

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.

## **IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BE A GENTLEMAN HORSEMAN / No Basta Ser Charro (1946)**

Juan Bustillo Oro

Genre: Comedy

To view: <https://youtu.be/v2uXfZX1Wi0>

**Contents** (Overview – Synopsis -Story – Themes – Characters)

### OVERVIEW

Juan Bustillo Oro continued his association with producer Jesús Grovas to write and direct *No Basta Ser Charro*, another in a series of Mexican music-focused films intended to be extremely popular with a largely middle class and working class audience. What makes this film unique is the fact that much of its appeal rests on a kind of extended inside joke which would have been quite amusing for the majority of the audience, who would have been very informed of the lifestyle, successes and scandals of the screen idol and popular singer, Jorge Negrete. They would have been amused at the idea of a look-alike with diametrically opposed attributes: Where Jorge Negrete is womanizing, the double is faithful; where Negrete is ambitious, the double is desirous of the status quo, and so on. The audience would also have been wildly entertained to follow the absurd delusions and high-jinks of a young woman super-fan smitten with puppy love for her idol who makes life miserable for her traditional Mexican family living in a “rancho grande” far from the vicissitudes of urban Mexican “chilango” life. While this is most definitely a vehicle for Negrete’s music, it is also a comedic farce of more complexity than might appear on the surface. In the fun it has with doubles, mistaken identities, and deliberate impersonations, it explores Mexican identity, and pushes the limits of knowing who and what we are, while suggesting that indeterminacy is what precipitates life-changing behaviors, emotional states, and conditions of being. In other words, over-determination blocks love; mistaken identities, masquerades, and embracing fantasy are what bring about transformative love. Further, the assumptions actually create the reality when Marta assumed the person who appeared on her doorstep was the wealthy, famous, heartthrob Jorge Negrete, she behaved in a completely different way than if she had believed he was the poor, hungry out-of-work ranchhand, Ramón Blanquet.

### SYNOPSIS

Ranch worker Ramón Blanquet, who just happens to be a dead ringer for screen idol and popular charro singer, Jorge Negrete, has quit his job and is looking for a new position. He is not alone, as his co-worker, Refugio, also wants better pay and conditions. They end up at a hacienda where, coincidentally, a young Jorge Negrete fan, Marta, has just read in the newspaper that Negrete has disappeared. Convinced that Ramón Blanquet is Jorge Negrete, Marta convinces her father to host and then hire him. Her father, Don Antonio, is exhausted by her obsession, so even though he knows Blanquet is not Negrete, he plays along to teach his daughter a lesson. What ensues is a series of comical attempts by Marta to seduce Negrete and by Refugio to secure a “meal ticket” kind of job at the ranch. Ramón Blanquet plays along, and in doing so, finds himself actually in love with Marta. The ruse falls apart in Mexico City where Marta and Ramón Blanquet attend a concert and meet Jorge Negrete in person. The core comedic conceit of the film has to end. Returning to the ranch and his old identity as a ranch worker, Blanquet prepares to say good-bye. Don Antonio, who has come to like and admire him, encourages him to pursue his love

for Marta. All ends happily, with Marta and Ramon, and as a bonus, Refugio and Carmen, the talented cook of the hacienda.

## STORY

**AT THE HACIENDA: SUPER-FAN LEARNS HER IDOL HAS DISAPPEARED** Lovely young Marta lives on a hacienda with her aunt, Tía Tula, and her father, Don Antonio. Much to the annoyance of her father, she is obsessed with Jorge Negrete. In the first scene at the ranch, Marta sits with her aunt, who dresses in pearls, a headdress, and jodhpurs, on the patio, chatting about the movies and Jorge Negrete. The daily paper is delivered and Marta opens it to read the headlines: “Jorge Negrete had disappeared.” Marta, the daughter of Don Antonio, lives an isolated life in a large ranch. She stays connected to the outside world through films and also a subscription to the daily newspaper, El Excelsior, which she reads assiduously. The headlines of the newspaper rivet Marta. She interprets the lines, “Jorge Negrete has disappeared,” to mean that the famous singer and actor has been kidnapped. Her father, however, chalks it up to a publicity stunt.



**LOOKING FOR WORK** In the opening scene, ranch worker Ramón Blanquet, who just happens to be a dead ringer for screen idol and popular charro singer, Jorge Negrete, has quit his job and is looking for a new position. He is not alone, as his co-worker, Refugio, also wants better pay and conditions. Luckless and hungry, Ramón and Refugio stop at a restaurant where they learn of a nearby hacienda where the owner, Don Antonio, will give work to anyone who needs it, and his daughter, Marta, is beautiful although completely consumed with an obsession for Jorge Negrete.



**ARRIVAL OF RAMON BLANQUET AT THE RANCH** Taking a calculated chance, Refugio races ahead to the ranch where he announces there is a distressed ranchero (designed to appeal to Don Antonio), and when the inert Ramón, lashed to the back of a horse, is brought to the ranch, Marta, the daughter, mistakes him for Jorge Negrete. Despite his protestations, she insists he is Jorge Negrete. Ramon feigns illness to gain Don Antonio's sympathy, but in doing so, triggers tremendous outpourings of care and attention from Marta and Tía Tula.



**MARTA AND RAMON** In their conversations, Ramón shares his philosophy of life and love. He is a simple, dedicated man, and when he marries, it is “till death do us part,” and there will be no straying and no divorce. To the contemporary audience, this was a comical allusion to Jorge Negrete’s multiple marriages, divorces, and girlfriends on the side. He also is remarkably ambition-free, which is absolutely the opposite of his double, Jorge Negrete. Furthermore, Ramón is tone-deaf, and cannot sing at all, while Negrete is a talented singer, trained in opera as well as traditional Mexican ballads, mariachi, rancheras, and more. Returning to the bedroom where Ramón Blanquet is “recovering,” Refugio puts his index finger to his temple to signal that in his opinion, Marta is suffering from mental issues.



**MARTA GOES TO MEXICO CITY** Marta insists on going to Mexico City for Jorge Negrete's special performance. Ramón protests, saying they will arrive too late. They make the trip and stay in her family's city residence. Later, her father arrives and the three go to the theatre where Jorge Negrete is performing. The real Jorge Negrete encounters Marta, but thinks she is simply a deranged fan looking for an autograph. Ramón Blanquet attempts to hide, but is found by a producer who wants to hire him to be a stunt double for dangerous stunts in a movie. After her daydream, Marta describes how eager she would be to screen films with Jorge Negrete, and also go to Mexico City to be in the movies with him. In the course of the concert, and after, Marta finally realizes that the real Jorge Negrete has no idea who she is. She does not believe him until Don Antonio points out Ramón Blanquet, who is still speaking to the director about being a stunt double. Outraged, Marta has to be restrained. Don Antonio arrives, and it is suddenly clear that Jorge Negrete is not the person who has been serenading Marta and declaring his love. Marta realizes the truth when she sees Ramón Blanquet in a meeting with a person interested in hiring him to be a stunt double for dangerous scenes in an upcoming Jorge Negrete film. Her father holds her down as she threatens to hurt the importunate Ramón.



**BACK AT THE RANCH** Ramón and Refugio sit on the steps in the patio and bemoan their fate. Ramón is sad because he has come to love the unattainable Marta, and Refugio because he had proposed to the wonderful cook, Carmen. Carmen responds to Refugio's proposal of marriage with an abrupt retort – "You? You're too ugly, short, and you're hungry all the time!" After that, however, she accepts, making Refugio a very happy man. It's hard to see why she might accept him as a husband, except he does seem to be a loyal, fairly hard-working man, and a good match in keeping with their stations.



**HAPPILY EVER AFTER** The ridiculous delusion and charade over, Marta and Ramon recognize that they love each other for who each one really is. They embrace and kiss in a very satisfying ending. He professes his undying love for her, and repeats what he has said earlier, that when he marries, it will be forever, and divorce will not be on the table at all. In the case of Ramón Blanquet, he is finally allowed to be the wholesome, dedicated, loyal ranch worker that he is.



## THEMES

**Doubles:** The two look-alikes, the screen idol, Jorge Negrete, and the simple ranch worker, Ramón Blanquet, have absolutely nothing in common except their appearance. While it is comical to any audience, the Mexican audience watching the film when it came out in 1946 would have been highly amused by the fact that everything that Ramón Blanquet represented was absolutely the opposite of the star, and in creating a total opposite, Jorge Negrete was poking fun at himself and the fact that he was often the subject of scandalizing newspaper headlines. Jorge Negrete made headlines for his life of excess: playboy, womanizer, multiple marriages and divorces, dalliances and illegitimate children, lavish spending, and more. Ramón Blanquet, in contrast, was a humble ranch worker who only wanted security, and who declared that when he fell in love, it was to be forever, and that he would never divorce. Ramón was humble, quiet, unassuming, and quite unable to carry a tune. Jorge Negrete was a gifted and talented singer, with seemingly infinite charm and charisma, albeit quite vain.

**Celebrity Worship:** Marta has succumbed to what was a phenomenon of film and music recording “star-making” which released enormous quantities of publicity in the form of titillating gossip. Both she and her aunt Tula are caught up in it, partly because it is an emotional escape and source of excitement for their lives at a remote hacienda many hours from Mexico City.

**Women’s roles in society:** Both Marta and Tía Tula do not conform to what is considered to be the normal roles for women in Mexican society. First, Marta is much too headstrong and utterly obsessed with Jorge Negrete, to the point that she is willing to throw herself at him (when she thinks Ramón is Jorge) and to propose marriage to him (which stuns Ramón, who was by then, captivated by her). Tía Tula shocks the very traditional ranchworker Refugio because she wears large, baggy jodhpurs instead of a skirt, and mixes it with a large pearl necklace, an elaborate head wrapping and gaudy earrings. For Refugio, her appearance is actually quite terrifying. Tia is a spinster. Marta’s mother passed away, and so the implication is that Marta has had very poor instruction in how to be a woman in Mexican society.

**Mexican Identity:** The film contains many aspects of Mexican identity that would likely resonate with the middle and working class audiences. The hacienda is at the very heart and soul of Mexican identity, and the “charro” – the ornately dressed cowboy from Jalisco – is the embodiment of that culture. Ramón Blanquet and Jorge Negrete embodied the charro. Later, the female embodiment appeared in the form of Carmen, whose traditional dress with shawl (rebozo), and her kneeling and grinding corn on a stone metate to make the flour for tacos, would pluck at the heartstrings of any Mexican. The ranch, with its patio, metal gates, stone fountains, and rustic furniture with a crucifix over each bed, also embodied the traditional Mexican way of life. Finally, the music – the rancheras sung by a singer accompanied by a group of mariachi musicians, represents an important aspect of Mexican identity, particularly one that accompanied the Jalisco cowboy, the “charro.”

**Indeterminacy:** Any time that there is a confusion of identity or an appearance of doubles, whether a gothic doppelganger or a farcical, comedic double, there is indeterminacy – not just in the identities of the characters, but also in the constructs of reality that frame them. The entire idea of knowing and knowledge is problematized, and the operative assumptions that people used to decide how to act, to behave, or to prioritize come into play. This is all the more evident in a hierarchical society, when, for example, one believes a person is a wealthy, influential heart-throb, or a poor, hungry out-of-work ranch worker. In this case, the assumptions become the reality, and the illusions are actually created by the assumptions.

## CHARACTERS

Ramón Blanquet / Jorge Negrete  
Marta  
Refugio

Itinerant ranchhand: double for cinema idol Negrete  
Lovely daughter of Don Antonio  
Ramón Blanquet’s partner / sidekick

Don Antonio  
Tía Tula  
Carmen  
Prospero

Marta's father, the patrón  
Maiden aunt  
Cook  
Veterinarian, who also fills in as a regular human doctor

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Ramón Blanquet / Jorge Negrete:** They are dead ringers for each other, but one is a poor, hungry out-of-work ranch worker, while the other is a wealthy, famous heartthrob singer and film actor. Not only are their stations in life completely opposed to each other, their values are also inverted mirrors.

*Humble / Proud:* Ramón Blanquet, the poor, hungry out-of-work ranch worker, is humble, and does not consider himself to be above other people. Jorge Negrete, despite his obvious charm and charisma, is self-centered and proud.

*Faithful / Womanizer:* Ramón Blanquet asserts to Marta and to Don Antonio (who is very approving) that when he marries, it will be forever. He is faithful, loyal, and doggedly devoted to the wife and the institution of marriage. There will be no divorce for him. On the other hand, Jorge Negrete, the heartthrob, is a known womanizer.

*Can't carry a tune / Talented trained singer:* Perhaps the most comical aspect of their diametrically opposed personalities is the fact that Ramón Blanquet is unmusical and untrained, while Jorge Negrete is a gifted singer, trained in opera as well as traditional Mexican music. Perhaps the most memorable scene of the movie was when Ramón, garbed in charro attire, mouthed along in a painful lip synch as Refugio sat on the floor in the room next door and played recordings of Jorge Negrete on Marta's new record player.

*Contented with station in life / Ambitious:* The out-of-work ranch worker simply wanted to have a job. He was fine with the work on a ranch, but he did want to be paid enough to eat. In contrast, Jorge Negrete was ambitious – successful not only in music, but also in acting in high-budget, wide-distribution films, where he maintained his reputation as a heart-throb and gallant.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Describe the key attributes, both physical and psychological of Ramón Blanquet. Which scenes best illustrate his physical attributes? Which ones show his essential character? How do they enable him to interact successfully with Refugio, Don Antonio, and Marta?
2. Describe the key attributes, both physical and psychological of Jorge Negrete. Which scenes best illustrate his physical attributes? Which ones show his essential character? How do they affect his interactions with Marta, Tía Tula, and his entourage?
3. What are the key attributes of Refugio? How does his background and experience affect the way he perceived Marta? How does his desire for steady, predictable meals affect his relationship with Ramón? With Carmen?
4. Select four scenes that place in question the identity or the history of a person. For example, when Marta is describing her fantasy that perhaps a band of outlaws kidnapped Jorge Negrete, describe how Refugio reacts, and how clear it is that he was once himself part of a band of outlaws. Or, for example, describe the reactions in the restaurant / cantina to the uncanny resemblance of Ramón Blanquet to Jorge Negrete, and how a case of mistaken identity tied into many of the inflammatory headlines in the daily newspaper from Mexico City, the Excelsior.
5. Describe how identity issues and flawed assumptions destabilize reality and engender a discourse of indeterminacy. Explore at least two possible outcomes in a narrative of



indeterminacy. They could include character transformation, social commentary, parody to bring together an audience in the shared joke, or your own thoughts.