

## **Hybridizing Modernism: Américo Paredes and the Revisionist *Corrido***

**By Andrew Ball**

The impact on a people of an idea or an ideal may be gauged by its influence on the folksongs of that people.  
—Américo Paredes

In 1990, upon the publication of his only novel, *George Washington Gómez*, Américo Paredes announced his one stipulation to the publishers, that the manuscript remain as he had left it in 1940 (Ramón Saldívar 156 n14). The consummate folklorist and ethnographer, Paredes treats his own work as an artifact that must remain uncontaminated in order to preserve what is evidenced about the moment of its composition. Paredes' demand is very telling; he seeks to lock the text into the cultural, sociopolitical moment of its original production and treats it as he would a work of folklore in order to unmask the conditions of the text's production and to preserve this representation of border conflict as one might safeguard the integrity of evidence or field observations. For Paredes, *George Washington Gómez* stands as a contribution to the tradition of the folklore of resistance that was proliferate along the lower border between Texas and Mexico. The novel represents a watershed in the development of an anti-hegemonic hybrid discourse that fuses traditional and modern modes of expression to create a new form that retains the elements of folklore and cultural critique characteristic of the former while also offering a sophisticated response to the conditions of production, occupation, and relations of power and knowledge unique to the modern encroachment of Anglo ideology along the border.

While today the concept of border writing has become more prominent and widely discussed—along with its characteristic multidimensionality, heteroglossia, and

hybridity—the writing of Paredes’ modernist novel precedes the development of this kind of Chicano/a literature and criticism. It was Paredes’ scholarship rather than his literary output that greatly contributed to the theoretical elucidation of border writing, revealing that the dialogical and hybrid nature of modes of expression along the lower border was not merely a stylistic or aesthetic endeavor, but was rather linked to a complex politics of location and the vicissitudes of cultural conflict and interrelation within the region. Paredes was primarily a folklorist, ethnographer, musicologist, and socio-cultural historian, and though he wrote *George Washington Gómez* long before completing his seminal study of the *corrido* in 1958 (*With His Pistol in His Hand*), his novel’s form and content is chiefly constituted by modes of folk narrativity and balladry. And yet, the novel is not simply a reproduction of or participation in the conventional folk genres of the region. Paredes develops a hybrid text that is at once an autobiography, a (counter) history, an Americanized form of the European *bildungsroman*, a proletarian novel, and an extension of a variety of folk genres, motifs, and styles.

While folklore—and the ballad of border conflict (the *corrido*) in particular—serves as the multifaceted model for the novel, the text reveals that, for Paredes, these traditional folkloric forms and practices were no longer adequate to represent border conflict or sufficiently critique the relations of power and knowledge that constituted the occupation of the borderlands at the time of the novel’s composition. We must read *George Washington Gómez* as Paredes’ revisionist, modernist *corrido*, a fusion of the folk *corrido* tradition and the modernist proletarian novel. This revision was necessary because the mode of representing and critiquing border conflict (formerly the traditional *corrido*) was not capable, in its present state, to respond to the increased encroachment of

advanced capitalism in the border region, the new conditions of production and industrialization, or new forms of colonization and disciplinary power. In short, the traditional folkloric forms that had been the Texas Mexican's discursive mode of resistance were reforming to accommodate new matrices of border conflict that had developed subsequent to the golden age of the *corrido*, which began with the seditionist movement of 1915. Paredes' modernist *corrido* acts as a corrective to the tradition, moving beyond the former limitations of the folk form to develop more complex and subtle analyses of class, race, and gender relations in the region, the processes of assimilation and Americanization, and the manner in which subjects are interpellated by both tradition and ideology. Indeed, the text itself positively performs this interpellative process, fusing traditional and modernist discursive forms to develop an oppositional hybrid discourse that can more successfully critique present relations of power.

We will begin by identifying and analyzing a number of the most fundamental aspects of the novel's form and content that serve as examples of the folkloric tradition. Then, we will examine Paredes' method of expanding upon this tradition in an effort to offer a critique of dominant historiography and modern processes of exploitation and assimilation along the lower border.

Though the writing of *George Washington Gómez* long precedes Paredes' formal study of border folklore in the academic sphere, he had been immersed in the folk traditions of the region his entire life, was already an accomplished *corrido* singer by the 1930's, and was thus extremely well versed in many folkloric forms and popular tales by the time he began to write the novel. Any challenge to that assertion could be put to rest by simply comparing Paredes' novel with the scholarship he wrote over the subsequent

forty years. The latter served as a formal, rigorous academic expansion of the many problems and processes that are represented in the novel. His work on the ballad of border conflict, the *corrido*, is perhaps what Paredes is best known for, and though this is certainly the folkloric form that casts the longest shadow across his literary work, his scholarship extended far beyond balladry into many other elements of folklore and aspects of border culture and politics. As José Limón argues, Paredes' "corridor scholarship, his politics and his poetics are ultimately not separate endeavors" (45). While his scholarship and literary output "was shaped by [the *corrido*'s] influence," he was primarily concerned with how the *corrido* tradition functioned as a mode of political resistance, a communal form of cultural critique, and body of knowledge that could not be co-opted or censored by their colonizers.

What is evidenced in Paredes' novel is a kind of "ideology of form" insofar as the text is formally and thematically dominated by the *corrido* tradition and the political and historical conditions that that inspired the development of the *corrido* (Limón 74, 51). A dominant feature of borderland folklore is its dialogical engagement with the "culture of conflict" that characterized everyday life in the region. Richard Bauman writes that "the generating force out of which folklore emerges is conflict, struggle, and resistance, and the folklore operates as an instrument of this conflict, not in the service of systems maintenance" (xiv). Similarly, José David Saldívar argues that the role of folklore is to be "an instrument of the culture of conflict; folklore undertakes struggle itself in the forms of songs, legends, jests, jokes, and *dichos* (proverbs)" (José Saldívar, *Border* 46). However much Paredes does depart from the *corrido* form it is always in an endeavor to

remain true to the socio-political function of the *corrido*, that is, to develop a narrative that can serve as an instrument of resistance amidst cultural conflict.

The *corrido* was most popular during the Mexican Revolution, from 1910-1921, but had its roots in the Mexican romance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Richard R. Flores argues that there was a paradigmatic shift in the form and content of the *corrido* following the seditionist movement of 1915, which was the inspiration for the ballad “Los Sediciosos” (166). He argues that the shift is a consequence of an increasingly important distinction that this *corrido* foregrounds, that is, it “begins to distinguish between two types of Mexicans: the *puro mexicano* [true-born Mexican], whose identity and consciousness is related more to the politics of Mexico, and the *mexicotejano* [Texas-Mexican], whose identity is shaped by issues of ethnic identity in the United States” (Flores 166). It is at this point, claims Flores, that the *corrido* becomes dialogical, incorporating multiple voices, and serves as the narrative signal of the emergence of a uniquely *mexicotejano* consciousness (Flores 166-167). Flores’ interpretation of the historical and political significance of this particular *corrido* sheds a great deal of light on its importance for *George Washington Gómez* and elucidates why Paredes chose to both formally and thematically begin the novel with the Seditonist movement as its main framing device. Flores claims that “Los Sediciosos” is not only the literary/folkloric symptom of an emergent ethnicity, but also that it stands as an instantiation of that community’s coming to self-consciousness regarding its autonomy and difference. One should note that, in the *corrido*, the catalyst that spurns the formation of an autonomous *tejano* identity and ethnicity is a consequence of national and political difference more than racial difference. With “Los Sediciosos,” questions of identity and ethnicity become intimately linked to

national identification and political affiliation; by invoking this *corrido*—and the historical and political climate that engendered it—with the first words that appear in the novel, Paredes has encoded the text with a complex, multidimensional problematic that would be immediately evident to anyone within the discourse community of Texas Mexican folklore. Before the narrative even begins, the informed reader is signaled that the text will concern—in the idiom of *tejano* folklore—border conflict around 1915 and will address issues of nationhood, identity formation, rebellion, class, occupation, and racial purity.

José David Saldívar describes the border ballad's ideological form and content as having three main components:“(1) the *corrido* is a multifaceted discourse with reflexive, narrative and rhetorical-propositional elements; (2) *corridos* as social texts tend to be historical and personal; and (3) *corridos* make assertions which derive from the collective outlook and experience of the Mexican ballad community on the border” (172). According to Saldívar, then, the *corrido* is at once historical, personal, and derivative of the collective border-*tejano weltanschauung*. Given these *corrido* conventions, the aspects of the novel that are clearly autobiographical or at least influenced by Paredes' own life experiences do not constitute parts of the text that stray from the formal or thematic constraints of the traditional *corrido*, rather these personal elements participate in, and perform *corrido* conventions. For instance, Saldívar relates elsewhere that Paredes' father was once a revolutionary who, according to the latter, “rode a raid or two with Catarino Garza”; Garza was a native of Brownsville—Paredes' hometown inspiration for Jonesville (170). Like Guálinto's foster father Feliciano, Paredes' father was once a revolutionary. In this case, the intertext—“Los Sediciosos”—and the

personal, the historical, and the communal form a multifaceted discourse in Paredes' narrative.

Similarly, Paredes' problematization of received history and his continued concern with historical events in the text also contributes the novel's placement in the *corrido* tradition. When the narrative voice shifts in the chapter "Jonesville-on-the-Grande" to one of scholarly detachment, the rhetoric and tone becoming something more akin to historiography or ethnography, Paredes has not strayed from the *corrido* model but rather complicated it. Bauman writes that "Paredes is always attuned to the dialogical resonances of Border genres, both insofar as they incorporate multiple voices within themselves and as they interact with each other in use and through time to constitute larger expressive systems" (xvi). Paredes broadens the polyvocality of border folklore in order to incorporate new discursive forms and ultimately to constitute a larger expressive system that can speak to modern concerns.

Limón writes that the *corrido* usually begins by establishing the date of the scene, the "'scenic structure,' the geographical locale and the opposing social forces" (67). True to the *corrido* form, *George Washington Gómez* begins: "It was a morning late in June. The flat, salty *llano* spread as far as the eye could see ahead and to the right. To the left it was bordered by the chaparral, which encroached upon the flats in an irregular, wavering line. Along the edge of the chaparral wound the road, and down the road four Texas Rangers were riding" (Paredes, *George* 9). Just a few lines after this passage, we read that the Rangers "spurred their horses into a lope and strung out to surround the buggy" that we are told held "a very dark brown" man and another who "had a rifle cradled in the crook of his arm" (Paredes, *George* 9). While Paredes' text precisely follows all of the

formal conventions of the *corrido*, we can already see how he adds layers of meaning and an implicit tinge of social critique that is evocative of the particularly modern border experience. As in the opening lines of a *corrido*, we are given the approximate date, “late in June,” and the scenic structure, the *llano* or plain on the right and the chaparral—a dense thicket—on the left. But, Paredes subtly uses this scenic structure as a metaphor for both the geographical locale and the opposing social forces in such a way that is suggestive of the condition of economic and political relations along the border at the time of the novel’s composition. Paredes writes, as if looking towards the East, that the open plains which “spread as far as the eye could see” were “bordered” by the dense thicket of the chaparral which, much like the Texas-Mexican border, “encroached upon the flats in an irregular, wavering line.” By invoking the sense of a dense, encroaching force that would eventually consume the open lands that lay across the border separating these two spaces, Paredes offers a subtle metaphor for the encroachment of capitalism and industrialization along the “irregular, wavering,” unstable border. Not only does Paredes announce the *corrido*’s opposing social forces by conjuring a scenic image of threatening border encroachment from the North, but he also gives us an image of the future of this encroachment. He writes that along the border between the chaparral (the North) and the plains (the South) “wound the road, and down the road four Texas Rangers were riding.” By beginning the novel with this apocalyptic image of four horseman who are “down the road” but who are progressing along the path that signifies the timeline of the border, Paredes at once conforms to *corrido* convention and offers a comment upon the even graver, depression-era conditions that await his people “down the road”; in each case the *rinches* are the force to be opposed, but in Paredes’

modernized revision of the *corrido*—as is evinced by these figures of apocalyptic encroachment—the *rinches* become symbolic of the entire assemblage of Anglo colonization in all of its material and nonmaterial instantiations.

“*El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*,” which would eventually be the subject of Paredes seminal study of the ballad of border conflict, is the primary *corrido* intertext that Paredes responds to in *George Washington Gómez*. Paredes dialogically re-imagines this famous ballad, at times incorporating the conventional tropes of the epic *corrido* into his text, but more frequently subverting or troubling those conventions to make the form more inclusive of the full range of depression-era border conflicts. The *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez is of particular importance in part because it is emblematic of the formal and tropical conventions of the *corrido* at the height of its development after 1915; this is often called the epic *corrido*. In this genre of folksong the hero is usually a just, quiet, good man who has been forced to kill a *rinche*, or Texas Ranger, either to defend himself and his family or in revenge for the unjust murder of one of his family members. The hero must then run from the Anglo authorities, being hidden by strangers on his way to Mexico. The Anglos are always represented as simple, cowardly, and too inept to capture the hero. Many times the hero turns himself in after learning that reprisals are being carried out on his family and those who have helped him. We hear in “*El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*,” “they say that because of me many people have been killed; / so now I will surrender, because such things are not right” (Paredes, *Texas* 67). Typically the *corridos* are, at bottom, very moralistic. The heroes are morally upright men who are persecuted for defending their families from the tyranny of Anglo authorities. The

*corridos* are typically based on factual events and real people. Ramón Saldívar writes that,

in the aftermath of the secessionist uprising, hundreds of innocent Mexican American farmers and ranchers were slaughtered by Texas Rangers, summarily executed without trial at even the smallest hint of possible alliance with, even sympathy for the secessionists. The result was that South Texas was virtually cleared of landholding Mexican Americans, making feasible the Anglo development of the region into its capitalist agribusiness formation in the 1920's. (266-267)

Gregorio Cortez's family were the victims of this same kind of unjustified persecution; in the *corrido* that heroizes him we learn that the hero kills a *rinche* to avenge the unprovoked murder of his innocent brother.

In the epic *corrido*, after the stage has been set, a murder or killing takes place, usually the murder of an innocent *tejano* and / or the killing of a *rinche* in self-defense or in reprisal for the unjust murder of a Texas-Mexican (Limón 68). *George Washington Gómez* begins in a similar fashion with the murder of Gumersindo, Feliciano's brother-in-law. The circumstances and representation of Gumersindo's death mirror both the historical and folkloric accounts of the Rangers' execution of secessionist sympathizers. Gumersindo, defenseless and wholly innocent, is executed in the middle of the road before ever receiving a trial. While the narrative begins by precisely emulating the epic *corrido* model, Paredes subverts the convention by making Feliciano fail to avenge his brother, opting rather to leave the *sediciosos* and to become the lackey of an Anglo politician-capitalist. Though, like the traditional *corrido* hero, Feliciano's actions are

undertaken in the name of morality, this is the very path that leads him into a process of gradual assimilation to “the Anglo development of the region” and the “capitalist agribusiness formation [of] the 1920’s” (Ramón Saldívar 266).

Paredes further troubles the traditional *corrido* model by beginning his narrative not with death, but with birth. We are immediately told that the story’s action is not predicated solely on murder and revenge, but on creation and hope. If the epic *corrido* chronicles the hero’s inevitably losing battle and eventual death in the face of the juggernaut of modernization, capitalism, and colonial expansion, then Paredes’ modernist *corrido* chronicles the hero’s birth into these same conditions. While the former tradition represented how *tejano* identity and morality was incommensurable with the values and societal forms violently overtaking the region, Paredes’ writes a modernist *corrido-bildungsroman* that represents a hero whose identity as a *tejano*, whose values, and processes of coming into self-consciousness are constituted by the very social, political, and cultural forces that the epic *corrido* hero had been idolized for opposing. Paredes deftly fuses the discourses and ideologies of both traditional *corrido* folklore and American capitalist hegemony, turning the instruments, conventions, values and presuppositions of both perspectives against themselves, forming a hybrid discourse that, at once, participates in and subverts each mode, forming a new type of oppositional literature that incorporates multiple voices to form a larger expressive system.

The other epic *corrido* that serves as a primary intertext for *George Washington Gómez* is “*El Corrido de José Mosqueda*” as does the corresponding *corrido* legend that developed after the folksong gained widespread popularity. In particular it is the *corrido* legend that Paredes incorporates into his novel. The *corrido* legend is a long prose

narrative that develops subsequent to the original *corrido* and expands the story of the *corrido* hero, fleshing out the details of the historical event that inspired the folksong. Interestingly, this *corrido* underwent a transformation into “border-conflict form around 1930 or earlier,” during the last stage of its development; originally the *corrido* was about a train robbery that occurred outside of Brownsville, Paredes’ hometown and the inspiration for Jonesville.

In 1973 Paredes writes an anthropological article about this *corrido* legend entitled “José Mosqueda and the Folklorization of Actual Events.” The article includes a transcript of Paredes’ interview with an informant who recounts the Mosqueda legend. Though the interview takes place in the early 70’s, it is remarkable to see that the folkloric motifs and tropes that appear in the legend also serve as crucial components of Paredes’ novel written forty years prior. Paredes could just as well be describing *George Washington Gómez* when he writes that “the *corrido* legend is not identifiable, as are tale types, by a certain ordering of its principle motifs. It is made up of a cluster of motifs occurring in different sequences, and it is their association with the *corrido* hero that identifies them as a distinct entity” (*Folklore* 194). Likewise, Paredes’ novel is a veritable hodgepodge of folklore motifs and tale types that do not strictly conform to any one formal structure, but it is their association with the folklore tradition—and the *corrido* hero in particular—that both identifies the novel’s placement within the folklore discourse community, and at the same time, makes it distinguishable as a distinct narrative form.

Paredes writes that often the primary figure of an epic *corrido* loses his status as hero in the transformation from *corrido* ballad to legend (*Folklore* 196). In the legend it

is Mosqueda's lieutenant Simón García who becomes the central figure of the narrative. Summarizing the legend Paredes writes, "Simón García was a little man, but he was really bad. More than bad, he was evil, the devil himself perhaps. He could make incredible shots with the .30-.30 carbine, his favorite weapon. He was never seen without his rifle in the crook of his arm" (*Folklore* 195). García is said to have made off with anywhere from \$22,000 to \$220,000, but Paredes estimates that local historian William A. Neale's estimate of \$75,000 is more accurate. According to the legend, after the robbery García fled to Mexico until "finally [he] became a revolutionary soldier in Villa's army" (Paredes, *Folklore* 196). In *George Washington Gómez* the legendary figure's last name is preserved when he becomes, in Paredes' text, Lupe García who, we are told, is famous for his diminutive size, his supernatural marksmanship, the "30-30 in the crook of his left arm," and for being the leader of the band who "held up the Isabel train" and "took eighty thousand in silver off of it" (Paredes, *George* 11, 10). Like his historical counterpart, Lupe becomes a revolutionary before fleeing to Mexico, eventually joining the military.

Paredes writes that in the transformation from *corrido* ballad to legend the Mosqueda-García story took on new folkloric motifs that became central to the legend and were part of the focal shift from Mosqueda to García. Because, after the actual train robbery, the men buried the money to be recovered later, the folk legend took on motifs surrounding buried treasure. Here, García becomes transformed into a demonic figure in accordance with the folklore "motif N571, 'Demon as guardian of buried treasure.' And in his woodland associations and his diminutive size the legendary Simón García reminds us of the malignant spirits of the woods ([motif] F441.1, 'Elf-like, male, malevolent

woodspirit’))” (Paredes, *Folklore* 197-198). Now García “is more than a bad man; his is evil with a special malign quality that makes him not an *hombre malo* but *El Malo*, the Evil One himself” who “haunts the chaparral” (Paredes, *Folklore* 197). From here, the legendary García begins to appear “in Mephistophelean guise,” and it is not long until another motif is integrated into the legend: “motif S241, ‘Child unwittingly promised: first thing you meet’” (Paredes, *Folklore* 197). In accordance with this motif, the legend tells us that Mosqueda makes a pact with the Mephistophelean García: the former must kill the first person that they meet along their way. Tragically, the first person that they meet is Mosqueda’s foster son. Performing this moment in the legend, Paredes’ informant narrates:

[Mosqueda:] “How do you want me to kill him?”

[García:] “Well...kill him, somebody.”

“He said, No, no.”

“You are the one out of the whole bunch who has to kill him.”

“No, man, no. You all ride ahead.” (*Folklore* 200)

Of course, Mosqueda cannot kill him and lets him go. Later the boy unwittingly reveals in town who robbed the train by recounting who he saw; this leads to the capture and execution of most of the train robbers including his foster father.

A great deal of exegetical work is not needed to see how this legend is integrated into Paredes’ novel forty years prior to the composition of his article. As Lupe and the other seditionists haunt the chaparral, waiting to ambush the *riches*, Feliciano gets angry with his brother and, in exclamatory terms, describes him as *El Malo*, or as a demonic figure, saying “you’re a beast, a beast with fangs and claws. All you want is blood—

Remigio's, mine, everybody's!" (Paredes, *George* 26). Immediately after this, we read Paredes' version of motif S241 when the Anglo merchant Sneed and his *tejano* foster son—who we find out later is Juan Rubio—are the first one's met along the road. In "Mephistophelean guise" Lupe demands that Feliciano kill the boy lest he unwittingly reveal the identities of the seditionists. As Paredes' informant will echo years later ("You are the one out of the whole bunch who has to kill him"), Lupe says "it is you, Brother, who will kill him"; then, Lupe the Little Doll "disappeared...into the chaparral" much like the "Elf-like...malevolent woodspirit" of border folklore (Paredes, *George* 29). As in the Mosqueda legend, Feliciano / Mosqueda releases the boy after the others "ride ahead" but in Paredes' text the boy—Juan Rubio (who later describes Lupe as "a wicked man")—becomes Feliciano's foster son after Feliciano spares his life. Another revised version of this motif appears at the end of the novel when Feliciano's other foster son, Guálinto, mistakenly kills his malevolent uncle after meeting him along the road.

Paredes writes that, in this particular legend we may observe a fundamental folkloric mode of narrative progression, namely: the "action is motivated by a series of prohibitions. As each prohibition is violated—by [the main character] or by others—the resulting consequence affects the fate of [the] central character" (*Folklore* 209). Just as in the legend, the action of *George Washington Gómez* is motivated by a series of prohibitions and deceptions, primarily Gumersindo's dying request that Guálinto not be told about the nature of his death and correspondingly, the history of the seditionist movement and Feliciano's participation in it. Also, the violation of a series of more minor prohibitions/deceptions motivates the text: Guálinto's family history, Miss Cornelia's

treatment of Guálinto, Maruca's pregnancy, Guálinto's after-school job, and later his involvement with the government.

Unlike the traditional *corrido* hero whose identity, though it may be a composite of *mexicano* and *tejano* identifications, is free of ambiguity, Paredes' modernist *corrido* hero is doubly interpellated by both *tejano* tradition, language, and value, and American ideology, language, and epistemic forms. Bauman writes, "the essence of the *corrido* lies in more than its form alone. For Paredes, the true *corrido* tradition centers around a spirit of heroic bravado, of defiant manly self-confidence, and this spirit is rooted in the emergent sense of Mexican nationalism 'stirred into life by the war with the United States and the French invasion'" (xvii). Traditionally, then, heroism, masculinity, and the spirit of resistance was represented in the epic *corrido* as being directly linked to the central figure's nationalism in the face of potential invasion. After the seditionist movement, which sought to instantiate a new republic that was neither Mexican nor American, *tejano* nationalism became yet another part of the people's "in-between existence" (Paredes *Folklore* 25). But it seems that Paredes' *corrido* hero displays anything but "defiant manly self-confidence" or anything more than an ambiguous, conflicting sense of nationalism. That is of course until Guálinto is faced with war and the threat of invasion. The irony is that, by prohibiting Guálinto's knowledge of his own revolutionary genealogy and by being complicit, even active in his assimilation to American ideology, Feliciano forecloses the possibility for Guálinto to develop a sense of hybridized *tejano* nationalism, let alone Mexican nationalism. By the time that Guálinto matures, he has become so Americanized by the assimilated ideals of his family that he sees Mexico rather than America as the nation threatening invasion. Guálinto's ignorance of his

seditionist heritage has a profound effect on his emergent sense of nationalism and ultimately contributes to his total assimilation. In accord with the *corrido* tradition, Guálinto's masculinity and mature self-confidence is predicated on his sense of national affiliation; in order to become a man, let alone a "hero of his people" he first had to choose a nation with which to identify himself. But his class and his perception of personal, familial, and cultural history, to say nothing of his life-long Americanization, prevent him from developing a sense of *tejano* nationalism.

If the hero figure and the "Texas Rangers become"—in the traditional *corrido*—"ideologemes for class" who participate in the "continuing race and class struggle by Mexican-Americans against domination," then one wonders, can there be a middle-class *corrido* hero? (Limón 74) Though the *corrido* had always implicitly been a discourse about class power relations, Paredes' novel foregrounds that aspect of the folklore to ask this very question. Paredes uses the folkloric device of inversion and irony to produce an oppositional discourse that expresses its moral in the negative, by developing a cautionary tale about the consequences of obscuring one's political and cultural history. Though Guálinto is "subjected to the interpellative work of both traditional Mexican folklore and the ideological system of assimilation to American modernity," the former modes of knowledge are repressed by his family's assimilative pressures as well as his American schooling (Ramón Saldívar 164). Feliciano's transformation into a bourgeois capitalist and his efforts to Americanize Guálinto—all ostensibly done for commendable reasons—contribute to his foster son's American nationalism and eventual refutation of *tejano* culture and history. Folklore, "jokes, popular sayings, legends, and songs...[and the] traditional social environment" of the *tejano* serve as the vernacular experience that

imparts and validates their “conception of identity and subjectivity” (Ramón Saldívar 163). By attempting to quarantine Guálinto from this vernacular experience—which contributes to his mixture of wonderment and terror upon hearing his uncle and their neighbors trading *casos* (belief, or wonder tales) on the porch, as well as his bewilderment when the *curandero* (folk healer) comes to his sickbed—his family inadvertently eclipses the *tejano* side of his split consciousness until he comes to identify more with the American and less with *tejano* nation.

*George Washington Gómez* is Paredes’ response to a sense that “folk tradition [had] reached its performative limits,” and his belief that, in its traditional form, the folklore could no longer speak to the complexities of border conflict in the modern era of advanced industrialization (Limón 55). His revision and reformation of the folklore of resistance, taking the form of an amalgam of various folklore systems and those borrowed from the Anglo-European tradition, resulted in a method of representing border conflict that could now speak to discourse communities on either side of the border. Paredes’ hybridized narrative, incorporating folk traditions like the *corrido* and European forms like the *bildungsroman*, is more inclusive than either mode alone, and thus performs the ideals that it advocates.

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