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Hidden in Plain Sight: Cinematic Legacies of the Western, Greaser Cinema, and
Chicanx Literature

By

Robert López Reyes

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Genaro Padilla, Chair
Professor Hertha D. Sweet Wong
Professor Ivonne Del Valle

Summer 2020

Abstract

Hidden in Plain Sight: Cinematic Legacies of the Western, Greaser Cinema, and

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Professor Genaro Padilla, Chair

When D.W. Griffith began filming *The Greaser's Gauntlet* in 1908, no one could have predicted that he would create an enduring character. This dissertation explores the history of the greaser character and its influence in American and Chicanx Literature. Beginning with *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, this study traces the greaser character and illuminates the history of greaser cinema in several films, including: *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914) and *Licking the Greaser's* (1914/1918). The dissertation then argues that the images produced in these films are essential to establishing racialized representations of Mexican and Latinx characters in the U.S. film industry and in the social sphere. Next, the dissertation investigates artistic responses to the greaser character. In particular, the dissertation examines four novels—Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust* (1939), José Antonio Villareal's *Pocho* (1959), Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973)—to show how creative writers have reimagined and critiqued the character in their fictions.

For Stephanie and Robert Aaron

with love

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Preface

"Where's Mecca"?

"It's out in the desert"

—Bruce Dern to Peter Fonda in *The Wild Angels* (1966)

I've tried to write a preface several times now, but it's taken me more than a few attempts to figure out what to say, or more importantly: how to begin. So, here it is. But first, a story (or two):

In the mid-1980s, the city of Coachella named a street "Lorenza Lane," to honor the late Lorenza Villanueva Reyes. She was my great-grandmother: a proud El Pasoan (and *Tejana*), whose family had emigrated west, from Louisiana. To the people of Coachella and its surrounding communities, she was called *Doña Lorenza*. I am told that she was a great *curandera* (a healer), and a generous soul who was revered by many. She was only thirteen when she married my great-grandfather Felipe Reyes—a seasoned veteran of the Mexican Revolution. They packed up our family and moved west to California.

In some ways, the street sign is ironic, given that my great-grandmother was also illiterate. She signed her name with an "X." Usually, my great-grandmother's "X" was accompanied by my grandmother's signature, Armida Tapía Reyes, followed by a statement to verify her identity to a bank teller: "I certify that this is the 'X' of Lorenza Villanueva Reyes—in my grandmother's most elegant cursive.

Once, my father told me a story about great-grandmother, about how during the Great Depression, she would bring extra food for the hungry children she encountered starving in the fields. The Reyes-Villanueva clan (as my father calls our family) were farm workers, laboring in the fields and orchards of the Southwest. They were survivors, too, much like the children of the "Okie Exodus" that my great-grandmother fed. Those were hard times.

I think about that story now. It's powerful; it nearly brings me to tears every time I think about it—about her. And it's fascinating to consider how one small detail can yield so much insight about a person. As I said, I heard this story from my father, who heard it from his *Nana*. I believe it's true. I mean, *I want to believe it's true*.

Here's the thing: a few years ago, I was watching John Ford's adaptation of Steinbeck's great novel of that era, *The Grapes of Wrath*, featuring the inimitable Henry Fonda. There's a scene in the movie that reminds me of my father's story. In the scene, Ma Joad feeds the hungry children who are starving at a labor camp. She does this though her family has little to spare. In this moment, the Joad's teach us about dignity. Though they're not starving like the children, they surely recall other times when they were. Another moment in the scene also seems familiar. As the children stand in line, Ma Joad rebuffs a man who cuts the line, and shoos him away.

After I saw the film, I couldn't help but wonder about the story my father recalled. I couldn't help but wonder how much of the story he had heard, and how much he had possibly fabricated over the years? Stories can be tricky like memories. Maybe, one day I'll ask my father about this coincidence. I doubt I'll get a straight answer. Perhaps I shouldn't expect one. Coincidentally, my father has been asking me to find him a copy of Ford's *Grapes of Wrath*.

* * *

Movies have always been central to my family. In my family, movies were used to mark special occasions. Birthdays were not birthdays without a trip to the movies. I spent many evenings at the drive-in, dozing off at the end of a triple feature. Though I'd try to stay awake for all the programs, I'd usually fall asleep just as the final picture was rolling. I'd crawl into the back of my parent's Dodge station wagon, while Richard Pryor was beginning his set.

We went to the movies as a family and we went often. Our uncles and aunts took us, too, as did our grandparents. It's not an overstatement to say that we were a movie-watching-family. In the 1980s, Video Cassette Recorders (VCRs) came into mass production, and this pastime became even more cemented. Soon, we began renting movies at video stores, which were opening across the nation. Each summer my sister and I would visit our grandparents in Coachella and watch many of the hundreds of movies they taped.

In many ways, this dissertation was written as an ode to my family's love of movies.

Acknowledgements

When I arrived to Cal in the Fall of 2004, I never would have imagined that I'd be a UC graduate three-times-over. I had visited the campus the previous winter with my parents and sister. I remember that trip fondly, because I got lost during what was an especially frigid winter. I stayed at the Shattuck Hotel and no one could tell me *how to get to campus*. I found it, eventually. And then I got lost trying to find Amoeba Records. Over the years, I would walk the same path—between Valley Life Sciences Building and the Chancellor's House—and laugh. Looking back, I realize how fortunate I am. I have such fond memories of Berkeley and I've made many friends and acquaintances.

No one completes a PhD without help. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the people who helped me along the way. First and foremost, I'd like to thank the members of my dissertation committee who supported me through the dissertation process. Of course, any mistakes or oversights are mine, and mine alone.

I'd like to thank my mentor and dissertation chair, Professor Genaro Padilla. Thank you for taking me on as your student. You helped get me on track when I was floundering in the department, and you saw me through to the end. *Gracias Profe!*

A huge abrazo to Professor Hertha D. Sweet Wong, who I met in my first year of graduate school. Thank you for always being an example of how to be an intellectual, artist, and student advocate. I owe you dearly.

I'd also like to thank Professor Ivonne Del Valle: for graciously taking me on as your student, first in Spanish, and then for the dissertation. I owe you more than words.

To all the *Profe's* who've inspired me over the years: the late (but not forgotten) Alfred Arteaga, Marcial González, Fred Aldama, Ray Telles, José Saldívar, Laura Pérez, Donna Jones, Sue Schweik, Jeffery Knapp, David Landreth, Cecil Giscombe, Scott Saul, Robert Allen, Jennifer Miller, and the great Don McQuade. Thank you all!

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A big thanks to all the people and who held me up and gave me words of encouragement. There are too many to name, though I would like to thank my fellow musician and partner-in-crime: Dr. Alex Sabogál.

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Of course, I wouldn't be here without my parents: to my mother Irma Yolanda Reyes and my father Robert Tapía Reyes II. Thank you for giving me life, bread, and love.

To my sister Jessica: thanks for always lending me your ear.

To my second parents, Martha Muñoz and Luis Ramírez Sr: thank you for coming into my life and always treating me like a second son. I'd also like to thank my brother-in-law, Luis Jr., Sophie and the children: Brianna, Izi, and baby Zadie.

To my grandparents, both living and alive in the ether: Armida and Robert V. Reyes I, and Enriqueta and Job López. Thanks for always being a loving presence in my life.

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Finally, I'd like to thank my wife, Stephanie Reyes: for standing by me throughout this entire endeavor. I am forever grateful to have such a loving partner and I could not have gotten through this program without you. Along the way, our son, Robert Aaron Reyes (IV) was born and has grown up in the shadow of UC. I hope this experience carries you forward into a bright future. I love you both dearly.

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Introduction: Remembering Greaser Cinema

The Mexican is the oldest villain in cinema.

—Chon Noriega in *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in American Cinema* (2003)

When we are in the dark, in the movies, it is as if the hand of god proffers to us via the silver screen (and now, in the twenty-first century, the plasma screen, a shining fabric with iridescent, tumescent threads), the face of god, or, at the very least, his proxy gods and goddesses.

And he hands us devils and bandits as well.

—William Anthony Nericcio's *Tex{t}-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America* (2007)

"Hey, you know that movie *Touch of Evil* is playing near my hotel. We could go check it out if you want? Go watch Charlton Heston be a Mexican"

—Chili Palmer to Karen Flores in *Get Shorty* (1995)

In Barry Sonnenfeld's adaptation of Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty* (1995), John Travolta plays Chili Palmer: a loan shark who becomes a movie producer. Palmer is a storied character whose adoration and knowledge of American cinema is rivaled by his performance as a smooth no-nonsense-good fella. He goes to Hollywood on assignment (in pursuit of a collection) and becomes enamored with the city and with the prospect of making a movie. True to Leonard's vision, *Get Shorty* is an exemplar of L.A. noir crime drama, and an homage to the genre. A celebration of noir and a veritable film-with-in-a-film, *Get Shorty's* allusions to Hollywood's golden age eventually collapse: Palmer (the-would-be mafioso) becomes more interested in the movie version of himself; the film produces a similar outcome when it coalesces in the final scene and becomes a filmset directed by the legendary Penny Marshall. All the characters are replaced with other a-list actors. Travolta's Chili Palmer becomes a highly idiosyncratic Danny DeVito. Dennis Farina plays Ray "Bones" Barboni, starring as one of Palmer's main antagonists. At the end of the scene, however, he morphs into the venerable mob-everyman, Harvey Keitel.

Sonnenfeld's film recalls the great duos of Hollywood's golden age. Nowhere is this more evident than when Palmer invites Karen Flores to see a screening of Orson Welles's crime drama *Touch of Evil* (1958). Flores, played by Renee Russo, stars as a disillusioned "B"-movie actress. Palmer ingratiates himself to Flores by recalling his favorite performances of her movies. The two share a moment and exude "chemistry" in a manner that reprises great romantic duos like Bogey and Bacall. After which, Palmer invites Flores to the movies, to see "Charlton Heston play a Mexican." Though she declines in the moment, Flores arrives to the storied Capitan Theater at the end of the movie; she enters the theaters and she spies Travolta as he mouths the final exchange between Hank Quinlan and Tanya (Orson Welles and Marlene Dietrich): the black-and-white palate of noir cinema and a heavily stylized mise-en-scène, which includes fog

and several closeups. In this moment, Flores acknowledges Palmer's absolute love of the movies, and in doing so, seems less disillusioned with the industry. *Get Shorty's* allusion to *Touch of Evil* is significant given Welles' own fraught history with the movie industry. Welles never made another studio picture in Hollywood after *Touch of Evil*. After filming, the studio relinquished Welles's authority and edited the movie without him.¹ These details seem to complicate *Get Shorty's* allusion to the film, and what Flores registers in Chili Palmer's adoration of the movies.

In its diversion and folly, *Get Shorty's* self-referentiality speaks to the issue of race in the movie industry, especially as it concerns the portrayal of Mexican-ness in "Hollywood." On this basis, I want to argue that Travolta's invitation—to see Charlton Heston "be a Mexican"—is more complex given Hollywood's legacy of racism. To put the matter differently, let's examine the movies stills and poster above. Considering that more than half of the characters are scripted to be ethnically Mexican, what does it mean that all the characters are played by white actors?

These criticisms notwithstanding, both films offer an incisive commentary on the movie industry and on how race is at work. Prominent Chicano film critic William Nericcio calls Welles' *Touch of Evil* a "border text" and a "precursor to Chicano Border Narratives," arguing that the film delicately balances narratives of contamination (56). For Nericcio, the film "reinforces predictable stereotypes" (57), but it does so in order to manipulate the audience's (moviegoers) expectation, and to examine the "nuances of difference that self-consciously derail previous Hollywood stereotypes" (57). This is true enough in Heston's character, a Mexican narcotics agent Ramon Miguel "Mike" Vargas, whose character is demonstrably virtuous vis-à-vis the fallen American detective Quinlan (played by Welles). In light of the racial nuances *Touch of Evil* evokes, it's clear that Chili Palmer's invitation to "see Charlton Heston play a Mexican" mimes a broader tradition of racial performance in Hollywood. In the final assessment, *Get Shorty* is a masterful homage to noir films like *Touch of Evil* and to Hollywood's relationship to Mexican-ness or what I call "Greaser Cinema": a recognition of the film industry's relegation of Mexican-ness to villainy, offering highly stylized and racialized characters central to the earliest *American* movies. While the term emphasizes the so-called "greaser" films from 1908 to 1918, the term—Greaser Cinema—is also meant to consider the legacy of these pictures, and the subsequent iterations of the greaser character that remains to the present.

The greaser character came into prominence some ten years earlier, though under similar conditions, and became the earliest representation of what it meant to be Mexican in the movies, thus influencing popular culture and those reductive images in the American zeitgeist. To be sure, the reliance on race and ethnicity in movies was a kind of convenient "shorthand" used to tell stories with the "new" medium, which was rudimentary at best and being innovated at every turn.² These films relied on ready-made stereotypes and re-invented them alongside renewed heroes like the cowboy.³

In this dissertation, I take up the greaser character vis-à-vis some of the protagonists of the film industry: D.W. Griffith, Francis Ford, and Broncho Billy Anderson. Though some would ultimately prove more influential, each was an

innovative film maker and visionary in their own right. And, each would have a hand in sculpting greaser cinema at a time when the film industry was more of loose web of aspiring directors. It was indeed a cottage industry before the great mergers of the 1920s and the consolidation of power by larger studios like MGM, Warner Bros, and Twentieth Century Fox became powerbrokers and kingmakers.

Though the characters and genres are of the same family, I distinguish between the greaser film and the serial Western, at least provisionally, in order to disentangle the “greaser character” and illuminate his legacy, first in film, and later in literature. As Garcia-Riera, the great historian of Mexican cinema recounts in *México Visto Por El Cine Extranjero* the greaser character preceded the serial cowboy (23). If the villain precedes the hero in the Western, as Garcia-Riera’s claim suggests, then the implications for the greaser character, and for what I’m calling “greaser cinema” are consequential, showing how the genres and corresponding characters were also malleable, and less formulaic than today. Moreover, we can grapple with what the Western means ideologically in the history of cinema, and perhaps in the American psyche as a whole.

To a broad extent, the serial Western film would come to represent the ongoing legacy of U.S. expansionism, and the imperial “eye” of the American gaze, by rehearsing and revising the story of “manifest destiny”: the American genocidal campaign that would uproot and displace nations of Native Americans, before making its way to California by 1848, and westward into the Pacific, to places like Hawaii and Samoa.⁴ It is in this context that the greaser character came to prominence, alongside other racialized characters, to include representations of African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. This dissertation will bracket these representations of otherness, save for a few occasions, in order to tell the story of greaser cinema and its legacy through the present.

The Greaser’s Return to the Big Screen

In 1972, Robert Downey Sr. directed and produced *Greaser’s Palace*: an off-beat “acid Western,” satirizing the life of Christ.⁵ Now considered a cult-classic, *Greaser’s Palace* is significant for another reason. It was the first time the word “greaser” was used as part of a movie title in more than 60 years, since the release of *Guns and Greasers* in 1918.⁶ Of course, one of the central points this dissertation grapples with is that greaser cinema was never wholly abolished, except in name. The character actually grew larger in stature with the rise of the serial Western, and in other, subsequent representations of Mexican-ness, which include the Latin lover. This is but one of many contradictions at work: the idea of erasing and effacing the character, in name only. Under these terms, I assert that the greaser is a kind of “ur image” in the history of American cinema.

According to film historian Margarita de Orellana, the greaser film categorically casts Mexican characters as villains. In doing so, de Orellana argues that American cinema suffers from what she calls “la mirada circular,” which roughly translates to the

“circular gaze.” De Orellana develops this thesis, arguing that this phenomenon in U.S. film represents the “history of America’s own self-image and the transformations of America’s imaginings of Mexico” (120-1). With de Orellana’s thesis in mind, I argue that the greaser character represents the apex of what Mexican-ness signifies in the American imagination in terms of otherness and social negation. This includes what I’ll identify as the greaser character’s malleability so that no villains appear the same. This dissertation will show how the same features that, ironically are established in film, are also to be found in art, politics, and literature.

I couch my discussion of the greaser character in Chicana Literature and movies, which, though an antecedent, became synonymous with the Western serial film. I examine the so-called greaser character, and how he emerged from 19th-century California regional Literature with the likes of Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* (1884): a novel that offers a romantic vision of Southern California in the aftermath of the US-Mexican War. This is one of the primary observations that David Seed makes when he begins *Cinematic Fictions*: his study of American modernism and the invention of cinema. Of his guiding premise, Seed writes, “This book asks a simple question: given their fascination with the new medium of film, did American novelists attempt to apply cinematic methods in their own writings” (1)? He answers in the affirmative and begins to trace this discourse of the cinematic within the literary.

Observing Seed’s argument that literature and cinema are engaged in a process of convergence, this dissertation makes a critical intervention in his argument to raise questions and show how *race* is also at work, especially given that greaser cinema offers a dominant image of Mexican-ness. One of my core questions rests on the extent to which Chicana literature and the “greaser film” have a shared history? This question gets at the broader point of the convergence of film and literature in the 20th Century. I make this very case in my initial assessment of Griffith’s film and its relation to his later blockbuster: *The Birth of a Nation*. In terms of the literary shift, I argue that the character became foundational for the Western, finding its way into American literature, proper, including Chicana literature. As such, we can trace a line between Américo Paredes and the epic *corrido* tradition, and José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho*, up through the Chicano Movement of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and the subsequent literary movement that emerged. In addition to scholarship that has persuasively argued about the role that the Chicano Movement had in shaping Chicana literature, I argue that Chicana literature—and American literature more generally—bear a closer relationship to the film industry than previously acknowledged.

I examine these coordinates through the term “greaser cinema,” in order to demonstrate how the character rose to prominence in the silent movies, beginning with D.W. Griffith’s *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* (1908), and the subsequent ten-year period that follows. I begin chapter one by showing how the term “greaser” was embedded in the law and became a synonym for “Mexican-ness” in the regional literature of California. I turn to the greaser film proper and argue that the groundwork was set for the film to emerge, as it does, as one of the first genres that is eventually codified into the serial Western movie. In addition to Griffith’s film, I examine Francis Ford’s *Licking the*

Greasers (1914) and Broncho Billy Anderson's eponymous *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914). I contend that these early films came to form a genre in their own right, before mounting domestic and international pressure by the Mexican government succeeded in turning the movie industry's hand. That ten-year period between 1908 and 1918 was crucial to forming the image of the greaser, and cementing that image in film, and onto the literary imagination, to reproduce what I call "the abduction scene": a moment where a white woman is abducted by a man of color. All of the narratives in this study include a version of the abduction scene.

To illustrate this shift from film to literature, chapter two picks up with Nathanael West's novel, *Day of the Locust* (1939). *Day of the Locust* is imbued with cinematic qualities including the innovation of the soundfilm around 1929. This feature aptly distinguishes the lot of characters, most of whom remain floundering performers of the earlier age, especially the narrator and protagonist Tod Hackett, who is also marked by the historical repression of the author. To the core argument, I'm interested in the novel's reliance on bit characters from the silent era, especially Miguel: the "Mexican" character who becomes the novel's villain. As I argue, Miguel's character serves a crucial, though convenient role of antagonist, especially juxtaposed with Earle the Cowboy, and the novel's generic "love" triangle, which replicates a version of the "abduction scene." In the end, both Miguel and Earle disappear from the novel all together, but not before fulfilling a version of the generic Western plot. At the end of this chapter, I make the case that Miguel's trajectory reflects currents in the movie industry and should be read in context of the greaser film in transition to the Latin lover film.

In chapter three I continue this examination of "greaser cinema" and literature with José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho*, to show how discourses of depravity shift to a politics of acceptance and inclusion, while being denied, nonetheless. While the novel is less fantastic than the former, it is also imbued with the cinema in the manner it replicates conventions of the Western serial film. This anxiety with genre is continued in the novelistic conflict and struggle for narrative authority in the protagonists, and father and son: Juan and Richard Rubio. In addition to *Pocho's* fragmentation, I take up the novel as a Chicana literary response to the "greaser film," marked by the history of Mexican Revolution, and the plight of Mexican American agrarian labor in the southwest. At the end of which, I examine a brief, though telling, "silence" in the novel. As the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot tells us about the production of history: "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will very accordingly. In *Pocho*, I highlight a silence that is revealed in the family's migration to California, concerning Juan Rubio's involvement in the Western movies: a feature that I consider in light of his penchant for visiting movie houses and drive-ins.

The fourth and final chapter takes on the controversial novels of Oscar Zeta Acosta, and his subversive take on greaser cinema. What's striking about Acosta's version of the greaser character is how his own protagonist and narrative strategy observes a version of Nathanael West's (Westean) masquerade, which is also a prominent narrative strategy that characterizes Acosta's version of Gonzo journalism.

Here, I drill down on the character's strategy of masquerade, or fooling his audience. This same narrative strategy, I argue, has its origins in the movies, especially in the greaser character, and the broader representation of such characters, from the greaser to the Latin lover.

Finally, this dissertation takes on this history of greaser cinema proper and in literature to raise a question about archive and literacy: What does it mean to look at literature through the aperture of cinema? How have Mexican Americans, or Chicanx/Latinx communities historically looked to movies to tell stories, to remember, to reconcile their status as diasporic figures from the Mexican Revolution, to the many U.S.-backed interventions, from the War of 1898, to the interventions of the 1980's? In what ways has the cinema reflected these historical currents? How does greaser cinema presage these events, to include prevalent attitudes and policies? This project resides at the intersection of an observation that film and literature are converging, but also that this phenomenon has much to do with war and its perpetuation of those mediums in the public sphere.

Chapter One

Synonyms of “the Mexican”: Greaser Cinema and the Visual Legacies of the Serial Western

The Biograph Company, pursuant of its policy of studying the public's taste, produced some weeks ago “The Redman and the Child,” a story of Western life among the Indians, and “The Greaser's Gauntlet,” a tale of the Mexican border. The unprecedented success of those two subjects induced us to present another, which in locale may be said to combine the elements of both those pictures, the resultant being the production of the most thrilling and soul-stirring film ever made. The scenic splendor of the picture will alone commend it to popular favor, besides which there is a rapid succession of the most exciting and novel incidents ever incorporated into a moving picture story.

—“Moving Picture World” on the premier of the movie, “The Red Girl” (September 19, 1908/ Vol. 3. Number 12)

It is likely that this stereotypical image was not intended as a direct attack on the character of all Mexicans. The American film-makers used the ‘greaser’ as a symbol for a representative foreigner, as the ‘other.’ And whilst they degraded the other, Americans implicitly cloaked themselves with virtue. But this portrayal was not born with cinema, for many of the characteristics used to portray Mexicans on screen had been inherited to a great extent from nineteenth-century American literature, which helped to embed the stereotype. For some writers, the Mexican was seen as the descendent of a once great, but now humbled civilisation, whose subjugation over centuries had resulted in the abject race of today. (114)

—Margarita De Orellana's *La Mirada Circular* published in English as *Filming Pancho*.

A trip to the Movies in 1908

Light is filtered on a screen. It flickers rapidly, before coming into focus. A man emerges. He is standing on a hillside with his arms outstretched regally. His mouth moves, revealing a narrow black space between his lips. He appears to be saying something jovial, though his eyes appear slovenly at moments. He waves goodbye to his mother and descends down-hill. The scene then moves to a saloon interior, which the man enters, taking up a table next to three gold prospectors—all raucously engrossed in a card game.

Until now, you've never seen a moving picture. You're mesmerized by the flickering images that light up the screen. Meanwhile, our hero is perched at his table, staring blithely into space. He is oblivious to the impending doom. Only the audience can see the plot against José unfold. The Chinese barkeep, played by an Anglo man in prosthetics and makeup, boosts money from a forty-niner's handkerchief, and then places it near José's feet. You marvel at the spectacle and at the people moving about the screen. And you're riveted by the sequence that follows: when José is accused of theft, then taken out by a mob to be lynched.

This opening scene is from D.W. Griffith's *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908). It stands as one of Griffith's earliest films and represents the first of many such greaser films made between 1908 and 1918. For modern cinephiles, these films provide a window to the past, offering the possibility of better understanding the world as it was, then. So, too, do these periodicals of the time, with names like "The Moving World Picture," make that world accessible. They also contain the promise of approximating what that experience of going to the movies may have been like for the earliest audiences. Such films implore us to imagine a time when movies were so new that they were novelties. These films were distinguished by their villains—so-called greasers—many of whom were identified by other synonyms, like "Mexicans" and "half-breeds." More importantly, they offer a view of life—of those most prevalent beliefs, values, and attitudes—in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth Century.

W.E.B. Du Bois famously said that the main issue of the twentieth century was the "problem of the colorline." What unfolds in his dissertation, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is the first study of African American life after the Civil War, beginning with political gains that were rescinded during Reconstruction. In *Souls* Du Bois theorizes race in America, through this concept of double consciousness, and the trope of the veil.¹ To be sure, Du Bois's "colorline" is a sophisticated analysis of blackness, especially through his analysis of songs, "negro spirituals," which presage each chapter. These negro spirituals, which were largely generational songs passed on during slavery, were among the first to be recorded, and consumed by a mass audience, to be sung across the nation. They represent some of the earliest expressions of American popular music.

Du Bois's masterful study sets a precedent for studying race and other forms of cultural production by marrying it to history. Thus, his second chapter on "Reconstruction" provides a trenchant account of American life after the Civil War and the broken promises by the nation to redress slavery. It also anticipates the retrograde movement to thwart these efforts with the creation of "Jim Crow" ordinances and laws, establishing a legalese for second-tier citizenship for Black people. Of course, the name "Jim Crow" was already significant in the American imagination and in music of the nation. Jim Crow was an established character in the Minstrel tradition, which is also one of the main foundations of American Popular Music.² Eric Lott's account of Jim Crow offers a history of the character while illuminating the point that the character precedes the legislation. In a similar manner, the greaser character came to name legislation in California.

As Margarita de Orellana asserts, the greaser character was a foil for the American moving-going public, who, she argues, upon seeing themselves on the big screen, could "cloak themselves in virtue," and be cast as eternal protagonists. This feature is central to the Western, and it is discernable in the manner that the greaser as villain precedes the cowboy as hero. Indeed, the greaser, along with other racialized characters, was essential to the establishment of formal conventions of the genre, situating the contours of good and evil, and then reproducing and formalizing these features in hundreds of short films. For Cedric Robinson, this foil of the greaser-cowboy

is part and parcel of the new whiteness that continues to be reinvented to fit the exigencies of life.

This dissertation will reimagine the Western film, and its relationship to literature, especially Chicana literature, in terms of this originary greaser character. This argument is an act of recovery in that I'm trying to "remember" what I'm calling greaser cinema—to recall a time when it was the most popular genre—in order to historicize the legacy of such films, and their influence, which is also foundational to the Western proper and to the creation of the serial cowboy protagonist. In framing the terms of this argument with the term "greaser cinema," I consider the relationship between the cowboy and the greaser in three films, while examining more generic features, including the abduction scene. I also invert each respective greaser character, so that they "face one another," figuratively speaking, in order to examine their vicissitudes and to show how they vary from film to film. One central aspect of greaser cinema is the fact of the greaser character's malleability: the way in which the character morphs between films. It follows that the greaser character is essentially palimpsestic, a composite character with roots in the legal sphere as well as in the artistic vision and the ideological scope of 19th-century American literature. To recall de Orellana's language, it's not only that American Anglos "cloak themselves in virtue," but that, in social-historical practice and permutation of the character, there is an articulation of racial otherness that is foundational to the nation.

By historicizing greaser films, I will tell a story of Mexican racialization in the Southwest by revisiting a story that is often assumed but needs to be refined and retold. This is especially true of the character's legacy, and its influence on other discourses and forms. The greaser's malleability indicates one such prominent cinematic legacy: the greaser is malleable in terms of physical features like visage and general irascibility, but also in the very terms of how he is identified. The fact that he is called and interpolated by such names—as *greaser*, *half-breed*, *savage*, and *Mexican*—demonstrates this legacy. In this chapter, I'll explore the nuances of what I call greaser cinema: a term that helps contextualize such films, by emphasizing the racial dimensions of the character. Ultimately, I claim the greaser's malleability as the character's most dominant trait also happens to illustrate the hegemonic racial politics of the day. In this way, the greaser character has been historically situated to "erase" racial boundaries, illustrating what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call "colorblindness." To be clear, this attempt at ideological erasure is an impossibility. The greaser's malleability has the opposite effect: reshaping and comporting the character to fit the story, while perpetuating entrenched racial categories, and magnifying them exponentially. This feature coupled with the influence of cinema, maintains hegemony over the ocular, and wields its authority by projecting that image across the globe.

To give one example of this phenomenon, recall the earlier reference to Du Bois. Du Bois's theory of race and his theory of double consciousness, is one likely predecessor to more contemporary studies of visual culture. Fifty years after Du Bois, Franz Fanon's groundbreaking *Black Skin, White Masks* would establish the foundations of critical race studies, and Ethnic Studies, by considering race as a

consequence of colonization(s). Fanon's work centers on the black male body as the center of its study and then traces how the black subject endures a series of philosophical (phenomenological) positions. Like Du Bois's study of music, Fanon would make a similar inquiry in his juxtaposition of these positionalities, including representations of blackness in French and American novels and film. Fanon's text yields a particularly incisive moment regarding his blackness while entering a movie theater. On this topic, Fanon writes: "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me" (40). Fanon's discussion of the movie theater serves as a metaphor for racial optics and what it means to be a racialized black subject. According to the Fanonian scholar, Maurice O. Wallace, Fanon is calling for the "end of monocularity" and for a "a new ontology of sight, one which liberates slave from master and master from himself" (177-78). Fanon's emphasis on the space of the movie theater to convey this vision is indicative of the influence movies have, especially given the emphasis on visuality.

Movies recapitulated the events of the 19th Century, including U.S. expansionism west to California, throughout the Pacific, then by controlling hemispheric relations (with the Monroe Doctrine). Even more insidiously, the Western is a hegemonic genre that fosters imperial ambitions, while articulating national sentiments about race. As we'll see, Griffith's films provide an important touchstone, as the creator of some of the most influential films of the era. In this dissertation, I argue that greaser cinema has a more profound legacy than it is often given credit for. According to Chicana film historian Laura Serna:

'greaser' films of the late teens and early twenties served a number of ideological functions. They assured U.S. audiences of their racial superiority at a moment of massive Mexican immigration to the United States, justified discriminatory practices, and fueled American economic imperialist impulses toward their neighbor to the South. ("As a Mexican I Feel it's my Duty," 8).

This was true enough in the 1910's, when, according to Serna, the Mexican Consulate proved successful in waging a boycott of American films, upending the popular greaser genre. This dissertation is an attempt to begin to historicize these films, to evaluate their legacy by charting how the character continued to live on, morphing into other versions in film and also in literature. My aim is to show how some of these iterations of the greaser character are constructed and taken up in a critical manner, all while illuminating lines of criticism, and by dissecting the image—face first.

"All persons who are commonly known as Greasers"

To return to José from *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, when we last saw him, he was just about to be framed, abducted and lynched. Lynching remains one of the most provocative conventions of the Western, both in literature and film. The act of lynching speaks to the rule of law and to the normalization of state sanctioned violence. There is something arresting about seeing José before the act. And there is something that

shocks us more generally in visualizing the practice as it unfolds on screen. John Rollin Ridge's narrator from *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murrieta* (1854) captures a similar sentiment, writing:

The time-honored custom of choking a man to death was soon put into practice, and the robber stood on nothing, kicking at empty space. Bah! it is a sight that I never like to see, although I have been civilized for a good many years. (138)

Rollin Ridge's words remind modern readers of the spectacle of violence that lynching generates, and of the repugnance of watching death unfold during the first years of California's statehood, in 1850, immediately following the US-Mexican War. Of course, lynching is a practice more often associated with the tactics used to terrorize African Americans before and after the Emancipation Proclamation. But, as Ken Gonzalez-Day reveals in his study, *Lynching in the Southwest*, the practice of lynching Mexicans was more common than often acknowledged (9).³ This is true of José: Griffith's version of the "greaser" character. He is one of three such characters we'll meet in the course of this chapter, and stands as one of the first depictions of that image to a mass audience, which is transmitted broadly to inform a global public of what it means to be "Mexican" in the U.S., and abroad.⁴

This sight of the "greaser" being murdered—and the attendant violence that results in the Borderlands of *Alta California*—largely frames the following argument and guiding questions: what is the relationship between the nation and violence, to include state sanctioned violence but also the symbolic violence that informs such narratives? And what is the legacy of films like *The Greaser's Gauntlet* and the greaser character more generally? In what ways do these films inform the present? What is the relationship and potential interplay of these films to cinematic and literary histories? To what extent do these early images initiate a Chicana/Latina tradition of visual cultures? These questions are crucial given the fact that the subject of lynching outside of the American South has been often been obscured by hegemonic histories of the nation, and by attempts to erase such practices altogether.⁵ In response to similar questions, Gonzalez-Day draws from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, and writes how: "Foucault insists that one must analyze methods of punishment, including capital punishment, not merely as consequences of legislation or as indicators of social structures but as proof that power is systemically dispersed" (24). For Gonzalez-Day "[this] principal holds true in California, where the public display of lynch victims and those legally executed continued until the final years of the nineteenth century, yet the impact of racial bias within these histories was masked; a realization that confirms not only that power is systemically dispersed but that it can be measured on the branches of each hang tree" (24). Indeed, one of the author's first tasks in *Lynching* is to identify these locales ("hang trees") along with the records of those that were lynched, and to aggregate that information, especially along racial lines.

With these questions in mind, this chapter will visit the legacy of Mexican representation in U.S. film, in the genre of "greaser cinema," including the three films I examine, here: *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908) by D.W. Griffith; *Shorty's Trip to Mexico*

(1914), retitled as *Licking the Greasers* (1918), directed by Francis Ford. The final title is from the (pre)Western series, called *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914), eponymously directed by Broncho Billy Anderson.⁶ These films, which I provisionally date from 1908 to 1918 represent some of the first attempts at representing *Mexicanos* on the silver screen.⁷ I argue that these early depictions of the greaser and its synonyms simultaneously mark the emergence of the Western film.⁸ With these “greaser” films, I will show how the Western was constructed on notions of Mexican villainy, and that the racial formations found on the screen largely come to concretize what it means to be of Mexican descent. To this end, I proceed by examining the greaser character and several plotlines to demonstrate that character’s centrality to the Western film, and ultimately to American and Chicana literatures.⁹ I also turn to historians and critical race scholars to sketch an account of the greaser as he unfolds from the legal sphere to the “common sense” of U.S. imperialism to include the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and what Carey McWilliams has called the memory of California as a Spanish Fantasy Heritage.¹⁰ I argue that these racial discourses are foundational to the movies of the silent era, including D.W. Griffith’s magnum opus, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). I begin by contextualizing the greaser, then by considering Griffith’s legacy, so that I can then frame the three greaser films to show how they replicate the abduction scene. This strategy will allow me to provide a picture of the greaser character and corroborate my central claim: the greaser character is most distinguished by malleability. Each of the greaser characters I examine look significantly different from one another.

The opening scenes of *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* broach the topic of lynching almost as soon as the camera gets rolling. In doing so, the film performs that major innovation of the motion picture: the chase scene. Parallel action begins in the next frame, with the juxtaposition of Mildred and the inner world of the bar, followed by José as he is accosted by assailants. José’s face registers this action, going from blithe ignorance to absolute terror. He is lambasted, berated by an angry mob, and forced to drink alcohol. Terrorized, José looks on as a noose is circled around his face, secured around his neck; the camera zooms out just as he begins his assent. Mildred intervenes before it’s too late, announces his innocence, and cuts him down with her own knife. As it turns out, the knife is one of the major symbols that unites the storyline. To be sure, José’s lynching raises a number of questions about the treatment of Mexicans, including those of populations of the Southwest, who found themselves American citizens overnight on February 2nd, 1848, only to be brutalized for generations. The act of lynching also forces us to think of this kind of violence in the western frontier—the borderlands. But we must also think about the act more critically in order to grapple with the symbolic violence that also comes with the erasure of these very acts from those official or state sanctioned narratives. The first raises a number of other questions. Namely, what does it mean that these first filmed images that signify Mexican-ness are almost always inherently depraved, monstrous, villainous? When we consider the publication of these films, how do they reflect the historical currents of the time, to include Mexicans in the popular discourse (like newspapers and other media)? And, how do they reflect national relations: how are Mexican Americans or Chicana regarded in the U.S. or the imagined community of “Greater Mexico,” to borrow that apt

term from Américo Paredes? Moreover, how do these greaser characters reflect transnational relations between the U.S. and Mexico? Finally, how have these films influenced literature? Where does one begin? According to Keller and Keller, greaser characters emerge in the nickel and dime novel of the mid-19th Century, including the first novel published in California by John Rollin Ridge, *Joaquin Murrieta* (1854)¹¹

While the greaser character undoubtedly emerges before cinema, it is with the cinema, and its global reach, that the image is more firmly established and projected around the world. The greaser is a stock character in the regional literature of California and the West reflecting the currents of the mid-19th Century. Historically, the character is a vestige of the U.S. War with Mexico, which ended in 1848, and culminated, with Mexico's surrender of half of its northern territories. These would become the lower southwestern states, including: Arizona, Texas, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and California. Ken Gonzales-Day's brilliant *Lynching in the West* historicizes the plight of Mexicans in the Southwest in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War. It's not surprising that the first "American" legislative body in 1849 wrote extensively about the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican war, to include language establishing statehood, but also the terms following the war set forth in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹²

By contrast, the fifth Californian legislative body of 1855 included much more punitive terms. The Anti-vagrancy Act of 1855, which was more commonly known as the "Greaser Act," targeted Mexicans (and other ethnic groups) in the wake of the gold rush. The legislation follows:

All persons who are commonly known as "Greaser's" or the issue of Spanish and Indian blood, who may come within the provisions of the first section of this Act, and who go armed and are not known to be peaceable and quiet persons, and who can give no good account of themselves, may be disarmed by any lawful officer, and punished otherwise as provided in the foregoing section" (Section 2, Chapter CLXXV (175) An Act to Punish Vagrants, Vagabonds, and Dangerous and Suspicious Persons. Approved April 30, 1855). (217)

Fashioned much like the "Foreign Miner's Tax" of 1851, the greaser act effectively criminalized an entire community without mentioning the name "Mexican." Rather, the legislation leaves implementation to local jurisdictions. Gonzalez-Day goes on to cite the law, which unambiguously integrates this language of the greaser. The law extended to "all persons who are commonly known as Greasers" to include those of "Spanish or Indian blood." Here, I want to point out the degree of generality involved in naming those so-called "greasers," with the language that these people are "commonly known."¹³

The legislation is especially striking for the way it defines indigeneity along ethnic and state lines. The act distinguishes people of "Spanish or Indian blood," from those other California Native Americans. For example, the first part of the statute begins from this premise, saying: "All persons except Digger Indians, who have no visible means of living...all healthy beggars...who travel with written statements of their misfortunes...all

lewd and dissolute persons who live in houses of Ill-Fame...all common prostitutes and common drunkards may be committed to jail and sentenced to hard labor” (section 1). To the first point, “Digger Indians” was a pejorative term ascribed to California Native people whose cuisine included insects. As the statute continues, the Mexican (American) community is not only differentiated from California Natives for the purposes of division and control. Perhaps the most telling part is the reference to those people “who travel with written statements of their misfortunes.” The terms of the legislation uses thinly-veiled language to describe what can only be characterized as dispossessed Mexicans of the southwest. These are the very people who become codified in this legislation as those “commonly known as ‘Greasers’; they are the survivors living in the aftermath of 1848 and the unilateral terms of the U.S.-Mexican War. Gonzales-Day underscores this point in his analysis of the greaser as a kind of racialized pejorative term that was apparently “common knowledge.” Upon further consideration, I argue that the invention of the movies and the brand of what I’ve been calling greaser cinema was also responsible for promoting the character in the national imagination so that the genre proliferated in these symbolic dimensions into the budding industries of travel literature and motion pictures.¹⁴

As the end of the nineteenth century, the greaser character had emerged largely as a defamed image of Mexican-ness in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War. By the turn of the twentieth century, the greaser character was primed for the movies and mass production.⁶ I argue that the construction of this Mexican villain is also essential to understanding how Mexican communities of the southwest were demonized following the war and up to the present. Thus, the greaser character is representative of a larger ethos and relations that frame the prolonged history of antagonisms of such communities, and the continued entrenchment of white supremacy. This aspect of white supremacy is not surprising when considering the legacy of race in California politics, and the general treatment of people of color. For example, in his State of the State address to the Legislature in January 6, 1851, Peter Hardeman Burnett, California’s first “American” governor, declared open war on California’s Native population, calling for a “war of extermination” (“Californian Governors”).

In *Racial Faultlines: White Supremacy in California*, Tomás Almaguer links the war of 1848 with the Gold Rush. This includes the introduction of capitalism to the Southwest, and the stratagem to recruit labor from across the Pacific from China, then Japan, and then the Philippines, and later still from Mexico. Almaguer’s history of California is significant for its methodology of comparative race studies that considers U.S. foreign policy and the budding demands for cheap (slave) labor. To this point, Almaguer argues that in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the racial landscape, one should consider the many (contradictory) prohibitions against the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino subjects from entering the U.S., beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act (1892), and continuing with the Gentleman’s Agreement (1907). In all of these policies, there is a similar story involving a “pull” to these countries in search of labor, followed by a pointed backlash against the same policy (and people) that results in a move to ban the same groups outright. Again, this comes after those groups were essentially solicited to perform essential labor for the national project of

nation building. Almaguer corroborates this argument in his account of the population explosion in the Southwest, particularly in the years between 1850 and 1910. He locates this contradiction in the rise of the shifting laboring populations that emerged in the wake of the U.S.-Mexican war. For Almaguer, it's the implementation of capitalism in the U.S. Southwest that accounts for the pushes and pulls of the labor market that transforms California from a pastoral to an agrarian economy (29).

For Chon Noriega, film and art historian, the import of race and capitalism converges in the new technological innovations of the movies and in the subsequent rise of the movie in California. This is one of Chon Noriega's central points when he links representations of Mexican villainy to the cinema. The significance of such a bold claim—[that] “the Mexican is the oldest villain in cinema” (*The Bronze Screen*)—grapples with the very materiality of the greaser character by linking it to the social sphere, to U.S. hegemony, and to its relegation of populations like Mexicans and other ethnic groups to the periphery. The implications of Noriega's claim are also rooted geopolitically. As a native of East Los Angeles, Noriega is arguably conceiving of Los Angeles as a colonial Mexican city that was transformed after the U.S.-Mexican war. This is the significance of Noriega's conception of the Mexican as villain, and as we'll see in the films, with its synonym: the greaser. As I'll show, the greaser character embodies this conflict, further signaling and cementing the legacy of Mexican depravity in the minds of Americans, just at the dawn of the silent film era.

According to film historian Linda Fregoso and her documentary, *The Bronze Screen*, such depictions of Mexicans as “greasers” were so egregious that they were successfully banned in Mexico and in a number of Latin American countries. Fregoso's documentary spans the twentieth century, arguing that “Hollywood” sought a new relationship with its neighbors to the South, and effectively ceased the production of so called “greaser” films—a position, which, as we'll soon see, was only nominally true. Laura Isabel Serna's groundbreaking book, *Making Cinelandia* takes on this history more comprehensively by researching transnational Mexican spectatorship in the 1920's. Her work examines the role of the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles as a censor. According to Serna, the Mexican Consulate fancied itself as a kind of “first defense” against offensive images like the greaser, by galvanizing support from Mexican government officials abroad, and Mexican American Citizens in various communities in Los Angeles (“As a Mexican I feel it's my duty”). For Serna, the work by those in positions of influence like government, but also in the Mexican press were essential in conducting boycotts. For Serna, the latter was also instrumental for creating “cinelandia”: “a new cultural space” (119). She writes:

Mexican fans were encouraged to see themselves as members of an audience bound by a shared national identity. In other words, Mexican audiences were encouraged to invest themselves in American film culture as Mexicans. Shared national identity, popular culture, and experiences of racism bound Mexican audiences to stars they could claim as their own. Popular writing that sought to explain Hollywood to Mexican readers was marked by ambivalent fascination, as writers fed audiences' desire for behind-the-scenes knowledge while

acknowledging and criticizing Hollywood's racism. As this extra-filmic discourse about stars, fashion, and beauty circulated in the Mexican popular press on both sides of the border, it was translated literally and figuratively into a recognizable local idiom. On one level, this localization demonstrates the flexibility of the American film industry as it sought out global audiences. On another level, the process provides evidence of the way that Mexicans translated, adapted, and appropriated American film culture. (...) Hollywood, rather than overwhelming or displacing local film culture became the very building blocks of that culture. Hollywood was thoroughly imbricated with the local and national conditions that shaped Mexican experiences of filmic texts and film culture. (119)

Consequently, Hollywood did make an effort to create other representations of Mexicans and Latinos in the movies. One strategy in the construction of post-greaser characters was the creation of the Latin lover and its gendered equivalent, the "Latina Spitfire." As we'll see at the end of this chapter, these characters are steeped in the same race and gender formations expressed in the greaser character. Scholars have mapped many different models of these stereotypes in the movies, and while they generally recognize the greaser character at the dawn of cinema, that character is largely relegated to a few paragraphs or footnotes. However, there has been a notifiable shift in films of the period with scholars like Juan Alonzo, whose book *Borders, Bandits, and Badmen* takes up *The Greaser's Gauntlet* and locates the character in his own typology of villainous Mexican characters that begins with the greaser, and continues with other modalities that he locates in his title: "Bandits" and generic "Badmen." In his study, of bandits, bad men, and other antagonists he argues that a similar confluence in literature and film occurs early in the twentieth century. While writing about William Hart, another of the prominent serial cowboys following Broncho Billy, Alonzo observes how the image of the Mexican becomes more fixed in its depravity, while the white cowboy becomes more virtuous. He writes:

In these Westerns, the Anglo-American hero defines his moral worth, his goodness, and his patriotism against the Mexican's villainy. Furthermore, these mid-decade films established Hart as the cowboy hero of his generation. Finally, *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 Mexicanness as the evil the Western hero must defeat. (57)

Alonzo's argument and typology of villains is convincing, as are those of his predecessors: from Cecil Robinson's *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning* to Charles Ramirez-Berg's *Latino Stereotypes in Film*. Most notably, each author points to the confluence of literature and film (as Seed does in his notion of *Cinematic Fictions*) and they make this point independently and irrespective of one another's scholarship. While I make a similar claim in my own study, my intention is to highlight greaser cinema's contribution to cinema and literature, while elevating the greaser character from a mere footnote to a character who's had a substantial impact on Chicanx/ Latinx representation.

I'll examine the greaser character and the subsequent emergence of alternate characters, like the Latin lover to sketch a paradigm of Mexican representation in the movies, followed by an examination of how those discourses were then reflected back into literature. I want to compare the greaser character to other racialized groups in film: Native American, Asian American, and African American. I want to briefly turn to representations of African Americans in D.W. Griffith's films, who was the director *par excellence* of his time. I examine his most notorious film to highlight the pervasiveness of the abduction scene and how it came to inform race—especially men of color—on the silver screen.

D.W. Griffith's Nation and the Abduction Scene

Consider the career of D.W. Griffith. He is the reputed “father” of the modern film industry and his most enduring film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is studied by film scholars and considered the first “Hollywood blockbuster.” This moniker is attributed to the film's technical achievements. The film was originally printed on thirteen movie reels and ran for more than 2 hours! To put these details in perspective, many of these films of the silent era were produced on one and usually no more than two reels; called one and two reelers, a single reel averaged ten minutes. *Birth of a Nation* was innovative in a number of other ways, including at the box office. The idea was that moviegoers would pay premium prices for a longer film. These innovations notwithstanding, *Birth of a Nation* is significant for the story it promotes about the South before and after the Civil War. The film thematizes the rift between the Union and the Confederacy, centering on one divided family. Griffith takes up the Civil War in two acts, beginning with the events leading up to armed warfare and then its aftermath in Reconstruction. Most insidiously, *Birth* maintains a view of the nation which maintains that struggles for black parity necessarily diminish the rights of whites. More than just providing a sympathetic portrayal of the South, the film is also charged with depraved caricatures of African Americans as monstrous.

In one particularly egregious example, the film turns to a depiction of an all-black Congress (which stands as one of the only scenes that actually featured African Americans, and not just Whites in “blackface” makeup). These characters are especially disorderly, suggesting the complete dysfunction of that institution, if Black people were to attain power. As the scene continues, the camera comes to a halt, resting over one oversized desk overlooking what appears to be an all-Black cast in the House. Suddenly, one of the newly elected congressmen removes his boot and places it on the table for no apparent reason. The intention seems to reify those all too conventional racist positions that, regardless of status or stature, black people are “uncivilized,” and therefore unfit to serve in government. Another congressman dances, while another one sits with his feet up, engrossed in the act of eating a large piece of fried chicken. To be sure, the film depicts Black people as being childlike, disorderly, and unfit for incorporation into the body politic of the nation. Given all of the hackneyed stereotypes of African Americans, the film stands as a polemic for the Ku Klux Klan and their politics of (overt) White Supremacy, providing a sympathetic portrayal of the Confederacy, albeit with an anti-war slant. None of this is particularly surprising, given that the movie

is based on Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905), a novel that venerates "The Klan," to the detriment of all others.

In 1931, Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* was re-released, following the introduction of the sound film. In keeping with this innovation in the thriving film industry, the *Birth* was screened with a new "sound" prologue. Though rendered with an affected performance, the prologue featured a conversation between Griffith and his friend and actor, Walter Huston: the father of the famous director, John Huston. The prologue was a response to the film's detractors, who condemned the film's racism and its misrepresentation of historic events. During the conversation, Griffith claims that the film was personal and captured his family story, which includes overtures to his father, a Confederate Officer. In effect, Griffith "doubles down" on critics, going so far as to argue that "the Klan was needed in those days to protect the rights of whites" ("Prologue").¹⁵

At the end of *The Birth of a Nation*, Elsie Stoneman has been abducted by the monstrously depicted black antagonist, Silas Lynch. The scene nearly grinds to a halt, as it teasingly delights in this premise of Elsie's impending assault. Before I come to that, a couple of points are in order. First, Lynch is played by George Siegmann, a white actor in "blackface" makeup and prosthetics. In terms of the storyline, Elsie is the daughter of Austin Stoneman, congressman and speaker of South Carolina's House of Representatives. Austin Stoneman is actually a thinly veiled (if not bald) reference to Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens, of course, was the Speaker of the House during the Civil War and is often reviled by Confederate sympathizers.¹⁶ More recently, Stevens was portrayed by Tommy Lee Jones in Steven Spielberg's "biopic," *Lincoln* (2012).

The *Birth's* most notorious and enduring scenes come at the finale. These penultimate scenes feature a "chase" sequence in which the Ku Klux Klansmen are depicted as heroic saviors riding furiously to save Elsie Stoneman. Here, the depictions of the depraved "black rapist" are set against the heroism of the masked riders on horseback to illuminate the aforementioned abduction scene. Indeed, the film's reliance on this abduction scene serves as the film's apex, unifying its racial premises in one final tour de force. However, before the Klan can arrive to save the day, the film makes it a point to bask in the racial spectacle that it sets forth.¹⁷

To return to our movie, the climax of *The Birth*, Griffith employs his innovative cross-cutting techniques and splices between scenes to create the effect of heightened action. The buildup continues and alternates between scenes of clansmen mounted on horseback rushing to the rescue. These scenes are contrasted with those of Silas Lynch in the act of molesting Elsie Stone. This juxtaposition of scenes and their alternation continues at an accelerated pace, heightening the tension between Lynch, Elsie, and Austin Stoneman, the latter of whom is physically (and figuratively) shut out of the room and restrained by Silas' band of renegades.

The symbolism of the space of the parlor is notable. The parlor is the room where guests are entertained in 19th-century Victorian (and American) culture. That Lynch is depicted in this manner speaks to the film's racial logic. Which is to say, he is not simply interested in abducting Elsie for the purposes of defiling her, but to symbolically place

himself at the top of the symbolic order, supplanting the racial-gendered hierarchies. It is also significant that she is the daughter of such a prominent political figure. The implication here increases the dramatic value, suggesting that Lynch is not only merely upending a singular household. Instead, he is symbolically usurping the power of the “House,” which alludes to the household of the nation, and as synecdochally as the “House of Representatives.” Thus, Lynch endeavors to place himself at the “head” of this household, as it were, instead of his normative place at the margins. The intertitle says this much in its assertion that Silas desires that Elsie be the “Queen” of his own “Black Empire.”

Upon further consideration, it's clear that Silas Lynch's character is most interested in reordering political power and inverting racial relations. In this interpretation, the invention of Silas Lynch's character magnifies white fears of black retribution (for slavery, among other humiliations). The film achieves this effect by the gratuitousness of the shot, which emphasizes Silas's ravenous derangement. The camera lingers in this moment of abduction, so as to sympathize with the father on the other side of the door. Indeed, we see his desperation; we can almost hear him pounding from the other side of the door, as we look on at Silas in horror. That the scene is also spliced with frames of the Klan riders, the likes of whom help accelerate the film's pacing, increase the tension, and give these (“chase”) scenes a sense of urgency.

Silas' call for the creation of a “Black Empire” as he assaults Elsie marks an ideological distinction the film makes between “Nation” and “Empire,” while simultaneously linking the two courses of action. Silas' declaration symbolically coincides with Elsie's abduction, suggesting that his desire for power is linked with his lust for Elsie and, more broadly, for white women. Thus envisaged, Silas' abduction of Elsie can be interpreted as the visual embodiment of white fear (and guilt)—presumably for slavery, the plunder of black bodies, and threats to the material and symbolic order. The idea that Silas needs Elsie to complete his plan for imperial rule, illustrates how the film's “gaze” is ideologically rooted in white supremacy. And the abduction scene ultimately thematizes the purity of white womanhood. Remarkably, these are the racial dynamics at the core of the film—of Griffith's “nation.” Silas' substitution of the word “Empire” for “nation” in the intertitle continues the film's racial logic: the notion that Silas is bereft of reason and entirely unfit for self-governance. This point is corroborated in the manner that he celebrates the (black) mob that “fill[s] the streets.” Read this way, the film resounds as a polemic in stark opposition to integration, and especially to the idea of racial inclusion into the United States. To be sure, this gaze upholds a pronounced belief in the virtues of whiteness (or white supremacy), insofar as it can only imagine Black agency as “Empire.” Ironically, this is one of the core blind spots of American Pragmatism, which idealizes democracy, while practicing genocide.¹⁸

Sociologist and film historian Cedric J. Robinson corroborates this point throughout his work and in his commentary on Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, discussing the tremendous backlash that followed. For Robinson, movies serve a larger ideological function in that they foment racial categories in the national imaginary. What he

theorizes is nothing less than the very rearticulation of what he calls “a new racial regime,” centered by what he calls “a new whiteness.” He says:

Moving pictures appear at the juncture when a new racial regime was being stitched together from remnants of its predecessors and new cloth accommodating the disposal of immigrations, colonial subjects, and insurgencies among the native poor. With the first attempts at composing a national identity in disarray, a *new whiteness* became the basis for the reintegration of American Society. And monopolizing the refabrication of a public sphere, with a reach and immediacy not obtained by previous apparatuses (museums, theaters, fairs, the press, etc), *motion pictures insinuated themselves into public life* (*Forgeries of Memory* xiv-xv)

Robinson’s idea of a “new whiteness” is compelling. He argues that an ideological vacuum emerges after the first World War. And he posits how a film like D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* invigorated White Supremacy.¹⁹ The interracial dynamics that Robinson illuminates captures the transnational ideological scope of movies and how their ubiquity fundamentally changes the marketplace of images: how black men are to be regarded in the social sphere. Given the scope of Robinson’s historical and transnational work, I want to consider the role of international war in shaping film and race. I especially want to consider the role of the U.S.-Mexican War (1836-48 if we include Texas) with the aftermath of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, for its proximity to the U.S. Further, I want to also briefly consider expanding this framework to consider a more global picture of the 19th century.

One point that contextualizes the greaser character are the pulls by the world economy, especially those years following the revolutions of 1848, with the term that Karl Marx calls the “48ers”: those self-described revolutionaries who sparked armed rebellions across Europe. About this time, Marx and his family were expelled from Paris, and exiled in London. There, Marx began writing for a newspaper: *the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Politisch-ökonomische Revue* (the New Rhineland Gazette, Political-Economic Revue). In the Revue’s first edition, Marx wrote about the “relative calm on the Continent in 1849 [due] to the previous year’s discovery of gold in California, which he said had created a revolution of its own that helped spark an economic recovery in Europe” (Gabriel 183-4). While Marx goes on to discuss the impending disaster and “economic crisis” brought about by the “flawed nature of the new economic system” that is capitalism, he acknowledges how the gold rush of 1849 was instrumental in pulling Europe out of recession (Gabriel 184). Marx is astute to connect the global economy and the manner in which U.S. capital essentially replenished Europe’s coffers, and by extension, the modern-colonial world. I want to consider these global optics and how the “pulls” of mass capital color and contour our object, the greaser. I also want to bring this international view to bear with the same fifty-year period following California’s statehood, with the ascendancy of one of its most ubiquitous and versatile villains. The point of which is to show how race and consolidation of state power is essential in understanding the gold rush in California,

and how this event is also useful in contextualizing the greaser character, while illuminating what is at stake in this brand of demagoguery.

Robinson makes a similar point in his broad view of Hollywood's racialized depiction of people of color, beginning with his documentation of Griffith's blockbuster that was *Birth of a Nation*. His account brings dissenting voices into the fold, establishing how groups like the NAACP denounced the film and waged a national campaign to sway public opinion. Robinson documents the division and immense unrest the film provoked (Robinson 92). More than that, he details the film's influence on white supremacy, both overtly and covertly. Additionally, Robinson shows how whiteness functions across broader terms and boundaries, national boundaries for example, but also domestically, so as to grapple with Mexicans (Chicanos in the Southwest, for example). His analysis of Mexican Americans in Cinema considers whiteness in broader terms. He writes:

As one might suppose, the synergy between American capital and the racial representations displayed in American silent movies extended beyond the domestic sphere. Mexicans (and Mexican Americans), too, were signified by chromatic categories determined by the binary set of black and white. As the second largest national minority of color, Mexican Americans had both a social presence and some significance in film consumption. (190)

Mirroring the continued entrenchment of racial hierarchies, which seem to change with their times, Robinson's analysis extends to the wars that punctuated the early 20th Century. Here, he comments on the import of race during the Mexican Revolution. He says:

The social base of the peasant-dominated 1910 revolution was the largest threat to American capital, consequently it is understandable if the film industry distinguished between white, virtuous Mexican aristocracy {sic} and a darker, villainous peasantry. In short, the "greaser," the mestizo peasant, became a nigger. (191)

Robinson's analysis is provocative as is his punchy delivery. Still, his notion of chromatic scale has analogues in the praxis of racial discourse. It also has broader implications, with the kind of (global) connections he makes across racial, ethnic, and national lines.²⁰ For example, his account of the greaser character suggests a more general point: that "art" often penetrates the social sphere, for better or worse. This is the case with *The Birth of a Nation*. According to Robinson, the film proved to be an effective marketing tool for the Ku Klux Klan:

Life, they say, does imitate art. And so it occurred on Thanksgiving night in 1915 when William Joseph Simmons and a group of friends met on Stone Mountain outside Atlanta, Georgia, and declared a new beginning: the new Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Over the next ten years, particularly from 1920 to 1925, the second Klan enrolled millions, frequently drawing recruits with a showing of *The Birth of a*

Nation. To be sure, the second Klan rode to the rescue of abused wives, communities preyed on by corrupt politicians and exploitative employers, impoverished families, and supporters of Prohibition; but its staple was hatred: Blacks, Jews, Catholics, and immigrants. (114-5)

Robinson account of the second wave of the Klan coincides with the national reception of *The Birth of a Nation*. While critics might argue that these events do not bear a direct correlation, the truth of the matter is that the film was successful in artistic terms as it was in serving as propaganda and in the view that Black people were responsible for sowing discord in the nation, especially during Reconstruction. During this time, overt violence like lynching rose dramatically. All Black townships and communities were targeted by white mobs. Many of these places where African Americans had amassed some measure of concentrated wealth—towns in St. Louis and Oklahoma to give two examples—were burned and razed to the ground.²¹

These depictions illuminate (white) fear of blackness, and the fear of people of color more generally. They are symptomatic of the DuBoisian questions in the *Souls of Black Folk: what will America do with Black subjects and bodies after liberation?* Comparatively, we may also ask *what did America do with her Native, Chicano, and Asian children?* My use of the word “children” is intentional here, as it was in Melville’s depiction of “orphans” wading in the symbolic ocean at the end of his masterpiece, *Moby Dick* (1848). To my point, all of these racialized groups have been historically likened to children in media and literary representations. As Ishmael notes while shipwrecked: “On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search for her missing children, only found another orphan” (Melville).

To return to Griffith’s representations of race, characters like Silas Lynch and José reveal larger ideological strategies at work that (unsurprisingly) diminish the humanity of people of color. These depictions demand a critical reevaluation, if, for nothing else, to understand them as they are, and what, if anything, they mean today. As I’ll show in the following chapters of this dissertation, creative writers of color have taken up the same characters in order to address and critique them in their own fictional worlds.

An Overview of Greaser Cinema in Three Synopses

While an accepted star is received everywhere as himself, the success of a film is apt to identify the ordinary actor with the role he plays in it. Producers are only too glad to repeat a success by catering to the well-known public fondness for seeing their favorite actors in their established roles. And even if an actor has sense enough to avoid being confined to a single role, *it is still a fact that his face will have some recurring mannerisms in his acting having become familiar will prevent the amalgam with nonprofessionals from taking place.*

—André Bazin “An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism” (25, *emphasis mine*).

An influential member of the French New Wave, along with François Truffaut and Jean Renoir, André Bazin is credited with rethinking Hollywood films as “high” art, in contrast to most American critics of the time. Bazin’s discussion of the face (and his rejection of the star system) gets at the rebelliousness of the French New Wave, and its affinity for the budding school of Italian Neo-realism, centered on Roberto Rossellini’s film, *Paisan* (1946). For Bazin, the face is the apex of character. This point merits further consideration given the issue of race in movies, and how people of color have historically been relegated to racialized stock characters.

Bazin’s view on the significance of the face seems more urgent in silent cinema. In contrast to movies in the digital age, audiences of the silent era were far more reliant on the actors’ faces, and other cues like body language, to follow the story. In one respect, however, Bazin’s privileging of the face, which he regards as foundational to his theory of film making, is complicated by Greaser Cinema with practices like “brown face.” Though, Bazin is correct in his assertion that there are aspects of performance that are carried into subsequent pictures, I want to pair this claim with the phenomenon of white actors purposely relying on racialized performance: masking their whiteness in makeup and prosthesis, as it were. What is the import of Bazin’s theory of filmmaking, and the aesthetic choice of preferring non-actors, in light of greaser cinema? How does the phenomenon of Anglo characters playing people of color by relying on make-up and prosthetics inform Bazin’s view of cinema?

To be sure, many actors and directors cut their teeth by playing people of color. The element of racial masquerade offers the possibility of grappling with Bazin’s notion that there is an “aura” of sorts that is transmitted by the unmasked character. I agree with Bazin’s assertion that the face is central. In order to broach these questions, I will begin by providing overviews of each film, first, then weighing in on them to examine their collective significance, which will ultimately observe and make sense of the core observation: that what binds these character is their difference and what I call their “malleability.” For the present moment, I’ll first offer three synopses of these films (since it stands to reason that few people have seen these films since they debuted more than a hundred years ago).

Synopsis One: *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* (1908)

D.W. Griffith directed hundreds of films in the years leading up to *Birth of a Nation*. An aspiring writer, he moved to New York, joined Biograph Pictures, and soon became the company’s leading director. At Biograph, Griffith taught himself to be a filmmaker. He mastered the camera, and pioneered techniques like parallel editing and camera shots like the “cut-in.” He would continue perfecting these techniques over the next forty years. *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* is one of Griffith’s earliest films—his sixth film to be precise. The short film was one of the hundreds of “1” and “2 reelers” he made between 1908 and 1914 (Jesionowski). To provide a contrast, *Birth of a Nation* is the first 12-reel film: a testament to the scope of its artistic vision, however flawed it was in its representation of race and its limited vision of American life.

One of the legacies of *The Greaser's Gauntlet* is that Griffith created one of the first Westerns. Indeed, it helped establish those conventions for the Western film by constructing the central villain of the genre. One unique dimension of the film is that this film predates the archetypal Western hero, the cowboy. As we'll see in subsequent analysis, the three greaser films, including *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, are foundational to the Western film and to the establishment of its conventions. One central aspect that I wish to examine registers at the level of plot. As I'll show in the following section (after these synopses), a major connection that Griffith's films establish—both in *The Greaser's Gauntlet* and in *The Birth of a Nation*—is the “abduction scene.” I'll come to a more definitive understanding of the convention shortly. For the time being, I'll make the claim that these films replicate the abduction scene in their own way, centering on a depiction of women that relegates them to a peripheral status as objects to be recovered. In both of these films, women, including Elsie Stoneman—are depicted as paragons of virtue. This point includes José's mother who sends him off on his journey with an embroidered cross that is featured in every scene, including the film's two climactic moments.

By comparison, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* is a relatively minor work. Yet, its importance can't be understated in consideration of Griffith's oeuvre, or his influence on cinema as a whole. Of the dozen or more films he made in 1908, Griffith initiated a (sub)genre in Greaser Cinema—a feat that is extraordinary, though not for Griffith. As a pioneering film visionary, he had many firsts, many of which predate film genres altogether, and are coterminous with the history of film making itself. On this score, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* can and should be regarded as one of the earliest examples of the Western, along with Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*. That said, this dissertation also wants to examine what Griffith's film has “to say” about Mexican-ness, both in the social sphere, and in the humanities, in art and literature.

The Greaser's Gauntlet is a transnational story that tells the story of José's migration from Mexico to the U.S. in search of fortune. José is played by Canadian actor, Wilfred Lucas. The plot spanning some five years on two narrative tracks, culminates with José's failed lynching, followed by the (failed) abduction of Mildred Berkeley. José and Mildred are two unlikely protagonists, fatefully united in a gold-rush era mining town that resembles San Francisco, shot on set in Manhattan.²² These principal characters, in addition to the rest of the cast, are introduced in the second scene, set in the “built-space” of the hotel. Their differences are stark. José is a Mexican from the mountains of the Sierra Madre. Mildred is an American from the East coast, who's recently been married to a civil engineer named Tom Berkeley. Mildred is lovely, cosmopolitan, and moral—all of which inform her race (or racialization). Read this way, Mildred's character represents the apex of whiteness: especially 19th-century ideals of white womanhood. Her urbanity is the antithesis of the ruggedness of the frontier and frontier life. In this way, her character is almost an inversion of José's story. And yet, the film brings them together as two unlikely protagonists.

Finally, we meet the film's villain, though he doesn't announce himself as such until three fourths of the film have passed. Tom Bates literally comes through the saloon

door last, just following Mildred and Tom. According to the Moving Picture Synopsis, Bates is a business associate of Berkeley's, and apparently one of Mildred's former suitors (a detail that the audience would never ascertain without aid of the "Moving Picture World"). At the end of the film, it is Tom Bates who proves to be the film's chief antagonist. He concocts a plot to abduct Mildred, with the aid of José, and another unnamed tavern dweller. Again, José is among these mercenaries; by now, he's become a drunkard. These details mark a shift in the passage of time—an aspect which is difficult to discern otherwise. Mildred's liberation, and the events that follow, set the course for José's redemption, providing occasion for him to exhibit heroism. The allegory of José's ascendancy is modeled on Christ (and the "passion plays" of the 7th-century, no doubt). This conflict is finally resolved at the film's end.

These two narrative tracks— José's abduction and Mildred's abduction—are established formally as chiasmus: a literary device associated with (biblical) poetry that alludes to the story of Christ's redemption, and is visually represented by the figure of the cross.²³ Chiasmus takes on a parabolic shape that begins and ends "high" with the scenes of José with his mother on the mountain top. On this point, José literally descends a mountain in the opening scene, and climbs back up the same mountain in the finale. Conversely, the film meets its "low" points of the chiasmus' parabola symmetry during the moments of abduction and violence. In between these scenes, we have two narrative arcs: beginning with José's escaped lynching and subsequent rescue by Mildred Berkeley. The next sequence reverses this narrative arc and depicts José's rescue of Mildred as she is abducted by a group of bandits. This is a point of situational irony, given that one of the bandits turns out to be José. José's inability to recognize Mildred, at first, is part of the film's attempt to represent the years that have passed between them, since their first encounters at the tavern and "hanging tree."

Though their social differences are many—Man/Woman, Mexican/ American, brown/white, rich/poor—José and Mildred are united by the cross: a symbol of their shared Christian faith. It is this Christian theme of redemption that ultimately reunites them—a theme symbolically rendered in the fabric of the cross that José is gifted (by his mother); this same emblem is given to Mildred after her intervention, and returned at the end of the film when he saves her.

Synopsis Two: *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914)

Between 1914 and 1917, while the U.S. was engrossed in World War I, the film industry was undergoing tremendous growth. Camera technology was improving. So was the means and manner of experiencing movies, going from short films in individually manned nickelodeons, to longer 1 and 2 reel-movies projected in makeshift theaters and auditoriums across the nation and abroad. To meet the demand, a number of independent filmmakers and entrepreneurs emerged and began mass-producing films. Essanay Films was one such company. Their name, "S and A," was derived from the initials of the partners, George Spoor and Broncho Billy Anderson. Essanay was successful for a few years, drawing some of the finest talent in the industry, including the likes of Charlie Chaplain, who made films for Essanay for a short period in 1915.

An East Coast transplant born Maxwell Henry Aronson, he fashioned the character, G.M. Broncho Billy Anderson, and became him on screen.²⁴ Of Broncho Billy and Essanay films, García Riera argues, the actor turned director established many of the conventions that we now associate with the Western, including the first serial cowboy short in the movies, preceding other luminaries like William S. Hart and Shorty Hamilton. Broncho Billy got his first big break and taste of show business as an extra in Edwin S. Porter's classic *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)²⁵: the same picture that inspired D.W. Griffith to begin his film career. This was actually Anderson's first role in a feature film and, by all accounts, its impact on him was indelible. He actually played three characters in *The Great Train Robbery*, including a small role as a train robber.²⁶ Anderson's experience proved formidable and inspired him to move West. At his studio in Niles, his version of the cowboy would transform the Western, and by extension, the film industry as a whole.²⁷

Broncho Billy and The Greaser was completed on October 10th, 1914, as a one-reeler, "short film." From the Essanay film record, the picture took just two days to make from start to finish (Kiehn 362). Moreover, it was Essanay's seventy-first picture that year! These details attest to the rapid rate of production: a movie version of Henry Ford's automobile assembly line. Indeed, *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* upholds a linear version of the abduction scene but deviates in one fundamental way.

In the film, Broncho Billy stars as a postman, working behind the counter of a bustling post office. Soon after Billy encounters a "greaser" (played by Lee Willard,) assaulting a woman in line (played by Marguerite Clayton). Anderson intervenes and rescues the woman. The film then transitions to the end of the day: Broncho Billy returns home and goes to bed for the evening. Suddenly the villain is upon him. He wrestles him down in his own home and then hog-ties him. Just before the greaser follows through with the promise of murder, a crowd shows up, led by the woman from the bank. As with the previous film, the woman saves the day! In this moment, the film also reverses the abduction scene, presenting the eponymous protagonist as the abductee.

Upon further consideration, a notable focal point is the phenomenon of racial passing that is prominent in Aaronson's character, as it is in Willard's portrayal of the greaser character. To the first point, it should be stated that the act of reinvention features predominantly in American literature and lore. Anderson, who was of Jewish American descent, also lived-out this theme, reinventing himself in the movies. At the same time, with this assumption of the character, he effectively masks all traces of his ethnicity, thereby "passing" into whiteness.²⁸ In the years following *Broncho Billy and the Greaser*, he made scores of other films, leaving his mark on the movies, and establishing a "formula" for the Western, and his newly established hero. In this way, Anderson would provide a model that many would emulate over the years: from John Ford, to John Wayne, to Clint Eastwood—the latter of which actually resurrected Broncho Billy's character in the 1970's. These influences extended horizontally, influencing other subsequent serial cowboys of the time: from William S. Hart, to the protagonist of our next film, Shorty Hamilton.

But first, to return to the issue of passing, Willard's depiction of the "greaser" character provides a contrast to Broncho Billy in the obvious way that they are featured as opposites: hero and villain. Willard's portrayal comports to other depictions of the greaser character in terms of the actual performance, but there is something amiss in the stated cast of characters. While the film's title marks Willard's character as a greaser—as in *Broncho Billy and the Greaser*—Willard is actually credited as "half-breed" in the list. The suggestion here is that the greaser is synonymous with other terms and deployed as racial epithets. This variability of terminology emphasizes the secondary status of Mexicanos in the Southwest. As we'll see in the physical features of each character, as well as in the subsequent chapters, the actual depictions of each "greaser character" is marked by difference. So much so that each is different in visage and attire, and, in this case, name. I call this differential feature, "malleability." Ironically, malleability is the central feature that seems to unite each version of the greaser.

Synopsis Three: Licking the Greasers (1914/1918)

By way of introduction, I want to begin with a tale of two brothers. The elder got his "big break" as actor, and then became a filmmaker. The younger brother followed the same trajectory, only he went on to become one of the most respected directors in the industry. As his stature grew, he became known as one of the greatest filmmakers of his generation.

The younger brother is John Ford. Ford went on to direct some of the most celebrated movies in Hollywood, including *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *The Searchers* (1956), *How the West was Won* (1962), and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), in a career that spanned more than fifty years. Francis Ford, the elder brother, was an emerging star in the silent era. Like so many others of his generation, his genius didn't completely carry over when the "talkies" came. Nevertheless, Francis Ford was able to eke out a living in Hollywood, even as his career as a director came to a standstill, as a bit actor in scores of movies, often going "uncredited" in minor roles.²⁹ In many respects, the making of Francis Ford's *Licking the Greasers*, captures a story of Hollywood during a time of mergers and transitions. This aspect is punctuated in the film's renaming and subsequent redistribution: from *Shorty's Trip to Mexico* (1914) to *Licking the Greasers* (1918). As with Broncho Billy Anderson's innovation in the cowboy serial film, it's important to point out a similarity here. Ford's film was originally part of a serial cowboy series, featuring "Shorty" Hamilton: a budding film star in the mold of Broncho Billy. The film production's strategy of the recurring (serial) actor anticipates another feature of the modern cinema: the star system.

The emergence of the star system in the industry, which relied on the "names" of individual actors to promote films, helped facilitate the conditions for the acquisition and consolidation of smaller film companies, like Essanay, to a handful of larger companies. These changes had pronounced effects for greaser cinema, as did the turmoil in domestic and international politics. According to Cedric Robinson, it was the onset of the Great War, World War I, which altered the depiction of the greaser character. The Mexican Revolution was also instrumental in helping redefine the contours of the

greaser character. In no time, others would follow suit, spawning generations of serial cowboy characters.

“Shorty” Hamilton, whose real name was William John Schroeder, was originally from Chicago. A veteran of the U.S. Cavalry, he spent the next years laboring as a “real” cowboy: herding livestock in Texas and Montana (Katchmer). His horsemanship and background proved to be a natural fit for his work in serial Westerns, beginning with his first film, *The Mexican’s Crime* (1909). Soon after, Shorty became a Western-megastar in the style of Broncho Billy, appearing in some eighty films between 1914 and 1917. In 1914, Hamilton was featured in the first of more than thirty “2 reel” pictures bearing his name. The film was appropriately titled *The Adventures of Shorty* (1914).

Like Broncho Billy, Shorty’s films relied on the creation of a persona in the serialized form. Such serial cowboy features relied on the gravitas of the character and the popularity of the namesake—much like the characters in “sitcoms” or “cartoons.” These films were premised on placing Shorty’s character and the size of his cowboy persona out of the west, into diverse locations and many zany situations. They were also more sophisticated films, in terms of storytelling and artifice. Consider these titles: *Shorty and Sherlock Holmes* (1914), *Shorty Among the Cannibals* (1915), and *Shorty goes to College* (1917). The more absurd the premise, the more these comedic situations proved effective in generating thematic clashes, resulting in a sense of levity that provides comedic relief in the middle of the Western.

Shorty Hamilton’s serial cowboy films were immensely popular. Part of Hamilton’s genius was his ability to balance his persona as a believable “tough guy,” while remaining light-hearted enough to include jokes, often at his own expense. To provide one example, there is a comedic scene in *Licking the Greasers*, at a moment in the plot when Shorty endeavors to save his lover, Anita. The scene is punctuated by a moment, which takes place just before, in which Shorty finds himself lost. The camera seems to match the emotional weight of this scene, by capturing the protagonist at a wide angle. The camera pans out, capturing Shorty center-mass, conveying a universal feeling of isolation. Just at this moment, Shorty stops, and scratches his head for a moment. He is lost. The gesture provides a bit of comedic relief about the absurdity of a character named Shorty, who is microscopically centered on the celluloid frame. A few frames down, however, he is back in the plot, freeing Anita, identified in the inter-title as: “Shorty’s Mexican sweetheart.”

The larger plot is organized around two related narrative arcs. The first involves Pedro, the films ostensible “greaser”: a Villista and gun smuggler for the Revolution.³⁰ The secondary plotline, deals with the aforementioned love-story, which emerges between Shorty and Anita. When Carramba, Pedro’s leader, abducts Anita, Shorty eventually double-crosses Pedro to save her.³¹ In one particular flashback, the dream-like sequence accentuates the love story, which, in the “pure cinema” of silent films, is narrated by the actors’ bodily language, especially their eyes.³²

To this point, both Shorty and Anita gaze out longingly (to the top right of the frame), positioned so that their eyes are focal points, without staring straight into the camera. These gestures are repeated at the film's end, as Shorty vows to marry Anita, calling her "Mrs. Shorty U.S.A." In this moment, the parameters of this version of the abduction scene are satisfied, as are the efforts to stave away the Mexican opposition. Most remarkably, this film culminates on the U.S. Mexican border and ends with Shorty and his posse who, though undermanned, manage to stave off the attack from the "greasers." Another innovative scene that echoes this ending, comes early on in the film, when Shorty is propositioned by Pedro. Pedro hires Shorty and his men to smuggle guns across the U.S.-Mexican border, presumably for General Carramba. The ("dissolve") shot effectively functions as a flashback and introduces the audience to the love story between Shorty and Anita, serving as Shorty's ulterior motive to join, and eventually double-cross Pedro, General Carramba, and by extension, The Mexican Revolution.

(Ef) facing the Greaser, Erasing Race

Now that I've surveyed the three films, it's important to state a point that seems fairly obvious: each of the putative greaser characters are dissimilar. This is true in the appearance of each greaser character, including costumes. This feature is especially discernable in the face signifying the greaser characters' *interiority* and highlighting the villain's "disposition." Notice how José's eyes register affably, with his arms outstretched. Even on the point of death, he never seems angered. Pedro, on the other hand, maintains a cold stare, and often telegraphs his sinister intent by clasp his hands, hunching his back, lifting his eyebrows to triangles, and communicating mal intent with his eyes. Comparatively, Willard's "greaser" character, referred to as a "half-breed" on the movie bill, maintains an especially icy stare, from which he never retreats. That a greaser's visage—especially his eyes—signals his interior state makes perfect sense, given silent cinema's reliance on body language. Further, while this observation risks banality, it will follow us through the rest of the project. The question remains: why do greaser characters look so different in each of the three films? And what should we make of the fact that the majority of these characters are played by Anglo actors, with at least one notable exception in *Licking the Greasers* and the example of Pedro played by Japanese national, Kisaburô Kurihara.

In consideration of Kurihara as Pedro, it seems ironic that these greaser villains are mostly played by white men in prosthetics. What does it mean that the films strive to represent a version of Mexican-ness without Mexicano or Chicano faces? In the case of Kurihara, the film is content to wade in the uncertainty of Kurihara's dark features. Perhaps, this point is indicative of the extent of segregation in the film industry, while revising Chon Noriega's insight: although the Mexican may be the oldest villain, that villain need not be cast by a Mexican. Nevertheless, it is apparent that these greaser characters are not defined by their likeness, but rather by their difference. The greaser's malleability is the only constant feature, most explicitly rendered in the face and costume.

In contrast to Griffith's film, *Licking the Greasers* (Ford) and *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (Anderson) are more sophisticated in their use of technology and film techniques. These films are superior in the way they use the most advanced technology and conventions of the day, to include inter-titles: short bits of descriptive language that are conventionally projected between scenes to keep the audience attuned to the plot. And yet, their plots are jejune—and linear—centering on a racial love-triangle, similar to the abduction scene described in *The Birth of a Nation*. In these films, the “Greaser” is ultimately marked by darkness, and typecast as an imposing villain, devoid of interiority. This feature is also true of his attire, so that there is a symmetry between his internal and external disposition, to include his race and ethnicity, and his implacable desire to prey on (white) women, and exact revenge. Of course, his motivations are unknowable. These scenes provide a contrast between each film's respective greaser and protagonist (or hero), all of which are marked by the racial codes of “whiteness.” They are framed as opposites internally and externally. In this way, the two films are at odds with *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, which, incidentally, offers a more complex storyline. While it is true that Griffith's greaser character bears some of these attributes, the other films are less ambiguous in their characterizations, reproducing the facile morality of the racial melodrama in which “good and evil” are so rigidly delineated. The other major feature that distinguishes Griffith's version versus the other two films is in the film's manipulation of time. Simply put, there is no time-lapse (or “fast forward”) in the latter films.³³ This is a contrast to *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, which actually takes place over some five years—not a small feat, considering that the film is only 19 minutes long, and doesn't have the benefit of inter-titles or written cues.

In contrast to the other two films, Griffith's version of the greaser character is distinguished by redemption. In all of these films, the greaser is marked by his malleability, and, as I argue, by the political climates to which he belongs. But it is this capacity for redemption that is forestalled in the two later films that requires some contemplation. This feature is especially curious in Griffith. Why is it that greaser characters—or representations of “Mexican-ness”—are deemed “redeemable” in this instance, and not in others? For scholars like Juan Alonzo, the answers lie in the political climate, especially in the two wars that follow Griffith's film: World War I (1914-1918) and The Mexican Revolution (1910-20). For Cedric Robinson, it's the effect of WWI that alters greaser cinema, prompting a shift in villainy to one that is more likely to be German or Russian. Robinson continues, arguing that this shift in the characterization of the Mexican as “Greaser” continued through WWII, in what he calls “villains of choice.” Accordingly, Robinson effectively links race and war, ultimately suggesting that the choice to construct the villain in the likeness of a national enemy was a consequence of the war that could be redirected at any moment, depending on what was happening in the global, political sphere. Robinson goes on to discuss boycotts of American films, saying:

at a time when foreign revenues were becoming increasingly important to the industry. (...) The boycott softened the treatment of Mexicans as characters, but the Mexican Revolution still needed containment, both actually and symbolically. (192)

Robinson's idea that the Mexican Revolution needed containment, both figuratively and literally, is persuasive and speaks to another aspect of the greaser films. *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* and *Licking the Greaser's* are marked by the influence of the Mexican Revolution in a manner that isn't true for Griffith's picture. For example, the costumes in these pictures, as well as the carbine rifles and the Pancho Villa-like bandoleers reflect certain iconic pictures of the period. To be sure, the Mexican Revolution is missing from Griffith's film, and for good reason: it was made two years before. Nevertheless, the latter versions of the greaser character are just as malleable as Griffith's. And each picture is marked by its own historical moment. In this case, the events between these pictures, between the years 1908 and 1914, respectively, also mark two distinctly global wars: the Mexican Revolution and World War I. While the Mexican Revolution wasn't "global" to the extent that the latter was, it was global in another sense. It was one of the first wars to be filmed and screened for foreign audiences, especially in the United States. This is the import of the partnership between Pancho Villa and Mutual films. It demonstrates Villa's understanding of the power of the cinema and its global influence.

These points notwithstanding, I now want to turn to the reciprocal relationship between the greaser's external and internal states. How we are to know these greaser characters, especially if we can't hear them? We can only "know" these characters through their appearance and through their actions. Thus, the greaser's character's costume becomes a central feature to discern disposition; it serves as a reflection of his disposition. Take José from *The Greaser's Gauntlet*. His attire seems to be an amalgamation of a miner along with a version of the vaquero, gaucho, or cowboy. This is not surprising given that the film was made in 1908. It would seem that this version of the greaser had more in common with the greasers of the latter 19th century. Unlike the greaser characters of the other films, José seems to possess no ill will or malevolent disposition. He's not irascible. Instead, he is marked by an air of buffoonery—a result of his whimsical disposition. To contrast, the other films feature greasers Pedro and the nameless "half-breed," both of which are decidedly incorrigible, and marked by a boundless sense of depravity. These versions of the greaser character are incorrigibly unredeemable, with a disposition that parodies Pancho Villa and the Mexican Revolution, more than the Mexican Cowboy and mining characters of *The Greaser's Gauntlet*. I argue that there is something in this trajectory of redeemable to unredeemable in Greaser Cinema. Despite this contrast, all these greaser characters are depicted within a version of the abduction scene—two of which are framed opposite (white) women as distressed maidens—so that the (white) heroes are also framed as white saviors. These films arguably reproduce the racial anxieties of their historic moments by upholding a version of the racial melodrama that Linda Williams puts forth in *Playing the Race Card*. With this schema in mind, these films maintain the view that (white) women's chastity stands as the apex of virtue, while depicting black and brown men conversely as the ultimate villains, hell-bent on corrupting the nation by defiling white women.

While some of the greaser characters are physically marked by this politics of war, all characters are still beholden to similar racial tropes. Without a doubt, the

conventions that constitute greaser cinema remain intact. And yet, when I consider the trajectory of the greaser character in the three films I've surveyed, beginning with D.W. Griffith's *Greaser's Gauntlet*, it is astounding to recall that the greaser character wasn't always so fixed in his depravity. Nor was he always predisposed to villainy. Rather, his presence was much more nuanced, though demonstratively swayed by the whims of an ever-changing political climate, from wars to the quotidian whims of public opinion. This observation only reveals itself when we consider greaser characters, like José and Pedro, in comparison to one another, rather than villains in relation to their respective protagonists. Regardless, one point to consider is how Griffith's character deviates from the latter (and later) two iterations. It's true that each greaser character is dressed as some version of a vaquero-cowboy. But, it's not just that Griffith's "greaser" is mutable in terms of dress, disposition, and characterization. He is also the only greaser character (of the given films) who is capable of redemption as in the Christian story, a point that is indicated by the title, "gauntlet"—the secondary meaning of which refers to a kind of difficult ordeal yet to be overcome. The significance of the greaser's malleability in these three greaser films has broader implications for all greaser films, so much so that this feature applies conterminously to the parameters of greaser cinema as a whole.

In addition to the status of the greaser character in *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, notwithstanding his malleability and the degree to which he can be redeemed, the other tantalizing aspect of Griffith's film is the representation of corporal punishment in the Southwest. Remarkably, José can be understood as the protagonist of this early film, in an industry that built its career on stereotypes of people of color. That José is a protagonist is exceptional, since greaser characters, with this one exception, are always villains. The film is also exceptional in its depiction of extrajudicial violence. In the depiction of José's attempted lynching, the film aspires to "tell the truth" and represent the phenomenon of lynching in the Southwest. According to Ken Gonzales-Day, the acknowledgment of "lynching in California is only the first step in addressing the legacy of violence and terror experienced by racial and racialized communities in the West" (3). In juxtaposing the scene with Gonzales-Day's scholarship, José's survival captures a historical practice that, by many accounts, seems repressed from public knowledge. Moreover, the ensuing scenes are just as crucial to the racial dynamics at play.

After the failed lynching, all of the "49ers" make it a point to shake José's hand. And so they do: they come up to him, one at a time, and shake José's hand, mouthing apologies, then disappearing from the frame altogether. At the end of which, José and Mildred find themselves alone. They literally share a touching moment: José gently grazes Mildred's arm in a manner that resembles Victorian mores and sexuality. That the two would appear in this scene, a man of color and a white woman, was certainly taboo in 1908.³⁴

The relationship contrasts to *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, where Mildred and José find themselves as competing protagonists. The film hinges on their improbable union: one that marks Mildred similarly as the pinnacle of grace and white womanhood. For José, their relationship allows for his character to be redeemed, while problematically asserting his humanity. In this regard, those traits, which make the other greaser villains

unredeemable, are jettisoned in this portrayal. It's as if Griffith is suggesting, José is good enough to speak with Mildred at least. He is good enough, though never an equal. In other words, the plot is framed in such a way for José to rebut this "innate" supposition, which deems Mexicanos as inherently inferior. José is forever cast as a Mexican Sisyphus. As in Greek mythology, José is always in the position of leveraging the figurative boulder—that is his humanity—up the hill. And, like the myth of Sisyphus, he can never quite get that boulder up the hill without it falling back to the base. In this way, José remains like Franz Fanon's speaker in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the Fanonian schema, José is bound to the position of proving his humanity to the same people who desire to kill him. Moreover, the Gold Rush men come to represent hegemonic aspects of society and dogmas that pronounce ideals for civilization rooted in liberty, while simultaneously denying others their humanity. To be sure, it's not really liberty that's at stake, nor democracy. Instead, the coded ideals of white supremacy are magnified in José's failed lynching and in the ensuing action. This is what Robinson means when he names the "refabrication of the public sphere" in his articulation of a new "whiteness"—which I understand is a version of a hegemonic racial project from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation*.

Racial cues in *The Greaser's Gauntlet* manifest in subtle ways. José's and Mildred's physical connection is punctuated by direct eye contact and by embracing hands. These cues are also preceded by the handshake. Handshaking in this context is largely symbolic, mirroring a bygone era. This convention of handshaking has several functions. For one, it works as an efficient non-verbal way of representing assent, especially in silent cinema. There is actually a long tradition of the handshake in cinema, beginning with these first films. There is also something amiss about the handshake the men share with José. They have just attempted to kill him by hanging him from his neck. Why then do they feel the need to embrace hands afterward? Is the handshake a display of contrition on behalf of the Gold Rush men? Perhaps it is. But there is also something symbolic in this gesture, something touching on civilization. Recall again Griffith's distinction between "nation" and "empire" in *Birth of a Nation*, and the implication that Black men lack the capacity to reason, and thus are incapable of self-governance, let alone the guarantee of rights that come with American citizenship. Within the terms of this racial logic, Silas declares his rights for the founding of a new "black empire" and not a nation. This idea, I argue, is also present in *The Greaser's Gauntlet*, in the seemingly innocuous gesture of the handshake.

Just as with José's caress of Mildred's arm, the handshake in *The Greaser's Gauntlet* seems extraordinary given the racial mores of the twentieth century, such as miscegenation laws which prohibited inter-racial marriage; these laws remained intact throughout much of that century. Moreover, the handshake serves as a contrast to the physical contact between José and Mildred. After she saves his life, for example, the two share a partial embrace, and José grazes her arm. Although the act is innocuous, the embrace of hands symbolizes a broader optics, including the engagement with the spirit of the U.S. Constitution, and the principles that govern justice, and the very legacy of Mexican-Anglo relations after 1848. Which is to say, in these gestures of touch, the film strives to represent civility and civilization. Read this way, the handshake is a

compromise, recognizing the imperfectability of frontier justice and by extension, the very courts of law. That when an innocent man is convicted to death, and the state almost carries out that order, the handshake stands as an inadequate apology. The handshakes in *Greaser's Gauntlet* vie for José's assent and, in doing so, the film makes the case that "brown" anger is never justified. Indeed, José's reaction is one of relief. Strikingly, his reaction is devoid of anger. Despite almost being murdered by three men, José seems happy to shake hands and to put this episode behind him. Of course, the film doesn't care to show how these same ideas have always been fundamental to the contradiction of the American project: espousing the principals of liberty and sovereignty, while practicing slavery and genocide. This scene, that depicts José's lynching, has the ability to resurrect that which is repressed in history, including extrajudicial violence.

When we consider the three greaser movies, we are able to glean the character's malleability. As I've argued, the greaser character's visage has a palimpsestic quality that can be written over and performed with a plethora of faces: Canadian, Anglo American, and Japanese. It's worth remembering that none of these faces are Mexican or Chicana. Nevertheless, this ability on the part of the greaser character to take on other faces as a kind of effacement makes for the character's most consistent feature. Along these lines, the greaser's disposition in all three films, which seems to go from affable to malevolent, is characteristic of this shifting visage. The character's malleability endows him with a unique ability to take on other mannerisms according to the story. Of course, as greaser cinema proper came to establish these conventions, the character became more and more sinister. That is, he became cemented as an ur-villain of the Western. And his potential for redemption in films like the *Greaser's Gauntlet* became the exception, not the rule.

Conclusion

In this first chapter I have surveyed the history of greaser cinema, beginning with its "origins" in California's first legislative sessions, including the so-called "greaser" act of 1855. With the rise of cinema, I argue that the greaser character formed a genre anticipating the serial Western and becoming prominent in the American imagination. According to historian Kevin Starr, after the War of 1848 between the U.S. and Mexico, the Californians sought to tell their story (110). Griffith's depiction shows the degree to which the original version was less established than in other films. And yet, it was the character's malleability that emerged as the most consistent feature in subsequent films. The greaser takes on a number of different appearances, while maintaining the same racial logic. This is precisely where creative writers pick up the greaser and adopt him into their fictions. As we'll see, Nathanael West's version of the greaser shows the character in transition, revealing more of a connection to the conventions set in motion by greaser cinema and the Western serial film.

Chapter Two

Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* and the "Greaser" in the Age of the "Talkies"

He walked the way John Wayne walks, striding out to clean up the universe, and he believed all that shit: a wicked, stupid, infantile motherfucker. Like his heroes, he was kind of pinheaded, heavy gutted, big assed, and his eyes were as blank as George Washington's eyes.

—James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*

Long ago Before the world's fair
Before you were born one night Mother was so frightened on account
of all the rifle shots but it was all right turned out to be nothing but a
little shooting they'd been only shooting a greaser that was all
that was in the early days

—John Dos Passos' *The 42nd Parallel*

"That's what comes of palling up with a dirty greaser," said the Indian excitedly."

—Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*

Anatomy of a Scene

In the (lesser studied) penultimate scenes of Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*, Tod Hackett (the protagonist) visits "Tuttle's Trading Post" in search of Miguel and Earle.¹ Both Miguel and Earle—also referred to as the "Mexican" and the "Cowboy" respectively—are two of the many Hollywood misfits whom Hackett befriends. These characters are among the many figurative "Locusts" who occupy Hackett's narrative and artistic vision: an elaborate fantasy that he calls "the burning of Los Angeles. Hackett is delusional in this regard. The masterpiece the narrator claims Hackett will paint, in order to assume the fantasy of himself as an artistic genius, is representative of the novel's narrative strategy, which blurs the line between fantasy and reality (Seed 258).² Thus, *Day of the Locust* grapples with this dialectic of appearance and essence, structured around the "California fake" with "Los Angeles as its signifier" (Brevda 382).

The spatial dynamics of the trading post corroborate the dialectic. At the trading post, Hackett's narration demonstrates the extent to which he fashions a version of the Western film out of the materials of the studio backlot. In this case, he observes and serves as an interlocutor in a debate over Miguel's humanity from two unlikely characters. At the same time, Hackett establishes the "world-as-movie-set metaphor" (387). By its own account, Tuttle's is a Western-themed souvenir shop that peddles "Genuine Relics of the West," including: "*Beads, Silver, Jewelry, Moccasins, Dolls, Toys, Rare Books, Postcards*" (emphasis original, 172). The signage as well as the ostensible "Western" characters that inhabit the establishment are representative of the many "California fakes" that Hackett encounters. *Day of the Locust* is populated by such cartoonish stock characters from "old" Hollywood: from the silent era and the older

vaudevillian circuit. In addition to the scene's outlandish characters, Miguel's condemnation as a "dirty greaser" by "Chief Kiss-My-Towkus" demonstrates the novel's wry humor, as well as the novel's mimicry of racial performance—a feature that satirizes the same phenomenon in the movie industry. To emphasize the point, the scene represents one of the many occasions in which the novel encounters a version of the Western serial film.

Indeed, *The Day of the Locust* has been hailed by many as the quintessential "Hollywood novel": "a broad category that includes romance, satire, and crime fiction" (Seed 258).³ This characterization of the novel as negotiating the poles between "illusion and reality" (258) is demonstrated as Tod Hackett (the novel's protagonist) gradually becomes ensnared in a fantasy of his own making, and ultimately becomes estranged from his body.⁴ In this chapter, I will grapple with the protagonist's relationship to Miguel, whom we meet indirectly at Tuttle's Trading Post. Little has been written about the novel's relationship to race, including its depiction of Miguel, the novel's only Mexican character. Within West's satire of Hollywood, I argue that there is an incisive discussion of the movie industry's relationship to race and Mexican-ness.

Life After Death

Scholars have convincingly argued that Nathanael West's novel is a satire that makes an incisive critique of the U.S. film industry.⁵ Of course, *Day of the Locust* is strongly informed by West's experience as a Hollywood script writer during the Great Depression. West served as a screen writer and "script doctor" throughout the 1930s, working for four major studios (Republic, RKO, Universal, and Columbia). In 1939 he was elected to the Executive Board of the Screen Writers Guild (Light 155-165). Although he achieved some success in the movie industry, West's true aspirations were to earn a living as a novelist. While he never reached that level of success in his lifetime (few novelists ever do), West did publish four novels: *The Dream of Balso Snell* (1931), *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Cool Million* (1934), and *The Day of the Locust* (1939). Two of which, *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Day of the Locust* have been anthologized and even adapted into motion pictures.⁶

As LA Times review columnist David L. Ulin observed nearly 60 years after the fact, "West achieved a "cult status in the 1960's" because his career was cut short, and because "relatively little was known about the man." For Ulin, whose review marked the publication of West's complete works by the Library of Congress (called *Novels and Other Writings*), these aspects continue to fuel the myth of the man and his legend.⁷ Nathanael West's career as a writer is often overshadowed by his tragic death.⁸ On December 22nd, 1940, Nathanael and Eileen West were driving home from a hunting trip in Mexico, when they were struck and killed by another motorist in El Centro, CA. It's well known that they were on their way to a funeral for friend and fellow writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Though West never achieved the kind of success he wished for in life, his works grew in popularity during the 1950's.⁹ His novels were reprinted, especially *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Day of the Locust*, which were bundled and reprinted together in 1962 (under New Directions Press; they remain in print). A number of literary biographies and

collections of essays on West and his works were published, including Jay Martin's *Nathanael West: The Art of His Life* (1970). Most notably, *Day of the Locust* was also adapted to the screen in 1975.¹⁰

The novel centers around Tod Hackett, who stands as a cliché for the aspiring artist searching for form. Hackett is a version of that often romanticized, though quintessential characterization which defines artists by their propensity to suffer through life. His character symbolizes the emergence of the mass audience of radio and film distinguished by passive collective participation (e.g. by listening or watching); in some ways, Hackett's narration is akin to this kind of participation—as a voyeur. Embedded in his narration is a struggle of the protagonist as he vies for narrative authority: to be both writer and director, while blurring the boundaries between film and painting.¹¹ This same blurring of boundaries becomes the leitmotif of Tod's Hackett's artistic vision: a vision mediated by the “mobs” of “locusts” he encounters, ballooning in the streets of Hollywood and on set in the film studio.

Consider the opening pages which frame Hackett as “almost doltish” (60) offering a series of antinomies that require further consideration. In fact, the narrator tells us how Hackett was hired informally, by telegram; the narrator surmises that “[if] the scout had met Tod, he probably wouldn't have sent him to Hollywood” (60). A few moments later, he describes Tod conversely: “Yes, despite this appearance, he was really a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes. And ‘The Burning of Los Angeles,’ a picture he was soon to paint, (...) [and definitively prove that] he had talent” (60). At the end of the sentence, the narrator fantasizes about the painting he'll produce, and ruminates on the prospect of fame.

These incongruities—which operate between the poles of fantasy and reality—reflect the modernization of the movie industry and its transition from silent pictures to “talkies.” This timeline includes the films made in the early 1910's to ones made in the late 1920's with titles like *The Jazz Singer* (1929)—commonly acknowledged as the first “sound” film. The timeline also overlaps with the emergence of greaser cinema. As noted in the previous chapter, the movie industries also shifted, transitioning from smaller localized production companies to the behemoths of today, giving rise to the large studios that would dominate the movie industry. In the wake of the innovations in the industry, including the “sound film,” most of the smaller studios (like Essanay) were consolidated during these early years, giving rise to the tycoons of the industry, with names like Warner Brothers, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Fox, and United Artists. Among the consolidation of power by the large studios was the implementation of the “star-system”: a practice which invested money and resources in individual actors and actresses, who were hand selected, signed to long-term contracts, bandied about to the general viewing audience as part of marketing campaigns to sell movies (and products).

This point is especially visible in the mention of Audrey Jennings, a silent film starlet turned Hollywood madam. Her introduction shows how the novel examines the modernization of the film industry, while demonstrating the extent to which social mores

have been reversed. As Hackett says: “[Jennings] had been a fairly prominent actress in the days of silent films, but sound made it impossible for her to get work. Instead of becoming an extra or a bit player like many other old stars, she had shown excellent business sense and had opened a callhouse” (73). Here the narrator identifies Jennings as a Hollywood madam, with an air of indifference and callousness, devoid of puritanical morality. Rather, the onus is on the transactional nature of the business. Hackett is shrewd to the point about Jennings’ “business sense”; though the line is tinged with understatement, the passage is representative of the narrator’s generally detached voice.¹² As the passage indicates, the innovation in sound pictures has major implications for the industry and for labor. Of course, the suggestion of prostitution is likely a satirical jab aimed at the movie industry for its ill-treatment of workers, especially screenwriters.

The screenwriter’s authority was divested, and other filmmaking jobs diminished, during the rise of studio system. This change resulted in regulating the director’s autonomy and diverting narrative control to the producer, many of which were the studio heads.¹³ According to social and political film historians Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, the opportunity to seize complete control of the industry came during the Great Depression when most of the large studios went into bankruptcy. By 1933, there was an “accelerated consolidation and control of Wall Street” (*Radical Hollywood* 10). In chapter 1 of their aptly titled “The Screen Writers Fate,” Buhle and Wagner examine these very conditions that would forever diminish the screen writer’s agency.

Part of their strategy was to create institutional changes and implement methods of “official censorship” by appealing to public morality. The result was the establishment of the “the Code”: official proprietary ordinances established in 1922 by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). The Code was formally adopted in the 1931 (11), just at the moment of consolidation. To reiterate, one of the main results was to successfully disempower screen writers, by taking ownership over the stories they told, and weighing in to rewrite them whenever the studios wanted to exercise their authority—especially when a writer’s artistic vision was thought to be subversive, offending the status quo, social mores, or the dollar.¹⁴ The consolidation of authority and reduction of the screenwriter’s “power” followed to other posts—a fate both Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles would experience directly.

Day of the Locust observes these transformations through Tod Hackett’s mediation of the Hollywood film industry. This observation unfolds at the beginning of the novel with one of the only references to a director, juxtaposed with one about Tod. Later, we meet Tod’s confidant and fellow screenwriter, Claude. The description of each continues as Tod Hackett’s character is introduced as a protagonist searching for the realization of his artistry—a position undermined and subverted by his positionality as a “hack” artist. Absent from Hackett’s notion of art is any reference to the artistic process. Instead, Hackett’s aspiration seems to be more wistful, and as the novel continues, it becomes more fantastic, culminating in Hackett’s desire for fame. This idea is born out in the narrative strategy that connects Hackett with his friend and more accomplished doppelganger, Claude Estee. Indeed, Estee is a successful version of Hackett (or the

“hack” artist) in that he is depicted as an accomplished scriptwriter, dragging Tod through Hollywood’s underworld of liquor, brothels and stag films. This propensity for hedonism is all the more salacious given the politics of the 1930’s and the establishment of the “Code.”

In addition to this schema, Hackett encounters a series of characters who seem pulled straight from silent films. Westean scholar Kingsley Widmer argues that these characters “turn out to be the props of artists who fear they have themselves become the properties of an unbelievable and puerile myth” (184). Widmer is speaking of the “California dream,” which West satirizes outright with the likes of another character, Homer Simpson. In framing these masqueraders of the first order, Widmer gets at the core of West’s satire. He refines his claim that *Day of the Locust* is a “masquerade of civilization” by asserting that “the historic Hollywood is dead; but just as essentially, America has become Hollywood” (193). Tod identifies Simpson as a quintessential masquerader (“locust”) and frequently scoffs at Homer’s gullibility: the inability to see when others take advantage of his hospitality. This trait renders Homer especially pathetic (and as memorable as Don Quixote). (Later, I’ll examine Homer as he becomes a second protagonist, as the novel briefly shifts its point of view from Tod to Homer). In this regard, Widmer notes how Simpson is a symbol of repression, fashioned after homespun modernist characters from Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).¹⁵ He writes:

The ravaging of the land by the petit bourgeoisie locusts, as West saw, rests in the culture of social and individual malnutrition which was Hollywood. In combining his Sherwood Anderson Middle American, Homer, with the cheaters, the technological fantasts, West’s insight was that the basic American repressed character was to merge with the Hollywood counterfeit—as it has in our puritanic decadence—providing the largest masquerade of civilization. (193)

In addition to Widmer’s reading of West’s overarching grand critique of Hollywood as an indictment of (Western) civilization, the actual “Locusts” or “masqueraders” are the many characters of “old Hollywood” whom Tod encounters as a “new” Californian. He meets them all by this time, which, incidentally, is only his third month in California. They are Harry Greener, a Vaudevillian Clown, and Greener’s daughter: an eternal debutante and inexpert singer named Faye Greener. Then there is “Honest” Abe Kusich, a petulant dwarf, who’s entire schtick is determined by the audience’s response to his anger. Finally, there are two stock characters of the Western: Earle Shoop, a serial cowboy character likened to a 2D drawing, and his compatriot, Miguel. As I will argue, Miguel is a version of the greaser character that I began examining in the previous chapter. Though, as with the novel’s cleverly thematized modernization of the film industry—and shift from silent cinema to “talkies”—Miguel’s character also reflects these changes. For Miguel, or “the Mexican” as he’s called on occasion, his character embodies the transformation of greaser cinema (and the Western). This includes shifting representations of Mexican-ness as the greaser character gives way to the emergence of the Latin lover.

According to Chicana film scholar Rosalinda Fregoso, the Latin lover character emerged as the dominant expression of Mexican-ness in the movies during the 1920s, following denouncements of characters like the greaser (“The Bronze Screen”).¹⁶ More recently, Latina film scholar Laura Isabel Serna chronicles these boycotts and transnational film culture among U.S. Mexican migrant communities and urban centers like Mexico City (*Making Cinelandia*). As Latino film scholar Antonio Ríos-Bustamante writes in his essay “Latino Participation in Hollywood, 1911-1945,” Latinos “were major participants from the beginning” (18) in all aspects of filmmaking: acting, directing, screen writing, and in all manner of positions on the technical side of the camera. Ríos-Bustamante offers a portrait of the film industry in transition, noting how the barriers that kept out people of color in the ensuing decades were adopted over time. As he says, “Non-Anglo ethnic groups were able to play a major role in early filmmaking, since racial and cultural barriers had not yet hardened into the later ethnic stereotyping, typecasting, and racial exclusion of some groups from film productions” (18).

One specific barrier worth considering (especially when we come to the final chapter) is how most of the Latinx players of the silent era, though light skinned, were able to start with Spanish surnames (19). Within a decade or so (after the 1910’s), Latinx actors would readily alter their surnames, anglicizing them as Anthony Quinn or Rita Hayworth, and effectively removing any trace of Spanish. Of course, conventions change over time according to the whims of public demand and the political climate. In this regard, the Latin lover character naturally superseded the greaser character in so far as it was more socially palatable. As Ríos-Bustamante puts it, the “Latin lover” was not only a character, it was a “craze that made Latinos temporarily fashionable” in America (19). While earlier characters like the “greaser” brought about aversion and boycotts in the film industry, the charming Latin Lover character made significant inroads to the viewing public, though not without completely disassociating himself from that earlier character.

As Ríos-Bustamante reminds us, despite their dissimilarities, the greaser and Latin lover characters are not so different. They are part of the same tradition, and they continue to inform Latinx characters in movies, so much so that “these older stereotypes would be even more fully revived in the form of the “Mexican bandit” in the 1940s with movies like John Huston’s *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)¹⁷ and throughout the “1970s and 1980s in gang and drug exploitation films” (21).¹⁸ If Ríos-Bustamante’s assertion about these early Latinx characters holds, then it is also true that those characters are composites. Like the argument in chapter 1, which concludes by asserting that the only consistent trait of greaser cinema is the character’s malleability, these characters, as well as the ones throughout the 20th Century, are more current expressions of the same malleability. Thus, the Latin lover can be thought of as a version of the greaser character. In a similar manner, the greaser can be thought of as a composite of coterminous social and legal discourses, 19th century literature, and public sentiment.

Exceptional Villainy: From Abduction to Seduction

As I've suggested, *Day of the Locust* satirizes the movie industry. The novel's encounter with the Western plot and characters demonstrates the boundaries of the satire, while providing the occasion to consider the novel's discussion of race and performance in the movie industry, including the role of greaser cinema in the novel. I've suggested that Tod Hackett's character and narrator voice allow the reader to consider the underside of the movie industry. Among these characters, are Earle and Miguel. I'll come to Miguel, but first I must make a few points about Earle's character. At the outset of chapter 14, Hackett narrates an encounter he has with Earle. The chapter begins: "Tod had other and more successful rivals than Homer Simpson. One of the most important was a young man called Earle Shoop" (108).

Earle is introduced in adversarial terms, as one of the other "more successful rivals." Soon after, Tod notes how Earle seems vapid, lacking emotional intelligence and humor. Earle doesn't register Tod's mimicry of Earle's monosyllabic cowboy greetings (110). Nor does Earle register the jokes that are made at his expense. While at Hodges Saddlery Store Tod encounters three such cowboy characters. Including Earle, Hackett meets "another Westerner in a big hat and boots" named Calvin, and another man "like the other two" named Hink (110). For a moment, the novel seems to pause in this moment of imitation as the three cowboys "stare across the street" (110). In this moment, Tod Hackett demonstrates his function in the novel as an outsider of sorts, and a kind of comedic "straight man." In this case, his outsider status gives him license to narrate the incongruity of this narrative world: one in which the old west has become modernized. Those outmoded principal characters like the cowboy seem out of place. Hackett serves as interpreter for what he perceives as unintelligible jokes. But it's the second joke that gives Hackett more insight into Earle's character. The scene unfolds as such:

It was another joke. Calvin and Hink slapped their thighs and laughed, but Tod could see that they were waiting for something else. Earle, suddenly, without even shifting his weight, shot his foot out and kicked Calvin solidly in the rump. This was the real point of the joke. They were delighted by Earle's fury. Tod also laughed. The way Earle had gone from apathy to action without the usual transition was funny. The seriousness of his violence was even funnier. (111)

In addition to narrating and translating jokes, Hackett's main observation involves how Earle is goaded to anger and retaliation. But it's the final line, linking violence to humor, that is most intriguing and worth considering in light of West's broader project. This same pattern of goading Earle to achieve an angry reaction is repeated in the impending scenes that follow, when Earle is positioned in contrast to Faye and Miguel's erotic rendezvous. At the same time, the characters are scripted in such a manner that reproduces a version of the Western, and a reversed version of the abduction scene, and rendered with a particular comedic violence. This aspect of Nathanael West's fictionality has been the topic of some commentary.

To provide one colorful example, scholars have frequently cited Nathanael West's statement from "Contact Magazine" as a clue to reading the violence in his novels. West writes:

In America violence is idiomatic. Read our newspapers. To make the front page a murderer has to use his imagination, he also has to use a particularly hideous instrument. Take this morning's paper: FATHER CUTS SON'S THROAT IN BASEBALL ARGUMENT. It appears on an inside page. To make the first page, he should have killed three sons and with a baseball bat instead of a knife. Only liberality and symmetry could have made this daily occurrence interesting. (162)

West grapples with the morbidity of violence, but also what he perceives as an escalation of violence in the discourse of presenting it. Hence, the act of filicide proves to be the grand example of West's maxim that "violence is idiomatic" for American audiences. Does West mean that violence is idiomatic in America so much so that it is unintelligible to non-Americans? Perhaps all of the above. When one considers the comedic violence of movies, of the 1930's screwball comedies, or the imitative Warner Brothers Cartoons of Bugs Bunny (for comedian Red Skelton), it's clear that there is another dimension to West's view that becomes apparent when one sees those movies and cartoons. In which case, I would add that there is something cartoonish in the statement that has much to do with hyperbole needed to have an impact on an otherwise disengaged audience whose consumption of images and movies has resulted in a disposition unfazed by violence. This is West's point in evoking the notoriety of the "murdering" who now have to "use imagination." West continues, explaining that the villain has to use "a particularly hideous instrument" as well. What's interesting here in West's argument regards degree. But also, this is not the only place where he imagines those "hideous instruments"—of death. To come to my point, Earle's introduction in the novel contains these same familiar words:

Earle was a cowboy from a small town in Arizona. He worked occasionally in horse-operas and spent the rest of his time in front of a saddlery store on Sunset Boulevard. In the window of this store was an enormous Mexican saddle covered with carved silver, and around it was arranged a large collection of torture instruments. (108)

The passage captures Earle's oddities—which are the same qualities that confer his authenticity as a cowboy. Of course, the larger spatial cues are the streets of Sunset Boulevard and the incongruousness of multiple saddlery stores located in what is also a beach town. Nevertheless, Earle is introduced in this manner of irascibility, but also, again, as one of many more suitable "rivals." The plural form of the noun is another signal. In it there is a potential for mis-associating Homer in this equation. But he is not the character that makes it plural. Miguel is.

Miguel's introduction and exit are organized around the fulfillment of the abduction scene. From his introduction, Miguel is framed within Tod's narrative voice (just as all the characters are framed and introduced). These same characters inhabit

Hackett's imagination, and his impending movie poster and "masterpiece"—the same ones about which he frequently daydreams. Miguel's entrance and connection to Faye is impressionable. In some ways, their union seems to recall those four movie posters displayed two pages back. The novel reproduces a version of this embrace so that Miguel is always positioned as a sexual foil along with Faye and Earle. As always, it's important to point out that Tod Hackett retains his position as narrator, even in Miguel's entrance. Consider Miguel's opening scene:

Tod saw a man watching their approach from the edge of the wood. Faye also saw him and waved.

"Hi Mig!" she shouted.

"Hi Chinita! he called back.

She ran the last ten yards of the slope and the man caught her in his arms. He was toffee-colored with large Armenian eyes and pouting black lips. His head was a mass of tight, ordered curls. He wore a long-haired sweater, called a "gorilla" in and around Los Angeles, with nothing under it. His soiled duck trousers were held up by a red bandana handkerchief. On his feet were a pair of tattered tennis sneakers. (113)

Tod mediates Miguel's introduction with a sensuousness and an attention to Miguel's body, describing it as an amorphous shade of brown, using coded adjectives like "toffee-colored," "Armenian," and "pouting." Miguel's "gorilla" sweater provides another contrast. These descriptions affirm Miguel's desirability. All of these details, including Miguel's "warm" disposition, suggests West is pulling from the cinema and relying on a stock Mexican character in the fashion of the Latin lover. Tod's gaze sexualizes Miguel's body, imagining his naked torso under the "gorilla." In doing so, he also registers the intimacy of Miguel's and Faye's relationship. Their shared "pet" names—"Mig" and "Chinita"—foreshadows the conflict, setting the stage for Miguel as the chief antagonist of the love triangle, though one would never know it from the tenderness of the description. This point is especially apparent when Faye runs to Miguel and falls in his arms in a manner that reproduces the body language of the movie posters (just above).

To reiterate, Miguel's character is framed through Hackett's point of view and sexualized from the outset. To offer another example, soon after Tod Hackett encounters Miguel, his observations are directed to Miguel's clothing. Hackett observes Miguel's mismatched "red bandana handkerchief" and "tattered tennis sneakers," which provide cinematic contrast and are also suggestive of Miguel's status as a Latin lover figure. To be sure, the color red is often selectively implemented in film, because "red" tends to dominate the frame, attracting the viewer's eye like a bull in a bullfight. In this case, the effect is two-fold. First, the red bandana symbolizes the *vaquero* (or Mexican cowboy). Interpreted this way, Miguel's clothing linked to those other cinematic types. Secondly, and perhaps even more compelling is the location of the red bandana near Miguel's crotch. It's as if Hackett, with his implicit desire to be a director, is training the reader's eye to Miguel's phallus. Of course, the bull fighting metaphor remains at play,

though it doesn't contradict Miguel's sexuality. Rather, it affirms this dynamic between auteur and subject. As the novel continues, these same erotic tones are revisited as Miguel displays his fighting roosters. As Tod puts it: "The Mexican came over and began to talk about the cocks" (114). A series of double-entendres follow, with elaborate and not so elaborate penis puns to fill the scenes. So much so that the actual game of cockfighting becomes an analogy to Earle's displays of comedic violence. Again, the chemistry between Miguel and Faye has a palpable effect on the characters. For example, Tod feels encumbered by the salacious couple. Consider the following lines:

Tod could sense her growing excitement. The box on which they were sitting was so small that their backs touched and he could feel how hot she was and how restless. Her neck and face had turned from ivory to rose. She kept reaching for his cigarettes.

Earle's features were hidden in the shadow of his big hat, but the Mexican sat full in the light of the fire. His skin glowed and the oil in his black curls sparkled. He kept smiling at Faye in a manner that Tod didn't like. The more he drank, the less he liked. (115)

As we can see from the passage, the unspoken attraction has a marked effect on all the characters, including Tod Hackett, who observes how Faye changes colors, donning the same red hues that Miguel is introduced with. Additionally, Miguel's character is depicted in contrast to Earle, who channels darkness and "shadow." Like Faye, the fire illuminates Miguel's features, so that even his black curls shine in the firelight. Furthermore, Miguel performance coincides with the versions of cinematic versions of "the Mexican." The increasing tempo replicates cinematic pacing; soon, the characters appear mesmerized in a manner that anticipates the conclusion, of Tod Hackett's split: the bifurcation between body and mind. In this moment, they are lulled into dance by Miguel's hypnotic song. This exchange continues:

Earle shifted uneasily and played with his stick. Tod saw her look at him and saw that she was afraid, but instead of becoming wary, she grew still more reckless. She took a long pull at the jug and stood up. She put one hand on each of her buttocks and began to dance.

Mig seemed to have completely forgotten Earle. He clapped his hands, cupping them to make a hollow, drumlike sound, and put all he felt into his voice. He had changed to a more fitting song.

"Tony's wife,
The boys in Havana love Tony's wife..." (116)

In this moment, Miguel switches songs and languages. He goes from the corridos in Spanish, to English lyrics set in Cuba. In this musical transition, Miguel mirrors the broader transformation of Greaser cinema. The choice of song to "Tony's wife" in Havana, mirrors the sexual energy of the Latin lover. Not only that, the fact that Miguel has essentially goaded the other characters into dance speaks to the Latin lover's ability to mystify others. Soon after, Miguel joins Faye in the dance. Then Earle does the same, performing what Tod calls "a crude hoe-down" (117). At the same time, Earle is

unable to fully synchronize his dance with the others, so that "he was unable to disturb the precision" which Miguel and Faye achieve. As a result, he attacks Miguel in a manner that replicates the comedic schtick of the earlier scene. The scene continues: "Tod saw the blow before it fell. He saw Earle raise his stick and bring it down on the Mexican's head. He heard the crack and saw the Mexican go to his knees still dancing, his body unwilling or unable to acknowledge the interruption" (117). Thus, while Earle's attack is brutal, the scene repeats the comedic violence of the earlier scene with the cowboys Calvin and Hink at Hodges Saddlery Store.

This narrative framing of Miguel as a Latin lover continues even as the novel shifts perspectives. As the novel reaches its denouement, it strategically switches perspective, from Hackett, to Homer Simpson, while ultimately fulfilling the narrative arc for the Latin lover.¹⁹ In this scene, the narrative filter continues. This time Homer discovers Fay having sex with Miguel. His incredulity and outright unwillingness to believe the spectacle before him is significant. Indeed, the novel seems to revel in this erotic narrative, offering up Homer's denial as a stream of consciousness sequence. The passage follows:

Faye let him in. She was curled up in bed like a little girl. She called him Daddy and kissed him and said that she wasn't angry at him at all. She said there had been a fight but nobody got hurt much and for him to go back to bed and that they would talk more in the morning. He went back like she said and fell asleep, but he woke up again as it was just breaking daylight. At first he wondered why he was up because when he once fell asleep, usually he didn't get up before the alarm clock rang. He knew that something had happened, but he didn't know what until he heard a noise in Faye's room. It was a moan and he thought he was dreaming, but he heard it again. Sure enough, Faye was moaning all right. He thought she must be sick. She moaned again like in pain. He got out of bed and went to the door and knocked and asked if she was sick. She didn't answer and the moaning stopped so he went back to bed. A little later she moaned again so he got out of bed, thinking she might want the hot water bottle or some aspirin and a drink of water or something and knocked on her door again, only meaning to help her. She heard him and said something. He didn't understand what but he thought she meant for him to go in. Lots of times when she had a headache he brought her an aspirin and a glass of water in the middle of the night. The door wasn't locked. You'd have thought she would have locked the door because the Mexican was in bed with her, both of them naked and she had her arms around him. Faye saw him and pulled the sheets over her head without saying anything. He didn't know what to do so he backed out of the room and closed the door. He was standing in the hall, trying to figure out what to do, feeling so ashamed, when Earle appeared with his boots in his hand. He must have been sleeping in the parlor. He wanted to know what the trouble was. "Faye's sick," he said, "and I'm getting her a glass of water." But then Faye moaned again and Earle heard it. He pushed open the door. Faye screamed. He could hear Earl and Miguel cursing each other and fighting. He was afraid to call the police on account of Faye and didn't know what to do. Faye kept on screaming. (169-71)

From the tone of the passage, we can infer that the reader is meant to sympathize with Homer's point of view: scandalized. Homer communicates these sentiments in the manner he deflects his vision (and feelings). He achieves this effect with subjunctive speech ("you'd have thought," etc.). The scandal of finding Faye in the throes of passion with "The Mexican" reinforces this premise. Homer's initial refusal to look at the couple, followed by the symbolism of him closing the door, confirms this point. The same can be said of his blatant "lie" to Earle that "Faye is sick."

Just as Tod is mesmerized by Miguel's phallic movement (represented by the metaphoric red bandanna), Homer is confounded and in complete denial at the sight of the lovers. And yet, he is not so stunned that he forgets about Miguel's Mexican-ness. Soon after he discovers the lovers, his scorn goes from Faye to Miguel, though he uses that synonym of the greaser character, referring to Miguel as simply "the Mexican." In doing so, he links Miguel to his place in the movies: as a greaser or Latin lover character. While Miguel appears closer to the latter, it is worth noting that the greaser is also stigmatized as being a depraved sexual being. This is the point of the abduction scene, to recall how Griffith's Silas Lynch (in *The Birth of a Nation*) is framed as the reviled rapist. This characterization is also consistent with the greaser film.

As Antonio Ríos-Bustamante says in his analysis of the Latin lover films: "Always just beneath the surface of the romantic Latin image [was] the older, more negative nineteenth-century stereotypes of the vicious 'greaser with a knife' (...) which the early silent films had incorporated from the dime Western and Western novel" (21). Thus, insofar as *Day of the Locust* is marked by the modernization of the movie industry (read "talkies"), Miguel's character remains a throw-back. Regardless of technological advances in the industry, he appears typecast as a greaser and Latin lover character. Again, this aspect is corroborated by the way he's framed by each of the narrators. To put the matter of Miguel's eroticization differently, it's significant that Homer cannot stop Earle from barging in the room. This confirms his naiveté as a credulous lover. And by extension, the scene affirms Tod Hackett's authority as a storyteller.

While Miguel's character fulfills the racial logic of the Latin lover—and his antagonistic role in the love triangle—the scene reveals more about Homer (and Tod), then it does Miguel, who remains a "flat" character through his exit. After all, Tod is the novel's protagonist; the novel's central conscious. It is through his point of view that all characters and actions are framed. And yet, his lack of critical recognition amounts to what film scholar Susan Courtney calls a "white masculinist fantasy": the proliferation of the fantasy of the black rapist-cum-murderer in modern movies (xvi). For, in Tod (and Homer's) incredulity is a denial of Miguel's very humanity. Case in point, Earle accosts Miguel in a chase sequence that continues off screen. In this way, this particular plot devolves into a version of the Western. So that the "hero" of the formulaic Western plot, Earle (the Cowboy) triumphs over Miguel (the Mexican villain or Greaser). Thus envisaged, Tod Hackett lives up to his name. Instead of authoring his own story, as a screen writer (director or protagonist), *Day of the Locust* takes up the hackneyed plot of the Western movie. This brings us back to the significance of the penultimate scene mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

In that scene, the point of view returns to Tod Hackett and he goes in search of Miguel and Earle at Tuttle's. A close examination of the scene suggests that Tod Hackett is really in pursuit of the abduction scene. The scene continues in its entirety:

Calvin was always friendly.
"Lo, thar," he called out, when Tod came up.
"Meet the chief," he added, grinning. "Chief Kiss-My-Towkus."
The Indian laughed heartily at the joke.
"You gotta live," he said.
"Earle been around today?" Tod asked.
"Yop. Went by an hour ago."
"We were at a party last night and I..."
Calvin broke in by hitting his thigh a wallop with the flat of his palm.
"That must've been some shindig to hear Earle tell it. Eh, Skookum?"
"Vas you dere, Sharley?" the Indian agreed, showing the black inside of his mouth, purple tongue and broken orange teeth.
"I heard there was a fight after I left."
Calvin smacked his thigh again.
"Sure musta been. Earle got himself two black eyes, lulus."
"That's what comes of palling up with a dirty greaser," said the Indian excitedly. (172)

The scene is marked by incongruity. From the signage to the banter, the conversation is charged with a comic-grotesqueness. In fact, Calvin and Chief Kiss-My-Towkus seem like comedians engaged in a kind of Western comic routine. This point is discernible in the manner the two finish each other's sentences, so that their banter becomes increasingly outrageous. The same can be said for their dress, especially the so-called "Chief," whose black mouth, "purple tongue and orange teeth" seem to be a play on flint corn (also called "Indian corn."). That the two characters lapse into English inflected with German soundings, underscores the ersatz qualities of each. Like the traditions of blackface and greaser cinema, it's obvious that Calvin and "Chief" are both played by white men in makeup and prosthetics. Thus, the characters seem to channel the cinematic trope of "cowboys and Indians," albeit in a more comedic manner. Like the incongruousness of the other "bit" characters of the novel, the duo is beholden to the novel's narrative strategy that blurs the line of fantasy and reality. In this case, Calvin and Chief seem to channel the Western, at least on the surface; only, their version of the Western seems more in line with Robert Downey's "acid Western," *Greaser's Palace*. These points notwithstanding, Hackett is not perturbed in the least. His engagement with these characters is significant, riffing on the abduction scene. Consider the second part of the exchange that links Miguel's Mexican-ness to villainy:

[Chief] and Calvin got into a long argument about Mexicans. The Indian said that they were all bad. Calvin claimed he had known quite a few good ones in his time. When the Indian cited the case of the Hermanos brothers who had killed a lonely prospector for half a dollar, Calvin countered with a long tale about

a man called Tomas Lopez who shared his last pint of water with a stranger when they both were lost in the desert.

Tod tried to get the conversation back to what interested him.

“Mexicans are very good with women,” he said.

“Better with horses,” said the Indian. “I remember one time along the Brazos, I...”

Tod tried again.

“They fought over Earle’s girl, didn’t they?”

“Not to hear him tell it,” Calvin said. “He claims it was dough —claims the Mex robbed him while he was sleeping.”

“The dirty, thievin’ rat,” said the Indian, spitting.

“He claims he’s all washed up with that bitch,” Calvin went on. (172-173)

As previously mentioned, this scene marks one of the only times Miguel is interpolated as a “greaser.” That he is called this by an ersatz “Indian chief” is revelatory, as is conversation that ensues regarding Miguel’s depravity. Of course, this exchange seems to be in line with the scene as a whole, given the stated incongruousness of the setting and character—including the manner in which the discussion becomes increasingly hyperbolic. Nevertheless, Tod Hackett’s interjections are puzzling, shifting to his obsession with Miguel’s sexuality. All this while Calvin and “Chief” debate the status of Miguel’s villainy, which is a decidedly satirical conversation, given that Calvin (the ostensible cowboy) comes to his Miguel’s defense. Hackett remains disconcerted. Twice he tries to redirect the conversation, saying “Mexicans are very good with women,” only to be undermined by both characters. When he tries to switch the conversation again, his attempt is rebuffed. It’s ultimately unclear why Hackett tries to direct the conversation in this way, and what kind of information he’s attempting to glean from the duo—especially since he is actually in the building when Homer (and Earle) discover Faye and Miguel in bed.

Conclusion

“You’re just like that mean Mr. Hackett. You just won’t let me cherish my illusions” (71).
—Nathanael West’s *Day of the Locust*

Day of the Locust offers a sophisticated adaptation of cinematic forms. This feature is useful in illuminating one of West’s core narrative strategies, which include the integration of cinematic conventions and culture from silent cinema. Miguel’s scenes are mostly shared with Earle the “paper cowboy.” Their scenes usually devolve into chase or fight sequences, including at the novel’s end, when Miguel and Earle disappear from the final mob scene altogether. Tod Hackett’s depiction as an artist in pursuit of his masterpiece is ultimately a cliché, though a purposeful one. In his position as narrator, Hackett’s encounters with the dregs of silent cinema—mostly bit characters—bring the novel’s title and central “Locust” metaphor into view. While the “Locust” metaphor is ultimately synonymous with the mobs of masqueraders that occupy his nihilistic death fantasy, they come to fruition in the final climactic mob scene. Though Hackett’s reliance on Western (or greaser) characters like Earle and Miguel, these characters

assist in telling the story, and in framing the action—regardless of their hackneyed plots. This turns out to be one of many genre-specific plotlines (stories) that Hackett regurgitates in his capacity as protagonist. In the final analysis, West's version of the Western, dramatized by Earle and Miguel, continues in a manner that remains overdetermined.

What is clear is that Hackett is invested in recapitulating a version of the abduction scene. This point is corroborated in the next scene. When Tod goes to dinner, he systematically works himself into a daydream, reenacting a rape fantasy. He spends more time daydreaming about abducting Faye than he does eating dinner. At the table, Tod imagines a version of Miguel "on a strange shore" as a "savage with pork-sausage fingers," "a pimpled butt" and "sagging belly" as he accosts Faye (174). Furthermore, the metaphor of the "Locust," as well as the masqueraders, speaks to the limits of spectatorship and audience. These metaphors are what happens when we yield our imaginations to hackneyed movie plots like those written by Tod Hackett. Indeed, Miguel never veers far from the conventions of Western films; this is Hackett's narrative strategy: the deployment of characters that merely fulfill their own "hackneyed" plotlines. Hackett's depiction of Miguel's character pantomimes greaser cinema and forecasts the impetus to offer new versions of what it means to be Chicano. In the next chapter, this dissertation will turn to other literary "adaptations" of the greaser character in two Chicano novels. I argue that these depictions are even more imaginative and subversive in their presentation of the greaser character.

Chapter Three

Rethinking Paradigms of Seeing the Greaser in José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho*

By placing the masterworks in different frameworks that include the voices to which the master texts were covertly opposed, voices that were and continue to be silenced by the hegemonic culture, we might indeed formulate a new literary history of a truly integrated American Literature (218)

—Ramón Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative*

'Well, I was living in Hollywood at the time, working as an extra in the cowboy movies. There were no Mexicans to speak of in Hollywood.'

— Juan Rubio to his children, *Pocho* (1959)

...And Now Introducing the First Chicano Novel, Maybe?

In her book *La Mirada Circular: El Cine Norteamericano de la Revolución Mexicana, 1911-1917*, Mexican film historian Margarita de Orellana argues that when the movie camera came into being, so did the impetus to film war (xv).¹ According to de Orellana, one of the earliest attempts to film war came on January 3, 1913, when the Mutual Film Company enlisted General Pancho Villa, and signed him to a contract to film him in battle during the outset of the Mexican Revolution (43). In 2003, HBO commissioned film historian Margarita de Orellana to be a consultant for the movie depicting those events. What follows is the improbable story of Villa's movie deal with Frank Thayer of the U.S.-based Mutual Film Company.²

...*And Now Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* features Antonio Banderas as an especially lean Pancho Villa. Thayer, played by Eion Bailey, is immediately awestruck when he encounters the landscape of present-day El Paso and Juárez. This landscape is soon punctuated by Villa's horsemanship. Thayer stands atop his hotel with scores of onlookers as he spots Villa for the first time commanding his troops across the Rio Grande River, on the battlefield in Juárez. This impulse to watch violence—and experience the war—channels the history of U.S. spectatorship of Mexico and of Latin America more broadly. It's also a precursor to the mass audiences generated by movies, confirming de Orellana's thesis that the U.S. film industry, and its representation of race—including Mexicanness—is a reflection of the industry itself.

José Antonio Villarreal makes reference to these battlefield spectacles in his 1959 novel, *Pocho*: a multigenerational saga of one family and their exodus from Mexico to California in the years following the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). Early in the novel, protagonist and retired Colonel Juan Rubio reunites with his compatriot, General Hermilio. The men wax poetic about the battle of Ciudad Juárez, trading war stories some ten years later. General Hermilio tells Juan Rubio:

'We are no better off than we were before, but the problem now is how to get you away from here. Juárez has changed, and one cannot get away with such

things around here now. Our proximity to the norteamericanos makes it imperative that we have an orderly city. We are so near to the other side that one errant bullet could do irreparable harm to our relationship.'

'Yes, we *are* close to the other side,' said Juan. 'Remember the times we took this place, how we could not effectively employ our artillery because a slight miscalculation would have sent shells into El Paso del Norte? *And remember how the gringos were all on the other side of the Bravo watching the fighting. We were like toreros those times—we had our aficionados.*' (7)

General Hermilio and Juan Rubio's conversation offers a nuanced depiction of U.S.-Mexican relations at the turn of the twentieth century. When Rubio kills a man in a crime of passion at a cantina, Hermilio arranges for him to flee the border city for the United States. The two men briefly call attention to the "norteamericanos" on the roofs watching the battle unfold. Most significantly, Rubio likens this war-time audience to the "aficionados" of the bullring, evoking a bullfighting metaphor (Pocho 7). It is an apt metaphor. In it, Juan Rubio channels the spatial dynamics of (mass) audiences, their desire for violence and war, especially in film. It's this same impulse to watch violence that informs the history of U.S. spectatorship, and more broadly, its hemispheric proximity to Mexico, as a gateway to Latin America. However apt the metaphor, it is one that collapses onto itself when Rubio crosses the border to El Paso and becomes more like the bull than the bull fighter. In this impending journey, Juan Rubio will have to remake himself many times over. Which is to say, he soon learns to negotiate U.S. forms of racialization, and in doing so, never comes close to attaining the stature that he once held in Villa's army, as Colonel Juan Manuel Rubio.³ Instead, he becomes a migrant worker, a menial laborer, and horse thief. Indeed, both Juan Rubio the father, and Richard Rubio negotiate American citizenship and race relations. And this negotiation is arguably mediated through media, by way of mass mediums like film.

I would argue that the allusions to the rooftop audiences both in *...And Now Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* and *Pocho* reflect the broader themes of the Mexican Revolution and the rise of the cinema. This is true enough in Villa's sagacity in signing a movie deal, as it is in *Pocho's* many allusions to Hollywood movies. This chapter will explore the novel's film allusions, as well as its relationship to the Western serial film, or what David Seed calls "Cinematic Fiction." By placing the novel in dialogue with the Western, I will explore its relationship to greaser cinema, in addition to the literary movement(s) of Chicanx literature from the 1960s to the present. Just as Ramón Saldívar calls for "a new literary history" in the 1990s, it's my contention that movies, graphic novels, and other modes of print culture must be considered in determining the search for "new" constellations of literary history.⁴

The link between the greaser character in film and literature serves as an opportunity to build a broader literary tradition that recognizes the porous boundaries between artistic mediums, what Hertha Wong evokes in her account of hybrid autobiographies that employ image and text. Her readings focus on how each artist-writer uses image-text to "link the personal and the political." Accordingly, Wong writes how these artists:

participate consciously in a process of creative rewriting and reimagining of 'haunting legacies' (Schwab), genocide, colonization, and slavery as well as ongoing forms of discursive violence—in order to break free of inherited verbal-visual regimes and to revise painful histories. (15)

What's clear from Wong's study is that art, form, and politics are intricately related. So much so that artists negotiate all three positions in the active production and reimagining of "verbal-visual regimes" in order to conceive of what she calls the "liberatory possibilities of selfhood and fresh modes of self-narration in image and text" (15). In a similar fashion, the creative writers and visual artists that I curate also experiment with a variety of mediums to fashion their art. This is true enough in Villareal's novel, which, I argue, borrows from cinematic forms like the Western, the American version of the bildungsroman, in addition to Villarreal's oral family history. As I've previously argued, the Western film is inextricably linked to the greaser film. Thus, while *Pocho* is a hybrid novel that only partly replicates these conventions, those features remain present, especially at the outset of the novel.

A Dubious Reception History

Published in 1959, *Pocho* is set in the early part of the 20th Century, just after the end of the Mexican Revolution to the beginning of the U.S. involvement in WWII. As we've seen with Nathanael West's earlier allusions to Hollywood and the rise of the sound film, the two decades following were also formative years: marking the beginning of the golden age of cinema, the rise of the "star" system, and the consolidation of many of the smaller film studios by larger ones.

As we've also seen with Greaser Cinema, these were also formative years in Hollywood's relationship to Mexico and Latin America, and the characterization of Mexicans on the big screen, who went from being Greasers in the 1910's to Latin lovers in the 1920's and beyond. *Pocho* is situated in the following decades from the 1930s to the mid 40s; the novel will help illuminate these early years of the movies as they run conterminously with the diasporic history of Mexican flight to the Southwest in the decades following the Mexican Revolution.

Pocho's relationship to the Western is apparent from the first page, as Juan Rubio enters the story *in medias res* as an anonymous charro.

A light snow was falling as the train from Mexico City pulled into Ciudad Juárez. A film of ice had formed on the wooden sidewalks, and the unpaved streets were deep in mud where the wagons and automobiles had sludged through. A man got off the train and elbowed his way through the crowd that inevitably gathered at the arrival of a train from the capital. Ten years earlier, as a young man of eighteen, he had come to this same city in not so quiet a fashion. Then he had been a cavalry officer in Villa's army that took Juárez, northern lifeline to the United States, from the forces of the government. A few months later, he had returned from the great General to retake the city after it had been sold out to the enemy by the army Villa had left there protect it. (1)

The details of the opening scene are thoroughly cinematic. The invocation of the snow, as well as the distance Rubio has traveled by train—from Mexico City to Ciudad Juárez—elevate the character's mythical qualities. Further, the passage begins by establishing Juan Rubio's anonymity, referring to him as a "man" for the first few pages. After which, Rubio's history as a cavalry officer in Villa's army is revealed and used to create gravitas. Juan Rubio's introduction could easily be interchanged with other celebrated Westerns depicting cowboys in the Southwest, which open with trains or train depots. *3:10 to Yuma* (Daves 1957) and *High Noon* (Zimmerman 1952) are two notable examples.

The juxtaposition of the ten-year period between the end of the Mexican Revolution and the "present" situate this protagonist around the year 1930; and the narrative camera eye filters this backstory by panning between the man and his memories of El Paso ten years earlier when he was virtually in charge of the city, as a commanding officer. Soon the camera eye brushes against the man's size, saying "[a]lthough he was not an inordinately large man, the mackinaw and the sombrero made him dwarf the people around him. He walked aimlessly along the streets, carried on and directed by the crowd, until finally he turned into a cantina (2-3). The description of the man's size contrasted with his clothing and the largeness of his sombrero along with his mackinaw jacket confirms the elements of mythical grandeur. This works by contrast; it's not that he's an "inordinately large man," as the narrator says, but not without giving the impression that there is some otherworldly quality about him. This point is corroborated many times over in the pages that follow, with his terse qualities of speech, his engagement with a young prostitute, and the deftness of his gun. In the cantina, he kills a man without hesitation, in a manner that seems extraordinary, so that "His gun [is] barely out of its holster when the bullet [hits an aggressor] above the groin" (4). Soon after, the same anonymous man is apprehended by the authorities in his hotel room by a young lieutenant, "Teniente Ramos." Ramos balks at the suggestion that the anonymous man is really a high-ranking officer: "suddenly the lieutenant said excitedly, "Wait! You cannot possibly be Juan Manuel Rubio? The Colonel Rubio?" (...) "Rubio of Santa Rosalía, Torreón, Zacatecas, and even here, Juárez" (5). The young Lieutenant's consternation confirms Juan Rubio's story and myth, while intervening on the character's previous anonymity: this is the first moment that Rubio's name is mentioned; and it's significant that his name is automatically connected to the great battles of the Revolution. So that one cannot decouple the war from Rubio, the man. And so, these opening passages elevate the man to the status of myth, though it's a status that no character shall return to, including the son and ostensible protagonist, Richard Rubio. The novel begins thus, evoking Western film conventions, as well as the dime-Western literary equivalent. The novel begins with Juan, it never entirely returns to this character, except conceptually, in the manner the novel ultimately swings to Richard's story, and strives to celebrate his education as a celebration of the individual.

For scholars like Ramon Saldívar and Rosaura Sanchez, *Pocho* is marked by a series of contradictions, including the Bildungsroman. These interpretations include how the protagonist, first Juan Rubio, and later Richard Rubio, strive and ultimately embrace

“middle class aspirations” (Sanchez 115). Sanchez summarizes this mode of criticism, saying:

[T]he protagonist attempts to mask and displace what is at odds with the dominant ideologies, but even his passing acknowledgement of social subordination and blatant discrimination against Mexicanos reveals the contradictions and problematic areas. In accepting the myth of individualism, the Chicano of the early forties in effect accepted the ideological representations, discourse, and power configurations of entrepreneurial capitalism. (115 Sanchez).

Sanchez’s criticism of Villarreal’s novel is significant for its emphasis on ideological contradictions that manifest in the novel’s bildungsroman and celebration of the “myth of individualism.” By the historicizing the novel as such, Sanchez reads the novel’s ideological contradictions dialectically, much in the manner that Ramon Saldívar interprets the novel’s contradictions as illustrative of a broader discourse and movement against the backdrop of the boundaries of American Literature. Saldívar is ambitious in his assessment of *Pocho*, invoking Georg Lukács theory of the “epic as oral form” as the “backdrop” to the “novel as written form (47). Saldívar continues his interpretation of *Pocho* by pairing it with Lukács’ “epic as oral form” and with a reading of Bakhtin’s term “novelistic discourse.” He synthesizes these concepts in order to bring the corrido, the Mexican folk ballad, to the fore. Of the *corrido*, he writes:

[that the] corrido served the symbolic function of providing alternative interpretations of empirical events (functioning as a substitute for history writing) and of creating counterfactual worlds of lived experience (functioning as a substitute for fiction writing). As if in response to the encroaching force of the dominant American hegemony and the decline of the corrido as an organic culturally symbolic act, after 1930 other narrative forms emerge to provide those alternatives interpretations of the historical world. (48)

For Saldívar, as well as Sanchez, the corrido serves as a marker of periodization or what Sanchez calls “benchmarks” that allow the critic “to retrace and formulate ideological models textualized in the narratives of two centuries of discourse” (Sanchez 116). Here, she is interested not only in the “ruptures in the discourse but also the links and differences between what was produced in the late nineteenth century and what has been produced in the twentieth century.” For Saldívar and Sanchez, this analysis includes the establishment of Chicana/Latina literary traditions, but also a critique of the structures of power, to include how literary works replicate those patterns and dynamics. In my conception of *Pocho* as a “cinematic fiction,” I’m in agreement with both Sanchez and Saldívar that the novel be considered alongside the broader tradition of corridos, as well as the analysis of novels for their ideological contradictions. By including an analysis of movies, I am suggesting that Saldívar’s emphasis on “benchmarks” can and should be expanded to consider how the visual dimensions both corroborate and complicate his idea of Chicana literature and narrative. Saldívar’s and Sanchez’s arguments are ultimately informed by Fredric Jameson’s Marxist theories of

narrative as well as his maxim to “always historicize” literature (9). I am very much in agreement that the novel negotiates the dialectic between the celebration of the individual and the collective. In this case, I wish to consider the status of the novel as it relates the diaspora of mostly Mexican subjects fleeing to the north after the Mexican Revolution. In this way, the novel both affirms the individual (to recall Sanchez’s criticism) and also balances individuality dialectically with its reflection of the collective.

While the novel begins by fictionalizing Juan Rubio’s journey to *el norte*, it also allegorizes the migration north, locating the father in the larger collective of bodies fleeing war. Consider the passage:

Thus Juan Rubio became a part of the great exodus that came of the Mexican Revolution. By the hundreds they crossed the Río Grande, and then by the thousands. They came first to Juárez, where the price of the three-minute tram ride would take them into El Paso del Norte—or a short walk through the open door would deposit them in Utopia. (15-6)⁵

Beginning with the father, Juan Rubio, the novel guides the reader through a border crossing, reproducing the larger story of the “Exodus.” This scene curiously links the act of border crossing with the novelty of the tram ride, replicating the experience of mechanized travel. In this way, the novel engages in an act of voyeurism, anticipating the spectatorship of the moviegoer. The language of “Utopia” is especially striking, given the father’s attachment to his *patria*.

In the conclusion of *My History, Not Yours*, literary scholar Genaro Padilla argues that Villarreal’s *Pocho*: “wrote of separation from another homeland.” He continues: “Mexicans crossed the border into a social space of economic exploitation, ethnocentric exclusion, and social uncertainty” (233). As it turns out, the geo-political border functions as a transformative threshold that changes Juan Rubio, certainly occupationally, but also in other ways that are reflective of the broader diasporic narrative. As Padilla writes:

The exodus and diasporic proliferation throughout the United States with which Villarreal’s novel opens represents a major shift in Mexican American social presence in the United States, just as it signals a shift in the narrative figurations of immigrant experience and sociocultural adjustment to the life in the United States. The internal social trauma caused by the Mexican Revolution and the severe economic destabilization of the country, coupled with the rise in industrial and agricultural business in the western United States from 1900 to 1930, created what Paul Taylor referred to as the “push” and “pull” of a massive labor pool to the border states. (234)

Padilla is astute in squaring the exodus of immigrants with the “push” and “pull” of the global economy. His analysis of the “labor pool” corresponds to other “border” scholars, like Tomás Almaguer, whose analysis further unpacks this resulting labor pool, by including consideration of U.S. labor and immigration policies of Chinese, Japanese,

Pilipino laborers, in addition to Mexican nations after the war of 1848, mostly after 1900 (26-32). But Padilla is also interested in how the novel conveys the subjective diasporic experience; as much as his analysis is interested in the social-economic dimensions diaspora in *Pocho*, he is also interested in the “internal social trauma” caused by the war.

Nowhere are these effects clearer than when *Pocho* briefly diverges from Juan Rubio’s perspective. A group of diasporic Mexican nationals are gathered at a card game; like Juan Rubio, they represent people of elite and lower classes; in South Texas, however, they have all been converted to manual agricultural and farm laborers, confirming Almaguer’s thesis of the establishment of a mobile laboring class. During the card game, Juan Rubio narrates the story of a man who is murdered for attempting to rob the card game. The narrative reports that the man calling himself “Mario” is anonymous. The moment reflects the first of many narrative diversions the novel takes. The significance of Mario’s murder is clear: violence against immigrants is all too common. The scene continues:

The man who died under the bridge that night had no name. Who he was, where he came from, how he lived—these things did not matter, for there were thousands like him at this time. This particular man had fought in the army of General Carrillo, who, in turn, was one of the many generals in the Revolution. And, like thousands of unknown soldiers before and after him, the man did not reason, did not know, had but a vague idea of his battle. (19)

Pocho takes up Mario’s death head on; but it also takes on the symbolic violence of dying with “no name.” In this way, the narrative illustrates the “social trauma” that Padilla illuminates. Of course, the symbolic violence continues, linking “Mario’s” labor as cotton farmer. The story unfolds as Mario takes his family to Pecos (Texas) and leases land from an Anglo man named Henderson. One day, after a year passes, Henderson arrives at Mario’s plot with the Texas Rangers to remove him and accuses him of assault:

“The man calls me a liar,” said Mr. Henderson.

“Do not call a white man a liar, boy,” said the sheriff.

“Do not call me a boy, said Mario, “for you cannot be much older than I am.”

“You are leaving tonight,” said the sheriff. “Get your family and your things together. Mr. Henderson will pay your fair to El Paso. Be thankful.” (20)

Accused of assault, Mario flees with his family to El Paso as a victim of extortion. Here, the language of race and white supremacy are revealed; so that Henderson has the full support of the state to back his claim. In this moment, it’s clear that Mario has no rights and no legal recourse, except to flee. Moreover, the language of whiteness is tied to the legal apparatus, so that Mario can’t even refute a “White man” without enduring real threats of violence and even state-sanctioned murder.

Of course, Mario's story is indicative of race and power dynamics in the border towns of South Texas. It's interesting then that Juan Rubio feels sympathy towards Mario's death, disapproving of his death and vocalizing his position to René at the card game, saying: "You need not have shot him....He was that [a thief]—and a fool also—but he need not have died" (19). In this way, Rubio confirms Padilla's point about the novel's representation of social trauma as a consequence of the revolution and the diaspora of Mexican nationals who flee through El Paso. To continue summarizing Juan's journey, Ramón Saldívar puts it thus:

In the second chapter of José Antonio Villarreal's seminal novel, *Pocho* (1959), Juan Rubio—paradigmatic hero, patriarch, and warrior, a virtual model of the stereotyped, sentimental, and reified hero of the very different Greater Mexican corrido tradition, having participated in the Revolution of 1910—finds that he must flee in defeat from Mexico to the United States. For Mexican Americans, Juan Rubio's flight dramatizes an equally important historical event: it marks the significant point in the rapid growth of Mexican communities in the American Southwest. And it is not accidental that here, at the "beginning" of the Chicano novel, we find the events of fiction firmly rooted in the events of history. The novel, more so than any other literary genre, insists on this tie to the real. In respecting the necessity of this tie, Villarreal offers us not so much a slice of reality as he does a representation of the cultural rules and conversations by which the fictional character Juan Rubio, and real men like him, dealt with reality. (60)

For Saldívar and others, Juan Rubio's "flight" aligns with the larger story of Mexican community building in the Southwest. It also complicates the special dynamics of the Western serial film, operating on a north-south axis instead of east-west. According to historians Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez, the ensuing diaspora involved hundreds of thousands of people that fled Mexico through *El Paso* as a consequence of the Revolution and the post-revolution aftermath (*A Century of Chicano History*, 58).

Richard's Novel of Education and the Spaces of Freedom

Richard Rubio is the embodiment of American pragmatism both in disposition and rationale—in body and mind. This is true enough in Richard's longing for adulthood and in the nostalgic remembrances of his family. This is also true enough in Richard Rubio's relationship to books and movies, which he regards as essential to stoking his "imagination." He endeavors to take up Ralph Waldo Emerson's call to "get out of the library" and experience the world outside. But he also reconciles the importance of books and movies, saying, "[i]magination would do only when he became old and incapable of experiencing actual adventure" (102-3). Indeed, books and movies represent one of the core ways that Richard experiences the world outside the constraints of his locale. This excursion continues, as Richard encounters a version of Cervantes's masterwork, *Don Quixote*, immersing himself in literature and popular movies:

With determination, he followed Tom Jones and Dr. Pangloss through their various adventures. From *Gone with the Wind* he emerged with tremendous respect and sympathy for the South and its people. And when the Dust Bowl families who had begun trickling into the valley arrived in increasing numbers, he was sad. They represented the South to him, and he mourned that the once proud come to such decay.

When the boy fell asleep over a book, his father blew out the coal-oil lamp and tenderly put him to bed. Only when riding out in the country lanes was Richard forbidden to read. Twice his father threw his books out the window of the car. "Look!" he would say. "Look at the world around, burro!" And the boy would think, What a funny one the old man is! (103)

Juan's advice is sagacious, as it is nostalgic; one can see the author's hand, as it were, stepping from behind the veil of verisimilitude, to conjure this aspect of his idiosyncratic father. Richard also notably calls the heroes of his book by their names, and not by their authors: Voltaire and Henry Fielding, respectively. Richard experiences the American South and Mexico through film versions of *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Juarez*. The latter of which debuted in 1939 and 1940. These films provide seminal experiences that shape Richard's education, informing the novel's status as bildungsroman. The politics of a film are curious given that Richard reproduces the racial attitudes of *Gone with the Wind*; the passage signals a feeling of loss, suggesting that he sympathizes with the politics of the South. Nevertheless, the narratives that Richard consumes from film and literature confirm his desire for self-enrichment, travel, and the development of his own imagination. This is represented in the novel's rendering of space, especially in its depiction of home and barn.

Within this schema, the home maintains a symbolic and ideological position of social mobility. Juan Rubio communicates this position at various moments in the novel, including in Chapter seven during his visit to Cirilo's home. The discussion involves the homes both men will build. Juan Rubio, in accord with Cirilo's position thinks: "A man must have a house, place his family within it, and leave no room for authority but his own." Rubio continues, reasoning that the home "was the only place a man could have authority" (122). The ideological meaning that home ownership signifies is clear and comports to the symbolism of the American Dream as an ideological position that is achieved with home ownership. Remarkably, Juan Rubio glosses both iterations, linking home ownership to the "authority" he wields over his family. Juan Rubio's conception of home also has implications for narrative authority, as well (a feature I'll examine in the following section). Finally, as home is conceived of as a rigid space of rules, a place where Juan Rubio's authority is unquestioned and inviolable, it is also positioned against spaces of fantasy where social mores and Rubio's authority breakdown.

If home is fashioned to be the center of Juan's authority, external spaces like the barn reside symbolically outside that authority. In *Pocho* barns tend to be spaces of fantasy. This motif is established early on in the novel's only allusion to communism. In this scene, migrant workers are organizing in Santa Clara; Juan and Richard, father and son, walk into Mat's Big Barn. The passage reads:

Richard and his father walked into the red barn. It was different inside from the first time he had seen it. The walls were newly whitewashed and a wooden floor had been installed. At the one end of the building was a raised platform on which stood a long table and chairs. The wall behind the table was bedecked with bunting, of which a red flag with hammer and sickle was the centerpiece. (48)

While the representation of “hammer and sickle” appears ominous at first—a feature magnified by Richard’s youthful eye—the depiction of the barn seems utopian. It’s representation of labor and social organizing is kept at the periphery, as is the ensuing state violence. The scene comes to a head when police attack the picketing migrant workers (57). Nevertheless, this meeting is organized by communists, setting the scene apart from the other moments of the novel. In one respect, however, the incongruities of the scene are apt given the novel’s episodic character.⁶

These points notwithstanding, the basic observation that the barn serves as a space of fantasy holds true. To focus on one example, consider the impassioned communist spokesman who gives a moving speech that imagines a more equitable world: one in which worker’s rights, education, and healthcare are attainable goals. For Richard, this space is also racially charged in a productive way. It’s this scene in the barn that Richard encounters African Americans for the first time, saying:

Regardless of their appearance, these men all had a common, haunted look of despair. Young and old walked with the same dazed air of incomprehensibility, except the Negroes. Richard, who had never seen Negroes in his life, mistook their attitude for morbid stoicism and was frightened by the black faces. Soon, however, he easily lost himself in their laughter and horseplay, and their color lost its strange ominousness. He learned to love the amazing beauty of their wide, toothy grins. When he talked to them, they told him about Alabam’, the C’linas, and other such alien and mysterious places. (50)

While Richard’s view of Black people borders on a kind of exoticism, it’s important to reiterate that Richard is, at this point, a boy. As such, his wonderment and tone suggest a youthfulness of the character, as well as an innocence and naiveté. Given the fact of how representations of black people have been constructed around racial stereotypes of the minstrel show, it’s not surprising that Richard’s first response is fear. Here, we might also think broadly about D.W. Griffith’s films, and the symbolic weight of the abduction scene and their influence on a young mind, like Richard’s who notably “had never seen Negroes in his life...and was frightened by the black faces.” Moreover, it is significant that Richard links blackness to place. Richard says this much at the end of the passage, in his linking of the South like Alabama and the Carolinas as “alien and mysterious places.” The symbolism of the barn remains as a space that unites disparate bodies and experiences; this includes the bodies of the household. In contrast, the barn functions symbolically in opposition to the home as ideological space, reproducing a space of authority and domesticity in the manner Juan Rubio strives to maintain order over his household.

These misgivings notwithstanding, the barn remains a place of exploration and fantasy. This delineation of home and barn spaces map onto the novel's larger narrative strategy and the dialectic of imagined space. To the previous, the house stands as a symbol of Juan Rubio's authority. To the latter point, Richard and his cohorts imagine the barn as a place of exploration and fantasy—though it is also true that Richard Rubio's exploration seems limited in that he ultimately seems to replicate his father's authority. To the broader point, the barn remains a place of fantasy that attempts to reimagine the order of his father's world. There are analogues that map onto both spaces, including the centrality of narrative: books and popular movies.

Richard's forays into the world via narrative is but a continuation of the search for exploration, fantasy, and self-hood. They are other manifestations of the barn, according to Richard's memory and his valorization of childhood. Of course, this propensity to resist order—and his father's authority—is circumvented at the end of the novel, with the novel's "conservative" turn. At which point, Richard's inability to support his Japanese American friend, Thomas Nakano, get at the limits of this fantasy (181). The same may be said of his enlistment into the Navy. Nevertheless, movies, books, are revelatory, as is the barn. They provide Richard with important narratives and with the act of narrativization itself, which signal his ambitions to become a writer.

Seeing Juárez at the Movies

"But there's another thing. Like when you came in tonight. I heard you ask your wife, "who's that, his grandfather"? That's Juárez: the father of Mexico. If I wouldn't know a picture of George Washington you would say I was an awful dumb *Mexican*."

—Ramón Quintero from *Salt of the Earth* (1954, *emphasis mine*)

Ramón Quintero's discussion of Benito Juárez from Herbert Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* (1954) is also an allusion to the film, *Juarez* (1939), starring Paul Muni as Benito Juárez.⁷ In the scene, Quintero admonishes his fellow Union organizer—an Anglo man played by Clinton Jencks—for not knowing more about the predominantly Mexican American community he serves. Quintero emphasizes this point by referring to the trope of the "dumb *Mexican*": a feature of those hackneyed stereotypes that I've surveyed with Greaser cinema. Quintero's utterance of the term is used to create emphasis. What's important in this scene is that the characters all seem to grasp his meaning. "Mexican" clearly remains a synonym for the greaser character and for a general state of ineptitude. In contrast to works like West's *Day of the Locust*, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* and the genre of Greaser Cinema, it is clear that *Pocho's* evocation of the *Juarez* film captures a shift in Chicanx representation in movies. This is especially true in the novel's attempt to represent the *inner lives* of these Southwestern Mexican characters and their communities, to use E.M. Forster's lovely term. Yet, even with this attempt on Villarreal's part to depict full-bodied characters, many of the aspects of the greaser character remain intact, including the influence of the Western.

To reiterate a fundamental point of this dissertation, allusions to movies abound in *Pocho*. I'll begin to examine two such allusions, especially in chapter seven. Chapter

seven is exceptional for its narrative shifts. It is the only chapter narrated by three different characters: Richard Rubio, Juan Rubio, and Consuelo Rubio; son, father, and mother, respectively. Further, Chapter seven is the only chapter that takes up Consuelo's perspective. This moment remains significant, despite the novel's eventual return to Richard's point of view, which, arguably fulfills the parameters of the *bildungsroman*.

The crux of chapter seven is punctuated by a shift to Consuelo that is shaped by an outing with Juan to the movies. This moment comports to the basic narrative scaffolding already discussed, in which the house and barn are delineated: the first being the place of family. On the other hand, the space of the theater replicates a version of the space of barn as fantasy and imagination. I will now discuss how this feature, which initially emerges in the delineation of home and barn unfolds a number of allusions to movies.

As previously mentioned in chapter seven, Juan Rubio declares his desire to see the *Juarez* film in order to gauge how it "distort[s] history" (126). The suggestion likens Juan to those Mexican film censors of the 1920s (as Isabel Serna argues in her analysis of film history). To situate the film allusion a bit more systematically, it is important to point out how the chapter begins as a house call that Juan makes to his *compadres*, Cirilo and Macedonia. Consider this passage in its entirety:

It occurred to him [Juan] that although these people were friends, he always spoke to them in the familiar, while they addressed him with respect. He felt a slight regret that this was so. He sat in the kitchen and thought how every time he entered a Mexican home, the woman would always be at her stove, preparing the dough or actually making tortillas. He was very conscious of this lately. Consuelo's lot was indeed a hard one. The girls must begin to do more of the work of the house. They must learn, for they would someday have their own home. He thought of his wife, and suddenly felt a tenderness for her he had never felt before, and, in fact, had not been aware of its lack. There was a Mexican movie in Mountain View tonight, he thought. I will take her with me this time. (120)

Juan's feelings of nostalgia are palpable, as are his sentiments that the respect he garners is less a feature of his stature, and more to do with social status. Moreover, his discussion of women, including his wife's lot (as well as his daughter's future) symbolically links them to the home. The open exchange of formalities, like the title of "don" and the formal expression *usted*, in place of the familiar *tú* (literally "you") also bespeak such gendered discourses of the home, while further alluding to constellations of Juan's race and class.⁸ As mentioned, there is also a significant discussion of the discourses of home and authority, which Juan curiously likens to "Mexican-ness" and the status of Cirilo's abode as a "Mexican home." (I examine this use of Mexican as an adjective later in the chapter). Consider Juan's misgivings about his friends, and about his wife in particular. As it turns out, these misgiving foreshadow his impending adultery. A bit later in the novel, Juan Rubio violates his friendship twice over, cuckolding his

compadre and symbolically violating the authority of his home. I emphasize this point to reiterate how authority in the novel is linked to representations of the house to include authority over one's family.

Moreover, the depiction of homeownership represents a central ideological discourse in the schema of the novel that accentuates Juan and Richard's competition for narrative control—a battle that Richard ultimately “wins.” In the interim, I've shown how the novel continues to alternate perspectives, switching to Juan, and later to Consuelo, before returning to Richard. I also make the case that a version of this competition is present in Juan's house call. And that this occasion of the house call functions symbolically to recall the novel's demarcation of home and barn. On this point, it's significant that the novel shifts (ideological) spaces as well as perspectives, to include a move to film spectatorship. In accord with these spatial politics, Juan corroborates this wish with his ruminations on wanting a “Mexican home” and family like Cirilo's. But what does the iteration of “Mexican” as adjective mean here? The use of Mexican as an adjective extends to Juan's mention of “Mexican movies” as well. In linking the two ideas through the adjective of Mexican-ness, the novel strategically returns to the movies, initiating a protracted discussion of movie spectatorship and its significance in this narrative world.

The allusion to the film continues at the end of Juan Rubio's house call. This time Juan Rubio announces: “All in all, it was a busy season. Next year, they will find it difficult to work here...But I must go. There is a picture about Benito Juárez in Mountain View. I must go see how the films distort history” (126). Curiously, Juan first regards *Juarez* not as an American production, but specifically as a “Mexican movie.” In doing so, he also links the movie to the discourse of home ownership. Such is the import of Juan's discussion of labor. The suggestion that he will go as an observer, and possibly as a “spy” of some kind, remains a possibility as it was at the outset of the novel, when he was pondering work as an assassin. To be sure, Juan's character is shrouded in mystery. Though these motives are never fully explained in the novel, it remains significant that his motivations to watch *Juarez* are two-fold: to take his wife out for a splendid evening and to practice spy craft. The secondary motive recalls Juan Rubio's time as a Villista, a general, and a would-be assassin.

The occasion of seeing *Juarez* at the movies is never realized for the reader. It becomes a detour instead. Between leaving Cirilo's and Macedonia's residence, and seeing the movie, there is a pointed narrative silence. So the reader never gets to see the movie and register the couple's experience. Instead, the audience is reunited with the couple, Juan and Consuelo Rubio, after the picture, as they drive home. Most strikingly, the point of view shifts and the scene is narrated by Consuelo Rubio. This is the first and only time in the novel, the point of view turns to her perspective; this is the first time we hear Consuelo's voice in a manner that is not filtered by Juan or Richard, father or son.⁹ The passage follows:

Consuelo sat by her husband's side as they rode down the 101 from Mountain View. The film about Benito Juárez had not been very good, she thought.

Somehow she resented México's heroes and México's wars. She sensed the futility of such things, for this which was to have made México really free, which was to have given the peasant liberty, had happened many years before her birth, and she could still remember the years of the Revolution. For too many years, her man had been away, perhaps to die. She remembered being evacuated from towns on troop trains, sometimes merely because she was Juan Rubio's wife and the people who were coming to take the town were his enemies and would destroy her and her children. No, she would much rather forget about the glories of México. There was too much blood shed by Mexicans for those glories. Her son must never see any of that. The second feature, however, had been very good. A tragedy, and she had cried and cried. Everyone in the theater cried, a mark that it was a good story, and even her husband had had an itching in his eyes, for she had noticed he rubbed them. (126)

While I've argued that *Pocho* is largely a novel about a father and son's wrestling for narrative authority, this moment marks a temporary shift to Consuelo Rubio's point of view; this perspective offers a unique counterpoint in the novel that symbolically intervenes in their conflict. What continues is an erotically charged account of the significance of movies in the sexual lives of the Rubios. To be sure, film spectatorship appears central to the family. Consuelo's notion of a "good" movie is tied to Mexican forms, especially the melodrama. Accordingly, the second film is "very good," even better than *Juarez*, the historical "biopic," because of the emotional response it creates. Tears are essential. As Consuelo's narrative suggests, everyone in the theater, including Juan Rubio, is lachrymose. Though for Consuelo the memory of the Mexican Revolution is not an event to be idealized as it is in Juan Rubio's account.

As with the previous comparison to Juan's house call, I'm interested in the discourses of Mexico that emerge from the movies to complicate those in the previous scene of Juan Rubio's house call. There, he tells his compadres that he "must go [to the movies later] see how the films distort history" (126). In contrast, Consuelo's understanding of movies and melodrama serves as a counterpoint to Juan's understanding of history, to include the Mexican Revolution, but also an implicit theory of spectatorship. To contrast, while Juan Rubio makes explicit a more passive-observational role, Consuelo's response suggests a vision of spectatorship closer to Richard's.

In fact, *Juarez* continues to be regarded as a milestone in Hollywood's treatment of Mexican characterization—a strong departure from those early greaser films. According to *New York Times*, *Juarez* was made during a wave of film production that sought to get away from depictions like the greaser (Woll). In this way, *Juarez* resembles the concerns of a novel like *Pocho*: both are meant to be generational milestones, whose production intended to intervene in some way, and perhaps subvert the status-quo of representation. Both were largely misunderstood in their own time. *Salt of the Earth* remains the only film to ever be banned in the U.S. Indeed, the referenced scene from *Salt of the Earth* captures a sentiment from *Juarez* that works by proxy, likening the Mexican President Benito Juárez to American President Abraham

Lincoln.¹⁰ The truth of the matter however is that the depiction of Benito Juárez was such a contrast that it actually worked to deify or idealize Mexican-ness. And, as Margarita de Orellana argues in her core thesis of *la mirada circular*, what we truly get from such films is a distortion that represents U.S. attitudes about Mexico, more than anything else, including a true depiction of Juárez, the man. Nevertheless, allusions to the film remain striking, ultimately providing a metacommentary on *Pocho* itself, and to *Juarez*, in such a manner that recalls the greaser character.

Conclusion: Juan Rubio at the Movies

So far, I've made the case that *Pocho* should be reevaluated for its relationship to the movies that texture much of the plot and the characters. To this point, there is another film allusion that requires some attention. There is a fleeting though considerable "silence" in *Pocho's* migration narrative. In this scene, Juan Rubio—the main character's father, patriarch, and war veteran—discloses what may be a family secret. He says: "Well, I was living in Hollywood at the time, working as an extra in the cowboy movies. There were no Mexicans to speak of in Hollywood" (133). Though the reference is fleeting, the mention of Juan Rubio's work in the film industry is one of many crucial allusions that links film, literature, and the history of Chicanos in the Southwest.

Years after the opening chapter (of the great migration), the Rubios become reasonably well-to-do in the burgeoning suburbs of San José. Towards the close of the novel the family is engaged in a lively conversation. Though this remains a fairly inconspicuous moment in the novel, it is here that Juan Rubio recounts his time as a movie-extra in Los Angeles to his children. This detail is remarkably absent from the first chapter, which mostly recounts the family's journey, west, to Los Angeles.¹¹ In the brief forty pages that make up chapter 1, Juan Rubio transitions from a celebrated Officer—a Colonel—in Pancho Villa's army, to a wayward instructor at the National Military Academy in Mexico City, to a murderer in Juárez, to a cattle thief and smuggler on the border, a would-be presidential assassin (plotting to kill Obregón), and finally to a farmworker in California. Nowhere is Juan said to be an actor, though his many occupations suggest this possibility, as does the tone and the form of the chapter. Said differently, the chapter has the feel and the formula of the Western, and more broadly, the epic, too.

I argue that there is an intentionality present here; this allusion is more significant when we consider the history of movies, including the Western, and the centrality of Mexicans to that genre—a genre that is conventionally thought to be the only film genre to originate from the U.S. This makes more sense when we consider Juan Rubio's experience as an extra in Hollywood Westerns, and the way in which Chicano bodies are racialized, and re-interpreted for commodification on the "big screen." In this way, people of color in literature, especially "brown" bodies can be characterized as a racial palimpsest of sorts. So that in the process of characterization, the "brown" bodies are erased and re-inscribed by the cinema. And those iterations are also refracted back into literature with the major film genres of greasers, Latin lovers, and the Western, more

broadly. In the case of Juan Rubio, this also entails the act of passing: appearing “white” or of European American ancestry.

As an extra in Westerns, Juan Rubio essentially “passes” as white, in order to play a Mexican character, in this genre that privileged Mexican-otherness in particular ways, including the emergence of Mexicans on the big-screen in the now defunct genre of greaser films, early in the 20th Century. Finally, we arrive at an important component of the dissertation title: Hidden in Plain Sight. I want to consider Juan Rubio’s name, which might roughly translate to “John Blond.” There is a connection to be made between Juan Rubio’s name, and the history of racial exclusion in the movie industry. On one hand, make the argument that “Hollywood” is based on this kind of exclusion. Most Hollywood films excluded people of color, and generations of Chicanx actors who had to mask their ethnic identities. They subsequently had to pass into whiteness to remain working in Hollywood. Thus, while Juan Rubio’s fleeting mention of his time in Hollywood presents a potential contradiction—the idea that there were no Mexicans on the set in a city distinguished for having one of the largest populations of Mexicans anywhere—it should be emphasized, along with Chon Noriega’s epigraph, that many of these Mexican characters in Hollywood films were actually played by Anglos, and others, in Brown “face” makeup. In this way, Juan Rubio is passing, racially, as an Anglo man: a strategy we’ll revisit in the next chapter in the discussion of Acosta’s narrative strategy of masquerade and dissemblance. Further, the films of Hollywood’s Golden Era uphold what Susan Courtney, film historian and scholar, observes as the transmission of white supremacy by locating race as central in the production of “new cinematic forms of ‘great white’ masculinity and spectatorship” (61). Again, this point might seem contentiously rendered given that, while Juan Rubio claims “[t]here were no Mexicans to speak of in Hollywood,” he is Mexican. The dissertation will take up this point to consider what it means to read film allusions (and history) in a novel, like *Pocho*. In fact, Juan Rubio’s allusions to “Hollywood” corroborate a more general relationship between film and literature that scholars have been making since the days when movies were novelties in nickelodeon machines. And, as we’ll see in the next chapter, these are some of the coordinates that Oscar Zeta Acosta will emphasize to craft his fiction, and even his name, “Zeta.”

Chapter Four

“Enjoying the Spectacle”: Buffalo Zeta Brown’s Cinematic Masquerade

Sir: Your November issue, “On the Scene” section on Mr. Hunter S. Thompson as the creator of Gonzo Journalism, which you say he both created and named...Well, sir, I beg to take issue with you. And with anyone else who says that. In point in fact, Doctor Duke and I—the world famous Doctor Gonzo—together we both, hand in hand, sought out the teachings and curative powers of the world famous Savage Henry, the Scag Baron of Las Vegas, and in point of fact the term *and* methodology of reporting crucial events under fire and drugs, which are of course essential to any good writing in this age of confusion.

—Oscar Zeta Acosta’s Letter to Playboy, *The Uncollected Works*, 105

And then it hits me. *Jesus H. Christ!* I’ve been sitting and staring blindly into space for nearly a whole day. *While people have been singing and laughing and enjoying the spectacle of it all*, I’ve been playing the part of some middle-aged phony ass mystic.

—*The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, 85 *emphasis mine*.

Now she’s asking the Cook if she knows where the American Dream *is*.

—*The Gonzo Tapes; Fear and Loathing* 164

Early Sightings the Brown Buffalo

One imagines Oscar Zeta Acosta as Doctor Gonzo in this moment: strung out on a cocktail of drugs and booze, struggling to contain his laughter, as Hunter S. Thompson—in character as Raoul Duke—mumbles in assent. Now famously referred to as “Terry’s Taco Stand, USA”, this footage is one of the extant recordings from their “Gonzo” exploits. Thompson would go on to popularize the term, *Gonzo Journalism*, and immortalize the duo in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: a trip into the Savage Heart of the American Dream* (1971).¹ Though “Terry’s Taco Stand” would find its way into Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing* (161), almost none of the duo’s excursions would make it into Acosta’s novels, save a few moments, though none from Las Vegas and for good reason. According to Phillip Rodriguez’s documentary, *The Rise and Fall of a Brown Buffalo* (2017),² Acosta was concerned that he’d appear as a literary charlatan.³

In his own novels, Acosta is characterized as the indomitable Buffalo Zeta Brown, Chicano Lawyer and Professional Revolutionary. Hunter S. Thompson emerges every now and again as “King” in *Autobiography* and as “Stonewall” in *Revolt*. He’s always fashioned as a high-profile journalist for the New York Times.⁴ Both authors delight in similar acts of masquerade and dissemblance, featuring their literary counterpart in their novels. In doing so, they attempt to ensnare unsuspecting passersby into practical jokes, trickery, manipulation of events and facts (or outright lying), and more often than not, narcotics binges.⁵ For example, “At Terry’s Taco Stand, USA,” the act of dissemblance speaks to a broader narrative strategy that carries the two men on their (sometimes shared) journeys throughout the Southwest.

In the actual segment, Acosta appears on the brink of laughter. Then he whispers to Thompson: “Now she’s asking the cook if she knows where the American Dream *is*” (“Terry’s Taco Stand, USA” *The Gonzo Tapes; Fear and Loathing* 164). His voice is low and quivers with delight. The entire affair is a practical joke—a fact lost on the owner, but not on the savvy young woman at the register. She makes a sharp rejoinder: “The American Dream?” she repeats, incredulously. Then she joins in on the joke, replying: “kill yourself and go to paradise” (“Terry’s Taco Stand” *The Gonzo Tapes*). Suddenly the cook, “Lou,” appears. Wearily, she says: “oh you mean a place [called the American Dream]” (“Terry’s Taco Stand” *The Gonzo Tapes*)? How perfect then, that the two are given directions to “the old psychiatrist club” on Paradise Boulevard, which is known as a “drug house” and a destination for hippies. Thompson seems to perk up from his drug coma, muttering: “Twenty-four-hour-a-day violence? Is that what we’re saying” (*Fear and Loathing*, 166)?⁶ In many ways, the scene captures the essence of Gonzo Journalism, in all of its playfulness and deception.

To the point, Oscar Zeta Acosta’s “Gonzo” is even more invested in dissemblance and masquerade, and in wearing a number of ethnic/racial “masks” in *The Autobiography*.⁷ His protagonist—a thinly veiled version of himself—delights in inhabiting such characters and in performing them. Acosta’s protagonists are not unlike those tricksters in African American, and Native American folklore.⁸ On the scope of Acosta’s novels, Marcial Gonzalez says: “If Acosta’s first novel essentially looks inward, his second novel looks outward” (105).⁹ I’m in agreement with Gonzalez’s assessment: if *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* moves thematically (and structurally) to examine the inner, psychic self (or selves), *Revolt of the Cockroach People* moves away from the self to imagine the collective identities of *chicanismo*.¹⁰ Acosta’s fiction maintains this relationship in his version of masquerade. But, while the protagonist in *Autobiography* ventures to put on these “masks” as part of the novel’s satirical bent,¹¹ the protagonist in *Revolt* strives to unmask those selves. This narrative strategy is rooted in Acosta’s version of masquerade. Dissemblance seems a purposeful narrative strategy for what Hunter S. Thompson identifies in Acosta’s life and fiction as a “politics of confrontation” (*Revolt* 6). In other words, Acosta’s protagonist utilizes these masks as a provocation, and more often than not, to ridicule and goad any and everybody with whom he comes into contact. At times, his protagonist seems to do so for the sheer folly of the occasion: to play pranks on unsuspecting “victims.” At other times, this strategy of masquerade and dissemblance is part of a larger political motive, which reaches its apex in the court scenes, and in the streets where the protagonist Buffalo Zeta Brown throws himself into a life of community activism.

In this chapter, I take up Acosta’s propensity for dissemblance and masquerade as part of a broader novelistic strategy, composed from hybrid forms and media, including movies. The cinematic aspect will be discernable in the allusions to “greaser cinema,” and to the novel’s broader references to the movies. My analysis will culminate with two of the most seminal moments in *Revolt*. These scenes—Zeta’s rally for sheriff and the autopsy of Robert Fernandez—are significant in that they are scenes where the acts of unmasking are central. Ultimately, what I want to assert in this pairing, and with

the observations of the thematic arcs of the novels, is that these scenes are always engaged in their own version of cinematic fictions.

Framing the Visual Dimensions in *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt*

While Oscar Zeta Acosta's life has long been mythologized, his death (or the fantasy of his death) has also been the subject of countless speculation. The issue is compounded by the fact that Acosta's novels are themselves hybrid forms that obfuscate those traditional "hardlines" between fiction and non-fiction. In many ways, Acosta's novels draw from the "schools" of the Beat writers¹² and the New Journalists, respectively.¹³

As I claim at the outset of this project, Acosta's novels are also imbued with a touch of the cinematic: with the gritty cityscapes of film noir and the hardboiled detective fiction of Raymond Chandler. Acosta's fictions often seem to channel Marlowe in their narration of irredeemable cities and "fallen" people; his own protagonist-narrator, brusquely elbows his way through case after case. By upsetting narrative conventions and aspiring to rattle the status-quo, Acosta's novel alludes to the robustness of its predecessors. Above all, the novels are provocations, and like the initial examples of masks and dissembling previously described, the novels endeavor to goad both the characters they encounter and their own readership to elicit emotional responses.¹⁴

Frederick Aldama's and Héctor Calderón's scholarship, both of whom interpret the works of fiction as parody and satire, respectively, corroborate that the novels are didactic provocations¹⁵—or at least we can deduce this much retrospectively. For Frederick Aldama, Acosta's fiction maintains its own "form of parody and cultural blending" (74). He continues by unfolding this discussion of Acosta's mode of parody:

The parodic play is given a Chicano rasquache spin identified by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, as not only an act of subverting and turning 'ruling paradigms upside down' (155), but also an act of recycling available images and objects to engender 'hybridization, juxtaposition, and integration [that] creates a florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations' (157). (*Postethnic Narrative Criticism* 74)

Aldama's recognition of Acosta's visual registers coupled with his mention of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's reading of Acosta as "Chicano rasquache," opens up that interpretation by making sense of the visual component of the narrative that was already latent in the prose. The colorful adjectives—"admixtures and recombinations"—that Aldama identifies convey the narrative hybridity and composite nature of Acosta's fictions, offering a productive strategy for reading and interpreting Acosta's novels. In considering the protagonist-narrator, for example, and his evolution from "Oscar" the boy from Riverbank to "Buffalo Zeta Brown," the self-proclaimed Chicano Lawyer, one observes the character's composite qualities. One hears (and sees) influences from Hemingway, the Beats, the New Journalists and from film noir and the Western. Héctor Calderón offers a complementary reading by locating Acosta in a broader discussion of the novel and genre.

In a lecture at the Modern Language Association (1982), Calderón developed a talk on “chicano narrative,” putting Chicano literature in conversation with Fredric Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*. In keeping with Jameson’s terminology, Calderón replaces “literature” with Jameson’s more expansive term “narrative.”¹⁶ In an argument that Calderón later revised for his anthology, *Criticism in the Borderlands*, he locates Acosta’s novels in a larger tradition that includes Cervantes’ *Novelas Ejemplares*. Calderón makes sense of the narrator-protagonist’s propensity for practical jokes and bombastic antics by locating the novels as participating in the tradition of satire. He continues by framing his discussion in terms of genre distinctions, saying:

While the novel may hold up a mirror to life [as in mimesis], the satirist uses the mirror to distort. Like the romance, satire may contain fantastic or marvelous devices, but only to produce outlandish or grotesque transformations in settings, scenes, and characters. In Acosta’s book, the modern equivalent of the marvelous, the hallucinogens of the sixties drug culture—grass, peyote, cocaine, and acid—are used not to produce any comic vision, but to distort. (7)

Calderón offers a salient commentary on the rise of the novel and genre formation. The metaphor of the mirror is apt given that Acosta’s *Autobiography* begins in front of a mirror, as we’ll soon see. His argument has the practical function of unmooring Acosta’s fictions from their bombastic qualities, to make sense out them as following a narrative strategy rooted in creating chaos, rather a more straightforward act of mimesis or reproduction of life. He writes:

Acosta’s satiric vision of sixties counter-culture, focuses on the American ideological solution to the problem of ethnicity, the metaphor of the melting pot. Acosta’s political strategy is to emphasize the ethnicity of all his many characters in both rural and urban settings, from Riverbank, California, to San Francisco (7).

I am in agreement with Calderón’s interpretations of the novels as trenchant satires, as well as fictionalized autobiographies. I will draw out these interpretations by examining various allusions to film genres, conventions, and content. This includes making sense of the novel’s fraught references to “Chicanos” and “cockroaches.” All of these allusions are arguably conversant with *greaser cinema*, which I read as a critical homage to that now bygone period of the silent film.¹⁷

In addition to these readings of Acosta’s novels, I want to privilege the way in which Acosta’s novels are visual, in order to make sense of their visual coordinates that contour Acosta’s fictionality. What does it mean to think of Acosta’s novels as cinematic fictions? What readings or interpretations will this parameter help illuminate? In part, I want to think critically about the visual signifiers, in addition to the literary ones, and to the allusions to movies strewn about the novels. To my mind, these readings should be couched in those previous readings of Acosta as satire. Thus, my focus on Acosta’s *visuality* aims to enrich these other interpretations.

Consider Nicholas Mirzoeff's framing of visual cultures and his argument that modern life "takes place on the screen" (1). Mirzoeff upsets the regimes of seeing and sight, by grappling with the power relations embedded in this act of looking. What do the dynamics of spectacle and recognition—of looking at a racialized body, and that racialized subject returning the look— suggest about how this paradigm is at work in broader society? Regarding this dialectic of seeing and being seen, Mirzoeff makes the claim that "We do not know what we are seeing" (2). Or, rather, one requires an "interpretive community" to help construct meaning from fragments. In a multi-volume series on the topic, Stuart Hall corroborates Mirzoeff's claims of visual cultures and visuality by conceiving of such an encounter. He describes "visual culture" as raising questions "of how to conceptualize 'visual culture' to the relation between the viewer and what is viewed." Hall continues illuminating this definition, saying that the study of "Visual Cultures":

is concerned with the cultural practices of 'looking' and seeing. It takes as its point of departure the image, which stands at the centre of visual culture, and its capacity to function as a sign or text which constitutes and produces meaning. It understands visual culture as composed of 'systems of representation', using visual 'languages' and modes of representation to set meaning in place. However, it assumes that the meanings of the image—for all images are multi-vocal and are always capable of bearing more than one interpretation—cannot be completed within the text as a self-sufficient entity. It is always part of, and constructed across, [a] wider discursive formation.(...) The power or capacity of the visual sign to convey meanings is only 'virtual' or potential until those meanings have been realized in use. Their realization requires, at the other end of the meaning chain, the cultural practices of looking and interpretation, the subjective capacities of the viewer to make images signify. (Hall 309-10)

I argue that these questions are embedded in Acosta's novels by virtue of the narrator-protagonists' propensity for masquerade and dissemblance which foreground his encounters. These engagements extend the novels visual scope with its literary allusions to movies, but also to the act of seeing itself—an engagement that both Hall and Mirzoeff locate as "visuality." Indeed, Buffalo Zeta Brown's strategies of masquerade and dissemblance are premised on a similar notion of visuality, which requires recognition, and above all, an audience. Both novels privilege visual registers in this regard, whether that be the cover art featuring buffalos, the cockroach, the actual cockroach graphics in *Revolt*, or the many references to cinema and popular culture.

Acosta's Symbols of Visuality

Let us now recall Calderón's metaphor of the mirror in the opening passage of Acosta's first novel, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. Here, Oscar, the narrator-protagonist, begins by orienting the reader's gaze to question the amorphousness of his own brown body. Anticipating the novel's forays into masquerade (and autopsies in *The Revolt*), the novel begins with Oscar's classification of his body before a mirror, in a manner that presages the autopsy he conducts over deceased client Robert Fernandez

(also in *The Revolt*). In this scene, Oscar takes an inventory of his body, part-by-part, in a manner both grotesque and gripping. The scene arguably illuminates a central strategy of narrative pastiche, while directing the “eye” to the novel’s other visual parameters. The novel begins:

I stand naked before the mirror. Every morning of my life I have seen that brown belly from every angle. It has not changed that I can remember. I was always a fat kid. I suck in and expand an enormous chest of two large hunks of brown tit. Possibly a loss of a pound here, a pound there? I put my hands to the hips, sandbaked elbows out like wings, and turn profiled to the floor-length reflection. I tighten, suck at the air and recall that Charles Atlas was a ninety-nine pound weakling when the beach bully kicked sand in his girl friend’s pretty face. Perhaps my old mother was right. I should lay off those snicker bars, those liverwurst sandwiches with gobs of mayonnaise and those Goddamned caramel sundaes. *But look*, if I suck it in just a wee bit more, push that bellybutton up against the back; can you see what will surely come to pass if you but rid yourself of this extra flesh? Just think of all the broads you’ll get if you trim down to a comfortable 200. (11, *emphasis mine*)

From the opening line, the novel raises questions about spectacle and recognition: of seeing and being seen. The references to “Charles Atlas,” (and to celebrities like Bogart et al. just after) figuratively stretch the body and the significance of the scene, to include other visual registers. Oscar continues in this trajectory, cataloguing body parts and the memories he associates with the body. The use of first-person narration—the protagonist’s “I”—narrates the contours of his body like a camera, and is refracted in the mirror, creating a sense of dimension like a movie screen. This idea of the body as the focus of the mirror metaphor is even more apt when we consider the many personas Acosta’s narrator takes on, including the ones he uses to disassemble. The emphasis on the speaker’s anatomy is filled with panning camera-like maneuvers and close-ups that narrate the body. After which, the reader is prodded to continue this act of visualizing: “But look,” the narrator says, giving orders. Of course, we’ve been “looking” the entire time. It’s this imperative to look again—to revisit the body as a site of trauma—that I wish to call attention to. The imperative to look, and to look again, suggests the dynamism of the scene, a feature that is amplified by the mirror. The mirror has two functions: it telegraphs and historicizes the narrator-protagonist’s body, while replicating the functionality of the movie screen. As the novels get underway, and the allusions to movies abound, the scene sows the seeds of what will be the narrator-protagonist’s misrecognition. It’s his amorphous brown body that will come to facilitate dissemblance and masquerade. My central point I’ll come to is that it’s this register of the brown body’s amorphousness that is also an allusion to greaser cinema. Additionally, it’s this command—or imperative that I’ve suggested, both in grammatical terms and in the authoritative manner the narrator-protagonist instructs the reader to look, and to look again—that speaks to Mirzoeff’s notion of visibility: to question meanings of the body being displayed in the mirror. I argue that this initial moment in the novel is itself part of the novel’s attempt at recovery: to include the meanings of Chicana bodies. This directive to look, and look again, also signals the novels larger act

of recovery of the body from film history, to include the bounded images of the greaser and the Latin lover, and more generally of the brown body as a racialized spectacle.

Read this way, Acosta's imperative "to look" channels Mirzoeff's thesis, so as to see the meaning that was always there on the "surface." For Mirzoeff, visibility and visualization are operations that must be re-evaluated in modernity. Indeed, one of the central questions of this project is what it means for such racialized characters to "see" themselves in film and literature, especially when those depictions are caricatures and thus, steeped in decades of racist representation. To my mind, part of what Mirzoeff is suggesting in his notion of visibility is that we should unpack the notion of audience and of implied readers, while considering the historic role that technology has played in this equation.

Visibility in Acosta's fictions extends well beyond the written word. Both *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *Revolt of the Cockroach People* are imprinted with images of Buffalos and Cockroaches, as well as advertisements for Acosta's actual campaign poster for Sheriff of Los Angeles County. Most pointedly, there are images of two-dimensional cockroaches, strewn throughout the text of *Revolt*. Their placement appears spontaneous at times. At other moments, the images of cockroaches seem to co-mingle with the text, in a manner that seems to augment and shape the literature in profound ways. Upon further consideration, these cockroach images are themselves performing a narrative that represents the boundlessness of Acosta's satire, by taking the novel's central metaphor of Chicanos-as-cockroaches, and expanding its meaning beyond the literary, and into the visual registers. While the cockroach best captures the novel's visual parameters to include notions of visibility and the visual-literary interplay of meaning, this narrative strategy extends to Acosta's satire of the Chicano movement to include the symbolism of naming.¹⁸ Acosta's novels capture the attendant nuances of self-naming, historicizing the legacy of Mexicans and their descendants in the wake of the Mexican-American War, the Mexican Revolution, and in their secondary status as newly minted "Americans."

Acosta makes reference to "the greaser" in both novels, mostly as a minor term that oscillates between the novelistic penchant for animal imagery (the cockroach and the brown buffalo) and the protagonist's assertion that he is "neither a Mexican nor an American...neither a Catholic nor a Protestant...[but a] Chicano by ancestry and a brown buffalo by choice" (*Autobiography* 199). This oscillation between terms is immediately apparent in the first lines of *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, as the depiction of protestors registers in a way that affirms and problematizes their humanity. The first lines begin:

It is Christmas Eve in the year of Huitzilopochtli, 1969. Three hundred Chicanos have gathered in front of St. Basil's Roman Catholic Church. Three hundred brown-eyed children of the sun have come to drive the money-changers out of the richest temple in Los Angeles. It is a dark moon-less night and ice-cold wind that meets us at the doorstep. We carry little white candles as weapons. In pairs on the side-walk, we trickle and bump and sing with the candles in our

hands, like a bunch of cockroaches gone crazy. I am walk-ing around giving orders like a drill sergeant. (11)

As with the introductory lines to *Autobiography*, the prose generates a multi-dimensional spectacle in which the reader must sort between the various narratives presented. One of those narratives is between Catholicism and Indigenous religions. Hence, the significance of the date, which juxtaposes Christianity with the Mexica god, Huitzilopochtli. Judeo-Christian time is parodied, with the conventional rendering of the date, and the phrase “in the year of our lord.” While the imagery of the “money-changers” parodies the biblical story of Jesus Christ, it is also a common story used in biblical “justifications” of anti-Semitism—a convention also present in writers like Pound, Joyce, and Hemingway.¹⁹ As we can immediately glean, the narrative is working on consecutive planes. But it is the depiction of the “chicano protestors” that is most striking.

In the space of two paragraphs, the protestors go from being described as “Three hundred Chicanos,” to “Three hundred brown-eyed children of the sun,” to cockroaches, and eventually to “Three hundred greasers from across town march[ing] and sing[ing] tribal songs in an ancient language” (11). This oscillation between Chicanos and cockroaches may be symptomatic of other anxieties at work, including questions of self-determination and self-naming which the novel also captures in its oscillation of terms. What is striking is that the more mainstream term, “Mexican American” is not included in the catalogue of names. In fact, it is not until the next page that we see the “300” referred to as “Mexican-Americans.” And even then, it’s rendered in quotation marks, suggesting that the novel disagrees with some aspect of the term, which we might incisively interpret as a satirical jab at the politics of the word, or what Carlos Muñoz calls the “Mexican-American generation.”²⁰ Of course, this constellation of terms may also be read historically. Acosta’s satire extends to this propensity for self-naming, which is also a thin allusion to the plight of African Americans at the end of the U.S. Civil War.

As he “splits” the movement, Oscar narrates this symbolic rupture in the third person, saying: “When the Brown Buffalo left LA and headed for Frisco Bay in the Spring of ’72...[he] knew his name, yeah, and just a little more” (*Revolt* 258). Here, we find the convenient and overstated allusion to slavery and to the practice of relinquishing “slave names,” echoing the concern of African Americans following the U.S. Civil War. Many of whom registered with the “Freedmen’s Bureau” and literally recorded their names, which, most often than not, were derived from their former “masters.” Still, this act of recording one’s name symbolized and actualized the recognition of Blacks in their formal transitions from slaves to citizens.

Of course, like many features in Acosta’s novels, the language he employs satirizes the status of Mexicans in the U.S., to include ongoing discrimination and disenfranchisement. For Buffalo Zeta Brown, the practice of U.S. Slavery is the ultimate racial touchstone by which justice and injustice is weighted, or what Ramon Saldívar

calls the “lie of justice” in *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. Saldívar continues:

Whereas we would expect Law, at least in its ideal form, to permit us an approximation to the state of transcendental right, Buffalo Zeta Brown shows us, in a series of increasingly allegorical trial scenes, that the truth of justice is intimately tied to its differential opposite. (96)

Saldívar’s discussion of legal discourses, coupled with aforementioned coordinates of visibility, delimit the novels and their scope. The question of *why* emerges: why depict the law as futile? One answer may be found in the novelistic desire to redress history, including the recollection of the conquest during the court scenes. These moments recall those injustices and outrages, which have never been, nor will never be litigated in a court of law. Nevertheless, part of the narrative strategy is to recover history from oblivion, in order to dismantle the status quo: those hegemonic (conventional) interpretations of history which gloss over the genocide of native peoples in the Americas or the history of the transatlantic slave trade. The point of which is to reimagine the function of the law, with the war of U.S. Mexican war, and before through the conquest. These attributes are also ubiquitous in the novels and the layers of meaning that inform the cockroach trope.

While scholars and readers alike have debated the significance of Acosta’s cockroach, among other features, the greaser allusion has passed largely unnoticed. These same references to “greasers” are absolutely essential to understanding both novels, including the references to animal imagery: the (brown) buffalo and the cockroach. They also serve as links to the past: a way of seeing into the national consciousness when “Mexican” was a term synonymous with depravity. The term also reflects a narrative strategy that allows us to “triangulate” representations of “Mexican-ness.” So that there is an oscillation between terminology: Chicanos, greasers, and animal imagery—first the buffalo, and later the cockroach. This triangulation of terms illuminates the plight of the protagonist, and by extension, the relegation of Chicanos to the social periphery. And yet, just as the cockroach imagery contains its own dialectical poles—thesis and antithesis, representing both vermin and the unlikely revolutionary gesture of endurance and survival—so too does the figure of the greaser contain these respective contradictions and potentialities.

To this point, the protagonist seems to evoke the greaser term and animal imagery, indicating the extent to which he both internalizes and externalizes these images. This association includes Oscar’s self-identification with the greaser. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* begins with a nervous breakdown, followed by a drug binge, and then a road trip around the Southwest. In these first scenes, we see Oscar returning from a drug-induced blackout, his friend Ted Casey—affectionately called “The Owl”—declares: “Ah, the Brown Buffalo can take it” (66).²¹ Film and literary allusions notwithstanding, what is absolutely clear is that Oscar cannot “take it.” The episode brings Oscar closer to the brink of madness, closer to the figure of the greaser

at Trader JJ's, Oscar's neighborhood bar in the City. Oscar, who self-identifies as "The Brown Buffalo," says:

It is all madness, I think to myself. Five years of madness in this hideout. No wonder I'm cracking up. I take the green death into my hands and see my reflection in waves on the mirror behind the bar. I am the son of Lorca, I remind myself. The only poet of this century worth reading. Did he suffer with those black eyes? That smooth, long greaser hair; did it make him hurt?
(67, *emphasis mine*)

Here, the narrative simultaneously reflects multiple literary-cinematic coordinates, including an earlier allusion to James Bond sequence at beginning of the novel. Also present are the bleak urban city-scapes of Raymond Chandler's detective fiction, the momentary suspense and mystique of Jack Kerouac's road trip across the American countryside, of which both are homages to Whitman's travel in the ever-expanding collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*. There is also the recurrence of the mirror and one of the first major references to the greaser character.

As Oscar's narrative shows, he remains deeply conflicted at the outset of the *Autobiography*. And, he'll continue negotiating this conflict through the next novel, *Revolt*. The passage also shows the extent to which Oscar leans on the "greaser" image to convey this experience. The allusion to Federico García Lorca, the famed Spanish poet and playwright, shows the capaciousness of the racial coordinates that the "greaser" reference engenders. Like the cockroach, the greaser is synecdochically (and metonymically) linked to Oscar. This point is discernable in the closing questions that parse Lorca's body: his "black eyes" and "smooth, long greaser hair." Even more crucial is the use of the semicolon, which links the two sentences, and frames the body as a site of trauma: as if the body, in and of itself, was the source of that trauma. Furthermore, the "cause" of the trauma is missing from the narrative, precisely because the mirror is ill-equipped to represent that which is missing from the narrative, showing instead that which is present in the mirror.

As with all metonyms, we are only privy to the resulting image, and not to the source of Oscar's pain. That Oscar is looking into a mirror at Trader JJ's Bar links this scene with the first one. In which case, it is the gaze—and the command to look, and look again—that is directed at the body. The implication of which is that trauma emanates from the social sphere. This identification of and with the "greaser" also suggests an allusion to an older set of prescribed meanings, like conventional stereotypes, which are ubiquitous in 'old' Hollywood movies, including "greaser cinema." In which case, Oscar's parsing of his self-identified "black" body parts are reflective of the cinematic practice of designating villains by making them appear "darker" and dressing them in black—a contrast to the "whiteness" of the heroes' wardrobe and complexion.²² Of course, Oscar's self-identification with the greaser also reflects the converse. Oscar mobilizes the term both in affirmative and nostalgic remembrances, but also to marginalize others. In contrast, the greaser image measures the protagonist's introspection of his racial status, and how his "friends" view him as a marked *brown*

body—as a “Brown Buffalo.” The greaser term takes on a decidedly contradictory status when it is uttered by King and Stonewall: two fictionalized versions of Hunter S. Thompson, who appears in both of Acosta’s novels, under these pseudonyms.

As the novel approaches its denouement, Oscar and King have a memorable exchange in Colorado. Unlike most of the characters Oscar encounters on his road trip through the Southwest, only King is able to see past Oscar’s manipulation of racial categories. Indeed, Oscar often conceals his identity. He also readily assents and complies with the identities he’s often mistaken for. In turn, Oscar dissembles his preference for the term, Chicano, and is happy to perform whatever amorphous brown ethnic character he’s identified as: a Samoan in San Francisco (*Autobiography* 48, 190), an Indian chief in Idaho (*Autobiography* 104) among others. Unlike these other encounters, King is quick to unmask Oscar’s true ethnic-racial identity, as the two engage in a game of the “dozens”:

Is that what you and Turk were doing when he busted his leg?
King gave me a thin-lipped smile and looked me straight in the eye. “No...we were out looking for greasers.” (*Autobiography* 139)

When Bobbi (King’s wife) makes inquiries about what “greasers” are, King’s playful rejoinder confirms this connection:

“Grease?” Bobbi asked. “What are you guys talking about?”
“Yeh. Grease. That’s what Mexicans use to cook gringos.” I said.
(*Autobiography* 139)

To be sure, Oscar and King seem to delight in this exchange. What is significant is the extent to which the greaser is evoked, affirming the link of Chicanos to the greaser character. Moreover, it’s also significant to point out that Bobbi, a white woman, requires an explanation at all. Recalling the discussion of the abduction scene in chapter one, Acosta’s fictions unearth the history of racialized bit-characters, including those from Greaser cinema. If I can position the abduction scene as the central story that the Western tells, in the films as allegories of the nation and expansionism, then this exchange breaches the core of Acosta’s fiction, and his engagement with the cinema, to include its reproduction of white womanhood as the ur-narrative of the Western, be it *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* (1908), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), or *The Searchers* (1956). To recap, the significance of Bobbi’s consternation (and outright ignorance) amounts to yet another satirical jab that the novel makes in boxing out the parameters of its satire. Subtle allusions to the “greaser” and “greaser cinema” continue in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*.²³

Anthony Quinn’s Many Faces

“And you can’t Anthony Quinn her into it, either.”

—Ana Castillo’s “Subtitles”

One of the most memorable scenes in *Revolt of the Cockroach People* occurs when Buffalo Zeta Brown attends a rally hosted by Anthony Quinn. The account is quintessential Gonzo Journalism. In Brown's narration of the event, there is a distancing effect that is established between Quinn, the master of ceremonies, and with Zeta Brown's stream of consciousness—an odd feature, given that Buffalo Zeta Brown is the novel's central consciousness. This distancing effect helps magnify the scene's spacing between Quinn and Brown; Brown narrates from the seats up above, closer to the "rafters," far from Quinn on center stage. Zeta Brown is running for office of sheriff under the most radical terms that are a matter of public record²⁴ and remains one of many politicians in attendance. Nonetheless, Quinn corroborates Zeta's anonymity, so it's striking, though not inconceivable, that Quinn claims not to know Brown when he introduces him:

'Ladies and gentlemen....I am informed that the next man to be introduced is a newcomer around here....You probably haven't heard of him as much as you have of [politicians] Roybal and Nava....And the note says that he prefers to be called Zeta, uh, or, the Brown Buffalo...and that he's running for Sheriff under the Chicano Militant banner....Señor Zeta, where are you?'

'Viva Zeta!'

'¡Qué Viva!' (172)

It's curious that Quinn doesn't know Buffalo Z. Brown. His own fumbling of Brown's names is also noteworthy given the novel's demonstrative preoccupation with self-naming, and by extension, sovereignty and autonomy. However, as with both novels and their relationship to movies and visuality, we would be wise to consider the optics. The significance (and performativity) of Quinn's "conversion" to Chicanismo requires further consideration.

The event is solemn and has the air of a benediction. Brown jests: "All Chicanos will now receive their blessings and money. The ones who have hidden for so long, those who have not spoken up for the two years we've been at war, now they will entertain us" (169). What unfolds is a parade of Chicano celebrities and politicians. While satirizing Catholicism and its history of pardon by payment, the scene lays bare the obstacles people of color in the industry must navigate. This is especially true for celebrities like Quinn, who are largely declaring their allegiance to the Latino community for the first time, and rebelliously proclaiming to be "Chicanos." The spectacle bespeaks the fraught history that Latinx actors have endured to make careers in the film industry.²⁵

In the scene, Brown's candidacy (and narration of the event), strives to level class distinctions, by bringing together rich and poor, celebrity and non-celebrity, to include Chicane professionals, all in the name of electing politicians like Buffalo Zeta Brown. What emerges, however, is a parade of Chicane celebrities, coming out of the shadows of "Hollywood," in order to reassert their connection to their community. And so, a number of políticos, músicos, actors, and comedians parade themselves before the stage. Buffalo Zeta Brown narrates the scene:

Soon the word filters up to the movie stars. The old-timers who have hidden behind grass skirts, the ones with the mustaches, with the broken accents, the Chile Charlie types, the Sancho Panzas of America, *los tontos*, sidekicks of Zorro. And those with red hair and Jewish names: Gilbert Roland, Vicki Carr, Anthony Quinn and others whose names I have forgotten over the years. (168)

Brown narrates what seems to be both a homecoming, and a “coming out” event. His allusions to the film industry’s (mis)treatment of the Latino community is especially critical, as is his observation that he has “forgotten” many of these names. The implication is that many of these celebrities have indeed successfully “passed” as non-Latinx. Brown underscores the racial strategies these actors have taken on to effectively mask their ethnic-racial identities in order to pass as “white.” To be clear, these actors and celebrities assumed such identities in order to have careers in “show business”—which remains segregated. As Linda Fregoso notes, while Latino and Latina actors in leading roles were more common before 1929 and the innovation of the sound film, these actors found themselves out of work, almost overnight. And, even when work did present itself, it was for roles that were far more marginal (*The Bronze Screen*). Actors like “Gilbert Roland, Vicki Carr {sic}, [and] Anthony Quinn” have all adopted Anglo names to “pass,” and to assimilate into society.²⁶ As I’ve argued in earlier chapters, there was a marked shift in representations of Chicanx late in the 1910’s when the movie industry haphazardly “retired” the greaser character by keeping the word “greaser” out of movie titles. The other strategy Hollywood adopted was to debut the Latin lover. This is an important point, given that Gilbert Roland was one of the first actors to play a Latin lover in the movies. Later, Anthony Quinn would get his “break” in the industry by playing that character.

To continue with the scene, Buffalo Zeta Brown is especially condemnatory of the “Chile Charlie types.” Comedians like José Jimenez are particularly scrutinized for their strategy of living out the most vulgar stereotypes of “los tontos.” Indeed, Jimenez’s main shtick was to sound out his name, “José Jimenez,” with a thick accent, to the delight of mostly white audiences. This evening, even Jimenez has shown up, intent on “retir[ing] his dummy slow-joe character” (170). The audience’s indifference, and outright aggression—with rejoinders like “About time!” and “Big deal!”—threaten to unsettle the novel’s claims to be a medium in search of “truth.” At the same time, the passage befits the observations of the novel as Chicano Narrative Criticism, to include the way in which even the community voices range dialectically. The significance of these voices, in concert with Zeta Brown, and Quinn as the master of ceremonies, reveals a fleeting moment in this scene where the novel’s satire threatens to unsettle the dialectic. Zeta Brown frames the scene as a “homecoming” for Chicanx actors and celebrity: an occasion to reveal their ties to the Chicanx community.

Buffalo Zeta Brown’s references to “José Jimenez” are especially curious. They complicate putative racial categories, revealing an even more subversive constellation of racial categories than the narrator seems privy to. Enter Brown’s mention of a performer by the name of “José Jimenez.” Jimenez is different from the other celebrities

in that his stage persona is a complete and utter fabrication. While most of the stars have been passing as not-Mexican in the movies, Jimenez's character achieves the opposite. The performer, Bill Dana, created the José Jimenez character in 1959 for the Steve Allen Show. Thus, unlike the other characters on stage at the rally, Jimenez is in fact masquerading as a Mexican. He is really an Anglo man. Moreover, it's clear that he's never hid from this fact. Rather, the audience seems to *know* this information; hence, the jeers from the raucous crowd. Brown must know this information, too.²⁷ Why then does Brown allow Bill Dana/José Jimenez to "pass" without making note of this point, opting to change Dana's stage name to a generic "slow-joe character"? Perhaps it's as Brown says of these actors in general: of "Quinn and others whose names I have forgotten over the years" (168). Those who have passed for white, have largely gone undetected to mass audiences, and for good reason.

The strange fact that Bill Dana/José Jimenez reveals about the film industry is the way race is in play. Many performers "broke their teeth" playing people of color: Mexican Americans, African American, Asian American, Native American—all of which were considered "exotic" by the industry. Bill Dana's character adds yet another layer onto the novel's play with race, to include Brown's performativity, and his assumption of other characters, including the Brown Buffalo and what I argue are aspects of the greaser character. But one must *know* Dana to know he is passing. On second glance, his character follows the larger strategy of negation: negating the significance of the other actors on stage, while raising the larger discussion about the import of the film industry and performance in the novel.

Acosta's novels take up a similar strategy in fashioning his composite greaser character. He thematizes a similar novelistic approach, while demonstrating the narrative strategy of performance, to include Buffalo Zeta Brown's penchant for masquerade and dissemblance, all for the purposes of manipulating the audience (to include *you*, dear reader). Indeed, the scene reveals a striking parallel between Latino celebrity and the protagonist's plight. He is, as the luminous Acosta scholar Héctor Calderón writes "A historian with a sour stomach," bent on recovering histories of Chicana people. And that includes the history of bodies, or brownness, but using his body as a mediator of sorts. In doing so, Acosta's protagonist draws from the oldest Hollywood depictions, and their relegation of Mexicans to the margins, as villains, secondary characters, bandits, and "bad hombres."²⁸

To continue this line of inquiry, let me now entertain some other questions about the Master of Ceremonies, of whom Brown comments, quite reverentially, at the outset of the night: "It is Anthony Quinn, the most famous Chicano of them all" (169). Again, Brown's discussion mirrors the novelistic penchant for self-naming. Here, too, Brown appropriates Quinn's character, by calling him a "Chicano," which, up until this moment, Quinn is most certainly not. What ultimately ensues that night is a somatic orgy scene that seems to be straight out of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). The scene has conventionally been read as an affirmation of the novel's "cultural nationalist" political vision; So that the "the rafters explode" and the "crowd" is said to "[melt] into one consciousness" so that "no man is alone in that madness any longer" (175).²⁹

These final lines go to the heart of the other scenes of Brown's solitude, denuded before the mirror. But they also prod us to consider the various spectacles at work, which are significantly represented by the various performers in the audience, both in show business and in politics. We should also be mindful of our preceding allusions to "greasers," and greaser cinema, which, as I've suggested, seem to exceed their nominal status (e.g. their names only), extending further into the realm of the symbolic. But also, to point this out again, to the degree that Hollywood (mimetically) represents the Chicano community, it is significant that *these* attendees, who comprise the lot of "brown" representation in the movies, have all been symbolically co-located, converging on this location, which the narrator identifies as an auditorium on USC's campus (169). This point cannot be overstated, especially since, as I've been arguing, these are the very structural and thematic coordinates of the novel. In my reading, I argue that the greaser's discursive qualities—the ones of his malleable character formation—are also perceptible in Buffalo Zeta Brown's character. These features are also pronounced in Anthony Quinn's performance, and, to a lesser extent, in Bill Dana's shtick as the monosyllabic José Jimenez.

While the novel privileges this dynamic relationship between the two characters—Brown and Quinn—it also delights in the play that comes with the familiar jettisoning of the "Mexican-American" term, revealing a larger critique of assimilationist discourses. Perhaps this is Brown's point in his identification of Quinn as "the most famous Chicano of them all" (169), a title which we can read ironically, given that Quinn, like the other celebrities, is marked by this contradiction. Brown's claim is patently not true. In fact, it is only now, while in the spotlight is upon him, that Quinn reflects on his Chicano-ness, saying:

You know, all my life, all my *professional* life, I have fought the battle of...I have been against nationalism from my earliest days. My father was Irish and my mother was Mexican....They would both agree with those back-stage who would have me call myself a Mexican-American....And I have called myself that all my life....I have acted every part, every race, every religion....I've been Japanese, Italian, Pole, White, Black and Brown...And yet, I feel like a Chicano tonight....Yes, I feel like those guys up there who were just shouting for *El Zeta... Whoever he may be....*I feel like I'd like to feel like I think he must be feeling....Heh, heh, I guess I'm a little confused....Anyway, to hell with it, here goes a little speech which some Indian Chief gave before Congress around 1790. (174, *emphasis mine*)

The final line is off-putting, since it seems to trivialize the plight of Indigenous people. Of course, it is rendered satirically, ironic even given Quinn's assertion of nationalism, which appears reductive, and takes on racial nuances. Perhaps Quinn is referring to "cultural nationalism," which is often a coded way of ascribing to a version of revolution characterized by armed violence (a theme that is present in both novels). At the same time, Quinn's naïve understanding of "nationalism" reproduces a discourse of American exceptionalism. In this case, Quinn neglects to see that the term "Mexican-American" is also steeped in a version of the nationalism he disavows. Quinn's claim to *Chicanismo*

is equally fraught. Consider the terse sentence fragment, again: “I feel like I’d like to feel like I think he must be feeling.” The repetition of the subjunctive mood expresses the desire to “feel” like Zeta (Brown). Quinn also claims that he “feels like a Chicano tonight.” It seems that Quinn, in expressing this want to *feel* like Brown, is expressing a desire to feel connected to community and to dissemble no longer. He wishes to affirm his status as “Mexican-American,” which is a decidedly less radical name than “Chicano,” in an industry where to claim one’s “Mexican-ness” could be a career-ending move. And yet, there is something else at work in Quinn’s claim, something symbolic with regard to the performance he gives. Like Brown, Quinn also disassembles and presents a familiar “mask” or “face.” But, perhaps, he’s also recognizing something else in Zeta’s character, something familiar, which I argue is the very resurgence of the greaser and Latin lover characters in these novels.

As he says at the political rally, Antonio Rodolfo Oaxaca Quinn has played a diverse number of characters in movies. By 1941, he had been in more than twenty-five films, where he was mostly cast as minor, character actors, from a number of racial-ethnic backgrounds. In 1941, Quinn had a breakthrough performance when he was cast as Manolo de Palma in Rouben Mamoulian’s remake of *Blood and Sand*, a film that originally featured Rodolph Valentino in 1922. With his version of *Blood and Sand*, Quinn found himself in the leading role, playing a “Latin lover,” in the tradition of Valentino and Gilbert Roland. Roland actually attends the rally and crosses the stage with a number of other celebrities of old Hollywood. Unlike other characters that grace the stage and address the crowd, he says nothing, a clever visual pun on Acosta’s part. Although Roland was a towering actor in his day, he was also a silent film star. Thus, his silence mimics this fact.

By contrast, Anthony Quinn’s character is wistful. He joins the attendees and waxes nostalgically, declaring that he, too, “feels like *Zeta*.” In this moment, Quinn’s character evokes the composite nature of Buffalo Zeta Brown’s character. Although he can’t “see” him, he asserts that he can “feel” him. At this moment, I argue that Quinn recognizes himself as a consummate Latin lover character. As mentioned earlier, in the first and second chapters, the Latin lover derives from the Greaser character. Read this way, the novel subversively recalls a moment in film history, when the Latin lover effectively superseded the greaser as the dominant representation of Chicano/Latino men in the movies. This moment also marked an end to greaser cinema. While these films ceased to be made, the character was absorbed into other genres, especially the emerging Western film. In *Revolt*, Quinn’s character, paired with Brown’s narration, symbolically brings together the Greaser and the Latin lover characters. And this is arguably what Quinn recognizes in Buffalo Zeta Brown at the political rally: he recognizes a version of himself as one of the character’s he’s played in the movies.

“The face is a mask” or The Writer as Coroner

I want to return to my earlier claim that Acosta’s narrator-protagonist is re-evaluating the politics of seeing, when he stands before the mirror in the opening scene of *The Autobiography*. These are the coordinates that Quinn returns to in the rally

scene. In fact, Acosta's fictions continue this exploration of vision and brown bodies to the point of dissection, with references to cannibalism and "death." Brown identifies these references as "a world of art" (89). The occasion of Fernandez's murder brings Brown closer to mastering his vocation as a lawyer. The references to legality and cannibalism allude to the religiosity of Catholicism—a feature established earlier in the chapter. At the same time, the suggestion of that Brown will cannibalize Fernandez's body serves as a conceit to bring the reader closer to the surreal experience of mutilation—even for the pursuit of justice.

The second autopsy—or inquest—rehearses the narrator-protagonist's reflexive gaze, following the novel's mode of visuality. The scene is spectacular. True to Acosta's penchant for the cinema, chapter eight is striking as a critical homage to detective fiction, followed by its noir-like rendering of the depraved city-life of "Tooner Flats." The chapter opens as Robert Fernandez's loved ones gather around Buffalo Zeta Brown to seek legal action. The passage continues:

It is early one morning when the family of Robert Fernandez arrives. The sign outside the basement office only announces *La Voz*, but these strangers come in asking for me. Via the grapevine, they have heard of a lawyer who might help them. Nobody else is around. It is just them and me:

'We got have someone to help us, Mr. Brown. The deputies killed my brother.' (89)

True to the ethos of the Chandlerian detective, Marlowe, Buffalo Z. Brown asks "for the whole story" (90), rendering it in first-person (plural) so the reader "hears" the story alongside the "detective," creating the illusion of immediacy, and thus placing the reader in the active pursuit of the murderers—who are the police.

The chapter continues with a broader depiction of life in Tooner Flats in a manner that conflates the bodies of the neighborhood with the landscape. Like the autopsy that will follow, the narrator-protagonist narrates the happenings of the land, in a mode of excavation. The passage reads:

Robert was seventeen when the weight of his hundred and eighty pounds snapped the bones and nerves of his fat brown neck. He, too, lived in Tooner Flats, a neighborhood of shacks and clotheslines and dirty back yards. At every other corner, street lights hand high on telephone poles and cast dim yellow glows. Skinny dogs and wormy cats sniff garbage cans in the alleys. Tooner Flats is the area of gangs who spend their last dime on short dogs of T-Bird wine, where the average kid has eight years of school. Everybody there gets some kind of welfare. (90)

Here, Brown captures the logic of the novel's visuality, depicting the built-world in terms of the community that populates it. Within the Chandlerian tone of the narrator-protagonist, the description identifies Robert Fernandez with the more general sociological grouping of the "Vato Loco." The passage reads: "There is no school for a *vato loco*. There is no job in sight. His only hope is for a quick score. Reds and Ripple

mixed with a bennie, a white and a toke. And when your head is tight, you go down to the hangout and wait for the next score” (91). Buffalo Zeta Brown captures this depiction of gendered *barrio* life, and the subsequent reality of state violence. Soon after, Fernandez is picked up by the police for raising his fist and shouting “chicano power!” (91). Fernandez is arrested under false pretenses of “geezing,” a term for heroin use. However, what the narrator-protagonist makes clear is that Fernandez is apprehended and killed by the law enforcement for defying the state authority. Indeed, Fernandez is killed while in his cell under murky circumstances. At first the family gets a call that Fernandez is awaiting bail. The second call informs the family of Fernandez’s suicide (93). During the actual inquest, Brown shows the inconsistencies of the official account of Robert’s death, which has been labeled a “suicide,” with the mis-matched evidence, which includes a precisely cut blanket that Fernandez is said to have used as a noose. Zeta Brown cross-examines a witness in the next chapter, another prisoner, who testifies that Fernandez’s blanket “wasn’t cut up” when he removed it from the cell, the day after his murder” (113). “He has just exposed a murder,” Brown says. Of course, “murder” is the legal term. The term murder highlights the severity of this moment and contradicts the official account of Fernandez’s death as suicide.

But Zeta Brown isn’t able to adjudicate Fernandez’s death in a court of law. Instead, he presides over an inquest: a second autopsy initiated by Fernandez’s family (114). Nevertheless, Brown reveals a sociological truth of Robert Fernandez’s life in a manner that captures the complexity of living as a dispossessed, disenfranchised youth. The passage reads:

Fernandez was a Chicano. A poor boy. He had a history of drug abuse. He’d been in jail an average of three months of every year since he was twelve. He’d never held a steady job. He had numerous women companions, drank heavily, too, amphetamines and depressants, reds and bennies in street language...and we know that he had been using heroin in the past. He had no job and he had a pregnant girl asking him to marry her. He had a promise of a job, but the fact remains that he hadn’t held a steady job in his life. In my opinion, Fernandez could very well have committed suicide. (115-6)

With the exception of the final pronouncement and speculation of Fernandez’s suicide, the passage offers a more robust account of Fernandez’s life that couching his experience in Tooner Flats, thereby placing life and death in a broader sociological context. However, the account is not made by Brown, but of the state’s witness: an “expert psychologist,” offering what he calls a “Psychological autopsy.” Brown attempts to intervene, by “objecting,” but he is rebuked by the “judge,” Mr. Pitluck, and told “not to make any statement to the jury” and that he cannot “argue,” since the matter is not being tried as a criminal case, but as an inquest: a formal proceeding regarding the cause of Fernandez’s death. As an aside, in addition to the compelling counter-evidence Brown presents (including a precisely cut blanket, from eye witness accounts by fellow prisoners, and even Fernandez’s bunkmate, Andy de Silva—who testifies that the death was a suicide by hanging—it’s abundantly clear that Fernandez is actually regarded as an adult male, and not a minor. While it is increasingly common for 16 and

17-year-olds to be tried as adults, this fact seems lost on the “expert” testimony of the psychologist, whose discussion of Fernandez’s substance abuse, and inability to hold down a stable job, as “proof” of a motive for suicide.

To return to Chapter eight, Buffalo Zeta Brown attempts to recuperate Robert Fernandez’s youth. At the end of the spectacle that is the second autopsy, Brown eulogizes Fernandez, saying:

And when it is done, there is no more Robert. Oh, sure, they put the head back in place. They sew it up as best they can. But there is no part of the body that I have not ordered chopped. I, who am so good and deserving of love. Yes, me, the big *chingón*. I, Mr. Buffalo Z. Brown. Me, I ordered those white men to cut the brown body of that Chicano boy, just another expendable cockroach. Forgive me, Robert, for the sake of the living brown. Forgive me and forgive me and forgive me. I am no worse off than you. For the rest of my born days, I will suffer the knowledge of your death and your second death and your ashes to my ashes, your dust to my dust...Goodbye, ese. Viva la Raza! (104)

Here, the rendering of the lawyer’s name in full, with the “Chicano boy” for Robert Fernandez, serves as a counterpoint to the state’s witness. Brown continues, locating Fernandez using the cockroach metaphor. In this way, Fernandez’s death provides an occasion to show what it means to live and die in Tooner Flats. So that Fernandez’s case is a further confirmation that Chicanx people are seen as expendable by the state, that they can be subject to extra-judicial violence, like state sanctioned murder, and that “young boys die too”—a reference to many of the cadavers in the morgue. But Brown’s account in chapter eight is even more profound with its play on the thematic of authority. Zeta Brown is flabbergasted that he is given license to direct this second autopsy. As the narrator-protagonist says: “I look around at the men in the room. Seven experts...they want *me*, a Chicano lawyer to tell them where to begin. They want me to direct them. It is too fantastic to take seriously” (101). Indeed, part of Brown’s consternation comes from the fact that it is he that must seek out justice for the young man, in spite of these professionals. In short, Brown identifies the inquest as a “joke”: a formal proceeding to appease the family and to uphold the appearance of justice, rather than the substance of it.

Be that as it may, the narrator-protagonist excavates Fernandez’s body in a manner that defies the logic of dissemblance in the novel. Foreclosing the possibility of masquerade, Zeta Brown’s inner voice seems more at odds with his directives to carve the body. In the end, Fernandez’s body is completely disfigured and annihilated; the parts are misaligned and opposite:

Slit. One slice. Up goes the chin. Lift it right up over the face...the face? The face goes up over the head. The head? The head is the face. Huh? *There is no face!*
What do you mean?

The face is hanging down the back of the head. The face is a mask. The mouth is where the brain...The nose is at the back of the neck. The air is the

ears. The brown nose is hanging where the neck...Get your goddamn hand out of there. (102-3, emphasis original)

Even though the passage is mediated by one, central consciousness—that of Buffalo Zeta Brown—there are a number of characters present, including the doctors and forensic pathologists. But also, there is a marked distancing effect in the narration, and in the almost stage-like directions of the autopsy, with cues like “Slit” and “Slice.” The final line (“Get your goddamn hand out of there”) shows the narrator-protagonist’s dissent; these remarks are not uttered but rendered in Brown’s mind (he doesn’t reveal them to his audience of forensic pathologists). Much of the passage involves the face as the central metaphor. Though the head has been rearranged and inverted so that the nose is touching the back of the neck, the face remains “a mask.” The “face-as-mask” metaphor shows the limits of Zeta Brown’s narrative strategy of dissemblance and masquerade in the novels. Brown sees the logical consequences of the face metaphor, firsthand, and it seems to shake him to his core. Upon second glance, there is another current that undergirds the scene that has much to do with the textual rendering of visuality.

This feature is evident at the outset of chapter eight, when the Fernandez’s are revealing the “whole story,” and they begin by telling Brown of a corrupt Chicano officer, who has assaulted Robert Fernandez on at least two other occasions. Quite tellingly, Juana (Robert’s mother) begins by saying:

“Tell him about the dirty greaser.”

“Oh, yes...We know this pig. He’s a Chicano. Twice he’s arrested Robert” (92)

The greaser epithet emerges, curiously, in this moment. While it seems that the family is using the term to identify the police officer (who is also Mexican American), there is a way in which the passage could be interpreted as something the officer says in the act of assaulting Robert Fernandez. Regardless of the ambiguity of the greaser term, I want to highlight this moment in order to think broadly about the novels’ allusions to film, and their implication for characters like Fernandez. Like the cockroach allusion (both as metaphor and metonym), the greaser is a synonym and a pejorative for Mexican or Chicano. As I’ve previously argued, the term is more wide-ranging in film history. And I want to assert that the text is also alluding to greaser cinema in this moment. To corroborate this interpretation, I want to recall the other minor character in this episode: Andy de Silva.

After the Fernandez family’s account, they identify Andy de Silva early in the scene as a minor celebrity in East L.A.: a community leader and former film actor who comes to the Fernandez family’s aid. When Brown requests to know if there is “Anything else?” to the story, Juana responds by saying: “Just what Mr. de Silva told me.” The conversation continues:

“Who’s that?”

“Andy de Silva....Don’t you know him?”

“You mean... *the* Andy de Silva? The man who makes commercials? Chile Charlie?”

“Yeah, that’s Mr. de Silva.”

I know of him. He is a small-time politico in East LA. A bit actor in grade B movies who owns a bar on The Boulevard. And he considers himself something of a spokesman for the Chicano. He served on Mayor Yorty’s Chicano Community Board as a rubber-stamp nigger for the establishment. He and his cronies, the small businessmen and a few hack judges, could always be counted upon to endorse whatever program the Anglo laid out for the Cockroaches. He had been quoted in all the papers during our uprising against the Church. He had agreed with the Cardinal that we were all outside agitators who should be driven out on a rail.” (94)

Buffalo Zeta Brown identifies de Silva, first as a character actor, and then by his opposition to Brown’s activism, to include his support of the status-quo (represented by his unflagging support of Los Angeles Mayor Yorty and Cardinal McIntyre). Later, when he meets de Silva, Brown recalls de Silva’s career:

I go with Gilbert to find de Silva, the movie actor. Chile Charlie has a big mustache, a big stomach and a big dog. When we walk up through the garden, a ferocious German Shepard leaps out at us and is ready to tear us to bits but is stopped by the appearance of his master. De Silva is a three-hundred-pound ex-vato loco who became famous by acting like a dumb greaser. (106)

Immediately, de Silva’s large body type is likened to those other “brown” vatos locos, like Robert Fernandez, whose stature is described in grand terms, like when Brown identifies Robert as a “bull of a man” (99).

As a point of contrast, there is no perceptible record of Andy de Silva in the movie industry. Unlike Quinn, or even “José Jimenez,” de Silva seems to be more of a composite character of several actors, and a stock villain to boot.³⁰ Indeed, Brown’s final description of de Silva as a “a three-hundred-pound ex-vato loco who became famous by acting like a dumb greaser” broadly corresponds to de Silva’s nephew, Mickey de Silva, whom is said to have bunked with Robert Fernandez on the night of his death. The same de Silva actively dodges Brown’s investigation, then appears in court to testify that Fernandez’s death was a suicide. What I want to highlight is the way in which Andy and Mickey de Silva are represented as having a similar body type, and thus, a sense of synonymy. As Brown narrates Mickey de Silva’s entrance to the courtroom, he says: “The big kid lumbers in with his nose to his chest” (117). Brown’s description of Mickey de Silva emphasizes the massiveness of his large body type. In a similar manner, Brown’s description matches his earlier description of the uncle, Andy de Silva as a “three-hundred-pound ex-vato loco. The same could be said of Robert Fernandez’s size and description as a “bull of a man.” Here, Acosta’s fiction forges a link between the three men, and Brown, himself, whom often refers to his “belly” and his “weight gain,” as barometers for his emotional state. That all of the principal Chicano characters in this scene are large-bodied, suggests that these characters are synonymous to some

extent. This sense of synonymy is arguably a reflection of the novel's fidelity to greaser cinema, delimiting the novels visual contours. Like the generic greaser character, both are marked by their appearance and by their size. Indeed, both elements describe that greaser villain, a point all the more cogent given that the character is ultimately defined by his malleability and by his ability to be redefined on the big screen, so that no two greaser characters "look" alike. On the other hand, their amorphousness, and in this case, their size, become nuanced articulations of the greaser character, continuing the homage that Acosta makes to the movies, which becomes a visual shorthand for his creative vision.³¹ So that these Chicanos of Tooner Flats are also racialized and gendered as large men, ironically made small by institutional and state violence. On a more formal register, these are the features that connect Acosta's fictions with those other cinematic-literary modes like film noir and detective fiction.

In the previous chapters, I've argued for the composite nature of Acosta's greaser allusions (to film) to argue that character was never truly retired, nor annihilated. Rather, the resurgence of the greaser in Acosta's fiction, and the Western more broadly in the other chapters, show the extent to which the greaser in Acosta's fictions are decidedly composite endeavors.³² Though this aspect is interesting in and of itself, the recognition of the greaser character (and the Western film) offer the potential of invigorating scholarship of Chicana writers, and American Literature more broadly, by helping scholars understand how the movies have been historically entwined with literature—especially in the Southwest. In Acosta, we find pointed allusions to film, especially with the greaser references, and with those broader references to greaser cinema and aspects of the Western (as with film noir).

Acosta's narrator-protagonist is a composite of many characters, including the malleable greaser, the over-sexed Latin lover, and the more generic Mexican "badman." This includes a relationship to his Gonzo doppelganger, Dr. Gonzo: the ever searching Kerouacian anti-I, and the self-proclaimed Chicano Lawyer. With each iteration, his character serves as a critical homage to greaser cinema. There can be no doubt that Acosta's fictional worlds are conversant with the films he integrates into his fiction.

Conclusion

Oscar Zeta Acosta's novels — *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973)—are linked to the cinema and to what scholars have called "visual cultures." Both novels are crafted with features that are distinctly cinematic. In this way, they also capture what David Seed, Cecil Robinson, Arthur Petit, and many others have deemed "cinematic fictions": a term which attempts to speak to the phenomenon of film and literature converging in modernity. This feature is readily apparent in Acosta's overt references to actors and actresses across Mexican and American cinematic traditions. But it is also true in the fabric of the narrative, in the narration itself, and the characterization of the protagonist and his penchant for dissemblance, which includes the various iterations of his name: Buffalo Zeta Brown, the self-proclaimed Chicano Lawyer and Revolutionary. This chapter has endeavored to illuminate these cinematic dimensions, while arguing that these novels recuperate an

older mode of cinema, nearly forgotten, though kept alive by scholars and aficionados of silent cinema. Acosta's novels recuperate the greaser character, and greaser cinema more broadly. In this way, the novels pay homage to the movie industry and to the Western serial film. Of course, Acosta's version of the greaser ultimately aims to subvert that character, by making him a protagonist, and by placing him in the courtroom to adjudicate the law. Such versions of the greaser character would have been unthinkable in the proto-Western films of the early 1910s, since those characters are marked by depravity. Acosta's version takes on some of these features of the early greaser, but, unlike his predecessor, his version "looks back" in response, critiquing that which deems him evil, foreign, and other.

Collocating Chicana Literature, American Cinema, and Other Conclusions

How can we understand this apparent love of moviegoing in the context of the transnational circulation of American films and film culture across the U.S.-Mexico border? Like their peers in Mexico, Mexican migrants in the United States most frequently saw American films shown with translated intertitles, but they responded with enthusiasm to infrequently screened Mexican productions or the appearance of Mexican actors and actresses in starring roles. As was the case with their counterparts in urban Mexico, moviegoing became a central part of their experience of modern life and its new models of gender and social relationships, from which they could fashion their own subjectivities. What differentiated their experiences from those of audiences within Mexico's borders was the way in which race shaped their engagement with films and film culture. (183)

—Laura Serna's *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture Before the Golden Age* (2014)

In short, the Mexican problem had nothing to do with integration or assimilation; rather, it was a question of locating another inferior race in American society. There was a general agreement, in Texas and elsewhere, that Mexicans were not a legitimate citizenry of the United States. They were outside the civic order, and references to American national integrity and Texas history were often ill-disguised claims of Anglo supremacy. A comparison with the "Negro problem" seems natural. (181)

—David Montejano *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*

The greaser character occupies a central position in the history of the movies. He is an "original" villain, positioned between the Western serial film and what Ramon Saldívar calls "chicano narrative": an expansive term that includes Chicana literature. The broader term that I call "greaser cinema" is meant as an archival lens—a corrective to national literary borders—to broader, transnational constellations. As such, the term strives to contextualize representations of villainy, like the greaser character, by showing how they evolved in the public sphere and in literature and film. Within this scope, I have tried to think broadly about narrative representations of Chicana, both historically and in these narrative modes. These representations perform a version of what Paul Virilio calls "The Sight Machine": a re-writing of the idea of the "war machine," arguing that the "optics" of war are first rehearsed in the domestic sphere, in places where stories are told, especially the movie theater. Or, as Paul Virilio quips: "no war without representation." To give a couple examples of the "sight machine" thesis, I only need to point to U.S. President Ronald Reagan's evocation of the movie "Starwars" program. More recently, President Donald Trump echoed Reagan's conscription of movies and movie terminology in his own call for the creation of a "Spaceforce": an inter-galactic space army, whose mission would be to protect the earth from otherworldly alien invaders.¹

While these pronouncements may seem fantastic (if not outright farcical), the belief in the power of film's influence is not new. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson successfully dissuaded William Randolph Hearst from screening his movie about

Japanese espionage and occupation of California called *Patria* (Robinson 190-1). Unfortunately, no one was able to dissuade his successor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, from rounding up Japanese Americans and placing them in camps during World War II. Woodrow Wilson would gain notoriety for screening *The Birth of a Nation* in the White House the following year, much to the chagrin of the NAACP, and other social justice organizations. Regarding that event, Wilson is often quoted as “doubling down” on his showing of the film, saying: “It’s like writing history with lightning. My only regret is that it is all so terribly true” (Benbow). To be sure, movies wield tremendous influence. And each of these examples demonstrates the extent to which leaders conceived of them and their potential to shape national discussions and sentiments.

This is the import of Maria de Orellana’s “mirada circular” thesis. In her masterful study of Pancho Villa and his contract with Mutual Films to capture war is also a story about how movies shape public discourse. de Orellana shows how support for Villa’s insurgency was initially backed by the American Government, and that translated to public support from newspapers and the American public. According to de Orellana, Villa’s image changed instantaneously: he went from being heralded as a patriot by the American public to a pariah. In many ways, Pancho Villa’s story captures the vicissitudes of U.S. foreign policy in relation to Mexico and the broader American hemisphere. It is in this context that the Western movie emerges and proves instrumental in shaping Chicanx representations. Longstanding characters like the greaser, and even the subsequent characters like the Latin lover and the others that followed, must be contextualized in these geopolitical currents of the U.S.-Mexican border: a boundary that literally went from a demarcation in the sand, an imaginary line, to the militarized fortress at the turn of the century.² With these points in mind, my project is obviously more retrospective: it is an assessment and a reckoning with this legacy. These are the implications of examining the greaser character, along with the Western serial film, to assert their centrality to Chicanx and American Literatures, respectively.

As I’ve argued, the greaser emerges in the context of the U.S.-Mexican War (1836-1848), with ordinances like the “Greaser Act.” Literary responses to the ill treatment of Mexican subjects followed with works like John Rollin Ridge’s *Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854)—a feature that continues with the likes of Nathanael West, Jose Antonio Villareal, and Oscar Zeta Acosta. Thus, while discriminatory laws would ultimately perpetuate state sanctioned repression and institutional racism, these novelists (and others) would respond in turn. Unsurprisingly, the Southwest experienced a great deal of change in the time between the U.S.-Mexican War and the turn of the 20th Century, to include the consolidation of imperial power and land grabs by the descendants of those two great empires. The story that was codified in the aftermath—American Pragmatism, and its twin, American exceptionalism—were social fictions established to maintain the illusion of democracy.

Under this aegis, films from *The Birth of a Nation* to *The Searchers* would rehearse this fifty-year period that saw a surge of Native American uprisings only to be forced onto reservations. The same government enforced segregationist policies, like

“Jim Crow” in the South, or the subsequent national “redlining” ordinances, or the story of Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles. In all cases, the U.S. federal and state government agencies handily determined where people of color could be and not be; and where they could live and not live. The legacy of greaser cinema is useful in animating a discussion of history, and in surmising how that which happened in the past, continues to the present. In the immortal words of James Baldwin, “the past is not the past, it is the present, and the future” (*Not Your Negro*). In other words, the stories we tell of the past, shape our present, while delimiting the future.

It is in this context that Robert Downey’s, *The Greaser’s Palace*, invokes the traditions of greaser cinema. Downey’s film is a classic “B” movie, meant both as provocation and as a trenchant satire. The film is modeled on the story of Christ’s resurrection. As such, much of the humor lands “on the nose,” like Acosta’s novels. One especially campy example is how the “God” character is named: “Bingo Gas Station Motel Cheeseburger With a Side of Aircraft Noise And You’ll Be Gary Indiana.” (Yes, this is the name of “god” in the movie). Oddly enough, some aspects of Downey’s greaser film correlate with Griffith’s version, including the Christian theme of salvation. In Downey’s film, the greaser character is completely inverted, as are the conventions of the Western. Instead of being cast as the villain outright, the “greaser” character in Downey’s film is named “Seaweedhead Greaser” (played by Albert Henderson). Seaweedhead Greaser is both sheriff and the owner of the saloon. Meanwhile, the protagonist, and the most greaser-like character (at least in terms of appearance) is named Jessy (played by Allan Arbus). Jessy comes off like the other greaser character I’ve surveyed, but his appearance is more comparable to those racialized depictions of African Americans from the Minstrel tradition. That is to say, he looks more like the “dandy” character, “Zip Coon,” rather than José or Pedro the Greaser. In this way, Downey conflates Chicano and Black traditions, both of which D.W. Griffith advances in his films: *The Birth of a Nation* and *The Greaser’s Gauntlet*. Just as those early films and later literary texts engaged with a version of the greaser defined by malleability, Downey’s film stretches that racial malleability to its limit.

I began this dissertation by comparing Griffith’s version of the greaser to his depiction of Silas Lynch in *Birth of a Nation*. My point is that the characters are entrenched in similar narratives that reveal their respective ethno-racial communities, but more broadly, they corroborate de Orellana’s thesis (“la mirada circular”) that theorizes what it means to construct racialized characters. Both are formed and constructed under similar material conditions, illuminating the racial logic of the nation. This would seem to be Downey’s point in satirizing the Western and inverting its conventions: as a way to subvert them entirely. These features tell us about the limits of such characters, while revealing some of the contours of whiteness.

Finally, I return to the initial discussion of *Get Shorty’s* allusion to *Touch of Evil* and John Travolta’s proposition to see Charlton Heston “be a Mexican.” As I’ve shown, Travolta’s words go to the heart of Hollywood’s depiction of race. Travolta playfully implicates himself in the proposition to Rene Russo’s character, Karen Flores. This moment illuminates another aspect of *Get Shorty’s* allusion to *Touch of Evil’s* racial

performance. Welles introduces his own greaser character named Pancho who riffs on the similar narratives, including the abduction scene. In addition to switching the poles of conventional racialization with Heston's character, Welles' introduction of Pancho (played by Valentin de Vargas) is positioned opposite Janet Leigh's character. In the movie, Leigh is abducted and ravaged by Pancho and his gang—setting in motion a course of events that leads to Hank Quinlan's demise. As a director and storyteller, the scene is successful in manipulating the audience, because the premise is based on foundation of racial performance and character. *Get Shorty* is a masterful homage to noir films like *Touch of Evil*. I would argue that some of Travolta's most iconic roles are conversant with the greaser character, including his portrayal of the Italian American Danny Zuko in *Grease* (1978). Though Travolta mostly plays Italian Americans in the movies, and not Mexican Americans, his character was certainly a "throwback" to greaser cinema, channeling the genius of Rudolph Valentino. In any case, *Get Shorty* is invested in similar modes of performance that play with and defy racial categories, especially those accorded to greaser cinema.

William Nericcio gestures at similar conclusions in his theorization of Mexican simulacra in *Tex{t}-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America*. In his conclusion and final "Coup de Grâce", he reconciles these iterations of Mexican-ness in symbolic space of the movie theater. I've leave us with his conclusion verbatim. He writes:

"When we are in the dark, in the movies, it is as if the hand of god proffers to us via the silver screen (and now, in the twenty-first century, the plasma screen, a shining fabric with iridescent, tumescent threads), the face of god, or, at the very least, his proxy gods and goddesses.

And he hands us devils and bandits as well.

Both photograph and living flesh, facsimile and relic, these uncanny phenomena reach out like ghosts and touch our souls with photon tongues that reach their place through the open doorways, the inviting velvet lips of our eyes.

That whole stupid argument about the real and the fake, reality and representation, verity and facsimile, unveils itself as a waste of time.

"Mexican"

Mexican

"Latina/o"

Latina/o

"Text"

Tex[t]

All and one, one and all, they reach out to us in a seductive cacophony, a cacophonous seduction, and we?

*We, in the dark, pulsing ersatz night of the theater, we drink it all in;
these flashing waters become our life.*

* * *

Wake up.

(208-9)

Endnotes

Introduction

1. This was actually the second time a studio had fired Welles and taken over the editing of the film. In 1942, Welles found himself in a similar situation when he was fired from *The Magnificent Ambersons*. He didn't return to make another Hollywood picture until *Touch of Evil* in 1958. For more on Welles, see Gerald Mast's and Bruce F. Kavin's *A Short History of the Movies*.

2. For example, one of the earliest issues with the camera was regarding the speed and number of frames per minute. When speeds were too slow, for example, audiences would experience a "flicker" which would detract from the movie. For more on these issues, see *Celebrating the Centenary of Cinema 1895*, edited by John Fullerton.

3. In David Kiehn's thoroughly researched book *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company*, Kiehn writes that the most popular characters at Essanay were based on the book *Thousand and One Nights*.

4. A special debt of gratitude is due to Lilia Soto. I was fortunate to teach for Professor Soto's Ethnic Studies 10B on the Southwest. I encountered this idea—that the U.S.'s move west (or the "Manifest Destiny") continued far beyond California and into the Pacific in places like Hawaii and Samoa.

5. *The Greaser's Palace* is a satire, much like Downey's earlier film *Putney Swope* (1969)—a film which takes on race and the advertising industry in Manhattan.

6. What follows in Seed's analysis is an engagement with (mostly) American Modernists: Gertrude Stein, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, John Steinbeck, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Nathanael West.

Chapter 1

1. Consider Du Bois's oft cited passage from *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapter 1): "[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

2. The term "Jim Crow" is used to describe the segregationist policies after Reconstruction, and comes from the minstrel shows and "coon" songs popularized in

the 19th century. For more on the origins of Jim Crow, see historian Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993).

3. I make this comparison respectfully. In no way is it my intention to diminish the plight of African Americans in the U.S. or the Americas. Rather, the methodological point is to engage with scholarship across disciplines—critical race studies, Ethnic Studies, Gender & Women Studies, Chicana/Latina Studies, Legal Studies, History, and Literary studies—in order to come to a more complete understanding of the race in the Southwest. This parameter continues under the premise that, in order to understand the broader “racial project” of race in the U.S.—by which I mean white supremacy and the racial formations of whiteness—one must be conversant with the strategies of racialization by the state across the U.S. and the body politic as a whole. In this spirit, I ask the question, what does it mean to understand lynching in the South and the Southwest in “Black and Brown” communities?

4. Here, I’m thinking of “Hollywood” and its depiction of race as a shorthand for characters, like the greaser. I make this argument throughout the dissertation.

5. To explain what I mean about the erasure of lynching, I would point the National Memorial for Peace and Justice that was established April 26, 2018. The museum includes 805 steel rectangles to represent each of the counties where a documented lynching took place. This museum is the first of its kind in the U.S., and has met with some community opposition for its purpose of memorializing victims of lynching. For more on the controversy, see NPR's coverage of the museum and their story "New Lynching Memorial is a Space To Talk About all of that Anguish" which ran on the same day of the museum's opening on April 26, 2018.

6. In addition to the three films in this dissertation, some of the other titles include: *Tony the Greaser* (1911) directed by William Haddock; *The Greaser and the Weakling* (1912) directed by Alan Dwan; *Broncho Billy's Mexican Wife* (1912) directed Gilbert “Broncho Billy” Anderson; *The Girl and the Greaser* (1913) directed by Lorimer Johnston; *A Mexican Spy in America* (1914) directed by Henry McRae; *The Greaser's Revenge* (1914) director unknown; *The Greaser* (1915) directed by Raoul Walsh; *Guns and Greasers* (1918) director unknown.

For a comprehensive list of U.S. films that represent Mexicans, including “Greaser” films, see parts one and two of Emilio García Riera's *México Visto Por El Cine Extranjero* (1987).

7. Let me qualify this point a bit more. Historicizing greaser films is difficult for a couple reasons. First, I want to emphasize the point that these films are mostly lost, due neglect and to the temperamental quality of the film stock. According to Martin Scorsese, more than 90% of all silent films have been lost to these factors (See Scorsese's Jefferson Lecture for more). Second, and more to the point, “greaser” and “Mexican” (and, to a lesser extent, “half breed”) are often used interchangeably in these films. For example, I introduce *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* later in the essay. The

greaser character is introduced as a “greaser” in the title and as a “half-breed” in the cast of characters.

8. In doing so, I grapple with the “slippage” of the greaser term, and its putative synonyms: Mexican, “half-breed,” and to a lesser extent “Mexic,” and “Mexique” all of which are found in a Western dime novel like *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854).

9. I continue mapping out the greaser in other chapters in dissertation, examining the character in three novels: Nathanael West’s *Day of the Locust* (1939), José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho* (1959), and Oscar Zeta Acosta’s *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973).

10. Cite Renato Rosaldo’s “imperialist nostalgia” from *Culture and Anarchy*. I have profited deeply from Professor Lilia Soto’s lectures on race in the North American West and her use of the term to frame imperialism in the Southwest.

11. It’s worth mentioning that John Rollin Ridge had also experienced state sanctioned violence similar to his Mexican protagonist. Rollin Ridge, who was also called Yellow Bird, was from a prominent Cherokee family, who had been displaced by the U.S. Government, nearly twenty years earlier.

12. For more on the U.S.-Mexican War, see Rudolfo Acuña’s classic textbook *Occupied American*. Additionally, see David Montejano’s *Anglos and Mexicans*, Genaro Padilla’s *My History, Not Yours*, and Gonzalez and Fernandez’s *100 Years of Chicano History*.

13. Consider this abridged passage from the “Greaser Act”:
“All persons who are commonly known as “Greaser’s” or the issue of Spanish and Indian blood, who may come within the provisions of the first section of this Act, and who go armed and are not known to be peaceable and quiet persons, and who can give no good account of themselves, may be disarmed by any lawful officer, and punished otherwise as provided in the foregoing section” (Section 2, Chapter CLXXV (175) An Act To punish Vagrants, Vagabonds, and Dangerous and Suspicious Persons. Approved April 30, 1855) (217).

14. I want to acknowledge and affirm Juan Alonzo’s strategy of interpreting greaser films without moral judgments, in a such a way that reflects cultural studies, and Homi Bhabha’s notion of “ambivalence” or slippage. While I consider Alonzo’s work and consideration of *Greaser’s Gauntlet* and discussion of the Western essential to my own project, I argue that racialization in the U.S. bears out specific hierarchies of power, rooted in white supremacy. This point is affirmed in the very scholars Alonzo cites, like Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon argues about how specific racial hierarchies in the modern world are rooted in the conquest. However, his analysis does not stop there. Rather, Fanon writes about these hierarchies for the purposes of revolution and decolonization. Still, I take Alonzo’s methodological position that scholarship must engage with the terms of these images, without falling into the

trappings of simply condemning them. My approach, while ultimately critical, is to understand the greaser as part and parcel of the larger thematic of racialization in the U.S. and abroad in Mexico.

15. Again, this makes perfect sense, given that Griffith's movie is adapted from Thomas Dixon's novel, which is called *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. Published in 1905, the novel was made into a play before becoming a movie in 1915.

16. For more on Thaddeus Stevens' legacy, see a specialized journal dedicated to the figure: "Pennsylvania History: A Journal of MidAtlantic Studies: Vol. 60 No. 2 Thaddeus Stevens and American Democracy April 1993." Historian Eric Foner's essay—"Thaddeus Stevens and the Imperfect Republic"—is especially noteworthy in contextualizing Stevens' controversy.

17. As I argue, this version of the abduction scene is also a dominant plot line of the Western.

18. I'm thinking of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and her language of the male gaze (1973).

19. See Cedric Robinson's masterful discussion of race and white supremacy *Black Marxism*.

20. Consider that the course of U.S. expansionism and the "Manifest Destiny" did not end in 1848 with the annexation of California. It continued through the Pacific, with the "annexation" of places like Hawaii and Samoa.

21. For one such account, see *The Autobiography of Miles Davis*. In his *Autobiography*, Davis discusses a story passed to him by his father of white mob violence on Black communities in his native St. Louis during the 1920's. This kind of violence, which was stoked by films like *Birth of a Nation*, swept the nation in places with high concentrations of affluent African American communities in Nebraska and Oklahoma. One of the most notorious episodes involved the community of Greenwood, Oklahoma. Now referred to as "Black Wallstreet," a white mob entered the town on May 30th, 1921, and leveled Greenwood, burning down all the buildings, and killing more than a hundred black citizens.

22. This account differs slightly from the "moving pictures" synopsis, which places the film on the Mexican border. One would never discern this by simply watching the film, since many of the characters, including the ones that attempt to lynch José, dress like men of the Gold Rush. In my analysis of the film, I'll insist on my reading of the characters as "49ers" or "Gold Rush" men, and not cowboys.

23. Two biblical examples of chiasm come to mind that take place in the story of Moses and the resurrection of Jesus, respectively. Take the previous, for example, and recall the moment when Moses parts the Red Sea in the book of Exodus (in the Old Testament). The narrative (or poem) literally begins on the shores. When Moses parts

the sea, and the landmass opens, the Israelites pass to the other side, and, completing the act of chiasm, climb up to the shore.

24. “El western no tuvo su primer héroe sino en 1908, cuando aún no se generalizaba el conocimiento público de los nombres de los actores de cine. Para que ese primer héroe, Broncho Billy, se hiciera popular, el nombre del personaje hubo de indentificarse con el de su actor, G.M. o Broncho Billy Anderson” (México Visto Por El Cine Extranjero, García Riera 23).

25. The film itself is quite important in the history of cinema. According to great director, Martin Scorsese, *The Great Train Robbery* is one of the first films to use the “cut”: “a shift from one vantage point to another, with the viewer understanding that we are still in one, continuous action” (Jefferson Lecture). Moreover, Scorsese argues how the film features various “cut” scenes, spliced together, so as to reveal “one unbroken action.” As Scorsese narrates: “even though we know we cut here...from the interior of the car to the exterior, we know we are in one unbroken action” (Jefferson Lecture). Of course, Scorsese sidesteps questions of “firsts,” opting instead to make the point of how the “cut” revolutionized filmmaking, so that, by composing a series of camera shots, the director was able to convey ideas with these moving images—a term that would later be codified as “movies.”

26. According to Broncho Billy’s biographer David Kiehn, Anderson was originally supposed to play one of the robbers on horseback. When it was revealed that Anderson lied about his ability to ride a horse, the director a liking to him, and allowed him to fill into the other roles. See his book *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company* for more.

27. The trains at Niles Canyon remain operational, though only for entertainment purposes. Niles Canyon is actually nestled in the urban sprawl of Fremont, California.

28. Ron Takaki eloquently frames this discussion on the construction of “whiteness” and how groups like Jews, Irish, and Italians eventually became “white.” See his book, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993).

29. According to popular legend, Francis Ford was a minor actor in Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*. He supposedly appears as one of the masked clansmen who ride to the Elsie Stoneman’s rescue, though he is uncredited. He actually is uncredited in many of the films he worked in, including for a minor role in his brother’s film, *The Searchers*.

30. Kisaburô Kurihara (who went by Thomas Kurihara) was a Japanese actor of the silent era that was featured in many Hollywood films. In 1914 Kurihara made more than ten movies. That same year, he reached a measure of stardom in his role as Takeo in *The Wrath of the Gods*. He made films for a few years in the U.S.,—and played the occasional “greaser” character—before continuing his career in Japan. There, he wrote and directed half a dozen pictures before his death in 1926.

31. General Carranza is commonly remembered for his role during the Mexican Revolution, when he rose to power in a coup d'etat, assassinating, then President Francisco Madero, and his vice president, José María Pino Suárez. For more on the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), including mention of Madero's education at UC Berkeley just prior to becoming president, see the documentary *The Storm that Swept Mexico* (2011). Margarita De Orellana also provides a succinct account of the Mexican Revolution in her masterful book, *Filming Pancho Villa*.

32. The term "pure film" from Francois Truffaut's interviews of Alfred and Alma Hitchcock. In the interview, Hitchcock goes on to talk about narration in silent film, and how directors (after the silent era) became too reliant on dialogue to make their point. His point is that the image, especially shots of the eyes, is powerful in and of itself. And, in order to be a master of the craft, one needs to learn to give the image its due and allow it to "speak." Indeed, the same emphasis on eyes is true throughout the film, including when Shorty is being propositioned by Pedro. In contrast to the simultaneous flashback scene, Pedro constantly looks menacingly, glancing to the left a few times, so as to convey the machinations of his ostensibly "evil" plan. For more on the term "pure film," see Kent Jones' documentary *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (2015).

33. Of course, *Licking the Greasers* is more sophisticated than Broncho Billy's film. For example, there is a scene in *Licking the Greasers* that offers a wistful sequence in Short fanaticizes to be reunited with his sweetheart, Anita. The scene is ultimately fulfilled at the movie's end. That being said, it's my opinion, that *The Greaser's Gauntlet* offers an even more complex story, especially in its rendering of time in years.

34. One only needs to recall the story of Emmett Till: a 14-year-old African American boy who was murdered by white supremacists in 1955 for supposedly whistling at a white woman. Remarkably, another version of this story (of a black boy whistling at a white woman) is said to have been the spark that ignited the (white) mob violence some thirty years earlier in Tulsa, Oklahoma on "Black Wall Street."

Chapter 2

1. Virtually all literary criticism of *Day of the Locust* strives to make sense of the final scene of the mob riot that ensues outside Kahn's Persian Palace Theater. (See the final chapter twenty-seven). It's an import, if not cathartic moment in the novel, and while I address the scene in a limited manner, I open with the scene at Tuttle's Trading Post to call attention to the cinematic qualities of the scene, including the structural irony that both invokes the Western and the discourses about Mexican-ness that I focus on in this chapter.

2. For example, David Seed reads West's *Day of the Locust* as a "place of simulation" (6) in the vein of Jean Baudrillard's essay, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/ 1994). In his essay, Baudrillard takes a nihilistic position, situating his conception of simulation as opposed to representation, saying: "Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole

edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (6). While Baudrillard’s essay is intriguing, I fundamentally disagree with his conclusion or the terms of his argument that the image (sign) is “has no relation to reality whatsoever” (6).

3. For more on *Day of the Locust* as a “Hollywood novel,” see David Seed’s *Cinematic Fictions* as well as see David Madden’s collection of essays called *Nathanael West: The Cheaters and the Cheated* (1973)

4. *The Day of the Locust* culminates with Tod’s estrangement from his body. The final passage reads:

He was carried through the exit to the back street and lifted into a police car. The siren began to scream and at first he thought he was making the noise himself. He felt his lips with his hands. They were clamped tight. He knew then it was the siren. For some reason this made him laugh and he began to imitate the siren as loud as he could. (185)

5. See David Seed’s *Cinematic Fictions* for more on *Day of the Locust* as satire.

6. In addition to adaptations of *Day of the Locust*, *Miss Lonelyhearts* has been adapted three times (under various names): *Advice to the Lovelorn* (1933), *Lonelyheart* (1953), and *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1983)

7. The first line of Ulin’s book review, reads: “When Nathanael West died on Dec. 22, 1940 in an automobile accident in El Centro, it barely sent a ripple through the literary world.”

8. For a more thorough account of the car accident that resulted in West’s death, see Jay Martin’s literary biography: *Nathanael West: The Art of His Life* (1970).

9. Jay Martin observes how West never escaped self-criticism of being a “working” writer. While very few writers actually achieve the financial wherewithal to earn a living through writing, West took the matter as a mark of his failure.

10. The film is superbly cast, featuring William Atherton as Tod Hackett, Donald Sutherland as Homer Simpson, Pepe Serna as Miguel, Karen Black as Faye Greener, and Burgess Meredith as Harry Greener. Meredith earned an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of Green (in 1976).

11. See Jay Martin’s literary biograph for more discussion on West’s “painterly language.”

12. According to David Seed, West originally planned to make Claude the protagonist. West re-centered the novel around Hackett later. Here I’m pointing to the often-clinical indifference with which Hackett narrates scenes.

13. According to Gerald Mast and Bruce Kavin's *A Short History of the Movies* (9th edition): the code presaged the formal blacklist of the 1950's, which was promoted by conservative voices in the industry and by the House on Un-American Activities which culminated with the banishment of a number of scriptwriters and directors, known as the "Hollywood Ten." According to Mast and Kavin, the Code was repudiated with "Otto Preminger's decision to release "The Moon is Blue" without the Code's seal of approval" (342-3). The conflict is depicted in the recent motion picture *Trumbo* (2015) starring Bryan Cranston, Diane Lane, and Helen Mirren.

14. Buhle and Wagner also point to other factors that led to the disempowerment of screen writers, including the "very creation of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, in 1927, [which] had been intended to foreclose on organized mental labor as much as raise the dignity of the new profession. Bringing together producers, directors, actors, writers, and technicians, the Academy abstractly offered a commonweal—but with some participants (or would-be participants) working under the absolute control of others. Actually, as open as it claimed to be all community members who had "contributed in a distinguished way," the Academy was open in fact to anyone whom founder Louis B. Mayer considered worthy, and to no one else. Then came the Depression. (44)

15. West's Homer Simpson character would later serve (at least partially) as an inspiration for Matt Groening's decades running animated sitcom, "The Simpsons." See Smithsonian Magazine's interview of Groening for more details: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/matt-groening-reveals-the-location-of-the-real-springfield-60583379/>.

16. Here, I'm purposely distinguishing between Fregoso's groundbreaking study of Chicana Cinema with the documentary she wrote and produced. Both are titled *The Bronze Screen*. Her scholarship is more concerned with Chicana film in the last decades of the twentieth Century. The documentary, in contrast, offers a history of Chicana/ Latinx representation in U.S. film. This includes "appropriation": films about mostly Mexican Americans, and what she calls Chicana and Chicano film culture: films made by Chicana.

17. See image Alfonso Bedoya as "Goldhat" on page 29 (in chapter 1).

18. For more on Gang films, see *Boulevard Nights* (1979), *Colors* (1988), *American Me* (1992), *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), and *Blood in Blood out: Bound By Honor* (1993).

19. The preceding moment is especially notable because it's the only time in the novel that the narrative switches point of view, from Tod Hackett to Homer Simpson's perspective. Notice how the pronoun ("he") switches, facilitating this transition. The passage reads:

He sat down and tried to make sense out of what Homer had told him. A great deal of it was gibberish. Some of it, however, wasn't. He hit on a key that

helped when he realized that a lot of it wasn't jumbled so much as timeless. The words went behind each other instead of after. What he had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way several sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph. Using this key, he was able to arrange a part of what he had heard so that it made the usual kind of sense.

After Tod had hurt him... (168)

The transition to Homer is complete with the new paragraph. Moreover, just as the passage indicates, the following two and a half pages lack indentation. Like the description of "jumbled" sentences that Tod intuits as a kind of "key" to understand Homer's language, preceding Homer's discovery of Faye and Miguel in bed.

Chapter 3

1. I'm referring to the original Spanish version of the text. See the bibliography, under *Film Pancho*, for the English translation.
2. Though some portions of the film have been recovered, most of Thayer's footage is lost. In hindsight, Thayer's efforts along with Villa's prescience to be filmed anticipates the serial Western film, and its preoccupation with Mexico, along with another cinematic milestone: the greaser character. This anecdote of Villa's acceptance on one hand, followed by the reversal into a kind of revilement, to the general one of the primary models for the character. In 1916, Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico in a response to losing U.S. financial support and resources during the war. In one fell swoop, Villa went from being celebrated across the nation in U.S. newspapers as a national figure vying for freedom, to an international terrorist. He became a villain overnight at the very moment when movies were arriving in California. Upon careful consideration, Villa's story illuminates the history of greaser cinema by. Both characters demonstrating an engagement with the American popular opinion. In Villa's case, his initial acceptance, followed by its antithesis, illuminates the role of Mexican representation at the outset of American cinema.
3. Of this point, I simply mean that Juan Rubio is celebrated for his leadership as a Colonel in Villa's army. And Colonel Rubio is mythologized on the Mexican side of the border. So much so that arresting officer (Lieutenant Ramos) is confounded after learning his identity, saying, "Wait! You cannot possibly be Juan Manuel Rubio? The Colonel Rubio?...Rubio of Santa Rosalía, Torreón, Zacatecas, and even here, Juárez" (5). This introduction is in stark contrast to the person Juan Rubio must become on the U.S. side: a farm worker.
4. My contention is that so-called conventional literary histories are outmoded the blurring of boundaries between the "literary" and the visual modes of narrative. The legacy of graphic novelists like Los Bros Hernandez and their robust narrative worlds of *Love and Rockets* is one example. Another point to consider is in Ramon Saldívar's argument that corrido's (the tradition of Mexican "folk" ballads) form an indispensable part of his conception of Chicana literary tradition. In the final chapter, I turn to the Oscar

Zeta Acosta's novels to continue this argument and to make the case that visual aspects, to include the cinematic, have long been part of Chicana literary traditions.

5. See *Pocho* pages 15-16.

6. Consider the first scene in which Juan Rubio arrives to El Paso. These first chapters are significantly different than the rest of the novel in terms of tone and plot.

7. *Salt of the Earth* lives on in film lore for its association with communism, the red scare, and with Joseph McCarthy's infamous House on Un-American Activities, which created the blacklist and the Hollywood ten, banning Biberman from making films. Of course, Biberman persevered, though not without turmoil. It's common knowledge that film was sabotaged at every stage of production, from the actual filming, to post-production. In fact, the film had to be edited in secret, to allay concerns. *Salt of the Earth* is commonly regarded as the only film ever to be banned outright in the continental United States. The fact that its subject is Chicana in New Mexico is remarkable, considering the fraught history of Chicanos in the cinema.

8. See Angela Davis' masterful *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998). At the outset of that book, Davis makes the argument that women are discursively tied to discourses of domesticity and to the kitchen specifically.

9. Here, we might muse about the novel's verisimilitude or lack thereof, to consider why José Antonio Villarreal makes the occasion to inhabit his fictional mother's subjectivity.

10. Indeed, both films are didactic in illustrating this connection between the two men. In making this comparison, the films reveal an allegorical relationship touching on national relations that quite anachronistically urge Mexico to follow its putative democratic example. The problem with this assertion is that Mexico actually abolished slavery in 1829. This remains a stark contrast to comparable ban in the U.S. with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, complication the *Juarez's* flawed suggestion of a moral high ground.

11. The passage concerning the narrative silence follows:

"Well, I was living in Hollywood at the time, working as an extra in the cowboy movies. There were no Mexicans to speak of in Hollywood." And he [Juan Rubio] would smile in spite of himself, and the children would laugh. (133)

Chapter 4

1. Though close friends and writing partners, it's worth noting that history has been kinder to Thompson and to his journalism covering those infamous Hell's Angels and the Watergate scandal. Thompson enjoyed much success and celebrity after publishing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which became an instant best seller. In contrast, Acosta's novels went out of print shortly after they were published and remained so for

nearly 20 years! Their absence, minus the extant copies in circulation, weirdly parallel the life of Oscar Zeta Acosta, who disappeared around 1974, and is presumed dead, though no one knows for certain.

2. Phillip Rodriguez's documentary on Oscar Zeta Acosta, aptly named *The Rise and Fall of the Brown Buffalo* (also the title of Acosta's third novel, *The Rise and Fall of General Zeta*, now lost), premiered at CINE+MAS, The San Francisco Latino Film Festival on September 16th, 2017. There were many notable guests in that small theater, including the director and producer, but also: Marco Acosta (Acosta's son), Anita Acosta (Acosta's sister), Betty Dowd (Acosta's first wife), Ann Henry (Acosta's friend and wife of the late "Owl") and relatives of Acosta's late wife, Socorro. Finally, Mr. Alan Rinzler, the former editor of *Rolling Stone* was in the audience. Though Rinzler edited both of Acosta's novels, and by his own account, had more of a hand in shaping *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. The documentary aired on PBS in 2018.

3. Acosta says this much in a letter to Hunter S. Thompson, published in *Oscar Zeta Acosta: The Uncollected Works*: "I've cut out the entire Las Vegas thing as such. I decided you wouldn't understand it and that others might accuse me of using your book as my notes" (105).

4. Although Hunter S. Thompson worked as a freelance journalist for many publications, he is mostly associated with *Rolling Stone Magazine*.

5. For another classic example of dissemblance, see Hunter S. Thompson's "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved." In one scene, the fictional version of Thompson convinces a fellow journalist that a group of armed Black Panther militants are in route to attack the horse race in order to start a race war.

6. This moment is captured in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and in the extant recordings of "The Gonzo Tapes." Thompson seems far more inebriated (and less coherent) in the latter.

7. There are other moments of masquerade in *Autobiography*. One of the most memorable scenes occurs when Acosta's protagonist morphs into a gorilla.

8. I'm thinking of the Coyote as a trickster character in some Apache stories creation stories. I'm also thinking of Brer Rabbit as a trickster character in African and African American oral traditions.

9. Gonzalez continues in his synthesis of Acosta criticism, reading this feature in terms of the novels "structure," which he interprets as a both a progression of form (in the Marxist sense of the term), and with regard to the novels thematic move from an individual to a collective identity.

10. See Antonio Viego's *Dead Subjects: Towards a Politics of Loss* for an interpretation of Acosta and psychoanalysis.

11. My reading of Acosta's satire is informed by Héctor Calderón's work, including a speech he gave to the Modern Language Association in 1982 titled: "To read Chicano Narrative: Commentary and Metacommentary." An updated version of that essay was published in *Criticism in the Borderlands*, co-edited with José Saldívar.

12. See a reading of Acosta's relationship to the "Beats," see Manuel Muñoz's *Countering the Counterculture*.

13. By "New Journalists," I'm thinking of Ken Kesey, Tom Wolfe, and Jimmy Breslin, among others.

14. I point to a line of punchy criticism dismissing Acosta's fiction. In Ilan Stavans's *Bandido*—a reading of Acosta's novels as cartesian meditation—Stavans surveys a number of Chicano authors to round out his literary biography, including celebrated novelist, Sandra Cisneros. Of Acosta, Cisneros opines: "I didn't really find anything worth reading in his novels." Another prominent example is from Arturo Islas's notorious retitling of Acosta's Autobiography as "Autobiography of a Malcriado."

15. In many respects, these visual registers have never been adequately addressed in literary criticism. I will come to these aspects later in the chapter. To the immediate point, this idea of how to read Acosta—whether to denounce the man and his works, and dismiss him outright, as some have—has long been a subject of Acosta's work in literary studies. I want to make my position clear that Acosta's fictions are sophisticated, despite the novel's blatant vulgarity. My analysis of the visual dimensions intends to develop a fuller picture (no pun intended) on the scope of Acosta's satire, and the contours of the visual motifs and imagery. Above all else, Acosta's novels require robust frames and contexts.

16. Calderón's use of the term "Chicano Narrative" anticipates Ramon Saldívar's seminal book, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. It's worth pointing out that Calderón uses the term two whole years before Saldívar does. Both scholars were undoubtedly influenced by Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, as was the field of literary studies.

17. Others critical forays into Acosta's fiction range broadly, from Josie Saldaña's masterful reading of race and indigeneity in *The Autobiography*, to Fanonian readings of Acosta as a commentary and critique of coloniality by Jorge Gonzalez. Other influential scholars, like Ramon Saldívar and Marcial Gonzalez have written persuasively about the imperative to read Acosta's fictions dialectically, and indeed, to read "chicano narrative" as part of a larger ideological focus of recovering and revising history from the vantage point of the dispossessed.

18. See Michael Hames-Garcia's *Fugitive Thought* for an interpretation of how Acosta satirizes the Chicano Movement.

19. See Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

20. For more on Carlos Muñoz's term, the "Mexican-American generation," see *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (1989). In his study, Muñoz writes about the term, "Mexican-American" as one that reflects the post-World War II politics of the baby boomer generation. It was a time when many Mexican Americans or Chicanos returned from the war and went to college on the GI Bill. For Muñoz, the term is also associated with whiteness and with adopting the point of view (mythology) of the United States that hard work equates to social (or financial) success. Muñoz calls the "Chicano Generation" to distinguish between political projects and beliefs. For Muñoz, one of the central features of *Chicanismo* was that it was a young movement, led by students in cities or more urban communities. Indeed, Acosta was of the "Mexican-American" generation, and was a military veteran, who served in the Air Force during the 1950's (like Hunter S. Thompson). That he is critical of the term is even more intriguing.

21. This is actually the second allusion to James Bond. A similar reference occurs at the beginning of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*.

22. For more on this relationship, see Abdul JanMohamed's "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory" (1985).

23. Consider the discussion of silent cinema in the first chapter, including the conclusion of *The Birth of a Nation*. While it isn't a greaser film per se, *The Birth of a Nation* participates in the same visual coordinates, including the racialized triangle: the encounter of the man of color abducting a white woman. As I show in chapter 1, the film concludes by setting up the conventional "chase" scene that culminates with the woman being saved by the white male protagonist—the "hero." Thus envisaged, this scene provides a counterpoint to the novel: a moment of structural irony, given the legacy of cinematic representations of race.

24. In truth, the real Acosta did run for Sheriff of Los Angeles. And, he earned 100,000 votes or more. See Hunter S. Thompson's eulogy of Acosta: "The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat" published in *Rolling Stone Magazine*.

25. See Chon Noriega's *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*.

26. While the protagonist's criticism of how Latinx actors have frequently had to anglicize their names to "pass" in Hollywood generally holds, the same cannot be said of Anthony Quinn. Even though Brown locates Quinn in that tradition of adopting a "stagename," Quinn is his true surname, passed down from his father. Thanks to Professor Padilla for pointing this fact out.

27. The scene calls to mind a similar moment in the Civil Rights Movement when Sammy Davis Junior was nearly booed off stage. For more, see the documentary "The Black Godfather."

28. Far be it from me to mention the 45th U.S. President by name. Still, I would be remiss if I didn't state the obvious: that when he announced his candidacy for President, he descended down a gilded escalator. And when he first opened his mouth to speak, the words "Mexican" and "bad hombres" were some of the first to exit his mouth. In many ways, he was tapping into the tradition of Mexican villainy.

29. See Carl Gutierrez-Jones *Rethinking the Borderlands*.

30. The reference could be to Henry Silva, though the person doesn't quite align with the character in the novel.

31. I make reference to this thesis—on the greaser's malleability—in chapter 1 of my dissertation.

32. Here, I'm thinking of Frederick Aldama's reading of Acosta in *Postethnic Narrative Criticism*.

Collocating Chicana Literature, American Cinema, and Other Conclusions

1. A recent parody Trump's endeavor can be found in Steve Carrell's series called *Space Force*. The series is a play on Trump's new "space program" and a nod to an older series from 1978.

2. For more on the militarization of the U.S. Mexican border, see Joseph Nevin's *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal" Alien and the Making of The U.S. - Mexico Boundary*.

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