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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Film Studies

**The Representation of Hispanic masculinity in US cinema 1998-2008: Genre, Stardom and
Machismo**

by

Victoria Lynn Kearley

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2014

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

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ABSTRACT

The Representation of Hispanic masculinity in US cinema 1998-2008: Genre, Stardom and Machismo

Victoria Lynn Kearley

This thesis examines how the conventions of four distinct genres, the star personas of two key Hispanic male stars and conceptions of Hispanic men as 'macho' intersected in constructing images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood between the years 1998 and 2008. The work makes an original contribution to knowledge as the first extensive study of Hispanic masculinity in contemporary Hollywood and affording new insights into the way in which genre conventions and star personas contributed to these representations.

The structure is based around four genre based case studies. The first analyses how Hispanic masculinity has been represented in action adventure films, with a specific focus on Antonio Banderas' performances in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003). The second case study chapter examines representations of Hispanic masculinity in the contemporary family film, its two case studies being the male members of the Cortez family of spies in *Spy Kids* (2001) and the animated Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2* (2004). The third focuses on the cross genre form of the border film discussing images of Mexican masculinity in the drug trafficking drama *Traffic* (2000), with a specific focus on the performance of Benicio Del Toro, and border Western *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005). The fourth and final case study chapter centres around the representation of Hispanic masculinity in contemporary Biopics, analysing the performances of Banderas in *And Staring Pancho Villa as Himself* (2003) and Del Toro in Stephen Soderbergh's *Che* (2008).

This research demonstrates that, in a decade where Hispanics became the US' largest ethnic minority, Hispanic males were cast in increasingly central and heroic roles across a range of genres but were still subject to long standing stereotypes than represent Hispanic men as excessively macho.

Contents

ABSTRACT	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
List of figures	v
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP.....	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction:	1
1.1 Aims and Scope.....	1
1.2 Methodology and Literature Review	3
1.3 Representation, Fantasy and Realism	9
1.4 A Brief Introduction to the place of Hispanics and Latinos in US History and Culture	10
1.5 Hispanics and Latinos in the US 1998-2008	13
1.6 Hispanics and Latinos in US Cinema	17
1.7 Hollywood and Hispanic, or more broadly Latin, Machismo	24
1.8 Genre	29
1.9 Stardom	36
1.10 Antonio Banderas	37
1.11 Benicio del Toro.....	39
1.12 Thesis Stucture	42
2. Hispanic Masculinity, Hispanic Action Heroes	46
2.1 Action, Pastiche and Nostalgia.....	46
2.2 A New Hollywood, A New Zorro	48
2.3 Pastiche Zorro, The Original Adventurer	50
2.4 Hispanicising Zorro, Taming the Animal.....	58
2.5 From Bandido Buffoon to Action Hero: Action as a Civilising Force	61
2.6 Performing Masculinity and the Action Hero Masquerade.....	65
2.7 <i>Once Upon a Time in Mexico</i> and Pastiche.....	69
2.8 Barillo and the White Bandido	71
2.9 El Mariachi and Mexican Nationalism	72
2.10 Conclusion.....	77

3. Hispanic Masculinity in the Family Film:	78
3.1 Introduction.....	78
3.2 What is a Family Film?.....	78
3.3 Robert Rodriguez Reborn as a Hispanic Family Man	83
3.4 The Hispanic Action Hero Becomes a Post Feminist Father.....	88
3.5 Creativity Versus Machismo in the Hispanic Family Film	91
3.6 Puss in Boots: Animating Hispanic Masculinity.....	92
3.7 The Hispanic Adventurer in a Cat's Body.....	96
3.8 Puss in Boots: From Lone Bandit to Part of the Family	99
3.9 Conclusion	100
 4. Hispanic Masculinity at the US Border.....	104
4.1 Introduction.....	104
4.2 The Border Film	105
4.3 'Indiewood', the Network Narrative and Realism	106
4.4 Benicio del Toro in <i>Traffic</i>	110
4.5 The 'Narc Hero' Crosses the Border	114
4.6 The Good Neighbour Within.....	118
4.7 Melquiades' Body in <i>Three Burials</i>	121
4.8 'I Am Just a Cowboy': <i>Three Burials</i> and the Western	123
4.9 Conclusion	126
 5. Hispanic Masculinity and the Star as Biographical Subject.....	127
5.1 Introduction.....	127
5.2 Pancho Villa and Che Guevara in US and Hispanic Culture	129
5.3 The Historical Biopic and Hispanic Masculinity	133
5.4 The Star as Subject	140
5.5 Promotion and the Hispanic Male as Biographical Subject.....	143
5.6 Reception and the Hispanic Male as Biographical Subject.....	148
5.7 <i>And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself</i> and Mexican Machismo	151
5.8 Pancho Villa: From Revolutionary to Screen Action Hero.....	153
5.9 The Biopic Within.....	157
5.10 Che as Teacher and the Educational Film.....	158
5.11 Che as Ordinary Man.....	161
5.12 Che as Heroic Leader and Star	162

5.13 Conclusion.....	163
6. Conclusions:.....	166
6.1 What is the Original Contribution to the Field?	166
6.2 What has Been Learnt About Hispanic Masculinity in Contemporary Hollywood?	166
6.3 What Has Happened to Hispanic Masculinity in the US Since 2008?	169
6.4 What are the Potential Avenues for Further Research?	174
Appendices	176
Appendix A: Key Term Definitions.....	176
Appendix B: Plot Summaries	176
Bibliography	178
Books and Journals.....	178
News References	186
Internet References.....	190
Filmography	194

List of Figures

- Figure 1.1: 'El Mariachi' and his friends prepare for the final showdown in *Desperado* - P.2
- Figure 1.2: Eli Wallach as Tuco in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* - P.26
- Figure 1.3: Alphonso Bedoya in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* - P.27
- Figure 1.4: Al Pacino as Tony Montana in *Scarface* (1983) - P.27
- Figure 1.5: Ricardo Montalban as Chu Chu Ramirez in *My Man and I* - P.27
- Figure 1.6: Theatrical poster for *The Son of The Sheik* - P.28
- Figure 1.7: Promotional image of Rudolph Valentino the original Latin Lover - P.28
- Figure 1.8: Japanese theatrical poster for *Never Talk to Strangers* starring Antonio Banderas - P.29
- Figure 2.1: Zorro and Elena in the Undressing Duel Scene - P.50
- Figure 2.2: Theatrical Poster for *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) - P.54
- Figure 2.3: Theatrical Poster for *The Mark of Zorro* (1940) - P.54
- Figure 2.4: Zorro and Lolita in the 1940s Church Scene - P.56
- Figure 2.5: The costume of De la Vega as Zorro - P.58
- Figure 2.6: The costume of Murrieta as Zorro - P.58
- Figure 2.7: Alejandro the Buffoon challenges Zorro to a duel - P.62
- Figure 2.8: Wanted Poster of the Murrieta Brothers - P.63
- Figure 2.9: The explosion shot from El Mariachi's guitar/gun - P.68
- Figure 2.10: Willem Dafoe as Barillo - P.72
- Figure 2.11: El Mariachi surveys the grand Mexican landscape of which he is King - P.74
- Figure 2.12: El Mariachi as a Mexican national hero - P.74
- Figure 3.1: Theatrical Poster for *Shrek 2* - P.100
- Figure 4.1: del Toro's Javier Rodriguez is 'checked out', in a scene from *Traffic* - P.119
- Figure 4.2: Melquiades on horseback, in a scene from *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* - P.124
- Figure 5.1: Popular images of Villa - P.129
- Figure 5.2: Popular images of Guevara - P.129
- Figure 5.3: DVD cover for HBO TV movie *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* - P.143
- Figure 5.4: Alternative promotional image for *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* - P.145
- Figure 5.5: Posters for *Che: Part One*, *Che: Part Two* and the Special Edition with both parts together - P.147

Declaration of Authorship

I, Victoria Lynn Kearley declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

The Representation of Hispanic masculinity in US cinema 1998-2008: Genre, Stardom and Machismo

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated:

Parts of the 'Hispanic Action Heroes' chapter are reworked from material submitted as part of my dissertation for a MA in Film Studies at the University of Southampton in 2008.

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as:

No parts of this thesis have been previously published but some material from it was reworked into an article entitled: 'Redefining Zorro: Hispanicising the Swashbuckling Hero' in University of Southampton's Humanities Graduate School Journal Emergence, Volume II in Autumn 2010

Signed:

Date: 8th May 2014

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the following academic staff, PhD students and family members who have helped and supported her in the formulation and production of this thesis:

Firstly, I would like to thank my excellent supervisor Dr Michael Williams for his invaluable support and guidance throughout the process of formulating and writing this thesis. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance provided, though insightful and constructive feedback on draft chapters, by my secondary supervisor Dr Mark Dineen and my upgrade examiner Dr Shelley Cobb.

I am also grateful to my fellow PhD students at the University of Southampton, both for their support and the feedback they provided on some of the work here at the Film PGR discussion group.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support offered by my parents Kelvin and Tracy Kearley and my partner Alex Duffell, the latter of whom also assisted with proof reading and formatting this thesis, without which I would not have been able to complete the PhD.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and Scope

In order to introduce the key themes and arguments of this thesis I will employ a brief illustrative example. In 2003 Antonio Banderas, the most successful Hispanic actor in my decade of study, described his gun-toting, guitar playing character El Mariachi as a new kind of hero for the Hollywood action-adventure genre.¹ What is different is the Latin machismo, and flair for movement that relocates Hispanic masculinity into the role of the action hero, traditionally reserved for white males in Hollywood. Banderas says, of El Mariachi:

This character is created from action, he is created from movement. He is not a discursive or a speech character. [...] He is a guy who moves like a bullfighter, he moves like a flamenco dancer. You know, just trying to add a little bit to the character's Spanish flavour. When he plays the guitar or when he shoots the gun it is practically the same thing, you've got the same music behind it.²

El Mariachi is a visual hybrid of ethnic identities, his dress combines cowboy boots and shirt (signifiers of the quintessentially American genre of the Western) with the tight trousers and waist length jacket that traditionally form part of the costume of a Mexican Mariachi, identifying him as transnational masculine hero, a hero for Hollywood and Mexico. It is through the form of the action-adventure genre that Robert Rodriguez, writer/director of *Desperado* (1995) and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003) relocates Latin machismo in mainstream Hollywood. In this example, as is evocatively described by Banderas himself, his star persona is presented as that of a Hispanic man of action and romance. In this image existing signifiers of Hispanic masculinity like the bullfighter and flamenco dancer and the representative conventions of the action genre combine to create an image of a Hispanic action hero. This thesis will examine the way in which the meanings imbued through stardom, genre and existing conceptions of Hispanic machismo construct images of Hispanic masculinity in contemporary Hollywood cinema, considering the example of El Mariachi in more detail and focusing on other case studies from a range of diverse genres.

¹ Banderas plays El Mariachi in *Desperado*. Robert Rodriguez. Los Hooligans Productions. USA. 1995 and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. Robert Rodriguez. Troublemaker Studios. USA. 2003. The character also appears in *El Mariachi*. Robert Rodriguez. Los Hooligans Productions. Mexico/USA. 1992 where he is played by Mexican actor Carlos Gallardo.

² Banderas states this in an interview as part of a featurette on the evolution of the character of El Mariachi entitled 'The Anti-Hero's Journey' that appeared on the UK DVD release of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*.



Figure 1.1: 'El Mariachi' and his friends prepare for the final showdown in *Desperado* (1995)

This thesis examines the attempts of Hollywood cinema to reconcile the minority identity of Hispanic masculinity in its process of representation, through refiguring the personas of Hispanic male stars in the conventions of popular genres. It is the first thesis to provide detailed analysis of images of Hispanic masculinity presented in the Hollywood films within my period of study, spanning a decade between the years 1998 and 2008. The research approach adopted combines genre and star studies. It engages with issues of ethnicity and gender and offers critical consideration of the way in which these identities can be represented on screen. It is wide-ranging in its focus, examining images of men of Hispanic racial origin, those from Spanish speaking countries, including both Spain and Latin America and the US Latino population. In reality, such groups may have quite different social and historical backgrounds, but as will be argued later in this introductory chapter, such a broad conception of racial identity will be used. Hollywood commonly homogenises them into a typology of undifferentiated Hispanic masculinity.

This study is based on the analysis of cinematic representations and draws heavily on textual analysis, examining portrayals of Hispanic masculinity in texts from the canon of four of US cinema's most prevalent genres in my decade of study, the action-adventure film, the social problem film (in the guise of the border film), the family film and the biopic. The images located in my film texts will necessarily be considered in their respective production and reception contexts. The purpose of this thesis is to consider how contemporary Hollywood's image of Hispanic masculinity is repeatedly reconstructed and redefined through the interplay between existing conceptions of this identity, the star images in which these are contained, and the representational conventions of specific generic forms. I shall argue that while the representations of Hispanic masculinity in my key case studies still engage with existing stereotypes, they have also been recast into heroic roles, through an engagement with genre conventions and the star personas of the performers that portray them.

1.2 Methodology and Literature Review

The following discussion of existing literature and methodological discussion is intended to situate my thesis in the context of existing academic research in the field and to differentiate my approach to this material from those which have gone before it. I shall outline how my research expands on existing studies by updating published work on Hispanic images in US film and moving away from solely star based studies to consider the interplay between genre and stardom in creating Hispanic images in Hollywood. This thesis expands on the existing body of research in this field in multiple ways. Firstly, there are still relatively few thesis length studies that have considered the Hispanic image in Hollywood film and only a small handful that have considered how Latinos have been represented in my decade of study.³

Important studies that have considered Hispanic and Latino images in Hollywood before 1998 include Frank Javier Garcia Berumen's, *The Chicano/Hispanic Image in American Film*, Gary D Keller's comprehensive but outdated *Hispanics and United States Film: an Overview and Handbook* and Clara E. Rodriguez's *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the US Media*. When I began work on this project only two full-length studies to date had considered the Hispanic image in Hollywood post 1998; Charles Ramirez Berg's book *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* which provides an in depth discussion of contemporary film texts in the light of Hollywood Hispanic stereotypes, and Jana Hantzschel's *Latinos in American Films* which provides a more broad survey of contemporary Hollywood's Hispanic imagery. More recently Mary Beltrán published the notable study *Latina/o Stars in Us Eyes: The Makings and Meanings of Film Stardom* which focuses on the careers of Jessica Alba and Jennifer Lopez in the 1990s and 2000s, but only considers male stars as late as the 1980s, though she has re-addressed this balanced with a chapter entitled 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo'. My thesis will update and expand upon the discussions of Hispanic and Latino masculinities in Hollywood contained within these works and provide new insights by considering how genre conventions and star personas combine to shape representations of these ethnic identities.

³ Frank Javier Garcia Berumen, *The Chicano/Hispanic Image in American Film* (New York: Vantage Press, 1995); Gary D Keller *Hispanics and United States Film: an Overview and Handbook* (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Review/Press, 1994); Clara E. Rodriguez *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the US Media* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Jana Hantzschel, *Latinos in American Films* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008); Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in Us Eyes: The Makings and Meanings of Film Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107

Indeed, there is still considerable room for more academic research with regards to Hispanic representation in Hollywood; the need for such research is timely, considering the fact that in June 2003 'Hispanics' were reported to have overtaken Black Americans as the largest ethnic minority group in the US.⁴ Recent publications that have addressed in detail the representation of Latino and Hispanic masculinities in Hollywood and US popular culture, Beltrán's *Latina/o Stars in US Eyes* and Rudolph's *Masculatinidad*, do not consider the representation of these masculinities on contemporary screens.⁵ However, analyses of the personas of Hispanic male stars in Hollywood have occupied a chapter each in the Star Decades series for the 1990s and 2000s.

Laura Isabel Serna considers the personas of Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos in the 1990s, arguing that Banderas' persona is created in the mould of the Latin Lover, and that his persona 'reinforced longstanding ideas of Latino male sexuality and physicality'.⁶ This essay provides a useful overview of the way in which Banderas' persona in Hollywood heavily engaged with the Latin Lover stereotype, particularly in the 1990s. My work goes beyond this to consider how the generic conventions of the action film, family film and biopic have recast Banderas as a Hispanic action hero and family friendly star in his later career, and is original in the way that it considers the star persona of Antonio Banderas in contexts not previously discussed in detail. It deconstructs his popular Hispanic action hero persona more fully and in a stronger generic context than previously examined and then goes on to consider how this persona is refigured in new contexts. The examination of Banderas' star persona in family films is something which has not previously received academic attention, but this thesis will show that it has significantly refigured the way in which Hispanic masculinity is placed in Hollywood.

The persona of Benicio del Toro is addressed in the next volume of the Star Decades series in which Beltrán argues that the personas of del Toro and Javier Bardem went 'beyond machismo' in the way in which they represented Hispanic masculinity in 2000s Hollywood. Beltrán writes that del Toro and Bardem 'emerged as Hollywood film stars, in complex and critically lauded roles in which they embodied a nuanced masculinity, and in promotional texts in which

⁴ BBC World News, 'Hispanics become largest US minority', 22nd January 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2682027.stm> [last accessed 1/6/09]

⁵ Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in US Eyes: The Makings and Meanings of Film Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jennifer Domino Rudolph, *Embodying Latino Masculinities: Producing Masculatinidad* (Palgrave Macmillan: NYC, 2012)

⁶ Laura Isabel Serna, 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades' in Anna Everett ed., *Pretty People: Movie Stars of the 1990s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012) pp.123-143, p.125

they were presented as intelligent and sexy icons for American and global fans.¹⁷ This chapter provides a useful overview and comparison of the careers of del Toro and Bardem and the way in which their stardom differs from that of Banderas in the 1990s, through basing their star personas on intelligence and thoughtful performances as well as attractive physicality. I agree with and have expanded upon Beltrán's characterisation of Benicio del Toro as a Latino star as performer that has challenged traditional US stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity through his promotion and reception. However, my own detailed analysis of del Toro's roles in *Traffic* reveal that stereotypical aspects of the characters portrayed by del Toro have been masked through a realistic acting style and the critical acclaim he has received as an actor.

This thesis represents the first thesis length study of images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood cinema to date, despite the fact that images of Hispanic males have endured on the Hollywood screen since the pre-sound era as discussed in the next section. In the field of sociology Jennifer Domino Rudolph's book *Embodying Latino Masculinities* has provided insights into how Latino masculinity is constructed and performed in the fields theatre, literature, music and sports, but does not consider film or television performances of Latino masculinities.⁸ In terms of the gendered Hispanic image in Hollywood, while a full length study of the female Hispanic image in US film and culture, entitled *From Bananas to Buttocks: the Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, has been published there has yet to be an equivalent study for the images of Hispanic males in Hollywood.⁹ This is unsurprising, considering that images of women have historically received more attention than those of men in Film Studies. Laura Mulvey's influential article 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' and its argument that the cinematic gaze is inherently masculine, symptomatic of patriarchal society's objectification of women has meant that images of the male are more often seen as neutrally coded, less in need of critical deconstruction than those of their disenfranchised, female counterparts.¹⁰ Mulvey has been frequently challenged since the publication of 'Visual Pleasure', not least by Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark who argue that the persistence of patriarchy in Hollywood cinema increases rather than

⁷ Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107, p.92

⁸ Jennifer Domino Rudolph, *Embodying Latino Masculinities: Producing Masculinidad* (Palgrave Macmillan: NYC, 2012)

⁹ Myra Mendible ed., *From Bananas to Buttocks : the Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007)

¹⁰ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' in *The Sexual Subject: a Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp.22-34

lessens 'the need to look closely at Hollywood's representations of masculinity.'¹¹ This thesis sets out to examine images of racial otherness that are contained in the body of the dominant male gender images that exist on the borderline between the socially hegemonic and the subjugated, in order to provide insights into whether Hispanic identity is still a barrier to positive representation in Hollywood cinema.

However, this thesis does not only distinguish itself from existing research in the fields of gender and racial representation through its examination of images of a gendered racial group that have received little critical representation, or by considering them in the context of very recent social and industrial changes. This thesis also takes a significantly different methodological approach to that of studies that have previously considered representations of gender and ethnicity in Hollywood cinema. Previous studies in this area have tended to either produce a broad survey of indicative images of gender or ethnicity in a particular period or used the personas of specific stars as the nexus of their image analysis; this study does neither.¹² Instead, I have chosen to consider images and star personas of Hispanic masculinity in the codes and conventions of the genres of the texts in which they appear. This thesis shall take the form of four textual analysis case studies grouped together by genre rather than chronology.

At first consideration, to choose to examine images of Hispanic masculinity in the framework of generically linked case studies may seem a less than obvious methodology for a study that considers representations over a distinct period of time, as it eschews chronology. A more broad survey of the most prevalent representations in a chosen period, as in Andrew Spicer's book on masculinity in British Cinema or Jana Hantzel's study of Latino images in contemporary Hollywood, would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the range of images of Latin masculinity in the parameters of my study.¹³ Such a survey approach would allow patterns in representations to emerge, and afford me the opportunity to track changes in images of Latin

¹¹ Steve Cohen and Ina Rae Hark eds., *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, (London: Routledge, 1993) p.8

¹² Examples of the former include studies by Gary D. Keller, *Hispanic's in United States Film: an overview and handbook* (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Press, 1994) and Jana Hantzel, *Latinos in American Films* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), while examples of the latter include Myra Mendible ed., *From Bananas to Buttocks : the Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), and Chris Perriam's work on Antonio Banderas, specifically his article Chris Perriam, 'Two transnational Spanish Stars: Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz' in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, Vol.2, No. 1, 2005 pp.29-46

¹³ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: the representation of masculinity in popular British Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Jana Hantzel, *Latinos in American Films* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008)

masculinity as they occur over time. However, for me to adopt a macro-level approach to the study of gendered ethnic representation would not provide a sufficient depth of analysis to fully deconstruct the images in my chosen texts. In depth, indicative case-studies will allow for a greater understanding of where the images come from and how they function in the texts.

As filmic representations of ethnicity and gender are most commonly embodied by star performers it would be appropriate for this thesis to take the form of distinct star studies. As previously noted, many studies of Latina/o and Hispanic identity in Hollywood have successfully adopted this methodology, examples being the previously mentioned *From Bananas To Buttocks*, which is comprised of case-studies that consider how female Latina/Hispanic stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Penelope Cruz and Salma Hayek negotiate conceptions of Latina sexuality through the presentation of their bodies in their performances and in the mass media; and Beltrán's *Latino/a Stars in US Eyes* which considers the personas of a key Latino star in US film and television from each decade between 1920s and the 2000s.¹⁴ However, as my study is very heavily based on the examination of genre based texts I do not feel it necessary to locate my analysis of representations solely around star personas, instead favouring an approach which allows me to consider how star personas and generic conventions work together in constructing ethnic images on screen. Surveying existing work in the field of ethnic and transnational star images in Hollywood also led me to the conclusion that to have based this project solely on individual analyses of the personas of Hispanic male stars would restrict its potential to contribute something new to the field. Due to the prevalence of Banderas a pure star study would almost inevitably become a larger scale extension of Chris Perriam's exemplary analysis of the Banderas star persona in Hollywood in his book *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: from Banderas to Bardem* and his essay 'Two Transnational Spanish Stars: Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz'.¹⁵ Add to this the more recent considerations of Banderas and del Toro's personas as defining images of Hispanic masculinity in 1990s (Banderas) and 2000s (del Toro) Hollywood, providing an overview of their careers and star personas in these eras by Laura Isabel Serna and Mary Beltrán respectively and the need to move beyond purely star based studies in order to say

¹⁴ Myra Mendible ed., *From Bananas to Buttocks : The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in Us Eyes: The Makings and Meanings of Film Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009)

¹⁵ Chris Perriam, *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: From Banderas to Bardem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Chris Perriam, 'Two transnational Spanish Stars: Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz' in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, Vol.2, No. 1, 2005 p.29-46

something new about these two performers becomes more of a necessity.¹⁶ Instead this thesis considers the key personas of these two stars through the prism of genre conventions in order to provide new insights into how their personas have impacted on images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood.

I reject the star study and chronological survey based approaches described above, as they assume too much unity in representation, expecting that an image of ethnicity or gender contained in a period, or a star body, will always necessarily be consistent. For example, this thesis expands on Chris Perriam's analysis of Banderas' star persona by considering his persona in the context of different genres; considering how his image differs between the action film, the family film and the biopic. I shall re-contextualise Banderas, considering Banderas' star image as a central part, of the multiple contextual factors which contribute to the understanding of an image. In addition, I shall consider the star persona of Benicio del Toro as a counterpoint to that of Banderas, examining how both adopt different performance styles to achieve stardom in the face of Hollywood's tradition of marginalising Hispanic actors. I shall consider the English language promotion of these two stars, the interviews, articles, websites and images in which they are presented outside the film texts, while considering the influence of genre conventions and existing types of Hispanic masculinity on the images presented in my case studies. I will necessarily examine both the promotion and reception of each film, as well as the films themselves, considering each in the contextual triad of genre, stardom and machismo.

This thesis will be largely based on an analysis of the key film texts as detailed in the chapter breakdown later in this introductory chapter. However it will also include some supplementary analysis of reviews and promotional posters, film images and trailers for my chosen films taken from release in the US and other English speaking subsidiary markets (UK, Canada and Australia). The reason for choosing these sources, as opposed to those from Hispanic countries and communities, is in order to contribute to the picture of how Hispanics are represented in majority Anglophone cultures. In addition to promotional material for the films, star materials such as interviews and features on Banderas and del Toro online, in US newspapers, magazines and the star's websites, will also be employed in my analysis. My analysis of these

¹⁶ Laura Isabel Serna, 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades' in Anna Everett ed., *Pretty People: Movie Stars of the 1990s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012) pp.123-143; Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107

materials will be situated in relevant existing theoretical research and will also be considered with respect to other significant inter-textual materials in my discussions of pastiche, such as the previous incarnations of Zorro in the case of *The Mask of Zorro* and the other cultural representations of key figures, such as the place of 'Che' Guevara's image in US popular culture.

1.3 Representation, Fantasy and Realism

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that the connotations of representation are at once 'aesthetic, political and semiotic', they not only portray a particular ethnic group but become linguistically and politically synonymous with them.¹⁷ Representations then have great social power, but their relationship to the people they aim to represent is problematic to say the least. Firstly these representations, particularly in Hollywood, and created by the white, Anglo majority and thus minority groups have limited access to self representation. However, even in the case of self representation the very nature of representations is as refracted rather than reflected images of realities. By this I mean they are mediated by social and formal conventions. Richard Dyer states 'what is re-presented in representation is not directly reality but other representations. The analysis of images always needs to see how any given instance is embedded in a network of other instances.'¹⁸ Genre is in essence an institutionalised 'network of instances', a recognisable formal tradition of representation in which subsequent images locate themselves. Such a perspective on representation gains validity when considering contemporary US cinema's propensity for nostalgia, pastiche and parody and the box-office dominance of blockbusters based on comic books, novels, and in the case of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series (2003-present), a theme park ride. Hollywood images became ever more readily identifiable as recycled and reworked versions of other cultural representations in my decade of study. Such a definition may appear cynical and a position on the nature of cinematic representations that considers them to be derivative of other cultural forms and traditions, rather than representative of the reality they appear to represent, does not immediately endear itself as a suitable argument for devoting an entire thesis to the study of images. However, recognising these representations as drawn from a 'network of other instances' aides the deconstruction of these complex, composite images and trace their cultural, traditional and formal origins. This will also allow me to chart the extent to which they

¹⁷ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation' in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp.178-219, p. 182

¹⁸ Richard Dyer in the introduction to *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, (NYC: Routledge, 1993) p.2

challenge and refigure existing stereotypes into more central and heroic images of Hispanic masculinity.

This thesis considers representation as constructs, and it is the nature of their construction which I have set out to study, charting 'network of other instances' from which an image is composed. It must be noted that the case studies in this project are divided into two parts in that the first two genre studies focus on films that locate their representative images in fantasy, while those in the latter two chapters present their representations as reflective of reality, though the representations in the latter are no less heavily constructed or more 'representative'. Indeed Shohat and Stam note that debates around representation of minority groups often break down around the issue of realism, as there is no definitive consensus as to what constitutes a realistic representation.¹⁹ Instead, as Shohat and Stam note what appears to the audience to be realistic representations are commonly those which are aesthetically realistic and thus assumed, often wrongly, to be reflective of social realities.²⁰ This issues will be explored further in my third and fourth case study chapters.

The 'networks of other instances' I will discuss will be different in the two halves of this thesis, with the fantasy sections drawing strongly on pastiche and action adventure genre tropes and the realistic films drawing on independent cinema conventions of realism and biographical intertexts. However, the influence of the star personas of Banderas, as an action adventure star, and Del Toro as an indie wood method actor, are central to discussions in both sections. In the transnational framework of my project it is also vital to consider that the images I am examining may be drawn from multiple national traditions of gender representation. Hence I shall consider the extent to which US cinema's contemporary images of broadly Hispanic masculinity are drawn from Spanish and Latin American traditions of machismo, Hollywood images of the macho hero, or long-standing Hollywood stereotypes of Latin masculinity, or probably more likely, a cultural hybrid of several of these.

1.4 A Brief Introduction to the place of Hispanics and Latinos In US History and Culture

The US idea of a Hispanic identity, as opposed to a white, English speaking mainstream, is central to my analysis. Hence this section will define the sense in which this term will be used in this

¹⁹ Shohat and Stam, 'Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation', p. 178

²⁰ Ibid. p. 179

thesis and how this relates to broader issues of racial and ethnic identity in US culture. I will also discuss how these term intersects with the term 'Latino' and why this thesis focuses on discussions of Hispanic rather than the more specific idea of a shared Latino identity. Both 'Hispanic' and 'Latino', in terms of the extent to which they are required to represent the peoples they have been assigned to – an ever growing sector of the US population – are problematic and hard to definitively define.

Jorge J.E. Gracia succinctly defines the term Latino as referring to people of Latin American descent regardless of their racial ancestry.²¹ Suzanne Oboler, in her book-length discussion of Latino and Hispanic identity in US culture, argues that the term is more readily accepted and chosen than Hispanics, by those who are commonly labelled as such, because it does not have some of the negative connotations in mainstream US culture that the term Hispanic does.²² In contrast she writes that the broader term Hispanic is the one that has commonly been ascribed to all peoples in the US who are affiliated (language, birth, parentage) with a Spanish speaking country, by the white English speaking majority.²³ This definition touches on the key reasons why I have chosen to discuss the idea of Hispanic rather than Latino (a term which is arguably more representative of social realities) masculinity as a gendered ethnic identity.

This idea of Hispanic identity tallies with Hollywood's in its broad and ill-defined nature. As my analysis of my key case studies will make clear, Hollywood represents the ethnic identities of the male figures I am discussing through tying them to generalised ideas of ethnic Hispanicness located around machismo. This is also apparent in the ways in which Banderas, as a Spaniard playing Mexicans, and Del Toro, as a Puerto Rican playing Mexican and Argentinean, are cast in a way which assumes a shared Hispanic identity. Indeed the term 'Hispanic' is most appropriate to this thesis because of its central focus on these two stars and the way in which their personas, performances and characters frequently engage with this US idea of a shared Hispanic identity, even as Del Toro tries to be assimilated beyond this into roles where his ethnicity is not explicitly defined. The term Hispanic is arguably more appropriate than Latino when dealing with these two

²¹ Jorge J.E Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999) p.4

²² Susan Oboler, *Ethnic labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (re)presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p. 166

²³ Oboler, p.164

stars in that they both conform to Hollywood's Eurocentric ideal of Latin stars as originating from Spain or from Spanish, rather than native Latin American, with their dark hair but relatively light skin.

Oboler's conception of who this idea of a shared Hispanic identity comes from is also central to why I have chosen this term. This thesis focuses on how the white, English speaking, mainstream institution of US cinema represents Hispanic masculinity and hence the fact that this term is ascribed to this identity by this majority is also central to my discussions. As Mendieta argues 'to be "Hispanic" is to be signified upon rather than to be the one who signifies, that [... This is a term] through which others refer to us, discounting the way in which we refer to ourselves.'²⁴ To be Hispanic is to be defined as 'other' by the white mainstream, despite the fact that almost half of Hispanics designated themselves to be racially white in the 2000 US census.²⁵ Indeed as Linda Martín Alcoff has noted Hispanic identity is a ethnic identity, based on shared cultural and linguistic heritage, but it is often represented as or transmuted into a racial identity in the US, easily identifiable by external characteristics in a US tradition of racialising its minority groups.²⁶

Though the definitions of the terms Hispanic and Latino relate to ethnicity, the history of these groups in the US has been racialised in that these groups have not been fully assimilated because they are seen as racial, rather than white, ethnic others.²⁷ This racialisation of Hispanics can be seen to be motivated by longstanding prejudices and stereotyping of Latinos and Hispanics in the US that dates back to the days of the Spanish American wars. Oboler and González argue that the racialised prejudice against Hispanics and Latinos in US culture originates in the Manifest Destiny doctrine. This doctrine was upheld by white protestant settlers in the US and that decried white, Anglo American settlers were superior to other ethnic groups. In line with this ideology

²⁴ Eduardo Mendieta 'The Making of New Peoples' in ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Pablo De Greiff, *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race and Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2000) pp.45-60, p.47

²⁵ 'Race and Racialization' in Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. Gonzalez ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*, pp. 536-544, p. 538

²⁶ Linda Martín Alcoff, 'Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?' in ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Pablo De Greiff, *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race and Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2000) pp.23-44, p.34

²⁷ Gracia and De Greiff p.44

Latinos were categorised as non-white, 'mongrelised' through intermarriage with non-white native peoples from Latin America. Oboler and González argue that this intensified during the United States-Mexican War (1846-1848) and Spanish-Cuban-American War (1895-1898). Conquered groups were portrayed in racialised portraits (Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos) and lands to the south were portrayed as places to be taken by white settlers. After the Spanish-American war of 1898 inhabitants of newly acquired territories were pictured specifically as dark skinned, childlike, poor and primitive peoples and images of Uncle Sam "saving" their black children were common.²⁸ While these images are now consigned to history, Both Gracia and Oboler argue that the term Hispanic is still associated with negative and culturally inferior behaviour in US culture. Oboler argues that Hispanics 'are often perceived to be responsible for many of the ills of modern life in the United States: drugs, unemployment, taking jobs away from "Americans" and Gracia notes that the term is associated with 'laziness, shiftiness, lax morals, low class, lack of education, drug use and so on.'²⁹ These stereotypes will impact upon my discussion of images of Hispanic masculinity and will be revisited in the next section when I consider the social and cultural impacts of Hispanics and Latinos within my period of study.

1.5 Hispanics and Latinos in the US 1998-2008

The following survey, which provides both a quantitative and qualitative exposition of the significant role played by Hispanics in US society in the years 1998-2008, provides a contextual background to my analysis and supports characterisation of my decade of study as an important period for Hispanics in US society.

As of 2006 the US census bureau calculated the US Hispanic population to be 44.3 million, forming 14.8% of a total of 299 million citizens. Between 2000 and 2006 the growth of the Hispanic population (24.3%) was more than three times greater than the growth rate of the total US population (6.1%). The US census bureau also estimated that Hispanics comprised more than half (52.4%) of international migration into the United States between 2000 and 2006.³⁰ This increase in Hispanic migration into the US caused hostility amongst Anglo-Americans. According

²⁸ Oboler and Gonzalez, p.535

²⁹ Oboler p.166, Gracia, p. 17

³⁰ Statistics taken from a presentation entitled 'Hispanics in the United States' produced by the ancestry and ethnicity department of the US census bureau, accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic.html> [accessed 1/6/09]

to hate crime statistics published annually by the FBI, anti-Latino hate crimes rose by almost 35% between 2003 and 2006, the latest year for which statistics are available in my period of focus. In California, the state with the largest population of Latinos in the country, the number of reported anti-Latino hate crimes rose 54% during the same time period.³¹ In 2007 the controversial 'Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007', which included funding for 300 miles (480km) of vehicle barriers, 105 camera and radar towers, and 20,000 more Border Patrol agents, while simultaneously restructuring visa criteria around high skill workers, proposed in response to the increase of illegal immigration in the US was rejected by Republican Leadership for being too soft on Hispanics.³² However, such a significant increase in population brought political power as well as hostility to US Hispanics. The aforementioned Republican protests against immigration reform increased the turnout of Latino voters by approximately 3 million citizens and aligned Latinos with democratic candidate Barack Obama.³³

In the years 1998-2008 there was also some progress in the representation of Hispanics and Latinos in the media, witnessing the growth of US Spanish language media and an increased Latino presence on major US television shows. In 1999, the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) led a "brownout" of the national television networks after discovering that there were no Latinos in any of their new prime time shows that year. This resulted in the signing of historic diversity agreements with ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC that have since increased the hiring of Hispanic and Latino actors and television personalities as well as off-screen staff in all the networks.³⁴ Since then networks have responded by producing successful series with significant Latina and Latino characters that moved beyond the menial roles of maid or janitor normally occupied by Hispanics on US television. ABC has produced prime time series *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010), based on a Colombian television series, which starred America Ferrera as a Latina assistant for fictional fashion magazine *Mode*, and *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012) in which Eva Longoria Parker co-

³¹ Taken from a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center entitled 'Immigration Backlash: Violence Engulfs Latinos' in October 2007, accessed online at:

http://www.splcenter.org/intel/news/item.jsp?site_area=1&aid=292 [accessed 1/06/09]

³² Details of the 'Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act' are taken from the website of the Library of Congress, <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:S1348>> [accessed 1/6/09]

³³ Statistics for Latino votes in the US election quoted in Justin Ewers, 'Republicans and Latino Voters: Has the GOP shifted on immigration reform?', U.S.News.com, 30th January 2009
<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/politics/2009/01/30/republicans-and-latino-voters-has-the-gop-shifted-on-immigration-reform.html?PageNr=2> [accessed 1/6/09]

³⁴ Chon Noriega, 'Making a Difference' in *Politics and Culture* vol1, 2002 accessed online at
<http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture/page.cfm?key=145> [accessed 5/6/09]

starred as glamorous Latina housewife Gabrielle Solis.³⁵ NBC political drama, *The West Wing* (1999-2006) featured Latino actor Jimmy Smits as democratic Presidential candidate Matthew Santos in its sixth and seventh series. Hispanic Santos wins the Presidential election at the end of the show's final series.³⁶ Though still under-represented, Hispanic actors have become more prominent on US Prime Time Television in my decade of study; *Entertainment Weekly* reported that the number of recurring Latino characters in prime-time doubled from 2% to 4% of the total in 2002.³⁷ A study by non-profit research organisation 'Children Now' found that the presence of Latino characters rose from 4% of the total prime-time population in the 2001-02 season to more than 6% in 2003-04. Among "opening credits" cast, the percentage increased threefold, from 2% to 6%. More than half of all primetime shows now include at least one Latino character.³⁸

Portrayals of Hispanics and Latinos in major-network news programming were less positive and they continued to be portrayed as a dysfunctional underclass that exists outside mainstream American society by the US national news. A 2003 report by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists reported that Hispanics were most often portrayed as criminals and the number of crime stories featuring Latinos was grossly higher than statistics for crimes involving Latinos in 2002. Latinos were almost always portrayed as living in poverty and a high proportion focused on the negative effects of illegal immigration, presenting Latinos as a security threat to White America. In addition to being negatively represented, the NAHJ report found Latinos to be significantly under-represented by US network news coverage. The study found that only 0.75% of news stories aired on ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC in 2002 were about Latinos. This did represent an increase from the previous year when only 0.65% of stories focused on Latinos but the figures remain discouragingly low, especially when it is considered that the Latino population represents 13% of the total US population.³⁹ On a more positive note the Spanish language media in the US, the primary medium for Latino self-representation, has grown from a minority industry to a significant media force since the dawn of the twenty-first century. Univision, the largest Hispanic television network in the US, was sold for \$13.7 billion in June 2006 and the following year

³⁵ *Ugly Betty*. ABC.USA.2006; *Desperate Housewives*. ABC.USA.2004

³⁶ *The West Wing*. NBC.USA.1999

³⁷ Gary Susman, 'Minority Report', *Entertainment Weekly*, 22nd May 2002, accessed online at http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,241623_2,00.html [accessed 6/6/09]

³⁸ 'Fall Colours 2003-2004: Prime Time Diversity Report', produced by *Children Now* in 2004, p.2 accessed online at http://publications.childrennow.org/publications/media/fallcolors_2003 [accessed 6/6/09]

³⁹ Serafín Méndez-Méndez and Diane Alverio, 'Network Brownout 2003: The Portrayal of Latinos in Network Television News', report produced for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists in December 2003, accessed online at <http://www.nahj.org/NAHJbrownoutreport03.pdf> [accessed 7/6/09]

Univision made history in the television ratings with the finale of *La Fea Mas Bella* (2006), a Mexican telenovella, beating all English-language television broadcasting networks with a 3.0 rating out of 9 share, making it the most watched show for the night and the second most watched show of the week.⁴⁰

Hispanics are also became increasingly visible in the US music industry and those stars that became more popular in my decade of focus did so with varying degrees of assimilation and ethnic identification, some have become largely dissociated with their Hispanic heritage, while others sing only in Spanish. In addition to becoming the highest paid Latina actress in history, Jennifer Lopez is arguably the most high-profile Latina in the popular music business, her debut album achieving platinum sales six times over.⁴¹ Lopez as a musical star has drawn on white, black and Latino culture in cultivating both her star image and her music, but adopted a more distinctly Latino image after her marriage to Salsa star Marc Anthony in 2004, who has himself sold over ten million albums and received one Grammy and three Latin Grammy awards, uniting them as the most successful couple in contemporary Latino music. Christina Aguilera (Ecuadorian parentage), has taken a similar route to Jennifer Lopez who, despite her Puerto Rican parentage, can speak very little Spanish and launched a successful music career in the mainstream US popular music market, and in 2007 her net worth was estimated at \$60 million. However, with the Latino population steadily growing in the US, it is possible for Latin stars to achieve significant success while generating their musical output entirely in Spanish. Los Tigres del Norte, a Mexican group famous for their authentic Mexican music have released more than 50 albums and established a new record at a Los Angeles sports arena when 200,000 arrived to hear them play. The new album of Spanish language rock group Mana achieved sales of 500,000 in the US and the band were subsequently nominated for 5 MTV Latin Video awards, while Colombian singer Juanes achieved an astonishing 92 weeks at the top of the Latin billboard charts starting in 2002. Other musical stars have taken a third approach, existing between Latin and US music industries, releasing material in Spanish and English and promoting themselves to dual markets. Latin stars such as Ricky Martin (Puerto Rican), who in 2010 finally ended years of speculation about his

⁴⁰ The figure of 13.7 billion dollars for the sale of Univision is taken from a Univision press release on 27/06/2006 accessed online at http://www.univision.net/corp/en/pr/Los_Angeles_27062006-0.html; *La Fea Más Bella*. Televisa S.A. de C.V..Mexico.2006; The rating success of *La Fea Mas Bella* was reported in John Dempsey, Michael Schneider 'Big Final For Univision's Bella' in Variety, 26th June 2006, accessed online at <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117967713.html?categoryid=1275&cs=1> [accessed 7/6/09]

⁴¹ Taken from the Jennifer Lopez Internet Movie Database page: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000182/bio> [accessed 20/09/09]

sexuality by coming out via his website, and Shakira (Colombian) have successfully 'crossed over' to achieve popularity in both Hispanic and English language speaking markets, releasing albums in Spanish and English, topping the US billboard and Latin charts.⁴²

It is in this context of increased political and media power, but continued social inequality and marginalisation, that I shall examine images of Hispanic masculinity in US cinema. Despite the fact that my study does not consider its texts and their representative images chronologically and it is not my intention to chart changes in images of Hispanic masculinity in direct reference to social and economic, I still feel it necessary to provide a basic outline of the social context in which this thesis is placed. This contextual introduction supports my assertion that existing research on images of Hispanics in US cinema needs to be expanded upon and that representations of Hispanic masculinity in the years 1998 and 2008 need to be considered due to significant changes in the place of Hispanics in US society. Indeed, the relative rise in the population and socio-cultural profile of Hispanics, combined with their continuing marginalisation in relation to the white majority and increased hostility with regards to illegal immigration may help to explain the conflicted nature of the representations discussed here which present Hispanic males as more heroic and central, while engaging with existing stereotypes.

1.6 Hispanics and Latinos in US Cinema

The US changed between 1998 and 2008, as did its film industry, and this effected images of Hispanics in US cinema. However, in order to understand the significance of such changes, it is first necessary to explain the situation of Hispanics in Hollywood before my period of focus. The following section provides a brief history of Hispanic screen representation from the silent era to the present day, before outlining the contemporary production context that provides a background to my analysis of Hispanic masculine images. I will return to this discussion in my conclusion to consider in more detail how the images in my chosen case studies have evolved in comparison to those which came before them.

Hollywood has always recognised the value of audiences beyond the US, addressing itself to a global market. Since the silent era it has collaborated across borders and imported 'exotic' (in comparison to WASP America) ethnic stars, to appeal to international and ethnic domestic

⁴² James Mickle, 'Ricky Martin Announces He is Gay', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 30th March 2010, accessed online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/30/ricky-martin-gay-homosexual> [accessed 06/01/2014]

audiences.⁴³ Without the barrier of the spoken language and before US dominance had been asserted in a nascent industry, the silent era of cinema was a period of high visibility for Hispanics. The 1920s were a time of change in US popular culture in which traditional social norms with regards to gender and ethnicity were challenged, and to some extent altered. Gaylyn Studlar in her discussion of masculinity in the Jazz age describes the era as 'a period association with radical and rapid change on many cultural fronts, popular magazines, literature and film constantly reiterated images of masquerade, of game playing and disguise, especially in reference to gender roles and sexual relations.'⁴⁴ Thus many Hispanic stars achieved prominence in Hollywood as personas imbued with exoticism and sexual transgression became popular with the American public, as part of this desire for masquerade. In this era of flappers and suffragettes, female movie-goers formed the majority of the screen audience; hence the most popular genre of this period was the female-centred melodrama. These films aimed to appeal to female viewers by casting performers with glamorous and flamboyant lives, starring in narratives that featured passionate and romantic characters in exotic locales. Latin stars were visibly exotic and suitably expressive in performance and the audience demand for The Latin lover was seemingly insatiable. The exotic type was so popular that some stars even changed their names to sound more exotic, the Jewish-Austrian Jacob Krantz, for example changed his name to Ricardo Cortez to achieve greater success in Hollywood in the 1920s.⁴⁵ However, for Hispanic stars exoticism was always necessarily qualified as European and/or aristocratic and strongly dissociated from the Latin American and US Latino working classes. Dolores Del Rio once commented regarding her US silent film career in an interview: "I tried to interest my producers in stories about Mexico. I wanted to play Mexican. But they preferred me to play a Frenchwoman or Polynesian."⁴⁶ This quote by the Mexican born explicitly identifies a US bias against the portrayal of Mexican stories and characters in the 1920s, linked to the previous discussed cultural bias against working class, racially impure Mexican exoticism. Michael Williams identifies a similar sublimation of the Mexican nationality of silent star Roman Navarro 'within a myth of 'Aztec' origins to establish him as an 'authentic' American and thus part of the making of modernity itself, while his lineage was

⁴³ WASP refers to White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants

⁴⁴ Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p.4

⁴⁵ This period of Latina/o stardom is discussed in detail by Mary Beltrán in 'Latin Lovers and American Accents', *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) pp. 17-39

⁴⁶ Dolores Del Rio as quoted in Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) p.20

simultaneously traced back to ancient Greece, by myth, and to Spain, by blood'.⁴⁷ Indeed as Gaylyn Studlar notes 'within the context of American social discourse [...in the 1920s] , race was the determining factor in class, and no amount of beauty, money, [...] or movie fame could change racial character.'⁴⁸

By the 1930s tastes and production conditions had altered, the move to sound meant that exotic stars with heavy accents or those with a poor command of the English language were no longer so desirable whatever their racial heritage. As Mary Beltrán notes, the broader social context also had a significant effect on depression era audiences who favoured stars who were 'all-American' in looks and character over the exotic and risqué vamp and lover stars of the 1920s; these types likely appeared excessively flamboyant in an age of austerity.⁴⁹ Hence, exotic stars had a definite choice; to achieve success in mainstream cinema they must either retain their national or ethnic identity and be almost exclusively confined to the highly stereotyped roles assigned to the racial other, or reject their ethnic identity in favour of assimilation into the anglicised Hollywood ideal of the star. To use Hispanic and Latina (in the case of Miranda) examples, Lupe Vélez (Mexico) and Carmen Miranda (born in Portugal, raised in Brazil) retained their ethnic identities in the 1930s and 1940s and were confined to stereotypical Latina roles. Vélez starred in the popular *Mexican Spitfire* (1940-1943) series until her suicide in 1944, in which she played a stereotypically tempestuous and feisty Latin heroine.⁵⁰ While Miranda's Hollywood persona cast her as the 'lady in the tutti-frutti hat', an elaborate head-dress piled high with fruit, which Lisa Shaw notes has become the ultimate image of commodified Latiness.⁵¹ In contrast Rita Hayworth (Margarita Carmen Cansino, Spanish father) anglicised herself to become a top-billed star, and a war-time pin-up in Hollywood in the 1940s and 1950s, in what Philip Swanson has described as

⁴⁷ Michael Williams, *Film Stardom, Myth and Classicism: The Rise of Hollywood's Gods* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 114

⁴⁸ Gaylyn Studlar, 'The Perfect Lover: Valentino and Ethnic Masculinity in the 1920s' in Lee Grieveson ed. , *The Silent Cinema Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 290-304, p.299

⁴⁹ Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) p.27

⁵⁰ The Mexican Spitfire series included *Mexican Spitfire at Sea*. Leslie Goodwins. RKO Radio Pictures. USA. 1942, *Mexican Spitfire Out West*. Leslie Goodwins. RKO Radio Pictures. USA. 1940 and *Mexican Spitfire Sees a Ghost*. Leslie Goodwins. RKO Radio Pictures. USA. 1942

⁵¹ Lisa Shaw, *Carmen Miranda* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan/BFI, 2013) p.83

the most notorious example Hollywood's 'de-Latinisation' in this era.⁵² Male Hispanic stars arguably faced a similar fate, Ricardo Montalban playing a string of 'Latin Lover' roles throughout the 1950s, while Mary Beltrán notes that Cuban television star Desi Arnaz struggled to escape Cuban stereotypes when playing husband to his real life wife Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957).⁵³ Gary D. Keller notes that Westerns, in addition to Latin musicals in the classical period and gang exploitation in the post-classical period, provided almost all the roles for Hispanics from the 1940s until as late as the early 1990s. On the whole, the only Hispanic actors to be given roles outside these genres were light skinned and US born, such as Martin Sheen (born Ramon Estevez, in the US to a Spanish father and Irish mother) and his sons Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez, and hence not bound by racialised casting. Keller also notes that the civil rights movement in the US did not make a significant difference to Hollywood's representations of Hispanics, with Hispanic roles often being awarded to non-Hispanic actors.⁵⁴

In contemporary Hollywood, ethnic identity is more openly acknowledged as fluid than ever before. Multi-racial stars such as Jessica Alba and Vin Diesel promote themselves as such, while stars such as Jennifer Lopez adopt facets of Latino, Black and White US culture as it suits their image. The previous Black/White binary that existed in US popular culture has begun to break down as America is increasingly forced to recognise the multi-racial nature of the nation; in 2008 the US population elected mixed-race candidate Barack Obama to the presidency. In the Introduction to *Mixed Race Hollywood*, Beltrán and Fojas proclaim that the multi-raciality of the US is now seen as attractive in the eyes of the US entertainment and media industries, with mixed race characters and performers no longer constructed as 'negatively tragic and/or villainous figures.'⁵⁵ Ethnic images become a vibrant alternative for Hollywood, a way to widen market appeal or enliven existing genres and film cycles. Diane Negra in her study of ethnic female stars in Hollywood argues that contemporary Hollywood poses 'ethnicity as a representational response to the perceived sterility of contemporary America whiteness.'⁵⁶ Hollywood cinema can

⁵² Philip Swanson, 'Going Down on Good Neighbours: Imagining *América* in Hollywood Movies of the 1930s and 1940s' in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 29 (2010), No 1, pp. 71-84, p.72

⁵³ Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) p.58

⁵⁴ Gary D. Keller, *Hispanics in United States Film: an overview and handbook* (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Press, 1994) p.178

⁵⁵ Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, *Mixed Race Hollywood* (NYC: New York University Press, 1998) p.1

⁵⁶ Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.17

also mask the reality of socioeconomic inequality for marginalised ethnic groups in a fantasy of inclusion. Richard Dyer argues that the power of Hollywood entertainment lies in its ability to allow its viewers to escape into a utopia, a wish-fulfilment space in which that which cannot be attained in real-life can be achieved with relative ease.⁵⁷ For marginalised social groups such as US Hispanics, representation in entertainment offers the end of social inequality by providing a Utopian narrative space, in which these inequalities can disappear. Richard Dyer makes this pronouncement on the nature of Hollywood entertainment in relation to musicals, but as Banderas hints at in the opening quote, it is equally applicable to the action film, and arguably its family orientated equivalent, where heroes solve social problems with action spectacles providing a visual escape and a fictional solution to the problems of contemporary society.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, before their ethnic image became more marketable, images of Hispanic males were quite clearly divided between those in Chicano (a politicised, self-assigned term of pride for Mexican-Americans) cinema produced as a form of resistance to the mainstream, and their counterpoint of largely negative, stereotyped representations of the Latino males in mainstream Hollywood. Chicano writer/director Luis Valdez placed the Latino male centre stage in the political *Zoot Suit* (1981), a film partially based on the true story of the 'Sleepy Lagoon' murder case in which a group of Mexican-Americans are condemned for murder despite insufficient evidence in California in the 1940s, and the more commercial *La Bamba* (1987), a biopic of 1950s Latino rock star Ritchie Valens.⁵⁸ The most memorable Hispanic male image in mainstream Hollywood in the 1980s was that of Cuban gangster Tony Montana, played by Italian-American Al Pacino in Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983).⁵⁹ While Valdez's images of Hispanic masculinity were intended to expose social injustice and racial prejudices in the case of *Zoot Suit*, and celebrate the musical talent and mourn the premature death of a Latin musical icon (Valens died in a plane crash aged just 17) in *La Bamba*, Tony Montana simply reinforced long-standing negative Hollywood stereotypes of Hispanic males. Montana's viciousness, greed and irrationality are indicative that his character is transparently cast in the mode of the Mexican bandit or 'greaser', a type traceable back to the silent era.⁶⁰ Charles Ramirez Berg writes that the El

⁵⁷ Richard Dyer 'Entertainment as Utopia' in Bill Nichols *Movies and Methods*: Vol. II (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985) pp.220-231, p.222

⁵⁸ *Zoot Suit*. Luis Valdez. Universal Pictures.USA.1981; *La Bamba*. Luis Valdez. Columbia Pictures Corporation.USA.1987

⁵⁹ *Scarface*. Brian de Palma. Universal Pictures.USA.1983

⁶⁰ Examples of silent films based on the greaser type include: *The Greaser*. Raoul Walsh. Majestic Motion Picture Company.USA.1915; *The Greaser's Gauntlet*. D.W. Griffith. American Mutoscope &

Bandido stereotype lives on in contemporary cinema in the form of the Latin gangster, who is slicker than his historical Western counterpart but still 'ruthlessly pursues [...] vulgar cravings – for money, power and sexual pleasure – and routinely employs vicious and illegal means to obtain them.'⁶¹

As Laura Isabel Serna has discussed in her essay on Latino stardom in Hollywood in the 1990s, it was in this decade that Hollywood began to experience a 'Latino boom'. However, though Hispanic males were now stars rather than just supporting players, their personas were still constructed in line with longstanding stereotypes.⁶² Serna argues that the personas of 90s Hollywood Latino stars were borrowed from earlier archetypes with Antonio Banderas cast as a neo-Latin Lover, Andy Garcia in a long tradition of 'almost white' striving immigrants and Edward James Olmos fulfilling the role of the ethnic social activist.⁶³ Serna also perceptively adds that these images were constructed to sell movie tickets to Latinos and provide socially acceptable Latino stars for white America, in amongst broader and more prevalent media images of Latin men as 'the illegal alien, the gang banger, the drug dealer.'⁶⁴ Mary Beltrán concurs with Serna's assertion that Latino stars up until the 2000s faced conforming to 'reinforced racialised stereotypes' or masking their Latino identities altogether in order to become a success in Hollywood, identifying Benicio del Toro and Javier Bardem as a new generation of Latino stars whose personas move beyond machismo.⁶⁵ Elsewhere Beltrán argues that in the 2000s Latina and Latino actors such as Jennifer Lopez, Michelle Rodriguez and Benicio del Toro, at a level not seen since the silent era, began to occupy the starring or at least a central role in Hollywood films as part of a lucrative 'Latinowood', rather than being sidelined as villains or used to provide 'local colour' in the proceeding decades.⁶⁶ While these stars also appeal to mainstream audiences, it is unsurprising that Hollywood is eager to appeal to Latino filmgoers as they not only form the

Biograph.USA.1908; *Broncho Billy and the Greaser*. Gilbert M. 'Broncho Billy' Anderson. The Essanay Film Manufacturing Company.USA.1914

⁶¹ Charles Ramirez Berg in *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) p.68

⁶² Laura Isabel Serna, 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades' in Anna Everett ed., *Pretty People: Movie Stars of the 1990s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012) pp.123-143, p.124, p. 142

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Laura Isabel Serna, 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades' p.143

⁶⁵ Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107, p.91

⁶⁶ Mary Beltrán, 'Mas Macha: The New Latina action hero' in ed. Yvonne Tasker *Action and Adventure Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004) pp.186- 200, p.190

largest ethnic audience in the US but are also statistically more likely to attend the cinema than any other ethnic group.⁶⁷ Much as ethnic stars and narratives became increasingly incorporated into Hollywood genre cinema in my decade of study, US Independent cinema became more closely tied to the US mainstream, creating what Geoff King has dubbed indiewood⁶⁸. Beginning with Miramax's success in distributing Steven Soderbergh's *Sex Lies and Videotape* (1989) and culminating in the unprecedented commercial success of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), the film Ryan Gibley cites as breaking down the 'demarcation between what was formerly known as 'Hollywood' and 'Independent' filmmaking', the Hollywood studios recognised that securing distribution rights to Independent productions could yield high profits.⁶⁹

By the late 1990s major Hollywood studios had gone a step further, forming their own 'Independent' Production Houses to produce projects aimed at minority and art-house audiences, forming a hybrid indiewood sector. 20th Century Fox's 'Fox Searchlight Pictures' describes itself as a 'filmmaker-oriented company that focuses on distinctive films helmed by world-class auteurs and exciting newcomers' and as 'blending specialty films with trademark art-house fare' to solidify its 'position in the independent film marketplace'.⁷⁰ Yannis Tzioumakis in *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* notes that 'the industrial background of a film has become a gradually irrelevant factor in its claim to independence', adding that the aesthetics and political stance of a film are now more readily accepted as hallmarks of independence than a productions financing.⁷¹ The relationship between the US and its Latin American neighbours, as well as the relationships between whites and Latinos in the US, became popular political topics for Indiewood films in my period of study. The award-winning ensemble drama *Crash* (2004) which examines racial tensions in the city of Los Angeles features a Mexican-American locksmith and a Latina detective as part of its cast of characters.⁷² Illegal immigration forms the topic of political comment in both Tommy Lee Jones' *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005) and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Geoff King, *Indiewood USA: where Hollywood meets independent cinema* (London: IB Taurus, 2009)

⁶⁹ *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*. Steven Soderbergh. Outlaw Productions. USA. 1989; *Pulp Fiction*. Quentin Tarantino. A Band Apart. USA. 1994; Ryan Gibley, 'Younger and Wiser', *Observer Review*, 23 February 2003 as quoted in Jim Hillier, 'Independent Cinema and Entertainment' in Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond eds. *Contemporary American Cinema*,. (Maidenhead : Open University Press : McGraw-Hill Education, 2006.) pp.248-264

⁷⁰ This self description of 'Fox Searchlight Pictures' is taken from the company's website <http://content.foxsearchlight.com/studio/node/218> [last accessed 7/06/09]

⁷¹ Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: an Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) p.266

⁷² *Crash*. Paul Haggis. Bob Yari Productions. USA/Germany. 2004

(2006), the former telling the story of a friend's quest to return an illegal immigrant rancher's body to his native Mexico, the latter devotes one of its trio of stories to a Mexican immigrant maid who is deported from the US after she returns home to Mexico for her son's wedding.⁷³

The growth of indiewood has also allowed for Hispanic actors to achieve greater critical recognition, as these films market themselves as distinct from the US mainstream and hence are more likely to cast Latin stars.⁷⁴ Spanish actor Javier Bardem won an 'Best Supporting Actor' Oscar for his performance as ruthless killer Anton Chigurh in the Coen brothers' *No Country For Old Men* (2007), following Puerto Rican actor Benicio del Toro who became the first Hispanic actor to win an Oscar for acting since Anthony Quinn in 1956 for his performance in *Traffic* (2000).⁷⁵ In this thesis I shall consider how indiewood has represented Hispanic masculinity in the framework of an analysis of images in the conventions of respective genres, issue based films with hallmarks of independence and popular genre films aimed at a mainstream US audience. This will allow me to fully consider the range of representational responses to Hispanic masculinity produced by US cinema between 1998 and 2008. As will be discussed further in the main body of this thesis, considering the 'realism' of the indiewood sector in comparison with those genres based in fantasy reveals that this formal realism does not mean a complete rejection of stereotypes in representing Hispanic masculinity.

1.7 Hollywood and Hispanic, or more broadly Latin, Machismo

I agree with Charles Ramirez Berg when he states that the use of broad ethnic terminology is highly appropriate when analysing Hollywood's images of Latinos and Hispanics. He writes that in the eyes of Hollywood:

U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans [and I would argue anyone of broadly Hispanic origin] could all be lumped together as people with identical characteristics; as such they could all be uniformly depicted stereotypically as bandits, harlots, Latin lovers, and so forth. And if Hollywood made no distinction between Latinos and Latino Americans, it certainly could not be expected to make finer distinctions between, say, Mexicans (citizens of Mexico) and Mexican Americans (citizens of the United States).⁷⁶

⁷³ *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. Europa Corp. USA/France. 2005; *Babel*. Alejandro González Inárritu. Paramount Pictures. France/USA/Mexico. 2006

⁷⁴ Geoff King, *Indiewood USA: where Hollywood meets independent cinema* (London: IB Taurus, 2009), p. 35

⁷⁵ *No Country for Old Men*. Ethan and Joel Coen. Paramount Vantage. USA. 2007; *Traffic*. Steven Soderbergh. Bedford Falls Productions. Germany/USA. 2000

⁷⁶ Charles Ramirez Berg in *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) p.6

Hollywood cinema is concerned with the imagery of race, with visual and oral signifiers of difference and its representations of ethnicity are refracted rather than reflected from reality, drawn from existing stereotypes and archetypes. Thus it is essential for me to view contemporary images of Hispanic masculinity in the light of existing Hollywood racial and gender stereotypes, due to Hollywood's historical reliance on established, instantly recognisable 'types' in its representation of the Hispanic male. I agree with Andrew Spicer's analysis of types as fundamental to popular culture's system of gender representation. He writes, in reference to popular British cinema that 'as changing and competing forms, types allow us to understand gender [...] as a cultural 'performance', which does not reflect 'reality' but is a discursive construction, the product of variable and specific sets of relations in particular contexts, and with a complex relationship to social change.'⁷⁷ Like Spicer does in his discussion of masculine types in British cinema, I will aim to consider representations of masculinity in my film case studies as externalised, discursive constructions, complexly created through the interplay between formal conventions and cultural intertexts.

However, it is my position that to simply consider masculine archetypes would underestimate the interdependence of gender and ethnicity in the formation of cultural typologies. Hence this thesis considers neither Hispanic types nor male types in isolation but rather Hispanic male types. More specifically this thesis is concerned with representations of Latin machismo, the hyper masculine, a conception which is arguably outmoded in contemporary reality but which endures as the most prevalent image of the Hispanic male. The idea of highly demonstrative, pronounced masculinity, that could be deemed excessive, is common to virtually all Hollywood stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity. The greaser or bandido stereotype (Figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4) clearly represents Latin males as excessively aggressive, while the more recent gangster incarnations of this type identify their material displays of masculinity in their possessions and dress as distastefully excessive. Hollywood's other long-standing Hispanic applicable stereotype the 'Latin Lover' (Figures 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8) emphasises excessive sexuality over aggression. Charles Ramirez Berg writes that actors cast in this role 'haplessly reiterate the erotic combination of characteristics instituted by Valentino: eroticism, exoticism, tenderness ringed with violence and danger, all adding up to the romantic promise that, sexually, things could very well get out of

⁷⁷ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: the representation of masculinity in popular British Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001) pp.1-2

control.⁷⁸ Even the Latin male buffoon type, the comedy from which Ramirez Berg notes comes from his differences to the 'WASP American mainstream', can be seen to engage with the idea of these men as excessively macho, as this is frequently where the comedy of difference originates from.⁷⁹ In Hispanic countries machismo has traditionally occupied a central place in national culture, particularly Mexico and Spain, the strength of the nation equated with the strength of its masculinity. Sergio de la Mora, in his book *Cinemachismo*, explains that machismo has been synonymous with Mexican nationalism since the time of the Mexican revolution in which revolutionary leader Pancho Villa was the ultimate hyper-masculine leader arguing that the 'specificity of Mexican machismo resides in its self-consciousness and its officially decreed status as the distinctive component of Mexican national identity [...] rivalled only by the nation's deep religiosity manifest in the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint.'⁸⁰ And as the opening quote from Banderas suggests, Machismo is also central to Spanish gendered identities. The performances of the flamenco dancer and the matador are physical demonstrations and cultural celebration of the prowess of the Hispanic male, the latter of which heightens machismo to a lethal level, matador literally translating as killer. While Rudolph, in critiquing the construction of Latin machismo acknowledges that, though these ideas shift in different 'historical, cultural and class contexts' discussion of Latino and Latin American masculinities almost always revolves around machismo.⁸¹ This thesis examines its images of Hispanic masculinity in the light of ideas of Hispanic machismo, both as a deviant and excessive form of masculinity and as the ultimate outward manifestation of masculine prowess.



Figure 1.2: Eli Wallach as Tuco in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*

⁷⁸ Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) p.76

⁷⁹ Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film*, p.72

⁸⁰ Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) p. 2

⁸¹ Jennifer Domino Rudolph, *Embodying Latino Masculinities: Producing Masculinidad* (Palgrave Macmillan: NYC, 2012) p.3



Figure 1.3: Alphonso Bedoya in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)



Figure 1.4: Al Pacino as Tony Montana in *Scarface* (1983)



Figure 1.5: Ricardo Montalban as Chu Chu Ramirez in *My Man and I* (1952)



Figure1. 6: Theatrical poster for *The Son of The Sheik* (1926)



Figure 1.7: Promotional image of Rudolph Valentino the original Latin Lover



Figure1.8: Japanese theatrical poster for *Never Talk to Strangers* (1995) starring Antonio Banderas

1.8 Genre

Cinematic images, particularly in Hollywood, are by their very nature are seldom original. They are composites of other images and traditions, stereotypes, star personas and generic conventions. As such representations rely on the intertexts that surround them and a viewer's level of comprehension and indeed their enjoyment of images is dependent on this. For example, the character of Zorro as a representation of Hispanic masculinity in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) is recreated in the line of the character's Hollywood appearances since *The Mark of Zorro* in 1920. The scene in which Banderas' Zorro hears Elena's confession while hiding in a confessional, for example, is an homage to a very similar scene in 1940's *The Mark of Zorro*. A basic knowledge of the Zorro character and his iconography from his previous big and small screen appearances in the audience, while not essential to following the films narrative, strengthens his status as a heroic, near mythical figure and generates nostalgia as a figure of classic entertainment.⁸² Banderas' Zorro is also inevitably embellished by the inference of his burgeoning Hollywood star persona which mixed the longstanding screen type of the Latin Lover with that of the action-adventure hero. His film's trailer proclaims 'If it's HEAT you're looking for, If it's ACTION you're

⁸² The character of Zorro was created by pulp fiction author Johnston McCulley. His first screen incarnation came in the form of silent star Douglas Fairbanks in *The Mark of Zorro*. Fred Niblo. Douglas Fairbanks Pictures. USA.1920 and its sequel *Don Q Son of Zorro*. Donald Crisp. Elton Corporation.USA.1925. Another Anglo actor, Tyrone Power was cast in the Classical Hollywood remake of *The Mark of Zorro*. Rouben Mamoulian. Twentieth Century Fox.USA.1940. The character of Zorro has also made appearances on the small screen, the most successful being in the 1950s Disney television series (1957-1959), appeared in multiple series of comic books and a West-End Zorro Musical in 2008. Banderas became the first Hispanic cast as Zorro in a major Hollywood picture in *The Mask of Zorro*. Dir. Martin Campbell. Amblin Entertainment.USA.1998.

looking for, He's the one man you've been waiting for!' perfectly encapsulating Banderas' Hollywood persona and his portrayal of Zorro as a character. Zorro, as Alejandro Murrieta, demonstrates his macho prowess, in order to charm Elena (Catherine Zeta- Jones), by dancing the tango; a highly sexualised Argentine dance which has become more broadly associated with the machismo of the Latin male in US culture. Banderas' dancing is reminiscent of the tango danced by the original 'Latin Lover' Rudolph Valentino in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921).⁸³ A further scene in which Zorro becomes embroiled in a sword fight with Elena which results in him slicing off her clothes, right down to her petticoats, with the elaborate flourishes of his sword explicitly aligns Zorro's roguish sexuality with his fighting ability, reaffirming Banderas' status as both a romantic and an action star.

However, while Banderas' portrayal of Zorro as an image of Hispanic machismo is in part composed through reference to Zorro's previous incarnations and is brought to life by the charm and charisma of the star performance of Banderas himself as the first ever Hispanic Zorro, it is not essential for the viewer to have knowledge of Zorro or the man who plays him to understand this image of Hispanic masculinity. However, it is necessary that the image of Zorro portrayed in *The Mask of Zorro* corresponds with the idea of the masculine hero as defined by the conventions of the action-adventure genre in order to make sense to its audience. Steve Neale in *Genre and Hollywood* defines action-adventure films as a Hollywood trend of formally aligned genres. He writes that 'the term 'action-adventure' has been used [...] to pinpoint a number of obvious characteristics common [...across multiple] genres and films: a propensity for spectacular physical action, a narrative structure involving fights, chases and explosions, and in addition to the deployment of state-of-the-art special effects, an emphasis in performance in athletic feats and stunts.'⁸⁴ It is my argument that to consider images of Hispanic masculinity in the light of the conventions of the genres, or more broadly defined modes of filmmaking, in which they appear, is the most appropriate methodological framework as genre is the most significant factor affecting the parameters of how something can be represented. Richard Dyer argues that it is conventions of the form and genre in which an image is created, which effectively bring the image into being. Therefore, in order to understand representations of such identities as gender and ethnicity we must analyse how they function in the genre that has defined them. Dyer provides strong support

⁸³ Silent star and Hollywood's original Latino Lover, the Italian Rudolph Valentino first became famous for the intense sexuality displayed in a spectacular tango dancing scene in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Rex Ingram. Metro Pictures Corporation. USA.1921

⁸⁴ Steve Neale, 'Action-Adventure' in *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.52-60, p.52

for privileging a discussion of the influence of genre over other significant factors, such as the intertext of star personas and the external influence of social context, when he writes that 'representations are presentations, always and necessarily entailing the use of codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation. [...] Without understanding the way in which images function in terms of say narrative, genre or spectacle, we don't really understand why they turn out the way they do.'⁸⁵

My rationale in choosing the specific genres and modes of filmmaking considered in this thesis has been to choose those that are representative of Hollywood production trends in my period of study, while also endeavouring to examine genres and film cycles which have been previously neglected in the field of film studies. This thesis features chapters on the family film and the biopic, two film forms that form a significant part of contemporary Hollywood's production output, while receiving relatively little academic attention. Peter Kramer notes that children's films are very low on the academic agenda, at least in film studies' and that major studies of genre in Hollywood have critically neglected family films and the related genre of the children's film.⁸⁶ Family films warrant critical attention as they are the biggest grossing films at the box office and have the greatest potential for success in the ancillary home video and merchandising markets. The Internet Movie Database's (June 2009) chart of the most commercially successful films at the US box office is dominated by family films released in the ten years proceeding. Computer generated animation dominates heavily with Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (2003), 15th in the chart and grossing \$339,714,367, *Monsters Inc.* (2001), *The Incredibles* (2004), and *Cars* (2006) all inside the top fifty.⁸⁷ Dreamworks' *Shrek* films, the second of which is discussed in detail in this thesis, also fared well with *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004) and *Shrek The Third* (2007) reaching thirty-eighth, fourth and ninth respectively in the all time US box-office chart.⁸⁸ Family films, by their very nature reach a greater audience than any other genre and are likely to be viewed multiple times by impressionable young viewers, hence their images are more

⁸⁵ Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, p.2

⁸⁶ Peter Kramer, 'The Best Disney Film Disney Never Made: Children's Films and the Family Audience in American Cinema since the 1960s' in ed. Steve Neale *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002) pp.185-200, p.185

⁸⁷ *Finding Nemo*. Andrew Stanton. Pixar Animation Studios.USA.2003; *The Incredibles*. Brad Bird. Pixar Animation Studios.USA.2004; *Monsters Inc.* Pete Docter. Pixar Animation Studios.USA.2001; *Cars*. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios.USA.2006

⁸⁸ *Shrek*. Andrew Adamson. DreamWorks.USA.2001; Statistics taken from the 'All Time USA Box-Office Chart' posted by the Internet Movie Database, accessed online at <<http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross>> [last accessed 7/6/2009]

pervasive than those of other genres and warrant increased critical consideration. An equally strong case can be made for considering images of Hispanic masculinity in the biopic. When I began writing this thesis the single full-length study of the genre was George F. Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* published in 1992. In *Bio/Pics* Custen declared that the biopic had become virtually extinct in Hollywood after the demise of the studio era, becoming confined to television's small screen.⁸⁹ In fact the biopic has actually increased as a proportion of Hollywood's production output since the studio era, reaching its highest proportion ever at five per cent in 1999, and in contemporary Hollywood it carries a prestige value for its ability to illicit awards from the American Academy.⁹⁰ Indeed Belén Vidal notes that the genre has 'has become synonymous with award worthiness and its attendant market benefits, particularly for star making turns.'⁹¹ Charlize Theron, *Monster* (2003); Cate Blanchett, *The Aviator* (2004); Jamie Foxx, *Ray* (2004); Marion Cotillard, *La Vie en Rose* (2007); and Sean Penn, *Milk* (2008) all won academy awards for their performances in biopics.⁹² Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* (2010) and the Tom Brown and Belén Vidal edited collection on the genre (2014) have since updated Custen's study, but do not consider how the form has been used to incorporate Hispanic identities in Hollywood as will be discussed further in my chapter on biopics.⁹³

More importantly, I have devoted chapters to genres and film forms, that relocate Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood cinema and represent Hispanic males in a way that has begun to alter existing typologies of the Hispanic male. My thesis considers two differing approaches to representation in the genres that I have chosen, that is, representations that are deliberately situated in the fantastic, action and family adventure films, and those which intend to be accepted by the viewer as reflective of reality, border films and biopics. Those genres which employ the former representational strategy are those commonly accepted as mainstream Hollywood entertainment, those which opt for the latter would be more readily characterised as

⁸⁹ George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics : how Hollywood constructed public history* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) p.214

⁹⁰ Carolyn Anderson and Jon Lupo, 'Hollywood Lives: The State of the Biopic at the Turn of the Century' in Steve Neale *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002) pp.91-14, p.91

⁹¹ Belén Vidal in the introduction to Tom Brown and Belén Vidal ed., *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, (New York and Abington: Routledge, 2014) p.2

⁹² *Monster*. Patty Jenkins. Media 8 Entertainment.USA/Germany.2003; *The Aviator*. Martin Scorsese. Forward Pass.USA/Germany.2004;*La Vie en Rose*. Olivier Dahan. Légende Films.France/UK/Czech Republic.2007; *Ray*. Taylor Hackford. Anvil Films.USA.2004; *Milk*. Gus van Sant. Focus Features.USA.2008

⁹³ Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* (Rutgers University Press: Piscataway, 2010)

part of the contemporary US film industry's style of indiewood, social conscious film-making. The first half of my thesis examines representations of Hispanic masculinity in the action-adventure film and its family targeted equivalent genres which favour fantasy over realism. The action-adventure film, a mode of film-making in which the primary form of representation is physical, masculine spectacle, is an obvious Hollywood vehicle through which to relocate Hispanic masculinity in mainstream entertainment. Hispanic males are traditionally viewed in US culture as being demonstratively masculine, and hence are quite easily translated into the action hero role. Yvonne Tasker notes that 'the action cinema depends on a complex articulation of both belonging and exclusion, and articulation which is bound up in the body of the hero and the masculine identity that it embodies'.⁹⁴ The action hero appeals to the audience through being simultaneously ordinary and exceptional; he fights for the ideals of society, but is at the same time excluded from mainstream society. The Hispanic male socially occupies a dominant gender position but a minority racial identity, and is hence easily placed in the dichotomy of belonging and exclusion that characterises the role of the action hero.

The family adventure film is in many ways very similar to the adult action-adventure film in that its major attraction to audiences usually lies in its visual spectacle. Peter Kramer argues that:

Films in this mould – which we can call family adventure movies – aim to address children and their parents as well as teenagers and young adults, typically, but not exclusively – by telling stories about the spectacular, often fantastic adventures of young or youthful, male protagonists and about their familial or quasi-familial relationships, especially with fathers or father substitutes; by evoking entertainment forms associated with childhood (such as fairy-tales, ghost-stories, movie serials, comic books, rollercoaster rides and other amusement park attractions); and by being released in the run up to, or during the summer and Christmas holidays.⁹⁵

These family adventure films, on which I will be focusing in my second case study chapter, also tend to be male orientated, although their audience is necessarily much wider than their adult equivalent. This means that the representations of Hispanic masculinity presented in these films, must be in some way altered from the traditional Hollywood image of Hispanic men as excessively violent and overtly sexual. Another important difference to note is that while the traditional

⁹⁴ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: genre, gender and the action cinema* (Routledge: London, 2003) p.8

⁹⁵ Peter Kramer, 'Disney and Family Entertainment' in Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond eds., *Contemporary American Cinema*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006) pp.265- 279, p.271

action hero is a highly individualistic figure, Hispanic males in the family film need to be portrayed as part of a group. This is because, as Kramer articulates, the appeal of the family film is based on:

[...]vicarious participation in group experiences and efforts, which again mirrors the very conditions of cinema spectatorship. Crucially, the group that is being assembled at the end of these films is just like the target audience, a mixture of men and women, children and adults. [...]Not only do the films work to strengthen the bonds between family members, then, but they also incorporate these families into a wider community, both on the screen and in the auditorium.⁹⁶

Locating Hispanic masculinity in the family film offers the potential for such a minority identity to be included in the sense of community created by the narratives of such films.

Incorporating Hispanic masculinity into genres based on reality offers two real options, mythologising the lives of Hispanic male historical figures, or portraying Hispanic males in present day social problems and inequalities which exist in the US and between the US and its nearest Hispanic neighbour Mexico. An historical representation of Hispanic masculinity is arguably an easier option for Hollywood than portraying present day Hispanics. Carolyn Anderson and John Lupo in an essay on the state of the biopic at the turn of the twenty-first century wrote that 'biopics of people of colour simultaneously offer an opportunity to market what studio distributors consider progressive political ideology. [...] By moving people of colour into central roles as admirable, often heroic, biographical subjects, Hollywood has managed to revisit conventional audience pleasing formulae and expand notions of whose lives are worth considering.'⁹⁷ Hollywood has always found it easier to mythologize the past than to confront the social realities of the present. However, as Dennis Bingham argues in his study of the Biopic as a contemporary film genre, the biopic performs the important cultural work of incorporating historical figures into contemporary cultural mythologies and justifying their place in it. Bingham writes that the biopic's 'charge, which dates back to its salad days in the Hollywood studio era, is to enter the biographical subject into the pantheon of cultural mythology, one way or another, and show why he or she belongs there.'⁹⁸ What could be added to this perceptive description of the biopic's function is that these versions of truth are specific to each time and place, that contemporary historical films arguably reveal more about the present than they do about the

⁹⁶ Peter Kramer, 'Would you take your child to see this film: The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie' in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* ed. by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 294-311, p.300-301

⁹⁷ Anderson and Lupo, 'Hollywood Lives: The State of the Biopic at the Turn of the Century' p.93

⁹⁸ Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives are They Anyway: The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010) p.10

past, by representing exceptional Hispanics in biopics, the history of the Hispanic male can be mythologised by Hollywood and recreated in line with the ideals of contemporary America.⁹⁹ It is the ability of the biopic to portray minority identities and progressive politics in a genre that, as Vidal notes, 'is often perceived as a throwback to old-fashioned modes of storytelling' that warrants its inclusion in this thesis.¹⁰⁰

In terms of considering how contemporary US cinema has represented Hispanic masculinity in present day, realistic settings, I will be examining socially conscious, indie wood which form part of the US filmmaking tradition of the border film. I have chosen to study these films because the border film is the film form which most readily tackles issues surrounding the political, racial, gendered, sexual, and ethnic borders of the US and the nation's relationship to the rest of the southern hemisphere. Camilla Fojas rightly acknowledges that the border film exists across genres, and in my study I will be considering a narcotraficante (drug-trafficking based crime film) and a Western, in the light of their border film classifications. Fojas characterises the border film as any film which occupies the terrain of the US/Mexican border, she writes that:

Though spanning many different genres, border films share a preoccupation with mobility, border patrol, immigration restrictions, and the control of various different kinds of traffic into the country; they trace the policy mood swings and shape cultural agenda. Many of the films that take place on or near the borderlands, express "American" anxieties, messianic prophecies, and fears about porous boundaries and the integration of the hemisphere through political intervention, economic globalisation, and transnational migration.¹⁰¹

Such anxieties about the borderlands are a longstanding feature of US culture, and I shall explore how indie wood cinema has responded to the problematic screen space of the border in order to present an exploration of contemporary social issues. I shall examine how Hispanic masculinity is represented in the border film and address how these images can be viewed as a response to such tensions.

⁹⁹ Belén Vidal notes that the genre has long been associated with 'Hollywood mythmaking' in the introduction to Tom Brown and Belén Vidal ed., *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, (New York and Abington: Routledge, 2014) p.2

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Camilla Fojas, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009) pp.2-3

My thesis is structured according to genre, as it is my argument that genre is essential when examining how any gendered or racial identity is represented on screen. However when examining Hollywood's representation of a minority identity, that of the Hispanic male, the impact of genre on the image is most interesting to consider as popular genres are normative, while the racial other exists outside the remit of mainstream US society. Barry Keith Grant writes that genre films can be most easily recognised through their familiarity as 'genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations. They also encourage expectations and experiences similar to those of similar films we have already seen.'¹⁰² At the centre of any definition of genre is the idea that genre is entertainment that creates pleasure it is audience through presenting that which is familiar. Thus, the genre film can be used to make the the Hispanic male assimilate into, or at least hybridise with, the familiar. This thesis considers genre films which are reliant on accepted conventions consisting of 'specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves during the viewing process. These systems provide spectators with means of recognition and understanding. They help render individual films, and the elements in them, intelligible and, therefore explicable.'¹⁰³ In placing a minority identity in a popular Hollywood genre, a tension is created between two opposing frameworks of expectations, that is between the familiar and the other. However, genre filmmaking is designed to effectively allay this tensions, by resolving social problems that cannot be easily resolved in reality to maintain the status quo. Indeed, Judith Hess Wright argues that genre films can temporarily relieve fears aroused by social inequality for oppressed peoples by dealing indirectly with these issues in a fantasy space in which they can easily be resolved.¹⁰⁴ This is particularly true of the fantasy genres I will be discussing, which employ action adventure narratives to portray a minority identity in a heroic role.

1.9 Stardom

While the sections of this thesis are organised around genre, it is also strongly focused on the way in which star personas impact on representations of Hispanic masculinity. Richard Dyer in his

¹⁰² Barry Keith Grant in the Introduction to *Film Genre Reader II* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1995) p.xv

¹⁰³ Steve Neale, 'Dimensions of Genre' in *Genre and Hollywood* (Routledge: London 2000) pp.31-47, p.31-32

¹⁰⁴ Judith Hess Wright, 'Genre Films and the Status Quo' in Barry Keith Grant ed. *Film Genre Reader III* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2003) pp.42-51, pp.41-42

influential book *Stars* writes that ‘what is important about stars, especially in their particularity, is their typicality or representativeness. Stars, in other words, relate to the social types of society.’¹⁰⁵ When I refer to a star’s persona or image in this thesis I will be using the term in the way in which Richard Dyer discusses it in his influential study *Stars*. Dyer writes that a star image has polysemic (multiple but finite) meanings and is composed through the inference of a range of different media texts which can be grouped together as promotion, publicity, films criticisms and commentaries. Promotion refers to texts which were produced as part of a deliberate creation/manufacture of a particular image or context of a particular star (trailers, press packs) whereas publicity is that which does not appear to be deliberate image making, that which the press ‘finds out’. Films play a central role but are also supported by criticism and commentaries, the way in which the star is discussed by critics, academics and increasingly in the post-modern age the wider audience.¹⁰⁶ The star image may contain contradictions and ‘images also have a temporal dimension. Structured polysemy does not imply stasis; images develop or change over time.’¹⁰⁷ Thus it is through the bodies of stars that the Hispanic masculine types, the ideas of machismo previously discussed, are given form and change over time. This thesis considers the performances of Antonio Banderas and Benicio del Toro and the differing ways in which they embody and challenge ideas of Hispanic machismo. In the case of Banderas, machismo is commonly represented through physical spectacle. In *The Mask of Zorro* and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, and perhaps even more so when his star persona is transferred into the animated Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2*, Banderas embodies machismo through movement, through elaborate fighting, dancing or musical performance and states as much himself in the quotation that introduces this thesis. In the case of del Toro, masculinity is presented through method acting, a form of performance that claims cultural value through legitimising acting as work.

1.10 Antonio Banderas

Having first found international fame through his performances in the work of Spanish auteur Pedro Almodovár, Banderas, upon his move to Hollywood, was cast in a firmly European mode of exoticism that made him a safer and more desirable image of Hispanic masculinity for US

¹⁰⁵ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998, 1979) p.47

¹⁰⁶ As outlined by Richard Dyer in *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998, 1979) pp.60-63

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.64

audiences during this period than a Latino actor.¹⁰⁸ But at the same time the images of Spanish masculinity portrayed by Banderas in his Almodovár period were drawn from queer and marginal sexualities that, while exotically exciting, were oppositional to recasting him as a Hollywood leading man for the small sectors of the US audience that were familiar with them.¹⁰⁹ Banderas' dark hair, Mediterranean skin tone and his thick Spanish accent marked him visually and linguistically as overtly Hispanic. However, as his Spanish cinema background was not widely known to mainstream US viewers he quickly became cast in roles in which he played Latino and Latin American characters. Thus upon his arrival in Hollywood in 1992 Banderas began to be cast in different incarnations of the traditional Hollywood Hispanic role of the Latin Lover, some more romantic, and others that played on the exotic, permissive sexuality of his Spanish career. It must also be noted His first US role *The Mambo Kings* (1992) cast him as a Cuban musician who comes to America and mourns his lost Cuban love. Other roles were similarly romantic, such as *Miami Rhapsody* and *Two Much* both 1995, in which he played the Latin love interest of Sarah Jessica Parker and his future wife Melanie Griffith respectively. But Banderas' early Hollywood roles also cast him as an exotic gay lover in *Philadelphia* (1993), a sexually ambiguous and deviant vampire in *An Interview with the Vampire* (1994) and a stalker who bizarrely seduces Rebecca de Mornay in a cage in *Never Talk to Strangers* (1995), with some illusions to the oppositional sexualities of the roles he played in Spain. But it must be noted that by the mid 1990s Hollywood was eager to firmly establish Banderas as a heterosexual image of exotic and romantic sexuality and an object of white female desire.¹¹⁰ The image of Banderas as a Latin Lover for white women was additionally informed by his relationship with Griffith, which attracted a high level of media attention in the mid 1990s.

However, it is the action genre which really established Banderas as a major star in Hollywood, most prominently in the roles of Zorro and El Mariachi which are discussed in detail in this thesis. Banderas has avoided being marginalised by Hollywood, in the first instance by establishing himself as a new, exotic action hero through performing spectacular, acrobatic feats

¹⁰⁸ Laura Isabel writes that Banderas' Spanishness allowed him to become a 'pliable, non-threatening image' of Latino masculinity in 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades', p.125

¹⁰⁹ In *Laberinto de pasiones/ Labyrinth of Passion* (1982) Banderas plays a gay terrorist, in *Matador* (1986) he portrays a trainee matador who attempts to rape a woman to prove that he is not a homosexual and in *Atame/ Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* (1990) he plays a young man recently released from a mental hospital who kidnaps and ties up a woman to convince her to marry him.

¹¹⁰ Serna, 'Antonio Banderas, Andy Garcia and Edward James Olmos: Stardom, Masculinity and Latinidades', p.127

of masculinity in his many action scenes. The many interviews given by Banderas upon the release of *The Mask of Zorro* in 1998 put a great emphasis on the fact that Banderas performed virtually all of Zorro's swashbuckling action scenes himself. In an interview with *The Toronto Sun*, Banderas states that "Nobody touched [Zorro's...] sword except me. All the swordfights are mine and no insurance company was going to take me away from that."¹¹¹ Banderas even demonstrated his ability as a swordsman for a live television audience on ABC's news programme *Good Morning America* in July 1998.¹¹² While del Toro has attempted to overcome the barriers of being a Hispanic actor in Hollywood by establishing himself as a serious method actor, Banderas has achieved success by demonstrating his irreverence with regards to his own star persona. Banderas' refusal to take himself too seriously has led to the formation of a new dimension of his star persona, voicing a parody of his own portrayal of Zorro, Puss in Boots, in the family films *Shrek 2* and *3*. The character of Puss in Boots has proven so popular that Banderas returned to voice him in a fourth *Shrek* film in 2010, and in a film entirely devoted to the character in 2011. Banderas himself has stated that he is amazed that he has achieved such success in a role where he has been chosen for his voice alone, when a decade earlier he came to the US speaking no English.¹¹³ In the main body of this thesis I shall consider how Banderas' multi-faceted star persona informs and adapts to changes in the representation of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood in the period 1998-2008.

1.11 Benicio del Toro

Benicio del Toro presents an opposing image of Hispanic masculinity to that of Banderas, an image which aligns him with the output of the socially conscious, contemporary US Independent cinema. Appearing in films since the late 1980s, del Toro first gained recognition for his performance in *The Usual Suspects* in 1995, has appeared in independent films such as *21 Grams* (2003), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), in addition to winning an Oscar for his performance in *Traffic*, the role that would make him a star.¹¹⁴ He is also a prime example of what Christine Geraghty, in her analysis of star typologies in contemporary Hollywood, identifies under the category of 'Star as Performer'. She writes that:

¹¹¹ 'Bandido Banderas: The Sword and Mask Get a New Guardian', *The Toronto Sun*, 12th July 1998

¹¹² *Good Morning America*, ABC Television Network, 16th July 1998

¹¹³ 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood: For Antonio Banderas, stardom is an ongoing story', *The Star Ledger*, Sunday 20th May 2007

¹¹⁴ *The Usual Suspects*. Brian Singer. Polygram. USA. 1995; *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Terry Gilliam, Fear and Loathing LLC. USA. 1998; *21 Grams*. Alejandro González Inárritu. This is That Productions. USA. 2003

In this [...] category [...] attention is deliberately drawn to the work of acting, so that, in a reversal of the celebrity category, it is performance and work which are emphasised, not leisure and the private sphere. [...] As a response to the proliferation of celebrity orientated media which gives soap stars, popular musicians and even reality TV personalities the attention that was once afforded only to the film star, there has been quite a pronounced shift towards performance as a mark of stardom and the concept of star-as-performer has become a way of re-establishing film-star status through a route which makes its claim through the film text rather than appearances in the newspapers. Method acting, in particular, claims cultural status by making the celebrity trappings part of the detritus which has to be discarded if the performance is to be understood.¹¹⁵

For del Toro, as a Hispanic actor in Hollywood, adopting a style of method acting, traditionally associated with masculinity through the brooding, thoughtful performances of Marlon Brando and James Dean, allows him to establish himself in a field of performance that moves away from stereotyped portrayals of Hispanic masculinity. Indeed Beltrán in her star profile of del Toro describes him as having 'broadened expectations of Latino roles and possibilities for Latino stardom through [...] nuanced and impassioned acting and daring choice of film roles.'¹¹⁶ Beltrán also aptly characterises del Toro's success as built on an ability to act 'his way out of the box that was the long history of typecasting Latino actors', though in my case studies I will argue that while Del Toro can certainly chose to avoid the box of playing a Latino character, when he does he cannot completely escape restrictive stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity.¹¹⁷

Geraghty argues that method acting offers the potential for actors who may be forced into type-cast, pin-up roles to avoid this by redefining the meaning of the male body on screen. She notes that method acting directs attention to the body of the star but 'shifts it away from the body as spectacle [...]to the body as a site of performance, worked over by the actor. [...] Even for young male stars who are teenage pin-ups (and thus operate as celebrities) the adoption of the method approach can work as a sign of more serious intentions.'¹¹⁸ For del Toro, as a Hispanic actor, the potential to be cast in restricting, over-sexualised roles is arguably greater than that of Anglo American actors and method acting represents a way to present more positive, complex images of Hispanic masculinity. Del Toro promotes himself as an actor rather than a celebrity, focusing press interviews on his performances rather than his personal life, about which very little

¹¹⁵ Christine Geraghty, 'Re-examining stardom: questions of texts, bodies and performance' in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams eds. *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000) pp.183-201, p.192

¹¹⁶ Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107, p.92

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Christine Geraghty, 'Re-examining stardom: questions of texts, bodies and performance' in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, pp.193-194

is known beyond his middle class, Puerto Rican origins. In an article in *The Daily News of Los Angeles* upon the release of *Traffic*, Bob Straus embellishes his interview with del Toro by remarking that:

Del Toro owes much of his success to a good Method foundation. Bitten by the acting bug while attending UC San Diego, he shocked his family - he comes from several generations of lawyers on both sides - by moving to New York to take up studies at the prestigious Circle in the Square Acting School and, on scholarship, the Stella Adler Conservatory.¹¹⁹

del Toro himself commented that his method training prepared him completely for his acting career.¹²⁰ Straus' article, along with many others, additionally features comments of other actors as well as independent film directors praising del Toro's acting talent. The same can be said for del Toro's most popular fan website, more an actor's resume than a fan page, which features quotes from Sean Penn, describing del Toro as 'an acting animal [...], the rest of the people haven't risen as high to the bar', and Steven Soderbergh, who confesses that he 'can't help but be infatuated with someone who cares that much [about acting]', and Matt Damon, who describes del Toro's performance in *The Usual Suspects* as 'the most memorable [...] of 1995'.¹²¹ In addition to these, and numerous more, quotes from professionals about del Toro's acting ability, the website also features lists of his favourite books, which include Satre's *Nausea* and Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, and favourite film directors, including indie favourites John Cassavetes and Terence Malik. This website, while not constructed by the star himself, is indicative of his public image and its material presents an image of him as not only a serious actor, but an educated and cultured individual, aligning him with the typically educated, middle-class target audience of the indie wood films in which he stars.

This thesis considers how the different acting styles and star personas of Banderas and del Toro have shaped representations of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood cinema, within the conventions of different cinematic genres. Their performances shall be examined in the context of mainstream genre and US Independent cinema traditions, as representations of two differing responses to the problem of integrating Hispanic masculinity in US cinema.

¹¹⁹ Bob Straus, 'Benicio Del Toro speaks his mind on acting and stopping *Traffic*', *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, Friday 9th March 2001.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Quotations taken from <http://www.beniciodeltoro.com/biography.htm> [last accessed 20/09/2009]

1.12 Thesis Structure

It is my aim to consider the way in which the Hispanic male was recast into more integrated and heroic masculine roles in my decade of study through an in-depth examination of generically aligned texts in which Latino males took on roles which deviated from, or at least refigured, longstanding Hollywood stereotypes of Latino masculinity. After viewing an extensive range of films featuring prominent Latin American, US Latino male characters, as well as those with male characters more ill-defined as broadly Hispanic, I have chosen the grouped films detailed in this introduction to form my case studies as I regard them as representative of new or refigured images of Latino masculinity in my decade of focus. While they all engage to a certain extent with long standing stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity, they also represent new directions in the way in which they represent this gendered ethnic identity as admirable and heroic.

This thesis is comprised of four case studies, the loci of which shall be four of the most prominent genres in contemporary cinema; the mainstream, action-adventure film, the socially conscious indie wood picture and the academically neglected but critically and commercially successful genres of the biopic and the family film. My thesis shall additionally be divided into two parts, each consisting of two chapters. I have divided my analysis into the consideration of representations of Hispanic masculinity that are set in a fantasy, or at least a heightened version of reality, and those which are presented in such a way as to be accepted by the viewer as a realistic representation of Hispanic masculinity through the recreation of factual events and real life persons or a basis in contemporary social realities. My chapters have been arranged according to style and subject rather than chronologically, as my aim is not to chart the changes in representations in my decade of study but rather to compare how different formal structures of representation in contemporary US cinema codified the image of the Hispanic male. Grouping my chosen texts in this way allows me to consider and compare them in light of their respective genres and representational styles, contrasting representations portrayed through realism with those which employ a more stylised, fantastic process of representation and those which recreate the past with those that intend to examine the society of the present. Such a structure affords me the opportunity to consider Hollywood's contemporary images of masculinity from the perspectives of different genres, aimed at a range of sectors of the viewing audience and will allow me to conclude as to the impact of genre conventions on traditional stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity. The detailed structure is outlined below:

In the next chapter I begin by discussing the nature of representation in the action-adventure mode of cinema, employing theoretical work on action cinema by Yvonne Tasker, José Arroyo and Mark Gallagher. My analysis of my film case studies, their promotional and reception materials shall be based on the assessment that meaning in action and adventure films is created primarily through the use of cinematic spectacle, privileged over narrative. Thus I consider how the Hispanic action hero is created through the elaborate combat sequences performed by Banderas in *The Mask of Zorro* and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. I also chart how the characters of El Mariachi and Zorro are constructed through reference to other masculine cultural forms, including Spaghetti Westerns in the case of the former and Zorro's many previous screen incarnations in the case of the later. The development of Banderas' transnational star persona and the external discourses of promotion and reception that enhance the perception of him as a Hispanic action hero are discussed, and I explain how this image can be viewed as engaging with the idea of Hispanic men as extremely masculine.

The third part of this thesis begins with a discussion regarding the nature of the contemporary family film, outlining how such films function to appeal to, and engage with, the viewing family as a whole. Peter Kramer, and others, has argued that the family film finds its appeal in fostering a sense of belonging, a feeling of being part of the action and subsequently part of a group or family. In this chapter I consider how Hispanic masculinity, an identity traditionally marginalised and often portrayed as deviant by mainstream Hollywood, can be reconciled in the family film. I propose that such films offer the greatest potential for Hispanic masculinity to be assimilated in mainstream Hollywood by fostering this sense of communal experience in the audience. While the previous chapter focuses on the individualistic, lone male hero, here I consider the Hispanic male as part of a group, examining the relationship between father and son in *Spy Kids* and Puss in Boots' relationship with his CGI buddies Shrek and Donkey in *Shrek 2*. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the potentially problematic identity of Hispanic masculinity is neutralised in the family film and how my case studies achieve this through the use of physical comedy, fantasy mise en scène, references to popular culture and, in the case of *Shrek 2*, CGI technology which displaces signifiers of ethnic identity from the body to the voice alone. As in the previous chapter, Banderas' star image is also necessarily considered, but here it shall be a further evolution of his image, characterising him as a father and family man which shall be the focus of my attention. In considering the recasting of Banderas in this way I will also consider how director Robert Rodriguez is transformed from a director of violent action films to a

Hispanic family man in the film's promotional discourses, and how this impacts on its images of Hispanic masculinity.

In the third case study chapter I turn my attention to films which attempt to present images of Hispanic masculinity which draw their basis from reality, considering indie wood films which intend to illuminate contemporary social problems. I begin by discussing the nature of the contemporary US Independent and indie wood film as it relates to my argument, and then situating my film case studies in their generic origins employing Camilla Fojas' description of the border film.¹²² The texts I have chosen to examine in this chapter present the relationship between the US and Mexico, with regards to drug-trafficking and illegal immigration; the narcotraficante film *Traffic* and the Border Western *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. I focus my attention on the portrayal of Mexican policeman Javier Rodriguez in the former, and that of the titular Melquiades Estrada in the latter, as representations of Hispanic masculinity. This chapter will explore representation of Hispanic masculinity situated within the context of the social problems that exist between the US and Mexico, and to assess whether this leads to a rejection of stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity. The impact of the reception of Benicio del Toro's performance in shaping the audience perception of his representation of Hispanic masculinity will also be considered, as I argue that this partially obscures the stereotypical nature of the character he portrays.

My final genre case study focuses on the Biopic, examining two historical films which portray the actions of Pancho Villa and Che Guevara, Latin America's most famous revolutionary leaders. This chapter begins with an introduction to the historical Biopic as a Hollywood genre, employing Custen and Bingham's discussion of the Biopic.¹²³ The Biopic has traditionally been seen as a conservative genre, and one which promotes US ideals of meritocracy and individualism, and this chapter will consider how such a genre responds to the anti-American, revolutionary masculine icons of Guevara and Villa. Through an analysis of the performances of Banderas and del Toro as Villa and Guevara respectively, and the promotional material for the films, I consider the extent to which the two men are mythologised as iconic images of Latino masculinity. I will examine how the films are marketed, and the extent to which the audience is encouraged to

¹²² Camilla Fojas *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009) p.239

¹²³ George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics : how Hollywood constructed public history* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives are They Anyway: The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010)

believe in the proposed reality of the images of Guevara and Villa that are being presented on screen, and in turn to accept these images as representative of Hispanic masculinity. I additionally discuss how the contrasting star personas of Banderas and del Toro are employed to enhance the characterisation of Villa as macho and aggressive, and Guevara as a left-wing intellectual.

Finally, in the Conclusion of my thesis I evaluate the impact of genre conventions on the representation of Hispanic masculinity and the extent to which relocating a minority identity in mainstream cinema has altered Hollywood images of Hispanic males in the years 1998-2008. I then consider how images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood have changed since I began working on this thesis in 2008, identifying later key case studies and issues worthy of further consideration.

2. Hispanic Masculinity, Hispanic Action Heroes

2.1 Action, Pastiche and Nostalgia

This chapter will deconstruct contemporary US cinema's most significant Hispanic action heroes, Zorro and El Mariachi, as screen images of Hispanic masculinity through an in-depth analysis of *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, and their respective English language promotion and reception materials. This chapter will contribute to fulfilling the project's unifying aim, which is to chart how genre conventions, star personas and traditional Hispanic male stereotypes are combined in the representation of Hispanic masculinity. I will consider how the figure of the action hero, as an image of hyper-masculinity and the performer and site of visual spectacle can be reconciled with the existing images of Hispanic masculinity discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. It shall be my argument that, in transposing a minority identity into the role of the action-adventure hero, the Hispanic man of action readily emerges as an apt ethnic hybridisation of this archetype. Mark Gallagher notes that 'the action film has historically been a "male" genre, dealing with stories of male heroism, produced by male filmmakers for principally male audiences.'¹²⁴ Hispanic masculinity has been traditionally represented as 'muy macho'; a Hispanic male action hero thus preserves the extreme, heightened masculinity of the genre and its hero, but allows for a minority ethnic identity, now the biggest minority in the US, to be translated into this role, thus attracting a new minority audience to the genre.

In performing spectacular action feats the Hispanic male thus becomes assimilated in commercial Hollywood cinema's code of representation; this previously marginalised identity being hybridised with the heroic identity of the action hero. Spectacle, at its most basic level of definition, is a public display, usually lavish and on a grand scale and it is this form of spectacle which is the central attraction of action-adventure cinema and, as Julian Stringer has noted, all commercial cinemas.¹²⁵ However the image of the Hispanic male in Hollywood, in this case Antonio Banderas, is not only altered by performing spectacular action sequences in that by assuming the mantle of the action hero, his machismo arguably becomes a spectacle in itself. Indeed Steve Neale argues that fight scenes function in action-adventure films to display the spectacle of the male body for the audience in a way which would not normally be permitted in

¹²⁴ Mark Gallagher as quoted in Yvonne Tasker's *Introduction to Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.9

¹²⁵ Julian Stringer ed. *Movie Blockbusters* (London: Routledge, 2005) p.5

mainstream entertainment.¹²⁶ I will consider the extent to which Neale's analysis applies to the representation of the Hispanic action hero in both films' fight sequences. As the Hispanic male has been historically presented as a sexual spectacle in the mode of the Latin Lover, and Banderas has been repeatedly cast as a spectacle of sexuality in both Spanish and Hollywood cinema, I will examine whether the body of the Hispanic action hero is as 'unmarked' as an object of erotic display as his white counterpart.

It would also be impossible to discuss the representational systems of my case studies without reference to the concepts of nostalgia and pastiche as both create their narrative spaces through a re-presentation of the cultural past. I use the term nostalgia here in the same sense that Pam Cook defines the term in *Screening the Past* when she writes that 'nostalgia is predicated on a dialectic between longing for something idealised that has been lost, and an acknowledgement that this something can never be retrieved in actuality, and can only be accessed through images.'¹²⁷ Pastiche is a manifestation of nostalgia as it 'sets in play our relationship with the past.'¹²⁸ The exact meaning of pastiche has fluctuated throughout cultural history, but in the context of this thesis I will employ Richard Dyer's comprehensive and contemporary definition of the term from his 2007 study *Pastiche*. As Dyer notes, pastiche, like nostalgia is intertwined with cultural memory in that 'pastiche imitates its idea of that which it imitates (its idea being anything from an individual memory through a group's shared and constructed remembering to a perception current at a given cultural-historical moment).'¹²⁹ This is particularly relevant in the case of *The Mask of Zorro*, a film in which the major sources of pastiche (*The Mark of Zorro* [1940] and the classical Hollywood action-adventure film) were popularised over half a century earlier. Dyer adds that pastiche 'facilitates an experience of the pastiched work' and in *The Mask of Zorro* it arguably allow an audience who would most likely only have second hand experience of a form to experience it.¹³⁰

However, it is the way in which pastiche deliberately alters the perception of that which it pastiches, the way in which it deforms the style of its referent: 'it selects [it chooses only some details of its referent to reproduce], accentuates, exaggerates [heightens its referents main

¹²⁶ Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp.277-287, p. 285

¹²⁷ Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005) p.4

¹²⁸ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007) p.179

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 55

¹³⁰ Ibid p. 60

features and repeats them more than the original], concentrates'¹³¹ which is of most interest to me here. Even more significant is Dyer's assertion that discrepancy in the recreation of a cultural form can be used to underline pastiche and in some cases this difference can be used to make a political statement or by a minority group to re-appropriate a hegemonic art form.¹³² It is the difference of Hispanic masculinity in the pastiches I will discuss here that is of particularly interest to me.

2.2 A New Hollywood, A New Zorro

Mary Beltrán makes a convincing argument regarding the timeliness of the development of the Hollywood Hispanic action hero in my decade of study, postulating that the increasing hybridity of Hollywood genres and the growing influence of ethnic audiences called into question the idea that the ideal action audience and hero is young, white and male.¹³³ My contextualisation of the period 1998-2008 in my introductory chapter outlines the growth of Hispanics and their culture in the US, supporting the assertion that Hispanics have become a significant ethnic audience that Hollywood cannot ignore. It is my argument that the male Hispanic action hero is Hollywood's most successful, though problematic, attempt to integrate Hispanic identity into the model of the action hero and this is supported when considered in the light of *The Mask of Zorro's* most memorable fight scene. In this scene the Spaniard Antonio Banderas as the young Zorro undresses his love interest Elena, played by Welsh actress Catherine Zeta-Jones, with a few deftly administered slashes of his sword. The duel itself is true to the traditions of the classic adventure film in the nature of its swordplay and even the structure is typical; the hero appearing defeated before using his cunning to regain the upper hand over his opponent. The characterisation of the hero, however, is notably different from Zorro's previous incarnations on the Hollywood screen in that a clear effort has been made to 'Hispanicise' the character of Zorro, perhaps in recognition of a more ethnically diverse audience, previously portrayed as Hispanic in name only. Though it must be noted that the film makes a choice to cast the Spanish Banderas to play a Mexican Zorro and the Welsh Zeta Jones his Spanish love interest, evidence of Hollywood again favouring Eurocentric casting over ethnic authenticity in portraying Hispanics and Latinos. An immediately apparent

¹³¹ Ibid. p.56

¹³² Ibid. p. 58, pp.156-157

¹³³ Mary Beltrán 'Mas Macha: The New Latina action hero' pp.186-200 in Yvonne Taker ed. *Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004) p190; 'Action!' in José Arroyo (ed.) *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, London: British Film Institute, pp. 17-21: p. 18

example of this Eurocentric Hispanicisation is the use of Hispanic sound effects to underscore the action in this scene; when Elena draws her sword to Zorro's throat castanets sound and in turn when he un-sheaths his sword this action is punctuated by the strumming of Spanish guitars, indeed the duel itself from the perspective of its sound effects more greatly resembles a flamenco dance than a sword-fight. It is worth noting that the promotional strategy for *The Mask of Zorro* acted to reinforce the importance of the new image of Zorro as a Hispanic hero embodied specifically by a Hispanic actor. The most interesting example of this was in an article for London newspaper *The Evening Standard* entitled 'Antonio Banderas on... *The Mask of Zorro*' purportedly written by Banderas himself, in which he writes:

Zorro is probably the only Spanish hero created by Hollywood. But Hollywood has never had a Spanish Zorro. After 78 years, I guess they decided it was about time. I was simply fortunate. There aren't that many Hispanic actors working here. It came down to Andy Garcia, Benicio Del Toro and me, before Steven Spielberg told me to put the mask on. Great news, right? I'm going to be an action hero!¹³⁴

This article explicitly states that Banderas was viewed as qualified to play Zorro because he is Hispanic, that there was a timely need to Hispanicise Zorro and that Banderas himself took great delight in assuming the role of action hero. What is most interesting is that the chance to see a new, Hispanic Zorro is presented as a major attraction in the UK, suggesting that it is not just a Hispanic audience to whom this Hispanicisation was directed to appeal.

Indeed the Hispanicisation of Zorro in this scene can be seen as an attempt to update a classical Hollywood genre. The same can be said for the fact that Zorro's opponent is also notably different in that she is not an enemy of the people but a beautiful noblewoman dressed in her nightgown. Although the sexual spectacle of Elena's undressing is undeniably targeted to appeal to the traditionally young, heterosexual, male audience typical of the action adventure film, there is also a well orchestrated attempt to engage female viewers in this scene as well. Zeta-Jones' Elena is not a stereotypical 'damsel in distress' and, despite the period setting and old-Hollywood style of the film, *The Mask of Zorro*'s heroine is presented as a worthy opponent and instigates the challenge against Zorro. The aforementioned 'Hispanicisation' of Zorro, and Banderas' burgeoning status as a Hispanic sex symbol in Hollywood, also render the two characters relative equals in terms of their sexual commodification in this scene in particular, and while it is she which loses the most clothing, the already revealing neckline of his shirt is suitably slashed by the end of the lovers' duel. This scene is a perfect example of the way in which the body of Banderas,

¹³⁴ 'Antonio Banderas on... *The Mask of Zorro*' in *Evening Standard* 'Hot Tickets' 10th December 1998 p.9

when performing the role of Hispanic action hero, is rendered a site of both action spectacle and sexual spectacle, often with both of these effects occurring simultaneously. As such, Zorro is characterised in the mode of the Latin Lover type, tempting Elena to give in to passion with the sort of risqué behaviour that Banderas had previously been associated, in order to appeal to the exotic fantasies of the female audience, while simultaneously retaining the macho mantle of the action hero in the eyes of the male audience.



Figure 2.1: Zorro and Elena in the Undressing Duel Scene

2.3 Pastiche Zorro, the Original Adventurer

Hybridising the minority identity of Hispanic masculinity with the classical archetype of the action-adventure hero, as I have begun to discuss, is a balance of preserving that which made the archetype popular in the first place while simultaneously refiguring this type to highlight that which is different. In both films pastiche, as it is described in the introduction to this chapter, is employed to emphasise the difference of the Hispanic action hero and to evoke the audience's nostalgia for that which is being pastiched. In the case of *The Mask of Zorro*, it is the film's pastiche of Zorro's previous incarnations, most heavily in *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), starring Tyrone Power as the titular hero, that I will argue is used to both emphasise the difference of and facilitate the appropriation of Hispanic masculinity in the longstanding character of Zorro.

In order to do this I must first provide a brief introduction to Zorro and the classic Hollywood adventurer hero as an archetype. Often seen as a Spanish Robin Hood by the viewing

public, Zorro (which is Spanish for fox), is also one of the silver screen's most enduring action heroes. Philip French in his review of *The Mask of Zorro* for *The Observer* describes Zorro's first screen appearance as 'the movie that created the swash-buckling genre'. While French's assertion cannot be strictly proven, it is certainly testament to the central place of Zorro in the public consciousness of the action-adventure genre.¹³⁵ Created by pulp fiction writer Johnston McCulley in 1919 and first immortalised on screen by Douglas Fairbanks in *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), Zorro, the masked hero of the people in Spanish California, is popular culture's most famous Hispanic adventurer and has been a regular feature of US film and television culture for almost a century. It would be seemingly impossible to devote a thesis to images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood cinema without considering the iconic Zorro and his alter ego, Spanish nobleman Don de la Vega, such is the omnipotence in the popular consciousness of the perennial hero. However, it will be my argument in my discussion of *The Mask of Zorro* that before Banderas became the first Hispanic actor to play the role, in 1998, Zorro existed as a Hispanic hero in name only, and as such *The Mask of Zorro's* references to the hero's previous screen incarnations act to emphasise the Hispanicisation of Zorro in this text.

If Zorro's previous screen incarnations are not representative of Hispanic masculinity, the role being most famously played by America's hero Douglas Fairbanks (1920), swashbuckling Irishman Tyrone Power (1940) and Italian-American Guy Williams in the 1950s Disney TV serial (1957-1959), then what is this enduring figure a representative of? Marcus Heide in an essay entitled 'From Zorro to Jennifer Lopez', writes that in the first instance Zorro's heroic values aligned him as a champion of American rather than Hispanic culture. He writes that, 'when acting as a representative of Spain, Zorro is weak, feminized and treacherous; when acting as locally rooted hero, he is virile, powerful and open to the sorrows of the people. In the latter role he most obviously acts as 'American hero [... representing] values, such as freedom and democracy, that the US claims to stand for.'¹³⁶ I agree with Heide's assertion that Zorro is a defender of American values, but I would also argue that Zorro is, and indeed has always been, an embodiment of a deeply nostalgic image of masculinity. In a sense this image of Zorro can be seen as a Hispanic-American hero, a pastiche of the past which alters the original image to reflect the US's growing Hispanic population. The revival of Zorro in 1998 is unashamedly nostalgic on many

¹³⁵ Philip French, 'Film of the Week' in *The Observer* 13th December 1998, p.6

¹³⁶ Marcus Heide, 'From Zorro to Jennifer Lopez: US-Latino History and Film for the EFL-Classroom' in *American Studies Journal* vol.55 November 2008 accessed online at <http://asjournal.zusas.uni-halle.de/107.html> [last accessed 08/08/2010]

levels, the icon of Zorro himself evokes memories of childhood, watching the character in the popular 1950s Disney serials, which later received a broadcast revival in the early 1990s. Indeed the opening title sequence of the 1998 film uses images that are reminiscent of the series credit sequence, both featuring the sign of the 'Z' being drawn in darkness and Zorro rising up on his horse in costume and riding across the desert. Indeed, Zorro is, above all else, a symbol of Classical, old-fashioned popular entertainment, an adventurer hero in the mode of *Robin Hood*, *The Three Musketeers* or his Mexican caballero (Spanish for knight or gentleman) counterpart the Cisco Kid. Indeed, much like the Cisco Kid who appeared in the 1940 film entitled *The Gay Caballero*, Zorro has strong ties to the gay caballero type. This Latin type was popularised in US culture between the 1920s and 1940s and was immortalised in the Frank Crumit 1928 folk song *A Gay Caballero*, which describes the type as part Latin Lover, part adventurer hero. The film's executive producer Laurie MacDonald has stated that *The Mask of Zorro's* production team did not want to 'reinvent the franchise with a hip veneer, but rather to celebrate the story's classic and romantic elements.'¹³⁷ The same promotional document states that director Martin Campbell was attracted to the character of Zorro precisely because he was an 'anachronism [...as a moral hero]' in 'the '90s action genre – characterised by gratuitous violence and a decidedly hard edge – who still generates excitement and retains tremendous appeal'.¹³⁸ The nostalgia of Zorro, however, goes beyond this; upon his first appearance in 1919 the idea of the noble adventure hero was as nostalgic an ideal of masculinity as the cowboy of the Old West, only in this case it is the grand Haciendas of colonial Spanish California which provide the romanticised backdrop to the action. Brian Taves notes that in the action-adventure film in which characterisation is entirely based on established types, the hero is the paragon of all that is good and just, He writes:

The adventure hero is usually attractive, endowed with personal magnetism, ardent in romance, a natural leader with worthy goals and a sense of duty to a country or cause. While enjoying existence to the fullest, the adventurous life is also serious. The hero is politically motivated and patriotic, selflessly dedicated to justice. Epitomising altruism, the hero is pure of purpose, brave in war, honourable, fair, and chivalrous, behaving as a gentleman and recognising a code of conduct. Peaceful at heart the adventurer only kills the most dangerous of villains, often in highly stylised duels.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Laurie MacDonald quoted in the promotional production notes for *The Mask of Zorro*, accessed at the BFI library.

¹³⁸ Martin Campbell, Ibid.

¹³⁹ Brian Taves, *The Romance of Adventure: The Genre of the Historical Adventure Movie* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1993), p.111-112

Taves also notes that, despite the internal characterisation of the adventurer as noble and pure of heart, the hero is ultimately defined by being a man of spectacular action. Zorro as 'the fox' is cunning and sharper of mind than his adversaries and uses his wits as well as his physical prowess as a fighter to outsmart villains.

The reflection of the nostalgic adventurer image can be seen in the poster for the 1940 *The Mark of Zorro*, and much can be learnt about the evolution of the character through a comparison of this with the poster for the 1920 original. The depiction of Zorro in both posters bears no visual hallmarks of Hispanic masculinity. The 1920 poster presents Fairbanks laughing in his Zorro costume alongside a staid black and white image of him in formal and decidedly un-exotic tweed suit, supporting Heide's argument for Zorro as an upstanding American hero. For contemporary audiences this portrayal of the character would be unsurprising considering, as Gaylyn Studlar notes, throughout the 1910s Fairbanks star performances were remarkably consistent, constructing his star persona as 'a young man of a certain patrician quality and privileged Eastern upbringing who ran, jumped, punched and smiled his way into a through a vigorous and "red blooded" manhood.'¹⁴⁰ Indeed the poster shows no hints of the Spanish identity of its hero or locale; it could be a poster for any Anglo action hero if the legend was absent. As the first of Fairbanks' adventure films it is also largely un-reliant on the adventurer archetype, and more in line with the 1910s Fairbanksian hero that Studlar described, that the star would later be all but synonymous with, as Hal Erickson states in a retrospective review of *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) for the New York Times; Fairbanks never dreamed in 1920 that 'the film's popularity would lock him into the swashbuckling mode for the rest of the silent career.'¹⁴¹ In the 1940s poster there is a notably greater emphasis on images of the swashbuckling adventurer in action in combination with a stronger focus on the adventurer as a man 'ardent in romance' in his pursuit of the beautiful Linda Darnell. The taglines for the film, 'Excitement! Romance and Drama go into this thrilling entertainment' and 'Riding through the night Zorro strikes terror into every heart but one!', echo the film's dual appeal of romance and adventure. Perhaps more interesting, is the way in which the film's press book is reflective of the studio's attempt to draw on nostalgia for its predecessor almost as much as *The Mask of Zorro* did in 1998. Tyrone Power is portrayed as Fairbanks' adventurer heir on a number of occasions, most explicitly in a story about Power

¹⁴⁰ Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p. 12

¹⁴¹ Hal Erickson in a review of *The Mark of Zorro* for *The New York Times* accessed online at <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/31497/The-Mark-of-Zorro/overview> last accessed [10/08/2010]

fighting with the 'historic sword' used by Fairbanks in the original film, passed on to him at Fairbanks' behest. Power had already begun to establish himself as an adventurer star before his performance as Zorro, starring as the eponymous hero in *Jesse James* (1939), a role that *Picturegoer* described as 'The American Robin Hood', suggesting that 'it may not be long before Hollywood will try to tip him off as a "second Errol Flynn."'”¹⁴² The same article describes Power as being known for 'his finely chiselled profile, his impishly tilted nose, his mischievous dark eyes [... and] his crisp honest sounding voice', star characteristics which are certainly emphasised in his performance as Zorro, as I explore further in the next section of this chapter.¹⁴³



Figure 2.2: Theatrical Poster for *The Mark of Zorro* (1920)



Figure 2.3: Theatrical Poster for *The Mark of Zorro* (1940)

¹⁴² Norman Maine, 'Tyrone Power Survives' in *Picturegoer* no.361 (New Series). Vol. 7., April 23rd 1938, pp.10-11, p.11

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Having now given a brief introduction to Zorro's most influential screen incarnations, their depiction of Zorro as a character, and the action adventurer type more widely, I will now turn my attention to the way in which *The Mask of Zorro* engages with its central character's cultural past.

Variety describes the genre of *The Mask of Zorro* as 'Period Romantic Adventure', which underscores that there is a compounded nostalgia in the film's visual style, both the nostalgic pastiche of swashbuckling entertainment of old Hollywood, and the nostalgic, romantic setting of caballeros and haciendas which the film shares with its predecessors; both of which offer the potential to reconfigure Hispanic masculinity.¹⁴⁴ The setting and style of the film itself are a particularly appropriate choice for relocating Hispanic masculinity in mainstream Hollywood cinema, as the romanticised historical setting and passionate heroics of the classical adventure film play into existing conceptions of Hispanic men as Latin Lovers. Mary Beltrán writes that the 1920s Hispanic Hollywood heyday allowed Hispanics such as Dolores Del Rio, Lupe Vélez and Ramón Navarro to become so popular, not only because of the perceived moral freedom of the social context, but also because the exotic, romantic and sensational storylines and highly demonstrative, expressive performance styles which typified contemporary popular entertainment, fitted particularly well with existing stereotypes of Hispanic performers. *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) has chosen an old-fashioned form of entertainment that, while it has not previously presented Hispanic actors in the role of the adventurer, displays many of the same features described by Beltrán in relation to 1920s melodrama, and thus is appropriate for incorporating this identity. Walter Parkes, the executive producer of *The Mask of Zorro*, quoted in the film's 'press pack', states that, in describing the style of the production, 'the word we constantly used was "operatic" – we wanted to create a story in which sweeping emotions like betrayal, revenge, and redemption were as much a part of the movie as the swordfights.'¹⁴⁵ Beyond the stylistic recreation of the classical historical adventure film, *The Mask of Zorro* also directly pastiches the 1940s *The Mark of Zorro*, greatly informing the film's creation of a Hispanic action hero for its audience. Through a direct comparison of a scene in which Banderas as Zorro hides in a church confessional and converses with Elena under the guise of a priest, and that which it pastiches, a very similar scene in which Power as Zorro hides in a church disguised as a

¹⁴⁴ Review of *The Mask of Zorro* in *Variety* <http://variety.com/1998/film/reviews/the-mask-of-zorro-1200453862/> [accessed 01/12/2014]

¹⁴⁵ Walter Parkes as quoted in the promotional production notes for *The Mask of Zorro*, accessed at the BFI library.

priest in robes and converses with Lolita (Darnell), I will consider how this recreation impacts on *The Mask of Zorro's* creation of Zorro as a Hispanic masculine image.

The 1940s church scene begins with Lolita praying in front of an altar. She prays: 'Blessed Mother, send someone to take me from this dreary place, someone I can love and respect. Let him be kind and brave, and handsome please, Dear Mother.' Zorro dressed in priest's robes then enters through a door at the back of the church and smiles to himself when he sees Lolita; he then pulls the hood of his robe down to shield his face and kneels at the altar making the sign of the cross before walking towards the girl, his face cast in shadow as the church is lit only by candlelight. Lolita confesses to the 'priest' that she has prayed to be saved from a convent, and asks if that is a sin; Zorro responds by saying 'a sin would be in sending you to one'. She responds, asking for clarification, and after stuttering Zorro regains his composure saying 'Well I ... a young girl with your... ah...I just think that you would probably be more useful out of a convent than in'. He slips again when she remarks that she has been praying for a husband, but quickly recovers the character he is playing, deftly bringing the conversation back to religious doctrine. There is comedy in this scene, such as Zorro's slips out of character and his frequent moves of the head in order to keep his face hidden from the light, but the underlining tone is of romance, the music swelling as Lolita reveals her hope for a man to rescue her. She is demure when telling Zorro she has been called pretty, he responds by calling her 'radiant, like a morning in June'; she realises the priest is Zorro but does not reveal him and he kisses her hand as she leaves.



Figure 2.4: Zorro and Lolita in the 1940s Church Scene

The 1998 version again features Zorro masquerading as a priest and charming a woman, but is different in a number of key ways, all of which can be related back to the film's characterisation of Zorro as a specifically Hispanic rather than Anglo-American hero. The tone is more comic than romantic and the scene opens with a nod to Zorro's enduring penchant for hiding in churches, the priest remarking that the years have been far kinder to Zorro than they have to him since Zorro last hid in his church, and enjoying the fact that the situation is 'Just like the old days!'. Zorro hides in the confessional and converses with Elena in the guise of the priest; at first he tries to suppress his strong Spanish accent when speaking in disguise but only manages to do so for his first few words. He also shows a lack of respect in his first responses to Elena and a distinct lack of religious knowledge; for example he confuses the commandments, indicating that his uncivilised background as a Mexican bandit has rendered him comically incapable of successfully masquerading as a priest. A different side of the Hispanic action hero emerges later in the scene when we hear that Elena's 'wild' heart has led her to dishonour her father by having 'impure thoughts' about a bandit-like man in a black mask. Zorro asks 'He had a deep voice?', 'Yes' she responds, 'Ruggedly handsome?', 'I do not know his face was half covered. But something in his eyes captured me; I felt warm and feverish and ...', 'Lustful?' Zorro asks, 'Yes, lustful' answers Elena. There is a clear difference in Elena's response to Zorro in this scene from *Lolita's* which it pastiches; while in the 1940s version the heroine wants a dashing and romantic adventurer to rescue her from her tyrannical uncle, in the 1990s recreation Elena wants to be ravished by Zorro and cannot contain her passion for the 'bandit'. Of course, the intervening fifty years of social and cultural changes, and the dissolution of the Hollywood Production Code, have significantly altered conventions of what is permissible in the type of family friendly Hollywood entertainment of which the Zorro films are an example. However, I would argue that the portrayal of Banderas' Zorro as comically uncouth, irreverent, and sexually provocative, is not merely indicative of representational trends in contemporary entertainment. As an analysis of this scene demonstrates, this representation of the hero is drawn specifically from existing typologies of Hispanic masculinity; in short his potent sexuality is aligned with his Hispanic machismo articulated in this scene in the references to his deep, hyper-masculine voice and his status as a bandit, references which are enhanced by Banderas' existing star persona.

This scene is the most potent example of the way in which *The Mask of Zorro* alludes to Zorro's classical Hollywood incarnations in order to generate a nostalgic response from its audience, hybridising this new Hispanic image of Zorro with a memory of the old-fashioned adventurer, and employing a playful pastiche in order to encourage the acceptance of this new

ethnic image of the hero in the minds of the audience. As Richard Dyer remarks of *Far From Heaven* (2002), which incorporates a narrative of closeted homosexuality and interracial romance into a pastiche of 1950s melodrama, *The Mask of Zorro* is 'very like but not quite' a replica of the classical Hollywood adventure narrative.¹⁴⁶ The film delights in displaying that which is new in this image of Zorro, emphasising the heightened Hispanic sexuality which adds a new dimension to the daring and charisma of the adventurer hero, embodied by the risqué and exotic Spanish star, and drawing comedy from and encouraging affection for the low born bandit, and the shortcomings of his spirited attempts to masquerade as a noble or spiritual figure.



Figure 2.5: The costume of De la Vega as Zorro



Figure 2.6: The costume of Murrieta as Zorro

2.4 Hispanicising Zorro, Taming the Animal

However, while *The Mask of Zorro* is eager to appeal to its audience's nostalgic appetite for a revival of the old-fashioned adventure film and its hero, the film also provides its viewers with a new, Hispanicised image of Zorro. In *The Mask of Zorro* there are two very different representations of Zorro; the elder Zorro who is portrayed by an Anglo Welsh actor and characterised as a cunning Spanish nobleman in line with previous incarnations of this character, and his successor, a tempestuous Mexican bandit played by Spanish star Antonio Banderas. It is the new Hispanic image of Zorro which is of critical interest to me here, however, a comparison of the contrasts between the traditional and Hispanic image of Zorro in this text, in terms of how

¹⁴⁶ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007) p.175

they are presented in the film's mise-en-scène, serves to emphasise the differences between these two images. Most immediately apparent is the notable difference in costume between the two Zorros; when Alejandro assumes the role of Zorro, he is deliberately differentiated from his predecessor through the costume that he wears. In the *Zorro Unmasked* documentary which appears as a DVD special feature for *The Mask of Zorro*, the film's costume designer comments on the differences in costume for each Zorro, stating that de la Vega's costume was designed to reflect Spanish costume traditions, while Murrieta's was designed to reflect Mexican ones. Even to the common viewer with little knowledge of these traditions, there is a clear reflection of each character in their dress, de la Vega's is suitably stately and traditional with its high neckline, waistcoat and long gloves, whereas Murrieta's is considerably more flamboyant and daring with its low v-neck, flowing cape and elaborate gold embroidered hat. The music which plays during the fight scenes of each Zorro underscores the visual differences in their representations. When de la Vega fights the evil Montero in an attempt to defend his wife and daughter at the beginning of the film, the music is grandly orchestral with sweeping strings that build to an emotive crescendo; it is traditional, conjuring up the same sense of white Anglo American romance, chivalry and adventure as the previously described music in *The Mark of Zorro* (1940). The music which punctuates the duels of the Mexican former bandit, Alejandro, is much more exotic, yet equally emotive, conjuring a sense of Latin passion more than romantic adventure. The sound of castanets and stomping feet, evoking the Spanish flamenco dance, and Hispanic guitars, associated with the Mexican Mariachi, which were present in the undressing scene, recur as punctuation for the young Zorro's duels and align him with these strong images of Machismo in Hispanic culture. In this way the film aims to present the new Zorro as more sexy, exciting and exotic than his predecessor but also less cultured and civilised, which adds uncomfortable neo-colonial overtones to his attempts to recast Zorro as a Hispanic-American rather than Anglo-American hero. This is complicated by the casting of Welshman Anthony Hopkins to play the Spanish Del le Vega and the Spaniard Banderas to play the Mexican Murrieta, which suggests that a light skinned Spaniard can be more readily recast in a traditionally Anglo adventurer role than a Mexican actor could.

The film's sound effects are also employed to underscore the sense that Alejandro, the Hispanic bandit, is a wild animal, uncouth and in need of taming by the noble de la Vega.¹⁴⁷ The first example of this can be heard in the panther noises used in the opening titles of the film; following the emphatic rhythm of Zorro's boots, and the punctuation of flamenco guitar, the film's title is emblazoned on screen with the sound of a wild cat roaring. The same sound is used near the end of the film when Zorro blows up Montero's mine, the roaring noises intermingling with that of the explosives in this spectacular set-piece. The implication that Alejandro is animalistic and too wild to ever be completely tamed is emphasised in his relationship with his horse, which he steals from Montero's men. The horse is anthropomorphised and is imbued with a rebellious personality; like the hero who chooses him, he is impulsive and does exactly as he pleases. Alejandro, dressed as Zorro, enters the stables, wearing his Zorro mask; the horse eyes him with an expression of perceived bemusement as he places the saddle on his back. He then approaches the horse and says 'Listen, I am going to give you the great honour of being my horse', the horse gives a neigh of expectance in response and Alejandro climbs onto its back, grabs hold of the reins and proclaims to the horse; 'You and I are one spirit!'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Alejandro pulls the reins the horse begins to buck and flail about wildly, the young Zorro hanging on to its back, struggling to stay on the horse as he profanes 'Santa Maria!'. The horse then rears up and bursts through the door of the soldier's quarters where they are smoking and playing cards; the young Zorro and his horse covered in straw. The horse then begins to spin round and round, the soldiers running to get out of its way, diving into their bunks. Two soldiers run towards the horse with their weapons drawn and it sends them flying through the air with its back legs, before its front legs sends the soldiers' table flying towards two more charging soldiers. In a final act of defiance, the horse then throws Zorro off its back and proceeds to completely destroy the soldier's bunks, snapping their supports with its front legs until the entire structure collapses upon them. Zorro then jumps back onto the horse, before being thrown off again as the horse charges through the door, out of the building and down the street, leaving Zorro to face the soldiers alone. When Zorro finds the horse again, after having unwittingly laid waste to and then blown up the barracks, he tries to call it to him and is ignored, even when he threatens to get another horse. He finally gets the horse's attention by summoning him with a whistle, but when he tries to launch himself on to the horse's back, it moves at the very last moment, sending Zorro

¹⁴⁷ This can be viewed as exemplary of colonial and Eurocentric cinematic imagery, in animalising the native Mexican character, as identified by Ella Shohat in 'Tropes of Empire' in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam eds. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 137-176, p.138

falling to the dusty ground; the horse merely looks at him and neighs in amusement. In previous versions of Zorro, the hero's horse, often called Tornado, was depicted as sharing his owner's intelligence and heroics; the depiction of Alejandro's horse and his relationship with the animal follow in this tradition, but it is employed to emphasise the animalistic, Bandido like qualities in the hero's nature.

2.5 From Bandido Buffoon to Action Hero: Action as a Civilising Force

However, while the action scene described above draws parallels between the character of Zorro and his horse, it also demonstrated how Alejandro occupies traditional Hollywood Hispanic roles of buffoon and bandit before he is transformed into a noble, adventurer hero by de la Vega. Banderas states that he feels much of the comedy in the film comes from the attempts of the 'mature' and 'skilful' de la Vega to teach Alejandro who he describes as 'pitiful', a 'clown' and a 'thief', as the characters are both described in the film's dialogue. Buffoonery is used to make Alejandro's banditry non-threatening, while it also recasts Banderas as a more family friendly star, and is employed the first time Don de la Vega meets Alejandro as an adult. He is tempestuous, overly emotional and comically inept with a sword when the men first duel, in a comedic scene which employs the bandit/buffoon typology to great effect. After the death of his brother Alejandro is distraught and turns quickly to drink; de la Vega must restrain him from taking ill-conceived revenge against the man who killed him. De la Vega throws Alejandro back against the door, in response the younger man violently un-sheaths his sword, hurling its sheath across the room, it clattering into a cabinet of crockery that tumbles to the ground. Alejandro then charges towards de la Vega, but is set off-balance and goes tumbling backwards into several bundles of straw, which topple on his impact with them. Clutching the wall, Alejandro pulls himself back to his feet, he again charges toward de la Vega, jabbing at him with his sword while making grunting noises which emphasise his effort in this ineptitude, and missing by a considerable distance three times in succession. As the final humiliation to Alejandro, de la Vega disables him with three swift blows to the body, and a debilitating blow to the crotch, before catching the younger man's sword as it is sent flying up into the air whilst his adversary falls to the ground. The representation of Alejandro in this scene invokes the Hispanic male buffoon stereotype, a type which combines ideas of the Hispanic male as both inept and immoral. Charles Ramirez Berg lists the Hispanic male buffoon as one of Hollywood's most prevalent stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity who serves as 'second-banana comic relief', and is laughed at for his perceived inferiority to the white American mainstream. He is commonly portrayed as 'simpleminded (the bumbling antics of

Gordito or Sergeant Garcia), he cannot master basic English [...], and he childishly regresses into emotionality.¹⁴⁸



Figure 2.7: Alejandro the Buffoon challenges Zorro to a duel

In the case of the depiction of Alejandro before he is chosen to become Zorro's successor, the buffoon and bandido types are combined, and this is apparent from his first appearance in the film. When we are introduced to Alejandro and his brother they have been apprehended by a bounty hunter. Their first appearance has heavy colonial overtones, as tied behind a horse they stagger through the dust, dirty and bearded in the typical image of the Mexican bandido. The men are ridiculed by the white bounty hunter, Jack, who employs his horse to pull them to the ground, has them quite literally sing his praises, and gives them an empty water canteen to drink from before laughing in their faces. As he approaches a battalion of the villain Don Montero's army, Jack proclaims, 'Hey, hey, hey! Come one, come all, for the fright of your life! See the notorious Murietta brothers; robbers, horse thieves and bandits!' The viewer is then presented with a wanted poster featuring the Brothers; the images of the Murrietas identify them as the consummate Mexican bandits, with their devious, narrow eyed expressions and wild, untamed hair. In their role as bandits, however, Alejandro and Joaquim Murrieta are at first presented as

¹⁴⁸ Ramirez Berg, C, *Latino Images in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) pp. 71-72

comically inept; while on the wanted poster they are fierce, in reality they are portrayed as buffoons. In viewing the wanted poster the brothers are embarrassed to discover that while they thought themselves to be infamous, they only carry a bounty of 200 pesos for the two of them. The scene, however, subverts the stereotype by revealing that the brothers are in fact not buffoons, but have rather played dumb, it emerging that they were in league with Jack to collect their own ransom money. The marshals emerge as the fools when they are left naked and embarrassed, white bottoms exposed, tied to a pole by the bandits. This scene does portray the Mexicans as emerging as the victors, but this is undercut by its reliance on old fashioned, reductive stereotypes of Mexican men as devious bandits.



Figure 2.8: Wanted Poster of the Murrieta Brothers

After presenting us with an image of Alejandro as a bandido/buffoon the film then depicts his transformation into an adventurer hero. Brian Taves notes that there is a history of an adventurer being trained by a more experienced mentor in the action-adventure film who 'recognises the potential beyond the veneer of inexperience' and that this 'process occurs without consideration of age or race.'¹⁴⁹ *The Mask of Zorro* continues in this cycle of action-adventure films, however in this case an interesting class and racial dynamic is added to a tale in which an older, aristocratic European (played by a white Anglo) teaches a young, Mexican bandit (played by a Spaniard) to become an action hero. The transformation of Alejandro from bandit to adventurer hero can be viewed as a colonial allegory of the civilisation of the savage, through

¹⁴⁹ Brian Taves, *The Romance of Adventure: The Genre of the Historical Adventure Movie* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1993) pp.112-113

teaching, in this case physical training. The Mexican's wildness and lawlessness is restrained and he is reformed to exist in the hero's balance of restraint and excess as described by Yvonne Tasker, in her analysis of the action genre.¹⁵⁰ The transformation of Alejandro and the building of the action hero are achieved through the employment of the typical training montage sequence which will seem very familiar to the viewer of contemporary Hollywood action and sports films, in which we see the progress of the hero compressed in time. When the training begins de la Vega remarks that, 'This is going to take a lot of work' and we see this labour begin in the 'Master's Wheel'. The audience is informed by de la Vega that this series of decreasing circles is to become the basis of Alejandro's training. He says: 'This circle will be your world, your whole life, until I tell you otherwise there is nothing outside of it. [...] As your skill with a sword improves you will progress to a smaller circle, with each new circle your world contracts, bringing you that much closer to your adversary, that much closer to retribution'. The 'Masters Wheel' is a physical representation of Alejandro's progress towards the goal of adventurer hero; his civilisation through action.

The message that the Hispanic male can potentially be transformed through action into a noble adventurer hero is laced with some uncomfortable colonial overtones. However, the way in which *The Mask of Zorro* puts a greater emphasis on the process through which an adventurer hero can be created than a classical Hollywood version of the narrative, could be viewed in a more positive light. The strong focus on the aspirational aspect of the formation of the action hero, the populist idea that any ordinary man, even those previously represented as deviant, can through action acquire such admirable moral values and masculine skills, represents a departure from the idea that nobility is denoted by birth. Zorro is again a champion of Anglo-American values, but in this case the film can be more closely aligned with the idea of the American Dream with Banderas' Zorro as a physical demonstration that Hispanics can achieve this ideal, thus creating a new Hispanic-American hero. However, it must be noted that in casting Banderas the film also tells us that this ideal Hispanic American hero is ideally European, or at the very least conforms to Hollywood's visual ideal of the Mediterranean looking, Spanish blooded Latino.

¹⁵⁰ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: genre, gender and the action cinema* (Routledge: London, 2003) p.9

2.6 Performing Masculinity and The Action Hero Masquerade

Chris Perriam, in an analysis of Banderas' transnational star persona, writes that *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and its predecessor *Desperado* 'de-Europeanise Banderas for an American audience by [...] exploiting the ludicrousness of the Latino character-based action movie by drawing attention to nationality, and tough vengeful gun-toting, as a masquerade.'¹⁵¹ It is my argument that the presentation of the machismo of the Hispanic action heroes as a masquerade is what unites the two significantly different images of the Hispanic action hero discussed in this thesis, which is that of Zorro and El Mariachi. In *The Mask of Zorro* we see Alejandro don a costume and train to perform the role of Zorro in the film's narrative, transforming himself through the performance of action stunts into a new embodiment of folk hero, to whose persona he was initially portrayed as the antithesis. The film, true to the traditions of the *Zorro* series, even features a scene which delights in the masquerading of both Zorros when they exchange social positions in order to obtain information about the evil Montero's plan for the state of California. In this scene, Alejandro masquerades as a nobleman in order to be accepted into the elite social circle of Montero, while de la Vega assumes the role of his servant Bernado, in a nod to the mute servant who often accompanied the hero in previous incarnations, in order to advise Alejandro on how to appear noble. Alejandro fears that he cannot successfully masquerade as a noble and Diego assures him that 'a nobleman is nothing but a man who says one thing and thinks another'; this scene as a whole emphasises the ease with which rigid social class distinctions can be flouted through masquerade. This scene is also tinged with irony in the eyes of those audience members aware that Banderas as a Spanish actor will have no difficulty assuming the role of a Spanish nobleman, and in fact it is the role of the Mexican bandit that for Banderas is really more of a performance. This move also suggests that European Hispanic identities were still seen as more attractive to US audiences in 1998 than those associated with Latin American or US Latinos, a legacy dating back to the 'exotic' stars of the 1920s.

However, it seems that, certainly in the eyes of the studio, Banderas' ability to perform as an action hero was in need of qualification for a contemporary audience. Indeed, upon the release of *The Mask of Zorro* in 1998, Banderas' credibility with viewers as an action star was by no means as proven as it is today. In 1995 Banderas appeared in two heavily action-based roles, amongst his performances as a love interest in a number of romantic films. In the first, Richard

¹⁵¹ Chris Perriam, 'Two transnational Spanish Stars: Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz' in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, Vol.2, No. 1, 2005 pp.29-46, p.35

Donner's preposterously plotted thriller *Assassins*, Banderas starred alongside Sylvester Stallone as a ruthless and formidable, but mentally deranged, assassin, Miguel Bain. The film was poorly received, but Banderas emerged unscathed, his energetic performance revelling in the ludicrous narrative of the film; Todd McCarthy in *Variety* writing that 'Banderas bounces and gesticulates all over the screen, injecting some welcome humour into the proceedings.'¹⁵² But it was his second action role of 1995 which demonstrated that Banderas possessed the required charisma and physical skills, as El Mariachi in *Desperado*, the predecessor to *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. Mick La Salle wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that 'Banderas lends the dark figure of the Mariachi a nice combination of gentleness and mystery' and that his 'physical grace is a great strength' and that he 'looks great' performing the film's physical stunts.¹⁵³ Key to La Salle's commentary on the success of Banderas' performance as El Mariachi is the implication that Banderas not only gracefully executes the film's acrobatic action stunts, but that 'he looks great' as he performs them. There is a sense that the looks of Banderas become part of the mystifying action spectacle; that he is a spectacle as much as the feats he performs. Martin Flanagan, in a discussion of *Desperado* supports this assertion that 'masculinity in the film is a site of spectacle' with Banderas being 'just as regularly fetishised' as his female co-star Salma Hayek.¹⁵⁴ It is arguably the critical success of Banderas' first performance as a Hispanic action hero in *Desperado* which led to him being cast in the role of Zorro, nonetheless, in the promotion of the film a clear effort was made to convince audiences that Banderas was a suitable successor in a long line of actors to play Zorro. As previously discussed, Banderas' Spanish nationality was used in the film's promotion to qualify his casting as Zorro, but Banderas was also presented as heir to the mantle of the action adventurer of classic Hollywood in the film's promotion. Indeed in the film's 'Production Notes' director Martin Campbell describes Banderas as 'a perfect Zorro' who shares Douglas Fairbanks' 'terrific sense of humour with the character, a real Joie d' vivre, we wanted that for our film.'¹⁵⁵ It was widely publicised that Banderas underwent intense sword-fighting training with the Olympic fencing team in Spain and received tuition from Bob Anderson, the legendary sword master who trained Errol Flynn. Banderas even made a public appearance on Canadian television in which he

¹⁵² Todd McCarthy in a review of *Assassins* for *Variety* published 2nd October 1995, accessed online at <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117904544.html?categoryid=31&cs=1&p=0> (accessed 27/04/10)

¹⁵³ Mick La Salle in a review of *Desperado* for *The San Francisco Chronicle* published August 1995, accessed online at: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/1995/08/25/DD21313.DTL#ixzz0f3OQJkA> (accessed 27/04/10)

¹⁵⁴ Martin Flanagan, "Process of Assimilation: Rodriguez and Banderas, from El Mariachi to *Desperado* in " *Ixquic: Revista Hispanica Internacional de Analisis y Creacion*, 3: (December 2001) pp. 41-59, p.55

¹⁵⁵ Extract taken from the promotional production notes for *The Mask of Zorro*, accessed at the BFI library

demonstrated his fighting skills in a duel with his interviewer. In the *Zorro Unmasked* behind-the-scenes documentary, Anderson praises Banderas' sword-fighting skills noting his 'fantastic physical ability' akin to Douglas Fairbanks but with a 'modern approach to it'. This suggests a need to promote Banderas as a worthy successor to his Anglo Zorro predecessors in order to encourage audiences to accept the Hispanic actor as suitable casting.¹⁵⁶

By the time *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* was released five years later, there was no longer a need to reinforce Banderas' suitability to perform the role of Hispanic action hero. Through the cultural impact of his performance as Zorro and *Desperado*'s subsequent resurgence in the home viewing market, he was now US cinema's embodiment of the Hispanic action hero. However, the focus on the masquerade of the Hispanic action hero, and in this case a profound emphasis on the self-conscious theatricality of performance, is arguably greater in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* than it ever was in *The Mask of Zorro*. In *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, as in the series' two previous films, the Hispanic action hero is also a Mariachi, Mexican culture's most famous masculine musical performer, and the character, who is only ever referred to by his role as a Mariachi, combines gunslinger and performer in one entity, reflected in the artwork for the series' DVD box-set which features guitar and gun intertwined. C.L.B. Taylor, commenting on the first film of the trilogy, *El Mariachi* (1992), traces the roots of the Mariachi character to the corrido (a traditional ballad, originating from the Tex-Mex borderlands praising Mexican heroic outlaws, often ones that fought against Anglos) which elevated those musicians who performed them, imbuing them with the heroic, nationalistic machismo of those they sung about, and creating 'an overlap between the role of the musician and the role of the warrior'.¹⁵⁷ In the opening scene of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, the character's dual roles as musician and action hero are more explicitly combined than they were in either of the film's predecessors. What is replicated from *Desperado*, however, is the way in which the character is mythologised through the retelling of his performances as action hero. Indeed the film begins with a retelling of an incident involving El Mariachi, in which the *misé-en-scène* deliberately draws attention to the macho actions of this scene as a performance. The telling of this tale, by Rodriguez regular Cheech Marin, even features a joke about Steve Buscemi's mythical characterisation of El Mariachi in *Desperado*; Marin's unnamed character says 'They used to say he was the biggest Mexican they had ever seen. (LAUGHS) It was total bullshit, he was 5'9, 5'10 tops, which is no record but bigger

¹⁵⁶ The 'Zorro Unmasked' documentary is featured on the UK DVD release of *The Mask of Zorro*

¹⁵⁷ C.L.B. Taylor, 'Identity is an optical illusion: film and the construction of Chicano identity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2001) p.183

than most of us.’ The scene recounts El Mariachi’s battle with General Marquez who holds a grudge against him. It begins in a dimly lit, shack-like bar in which El Mariachi sits, drumming his fingers on a table lit by a single candle. Marquez steps forward into the bar, pushes back his jacket and reaches for his gun, the scene then cuts to El Mariachi who in response snuffs out the candle and throws the table to the floor, the rest of the bar looks on like an audience watching a play. The film cuts back to Marquez and we see the bar move back out of the way, as if it is on wheels as part of a stage set. We then cut to a close up of El Mariachi’s cowboy boots as they flick open his guitar case. ‘A guitar?’ asks Agent Sands, ‘Believe me, he really knew how to play it too’ responds Marin’s one eyed bandit. El Mariachi plugs in the guitar, and we then cut to puzzled reaction shots of the customers, bartender and Marquez. El Mariachi flicks back his hair and we then see his hands in close up strumming the guitar, the reaction shot of the bar shows the crowd laughing at him, he continues to play, building a crescendo as sparks start to fly from the neck of the guitar, he then cocks back the guitar as if it is a gun, firing a shot which causes a large, bright white explosion and smoke before Marquez and several others fly through the air. The bandit admits that ‘The stories are well travelled; they may have picked up some embellishments along the way.’ The scene then erupts into spectacular action, an all-out fight in which men fly through the air and El Mariachi performs artful action feats until he runs out of ammunition, before being cornered by a large group of men only for Salma Hayek as his wife to come to his rescue.



Figure 2.9: The explosion shot from El Mariachi’s guitar/gun

There is a sense that the stagey mise-en-scène and the hyperbolic performance style in this opening sequence are part of a celebration of theatricality in the representation of the

Hispanic action hero, and the film encourages the audience to revel in the spectacular artifice of El Mariachi's machismo, created through acrobatics and ostentatious use of special effects. Although the audience sees El Mariachi perform many heroic feats first hand in the course of the narrative, this scene provides a cinematic equivalent for the corrido ballad, unmasking the mythologisation of the hero which is created in the retelling of his heroic actions.

2.7 *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and Pastiche

The use of pastiche in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* is evident from the beginning; indeed, the reference in title to Sergio Leone's *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), makes the film's major source of pastiche explicit before the opening credits even roll. Leone's Spaghetti Westerns resonate throughout the trilogy, so much so that the films have been dubbed tortilla or taco Westerns in recognition of their debt to the spaghettiis. At first assessment the choice to rely so heavily on a pastiche of Leone seems counter-intuitive. Why, if Rodriguez is trying to bring together dual traditions of minority Mexican masculine identity and mainstream US masculine identity, would he choose to further complicate things by the decision to recreate Italian Spaghetti Westerns? This decision adds Italian masculinity to the mix of US and Mexican masculine traditions referenced, not to mention the Spanish masculinity introduced by Banderas, and the further eastern cultural borrowings in the film's kung fu-influenced spectacular action sequences. In the process of a more detailed deconstruction of the film's masculine images however, Rodriguez's choice to pastiche not Hollywood Westerns, but rather their most famous pastiches, Leone's Spaghetti Westerns, begins to make considerably more sense. This is because of the change of the type of masculinity presented in the Spaghetti Westerns which occurs when they are translated from Hollywood by Italians. Christopher Frayling writes that Spaghetti Westerns are 'distinguished [... from their Hollywood counterparts] by obsession with style, ritual or external gesture – with Latin machismo rather than American toughness.'¹⁵⁸ The heroes in Leone's Spaghetti Westerns are also free from the North American frontier ideology which is embodied in the Hollywood Western hero. Richard Dyer writes that in Spaghetti Westerns 'instead of the hero representing the values of the cowboy and the West, he is valued for how he looks, how he rides, and how he shoots.'¹⁵⁹ As the Spaghetti Western engages its audience through the masculine prowess of the hero and not his Western ideology, it is a cultural form that

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998) p.61

¹⁵⁹ Richard Dyer, 'Pastiche, genre, history,' in *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007) pp. 92-136 p.106

is considerably more open to transnational translation than traditional Hollywood Westerns. The way in which Spaghetti Westerns substitute 'Latin machismo' for 'American toughness' allows Rodriguez to easily incorporate Mexican machismo into the Western genre, as the culture of masculinity on which they draw is much closer to that which Rodriguez wishes to represent. The actions of the Spaghetti hero are highly ritualised and symbolic. He is not a realistic man but rather a clearly recognisable symbol of mythologized. Through appropriating the aesthetic characterisation of the Spaghetti Western, Rodriguez is able to transform the El Mariachi in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* from a man into a symbol of Mexican national identity in American culture from the very beginning of the film.

The hybridisation of a Mariachi and a Spaghetti Western hero forms the most significant source of pastiche in the creation of El Mariachi as a Hispanic action hero. His dress combines elements of both archetypes and his performance style has all the Hispanic flair that Banderas previously described in my introductory quote, while his body is segmented by the camera's focus, a technique often employed in the depiction of Spaghetti gunslingers. However, they are not the only symbols of masculine culture to be pastiched in the film. Most notable in the context of this chapter is the way in which *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* makes direct reference to the confessional scene in *The Mask of Zorro*. In this scene El Mariachi walks the steps of a grand, catholic cathedral; the shot then reverses to show him walking down the aisle of the cathedral and he enters the confessional. As in the scene in *The Mask of Zorro* we see the hero's face is partially masked by the partition inside the confessional, but in this scene he is the one who has come to confess. There is then a close up on the hero's face in which he closes his eyes, as if in contemplation, and begins to pray in Spanish. The confessional opens and El Mariachi opens his eyes to see Agent Sands (Johnny Depp) in an outlandish priestly disguise - the fake beard is particularly ridiculous - who gives the Mariachi information regarding a role he must play in a military coup, which promises to provide him redemption and freedom. Sands exits the confessional and we hear the loading of guns; El Mariachi then dives to the floor out of the confessional as machine gun bullets rain into its doors. The scene erupts into a massive gunfight, the hero making the sign of the cross across his chest and struggling to avoid an old woman praying as he sends his adversaries crashing into pews. This scene is an enjoyable nod to Banderas' role as Zorro, emphasising his calibre as an action star, but it also serves to highlight the difference between the characterisation of the two Hispanic action heroes in these scenes. The hero in this confessional scene is portrayed as a humble and respectful paragon of masculinity, not a tempestuous bandit as Zorro is portrayed in the sequence it pastiches. Indeed, despite his

propensity for violence and Banderas' undeniable sex appeal, the film does not engage with the Latin Lover or Bandido types in the representation of El Mariachi. However it must be noted that El Mariachi was significantly more sexualised in *Desperado*, and was cast in the mould of the Latin Lover in a number of significant scenes in that text. This could be attributed to the development of Banderas' star persona in the intervening years, and his increasing move away from heavily sexualised, romantic roles that hark back to his Spanish career. to action-based roles and those which cast him in a more mature, fatherly role in family friendly films.

2.8 Barillo and the White Bandido

Having noted that El Mariachi is not depicted in line with Hollywood Hispanic stereotypes in this film, it is also worth considering the counterpoint of the film's major villain Barillo who, in contrast to the representation of the hero, is presented as the consummate contemporary bandido. Indeed, in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* Rodriguez presents the viewer with yet another cruel, violent and sadistic drug lord as the film's villain. However, in this case the film's Mexican villain is played by an Anglo-American Hollywood star, Willem Dafoe, and this fundamentally changes the significance of a familiar archetype in traditions of Hispanic male representation. Deborah Shaw, while noting that Rodriguez's decision to cast an actor without Mexican heritage to play Barillo is in line with a long-standing Hollywood tradition, argues that the casting of Dafoe in the role is simply a cynical bid to attract an Anglo-American audience to the film. She writes, in an essay on *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* that Dafoe's marked American accent while speaking Spanish identifies the film as 'seeking to appeal to a mainstream U.S. audience who will recognize Dafoe, but are unlikely to notice the problems with his Spanish pronunciation.'¹⁶⁰ While Shaw has a valid point here, it is my argument that the casting of Dafoe as Barillo could also be read as yet another example of the film's presentation of nationality and national conceptions of masculinity as a performance. Barillo is very easily identified by a Western viewer as a villain in the Mexican greaser, bandido mode but the key difference in this case is the way in which we are repeatedly reminded that this type lacks authenticity, in the mode of Brecht's alienation effect by both the casting and performance of Dafoe.¹⁶¹ We recognise Dafoe's deliberately laboured accent as an American attempting Spanish; we know that under the dark make-up his skin is pale, the orange tone of the face-paint accentuating the incongruity of the Anglo actor's pale blue eyes. His

¹⁶⁰ Deborah Shaw, 'Robert Rodriguez's Mexicans in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003)' in *Reconstruction* 7.3 (2007) accessed online: <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/073/shaw.shtml> [accessed 16/06/07]

¹⁶¹ Bertolt Brecht in John Willett, 'A short organum for the theatre' in *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1978) pp. 179-205, p.192

performance style is mannered and overly gesticular, and the scenes in which Dafoe appears as Barillo are punctuated by frequent close-ups of his face and hands, highlighting every detail of this masquerade. The marked artificiality of his appearance is emphasised by the way in which his face is removed later on in the film like a mask, in a pastiche of John Woo's *Face/Off* (1997), as Barillo aims to elude his enemies and the legal authorities by radically altering his appearance. In short, we are encouraged to recognise Dafoe as an Anglo playing a Mexican, a type of performance which is outdated in terms of the practices of twenty-first century Hollywood, if not necessarily anachronistic in the context of the film's location of setting in an imagined historical Mexico composed largely of nostalgic images of the filmic past. In this case there is an even more explicit recognition of Barillo's drug lord as an image of Mexican masculinity which exists purely as a set of external signifiers, but also a sense that this is the image of the villain that is produced by the effect of an Anglo playing a Mexican. In short, Barillo in his first incarnation is not authentic, but rather an Anglo stereotype of Mexican masculinity. This could be interpreted as reinforcing this negative image of Mexican masculinity as Shaw suggests, but I argue that the casting of Dafoe can be also be viewed as an attempt to undermine the assumption that this image is authentic, subversively exposing it as a performance of a Hollywood national gender type.



Figure 2.10: Willem Dafoe as Barillo

2.9 El Mariachi and Mexican Nationalism

If Barillo is employed as a representation of negative Hollywood stereotyping of Mexican machismo, then El Mariachi acts metonymically for nationalistic Mexican masculinity. Indeed, the opening of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* demonstrates that this is a film not only about his hero,

but also his country. In fact it goes further than this, directly aligning the strength and beauty of the Mexican nation state with that of the hero; the wearing of the Mexican flag reinforces the fact that his body is metonymic for the Mexican nation. The film begins with El Mariachi being given a guitar that has been handmade especially for him by a guitar craftsman in his village, a sign that he is no longer an outsider but a hero to the citizens of his village. He walks away with his guitar in hand, strumming as he walks across the village square, the camera then reverses to show a wide angle shot from behind El Mariachi who is located to the right of the screen. In front of him we see a grand building towering over the village square as children play and men go about their business around him. The music builds to a crescendo of brass instruments over El Mariachi's guitar playing and the title *Once Upon a Time in MEXICO* appears beside him, his iconic scorpion symbol in the 'O' of Mexico. The camera continues to shoot from behind El Mariachi as he walks into the building's courtyard, the luscious green of its grass contrasting with its red and white walls in the Mexican national colours, the gravestones in it foreshadowing the narrative's culmination on the 'Day of the Dead'. The camera then follows the hero up a winding open staircase, his shadow cast dramatically on the walls, before cutting to a high angle shot surveying the expanse of the city beyond the building. When we rejoin El Mariachi he is perched on the rooftop, looking out over the landscape as if he is addressing all of Mexico with his music. Then from the rooftop we see Cucuy (Danny Trejo) arrive with his gang and when the man who made El Mariachi's guitar refuses to tell him the hero's location Cucuy has him shot.¹⁶² El Mariachi gives himself up in order to save his village from a similar fate; he is driven off on the back of the truck, the guitar in his lap as five men point their guns at his head. This scene establishes El Mariachi as a man of the people and master of the grand Mexican landscape that surrounds him and represents another inter-text with Zorro in that the hero's surveying of the land which he protects from the rooftops is reminiscent of Zorro's interruption of the public execution at the beginning of *The Mask of Zorro*.

¹⁶² El Cucuy in Latin American cultures is an ill-defined monster of popular folklore that inspires irrational fear, a Latin equivalent of the bogeyman.



Figure 2.11: El Mariachi surveys the grand Mexican landscape of which he is King

When Peter Bradshaw wrote in a review of the film, for *The Guardian*, that the character's self-conscious use of mobile phones is the only major indication that the events of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* are occurring in the twenty-first century, he fails to consider the extent to which the film's setting in a glorious, imagined alternate Mexican reality underpins its meaning.¹⁶³ *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* is deeply nostalgic for an idealised Mexican past of revolutions and macho heroes, more so than any of its predecessors. Indeed the final part of the *El Mariachi* trilogy can be interpreted as evidence that Rodriguez's greater assimilation in the Hollywood film industry provoked in him an increased sense of diasporic nostalgia for a fantasy of a glorious, imagined Mexican past. Sergio de la Mora writes, in *Cinemachismo*, that after the 1910 Mexican revolution the new government created and aggressively promoted a male-centred, modern national project to present Mexico as a quintessentially macho nation through literature, sports and popular music.¹⁶⁴



Figure 2.12: El Mariachi as a Mexican national hero

¹⁶³ Peter Bradshaw in a review of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* for *The Guardian*, Friday 26th September 2003 http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,,1049531,00.html last accessed 25/06/08

¹⁶⁴ Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) p.2

In *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* Rodriguez presents a nostalgic revival of the post-revolutionary equation of masculine virility with national strength. The character of El Mariachi is used to reaffirm the macho as the ultimate symbol of Mexican nationalism. While in the film's predecessors El Mariachi was defined simply as a Mexican action hero, in the final part of the trilogy he is explicitly identified as a hero for the people of the Mexican nation, and his macho prowess as a fighter is what preserves the future of Mexican democracy. This is best encapsulated in the film's conclusion, in which El Mariachi saves the Mexican President from certain death, with the support of two fellow mariachis played by Latin music star Enrique Inglesias and Marco Leonardi, star of the hugely successful Mexican film *Como agua para chocolate/Like Water for Chocolate* (1992).¹⁶⁵ When the President is about to be killed - betrayed by his closest aide, in league with Agent Sands - the band of mariachis storm the grand parliamentary building to rescue him. They quickly dispense with the attacking soldiers who are sent flying across the floor or into the air, falling from the parliamentary building's large staircase and high balcony in slow motion. El Mariachi then approaches the President, leads him down the staircase and says, 'It feels like you need some protection, sir' and hands the President a large automatic rifle. His fellow mariachis then approach and the President asks, 'Who are you guys?' El Mariachi replies, 'We are sons of Mexico, sir' and the three Mariachis shoot an approaching soldier in unison.

El Mariachi is presented as the epitome of Mexican nationalistic machismo not only through his patriotic actions, but through a change in the visual iconography with which he is associated. As previously stated, El Mariachi is a character whose masculinity and nationality is defined by external signifiers in the mode of the Spaghetti Western. In *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* the hero's masculinity becomes refigured in the light of a new symbol, the Mexican national flag. He is no longer a transnational hero, nor a broadly Hispanic hero; he is a specifically Mexican hero. In *El Mariachi* and *Desperado* the viewer barely catches a glimpse of a Mexican flag, indeed the only memorable appearance of the Mexican national colours is noted by C.L.B Taylor in the dream sequences in *El Mariachi*, outside the reality in which the narrative takes place.¹⁶⁶ In *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* the national flag appears frequently, flying high in the air,

¹⁶⁵ *Como agua para chocolate/Like Water for Chocolate*. Alfonso Arau. Arau Films Internacional. Mexico. 1992; Casting Leonardi and Inglesias as the supporting mariachis, enhances the image of the mariachi as a great romantic, musical figure as Inglesias is most famous for his popular love songs, including the aptly titled 'Hero', and Leonardi for his romantic role in the hugely popular *Like Water for Chocolate*.

¹⁶⁶ C.L.B. Taylor notes that the small boy in the mariachi's dream sequences carries a ball that features the colours of the Mexican flag and later stands in front of a mural featuring the Mexican national colours in

emblazoned across the walls behind the president and the Mexican national colours of red, white and green are echoed in the mise-en-scène. When the film's climactic revolutionary battle takes place however, the Mexican flag becomes a symbol worn by El Mariachi, the strength of his machismo cloaked in the Mexican national flag. The Mexican colours appear behind El Mariachi when he defeats General Marquez, the sash of the Mexican flag that was once worn by the President in his hand as he shoots the legs out from under him. The audience has previously been informed that El Mariachi has a personal vendetta against Marquez, the man who killed his wife and daughter, but in their final confrontation El Mariachi's defeat of Marquez goes beyond personal revenge. This is made clear symbolically through the use of flags and is confirmed by El Mariachi's proclamation that he fights 'for you (Carolina), for our daughter, for Mexico.' The association between the moral and physical strength of El Mariachi and that of his country is so central to the meaning of the film that it is reiterated in the film's resonant final shot, in which El Mariachi walks alone into the distance, the sash of the Mexican flag across his chest which he kisses in his last act before the credits roll on the trilogy. Whereas its predecessors read like Westerns transposed into a Mexican context, the third chapter of the trilogy is unmistakably a film in which the action hero becomes a symbol of Mexican national identity.

The final scene of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* also demonstrates the way in which Banderas' Hispanic identity has been increasingly altered by Hollywood. Perriam writes in an analysis of Banderas' transnational star persona, that Banderas is 'transmuted into generalized Latino in a typical manoeuvre of commodification' while Flanagan rightly surmises that Banderas, for Hollywood, 'represents a broad signifier of exotic otherness' having played a range of Latino and even French (*An Interview with the Vampire*) and Arabian (*The 13th Warrior* [1999]) characters.¹⁶⁷ Banderas' Spanishness, after more than ten years in Hollywood, had become translated into a more broadly Hispanic racial typology as Perriam described; he is no longer simply a Spanish star but arguably the most recognisable symbol of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood. His body no longer bore the unmistakable marks of Spanishness and had become more and more distanced from his Spanish filmography; the characterisation of both his nationality and masculinity had become fluid, shaped and moulded by each individual context of

'Identity is an optical illusion: film and the construction of Chicano identity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2001) p.185

¹⁶⁷ Chris Perriam, 'Two transnational Spanish Stars: Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz' in *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, Vol.2, No. 1, 2005 pp.29-46 p.36; ¹⁶⁷ Martin Flanagan, "Process of Assimilation: Rodriguez and Banderas, from El Mariachi to Desperado in "Ixquic: Revista Hispanica Internacional de Analisis y Creacion, 3: (December 2001) pp.41-59, p.55

performance. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden cite Banderas as a pertinent example of the force of Americanisation of transnational stars for whom 'national identity has been jettisoned as a mark of cultural specificity which goes far beyond what might be necessary for the demands of a particular role.'¹⁶⁸ The Hollywood process of eroding Banderas' national specificity in the case of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* allows Rodriguez to appropriate Banderas as a symbol of Mexican masculine identity; this in combination with the increase in the visibility of Mexican-American culture caused by a substantial growth in the US Hispanic population meant that the time was right for El Mariachi to emerge as a fully fledged symbol of Mexican machismo for Americans.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has not only demonstrated that the introduction of the Hispanic action hero has reconfigured Hollywood's image of Hispanic machismo between the years 1998 and 2008, but has also contrasted two very different images of the Hispanic action hero and considered their constructions and the significance of their potential meanings. In considering these images of Hispanic masculinity, what is most interesting is the way in which both manage to be overwhelmingly marked by nostalgia and longstanding stereotypes and archetypes of Hispanic masculinity, while being revelatory in the way in which they recast Hispanic machismo in the role of the action hero.

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden in the introduction to *Transnational Cinema: a film reader* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.2

3. Hispanic Masculinity in the Family Film

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers how the construction of the specifically Hispanic action hero, arguably the most successful facet of Antonio Banderas' star persona and, by 2001, an image that had become heavily assimilated into popular culture, has subsequently been refigured in the contemporary family film. Building on my discussion of the Hispanic action hero in the first case study chapter of this dissertation, I now turn my attention to considering how this newly established cinematic type changes when it is transposed into a new generic context, through a textual analysis of the presentation of the Cortez family of spies in Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids* (2001), and the re-embodiment of the Hispanic adventurer in Puss in Boots in Dreamworks' *Shrek 2* (2004).¹⁶⁹ Underlining the focus of this chapter is a consideration of the extent to which the Hispanic action hero is necessarily altered in order to allow him to become, if not a part of the family in the eyes of US audiences, at least appealing to a family audience. In terms of the wider context of this thesis, I also explore how this could potentially transform existing conceptions of Hispanic masculinity in the eyes of the popular audience.

3.2 What is a 'Family Film'?

The family film is defined here as a mode of filmmaking which in its images, ideology, narrative and marketing is designed to appeal to 'all the family'. The family film offers us spectacles and storylines which aim to captivate adults and children alike, by presenting their audience with imaginative and often deeply nostalgic narratives and iconography to appeal to the child in everyone. Many contemporary incarnations of these films also adopt some form of dual address, incorporating pop-culture parody for adults into traditionally child orientated narratives. Family films are also often concerned with the role of the family or quasi-familial relationships in contemporary society, performing the cultural work of affirming the strength of community and family in a time when these institutions are often seen as being threatened. The family film has existed, under various guises, in US cinema since the Classical Hollywood era, but it was the release of *Toy Story* (1995) which is arguably most significant in refiguring ideas of the family film in recent times; its huge commercial and critical success granting the form increased prestige and setting a high standard for technical innovation and imaginative storytelling in the family film. It is in this historical, generic context which my case studies were produced and received.

¹⁶⁹ A full plot summary of each of these films can be found in the appendices of this thesis

The term family film in itself is an indicator of why this genre is so culturally important and commercially successful. Firstly, it is reflective of the way in which these films aim to attract the widest social strata of audiences. Family films differ from the long-standing Hollywood children's film in the way in which they aim to appeal to 'all the family', offering visual and narrative pleasures that will appeal to adults and teenagers as well as young children. Robert C. Allen asserts that the position of the family film to the concept of the 'family' in its title can be almost entirely attributed to its intended audience as it exists across genres and forms including comedy, fantasy, action and animation, and is not exclusively about the family. He writes that the term family film has become a 'discursive marker for a set of narrative, representational and institutional practices designed to maximise the marketability of and profitability across theatrical, video, licensing and merchandising markets by means of what we might call cross-generational appeal.'¹⁷⁰

Allen's definition of the genre above deftly encapsulates the industrial function of the family film. The necessary 'marketability' of this genre is important to my discussion of the way in which the identity of Hispanic masculinity previously only seen as marketable as a sexualised, exoticised site of spectacle, and thus historically unmarketable for a family audience, is necessarily refigured in the generic context of the family film. However, in terms of the cultural work these films enact on their audiences and the way in which they function visually and narratively to appeal to different social demographics, this definition of the family film is insufficient to support my analysis of it in this thesis. However, Allen's definition of the family film is useful in that it raises further questions as to what specific 'narrative, representational and institutional practices' characterise this mode of filmmaking in short and exactly how it cinematically appeals to such a wide spectrum of film viewers. At a later point in his argument, Allen himself lists the potential attractions of the family film for its multi-generational audience, including visual gags, special effects, puns, intricate noise tracks, popular music soundtracks, spectacular visual effects, animated representations and allusion to other media.¹⁷¹

It is hard to disagree with Allen in his assertion that the family film offers its viewers of all ages spectacular cinematic attractions. In fact Allen's characterisation of the pleasures offered by family films, as a result of the rise in popularity of CGI animated filmmaking, high definition

¹⁷⁰ Robert C. Allen, 'Home Alone Together: Hollywood and the "family film"' in ed. Melvyn Stokes, *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: cultural identity and the movies* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), pp.109- 131, p.114

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 127

television and video formats, IMAX and 3D cinema screens, was arguably truer by the end of my chosen period than when Allen's essay was published in 1999, and CGI family films are now more frequently successful than their live-action counterparts. This characterisation of the family film as a form of filmmaking whose meanings and pleasures are based more heavily in spectacle than narrative highlights something it shares with the action adventure genre. Expanding upon this identification of the similarities between these two genres, in terms of their employment of visual and audio spectacles and effects, is integral to my examination of the relocation of the Hispanic action hero into the family film. Indeed, many of the key features of the family film that Allen identifies are applicable to *Shrek 2* and *Spy Kids*, particularly in terms of their visual and audio effects and allusions to other media. Perhaps more importantly in terms of the aims of this chapter, both films employ these generic features of the family film to refigure the image of the Hispanic action hero.

I also expand on Allen's characterisation of the family film's generic features by giving greater critical attention to the way in which these films employ allusions to other media in their representational strategies. When considering how Hispanic masculinity is represented in the family film, I discuss the impact of intertextual references to popular culture forms, texts or personalities not in the way that Allen seems to view them, as just another in a long line of cinematic attractions cynically employed to increase the films' audiences, but as an integral part of the way in which these films create their representational images. As previously stated in the introduction to this chapter, I consider here the way in which both *Spy Kids* and *Shrek 2* make reference to the Hispanic action hero type and Banderas' star persona to create their images of Hispanic masculinity. In addition to this, however, I also consider the way in which these films employ references to other, arguably more family friendly, media in order to facilitate the assimilation of Hispanic masculinity in the family film. Peter Kramer writes that family films aim to appeal to children and their parents by 'evoking entertainment forms associated with childhood (such as fairy-tales, ghost-stories, movie serials, comic books, rollercoaster rides and other amusement park attractions); and by being released in the run up to, or during the summer and Christmas holidays.'¹⁷² As such, family films operate in a manner of dual address in their narrative and characterisation, alluding to childhood forms of entertainment that are traditionally aimed at children, but will generate a sense of nostalgia for the adults in the audience. As in the previous

¹⁷² Peter Kramer, 'Disney and Family Entertainment' in Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond eds., *Contemporary American Cinema*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), pp.265- 279 p. 271

chapter when I discussed how the nostalgic image of the adventure hero was employed to facilitate the relocation of Hispanic machismo in mainstream Hollywood in the action-adventure film, in this chapter I now discuss the extent to which nostalgic references to cultural forms associated with childhood can allow for a similar incorporation of Hispanic masculinity in the family film. More recent family films have arguably taken this system of dual address in their illusionary references a stage further, by combining traditional fairytale characters or archetypes familiar to children with those parodied from more adult cultural forms; the *Shrek* films are perhaps the most successful example of this. Hence I also consider the dual address of allusions to other media which potentially exists in my case studies' representations of Hispanic masculinity, being mindful that these images could have a different effect on child and adult viewers.

This system of dual address does not just exist in the allusions to other cultural forms that are employed to create the films' characters; it is also arguably present in the way in which family films typically attempt to involve different members of their audience in their narratives. Before this point my discussion of the family film has not sufficiently characterised the significant role of narrative in this mode of filmmaking. As my intention is to argue that the family film offers more than just spectacular pleasures to a family audience, and that it performs important cultural work in contemporary society, I now turn my attention to the greater implications of 'Family' in the family film in terms of narrative of the films discussed. Indeed, while family films are, in part, arguably called this because they aim to appeal to all sectors of the family unit, in the context of this thesis family films are further defined as films that serve to reinforce the importance of family units in a contemporary society in which family units are increasingly becoming more diverse and disparate, and bring families together throughout the course of the narrative. Yvonne Tasker notes that family films address adults and children differently in order to encourage both sectors of the audience to become involved in the narrative, expressing in its 'staging of familial and other bonds of loyalty [... an] insistent and intense opposition between the perils and pleasures of freedom [...] on one hand and responsibility [...] on the other.'¹⁷³ Tasker argues that most successful examples of this effect in a family film occur in *Spy Kids*, with the film suggesting in its staging a desire on the part of Carmen and Juni for their parents to be cooler than they seem to be, but also the yearning of Gregorio and Ingrid for the thrills and excitement of their former lives as spies. As such these films articulate a tension between the value of family and the excitement

¹⁷³ Yvonne Tasker, 'The Family in Action' in *Action and Adventure Cinema* ed. Yvonne Tasker (Oxon: Routledge, 2004) pp.252-266 p 254

of action, a tension which must then be reconciled in the film's narrative. In the framework of this case study I consider the way in which the incorporation of the Hispanic action hero in the family film plays into this existing narrative pattern of tension and eventual resolution of family versus action established in the genre. The implications for Banderas' Gregorio leaving behind Hispanic machismo in favour of a role as a sensitive, responsible father in a post-feminist family, will also be explored as part of a tradition of aging action heroes escaping obsolescence by recasting themselves as fathers and paternalistic characters.¹⁷⁴

It is the way in which these films resolve the conflict of family versus action in their narrative which is key to the way in which they can refigure Hispanic masculinity in mainstream US cinema. Peter Kramer argues that family films transmit the moral message that everyone in the family unit can take part in the action and become a hero; they also commonly end with a scene of resolution and togetherness in which the strength of the family, or in some instances quasi-family unit, is reaffirmed. In doing so these films also serve to strengthen the bonds between family members, but they also incorporate these families into a wider community, both on the screen and in the auditorium.¹⁷⁵ It is this creation of community and a sense of social togetherness, fostered by participating in heroic action feats as a family or quasi-family unit, which offers the opportunity to recuperate minority identities, such as Hispanic masculinity, and offer them a positive and integral function in the narrative. It is also interesting to consider the potential effect of this scene on its audience, which Tasker puts forward in the quotation on the preceding page, in the light of minority representation in the family film. In my analysis of both my case studies, I contemplate whether these scenes in which the character in the film come together as a group, encourage the audience to accept Hispanic masculinity as part of their wider community rather than as a minority group, distanced from mainstream US society.

The cultural work of the family film then is, at its core, to reaffirm the importance of family and community in contemporary society and to encourage the individual to form part of the whole. It is also important to note, in the context of this thesis, that the central individual who must find their place in these films is almost always male. That is not to say that girls and women

¹⁷⁴ Hamad has explored this idea in relation to aging Hollywood action stars such as Bruce Willis who is five years older than Banderas, who was still able to be cast as an action adventure hero in films made after *Spy Kids*, in *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film* p. 76

¹⁷⁵ Peter Kramer, 'Would you take your child to see this film: The cultural and social work of the family-adventure movie' in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* ed. by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998) pp.300-301

are not portrayed as part of the action, but rather that the central concerns of these films, like their typical protagonists, are almost always male, as their generic origins in the action-adventure genre arguably dictate. Peter Kramer notes that family films commonly tell the story of 'the spectacular, often fantastic adventures of young or youthful, male protagonists and about their familial or quasi-familial relationships, especially with fathers or father substitutes.'¹⁷⁶ In the main body of this chapter I examine the representation of the relationship between father and son in *Spy Kids*, and the way in which this is used to contrast different images of Hispanic masculinity. In *Shrek 2* the involvement of the Hispanic male character Puss in Boots is not directly involved in the familial unit portrayed in the film in the way that the male members of the Cortez family are. However, in the course of the film's narrative, Puss in Boots is transformed from his initial role as an assassin hired to kill Shrek by the ogre's father-in-law, into an integral part of a group of friends who fight to regain Shrek's place in the family unit. The quest itself is about the bringing together of outsiders into the community; the unified trio that represent black (Donkey), white (Shrek) and Hispanic (Puss in Boots) masculinity who eventually claim a place in the community of 'Far Far Away', a land which can be seen as representing Hollywood.

Now that I have outlined my conception of the family film as a mode of filmmaking in my chosen time period, and briefly introduced the way in which these features have the potential to facilitate a refiguration of Hispanic masculinity in mainstream Hollywood cinema, I now continue to examine my two case studies in detail. I examine my case studies in chronological order in the structure of this chapter because the re-characterisation of Antonio Banderas as a family film star, which first occurs in *Spy Kids*, arguably informs the character of Puss in Boots four years later. This can be identified both in terms of the allusions to Banderas' previous action roles that are inscribed onto the CGI body of Puss in Boots, and in relation to the way in which the promotion for *Shrek 2* made reference to Banderas' performance in *Spy Kids* to characterise him as a family film star.

3.3 Robert Rodriguez reborn as a Hispanic family man

[On the set of *Spy Kids*] for the young actors, the production felt like a summer camp. [Daryl] Sabara [Juni Cortez] was just a few years older than Rodriguez and Avellán's oldest son Rocket. Along with Rocket's brothers Racer and Rebel (born in 1999), the Rodriguez children and the couple's extended family were a constant presence on the set. Avellán,

¹⁷⁶ Peter Kramer, 'Disney and Family Entertainment' in Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond eds. *Contemporary American Cinema*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), pp.265- 279 p.271

who was “Miss Elizabeth” to the younger actors, worked hard to create a family-friendly environment, hiring a mariachi band for special occasion lunches and instituting “Silly String Day” and sanctioning cake fights. Sabara and [Alexa] Vega [Carmen Cortez] would hang out in the director’s trailer, where Rodriguez would give them tips for making their own short films. Observes [Carla]Gugino [Ingrid Cortez], “It felt like Robert was very at home making this movie. I think it connected the fantastical, comic book elements of things that he really loves with something that meant so much to him, which was his family.”¹⁷⁷

The quotation above is taken from a book by journalist Alison Macor in which she considers *Spy Kids* as a pivotal film in terms of its role in establishing Austin, Texas as a centre for filmmaking. Indeed, *Spy Kids* is notable as the production from which Rodriguez established Troublemaker Studios, his own independent film studio in Austin. However, what is most interesting to me, in the context of the thesis, is that which is nicely encapsulated in the quotation above; that Rodriguez chose to make his first independent production a Hispanic family film both in terms of its subject matter and in terms of the way in which it was produced. I have raised the idea above that *Spy Kids* was the first film to begin to re-contextualise Banderas as a family film star and I return to discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter. However, what is equally interesting is the way in which the promotion of *Spy Kids*, and its sequel, highlight that these films were intended as much to refigure Robert Rodriguez’s identity as Latino male director as they do to refigure screen images of Hispanic masculinity through the representations of the male members of the Cortez family, Juni, Gregorio and Machete Cortez. It reconstructs Rodriguez, Hollywood’s most successful Latino director, as a Latino family man, making films for a family audience. Indeed his transition follows, and in the case of *Spy Kids* it arguably directs, the progression of the Hispanic action hero archetype. At the point of making *Spy Kids* Rodriguez makes a notable transition from writing and directing films in which Hispanic males are represented as renegade anti-heroes who exist as individualistic figures, excluded from society, to writing and directing a film in which Hispanic males function as part of a family of spies who are united in action. Hence, I now discuss how the image of Rodriguez, as a Hispanic male auteur director in Hollywood, is reconstructed in reviews and promotional interviews for *Spy Kids*, considering Rodriguez as not only the primary architect of the images of Hispanic masculinity presented in his films, but also as a self-constructed image of Latino masculinity in his public persona as a filmmaker.

In the time period this thesis focuses on, Rodriguez made three films in the *Spy Kids* series; *Spy Kids* (2001), *Spy Kids 2: The Island of Lost Dreams* (2002) and *Spy Kids 3: Game Over*

¹⁷⁷ Alison Macor, *Chainsaws, Slackers and Spy Kids: 30 years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010) pp.282-283

(2003), with a fourth film, *Spy Kids 4: All The Time in the World*, released in 2011. The point I wish to make from this statement is that the idea of Robert Rodriguez as a filmmaker of family films at present, and indeed by the time my period of focus ends in 2008, has become widely accepted as part of his public persona. Indeed, Rodriguez has made more *Spy Kids* films than he has made films in the *El Mariachi* series for which he is arguably best known. Upon the release of *Spy Kids* in 2001, however, the fact that Rodriguez had written and directed this Hispanic family film was almost incomprehensible to reviewers who associated the director with hyper-violent films firmly aimed at an adult male audience. Nicholas Barber in *the Independent* expressed his disbelief that 'the Robert Rodriguez. The one who made *El Mariachi* for \$7,000. The one who brought us Antonio Banderas sharp-shooting in *Desperado* and George Clooney vampire slaying in *From Dusk till Dawn* could be responsible for *Spy Kids*.¹⁷⁸ Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* echoed Barber's sentiments noting his surprise that a 'funny and charming movie' with 'family values' could be written and directed by 'the man who brought us, for example, the yucky *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996), with its vampires playing guitars fashioned out of corpses and the bullet-riddled *Desperado*.'¹⁷⁹ Both these statements are based on a belief that Hispanic machismo, but in a character and a director, are incompatible with a family film and family values, something which will be discussed further in my analysis of my film case studies.

Both of these comments open reviews for *Spy Kids* by constructing the film as largely antithetical to Rodriguez's previous successes *El Mariachi*, *Desperado* and *From Dusk till Dawn*. Both critics emphasising the violent and grotesque nature of Rodriguez's previous films, as oppositional to *Spy Kids*; the similarities in comparison between the ways in which these films address Hispanic identity through fantastical action was not drawn by critics in their reception of *Spy Kids*. Indeed, *Spy Kids*, despite its dramatically different target audience, is actually exemplary of Rodriguez's tradition of creating ethnically enthused popular genre pastiches which subvert traditional ideas of Mexican and more broadly Hispanic identity. While *El Mariachi* and *Desperado* refigured the Mexican male as a heroic action hero and *From Dusk till Dawn*'s grotesque vampire horror took US fear of the Mexican borderlands as a site of debauchery to ridiculous extremes, the *Spy Kids* films are perhaps more revolutionary in the way in which they relocate the Hispanic identity in a genre that is not only Hollywood's most commercial, but also its most traditional in terms of its role in upholding 'family values'.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas Barber in a review of *Spy Kids* which appeared in *The Independent on Sunday* on 15th April 2001, p.3

¹⁷⁹ Peter Bradshaw, 'I spy with my little eye' in *The Guardian*, Section 2, 13th April 2001, p.13

The following quote from the production notes for *Spy Kids* perfectly encapsulates the way in which Rodriguez was presented in the promotion for the film, and to a certain extent its sequel a year later. The importance of family is the underlying theme of *Spy Kids*, and it is also the underlying theme of its promotion of the film as a family film in terms of both its morality and its marketing. More than this though, the film's promotion presents Rodriguez as the author of the film's pro-family message and relates this to his status as a Hispanic father as well as a Hispanic filmmaker.

The production notes proclaimed that:

Spy Kids could only have come from the imagination of a man who is not only used to making high-octane movies but also has another unique qualification for this mission – being a parent. Robert Rodriguez, best known for such stylish action films as *El Mariachi*, *Desperado*, *From Dusk till Dawn* and *The Faculty*, wanted to create for a first time a fun, adventurous film that he could take his own three kids to see. In fact, Rodriguez who has always loved making up fairytales and inventing wild gizmos has dreamed of making a high-flying adventure film for years. Early in his career he made an award-winning short film entitled *Bedhead* that starred his four youngest siblings in the comedic story of a psychic little girl – and since then he has longed to return to family filmmaking with a much bigger bang. With *Spy Kids*, Rodriguez is able to take the conventions and morals of a classic family film and hurtle it into the future with cutting-edge special-effects and unbridled invention.¹⁸⁰

This extract demonstrates how deftly the film promoters marketed Rodriguez as an exemplary director of a family film that could appeal to children and adults. This statement emphasises Rodriguez's macho action credentials to appeal to male adult viewers of his previous films, employing phrases such as 'high octane' and 'cutting-edge' and references to his previous direction of 'stylish action films'. It also highlights his auteur creativity, which arguably established him as a director with the low budget *El Mariachi*, using phrases such as 'unbridled invention' and references to the director's 'inventing' and 'imagination', addressing the concerns that Rodriguez could be 'selling out' creatively which were addressed by Barber in his review of the film. This statement is also indicative of the methods used by the film's promotion to re-characterise Rodriguez as a family filmmaker. This was done firstly by remarking on his status as a father and emphasising both the importance of family to the filmmaker and his role in the authorship of a film that has family as its primary theme. The extract above remarks upon Rodriguez's 'qualification as a father' and his desire to make a film he could take his own children to see; this message is continually re-inscribed throughout the production notes. For example these

¹⁸⁰ From the UK production notes for *Spy Kids*, part of the press pack used to promote the film

production notes explicitly state that ‘he [Rodriguez] wanted it [*Spy Kids*] to truly be a family adventure film about the power of family’ and link Rodriguez’s creativity as a filmmaker to his role as a father, remarking that ‘throughout the process Rodriguez was inspired by his own real-life role as a father to three young boys.’ This is taken a stage further in the conclusion of these production notes which feature a direct quotation from Rodriguez in which he says ‘making movies like *Spy Kids* is a lot of fun, but taking on the mission of keeping my family close and together is what I most want to spend my life doing’, suggesting that Rodriguez views himself primarily as a family man rather than a filmmaker. In other interviews Rodriguez has refigured his status as a filmmaker in relation to *Spy Kids* as a family action film, emphasising the fact that the Cortez’s are members of a family first and spies second, saying ‘I loved the idea that they weren’t spies who happened to be a family [...] they were a family who happened to be spies.’¹⁸¹ Hamad has argued that post feminist culture has challenged the dominance of a hegemonic masculinity in society, creating a plurality of masculine identities that can be unified in popular culture through the promotion of an ideal fatherhood and paternalistic masculinity.¹⁸² In the way in which Rodriguez is characterised as a father here, we can see an attempt to integrate an oppositional, marginal masculinity into an ideal cultural archetype of fatherly masculinity.

What is largely left out of this promotion of Rodriguez as a family man and action filmmaker of childlike creativity is his status as a Hispanic filmmaker which suggests that the film’s promoters felt that emphasising the director’s ethnicity could hinder the presentation of him as a family filmmaker. It is worth noting however, that Rodriguez’s Hispanic ethnicity is linked to his visual creativity in *Spy Kids*, and this is discussed further later in this chapter. I now turn my attention to the filmic text of *Spy Kids* itself, discussing the way in which the representations of Hispanic masculinity in *Spy Kids* can be seen as engaging with the re-characterisation of Rodriguez as a Hispanic male director further than occurs in the film’s promotion. Building on my analysis of the promotional material, I consider how *Spy Kids* re-represents the Hispanic action hero as a father; discussing the competing conceptions of Hispanic men in the film as macho and creative, ending with an analysis of the film’s ending in which the strength of the Hispanic family is rearticulated in the mode of the family film.

¹⁸¹ Robert Rodriguez in ‘*Spy Kids 2*’ in *Cinefantastique* v.34 issue 5 August 2002 pp.46-49 p46

¹⁸² Hamad, *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film* p.1

3.4 The Hispanic Action Hero Becomes a Post Feminist Father

The representation of spy-father Gregorio Cortez, who shares the same name as a historical Mexican-American outlaw, in *Spy Kids* directly engages with Antonio Banderas' established star persona as a Hispanic action hero, as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Indeed, in the film's flashbacks to Gregorio's previous life as a spy, he is depicted as a Hispanicised version of James Bond, part Latin Lover and part Hispanic action hero. Gregorio and Ingrid's previous life as spies is retold in the narrative as a children's bedtime story entitled 'The Spies Who Fell in Love'; the title of the story echoing the romantic and action combination that has previously been key in the Hispanic action hero image. In the bedtime story, Gregorio is depicted as one of the world's most dangerous spies, his image is concurrent with Banderas' star persona; he is suavely dressed in a full-length leather jacket, with slicked-back hair and a thin pencil moustache. Like Zorro, and as is later discussed Puss in Boots, Gregorio's romantic and noble nature are what prevents him from being vanquished by his enemy. The glamorous, red haired Anglo American Ingrid has been sent to kill Gregorio but could not as she found him 'charming and intelligent. But also unexpectedly honourable.' Action and romance are linked again in the depiction of Gregorio as a spy, their marriage described as a romantic mission; the marriage scene in itself is a spectacular articulation of romance and action as their lavish ceremony quickly turns into an high impact action scene which ends with the spies parachuting off a cliff top, with heart-shaped parachutes, and quite literally sailing off into the sunset.

Having re-articulated this image of the Hispanic action hero, Rodriguez then contrasts this image with that of Gregorio as a Hispanic father in the narrative present day. In his role in the family, Gregorio no longer dresses like a Hispanic James Bond, but is conservatively dressed in blazers, cardigans and wears glasses in many scenes; his dress is no longer outwardly macho or explicitly Hispanic concurring with Hamad's assertion that fatherhood can be used to deracialise ethnic male stars.¹⁸³ The previous Banderas role that this image is most reminiscent of is not El Mariachi or Zorro, but rather the shy, awkward, bespectacled Carlos, portrayed by a young Banderas in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios/ Women on the Verge of Nervous Breakdown* (1988), before his star persona became all but synonymous with Hispanic machismo. He is now a reserved father-figure with little trace of Hispanic machismo, who worries that stories

¹⁸³ Hamad, *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film* p.113

of his spy past may scare his children.¹⁸⁴ This is underlined by the children's disbelief when they discover their parents' heroic past: 'Our parents can't be spies, they're not cool enough!' The contrast between their current life and their previous spy life is rendered comical, for example in one scene Gregorio looks under a pile of stuffed toy bears in an attempt to find some of his spy equipment. This presents Banderas as a domestic, even emasculated, figure, rather than the supremely macho lover and hero he has previously been characterised as. The press pack for *Spy Kids* features a comment by Anglo American actress Carla Gugino, who plays Ingrid Cortez, commenting on Banderas' ability to portray a spy and a father in which she describes him as 'the perfect person to play a spy [...] he always has that debonair quality and yet he is also very human and accessible so you can believe him as a father.'¹⁸⁵ This characterisation of Banderas emphasises the duality that is required of his image in this film, and the fact that it's distributors felt the need to qualify Banderas as an accessible, yet alluring, image of Hispanic masculinity in the film's promotional material. As discussed earlier, there is a need to appeal to a wide range of views in a family film and hence this promotion presents Banderas as a figure that children in the audience could believe as a father, fathers in the audience could identify with, but that mothers would still find handsome and charming.

Banderas himself cites the opportunity to expand upon his persona as a Hispanic action hero as a major attraction in playing the role of Gregorio Cortez, offering a 'chance to take a type of character I have played before in a completely new direction' in which he had to think from the perspective of a father and 'family man'.¹⁸⁶ This transition, in the mind of the Hispanic male, from thinking from the perspective of an action hero to the perspective of a father, is represented very effectively in the narrative of *Spy Kids*. Indeed, the film re-characterises the image of the Hispanic action hero for a family audience by recasting Banderas in the role of a fatherly everyman before comically rendering the father's attempts to reclaim his identity as a Hispanic action hero. There is a romantic element to this, for example Gregorio is convinced to embark with Ingrid on another mission when she provocatively tempts him in Spanish, but the best rendering of this contrast is achieved in an action scene in which Gregorio's view of himself as a Hispanic action hero and the realities of his responsibilities as a father are comically juxtaposed. The scene begins with the spy-parents Ingrid and Gregorio completing the mundane activity of dropping their children off at

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that the dressing of Banderas in such anglicised fatherly clothing could also be seen as indicative of his Americanisation within Hollywood and an attempt to make him seem more appealing to an Anglo family audience, though this is not key to the film's characterisation.

¹⁸⁵ Carla Gugino in the production notes for *Spy Kids*.

¹⁸⁶ Banderas in the production notes for *Spy Kids*.

school. As his son Juni leaves the car Gregorio says to him, 'If anyone tries to pick on you at school, remember that you are a Cortez'; 'what's so special about being a Cortez?' his son responds. This opening exchange introduces that which will be confirmed in this scene; that Gregorio views being a man of the Cortez family as a marker of heroic, macho Hispanic masculinity, while his son Juni notably does not.¹⁸⁷ After Juni exits the car he begins to walk towards the school carrying in his arms action figures from his favourite television programme 'Floop's Flooglies', the significance of these figures to be explored in greater detail later, and is cornered by an aggressive boy of approximately the same age. The boy begins to berate Juni in ways which question his masculinity, teasing him about his 'dolls' and the many plasters which he wears on his hands. When Gregorio sees this he is dismayed and exits the car walking towards the school, he changes his mind and walks back, until he hears the voice of the bully's father behind him encouraging his son saying, 'Have a good day son. Show them who's boss!' Gregorio turns to be confronted by the father who towers over him, this effect being intensified by the fact that this shot is positioned over the much taller man's shoulder. The bully's father then says 'What are you looking at, Macho!'. Gregorio's response to this is to show the bully's father how macho he really is; he sighs before looking down and carefully removing his glasses and placing them in his blazer pocket. As he does this, there is a strumming of Spanish guitars, that sound as if they could have been lifted straight from the *Mask of Zorro* or *Desperado* soundtrack, which builds to a heroic crescendo as Gregorio lifts the bully's father with the use of only one arm and hurtles him through the air and flying past of group of school children who look on in awe as he crashes through a large window. A fanfare plays as the children run towards him cheering and he lifts his hands high, triumphant. The music then changes to more sentimental strings as Juni runs towards his father, both their arms are outstretched before Gregorio picks Juni up and lifts him into the air as the surrounding children continue to cheer.

This melodramatic sequence presents Gregorio as a macho, Hispanic father of action who saves his son with his superlative strength, and is hailed a hero by the schoolchildren that bear witness to the scene. When this scene fades out, however, it is revealed unsurprisingly as a fantasy that has taken place only in the mind of Gregorio, and another version of this scene is replayed for the viewer in which a very different image of the Hispanic father emerges. Gregorio is again confronted by the bully's father who says, 'Can I help you with something, Chief?!'; note

¹⁸⁷ It could be argued that this suggests that Gregorio's idea of Hispanic masculinity is exposed as outdated and old-fashioned by his son's challenge to it but for me it is perhaps more readily understood as symptomatic of Rodriguez's macho/creative dichotomy within his auteur persona.

that Gregorio in the cinematic reality is not referred to as macho, even in a sarcastic manner. In this version of the scene, Gregorio's reaction is far from heroic and consequently it is not accompanied by Hispanic action hero appropriate music. He simply shakes his head and looks down to mumble an inaudible response as the school bell rings, as if in emphasis that Gregorio's time as a Hispanic action hero is over. Juni looks at him in dismay as the bully boy says 'my dad is going to beat your dad up', indicating that the boy's dad is perceived as more macho than Gregorio. The end of this scene suggests that there is a space for heroic action in the family unit, perhaps even a need for it, and this sentiment is confirmed in the film's final action scene. The scene can also be seen as a wish-fulfilment fantasy for fathers in the audience who feel that their own masculinity has been diminished by post-feminist fatherhood, and can express a desire to reclaim it by watching Gregorio reborn as a hyper macho image of Hispanic masculinity.

3.5 Creativity versus Machismo in the Hispanic Family Film

As I have described above, the Hispanic masculine ideal for the character of Gregorio is portrayed as the macho and romantic Hispanic action hero. In the character of his son Juni, however, we are presented with a very different image of Hispanic masculinity, one that arguably reflects the characterisation of the Hispanic male as a creative artist that was presented in relation to the film's writer-director in much of the promotional material for *Spy Kids*. Indeed, in one promotional newspaper feature on Rodriguez, it is explicitly stated that the character of Juni Cortez is a recreation of Rodriguez's perception of his childhood self as 'nervous, physically awkward and lost in his own world.'¹⁸⁸ Juni Cortez is portrayed as a creative figure rather than a macho man of action like his father was; he has no friends and is portrayed as an imaginative but isolated child. His imaginary friends have Hispanic male names, which suggests that he lacks the ability to form relationships with other male children in the film's Hispanic community. Juni is presented as lacking the physical skills and strength of character that typifies the Hispanic action hero; he is not presented as inherently brave and demonstrates little or no skill in performing macho action stunts. He is clumsy and timid; we are told that the plasters on his hands are a result of nervous sweating. He also appears to have very little aim or co-ordination when performing the action feats and using the high-tech gadgets expected of a 'spy kid'. He is characterised as pathetic by his older sister who initially views him as a burden; for example she does not want to embark with him on a mission to save their parents because she is worried that

¹⁸⁸ "'I'm probably the only guy who really enjoys being in the movies": Robert Rodriguez, director of *From Dusk Till Dawn* and the smash hit *Spy Kids*, talks to Will Hodgkinson' in *The Guardian*, Arts, 11th April 2001, Features, p.16

he will 'cry all over' her. However, it is Juni's knowledge of Floop and his Flooglies, through his love of Floop's surreal television programme, that is instrumental in defeating the evil Minion (Tony Shalhoub), and his capability in drawing one of the Flooglies, which are really mutated spies, enables Gregorio to recognise the true identity of these creatures.

Similarly creative is the children's uncle and shopkeeper Machete Cortez, but his spectacular spy gadgets can only become useful when they are used by the children to save their parents. The grizzled Machete, played by Danny Trejo, is first portrayed excessively macho, aggressive and defensive. Machete complains about his responsibilities as a brother and constantly refuses the children's pleas for him to help his family, but in the final battle the enemy cannot be defeated without him and he jumps through a plate glass window to take his place amongst the family. The film also mocks the existing image of Trejo, as a grotesquely macho, stoic image of Hispanic masculinity, by having him burst into tears when he is reunited with his brother, and this is commented on in specific reference to his ethnicity, 'Latinos – so emotional!', says Gregorio in an aside to the camera, commenting on Machete's response and the way in which it comically conforms to the stereotype of the emotional Latino.¹⁸⁹ The final action scene of the film, in which all the Cortezes must fight to defeat the evil character, Floop's former sidekick Minion, demonstrates that both creativity and action prowess in the Hispanic male characters are needed to allow the Cortez family to be successful in action. In short, every image of Hispanic masculinity presented in the family unit forms an integral part of the action, from the grotesque or heroically macho heroes, to the sensitively creative son and domesticated father; all integral parts of the Cortez family. Indeed, what is most notable about *Spy Kids* is the way in which it manages to be ethnically specific but also suitably universal in its exhortation of the importance of the family unit in the family adventure film.

3.6 Puss in Boots: Animating Hispanic Masculinity

Angela Carter's assertion that 'all cats have a Spanish tinge' was certainly shared by the writers of *Shrek 2*, who transformed the fairytale character of Puss in Boots, who first appeared in French writer Charles Perrault's *Le Chat Botté* in 1697, into what is arguably the family film's most potent

¹⁸⁹ Viewing these after the release of Rodriguez's *Machete* (2010) in which Trejo plays an assassin, also named Machete though not explicitly identified as the same character, creates an interesting intertextual link with the *Spy Kids* films. The significance of this intertextuality in the character of Machete is explored in the conclusion of this thesis, where I consider how Hispanic male images have changed in US film since 2008.

image of Hispanic masculinity in 2004.¹⁹⁰ In this concluding portion of this chapter, I examine the way in which this character is created through a synthesis of the fairytale character of Puss in Boots, popular perceptions of cats in general, and the image of the Hispanic action hero, as well as the impact of CGI animation on the representation of Hispanic masculinity. Indeed, I begin by outlining how the animated nature of the character impacts on the system of representation used to create him, as this underpins many of my more specific arguments about Puss in Boots and what he represents as an image of Hispanic Masculinity. In transposing Hispanic male identity into the computer generated body of a small ginger cat, this identity becomes disembodied from its primary signifier – the Hispanic male body itself. Hence, in order for Puss to be perceived as an image of Hispanic Masculinity by the audience, secondary signifiers of Hispanic masculinity must be intensely emphasised and then inscribed onto his form. Thus the characterisation is necessarily more reliant on oral signifiers, Hispanic music and Banderas' voice, and engagement with existing stereotypes and pop-culture incarnations of Hispanic masculinity, the Latin bandit and lover images, and the persona of Zorro and Banderas as a Hispanic action hero, than live action images. In this disembodied form conceptions of Hispanic masculinity have the potential to become crystallised, but also potentially refigured in the minds of the audience.

The image of the Hispanic action hero, that the characterisation of Puss relies on heavily, has already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter of this thesis. The way in which the character of Puss in Boots, and perhaps more importantly the way in which the existing characterisation of the cat as a fairytale character was discussed in the promotion of the film, however, requires further elucidation. The press-pack for *Shrek 2* focused strongly on promoting the appeal of Puss in Boots as the film's most significant newly developed character, and in doing so made reference to the way in which the film's narrative can be seen to engage with the presentation of Puss in Boots in Perrault's original story. The UK production notes for *Shrek 2* retells Perrault's characterisation of Puss, firstly by stating that 'the story of Puss in Boots depicts him as a clever and fearless ogre killer, which would make him a formidable adversary for Shrek.'¹⁹¹ This is then expanded upon through a direct quotation by writer Andrew Adamson in which he relates his nostalgic feelings towards the character of Puss in Boots, and comments on the way in which the character can be aptly incorporated in the existing narrative framework of the *Shrek* films. In this extract Adamson is described as revealing that Puss in Boots had been one

¹⁹⁰ Angela Carter writes this when she describes puss in boots in her short story 'Puss-in-Boots' in *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage 2006, 1976) pp.76-77

¹⁹¹ Production notes taken from the *Shrek 2* UK Press Pack

of his favourite fairytale characters as a child, and that his origins as an ogre killer provided a suitable starting point for incorporating him into the world of Shrek.¹⁹² As such, the inclusion of Adamson's comments underlines the nostalgic appeal of seeing fairytale characters reborn in *Shrek 2*, an attraction that is key to the family film genre. However, what is interesting to me, in the context of this thesis, is the way in which a recreation of the traditional fairytale and popular pantomime (which like the family film is constructed for cross-generational appeal) character of Puss in Boots is used in *Shrek 2* to incorporate Hispanic masculine identity in its post-modern fairytale formula. The fact that Puss in Boots is a Hispanic character, and thus deviates from the traditional image of the character, is portrayed as a cinematic attraction for the film's audience. The production notes for the film present the idea that the filmmakers thought an Anglo Puss in Boots too 'conventional' for the *Shrek* films, and that when they decide to make him a 'Latin' character they, in the words of Adamson, "pictured him as Zorro embodied in a cat, so from that moment on Puss in Boots was Antonio Banderas."¹⁹³

It must be noted that since this portrayal of Puss in Boots, central Latin male characters have continued to be presented as a cinematic attraction in the animated family film, *Toy Story 3* (2010) features a heroic Spanish Buzz Lightyear, and Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) features a Latin Lover-like prince frog, while *Despicable Me 2* (2013) featured the Mexican El Macho as its villain. This suggests that incorporating Hispanics, into family animation is perceived as a successful way to attract audiences, despite the highly stereotypical nature of these portrayals, or at the very least that Hispanics are viewed by these film studios as a significant group in contemporary US culture and society. In the anthropomorphism of the characters these films are also reminiscent of the singing and dancing birds Disney good neighbour animations *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1944) which aimed to appeal to Latin American audiences and engender their support during World War Two.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ The 'Good Neighbour' policy was a US foreign policy aimed at securing political and economic cooperation from Latin America. It reached its height during World War Two, due to concerns about transatlantic and transpacific supplies and markets in a time of political uncertainty. In 1940 the Office of the Coordinator of Inter American Affairs was established to promote positive cultural relations across the Americas and film was a key part of this. See Philip Swanson, 'Going Down on Good Neighbours: Imagining *América* in Hollywood Movies of the 1930s and 1940s' in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 29 (2010), No 1, pp. 71-84

What is not discussed in the promotion, but which represents a very interesting point of consideration, is exactly why the creators of *Shrek 2* chose the character of Puss in Boots, an anthropomorphised cat emissary, to transform into their first Hispanic character. In the original story, Puss in Boots is left to a young man after his father's death; he is disappointed to receive the cat, as his brothers receive useful livestock. Puss more than proves his usefulness with his cunning however - falsely presenting his master as a Marquis to the King through a number of cunning misrepresentations, tricking a giant into turning into a mouse so Puss can eat him, and winning his master the hand of a Princess in marriage. Puss in Boots gains for himself and his master, not through hard work or strength of character, but through his cunning, much like a Bandido, and his charm, much like a Latin Lover. Moving on to consider more generally the popular perception of cats in modern Western culture in comparison with popular conceptions of Hispanic machismo, Carter's idea that 'all cats have a Spanish tinge' is repeatedly reaffirmed.

Most obviously Hispanic males have frequently been portrayed as animalistic in nature in US popular culture, for example Zorro's similarities in personality with his horse as discussed in the previous chapter, so embodying Hispanic masculinity in an animal character is arguably a natural progression of Hollywood's representation of Hispanic masculinity. This is underlined by the fact that Puss in Boots' wildness, and general lack of restraint, is arguably presented more readily than that of the film's other animal characters. For example, Puss protests violently when he is arrested with catnip and is chastised by Shrek for his attempts to eat the three blind mice during the hero's rescue. The perception of cats as cunning and self-interested, beyond their wild animalism, in nature also draws comparisons to the Hispanic male stereotype of the Bandido. I discuss in more detail the presentation of Puss in Boots as a banditry figure later in this chapter, but it is worth noting that Puss' feline attributes are aligned with banditry in the suggestion that the character was once a 'great cat burglar'. Donkey's deprecating description of Puss in Boots as a 'sleazy hit-man' suggests not only references to the Hispanic male Bandido stereotype, but also that of the Latin Lover. Indeed, cats are also commonly perceived as being imbued with a series of character traits which paint them as the animal equivalent of a Latin lover. Anthropomorphised Cats, like Latin lovers, are often portrayed as being excessively image conscious, perhaps even vain, due to their frequent preening. Puss in Boots behaves in concurrence with this stereotype, delighting in looking at himself in the mirrored shop fronts of Far Far Away, the film's equivalent of Hollywood. While Puss' ginger fur does not automatically seem like the most natural colour of cat in which to embody Hispanic masculinity, the relative rarity of female cats of this colour means that the tone of Puss' fur adds emphasis to his status as a supremely macho tom-cat. Puss' ability to charm those of the female gender, both feline and human, is frequently referenced in

the *Shrek* series, mostly notably in a scene in *Shrek the Third* in which we see Puss as he is about to embark upon another heroic mission surrounded by female cats meowing sadly in lament of his departure. In *Shrek 2*, Puss is also characterised as a typical tom-cat/Latin Lover; he delights in the attention lavished on him by a group of strange maids that discover him, Shrek and Donkey in a barn, and is quite willing to be mistaken for his friend Shrek if it will give him a chance to get closer to the beautiful Princess Fiona in human form.

The similarities in the character traits that are often associated with cats and those which characterise traditional stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity ensure that there is a suitable synthesis between Puss' feline attributes and his Hispanic masculine ones. Furthermore, by portraying these traits in the body of an animated cat, stereotypes of ethnicity and masculinity commonly presented in adult films can be softened and domesticated through their relocation to the form of a domestic animal to render this type more suitable for depiction in the family film. Thus Puss in Boots can be identified as both a cat and a Hispanic male figure, and can be taken to signify both of these things to differing degrees by different sectors in the family audience, true to the pattern of dual address which exists in the family film. However, as was indicated in the extract from the *Shrek 2* press pack referenced earlier in this chapter, Puss in Boots as a character and a representation of Hispanic masculinity is more than just a Hispanicised feline; he is more specifically a transposition of Antonio Banderas' Hispanic action-hero star persona into the animated body of a cat. Hence I now turn my attention to the way in which Puss in Boots can be viewed as a re-figuration of the Hispanic action hero persona in the genre of the family film.

3.7 The Hispanic Adventurer in a Cat's Body

In addition to the film's previously mentioned nostalgic references to traditional fairytales, *Shrek 2* is also typical of the contemporary family film in the way in which it employs references to popular culture in order to appeal to a wide cross-section of audiences. The film's reliance on references to other media can be clearly seen in the way in which it represents Hispanic masculinity, as its representation of the character of Puss in Boots engages heavily with Antonio Banderas' existing star persona and his version of the Zorro character. The representation of Puss in Boots as a charming and amorous figure, particularly given his comically antithetical visual image as a small feline, is enhanced by the inference of Banderas' existing star persona. The way in which Puss in Boots parodies the Latin lover aspects of Banderas' star persona is aptly characterised in the following quotation from an interview with Banderas in *The Times* in June 2007:

Puss in Boots, the little cat with the personality of a swashbuckling Latin heartbreaker, parodies not only Zorro but Banderas before he settled down and dropped off the top of the Most Gorgeous lists. "Puss in Boots is a bit as I was in the Eighties: a little bit Casanova, a little bit Don Giovanni."¹⁹⁵

What is notable in the extract above is, firstly, the way in which Banderas identifies himself as a star in a broadly Latin way, aligning his persona with historical, Italian Latin Lovers as an acknowledgement of the ethnic blurring that occurs in his persona and the character of Puss in Boots. However, perhaps more timely is the way in which the association of this image with Banderas' star persona so clearly characterised as a relic of the cultural past. In terms of considering the way in which the character of Puss in Boots, as an image of Hispanic masculinity, engages with Banderas' star persona, this statement is particularly interesting because it suggests that by 2004, and certainly by the time of the release of *Shrek the Third* in 2007, Banderas was no longer perceived as a current Latin Lover, and that this element of his persona would only be a suitable source of parody for the series' older viewers.

The main facet of Banderas' star persona then which is parodied in *Shrek 2* is the perception of him as a Hispanic action hero. Indeed, many promotional interviews and profiles of Puss in Boots for *Shrek 2* focused heavily on the extent to which its filmmakers reference Banderas' performances as Hispanic action heroes in their creation of Puss in Boots. In an interview in popular film magazine *Empire*, Banderas commented on his surprise regarding the extent to which the animation of Puss in Boots emulated his previous action hero performances; 'I suppose they went to some of my epic movies like *Zorro*, *Desperado* and *The 13th Warrior*, because sometimes I recognised moves and thought "Oh my God that's mine."¹⁹⁶ In a further interview to promote the film, Banderas expanded upon the extent to which Puss in Boots recreates Zorro, "[...] the only thing that makes a difference between Zorro and this character is the main weapon for Zorro is the sword, and this cat his main weapon is himself. He can stop an army with his sad eyes."¹⁹⁷ Banderas' assertion that Puss in Boots' main weapon is himself, that his appeal as an adorable cat is a more potent weapon than his fighting skills, is significant in terms of considering the way in which Banderas' star persona, as an image of Hispanic masculinity, is rendered non-threatening for a family audience. Indeed, as I now discuss, it is arguably the contrast between Puss in Boots' feline body and his macho Hispanic action hero persona which best facilitates the incorporation of Hispanic masculinity into the narrative world

¹⁹⁵ Stefanie Marsh, 'Antonio – he's a cool cat' in *The Times, The Knowledge* 26th June 2007 p.7

¹⁹⁶ Banderas in *Empire*, 'This Month You Really Can't Miss Puss in Boots' August 2004 p.51

¹⁹⁷ 'Antonio Banderas, Show Stealer' in *Film Review*, 'Shrek 2 Feature' July 2004 p. 71

of *Shrek 2*. It must be noted that the exact nationality of Puss in Boots is not clearly defined within this film or others in which he appears, and the character combines signifiers of both Spanish and Mexican masculinity in creating the feline Hispanic action hero persona.

The contrast between Puss in Boots' feline body and his Hispanic action hero persona is most effectively presented in *Shrek 2* in the scene in which Puss in Boots attacks Shrek and Donkey. This comic attack is prefigured by the loud purring noises, and we are given glimpses of Puss' boots before we see him in a presentation of the action hero that focuses on individual parts of his body that is reminiscent of the way in which Banderas was introduced as El Mariachi in *Desperado*. Puss then jumps from the tree proclaiming: 'Ha ha, fear me if you dare', pointing his sword at Shrek and Donkey. He then he hisses at them while making a clawing motion towards them, the non-threatening nature of his attack rendering his confident speech comically incongruent in comparison. A reverse shot over the cats shoulder then reveals his small size, in comic juxtaposition to his large Hispanic action hero persona, as Shrek says 'oh look a little cat!'. 'Come here little kitty', says Shrek; Puss removes his boots and cape before dropping to all fours and charging at the ogre, in response to this insult to his masculine prowess. Dramatic adventure music plays as his claws come out and he grabs Shrek's leg, he then crawls up his back and bursts out of his tunic to a flourish of Spanish guitars. The dramatic music builds up again as Puss lunges again for Shrek's leg; Donkey aiming for the cat, then accidentally hits Shrek in the groin to a strum of Spanish guitar. Puss then jumps from behind his assailants, spins through the air and then lands on his feet back into his boots. He says, 'Pray for mercy from ... Puss.. In Boots!' before tilting his hat, stabbing with his sword, and carving a 'P' into the tree in emulation of Zorro. This scene derives its comic effect by referencing Banderas' performance of Zorro and re-embodying it in an animated feline body which is incompatible with the persona that it contains. The heroic Hispanic music, confident macho postulating and acrobat dexterity of the character are at odds with his adorable appearance, non-threatening attacks and innocuous purring. Banderas himself aptly characterises the difference between the persona that is contained in the body of Puss in Boots, and the appearance of this body when he says:

"Puss has a tremendous sense of honour [...] and a very strong personality. But his body doesn't exactly correspond to how he presents himself to the world. He's really an adorable kitty-cat – you just want to cuddle him – and that contrast makes him very appealing to anybody ... except Donkey."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Antonio Banderas in the UK Production Notes for *Shrek 2*

This contrast between the visual appearance and the Hispanic action hero persona as portrayed in the mise-en-scène on screen is suitably enhanced by the vocal performance of Banderas, who has stated that he wanted to give the character the voice of a 'conquistador', a term that has aggressive and colonial implications.¹⁹⁹

3.8 Puss in Boots: from Lone Bandit to Part of the Family

Having discussed the construction of Puss in Boots as a feline re-incarnation of the Hispanic action hero, I now examine the progression of this image of Hispanic masculinity in the narrative of *Shrek 2* and how this conforms to the generic expectations of the family film. To conclude my discussion of Puss in Boots, I present my analysis of the way in which this character is recuperated into the community of Far Far Away, beginning the narrative as a lone assassin and ending it as an integral part of Shrek's extended family. Indeed, when we first encounter Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2* he is shrouded in mystery and is portrayed initially as an unknowable figure. Puss is first introduced in a scene in which Fiona's father enters a disreputable tavern full of grotesque fairytale misfits, he asks at the bar for the as yet unnamed assassin and is informed that he 'does not like to be disturbed'. The King opens the door, to see only boots and cat like eyes shrouded in darkness, moonlight from a plaited window shines off his boots. We then see the shot reversed and view Puss from behind his cowboy boots. In the following conversation with the King he is identified as a mercenary and states that he will charge a lot of money to get rid of the ogre. The King places a bag of coins on the table and Puss leans forward still shrouded in darkness, slashing open the bag of gold with his sword to assess its worth. Though he leans forward towards the screen we still only see his eyes. In this scene the bandit is shrouded in mystery, his feline and Hispanic identity are only hinted at but not confirmed. The music is low and ominous but with no Hispanic overtones, although when he briefly speaks the voice is clearly that of Banderas and the iconography in this scene is reminiscent of the shadowy introduction of Banderas' El Mariachi in *Desperado*. At this stage the character is presented as visually and morally unknowable, he is clearly an outsider in the fairytale society of the narrative.

¹⁹⁹ Stefanie Marsh, 'Antonio – he's a cool cat' in *The Times, The Knowledge* 26th June 2007 p.7

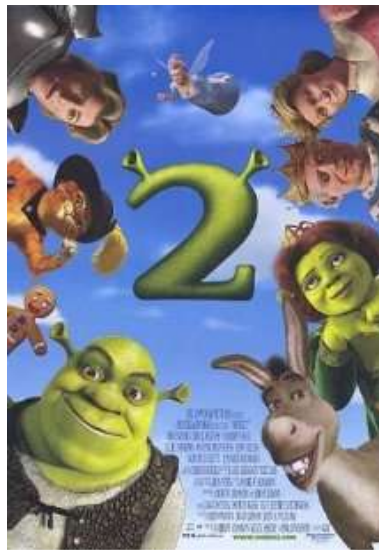


Figure 3.1: Theatrical Poster for *Shrek 2* (2004)

However, as the narrative of the film progresses Puss employs his skills as a Hispanic action hero to assist Shrek in reclaiming his place in his family, uniting with other fairytale characters and forming an integral part of a heroic team. This idea that Puss in Boots forms an essential part of the community of characters in the film is represented in the theatrical poster for *Shrek 2*, which emphasises the family film's focus on creating a sense of community by portraying its diverse cast of characters grouped together around the text of the film's title. Puss' place in the extended family unit of the film is reaffirmed in *Shrek 2*'s final scene in which the cat initiates a 'fiesta' to celebrate the relationship of Shrek and Fiona. This musical scene, which features all the characters singing and dancing together as Puss and Donkey perform a version of Latin music star Ricky Martin's 'Livin' La Vida Loca', contrasts very strongly with his first appearance. He is no longer concealed alone in the darkness, but rather occupies a central place in the film's community on the brightly lit stage. What is most interesting about this scene is the way in which the characters come together in a performance, as is conventional in the family film, of a song which is so strongly associated with Hispanic-American culture. This indicates that by the end of the film its Hispanic action hero is no longer outside society, but rather it is he that is instrumental in bringing the fairytale community together.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, as my analysis of my two key case studies demonstrates, the family film has arguably altered popular US conceptions of Hispanic masculinity by relocating the Hispanic action hero in its generic framework. The wide-ranging audiences that family films attract has increased the visibility of this minority identity and the cultural work of the family film of creating a sense of inclusion and community in the audience, as described by family film theorists, has now been extended to include Hispanic males in it.

The huge impact of his performances in these films on Banderas' star persona, and hence images of Hispanic masculinity, also cannot be overstated. Indeed, before his performance as Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2*, Banderas' appeal as a star was arguably on the wane post *Spy Kids*. Between 2001 and 2004, other than reprising his roles in successful sequels as El Mariachi in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and as Gregorio Cortez in two *Spy Kids* sequels, and receiving Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for his performance as Pancho Villa in HBO TV feature film *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (2003), Banderas largely appeared in films that garnered neither critical nor commercial success. In August 2003, shortly before the release of *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and a year before the release of *Shrek 2*, John Patterson in *The Guardian* questioned whether Banderas was heading for the 'Hollywood Hall of Fame or Hispanic History Channel?'. He argues that, excluding his collaborations with Rodriguez and roles as iconic Hispanic figures, Banderas' 'career choices seem shoddy and short-sighted indeed, given the assets he's squandering', concluding the article with the pronouncement that 'He [Banderas] should be a great movie star. And he could be.'²⁰⁰ By the end of the period of time I am considering in this thesis, however, the pop-culture relevance of Banderas' star persona had been reaffirmed, largely through his performance as Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2* and its subsequent sequel *Shrek the Third*. In an interview to promote *Shrek the Third* in *The Times* in June 2007 entitled 'Antonio – he's a cool cat', Stefanie Marsh pronounces that while 'These days he may be best known as a CGI moggy in the *Shrek* movies, but Antonio Banderas still does a passable global sex god.'²⁰¹

The commercial success of Puss in Boots as a Hispanic character and his popularity with Hispanic audiences was eagerly promoted by Dreamworks, though the evidence for this is relatively limited. An interview with Banderas which appeared in *The Independent* in July 2006 identified Puss in Boots as 'critical to the film's titanic success [...] The executive producer, Jerry Katzenberg phoned Banderas to tell him that the film's highest per-screen average was in El Paso, Texas a town overwhelmingly Latino.'²⁰² This article continued to pronounce on the future of Banderas and Puss in Boots as images of Hispanic masculinity stating that though, 'Banderas may not hail from Central America, [...] Latinos worldwide have embraced his success and Dreamworks knows it, green-lighting a Puss in Boots spinoff.'²⁰³ This film, entitled simply *Puss in Boots*, was

²⁰⁰ John Patterson, 'John Patterson wonders where Antonio Bandera is headed – Hollywood hall of fame or the Hispanic history channel?' in *The Guardian, The Guide* 2nd-8th August 2003 p.15

²⁰¹ Stefanie Marsh, 'Antonio – he's a cool cat' in *The Times, The Knowledge* 26th June 2007 p.7

²⁰² 'Don't Call Me Sexy', interview with Banderas in *The Independent, Arts and Books Reviews*, 7th April 2006 p.11

²⁰³ Ibid.

released in December 2011 and develops the feline Hispanic action hero character further. In an interview with *Empire* magazine in August 2010 Banderas described the film as “quite different to the *Shrek* style” and “more inspired by the idea of Spaghetti Westerns and Sergio Leone, with wider screens and zooms.”²⁰⁴ The continuing success of *Puss in Boots* as a character suggests that the Hispanicisation of the family film seems set to grow.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ ‘A Band Apart: Antonio Banderas on the future of *Puss in Boots*...’ in *Empire* August 2010 p.23

²⁰⁵ *Puss in Boots*. Chris Miller. Dreamworks. USA. 2011

4. Hispanic Masculinity at the US Border

4.1 Introduction

The area of the US/Mexico border in US popular cultural imagination has commonly been presented as a place of harsh realities, both socially and geographically. Both of the key film texts that I will discuss in this chapter continue this tradition to different effects. In *Three Burials* the bleak yet beautiful landscape that occupies the border spaces of Texas and Mexico is the setting for a contemporary Western, its bleakness echoing the empty modernised lives of citizens on both sides of the border, and its ancient frontier geography enhancing the film's sense of nostalgia for the noble masculinity of the cowboy. In *Traffic*, the first image we are presented with is the bleached scrubland of a desert outside Tijuana, in which a lone, dusty saloon car parked on a dirt road. We are then introduced to two Mexican men who are later revealed to be police officers. In the course of the scene that follows, what should be a heroic drug trafficking arrest, they are belittled by both the criminals and the military for their lack of power. I have included these descriptions here to give a sense of the cinematic context in which the images of Hispanic, in this case specifically Mexican, masculinity that I will be discussing in this thesis are situated. Indeed, the third case study chapter of this thesis represents a shift in the focus of my analysis from a consideration of representations of Hispanic masculinity rooted in fantasy to those which present their images to be a reflection of the contemporary social realities of the US/Mexico border.

Whereas the previous two chapters deconstructed the evolution of the Hispanic action hero, in the remaining chapters I examine representations of this gendered, ethnic identity in films that aim to reflect and comment upon social and historical realities. These films aim to present their representations of Hispanic masculinity as more 'authentic' and 'realistic', both heavily constructed concepts and arguably impossible ideals, than those previously discussed in this thesis. As such, their systems of representation are arguably more problematic than that of those films that represent Hispanic masculinity through fantasy, and this concern will be central to my analysis. Indeed, the two previously described images of the borderlands are presented as 'real' spaces, easily recognisable to US audiences as Mexico, partly because they were both filmed in Mexico, but also because they comply with images of it from countless previous Hollywood films set along the US border. Both films deal with 'real' issues of drug trafficking and illegal immigration, but as will be explored further later, the representations of Mexican masculinity in both films may not be the stock bandits typically depicted in a Hollywood border film, but instead

both Javier Rodriguez (Benicio del Toro, *Traffic*) and Melquiades are portrayed as almost impossibly noble, which evokes troubling echoes of the noble savage stereotype.

4.2 The Border Film

The border film, as articulated by Fojas in the previously referenced description of the form in my introductory chapter, is a mode of filmmaking that exists across genres. What these films share is their location in the border spaces of the US and Mexico, and their preoccupation with US social and political anxieties that surround this region. However, the two texts I am discussing fall into the distinct genres of the border Western, *Three Burials*, and the American version of the narcotraficante film, *Traffic*, respectively. While the former is a contemporary Western with the accompanying mise-en-scène and nostalgia for traditional masculinity, the latter deals specifically with drug crime and authorities attempts to tackle it, but they are both concerned with the socially constructed borderlands and its border masculinities. The differences between these two distinct genres will be fore-grounded more strongly in my discussion of the individual texts, for the moment though I will focus on that which they share; that is their expression of US anxieties surrounding the US/Mexico border in the tradition of the Hollywood border film.

There are, of course, Latino made films that focus on the border spaces that portray those crossing the border as the heroes, such as *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) featuring Edward James Olmos as a Mexican-American outlaw who became a hero to Mexicans living in Texas in the early 1900s and *El Norte* (1983), told from the perspective of two Guatemalan immigrants who travel through Mexico to become illegal immigrant workers in the USA. However, for the purposes of this thesis I will concern myself with the Hollywood incarnation of this form. Historically, these films have characterised Mexican societies and peoples as distinctly oppositional to US society and values, arguably in order to reaffirm the strength of these national ideals for a US audience. Camilla Fojas aptly characterises the social work of the border film and the way in which it portrays that which lies across the border when she writes:

Hollywood has often exploited the trope of the southern border between the United States and Mexico to capture a range of “American” ideals and values – integrity, moral clarity, industriousness, rugged survivalism, confidence and self-sufficiency among others. The border is also a vital repository of threatening ideas – homosexuality, prostitution, globalisation, economic liberalisation, drug trafficking and abuse, sexual promiscuity, effeminacy and terrorism – and undesirable or inassimilable people [...] ²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Fojas, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p.2

Both Fojas' description of the "American" values captured by the border film and the threatening ideas it has ascribed to the 'undesirable or inassimilable' border peoples, can be seen as constructed in concurrence with Hollywood's historical constructions of Hispanic and Anglo-American masculinities. Indeed, the previously outlined Hispanic masculine Hollywood stereotypes can be aligned with many of the descriptions of threatening border activities. Latin Lovers are commonly portrayed as sexually promiscuous in the eyes of Anglo men and are frequently portrayed as somewhat effeminate in their behaviour. It must also be noted that the most prevalent contemporary incarnation of the greaser has been in the form of Latin drug-lords, such as Pacino's Cuban Tony Montana, which explicitly associates Hispanic masculinity with drug trafficking and abuse. The 'American' values of 'survivalism', 'self-sufficiency' and 'integrity' are also implicitly masculine and conjure up images of noble American cowboys and sheriffs that embody old-fashioned patriarchal American ideals. These masculine values are drawn from the Western, which has a strong overlap with the cross-genre form of the border film. As previously noted, the role of Western tropes and their relationship to constructing images of Mexican masculinity in the border Western will be explored further in my analysis of *Three Burials*, a film that conforms to the tradition that in a Western 'masculinity [forms...] the only source of stability in a frontier world where the clash of savagery and civilisation threatens cultural and social order.'²⁰⁷ In the main body of this chapter, I will argue that border film ideals of masculinity are still present in the systems of representation of *Three Burials* and *Traffic*. Indeed, although some of the more noble aspects of these masculine archetypes are ascribed to the Hispanic figures, rather than the Anglo figures of masculinity, at times, the construction of masculinity in these films is still primarily based upon the assumption of a dichotomy between the heroic and villainous, the moral and amoral, the American and un-American. In this way the ascribing of 'all American' borderland values to Mexican male characters, while demonstrating a move away from previous stereotypes, still preserves the trope that US border films are about asserting the value of US masculine values, exerting neo-colonial ideologies in Mexico.

4.3 'Indiewood', the Network Narrative and Realism

Geoff King writes that 'a central characteristic of Indiewood cinema [...] is a blend comprised of features associated with the dominant, mainstream convention and markers of "distinction"

²⁰⁷ Edward Buscombe ed., *The BFI Companion to the Western* (London, Deutsch/BFI, 1993) p.181

designed to appeal to more particular, niche audience constituencies.²⁰⁸ Both *Traffic* and *Three Burials* could be considered examples of Indiewood because they feature more mainstream Classical Hollywood aspects (recognisable stars, clearly defined genres, character archetypes) and marks of 'distinction' in terms of features more readily associated with independent and art cinemas (prevalence of auteurs, non-traditional 'network narrative' structure, social commentary, use of foreign language dialogue). Both were also financed by cooperation between smaller US and European production companies, but released by more major studios as is typical of Indiewood. It is the more 'indie' aspects of these productions which arguably encourage audiences to give weight to these films' social commentary on the issues of drug trafficking and illegal immigration and to view their images of ethnicity and gender as more realistic than those within mainstream Hollywood filmmaking.

I argue this because, as scholars Geoff King and Jim Hillier have noted, contemporary American Independent cinema and the closely related Indiewood are identified with various narrative and stylistic features that encourage audiences to identify films in this mould as more representative and realistic than their mainstream Hollywood counterparts. Jim Hillier argues that audiences have come to expect less stereotypical representations of ethnicity, gender and sexuality from American independent cinema in comparison to Hollywood because of the formers historical alignment with queer, ethnic minority and feminist filmmaking and social issues.²⁰⁹ For his part, Geoff King identifies that American Independent Cinema has a potential for expression of alternative social and ideological perspectives not found in Hollywood, which again suggests that audiences may expect a rejection of ethnic and gender stereotypes.²¹⁰ However, in terms of the perception of Independent or Indiewood films' presentation of ethnic minorities it is also worth raising King's assertion that 'In most cases [...] the primary audience [... for these types of filmmaking is] probably a white as well as a middle-class entity, of whatever age or gender', due to a class based concern for taste and culture.²¹¹ This raises the question as to whether the typical white, middle class Indiewood audience would recognise stereotypes of a largely working class ethnic minority such as Hispanics as such?

²⁰⁸ King, *Indiewood USA*, p.2

²⁰⁹ Jim Hillier, *American Independent Cinema: a Sight and Sound reader* (London: BFI, 2001) p.i

²¹⁰ Geoff King, *American Independent Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005). p. 199

²¹¹ King, *Indiewood USA*, p 27, p.16

The potential for audience assumption that Indiewood will be more progressive and representative in its depiction of ethnic minorities, is compounded by its association with a greater aesthetic realism which further encourages audiences to see these films as a reflection of reality. This is particularly important when discussing ethnic representations in film, as Shohat and Stam argue 'films which represent marginalised cultures in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to represent specific historical incidents, still implicitly make factual claims' in terms of the representativeness of their ethnic images.²¹² King argues that 'from pioneering films of the 1950s to the latest in digital video production, a strong tendency in one strain of American independent cinema has been towards the creation of a greater impression of reality or authenticity than is associated with the glossier style typical of the Hollywood mainstream.'²¹³ King's identification of this sense of reality as an 'impression' created by a rejection of Hollywood mainstream 'style' indicates that this realism is an aesthetic effect, based on stylistic devices, which does not necessarily indicate that these films reveal political or social truths. Shohat and Stam argue that, particularly when dealing with representation in films, it is important to 'distinguish between realism as a goal - Brecht's laying bare the "causal network" - and realism as a style or constellation of strategies aimed at producing an illusionistic "reality effect"'.²¹⁴ Both *Traffic*, which King identifies as using verité effects to support its agenda of portraying the reality of drugs as a social problem, and *Three Burials*, which features brutally realistic images of the illegal immigrant body to provide social commentary, can be seen to use aesthetic realism as a style to support their political message.²¹⁵ In my close analysis of the two films I will explore in more detail how this visual realism can be seen to obscure some of the more stereotypical aspects of Hispanic masculinity.

However, these films do not just aim to provide realistic looking images but also seek to provide a narrative which reveals a greater reality of a social problem by providing multiple, non-linear perspectives on the issue. Hillier argues that there is a tendency in contemporary US independent cinema towards experimentations with generic and narrative forms and devices that

²¹² Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation' in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp.178-219, p. 179

²¹³ King, *American Independent Cinema*, p.107

²¹⁴ Shohat and Stam, p. 180

²¹⁵ King, *Indiewood USA*, p.168

call attention to the narrative process as a comment on the 'nature of experience or its mediation'.²¹⁶ King goes further, arguing that independent cinema that moves away from the Classical Hollywood form to capture the realities of life more effectively can be linked to political desire to undermine traditional American dream values.²¹⁷ Both *Traffic* and *Three Burials* arguably use non-linear narratives to present a comment on the 'nature of experience', but only the latter really does much to undermine traditional American values and even then it seems to lament their loss. It must also be noted that neither really reject Classical Hollywood narration, but tell their stories in a way which King identifies as typical of Indiewood, that is with narration which lies somewhere between that of Classical Hollywood and art cinema.²¹⁸

Indeed they are both examples of what David Bordwell has defined as the 'network narrative'. This is a form of storytelling in later 1990s to mid 2000s Indiewood which is characterised by departure from Classical Hollywood traditions through a non-linear and multi thread narrative in which a series of different strands and casually or thematically related.²¹⁹ This style of narrative is drawn from art cinema that 'defines itself as a realistic cinema' with 'real locations [...] and real problems' and subsequent independent cinema traditions of a novelistic style in 1960s and 70s New Hollywood, best exemplified by the films of Robert Altman and John Sayles.²²⁰ However, Bordwell makes clear that these films, like King's definition of indiewood narration, must still retain some aspects of Classical Hollywood plot, characterisation and genre in order not to lose their audience with their complex storytelling, arguing that 'the complex the devices the more redundant the storytelling needs to be'.²²¹ Both *Traffic* and *Three Burials* can be seen to define themselves, to a certain extent, against the classical narrative's cause and effect linkage of narrative events in the mode of network narratives. *Traffic* aims to draw parallels between a myriad of different character-focused storylines that are not directly linked through

²¹⁶ Hillier, *American Independent Cinema* p.i, p.98

²¹⁷ King, *American Independent Cinema* p.67

²¹⁸ David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as Mode of Practice' in Catherine Fowler ed., *The European Cinema Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.94-102, p.95; David Bordwell, 'Subjective Stories and Network Narratives' in *The Way Hollywood Tells It: story and style in modern movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) pp. 72-103, p.101

²¹⁹ David Bordwell, 'Subjective Stories and Network Narratives'

²²⁰ David Bordwell, p.95

²²¹ Bordwell, 'Subjective Stories and Network Narratives' pp. 77-8

cause and effect, while *Three Burials* brings the non-linear, multi-perspective narrative structure of Guillermo Arriaga's previous art-house films to the subject matter of a border western. However, they also conform to Bordwell's assertion that these films cannot completely reject mainstream Hollywood storytelling, with *Three Burials* firmly part of the Western Genre and *Traffic* firmly centred around 'character driven melodrama'.²²²

4.4 Benicio del Toro in *Traffic*

In *Traffic* the question of the 'realism' of the film's representations of Hispanic masculinity is arguably more complex in the eyes of the audience, than it is in *Three Burials*, because of the star-making nature of Benicio del Toro's performance as Javier Rodriguez, hence I will now turn my attention to characterising his burgeoning star persona at the time of *Traffic*'s release. At the time of writing in 2014 Benicio del Toro is a successful Puerto Rican born star; his persona is based primarily on his strength and authenticity as an actor, who has continued to take on major roles in films in the same independent, socially conscious vein as *Traffic*, such as, *21 Grams* and *Che* parts one and two (2008). Del Toro has also taken on roles in more mainstream Hollywood entertainment, for example the recent remake of *The Wolfman* (2010) and the graphic novel adaptation *Sin City* (2005). Indeed, as I have previously noted in my introduction to this thesis, it must be emphasised that the Puerto Rican nationality of del Toro has informed some but not all of his roles. His Latino background and political engagement with Latin American history and contemporary concerns has been fore-grounded in his star promotion for both *Traffic* and the two *Che* films in order to construct him as an 'authentic' choice for these roles. However del Toro has also played characters, before and after *Traffic*, that are not explicitly identified as Hispanic, and their ethnic identity is portrayed as seemingly irrelevant to the narrative, though it must be noted that he frequently plays characters marked as outsiders or others in some way. These roles include mumbling criminal Fred Fenster in *The Usual Suspects*, the deranged Dr Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, flamboyant gangster Frankie Four Fingers in *Snatch* (2000) and the monstrous Lawrence Talbot in *The Wolfman*. This lack of ethnic specificity arguably be in part attributed to his long residence in America and his lack of a strong Hispanic accent, but perhaps also the way in which his star persona has focused so heavily on his abilities as an actor capable as playing a range of roles.

²²² King, *Indiewood USA*, p.162

Back in 2001 though, upon the release of *Traffic*, del Toro had been working as a character actor in Hollywood since the 1980s without ever achieving major stardom or significant critical acclaim, though his roles in *The Usual Suspects* and *Fear and Loathing* had garnered him enough attention for him to be viewed as an up and coming performer in Hollywood. While his relative youth, sex appeal and educated middle-class background have arguably made it easier for del Toro to establish himself as a major star, at this stage his career was in some way comparable to that of his Puerto Rican co-star in *Traffic* (as Latino DEA agent Ray Castro) Luiz Guzmán, who has played working class Latino character roles, largely alternating between cops and thugs, in US Film and Television since the 1970s. As previously stated in my introductory chapter, del Toro's performance in *Traffic* and his Oscar win for it can be seen as a landmark moment in del Toro's career establishing him as a star and a serious actor, in line with the 'star as performer' category put forward by Christine Geraghty. As one contemporary reviewer noted in 2001, 'Benicio del Toro, winner of Sunday's Oscar for best supporting actor for *Traffic*, has gone from being recognized as a solid character actor to an authentic star in only three months.'²²³ I will now deconstruct the way in which del Toro's star persona was constructed in the press, at the time of *Traffic*'s release, discussing the focus on his biography, acting and Puerto Rican ethnicity and how this presentation of him in the print media could impact upon audiences' understanding of his character Javier Rodriguez.

In reviews of *Traffic*, del Toro is almost universally praised for his acting in the role of the Mexican cop, and his performance is frequently singled out as being the strongest in an ensemble cast of accomplished actors. Stephen Dalton in *The Times* (UK) wrote that 'Benicio del Toro gives a superb performance as a quietly heroic Mexican cop', emphasising the strength of his acting and the heroic role of his character, the two factors which are arguably central in establishing del Toro as a burgeoning star in this role.²²⁴ Henry Fitzherbert in UK's *The Sunday Express* makes del Toro's ascension to star in this role more explicit when he writes that Mexican cop Javier Rodriguez is 'played with star charisma by Benicio del Toro.'²²⁵ Edward Guthmann of *The San Francisco Chronicle* writes that 'Del Toro, winner of the New York Film Critics' best-supporting-actor prize, has a sense of tragic inevitability as Javier', elevating the actor with both the recognition of the award-winning nature of the performance and the description of his character which presents

²²³ John McKay, '3 brilliant storylines jammed into *Traffic*' in *The Record*, Thursday 31st May 2001, Section: Entertainment, p.13

²²⁴ Stephen Dalton, 'Film Guide' in *The Times* Saturday 27th July 2002, Section: Features, Play, p.30

²²⁵ Fitzherbert, *Sunday Express*, 28th January 2001

him as akin to a classical, tragic hero.²²⁶ Lowing in Australian newspaper *The Sun Herald* shows prescience in predicting del Toro's Oscar success when he writes: 'Del Toro must win Best Supporting Actor for a performance so natural you feel you're sweating with this \$600-a-month cop on morally dangerous Mexican streets.'²²⁷ This reviewer's statement also underlines the ability of del Toro's acting skills to render the idea typical of the Hollywood border film; that the streets of Mexico are more 'morally dangerous' than those on the US side of the border, as believable and credible for the viewing audience.

Desson Howe in *The Washington Post* identifies del Toro's performance as standing out from the rest and acting as the film's biggest audience attraction, writing:

There's a ton of strong performers in *Traffic*, including Michael Douglas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Dennis Quaid and Don Cheadle. But as Javier Rodriguez, a Mexican policeman caught between overwhelming corruption and his granite-encased integrity, Del Toro's the best reason of all to watch the movie.²²⁸

Jami Bernard in the *New York Daily News* echoes Howe's sentiments and expands upon it, describing the reason del Toro's performance is so powerful, writing:

This actor's paradise is packed with outstanding performances. But first among equals is Benicio Del Toro, a consistently surprising young man [...]. Del Toro's part is almost entirely in Spanish, and almost entirely cerebral. You see him chewing over the latest turn of events, trying to make a plan. He can do a poker face with an unusual amount of animation, which makes him incredibly magnetic.²²⁹

What is particularly interesting to me here, in the light of my thesis as a discussion of representations of Hispanic masculinity, is the way in which Bernard describes del Toro's performance as 'cerebral' in distinct contrast to previous Hollywood stereotypes of Hispanic men as overly emotional and unrestrained in their actions. Rob Lowing in *The Sun Herald* recognises del Toro's method acting background and compares him to one of the most successful stars of this style of performance when he writes, 'You want brooding street realism and a searing Brando-esque performance? Check out Del Toro's struggling Mexican cop who has to decide

²²⁶ Guthmann, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Friday 5th January 2001

²²⁷ Rob Lowing, 'Scores on All Counts' in *The Sun Herald*

²²⁸ Desson Howe in 'Green Light for *Traffic*' in *The Washington Post*, Friday 5th January 2001, Section: Weekend, p.36

²²⁹ Jami Bernard, 'IT'S BORDERLINE BRILLIANT DRUG-WAR DRAMAS INTERSECT IN 'TRAFFIC'' in *New York Daily News*, Section: New York Now, Wednesday 27th December 2000 p.39

whether to make his own stand on drugs.²³⁰ The way in which method acting has represented acting as work, arguably cerebral work, rather than instinct sets del Toro apart from some existing stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity.

The praise of del Toro's acting in *Traffic* as outstanding and exceptional, in comparison with the film's other accomplished performers, and the focus on his believability in portraying the humble and heroic Mexican cop, both encourage us to view him as a star as performer and to accept the image of Hispanic masculinity he portrays as realistic. This is enhanced in the film's promotion in which frequent references to del Toro's performance are made by director Steven Soderbergh. In the newspaper *The Record*, based in Ontario, Soderbergh is quoted as praising del Toro's commitment to honesty in his performance:

"He's [del Toro] just so passionate and committed," the film's director Steven Soderbergh told USA Today. "It's not that he's a perfectionist," Soderbergh said. "I don't think he cares that it's perfect. He just wants it to be true. It's about honesty. I totally respect that kind of dedication."²³¹

The employment of a quotation from the previously established auteurial authority of Soderbergh as the director here enhances the perception of del Toro's 'truth' and 'honesty' in portraying Javier Rodriguez, arguably pre-disposing the viewer to overlook the more stereotypical aspects of his characters construction.

Del Toro's Latino origins are also strongly fore-grounded in the promotion of his star persona in 2001, arguably in order to emphasis the ethnic authenticity of his portrayal of Mexican cop Javier Rodriguez. Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* featured two stories which emphasised del Toro's pride in his Latino identity. In the first the reader is informed that:

Puerto Rico-born Benicio Del Toro says that more work is needed to increase the presence of people with Latin American roots in Hollywood. "There are few writers, there are few directors," said Del Toro, 34, who won an Oscar earlier this year for his role in *Traffic*. "The reality is that Latinos must do it themselves," said the actor. "Neither the studio nor anyone else is going to do it for them."²³²

Just a few days earlier *The Globe and Mail* also reported that del Toro and director Steven Soderbergh flew to Cuba in July 2001 to introduce free showings of *Traffic*, as they felt it would be

²³⁰ Rob Lowing, 'Scores on All Counts' in *The Sun Herald*

²³¹ John McKay, '3 brilliant storylines jammed into *Traffic*' in *The Record*, Thursday 31st May 2001, Section: Entertainment, p.13

²³² Benicio del Toro as quoted in 'more opportunities, por favor' in *The Globe and Mail*, 13th July 2001, Section: The Globe Review, Arts Notebook, p.2

of interest to the Cuban people.²³³ The fact that del Toro, who is specifically described in the article as being Puerto Rican, travelled to Cuba to promote the film suggests a sense of a pan-Latin American engagement between nations on the part of del Toro here.

This is echoed in the production notes for *Traffic* in which the importance of the casting of Latino actors, in order for the film to authentically capture border relations between the US and Mexico, is strongly emphasised.

Further contributing to the authenticity of *Traffic* was Soderbergh's decision to cast a number of Latino actors in key roles. The cast includes Puerto Rican-born Benicio Del Toro and Luis Guzman; Cuban-born Steven Bauer and Tomas Milian; and Mexican-born Jacob Vargas and Marisol Padilla Sanchez.²³⁴

Del Toro himself is even quoted to underline the Latino actors' support for this casting and the authenticity is explicitly noted as 'ethnic' rather than 'national', perhaps to gloss over the fact that del Toro was a Puerto Rican actor playing a Mexican role:

Benicio Del Toro found, as did other cast members, this emphasis on ethnic authenticity to be refreshing: 'Steven's idea – to do it in Spanish – it was exciting to tackle that. It adds texture to the story, realism of a kind we haven't seen.'²³⁵

What is interesting here is that the production notes specifically feature del Toro, with his Latino ethnic identity frequently underlined, endorsing the realism of the film and encouraging us as viewers to believe in his performance of Javier as a realistic image of Hispanic masculinity. His rather ambiguous comment that this is 'realism of a kind we haven't seen', could perhaps be followed with the qualifier 'in Hollywood', again emphasising *Traffic* and del Toro's perceived difference and distance from Hollywood's stereotypical representations of Hispanic masculinity.

4.5 The 'Narc Hero' Crosses the Border

Having discussed the production and reception discourses surrounding *Traffic* and Benicio del Toro at the time of the film's release in cinemas and on the home video market, I have now established how the critical perception of the film and its most outstanding actor, star and hero were constructed in order to facilitate the audience's acceptance of Javier Rodriguez as a realistic and authentic image of Hispanic masculinity, in that they believe that this is, at least somewhat,

²³³ 'Havana Gets a Taste of *Traffic*' in *The Globe and Mail* Tuesday 10th July 2001, Section: The Globe Review, Arts Notebook, p. 2

²³⁴ Production notes for *Traffic*, included as part of the UK press pack for the film.

²³⁵ Ibid.

reflective of reality in order to support *Traffic*'s credibility as socially conscious indiewood film. What must be added to this discussion, if del Toro's performance as Javier Rodriguez is to be fully understood, is a brief analysis of the notable amount of attention given to the construction of the character Javier and his function in the film in the production notes for *Traffic*. The film's producer Laura Bickford is quoted discussing the political function of Javier in *Traffic*:

"One thing that we wanted to make clear is that all the Mexicans aren't 'bad guys'. Benicio's character, Javier, is a good man caught in a bad world where he might not have a choice. The 'bad guy' is the system and the corruption around the illegal drug trade. Javier has to make a decision about how to deal with it: does he take bribes and essentially work for the cartels or not? It's almost impossible for him, at some point, not to work with one side or the other. So we tried to show what it's like for a police officer who's totally honest, but has no way to survive without making some compromises."²³⁶

This quote is particularly revealing as it highlights the duality of the function of Javier Rodriguez's character in the film, functions which could be seen as conflicting. There is a suggestion here that Javier is intended to be a three-dimensional character. As Billson noted in her previously mentioned review, he must make difficult decisions and face complex moral dilemmas throughout the film's narrative. But, yet, the very suggestion that Javier has been created in the narrative to show that Mexicans are not all 'bad guys' and as a character who is 'totally honest' gives the sense that the filmmakers of *Traffic* are simply swapping one heavily stereotypical representation of Hispanic masculinity for another more 'positive' archetype, rather than attempting to create a psychologically realistic character. This is arguably also true of the representation of Melquiades in *Three Burials*, although, as will be explored later, this film shows a greater awareness of the fallacy of these positive archetypes.

Later in the production notes for *Traffic*, the need to present Javier as a realistic and authentic representation of a Mexican lawman is reasserted when the authorship process is discussed in more detail. Steven Gaghan is here quoted as describing the origins of Javier in these terms:

"The character of Javier Rodriguez [portrayed in *Traffic* by Benicio Del Toro] came out of discussions I had with Steven. Every day in the newspaper, there were fascinating stories about border politics. I was reading a lot about the effect of American drug policy on Mexico, and Tim Golden suggested that we show what the day-to-day is like for Tijuana lawmen and citizens. The vast American appetite for drugs and the current interdiction strategy have destroyed the Mexican towns along the border with the United States."²³⁷

²³⁶ Laura Bickford, Producer, as quoted in the production notes for *Traffic* p.7

²³⁷ Production notes for *Traffic* p.6

It is notable that the character of Javier Rodriguez receives the most discussion in the film's production notes in terms of authenticity in that the producers of the film clearly want the audience to perceive him as a positive image that is truthfully drawn from the experiences of honourable Mexican law enforcement, underlining that there is a sense of national guilt expressed here; that the US has caused that which the film attempts to allay through the character of Rodriguez.

But for all the defence of the film's realism, authenticity and impartiality in its construction of Rodriguez, there is still a need to identify the Mexican characters as distinct and other from the Anglos in the film, and the document features a revealing quote from Soderbergh in which he discusses the use of Spanish language dialogue in the film:

"It was always envisioned that the scenes in which Mexicans are speaking to Mexicans would be done in Spanish. I felt that if you wanted anybody to take the film seriously on any level, we had to do that. In the film there is an important distinction between how Mexican's speak to one another and how they speak to Americans. Even in the Spanish language, it's a completely different way of speaking. Their use of metaphor is completely different when they talk to each other and when they speak in English to an American. I wanted people to understand that, because impenetrability of another culture is part of the Mexican story. [...] "You have Americans coming into Mexico and making a lot of assumptions about rules they can impose upon Mexican culture. And it simply doesn't work that way. So, having the dialogue spoken in Spanish seemed like the way to make audiences buy it and believe it."

This makes clear that the Mexican characters are deliberately portrayed as somewhat unknowable to the US audience; they have their own metaphors and codes of conduct that differ from those of the US characters. It can also be read into this that Soderbergh believes that by portraying Mexicans speaking in their native tongue, the film is not imposing US rules and assumptions on Mexican peoples, and that the film's English speaking audience will accept this to be true, an assertion which is somewhat troubling. What this characterisation by Soderbergh overlooks is that which is key to Javier's character; the fact that he can converse with Americans, and he is essentially portrayed as a man caught on the border between two nations, but with this being a US film he necessarily moves closer towards US values along this border.

Camilla Fojas writes that the character of Javier Rodriguez is, at his simplest, a fairly standard archetype of the narc hero in the narcotraficante genre who defends the people from drug dealers. The difference is that in this case it is a Mexican rather than an Anglo character who takes on this role. She writes:

Traffic is ostensibly about the war at home, but it projects the narc sensibility on to the Latin/o American character, one who as a border resident encompasses both spaces: he is bilingual and travels readily in both Mexican and U.S. cultures. Within the logic of the film, the ideal viewer is not the Anglo family whose portion against drug trafficking has been well established and confirmed across popular media and culture, but the transnational, Latin/o American whose cultural fluidity and access is a valuable commodity in the war on drugs. Javier gives up his coveted information because he feels it is the “right thing” to do. He is the cowboy on the frontier, the “American” hero who stand up for what he believes is right. But, more importantly, he does so in a way which privileges the role of the transnational American narc to encourage and promote collaboration across Americas.²³⁸

The film does certainly project the narc sensibility onto Javier and, although there is no strong evidence in the film’s promotion that Latinos are the film’s ideal viewers, as Latinos are arguably the ‘US’s keenest, most youthful and fast-growing film demographic’, it is likely that they were considered to be a key audience sector for the film’s producers.²³⁹ However, even if Latinos cannot be established as the ideal viewers of the film, Fojas is certainly valid in arguing that the film’s producers certainly feel a need to present Javier as strongly ‘American’ in terms of his values and allegiances, and this is reflected in my analysis of his character. Indeed, the character of Javier could be seen to be part of a wider trend in US screen representations of Hispanic masculinity since the early 2000s, in which Latino characters are presented as more morally ‘American’ than their Anglo counterparts. This portrayal of Latino male characters has been particularly prevalent in small screen fictions, with Jimmy Smits portraying a law defending and patriotic politician for two seasons of *The West Wing* (2004-2006), before playing with audience’s expectations in the role of respected Latino district attorney turned murderer in *Dexter* (one season in 2008) and to Latin Lover stereotypes as a pimp in *Sons of Anarchy* (from 2012). Series’ focused on law enforcement in the era of this thesis have also presented Latino male enforcement officials as more abiding of the US law than their white counterparts, examples include Captain David Aceveda trying to reign in the corruption of maverick Detective Vic Mackey in *The Shield* (2002-2008) and the revelation that the drug cartel soldiers played by Danny Trejo and Benito Martinez in *Sons of Anarchy* (Season 4, 2011) are in fact undercover agents for the CIA. This trend of representation could be viewed as an attempt to encourage Latino audiences to align themselves with American patriotism and mainstream political values as the US Hispanic population increases. However, when I move on to consider Javier as a character in more detail, I

²³⁸ Camilla Fojas, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009) p.135

²³⁹ Phil Hoad, ‘Will Hollywood Ever Speak Hispanic Audiences’ Language?’, *The Guardian Film Blog*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2012/mar/13/hollywood-hispanic-audiences-cinema?INTCMP=SRCH> [accessed 11/07/2012]

will also argue that as a representation of Hispanic masculinity, he is portrayed in this way in order to assuage US neo-colonial guilt towards Mexico and to render Mexican masculinity innocuous, as a potential threat to US values and culture. It must be noted that the sense of Javier as a man who can cross the borderlands, both physically and metaphorically, is enhanced by del Toro's status as a star who can be both American and other. As a Puerto Rican actor who has spent most of his life in the US, del Toro is Hispanic enough to be authentic as Javier, but 'American' enough to not appear foreign to US audiences, and has appeared in roles when his ethnicity is not strongly defined. In interviews, del Toro speaks without a trace of his Hispanic accent, yet he has at times aligned himself with Latin American culture in his appreciation of Che and his playing of him, which will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis. In being able to play Hispanic and non-Hispanic characters, he bridges the gap between the masculine other and that which is fully assimilated into US culture.

4.6 The Good Neighbour Within

Javier is arguably presented as the most morally commendable character in the narrative of *Traffic*; however, the portrayal of the Mexican cop as a defender of the US Nation has uncomfortable neo-colonial overtones. The film may be twenty-first century in its political concerns and, as Fojas notes, the film arguably addresses growing domestic Latino audience in, but in its representation of Javier the film shares some similarities with the 'Good Neighbour' propaganda films of the 1940s. These films, intended to support the contemporary US government policy of keeping a 'neighbourly' eye on Latin American affairs, rather than directly interfering, in order to engender Pan-American political and economic co-operation in a time of global political uncertainty.²⁴⁰ Philip Swanson notes that 'Good Neighbour' policy reached its height during World War Two. This was due to concerns about transatlantic and transpacific supplies and markets in a time of political uncertainty. In 1940 the Office of the Coordinator of Inter American Affairs was established to promote positive cultural relations across the Americas and film was a key part of this.²⁴¹ These films, such as the cartoons *The Three Caballeros* (1944)

²⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of 'Good Neighbour' films and the related US government policy see Dale Adams, 'Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's Good Neighbour Policy' in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 24(3), 2007, pp.289-295 and Philip Swanson, 'Going Down on Good Neighbours: Imagining América in Hollywood Movies of the 1930s and 1940s' in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 29 (2010), No 1, pp. 71-84

²⁴¹ Philip Swanson, p. 72

and *Saludos Amigos* (1942), José Piedra notes, were typified by a colonial tendency towards "infantilizing" and "effeminizing" the natives, caricaturing Latin American men as "unnaturally macho or subliminally sissy", in need of temperance or at least guidance from 'Uncle Sam'.²⁴² In *Traffic*, the idea that Mexican masculinity needs to be cooled by a calming US influence is enhanced by the contrast between the cold, blue tint to the scenes taking place in the US, and the hot, yellow tone of sun-baked Mexico. Indeed *Traffic*, despite its claims to realism, depicts Javier in a way which conforms to the tradition of feminising the male other, which has long been typical of colonial narratives. It must also be noted that, as will become important in my discussion of *Three Burials*, this US colonial tendency of feminising the male other certainly extends to the Western, in which both Native Americans and Mexicans are aligned with women, the genre classifying them as 'non-men'.²⁴³



Figure 4.1: del Toro's Javier Rodriguez is 'checked out', in a scene from *Traffic* (2000)

²⁴² Jose Pierra 'The Three Caballeros: Pato Donald's Gender Duckling' in *Jump Cut* no.39, June 1994

²⁴³ Ella Shohat, 'Tropes of Empire' in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam eds. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 137-176, p. 141-142; Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.168

Javier does not easily conform to the categories of 'macho' or 'sissy'; however he is the subject of the gaze; feminised and exoticised as a sexual spectacle for the audience. He is presented as a sexual object in a scene in which his body is used to lure and subsequently arrest the gay assassin Frankie Flowers (Figure 4.1). In this scene we see Javier enter what has already been identified as a gay bar, and place his shopping bag with his partner Manolo. He visibly takes a deep breath before standing up, this could be read as nervousness before an entrapment or an indication that the film's producers want to suggest to a mainstream audience that Javier is not gay, despite his notable lack of interest in women throughout the film. He then walks to the bar and leans over in front of Frankie Flowers to order a beer and we witness Flowers admiring Javier's figure in his tight jeans as he is presented as a feminised sexual spectacle. Later in this scene he does take on a more traditionally masculine role, lighting Flower's cigarette for him but his romantic flirtation with the assassin ultimately places him in a traditionally female role as his Latin sexuality is a weapon to be employed in the war against drugs. This scene presents Javier as a 'good guy', but is at the same time confirming uncomfortable stereotypes of Hispanic men as we see him effectively prostituting himself for the American cause. His body is a commodity, the film at once seeks to assimilate him, present him as a Pan-American masculine ideal while constructing him as a racial and sexual other, a passive, feminised and a sexual object, in line with traditional Hollywood stereotypes, who can be bent to the will of US national interests. Indeed this portrayal of Javier can be seen to engage with many of the aspects that Swanson identifies as typical of Good Neighbour films portrayals of Latinos in that it portrays them as exotic and sexually marked peoples to be played with, to impose US ideals on but to also keep at a distance.²⁴⁴

Indeed while Banderas has been frequently presented as a sexual spectacle throughout his Hollywood career, his major roles demonstrate a need to qualify his masculinity as he is objectified through the portrayal of his masculine action prowess and his romantic liaisons with beautiful female stars such as Catherine Zeta-Jones and Salma Hayek. Del Toro as Javier, in comparison, is a relatively passive figure, particularly sexually as he is not tempted by the feminine charms of Salma Hayek, the materialistic trophy girlfriend of a drug dealer for whom he and Manolo act as drivers. This could be interpreted as him being too noble to engage with such a woman and he offers only brotherly support to Manolo's wife after he goes missing, which again makes him seem highly moral and superior to his fallen friend. Indeed, apart from in tempting Frankie Flowers, Javier exhibits no Latin Lover tendencies, but is rather strangely a-sexual and has

²⁴⁴ Philip Swanson, p. 73

few relationships outside his work. We know that his parents died in the floods and he has no wife, girlfriend or children, as if he is not a fully formed adult. Even in the opening scene in which Javier speaks of his traumatic nightmare, it is his mother that he imagines kidnapped and suffocated rather than a wife or girlfriend. He seems to exist purely in the realm of the symbolic, and he is a character with no real back-story beyond his heroic law-enforcement role, but yet del Toro's performance and the promotion of his character's function seem to encourage us to view him as a fully formed human being. Indeed, the character of Javier Rodriguez in *Traffic* is exemplary of how American anxieties surrounding the Mexican border can be projected on to the Mexican male body. This portrayal of Javier can be seen to be aligned with the good neighbour film's tendency to view Latinos and Latin America itself as 'raw material for the exploration of North American heroisms, fantasies and national myths'.²⁴⁵ He is at once portrayed as 'other' for the US audience in a manner that makes him appear feminised and innocuous, yet the film also portrays Javier as a bastion of traditional US masculine values. He is selfless, values his community of Tijuana, and is like a soldier or a cowboy, the ideal Pan-American hero, a defender of the American way from across the Southern border. This is encapsulated perfectly in the film's ending in which we see Javier at a children's baseball game, after we have been informed earlier in the narrative that in exchange for helping US authorities he wants children in Mexico to be able to play baseball on a well lit court. This ideal seems taken directly from US culture, and is clearly constructed to appeal to the sentiments of a US audience who connect baseball with childhood nostalgia and represents the successful assimilation of Hispanic masculinity into US culture.

4.7 Melquiades' Body in *Three Burials*

Camilla Fojas writes that, despite the Mexican immigrants name in the title, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* is essentially "about [...] Anglo male couples'" journey into the heart of darkness of U.S. myths and cinematic histories of cross-border encounters. In fact the corpse of Melquiades might represent the death of the fantasies about the place of Mexico and Mexicans in the US imaginary.²⁴⁶ In this section I will examine Fojas' statement and explore the potential ways in which Melquiades' body, living and dead, can be read as a symbolic representation of US attitudes towards US/Mexico border-spaces, their culture and peoples. I will consider the role of the Mexican vaquero (Mexican border cowboy) Melquiades in *Three Burials* as a contemporary

²⁴⁵ Philip Swanson, p. 73

²⁴⁶ Camilla Fojas, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009) p.192

Western, a genre which, as I have previously noted, has historically portrayed Mexicans as 'non-men' who do not possess the noble and heroic masculinity of the Anglo cowboy. In the Western, Mexico is constructed as a nostalgic place to escape to and seek lost ideals, but it is also a dangerous and lawless place which lacks the civilisation of the US.²⁴⁷ An example of this can be seen in the *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) in which Humphrey Bogart's character is brutally killed with a machete by a vicious Mexican, but Mexico is also portrayed as a place of spiritual renewal where a village accepts Walter Huston as its leader.²⁴⁸ It shall be my argument that throughout the film, Melquiades is portrayed as both more and less of a man than the majority of his Anglo counterparts through different points of view. His portrayal, for most of the film, follows in the tradition of presenting Mexico as morally more and less than the US by presenting us with views of Melquiades as a 'non-man', perhaps even a non-person, and the ideal man cast in the cowboy tradition. This is until the film's ending, which causes the audience to completely reconsider everything they have previously learnt about Melquiades, and challenges US ideas of Mexican masculinity and Mexico itself.

The film employs a non-linear narrative structure, that begins with the discovery of Melquiades' body in a shallow grave in the desert as he is eaten by a coyote before flashing back to the memories of Melquiades' life through the eyes of his friend and fellow rancher Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones), who kidnaps his killer and leads him on a quest to return Melquiades' body to his family in Mexico. Each of the film's three parts is organised around a burial of Melquiades Estrada, and hence it is through the meanings attached to each of his burials that we come to understand the body of Melquiades through the eyes of those who bury him. As previously stated, the first burial takes place in a shallow grave in the desert after he has been wrongly shot by a border patrolman before being partially devoured by a coyote. So from the very beginning of the film he is portrayed more like a piece of meat than a human being, as he is quite literally eaten by the predator, and this is reinforced through his second burial at the hands of the Texan authorities. During this burial, the industrial digger, which is used to bury his body without ceremony, driven by a man in a work shirt and baseball cap, makes the burial seem like a casual disposal. A small cross is to be placed on the grave, with the text written on in black marker and the details contain no surname or definite place of origin. The marker says simply 'Melquiades, Mexico' which suggests that the two are one and the same to the men who bury him, and

²⁴⁷ Edward Buscombe ed., *The BFI Companion to the Western* (London, Deutsch/BFI, 1993) p.185

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p.186

reinforces the idea of the Mexican in the Western as a 'non-man', taking this to the extreme that he is almost inhuman. He is unknown, lacking in identity. Pete, who is identified as Melquiades' only friend, is unaware of the burial, 'you were not his family, I don't have to notify you about a god damn thing, he was a wetback!' says the sheriff to Pete when he admonishes him for this. The sheriff's characterisation of Melquiades as a 'wetback' (an offensive US term for a Mexican illegal immigrant) and the casual disposal of his unknowable body underlined his marginalised and voiceless position in Texan society.

Indeed, this scene makes clear that Melquiades is defined in the eyes of the Texan society, to everyone apart from Pete, as a 'body' rather than a person. As a man, when he is alive, he is presented as largely unknowable to the audience; we are shown only snippets of his life through the medium of his friendship with Pete and we are given cause to question how much 'truth' these reveal. However, when Pete kidnaps Melquiades' killer and forces him to accompany him across the border to bury Mel's corpse in his homeland, the representation of Melquiades' corpse, in complete contrast, is rendered in explicit detail, suggesting that Texan society can only know him through his death, rather than his life. His corpse (which Pete carries with him preserved with anti-freeze), unlike the near anonymous Mexican immigrant, is so potent and grotesque, an assault on the senses that provokes nausea and vomiting from all but Pete, that it forces the patrolman to confront the death and life of Melquiades, confronting his fear of Mexico and its peoples. In her essay on horror and the abject, Julia Kristeva wrote that 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life.'²⁴⁹ The corpse of the Mexican in *Three Burials* becomes the ultimate abject for his killer and the viewer, as the illegal immigrant is for the Texan society of the film. Melquiades' burials, first in the desert and then in a barely marked grave before being returned to his imagined 'homeland', symbolise US attitudes towards border peoples. But it is only in the last burial he is named and given identity. In the previous two burials he is simply a corpse and a wetback, conforming to the stereotypical idea of Mexican's in the Western.

4.8 'I am just a cowboy': *Three Burials* and the Western

The film encourages the audience to become invested in Pete's quest to restore Melquiades to his homeland and his family for his final burial, to restore the identity to the body of the unknowable man. As with most Westerns we view the landscape through the idealised eyes of the cowboy, in

²⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press: 1982) p.4

this case Pete, and his relationship with Melquiades is central in the film's narrative as male relationships tend to be most valued in the Western.²⁵⁰ However, when the men reach the mythical Jimenez, Melquiades' story of his past and his family is revealed to be a fantasy. The place detailed in his hand-drawn map does not exist, and Mel's 'wife' claims never to have known him. The reason for its fabrication is never explained and our trust in the narrator dissolves. We begin to suspect that Pete has projected his longing for a pre-modern lifestyle, old-fashioned values and the traditional family on to his friend, in the mode of the good neighbour approach to Mexico. His final burial is a way of honouring this idea of Melquiades, as Pete and the captive patrolman build Melquiades a home in a place that resembles his description of the mythical Jimenez before burying him beside it.

I concur with Donald Pye when he writes of the film:

The presentation of the Anglo world [in *Three Burials*] makes the image of family attractive and highly charged – something to be cherished. Strongly informing the opposition between this world and Mexico are traditions of the Western in which Mexico can be a mythic location for such dreams of community and the possibility of a kind of life increasingly hard to locate in the U.S. It is this vision of family life across the border that underpins Pete's quest.²⁵¹



Figure 4.2: Melquiades on horseback, in a scene from *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005)

²⁵⁰ Edward Buscombe ed., *The BFI Companion to the Western* (London, Deutsch/BFI, 1993) p.182

²⁵¹ Donald Pye, 'At the Border: the limits of knowledge in *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* and *No Country for Old Men*' http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie/contents/at_the_border.pdf p.4

Indeed, Melquiades is clearly presented through the eyes of his friend as the pure masculine ideal of the traditional cowboy. Melquiades says to Pete when he first meets him, 'I am just a cowboy', and he is presented as a noble and nostalgic image of this archetype when portrayed through the eyes of Pete, for whom he is not a 'non-man'. When the two men first meet Melquiades appears as if from nowhere on horseback in the doorway of the cattle-barn (Figure 4.2). He is brightly lit in comparison to the dark barn, standing apart from the other men in front of a vista of pure blue sky and a landscape free from any sign of modernity, as if he is a visitor from not just another place, but another time. The idyllic background and the bright light make him appear almost angelically pure, perhaps with overtones of the traditional Western trope of the noble savage, while his traditional Western setting and dress mark him out as a throw-back to a more traditional era of cowboy masculinity. This is reinforced by the later locales we see him living and working in as he shies away from modernity and commercialism, appearing distinctly uncomfortable in the town for fear of the border police. While the other characters spend their time in modern malls and diners, he tends his herd of goats or lives in a humble shack, and this is portrayed in a scene in which Pete forces Melquiades' killer to drink from the vaquero's cup and eat from his humble wooden bowl in order to embody and understand the purity of the man.

It is not just these visual signifiers in the film that identify Melquiades as a symbol of traditional cowboy masculinity, but also his behaviour. Pete's memories cast Melquiades as a resourceful and hardworking rancher who respects those who work on the land; he comments that the owner of the ranch cannot be a real rancher if he does not drive cattle himself. He is also selfless and noble in his dealings with Pete and with women, for example he gives Pete his own horse. In this he shares notable similarities with the character of Javier in that, in contrast to traditional ideas of Hispanic masculinity as highly sexed or aggressive, he is passive and reserved. He merely dances with the married Louanne when Pete implores him to sleep with her, while her Anglo border patrolman husband nearly rapes her and masturbates to pornography in the desert when he patrols the border. It is notable that the wallpaper of the motel room in which they dances has a large image of a tropical sunset; the music that plays is also a romantic ballad that suggests an escape for her from the bleak modernity of Texas, and casts Melquiades as an old-fashioned gentleman in comparison to her base and brutal husband. The contrasts between Melquiades and the Anglo characters is created to underline their differences, which frequently present the Mexican vaquero as a more positive image of masculinity than his Anglo counterparts, albeit one which may have uncomfortable colonial overtones of the noble savage archetype, a longstanding Western image of the pure and uncorrupted native, and this is enhanced by the non-

linear narrative of the film which seems constructed to emphasise these contrasts for the audience.

However, what is key to the film's meaning and message, and what changes the audience's understanding of Melquiades as a representation of Hispanic masculinity, is the exposure of his story of his homeland and family as a fiction. Indeed, the dead man's reason for creating this fantasy remains unknowable to the audience and the character. In the end, Melquiades comes to represent not a fear of the Mexican borderlands, but an exposure of the fallacy of the Texan community's construction of Mexico and its peoples as antithetical to their ideas of their own community. This is emphasised by the film's presentation of the watching of the same soap opera across nations, where the characters hope to return to an idealised past, suggesting to a US audience that Mexico exists in a very similar state of empty modern or post-modern commercialism that the US does, provoking similar nostalgic yearnings. So then, it is arguably the final burial that represents 'the death of the fantasies about the place of Mexico and Mexicans in the US imaginary' as Fojas postulates. But it also demonstrates that both Pete and Melquiades both feel a strong emotional need to preserve a fantasy of Mexico, the Mexican cowboy fabricating his past and his Anglo counterpart seeking to preserve this ideal even after his friend's death. Thus, ultimately I would argue that the film fills us with the sense that people on both sides of the border are united in their need to preserve a traditional fantasy of heroic masculinity on the US/Mexico border, as the contemporary alternative is demonstrated to be bleak and empty.

4.9 Conclusion

To conclude, in examining the presentation of images of Hispanic masculinity in *Traffic* and *Three Burials* that initially present themselves to be a reflection of social realities, it has emerged, perhaps as expected, that these images are as constructed as their previously discussed fantastical counterparts. It is clear, from my analysis here, that production and reception discourses surrounding the films and their key personnel play a central role in creating the perceived 'realism' of these images. Nonetheless, in examining the texts themselves, and to an extent the discourses surrounding them in more detail, it becomes clear that the images they present, and the way in which these images are promoted and received, seem somewhat incongruous, in that their perceived 'realism' quickly dissolves during deconstruction. Indeed, while on the surface these films differ radically in style and subject matter from those discussed in

the two previous chapters, these films are similar to those previously discussed in that they project nostalgic images of heroic, Hollywood masculinities on to the body of the Hispanic male.

5. Hispanic Masculinity and the Star as Biographical Subject

5.1 Introduction

We first view Antonio Banderas performing the role of the Hispanic hero in *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (abbreviated to *Pancho*) from a rooftop overlooking the Mexican border from the US. Through the eyes of a US onlooker we see him riding on horseback across the Mexican desert plains as the heroic music swells. He turns and nods, pulling the reigns of his horse, and then the shot reverses to show his striking image reflected in the lenses of binoculars. We hear Banderas call out in Spanish and the shot reverses again to show him framed through the eyes of the binoculars, as if in a spotlight, and we follow as a lit stick of dynamite is thrown through the air towards him. After a close up of the American's face in shock we see Banderas hurl the dynamite over the gate of a hacienda before it explodes outwards in a ball of flame. For contemporary viewers this performance plays to their expectations of Banderas as a star whose image, as this thesis has already demonstrated, has become the ultimate embodiment of the Hispanic action hero. But in this scene Banderas is not portraying El Mariachi or Zorro, but rather the historical Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa in the HBO movie *Pancho*. This scene is a strong example of the way in which the existing persona of a star shapes the image of the subject they embody in the Biopic genre, something which I will discuss in detail in this part of my thesis. Indeed, in this fourth and final genre study I will consider the performances of two of contemporary Hollywood's most prominent Hispanic stars, Banderas and Benicio del Toro, playing two of history's most iconic Latin American revolutionaries; Pancho Villa and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara.

This chapter expands upon my discussion of images of Hispanic masculinity that present themselves as being partly based on 'reality' in the previous chapter, and examines how portraying Hispanic masculinity through embodying historical figures could affect audience understanding of these images. Considering Hispanic male representation in the biopic genre, the first part of Steven Soderbergh's *Che* and *Pancho* more specifically, is also a fitting way to begin to conclude this thesis, as this chapter will bring together a number of theoretical issues that were introduced in the preceding chapters. Firstly, in these biopics Hispanic masculinity is again presented to the audience as being heroic, as it was in the action adventure, family film and border film case studies previously discussed. Secondly, like the family film, it is has only been very recently that the biopic has begun to focus on subjects that are not white, Anglo and male. Thus it represents a relatively new platform for images of Hispanic masculinity and will allow me to consider how Villa and Guevara, two figures of international political significance who opposed

US capitalist imperialism, are presented as important historical figures for US audiences. Film historian Pierre Sorlin argues that 'every historical film is an indicator of a country's basic historical culture, its historical capital' and as such these biopics represent an attempt to assimilate these two foreign and politically oppositional historical figures into cultural imaginary of a US audience.²⁵² Lastly, this chapter allows for a direct comparison of the contrasting star personas of Benicio del Toro and Antonio Banderas, discussed in previous chapters.



Figure 5.1: Popular images of Villa



Figure 5.2: Popular images of Guevara

5.2 Pancho Villa and Che Guevara in US and Hispanic Culture

The images above depict the biographical subjects that I will discuss in this chapter, Villa and Guevara respectively, included here as a means to compare them with those images depicted on screen in my case studies. In order to reinforce their importance in both US and Latin-American cultures, I will also briefly outline their historical and contemporary cultural significance here as background to my analysis of their cinematic representation. Pancho Villa (1878–1923), birth name Doroteo Arango (also called Francisco), was a Mexican revolutionary and guerrilla leader.²⁵³ He spent his adolescence as a fugitive, having killed the owner of the estate where he worked because he had assaulted Villa's sister. Villa fought in revolts against dictators Porfirio Díaz and

²⁵² Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) p.22

²⁵³ "Pancho Villa." 2006-01-01. *Oxford Reference*. 2007-01-01. Date Accessed 22 Mar. 2013 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115846968>

Victoriano Huerta, and fled Mexico in 1912, but returned in 1913 and formed a military group of several thousand men, the famous División del Norte. In 1914, joining his forces with those of Venustiano Carranza, they won a decisive victory over Huerta and entered Mexico City as the victorious leaders of a revolution. His relationship with Carranza was short-lived, however, and, after being defeated in several battles, Villa and Emiliano Zapata fled to the northern mountains of Mexico, where he engaged in rebellion and guerrilla activities. He continued to oppose Carranza's regime until the latter's overthrow in 1920, after which Villa was pardoned and given a ranch in Chihuahua after he promised to retire from political activities. He was assassinated on his ranch in 1923.²⁵⁴ As Villa's biographer Fredrick Katz acknowledges, very few documents survive that can reveal the true nature of Villa's life before the Mexican revolution, and hence legends and mythic speculation abounds in relation to this part of his history, painting him as both a hero and villain.²⁵⁵

In Mexican culture and history, Pancho Villa is recognised as a figure of Mexican nationalism and more specifically with Mexican machismo, as he championed art, cultural and social pursuits that made Mexican national identity synonymous with strong, traditional masculinity, though this is not necessarily viewed in a positive light by contemporary Mexican society.²⁵⁶ He is particularly revered in the region of Chihuahua, where he lived prior to the revolution, so much so that in 1976 thousands of people lined the streets to watch Villa's body being transferred to Mexico City.²⁵⁷ In US culture, Pancho Villa is additionally associated with Mexican machismo, though in a more negative bandido-like sense. Though this is in line with common US stereotypes of Mexican masculinity, it can also be attributed to his ambivalent history with the USA, as in 1916 he invaded the USA before being repelled by the US army. As part of this invasion he executed sixteen U.S. citizens at Santa Isabel and President Woodrow Wilson sent Gen. John J. Pershing to find and capture Villa. But the willingness of his comrades to help him and his knowledge of the geography of northern Mexico, in addition to the fact that Mexico did not want Pershing on its soil, made it impossible to catch him.²⁵⁸ However, while Villa was

²⁵⁴ "Villa, Pancho." *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*. : Oxford University Press, 2001. Oxford Reference. 2002. Date Accessed 22 Mar. 2013 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001/acref-9780199891580-e-8872>

²⁵⁵ Frederick Katz, *The life and times of Pancho Villa*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) p.8

²⁵⁶ Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) p. 2

²⁵⁷ Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, p.1

²⁵⁸ "Villa, Pancho." *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*

viewed as an enemy of the US state, he also acquired a legendary status in the US, and was described by President Wilson as "a sort of Robin Hood [who] had spent an eventful life in robbing the rich in order to give to the poor."²⁵⁹ Villa still continues to evoke strong emotions in the US; when in 1979 a statue of him was brought to Tucson, Arizona it was greeted with mixed emotions of respect and contempt by citizens.²⁶⁰ Indeed, while Villa does not quite have the iconic contemporary cultural status of Guevara, he is still likely to be seen by US audiences as an important and controversial figure worthy of biographical representation on US screens.

In discussing the cultural value of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara as a biographical subject, it is necessary to discuss both his life and historical actions but also his image, the latter of which exists almost separately from the former. As Trisha Ziff notes in her introduction to a book charting the evolution of Guevara's image and its meaning across cultures, the single image of Che's face is arguably the most reproduced in the history of photography and has been 'endlessly mutated, transformed and morphed' in terms of its meanings and cultural signification.²⁶¹ The image of Che's face, most strongly the popular image taken by Alberto Korda, has been used to advertise clothing, Vodka, ice-cream and even Ricky Gervais' comedy tours.²⁶² As is emphasised in the Latin American film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) which depicts political awakening of a young Guevara as he travels across Latin-America, 'Che' is a figure of pan-Latin American revolutionary spirit and activist nationalism. Beyond Latin America however, particularly in the US and other English speaking cultures, his image has been transmuted in the last four decades from a specific symbol of left-wing anti-capitalist rebellion, to a pop art image of counter culture and anything anti status-quo and finally, since the 1990s, a commoditised, commercialised image of indie values used to sell almost anything. I concur with Ziff when she argues that the pop cultural images of Guevara have been separated from his historical achievements and has become 'a potent symbol of freedom, of anti-establishment for a new generation that has embraced the idealism of *The Motorcycle Diaries*.'²⁶³ It is arguable that the target audience of Soderbergh's *Che* is the same generation, and thus that the recent economic downturn has enhanced the need for branded Guevara anti-establishment idealism. It is arguably this broad rebellious image of

²⁵⁹ WWP, 29: 229, Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice to Sir Edward Grey, Feb. 7, 1914 -20. Herrera 1981, 42-43. Chapter One, referenced by Katz in Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, p.9

²⁶⁰ Katz, *The life and times of Pancho Villa*, p.1

²⁶¹ Trisha Ziff, *Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon* (V&A Publications: London, 2006) p.7

²⁶² Ibid.p.10-11

²⁶³ Ibid.p8

Guevara, rather than his anti-US political ideals, which the film *Che* employs to appeal to its audience.

Though I concur that Guevara's image has become somewhat dissociated from his role in history, his historical importance is still very central to my discussion of the film and hence now I will give a brief introduction to his historical role in relation to Latin America and the US. 'Che' Guevara (born Ernesto Guevara de la Serna) (1928–67) was a Latin American revolutionary and political leader. Born in Argentina, he joined the pro-democratic regime in Guatemala, and when this was overthrown by a US supported military coup (1954) he fled to Mexico. He served as one of Fidel Castro's lieutenants in the Cuban revolutionary war, before being given a cabinet position and placed in charge of economic policy in communist Cuba. In 1967 he led a revolutionary campaign in Bolivia which failed when Guevara was captured and executed shortly thereafter. His remains were discovered in 1997 and returned to Cuba for a state funeral.²⁶⁴ Guevara also wrote several books such as *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961) on military tactics, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1963), and *Bolivian Diary* (1968) which recall his revolutionary battles, and on which *Che* is based, and *The Motorcycle Diaries* which was a key source for the previously mentioned film and was published by his family in 1993.²⁶⁵ Guevara had an ambivalent relationship with the US government, because of his communist politics and fervently anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist views, so much so that they were instrumental in his assassination through CIA collaboration with the Bolivian military. In 1965 he gave a speech in which he equated imperialism with 'bestiality' and compared the imperialism of 'North America' to that of 'Hitler's armies', this following his criticism of US aggressions against Cuba in a speech to the UN in 1964. This visit to the UN is depicted briefly in *Che*, but the heavy criticism of the USA in the speech is not depicted.

To some Latina/o and Chicana/o communities in the US however, aside from anti-Castro Cuban immigrants in Miami, Guevara was less an enemy and rather an instrumental figure in the civil rights movement and his assassination spurred discontent amongst activist groups in

²⁶⁴ "Guevara, Che." in *A Dictionary of World History*. Ed. Wright, Edmund: Oxford University Press, 2006. [Oxford Reference](http://www.oxfordfodreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192807007.001.0001/acref-9780192807007-e-1564). 2007. Date Accessed 22 Mar. 2013
<http://www.oxfordfodreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192807007.001.0001/acref-9780192807007-e-1564>

²⁶⁵ Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961); *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1963); *The Bolivian Diary* (London: Lorrimer, 1968); *The Motorcycle Diaries* (London: Harper Perennial, 1993, 2004); *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) was also partially based on *Travelling with Che Guevara: The Making of a Revolutionary* by Alberto Grenada (London: Pimlico, 2003)

these communities in late 1967.²⁶⁶ His speech to the United Nations in 1964, also provoked renewed fervour for Puerto Rican independence.²⁶⁷ His importance to some of these communities still lingers today; Jose Morales in the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States* writes:

Guevara symbolized a legendary hero worthy of emulation to [Latina/os] in Latin America and elsewhere. His now mythical courage, idealism, and fervour for justice have influenced Latino and Latina youth movements decades after his death.²⁶⁸

It is the perceived continuing importance of Guevara to Latin Americans and Latina/os in the US which del Toro aims to appeal to in his promotion of *Che*, and I will discuss this further later in this chapter.

5.3 The Historical Biopic and Hispanic Masculinity

Kegan Doyle in his discussion of Michael Mann's *Ali* (2001) aptly encapsulates what is expected of the historical biopic when he writes that:

Greatness, in the biopic genre, is nearly always related in the same way. The cultural work of the classic biopic is to explain the role that the famous play in history, or, to put it more strongly, to show that history can be reduced to a narrative of the lives of the famous. As Emerson famously said, history "resolves itself very easily into the biographies of a few stout and earnest persons."²⁶⁹

In the case of the biopics I will be examining here, their purpose is more specifically to explain the role of two prominent Latin American revolutionaries and their place in history, or more specifically, a version of history primarily aimed at a US audience. Though these films are about history, they are not historical documents and as Sorlin rightly acknowledges 'even if [a historical film] appears to show the truth, it in no way claims to represent the past accurately.'²⁷⁰ However

²⁶⁶ Jose Morales, "Guevara, Ernesto "Che"." In *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*. : Oxford University Press, 2005. [Oxford Reference](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156003.001.0001/acref-9780195156003-e-365). 2005. Date Accessed 22 Mar. 2013 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156003.001.0001/acref-9780195156003-e-365>

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Kegan Doyle, 'Muhammad Goes to Hollywood: Michael Mann's *Ali* as Biopic' in *Journal of Popular Culture* Vol 39: 3, June 2006, pp.383-408, p.384, quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' in *Ralph Waldo Emerson-Texts*. 26 January 2004 [<http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm>]

²⁷⁰ Sorlin, p.21

a sense of realism and link to historical realities are central to the appeal of the genre. Indeed, Vidal notes that 'it is the fundamental link to historical fact which seals the generic contract between producers and audiences of biographical film fictions, with the attendant pleasures of recognition.'²⁷¹ Biopics can be viewed as historical films as understood from a post-modern theoretical perspective in that they comply with the post-modern idea of a plurality of truths, offering a narrative, rather than the narrative, of history in which 'events and images from the past are invoked as rallying points, as forces for cohesion and consensus.'²⁷² What is particularly interesting here is that it is Latin American history that is offered as the rallying point for US audiences, which suggests an appeal to US Latino audiences and a desire to assimilate Latino history into mainstream US culture on the part of the filmmakers. As such, the biographies of these two men become an encapsulation of Latin American history for US audiences and thus, in the context of my discussion, the embodiment of historicised Hispanic masculinity. A biopic, for the purposes of this thesis, shall be defined as a film with a narrative based on the life of a real life figure, living or dead. My two chosen case studies are more specifically historical biopics, in that they consider events in the lives and historical significance of two major political figures of the past. As such they are not only important as representations of Hispanic masculinity through the biographical subject, fusing the contemporary star with the figure of history, but shall also be considered in terms of the way in which they invoke the past to engage with present values and concerns. *Pancho* is a made-for-television film loosely based on the true story of Pancho Villa making a deal with the Mutual Film Company to film his revolutionary battles along the Mexican border in 1914. The film was released as *The Life of General Villa* in 1914, but only a few battle scenes from it now survive, so the nature of this film as portrayed in *Pancho* is largely imagined, and acknowledged as so by the film. Steven Soderbergh's two part biography of Che Guevara focuses on Guevara's leading role during the Cuban revolution and Bolivian campaign, until his assassination in Bolivia in 1967. The first part focuses on his visit to the US and the progress of the Cuban revolution, while the second focuses on the guerrilla war of the Bolivian campaign.

The first part of *Che* shall be my primary focus in this chapter for a number of reasons. Firstly, it introduces Soderbergh's construction of Che to the audience and constructs his relationship with the US in the contemporary period, which is central to my analysis. From a genre perspective, the first part is also the most biopic-like, the second being constructed along the

²⁷¹ Belén Vidal in the introduction to Tom Brown and Belén Vidal ed., *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, (New York and Abington: Routledge, 2014) p.3

²⁷² Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1996) p.2

conventions of a war film without such a strong focus on Guevara as the subject and his place in the contemporary social context. Hence the first film makes a more suitable comparison with Banderas' performance as Villa. Finally, in terms of my analysis of the promotion and reception of the film, it is the first part of *Che* which seems to be the most significant in terms of the way in which producers and reviewers construct Guevara's image for audiences. It must also be noted that the combined running time of *Che* in its two parts exceeds four hours in length, and hence to consider the entire film in detail would offset the balance of this chapter and would render it difficult to consider both parts fully.

As will be explored further in my consideration of the promotion and reception of *Che*, the production was presented to audiences as a largely historically accurate recreation of the events it depicts and with substantial focus put on the levels of research into Guevara's life before the film's production, as well as its being based on Guevara's own *Memoirs of a Cuban Revolutionary War* and *Bolivian Diaries*. As such, the film can be seen to reject the accepted post-modern notion of a plurality of histories, which is characterised by a 'general drift [...] towards cultural and epistemological relativism' in terms of the way in which we understand representations of the past in history and popular culture.²⁷³ Indeed, the varying extents to which these films construct themselves as truthful reflections of history and encourage us to believe in Banderas and del Toro as embodiments of Villa and Guevara is central to the way in which they present them as images of Hispanic masculinity. Indeed despite the scholarly and increasingly popular recognition of historical relativism, non-historians are still likely to receive most of their understanding of history through film and fiction.²⁷⁴ For these reasons, I will now outline the way in which the biopic functions as a contemporary film genre, and how this impacts on the way in which it represents Hispanic masculinity for its audience by presenting images that are based on real life figures. As previously indicated, my two chosen case studies could also be defined as historical films because they have, to differing degrees, some basis in historical events and portray significant historical figures. This arguably allows for a greater freedom for the film's producers in representing these Hispanic masculine figures than it would for a biopic of a contemporary figure, as its audiences are less likely to be extensively familiar with the lives of figures long dead than with those of present day celebrities. Historicising Hispanic masculinity, though not to the extent of locating it in fantasy-based genres such as those discussed in my first two case study chapters,

²⁷³ Deborah Cartmell and I.Q. Hunter in *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction* (Pluto Press: London, 2001) p.1

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

also allow the films' producers to avoid directly addressing contemporary social tensions between US and Latin America. Indeed, while both Villa and Guevara were commonly viewed as enemies of US beliefs, values and politics in their contemporary time period, in the 2000s the images of these figures can be more freely appropriated into US culture and shaped to reflect twenty-first century US values. As Marcia Landy acknowledges, the representation of history in film is arguably as much of a pastiche, composed of common-sense and popular ideas about the past and about its reflections in the present, as the images of Hispanic action heroes discussed at the beginning of this thesis.²⁷⁵ Landy also acknowledges that what motivates this pastiche is current values and conceptions of identity, be these minority or majority ideologies.²⁷⁶ This returns me again to Richard Dyer's idea that one of the major functions of pastiche is that it 'sets in play our relationship with the past.'²⁷⁷

The traditional biopic is a genre that serves to individualise and personalise history for its audiences, entering figures into the cultural pantheon and exploring their significance for contemporary society. As such, it is a powerful genre for incorporating Hispanic masculinity into US cinema as it allows for the historical significance of Hispanic male figures to be personalised for the audience, allowing them to empathise with and understand their actions. Indeed, as Anderson and Lupo have noted, contemporary biopics allow studios to appeal to minority ethnic audiences and incorporate what they view to be progressive ideology in what is still considered a traditional genre, thus avoiding alienating mainstream, white US audiences.²⁷⁸ But the composition of the biopic as a film genre, particularly in the contemporary era, is more complex than this, as different biographical cycles with different styles and narrative intentions have emerged as the genre has evolved. Indeed, Vidal has noted that the biopic as a contemporary form is much more diverse than its classical Hollywood counterpart that exists in a 'hybrid of forms, narratives and politics' and interacts frequently with other genres to such an extent that it could be considered a 'metagenre'.²⁷⁹ Dennis Bingham in his book on the biopic as a contemporary film genre, identifies a range of different modes in the genre, arising from the different historical cycles of its development, which are available to contemporary filmmakers working in this form. The classical

²⁷⁵ Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1996) p.2

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p.1,2

²⁷⁷ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007) p.179

²⁷⁸ Carolyn Anderson and Jon Lupo, 'Hollywood Lives: The State of the Biopic at the Turn of the Century' in Steve Neale *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002) pp.91-104, p.93

²⁷⁹ Belén Vidal in the introduction to Tom Brown and Belén Vidal ed., *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, (New York and Abington: Routledge, 2014) p.2, p.10, p.5

biopic, which dates from the silent and Classical Hollywood era, is closely related to the melodrama and focuses on an emotionally engaging, if largely clichéd, celebration of the biographical subject's life. Later biopics evolved from this cycle by portraying some less flattering and more morally ambiguous aspects of the subject's life in what Bingham calls a 'warts-and-all' treatment, while essentially still conforming to the classical model. Bingham also identifies a number of other trends in biopic production which deviate from these Classical models by providing a 'critical investigation and atomisation of the subject' as in *Citizen Kane* (1941), the veiled biography of newspaper magnate Randolph Hearst, and biopics that parody the celebration of the biographical subject and a culture that values celebrity and consumerism.²⁸⁰ Besides these narrative differences, Bingham also identifies a shift in both the key creative talent driving biopics and the subjects of the biopics themselves. He writes that the contemporary biopic, once a producer's genre in the studio era, has now become a genre for auteurist directors such as Martin Scorsese (*The Aviator*, 2004), Spike Lee (*Malcolm X*, 1992) and Oliver Stone (*Nixon*, 1996.²⁸¹) In my discussion of my key texts, I will explore the extent to which *Pancho* and *Che* conform to the typologies of biopic that Bingham outlines. I will also briefly consider the role of the authorship of Steven Soderbergh, but more prominently the role of Benicio del Toro as producer, in the authorship of *Che* and how this is used to promote the film.

Arguably more important, in terms of the subject of this thesis, is the way in which the biopic has been appropriated by minority filmmakers to portray subjects and address to audiences previously marginalised by the genre. This is notable in the rise of biopics focusing on female and gay subjects, Sophia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) and the Oscar winning *Milk* being high profile examples, and those from ethnic minority groups such as blacks and Hispanics. As previously indicated at the beginning of this chapter, scholars of the genre have noted that the biopic has long been associated with traditional storytelling and values, acting to reinforce rather than challenge prevailing ideals relating to national and cultural identities.²⁸² Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of biographical subjects portrayed by Hollywood, even in the twenty-first century renaissance of the biopic, are white men, and those that exist outside this majority are typically shaped to support prevailing US values. This makes it an interesting genre to see Hispanic male subjects appear as the biographical subjects, particularly figures who

²⁸⁰ Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives are They Anyway: The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p.18

²⁸¹ Bingham, pp.17-18

²⁸² Scholars who have viewed the traditional biopic in this way include George Custen, Dennis Bingham, Carolyn Anderson and John Lupo and Belén Vidal

challenged prevailing US values in their own lifetimes, because it allows them to become incorporated into a role predominantly reserved for their assimilated Anglo counterparts.

It must be noted that while both these biopics are based on the lives of Latin American figures, they are also very much about how these figures relate to the US and its values. Even *Che*, as a film made outside Hollywood without major US financing, is the product of the image of Che as understood by the US born auteur Soderbergh and the Puerto Rican born del Toro who moved to the US at an early age. It is very different from the recent Pan-Latin American biopic of Guevara *The Motorcycle Diaries*, in that it explores Che's relationships with the US rather than Latin America more fully, and in that it seeks to document Che's actions and beliefs rather than offering an explanation for how he developed them in response to the conditions of Latin America. The fact that these films were released only four years apart, suggests a timely need to re-explore the significance of Guevara in US and Latin America through cinematic representation. In the course of my research I could not discern a definitive reason for why this resurgence occurs at this time, but the critical and commercial resurgence of Latin-American cinema in the early 2000s, and US cinemas' increase in Latino subjects as the domestic Hispanic population in this era, was likely to make Guevara, as a figure so important to pan-Latin American and US history, an attractive subject for biopics in US and Latin American cinemas.

Both the films I am discussing can also be seen to conform to Vidal's idea of the biopic as a hybrid or 'metagenre', with *Che* drawing from documentary traditions and *Pancho* employing elements of the action adventure film.²⁸³ The docu-drama-like style of *Che* encourages us to accept the image of Guevara, and thus the image of Hispanic masculinity, that is presented in this film as a reflection of reality. Thus, the film is presented more as an educational document rather than a piece of entertainment both in its representational style and through its promotion, as I will discuss further later. I would argue that *Che's* portrayal of its biographical subject is more problematic than that of the more traditional Classical Hollywood style biopic, that encourages viewers to engage with the subject as a character, and it does not give a sense of subjectivity in its perspective. It also goes against the contemporary trend in the genre, which Bingham has defined as the neo-classical biopic, which adopts a mocking or self-reflexive approach to the representation of a historical figure. Indeed *Che* seems to reject the post-modern idea of a

²⁸³ Vidal, *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, p.5

pluralism of truths, as its documentary style arguably encourages its viewer to accept this as the 'true story' of Guevara's political struggles. *Pancho* is much more a traditional biopic as entertainment, as a made-for-television film, albeit for prestigious cable network HBO, following in a long tradition of made-for-television biopics. It gives us a US perspective on Pancho Villa through the eyes of movie producer Frank Thayer, and presents Villa as a strange but charismatic other. It focuses on entertainment and emotional engagement by concentrating on Villa's relationship with Thayer. But although it includes elements of melodrama reminiscent of the classical biopic, it also presents a self-conscious parody of the way in which biographical figures are constructed in films as we see the 'truth' of Villa's life manipulated by Hollywood.

It must be further noted that the styles and likely audience of each Biopic are very well matched to each star and their vision of the subject. Banderas as a Hollywood action star adds prestige to *Pancho* as a television movie and adds popular genre appeal to a historical film for a premium cable audience. *Pancho* is also very much a film about the performance of 'heroism' and machismo and exposing this as a construction, which has been a key part of Banderas' Hispanic action hero roles. The film takes a very self-reflexive approach to Villa and the creation of his own myth, which suits a star who frequently plays larger than life figures who self-consciously masquerade as hyper masculine heroes. *Che*, in contrast, is constructed very much as a 'realistic' documentary in terms of its visual style, acting and approach to the biographical subject; it feels very much like watching an educational, political film rather than a piece of Hollywood entertainment, and is thus well suited to del Toro's cerebral, method acting which further encourages the audience to view the film as a truthful reflection of Guevara's character. This is perhaps best explained in an *Empire* article before the film's release; '*Che* was to have a docudrama's objective eye, as Soderbergh grandly puts it, "practical real-world expressions of his ideology", interactions on a ground level, a sense of what it took to achieve the Cuban victory, and the undoing of his purpose in the miasma of Bolivia.'²⁸⁴ This does not really match any of the expectations of a classical or neo-classical biopic, opting neither for sentimental, emotional engagement with the subject, cross-perspective analysis or any trace of parody. Thus the casting of del Toro, who previously worked with Soderbergh in *Traffic*, is very appropriate for this style of biopic as his status as a respected method actor encourages the, likely, middle class and well educated US audience of the film to view del Toro as an authentic embodiment of Che.

²⁸⁴ *Empire*, 'Oscars 2009', January 2009, p.115

5.4 The Star as Subject

Indeed, the existing star personas of del Toro and Banderas play a significant role in constructing a contemporary US audience's perception of Villa and Guevara in these two biopics. Both Banderas, who was nominated for an Emmy and a Golden Globe for his performance as Villa, and del Toro, who won the best actor award for his performance as Che, received critical acclaim for their performances in testament to their success in embodying these figures. But even before starring in a twenty first century biopic became an almost certain way to win an acting award in Hollywood, the biopic has long been viewed as a star vehicle in which the star persona and the image of the biographical subject become fused together.²⁸⁵ George Custen has previously written about the classical Hollywood era biopics as star vehicles, and the way in which in biopics' key historical figures would be characterised as stars; Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (1933) being a prime example.²⁸⁶ Thus, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, in *Pancho*, Pancho Villa becomes a Hispanic action hero in line with Banderas' star persona. The star presence of Banderas also arguably encourages more sympathy for a character that is portrayed as ruthless and could be unsympathetic for an audience. As the film is made for television, the movie star presence of Banderas additionally enables the audience to grasp a character which has not been heavily built up in surrounding promotion discourses in the way it would be for a theatrically released film such as *Che*. The self-reflexive nature of the film also arguably hinges on a blurring between Villa's status as a revolutionary leader and his on-screen role as a star in the film-within-a-film. Comolli's idea of a 'body too much' here in relation to the presence of the actor embodying, yet also denying, the possibility of representing the real body is further complicated as we see Banderas, playing Villa, performing as Villa on screen.²⁸⁷

In *Che*, however, we are encouraged to view del Toro as an authentic embodiment of the real life Che, building on the film's documentary-like style which encourages the audience to believe that the film is a realistic reflection of history. This is achieved both in the promotion and reception of del Toro's research and method acting in the role, but also in the promotional trailers and images for the film that encourage us to view del Toro as the perfect embodiment of Guevara

²⁸⁵ The success of the biopic as a contemporary star vehicle that frequently results in awards for starring actors has been noted by Carolyn Anderson and Jon Lupo, 'Hollywood Lives: The State of the Biopic at the Turn of the Century' in Steve Neale *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002) pp.91-104, p.92

²⁸⁶ George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) p.4

²⁸⁷ Jean Louis Comolli, 'Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much' in *Screen* 19:2, 1978, pp.41-54, p. 42

through image matching. Del Toro's well publicised role as producer of the film and as the force behind its inception (it was the star who brought the film idea to Soderbergh and convinced him to make it) also serves to enhance the idea that he is qualified to shape the film's production of Che into an authentic image. In one trailer in particular, the camera is used to merge a historical image of Che with one of del Toro. The camera zooms in on Jim Fitzpatrick's black and white printed image of the real life Che (pictured in the introduction to this chapter), arguably the most iconic image of him, which begins to emerge on screen as if being inked onto a page. The camera zooms in to an extreme close-up on Guevara's left eye and this then dissolves into a black and white extreme close up of del Toro's eye. He then looks up, but the camera remains still and we see him take a puff on a cigar, before his eyes return to face the camera.

This opening of the trailer, which is also the first shot of del Toro in the film, is used to establish that the real-life Guevara has become embodied by del Toro as one image fades into another. In a historical film where an actor is playing a real life figure, this opening shot is particularly important in creating the star as the historical figure. The extreme close-up that reveals the transition between the two men's eyes is also significant as this could be seen to suggest that the actor and the subject are the same in character and belief rather than just their visual appearance. Vidal notes that the 'biopic trades on a sense of authenticity that stems from the actors body itself and a need to meet a set of expectations [...], shaped not only by an audience's knowledge and emotional response to the person being portrayed but also, more often than not, the history of previous representations.'²⁸⁸ Indeed, it must be noted that the images the trailer chooses to begin with are iconic images of Guevara; the first image of him is that which is drawn from Alberto Korda's famous photograph of him frequently featured on posters, t-shirts and product advertisements internationally and the image of the cigar del Toro smokes is also a symbol strongly associated with Che. Hence there is a sense here that del Toro needs to embody not just the real life figure of Che, but the iconic, pop-cultural image of Che as well; the image that, as Trisha Ziff notes, 'can disseminate a message that is instantly recognisable and has an ever potent visual currency.'²⁸⁹ In this film the 'message' is that Che was an intellectual, middle class thinker and leader, a representation which fits strongly with del Toro's existing star persona as a cerebral, method actor. As one critic notes:

²⁸⁸ Vidal, *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, p.11

²⁸⁹ Trisha Ziff, *Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon* (London: V&A Publications, 2006) p.14

The fact that del Toro won the Best Actor award in Cannes will tell you he gives a stunning performance. Enough to have him talked as an Oscar potential. Yet, with few close-ups, it is an intense, emotional turn with none of the emotive flourishes that fuel biopics. There remains a distance between subject and viewer as if we are peering down upon history; hardly the kind of broiling drama Oliver Stone would have cooked up.²⁹⁰

This suggests that it is del Toro's quiet, understated and 'realistic' method acting, as employed in *Traffic*, which encourages audiences to accept him as an authentic representation of Che, in keeping with the film's docu-drama style.

However, it must be noted that the casting of Banderas and del Toro as these two historical figures presents a problem in terms of national authenticity. Banderas is a Spaniard playing the Mexican nationalistic figure Pancho Villa and the Puerto Rican born, US raised del Toro is playing the Argentinean revolutionary hero of Latin America Che Guevara who, as a communist, was a notable political enemy to the United States. I would argue that *Pancho* attempts to overcome this problem firstly by presenting Pancho Villa as a macho action hero, which Banderas has previously portrayed in many of his screen roles, which encourages the audience to view Banderas as an authentic embodiment of Villa in masculine spirit, if not in nationality. As discussed in the previous section, the film also presents Villa's macho persona as a heavily constructed masquerade, and this makes Banderas' nationality less of a problem. It must also be noted, as in previous chapters, that Banderas as a Spanish actor in Hollywood has portrayed a Mexican figure in his most famous action roles as El Mariachi and Zorro, and hence the film's audience would be likely to readily accept his performance as a Mexican. Pancho Villa, like Banderas' Zorro, is also described in the film as a mestizo Mexican of mixed-race heritage, and of lower relative class to Mexicans with pure Spanish ancestry, which is of course undercut by Banderas' status as a Spanish star. The rest of the Hispanic cast is largely Mexican, but Banderas as Villa is the only Hispanic in the top billed cast and as the other Mexican roles are minor this does not add a great deal to the film's ethnic authenticity. In the case of del Toro, promoters of *Che* attempt to overcome the potential problem of national authenticity through a focus on his Puerto Rican origins and the significance of Che as a Pan-Latin American figure of significance to all peoples of Latin-American origins. Though del Toro is the film's only major star, the other recognisable character actors in the cast are also largely Latin American, such as Brazilian Rodrigo Santoro (Raúl Castro) and Colombian Catalina Sandino Moreno (Aleida March), though they are not necessarily cast to be nationally authentic in terms of their historical subjects.

²⁹⁰ *Empire*, 'Oscars 2009', January 2009, p.115

Del Toro's political responsibility as a Latino actor, as previously promoted in relation to his star-making role in *Traffic*, is also important here in encouraging audiences to view him as an authentic embodiment of Che. However, del Toro's US identity could potentially present a challenge to his authenticity as an embodiment of Che, considering that he has been historically viewed as an oppositional figure to the US, though this is likely to be less so for liberal, middle-class audiences that have been the target audience for much of del Toro's and Soderbergh's previous work. But the film's promotion does feature demonstrated attempts to characterise del Toro's performance of Che as morally appealing for twenty-first century American audiences. Though Guevara was strongly opposed to the consumer capitalist values of US society in his own lifetime, the film's promotion aims to reframe him as a moral role model for contemporary American audiences, as evidenced in the quote overleaf, when del Toro proclaims in an interview:

A lot of Americans really don't know much about the revolution and I think it is good for a lot of people to see this because they can now see the Cuban revolution from a different point of view. I think this film is a testament to America and to the things I believe in – freedom of speech – and whether we like it or not this film was made by Hollywood people. Fifty years ago I would be hiding out in France after making this.²⁹¹

The film itself also includes del Toro as Che stating that he does not oppose US people, only the country's politics and that he supports civil rights for Latinos and blacks in the US, sentiments that though antithetical to US politics at the time, are likely to render him sympathetic to contemporary, liberal US viewers.

5.5 Promotion and the Hispanic Male as Biographical Subject

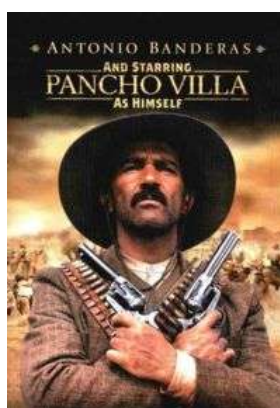


Figure 5.3: DVD cover for HBO TV movie *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (2003)

²⁹¹ Benicio del Toro in an interview with Chris Sullivan, *The Independent*; Arts, 12th December 2008, pp.12-13, p. 13

Indeed, the star personas of Banderas and del Toro play a central role in the promotion of these biopics as is demonstrated in the DVD cover above for *Pancho* (Figure 5.3) which engages strongly with Banderas' existing Hispanic action hero persona in constructing its macho image of Pancho Villa. The way in which he is presented in this image shows some engagement with surviving photographs of the real Villa, as included in the opening section of this chapter, in terms of his proud expression and bandido-like dress, but I have been unable to find any images of the real life Villa holding a gun or guns across his chest in the way that Banderas is pictured here. The image is heavily reminiscent of Banderas' gun toting roles in *Desperado* and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, and the fact that the latter was released in the same year could only add to this allusion. His dress and costume in the picture also clearly aim to replicate the most recognisable dress of Villa, pictured at the start of this chapter, during the Mexican revolutionary war, resulting in a fusion between Banderas' star persona as a Hispanic action hero and the historical image of Villa as the ultimate Mexican macho leader. The trailer, used to promote the film as part of its screening on cable network HBO and for its international television broadcasts and DVD release, also frames Banderas as Pancho Villa as an image of Mexican machismo for its audience. 'He is a wolf of instinct and intelligence. He may be the only hope for this blighted country.' This is the first description we hear of Villa in the film, as spoken by the character of movie producer Frank Thayer, conjuring up an animalistic image of Pancho Villa before we see Banderas perform him. The idea of Villa as an instinctual wolf, typically a violent animal, aligns him with the bandido stereotype, but the characterisation of him as intelligent and the hope of his country prepares the audience for a man who rises above these baser qualities. The trailer then reinforces the idea of Villa as a heroic soldier and leader; we see him deliver a rousing speech by firelight about achieving victory in the revolution, see him charge forward into battle on horseback, and excel in sword combat as Banderas did as Zorro. But the trailer is also suggestive of the way in which the film explores the construction of Villa's persona in the film's silent film in, drawing attention to the performative nature of the image of Hispanic masculinity portrayed in the trailer. The film's inter-titles are displayed over flickering film frame projections to underscore the narrative's film-within-a-film construction, and the fighting scenes are intercut with images of cameras filming them to suggest that these battle scenes are being staged for filming. The trailer also suggests that the character of Pancho Villa is performing a persona for the cameras. We see Villa asked if he can change the direction of his attack so the cameras can gain a better picture of him and we see a close up of him stepping into the light, as if a star in the spotlight. This is taken a stage further in the alternative DVD promotional image (Figure 5.4) which features Banderas posing as Villa for a photograph in a set chair, gun in hand, with the revolution as a back-drop, presenting

Villa as movie star and revolutionary. As I will discuss later in relation to del Toro's portrayal of Che, presenting revolutionary figure as 'star' can be aligned with Richard Dyer's idea of the rebel star type, in that it presents Villa as a charismatic rebel who, though oppositional to US values, can be recuperated and neutralised by Hollywood.²⁹²

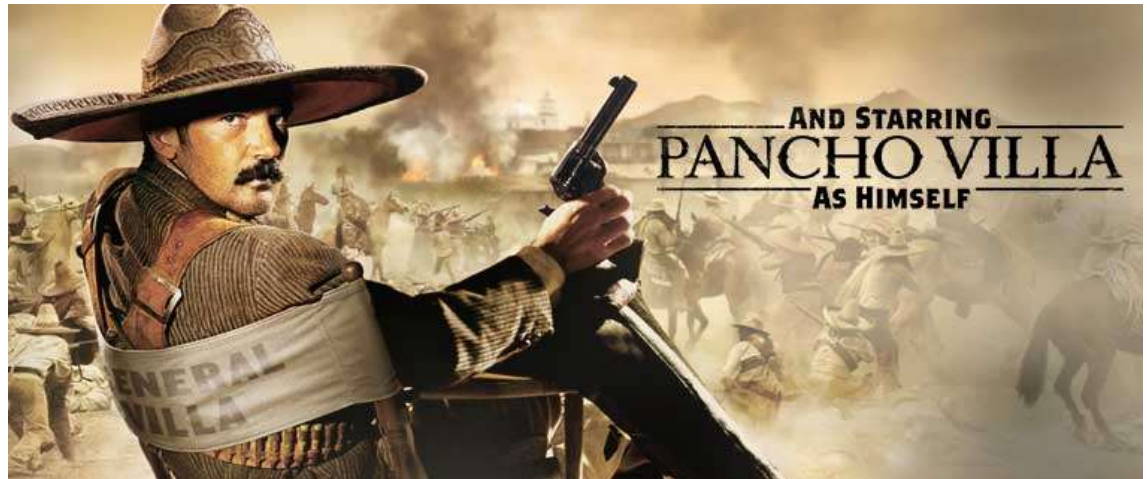


Figure 5.4: Alternative promotional image for *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (2003)

Indeed, the trailer and alternative DVD cover for *Pancho* above presents Banderas as Villa largely as a traditionally macho image of Mexican masculinity. This is unsurprising considering Villa has been identified as the figure responsible for equating Mexican nationalism with machismo.²⁹³ But the trailer and alternative DVD cover arguably also encourage the viewer not to take this construction of Villa at face value by suggesting that his image as a 'star' is constructed in the film-within-a-film. Thus its image of Villa, and therefore its image of Mexican masculinity, is framed as a masquerade rather than a 'true' portrayal. The image on the alternative DVD cover in particular also suggests an irreverence in tone and an ironic perspective on the way in which Villa is presented as a 'star' within the film; this engages with the film's self-reflexive approach to the biopic, as will be discussed further later in this chapter. It is also reflective of the way in which Villa is portrayed as a Latin buffoon in some of the film's scenes, a characterisation which undercuts some of the character's more vicious and vindictive behaviour while reinforcing the idea of him as impetuous and lacking in emotional restraint.

²⁹² Richard Dyer, *Stars*, (London: BFI, 1998, 1979) p.53

²⁹³ Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) p. 2

However the promotion of *Che*, in its various trailers and posters, is significantly different in tone, as we are encouraged to view the film's presentation of Che as truthful and his status as an iconic and important historical figure, not just for Latin America but for the wider world. Indeed, though Soderbergh has claimed that he did not intend *Che* to be a classical biopic, the way in which the film's trailers focus on Che's greatness as a near mythical icon and his struggle for what he believed in, present Che as a classical biographical subject. The inter-titles of the film's teaser trailer tell us that it will be 'the epic true story of the man behind the icon' and focus on 'one incredible life'; while a full trailer tells us that Che was 'the inspiration behind a revolution that spread throughout the world.' The latter comment could be seen to suggest that the film intends to represent Che as a globally significant figure, whose importance extends beyond the boundaries of Latin America. Another trailer for the first part of *Che* frames the historical narrative of the film through titles that cast the setting as 'Cuba 1957, rebels gather in the hills to wage war on a corrupt dictator and start a revolution. From their ranks one man will rise to unite an army and give the people hope.' This description of the film's narrative is again typical of the biopic in that it seeks to highlight both the subject's uniqueness and importance as a cultural figure and performer of history-defining deeds, but also as a relatively ordinary and relatable 'man'. What is also interesting about the trailer it proclaims the film to be 'The true story of Che Guevara and the conflict that made him a legend', showing no self-reflexiveness or irony in presenting the image it offers of Che, and thus Hispanic masculinity, as true.

The images of del Toro as Che used to promote the film present Che as a hero of mind and body, as both an intellectual and a soldier. This is something which complies with existing conceptions of Guevara as an ideological hero for left-wing intellectuals, but is a marked contrast to Hollywood's traditional images of Hispanic males as motivated by instinct rather than intelligence. The images of del Toro as Che in the posters (Figure 5.5 overleaf) evokes familiar media iconography of Guevara, as the previously discussed trailer did. Guevara is pictured in uniform and a military cap or beret in all three images. These images of Guevara are instantly recognisable, but are also suggestive of the fact that the film intends to focus on his importance as a leader and soldier, rather than his private life as a man. In all but one of the posters, Guevara is armed with a gun, but the expression and body language of del Toro is not violent in the way that Hollywood has historically depicted male Hispanic characters. Instead he appears deep in thought in two of these images, one of which he looks down at the ground in contemplation, his gun held high. While the third poster promotes *Che* in its entirety, the first two offer a contrast between the image presented of Guevara in relation to part one and part two of the film. The

image for part one presents Che as an intellectual thinker, pen in hand, in contrast to the image for part two which presents a near defeated man on his knees, pointing a gun at an unseen enemy. These images of Guevara are humanising and vulnerable, presenting him as a victor of ideas more than combat, which could be seen as appealing to the popular US idea of him as a liberal, idealist thinker. The fog and sepia tones of these posters give them a mythic quality and a romanticised image of history, which can be seen as an attempt to tap into Che's existing mythology, as discussed in the opening of this chapter. It must also be noted that Guevara is presented in all these images with the jungle scenery of Latin America, and in some instances images of guerrilla warfare, as a backdrop. This presents the Latin American locations as an important facet of the films promotion in that these posters are promoting Che as not just an exemplary leader and thinker, but an exemplary Latin American, which could be seen as an attempt to appeal to Latino audiences.



Figure 5.5: Posters for *Che: Part One* (2008), *Che: Part Two* (2008) and the Special Edition with both parts

What is also interesting about the promotion of *Che* is the way in which the film is presented as a historical tale which is particularly timely in its presentation, such as del Toro's suggestion below that Che's ideas have a strong relevance to contemporary society:

First of all, it's the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. And, secondly, there's the current economic crisis. I think Che's idea of constructing a society in which the strong don't profit from the labors of the weak is an idea that might get some traction now. Audiences might not agree with his methods. But, look, what we're seeing now is the result of a system in which money doesn't represent any labor or any product. It's money being made off of other money. It's meaningless. And this is what happens when you let that mushroom out of control. Che's dream of a society may not be the same as yours or mine, but his feeling that we can do better than this - I think everybody can relate to that.²⁹⁴

This construction of *Che* as an educational film will be explored in more detail during my textual analysis of the film.

5.6 Reception and the Hispanic Male as Biographical Subject

The reception discourses surrounding *Pancho* and *Che* are equally useful to my analysis as they reveal much about critics' expectations of how these figures should be immortalised within the conventions of the biopic. For example Peter Bradshaw writes that *Che* is 'at times frustratingly reticent, unwilling to attempt any insight into Che's interior world. We see only Che the public man, the legendary comandante, defiant to the last.'²⁹⁵ This suggests that the film somewhat alienates its viewers from Che and makes it more difficult to understand or empathise with his actions than if it had adopted a more emotionally driven approach to the biographical subject and his narrative. This is particularly significant considering that Che is a Latin American figure, firmly oppositional to ideals of US capitalism and imperialism, and hence it may make it more difficult for audiences from other nations to identify with him. Bradshaw later adds that he was 'baffled that Soderbergh fought shy of so many important things in Che's personal life.' Before adding that 'it could be that he avoided them to avoid vulgar speculation', echoing an idea that I propose in my later analysis of the film, that is that these elements were excluded in order to avoid pandering to archetypal ideas of Che as a Latin Lover figure.²⁹⁶ The discourses surrounding the

²⁹⁴ Steven Soderbergh in an interview with Joe Leyden, 'Che director listens and learns; Soderbergh's movie about Cuban Revolution icon Che Guevara is ambitious, accomplished' in *The Houston Chronicle*, 16th January 2009, Section: Star, p.1

²⁹⁵ Peter Bradshaw, 'Che – Cannes Film Festival', *The Guardian*, 22nd May 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/may/22/cannesfilmfestival.festivals2?INTCMP=SRCH> [accessed 22/10/12]

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

extent to which critics accept the film as reflective of reality are also interesting in their contrasts, and offer a useful insight into the disparities between differing views of the film's perceived truthfulness. Alan Hunter in *The Express* described *Che* as 'an intelligent, fast-moving, well-researched film, based in part on Che's posthumously published *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, offering both a convincing account of the bitter, hard-fought struggle and a portrait of a great and complex revolutionary.'²⁹⁷ But while Hunter is keen to accept the factual credentials of the film as a hallmark of authenticity, Alex von Tunzelmann in *The Guardian* takes a contrasting view, arguing that:

The *Che* films cannot be faulted on the accuracy of what they show. The more interesting question is about what they don't show. The focus is sharply on the man's virtues, while his flaws are glossed over. For their nearly five-hour marathon, viewers are rewarded with a distant, Christlike figure, hardly more three-dimensional than the famous photo of Che reproduced on millions of T-shirts, posters and mugs. Basically, he's just revolutionary totty. Soderbergh's two-parter is undeniably accurate to the letter of history, but the films don't tell you a thing.²⁹⁸

Other critics were similarly critical of the film's rejection of traditional narrative drive and characterisation, with comments such as 'The film took seven years of research; it seems to take 10 years to watch' and 'the jumbled running order makes you feel as if you are living through the rough lessons of history more than caring whose side of the chilling firing squads you are on.'²⁹⁹ This suggests that *Che*'s positive representation of Guevara as a heroic Hispanic figure becomes somewhat lost in its dry, educational narrative and worthy docu-drama style. Manhola Dargis in *The New York Times* echoed von Tunzelmann's criticism that the film avoids showing Guevara's more negative character traits writing that; 'Mr. Soderbergh cagily evades Che's ugly side, notably his increasing commitment to violence and seemingly endless war, but the movie is without question political -- even if it emphasizes romantic adventure over realpolitik -- because, like all films, it is predicated on getting, spending and making money.'³⁰⁰ It is interesting that the film appears to be not 'Hollywood' enough for some, but yet too 'Hollywood' for other critics, in terms

²⁹⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jan/04/che-part-1-review?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487> [accessed 22/10/12]

²⁹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/feb/18/che-part-two-reel-history?intcmp=239> [accessed 22/10/12]

²⁹⁹ Graham Young, 'Reliving a Rough Lesson in History' in *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 2nd January 2009, Features, p.31; 'What to See in Arts this Weekend' in *The Times*, 11th January 2009, Culture: Features, p.33

³⁰⁰ Manhola Dargis, 'Revolutionary Hero, Relentless Heroine' in *The New York Times*, 3rd October 2008, Section E: Film, p.1

of the extent to which it idealises Guevara, perhaps to avoid the characterisation of him as a bandido-like figure.

In its reception, *Pancho* similarly faced some criticism for the way in which it obscures some of Villa's more ruthless actions, despite its opening disclaimer that it is only loosely based on history. A review for *USA Today* noted that:

As the filmmakers readily admit, there are many places in which *Pancho* strays from the truth. Most crucially, perhaps, the movie can be accused of glorifying Villa, the same charge the Hearst newspapers leveled at Griffith's vanished classic. While the movie doesn't shy from showing us Villa's atrocities, the real-life image tends to be blurred by the immense charm and brio Banderas brings to the role.³⁰¹

The New York Times similarly praises Banderas for bringing many of the qualities he has brought to his previous Hispanic action hero roles, writing; 'Mr. Banderas revels in the role, playing Villa as a noble bandit who is by turns audacious, cold-hearted, capricious, insecure, and even -- when it comes to winning the love of Americans -- importunate.'³⁰² This review also praised the way in which the film draws attention to the US' historical relationship with Mexico and the US' negative involvement in it. The reviewer notes that '*Pancho* is one of the few TV movies ever to broach the idea that we may not always have been the best of neighbours to Mexico, and that some of our lack of neighbourliness may have contributed to that country's recurring political and economic miseries.'³⁰³ But while *the New York Times* took a positive view of 'the movie's theme of Mexican disillusion -- and American illusion', not all reviews of the film's presentation of Mexico and Villa were so positive in their criticism.³⁰⁴ Gregorio Rocha, a Latino scholar, in a review of the film for *The Moving Image Journal*, criticises what he views as a highly stereotypical characterisation of Villa offered for Anglo audiences, writing:

Although this HBO production offers a storyline, a cast of characters, and a crew much different from the seminal 1914 Villa film, this new movie changes little of substance about the antiquated greaser formula. [...] Presumably to secure Anglo audiences, the filmmakers relegate the Villa of 2003 to a colorful and clownish secondary role, contrary even to the vision attributed to D. W. Griffith, who we see pitching a broad heroic sketch of Villa as movie hero.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2003-09-04-pancho_x.htm [accessed 22/10/12]

³⁰² <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/06/arts/television-review-pancho-villa-fights-for-glory-and-dw-griffith-for-money.html> [accessed 22/10/12]

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Gregorio Rocha, 'And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself: Review' in 'The Moving Image', Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 142-145, p.143

Rocha is also highly critical of the casting and performance of the Spanish Banderas in the film, in contrast to the largely positive reception his portrayal received in the mainstream press. He also argues that Banderas' casting was negatively received in Villa's native Mexico, though offers no supporting references to reinforce this point. He writes that:

Instead of the machoistic yet sympathetic interpretation of young Raoul Walsh in *The Life of General Villa*, HBO gives us the pretentious and sometimes pathetic presence of gachupín actor Antonio Banderas, a native of Spain. Since leaving Pedro Almodovar's guidance, Banderas has been unable to differentiate any subtleties in the construction of his characters. In Mexico, critics of his casting saw Banderas as not only too short for the role but even too small for the hat he wears in the film!³⁰⁶

This contrasting reception suggests that reviews of the film are divided between those which view Banderas' Villa as a positive and heroic image of Hispanic masculinity and those which view it as a negative one, reliant heavily on Hollywood stereotypes. I will now continue to my close analysis of the film itself, in which I will argue that both of these perspectives have some validity.

5.7 And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself and Mexican Machismo

Sergio de la Mora, in his book *Cinemachismo*, explains that machismo has been synonymous with Mexican nationalism since the time of the Mexican revolution in which Pancho Villa was the ultimate hyper-masculine leader. He writes:

To be sure, the specificity of Mexican machismo resides in its self-consciousness and its officially decreed status as the distinctive component of Mexican national identity [...] rivalled only by the nation's deep religiosity manifest in the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint.³⁰⁷

As has previously been discussed in this thesis, in Hollywood the idea of Mexican (and indeed all Hispanic) men is commonly articulated through archetypes which translate machismo into a conception of demonstrative excess in outward displays of masculinity, including unrestrained, animalistic sexuality, outbursts of violence and aggression, and a general lack of physically and emotionally restrained behaviour. It is perhaps not surprising then that the film's representation of the ultimate macho Mexican Pancho Villa embodies traits of the common Latin Lover and greaser archetypes. *Pancho* presents its title character as irrational, vicious, ruthless and overly

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) p. 2

fond of violence; character traits which Ramirez Berg has identified as key to the bandido stereotype. Villa is dismissed as a 'bandido' by an English landowner in the film's narrative, and displays a range of characteristics attributable to this type throughout the film. His physical appearance is typical of a bandido figure from a classical Hollywood or spaghetti western; he has the same greasy hair, bandido style moustache and is adorned with bullets in suggestion of a violent nature. One could argue that this is because these images are likely to have been inspired by negative historical images of Pancho Villa in US culture. But the behaviour of Villa in the film also conforms to bandido expectations at times, particularly when he shoots a widow who attacks him after her husband has been killed by his men, to the shock and horror of the filmmakers. He also stages a mock assassination of the film's director and crew when he learns that they intend to leave before the culminating revolutionary battle. There is even one scene in the film which is titled 'bandido Villa' on the DVD's chapter menu, in which Villa forces a landowner to sign his land over to the poor by threatening to 'feed his balls to the pigs'. This scene also portrays Villa as an un-dignified and un-cultured man in comparison with the stoical landowner, as he sets light to the deeds to the property and throwing them to the floor. Villa has also never read the Spanish classic *Don Quixote* that the landowner describes as a book any man who calls himself cultivated must know well, and this portrays Villa as an uncivilised man of low class and education. Villa also comments later in this scene that in a library, such as that in the hacienda he has just seized, there is room for no 'half breeds' such as him, identifying a colonial route for this anger. Some of Villa's bandido-like behaviour is comic, as in the scene where he splashes excessively in the bath when he does not get his way, and this also has elements of the Latin buffoon type. This ridiculous representation of his overly emotional behaviour softens the impact of his violent and ruthless behaviour for the audience, but it also creates ruptures in the film's presentation of Villa as a heroic image of Hispanic masculinity. The description of Villa as a 'half breed' draws comparisons with Banderas' Zorro, who is transformed from a buffoon-like mestizo bandit into a heroic hero and husband of a noblewoman; what is different in the character of Villa is that he is not 'civilised', but rather the role of bandit and hero exist together simultaneously.

The representation of Villa as a Latin Lover is arguably more compatible with the presentation of Villa as a Hispanic action hero, as represented in his previously described first appearance in the film. We see Villa dancing and cavorting with a number of women, who are suggested to be prostitutes, and in bed with them. There is also an atmosphere of macho sexual excess in the Villa camp, where it is proclaimed that 'the virgin of Guadalupe is the only virgin left' and Villa comments that he has more sons than there are colleges in America. Both these two comments

are interesting in that they rely heavily on stereotypical US conceptions of the US as the educated and rational modern world and Mexico as a place of religious tradition and superstition. The characterisation of Pancho Villa certainly echoes this contrast as he is shown to be a man of emotion rather than rationality.

5.8 Pancho Villa: From Revolutionary to Screen Action Hero

As previously discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is arguably the star persona of Banderas, and the film's engagement with it, which encourages the audience to view his embodiment of Pancho Villa as a Hispanic action hero. The first scene in which he appears, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, encourages audiences to view him as another Zorro or El Mariachi, and identify him as a heroic image of Hispanic masculinity in this mould. Later scenes in the film also show notable engagement with Banderas' previous action hero performances, the most notable being the scene shown in the film's trailer in which Pancho Villa steps out of the shadows in a bar and into a spotlight-like shaft of light. This scene does not show Banderas as Villa performing any heroic action feats, but it bears striking similarities with a scene in *Desperado* in which El Mariachi enters a bar shrouded in shadow before a fight, and also evokes the referencing of this scene in *Shrek 2* year later in 2004, in which we see Puss in Boots shrouded in darkness in a tavern, before emerging into the light. This presentation of Pancho Villa casts him as dark, mysterious and bandit-like, but for viewers familiar with Banderas' previous performance in *Desperado*, it suggests that he also has heroic qualities. But I would argue that the existing star status of Banderas not only serves to enhance the perception of Pancho Villa, who in this screen incarnation exhibits some ruthless, violent and amoral behaviour that could render him unsympathetic for audiences and unworthy of immortalisation in a biopic, as a Hispanic action hero. It also serves to facilitate the film's construction of Pancho Villa as a media and screen star in his contemporary era and in the film-within-a-film, *The Life of General Villa*.

Indeed the film aims to present Villa as a contemporary Hispanic male star whose public persona in the US media arguably exceeds that even of Banderas. When trying to sell the idea of a film focusing on the life story of Villa, in the film the producer Frank Thayer argues that 'not a day that passes when this man is not featured on the pages of the world's press. He's a star, and stars are the mother's milk of box office' [dialogue from *Pancho*]. This comment can be interpreted as self-referential on the part of the producers of *Pancho* as the film could be characterised as a star-vehicle for Banderas as it relies heavily on his existing star persona, and he is the Hollywood star in a cast comprised of respected television actors, in the titular role. Indeed, within the narrative

of the film, Pancho Villa is characterised not just as a historical Hispanic action hero, played by a Hispanic action star, but as a historical Hispanic star played by Hollywood's biggest Hispanic star. Thus the film makes explicit the equation of the biographical subject and the star that Custen identifies as underlining many classical biopics by portraying the historical hero as a star in his own time. The film also features a description of what could be described as Pancho Villa's star persona (as he appears in *Pancho*) when the character of Thayer describes his perceived heroic appeal to Hollywood audiences. He says,

He's [Villa] been beaten and tortured all his life. They say he still has whip scars across his back. He was a convict before he turned 20. Before he was twelve he was already being hunted by the law. Now there are places in Mexico where he is the law. He's the James Boys, he's Billy the Kid, he's Napoleon all rolled into one. But he asks nothing for himself. He takes nothing. He builds schools where there were none. He seizes the homes of the wealthy. He redistributes the land he gives it to the poor. He feeds them. He even prints his own money. Tell me that this material would not make a fantastic motion picture [dialogue from *Pancho*].

What is interesting here is that Villa is again described as an action hero for the people, akin to a Mexican Robin Hood, reinforcing his previous description by this title before his first appearance in the film, and that attributed to President Wilson in Katz's biography of Villa. He is also presented in this speech as the perfect hero and star for the big screen and his aspirational rise from a convict and beaten man to 'the law' in Mexico can be read as a more brutal version of the rags-to-riches tales that are typical of star narratives in the popular media. This characterisation of his rise to leadership also engages with the narrative of the American dream, central to US culture, while ignoring the Mexican specificity of Villa's historical politics. Indeed Villa's behaviour is reflective of US values such as individualistic self reliance and capitalist meritocracy, as there is certainly a suggestion here that Villa is valued for being able to print his own money. The comparison of him to the James Boys and Billy the Kid also conjures up ideas of the Western, all American heroes for audiences watching the film, which casts Villa in a role traditionally reserved for Anglos in these films. As previously discussed in the border films chapter, Mexicans would typically be represented as bandits and non-men in terms of the genres system of representation, so it is interesting that Villa would be elevated to this role. This could partly be attributed to Banderas' existing status of a Hispanic action hero, as he has been elevated to the level of a cowboy before in Rodriguez's tortilla Westerns. It must also be noted that this characterisation of Villa as a Western hero conflicts with the previously discussed aspects of the film which cast Villa in the model of the Bandido.

This characterisation of the film's representation of Villa as star is further enhanced by a scene in which Banderas as Villa becomes a screen star in the film-within-a-film *The Life of General Villa*. In this scene, Banderas as Villa plays himself in a dream future of Mexico in which he holds the office of President. Villa is dressed in a white suit and bowtie, in notable contrast to his previous bandit like dress and his hair has been greyed with make-up to reflect the passing of time. His dress and his movements in the scene, in which he gazes thoughtfully into the distance, sighs in contemplation and bows after signing important documents with the dignified air of a statesman, present him as a worthy and thoughtful hero for US audiences. This scene sees Villa portrayed on film as a noble hero, rather than a Mexican bandit or buffoon, but it is the delivery of his speech in it that does most to present him as a star. The speech delivered in close-up and in Spanish, tells of Villa's love for his beloved Mexico and is met with rapturous applause by the revolutionary and Hollywood audience for the shoot. This suggests that Villa can be both a hero for Mexico and a star for Hollywood, the response of the audience and his praise for being able to perform the scene in one take presents him as a man with authentic star presence and the way in which we view the speech through the camera lens suggests that this is a star-making moment for Villa. This scene exposes the way in which the film engages with an ironic post-modern approach to historical representation, presenting many layers of meaning in a scene in which a star (Banderas) portrays a historical figure (Villa), recast as a screen star (Banderas as Villa in *The Life of General Villa*).

This is not the first shot footage we see of Villa, and the first shot footage we do see of him in the film is met with laughter and derision from the audience of producers and studio executives. This first footage is characterised as 'real', rather than constructed footage, shot on the battlefield and is deemed unsuitable for being unclear in both its narrative and visuals. Aside from the production values and the lack of clear story, however, the central character of Villa is presented in this footage as a Latin buffoon, rather than a suitably Hollywood hero. In this shot Villa rides into the foreground into a close-up, dramatically pulling back his sombrero and saluting towards the screen. He then breaks into a wide smile and we see him talking rapidly, while overly demonstratively and animatedly gesticulating with his hands. He behaves in a buffoon-like way that is unbecoming for a general and for a screen hero, and is consequently presented as an overly emotional, unthinking native, unconscious of the need to cultivate himself for a screen appearance. This Villa, though presented in the film as 'real', rather than heavily mediated by Hollywood, is presented as in need of civilising and refining in order to transform him into an appealing image. This represents a neo-colonial approach to the screen image of Villa, both in the way in which he is portrayed as a Latin Buffoon and the producer's later attempts to "civilise" him

in the film-within-a-film, reminiscent of Alejandro's civilising through action in *The Mask of Zorro*. But it also offers a self-reflexive critique of the way in which the biographical subject is represented as a star in the genre, with the film allowing us to witness the way in which the 'real' image of Villa is reconstructed into an image of Mexican masculinity more appealing for US audiences.

For the rest of the film-within-a-film he is played by actor Raoul Walsh (Kyle Chandler) who must perform the role of Villa. Walsh actually acted as assistant director and performed the role of Villa in the silent film *The Life of General Villa*. Walsh was an American actor of Irish immigrant parentage. He was most famous for his directing for Warner Brothers in the Classical Hollywood era, but did have a career as a silent film actor until an accident put an end to it in the late 1920s, his most notable role being *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) directed by D.W. Griffith, producer of *The Life of General Villa*.³⁰⁸ On first meeting Walsh, and learning that he is to play him, Villa questions his ability to portray him saying, 'Tell me Raoul Walsh, you know even which end of the horse shits?' Walsh must compete with Villa in macho feats of shooting and horsemanship in order to prove himself worthy to play him in the film. Though Walsh performs impressively, Villa beats him in all of these, even going as far as to shoot Thayer's cigar out of his mouth while he is still smoking it. At the end of the contest though, Villa pronounces his approval; 'bueno Americano, you can be me!', as if indicating that despite his American-ness Walsh has proven himself worthy to portray him. It is interesting that an Anglo actor is cast as Villa in the film-within-a-film, and this is accurately recreated from the original silent film casting. This can be seen as reflecting the contemporary reality that an Anglo cast as Villa was likely to be more appealing to US audiences, particularly as *The Life of General Villa* (1914) was made just a year before the controversial *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

The fact that Walsh cannot perform the action feats as successfully as Villa could be seen as a comment on the idea that he is not macho enough to portray him, certainly in the eyes of the film's representation of Villa himself, if not in the eyes of the film-within-a-film's producers. Villa's interaction with Walsh, as the star portraying him in the film-within-a-film also presents Villa as a man conscious of how his own image will be presented on screen. More specifically, in the interaction between the two characters we see Banderas' Villa as eager to shape the way in which his macho prowess will be presented on screen, in contrast to his initial buffoon-like screen appearance. This is made more explicit in a scene in which Pancho Villa proclaims to Thayer that

'people believe more what they see on the picture screen. When your President Wilson sees my movies, he will know he must support Pancho Villa. He will see that Pancho Villa is a good guy.' This is interesting in that it does not portray Villa as a passive colonised figure, in line with neo-colonial discourses relating to power relations between the US and Mexico, but rather the architect of his own media persona. He is also shown to be very aware of the power of modern media and grows more aware of this as the film progresses, which contradicts the stereotype of Mexican peoples as being historically more primitive and traditional than their US counterparts.

5.9 The Biopic Within

To conclude my discussion of *Pancho*, I wish to emphasise the way in which the film's self-reflexive critique of the nature of biographical filmmaking impacts on its representation of Pancho Villa as an image of Hispanic masculinity. George F. Custen in the first book-length study of the Classical Hollywood Biopic wrote that:

One of the most interesting rituals to study is the construction of the Hollywood biographical film. In making the lives of the famous fit particular contours - and thereby controlling the normative boundaries of actions and lives - these films cultivate the interests of their producers, presenting a worldview that naturalises certain lives and specific values over alternative ones. Biopics also created a view of history that was based on the cosmology of the movie industry; in this world, key historical figures became stars, and the producers of these films often filtered the content of a great life through the sieve of their own experiences, values, and personalities.³⁰⁹

Pancho conforms to all these key elements identified by Custen above. I have previously discussed the way in which it constructs the life and character of Villa to fit the 'particular contours' Custen speaks of, constructing him in the mould of traditional Hollywood stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity and in line with Antonio Banderas' popular Hispanic action hero persona. The film also adopts the traditional convention of casting the biographical subject as a star, arguably more explicitly than most biopics, through its film-within-a-film narrative. The way in which Pancho Villa and his life are portrayed in the film are also distinguishably mediated by the values of the film's producers in that it focuses on his relationship to US culture and Hollywood as a developing film industry. What is different about this biopic is the self-reflexive critique in the way in which the film portrays the construction of the biopic in it, *The Life of General Villa*. In the way in which the production of *The Life of General Villa* is portrayed in the narrative, the film shows the process by

³⁰⁹ George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics : How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) p.4

which Villa's screen image is constructed and thus causes us to question the 'reality' of the image of Villa being portrayed in *Pancho* as a biopic. Through the production of *The Life of General Villa* we see the producers decide that the 'real' footage of the battle taking place cannot provide the narrative coherence and heroic characterisation required by Hollywood and hence it is to be interspersed with a 'specially written photoplay' entitled 'The heroic Life of Pancho Villa'. Thus we see the film-within-a-film transform from a documentary depicting the realities of Villa and his war, into a Hollywood entertainment, with the image of both cultivated to appeal to US audiences. A reporter depicted in the film aptly describes the nature of the manipulation of Villa's life and revolutionary battles, when he says at the premiere:

I understand the difficulty of selling tickets to see a hero who mows down widows in cold blood. I even understand the need to transform an outlaw into an aristocrat. Or passing off whores as loving wives. Barefoot peasants who are entitled to freedom only after they've been properly dressed for the occasion. [...] It's the movie's turn to make truth the first casualty of war. [...] The lens is mightier than the sword.

Several of the aspects identified by the reporter as being altered from truth to fiction in the movie are those aspects which can be seen to relate to the negative stereotypes of Mexican masculinity, as it is Villa's bandido and Latin lover-like behaviour which he remarks have been changed to cast him as a hero that will sell tickets to Hollywood audiences. But it is not just the American reporter who takes a negative view of the film's manipulation of Villa's image, as we see Villa himself shooting the photoplay to express his dislike for its Hollywood friendly content. He says 'every page is a page of lies, Cervantes would not wipe his ass with this shit!' suggesting that the producers have not elevated him to the great hero of literature that he was hoping for. This portrayal of Villa as angered enough by the manipulation of his image by Hollywood to shoot the photoplay again presents him as a bandido-like figure, but it also causes the audience to question the way in which Villa is represented in *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* and the extent to which it would have pleased Villa himself.

5.10 Che as Teacher and the Educational Film

As previously mentioned, it is *Pancho's* awareness of the constructed nature of the biopic as a cinematic form which contrasts so strongly to the way in which *Che* encourages us to view its image of Guevara as reflective of reality. Indeed, the way in which these two films represent their subjects raises theoretical questions as to which is the most 'real' or 'authentic' as, while *Che* has more of a claim to realism and authenticity in terms of its visual style and historical accuracy, the more self-reflexive approach of *Pancho* is arguably more conscious of the constructed nature of

biographical representation. As previously noted in my analysis of the film's promotion and reception, *Che* presents itself and has been understood as a film which aims to educate its audience, envisaged to be largely based in the US, about the revolutionary ideals and actions of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. I will argue in this section of my thesis that part one of *Che* confirms these promotional and reception discourses by presenting itself as an educational film, through its narrative, visual style and the way in which it constructs its image of Guevara himself. The film begins with an educational map of Cuba, the country coloured in reds and oranges against a black background, obscuring all other nations surrounding it, as if to emphasise that Cuba alone is the film's focus. The country then becomes divided into regional zones, each highlighted and labelled in turn, the key cities of La Habana, Santa Clara and Santiago, and the mountain range of Sierra Maestra are then highlighted on the map before it fades into black. This lesson in geography occupies the first forty-five seconds of the film, without dialogue, characters or even a supporting written narrative, defying the narrative conventions of Hollywood. This scene also defies what we expect of the traditional biopic as Che is not the first image we see on screen, the film suggesting that we need to understand the geography of the country he will be fighting for before we can understand the man the film portrays. This also suggests that this knowledge is not already part of what Sorlin would call a US audience's common cultural heritage, or 'historical capital', and hence the film must explain this history to them.³¹⁰ This opening preface to the film does not feature Che's name, the film's title, director, or del Toro's name as the film's star, which suggests we are to view the film more as a recreated documentary of historical re-enactment rather than movie entertainment. What is also interesting about this educational introduction is that it focuses on geography, rather than history, considering its subject is a major historical figure. This suggests a less didactic approach to the historical narrative of the film, suggesting the events will be presented as if in real time rather than being framed by a historical judgement. This framing scene presented before we have seen, heard, or read the name Che, presents us with the idea that we need to prepare to learn from him rather than to be entertained by him.

This introduction to Che complies with the existing image of him as a role model for left-wing activists, encouraging the audience to view him as an example to learn from. The film presents Che as a doctor and educator in many of its scenes, in defiance of traditional stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity, by presenting him as a thinker, rather than an excessively aggressive and emotional man. This construction of Che is arguably enhanced by Benicio del Toro's star persona

³¹⁰ Sorlin, p.20

as a cerebral actor from an educated middle class background like Guevara's, as I have discussed in more detail in the previous chapter and earlier sections of my argument in this one. Che is frequently referred to as 'the doctor' by other revolutionaries in the film and we see him act and think as a doctor more readily than as a military leader, such as when he asks if he can stay behind while others advance the fighting so he can treat his wounded comrades. We also see Che benevolently acting as a doctor to the local citizens, and witness one old woman telling him that she has come to see him because she has never seen a doctor before. While Che is presented as rare in his ability to be able to heal others through his medical training, he is also presented as a man who aims to elevate the minds of his comrades through educating them. He teaches other revolutionary soldiers to read and write, telling them that a country that learns to read and write cannot be so easily tricked by others into accepting an unjust situation. This presents Che as an image of Hispanic masculinity that is not only educated but an educator, thus facilitating the rejection of colonial powers by his Latin American comrades. In line with this construction of Che as a thinking man, the film also demonstrates a need to separate Che as far as possible from the bandido image of Hispanic masculinity. The idea that intellectualism and Latino masculinity are far from synonymous in the eyes of the US is demonstrated in a de-classified FBI profile of Che that noted that he was 'quite well read' and 'fairly intellectual, for a Latino'.³¹¹ The efforts of the film to distance Guevara from the bandido type is portrayed in a scene in which we see him condemn two revolutionary soldiers who behave like bandidos in their mistreatment of the local people they are fighting for. This echoes the way in which the film can be seen as attempting to separate Guevara from Latin Lover stereotypes, which could be drawn from romantic events of his personal life. In the previously referenced *Empire* article, Soderbergh later states that he aimed to humanise Che and explore the reasons for his heroism by excluding references to and depictions of Guevara's personal life in favour of focuses on his revolutionary, exceptional ideas.³¹² This exclusion from the film of details of his personal life, such as the fact that Guevara had been married twice by the time of his death aged 39, could certainly be seen as an effort to distance the portrayal of Che from any Latin Lover stereotypes.

³¹¹ Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith (eds.), *Che Guevara and the FBI: The U.S. Political Police Dossier on the Latin American Revolutionary* (New York, Ocean Press:1997) p. 25

³¹² *Empire*, 'Oscars 2009', January 2009, p.115

5.11 Che as Ordinary Man

Soderbergh's image of Che aims to present him as a man of thought, rather than macho action man in contrast to Hollywood stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity. While in *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* Villa is presented as a Hispanic action hero whose action prowess cannot be matched by the Anglo actor given the task of performing him, *Che* presents its hero as a man who neither enjoys nor is accomplished in fighting a military battle, though this shifts slightly in the second part of the film which portrays his Bolivian campaign. I argue that, in combination with the previously discussed portrayal of him as a doctor and educator; it is the depiction of Guevara's asthma which presents him as a very different type of military hero to that of Pancho Villa. He performs no macho, heroic action stunts, but rather fights quietly and thoughtfully for his cause while battling asthma attacks that render him physically weak with bouts of wheezing. This vulnerability presents Guevara not as a supremely macho military icon, but rather a sympathetic and human man, encouraging audiences to sympathise with him, whether or not they share his political ideals. For US audiences, it is this vulnerability in del Toro's performance as Guevara which is most likely to encourage them to view him as an inspirational man and image of Hispanic masculinity, even if they do not fully agree with his anti-capitalist politics. The episodes in which we witness Guevara's asthma attack are among relatively few scenes, in which del Toro is shot in close-up, the majority of shots of del Toro being mid-range shots in which he is portrayed as one of a group of soldiers rather than a central protagonist. This is perhaps best exemplified by a scene in the film in which we see Che before the revolution, back in the 1950s, in which del Toro performs Che with none of the star presence or centrality that we see given to him later in the film's chronology. In this scene, Guevara sits quietly on the periphery at a dinner at Castro's home and carries bread humbly to the table. He is casually dressed and does not have the beard that later became a key signifier in his image. The message here is that Guevara was once a relatively ordinary man, in an ordinary house, before he was instrumental in starting a revolution and leading an army. This scene almost seems to present an image of Guevara before he became the 'star' that we see in the black and white interview footage, a common biopic trope that contrasts with the film's documentary style. The presentation of Guevara as a humble man is emphasised by the way in which we see him introduce himself and address other soldiers as ordinary citizens in the film. He introduces himself by his name rather than his title and always asks the names of any new people he encounters regardless of their rank.

This, in a less emotive way than the performances of his asthma attacks, again encourages the audience to empathise with Guevara, despite his status as a Latin American revolutionary who

was antithetical to US beliefs. It also makes the majority of the film, aside from the television interview section which will be discussed later in this chapter, appear documentary-like in its style and in direct contrast to the traditional Hollywood biopic. Indeed, throughout much of the film it is only the way in which it is framed by an opening interview with the celebrity Guevara has become that frames him as the film's central subject. This arguably encourages the audience to accept the film's presentation of Guevara as more real, in that it does not construct him as a protagonist who can be easily emotionally engaged with through use of extensive close-ups, and a familiar, inspirational life story narrative common to the biopic. However this is somewhat undercut by some of the film's other scenes that present Guevara as not only a star, but a man who is, to an almost impossible degree, purely motivated by his revolutionary aims.

5.12 Che as a Heroic Leader and Star

As previously mentioned, the majority of the film is shot in colour and in a documentary-like style, which encourages us to believe that the image of Che we see on screen is real, and this is framed by a television interview with del Toro as Che and a female US journalist. In this scene we see Guevara through a media lens and through the eyes of a US audience, in stark contrast to the rest of the film in which he is portrayed in a Cuban, and more broadly Latin American, context. It is this scene which begins the film, suggesting that Soderbergh feels a need to frame Che for a US audience, despite the Spanish language of the film, before portraying his revolutionary campaign in Cuba. It is in this scene that Che is also portrayed as a star and iconic figure, in contrast with the rest of the film which could be interpreted as an attempt to engage audiences expecting the more traditional biopic that the film's promotion presented it as. Before we see Che in the film he is asked for a sound level check by the American journalist, we hear his voice before we see his face in order to build anticipation of viewing the star. He says, 'one, two, three, one, two, three', as if he is a performer about to begin a show, rather than a political leader about to address the public. The fact that this section is shot in black and white makes us view it as screen footage rather than narrative, real world footage in the rest of the film.

This presents Che as a star, constructed by the media as Banderas' Villa was in the shots from *Pancho's* film-in-a-film, as a Hispanic hero on display for the audience and mediated by the camera. Rather like Banderas' *El Mariachi*, we see him fetishised by the camera, each piece of his body offered as an iconic spectacle for the audience. This begins with perfectly polished soldier's boots, before moving up to an extreme close-up of the detail at the neck of his jacket, before moving up to another extreme close-up of his hand holding his iconic Cuban cigar. The camera

then moves higher so we can see only the smoke from his cigar, before slowly panning across to an extreme close-up of his eyes and forehead as we try to fathom what he is thinking. It then zooms out slightly and we see del Toro take a deliberate and contemplative puff on the cigar. The dramatic tension of this scene, but also its clear framing of the film to show the importance of Che's relationship with the US to its narrative drive, is intensified by the unanswered question that the reporter asks him, namely, whether his war will become irrelevant if US efforts to help the Cuban people by financially and politically enabling the Cuban ruling classes is successful. Che is constructed here both as a rebel star, akin to Richard Dyer's rebel star type which as he notes are frequently recuperated to reflect more conservative or mainstream values in the narratives that they appear, but more specifically as a Latin American revolutionary star rebelling against the control of the US.³¹³ The way in which Che is represented in the film can definitely be seen to reflect anomie and alienation from capitalist societies and a rebellion against this, which is a key aspect that Dyer outlines in this type. However, Che is arguably not as easily recuperated than many of these star types, epitomised by Marlon Brando and James Dean in the 1950s, because he does not have the 'inarticulacy' Dyer has identified as key to this type, in fact Che is presented as an intellectual and strong communicator who cannot be so easily marginalised by capitalist society. The idea of Che as a star in a contemporary US context is intensified by the way in which this interview is framed in the film. We are shown Guevara's arrival to begin the interview, in which he walks down the street lined by journalists with flashing cameras, shouting detractors and supporters and Americans asking for his autograph and him being offered make-up in the dressing room before the TV interview, initially refusing and then accepting a little powder. This characterisation of Guevara as a star, while occupying a relatively small amount of the film's screen time, is essential to understanding the way in which it represents Hispanic masculinity for a US audience. It is this presentation of him as a star in the eyes of 1960s America, as represented in the film, which encourages US viewers to understand him as a significant international figure beyond the boundaries of Latin America.

5.13 Conclusion

Through my examination of Antonio Banderas' performance as Pancho Villa in *Pancho* and that of Benicio del Toro as Ernesto 'Che' Guevara in part one of *Che*, I have explored the way in which the historical biopic can be used to show the significant role that these Latin American male figures

³¹³ Richard Dyer, *Stars*, (London: BFI, 1998, 1979) p.53

have played in the US historical imaginary for a contemporary US audience. Both these films demonstrate the way in which a genre that has historically been biased towards representing only Anglo American male figures, can be used to relocate Hispanic masculine figures to a more central role in screen representations of history. As in previous chapters, it is clear that the star personas of the Hispanic stars who portray these figures, play a central role in constructing them as heroic and sympathetic images of Hispanic masculinity. Indeed, these films can be viewed as progressive in the way in which they represent Hispanic masculinity, presenting us with two figures who are portrayed as heroic and embodying characteristics and values that would be seen as morally appealing to a contemporary US audience. However, a close examination of these texts reveals that their construction of real-life historical figures still rely on archetypes, positive and negative of Hispanic masculinity, and their own individual cultural mythologies, as the images of Hispanic masculinity based on fantasy genres discussed earlier in this thesis. While they focus on Latin-American figures, like the border films discussed in the previous chapter, they are US centred in the sense that they aim to reflect US ideologies, at times with neo-colonial overtones.

6. Conclusion

6.1 What is the original contribution to the field?

This thesis has examined the way in which Hispanic masculinity was represented across diverse film genres in the decade 1998-2008 and has made an original contribution in a number of significant ways. The multifaceted methodology of the thesis is an original approach to the subject area and has provided new insights into the way in which genre and star performances can impact on the way Hispanic masculinity is represented on screen. In order to further demonstrate what original knowledge about the representation of Hispanic masculinity in contemporary Hollywood has been gained by this thesis, I will now discuss this in more detail.

6.2 What has been learnt about Hispanic masculinity in contemporary Hollywood?

Across my four distinct genre case studies, this thesis has demonstrated that generic tropes do have the potential to refigure existing stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity in US cinema. It has also demonstrated that this has occurred in genres whose systems of representation are based on fantasy and symbolic archetypes; the action adventure and family film, and those which aim to reflect social realities: the border film and biopic. The conventions of the action adventure film have recast the banditry aspects of Hispanic machismo as romantically heroic, challenging the idea that the action hero is an exclusively white male type. This image has then further been translated into the family film, assimilating a formerly violent and oppositional identity into entertainment aimed at a mainstream family audience. These two chapters have demonstrated representations of minority identities in genres which base their system of representation in fantasy and have the potential to create heroic images of minority figures. The analysis of the evolution of the Hispanic action hero character in this thesis has shown that images of minority identities based in fantasy have as much, if not more, potential to integrate them in to mainstream genre filmmaking than those based in social realities.

In the second half of this thesis, however, heroic Hispanic male characters have also been studied in border films, where they have been portrayed as embodying US values more strongly than their white, US counterparts. These narratives challenge the idea that the ideal US citizen is native-born and white, and present Hispanic male characters that, though outsiders, are morally identifiable and appealing to US audiences. And as the final case study chapter of this thesis illuminated, the biopic has been employed to integrate Hispanic male subjects historically opposed to US values into a sympathetic role in a US centred view of history. These biopics of anti-US revolutionaries Pancho Villa and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara are exemplary of the way in which

US film and television has revised its ideas of whose histories and biographical narratives are important to Hollywood audiences. Overall, this thesis has confirmed its initial assertion that, while stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity exist across different Hollywood genres, generic conventions can have a dramatic impact on the way in which minority identities are portrayed in Hollywood cinema with the potential to recast marginalised identities as admirable, identifiable and heroic for mainstream audiences.

Beyond the role of genre, this thesis has also demonstrated the way in which personas of Hispanic male stars have refigured Hollywood representations of Hispanic masculinity. Antonio Banderas' persona shift from archetypal Latin Lover to Hispanic action hero for adult and family audiences represents a shift in perceptions of Hispanic machismo in Hollywood. The transition of his persona has shown a noticeable change in the way in which Hispanic masculinity has been represented in Hollywood and viewed by audiences. When arriving in Hollywood in the mid 1990s, Banderas was cast as marginal, oppositional bandits and sexually ambiguous and ambivalent Latin Lovers, but has since been recast as a family friendly Hispanic hero with such success that his Puss in Boots character was given his own film. Benicio del Toro's establishment of himself as a Latino 'star as performer' has also challenged traditional stereotypes of Hispanic male stars, creating a persona that casts himself as an intelligent and thoughtful, rather than purely physical, performer. My analysis of del Toro's persona in two genre case studies has confirmed Beltrán's assertions that his persona, along with that of Spanish star Javier Bardem, represents a change in images of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood that proves that Hispanic stars can be recognised for their intelligent performances and embody a somewhat more nuanced image of masculinity beyond machismo.³¹⁴

However, it must be concluded that despite the fact that Hispanic masculinity has been refigured into more central and heroic roles across a range of genres and by shifting star personas, the representation of Hispanic masculinity on Hollywood screens has not been radically reinvented. Indeed, it is still virtually impossible for Hollywood films to represent Hispanic masculinity on screen without some sort of engagement in existing stereotypes. Ramirez Berg's major Latin male stereotypes of the bandido, the Latin Lover and the Latin buffoon are still the most common touchstones across genres in representing Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood. Banderas' Hispanic action hero persona can, in part, be read as a reformed Bandido, particularly

³¹⁴ Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107, p.92

in the case of his Zorro and Puss in Boots characters who are explicitly characterised as reformed bandits. Furthermore, despite the evolution of his persona with age, Banderas cannot escape the traces of his initial characterisation in Hollywood as a Latin Lover even when playing an animated character, as my analysis of *Shrek 2* demonstrates. This thesis has also demonstrated that a reliance on stereotypes is arguably equally apparent in those genres intended to reflect social realities as it is in those based purely in fantasy worlds. This is particularly true of the biopics, where Banderas' Pancho Villa is largely constructed as a more bandit-like version of his previous Hispanic action heroes, while del Toro's strong performance as Guevara could not disguise the way in which the film sought to further his mythology and cast him as an almost impossibly moral character, while avoiding ethnic stereotypes.

The border films discussed here do not replicate the image of Hispanic men as bandits that has historically been the norm for this genre. However, in not conforming to these stereotypes, these films instead fall victim of presenting Hispanic men, in this case Mexicans, as almost impossibly humble and moral akin to the colonial image of the noble savage. Indeed, as has been discussed in more detail in my case study chapters, the images of Mexican men in particular are presented in narratives that have traces of neo-colonialism in them, with Mexicans converted to US values, ideology and ideals of masculinity. As these more 'realistic' films move away from the banditry stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity, in the case of *Traffic*, *Three Burials* and *Che*, they also seek to move away from the characterisation of Hispanic men as Latin Lovers. However, in the case of the examples here, they do this to such an extent that they present these men as largely absent of sexual desire. This absence is so conspicuous that it makes these characters seem unreal and could even act to remind viewers of the Latin Lover type through presenting images that are so heavily opposed to it. In much the same way that these films based in social realities cannot fully escape stereotypes of Hispanic masculinity, del Toro as a Hispanic 'star as performer' has not entirely escaped them either. The reception documents analysed in this thesis have demonstrated the critical acclaim del Toro has received for his performances, and his persona has combined the 'intelligence' and 'sexiness' that Beltrán describes. However, despite his acclaim as an intelligent actor, Del Toro cannot entirely escape being cast in the mode of the Latin Lover. This has been most effectively demonstrated by the persistent rumours that

del Toro had a romantic liaison with Scarlett Johansson in a lift after the 2004 Academy Awards ceremony.³¹⁵

In the introduction to this thesis I characterised the period before 1998 as an era in which Hispanic male stars must either reject their ethnic identities, or be bound by US cultures stereotypes and expectations of Hispanic masculinity. By the end of my period of study this was largely still the case, though Benicio del Toro has demonstrated himself to be a Latino 'star as performer' who can speak without a marked Spanish accent who can portray non Hispanic characters without entirely rejecting his ethnic identity. What has been demonstrated by this thesis however is that, even though Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood is still largely defined by US culture's expectations of Hispanic masculinity, these expectations have shifted. Hispanic masculinity is still frequently constructed in line with stereotypes that first appeared long before 1998, including the Latin Lover, bandido, Latin buffoon, noble savage and the good neighbour. But at the same time these Hispanic male characters can also now be heroic action heroes, ideal fathers, inspiring revolutionary leaders and nostalgic images of frontier masculinity. These new roles are arguably all US cultural projections onto the male Hispanic body, but the way in which they combine reductive stereotypes with more progressive characterisations arguably reflects a transitional period in which the growing Hispanic population is becoming increasingly integrated into US society, while remaining relatively marginalised as a racialised minority.

6.3 What has happened to Hispanic Masculinity in the US since 2008?

In the six years since 2008, representations of Hispanic masculinity in US film continues to be relocated and refigured through more central and heroic roles on screen. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, they still engage quite heavily with existing stereotypes relating to Latin masculinities, thus continuing the conflicted nature of representations that have been charted in this thesis. A compelling example of this can be seen in Javier Bardem's portrayal of the James Bond villain Raul Silva in *Skyfall* (2012), one of the most high profile Hispanic male performances of the last six years. The film was a great success commercially and critically, with Bardem's portrayal of Silva, praised as 'the most authentically Bondian Bond villain in decades',³¹⁶ and

³¹⁵ <http://www.hollywood.com/news/brief/2436149/benicio-del-toro-hints-scarlett-johansson-elevator-romp-took-place?page=all> (accessed 30/08/2013)

³¹⁶ Henry K. Miller, 'Film of the Week: Skyfall' in *Sight and Sound*, Friday 26th October 2012, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/film-week-skyfall> (accessed 30/08/2013)

cementing his rise to become Hollywood's most high profile Hispanic star that began with his Oscar winning performance as Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* (Ethan and Joel Coen, 2007). However, as Niamh Thornton has noted, Bardem's role in *Skyfall* draws on a long tradition in Hollywood of representing Latinos as looming others, while his outrageously camp performance, ambiguous sexuality and bandido-like character, conform to a range of expectations of Latino men as more morally and sexually transgressive than their white counterparts.³¹⁷ The physical appearance of Bardem as Silva is used to enhance his sense of otherness, both in his incongruous and feminine blonde hair and flamboyant shirts and the later revelation of his concealed and monstrous facial disfigurement. Silva is depicted as a man who was once like Bond, trained to be an agent under M's instruction before he was physically and mentally damaged to the point of insanity. Thus in the film Silva seeks to break Bond's resolve and turn him into himself by flirting with him, torturing him and attempting to destroy his mentor and his childhood home. Though Silva is not an entirely unsympathetic villain, the film's stereotypical representation of him could be read as a suggestion that Hispanic men are emotionally weaker, and therefore the British Bond would not descend into madness in the same way.

As a Spanish star, Bardem has arguably been able to cultivate a more sophisticated star persona off-screen than contemporary Hispanic male stars of Latin American and Latino origin, though his persona shares many similarities with that of del Toro in terms of the way in which he is represented as a Latino 'star as performer' and intelligent actor. Mary Beltrán writes of Bardem's Hollywood persona, that his 'fans typically know him not only for his brooding good looks and urbane image as a modern-day Renaissance man but also for the seriousness with which he approaches his work.'³¹⁸ On screen in Hollywood however, again much like del Toro, his roles beyond *Skyfall* have still been largely subject to the bandido and Latin Lover stereotypes, liltling between the villainous and the romantic. In Woody Allen's *Vicky, Cristina, Barcelona* (2008) he portrays a cultured Spanish artist, but the character is basically a more sophisticated version of the Latin Lover type, while in the Julia Roberts star vehicle *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010) he plays a Brazilian businessman whose character role is to provide a love interest. His Oscar winning performance as the disturbed, ethnically ambiguous hit-man Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* also engages with the bandido stereotype and, although Chigurh is not explicitly identified as Hispanic, Bardem is presented as a frightening other as he is in *Skyfall*. It is interesting to note that

³¹⁷ <http://www.niamhthornton.net/tags/skyfall/>

³¹⁸ Mary Beltrán, 'Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro: Beyond Machismo' in Murray Pomerance ed. *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011) pp.90-107,p.100

in his most commercial Hollywood films, in the last six years, del Toro has also been cast as monsters and villains, playing the eponymous monster in *The Wolfman* and recently being cast as the villainous Collector in Marvel studios forthcoming film *The Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014).

The rise of Javier Bardem as a Hispanic star in Hollywood, given his star stature in Spanish language cinema with transnational success in films such as *Jamón, Jamón* (1992), *The Sea Inside* (2004) and *Buitiful* (2010), is not surprising. The movement of Danny Trejo from stock bandit to action star in *Machete* (2010) and the subsequent *Machete Kills* (2013) sequel is considerably more unlikely, but has had a significant impact on the representation of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood. *Machete* continues the refiguring of Trejo's persona begun in *Spy Kids* and, despite their dramatically different content and target audience, *Machete* can be aligned with *Spy Kids* in that it again engages popular genre conventions to assimilate a marginal ethnic persona, such as Trejo's, in the eyes of a mainstream cinema audience. Trejo again plays Machete Cortez, who is the film's hero, a renegade ex-federale (Mexican policeman) who literally fights against corrupt politicians who aggressively oppose illegal immigration. The casting of an oppositional figure such as Trejo, an aging ex-convict turned supporting actor with a brutally grizzled face, as the film's hero does not seem out of place in the 'Grindhouse' world of *Machete*, yet it has significantly altered public perceptions of the type of Hispanic masculinity that could be cast as heroic.

Trejo's banditry persona has now become so popular and assimilated into popular culture that it has been employed comically by the star to advertise Old El Paso tacos in 2013, including in the UK, and in the film *A Very Harold and Kumar Christmas* (2011) in which Trejo plays Harold's intimidating father-in-law who wears comically incongruous novelty Christmas jumpers. Even when portraying a drug-lord's enforcer in the popular television series *Sons of Anarchy* (2011 series), a role concurrent with Trejo's traditional bandit image, his character was later revealed to be an undercover agent for the CIA. Elsewhere, Rodriguez further re-imagined the Hispanic action hero by casting diminutive Latino everyman Freddie Rodriguez, best known for his role as Rico in television series *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), as the protagonist in his previous Grindhouse film *Planet Terror* (2007). The writer/director will undoubtedly have further long-term impact on the way in which Hispanic masculinity is viewed on US screens as a result of the launch of the El Nuevo television network in late 2013 in the US for Univision, specialising in English language programming aimed at a US Latino audience. The television shows developed for the network

include a series based on Rodriguez's *From Dusk till Dawn*, and a spy series with a Latino James Bond-like character.³¹⁹

Indeed, as these examples of programming for the El Ray network demonstrate, it is the Hispanic action hero image previously discussed which continues to be the most popular and commercially successful image of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood. Of the characters discussed in this thesis it is the Hispanic action heroes that have been given new film vehicles or are set to be in the near future. As previously mentioned, the character of Puss in Boots has appeared in his own self-titled film, set in a fairytale land defined neither as Spain nor Mexico but akin to a family friendly version of the tortilla western world of Rodriguez's *Once Upon in Mexico*. The film expands on Puss' characterisation as a romantic, Hispanic action hero by having him jump over rooftops, perform in a cat flamenco, and become romantically involved with the beautiful cat burglar Kitty Softpaws voiced by Salma Hayek. The family friendly Hispanic action hero was also incorporated into the most recent *Toy Story* film in 2010, in which Buzz Lightyear is switched to 'Spanish Mode'. He is still portrayed as a heroic space-captain as he was in *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* (1999), but in *Toy Story 3* he is transformed to be heroic in a demonstrative, passionate stereotypically Latin way, in contrast to his usually romantically-reserved behaviour. His dramatic movements, gestures and hip-swivelling dance moves render him to be a character comedic in his contrast with Anglo Buzz's behaviour and the behaviour of the other toys. Yet Spanish Buzz saves the day with his heroism and, as he is still Buzz underneath and loves Jesse, he is able to express his love and win her heart as a Latin Lover, in a way that he could not in his previous persona. Though this characterisation of Spanish Buzz relies heavily on existing stereotypes, it still sends a message to Hollywood's family audiences that a hero who speaks Spanish can still be as heroic as one who speaks English. While these family films have capitalised on the popularity of a family friendly Hispanic action hero, with the recent resurgence of superhero films, Zorro is also forecast to return in the not so distant future. Gael García Bernal has been approached to star in a Fox reboot of the series set in a post apocalyptic future and entitled *Zorro Reborn*, while Sony are mooted to be planning a more traditional retelling of the story akin to the 1998 version, based on Isabel Allende's 2005 novel, though it is not suggested that Banderas will return.³²⁰

³¹⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/09/latino-james-bond_n_3411842.html (last accessed 30/8/2003)

³²⁰ <http://variety.com/2012/film/news/garcia-bernal-to-mark-fox-s-zorro-reborn-1118050418/>

These more recent representations of Hispanic masculinity could provide a range of case studies to expand upon this thesis and consider Hispanic masculinity in more detail. In the final section of this concluding chapter I will outline my suggestions for further research.

6.4 What are the potential avenues for future research?

Although this thesis has provided a substantial insight into the way in which Hispanic masculinity has been represented in contemporary Hollywood cinema, this is still a relatively under-represented area of study and hence there are several potential avenues that further research on this subject area could take. Firstly, there are several important male Hispanic stars not discussed here that could be looked at in more detail, particularly as their personas and importance in representing Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood since 2008 have grown in significance. An original idea for this project was to base it around four case studies of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood focusing on Antonio Banderas and Benicio del Toro, as discussed here, but with two further case studies focusing on the performances and personas of Mexican star Gael Garcia Bernal and Spaniard Javier Bardem in US cinema. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the project was reworked to make genre the primary focus, in order to make the most original contribution to the field, given Perriam's existing extensive work on Banderas. However, extensive star studies of the most recent work by del Toro, Bernal and Bardem in Hollywood, beyond Serna and Beltrán's short articles, have yet to be done and these could still make an original contribution to understanding Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood. As Bardem has now overtaken Banderas as Hollywood's biggest Spanish star, particularly given his high profile role in *Skyfall*, the study of his persona now seems particularly timely and pertinent. The rather unlikely rise of the profile of Danny Trejo as a heroic image of Hispanic masculinity arguably also makes him worthy of a more extensive study of oppositional Latino stardom. Indeed, he presents a very different image of Hispanic masculinity to the stars I initially considered focusing on in my early ideas for this project, and was still a relatively minor figure when I began writing it in 2008.

It must also be noted that stars and supporting performers on television have had a significant impact on the way in which Hispanic masculinity has been represented in US popular culture in the last fifteen years. Though there was simply not enough space to talk about Hispanic masculinity on small screens in this thesis, a detailed study of representations of Hispanic masculinity in television fiction series would create a valuable companion piece to this thesis. The role of key performers in shaping representations of Hispanic masculinity on television is worthy of further consideration, with the longer running times of these series arguably providing more

scope for them to transcend stereotypes. To contemporary viewers, Edward James Olmos is arguably more recognisable for his popular television roles as Admiral Adama in *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), Professor James Geller in *Dexter* (2011) and Judge Roberto Mendoza in *The West Wing* (1999-2000) than he is for his role in the Chicano cinema movement. These roles cast Olmos as an educated, respected Hispanic figure of authority, presenting a challenge to the idea that Hispanic men are less cerebral and successful than their white counterparts. The small screen persona of Latino actor Jimmy Smits would also provide an interesting study of Hispanic masculinity, as Smits has portrayed respectable and educated Latinos, as Presidential Candidate Matthew Santos in the later series of *The West Wing* (2004-2006) and ex-Supreme Court Judge Cyrus Garza in *Outlaw* (2010), and more working class figures. The latter include a detective in police drama *NYPD Blue* (1994-2004) and a high level pimp in *Sons of Anarchy* (2012-present). But arguably the most interesting of all these roles, in terms of representations of Hispanic masculinity, is his performance as Assistant District Attorney Miguel Prado in *Dexter* (2008) in which his character initially appears to be a restrained and respectable figure, but quite quickly gives way to amoral and murderous instincts like a typical bandido.

Though a star based study of representations of Hispanic masculinity on the small screen could provide valuable insights into the way in which Hispanic masculinity has been represented, a study of Hispanic masculinity across different television genres would also be worthwhile. In the last fifteen years major Hispanic male characters have featured in prominent roles in a range of television genres from crime dramas; *The Shield* (2002-2008), *Dexter* (2006-2013), *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-Present), *24* (2001-2014); to science fiction and fantasy; *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), *True Blood* (2008-present); sit-coms, *Modern Family* (2009-present), *Eastbound and Down* (2009-present) and shows aimed at teens and families, *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007) and Nickelodeon's *The Brothers Garcia* (2000-2004).³²¹ After the launch of the El Ray

³²¹ As previously mentioned *The Shield* features Benito Martinez in a central role as David Aceveda, police captain and later politician, throughout its seven series. *Dexter*, being set in Miami features several major Cubano characters, the most central male one being the womanising Sgt. Batista (David Zayas), but it also features major recurring roles for Jimmy Smits and Edward James Olmos. *Sons of Anarchy's* Californian setting presents a Latino motorcycle gang as recurring antagonists, while the LA set *24* gives its hero Jack Bauer a Latino colleague and later enemy in Tony Almeida (Carlos Bernard). Edward James Olmos as Admiral Adama in *Battlestar Galactica* is arguably the most prominent Hispanic male character in television science fiction, while *True Blood* featured gay Latino mystic Jesus Valasquez (Kevin Alejandro) in a recurring role. Sofia Vergara may be the highest profile Hispanic in *Modern Family*, but it also features a regular role for Rico Rodriguez as her character's romantic son Manny and a recurring role for Benjamin Bratt as his Latin Lover father Javier. The second series of HBO comedy *Eastbound and Down* takes place in Mexico, providing regular roles for Marco Rodríguez as a long suffering baseball coach and Michael Peña as an

network it could also be worthwhile to compare the representations of Hispanic masculinity depicted in case studies from its programming, aimed at Latino audiences, with those featured on standard networks, such as ABC and NBC, aimed at mainstream audiences, and those of cable networks, such as FX, Showtime and HBO, typically marketed at more 'niche' or 'sophisticated' audiences.

These further avenues for research have the potential to expand upon the insights this thesis has provided into the representation of Hispanic masculinity in Hollywood, to be taken up by myself and other scholars.

eccentric baseball club owner. Teen series *Veronica Mars* featured a morally ambiguous Latino gang leader as one of its title characters, while *The Brothers Garcia* focused on a family of Mexican-American brothers in Texas.

Appendices

Key Term Definitions

Hispanic, a term referring to persons whose origins are from a Spanish speaking country.

Latino, a term referring to a person of Latin American origins, usually used to refer to US Latinos.

Chicano, a political term of pride, self-assigned by Mexican Americans.

Plot Summaries

And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself

Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa convinces the Mutual Film Company to film his revolutionary battles in exchange for further financing of his war. Producer Frank Thayer is sent to develop the project into a feature film and becomes both horrified and fascinated by the brutal and charismatic Villa.

Che (Part One)

The first part of Che follows the progression of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara over the course of the Cuban revolution, from doctor to commander and finally revolutionary hero. This storyline is intercut with that of Guevara's visit to New York City for a UN conference and television interview.

Once Upon a Time in Mexico

El Mariachi is recruited by CIA agent Sands to kill General Emiliano Marquez , leader of a guerilla force who has been hired by Mexican drug lord Armando Barillo to assassinate the and overthrow the government. Many years before this, El Mariachi and his wife Carolina confronted Marquez in a shootout and wounded the general; in retaliation, Marquez took the lives of Carolina and their daughter in an ambush. In addition to El Mariachi, Sands convinces former FBI agent Jorge Ramírez to come out of retirement and kill Barillo, who had murdered his partner Archuleta in the past. Furthermore, AFN operative Ajedrez is assigned by Sands to tail Barillo.

Shrek 2

After their honeymoon, Shrek and Fiona go to Fiona's parents for dinner. When the Fairy Godmother discovers Fiona and Shrek are married she reminds the king about a deal they agreed on years ago that Fiona should have married her son Prince Charming. The king then hires a cat named Puss-in-Boots to kill Shrek, but the cat joins forces with Shrek to defeat the Fairy Godmother and win back Fiona.

Spy Kids

Gregorio and Ingrid Cortez, two of the greatest secret agents the world has ever known, fall in love and get married. Nine years later, after their retirement, Gregorio and Ingrid are called back in to action. When their former colleagues start disappearing one by one, Gregorio and Ingrid are

forced to take on Floop and his evil sidekick, Minion. But when they too disappear they must be saved by their children Juni and Carmen.

The Mask of Zorro

The original Zorro, Don Diego de la Vega, is captured and imprisoned just as Spain concedes California to Santa Anna. When twenty years later his mortal enemy, Don Rafael Montero, returns to California with an evil plan, the original Zorro escapes from prison and trains a new Zorro, Mexican Bandit Alejandro Murrieta, to take his place.

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada

Illegal Mexican immigrant cowboy Melquiades Estrada is killed by a border patrolman in the Texas desert. When his friend and fellow rancher Pete Perkins learns that Melquiades has been murdered and buried in a pauper's grave he kidnaps the border patrolman that killed him and takes him on a brutal quest to return Melquiades' corpse to Mexico.

Traffic

Four interrelated storylines provide different perspectives on the 'war on drugs'. In Washington D.C. a judge appointed as the new US drug czar discovers that his daughter is an addict. A trophy wife discovers that her rich husband's money comes from the drugs trade when he is arrested, while two DEA agents protect a witness with vital evidence against her husband. Meanwhile in Mexico, a dedicated but troubled Mexican cop attempts to fight drug-related corruption in the Mexican establishment, bringing vital information to the US government.

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