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Latino Acting on Screen: Pedro Armendáriz Performs Mexicanness in Three John Ford Films*

Este artículo propone una exploración del papel del actor y estrella del cine mexicano clásico Pedro Armendáriz en la performance de mexicanidad en tres westerns de John Ford. Plantea que la aproximación a la performance de Armendáriz en estas películas fordianas permite un mejor entendimiento de las diferentes estrategias discursivas del propio actor, del western y del director John Ford, así como una mejor comprensión de la situación, tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, del actor latino en el cine hollywoodense y en la jerarquía racial estadounidense.

Pedro Armendáriz was one of the most successful actors of Mexico's classical cinema. Acting alongside Dolores Del Rio, María Félix, Andrea Palma and other Mexican divas, he starred in many of the Golden Age's most significant films and is to this day strongly associated with the nationalist cinema of Emilio Fernández (*María Candelaria*, 1943; *Flor Silvestre*, 1943; *Las abandonadas*, 1944; *Enamorada*, 1946; *Maclovía*, 1948). In the latter half of the 1940s, at the height of his success in Mexico, he began a career in Hollywood, moving between Mexican, Hollywood and European projects until his death in 1963. Armendáriz's incorporation into the US industry took place at a significant moment in the "evolving status of US Latina/os" (Beltrán 40) within the US racial hierarchy. Whereas, in the 1920s and early 1930s, Latina/o actors (Del Rio,¹ Ramón Novarro and others) had "passed" as ethnic others, who were nevertheless considered white, during the late 1930s, into the war and immediate postwar era, Latinos were consistently racialized as non-white (Beltrán 39). Armendáriz's initial roles in Hollywood were all in John Ford westerns or quasi-westerns, in which the racial representation of ethnic others was also, not unrelatedly, "evolving" from what Dagle (102) refers to as the "racist" *Stagecoach* (1939) towards the "revisionist" *The Searchers*. Through the analysis of his different acting styles in Ford's *Three Godfathers* (1948), *The Fugitive* (1947), and *Fort Apache* (1948), this

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article explores the participation of Armendáriz in the shifting “representation of Hollywood Latinidad” (Beltrán 40) during the immediate postwar era. It argues that examining the representation of Hollywood Latinidad from the perspective of Armendáriz’s performances allows for a greater understanding of the Latina/o actor and of the relative position of Mexicanness in the US racial hierarchy.

Mary Beltrán’s excellent exploration of Latina/o stars and how they have been imagined by US entertainment media in the twentieth century focuses not just on the extent to which their star images are embedded within and reflective of the material realities of particular historical moments, but also on the agency and authorship of some of these stars in the production of their own images. For example, Beltrán (68–69) charts Rita Moreno’s simultaneous compliance with and resistance to the norms of Latina representation in the 1950s, accepting roles that offered stereotypical notions of Latinas but choosing not to straighten her hair or anglicize her name.² In these analyses, Beltrán relies mostly on plot and character synopses of the media texts in which Moreno appeared as well as the actor’s star text (interviews and promotional materials). Textual analysis of acting and performance styles would offer a useful addition to Beltrán’s case studies of Moreno and other Latina/o stars (Del Rio, Desi Arnaz, Edward James Olmos, Freddie Prinze, Jennifer López) not least because it would further highlight the skills and strategies and, in some cases, agency of the Latina/o star.

In neglecting the role the Latina/o actor (rather than the star) plays in creating these representations of Hollywood *latinidad* Beltrán is not unusual in the study of racialized representations in film. There is already a large absence in cinema scholarship of the study of screen performance itself, an absence that is particularly acute with respect to the racialized actor. Studies of racial representation in films that *do* consider screen performance often reduce acting to the playing out of stereotypes, concentrating textually on the performative excess of actors who represent their otherness stereotypically; consider Shari Roberts’ (143–53) exploration of Latina performer Carmen Miranda “The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat.”³ Whilst the focus on stereotype can be productive in the analysis of racial representation, it makes little allowance for broader ideological issues that pertain to performance as one of “the contradictory and diverse sites within the textual system which *construct* national/cultural differences” (Bhabha 68). And by not scrutinizing each element of performance as ideological, this kind of approach tends to reduce the actor to a passive element in the manner of Lev Kuleshov where meaning is produced through montage,⁴ or through what Homi Bhabha would call the “ethnic fetish” rather than through the discursive strategy of the actor’s performance.⁵

What this article wishes to do, therefore, is give more emphasis to the discursive strategies of one Latino actor. Following James Naremore it will consider Armendáriz as a “crafts[person],” rather than a “personality” (1) shaping

his portrayal of Mexicanness for the US racial imaginary. It will take into consideration the way creative theories of how to perform (Stanislavsky) and those of how to analyze performance (Naremore) affect our understanding of Armendáriz' portrayal of Mexicanness. At the same time the article will acknowledge the ways in which Armendáriz's personal craftsmanship, including his style as developed in Mexican cinema, is embedded within a larger ideological and industrial context that includes the genre conventions of the western, the directorial interests of John Ford, and the liberal, if Eurocentric, norms of postwar racial representation in Hollywood.

In order to explore the tensions in Armendáriz's racialized representation, the article will focus on two key elements, based broadly on who is controlling the construction of Mexicanness. Firstly, it will look at the ways Armendáriz shapes his own performance through gesture, voice and appearance. Secondly, it will consider the ways in which the actor's performance is embedded in and made coherent through the narrative and *mise-en-scène* of the film in which it appears – i.e. how the discursive strategies of the actor's performance are ordered by their integration into the rest of the filmic text. Throughout, the article will mainly use the terms “white” and “non white” to refer to the racial categories which define Armendáriz's characters but it will also use the terms “Latina/o” “Anglo” to avoid any confusion between Mexicanness and “off-whiteness” (Negra) given that dependent on their shifting position in the US racial hierarchy, Latina/os have been considered liminally white at different points in the twentieth century.

ANALYZING ACTING ON SCREEN

A major problem with the exploration of Latina/o acting on screen is that the critical language for discussing screen performance operates mostly from Stanislavskian-expressive realist assumptions through which performance is evaluated on the extent to which the actor is perceived to bring the character to life through some aspect of psychological realism (Naremore 2). According to Naremore, the hallmark of these assumptions is the belief that “good acting is ‘true to life’ and at the same time expressive of the actor's authentic, ‘organic’ self” (2). From Naremore's description of good acting we can extrapolate that, within expressive realist assumptions, bad acting is not “true to life” and represents an inauthentic, inorganic self.

That good acting is reflective of the actor's “organic” self has implications for the similarly problematic critical language used for discussing racial or ethnic representation in film because this also operates from an expressive realist logic. When we consider how race and ethnicity is constructed through performance, if the performance seems inorganic or inauthentic (and this is particularly the case when an actor is called on to act an ethnicity or race other than his own) we also view the representation of race and ethnicity as “false” or

“negative.” This is especially true when the performance mocks a specific racial group, for example, Mickey Rooney (an Irish-American actor) as a Japanese man in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961). Although it is fair to reject Rooney's performance as false and offensive on ideological grounds, dismissing the depiction as a misrepresentation as well as being overtly obvious limits the analysis and lacks critical rigour. It does not explore how the performance operates or analyses the reasons why the ethnicity in question has been characterised in that way.

Another problem of authenticity as a ruling paradigm in the analysis of acting is its suggested focus on the unified self, given that both theories about acting and Lacanian theory help us understand why such wholeness is illusory (Lacan 75-81, Naremore 5). Similarly, although race may be based in biology, its cultural, historical and social constructions go beyond any biological differences. In other words racial categories are not fixed or guaranteed by nature or biology, but are established through economic, political and cultural practices such as colonialism and slavery (Stam and Spence 879). In light of this, employing authenticity as the central logic in exploring how film acting depicts race and ethnicity seems equally problematic. It appears more progressive to read the representation of racial difference, not as binaries of authenticity vs. inauthenticity and positivity vs. negativity but, as Bhabha would have it, deconstructively as a set of codes. With this in mind, rather than simply consider Armendáriz as an “ethnic” actor, acting his “own” ethnicity (Mexican or Mexican-American), this article will explore how Mexicanness is represented through his acting and the personal discursive strategies, Fordian traits and postwar racial imperatives of the US that such representations reveal.

It is significant with respect to the ultimate aims of this article that Armendáriz's first roles in Hollywood were in Ford westerns in particular, given that these are, as many commentators have pointed out, self consciously “concerned with defining an American nation” and therefore “preoccupied with matters of race ... and ethnicity” (Kalinak 169; see also Berg 128, and Dagle 102). Although it is largely agreed that Ford's representation of the multiple others in his westerns (American Indians, Mexicans) was totally within “Hollywood's representational poetics” and stereotypes, it has also been argued that there is scope to question the extent to which his representation of others is totally reflective of dominant ideologies (Berg 140).⁶ The exploration of Armendáriz's performance of Mexicanness as it is shaped by the Latino actor, Ford and the western is the ideal space to investigate these claims because it reveals a complex understanding of Mexicanness that sometimes goes beyond straightforward Hollywood poetics, even though, we may eventually conclude, it is ultimately governed by the same logic.

Pedro Armendáriz Hastings was born in 1912 in Churubusco (then) outside Mexico City to an American mother and Mexican father. Soon afterwards he and his parents immigrated to Laredo, Texas, where he was raised and educated (latterly by his American grandparents when his parents died in 1921). He attended college in California, studying at the Polytechnic Institute San Obispo and returned to Mexico in 1932. After a number of odd jobs in tourism and the theatre, he was “discovered” reciting Shakespeare in English in a café in Mexico City, and soon integrated into the fledgling Mexican film industry (Ramón 10-14). He appeared in his first film *María Elena* (Raphael J. Sevilla) in 1935. In 1943, he had his first big successes: indigenist drama *María Candelaria* (Fernández), revolutionary melodrama *Flor Silvestre* (Fernández) and the noir/brothel melodrama, *Distinto amanecer* (Julio Bracho). The following year he was courted by Hollywood, travelling in 1945 at the invitation of Mary Pickford (to whom he was contracted) first to Los Angeles where he made a screen test with Jane Russell and then to New York where he was warmly greeted by Latino audiences familiar with his starring roles in Mexican cinema, which was at that time exhibited widely across the US (including New York) in Spanish language theatres (García 16-17).

Armendáriz’s incorporation into the US industry began in 1945 at the hands of a Hollywood anxious to profit from the transnational success of Mexico’s film industry by co-opting both its stars and directors.⁷ He starred in the RKO, US – Mexico dual language coproduction *La perla/The Pearl* (1946), an Emilio Fernández-directed adaptation of John Steinbeck’s novella. In 1946 after making *Enamorada* with Fernández he starred in another RKO/Mexico coproduction, Ford’s *The Fugitive* which significantly was also planned as a dual-language production.⁸ What makes Armendáriz so interesting as a case study of the Latino actor is that his incorporation into the postwar US industry illustrates both a generic and directorial deviation from contemporary norms of Hollywood casting, both for Latina/os and for people/characters of colour and in terms of film genre.

Firstly, at a time when the US ideological agenda was still governed by the “good neighbour” policy and 1940s major roles for Latina/o actors were consequently constrained unless they could be musical stars (like Miranda and Arnaz) (Beltrán 41), Armendáriz found co-starring roles beyond the musical in westerns and in other genres, including spy films (John Huston’s *We Were Strangers*, 1949). Secondly, while, according to Hollywood conventions, characters of colour who “figure importantly in the narrative” would be played by white actors in brown or blackface,⁹ in the Ford western, Mexican characters or Native American characters are sometimes played by significant stars from Mexican cinema; Miguel Inclán as Cochise in *Fort Apache* and Armendáriz in the films explored in this article (Berg 136, 141).¹⁰ A potential explanation for Ford’s

deviation from – and Armendáriz’s ability to circumvent – casting norms can be explained in terms of industrial strategy as well as Armendáriz’s personal characteristics. In the mid 1940s Hollywood had begun “poaching” Mexican stars and film personnel in an attempt to benefit from the hemispheric appeal and success of the Mexican industry. Armendáriz arguably fit into this transnational strategy; his bi-lingualism (he spoke unaccented English), bi-culturalism (his upbringing in the US) and bi-raciality (his mixed Mexican and American parentage) allowed him to creatively shape the way he exaggerated or limited his “Mexicanness” in a variety of roles in line with the demands of narratives of the different films he appeared in as we will study in this article. At the same time, his star status in Mexico and the rest of Latin America gave his US films hemispheric appeal to Latin audiences on both sides of the Rio Grande.

In two of the three films this article will analyse, *Three Godfathers* and *The Fugitive*, Armendáriz co-stars alongside Anglo actors, which is itself an important indication in the consideration of how Mexicanness is positioned in these films. That a Mexican/Mexican-American actor can star alongside Anglo actors in these Ford films and play a full role in the narrative when in other contemporaneous films Latino actors play only character parts underlines the uniqueness of Ford’s casting norms and the uniqueness of these Ford films in this era. In *Fort Apache*, Armendáriz has a supporting character role. This article begins by analyzing Armendáriz’s co-starring roles, comparing his acting styles and exploring how they figure Mexicanness. It continues to look at Armendáriz’s acting style in *Fort Apache* and concludes with an analysis of Mexicanness and its position in the racial hierarchy from an interpretation of all three films.

Three Godfathers weaves a foundational narrative around a quasi-biblical story. Armendáriz plays Pedro Incarnación Arango y Rocafuerte who, with fellow outlaws Robert “Bob” Hightower (John Wayne) and the Abilene Kid (Harry Carey Jr.), robs a bank. Whilst escaping they find a baby in the desert. Moved by a sense of moral duty and a promise to the baby’s dying mother, the outlaws save the baby sacrificing their chances of escape and, in the case of Rocafuerte and the Kid, ultimately their lives.

We first see Armendáriz’s character at the beginning of the film when the outlaws arrive in the town of Welcome. When asked by Wayne if they are in the correct town, he responds in a heavy Mexican accent elongating his vowel sounds: “I don’t know. There was a *leetle cantina* and the most *beeautiful* girl called Josefina” (00:03:44). This introduction to his character is representative of Armendáriz’s acting style throughout the film which is more comedic and physically expressive than Wayne’s or Carey’s. That Armendáriz acts in a comedic way is an important generic feature of acting styles in the Ford western and one that functions in particular in relation to racial others. Rocafuerte is an “other” who, as one of three godfathers to an Anglo baby, is to be assimilated into

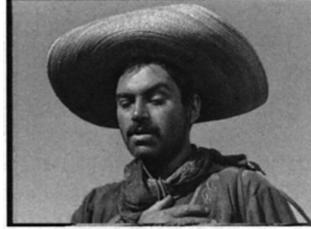
a society or group; if he is comic, he represents less of a threat to white dominance and can be tolerated more than the serious/angry other. In specific Fordian terms, the comedic Mexican functions as a non-threatening and partially assimilated other (like Chris, the station master at Apache Wells in *Stagecoach*).

Similarly, Armendáriz's general physical expressivity is a key feature of acting "otherness" both in the western and in Ford's films in particular in which, Berg argues, it shows the others' "ready access to emotional and sentimental human expression" (137). In *Three Godfathers*, after the three men have robbed the bank and escaped, they awake in the desert to find their horses have disappeared. Armendáriz launches into a lengthy Spanish rant shaking his fists and blaming "the devils" (00:29:44) for taking them (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1 *Three Godfathers*: Expressive ranting

This rant continues for some time until Hightower puts a stop to it. In contrast to the passionate anger of Rocafuerte, Wayne's Hightower remains largely impassive despite the loss of the horses and the other mounting problems that besiege the men in the desert. Another example of Armendáriz's physical expressivity occurs when the mother of the baby dies. At the makeshift funeral Carey sings Ford's anthem "Shall We Gather at the River" (00:47:28). Wayne stands stoically by, while Armendáriz prays reverently in Spanish exaggeratedly bowing over the grave (see fig. 2). Although it is significant with respect to assimilation that Armendáriz should be included in the funeral, a key rite of community in Ford films, Armendáriz's exaggerated grabbing of his heart at this and other moments of emotional intensity also sets him apart (see fig. 3).

Fig. 2 *Three Godfathers*: Physical expressivityFig. 3 *Three Godfathers*: Emotional Intensity

Armendáriz's excessive use of his body, and the othering it engenders, is tempered by smaller, almost unnoticeable and therefore seemingly more organic facial movements. For example, he makes particular use of his eyebrow at certain dramatic moments. He arches it slowly to show anxiety when he first meets the Sheriff (see fig. 4)

Fig. 4 *Three Godfathers* Small facial gesture showing anxiety

and twitches it nervously when he approaches the frightened woman in the wagon. Further, more “organic” acting is suggested by his frequent lapses into Spanish, particularly at moments of great emotion such as when the woman dies or the baby is crying. One gets the impression that Armendáriz is improvising these rants because it would have been common at that time not to script subtitled Spanish with no causal relationship to the plot. These two techniques suggest privileged moments of emotional “authenticity” in Armendáriz’s performance. Small facial gestures such as the eyebrow twitching are characteristic of the Stanislavskian actor who is encouraged to let “gesture or facial expression arise ‘naturally’ out of deep felt emotion” (Naremore 51). Similar eyebrow arching is a feature of his acting style in Mexican cinema, occurring at

key points in *Enamorada* and *María Candelaria*.¹¹ And this connection to his acting in Mexican films, coupled with speaking his (the character's) "own" language (rather than heavily accented English) suggest that this is truly how he expresses himself. However, the Stanislavskian and Mexican-identified features of Armendáriz's performance at these moments are outweighed by the stock traits – heavy accent, gesturality, hot temper and the suggestion of womanising and drinking (from his initial observations about the town) – through which he depicts, and is called on to depict, his Mexicanness.¹² Hence, rather than acting in a way that would suggest a commitment to a realist portrayal, Armendáriz seems to be exaggerating traits considered stereotypically Mexican in Hollywood and Fordian terms. This is further confirmed by the revelation in Armendáriz's biography that the Spanish rants *were* scripted and furthermore that Armendáriz and Ford came to blows when the former felt some of these lines were inconsistent with what his character would say (García 46).¹³

Such ostentation in film acting is, as Naremore argues, an indication of otherness. Naremore observes that "as a general rule, Hollywood has required that supporting players, *ethnic minorities*, and women be more animated or broadly expressive than white male leads" (43; my emphasis). Naremore does not speculate about what is at stake when the representation of ethnic minorities calls for such over-performance, but reading it ideologically one could say that such exaggeration has something to do with the fact that the dominant (in this case the white male lead) always exists in a position of power and thus has no need to define itself as anything other than the norm against which everything else must be defined. Hence Wayne underplays the dominant white male lead's character (Hightower) and Armendáriz overplays the ethnic other. This idea of how what Naremore calls "low-level" (43) acting (underacting) and ostentatious acting work together to depict the dominant and its other connects with Richard Dyer's observation about whiteness. Dyer argues that whiteness is represented in Western culture as always the "norm," the "ubiquitous" and never "as a racial position" and that whiteness draws its power from this racial "invisibility" (3). In *Three Godfathers*, in order to represent this norm, in playing the white American protagonist, Wayne has literally to "do nothing" in order to be defined against Armendáriz's hyperbolic Mexicanness. For example, when Wayne meets the Sheriff for the first time, in contrast to Armendáriz's eyebrow twitching, he stares expressionlessly (see fig. 5).

With the idea of otherness in mind, Armendáriz's position within the group of outlaw males potentially affects the ways in which his exaggerated performance produces meaning. The Abilene Kid and Hightower are presented as white – with that whiteness posited as a positive masculine virtue. The Kid is referred to as "carrot top" (ginger hair reinforcing whiteness) whilst Hightower is dependent on being a white heterosexual male, unquestionably American.

Armendáriz as Rocafuerte thus seems to operate as a point of contrast to reinforce the other main characters' whiteness and his acting is accordingly modified. For example, when they rob the bank, Hightower and the Kid are swift and focused on the job at hand, whilst Rocafuerte is crazy and excitable, shooting his gun, whooping and enjoying himself (see fig. 6).



Fig. 5 *Three Godfathers*: Wayne
"anxiously" doing nothing



Fig. 6 *Three Godfathers*: Whooping and
shooting his gun

That Rocafuerte's narrative function is to act as a point of contrast to Hightower and the Kid to further emphasize their whiteness is underlined by Armendáriz's presentation within the *mise-en-scène*. He wears an excessively different costume, a wide Mexican sombrero and leather trousers whilst they wear leather chaps and Stetsons, standard cowboy garb. Interestingly, Armendáriz wears a costume he brought with him from Mexico which he considered more authentic for the time period (García 45). This points to his own refusal to further the stereotype by wearing a Hollywood version of a Mexican costume although within the context of the film, his efforts are unsuccessful. Further emphasizing his otherness, Armendáriz's character is shown as somewhat unkempt and dirty even before the three men are stranded; and after only hours in the desert he sports a nascent beard whilst Carey and Wayne remain almost clean-shaven. Lighting further emphasizes difference: Carey and Wayne are often lit with a heavenly glow (particularly Carey at the makeshift funeral), whilst Armendáriz is cast in shadow, which serves to emphasize the fact that he is (or is made up to be) darker skinned than they are (see fig. 2).¹⁴

In *The Fugitive*, an adaptation of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940), Armendáriz both looks and acts in a very different style and manner to that of his character in *Three Godfathers*. This is potentially because *The Fugitive* offers a concept of Mexicanness that does not depend on avowing difference, but on disavowing it. In this film about a fictional Latin American state (based on the 1930s Tabasco of Governor Tomás Garrido Canabal) in which the last remaining priest is hounded and finally executed by a zealously anti-clerical military, Armendáriz plays the Lieutenant opposite Henry Fonda's Priest. When we first see Armendáriz he is calling a squad to attention in a booming voice without a

trace of a Mexican accent. Dressed in a military uniform he is immaculately groomed and dressed (see fig. 7). His moustache here, straggly and unkempt in *Three Godfathers*, is clipped. As the shot cuts from Armendáriz calling the squad to attention, he marches stiffly away in shiny jackboots with his arms at his sides. He stops briefly and exchanges glances with a group of waiting “Indians.”¹⁵ He looks disapprovingly at the scruffier, less well-lit and therefore darker Indians. One woman smiles suggestively at him and a close-up shows his disgust as he orders her away.

Armendáriz’s restrained performance and flawless appearance in *The Fugitive* serves to portray a highly disciplined, very principled army officer, with a strict moral code and a dislike for vices. His concern for appearance (he bends to polish his boots on at least one occasion) not only contrasts greatly with the unkempt and dishevelled Indians, but also represents the officious soul of the character he plays. As with *Three Godfathers*, lighting again constructs ideas of ethnicity. But this time it is Armendáriz who is basked in light in order to create a glow around his face and a sparkle in his eyes. Although throughout the film he insists, “I am an Indian,” the *mise-en-scène* and in particular the lighting clearly inscribes him as fair skinned. What is interesting here is that Armendáriz is lit very similarly to how he is lit as an *indígena* in the Mexican film *María Candelaria*, and notably by the same photographer, Gabriel Figueroa. However, one significant difference is that whilst the light around Armendáriz would seem to carry specific moral resonances in *María Candelaria* (i.e., white connotes moral virtue as in the tradition of Western representation), in *The Fugitive* it has purely racial overtones: Armendáriz is lit as visually white (Dyer 72) (see fig. 8).



Fig. 7 *The Fugitive*: immaculately groomed



Fig. 8 *The Fugitive*: lit to glow

In contrast to the Lieutenant’s luminosity, Fonda is placed consistently in the shadows; his skin is slightly darkened by makeup (a fact which is accentuated through low-key lighting), his hair is brushed forward and he is scruffily dressed. As Fonda’s character is supposed to be Mexican, through the *mise-en-scène* Armendáriz is made to look taller than Fonda, drawing on cultural stereotypes that Mexicans are small. This is achieved through camera angle (shooting Fonda from above waist height), composition (by placing Armendáriz literally above Fonda and other characters on a step) or through the physical

performances of Armendáriz and Fonda. Fonda, who is taller than Armendáriz (6'1" vs. 5'10"), stoops whenever they are together while Armendáriz pulls himself up to his full height (see fig. 9 and 10).



Fig. 9 *The Fugitive*: Fonda (right) stoops in the shadows



Fig. 10 *The Fugitive*: Fonda "mexicanized."

Height is also an element of the racial attributes in *Three Godfathers*, but in that case it is Armendáriz, the Mexican side-kick to Wayne's whiter than white cowboy, who is dwarfed by Wayne, reinforcing cultural perceptions of Americans.

In comparison to his accent in *Three Godfathers* and to the Indians' accented English, Armendáriz's Lieutenant speaks flawless American English. Apart from Fonda, he is the only major Mexican character *not* to speak with a Mexican accent. Armendáriz's perfect English coupled with his self-avowed status as indigenous within the fictional state (which is really Mexico) helps Fonda pass as Mexican with his own American accent.¹⁶ Unaccented English stands in for unaccented Spanish, while Mexican-accented English (spoken by the waiting Indians) stands in for rural/indigenous inflected Spanish.

What seems remarkable is the difference between how Mexicanness is inscribed in Armendáriz's performances in *Three Godfathers* and *The Fugitive*. In *Three Godfathers*, he exaggerates those traits that are considered part of the Mexican type: a fiery, sombrero-wearing, religious, womanising *bandido*. In *The Fugitive*, he does not act or look Mexican in stereotypical film terms, ultimately playing down his ethnic difference. Armendáriz's whitening and lack of identifiably Mexican attributes, conveyed through camera angle, lighting, and most importantly, acting give credibility to Fonda's portrayal of a Mexican.

REPRESENTING MEXICANNESS

This difference between performances in two films shows ambivalence towards Mexicanness and to what is required to represent it. The reason for such diversity in *Three Godfathers* and *The Fugitive* in the articulation of racial difference seems to relate ultimately to the social position of the characters Armendáriz plays

within the narratives. If Armendáriz played Rocafuerte in his normal American accent and in a “low-level” style of acting like Wayne’s, there would appear to be less ethnic difference between him and Wayne and Carey. The narrative of *Three Godfathers*, based on founding a “white” civilization – as arguably all classical and particularly Ford westerns are – requires that Rocafuerte be *clearly* Mexican, but not necessarily *realistically* so, in order for the other two characters to appear unequivocally white. The ideological implications of this are particularly evident in the manner in which his Mexicanness sets limits on his integration into the outlaw group and, beyond it, into society. In John Ford’s narrative of United States history, whites are given the authority whereas the Mexican influence is undermined or obliterated.

To be included it is significant that Armendáriz’s character’s name must be anglicised from Pedro to Pete – not unlike the town of Welcome, which previously as “Tarantula” had a *cantina*, but now has been dehispanized and consequently “civilized” with the addition of a railroad and a bank.¹⁷ The use of an affectionate diminutive (Pete) could be read optimistically as Hightower eliminating ethnic differences, as though he refers to Pedro just as he himself (Robert) is referred to as “Bob.” However, given Hightower’s dislike of Rocafuerte speaking Spanish around the baby – at one point he says “Cut out the Mex-lingo around the kid, will ya Pete! First thing you know he’ll be talking it. We gotta raise him with good old American *habla* [speak] just like his Ma” (00:57:10) – it is more convincing to read it as negative: that to be included in the group his Mexicanness must be suppressed in the minds of the white members, and that Spanish is an undesirable element in America’s future.¹⁸

Similarly, when the mother has named her child after its three godfathers, Rocafuerte’s (Armendáriz’s) name comes last, so that “Mexicanness” becomes the least important and most likely to be overlooked, despite Rocafuerte persistently stressing that the baby’s full name is “Robert William *Pedro*.” If the baby represents the future of America – as Douglas Pye suggests is often the case in the western, citing Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939) as an important example – then the Mexican element must be seen as disposable, or at the very least marginalized (Pye 112).

This presents an interesting conflict in the film: on the one hand Rocafuerte’s Mexicanness is extremely exaggerated through Armendáriz’s performance and the *mise-en-scène*; on the other Mexicanness is suppressed or undermined by other elements in the film. In a sense his Mexicanness seems simultaneously reinforced *and* disavowed. However, I would argue that the ideological structure of the film seems to suggest that his Mexicanness is reinforced precisely so that it can be disavowed; or rather that the exaggeration of Mexicanness serves to heighten the sense of ethnic difference (principally between Rocafuerte and

Hightower): when the Mexican contingent is disavowed or obliterated, the “white male” shines even more brightly.

For example, within the quasi-familial structure established between the three godfathers, Hightower as the authority figure is father and The Kid (Carey) is literally the child. When they find the baby’s mother, Hightower leaves it to Rocafuerte to assist at the birth, as though it is something to which he is naturally suited. The effect of this is to ascribe into its view of Mexicanness an essential effeminacy as Rocafuerte assumes the role of mother in this family, and in doing this, further draws out Hightower’s masculinity and patriarchy. Rocafuerte is the only one allowed into the wagon at birth, whilst Hightower and The Kid stay outside doing men’s work (e.g., chopping up cactus to get water, an action which itself suggests that taming the land is the white man’s destiny). After the baby is born, Rocafuerte appears in a huge apron with a big bow tied behind; he weeps a bit, prepares the baby’s milk and wets a cloth to wipe its face. In this instance, the stereotypical hyperbolic machismo of Mexicanness, and of Armendáriz’s Mexican career, is defused in favour of an unrealistic effeminacy, largely as a means of stressing Hightower as the father figure.¹⁹ Just as the baby’s biological mother did, Rocafuerte also dies in the narrative. The film could not have resolved the challenge to mainstream ideologies and the US racial hierarchy that would be raised if he survived. Wayne is set up as the father figure of the baby. What room would that leave for Rocafuerte? The civilized white American family does not allow for two fathers, and much less for one as non-white.²⁰

Armendáriz’s performance in *Fort Apache* raises a completely different set of issues corresponding to the position of Mexicanness in the US racial hierarchy, this time in relation to the performed quality of social and ethnic behaviour. As well as a retelling of Custer’s defeat at Little Bighorn, that changes the “tribe and topography,” *Fort Apache* is also significantly about the “military’s caste system” and the role “ethnics” play in this system (Gallagher 246, 248). Lieutenant Colonel Owen Thursday (Henry Fonda), the newly arrived commanding officer at the Fort, is portrayed negatively from the beginning of the film, largely because of his racism, towards the Irish (he treats both O’Rourke Sr. and Jr. disparagingly, mixing up their name with other Irish names) and towards the Apache. Armendáriz plays a secondary character, Sergeant Beaufort. As Beaufort he is initially well dressed, notably smarter and more proper than the rest of his rank (see fig. 11).



Fig. 11 *Fort Apache*: Passing as Straight Man

With an Anglo name, unaccented speech and no visual traits of otherness, he passes for Anglo-American. He is almost invisible for the first few scenes, just another of the secondary characters. However, one element of his depiction incongruous with the “low-level” (Naremore 43) acting he performs in these initial scenes is that he is placed as part of a comic group of other all-Irish sergeants. The comedy that results from such a positioning comes not from his performance, as with Rocafuerte in *Three Godfathers*, but from playing the straight man to the Irish sergeants Mulcahy and Quincannon (Victor McLaglen and Dick Foran), who indulge in slapstick humour as they teach new recruits how to ride a horse.

Although a well-developed minor character, Armendáriz as Beaufort initially seems out of place in *Fort Apache*, not at home in the group of ethnics to which he is assigned, nor beyond it as a major character. His function in the film therefore seems puzzling at first. It is only once he becomes visible as a Mexican-American when he is given the role of interpreter between Captain York (John Wayne) and Apache Chief Cochise (Miguel Inclán) that the previously incongruous-seeming comedy becomes ethnically motivated. From the point in which he emerges as an ethnic character, his acting becomes organized around the stock traits of Mexicanness as in *Three Godfathers*. Travelling with Wayne to meet Cochise he appears dishevelled and unkempt in comparison to his previous Anglo impeccability. The neat cap he had worn until this moment is replaced by a wide-brimmed, scruffy (yet still army-issue) hat. Although his speech remains accentless he now starts to sprinkle his dialogue with Spanish words and embellish them with big hand gestures (see fig. 12 and 13). For example, stopping for a moment to look across the Rio Grande, he tells Captain York his hang-over is “espantosa” (01:12:27) (we have previously learnt that he indulged in heavy drinking with the Irish sergeants), then waves the flask of whisky York has offered him towards Mexico, calling it “La tierra de mi madre” (01:12:35). This sudden shift in Armendáriz’s performance and appearance – from Anglo-American to stereotypical Mexican-American – suggests that ethnic characters in Ford films may be depicted sympathetically,



Fig. 12 *Fort Apache*: As comedic Mexican-American



Fig. 13 *Fort Apache* Taking a Swig

even fondly, as Berg states is often the case with respect to drinking and “carousing” (137), but they are also sometimes called on to perform unrealistically, in a way that is incoherent with their character but coherent with the film’s ideological project.

If in *Three Godfathers* Armendáriz’s “high-level” acting serves to emphasize racial difference and in *The Fugitive* his “low-level” acting serves to disavow any such difference, his performance in *Fort Apache* seems to fall somewhere between the two and with a similar dual purpose. Armendáriz’s passing for Anglo for the initial part of the narrative is important in the implicit ideology of the film. Again, like in *Three Godfathers*, in *Fort Apache* it is America’s future that is at stake for which, the film argues, all must come together: tolerance of and indeed co-existence with the racial and ethnic other is a necessity. Thursday is depicted as fatally flawed because he can neither tolerate nor peacefully co-exist with the racial and ethnic other. As a result of this inability, he brings about his own death and that of his troops when he reneges on a promise to the Apache Chief Cochise. The film clearly criticizes Thursday’s racism and intolerance (in scenes which show him to be the only soldier who behaves this way) but at the same time glorifies the army as a system in which, despite its flaws, Beaufort, and the other ethnics may happily exist and/or die. The film has been read as liberalist race drama preaching tolerance of others (Neale 9). But this article’s analysis of performance suggests it might also be about how certain liminal others (the Irish and Mexican-Americans) can be assimilated into a “white” institution (the army) and its vision of society. *Fort Apache* as acted by Armendáriz ostensibly espouses the melting-pot idea of belonging to the army or of being an American. There is room for certain others, the Irish and Mexicans, as long as they conform where necessary to white behaviours.

This is supported by the final moments of the film. Throughout, Thursday has sought but rarely received unquestioning obedience for all his orders; at one point Beaufort and the Irish sergeants disobey the command to destroy the Indian

Agent Meachum's liquor and instead drink all of it. It is only in his "last stand" that Thursday receives such obedience from Wayne (who withdraws to safety as commanded) and, significantly, from the ethnic characters Beaufort, O'Rourke Sr., Mulcahy and Quincannon. They remain with him, trapped in a canyon and facing certain death. Despite the fact that Beaufort has shown sympathy with Cochise's position, he stands ready to die fighting Cochise alongside Thursday.

The ultimate message of *Fort Apache* with respect to issues of difference seems to be support for the system of the army as a means of assimilation of others.²¹ If we were to consider *Three Godfathers*, *The Fugitive* and *Fort Apache* as films from a Stanislavskian perspective, we may be tempted to read Armendáriz's performance in *The Fugitive* as offering the more affirmative representation of his ethnicity, largely because it seeks to eschew the stereotypical traits of Mexicanness on which much of *Three Godfathers* and ultimately *Fort Apache* are built. However, when we explore the broader ideological issues that govern how difference has been constructed in all three films, it becomes clear that the construction of ethnicity through Armendáriz's performances is less inspired by a desire for expressive realism – showing Mexicanness as it *truly* is – than by a concern with using Mexicanness as an instrument in the story of whiteness and the related Fordian narrative of Anglo expansionism.

From the perspective of performance, the divergent images of Armendáriz's Mexicanness offered by *Three Godfathers* and *The Fugitive* seem to serve the white male star. In *Three Godfathers*, Mexicanness is represented so that the racial difference between white/Wayne and Mexican/Armendáriz seems greater to reinforce Wayne's whiteness (and masculinity). In *The Fugitive*, Armendáriz's representation of Mexicanness is used to *play down* racial difference between Armendáriz and Fonda, to aid the white male star's passing as Mexican. In *Fort Apache*, Mexicanness is inconsistently represented in order to both disavow racial difference (i.e. to deny racial prejudice in the army with the exception of Thursday) and also to suggest that the other can make his difference more acceptable (in a white institution and country) through acting white.

In other words, whilst two of the performances (*Three Godfathers* and *The Fugitive*) seem initially at opposite ends of the scale and the other (*Fort Apache*) seems to fall somewhere in between in terms of representing ethnicity organically and authentically, all three serve the same end. And all three highlight how postwar Hollywood is not interested in offering a positive image of Mexicanness. To simply evaluate the representations of Mexicanness in terms of "positive" or "negative" levels of expressive realism (e.g. Armendáriz speaking his own language or bringing his own costume from Mexico) would risk overlooking this. From this performance-oriented analysis, the idea of Mexicanness produced in these three Ford westerns may seem inconsistent, but

ultimately is governed by the same ideological agenda and positioned in the same place vis-a-vis a white American mainstream.

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NOTES

- 1 Dolores Del Rio capitalized the “d” and dropped the accent from her last name (Del Río) when she became a Hollywood starlet in the 1920s and continued to sign her name in this fashion for the rest of her career. To acknowledge the transnationality that her passage through Hollywood suggests I maintain this spelling of her name.
- 2 Beltrán (69) points out that Moreno chose Rita instead of the studio-advised Tina for her stage name and that, unlike other “ethnic stars” of the 1950s whose ethnicity was “repressed” (Doris Day, Natalie Wood, Anthony Quinn) she refused to disavow her Puerto Rican heritage.
- 3 A recent article on Miranda (Shaw) does go beyond stereotype analysis to argue for Miranda’s agency in the construction of her own celebrity status.
- 4 Famously, in Kuleshov’s apocryphal 1920s experiments, when a close-up shot of a man was juxtaposed with shots of a bowl of soup, and then a coffin its “meaning” changed. This proved (in Kuleshov’s mind) that it was editing and not the actor’s performance which was central to the production of meaning in the cinema (McDonald 28).
- 5 In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (66-84) suggests colonial discourse fetishizes the other’s body in a disavowal of racial difference.
- 6 For instance, recent work has stressed how Ford’s self-identifying racial status as “other” (Irish-American) produces a sympathetic representation of “others” in his films (Berg 128).
- 7 Indeed, Hollywood was in part responsible for the success of Mexico’s industry having supplied, at the behest of the State Department interested in fostering inter-American relations with this ally nation, equipment, technical personnel and training to Mexico during the war.
- 8 See Tierney (“Emilio Fernández”) for more on the dual-language production of *La perla/The Pearl* and *The Fugitive*’s planned Spanish language version as well as the ideological and economic perspectives that made such projects attractive to Hollywood.
- 9 This is particularly true of the western. Several notable examples include: *Apache* (Robert Aldrich, 1954) with Burt Lancaster as Native American; *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Daves, 1950) with Deborah Paget as Native American; *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946) with Jennifer Jones as half Mexican, half Creole; *Hombre*

(Martin Ritt, 1967) with Paul Newman as a “faux” Indian; *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946) with Linda Darnell as Native American; *Taza, Son of Cochise* (Douglas Sirk, 1954) with Rock Hudson as Native American; *Viva Zapata* (Elia Kazan, 1952) with Marlon Brando as Mexican; and *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) with Henry Brandon as Scar, a Native American.

- 10 Ford’s casting of Mexican actors as Native American characters is actually a “fairly accurate rendering” since most Mexicans are *mestizos*, of both Spanish and *indio* blood (Berg 141).
- 11 Near the beginning of *Enamorada*, Roberts the American suitor asks Armendáriz’s character if he has ever been in love. We cut to a close-up of Armendáriz, who registers the question and the distracted and slightly troubled thought it generates by arching his eyebrow and looking down and away from Roberts/the camera into thin air.
- 12 Although Rocafuerte corresponds roughly to one of the six types that Berg argues are perennial in Hollywood representations of Latina/os, the “bandido” type (68), he also deviates quite substantially from its more negative associations (venal, treacherous type) in that he is optimistically characterized. This in itself shows that there is space for more than just stereotype analysis in the approximation of the Latino/a character in film. It is also worth pointing out, Berg’s idea about the “boozing” that may seem stereotypical of others in the Ford western can also be interpreted positively as pointing towards a “free-wheeling joy of being alive” (137) not present in the Anglo mainstream.
- 13 Armendáriz objected in particular to calling Mexican General Santana “ilustre” arguing that his character would never praise Santana. After a stand-off, Ford got Armendáriz to say the line (García 46).
- 14 Tellingly, in a previous version of *Three Godfathers*, *Hell’s Heroes* (William Wyler, 1930), the Mexican member of the gang, José (Joe de la Cruz) dies as they are escaping from the robbery. Hence, the Mexican element does not even feature in America’s future as envisaged in Hollywood in 1930. In keeping with this marginalization, José’s character is played by a much more *mestizo* looking actor (Joe de la Cruz) in comparison with the European looking Armendáriz. On the other hand, José is much less physically differentiated in costuming and acting style from the other three Anglo cowboys. They begin the film looking equally unkempt and scruffy. Unlike Pedro in *Three Godfathers*, José is no more or less expressive in the robbing of the bank and is not even the one to shoot at the bank clerk. My thanks to Frank Krutnik for his insights into *Hell’s Heroes* and for lending me a copy of the film.
- 15 “Indian” is the term used in the film to refer to the native or indigenous characters. The location of the film is deliberately not clarified (with the prologue only stating “its locale is fictional ... it is merely a small state a thousand miles north or south or

- the equator”] (00:02:35) so we can expect that these players are supposed to stand in for a generic indigenous group.
- 16 Similarly, in *The Conqueror* (Dick Powell, 1956), Armendáriz plays Jamuga, brother to Wayne’s Ghengis Khan again serving the purpose of helping a white star pass as a Mongol even though he is not a Mongol either but just an “Other” playing an “Other.”
- 17 *Three Godfathers* figures dehispanization as an improvement, but a much later Ford film with a similar trajectory of “civilization as dehispanization,” *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), shows a definite nostalgia for the lost Latino element and indeed the rest of the old west, as preferable to the lifeless, Anglo-settled west of contemporary Shinbone. In Ransie Stoddart’s flashback Shinbone has a cantina and a lively Mexican population.
- 18 Although this is tempered at the end of the film when Hightower recants and says “Adiós compañero” (01:40:03) to the baby.
- 19 However, even in some of his Mexican roles there is a similar defusing of Armendáriz’s masculinity. *Enamorada* seeks to temper the hyperbolic, virile masculinity associated with the revolution and its heroes through recourse to melodrama and the screwball comedy (Tierney, *Emilio* 118).
- 20 There is a similar killing off of the racial other in the otherwise progressive western *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Daves, 1950). Sonseeray, a Native American character (played by Deborah Paget), can marry a white man Tom Jeffords (James Stewart), but she too has to die before the end of the narrative because, if the marriage continued, it would raise the possibility of miscegenation in the future.
- 21 This support for the army is only slightly tempered by the film’s criticism of American history and its tendency to glorify the various battles of the “Indian campaign.” At the end of the film, faced with questions from journalists, Captain York impassively asserts that the heroic depiction of “Thursday’s last stand” in a painting on the wall is “correct in every detail” (02:00:22). Ford’s film however has previously shown us a very different and much less heroic “last stand” than that of the painting. It is this disjuncture between history and events that the film criticizes. This time Wayne’s low-level acting works not to support but to undermine the white-centric interpretation of America’s history.

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