

bandit chief as a fearless enforcer of higher law who appears in saloons “punishing Anglos” while wrongly condemned by the state’s “unjust laws”: “Ay, que leyes tan injustas / fue llamarme bandolero” (“Oh, what unjust laws / to label me an outlaw”).* In texts such as Ireneo Paz’s novel *Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido sonorense, Joaquín Murrieta* [*Life and Adventures of the most Celebrated Sonoran Bandit, Joaquín Murrieta*], published in Mexico City in 1904, the poem “Yo Soy Joaquín” [“I am Joaquín”] (1967) by the Chicano activist and poet Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzáles, and Pablo Neruda’s play *Fulgor y Muerte de Joaquín Murieta* [*Splendor and Death of Joaquín Murieta*] (1967), Murieta emerges as a popular hero standing up against US racism and colonialism. Gonzáles’s poem—which connects Murieta with other revolutionary figures from Mexican and Chicano history—made the bandit an icon of the Chicano movement against economic and cultural imperialism in the 1960s: “our art, our literature, our music, they ignored / so they left the real things of value / and grabbed at their own destruction / by their greed and avarice. / They overlooked that cleansing fountain of / nature and brotherhood / which is Joaquín.”†

Authors who have rewritten Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* for commercial and political purposes have frequently simplified the novel’s cross-racial empathy and political complexities. The historical background of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the displacement and disenfran-

* Unsigned, *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta* recorded by the Sánchez and Linares Brothers in 1934, trans. Philip Sonnichsen et al. in Chris Strachwitz, ed. *Texas-Mexican Border Music*, vol. 2, *Corridos Part 1: 1930–1934* (Folklyric Records, 1975).

† Gonzáles, *I am Joaquín / Yo Soy Joaquín: An Epic Poem by Rodolfo Gonzales with a Chronology of People and Events in Mexican and Mexican American History* (New York: Bantam, 1972).

chisement of many *Californios* is completely excised in the most popular manifestations of the Murieta legend. While Zorro—first introduced in Johnston McCulley’s *The Curse of Capistrano* (1919)—echoes Murieta’s romantic and chivalrous character and his vigilante methods, the pre-1846 setting of the Zorro stories makes Mexican rulers, rather than Americans, the agents of injustice.* Bob Kane, the creator of Batman, acknowledges Zorro as an important influence on Batman’s vigilante persona,† but the Batman comics transform the masked vigilante into a member of the wealthy white elite. Whereas Zorro and Batman focus on redressing individual injustices, Ridge emphasizes Joaquín’s network of fellow outlaws and their effort to avenge the US’s racial injustices toward all Mexicans. In this trajectory of popular vigilante heroes, Ridge’s Murieta becomes increasingly wealthy, white, and cut off from the social context of anti-Mexican racism.

That the seeds of such diverse (and often contradictory) interpretations and rewritings are contained in Ridge’s brief, action-packed novel testifies to both Ridge’s capacities as a writer and his political ambivalence as a writer of Cherokee descent who advocated for both disenfranchised *Californios* and the impartial rule of “sovereign law.” The novel continually undermines Ridge’s suggestion that the “pure administration” of the state government might put an end to “injustice to individuals” and “prejudice of color”: If Mount Shasta symbolizes the impartial rule of law in Ridge’s poem within the novel, we learn on the very next page that Murieta’s outlaws hid themselves “in the rugged fastnesses” of the mountain. The novel concludes

* Curtis, *Zorro Unmasked: The Official History*, p. 75.

† Curtis, p. 22. For a discussion of Zorro and Batman as reworkings of the Murieta tradition, see Hausman, pp. 145–49.