Fregoso *Bronze Screen*, Gutiérrez-Jones “Legislating”). While Noriega praises the movie for deconstructing “both the classical western and the silent ‘greaser’ genre”(153), Fregoso is far more critical:

Despite Robert Young’s self-reflexive antiracism politics, the most striking feature of the film is the subordination of Cortez within the narrative discourse. The character hardly speaks on screen. . . . Cortez’s

silence is moreover significant because the film privileges Anglo-Texans as the subjects of verbal discourse, thus relegating Cortez to the status of a mute-silent Other. (*Bronze Screen* 70)

In emphasizing Young's failures, Fregoso does not acknowledge *Ballad*'s multi-ethnic collaborative origins: Victor Villaseñor wrote the screenplay and Moctezuma Esparza produced it. Ironically, then, in ignoring the film's Chicano/a contributors, Fregoso reproduces the silencing of the Other she critiques.

American Me (1991), directed by Edward James Olmos, closes the second phase Chicano/a film history, and its importance lies in being the first Chicano/a-directed film to explore notions of hybridity from the perspective of a cultural formation rather than an ethnic formation. *American Me* confronts the possibility that a non-Mexican may participate in lived Chicano/a culture. In the film, JD (William Forsythe) is a gang member living in East L.A. who, despite his perceived White ethnic identity, calls himself a Chicano/a because he inhabits the particular social and cultural space of a Mexican American neighborhood. In a moment that tellingly expresses the complexity of this hybrid cultural formation, a member of an opposing White gang is confused that JD "talks like a Chicone." JD's response, "La Primera, ese"—his gang identification—demonstrates that cultural identity is never transcendent or pure.

The third phase of Chicano/a cinema begins in the mid-90s, when, due to very limited opportunity within Hollywood, the most visible films exploring Chicano/a identity simply regurgitate a congratulatory and apolitical multiculturalist ideology. Such is the case with Gregory Nava's *Mi Familia/My Family* (1995), *Selena* (1997), and the recent PBS-produced series, *American Family* (2002). The Chicano/a identity these films express is premised on the initial proclamation of the culture's "unique" features (superstitious practices, boisterous family dynamics), on the commemoration of the culture's suffering in its acculturation to U.S. society, and on the conclusion that Chicano/as are, in the end, "American" (they value family, they want success). In their celebration of the culture's distinctiveness, these films are reminiscent of the Texas folklorists Américo Paredes long ago criticized for carrying a "romantic point of view [that] deals not with living things but with idealizations of them" ("Folklore" 17). The films' tendency to romanticize and to emphasize unusual cultural elements—what Paredes called "local color"—eviscerates Chicano/a cinema's historically critical relation to mainstream culture.

I have provided a schematic overview of the first three phases of Chicano/a cinema because my greatest interest is with what is, in my estimation, a fourth phase in Chicano/a filmmaking. This final period, which overlaps with phases two and three, is characterized by contingency, playfulness, and a critique of American modernity; it evokes Chicano/a Movement films, but without the

Movement's complete denial of a monolithic Anglo-American culture. Fourth phase cinema self-reflexively appropriates Hollywood's generic conventions and transforms them in a critical fashion; it is an independent cinema because its expressive concerns deal with localized subjects outside the ken of Hollywood's marketing imperatives. Fourth phase films are often shot on video, and may be short format.

Chon Noriega has recognized these stylistic and thematic elements in the work of Chicana filmmakers such as Lourdes Portillo, whose work is "pivotal in the development of an alternative Chicana/Latina film practice, challenging assumptions about an essential subject, style, and genre for the female, ethnic, and bicultural filmmaker"(*Shot in America* 187). Primarily documentaries, Portillo's films "confront political issues from the personal perspective of Latina resistance"(191). Among the Chicana and Chicano films that fit the fourth phase aesthetic, Noriega includes Sylvia Morales's *Esperanza* (1985), Carlos Avila's *Distant Water* (1990), and Jim Mendiola's *Pretty Vacant* (1996) (195).

Similarly, Charles Ramírez Berg has identified a "resistant form of postmodern" cultural expression in his analysis of recent Chicano/a documentaries. Ramírez Berg calls this a Mexican American postmodernism, characterized by "fragmentation, heterogeneity, hybridity, an ironic relation to the past, and a healthy skepticism about the master narratives of progress, liberation, and science"("El Genio" 75-76). He avers, additionally, that "nearly all Chicano

filmmakers—whether they work in fiction or film—are border documentarians in that their films almost always refer back to their Mexican roots, directly or indirectly juxtaposing their heritage with their current U.S. existence”(76). In following discussion, I argue that *Come and Take it Day* exemplifies fourth phase Chicano/a cinema, for it explores a specific aspect of Chicano/a identity in a manner that is self-reflexive, intertextually nuanced, and critical of the continually changing relation between Chicano/as and U.S. modernity.

Come and Take it Day

I first viewed Jim Mendiola’s *Come and Take it Day* as a work-in-progress in the Spring of 2001, during the Américo Paredes Annual Conference at UT Austin. Even in rough form, the movie’s ironic and humorous explorations of contemporary Mexican American identity struck a chord with the audience. The film is divided into three titled sections, “First Day,” “Discovery Day,” and “Come and Take it Day,” but it begins with an untitled prologue that provides a tight synopsis of the film’s narrative and thematic concerns. The prologue, which is almost three minutes long, initially follows the conventional style of a documentary film, with Jesse (Jesse Borrego) providing an unseen interviewer with information about Miguel’s (Jacob Vargas) death. The film’s first shot frames Jesse’s head and shoulders and maintains the camera in a fixed position. At fifty seconds, this relatively long opening shot establishes that Jesse blames himself for Miguel’s death. At this point, the viewer expects a run-of-the-mill

mystery, told in the slow, methodical style of an investigative documentary. But then the movie launches into a montage sequence whose technical proficiency is only eclipsed by its thematic richness. Employing an extremely fast-paced editing technique and a heavy metal soundtrack, the remaining two minutes of prologue—composed of almost ninety separate shots—introduce the film’s dominant concerns: the hybrid and contingent character of Chicano/a identity; the construction of Latino/as as deviant by the U.S. media; the commodification of Mexican American culture in San Antonio; the fragmentation of Chicano/as along class lines; and the constructed and ideological nature of “history” and “truth.”

One of *Day*’s central concerns is to investigate the constituents of contemporary Chicano/a hybridity and contingency. We see this in the initial scene of “First Day,” when Miguel and Nena (Maria Candelaria) first meet. Miguel wears the typical heavy metal outfit that defines many young working-class San Antonians—blue jeans, a black Black Sabbath t-shirt, biker boots, and a studded leather bracelet. Additionally, because he enjoys flowers, he earlier placed Texas Bluebonnet over his right ear. Nena, who is a savvy future graduate student (on her way to Berkeley), notices the interesting juxtapositions and comments, “[t]hat’s an interesting neo-hippie-*pachuco* thing you’ve got going there.” The remark, which confuses Miguel because he is not as well educated as Nena, reveals that hybridity is a notion that is both constantly articulated and always questioned within Chicano/a culture. (The disjunction between Nena’s

high academic analysis and Miguel's blank expression also exposes the dangers of mystifying culture in academic jargon.)

That Chicano/a culture is defined by hybridity or *mestizaje* may be a foregone conclusion for some, but this should not lead us to conclude that the film invokes hybridity in a merely celebratory fashion. Instead, *Come and Take it Day* articulates a critical Chicano/a hybridity. We see this critical stance during Miguel and Jesse's visit to the "Come and Take it Day" celebrations at Fort Walker in Gonzales, Texas. Miguel walks into a local convenience store looking for, among other things, rolling paper, and while he is browsing through various Texas tourist store knickknacks, an Anglo family enters the shop. As they happily handle and try on the merchandise, a twangy country song plays in the background. For Miguel, the experience is momentarily unnerving. The Chicano/a *metallero* looks uncomfortable and out of place in the tourist shop. He turns to a mirror in the store, as if comparing himself to the family. As he studies himself from head to toe, he straightens his posture and smiles mischievously. He then picks up a Davy Crockett coonskin cap, a disposable camera, and, incongruously, a sticker of Emiliano Zapata from a bubblegum pack. Sticking the image of Zapata to the coonskin cap, he puts on the hat and, walking over to Jesse, declares himself a "neo-turista hybrid," echoing Nena's earlier remark. The scene critiques the unconscious acceptance and mass consumption of Texas myths by cutting between Miguel's rebellious appropriation and the family's

innocent usage of the cap, and it shows the oppositional and playful potential of hybrid expressions of identity.

If, as I have noted, Chicano/a cinema of the 60s and 70's affirmed Chicano/a identity through essentialist notions of culture, *Come and Take it Day* affirms identity by asserting identity's contingent status. Much of the Movement's discourse was predicated on invocations of a reclamation of Chicano/as' Aztec origins, and Norma Alarcón recollects the "quest for a true self and identity which was the initial desire of many writers involved in the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s." Contemporarily, Chicano/a expressive culture gives way "to the realization that there is no fixed identity" ("Chicana Feminism" 250). Chicano/a contingency acknowledges "the complex and multiple ways in which the subject . . . is constituted," as well as the "discourses that transverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly" ("Theoretical Subject(s)" 34, 38). Identity, therefore, does not emerge from a fixed past formation, but from the particular socio-cultural spaces and discourses it inhabits.

In *Come and Take it Day*, contingency revises the two protagonists' vision of an unassailable and essential self-identity. Jesse and Miguel, who are cousins, believe that they are the great, great grandsons of the folk hero, Gregorio Cortez. However, while doing genealogical research, Jesse discovers that this is not the case. A cynical self-taught intellectual, Jesse narrates that his family's "Cortez

myth always bothered me; a bit too convenient in its brown nobility.” What Jesse discovers is that the narrative of his family’s heroic pedigree is an essentialist myth. Yet more shocking, he learns that he and Miguel are actually the great, great grandsons not of Gregorio Cortez, but of Jesus Gonzales, “El Teco,” the man who, according to the Cortez legend, turned Cortez in to the Texas Rangers for one thousand dollars in silver. The scene in which Jesse delivers the news to Miguel is both humorous and unsettling.

Jesse: El Teco, the *vendido* Judas narc? The dude’s our great grandfather.

Miguel: Shut up, no he’s not.

Jesse: *En serio*.

Miguel: He’s not!

A sustained pause follows this exchange as Miguel struggles to come to terms with his imagined self-conception. Fortunately, it does not take long for either Miguel or Jesse incorporate this new interpretation of their lineage, since their day-to-day existence as Chicano/as is already defined by a cultural formation that is hybrid rather than pure, contingent rather than essential.

The representation of hybridity and contingency are instantiated within a filmic discourse that maintains a critical stance vis-à-vis a dominant culture that, in ambivalent fashion, simultaneously construes Latino/as as stereotypically deviant and commodifies Mexican American culture as part of San Antonio’s tourist industry. In the film, Miguel’s mistaken killing by a Texas Ranger is

justified because he was a *metalero* who happened to be fascinated by an infamous serial killer, Richard Ramírez. As a working-class Chicano/a practicing an alternative lifestyle, Miguel is on the margins of society. In her version of the story, Nena tells her audience—a graduate class at Berkeley—that “they [the authorities and the media] painted him as this drug-dealing, heavy metal-loving social deviant.” Yet as Jesse makes clear, Miguel’s life choices expressed an oppositional stance: “It was Richard Ramírez the media figure that Miguel was into, rather than Richard Ramírez the serial killer. . . . It was political man. The night-stalker’s transgressive Latino presence in the *Gringo* media? Miguel dug that. Plus, you know they were both big AC/DC fans.” *Day*’s critique of the media’s construction and conflation of negative stereotypes about Latino/as takes place from the very space of imputed deviance: Jesse and Miguel embrace their marginal status and use it oppositionally. By refusing to conform to mainstream American or middle class Mexican American norms, the characters are doubly transgressive.

Come and Take it Day shows, furthermore, that the marginalization of Chicano/as—especially working-class Chicano/as—occurs even as San Antonio’s Mexican American heritage undergoes a process of Disney-fication. Jesse, Miguel, and Nena work at a café on San Antonio’s River Walk. The movie’s opening sequence shows Miguel walking to work as a tour-boat glides along in the river next to him. As the tour-guide narrates the river’s history and related

trivia—"Did anyone see the movie, *Selena*?"—a gawking tourist photographs Miguel. Though he looks somewhat out of place in his backward cap and heavy metal clothes, he obliges her by posing and waving the "Ozzy" sign.² The scene succinctly establishes the relation between Mexican Americans and tourism in San Antonio—they are either part of the scenery or part of the infrastructure that supports the industry. Significantly, Miguel's dress and actions subvert the act of culture collecting that the tourist attempts.

In several other instances, *Day* mocks the concept of San Antonio as a tourist destination. While arguing with Nena about his plans to move to Thailand, Jesse tells her that at least that country "has never been colonized, which is more than I can say for this 'remember the Alamo – Sea World – buy a *sombrero*' tourist attraction of a town." Jesse's derisive comment implies that San Antonio's Mexican heritage has been so commercialized that its cultural significance has weakened for many Mexican Americans. Further, the film's instantiation of the commodification of the Mexican heritage against the backdrop of Chicano/a deviance signals the dominant culture's ambivalent relation to Chicano/as: it desires the economic benefit of marketing the Mexican heritage, but it denies actual Mexicans.

The commodification of Mexican American culture and the construction of Chicano/a deviance are accompanied by a fragmentation of the Chicano/a community. This deterioration occurs along class lines and at levels of education.

In a recent interview, Mendiola discusses class conflict within the Chicano/a community:

I used to work in a tourist restaurant. . . . Mainly Mexican Americans worked there. It was an interesting dynamic that happened when these educated brown college people would come and work for the summer among the working-class and some really poor people, who were the dishwashers. There was a certain hierarchy based on class. (“Pedal”)

We see Mendiola’s class analysis in the representation of the relationship between Jesse and Miguel, and their boss, Carlos (Rick Delgado) on Nena’s first day at work. Carlos gives Nena a tour of the restaurant and warns her to watch out for the cooks and the busboys, whom he labels “oversensitive *vatos*” and “drug-dealing punks.” When Nena asks to see the dish room, Carlos quickly turns her away with the words, “third world, forget it.” Class division among Chicano/as—which also reflects, in this instance, the reproduction of neocolonial relations between first and third worlds—is evidenced in other ways. For example, Miguel recounts to Nena that while Jesse and Carlos were once good friends, Carlos’s family eventually “moved to the Northside [of San Antonio] to get away from the negative influence—us.”³ By “us,” he means Jesse and himself, but also the deviant working-class Mexicans.

Additionally, *Come and Take it Day* also represents the fragmentation of the Chicano/a community along levels of educational achievement, which usually

accompany class divisions. In the film, Nena is a college-educated, graduate school-bound Chicana who purports to understand Chicano/a culture better than Jesse and Miguel. For instance, after being caught snooping in Jesse's journal, Nena sheepishly explains, "I was fascinated by your words. . . . The ones suggesting a postcolonial critique." Though Jesse understands her, Nena clearly uses language as a way to demonstrate her superiority. In a different scene, Miguel turns the tables on her.

Miguel: Why do you talk like that?

Nena: Talk like what?

Miguel: You know, "Gauguin," "Sahiba colors," show-off words.

Nena: Do I sound condescending?

Miguel: You mean, do you make me feel stupid?

Nena: [Silence.]

Miguel: Sometimes. But I know you don't mean it.

In this scene, *Day* once again uses humor to point out that while education is certainly a worthwhile goal, it can often divide Chicano/as.

Day's most important contribution to contemporary Chicano/a cinema is its playful exposing of the constructed and ideological nature of discourses, in whatever form those discourses may appear, whether as documentary or narrative films, as "historical," "truthful," or "fictional" accounts of events, or as cultural symbols, such as the Alamo. In the prologue, *Day* explores the truth-making

tendencies of the documentary form by couching its narrative as a series of documentary interviews investigating the reasons for Miguel's death. It also makes references, through Nena's commentary, to the narrative film adaptation of the events associated with Miguel's death: "it all started that first day of summer—the movie got that part right, at least." Throughout its narrative, *Day* leads the viewer to question and revise the veracity/fictiveness of the discourses within which it participates and upon which it comments.

While Chicano/as artistic expression has always challenged the notion of "history" as written by dominant culture, *Day* radically turns the question inward. Chon Noriega writes that Chicano/a film asks, "[h]ow can Chicanos depict history when historians, journalists, and Hollywood have either distorted, censored, or repressed the history of the Chicano experience?" Chicano/a cinema has responded by producing a "historical discourse [that] operates within a bicultural logic that informs, undercuts, or otherwise engages 'History.' Films may draw upon culture-based, alternative forms of history telling, as in the *corrido*"(153). *Come and Take it Day* takes questions of history and confronts Chicano/as with them. For instance, in the account of Gregorio Cortez's resistance to the Texas Rangers, what heterogeneous interpretations has Cortez's story taken in the Chicano/a community? Nena's version of the story assumes an objective historicism and places it within the academic discourse of postcolonial studies: "June, 1901. Gregorio and his brother sharecropped a small ranch in Gonzales,

Texas. . . . [Cortez's actions against the sheriff were a case of the] subaltern's challenge to the colonial power." Jesse's retelling, meanwhile, is far more politically fraught: "For the *Raza*, it was a rare instance of sticking it to the *Gringo*." Carlos's revision of the story demonstrates contemporary forgetfulness: "You know, [Cortez was] the dude who evaded the Texas Rangers. . . . [He] fled to mother Mexico." Not knowing that Cortez was a *Texano*, Carlos assumes he's an immigrant.

Mendiola's marshalling of different interpretations of an event recalls such classic film's as Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), but rather than commenting on the undecideability of truth, *Day* argues that the construction of history depends on the discursive communities within which one participates, and the power relations within them. In terms of its own engagement with Gregorio Cortez's story, *Come and Take it Day* suggests that Chicano/as must actively participate in its preservation and dissemination, Cortez is a crucial part of Chicano/a self-identity. The presence of Cortez in Chicano/as' self-identity does not imply an essentialist abstraction like Jesse and Miguel's; rather, the account of Cortez's resistance informs contemporary understandings of community and history. The film cautions against Jesse's romanticism, but it also warns against Carlos's historical amnesia. If, in the days of Gregorio Cortez, the *corrido* was a dominant narrative form, then *Day* makes a space for contemporary forms such as

film—in Miguel’s version of the story, the graphic novel—to produce knowledge about Mexican American history.

Come and Take it Day’s inward emphasis on questions of history accompanies a broader critique of dominant culture’s interpretation of history and truth about Chicano/as. Like other Movement films, *Day* “sustain[s] an intertextual dialogue with previous Hollywood representation,” but it does not limit its critique to the film medium (Noriega 153). I have already referenced the film’s questioning of the documentary’s truth-making tendencies, and its assessment of the media’s construction of Chicano/a deviancy. *Day* also humorously comments on the proliferation of “real-life” book exposés and sensationalistic journalism. Nena refers to a made-for-TV movie and calls the written account of Miguel’s death, *Sex, Silver & Sin!* a “constructed mythology.” Carlos has cashed in on the “option” to his version of events, written by “the dude who did the JonBenet Ramsey movie re-write.” Jesse, meanwhile, has written a memoir, *Notes of a ‘Beatnick Spic’*. Finally, the Spanish-language Mexican tabloid *Alarma!* has published a huge story on the events surrounding Miguel’s death. The reproduction of these humorous intertexts within the movie suggests a media establishment out of control in its appropriation of Chicano/a history.

Charles Ramírez Berg has commented that Mexican American postmodern filmmaking “questions not only the past but also . . . dominant political structures”(85). Especially in San Antonio, the most powerful symbol of

Anglo-Texan dominance is the Alamo, and in *Come and Take it Day* it becomes fodder for hilarious critique. During their day off, Jesse and Miguel decide to take in some sights in the San Antonio area, and they playfully discuss some possibilities.

Miguel: So let's be *turistas* today.

Jesse: *Oralé*, we're on vacation, right?

Miguel: Yeah, vacation.

Jesse: Where do you want to go, the Alamo?

Miguel: *Chalé*, forget the Alamo!

The expression, "forget the Alamo," may or may not be an intertextual wink at the well-known line from John Sayles's *Lone Star* (1995). Still, in both contexts the phrase criticizes the shrine's ideologically heavy-handed uses to remind Mexicans of Anglo-Texas's domination.

While *Come and Take it Day* contests dominant culture's interpretations of history and truth, the film nevertheless embraces Chicano/a participation in and dialogue with Anglo-American culture. Unlike Chicano/a Movement films, which reject American culture's and Hollywood's influences, *Day* confidently appropriates non-Chicano/a cultural forms as part of its aesthetic. For instance, rather than adhering to a Mexican derived musical tradition for its soundtrack, *Day* employs heavy metal music to give the narrative a gritty, pulsating feel and a contemporary Chicano/a flavor. The use of this musical genre may hint at

cultural assimilation, but, within the film's context, heavy metal signals the distinctiveness of San Antonio's working-class Chicano/a culture. Heavy metal, however, does not displace the *corrido* as the valued form of musical expression. Consistent with its concern for preserving the story of Gregorio Cortez, *Day* ends with a *corrido* about Miguel's death.

As I have stated previously, Chicano/a films often express anxiety vis-à-vis their relation to Hollywood. Fourth phase films such as *Day*, on the other hand, self-consciously exploit the film industry's formal conventions. *Day* structures its narrative using classical Hollywood cinema's three-act structure. Like Hollywood's narrative style, *Day*'s narrative "depends on the assumption that the action will spring primarily from *individual characters as causal agents*. . . the narrative invariably centers on personal psychological causes: decisions, choices, and traits of character"(Bordwell and Thompson 108). Although *Come and Take it Day* obviously engages broader cultural and political themes, all the action in the narrative emerges from individual desires. As Jesse admits, it was his desire for revenge (against Carlos) that caused Miguel's demise.

But while *Day*'s narrative follows a classic three-act structure, it also follows the documentary form by replicating its investigative techniques. The film opens with talking heads of Jesse, Nena, and Carlos, each who have a different interpretation of events. Like a documentary in the tradition of *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris 1988), the film builds tension and viewer interest by

showing the different facets of the mystery. The documentary form, however, is not *Day*'s ultimate stylistic signature. As I have earlier pointed out, the film begins in the slow and methodical style of a documentary, but suddenly accelerates the narrative by using the quick editing style of a music video—and by adding a driving heavy metal soundtrack. In the space of two minutes during the prologue, the film makes almost ninety editing cuts, or almost one per second. Clearly, then, *Day* is completely at ease in appropriating various narrative and formal techniques derived from Hollywood, documentary film, and music video.

Day, furthermore, intertextualizes a broad array of films, especially its ethnic forebears. In the prologue, we overhear a tour guide ask, “Did anyone see the film, *Selena*?” Miguel, meanwhile, makes reference to “Eddie Olmos” in *Zoot Suit* (1981), repeating the *pachuco*'s cool-cat expression, “*Oralé!*” And Nena provides a comparative analysis of *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) and the classic Blaxploitation film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles 1971), stating that while both films deal with an ethnic subject on the run from White authority, “*Ballad* has this real passive [protagonist].” These allusions demonstrate *Day*'s consciousness of its place within an American filmmaking culture and in an ethnic cinematic tradition.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the most recent period in Chicano/a cinema expresses hybridity and contingency, but the closing sequence of *Come and Take it Day* suggests that hybridity, contingency, and oppositionality

cannot be restricted to cinematic representation. In the sequence, Jesse makes his way along the River Walk when he is photographed by a tourist, paralleling the opening sequence with Miguel. As he is photographed, Jesse makes the “Ozzy” sign and angrily screams, “Remember Miguel, *cabrones!*” Thus, we are asked to keep Miguel—and not the Alamo—in our memory of San Antonio’s cultural history. Disturbingly, however, the film closes with Jesse’s photo being placed in the tourist’s photo album. As the album is closed, we glimpse the album’s first page, and a photo of the Alamo. The scene fades to a shot of suburban idyll as the soundtrack plays the *corrido* about Miguel’s death. What are we to make of this final, disquieting moment? Jesse’s scream of protest signals Chicano/a culture’s continued oppositionality to dominant narratives, but his circumscription within the photo album portends the ultimate victory of American capitalist modernity: the tourist succeeds in collecting the culture, we are left in the safety and cultural homogeneity of the suburb. Yet the power of *Come and Take it Day*’s troubling conclusion lies in taking the Chicano/a spectator out of the comfortable tendency to celebrate the culture’s critical stance. In the final analysis, Jesse’s confinement within the photo album suggests that while hybridity and contingency may open routes for critiquing dominant culture, only Chicano/as’ self-conscious lived relation to American modernity carries the possibility of maintaining cultural specificity.

¹ For a lucid account of Chicano/a cinema's politically vexed relationship with Hollywood, see Chon Noriega's *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (2000).

² Along with AC/DC and Metallica, one of the icons of heavy metal rock in San Antonio is Ozzy Osbourne and the group he fronted in the seventies, Black Sabbath. The "Ozzy" sign looks like a "Hook-em-Horns," but with the thumb extended; it is usually accompanied with a wagging tongue and demonic look. In the early eighties, Osbourne incurred the wrath of city leaders when he urinated on the Alamo. Perhaps this action resonated with working-class Mexicans in San Antonio, cementing his iconic status among them.

³ Like many cities in the United States, San Antonio is segregated along class and ethnic lines. The South- and Westsides are predominantly working-class and Mexican, while the Northside is middle and upper class and White.

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