

of extraordinary police powers? If Three-Fingered Jack's violence and lack of self-restraint represent the antithesis of Murieta's noble character, what are we to make of the fact that Murieta's plans depend on Three-Fingered Jack's brutality?* If *Joaquín Murieta* allegorizes the injustices experienced by the Cherokee, why does Ridge depict Cherokees torturing suspects to help hunt down the bandits?† Does the novel evoke the need for impartial law and "pure administration" (in the words of Ridge's romantic poem about Mount Shasta included in the novel), or does it advocate for natural rights and individualist ethics as opposed to legal doctrine?‡ Does Ridge represent women as objects and prizes fought over by men, or does his portrayal of the stealthy murder of an abusive bandit by the bandit's wife represent a woman heroically taking justice into her own hands?§

Critics have also traced *Joaquín Murieta's* diverse influences across genres, media, and national boundaries.¶ Ridge's intention "to contribute my mite to those materials out of which the early history of California shall one day be composed" was eventually realized when historians—many of them influenced by Hubert Howe Bancroft's *History of California* (1882)—cited his fictional narrative as a factual record. Although the novel

* See Stevens, "Three-Fingered Jack and the Severed Literary History of John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*."

† Hausman, pp. 15–18.

‡ See Walker, *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms*, pp. 111–38, and Rowe, "Highway Robbery: 'Indian Removal,' the Mexican-American War, and American Identity in 'The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta.'"

§ See Windell, "Sanctify Our Suffering World with Tears: Transamerican Sentimentalism in *Joaquín Murieta*."

¶ For more extensive discussions of the many reworkings of Ridge's novel, see Donahue, Hausman, Irwin, Leal, and Streeby.

was not widely reviewed upon its 1854 release, the *California Police Gazette* serialized a plagiarized version in 1859 under the title *The Life of Joaquín Murieta, the Brigand Chief of California*. This version, which demonized Murieta by omitting some of Ridge's psychological and legal explanations for Murieta's motives, was a popular success and became the source for numerous dime novels, such as *Joaquín the Saddle King: A Romance of Murieta's First Fight* (1881) and *The Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquín's Death Hunt* (1882). (In 1871 a posthumous "Third Edition," revised and expanded by Ridge, was published by Frederick MacCrellish; in his preface, Ridge claimed that his intention was to correct the misrepresentations propagated by these derivative versions, which he referred to as "the spurious work, with its crude interpolations, fictitious additions and imperfectly disguised distortions of the author's phraseology. . . .") Published during the Great Depression and adapted as a film by MGM in 1936, Walter Noble Burns's *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* (1932) helped to revive Ridge's portrayal of Murieta as a hero fighting for the poor and downtrodden. This revival of interest in Murieta gave rise to both popular manifestations—such as a 1949 *Western True Crime* comic book adaptation and the George Sherman film *Murieta!* (Pro Artis Ibérica, 1965)—and the influential University of Oklahoma Press edition of *Joaquín Murieta* published in 1955. Ridge's novel has also been profoundly influential as an unambiguous representation of anticolonial resistance and resurgent cultural nationalism in Mexican American, Mexican, and South American literature and culture. The popular ballad "El Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta," for example, depicts the

* Ridge, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (1871), p. iii.