

From Latin to Latino Lover: Hispanicity and Female Desire in Popular Culture

Nadia Lie

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Abstract: This article examines the relationship between the concept of the Latin Lover and the notion of Hispanicity. The essay starts with an analysis of *The Sheik* (1921), which is generally considered as the film that launched the figure of the Latin Lover. The author then compares this figure to an important icon of Hispanicity: Zorro. Discussing various incarnations of Zorro, the author argues that the Latin Lover and the Zorro-incarnation of Hispanicity gradually merged over the years, thereby producing a new species: the *Latino Lover*.

About the Author: Nadia Lie is professor of Spanish and Spanish-American literature and film at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). She is the author of *Transición y transacción: la revista cubana Casa de las Américas* (Maryland-Leuven: Hispamérica-Leuven UP, 1995) and of several (co-)edited volumes in the field of comparative literature (e.g. *Constellation Caliban* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), *Zorro & Co* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2002), and *El juego con los estereotipos: la redefinición de la identidad hispánica en la literatura y el cine postnacionales* (Genève-Bruxelles-Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012)). She is currently working on space and mobility in contemporary Latin American cinema. Since 2013, she directs the international research project *Transit. Transnationality at Large. The Transnational Dimension of contemporary Hispanic culture*, funded by the European Union (website: <http://projecttransit.eu/es>).

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According to Richard Rodriguez, we owe the invention of the Hispanic to Richard Nixon, whose administration introduced this category in 1973 in the classification system of United States citizens (15). Until then, demographic censuses had been based upon categories such as White and Black, Asian and Native American. Though inconsistent with this racial classification, the term Hispanic is embraced by Rodriguez to designate a new

kind of Hispanic: US based and more open to US culture in general. In fact, by a kind of discursive contamination, the category of the Hispanic starts to represent another racial color: “brown.” Suggesting the combination of two opposed colors – black and white – this word then acquires a subversive function with respect to the clear-cut distinctions of the other categories. Brown stands for the combination of what seemed to be incompatible, for its mutual attraction. It rejects dichotomic thinking, celebrates impurity and is connected to concepts such as “irony, paradox, pleasure” (xi) and “eroticism” (xv). The term “browning” is used by Rodriguez to refer to the increased importance of the Hispanics in US society, a phenomenon which he considers to be a great opportunity for mutual exchange between Anglo-Saxon values – such as (in his opinion) freedom- and Latin American ones – such as (racial and cultural) impurity.

Though the creation of the Hispanic in North American politics is presented as a relatively recent fact, the author of *Brown* points at a forerunner. “Before there were Hispanics in America, there was another fictitious, inclusive genus: the Latin Lover” (R. Rodriguez 107). Set against the background of a sexually repressive society, the Latin Lover derived his appeal from the taboo of racial transgression (107). But if this is true, how can the persistent and even increased success of the Latin Lover in our days, in which America is “browning,” be explained? What exactly is a Latin Lover anyway? And how can its relationship with Hispanic identity be described? In what follows, I propose to take a closer look at this notion by studying its first incarnation in the movie *The Sheik*. The prototypical features will then be confronted with what I consider to be one of the most popular icons of Hispanicity in popular mass culture: Zorro.^[1]

Defining the Latin Lover: Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik* (1921)

In *Latin Lover: The Passionate South* – one of the rare studies extensively dedicated to the subject— Gianni Malossi refers to a dictionary^[2] in order to define the phenomenon of the Latin Lover: “passionate, but romantic, lover; it is believed, above all in Northern European countries, that they are men from Latin countries; heartbreaker, seducer” (Malossi 18-19). To provide a more elaborate, coherent definition of the phenomenon seems almost impossible as characteristics ascribed to the Latin Lover vary from his being “mute” (R. Rodriguez 107) to his ability to “use a lot of words” (Malossi 30), from “a tendency to be short” (Malossi 66) to his being “tall” (Limón 137), from his incarnation as “phantom, sheik or matador” (R. Rodriguez 107) to his fixed association with the cravat (Malossi 35) and the costume (Reich 35).

Opinions on the origins of the icon differ as well: whereas some consider the Latin Lover to be an archetypal figure (Thomas, 9) ranging back to Zeus (Malossi 64), Jacqueline Reich points at his historical and anthropological roots in Renaissance and Mediterranean culture (Reich 2-3). Others, such as Ramírez Berg (4), insist on his genesis in Northern conceptions of Latin otherness, which suggests an affinity with 19th-century debates on the differences between Anglo-Saxon and Latin “races” (Litvak). The one point all studies dealing with the Latin Lover have in common, however, is their abundant use of photographic materials, thereby revealing what goes almost unnoticed in the definitions: the profoundly visual nature of the stereotype. And though the pictures included show a

certain disparity, limiting themselves either to actors performing roles connected to the Latin Lover or expanding the notion to real-life examples such as Onassis (and even Che Guevara, to some), no disagreement exists regarding the name of the very first incarnation of the icon: Rudolph Valentino (1895-1926).[3]

This Italian immigrant to the United States, born under the name Rodolpho Guglielmi, first earned a living in the United States as a *gigolo* – a male dancing partner for wealthy women. However, he soon made his way to the hearts of millions of women by his dashing appearance in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), where he performed a seductive dance as an Argentinian tango-dancer.[4] The association between Latin Lovers and dance will become a fixed one in the following decades. It was *The Sheik* (1921) in which “he began to define a new kind of screen lover and an Other way of making screen love” (Ramírez Berg 115). In spite of the paradigmatic nature of this film, books on the Latin Lover limit themselves to brief mentions of its plot and instant success. The way in which the two terms united in the expression “Latin Lover” is inscribed in this movie has not yet been the object of more extensive commentary. This is all the more striking since, according to Ramírez Berg, this movie launched “the Latin Lover [as a] remarkably consistent screen figure, played by a number of Latin actors (...), all maintaining the erotic combination of characteristics instituted by Valentino” (115).[5]

When we take a look at this famous film, we notice that nothing in the movie – at least at first sight – sustains Rodríguez’s close association of Hispanicity and Latin Lovers: an Italian actor plays the role of the Arab sheik Ahmed (Rudolph Valentino) who falls in love with the British lady Diana Mayo (Agnes Ayres). However, the term “Latin” was used in those days in a broad sense, including all those who spoke a language derived from Latin (so also the French) and sometimes even the Greeks and all of the Mediterranean people (so also inhabitants of Arab countries).[6] In *The Sheik*, this broad sense of Latinness is defined by a first, major oppositional figure that establishes a difference between Northern and Southern countries as visually expressed by the two main characters: the fair-haired Anglo-Saxon young lady with the pale hands stands in opposition to the Arab sheik Ahmed with the very dark eyes. Besides this sharp contrast between North and South, there is a second one that concerns not racial features, but cultural values. On the one hand, Ahmed represents premodern patriarchal Arab values when he captures Diana during her trip through the desert in order to take her to his tent. As he explains to a friend: “When an Arab likes a woman he sees, he takes her.” On the other hand, there is a certain reticence in him because he refrains from taking Diana by force when he notices her despair at the situation she finds herself in: he has received part of his education in France and it is this European aspect in his upbringing which seems to account for a softer approach to the woman.[7] There is in fact a range of cultural differences varying from the complete Anglo-Saxon Northern values over the more mitigated European Latinity to the complete otherness of Arab Latinity. It is this “range” which grants the Sheik his erotically productive ambiguity, evoking both “suavity and sensuality, tenderness and sexual danger” (Ramírez Berg 115). In this combination, suavity and tenderness are evoked by European Latinity (France and Italy), whereas sensuality and sexual danger are projected onto the Arab world.[8]

If the tension between European and non-European Latinness, tenderness and sexual danger, is what grants the Sheik his erotic appeal throughout the movie, the film surprisingly resolves the antinomy between these opposed values in the end. The happy

ending is indeed provided by a revelation concerning Ahmed's true background: he was the orphan of an English father and a *Spanish* mother found in the desert, after which he was adopted by an Arab sheik. This ending is doubly productive: it sanctifies the union between Ahmed and Diana as a repetition of a previous relationship between partners from the North and the South of Europe, and it clearly places Ahmed on the European side. To put it even more strongly, one could argue that Ahmed's very ability to learn the European lessons in education and human rights is explicable by his innate European blood.[9] In a way, Ahmed is a true European, dressed up as an Arab. His clothing as a sheik is his costume. His Arab identity, his mask.

As a lover, Ahmed combines features of both forms of Latinity: he serenades Diana secretly below her window while she sleeps in the town of Biskra but he also abducts her against her will in order to possess her. He connotes softness and strength. This strength is what turns him into a dangerous man, who is able to frighten Diana and make her obey. On the other hand, it is also this capacity which turns him into her savior when she tries to escape through a desert storm, or falls into the hands of the Arab bandit Omair. Here, the sheik turns into the hero who saves the damsel in distress by plucking her from the ground and riding off with her on his horse in order to protect her.

Ahmed's moral and physical strength functions as a token of his sexual superiority with respect to Diana as a woman. At the same time, it singles him out as "the other man" from a double perspective. First, his strength distinguishes him from the men in Diana's own society, who appear to be too weak to control her strong character (e.g., she laughs at her brother when he tries to talk her out of her plan to travel to the desert). Second, as an Arab, he is not to be confused with other Arab men either, because he does not resort to clear violence against women, unlike the desert bandit Omair. The fact that he is neither identical with the British men – who all wear moustaches – nor the other Arabs – who all wear beards – is visually expressed by the many close-ups of his hairless face, accentuated by his turban.

Finally, the two terms under scrutiny – Latin and Lover – are of course intimately connected. What Diana is attracted by in Ahmed from the start is not only his strength, it is also his belonging to another culture: exoticism and eroticism go hand in hand. There is immediate attraction from the first time they see each other, in the town of Biskra, before Diana leaves for the desert. And when she is denied access to the Arab casino, she boldly decides to dress up as an Arab dancer, after having watched the sensuous moves of this Arab woman with fascination. She even insists on borrowing exactly the same clothes this dancer was wearing, thereby suggesting a desire to experience the Arab sensuality in person. As Said has explained, the Orient not only symbolized sexuality as such, but very often also the promise of a different kind of sexuality, generally projected onto the female body (Said 180). In *The Sheik*, this kind of sensuality is appropriated by Diana as she cross-dresses culturally and feels her senses aroused by the dancer. At the same time the movie performs a twist on the Orientalist discourse of its time by turning the male partner into an object of desire.

In all, the first Latin Lover can be described as a highly ambivalent figure who, in the end, reconciles the opposition between the North and the South by inscribing it into a shared feeling of Europeaness. Hispanicity here performs a syntactical gesture between North and South. In the words of Clara Rodríguez commenting upon Valentino and his imitators, "All of these stars conformed to European prototypes – perhaps to southern and

eastern European prototypes, but clearly in the evolving fold of what it meant to be ‘white’ (and upper class) in the United States at the time.” (C. Rodríguez 28) Latinness is therefore on the one hand the suggestion of Otherness, but at the same time based on the reassuring recognition that this Otherness is within the limits of the own identity.

Valentino’s appearances in movies such as *The Sheik* set in motion the so-called “Latin craze” (C. Rodríguez 28) that flourished in the Roaring Twenties. This period was characterized by major social changes brought about by World War I and the Russian Revolution, and economically beneficial to the United States until the Depression broke out. The social changes altered the position of woman and to some also implied “libertad en el amor” (Belluscio 13). Belluscio considers the Latin Lover as an expression of modernity as it manifested itself around 1900: “En esa zona del planeta [USA], los hábitos se modificaban con el automóvil, la radio en casa, la publicidad impresa, y las salas de cine simbolizaban el nuevo urbanismo yanqui. La difusión e influencia del séptimo arte creó una idolatría sin fronteras, engendrando psicosis colectivas (...) En ese momento singular, que ambulaba entre la añoranza y el futuro, el ‘latin lover’, macerado como una burbuja, surgía excitante, digno de la ostentación, el lujo y el donaire del ‘American way of life’” (13-14). At the same time, both Ahmed and Diana belong to the upper classes of their society, which might reflect the nostalgia for a vanishing aristocracy in that same period (13). This is also why other authors connect the Latin Lover to the expression of anti-modern values (Malossi 24; Reich 26). In a sense, he is both a symptom of modernity and a reaction to it. Once again, he turns out to be an ambivalent sign.

Zorro or purity

Zorro’s birth is almost contemporaneous to the rise of the Latin Lover icon: the original stories appeared in 1919 and were followed in 1920 by the first Zorro movie, *The Mask of Zorro*, starring Douglas Fairbanks in the role of Don Diego de la Vega.^[10] The fact that the leading part was given to an Anglo-Saxon actor shows that the Latin craze had not really started yet,^[11] but the overall setting of the stories and the success of the movie^[12] directly inspired by them are indicative of the “diffuse hispanophile sentiment” which Clara Rodríguez sees emerging in the same period (26). Contrary to *The Sheik*, which shows a diffuse concept of Latin identity, the Zorro stories foreground Hispanicity in an unmistakable way. The names of the main characters –Diego de la Vega, Zorro and Lolita Pulido – and the use of Spanish words in the English text (the “*comandante*,” the “*señorita*”)— refer to Hispanic identity as perceived from a North American perspective. Similarly to *The Sheik*, there is the nostalgic evocation of aristocratic values, here attached to the class of the “*caballeros*” of “blue blood” and merged with a hispanist discourse of clearly conservative and antimodern brand. Zorro’s defence of the weak is in line with the tradition of Spanish *caballeros*, and the evildoers are people of “ill blood” (McCulley 91), such as Captain Ramón, who try to take in the positions legitimately held by the aristocratic families to which Zorro and his friends belong. Though he also avenges natives and “mongrel” people when they are treated unjustly, it is clear from the book that they belong to another kind of “race” and are unable to perform the noble deeds that Zorro accomplishes. Rather, Zorro is an example to the youngsters of his own generation, whom

he summons to follow his example: "Take your swords in hand and attack oppression! Live up to your noble names and your blue blood, *señores!* Drive the thieving politicians from the land! Protect the *frailles* whose work gave us these broad acres! Be men, not drunken fashion-plates" (McCulley 167). The full restoration of their class, in power and in spirit, is what he aims at.

McCulley's Zorro is part of the "cult of Spanish California" that characterized California, where the stories are set, towards the end of the 19th century (Lie, "Free Trade in Images").^[13] David Weber has explained the phenomenon as a critical reaction to the accelerated modernization in the United States: "As the nation became more urbanized and industrialized in the late nineteenth century, many Americans recoiled from what they saw as excessive commercialism, materialism, vulgarity and rootlessness and longed for pastoral values that they imagined had existed in a simpler agrarian America" (Weber 342).

In this context, Zorro shares with the Latin Lover a nostalgic return to premodern values, projected onto the Hispanic past of California. He, however, connotes more clearly than the Latin Lover the idea of purity. If the Latinness of the Latin Lover was marked by its opposition to Anglo-Saxon society, in the Zorro stories, the concept of Hispanicity is offset against the "ill blood" of other people speaking Spanish, especially the politicians and the military. Blood is also what distinguishes the noble class from the "natives" and the "mongrel people."

The motif of "blood," as indicative of noble upbringing, also lies at the heart of the second story-line in the Zorro episodes. Don Diego de la Vega is urged by his father to find himself a proper bride in order to prevent the family from extinction: he is the only son and heir to his father. If most of us know Zorro as the defender of the weak, this second theme is very striking in the original stories and turns Zorro not only into a model of Hispanic purity, but also of masculinity. Though Don Diego de la Vega is considered "a good catch" because of his wealth and influence in the region, he is not "a man" (McCulley 128) and in the Zorro movie, Lolita Pulido (actress Noah Beery) even cries out that he is "a fish." Lolita Pulido, the girl whom he tries to convince to marry him, cannot give him her love because he is incapable of arousing romantic feelings in her. The key words in this respect are "courting" and "wooing," terms by which are referred to as the ability to speak to the *señorita* in low and rich tones, to look at her with desire, to bring her serenades (McCulley 175). All of this is considered unnecessary by Don Diego: "I trust there will be no undue nonsense. Either the lady wants me and will have me, or she will not. Will I change her mind if I play a guitar beneath her window, or hold her hand when I may, or put my hand over my heart and sigh? I want her for wife, else I would not have ridden here to ask her father for her" (McCulley 37).

This constantly fatigued, yawning aristocrat corresponds to the popular stereotype of the indolent don in those times (Foster 27) and provides a sharp contrast with the vigorous highwayman Zorro! After Don Diego has made his first – and very unsuccessful – attempt to win Lolita's heart, the next chapter confronts her with Zorro under the title "A different sort of man." This is how Zorro makes his acquaintance with Lolita Pulido: "And suddenly she was awakened by a touch on her arm, and sat up quickly, and then would have screamed except that a hand was crushed against her lips to prevent her. Before her stood a man whose body was enveloped in a long cloak, and whose face was covered with a black mask so that she could see nothing of his features except his glittering eyes. She had heard Señor Zorro, the highwayman, described, and she guessed that this was he, and her

heart almost ceased to beat, she was so afraid. ‘Silence, and no harm comes to you, *señorita,*’ the man whispered hoarsely” (McCulley 45). Zorro, then, symbolizes strength in the same way the Sheik did: the strength to overwhelm her (she feels frightened the first time she sees him), but also the strength to protect her: he saves Lolita and her family from prison and takes her – on his horseback – to a secure destiny. When he speaks to her, he immediately sings her beauty and asks to kiss her hand twice, so it is a small wonder that he quickly gains access to Lolita’s heart.

The exoticism of *The Sheik* finds an equivalent here in the anonymity – and therefore mysterious character – of the hero. Likewise, his being an outlaw situates him outside conventional – routine – society. As was the case in *The Sheik*, the stress is on the eyes and the clothing, which function as a costume of a false identity: in the same way that Ahmed was a European dressed up as an Arab, Zorro is a *caballero* dressed up as a highwayman.

The opposition between the vigorous Zorro and the fatigued Don Diego de la Vega reflects the dichotomy between one variant of the Latin Lover and what may be considered its opposite: the *inetto*. “The *inetto* articulates the traditional binary opposite of the masculine, as it is constructed in Italian culture and society, and as it relates to sexuality: the cuckold, the impotent and feminized man. Rather than active, the *inetto* is passive; rather than brave, he is cowardly, rather than sexually potent, he is either physically or emotionally impotent (...)” (Reich 9). In the Zorro stories and especially in the first Zorro movie, this passive side is expressed by Don Diego’s constant yawning, whereas Zorro, as a full time fighter for justice, enhances the “active” side of the Latin Lover. From a gendered perspective, he symbolizes “performative masculinity,” considered by Jacqueline Reich to be an essential component of the Latin Lover: “Along these lines, the Latin Lover literally puts on a carefully staged show for his admiring public, be it at the beach, which Latin Lovers were known to frequent, or in the mass-produced fantasies for and by Anglo-Saxon women” (Reich 27). True, Zorro does not fight oppression to impress *señorita* Pulido, but – together with his courting style – this is an important reason why she falls in love with him.

What is lacking from the Zorro stories, however, is the hidden sexuality and open eroticism of *The Sheik*, which was connected there with the non-European form of Latin identity: the Arab nature. The love between Zorro and Lolita Pulido rather seems to justify the natural appeal between people of the same blood and evokes the pureness of love against the more pragmatic concerns for marriage. Precisely the fact that Lolita Pulido loves Zorro in spite of his anonymity is considered by Don Diego to be a sign of her true love. In this respect, the weak aristocrat he had pretended to be as Don Diego de la Vega was nothing but another mask that he used not only to deceive the authorities, but also to test the true feelings of his future bride. In Don Diego’s final words: “She turned from the wealth of Don Diego de la Vega to the man she loved, though she deemed him, then, an outcast and outlaw. She has shown me her true heart, and I am rejoiced at it. Your excellency, this *señorita* is to become my wife” (265). The concept of “pure Hispanicity and pure blood” is thus complemented by the concept of “pure love.”

To sum up: there are important parallels between the story of *The Sheik* and the original stories on *Zorro* as the motif of the Latin Lover is concerned. Both stories thematize the necessity of love in the relationship between man and woman, as an ingredient not to be confused with (but ideally leading up to) marriage. Love is what women are looking for, even as they reject marriage. But it can only be given by men who are strong enough to control them and protect them at the same time. Eroticism is infused in the relationship by

the mysterious side of the male partner, either under the form of exoticism (the Arab) or social marginality (the masked outlaw). The divergencies between *The Sheik* and *Zorro* reside in the way cultural identity, and especially Hispanicity, works. Whereas the Sheik played with different shades of cultural identity, producing an image of ambiguity and ambivalence throughout the movie, Zorro is the quintessential Hispanic and therefore a symbol of purity. If *The Sheik* turns out to be a cultural hybrid who spans two opposing cultures (North and South), Zorro is a direct exponent of the Spanish *hidalgos* and therefore anything but a *mestizo*. Though he makes women dream, his aim is marriage, not “licitious sex” as Beluscio would have it. Sexuality in the Zorro stories is only there in the theme of procreation and lineage.

From Latin to Latino Lover: Banderas in *The Mask of Zorro*

In *Heroes, Lovers, and Others: The Story of Latinos in Hollywood*, Clara Rodríguez argues that there are several analogies between the 1920s and the present-day context: the fact that “Latinos” are “in” again, the pendulum shift in economy (the Roaring Twenties leading up to the Depression just like the economic boom of the 1980s led to the dot.com burst of the 1990s) and the immigration movement at both moments in history accompanied by a certain “concern” about foreigners entering the United States (C. Rodríguez 244-245). There is, then, a new “craze for all things Latino” (214), but this time, the word “Latin” – if still used – tends to be restricted to the Hispanics from Spain and Spanish America only (26). At the same time, we witness a remarkable presence of actors associated with the Latin Lover. One of the most cited examples nowadays is Antonio Banderas, who “fulfills the fantasy of the Latin Lover at his most classic” (Thomas 141) and is described as the “Valentino-Banderas” (Beluscio 77) symbolizing “la resurrección olímpica del ‘Latin Lover’” (Beluscio 51). Even Banderas himself has proclaimed: “I’ll probably be seen as that Latin Lover type forever. Even if I get greasy and fat and lose my hair, they’ll cast me and say, ‘Yes, but he was a Latin Lover!’ It’s funny there’s always been that thing” (quoted in C. Rodríguez 206). But has “that thing” remained the same now that new Hispanic identities see the light?

The 1998 film *The Mask of Zorro* was directed by Martin Campbell and produced by Steven Spielberg. The second one, *The Legend of Zorro*, was made by the same team and forms the sequel to the first. In both movies, the role of Zorro is given to Antonio Banderas, and this is presented by the makers as a deliberate option to highlight the Hispanicity of the popular hero. As the publicity campaign recalls: “Zorro was the first Spanish hero invented by Hollywood,” but never before had he been played by an actor of Spanish descent.^[14] Hispanicity is at stake, then, and not in a minor way.

One of the most interesting aspects of this movie is the fact that it portrays two forms of Hispanicity by opposing two Zorros: there is the so-called “original” one, Don Diego de la Vega, who is interpreted by Anthony Hopkins; and there is the new one, whose part is given to Antonio Banderas. The old Zorro has come of age and is looking for a successor. He meets with Alejandro Murieta (Antonio Banderas), who plays a grown-up orphan of Mexican descent. In the book accompanying the movie (Luceno 1998), Alejandro Murieta is described as a *mestizo*, and this is rendered in the movie by a slight darkening of

his skin. Banderas is then almost the opposite of the original, “pure” model that Zorro represented, and the movie displays the contrast between the two forms of Hispanicity – the European one, and the Spanish-American one – through a series of lessons. What old Zorro teaches the younger one is not only how to use his sword in a proper way, but also how to control his anger and put the notion of justice above the one of revenge. In short, he teaches him the values of *caballería*. At the same time, the fact that these can be learned by someone of different blood is, altogether, a major difference with respect to McCulley’s first stories. What was a vocation inscribed in the blood of *caballeros* becomes a lesson to be taught to everyone. The psychological growth into maturity of the new Zorro is visualized by his physical change: in the end, it is the handsome Banderas who succeeds in defeating his enemies.

It should be stressed that this new Zorro is not an assimilated Mexican: he represents a hybrid, a combination of the two forms of Hispanicity that merge into a panhispanic form, embracing now, for the first time, Spain and Spanish-America (Mexico). This hybridity also alters Zorro’s relation to justice itself: if McCulley’s Zorro was a restorer of the natural, social order, anything but a revolutionary, Campbell’s Zorro (the old as well as the young one) is identified with the legitimate fight of the Mexican peasants against the Spanish oppression. From a symbol of premodern values, he turns into a defender of modernity. Modernity is also present at a more profound level: the very idea that people from a completely different background, such as Alejandro Murieta, can become Zorro is, of course, a clear departure from the original association between Zorro and Spanish aristocracy. The Zorro vocation is no longer inscribed in the Spanish blood: it can be offered as a programme to anyone.^[15] Does this modernity also affect Zorro’s connection to the Latin Lover?

At first sight, the answer is yes, because one of the things old Zorro sees lacking in his disciple is “charm” and so this quality is once again presented as something that can be acquired. The instruction in charm constitutes another departure from the original model: normally, the Latin Lover’s charm has to appear as a natural quality, even though it was acquired artificially. Jacqueline Reich links this to the concept of *sprezzatura*: “The opposite of affectation, *sprezzatura* denotes a naturalness in appearance without revealing the effort that went into its preparation. The result is the projection of grace” (Reich 3). We watch Alejandro Murieta being shaved and washed and dressed up as a real aristocrat: an ironic inversion of the original Zorro figure, who was an aristocrat disguised as a bandit. All of this is necessary to gain access to the circles of his true enemies: Rafael Montero and Captain Love. True to these codes, he brings flowers to the lady of the house, and impresses Rafael Montero by his official greeting of the Spanish court. However, Don Alejandro del Castillo y García (as Zorro-Banderas presents himself to his enemies) is really a hybrid, and in his behavior towards women he goes far beyond old Zorro’s imagination. When inviting the beautiful Elena (Catherina Zeta-Jones) to the dance-floor, he chooses a wild dance that is definitely not appropriate for the occasion, but it does reveal his innate “wild” nature to Elena. It also recalls the fact that shortly before he made *The Sheik*, Valentino conquered women’s hearts with his tango in *The Four Horsemen*. Later, Banderas confronts Elena as Zorro and leaves her partly undressed by teasingly stripping her clothes off with his sword. Attraction between Elena and Alejandro Murieta is an instant phenomenon and predates the classes he receives in charm: on his way to the town dressed up as a bandit, he crosses the path of Elena. She is slightly frightened, but admits later at confession to have sinned: “I

had guilty feelings about a man,” she says, “I think he was a bandit. Something in his eyes caught me.” Once again, we find the trope of the immediate attraction between the future lovers, only now they belong to different classes and have “different blood.” As representatives of two forms of Hispanicity, their final marriage and first child symbolize, once again, the conversion of the “pure” form of Hispanicity into a broader one.

This amplification of the notion of Hispanicity in a panhispanist sense in a way runs parallel to the original concept of Latinity, which embraced various forms of it. It also accounts for a more sexualized form of Hispanicity, a dimension that is infused by the reference to Spanish-American culture as the Other form of Hispanicity. In a way, Mexican “wildness” equals Arab sensuality. It reinscribes otherness in the pure form of Hispanicity of the original Zorro. In this sense, the merging of the two figures – Latin Lover and Zorro – produces a new species: the *Latino Lover*. Typical of this Latino Lover is not only the fact that he embraces European and non-European (read Spanish-American) forms of Hispanicity, but also that he establishes a new relationship with modernity.

Mocking the Latino Lover

The departure from the original Zorro acquires parodic dimensions in the 2005 production *The Legend of Zorro*.^[16] Old Zorro has died and new Zorro has won himself a stable and almost accepted position in his society. In fact, his wife Elena believes he is no longer needed: the only person who needs him, in her mind, is Don Diego himself. The rest of the movie will show that this analysis is only partially correct, but it does confront the viewer immediately with a certain mocking of the Zorro icon. Is Zorro really necessary, or is he an excuse to neglect his other duties, regarding his son Joaquín, for instance? The whole dilemma adds a new dimension to the relation between the old Zorro figure and modernity, because it projects the demands of the new fatherhood onto the old aristocrat Zorro. Their argument gets so strong that Don Diego walks out of his house, to be faced some days later with an official demand for divorce by his wife. We then see Zorro losing control of himself, going out until late at night, waking up too drunk to remember where he was, forgetting to pick up his son at school, etc. When Elena reappears with a new lover, the French count Armand, Alejandro creates a scandal at her party. Their dance, interrupted by sneering remarks to each other, is a parody of their wild dance in the first movie and so of Zorro as a Latin Lover altogether. In another scene, Don Alejandro, after a heavy night, is awakened by a room-maid. When he gets up, he discovers he is not wearing any clothes: the image of poor Don Alejandro hiding his sex with his hands in front of a giggling room-maid is symbolic of the overall “undressing” of his Zorro character. Of course, it is not Zorro himself who is mocked, it is Alejandro Murieta, the married man and father of a son.^[17]

This parodic element can be related to the comic dimension of the first Zorro movie, where Banderas not only learned how to behave as Zorro, but also made many laughable mistakes. However, it now, more clearly than before, affects his erotic dimension. When he walks out of his house after the argument, Elena shouts at him: “I hope you and Tornado will become very happy” – “We will,” he replies. Later on, while Don Alejandro is sitting drunk on his horse filled with self-pity, even Tornado drops him (literally and symbolically). The weak man that Don Diego de la Vega just pretended to be in the

McCulley stories has now become reality. The cause is simple: this Latin Lover has been abandoned by his wife. Total destruction is the consequence. The fact that he moreover seems to lose Elena to a European-born French count, Armand, functions as an ironic reference to the Latin Lover figure altogether.[18]

Seen from the point of view of the whole Zorro cycle, this movie insists upon Don Alejandro as “*inetto*,” under the pressures of modern life. Hispanicity is still there, but it becomes part of the ironic distancing of the original hero. Two scenes in which Zorro speaks Spanish are symptomatic in this light: the one in which his horse refuses to follow his instructions because they are uttered in English, and the one in which Zorro uses Spanish to admonish his own son – who has just performed a risky operation and does not know who his father is. Apparently, only Spanish can give Zorro the authority which before he also had in English.

In the animation *Shrek 2* (2004), the parody turns to mockery and extends to the figure of Zorro himself (as opposed to Don Diego). In this movie, a new character is introduced: Puss in Boots. Though his name refers to the clever cat of Perrault’s fairy-tale, who helps his poor master marry a princess through his cunning and his eloquence, Puss in Boots is also a parody of Zorro: he is dressed up as the Spanish swordsman, with special emphasis on the boots they have in common; he leaves the first letter of his name in a tree using three strokes of his sword; and –not in the least– he speaks with the voice of Antonio Banderas, who had played the role some years before. Though Puss in Boots does not wear a mask, the stress is on the eyes: we notice this from his first appearance onwards, when darkness prevents us from seeing anything but his eyes, and later we discover his ability to endear his opponents by casting seductive glances. In a way, he shares with Zorro the latter’s double identity, for he misleads his opponents on various occasions, pretending to be a cute, inoffensive little kitten (“Don Diego”) whereas he is always ready to attack.

These attacks, however, are deprived of their original meaning, since Puss in Boots is not committed to the fight against injustice. Rather, he offers his services to anyone who pays for them, even when murder is involved. His cynicism shows as he turns from the future assassin of Shrek, hired by the evil king, into his friend as soon as he notices the assignment is more difficult than expected. In this context, he appears as “the other friend” of Shrek’s, who is still accompanied by Donkey, his kind-hearted but rather naive buddy from the first movie. Whereas Donkey jealously claims no more friends are needed, Puss in Boots quickly wins Shrek’s heart by flattering him and gazing at him with his cute, deep eyes – an ironic return of the “courting” capacities of Zorro. The fact that Eddy Murphy is Donkey’s voice adds an ethnic flavour to the rivalry. Whereas Donkey speaks with a “black” accent, Banderas turns Puss in Boots into a very Hispanic creature, with his Spanish accent, Spanish words (“*señor*”) and Spanish style (“it would be my honor”). The contrast with the simple-minded Donkey gives his Hispanicity a sophisticated, but also treacherous, side. It appeals to baroque culture, with its fascination for illusions, costumes, play.[19] Hispanicity finds an ironic equivalent in the notion of “honor” through the various suggestions of the huge ego that Puss in Boots displays – an ego that is so much bigger than his real size. Most importantly, *Shrek 2* clearly inscribes the word Latino in the concept of Hispanicity as it relates to music and rhythms: at the end of the movie, it is Puss in Boots who fires the starting gun for the closing party by shouting “fiesta,” after which everybody joins him in a passionate dance to Ricky Martin’s “*Livin’ la vida loca*.” Except for his constant flattering of Shrek and one suggestive pass to Fiona (“I could be Shrek to you,

baby”), all that remains of his Latin Lover capacities is this ability on the dance floor. Hispanicity is thus reduced to a certain temperament and style, a set of costumes and rhythms that suits anyone, even a cat. At the same time, the Shrek story, as a parody of the typical fairy-tale-plots, reverses the traditional beauty norms that also underlie fictions involving Latin Lovers: the evil character of the prince charming Fiona used to dream of as a child contrasts with the good character of the hideous ogre she finally falls in love with. It is as if Zorro, as he removes his mask, turns out to be so very different from what we believed him to be.

But what did we believe he was, after all? Let us give the final word to a woman in this essay on Zorro as a Latin Lover. In 2005, Isabel Allende published a novel at the request of the Zorro Company. She was given complete liberty as an author, except for the fact that Zorro had to be recognizable through his attributes. A full consideration of the adaptation Allende proposes of Zorro would be the subject of another essay. But since her book is part of the official Zorro revival that the Zorro Company set in motion in 1998, her portrayal of Zorro as a Latin Lover deserves some conclusive considerations. One of the most striking features of her book is the introduction of new female characters, which – together with the magical realism – function as sometimes overtly ironic tokens of the Allende idiom entering the McCulley imagination. A first important change is the fact that Zorro obtains a mother and a grandmother (Toypurnia and Lechuza Blanca, respectively), who have a different background and opinion than Don Alejandro de la Vega. Besides rewriting Zorro’s Hispanic background in terms of hybridity – which acquires carnivalesque elements as it mixes with other minority cultures (gypsies, pirates...) – they point at the fact that Zorro was always his father’s son, never his mother’s. According to Annick Houel,^[20] the absent mother enhances a quality of the hero of these romantic stories: the fact that they are able to protect and shelter the woman. Secondly, Allende, who writes a prequel to Zorro by describing his years as a child and teenager both in California and in Spain, situates him primarily in between two women of the same family de Romeu: Juliana – whom Zorro falls in love with from the first time he sees her – and Isabel, who is her younger sister and far below Juliana’s beauty. However, Zorro’s love is left unanswered, since he loses Juliana to the pirate Jean Lafitte. Lolita Pulido, his true love in the McCulley stories, then appears as his second best choice, but Allende insists on the fact that Don Diego “debió confesarle la identidad del Zorro antes de ser aceptado” (Allende 381). The most ironic reference to Zorro as a Latin Lover is provided by the anonymous narrator, who turns out to be Isabel. The use of the third person to refer to herself – often in sarcastic ways – functions as a textual mask of her true identity, which is revealed in the epilogue. And a real mask she will wear in the end of the story, when she convinces Zorro to allow him to help her, at the side of Bernardo. Most importantly, she provides what Bernardo (Zorro’s loyal servant in the Disney television series) lacks: a voice to tell Zorro’s stories. By doing so, she not only focuses upon his qualities, but also upon his defects: his big ears that he tries to hide with his mask, a certain vanity before the mirror. She even ends up “psychoanalyzing” Zorro by concluding that he can only truly love unattainable women, such as Juliana (382). This is why Isabel – later in her life – decides not to accept Zorro’s proposal to marry him ... yet: “Sé que estaremos juntos cuando él sea un anciano de piernas enclenques y mala cabeza, cuando otros zorros más jóvenes le hayan reemplazado, y en el caso improbable de que alguna dama le abriera su balcón y él no fuera capaz de treparlo” (382). With this last image, of the cripple Zorro who has already turned bald by the end of

the book, Isabel (de Romeu/Allende) concludes her novel: “El Zorro me tiene harta, y creo que ha llegado el momento de ponerle el punto final” (382).

Conclusion

If Clara Rodríguez pointed at several similarities between the 1920s and the current context, all leading up to a “Latin craze,” one has to admit that we have come a long way from the Valentino trope and the original Zorro. The concept of “pure Hispanicity” has been abandoned in favor of a more multicultural definition, which includes Spanish-American and indigenous cultures. Especially in its openness to the “other” form of Hispanicity, incarnated in this case by Spanish America, this rewriting seems to have been to the benefit of the erotic appeal of Zorro, because his sexuality has been enhanced. At the same time, we witness an ironic and parodic treatment of Zorro as a hero, which reduces his position as a symbol of masculinity. The premodern values associated with both the Latin Lover and Zorro have disappeared in favor of the –often comical – clash with modernity itself.

It would be tempting to consider this rewriting as indicative of a more open, tolerant concept of Hispanicity, one that rejects essentialism in favor of a postmodern concept of cultural identity that could be considered more politically correct or illustrative of the “browning” that Richard Rodriguez hopes will occur. However, this would leave out of the picture an essential ingredient of the Latin Lover: the fact that it is a consumer’s icon (Malossi 24), designed to make money. Without a doubt, the North American society that brought forth Zorro has changed in such a way that Hispanics are now not only people of a country “far-far-away” (to quote *Shrek 2*): the fact that they are an active part of the consumer audience of these icons must have helped the producers find their way to an updating in terms of multiculturalism and humor.

[1] This essay constitutes a complement to a previous analysis of the Zorro-figure, in which I focused on its appeal as a symbol of resistance and cultural identity (Lie 2001). Though detailed surveys of Zorro’s evolution in the 19th century exist (Mérida 1997, Curtis 1998), the connection between Zorro and the stereotype of the Latin Lover has never been studied before.

[2] The dictionary quoted is *Il Grande Dizionario*, Garzanti, Milano, 1987.

[3] Though this article centres on North American popular culture, it should be noted that images of Latin Lovers circulated everywhere, including Latin America. Thus, Jaime Manrique, in his semi-autobiographical book on homosexual writers, testifies about the pervasive influence of Hollywood and European movies on the Latin American popular imagination and his own erotic imagination (Manrique 1999: 15, 25). In this context, it is telling that Manrique explains his initial romantic crush on Manuel Puig – who would later on become his main literary and personal model – by referring to a picture he had seen of Puig, in which the writer resembled Marcelo Mastroianni, that other prototypical figure of the Latin Lover (Manrique 1999: 39). This also shows that Latin Lovers can appear in contexts of homosexual attraction, an aspect not dealt with in this article; a famous example can be found in *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), in which the main

character Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) has a lover called Miguel Alvarez, interpreted by Antonio Banderas.

[4] Useful information about the life of Valentino can be found in Belluscio 1996, Malossi 1996 and Thomas 1998. Without a doubt, his life and early death contributed to his mythical status. An interesting fact is that he was “discovered” and “designed” by women such as Natascha Rambova.

[5] Another important prototype of the Latin Lover was Marcello Mastroianni.

[6] Some, as Panaro, state that Latin meant “exotic” to an American and could therefore include “Mexican, Spanish, Parisian, Italian, Arab (and also included Viennese, Hungarian and Slavic touches)” (Alberto Panaro, Mass-produced Valentinos in Malossi 1996, 95). Allen Woll observes that “only rarely was it synonymous with ‘Latin American’”. More often than not, the Latin Lover was “of Italian descent” (1980, 23) or “the property of Mediterranean civilization” (1980, 25).

[7] This French background also explains the presence of two French-speaking servants in his tent, who can communicate with Diana, and the visit of his dear friend Raoul de Saint Honoré. This French doctor admonishes Ahmed on the values of respect and liberty, thereby rehearsing a trope in Orientalist discourse: “the theme of Europe teaching the Orient the meaning of liberty, which is an idea that Chateaubriand and everyone after him believed that Orientals, and especially Muslims, knew nothing about” (Said 1978, 172). In the end, Ahmed is ready to free Diana in spite of the fact that he has fallen in love with her.

[8] In *Muy Macho* – a collection of autobiographical essays in which sixteen Latino writers testify about the impact of the stereotype of the macho on their personal lives - the word ‘macho’ is presented as “the catchword for Latino adult manhood” (González 1996:xiii), and the general term under which all North-American images about Latino men can be ranged (González 1996 cover text). However, I believe there is ground to distinguish between the macho and the Latin Lover in terms of erotic and sexual behaviour. Thus, it is striking that the concepts of ‘suavity and tenderness,’ which figure so prominently in *The Sheik*, and the intimate connection with the motif of female desire, hardly ever appear in the essays collected by González. Moreover, the main figure evoked in the essays of *Muy Macho* is the father, never the mother nor the female lover, which underscores the fact that the macho world is mainly a male world, whereas Latin Lovers are directly defined with respect to women.

[9] See the analogy with Tarzan (1911-1912), who is able to develop into Lord Greystoke because he has the European genes (Cheyfitz 1997).

[10] Interestingly, Curtis points out that Fairbank’s interest in the Zorro stories was the result of his objective to attract more female, matinee audiences (in McCulley 1998, viii).

[11] In this context, also see Foster on the first filmic interpretation of the Cisco Kid in 1914: “Thus, in keeping with an entrenched Hollywood tradition that has a long life, people of color (Mexicans, Native Americans, blacks, Asians) are played by Anglos; this practice was true even when the former were as much the evil and perfidious enemies of the latter as their benefactors” (Foster 2010: 29).

[12] “El éxito de *La marca del Zorro* llegó a tomar tales dimensiones que, durante las primeras semanas de exhibición en el Capitol Theatre de Nueva York, la policía tuvo que

tomar el local para contener a las exaltadas masas que anhelaban ver a su nuevo héroe” (Mérida 1997, 35).

[13] Sandra Curtis believes McCulley depicts Californian life under Mexican rule (in McCulley 1998, x). However, no single mention of Mexico is given in McCulley’s text, except for vague references to “the mongrel people”. Possibly, this has to do with the influence of the Boltonian school of historiography, which silenced the part Mexico played in California’s history. The Boltonians were part of the “cult of Spanish California” and Curtis (1998, 11) confirms that McCulley consulted documents on the region before writing his stories.

[14] “To play the only Spanish hero created in Hollywood and the first time a Spanish guy is going to portray that character is an awesome and beautiful thing. It is almost spiritual to me” (Banderas quoted in Lie 2001: 497).

[15] In Lie 2001 I have analyzed the way in which the master-disciple-figure in this Zorro movie rehearses and rewrites the dichotomous discourse on Mexican subalternity which Claire Fox, in *The Fence and the River* (1999) saw appearing at the beginning of the 19th century. In this respect, *The Mask of Zorro* presents itself as a post-NAFTA movie that inscribes Mexican subalternity in a playful way into an inclusive concept of Hispanicity.

[16] In his brilliant study of the Cisco Kid, David William Foster points out a similar emergence of an ironic and parodic stance towards this character in a made-for-TV movie directed by Luis Valdez in 1994 (Foster 2010: 27). In his conclusion, Foster draws a comparison between the Cisco Kid and Zorro, which first shows an important difference between the two figures: whereas the Cisco Kid allows for homosocial and homosexual behaviour, which is due to the fixed presence of his male sidekick Sancho, Zorro – often solitary – tends to be ‘straight’ (Foster 2010: 39). At the same time, Foster underscores the crucial fact that both popular characters are incarnations of the Hispanic caballero *as a deviant* moving through the Anglo world and therefore carry with them the potential to unsettle Anglo heterosexual normativity. In the case of the Cisco Kid, this ‘queer’ character is shown in scenes in which a certain effeminate posture of the Cisco Kid becomes an important tool to outwit his adversaries. In the case of Zorro, the potentially subversive dimension of his behaviour shows in his systematic triumph over Anglo rivals when it comes to winning the heart of women. As for the stereotype of the Latin Lover in general, his transgressive nature is often staged in the context of a marriage or another form of an official engagement between an Anglo man and woman, which turns him into an important agent of adultery and illicit sex. For a famous example, see the disruptive effect of the exotic Hungarian guest Sandor Szavost on the marriage of Alice Harford (Nicole Kidman) and her husband Dr. Harford (Tom Cruise) in Stanley Kubrick’s last film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999).

[17] We find a similar strategy in the movie *Internal Affairs*: see Lie 2006.

[18] Another aspect of this deconstruction of the Zorro-figure is the way in which his son Joaquín appears as a childish incarnation of Zorro. When faced with a rather strict schoolmaster, who is out to punish him, he performs a playful fight with his “opponent,” and lands outside on his feet, receiving, with a glimmering face, the applause of his fellow schoolmates. Zorro is not only about heroism: it is about playing and performing.

[19] The fact that the original Puss in Boots helped his master to appear as a count (the Marquis de Carabas), though he was only a miller’s son, is another indication of this connection to illusiveness.

[20] Quoted from her book *Le roman d'amour et sa lectrice* by R. Amossy and A. Herschberg-Pierrot (2005: 84).

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