

THE CABALLERO REVISITED: POSTMODERNITY IN *THE CISCO KID*, *THE MASK OF ZORRO*, AND *SHREK II*

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Although by the 1990s the Robin Hood heroes embodied by the Cisco Kid and Zorro had been absent from cinema screens in North America for a number of years, they had not disappeared from the popular imagination. Luis Valdez, who was to direct *The Cisco Kid* in 1994, had long been fascinated by the figure of the rebel bandit. His darkly comic 1986 play *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges!* features Hollywood extra Buddy Villa, who has made a career of portraying stereotypical Mexicans in Hollywood films. The highlight of this less than illustrious but lucrative career was his role as a defiant bandit opposite Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. This film continued an exploration of stereotypes of the Mexican bandit that also informs Valdez's 1982 drama *Bandido! The American Melodrama of Tiburcio Vásquez, Notorious California Bandit*. In the foreword to the earlier work, Valdez expressed his desire to recover the figure of Vásquez from the stereotypes propagated by Western conquest fiction. He also notes that his decision to concentrate on Vásquez was largely due to the fact that his story was far less well known than that of Joaquín Murrieta, whom he describes as a "legendary icon, even among Anglo-Americans."¹ Murrieta was instead to become the inspiration for a new Zorro in Martin Campbell's *The Mask of Zorro* (1998). Prior to this film, the character of Zorro had appeared on the small screen in the comedy series *Zorro and Son* in the early 1980s and in the 1981 parody *Zorro, The Gay Blade*, which starred George Hamilton as both Don Diego Vega and his outrageously campy gay brother.

The release of the 1990s Cisco and Zorro films was preceded by Robert Rodríguez's *El Mariachi*, a film that has much in common with them despite its more contemporary setting. Rodríguez's debut feature centers on a nameless mariachi who is mistaken for a hit man known as Azul, known for carrying his weapons in a guitar case. Azul has recently broken out of prison in order to kill his former partner, Moco, a North American drug lord who double-crossed Azul and cheated him out of his share of a deal. The mariachi becomes embroiled in a web of violence and deception and relies on his wits and skill in battle to defeat his corrupt adversaries. He evolves from being a journeyman musician to a lone warrior who is the sole embodiment of honor and decency in a border community on the verge of implosion because of corruption and drug trafficking. He is further distinguished by being the only character in the film with a sense of identity and a reverence for Mexican traditions, as his interior monologue at the opening of the film makes clear: "Desde que era pequeño siempre quise ser un mariachi, como mi padre, mi abuelo y mi bisabuelo . . . Mi idea era seguir sus pasos hasta el final y morir con mi guitarra en la mano."

Like *El Mariachi*, *The Cisco Kid* and *The Mask of Zorro* also focus on protagonists who deal with difficult circumstances, particularly corrupt regimes, and engage in violence, but whose actions are not motivated by self-interest but by a desire to defeat the evil potentates whose actions are destroying their environs. Eric Hobsbawm's groundbreaking theories on the social bandit, a figure motivated by a desire to avenge the oppression and racism endured by his community, find a parallel both in the 1990s caballero films and in *El Mariachi*. Furthermore, his ideas are useful in elucidating the motivation behind Valdez's (and other filmmakers') enduring fascination with the bandit character. As Hobsbawm points out, there was a glaring discrepancy between attitudes toward the bandit north and south of the border. Commenting on the emergence of the popular myth of the bandit during the reign of Porfirio Díaz in nineteenth-century Mexico, he notes that "Thanks chiefly to Pancho Villa, the most eminent of all brigands turned revolutionaries, this has brought banditry a unique degree of national legitimacy in Mexico, though not in the USA, where in those very years, violent, cruel and greedy Mexican bandits became the standard villains of Hollywood, at least until 1922, when the Mexican government threatened to ban all films made by offending movie companies from the country."²

Another crucial aspect shared by Valdez and Campbell's films was the long cinematic tradition that they continued and the way in which references to it enhanced them. By both acknowledging the past films that inspired them and incorporating intertextual references to them, *The Cisco Kid* and *The Mask of Zorro* manage to be both part of a rich cultural legacy and utterly contemporary.

This tendency toward referentiality is a key aspect of Valdez's *The Cisco Kid*, which continues and renews the Cisco filmic tradition. Valdez, a former farm worker, was the founder of the Teatro Campesino and a key figure in the creation of Chicano cinema. Valdez has had his greatest success to date with *La Bamba*, a musical biopic based on the life of Ritchie Valens. No other Chicano film has had the box office success of this film while simultaneously bringing serious issues, such as the exploitation of farm workers, the difficulties associated with assimilating into North American culture or rejecting it, and generational gaps between Mexican American parents and their children, to a mainstream audience. Such was the success of *La Bamba* that critics suggested that it was a watershed that would lead to the development of a Hispanic Hollywood. This did not come to pass, but its overwhelming appeal has been something of a mixed blessing for Valdez in that Chicano audiences continue to expect a great deal from his subsequent films, which have not achieved anything near the level of commercial and critical acclaim enjoyed by *La Bamba*. The response of many Chicano commentators to *The Cisco Kid* has been less than overwhelming. David R. Maciel and Susan Racho, in their article "Yo soy chicano: The Turbulent and Heroic Life of Chicanas/os in Cinema and Television," while expressing reservations about *La Bamba's* suggestion that the American Dream can only be achieved through "accommodation or near assimilation," praise it as a creative and commercial success.³ *The Cisco Kid* does not fare nearly as well in their estimation. Its success is limited, they argue, to "the purely entertainment level of a movie made for television."⁴ Moreover, it is considered to have "a flawed script, uneven performances, and a not-so-successful Chicano interpretation of Mexican traditions, history, and folklore."⁵

The mainstream press was somewhat more encouraging in its response to the film. Todd Everett suggests that it is Valdez's "most accessible project yet, with even wider potential appeal than *La Bamba*."⁶ More significantly, he locates the appeal of the film in the tradition of the Cisco Kid series, noting that "it's a welcome return for the characters

and should bring knowing smiles to fans of the Duncan Renaldo-Leo Carrillo interps in the '50s."⁷ This is, in fact, the key to the appeal of the film, despite the fact that, as a brief summary will demonstrate, it is hampered by its overreaching plot.

Valdez's film introduces viewers to the Cisco legend against the backdrop of the struggle between France and Mexico in 1867. The supporters of President Benito Juárez are battling the occupying French armies of Napoleon II, who has appointed the Austrian Emperor Maximilian as the puppet ruler of Mexico. Cisco first appears as a prisoner in a French jail, where he meets a priest named Pancho while both are on their way to be executed by a firing squad. Cisco recounts that his troubles began when he tried to rescue a prostitute named Libertad from a French army brothel. Although Pancho is less forthcoming about his past, we soon learn that he is a Juarista. The pair escapes as a group of Mexican gunmen disrupts the executions, and they ride on a burro to a nearby village. Here they encounter a French tax collector whose henchmen terrify the local people into paying them a tithe of 100 pesos. Cisco and Pancho overpower the tax collector and demand his loot. He takes them to a bedroom, where they meet Dominique, the beautiful niece of the commander of the French army, General Dupré. The duo argues over the fate of the money, which Pancho wants to return to the people through the Juaristas, while Cisco wants to keep it. Pancho prevails. Fearing that their dispute will escalate, the cowardly tax collector offers Dominique to Cisco on the condition that he himself escape unharmed, but Cisco refuses to take advantage of the situation. It is at this point in the story that Cisco finds his signature flamboyant suit, which he takes from the tax collector's wardrobe.

The men then ride to the Juarista camp, where Pancho learns that a poster has been issued offering a reward for his arrest. Cisco speaks with the Juarista leaders and makes a deal to sell them guns that he can obtain from Texan confederate renegades. In the following scene, two of the Texans, Washington and Longquist, have an interview with Dupré, who is holding them on suspicion of gun running to the Mexicans. He agrees to free their men and give them each a hacienda if they complete a mission for him. The villagers of San Miguel, an important strategic location that blocks the access of the French to the sea and is ruled by the Juaristas, worship an image of the child Jesus called El Niño, which was fashioned from gold taken by the conqueror Cortez from the Aztec emperor Moctezuma. The Texans are to steal the statue, robbing the Indians of the will and strength they believe it gives them, thus ensuring a French victory. The camera cuts to a procession in the village of San Miguel leading to the church, where El Niño is exhibited only once a year, on Christmas Day. Cisco and Pancho arrive at the village, where Cisco learns that Pancho is not a father in a religious sense but the head of a substantial family. They all go to church, but the ceremonies are interrupted by the Texans, who steal the statue and leave the church in flames, having killed the priest and a number of worshippers. Cisco saves Pancho's daughter from the fire, then they set out to recover the statue.

It is at this point that Cisco, who has previously refused to get involved in the political struggle, decides to fight with the Juaristas. In the town of Cueros, he and Pancho encounter the confederates in a cantina and a fight breaks out; as Cisco and Pancho are about to overcome the Texans, Pancho is captured by a bounty hunter but is rescued by Cisco. After leaving the bar, they learn that there is a competition in the local bullring for the best caballero and that the winner will attend a ball in the governor's palace, where Pancho is sure El Niño has been taken. Following an impressive display of horsemanship, Cisco wins the contest and he and Pancho attend the ball. While Pancho rescues El Niño, Cisco romances an increasingly compliant Dominique. The pair's perfect mission is

thwarted, however, when the tax collector recognizes Cisco and they are forced to flee. The Texan renegades capture them and take them to a French brothel, where the prostitute Cisco had previously defended, Libertad, aids their escape. Meanwhile, Dominique is kidnapped by another of the renegades, who leaves a ransom note to make it appear that Cisco is the kidnapper. Cisco and Pancho, unaware of this development, return to the Juarista camp with both El Niño and the much-needed guns. Cisco asks one of the Juarista leaders, Doña Josefa, for money and a receipt from Benito Juárez to confirm that he has received the guns, much to the disgust of both Doña Josefa and Pancho. Cisco's apparent greed, which he explains as a need to clear his name of being a bandit north of the border, leads to a fight between the men. At this point, a Juarista horseman comes to warn the camp that Dupré and the entire French army are coming.

The Mexicans prepare for battle as Cisco learns of Dominique's kidnapping and rushes to find her. Pancho, meanwhile, rides through the countryside displaying El Niño in a successful bid to inspire men to join the battle. Cisco finds the Texans in the same bar in which Pancho was captured by the bounty hunter and rescues Dominique, taking her to the safety of the Juarista camp. Cisco and Dominique make love. The following day, Cisco is instrumental in helping the Mexicans defeat the French, killing Dupré and defeating his right-hand man and Dominique's fiancé, Lieutenant Colonel Delacroix. Soon after this decisive battle, Juárez arrives at the camp and personally thanks Cisco. Doña Josefa gives Cisco the money and the letter and, with a notably softened attitude, asks him to join their struggle. Cisco takes his leave of Pancho outside the latter's house, as he had promised his wife Rosa that he would give up his life as a freedom fighter and settle down. Cisco departs and bids farewell to Dominique, who is returning to France. As Cisco rides forth, Pancho catches up with him and the pair joins forces once more.

Although this complex, twist-laden plot would doubtless have thrilled Cisco's creator O. Henry, those unfamiliar with the Cisco films probably find it overly detailed and even hard to follow. It is therefore the referentiality of the film to the history of the Cisco series that is central to the appreciation of how Valdez both pays homage to and appropriates the Cisco legend. The film has much in common with previous Cisco adventures. Cisco's apparently mercenary attitude toward the money he and Pancho recover from the tax collector is explained by the assumption of North Americans that every man of Mexican descent is a bandit and his subsequent longing to clear his name, as he explains to Pancho:

Cisco: You want to know why I came with Washington and Longquist? It was either run guns to Mexico or go to prison.

Pancho: Says who?

Cisco: U.S. federal agents. That's who. Hombre, you know what they call a Mexican with a good horse and money over there? A bandit. That's why I need the letter from Juárez. So I can exonerate myself and go back.

Another staple of the Cisco series is the engagement of its hero in daring exploits that reveal his bravery and honor. Although Cisco is at first doubtful about getting involved with the Juaristas, his skill, quick thinking, and courage perfectly suit him to the role of freedom fighter, a fact recognized more quickly by the Mexicans than by Cisco himself. His chivalry is also a legacy from the previous Cisco films. Far from taking advantage of Dominique, unlike the brutish North American who tries to rape her, he is gentle and considerate toward her, and it is she who initiates their lovemaking. Her initial distaste for him dissipates when she witnesses his skill at riding and then at dancing. Indeed, even

their relationship is a reworking of the plot of the Gilbert Roland film *Robin Hood of Monterey* (1947), in which a French woman who is initially uninterested in Cisco falls madly in love with him. Cisco is even charming and courteous to a horribly disfigured old prostitute, thanking her for helping him in a fight against the Texans with a tender kiss. Like previous Ciscos, the protagonist here is unerringly witty and humorous. While the Juaristas shout slogans in support of a liberated Mexico, Cisco shouts, “¡Viva la Libertad!,” a reference to his prostitute friend rather than to national independence.

Costumes are also important to the film, as in previous ones, as Cisco’s costume helps him to cement his new identity as the Cisco Kid, while Pancho’s adoption of the clothing of a priest alludes to the use of costume and assumed identities in almost all the Cisco films. Music, although not central to the film, is used to give a Mexican flavor to the action. Finally, religion plays an important part in the film. Although Pancho’s pretense of being a priest is a decidedly ironic allusion to the presence of a spiritual guide to Cisco in the earlier films, he is nonetheless a wise mentor to Cisco, instilling in him the importance of his nation and of fighting to secure its independence. The villainy of the Texans and the tyranny of the French are also underlined by their utter disregard for the Catholic Church and their cynical attempt to use El Niño, a figure of great religious significance to the Mexican people, to secure their own base victories.

The less positive elements of the series, racism and negative stereotyping of Mexicans, are also much in evidence. Apart from Cisco’s dilemma of clearing his name from a false charge of being a criminal, which, as he points out, is solely a result of his being of Mexican origin, the North Americans in the film display an insidious racism toward Mexicans. When Dupré accuses the Texans of running guns to aid Juárez, Washington responds incredulously, “That red nigger president of Mexico? Don’t make me laugh.” His racism is based not only on Juárez’s race but on his ethnicity, as Juárez was the first indigenous Mexican to be elected president of his country. Significantly, the portrayal of Juárez highlights his ethnicity in a depiction far removed from that of William Dieterle’s 1939 film *Juárez*, which, despite its title, focuses less on the figure of the Mexican president and more on what is presented as the tragic plight of the besieged Emperor Maximilian. In this film, Juárez is constantly likened to Abraham Lincoln, dresses like him, and even appears beside a portrait of him in an attempt to emphasize their similarities. Indeed, Juárez is not presented as a noble figure in his own right but as a simulacrum of Lincoln. In contrast, Valdez’s figure is a dignified, serene character whose ethnicity, which is underlined both by his appearance and his use of code switching, is a key aspect of his nobility. He is a leader of the people who remains one of them and who even at the height of the battle with the French finds time to personally thank his loyal supporters. His actions stand in sharp contrast to those of the French, who must rely on corrupt mercenaries to achieve their objectives and whose utter disregard for the Mexican people ultimately leads to their defeat. Washington’s racism is not confined to Juárez, as he taunts Pancho by saying that “all you greasers” have the same name. Similarly, when Dupré explains how revered El Niño is by the people of San Miguel, it is clear that their devotion is seen by him as primitive idolatry.

In fact, race is a pivotal aspect of Valdez’s updating and reworking of the Cisco myth. The key difference between his Cisco and previous ones is that Cisco is Chicano, not Mexican as the character traditionally was. At the outset of the film, Cisco is a rather confused figure who has a conflictive attitude toward his ethnicity, which he identifies as the reason that he is considered a criminal in the United States. Pancho functions as a role model who awakens his pride in his ethnicity and his motherland. The irony of his dress-

ing as a priest notwithstanding, Pancho is literally a father figure to Cisco, and he makes him realize that the plight of the people of Mexico is more important than his own quest to clear his name and return to the United States. Thus, after they recover the money paid to the tax collector, they argue over the right thing to do with it, with Pancho pointing out that Cisco cannot possibly keep it:

- Cisco: What do you mean, you can't keep the money? I have to keep it.
 Pancho: It's not yours.
 Cisco: He just gave it to me.
 Pancho: It's not government money, it's not French money, it's not even the church's money. It belongs to the people.
 Cisco: What people? I don't see their names on it.
 Pancho: Look again and you'll see their blood on it. Look, the Juaristas will make sure it gets returned.
 Cisco: We don't know that.
 Pancho: Trust me.
 Cisco: There's more than enough in there. We can split it with them. That'd be fair.
 Pancho: No!

Cisco reluctantly capitulates, but his removal from the cause Pancho fights for is further underscored when he meets Doña Josefa and tells her that he is not political, to which she replies: "Neither are we. We just want our country back." This comment means little to Cisco at this stage in the action, for it is the crucial issue of belonging to Mexico that remains a stumbling block to his idea of belonging with the Juaristas. This issue comes to the fore when Cisco comments to Pancho that he has a wonderful family and a country to fight for. Rosa, Pancho's wife, tells him that it is his country too, but Cisco is adamant:

- Cisco: It used to be.
 Pancho: What do you mean, used to be?
 Rosa: We need men like you.
 Cisco: No, I work better alone.
 Pancho: Hombre, help us! San Miguel is dead without El Niño.
 Cisco: Without guns, Pancho, it's dead already. Ah! I'm headed for Cueros.
 Pancho: Take me with you.
 Cisco: I don't fight for causes.
 Pancho: Well then, what do you fight for?
 Cisco: Ándale, pues, let's go.

Although this exchange seems to be a turning point, Cisco's ideas about the gulf between himself and the Mexicans he encounters through Pancho run too deep to be easily discarded. This sense that he belongs neither in the United States, where he is looked down on because of his ethnicity, nor in Mexico, where he feels like a North American, comes to a head over the issue of the money he seeks to clear his name. Pancho is utterly shocked and disgusted when, despite their many adventures together, Cisco insists on having the money.

- Pancho: I thought you were one of us.
- Cisco: I wish I was, but I'm not.
- Pancho: You've been living with gringos for too long, Cisco. Come back home, hombre.
- Cisco: I was born on the other side of the border. Gringos or no gringos, that's my home.

This fraught conversation crystallizes the situation. Pancho, who is secure in his identity and enveloped by his political struggle, cannot conceive that it is not also the focus of Cisco's life. Moreover, he cannot appreciate the difficulty faced by Cisco as a person who lives between two clashing cultures. Ultimately, however, Cisco's bravery and inherent nobility mean that he proves himself to be true to his ethnic roots while coming to terms with his identity crisis in his own time. In the end, the roles are reversed and it is he who tries to encourage Pancho to continue to participate in the Juarista struggle. A final notable aspect of the characterization of the protagonists is that in many ways the actors remain true to their public images from previous roles. Cheech Marín, in the part of Pancho, reprises his role in *Born in East L.A.* (1987) as a streetwise trickster who values his culture and ethnicity. Similarly, Jimmy Smits in his role carries the dignity of his part as a successful lawyer in the hit TV series *L.A. Law*.

Overall, despite the overly detailed story, Valdez makes a strong argument for the importance of defending one's ethnic identity through the character of Cisco. He respects the tenets of the earlier film series and puts them to good use in the charting of Cisco's journey from a rather selfish, devil-may-care adventurer to a freedom fighter who is worthy of the name of hero. His Cisco learns that there is more to being a Mexican American than the one-sided, derogatory interpretation he has suffered from north of the border. His transformation is such that he becomes a role model in the mold of the social bandit espoused by previous screen Cisco Kids.

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Martin Campbell's *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) is in some respects indebted to the action hero who is the protagonist of the director's earlier film, the Bond adventure *Goldeneye*. Both are suave, quick-witted, athletic ladies' men who engage in dramatic escapades. Campbell is keenly aware of the history of the Zorro character, however, and is successful in both paying tribute to it and making it relevant to contemporary audiences. Like the Cisco Kid, Zorro first appeared as a literary character, in Johnston Campbell's 1919 adventure story *The Curse of Capistrano*. The swashbuckling nobleman is almost universally believed to be Mexican, unless the theory advanced by The Honourable Society of the Irish Brigade—that Zorro was an Irish nobleman, William Lamport, who changed his name to Guillén Lombardo when he moved to Mexico to defend the rights of the poor while engaging in "steamy affairs" with Spanish noblewomen—is correct!¹⁸ The Zorro character was initially played by Douglas Fairbanks in the 1920 film *The Mark of Zorro*, which was remade in the 1940s with Tyrone Power in the lead role. Zorro has appeared in countless TV series and films and even in an animated series entitled *The New Adventures of Zorro*.

Like the Cisco Kid, Zorro is a social bandit who empathizes deeply with the suffering of the marginalized and constantly battles against cruel colonialist rulers in Mexico.

The reaction to the film was overwhelmingly positive upon its release, with special praise reserved for Anthony Hopkins as Zorro and Antonio Banderas as his protégé and successor. *People Weekly* described it as “a stylish if old-fashioned swashbuckler best seen on a Saturday night with a giant tub of popcorn.”⁹ Richard Schickel praises the film’s many dueling scenes and humor, as well as its social awareness: “When cold steel is their weapon of choice, men can actually exchange snappy dialogue while engaging in mortal combat. Better still, when heroism and villainy go at it mano a mano, a certain clearly identifiable humanity as well as a certain cinematic grace and fluidity is imparted to their conflicts.”¹⁰ *Newsweek’s* reviewer also greeted the film enthusiastically, making special mention of its neat mixture of “parody and panache.”¹¹

Although Schickel is the only reviewer to note the film’s social content, from the opening titles it is clear that this is a central concern of the film, as the historical context is explained before the establishing shot:

In 1821, Spain’s three hundred year domination of Mexico was about to come to an end. A people’s rebellion, led by General Santa Ana, spread from the arid mountains of the North to the rich and fertile Southern province known as California. Peasants gathered in the street, calling for the blood of the last Spanish governor, Don Rafael Montero. Although under orders to return to Spain, Montero refused to relinquish power without one final reckoning.

In a sequence that neatly foreshadows the destiny of the protagonist, Montero’s final standoff is seen largely through the eyes of two orphaned brothers, Alejandro and Joaquín Murrieta, who hide in a wagon near the town square. Alejandro tears two slits in the canvas of the wagon so that his eyes are framed by the fabric as they will later be framed by Zorro’s mask. The youths are sent on their way by the wagon’s owner but do not return to the mission where they live, preferring instead to watch the action from a vantage point above the city. Montero is jeered by the crowds as he appears on the balcony of a mansion. His crony Don Luiz begs him to leave as Santa Ana’s troops are fast nearing the town. Montero divides the land held by the Spanish crown between Don Luiz and the other dons of California, then orders the square to be cleared of children in preparation for the shooting of three peasants drawn at random from the crowd. His plan to execute them is thwarted by Zorro, who moves through the crowd disguised as a priest before he overpowers the firing squad with a skillful use of his bullwhip. Zorro then escapes the shots of other soldiers through a mixture of his own agility and the help of the Murrieta brothers, who send a large statue of an angel crashing down on a group of soldiers about to kill the hero. In gratitude, he presents Joaquín with an amulet before confronting Montero on his balcony. Zorro is disgusted by Montero’s willingness to kill three innocent men just to capture him and carves his initials on Montero’s neck with his sword, saying, “Three men, three cuts, and a small reminder of Mexico, Rafael, to remind you not to return.”

After this, Zorro escapes to his home, where his wife Esperanza and infant daughter Elena await his return. He tells his daughter a fairy tale based on his adventures, then assures his wife that his adventures are at an end, as the departure of the Spanish means that the people no longer need Zorro’s protection. Their embrace is interrupted by the arrival of Montero and his men. Montero confirms that the nobleman Diego de la Vega is Zorro by revealing his wounded arm and accuses him of being a traitor to his country and his class. In the struggle to capture Zorro, Esperanza is accidentally killed by Montero’s henchman. Montero, who has long harbored an unrequited love for Esperanza,

is outraged and kills the hapless soldier. Zorro is overpowered and taken prisoner. His last view of his home is to see it destroyed by fire while Montero steals his child.

After this sequence, which is revealed to be a flashback from twenty years before, the camera cuts to the present day. The Murrieta brothers have become bandits who pose as the prisoners of a bounty hunter, a North American called Three-Fingered Jack, in order to catch a troop of Mexican soldiers unaware and steal their strongbox. As the trio flees with its booty, a group of North American soldiers, led by Captain Harrison Love, detains them. Jack and Joaquín are injured in their attempts to escape, and Joaquín shoots himself before being decapitated by Love. Alejandro watches, horrified, then goes to drown his sorrows in a cantina. Meanwhile, Montero returns to Mexico after spending two decades in Spain. His first stop is the prison where he believes Zorro may still be detained. In the confusion that follows his visit, Zorro escapes, although an unsuspecting Montero believes him dead. The following day, Montero is welcomed back to California by the dons and by a rather unenthusiastic crowd of Mexicans. Montero turns to them, acknowledging that they are not really happy to see him return and outlining the history of their repression by a succession of leaders: "Why should you care about any of your leaders, past or present? What did they ever do for you? The Spanish oppressed you, the Mexicans ignored you and the dons, well, the dons, the dons . . . The dons seem content merely to cheat and lie to you. In fact I put it to you, who in your entire history has ever helped you?"

At this, a friar immediately responds by saying that Zorro fought for the people, an answer that prompts enthusiastic chanting of Zorro's name by the crowd. Zorro is, in fact, in the crowd with the intention of killing Montero, but he stops when Elena appears by Montero's side. In the following sequence, Alejandro drinks heavily in a cantina and is about to trade his amulet for more drink. Zorro recognizes the piece and chides Alejandro for throwing away something so precious. He then prevents him in his drunken state from attacking Love, who appears across the square. Zorro pledges to train Alejandro to enable him to properly avenge his brother's death. In turn, he will help Zorro thwart Montero's plan for California. There follows a lengthy training regime for Alejandro, who interrupts it to steal a magnificent Andalusian stallion from the Mexican soldiers. During this escapade, he meets Elena for the first time, and there is an immediate attraction between them. When Alejandro, dressed as Zorro, barely escapes the garrison with the horse, he is forced to hide in a confessional to avoid Love but eventually returns to Zorro's hideout with his horse.

On his arrival, he is chided by Zorro for appropriating the Zorro name before he is ready, but they decide that the best strategy is for Alejandro, in the guise of a Spanish nobleman, Don Alejandro del Castillo, to ingratiate himself with Montero at a ball held by the latter. Alejandro performs the deception with aplomb, even finding time to perform a sensual dance with Elena. He learns during the evening that Montero plans to deceive Santa Ana into selling him California by paying him with his own gold. The following day, Alejandro and the other dons visit the mine, where legions of the disappeared, including children, toil in appalling conditions. After this visit, Love insists on speaking with Alejandro, while Elena chats with Don Diego, who she believes is the servant of Don Alejandro, and tells him that her mother died in childbirth. During their simultaneous meeting, Love shows Alejandro his brother's preserved head, telling him that he suspects his true identity. Meanwhile, Elena meets her former nanny, who casts further doubt on Elena's history and parentage by saying that her father is Don Diego de la Vega. On Alejandro's return from his meeting with Love, he and Don Diego decide to find anything they can in Montero's house that will help them foil his plans. As Montero and Don Luiz

share a toast to the confirmation of their deal with Santa Ana, an alarm sounds and they see a huge burning “Z” on the grounds of the mansion. Alejandro, who is already inside the mansion, steals a map that shows the way to the mine. Montero and Love decide to destroy the mine, along with the workers, in order to hide the evidence of their treachery. Love notices that the map is missing and fights Alejandro with the aid of Montero. Alejandro escapes, only to meet Elena in the stable and to engage in a duel with her, which ends with him playfully wielding his sword so that her dress falls to her ankles. They kiss briefly and he disappears. Alejandro defeats a troop of Mexican soldiers through ingenious stunt riding and escapes. Don Diego is pleased at Alejandro’s achievements but refuses to accompany him to save the mine, as his priority is to get his daughter back.

At the mansion, Montero and Love have a heated discussion, with Montero voicing his concerns about a possible battle with Santa Ana if their plot is discovered. At this, Don Diego appears and Montero recognizes him for who he is. After a prolonged fight, Don Diego overpowers Montero and demands to see Elena. At this point, Elena’s doubts about her true identity are confirmed, but she cannot bear to allow Diego to kill Montero, so he lets him go and is imprisoned once again. Alejandro visits the mine disguised as a priest and thwarts Love’s plans to explode it. Meanwhile, Montero arrives, as does Don Diego, who has been freed by Elena, and they are soon locked in a duel. As the two pairs of adversaries continue to fight, the mine catches fire. Elena opens the cages where the workers have been imprisoned. Alejandro fatally wounds Love, while Montero is dragged to his death by a runaway horse. Alejandro helps Elena free the remaining workers. Don Diego has also been fatally wounded and dies having reconciled himself with Elena and blessed the nascent relationship between her and Alejandro. The final scene sees Alejandro and Elena some time later in their home with their infant son in a sequence that echoes Don Diego’s storytelling to Elena at the start of the film.

In a rather sardonic commentary on the film, reviewer Richard Schickel reflects on the decision to include not one but two Zorros in the story:

Generous almost to a fault, the movie offers us not one but two Zorros. There’s an aging one, Don Diego (played with impeccable elegance by Anthony Hopkins), making a comeback after suffering a long imprisonment, to fight a resurgence of tyranny in old, Spanish-controlled California. In the process, he recruits a young nimbler apprentice, Alejandro (portrayed by Antonio Banderas), who’s not afraid of acting a little dumb until his mentor smartens him up, cools his ardent blood and teaches him the skills that make him worthy of wearing the black mask of the gallant outlaw.¹²

Certainly, the narrative device of introducing two versions of the same character is ingenious, for the original Zorro both embodies the legend of the swashbuckling hero and imparts his skills to his protégé. The discrepancy between the suave original Zorro and the initially unskilled, rustic pretender to his role is the source of much of the comedy in the film. The fact that Alejandro is the brother of the deceased Joaquín Murrieta has a much deeper sociohistorical significance, however. As María Herrera-Sobek persuasively argues in her essay “Joaquín Murrieta, mito, leyenda e historia,” Murrieta is an important example of the social bandit whose exploits have been celebrated in border *corridos* for generations.¹³ She notes that Murrieta fits the “noble bandit” model outlined by Eric Hobsbawm in his seminal work *Bandits* because he is a victim of injustice who seeks to avenge the wrongs done to him—in the case of the ballad tradition, the murder

of his brother and his wife. He is also a revered member of his community who seeks to gain justice for his people and who is practically invulnerable, thanks to a mixture of skill and cunning. While the facts of Alejandro's case differ somewhat from those of the ballad tradition, the many references to his dead brother and his burgeoning desire to end the oppression of the Mexican people link him strongly to the legend. Another aspect of the film that self-consciously evokes the Murrieta legend is the identity of Alejandro's adversary, who, as in the ballads, is a North American captain named Harry Love. Herrera-Sobek concludes that Murrieta has become "a metaphor that represents the frustration and courage of an oppressed people who seek liberation and justice."¹⁴ The linking of the new incarnation of Zorro to a legendary Mexican defender of the people reclaims the Zorro myth for a Mexican and Chicano audience and gives it an added authenticity and resonance. The appearance of two Zorros in the film has a further significance in that it refers back to Fairbanks's portrayal of both Zorro and his son Don Q in *Don Q, Son of Zorro* (1925). In that film, Zorro and Don Q appear together in several scenes, which was quite an innovation at the time.¹⁵

The mentor figure represented by Don Diego in *The Mask of Zorro* is as important to the transformation of Alejandro into a noble warrior worthy to carry on Zorro's work as the figure of Pancho was in *The Cisco Kid*. Time and again, Don Diego points out Alejandro's shortcomings. When Alejandro returns in triumph after stealing the Andalusian stallion, the response that greets him is far from celebratory:

Don Diego: You're a thief, Alejandro, a pitiful clown. Zorro was a servant of the people. He was not a seeker of fame like you.

At length, Alejandro proves that he is able to meet Don Diego's exacting standards, and he is deemed worthy of being the next Zorro. In fact, at this point, it is the student who reminds the teacher of his obligations to the people:

Don Diego: I have taught you everything you need to survive. Now I must look to my own heart. Elena is all I have left. I'm not going to lose her again.

Alejandro: What about California? What about the people?

Don Diego: They still have Zorro.

Alejandro finally becomes Zorro in his own right during his final showdown with Love. Before dealing him the blow that will end his life, he carves the initial "M" for Murrieta into his cheek, just as Don Diego did many decades before to Montero.

A further aspect of the Zorro figure that resembles the Cisco legend is his close relationship with the church. Time and again throughout the film, clergy step in either to praise Zorro, as when the priest points out to Montero that Zorro was the people's champion, or to aid him directly, such as the scene where Zorro is concealed in a confessional by a sympathetic priest. These interventions underline the morality of Zorro's enterprise by offering him the validation of the Catholic Church. The romantic aspects of the plot also echo Cisco's prowess as a ladies' man. Here, however, the romantic subplots are more than additions to the main narrative. Montero's obsession with the beautiful Esperanza, who does not reciprocate his feelings, is emblematic of his desire to possess California, which is never truly his. Meanwhile, the relationship between Alejandro and Elena further legitimizes Alejandro's right to be Zorro's successor.

* * *

A final indication of the success of the social bandit hero's reinvention lies not in *The Cisco Kid* or *The Mask of Zorro* but in Antonio Banderas's reworking of his character for the recent animated adventure *Shrek II*. *Shrek II* continues the story of the unlikely love affair between Shrek, a swamp-dwelling ogre, and the beautiful Princess Fiona from the land of Far Far Away. In the original film, Fiona was locked in a tower by her parents until a handsome prince could rescue her from a dragon and thus free her from a curse that turned her into an ogre by night. This plan is frustrated by the intervention of Shrek, who rescues Fiona but whose kiss makes her ogre state permanent, rather than reversing it. The sequel follows the pair's return to Far Far Away and Fiona's father's determination to get rid of Shrek and restore Fiona to her former state by uniting her with Prince Charming.

Banderas lends his voice to a new character, Puss in Boots, who in many ways resembles Zorro. Indeed, as Banderas points out in an interview that accompanies the DVD release of the movie, he relished the opportunity to parody the Zorro character: "I have the opportunity actually in this movie of taking a little laugh on Zorro. Zorro's character is serious, arrogant, brilliant, very sly, and in this character what I try to do is to actually laugh at myself a little bit." He is introduced when the king goes to a seedy bar, the Poison Apple, in search of an assassin who will rid him of Shrek for good. Puss sits in a darkened room with only his boots and his eyes to identify him. The focus on his eyes is a wry allusion to Zorro, whose eyes are always visible through his mask. He springs into action soon after, when he ambushes Shrek and his friend Donkey in a forest near the castle, appearing with a flourish to the accompaniment of Latin-flavored music. As he urges Shrek to pray for mercy, he carves a "P," Zorro-style, on a tree trunk. His attack is not successful, however, as he is incapacitated while coughing up a hairball and is forced to beg for mercy and confess that he is a hired assassin: "Por favor. Please, I implore you. It was nothing personal, señor. I was doing it only for my family. My mother, she is sick and my father lives off of garbage. The king offered me mucho gold."

Puss's constant use of code-switching further identifies him with Zorro, as does his use of formal, flowery language. He pleads with Shrek to forgive him and to let him restore his honor, saying: "Stop, ogre. I have misjudged you. On my honor, I am obliged to accompany you until I have saved your life and you have spared me mine." Like Cisco and Alejandro, Puss is transformed from a self-interested mercenary to a champion of an oppressed minority, in this case the marginalized ogre. When Fiona learns that Shrek has been transformed by a magic potion, she mistakes Puss for him, asking him if he is Shrek. In a parody of the Latin lover's constant wooing of women, Puss replies, "For you, baby, I could be." In the final standoff at the castle between Shrek and his adversaries, Puss proves his nobility, holding off several soldiers with his skillful swordsmanship to allow Shrek to be reunited with Fiona. To eliminate any doubt as to his ethnicity, Puss leads the celebration at the film's conclusion with a rousing version of Ricky Martin's "Livin' la Vida Loca."

The one sobering note in the generally lighthearted and sympathetic portrayal of the Puss character as an animated Zorro is in a scene that occurs when Shrek, Donkey, and Puss are on their way to the ball toward the end of the narrative. Before they near the castle, they are intercepted by royal guards, who imprison them before Pinocchio and others help them escape and continue their adventure. During the arrest, Puss is searched, and drugs fall from his pocket. This episode is out of place in a comic film largely directed at

children. Far more damaging, however, is its anachronistic transposing of a modern-day negative stereotype of Latinos as inveterate drug smugglers to a fairy tale set in the Middle Ages. For all the humor and charm afforded to the portrayal of Puss, he is ultimately represented as a criminal, even after the point in the narrative when he has made good his initial lack of judgment in serving as the king's assassin.

To conclude, the continued relevance of the social bandit myth is clearly demonstrated by *The Cisco Kid* and *The Mask of Zorro*. Both films show how initially flawed or directionless characters can realize their potential to avenge the suffering endured by a subaltern community and in so doing become worthy heroes and role models. *The Cisco Kid* represents a parallel development to that of Ritchie in *La Bamba* in that the very qualities that Ritchie suppresses in order to succeed in North America become those that he treasures after his journey to Mexico, which leads him to create a version of the song that becomes a crossover hit emblematic of a positive cultural hybridity. Similarly, Cisco learns to appreciate his Mexican heritage and use it to his advantage in order to form a more meaningful identity. Despite its heavily ironic tone and its problematic and stereotypical representation of Puss as a drug smuggler, *Shrek II* does not diminish the importance of the Latino washbuckler as a social bandit who comes to the aid of an oppressed minority. The vibrancy of the Zorro myth in particular is suggested not only by its appropriation in *Shrek II* but also by the fact that a sequel to the film is currently being made and that no less an author than Isabel Allende has based her latest work, *Zorro: A Novel* (HarperCollins, 2005), on the development of the legend. The greatest achievement of the postmodern caballero films lies in their resurrection and radical updating of heroic sagas that point a way forward for Chicano resistance.

Notes

¹ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit and Other Plays* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1992), 97.

² Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Abacus, 2000), 162.

³ In *Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends*, ed. David R. Maciel, Isidro D. Ortiz, and María Herrera-Sobek (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Todd Everett, "The Cisco Kid," *Variety*, January 31-February 6, 1994, 66.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See the Society's Web page at home.earthlink.net/~rggsibiba/html/sib/sib6.html-8k.

⁹ Leah Rozen, Tom Gliatto, et al., "The Mask of Zorro," *People Weekly*, July 27, 1998, 35.

¹⁰ Richard Schickel, "The Mark of Excitement," Review of *The Mask of Zorro*, *Time*, July 20, 1998, 62.

¹¹ David Ansen, *Newsweek*, July 20, 1998, 66.

¹² Schickel, 62.

¹³ María Herrera-Sobek, in *Entre la magia y la historia: tradiciones, mitos y leyendas de la frontera*, José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, ed. (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1992), 163-174.

¹⁴ Herrera-Sobek, 172 (my translation).

¹⁵ My thanks to Gary Keller for this insightful observation.