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West of Us All

Sue Matheson

INTRODUCTION

'Westering' into the East: From Alternate & Spaghetti Westerns to Asian Cowboys and Gangsters

> Those who insist that history is simply the effort to tell the thing exactly as it was, to state the facts, are confronted with the difficulty that the fact which they would represent is not planted on the solid ground of fixed conditions; it is in the midst and is itself a part of the changing currents, the complex and interacting influences of the time, deriving its significance as a fact from its relations to the deeper-seated movements of the age, movements so gradual that often only the passing years can reveal the truth about the fact and its right to a place on the historian's page.
>
> —Frederick Jackson Turner[1]

Frederick Jackson Turner, the American historian best known for the "frontier thesis," that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* considers "[t]he single most influential interpretation of the American past, [for] it proposed that the distinctiveness of the United States was attributable to its long history of 'westering,'"[2] recognizes that historical facts are "not planted on the solid ground of fixed conditions" and instead, are "part of the changing currents, the complex and interacting influences of the time." While Turner's frontier thesis about the American frontier and history is famously interpreted as 'monocausal,' Turner himself insisted on the 'multi-causal' model of history because he realized how the interaction of politics, culture, economics, and geography impacted the making of history. The same can be said of the developing history of the Western genre in film which emerges in Hollywood from the early1900s to the 1960s under the political, economic, cultural, and geographical contexts of its own times even as it sets out to document (and celebrate) the experience of the frontier spirit, freedom and ideals of pioneering immigrants who ventured Westward to "civilize" and tame the new land and its indigenous inhabitants over a century before.

The articles comprising this Special Issue of *the quint* on "Alternate and Global Westerns," draw on this idea of "changing currents" and "complex and interacting influences of the time," to explore how the genre of Western films (considered specifically an American one) evolves, expands, and incorporates the tenor of its times from alternative, innovative, and cross cultural perspectives within the United States and from around the world. The films analyzed in these articles from the early 1950s to the present often frame the American West as a space for audiences to think through social, political, economic, racial, and environmental issues of their contemporaneous times. Despite the genre's malleable representations of life in the West over different decades, most audiences of

1. http://sunnycv.com/steve/text/civ/turner.html

2. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Jackson-Turner

Hollywood Westerns still perceive tropes of frontier expansionism, cowboy masculinity, etc. as true American Western ideas that are fixed and enduring. In reality Western films, however, have been crossing new frontiers both within the United States and across cultures since their earliest iterations and continue their territorial expansion into new areas with each decade. In recent years, these forays have resulted in new scholarship on Alternate, Weird, Post, Neo, International, Global, Eastern, and Mid-East Westerns. These areas of study have evolved in the wake of film productions that broke ground with new takes on the mythology of the American West through contemporary cultural lens' from the United States and from around the world, including ones that may not traffic in traditional Western tropes, but still inhabit the spirit of the Western.

Engaging with select films, the authors of the articles in this Special Issue developed their critiques in a graduate course on "Alternate and Global Westerns" that I taught in Fall 2020--a stressful semester at the height of the COVID 19 Pandemic. The course, delivered online, comprised of 24 students once the in person and online sections were combined when the Pandemic necessitated all teaching to be virtual. Despite its unusually large enrollment for a graduate seminar, class engagement on Discussion Boards and research projects was highly productive leading to the decision to showcase select projects in this Special Summer issue of *the quint*. The seven articles that follow were reviewed and selected for their unique and eclectic takes on what makes some Westerns Alternate, Weird, and/or Global, and to what extent they challenge traditional Western tropes of cowboy masculinity, female agency/or lack, manifest destiny, American exceptionalism, and the frontier myth. Since the course emphasizes the malleable and flexible nature of the Western genre, these articles unpack its fusion with subgenres of Superhero, Horror, Wuxia, Science Fiction, and Bollywood films and their embodiment of the "spirit of the Western" regardless of whether made or set in the United States, Europe, or Asia.

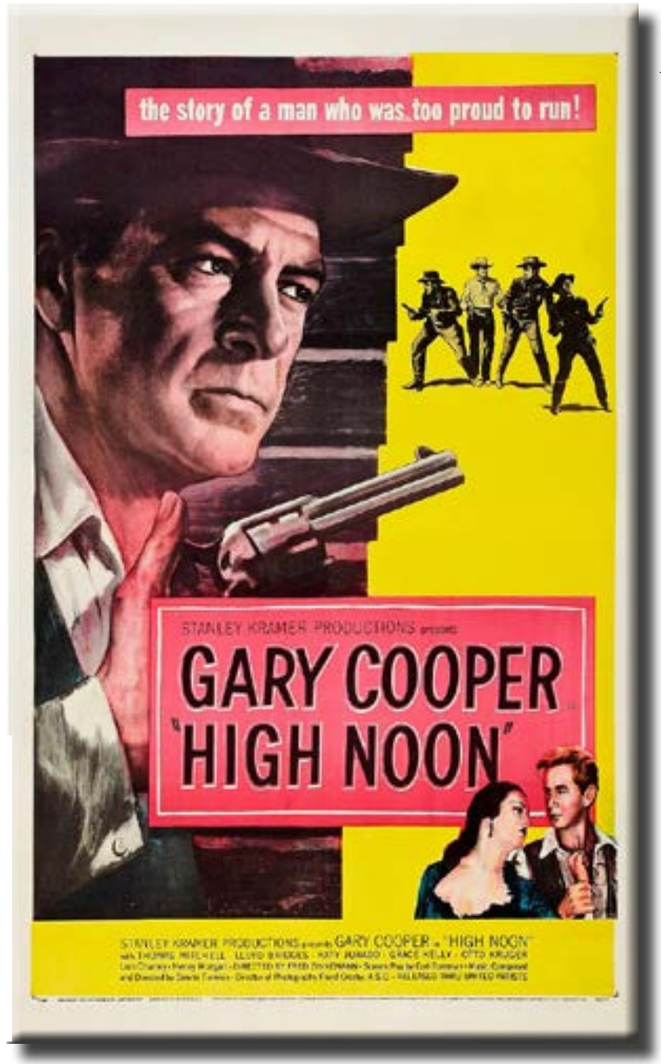
Westerns that offer alternate perspectives to the traditional or typical Western reflect the changing political and economic landscape of America. While some regret the passing of a simpler era, they are not necessarily invested in nostalgic longing for the Old West; instead, they comment on and critique their own times, regardless of the era in which they are set. Alternate Westerns begin appearing in the early1950s on the big screen and on select Western Television series during what some have termed the "the Paleontological TV Single Dad era."[3] Among a number of single dad sitcoms several were Westerns,[4] the most memorable being *The Rifleman* (1958-63), which, ahead of its time in many ways, features a single father who, after the death of his wife, moves west to make a new life and raise his son. Throughout the series the character of Lucas McCain (played by Chuck Connors) never marries; yet, he does an excellent job keeping house, managing his ranch, and raising his son with some assistance from close friend, the local Marshal. The show reifies family values and a quiet life, but does so without giving its handsome yet rugged lead character a female love interest, or wife; instead, it shows the character as being both a provider and an emotionally available parent whose masculinity is balanced with his feminine qualities of parenting and managing a household.

The early 1950s also witnessed some portrayals of Mexican and Native Americans

3. See https://www.tvdads.com/the-50s-60s/.
4. *Sky King* (NBC, ABC, Syndication; 1953-54), *Fury* (NBC, 1955-60), *Adventures of Champion* (CBS, 1955-56), *Brave Eagle* (CBS, 1955-56), *Bonanza* (1959-73), *Stagecoach West* (ABC, 1960-66). See https://www.tvdads.com/the-50s-60s/.

in more or less positive roles. *The Cisco Kid* (1950 -56) featuring mostly Mexican American actors although not a network show, was sold to and broadcasted from several stations and later dubbed and distributed in European countries, including France and Italy. *The Lone Ranger*, another variant, originating from a 1930s radio program with several TV versions and films features a partnership between an American Cowboy and an Indian.[5] Series like *The Cisco Kid* **and** *The Lone Ranger* can be seen as counterpoints to shows like the popular *The Roy Rogers Show* (1958-63). These instances of inclusion of otherness in some weekly Television series, on which the next generation of film and television enthusiasts is raised, could very well indirectly have influenced changes to come in the late1960s and 1970s which either challenge the oneness of Western stories or rejuvenate them with new twists that even when present in some1950s series went largely unnoticed by most audiences. On the other end of the spectrum, *Wild Wild West* (1965-69), listed by *IMDB* as "half science fiction, half western," steps into the modern age with a partnership between a charming gunslinger, James West, modeled on James Bond who has an eye for the ladies with Artemis, his partner and sidekick, who is an inventor and master of disguise. They are called on by President Ulysses S. Grant to become the country's first secret agents. In a James Bond-like way, they travel the West by train, fighting bad guys with their cachet of technological gadgetry.

5. *IMDB* accounting the history of the Lone Ranger and his Indian companion, Tonto, writes: "The character was created in the Lone Ranger radio program by George W. Trendle and Fran Striker back in 1933, the radio program made "Hi-Ho, Silver, away!" so famous among children and adults. It was in 1949 a television version of the radio show debuted on the ABC network, and Clayton Moore became so synonymous with the character he played that he is forever known as the Lone Ranger and has really embraced it. Moore also starred in three Lone Ranger movies - *The Lone Ranger Rides Again* (1955), *The Lone Ranger* (1956), and *The Lone Ranger and the Lost City of Gold* (1958). The Lone Ranger's adventures continued in various forms, including the movies, *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* (1981) and *The Lone Ranger* (2013). Jay Silverheels became his companion Tonto" (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041038/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2).



United Artists, 1952

On the large screen, a handful of Westerns were crossing frontiers of their own. Two films from1952 and 1953, namely *High Noon* directed by Fred Zinnemann and *Shane* directed by George Stevens actually diverged considerably from mainstream Hollywood Westerns of their era. In both films the expression of the frontier spirit is recognizable, albeit in different ways than in most popular and box office Westerns from prior decades; yet, they also can be read as documents of the political, cultural, and societal concerns of the late 1940s and early 1950s and are "a part of the changing currents, the complex and interacting influences of the time." *High Noon* is a quiet film, based primarily on psychological suspense. It is about the way a man is left alone to do the right thing when the community he has befriended and served (including his bride), abandon him. The tight tension and certain elements of the plot of *High Noon* reflect the anxieties caused by the toxic climate engendered by the Hollywood

Blacklist and fear over the powers of the House of Un-American Activities Committee.[6] Today, it is read by many as a response to what was happening in Hollywood with the Hollywood 10 and the House of Un American Activities Committee and because of this underlying contemporaneous political critique, its essence is quite different from the majority of the Western genre films of its time such as the classics of John Ford and those starring John Wayne, the actor who typifies the cowboy for so many. Although made during the time of the "quintessential western," *High Noon* initially was not considered typically Western. The fact that *High Noon* today is recognized as a representative of the Western genre alongside John Ford's films is a testament to the expandability of the genre.

George Stevens, the director of *Shane*, in order to preserve the reality and tenor of the novel the film was based on, presents a view of frontier life as realistically as possible minus the "Hollywood stylizing" with fancy western gear, six shooters, noisy gun fights, and non-stop action that typify most Hollywood Westerns. The film reflects Stevens' desire to present a different vision of the cowboy outlaw and the gun-slinging West, and because of this very untraditional styling and message Shane can be read as an "Alternate Western." Its main protagonist's gentler and quiet demeanor, his slight build and low-keyed costume present a very different kind of quiet leading man. Its anti-violence message goes against the grain of most Hollywood Westerns that glorified cowboys and outlaws on horseback raising a lot of dust with six shooters firing in all directions. When Shane uses his gun, it is only when absolutely necessary. In a critical scene when the Starrett kid, Joey (played by Brandon De Wilde) asks Shane to show him how to use a gun, Shane gives him some pointers only to have Joey's mother emphatically tell Shane her son will not grow up to be a gun slinger. At the end of the film, Shane cannot stay with the Starrett family even though he would like to because "There's no living with a killing. There's no going back from it. Right or wrong, it's a brand, a brand that sticks" (*Shane*). He is compelled to banish himself from a normal life because he has had to kill, even though it was to save the community. Stevens' message is that good guys who end up taking the gun to handle situations (even when they have no other choice), realize that the killing they commit is incompatible with living a normal life.

Both *High Noon* and *Shane* function on a different moral plane than many other Westerns where some men, lured by the freedom of frontier life, develop a desire for lawlessness allowing them freedom without guilt or moral conscience to exploit others and live by their own rules. *High Noon* and *Shane* **p**rioritize duty to one's family, one's calling, one's community, and are about taking responsibility and making choices that are for the greater good of the community. These films also express the tension between a love for settlement, tranquility, and the draw of transience. We see how this works in *Shane* and in *High Noon*, where even the female characters find themselves caught within it. Both films use slow pacing deliberately to set them apart from other Hollywood Westerns in which loud noises, fast horses and fast guns cause raucous noise and mayhem. The camera work of *High Noon* and *Shane* is soft and often lingers on their locations exaggerating the tension in *High Noon* or the simplicity of evocative natural landscapes in *Shane*. Stevens takes his crew to locations where the settler community in the novel had settled and has houses for the sets built to replicate the original settlement. As with

6. "What a Classic '50's Western can teach us about the Hollywood Blacklist." Author Interview with Glen Frankel (*'High Noon': The Hollywood Blacklist and the Making of an American Classic*) on NPR February 21, 2017. https://www.npr.org/2018/01/30/580689793/what-a-classic-50s-western-can-teach-us-about-the-hollywood-blacklistLinks to an external site.

his settings, Stevens uses authentic costumes people wore during that time rather than western style cowboy gear that most western films had made popular.

Despite breaking from the typical pattern of the entertaining classic Westerns of the past and present, both films still continue to be emblematic of the overall Western genre, pointing to its flexible and expanding nature. Their "alternative" characteristics that diverge from what audiences of the early decades of the Western considered to be defining characteristics of the American west are not as singular as one may imagine. The question what makes a Western "American" is not as easy to answer as one might think as that too can be malleable. This is proven to some extent by the fact that as the Western travelled east to Europe around the time American audiences were losing their enthusiasm for Westerns, the Spaghetti Westerns from Italy, initially popular mostly in Europe and Asia eventually make their way to the United States and today many Americans think these are the "real" American Westerns. This phenomenon of genre borrowing, bending and fusing with other genres while not specific to the Western; however, occurs fairly steadily during the 1960s as the popularity of the traditional style Western began to wane and production of Hollywood Westerns declined. Part of the reason for the decline related to changing audience demographics, but the social and economic conditions in the United States undergoing seismic changes were an important factor. From the early 1960s through the1970s the Hippy Flower Child movement, Vietnam War, draft resistance, and changes in youth lifestyles had begun to create a divide between generations and these shifting attitudes came to be reflected in most films, with Westerns being no exception. In the United States, Westerns start tackling contemporary issues around gender, sexuality, race, class, and environment as in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1971), *Buck and the Preacher* (1972), *Blazing Saddles (*1974), and in recent decades *Dead Man* (1995) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) among others. At the same time the Western was being rejuvenated in Germany, Italy and Eastern Europe though primarily for European audiences.

Besides exploring German and Italian cinematic forays into the Western genre, Christopher Frayling, in his seminal work on European Westerns, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, addresses trans-Atlantic cross cultural interactions and borrowings between American and European cinemas to show how much the American Western as a film genre is an invention of European understanding of what life in the West was like and a collaboration between Hollywood and European artists and craftspeople within the various cinema industries. Tracing the birth of early Westerns, in his introduction, Frayling sets the stage to show how the Italian and German Westerns evolved. Discussing several films that were early pioneers, Frayling explains how early 1920s Hollywood Westerns draw from stories, novels, and accounts about the California Gold Rush and legends and novels about Sutter's Gold, many written by Europeans (5). Interestingly, Sergei Eisenstein, Russian director and film theorist, wrote the first script for the Sutter's Gold film but was not given the role of director for it because the socialist aspects of his script disturbed some Hollywood producers. Frayling's analysis of different versions of *Sutter's Gold* from 1925 to 1936 illustrates how European values came to be embedded in Westerns alongside Turner's frontier narrative given the collaborative mix of the cinematic geniuses of several European

countries, including Russia and Germany, with the Hollywood system. Frayling observes

> [b]etween 1925 and 1936, three European artists (of radically different political persuasions saw in the Sutter story a chance to relate the classic 'Western' to Old World cultural and socio-political concerns of the moment. The clash between the 'storybook' account of the Gold Rush, and the allegory of Sutter's rise to fame, provided them with a perfect opportunity to view the 'Western' from a European perspective. (5)

Hence, many Westerns produced during this time are an amalgam of the diverse cultural, political and economic histories of the people involved in the genre's early iterations and these histories, backgrounds, and values of writers, directors, cameramen, and actors influenced and created the storylines and performances that came to represent the genre as an "American" creation. These early years of cinema overall contained a great deal of collaboration between Europe and America as there were not many artists and innovators in the field.

With the decline in Hollywood productions of Westerns both on television and the large screen during the 1960s, European filmmakers in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Italy who had begun making their own versions of the Western drew on American talent for their films.[7] This led to the popularity of the Spaghetti Western and during its heyday in the 1960s, a good deal of talent crossover occurs between the United States, Italy, Germany, and France, and especially in Italian productions. The crossover of acting

7. Quentin Tarantino's homage to the Western genre in his 2019 film, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,* addresses this in plot and tone when Rick Dalton(played by Leonardo DiCaprio) finds his career as a Television cowboy in Hollywood waning and takes an acting role in Spaghetti Westerns in Italy when his Television show goes on hiatus.

and other talent include Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef, Henry Fonda, Charles Bronson, Franco Nero, Richard Harrison, Klaus Kinski, John Louis Trintignant, Frank Wolf, Lang Jeffries, Chuck Connors, Jason Robards, Jack Elam, Jack Betts, Gordon Mitchell, Thomas Hunter, Ray Saunders, Van Johnson, Tony Anthony, Henry Silva, Burt Reynolds. Eli Wallach, Jack Palance, to name many. Eastwood, having worked on several films under Sergio Leone's direction, goes on to become a skillful director in his own right. While a handful of Italian directors make their mark on the Western genre such as Sergio Leone, Sergio Corbucci, Enzo G. Castellari, Sergio Solima, and Gianfranco Parolini, the vast majority of them make films primarily for European audiences in Italian or French that are rarely distributed in English speaking countries.

The Italian and other Euro Westerns could fall into the category of Alternate Westerns because even though many of them pay nostalgic homage to the Hollywood Western, they are critical of some aspects of it. Leone, despite his love of the American Western, is sometimes at odds with some of its tropes. In *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) and *Duck You Sucker* (1971), he expresses through the bewilderment of his characters a critique of the militaristic aspects of frontier expansion. In *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, for example, when Blondie and Tuco without taking sides observe the mindless battles during the Civil War scenes--they appear to be like Leone onlookers, foreigners watching American soldiers running around stupidly killing each other in a war that doesn't mean anything to them other than a sheer waste of human life. Frayling, along with other scholars points out how Leone uses the Civil War to comment on the role of violence during this time in America. The Civil War scenes serve as the backdrop

against which Leone's characters pursue their own agendas searching for gold. Their crooked deals and small acts of amorality are on a much smaller scale than the massive waste of human life caused by the Civil War. As they cross over to the other side of the river heading towards the graveyard where the gold is buried, the camera pans across the carnage all over the landscape while Blondie and Tuco watch the troops heading towards certain death. Leone critiques how average men get called upon to have a higher moral compass, yet the country uses citizens as fodder for causes or principles that are neither clear nor meaningful to them.

Euro International Film, 1966

Since Leone's Spaghetti Westerns, also critique American capitalism (as in *Once Upon a Time in the West*), they can be considered both Alternate and Global, especially in his re-inventions which revived and invigorated the Western genre in the 1960s in ways not seen since. With the enormous success of Leonie's dollar trilogy that raised Eastwood to stardom, numerous imitative formulaic Spaghetti Westerns were also made. The other director besides Leone to acquire a cult like status of his own is Sergio Corbucci

whose *Django* (1966) and *The Great Silence* (1968) stylistically differ from Leone's films. The popularity of Leone and Corbucci's films reached all around the world and for many countries, these became the "real western." For most audiences it was irrelevant who made them and where as long as they were tales of the American West which symbolized a time and place where people dealt with life's problem with direct and simple action despite the violence and brutality of the era. Unlike American Westerns of earlier decades that made clear-cut divisions between good and evil characters, Spaghetti Westerns express a more realistic understanding of the moral ambiguity of their protagonists who are often anti-heroes. Even with titles like *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) the audience realizes that the three characters are in it for what they can get--money. *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) is about the money Eastwood's character (the Man with No Name) wants for his participation in the fight, but as the film progresses, gives it all to help the woman prisoner and her family escape. Good characters too are driven by monetary motives, but may at times of crisis do the unexpected. The classic American Westerns have more clear cut good and bad characters, which Leone found unrealistic particularly for people facing the uncertainties of frontier life.

The Western's journey eastward does not stop with Europe as it continues "westering" further East. In her discussion of "the global travels of the genre" in Chapter 6 and in the Conclusion of *Captivating Westerns: The Middle East in the American West*, Susan Kollin too points to Asian Westerns as the next stage of travel for the genre of the Western. This is not surprising given that both traditional American Westerns of John Ford and others along with Spaghetti Westerns were hugely popular in Asia and where Hollywood

and European films were distributed because not only were these countries fond of Hollywood films in general, but found Westerns resonated with storylines and situations paralleling those of several global cultures. Global cinema cultures begin creating their own "Westerns," at times to reify and emulate/imitate, and at other times to challenge, revise, and reinvent the American Western's popular tropes and stereotypes of frontier narratives, cowboy masculinity, and American exceptionalism. They do this often as a response to their own individual histories, cultures, and contemporaneous political and economic conditions as can be seen in *Sholay* (1975), *Kung Fu Hustle* (2005), *Sukiyaki Western Django* (2007), *The Good the Bad the Weird* (2008), and *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2008),

Columbia Pictures/Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2004

among others. While in prior decades scholarship has not addressed in any great depth how this genre is employed by international cinema cultures, lately there is a burgeoning interest in this area of film studies, mostly among Asian scholars. Stephen Teo's *Eastern Westerns: Film and Genre Inside and Outside Hollywood* is one of the more comprehensive discussions of Asian Westerns that, in addition to discussing a number of Eastern Westerns, also examines American Westerns through Eastern cultural perspectives and myths.

In later Global Westerns, issues are more complicated than with the Euro Westerns, since for many directors in other parts of the world, knowledge of the Western is already a pastiche of the classic Hollywood Western with the Spaghetti and other Euro Westerns of their childhood. As mentioned earlier, Spaghetti Westerns in particular were far more popular internationally before they were accepted in the United States. Also, for many young directors from some countries in the Middle East, South and East Asia, Australia and New Zealand, concepts around ideas of the frontier myth and the masculine pioneer spirit have strong similarities to their own national histories of colonization and mythologies. As a result, popular culture monikers have been given to films from these regions to define their various Western styles as Vegetarian,[8] Miso, Noodle, Kimchi, Meat Pie, and Hamburger Westerns. Many of these films combine the nostalgia these directors have for the old American and Italian Spaghetti Westerns they grew up with and the need to have their films reflect something about their own culture meaningfully for their own audiences. This new cross cultural melange and engagement adds new levels of meaning and further enhances the global appeal of the Western genre .

8. A 2009 Tamil language Western "Quick Gun Murugun: The Misadventures of an Indian Cowboy" " is about a fight to save cows from the non-vegetarians and hence can be categorized as a 'Vegetarian Western!' According to the synopsis from *IMDB,* "*Quick Gun Murugun* is a western spoof with attitude, featuring outlandish songs, outrageous melodrama and crazy action sequences including a classic duel in a traffic jam. The film tells the story of Quick Gun Murugun – a South Indian karmic cowboy whose duty is to protect and cows. When faced with a world-conquering arch villain restaurant owner who wants to create the ultimate McDosa chain using beef, Quick Gun enters into an epic battle of vegetarianism vs. non-vegetarianism that spans time and space, from a small South Indian village to an Indian heaven, then finally to a cosmopolitan Mumbai across 15 years (see *Phat Phish Motion Pictures"* https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1176911/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1).

The question that arises is to what extent any audience's expectations are shaped by the original mythology of the Western which happens to be a creation between European and Hollywood cinema industries together as Frayling has shown. That mythology then becomes part of what Alternate and Global Westerns either challenge or reshape through their cultural, political, and geographical lens of the times in which they are created. Some Global Westerns may not necessarily engage in challenging this mythology, especially those that find in it relevant parallels to cultural mythologies or epics of their own countries, as for example in Takashi Miike's *Sukiyaki Western Django* (2007)--meant to be a prequel to Corbucci's Django--the rivalry between the two gangs parallels not only Britain's War of the Roses, but recalls tribal enmities expressed in Japanese epics such as *The Tales of the Heike*. In it, Ruriko's grandson, the offspring of her Heiki son and Genji daughter-in-law, a hybrid progeny of the coming together of the two warring factions, is shown tending a hybrid rose bush in the film. He is the future or at least the hope for a better future from what is a brutal and violent time in Japanese, Western, and British history. The film works on multiple levels of confluences. Miike layers not only references to Spaghetti Westerns and other films, but to historical myths and histories of both Western and Asian cultures and societies. While this and other Eastern Westerns may not be quintessentially Western in the American sense of the term, they employ Western style narratives of frontier life to address problems/issues of their time and culture. Global cinephiles, drawing on the quintessential American elements of the genre, craft their own versions to address different national and cultural dilemmas. While many transnational filmmakers are fans of the American Western, for some it is purely an art form they choose to work with and enhance. In the process, viewers and students of these two strains of filmmakers (the Alternate and the Global) can see how both groups of fans of the genre, mold it to fit the narratives they want to tell resulting in a tremendously wide range of diversity of perspective and new ways of creating a Western ethos.

Five Star Production, 2000

Some Global Westerns redefine the mythology of the Western through romantic plots peppered with popular culture references reflecting entirely different cultural and geographical experiences alien to an American Western ethos. This is the case with the Thai cult Western by Wisit Sasanatieng, *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2008). He creates his own

mythology through a pastiche of United States, Asian, and South Asian Bollywood style film genres intertwining them with Thailand's colonial history and her contemporary class and economic inequities that can be traced back to the years of the Second World War. He is less interested in challenging the mythology of the American Western, and more focused on creating a new contemporary mythology of the Thai Western that incorporates all the influences, historical and contemporary, in narrating a love story during troubled and violent times through his innovative experimental cinematic technique. Sasanatieng, a creative imaginative filmmaker, mixes genres using color and scene sets in unusually vibrant ways, His film is like a moveable painting with mesmerizing dreamlike otherworld aesthetics that dialog between cultures.

Most directors of Alternate and Global Westerns manipulate the genre to their own ends and in doing so often create a new kind of film, not necessarily one with tried and true Western criteria, but one that uniquely reflects the spirit of the Western nevertheless. Others fuse Western generic elements with those of other genres or subgenres to create films that resonate at multiple levels. These innovations run the risk of these films becoming cult films or appealing only to smaller coteries; and, in some cases not working as Westerns or even as reasonably good films. This is a chance, however, that many creative directors of Alternate and Global Westerns take to voice both their admiration for American and Spaghetti Westerns and to express their unique cultural and diverse perspective whether from an alternate culture or one from a geographically different place. The fact that they may reference and emulate different styles and genres adds to their uniqueness and individuality. They are aware of the traditions of the Western and also of their own cultural moment and/or history and they voice their own perspectives on both through their creations--a process that scholars have begun to define as "internationalizing," "globalizing," or "weirding" the Western. The essays that follow explore these processes with reference to specific films that each author chooses to analyze as Alternate or Global Westerns.

Hayley Shipley's article "'He's bad, he's beautiful, he's crazy … he's The Man With No Name': George Miller's Mad Max Franchise in Conversation with Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns," explores the Mad Max franchise from Australia by examining the many ways George Miller pays homage to Sergio Leonie's Spaghetti Westerns. Next, in "'The Best There Is at What He Does': Weirding the Western and the Superhero in James Mangold's *Logan*," Bryan Bove, noting the similarities between the cowboy and the superhero, analyzes the series of films based on the character of Logan and his alias the Wolverine as "Weird Westerns." Starting with the notion that the malleability of the "idea of the frontier" is tied into capitalist ideology, Joe Neary illustrates how this is played out in two films *Spring Breakers* (2012) and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) in his article, "'Trudging Through the Ruins and the Relics': *Spring Breakers* , *Midnight Cowboy* and the Expansive Spirit of the Western Under Capitalist Realism." This is followed by "Cowboy Masculinity Redefined: From 'Hollow Masculine Icons' to a new 'Anguished Taciturnity' by Marshall Hoovler, who explores how many Alternate Westerns deconstruct the cowboy's tough guy image either through buddy films like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), or through films with empowered women characters as in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971) and the modern *Jane Got a Gun*

(2015). In the next article, "Agency and the Capitalist Entrapment of Cowboys in *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*," Olayinka Oladosu, taking another angle on the Western's capitalist ideology, examines Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* as exemplifying "capitalist entrapment." Then, Shane Heskith, in "Slashing Genre Lines: Viewing the Texas Chainsaw Massacre Films as Weird Westerns," analyses the fusion of horror genre films of the Chainsaw Massacre series with the Western genre as "Weird" Westerns. This special issue closes with Robyn Perry's article, "So Far West, it's East: Asia and the West(ern)," in which she takes the reader all the way East to examine Asian Westerns from Japan, Korea and Thailand: *Sukiyaki Western Django*, T*he Good the Bad the Weird* (2008), and *Tears of the Black Tiger* as global cross-cultural iterations that are breathing new life into the genre by making global connections. This collection of articles together reveals multifarious possibilities in the area of Alternate and Global Westerns for further scholarly attention. The genre of the Western continues to travel and will likely find new frontiers to cross as long as filmmakers continue imagining them.

Khani Begum
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He's bad, he's beautiful, he's crazy … he's The Man With No Name": George Miller's Mad Max Franchise in Conversation with Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns

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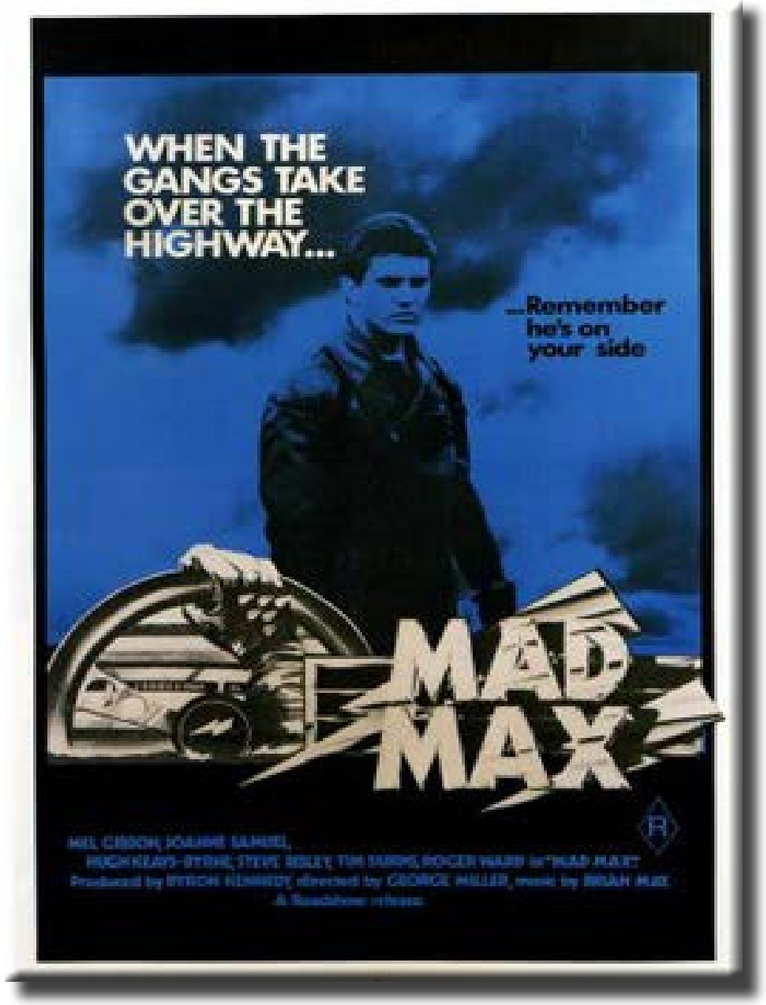
By the time George Miller was directing the third film in the *Mad Max* franchise – *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* – there was no doubt that he was paying homage to Sergio Leone both in aesthetics and story. As the titular Max (played by Mel Gibson) enters into a cage-match to the death, he is introduced as a man who is bad, beautiful, crazy, and The Man With No Name. For any audience member familiar with the Spaghetti Western, Max is immediately tied to Clint Eastwood's The Man With No Name in Leone's 'Dollars' trilogy. This connection, while obvious in this instance, was a long time coming for the franchise. Miller, from his first film, used the setting of a post-apocalyptic Australia to

put a spin on the Leone Western. Where Leone's films are working to tell a story of the American past from an Italian perspective, Miller is influenced by this Italian view of the American past to tell an imagined story about Australia's future. In a complicated web of culture and background, Miller is able to craft a franchise that draws on the perceived lawlessness and violence of the American West through the lens of Leone's brutalness, attention to detail, and harsh look at what it means to be moral in the face of strife. In Leone's 'Dollar' trilogy, as well as the almost-sequel of *Once Upon A Time In The West* (1968), the characters are driven by greed above all – they want money and the security that comes with having it. The *Mad Max* franchise seems to be unconcerned with money; however, it does not shy away from greed and want. By working in conversation with Leone's films, *Mad Max* tackles the question of what men truly want and need to survive and what role a wandering protagonist should take as he stumbles into stories. While it took until the third film to make the bridge between Max and The Man With No Name, the franchise was always asking what it means for a man to be a hero, a killer, and a survivor in a world that is unforgiving.

Christopher Frayling writes that "Leone makes no attempt to engage our sympathy with the characters, but watches the brutality of his protagonists with a detached calm: they are brutal because of the environment in which they exist. And they make no attempt to change that environment. They accept it, without question." [1] Miller clearly took this brutality to heart as each of his films features the same, often times grotesque violence that Leone's films have. That said, the first film of the franchise, *Mad Max* (1979), does instill a sense of sympathy for the protagonist that Leone's films never had. This analysis examines all four *Mad Max* films and four of Leone films; however, it is not necessarily a one-to-one comparison because Leone's 'Dollar' trilogy does not have the same "origin story" that Miller's franchise does. By including the backstory to Max, Miller makes his first departure from Leone's filmmaking style. The brutality is still there, but there is a level of slow emotional investment that feels unique to *Mad Max.* The film begins with a classic cop and robber chase – if the classic includes a post-apocalyptic world where people kill for fuel and have tied their sense of religion to drugs and gasoline as opposed to the church. Max starts his journey as a cop who has to be bribed to stay on the force after seeing the way that the traditional justice system is failing to punish the bad guys. Having seen his partner nearly burned alive by a biker gang that keeps escaping justice, Max takes a vacation with his family to clear his head. While on the trip, he and his family are hunted down by the gang who eventually kill both his son and wife by running them over with their motorcycles. Seeing their deaths and being unable to prevent them, Max becomes consumed with anger – hence the Mad – and vows to get revenge on these men. In a scene reminiscent of *Duck, You Sucker* (1971), Max leaves the leader of the gang handcuffed to a car that will explode – the use of explosives is yet another homage to Leone's violence and style especially in the dynamite scene in *Duck You Sucker.* Having gotten his revenge, Max leaves to travel the post-apocalyptic wasteland and these travels become the subject of the next three Mad Max films.

When Leone begins his 'Dollars' trilogy, we know nothing about The Man With No Name – he merely shows up in a warring town and begins playing the two factions

1. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 160.



Roadshow Entertainment, WArner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1979

against one another. Because we know nothing about his past or his motivations, the audience lacks the sense of empathy that they have for Max in the Max franchise. When the audience watches Max brutally murder and leave a man for dead, we understand why he had to do it. Not only do we see how this biker gang has escaped justice for murder, rape, and an imaginable litany of other crimes, but we know how much Max was impacted by the murder of his partner and his family. He is taking justice into his own hands in a way that is ultimately as rewarding to watch as it is graphic. Where Max is seeking justice and a sense of peace in his first film, The Man With No Name in Leone's first Dollars trilogy seems only to be seeking money. In *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), The Man With No Name sees that "there's money to be made in a town like" San Miguel which is caught between two warring families.[2] This money is the only way he finds a sense of peace and security even as his scheming to get more money is causing the fighting between the Baxters and the Rojos to come to a head. The Man With No Name does not sympathize with the townspeople until he meets a mother and her child – and to a degree her husband - who are caught in the middle of the fighting. As he gives them the money he has made and helps them escape, he makes an allusion to his past – he views saving their lives as a second chance to save the lives of someone he was unable to save once. In this, one can make the connection that George Miller used the first *Mad Max* film as a way to tell this story. Perhaps The Man With No Name was once a man of the law who lost his family to a group of outlaws – Leone leaves his past ambiguous enough that this could be a real possibility. Reading *Mad Max* as a spiritual prequel to The Man With No Name puts the rest of the franchise in direct conversation with Leone's films by asking how this haunted protagonist deals with morality in his new world.

In addition to the story elements that Miller borrows, he also plays off of Leone's stylistic choices – but always with a twist. The Mad Max movies are modern Westerns in that they take place in the late 20th century (or possible the early 21st century, it is never clear) in a time where motor vehicles remain the main mode of transportation. The classic Western horse is replaced by the motorcycle and the muscle car – a decision that impacts the soundscape of the franchise compared to that of the traditional Spaghetti Western. Leone's films use their soundtracks as set pieces. Frayling notes how Leone's composer, Ennio Morricone, "uses 'sounds' and snatches from main themes to represent characters, loud orchestral passages for action sequences or panoramic landscape shots."[3]

2. *A Fistful of Dollars,* directed by Sergio Leone, (1964; Rome, Italy: Jolly Films).

3. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 165.

Miller, rather than orchestras and whistles and trills, uses the sounds of engines revving up and exhausts backfiring to set the tone of his film. At the time Leone's films came out, Morricone's choices were unusual and would come to represent both the director and the genre. Miller's composer for the first two films, Brian May, took this idea of scoring the film and incorporated vehicle sounds to set the tone. By doing so, May is able to situate the films soundly as Westerns, while also making it clear that they are different and new. These films and their mechanical sounds show that Max is living in a new type of Western landscape – and nowhere is this clearer than in the second film of the franchise. *Mad Max: The Road Warrior,* which shows Max in a much more broken-down society than the one in the first film. In the first film, there is still a sense of the existence of a conventional society with stores, ice cream shops, a justice system, and hospitals. While in Leone's films the West is shown as growing more and more urbanized and "civilized," Miller is doing the opposite. The world of *The Road Warrior* is empty – the film shows multiple scenes of an open, empty road surrounded by deserts. It is easy to imagine that this is what Leone's West would look like with highways instead of train tracks. While *The Road Warrior* takes place in a broken Australia, the use of desert landscapes and other visual conventions of the Western, show Leone's influence transcends location.

The brokenness of *The Road Warrior* sets the tone of the film – Max is now in fully The Man With No Name mode as a man who "roams aimlessly looking for petrol, food and water that he needs to survive."[4] There is no order to Max's world, just him and his pet dog as they try to live through their travels. Understanding the brutality of the American West during the Civil War, one can also assume that it was difficult for The Man With No Name and the other wandering outlaws and vigilantes to survive; however, we never see this. When The Man With No Name rides off into the sunset, we never see him have to barter for food or water. By showing Max go through those trials of survival, we are once again made sympathetic to his character. Where The Man With No Name is searching for more opportunities to make money he will never spend, Max is searching for essential resources at every turn. However, *The Road Warrior* does find Max channeling The Man With No Name as he begins his own sort of scheming in order to gain much needed supplies from a traveling group of survivors.

Max comes across this settler group who are mining an old oil field for what fuel is left before they continue on their way. In a scene that feels more reminiscent of a John Ford Western than a Spaghetti Western, the settlement is set up like a wagon train encampment – the wagons, now replaced by buses, encircle the oil mine for protection. As the settlement is attacked by a roaming biker gang, Miller is drawing on the Western trope of a dangerous Indigenous group attacking white settlers. Paul Robertson breaks down the racialized aspects of this dynamic writing that:

> in their heavy borrowing of established John Ford-era western film conventions, [*The Road Warrior* and other contemporary films of its kind] reinforce negative associations of Aboriginal/Native/Indian iconography with the Other and with a threat to white, industrialized civilization. Although the Fordist westerns depicted Indians as a violent obstacle to a modern, industrial state coming into being in the nineteenth-century United States, this genre of postnuclear dystopian films

4. James Curnow, "Mad Max and The Man With No Name", last modified May 23, 2015, http://curnblog.com/2015/05/23/mad-max-and-the-man-with-no-name-a-reflection/.

Produzione Europee Associate, United Artists, 1966

presents racially indistinct yet Indian-coded "savages" as a violent threat to attempts at reforming a devastated western civilization.[5]

Max seems to exist outside of this racialized and moralized dichotomy he is instead "an enigmatic loner seeking his fortune but decides to help out, first for the sake of his own well-being but ultimately out of principal."[6] Much like The Man With No Name in *A Fistful of Dollars,* Max just wants resources and then to move on. He only seems to help the settlement after they save his life when Max attempts to leave after receiving his bargained for fuel and supplies. Max's decision to ultimately help the settlement escape is a complicated one – he is both clearing the debts he owed the settlement for saving his life as well as positioning himself and the audience alongside civilization over savagery. There is also a sense that he is doing this selfishly for revenge against the gang that killed his dog and only companion. Much like

5. Paul Lester Robertson, Indians of the Apocalypse: Native Appropriation and Representation in 1980s Dystopic Films and Comic Books, *Journal of Popular Culture Vol 51, Issue 1* (2018), 68 – 90, https://doi-org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/10.1111/jpcu.12649.
6. Martin Beana, "The Road Warrior: A Post-Apocalyptic Western." *Hand Crafted Cinema*, June 8, 2010, http://www.martinbaena.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/the-road-warrior-a-post-apocalyptic-western.

The Man With No Name, "his identity is defined by the self-interested moves he makes" – Max's choice to help the settlement instead of leaving them for dead is tied to his sense of obligation and revenge rather than a real connection to these people and their survival.[7]

While both Max and The Man With No Name are driven by their own needs and motives, there is still a sense of sympathy for Max that The Man With No Name is never given – at least until *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (1966). Throughout the *Mad Max* films, Max is shown to be suffering – his character has "transitioned from able-bodied masculinity in the first film to a limping, maddened road warrior" who clearly suffers from PTSD and the emotional weight of his actions to survive.[8] The same cannot be said for The Man With No Name in spite of the violence he has been a part of. He is not shown to be suffering until in *The Good. The Bad, and The Ugly* when "the sheer duration of [his] suffering makes Eastwood's character a plausible lower-class hero whose physical redemption is the contemporary correlation of Christ's spiritual redemption."[9] While it feels like a stretch to call The Man With No Name a sacrificial, Christ-like figure, the film does specifically put him in the position of the titular "Good". Despite the fact that we see his character lie, steal, and betray his partner in crime (Tuco, The Bad, played by Eli Wallach), The Man With No Name is the character the audience finds themselves supporting in the film's hunt for treasure across a Civil War torn West. He is shown to have a sense of intelligence and charisma that makes him adept at surviving the West – traits shared by Max as well. This is also the first time the audience sees The Man With

7. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 168.
8. Mick Broderick and Katie Ellis, *Trauma and Disability In Mad Max: Beyond the Road Warrior's Fury,* (Cham, Switzerland; Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2019), page 1.
9. Andrew Sarris, "Spaghetti and Sagebrush", *The Village Voice,* (19/26, September 1968).

No Name suffer to the degree that they root for his recovery and ultimate success. The suffering comes when Tuco drags him across the desert with no water, causing him to almost die from dehydration. Leone makes it a point to show The Man With No Name's decline in a gruesome and visceral way – his lips begin to crack and bleed and his body becomes ravaged by sand and heat. When it becomes clear that he will survive because he has the key to finding the lost treasure, the audience is relieved. This relief partly comes from this being the first time that The Man With No Name came close to not surviving. He is continually too smart, too fast, and too good to suffer any real or lasting harm, so the audience is expecting that he will be rewarded for surviving almost dying in the desert. And he is rewarded at the end of the film as he rides off into the sunset having found the treasure and outsmarted his former partner and his competition.

As mentioned earlier, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* makes the connection between Max and The Man With No Name considerably obvious by referring to Max as The Man With No Name. The first part of his introduction is also a tie-in to *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.* with Max being referred to as bad, beautiful, and crazy – 'the bad' connects to 'The Bad,' 'the beautiful' is meant to show the opposite side of 'The Ugly,' which leaves 'the crazy' to represent a change in 'The Good.' If The Man With No Name is 'The Good,' then why make Max 'the crazy?' What about his reality and his actions can be read as crazy, or is it merely a nod to his challenges with mental health as he continues on his journey? The latter feels more plausible as Max's actions in the third film position him as a force of good more than they do of a crazed man. *Beyond Thunderdome* finds Max in two different communities, both shaped by violence and a nostalgia for the past. He first goes to Bartertown, "an outpost of trade, sustenance, and community, although an undercurrent of violence remains present, threatening to rupture civil order."[10] The town is run by Aunty Entity (played by Tina Turner) who keeps her neo-colony alive through a strict separation between the working and the ruling classes. While the colonial narrative is flipped on its head from the sheer fact that the leader of this town is a Black woman, it is still a more conventional civilization than we saw in the previous film. Max finds himself in the middle of a possible proletariat uprising from the workers – much like The Man With No Name, he seems to stumble into these large debates and disagreements with no real agency at the beginning. Aunty Entity, in an effort to squash the potential working-class uprising, tasks Max with defeating Blaster – a physically intimidating man who works in tandem with a midget called Master to run the worker's factory - in a cage-match to the death in return for supplies. It is at the end of this fight that Max first challenges the assumption that he is 'The Crazy' rather than 'The Good.' Having incapacitated Blaster, Max is told that he must now kill him. Before he can, he takes off Blaster's helmet and discovers that Blaster has what appears to be Down's Syndrome. He refuses to kill "a man with the mind of a child" and shows remorse for having injured him at all – his refusal to kill Blaster seems crazy to the people of Bartertown as it goes against their society's rule.[11] Yet, for the audience this places Max as the good guy and his punishment for breaking the rules feels particularly harsh.

In yet another direct reference to *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,* Max is punished with the "gulag". While this is linguistically a connection to Soviet labor camps, the actual

10. Paul Williams, "Beyond "Mad Max III:" Race, Empire, and Heroism on Post-Apocalyptic Terrain," *Science Fiction Studies* vol. 32, no. 2 (2005): 304.

11. *Mad Max III: Beyond Thunderdome,* directed by George Miller and George Ogilvie, (1985: Sydney, Australia; Kennedy Miller Productions).

punishment itself is much more like the one The Man With No Name suffers. Max is put on a horse who, rather than following a carrot on a stick, follows a container of water and is sent into the desert. Where Leone wanted the audience to see The Man With No Name's face as he suffered from dehydration, Max's face is covered with a comically large, paper-mâché head. We know that Max is suffering, especially after his horse sinks into a pit of quicksand, but we do not see the same level of violence that we saw from Leone. Perhaps this is because Max should not have to suffer the way The Man With No Name does – he was punished for an act of kindness whereas The Man With No Name was punished in an act of revenge. Max is not a character who we see as needing redeeming despite, or maybe in spite, of his madness. Again, Max takes on a more sympathetic role than The Man With No Name because we are continually reminded of his pain and suffering as we have followed him through physical and emotional scarring in each film. Leone tells the audience that The Man With No Name is the good guy where Miller shows us that Max is a good man who is forced to act in bad ways to survive. Even when Max is compelled by a sense of revenge, it comes across as justified due to the continual empathy Max is given – something that continues to ring true in *Beyond Thunderdome.*

After Max's horse dies in the desert, he wanders around looking for water until he passes out and is found by a group of children who believe he is their prophesized savior, Captain Walker. Although they are the ones to save Max's life, he soon adopts a very paternalistic relationship towards these children – something that is complicated by the racialized elements of their characterization. "The children take the place of 'Indigenous,' 'Native' people … understood to [be] 'savage'[because] the children are exiled from the edifice of civilized order, not through choice but because of an abortive evacuation attempt at the outbreak of nuclear war."[12] Because these children are racialized as others, the paternalistic nature of Max's relationship to them is reflective of the real life paternalism of the American West and the colonial founding of Australia; however, there is an argument to be made that Max seeks to save and take care of these children because he was once a father himself. While the racial aspects of this relationship cannot be ignored, they can be overshadowed by Max's fatherhood. The Man With No Name risks his life to save the mother and child in *A Fistful of Dollars* because of a paternalistic need to help them and make up for a past failure. Max is given the same opportunity here as multiple children set out to find the promised paradise of their prophecies, "Tomorrow-Morrow Land". The children are unable to survive alone in the desert and Max not only saves them, but is able to get them resources by covertly raiding Bartertown. Having fled Bartertown with enough supplies to set out to find their new home, Max and the children are then attacked by Aunty Entity. Max is able to destroy Bartertown with the help of the workers and kill most of Aunty Entity's forces, allowing the children to safely return to their camp and begin their journey to their prophesized promised land.

Like The Man With No Name, Max refuses any opportunity to capitalize on his paternalism by joining a family unit. Frayling argues that Leone paints families as "a central, positive force" as well as "motivation" for his characters; yet The Man With No Name is always alone. [13] Miller does the same things with Max by having him refuse to join the

12. Paul Williams, "Beyond "Mad Max III:" Race, Empire, and Heroism on Post-Apocalyptic Terrain," Science Fiction Studies 32, no. 2 (2005): 306.
13. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 182.

Euro International Films, Paramount Pictures, 1968

settlement in *The Road Warrior* and the children in *Beyond Thunderdome*. If the Leone style of hero is meant to merely accept the world around him, then it would make sense that both of these men reject the chance to join a new society and choose to ride off into the sunset alone time and time again. In *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, Tuco reflects that The Man With No Name is "all alone … not even a mother" in an effort to emotionally connect with him.[14] Even though they are two men who are both alone, The Man With No Name makes no effort to truly form a familial relationship with him outside of not killing him at the end of the film. Max, who does not seem to have the same antagonistic relationship with any of his companions, also chooses solitude in the end. Max's loneliness feels palpable and disheartening where The Man With No Name's choice feels stoic and less emotionally charged. Are Leone and Miller saying that the mark of the Western hero is his loneliness above his greed and morality? Or is it merely that this type of hero is coming to an end – both *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome* end with a voiceover that positions Max as a mythical figure from the past of the people he has saved. Perhaps by turning Max into a figure of legend, Miller is positioning him in the same past as the Spaghetti Western – stories that while influential, are just that, stories. These are no longer men whose journeys we should follow as they have grown outdated as the world continues to change and shape into new and different societies – societies that they themselves have no place in anymore.

Frayling details how *"Once Upon a Time in the West* was originally to open with a scene containing Leone's farewell to the 'Dollars' trilogy … by showing the death of those three characters [The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly] in the [opening] credits sequence."[15] Their deaths by a new protagonist were meant to represent how the Western had moved on from the wildness of the genre. This scene never happened as Eastwood refused, but if it had, it would have cemented *Once Upon a Time in the West* as the final story of The Man With No Name. By killing this character off, Leone is allowing the silent, solitary, and selfish hero to fade into legend as society becomes more modern. The greediness of The Man With No Name is no longer possible when money is controlled by corporations and corrupt businessmen instead of outlaws and other vigilantes. While Max stays alive throughout his fourth film, *Mad Max: Fury Road,* there is also this sense that he is being replaced in what was – and possibly still is – his franchise. The script for *Fury Road* was partially written in 1999, yet the film was not made and released until 2015 – one can see the ways in which those years shape *Fury Road* as well as the past films.[16] The film

14. *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,* directed by Sergio Leone (1968; Rome, Italy: Produzioni Europee Associate).

15. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 141 and page 197.

16. Rene Rodriguez, "Interview: Director George Miller on 'Mad Max: Fury Road'", Fort-Worth Star Herald, Miami Herald, last revised May 13, 2015, https://www.star-telegram.com/entertainment/arts-culture/article20797569.html.

begins with a voiceover from Max (now played by Tom Hardy) who describes himself as:

> a [former] road warrior [once] searching for a righteous cause. As the world fell each of us in our own way was broken. It was hard to know who was more crazy, me or everyone else. I am the one who runs from both the living and the dead, hunted by scavengers, haunted by those I could not protect. So, I exist in this Waste Land, a man reduced to a single instinct . . . survive.[17]

In this opening, Max is already denied the agency that he had in the other films – his madness is manifested in anger and violence as opposed to a side-effect of his PTSD in those films. When he is called crazy, it is because he refuses to participate in the societal structures of Bartertown, or by refusing to become a pilgrim in search of a perceived new home. While the earlier films show that survival was his main motivation, they do not show his madness in the way that *Fury Road* does. When he is being haunted by his lost child, he takes that grief to save other children. While he may seem to "run from the living", he feels much more like The Man With No Name whose heroism always ends with the solitude of riding off alone after the work is done.

If *Fury Road* is to be read in conversation with *Once Upon A Time in the West,* then how does Max compare with the metaphorical death of The Man With No Name? Max is not killed, but from the very beginning he is put in a different position than he is in the other films. He is always a reluctant hero, but a hero nonetheless. *Fury Road* places him at the periphery of the story, painting him as a man who seems to be losing the struggle for survival instead of a man who ends up being sympathetically violent to save the day. Much like in *Once Upon A Time in the West,* the traditional hero seems to be replaced with a new one, a more feminine one. Both Max and The Man With No Name had a silent, rugged masculinity about them – in part due to the actors playing the roles. Yet, masculinity is now something to be challenged with these new films. We find Max once again wandering through the desert when he is captured and imprisoned by a war lord called Immortan Joe. Already this is a departure from the Max who seemed to stumble upon situations and decided to get involved. Eventually, Max ends up reluctantly helping a woman named Imperator Furiosa (played by Charlize Theron) take Immortan Joe's wives to safety away from their abusive husband. From here, Furiosa takes on the role of hero at almost every turn. She leads them through the desert, has the expertise to traverse the land, and ultimately kills Immortan Joe. As the film ends, Furiosa is seemingly placed in a position of power as she is lifted onto the shoulders of the citizens Immortan Joe once ruled – "Furiosa's ascension at the end of the film is not an ascension to heaven, but an ascension to a future, a continuation, as it were, with her tribe of compatriots and the people of the Citadel."[18] Max is left alone and ready to continue what now seems to be an aimless journey through the Waste Land. The other films end with a sense of peace – he is seen making the decision to leave alone, while in *Fury Road* there is a sense that he is being left behind. If we continue to view *Fury Road* as in conversation with Leone, then it is clear that this shift to placing women in power can also be found in Leone's films as Leone ushers in the end of his 'Dollars' trilogy. *Once Upon A Time in the West* places a former prostitute Jill McBain in the position of protagonist and in a position of

17. *Mad Max: Fury Road,* directed by George Miller, (2015: Sydney, Australia; Kennedy Miller Productions).

18. Belinda Du Plooy, 'Hope is a mistake, if you can't fix what's broken you go insane': a reading of gender, (s)heroism and redemption in Mad Max: Fury Road", *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 28, no. 4, 423.

power in a similar way. Jill comes to the town of Sweetwater expecting to start a new life with her widowered husband, only to find that he and his family have been murdered. Much like Furiosa and the wives Furiosa saves from abuse, Jill survives abuse and ends her story as a survivor with a level of power she did not have at the beginning of the film. Frayling writes that "she is the *only* character who is not destroyed when history bursts in on the fiction: whereas the others play their parts, then bow out, she at last has a useful, purposeful role to fulfil when the railroad finally arrives. As the 'myths' dissolve, she comes into her own."[19] Much like Furiosa, Jill becomes something more than just a damsel in distress or a subservient wife, she becomes central to the story of the new and growing civilized American West as Furiosa does in the emerging Australian West. Max and The Man With No Name are no more, relegated to becoming myths and legends as the world develops and leaves them behind.

It seems strange that two storylines both end with the metaphorical death of who was once the main character of the story. Leone kills off The Man With No Name before the credits are even done rolling and Miller has Max both vocally and physically stripped of his usual power in the first minutes of his last film. There is no money left for The Man With No Name to claim and steal, while Max's search for resources to survive seems more and more fraught. While they both have seemingly negative endings, it is importance to examine the audience's feelings about these characters. The Man With No Name is continually viewed as "The Good" despite being a very selfish and violent man – even when he helps others, it always seems to be in his own self-interests and it is hard to sympathize with the man until his mortality is seriously in question. Max is different. From the first film the audience sees what caused him to break as he watches his family be killed in front of him. Even as he reluctantly takes on his role as the hero, he does so in a way that keeps the audience on his side as they can understand his use of violence as a reaction to his traumas. *Fury Road* shows him succumbing to those traumas and allowing the mantle of hero to be passed on to someone more willing to take it up – or at least someone that is not as tired. Miller continually pays homage to Leone, right up until the end by setting the future of the growing civilization in the hands of a competent woman. Yet, Miller refuses to kill his hero in the way that Leone does – it is hard to say if this is Miller reluctant to kill off the titular character in a newly revived franchise, or because he refuses to make Max unsympathetic and jaded like Leone's The Man With No Name. If Leone wants his protagonist to accept the brutality of the world around him, Miller ultimately lets his hero remain hopeful that one day someone will take up his mantle and change the brutality of the world that took everything from him. It is this sense of hope that sets the two filmmakers apart from one another in the end. Max is more than The Man With No Name: He is the man who is mad for hoping that one day he will no longer have to fight to survive.

19. Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: I.B. Taurus 2nd edition, 2006), page 202.

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‘The Best There Is at What He Does’: Weirding the Western and the Superhero in James Mangold’s *Logan*

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In the foreword to Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan’s *What is a Superhero?*, Michael Uslan declares that heroes “have been essential parts of folklore and mythology since the beginnings of oral traditions and storytelling,” and “have come in many forms and sizes, varying from culture to culture around the world” (xi). The hero’s ability to transcend the boundaries of genre are perhaps most clear in *Action Comics #1* published by DC Comics in 1938, which feature the first appearance of the character Superman (Siegel and Shuster 1) as well as stories about other heroes like Marco Polo (Elven 38), a magician known as Zatara (Guardineer 20), and the cowboy Chuck Dawson (Fleming 14). From the inception of Superman by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and the inauguration of the age of the vigilante caped crusader, the figure of the superhero has shared some of its life’s blood with the figure of the cowboy and the Western genre. While many superhero narratives could be categorized as “science fiction,” Chuck Dawson’s presence in a comic alongside Superman and other heroes—fantastic, fictional, or otherwise—speaks to “the western genre, even when it purports ‘realism,’ [that] is often deeply rooted in fantasy and has always shared many elements with its historical sibling, science fiction” (Fine, Johnson, Lush, & Spurgeon 2). In their edited collection *Weird Westerns: Race Gender, Genre*, Kerry Fine, Johnson, Lush, and Spurgeon examine the ways westerns have been “weirded,” defining these “weird westerns … as texts that utilize a hybrid genre format, blending canonical elements of the western with either science fiction, fantasy, horror, or some other element of speculative literature” (2). While the term is applied in their collection to television series like *Wynonna Earp* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and novels like Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower*, the term “weird western” could also be applied to James Mangold’s 2017 film, *Logan*, based on the Marvel comics character of the same name. Further, according to Hillary Chute the comics are “a *medium* in its own right—not a lowbrow genre of either art or literature, as it is sometimes understood—and it can be about anything” (2). Because of their combination of words and images, and their capacity to depict any kind of genre, comics, like weird westerns, are also a site of hybridity, for they contain some heroes that cannot be easily labeled.

Also known by his superhero alias, Wolverine, Logan embodies many of the same traits as cowboys do in Western films. He is a loner (even though he belongs to the superhero team the X-Men) who often goes off on his own missions; he is more inclined to violence, vengeance, and vices than many of his team members; he has a mysterious

past that has unfolded over the course of his character's 45-year history in the comics including his time spent training in Japan, and the revelation that he was experimented on by the government. Cinematic portrayals of the character—beginning with Australian actor Hugh Jackman's first appearance as Wolverine in 2000's *X-Men* and ending with 2017's *Logan*--altered the character's history slightly; however, he still was portrayed with the same loner cowboy swagger as found in his portrayal in the comics. This lone cowboy persona was heightened for Jackman's final performance of the character in *Logan*, for which Mangold made "a very clear decision to apply a film genre to the material," because he felt, and rightly so, that "superhero" in and of itself is not a genre (Davis). In applying the Western to Wolverine, Mangold set out to make a film reminiscent of "the most memorable comic book sagas" he knew that "had a narrative position in terms of what they were trying to do with these characters" (Davis). In doing so, I would argue that Mangold created a cinematic version of Wolverine truer to the comics character than any of Logan's previous portrayals in film.

In this article, viewing Mangold's *Logan* as a "weird western," I evaluate the production's blending together of Western and superhero tropes and how they together reflect the perspectives of the comics genre. By drawing on Christopher Frayling's definition of the Italian plot of Spaghetti Westerns as a foundational narrative, I analyze *Logan* to show how the film weirds both the Western and the cinematic superhero. In doing so, I address how the film signals the end of an era with the death of its titular hero, how his death relates to Hollywood's history of the Western, and what implications the closure of Wolverine's narrative has for the future of superheroes in film.

Context: From Cowboys to Superheroes

Noting the similarities between the cowboy and the superhero, many scholars claim the former passed the torch to the latter in the mid-twentieth century as a representative of the American dream, preserver of justice, and symbol of progress. Speaking of superheroes in *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*, Ramzi Fawaz states,

> Gifted with abilities beyond the ken of normal humans, superheroes possessed an unprecedented capacity to extend their bodies into space and manipulate the material world with physical powers—among them extraordinary strength, speed, agility, and energy projection—that mimicked the capacities of modern industrial technologies. Both scholarly and fan literature often locate the American superhero at the tail end of a long tradition of mythic folk heroes, namely the frontier adventurers and cowboy vigilantes of nineteenth-century westerns. (6)

Rosenberg and Coogan share a similar sentiment, asserting that

> the superhero genre moved into the position held by the Western genre for most of the 20th century, when it served as a useful metaphorical way of discussing immigration, Americanization, urbanization, American identity, changing conceptions of race and gender, individualism, capitalism, modernism, and so many other central cultural concerns. (xvii-xviii)

They also contend that "the Western became crucial to America's image of itself" during

the Cold War (xviii), while comics writer Grant Morrison simultaneously connects the Cold War to the rise of the superhero. In *Supergods,* Morrison writes about their childhood fears of the atomic bomb, and how they did not need "Superman to be "real," [they] just needed him to be more real than the Idea of the Bomb that ravaged [their] dreams" (xv). The popularity of the superhero blossomed with the mid-twentieth century's advancements in technology and America's space race against nations like Russia and China. Further, with the emergence of identity movements like the civil rights movement, the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and the early stages of the LGBTQIA movement, comics narratives were influenced by numerous intersections of thought and were reflective of America's multi-faceted identity.

Fawaz claims that "by 1971 [comics] had come of age as America's 'native art': taught on Ivy League campuses, studied by European scholars, artists, and filmmakers, and translated and sold around the world" (126). In this way, comics were "taken up as a new generation's critique of American society" in much the same way that Westerns had been. The global influence of Westerns was felt in European cinema, as in the Italian Westerns of Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci and also in Asian cinema as in Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's 1961 film *Yojimbo* among others. In critiquing American society of the mid-twentieth century, tales of "the space opera" and "the urban folktale" were popularized in superhero comics, "to account for American political life after the fracturing of the New Left political coalitions in 1968 and the rise of identity politics" (Fawaz 127). According to Fawaz, "the space opera depicted Earth as a tiny planet within a vast cosmos teeming with enigmatic and potentially dangerous alien and divine forces capable of destroying humankind with unparalleled space-born powers" (127). This is not dissimilar to the dangers that people in the West would face on the frontier—and the parallels of Western expansion and space exploration were illustrated in television series like *Star Trek* and *Lost in Space*, and in the pages of comics, like in *Uncanny X-Men's* "Phoenix Saga" and "Dark Phoenix Saga," written by Chris Claremont with art by Dave Cockrum and John Byrne. The collective "Phoenix Saga," which would go on to become one of the franchise's most iconic storylines, would also be memorable for being one of the earliest overarching storylines for the second generation of the team, which included Wolverine.

Though *X-Men #1* written by Stan Lee and illustrated by Jack Kirby debuted in September of 1963, the initial series only lasted for 66 issues, getting canceled in 1970 for its waning popularity (Fawaz 145). In previous scholarship on *X-Men*, while the book's narrative may have reflected identity movements of the sixties and resonated with marginalized fans by centering on mutant characters with special abilities and positioning them as a 'sub-species' othered by society, the original team of all-white characters did not align with the book's message (Bove 532). In an effort to rejuvenate the title and to better reflect the times, the title was relaunched in 1975 with *Giant-Size X-Men* #1, which introduced a more diverse cast of characters, including Wolverine (Wein and Cockrum). Although Wolverine previously made his debut in the series *The Incredible Hulk* a year prior (Wein and Trimpe), this was his first inclusion as a main character in a monthly ongoing series. The character would continue to be a presence on the main team or one of the X-Men's secondary teams through to the present day, while also receiving his own

limited solo title in 1982 (Claremont and Miller) and an ongoing series in 1988 that ran for 189 issues (Claremont and Buscema). Since the end of his initial solo series run, the character has died, returned (Soule and McNiven), and rejoined various X-teams in the current bevvy of X-Men titles that are part of the "Dawn of X" lineup, orchestrated by writer Jonathan Hickman (Belt).

Sharing Wolverine's entire backstory would be too much of a tangent and not entirely relevant, but suffice to say, the character has experienced his share of hardships. From accidentally killing his biological father (Jenkins and Kubert) and his childhood friend, to living alone in the wilderness (Jemas and Kubert) and later with an indigenous tribe ("24 Hours"), to losing lovers, the tragedies he faces are not unlike those of a cowboy.

> In comparing the cowboy to the superhero, Fawaz contends the superhero is historically distinguished from these previous icons by its mutually constitutive relationship to twentieth-century science and technology. Unlike the frontier hero escaping the constraints of civilization, the modern superhero is an embodiment of the *synthesis* between the seemingly "natural" biological self and the technologies of industrial society. (6)

It is easy to view Wolverine as this modern superhero who synthesizes biology and technology, because that is in fact a major narrative in his character's history. In the mini-series *Weapon X*, written and illustrated by Barry Windsor-Smith and produced by Marvel in 1991, readers learn of Wolverine's time spent in Weapon X, a genetic research facility run by the Canadian government, where he was forcefully experimented on. Chosen because of his mutant ability to heal at an accelerated rate and the bone claws on the backs of his hands that could extend and retract, the scientists of Weapon X bonded the metallic alloy adamantium to his skeleton and erased his memories (Windsor-Smith). However, despite his literal embodiment of the synthesis of biology and technology, one could argue that Wolverine is more like a cowboy or frontiersman in his efforts to escape civilization for the natural world.

20th Century Fox, Marvel Entertainment, 2017

Wolverine's preference for nature and solitude over the technological, industrial, and social are illustrated in the character's film appearances. In the end of 2000's *X-Men*, directed by Bryan Singer, rather than staying with the team, Wolverine decides to explore the Canadian wilderness in search of an abandoned government facility that Professor Xavier (played by Patrick Stewart) tells him about that could reveal secrets about his

past (*X-Men*). In the 2009 film *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, the first solo outing for the character, directed by Gavin Hood, Logan becomes a logger in Canada, until the death of his girlfriend, Kayla Silverfox (played by Lynn Collins), at the hands of his nemesis and half-brother Victor "Sabretooth" Creed (played by Liev Schreiber), forces him out of seclusion and onto the path of vengeance (*X-Men Origins: Wolverine*). *The Wolverine*, the 2013 follow-up to *X-Men Origins* directed by James Mangold, finds Wolverine living as a recluse in the Yukon after the events of 2006's *X-Men: The Last Stand*, until he is called back into action on a mission for a wealthy Japanese businessman (*The Wolverine*). However, it is Mangold's 2017 follow-up *Logan* that really showcases the hero's call to nature and resistance to technology. To illustrate Logan's rejection of technology/society and to demonstrate how *Logan* the film weirds both the Western genre and the cinematic superhero to create a hybrid product that is both a Western *and* a superhero film, I break my analysis into two parts. First, I analyze the content of the film according to Christopher Frayling's foundation narrative variant, in order to explore the ways the film follows certain Western conventions while breaking away from others to create an alternative, super-Western that is a fresh take on the Western genre and the superhero genre. Second, I critically assess the construction of the film, considering the cinematic tropes Mangold utilizes from Westerns and from superhero films and their source material, namely comics, in the creation of his production. In doing so, I make connections between Wolverine's film legacy, the history of Westerns, and draw conclusions about the "deaths" of the cowboy and the superhero.

Analysis A – The Content

In *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, Christopher Frayling builds on the work of Will Wright, who uses "Lévi-Strauss to lay the foundations for an account of how Westerns might be received" and then "[Vladimir] Propp to provide a method of categorizing these Westerns" (Frayling 46). To create his own plot analysis conventions specifically for Italian Westerns he categorizes into three variants (51). My analysis is concerned with the first narrative variant which Frayling labels the "foundation" variant or the "*Servant of Two Masters* plot" (51). What follows are the characteristics of the foundation narrative variant along with the details from the movie that either comply with or defy these characteristics.

a. The 'hero' rides into a shanty-town, on the Southwest border (51).

In the beginning of the film, we find the titular character riding through the town of El Paso, Texas in the year 2029, where he works as a chauffeur under his birth name James Howlett. His use of this name could signify his desire to distance himself both from his superhero persona and from the society that turned him into that superhero—including his admirers and the scientists who gave him his metal skeleton. His desire to put his superhero past behind him is also signified by the fact that he lives just over the border in a secluded part of the Mexican desert in what appears to be an abandoned warehouse with an ailing Professor Xavier and another mutant named Caliban (played by Stephen Merchant), who cares for Xavier when Logan is working. Throughout the film it becomes clear that Professor Xavier's powers are deteriorating, and he suffers from seizures that, when untreated, can cause immeasurable damage. It is revealed that a year

prior to the events of the film, Xavier suffered a seizure that killed the other members of the X-Men.

b. The 'hero is established as being from a different culture to that of the 'Latin' inhabitants. He is usually a bounty-hunter **(Frayling 51).**

Logan, Xavier, and Caliban are mutants, also known as homo superior, who are born with genetic differences that cause them to have unique abilities. In the context of the film, and of the *X-Men* franchise, mutants are established as "different" from other humans, and often face persecution because of their mutant status. When the film begins, the number of mutants on the planet have significantly dwindled. Although Logan is not a bounty-hunter per se, Professor Xavier does say that Logan led "a life as an assassin" before the X-Men took him in (*Logan*). Logan is also different from the rest of humanity and from other mutants because he has experience as a superhero. According to Clare Pitkethly's "Straddling a Boundary: The Superhero and the Incorporation of Difference,"

> The superhero is, in simple terms, different—in some way other—fighting for a world that is not quite his or her own. Walking the line between two different worlds, the superhero is a go-between, with one foot on either side. In this way, the superhero straddles the boundary of a duality or an opposition and is simultaneously on one side and the other, incorporating both opposing sides. The superhero is split and is characterized by the tension of this contradiction: He or she is in some way paradoxical, and doesn't quite fit in. (25)

Although Logan is a mutant, he is older and his abilities are fading. After a fight with some men who try to steal his tires, he takes longer to heal, and his claws take longer to extend and retract. He is not the warrior that he once was, but he is also not human. Straddling the border between Mexico and Texas, Logan exists in a liminal space and embodies difference.

c. The 'hero' is revealed to have an exceptional (not to say superhuman) ability – his technique (and knowledge of 'hardware') far outstrips that of his various opponents **(Frayling 51).**

As previously mentioned, Logan has an accelerated healing ability, an adamantium skeleton, and retractable claws on the backs of his hands. Although he is not as strong, as fast, or as quick to heal as he once was, he is still a formidable opponent.

d. The society is divided into factions (or clans, mafias, camarillas): usually one is Mexican, one is 'Gringo', and their economic power tends to rest on guns, liquor, gold or exploitation of the peons. These factions are not divided by values—simply by interests **(Frayling 51).**

In this film, the clans are the human scientists who work for Alkali/Transigen versus the mutants—specifically, the mutant children they have created using the DNA of Logan and other (now deceased) mutants. The scientists garner their (economic) power from the production of corn syrup, which they genetically alter and put in different food and drink products to stop natural mutations so they can create their own mutants and train them to be super soldiers.

e. The 'hero' sells his services first to one clan, then to the other (no preference for the 'Gringos – he exploits everyone); the plot unfolds like a mathematical formula thereafter **(Frayling 51).**

Initially, Logan avoids both "clans." When Gabriela, the nurse who helped the mutant children escape from Alkali/Transigen comes to Logan for help, he ignores her. Soon after, when Donald Pierce, the Chief of Security for Alkali/Transigen, comes to him asking if Gabriela has been in touch, Logan also avoids him. It is not until Gabriela contacts Logan again that he agrees to drive Gabriela and the little girl she is with, Laura, to North Dakota for $50,000. At no point does he switch and sell his services to Alkali/Transigen, nor would it make sense for him to, since the company is what became of the genetic researchers responsible for giving him his adamantium skeleton (*Logan*).

f. Apart from those involved in the clan rivalry, the society consists of peons, priests, whores and bartenders, and centres on the local church bell-tower (campanilismo) **(Frayling 51).**

Because the world of the movie is much bigger than the world of a typical Western, there are more character archetypes involved. We do, however, see bartenders and "peons" in the form of patrons of the casino hotel that Logan, Xavier, and Laura go to, and other minor characters that they encounter on their drive to North Dakota.

g. The family is revealed both as a divisive force (the clans, or extended families), and as a guide to the morality of the protagonists (when the 'hero' has a past, it invariably involves the breakup of his family; and if he is not a bounty-hunter, he is out for revenge – to defend his family's honour) **(Frayling 51).**

Because of what happened with Professor Xavier and the rest of the X-Men prior to the action of the film, Logan's relationship with Xavier is understandably strained. Xavier has been a mentor to Logan, and in his words, took him in and gave him a family (*Logan*). He, however, also killed the only other family members Logan had, albeit accidentally. Additionally, the professor's deteriorating health puts an emotional and psychological strain on Logan, because he has to care for this man who, with each passing day, he no longer recognizes. Still, the Professor continues to act as a guiding moral force in Logan's life; it is the Professor who urges Logan to help the young girl, Laura, after Gabriela is killed (*Logan*). It is also revealed that Laura is Logan's daughter, because the scientists used his DNA to create her. While Logan does not want to get involved, he also does not want to see his daughter get hurt, especially at the hands of the company who hurt him.

h. The clans are stronger than the other groups in the society (which scarcely exist) **(Frayling 51).**

This is true of both Logan's group and the scientists working for Alkali/Transigen. Laura has inherited Logan's powers, as well as claws on her feet. Xavier is also powerful, although his powers are unpredictable. The scientists are more powerful than average citizens because they have the financial backing of the government and military resources. They also have X-24, an exact clone of Wolverine, who is extremely lethal (*Logan*).

i. The leaders of the clans have much respect for the 'hero's' technical prowess, and attempt to buy his loyalty (without success) **(Frayling 51).**

As previously mentioned, Gabriela offers to pay Logan thousands of dollars for his help; and while Donald Pierce does not explicitly offer Logan a financial reward, it is implied that some kind of reward would be offered were he to help Alkali/Transigen.

j. The 'hero' plays one clan off against the other **(Frayling 51).**

This is not the case for Logan. Once he is fighting on the side of "good," he does not switch to the "bad" side or play the sides against each other.

k. The clans endanger a friend (male or female) of the 'hero' **(Frayling 51).**

Alkali/Transigen take Caliban hostage and beat him until he agrees to help them track Logan, Xavier, and Laura using his mutant abilities (*Logan*). Logan believes Caliban is dead, because Pierce tells him he left Caliban in a ditch *(Logan*). Alkali/Transigen also use X-24 to murder Professor Xavier and put Laura in danger.

l. The 'hero' watches the two clans destroying each other, then intervenes for the final showdown with the stronger leader; he invariably gets savagely beaten up by members of the stronger clan, then 'rises again' for this final showdown **(Frayling 51).**

Logan does not watch the humans and the mutants destroy each other. Rather, when he and Laura reach North Dakota and find the other mutant children who escaped the facility with Laura, Logan stands and fights with them against X-24 and the men of Alkali/Transigen.

m. The 'hero' defeats the stronger villains, in an elaborate ritual **(Frayling 51).**

Logan does not defeat X-24. Rather, Laura defeats him by shooting him in the head with the adamantium bullet that Logan has been carrying with him the whole time, positioning Laura as the new hero.

n. The society is still not safe, but –

o. The 'hero' rides away, since, for the time being at least, there is no one left to exploit **(Frayling 51).**

While Pierce, X-24, and their men have been defeated, there are other scientists still alive, and they still have the support of the government. X-24 also managed to kill Logan, impaling him on a tree branch. Laura and her clan of mutant children continue to run away to freedom/safety after burying Logan's body and having a service for him (*Logan*).

p. The 'hero' does not spend his dollars: he treats them strictly as 'prize', as 'something that must be grabbed, before the next man reaches them'.

This characteristic is largely irrelevant by the end of the film.

Narratively, *Logan* fits quite well into the foundation plot variant that Frayling describes, and could arguably be viewed as a Western or alternative Western based on this alone. Taking this analysis further, however, reveals how Mangold's use of Western and comics tropes together allow the film to both embody the Western genre and bring the spirit of the comics from the page to the screen.

Analysis B – The Construction

One of the more obvious tools Mangold utilizes in constructing his film as a

Western is to use quotes from the final scene of George Stevens's 1953 film *Shane* as a framework for his narrative. At Logan's funeral at the end of the film, Laura quotes *Shane* as a form of eulogizing her father: "A man has to be what he is, Joey. Can't break the mold. There's no living with a killing. There's no going back. Right or wrong, it's a brand. A brand that sticks. Now you run on home to your mother. You tell her everything's all right. There are no more guns in the valley" (*Logan*). On the one hand, this could be Laura memorializing a special moment for her—the first time she heard the quote on the television in their hotel room in the casino they stayed at in Oklahoma City. In the hotel room, Professor Xavier shared that seeing the film in the cinema was one of his earliest memories from his childhood (*Logan*). Watching the movie with Xavier, and getting to spend time with her father and his father figure, was something Laura had never experienced before. Quoting the film at Logan's funeral was to recall that special time they shared. It could also have been to symbolize that Logan would no longer have to commit violent acts, and that Laura herself could turn away from a life of violence to a gentler, more peaceful life with the other children.

The film may use dialogue from *Shane*, but critic Molly Freeman notes it also has some other commonalities with the film: both movies are titled after their protagonists, both feature mentor-mentee relationships—Logan and Laura in *Logan*, and Shane and Joey in *Shane*—and in both the heroes leave town/leave their mentee; although, in the case of *Logan*, he leaves town/his mentee by dying (Freeman). While Mangold may use dialogue and narrative beats from *Shane*, he takes visual cues from the Italian director Sergio Leone's films and from the pages of comics. Critic Kofi Outlaw points to the funeral scene, in which Logan is standing against a tree in a cemetery drinking a beer in the rain, while a funeral service is happening in the background, as being "an evocative image for viewers" because of its resemblance to a comics panel (Outlaw). This type of wide framing for a scene is also evident at both Xavier and Logan's funerals, where we see the mourners in the foreground, and bodies of water, forest, and mountains in the background. Mangold confirmed in an interview that he was, "trying to set frames that are, in some way, descriptive and yes, are kind of evocative of comic-book panels and also for me classical filmmaking" (Outlaw). Some of the "classical filmmaking" that *Logan* evokes are the films of Leone. Early in the movie when the viewer is introduced to the abandoned warehouse where Logan, Xavier, and Caliban live, it is in a wide shot, with a train passing in front of it (*Logan*). The scene is evocative of the sparsity of Sergio Leone's West, in films like *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Frayling claims that Leone's work can be viewed

> in terms of a form of 'critical cinema,' utilising the internal conventions of the genre (and extending them), in order critically to examine not so much the mythology of the frontier itself, as a later cinematic mythology, debased but still producing 'infatuated tributes'. A form of 'cinema about cinema'—but one with the potential to 'comment' as well. (Frayling 40)

Through the use of evocative imagery and framing, Mangold applies the Western to a popular superhero to create something unique that can be categorized in multiple genres and speaks to the way that a hero, whether it is a superhero or a cowboy, can transcend genre. His method of construction also serves as this idea of "cinema about cinema,"

particularly in the death of his protagonist.

Conclusion

Logan's death holds several meanings: it is the passing of the torch from one generation of heroes to the next, as Laura lives on to potentially take on the mantle of Wolverine; it is the end of a chapter, as Logan is the last of the original X-Men to die in the *X-Men* franchise (since, in the chronology of events, 2019's *Dark Phoenix* takes place before it); and it is the end of an era, as actor Hugh Jackman will no longer play the role of Logan, after seventeen years of embodying the character onscreen. Over the course of his seventeen years as Logan, the landscape of superhero films transformed drastically. While the *X-Men* franchise was the first to usher in the modern era of superheroes on film, closely followed by Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* franchise, the stakes for movie superheroes have been raised exponentially by Marvel's Cinematic Universe. What has proven to be a successful formula for the MCU –a mix of comedy, action, and emotions – would not necessarily yield the same results for a character like Logan, who is not especially funny or overly emotional.

Wolverine's death is reminiscent of narratives depicting the fading glory of Western heroes, such as Quentin Tarantino's 2019 film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, which charts the career of Leonardo DiCaprio's Rick Dalton from leading man to featured villain-of-the-week to Spaghetti Western star (*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*); or John Schlesinger's 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy*, where Jon Voight's Joe Buck moves from Texas to New York and learns the hard way that the city was not made for cowboys (*Midnight Cowboy*). However, as A. David Lewis points out, "heroes die, but legends live forever" (31). The popularity of superheroes and cowboys might wax and wane, but their influence on culture and their presence in media seems eternal.

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'Trudging Through the Ruins and the Relics': Spring Breakers, *Midnight Cowboy* and the Expansive Spirit of the Western Under Capitalist Realism

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In his recent book, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*, Greg Grandin argues that while all nations have borders and many have walls, only the United States has a frontier that serves as a proxy for liberation "with the possibilities and promises of modern life itself and held out as a model for the rest of the world to emulate" (2-3). This deeply ingrained glorification of the frontier within American culture has continued to persist throughout the nation's history. Grandin adds that when the physical frontier was closed, its imagery could easily be applied to other arenas of expansion, to markets, war, culture, technology, science, the psyche, politics. In the years after World War II, the 'frontier' became a central metaphor to capture a vision of a new kind of world order. Past empires established their dominance in an environment where resources were thought to be finite. … Now, though, the United States made a credible claim to be a different sort of global power, presiding over a world economy premised on endless growth. (3-4)

This frontier ideology, especially as it manifests itself in the United States since the postwar era, serves as fertile ground for the development and popularization of the Western film genre, as audience's align their own (and their nation's) pursuit of wealth and globalized economic opportunities with the image of the Western frontier.

Despite the popular image of the noble Western gunman cloaked in classic cowboy attire that grew in prominence during the postwar era, the ideology of the frontier was is quite malleable and has found its way into film in a variety of ways. This fact is made evident in Christopher Frayling's, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. In a section on Sergio Leone's films, Frayling highlights the immense changes to the ideology of the Western that were ushered in by the Spaghetti Western movement that Leone helped lead. He argues that, rather than offering viewers a traditional-Western-like vision of good versus evil, Leone, instead,

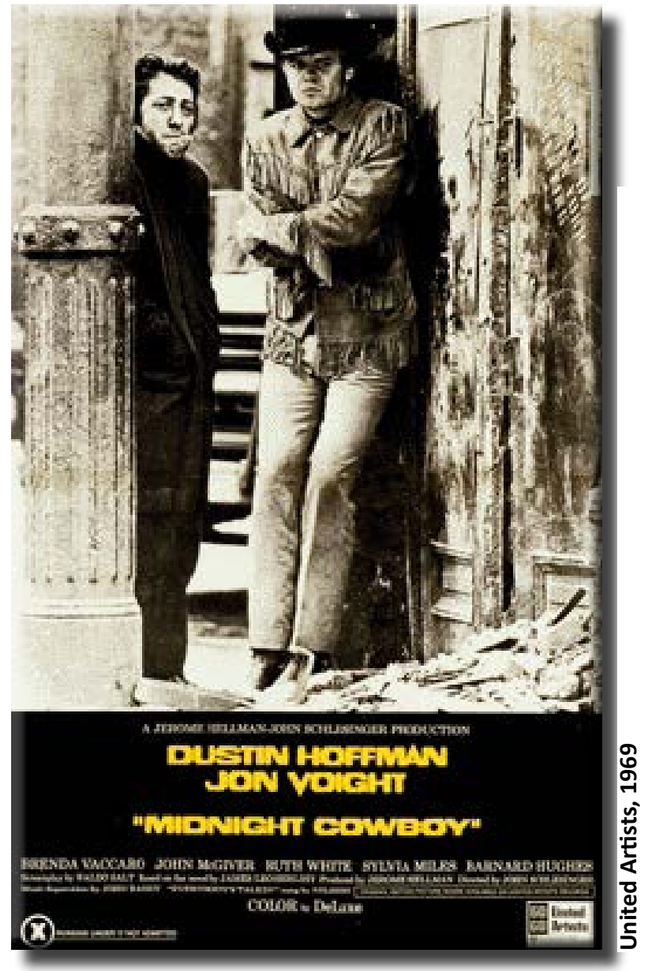
> watches the brutality of his protagonists with a detached calm: they are brutal because of the environment in which they exist. And they make no attempt to change that environment. They accept it, without question. …The primary motivation is money, the dollar. Not so much money as usable for ready cash, but, as one critic put it, 'money as a prize, as something which must be possessed.' (160)

Thus, even within films, such as Leone's, that share many of the traditional formalistic

aspects of the Western genre, the version of frontier ideology that they put forward can already be seen to have changed from that of traditional Westerns in many ways. This can be attributed to both different cultural norms (like Leone's Italian heritage), as well as the shifting nature of capitalism over time—something that, as Grandin highlights, is at the core of frontier ideology.

One must also remember that the Western, despite common perceptions, need not be set in America (as even most of Leone's 1960s Spaghetti Westerns were). In his book, *Eastern Westerns: Film and genre outside and inside Hollywood*, Stephen Teo describes the rise of the Western genre in Asia, while also decrying what he sees as the mislabeling of many Easterns (or martial arts films) as Westerns, simply due to the similarities between the common settings of these two genres. Teo writes, "just because these films emphasize 'dusty western settings' do not make them Westerns. … This kind of 'complete mix-up' critical approach is, I now believe, mistaken, smacking of a lazy structuralism that fails to denote the qualitative aspects of either genre" (Teo 5). Teo goes on to argue that, in contrast to Easterns, which he sees as greatly differing from Westerns, there are, in fact, some films that should be considered Eastern Westerns (meaning Westerns made in Eastern countries, or those that share elements inspired by Eastern cultures). Teo says that these sorts of films are

> manifestly western in spirit and theme [but] also contain the same outward elements that are universal to the Western: characters dressed in cowboy costumes and big hats, gunfights (as distinct from swordfights)... not to mention the landscape space. It is therefore important to emphasize that Eastern Westerns are fundamentally Westerns in form as well as spirit. (5)



United Artists, 1969

Teo continues, "There are certainly samurai movies, or other 'Easterns' such as wuxia and kung fu movies, that are not Westerns in form but could be so in spirit" (5). This distinction between the Western form and spirit is important, as, for the purposes of my discussion, it is the spirit of the Western, in the continued prevalence of frontier ideology within contemporary America, that sits at the heart of two films I analyze here, the 1965 John Schlesinger film, *Midnight Cowboy* and the 2012 Korinne Harmony film, *Spring Breakers*, and which can both be termed Westerns.

When analyzing John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), one can see how it illustrates both the flexibility of the Western genre and Teo's points regarding the distinction between a film that functions as a Western on a formal level versus on a spiritual level. *Midnight Cowboy* highlights how any semblance of the Western on a formalistic level, no matter how insignificant to a film's larger purpose, often makes critics more comfortable classifying it as Western. This film's formalistic semblance to

the Western are very surface level, while, conversely, its occupation of the spirit of the Western, in the form of frontier ideology, is quite profound. Therefore, many critics are correct in seeing *Midnight Cowboy* as a Western, though not necessarily for the reasons that they may think.

The film tells the story of Joe Buck, a small-town dishwasher and wannabe hustler from the American west, who constantly dresses in classic cowboy attire. Buck makes his way to New York City, in an attempt to make it as a "hustler" (or male prostitute). In this way, the film's setting (the late 1960s) serves as a reversal of the traditional American Western, from a geographical perspective, as the Western frontier of opportunity has now been reversed into Buck's journey eastward. Rather than the open prairie that is ready to be farmed and settled, Buck, instead, finds himself in a highly industrialized and developed landscape. However, it is the same frontier logic, as outlined by Grandin, that leads him eastward to the new center of capital accumulation and opportunities it promises.

This fact is hinted at in the film's opening scene—one that also ties frontier ideology directly to the Western genre itself. In her article, "John Schlesinger's Bildungsfilm: *Midnight Cowboy* and the Problem of Youth," Julia Prewitt Brown describes the significance of this scene:

> The film opens with a shot of a blank screen. … A lone child wearing a cowboy hat and sitting astride a rocking horse appears in the drive-in's playground beneath the screen. What story is being told in these images? As critics have often pointed out, it is that of a young man whose head has been filled from early childhood with the fantasies of Hollywood westerns. Before we hear the sound of gunfire, however, we see a blank screen, suggesting … the inchoate nature of consciousness before it processes impressions. …Consciousness emerges out of nothingness, yet has a prehistory that is essential to it—in this case, the prehistory of American cinema. (Brown 651)

Brown's analysis here is spot on, and *Midnight Cowboy's* meta-references to the Western genre indicate Schlesinger's view of frontier ideology. Throughout the rest of the film, however, these references to the formalistic components of the Western all but disappear. Thus, Schlesinger, by highlighting the formalistic components of the Western, only to later negate them, is stressing the ideological spirit of the Western even as he seeks to illustrate how this spirit lives on within Buck's contemporary lifestyle.

One can better understand how this reversal of the physical location of the frontier that Buck pursues might still be understood as inhabiting this spirit of the Western by looking to Susan Kollin's book, Ca*ptivating Westerns: The Middle East in the American West*. Kollin argues that

> the western was never merely regional or necessarily located in spaces associated with the present-day West but was always based in a geography that continually shifted, partly because, at one moment or another, all regions of the United States have had the opportunity to 'claim their time

as the frontier'" (Kollin 35).

By highlighting the fabricated nature of all attempts at geographically labeling any space as being "western," Kollin helps to underline the inherently ideological nature of the concept of the frontier—something that, due to its origins in capitalism (at least in America, as Grandin highlights), is constantly shifting.

Kollin further demonstrates the effect that the recognition of the ideological nature of the Western frontier has had on scholarship, citing Ella Shohat and other scholars in Ethnic Studies whose work "deterritorializes regions as stable objects of study, and offers new angles on the ongoing critique of the essentialist fixity of East-versus-West and North-versus-South" (66). It is this process of deterritorialization and destabilization that is evident in *Midnight Cowboy*, and that highlights its connection to Teo's notion of the spirit of the Western, despite its 1960s setting and its lack of many formal similarities to more traditional American Westerns (other than Buck's cowboy garb and the opening's meta-Western references, which function mostly as a pastiche of the formalistic components of the Western and grow less prominent as the film goes on).

Once Joe Buck makes his way to New York City, he is quickly faced with the brutality of contemporary capitalism in its highly-developed, late-1960s state in America—an era that, viewers quickly realize, has in many ways, left behind working class men like Buck who, in more traditional Westerns, may have worked as cowboys on the frontier. This fact is played with by Schlesinger in his decision to center Buck's preoccupation with cowboys. Schlesinger offers commentary on the American Western's supposed demise, while also aligning this loss of the image of the traditional Western frontier of opportunity

to the precarious state of working-class men, like Buck, within a developed and high-tech capitalistic economy.

Through this approach, Schlesinger is able to sever the film's ties to the formalistic expectations of the Western genre, while also offering commentary on his reasons for doing so—reasons rooted in a desire to accurately represent the functioning of the Western spirit in the form of frontier ideology within the era in which the film takes place. In this era, the precursor to the neoliberal shift in society that would take place in the early 1970s and the frontier of opportunity, as dictated by financialized capital exists in a constantly fluid state that is dictated by the whims of a sped-up consumer-based business cycle. Rather than engaging in the pursuit of land on a physical frontier, working people like Joe are forced to pursue the disembodied frontier of capital—a frontier that can only be accessed through the constant trading of their own physical body and personal labor, and by grappling with the constant displacement that they inevitably face as they try to sell this labor to maintain a decent standard of living.

As *Midnight Cowboy* progresses, Joe meets a conman nicknamed Ratso with whom he forms a close friendship, despite their initially rocky start after Ratso attempts to scam him. The two men essentially lead lonely lives with only each other for support. Eventually, due to Ratso's health issues and his dream of someday moving to Florida, they both decide to make their way down to The Sunshine State by bus. Although they make it to their destination, Ratso, who has been ailing for some time, dies on the bus ride. Joe, as the bus nears their destination is seen to no longer be sporting cowboy gear. By having Joe and Ratso abandon New York City for another supposed frontier

of opportunity, Schlesinger, again, helps illustrate the highly destabilized nature of the frontier under late-1960s American capitalism. At the same time, despite the frontier logic of the Western living on in his characters' minds, Schlesinger shows, by the end of the film, the almost complete disappearance of any formalistic remnants of the Western genre, through Joe's decision to leave his cowboy clothes behind. In this way, *Midnight Cowboy* begins to offer an image of how the spirit of the western will continue to live on under the soon-to-come era of neoliberalism, and, as Fisher highlights, the further intensification of this era under capitalist realism.

At the same time, the frontier logic governing Buck and Ratso's journey to Florida is the same as that which governed Buck's initial journey eastward to New York City. Thus, if one views this film as a Western, it is mostly because it inhabits the spirit of the Western in the form of frontier logic rather than because of the film's miniscule formalistically Western aspects, which by the end of the film have all but disappeared.

While there continues to be a proliferation of films that follow the more traditional formalistic aspects attributed to the Western, *Spring Breakers*, at first glance, is a film that most people would likely not see as being a Western at all. It is the commonness of this act of devaluing the spirit of the Western, in favor of emphasizing its formalistic elements, that, I argue makes *Spring Breakers* an important film to view through this lens. I find that as Grandin argues, frontier logic (which I equate with the spirit of the Western) has been a constant force within American society and hence within American film. By focusing on the spirit of the Western, and locating this spirit in a contemporary coming-of-age film like *Spring Breakers*, I demonstrate just how dominant, and intensified, this frontier logic becomes. At the same time, I expand upon Teo's analysis of the Western by highlighting how wide-ranging and malleable the genre can be when examining/emphasizing its spirit, rather than focusing only on its formalistic elements.

Central to my analysis is demonstrating how the frontier logic outlined by Grandin changes over time, and how it functions in contemporary America—which I equate with what Mark Fisher terms capitalist realism in his seminal book, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Fisher aligns his definition of this term with the popular quote, often attributed to both Slavoj Zizek and Fredric Jameson, that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Fisher 2), saying, "that slogan captures precisely what I mean by 'capitalist realism': the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it" (2). Fisher goes on to directly tie the ramifications of this dominant ideology to youth culture, arguing that

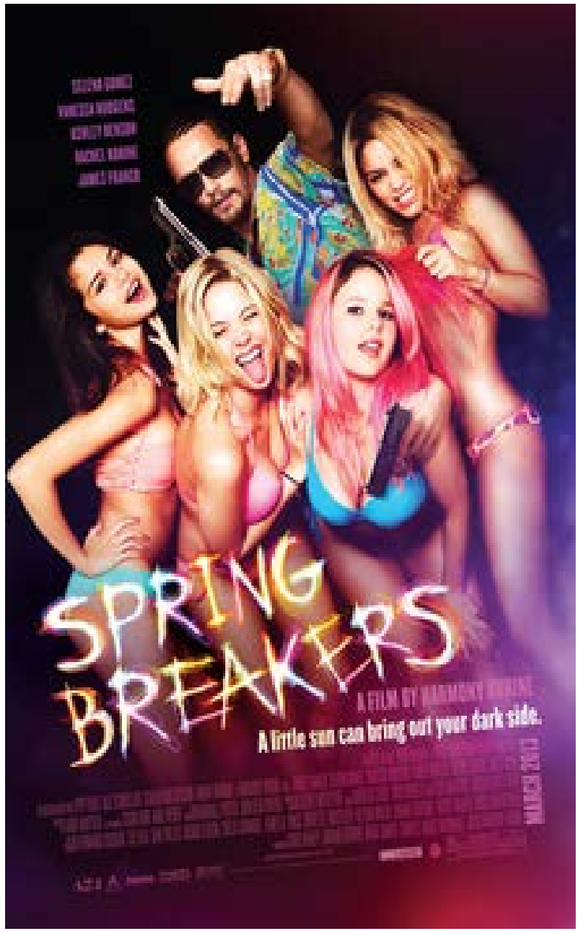
> for most people under twenty in Europe and North America, the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable.…The fact that capitalism has colonized the dreaming life of the population is so taken for granted that it is no longer worthy of comment. (Fisher 7-8)

Spring Breakers, as a coming-of-age film, features young characters operating with this assumption—one that dominates the film's particular rendition of frontier logic, grounding it within an endless pursuit of individualistic pleasure and capital accumulation

(one that is separated from any notion of change or opportunity outside of the bounds of late

capitalism).

While capitalist realism and further intensification of the frontier logic of capital over time causes many films from various genres to function as Westerns, *Spring Breakers* as a coming-of-age film offers a particularly helpful lens through which to analyze the expansion and intensification of frontier logic into all aspects of life. Part of the reason for this is what Danielle B. Schwartz, in her essay, "'You Look Good Wearing My Future': Resisting Neoliberalism in John Hughes's *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*," describes as the fact that in coming-of-age films "the teen … becomes a loose category somewhere between induction into subjecthood and fully formed subject" (Schwartz 395). This liminal space occupied by the adolescent psyche allows for more flexibility when it comes to critiquing the dominant ideologies governing the societies within which the characters live. In some cases, certain characters have yet to become fully enveloped within these ideologies. In *Spring Breakers*, this fact is perfectly represented by the character, Faith (played by Selena Gomez), who expresses



Muse Productions, Annapurna Pictures, Division Films, Radar Productions, A24, 2012

hesitancy when confronted with the frontier logic of capitalist realism—a hesitancy that eventually leads to her outright rejection of this logic, in the form of a decision to leave Spring Break, and her friends, behind. The spirit of the Western is ultimately founded upon a subjective state, rather than a physical destination. This is represented in the film in the very notion of spring break which, standing in for the frontier, is shown to be a mindset, rather than an event or physical destination. Faith, by rejecting this mindset, allows the audience to see its subjective nature more clearly.

Teo is not alone in his analysis of the highly malleable nature of the Western genre or in expressing the ongoing tension over defining films that overlap with dominant aspects of the genre. In *Postwesterns: Cinema, Region, West*, Neil Campbell argues for the continuing relevance of the Western genre, despite the many calls for its demise over the past few decades. By pushing back against Gilles Deleuze's argument that the genre of the Western collapsed "through revisionism and new forms during the postwar period" (Campbell 2), he argues that "the Western genre, rather than collapse, actually found a project of positive creation through which to interrogate the very ideological frameworks that had conjured it into being in the first place" (2). Campbell's term for this "project of positive creation" is the postwestern—a term also in popularized by other scholars in the field.

Campbell elaborates on this terminology with references to claims from other critics, as for example Philip French's definition that sees "the post-Western as always examining the 'limits and inaccuracies of Western generic formulas', with particular emphasis on 'the ironic parody of the Western myth'" (7). Campbell, discussing French's view, says that

this label should include "those films that were 'made in other countries [and] redefined and expanded the meaning of the west itself as mythic terrain or territory'" (7). These are helpful distinctions for demonstrating how *Spring Breakers* might be seen as a Western (or, from Campbell's viewpoint, as a post-Western), in its specific rendition of frontier logic under capitalist realism almost completely detached from geography. In *Spring Breakers*, the frontier is, instead, firmly rooted in an imagined vision of endless capital accumulation and commodity signs (i.e., "the mythic terrain or territory" of the Western, as expressed under capitalist realism).

Despite the alignment between much of Campbell's description of the post-Western and more recent evolutions of the genre, the very concept of the post-Western is still a fraught one. In his book, *Late Westerns: The Persistence of a Genre*, Lee Clark Mitchell writes,

> the Western best clarifies how fully genres change yet endure— indeed, how they must change to endure— and solicit our interest by confirming expectations while nonetheless diverging from them, inventively, entertainingly. That process, once understood, helps explain our routinely renewed interest in a supposedly identifiable genre regularly viewed as on its way out. (Mitchell 3)

This notion of the ever-changing and flexible nature of the Western complicates claims of the need for the post-Western as a category. Mitchell continues,

> My argument extends from the premise that genres are always hybridized, consisting of a shifting array of thematic and formal constructions, never so distinct or finished as critics retrospectively make them out to be. In fact, my more aggressive claim is that recent 'postwestern' critics are actually diminishing the power of the Western genre—and by extension, of all genres—not so much in limiting what recent versions have achieved but more in curtailing an appreciation of what earlier films themselves had already accomplished. (Mitchell 7)

As Mitchell argues, the Western has been a highly flexible and variant genre for decades, and attempts to label more recent versions of the Western as post-Westerns can be seen as ignoring this fact. Therefore, Campbell prefers the term "late Western"—or even, simply, Western. With *Spring Breakers*, even when considered through the highly flexible lens of a post-Western or late Western, classifying *Spring Breakers* as a Western may still appear to be a bit of a stretch; however, if one keeps in mind the spirit of the Western, in the form of the contemporary manifestation of a deterritorialized frontier logic that is rooted in a constant pursuit of capital accumulation and commodity signs, then this connection becomes more visible. Besides, in it, the spirit of the Western and its frontier ideology are all-encompassing and the film offers no formalistic references to the Western genre of old. So, agreeing with Campbell, I find *Spring Breakers* should simply be called what it is—a Western,

Directed by infamous American film auteur, Harmony Korine, *Spring Breakers*, tells the story of four cash-strapped female college students: Faith, Candy, Brit, and Cotty, who find themselves feeling left behind as their college campus grows deserted

during spring break. This leads them (excluding Faith) to decide to rob a local restaurant with squirt guns. The other girls succeed and convince Faith to join them on their trip down to Saint Petersburg, Florida, on a party bus. Once the girls arrive, a blur of constant, out-of-control partying ensues, and things quickly get out of hand, leading to their arrest. Despite the fact that this opening plot may sound like a somewhat stereotypical (albeit dark) teen film, this could not be further from the truth. Due to the film's uniqueness, many critics have found themselves confused, when it comes to trying to understand its message. In his review of the film for *Cineaste Magazine*, Thomas Doherty writes,

> the sentient spectator has copped to the fact that *Spring Breakers* is not a narrative meant to intersect with youth culture, criminal conduct, or any zone of the (non-MTV) real world. Except for the soundtrack tunes—contemporary hardcore rap, vintage Britney Spears—the film exists outside the realm of history and politics and lives as an exercise in video game pastiche and postmodern distanciation. (Doherty 46)

While some audience members may, mistakenly, experience *Spring Breakers* in the way described here by Doherty, this does not mean that the film actually "exists" in this way. What analyses like Doherty's miss is the fact that the world of "pastiche and postmodern distanciation" that Korine crafts is, in fact, the real world his characters find themselves in (i.e., the world of youth culture under capitalist realism).

A similar misreading of *Spring Breakers* is evident in Richard Alleva's review of the film for *Commonweal Magazine*:

> Korine's filmmaking evokes the mystical. … The film's style recalls Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life*. In both films, we hear the characters repeating certain phrases over and over on the soundtrack. … But [*The*] *Tree of Life* employs such devices to meditate dreamily on the human condition, to delve beneath surfaces and get at the thoughts, yearnings, and fantasies of its characters. The disjunctions and repetitions are intended to communicate a sense of spiritual life. What has spiritual life got to do with Korine's spring breakers, with their vacuous faces, toneless voices, cliched babblings, and affectless sexuality? (Alleva)

While Alleva clearly describes the film's aesthetics and how they differ from what one might expect in a vapid teen film, he fails to read Korine's reasoning behind the decision to blend two seemingly disparate worlds of the spiritual arthouse film and a teen movie about spring break—something that is rooted in Korine's awareness of capitalist realism and how within this new epoch the pursuit of a narrow sense of commodified self-fulfillment is seen as encompassing all of life's possibilities. These devices "meditate dreamily on the human condition" within *Spring Breakers*; this condition is just shown to be vapid, to allow for nothing beyond the pursuit of a frontier logic expressed by a dog-eat-dog world of mindless entertainment and distraction.

In her article, "Deleuze, Zizek, *Spring Breakers* and the Question of Ethics in Late Capitalism," Jenny Gunn, describing the workings of neoliberal logic in *Spring Breakers*,

compares the film to the 1970s youth counterculture film, *Zabriskie Point*.

> Like *Spring Breakers* takes on the collegiate spring break, *Zabriskie Point* ultimately portrays the hippie movement as an unsustainable fantasy but one that Antonioni nevertheless asks us to take seriously. Also like *Zabriskie Point*, *Spring Breakers* considers the relationship of its utopian fantasy to capitalism. (Gunn 100)

Despite these similarities between the two films, Gunn goes on to highlight their differences, saying,

> unlike the hippies of *Zabriskie Point*, for the neoliberal subjects of *Spring Breakers*, the logics of utopia and capitalism are no longer diametrically opposed. … In other words, Korine's film suggests that for the neoliberal subject of late capitalism, the real high, the highest high, is no longer found in the fantasy of the collective utopian orgy but rather in the driven and competitive pursuit of capital gain. (Gunn 100-101)

Gunn is spot on in this assessment and her description of the neoliberal adolescent subject of late capitalism (or capitalist realism) perfectly describes the ways in which the frontier spirit of the Western, in the form of a brutal drive for capital accumulation, has come to dominate the psyche of America's youth—something that has the consequence of rendering *Spring Breakers* a Western. By keeping in mind the dynamics laid out by these examples of a quest for both spirituality and utopia that gets drowned out by capitalist realism, the audience can better understand the significance of the rest of the film's events.

In particular, it is important to focus on the character of Faith (played by Selena Gomez), as she is the sole character who shows some resistance to the ideological forces around her. Early in the film, Candy, Brit, and Cotty are shown to suffer from what Fisher terms capitalist realism's effect of "depressive hedonia" (21). Fisher writing of this novel form of depression, says:

> depression is usually characterized by a state of anhedonia, but the condition I'm referring to is constituted not by an inability to get pleasure so much as it [is] by an inability to do anything *except* pursue pleasure. There is a sense that 'something is missing'—but no appreciation that this mysterious, missing enjoyment can only be accessed *beyond* the pleasure principle. (21-22)

This "inability to do anything *except* pursue pleasure" is shown, at the beginning of the film, to manifest itself in the form of cynicism and hedonism in Candy, Brit, and Cotty. Faith, in contrast, seems to seek a sense of meaning and purpose through evangelical Christianity. She is shown at a youth group singing hymns with other young Christians; however, Korine makes it clear through Faith's absent gaze and wandering attention that whatever meaning this form of charismatic faith had once brought her, it is no longer sufficient.

Soon after these opening scenes, Faith agrees to join the other girls on their spring break trip, bringing her into direct contact with the frontier logic they abide by, as well as this logic's effect, in the form of depressive hedonia. Inklings of these traits can be seen

bubbling up in Faith, as she says, in a voice over a phone call to her grandma, "this trip is about more than spring break; it's about the chance to see something different." Faith is no longer content with the world around her; she has tasted the logic of the frontier, and the pleasure it promises.

Despite this fact, Faith continues to serve as an excellent illustration of the liminality offered by adolescent subjects, and, thus, the interesting rendition of the alternative Western offered by *Spring Breakers*—one where certain characters, like Faith, have yet to become fully formed neoliberal (or capitalist realist) subjects. This liminal space that Faith occupies allows *Spring Breakers* to contain a critique of the very frontier logic it demonstrates. Faith's liminality is further evidenced once the girls are down in Florida and find themselves partying day and night. One night, as they are all alone in the pool in a rare moment of silence, Faith says that she wishes she could freeze time. The other girls laugh at her, which seems to bother her. They understand that the point of robbing money and traveling to Florida for Spring Break was not to make a stable new life for themselves, rather, it was the pursuit of endless pleasure and capital—a pursuit, driven by frontier logic, that is inherently ongoing. In contrast, Faith still seeks a life of meaning and stability and has yet to be fully enveloped by this frontier logic. In this way, faith demonstrates the urge to settle down on the frontier—something that the disembodied nature of the frontier under capitalist realism makes impossible.

After the girls find themselves arrested for the possession of cocaine at a party, they are bailed out of jail by a rapper, and real-life gangster, named Alien (played by James Franco). Alien convinces the girls to join him in his car, and, later, to attend a party with his friends. While the other girls gleefully go along with Alien's desires, Faith is hesitant. She flees the party crying and when Alien confronts her, says she wants to go home. Alien agrees to let her go but tells her that her friends are staying with him.

Alien can be seen as the physical manifestation of frontier logic under capitalist realism. When asked what he does, he says that he's all about making money (he even has a tattoo of the dollar symbol). It is no accident that Korine decides to make Alien a part-time rapper, with lyrics and a persona that would fit right in with top forty radio hits of the 2010s. Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*, writes about the social significance of the popularity of this sort of gangster persona in hip-hop: "for much hip hop, any 'naïve' hope that youth culture could change anything has been replaced by the hard-headed embracing of a brutally reductive version of 'reality'" (10). When directly confronted by this brutal ideology, in the form of Alien, Faith, from her liminal position, is still able to choose, at least temporarily, to turn away from the worldview he represents—symbolized by her decision to return to college alone, leaving her friends behind.

At the same time, the other girls are enveloped fully into this contemporary manifestation of frontier logic, as they work alongside Alien and become full-fledged criminals, eventually committing serious robberies and murders. After the girls are shown committing numerous crimes, Cotty is forced to leave once she gets shot; however, her character is never shown to have any real remorse or second thoughts about her actions or her logic governing them. Candy and Brit stay in Saint Petersburg eventually murdering Alien's drug-gang rivals—including, his arch nemesis, Big Arch—in a shoot-out (in which Alien himself, dies).

It is noteworthy that Korine never returns to the character of Faith, once she is shown leaving spring break. Whether she ever will be able to fully escape frontier logic and the grips of capitalist realism, or find self-actualization through some other method is unclear. Conversely, Candy and Brit at the film's close are shown driving off into the sunset. Jenny Gunn in "Deleuze, Zizek, *Spring Breakers* and the Question of Ethics in Late Capitalism," says of the final scene

> with the deaths of both of these hetero-patriarchal personifications of capital at the end of *Spring Breakers*, a fragment of hope may be born. As a feminine alternative to the masculine logic of global capitalism, Candy and Brit ride off into the sunset together no longer under Alien's yoke. But is this truly an alternative? The fact that Candy and Brit keep Big Arch's Lamborghini as a souvenir of their spring break debauchery – and the sports car being perhaps the status symbol of the capitalist – makes the ending of the film somewhat ambivalent. (109)

Gunn's reading of the ending ignores the fact that both Candy and Brit already find themselves governed by a brutal and materialistic logic from the film's very beginning—in fact, it was this very logic that causes them to rob a restaurant in order to go to Florida in the first place. By failing to see spring break itself as representative of a mindset (one that, I argue as aligned with that of the Western frontier), Gunn mistakes Candy and Brit's further entrapment in frontier logic as a form of escape.

While the ending of the film may be considered ambivalent, to the extent that the viewer does not know what exactly is next for Brit and Candy, Korine makes it quite clear that, for them, frontier logic has won out. In this way, the girls riding off into the distance in the stolen Lamborghini should be seen as a contemporary version of the classic Western vision of a cowboy or gunman riding off on horseback into the open frontier that awaits him. In this contemporary rendition, however, the notion of a new geographic destination has been replaced with a deterritorialized and internalized version of frontier logic. As Alien repeats in voice-overs throughout the film, it is the mantra of "spring break forever" (or the endless pursuit of pleasure and capital) that is the new frontier. In other words, spring break, just like the Western frontier, was never really a destination; it was always a mindset.

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Agency and Capitalist Entrapment of Cowboys in *Once upon a Time in the West* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

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Typically American Western films document a period of American history when patriarchy was flourishing. Most films belonging to the genre of the Western tend to depict patriarchy and the submission of women to patriarchal values given that the vast majority most of their storylines are inherently male-centered. Lee Clark Mitchell reiterates this in his 1996 book, *Westerns – Making the Man in Fiction and Film,* stating that "[Westerns] oscillate between sex and gender, between an essentialism that requires the display of the male body and a constructivism that grants manhood to men not by virtue of their bodies but of their behavior" (155). Men in Westerns act, while women - if they appear at all - are acted on. The passivity of women in Westerns is usually characterized by their lack of agency. There are, however, some exceptions, such as the characters of Jill and Etta in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and George Roy Hill's *ButchCassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1968) respectively, who stand out as strong female Western characters because they possess agency and they use it to their advantage in a patriarchal world of violent and greedy cowboys. My analysis explores their uncharacteristic possession and use of agency in the two films under discussion.

Once Upon a Time in the West and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* feature the introduction of modernity in the American West with its consequent influx of capitalists, and both films appear to be poised at the beginning of the end of the age of the American cowboy outlaw. In her book, *King Kong Theory*, Virginie Despentes theorizes the relationship between power, patriarchy, and capitalism. Despentes argues that "capitalism is an egalitarian religion in the sense that it demands general submission, making everyone feel trapped—as all women are" (27). Here, Despentes states that while patriarchy removes women's agency, capitalism entraps and subjugates *everyone* by denying them their agency. My analysis explores, through a feminist and a Marxist lens, the power dynamics between capitalists and proletariat cowboys in *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* to argue that the end of the age of the cowboy outlaw began with the subjugation of the cowboy by capitalism. It is important to note that the two Westerns selected for this analysis are from two different cultures and countries: one an American Hollywood production and the other an Italian production what falls under the subgenre of the Spaghetti Western.

> Writing about Westerns, Kiva Reardon of *The AV Club* describes the genre as stories of lone men on horseback who stoically fight their inner demons as well as bandits and racist caricatures of Native American people. Because the genre experienced a resurgence of popularity during the Cold War, the Western became a mode of storytelling that spoke to American ideals. All mainstream American films do this in some manner, but the stakes are higher with the Western, as the genre's tales are based in 'fact.' Winning the West, crossing the Oregon Trail, the genocide of Native American people—all these things really happened, and as Hollywood recast history, white men took possession of the stories. (Reardon)

With the focus on the American cowboy, comes the erasure of women, who even when featured are presented as disposable extensions of the male lead character. The relegation of women to the background in an historical genre like the Western suggests that women played a lesser part in the foundation of America, that their role in establishing frontier life only existed in relation to men with guns. This is realized in the typical characterization of Western female characters as prostitutes, wives, and lovers. So, it suffices to say that while the cowboy drives the action in a Western, the female character is one of the entities that he acts on. The characters of Jill and Etta from *Once upon a Time in the West* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, however, as I argue here, are different. Instead of being mere extensions of the cowboy outlaw, they dictate their own destinies and take charge of their lives.

In her article, "From Autonomy to Agency Feminist Perspectives on Self- Direction," Kathryn Abrams engages the concept of resistant self-direction and argues that it should be considered a form of agency. Resistant self-direction, in Abrams' view, occurs in situations where social or political transformation is not the goal. Instead, it is realized as a woman's choice to resist oppression when faced with gender-based challenges in the pursuit of their goals. Abrams writes that

> a woman who chooses traditionally masculine work may be met with harassment from her colleagues. A woman who exhibits independence within, or seeks to extricate herself from, an abusive relationship may be met with domestic violence. The ways in which women respond to these challenges often constitute a form of self-direction or an effort to negotiate gender-based obstacles in order to achieve their larger goals. (832-833)

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. One that women face gender-based oppression in places--workplace, homes--where their outright resistance may cost them. For instance, a woman protesting sexual harassment at the workplace risks losing her job while a woman who openly plans to leave an abusive relationship risks domestic violence. The second conclusion that can be drawn from Abrams' statement absolves women of the risk that accompanies loud resistance. It is that to remove the risk of resistance, women often strategize and negotiate their way out of oppression. Abrams proceeds to mention instances of how this can play out. She writes that

> women may be unable to bring a battering relationship to a rapid close, but they may assert themselves in a variety of ways that contribute to their security-and to that of their children--and equip themselves ultimately to end the relationship. They may act to protect their children from abuse and otherwise secure their well-being. They may amass funds, information, and support that ultimately help them to escape the relationship. They may strategize actively in the face of separation abuse, which exposes women to increased violence when they try to leave and succeed at separating after multiple attempts. (834)

The acts of resistant self-direction, Abrams argues is a form of agency as they "permit battered women to protect their children, to preserve specific portions of their lives, and in some cases, to exit their abusive relationships." Following this line of argument, I analyze the characters of Jill from *Once Upon a Time in the West* and Etta from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* to show how they use resistant self-direction to survive the patriarchal oppressions of the American West.

In *Once Upon a Time in the West,* Jill arrives in Sweetwater and is greeted by the news of her husband and stepchildren's brutal deaths. Apart from the obvious ploy by the men in the area to snatch Sweetwater from her, her identity as former prostitute from New Orleans and the fact that she is new to Flagstone make her even more vulnerable to attacks from the men hoping to exploit her vulnerability. Jill, however, is able to survive the wildness of Flagstone through resistant self-direction. When Cheyenne meets Jill in

Euro International Films, Paramount Pictures, 1968

her new home, he threatens her, subtly alluding to the fact that her identity as a woman with no man and her newness to the town make her vulnerable to many injustices. Jill replies, "I'm here alone in the hands of a bandit who smelled money. If you want to, you can lay me over the table and amuse yourself, and even call in your men. Well, no woman ever died from that. When you're finished, all I'll need will be a tub of boiling water and I'll be exactly what I was before with just another filthy memory!" (*Once Upon a Time in the West*, 01:05:34 -01:05-58), and suddenly, Cheyenne is discouraged from bullying her. Jill's action here is a form of resistant self-direction. Abrams notes that when faced with potential sexual harassment, "most [women] avail themselves of a repertoire of forms of indirect resistance that signal their distaste for the conduct and their desire that it cease. Women may change the subject, use humor to diffuse the impact of the treatment or comment, leave the room when offensive conduct occurs, or avoid the perpetrator."(833). Through these moves, the effect of such conduct on the woman is controlled and assuaged and she can

function in the workplace in which it occurs. Jill's reply to Cheyenne's subtle threat is straightforward and calculated. Just like the cowboy hero quickly draws his gun to save himself, Jill draws out this speech to clarify that she is not a good candidate for rape since it would not faze her.

Another point that Abrams makes directly applies to Jill's situation and her use of resistant self-direction: "in many cases, the muted or indirect character of such resistance reflects the calculated or instinctive response of a woman who seeks to protect her livelihood in the face of a behavioral obstacle" (835). In Flagstone, Sweetwater is Jill's livelihood and it is threatened by the misogyny of Flagstone and the capitalist agents of Morton, the railway tycoon. However, she saves herself and her livelihood through calculated responses. Cheyenne tries to bully her but she breaks into her speech about how rape does not faze her. She lets Frank seduce her and plays along because otherwise, he may kill her and still assume ownership of Sweetwater. When Jill arrives in Flagstone, it is obvious that she does not belong there. One wishes that she would just go back to New Orleans so she would not have to deal with Frank, his men and the wildness of Flagstone. However, what we later discover is that although Jill is from the city, she is no stranger to the type of patriarchal oppression that dominates the American West. Her reply to Cheyenne, quoted above, confirms this. For Jill, going back to New Orleans means that she will go back into prostitution, a profession she has abandoned to become the landlady of Sweetwater. Her determination to pursue this dream, with or without McBain, regardless of the opposition from Morton and Frank and his men, demonstrates her agency.

Furthermore, as Jill deals with friends and foes interested in her inherited land, she is finally enlightened on how to go about keeping her land. Even when Frank is dead, Jill still must fight for her land by adhering to the clause in the contract that dictates that Sweetwater must be built before the railway that will run across it is constructed. Here is when Jill must make what Abrams has called a calculated "response of a woman who seeks to protect her livelihood in the face of a behavioral obstacle" (835). As the railway workers build the railway towards Sweetwater, the existence of the all-man team is accompanied by a behavioral obstacle - sexual harassment. Jill's status as the only woman in Sweetwater surrounded by a sea of male railway workers skyrockets the possibility of her being sexually harassed. It is worse that she still needs to delay the progress of the railway so that she does not lose her land. As Cheyenne and Frank ride away from Sweetwater at the end, we see the railway is being built and Jill taking water out to the railway workers. The film ends with the workers swarming around Jill and we see her as having become a fixture of the land and realize she will be a part of the future ahead. Jill thus secures her property and her dream through resistant self-direction.

The character of Etta in George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* shares a key similarity with Jill in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Like Jill, Etta at the beginning is introduced as a helpless woman. The first time we see her, a gun is pointed at her and it appears she is about to be raped, but quickly realize that the intruder is her lover, the Sundance Kid. While Etta is not at risk of being raped by Sundance, their relationship is lopsided. Etta treats Sundance with love, but he is often brusque with her. The ways Sundance and Butch relate with Etta shows the difference between the two

outlaws. While Butch is friendly, Sundance is quiet and sometimes mean. The scenes between Butch and Etta often imply that Butch is a better fit for Etta, especially in the scene where Butch drives Etta around on a bicycle. Etta, a schoolteacher, fits well with the modern man who drives a bicycle and is open to a new world than the traditional type of cowboy outlaw that Sundance appears to be in the earlier parts of the film.

Campanile Productions, Newman-Foreman Company, 1969

In her article, "Genre and Gender", Julie Levinson discusses the two archetypes of the Western woman writing that

> first, there is the transplanted Eastern woman who, by profession or personality, is a schoolmarm. Educated, chaste, and proper, she represents all of the forces that threaten to displace the world of the wild West. The Western hero respects and protects her and often courts her. But she is his polar opposite, embodying as she does the seeds of progress. She also disapproves of his violent means and her opposition contributes to his own misgivings about violence and, therefore, about himself. (Levinson)

Clearly Levinson's description of this first archetype of the Western woman fits Etta and her relationship with Sundance and Butch. Etta is a modern woman who is unsettled by the violence that permeates the men's profession. While Butch and Sundance belong to the passing world of the cowboy outlaw, Etta is a member of the new world of civilization that rejects the cowboy and his ways. Etta's status as a modern woman is instrumental to her possession of agency. Etta is unlike the female Western character who needs men for protection and survival and her decision to follow the men to Bolivia is not born out of compulsion but her love for the two men. When Sundance informs her of their plan to flee to Bolivia, Butch adds that "we'll go down there and play it safe. Maybe keep our hand in a little bit" (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* 01:04:34-01:04:38) Hearing that the duo may quit their outlaw ways in Bolivia encourages Etta to follow them. However, it is important to her that she will not watch them die.

The trio's life in Bolivia shows that the men need Etta, not the other way around. Also, in Bolivia, Sundance's mastery of the gun is not the only requirement to rob a bank. They also must speak Spanish. It is worth noting here that the introduction of modernity in the American West changes the rules the cowboys have mastered. Harriman's counterattack on the cowboys is the first clue that their world is changing, and they are no longer wanted. Butch's tricks prove ineffective against the Harriman's

posse. In Bolivia, the men are lost and Butch's wits are not helpful because he has not yet experienced this different world. Etta's status as a schoolteacher, however, allows her to blend into this new community. Unlike the two cowboy outlaws, modernity has equipped her with the mastery of Spanish. This brings us to the second point that the trio's life in Bolivia makes - the outlaws need modernity to save them. To survive, they must fit into the modern world by dropping violence and earning an honest living. In Bolivia, Etta is again reminded of the importance of the men quitting their outlaw ways and she advises them to go into farming or ranching. However, the outlaws are stuck in their violent ways. The consequence is that Etta moves back to the United States so she does not watch the men die, just as she foretold. Etta's choice to leave the men in Bolivia, regardless of their situation, demonstrates her agency. By choosing violence, Butch and Sundance have rejected Etta and she, a modern Western woman rejects them and their outlaw ways. Moreover, the appeal of the image of the American cowboy is that he can do whatever he wants. He exists in the wild West, a world that allows his violent ways because he is needed to rid the community of un-American forces like the Natives. Hence, he is, as Julie Levinson opines, "as tough and stony as the landscape that he inhabits." However, once the American West started tasting civilization, the conduct of the cowboy outlaw became thorny for members of his community. Levison notes that "by definition, civilization eschews violence; he, who is defined by violence, cannot exist in the settled, tamed West, so, of necessity, he [cowboy] ends up a loner and a nomad, riding off into the sunset to avoid the trappings of civilized society" (Levinson). Hence, the cowboy outlaw transforms from a key member of the society to a minority who must navigate his new society.

Capitalism is an important part of the new American West. With the influx of civilization came commodities like trains and bicycles and therefore, capitalists. The wealth of these capitalists afforded them power over the cowboy outlaw. Unlike the cowboy outlaw, the capitalist does not have to master the gun to survive the American West. Since the outlaw's most vital interest is money, the capitalist can make him a part of his proletariat which does his bidding. This status of the capitalist as a wealthy white man who can afford any gunman, however, comes with a problem for the cowboy outlaw. As raised earlier, Despestes's argument in *King Kong Theory* shows that capitalism, like patriarchy does to women, traps *everyone* and requires their submission, stripping them of their agency. She calls capitalism "an egalitarian religion in the sense that it demands general submission, making everyone feel trapped—as all women are" (27). This capitalist entrapment and demand for submission may be interpreted as "the feminization of the cowboy." After all, forced submissiveness and passivity have become synonymous with the perception of femininity under patriarchy. Following this, I examine how cowboys transform from possessing agency to lacking it when they stop being masters of their own lives and assume the position of the powerless proletariats in Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* and Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

To begin with, the most significant case of capitalist entrapment and submission in *Once Upon a Time in the West* is that of Frank. In Leone's film, Frank, at his peak as a cowboy outlaw, can do whatever he wants. His outlaw ways are legendary and the flashback to his murder of Harmonica's brother proves this. However, when Frank starts working for Morton, the railroad tycoon, his independence is curtailed because he must

report to Morton. It is also noteworthy that Frank tries to frame Cheyenne for the McBain massacre. Usually, a cowboy outlaw like Frank would own up to his murders. However, because of civilization and his capitalist dreams, Frank is left to rely on schemes to get to his treasure -- Sweetwater.

It is obvious though that Frank's identity as a cowboy outlaw prevents him from being a true businessman. He tries to learn capitalist ways from Morton but it is impossible for him because as Harmonica notes, cowboys like Frank can either be capitalist machinery (gunmen) or bourgeois, if he retires his gun. Since both operate differently, it is impossible for Frank to become a true businessman. An examination of Frank's conversation with Harmonica in Flagstone is crucial here. When Franks tries to buy the McBain property from Harmonica, the latter deduces that Morton has paid Frank's men to betray him. So, he tells Frank:

> You sound like a real businessman, Frank. Being with Mr. Morton has done you a lot of good. And you've learned some new methods. Yeah, Mr. Morton is showing you a lot of new ways, even though you haven't given up the old ones" (*Once Upon a Time in the West*, 02:02:04 -02:02:32).

This scene subtly depicts the reason why cowboys like Frank cannot become capitalist machinery and bourgeois at the same time. Normally, Frank's men would be loyal to him because they fear him. Without capitalism in the picture, they could have shot helpless Morton, taken his money, and happily reported their new booty to Frank. However, with capitalism in the equation, Frank's men cannot but assume their status as mindless proletariats, thereby betraying Frank. It is therefore safe to conclude that *Once Upon a Time in the West* predicts a future where expert gunslingers like Frank will not have enough power to bully people and steal their properties. Instead, that future will be ruled by capitalists like Mr. Morton who use money and brutal capitalist wits to get ahead.

Furthermore, some cowboys in George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* are under capitalist entrapment which dictates their decisions as well. This capitalist entrapment is instrumental to the elimination of the cowboy outlaw and the establishment of modernity. However, before Hill makes this point in his film, he notes the cowboy's ignorance of their changing world. In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, before Butch and Sundance left Wyoming, they watch the bicycle salesman proclaim that "the horse is dead" (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* 21:58- 22:00) and the bicycle is the future. This is the first time the film signals the duo's impending death. The bicycle and the salesman obviously represent modernization and capitalism while the horse represents the days of the cowboy, which are dying. Although Butch and Sundance witness the bicycle salesman's speech, they are oblivious to the symbolism in it. However, they soon realize that they are in fact doomed when Sheriff Bledsoe tells them that "it's over! Don't you get that? Your time is over and you're gonna die bloody and all you can do is choose where" (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* 48:50-48:58).

Hill's film features a group of lawmen who have been selected by Harriman to hunt down the Hole-in-the-Wall gang and kill its leaders- Butch and Sundance. The men in Harriman's posse have reputations that intensify their legendary status. Lord Baltimore,

for instance, as Butch says, never leaves Oklahoma. Also, Joe LeFors has a reputation for never leaving Wyoming. However, these men are forced to break their rules because of their capitalist employer who needs them to stop Butch's gang from robbing him. In the film, Butch and Sundance keep asking each other "who are those guys?" This is significant because even though the duo think they do not know their pursuers at this point, they have abandoned the possibility that two of them could be Lord Baltimore and Joe LeFors who never leave Oklahoma and Wyoming respectively. Even when Sundance realizes that Joe LeFors is one of their pursuers, he still mutters to himself "Jesus, who are those guys?" (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* 55:38- 55:40).

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is especially important in the context of civilization chasing cowboy outlaws out of the American West via capitalist agents. It is noteworthy that Harriman's posse follows Butch and Sundance no matter where they go. The resilience of the outlaws' pursuers is astounding, and it is safe to assume that if they were not being paid, they would have given up on their search easily. Unfortunately for Butch and Sundance, this is not the case. Frustrated with the men still chasing them after a day, Sundance whines "Damn it! Don't they get tired? Don't they get hungry?" (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* 53:50- 53:53). This depicts the men as mindless zombies, proletariats who will not stop until they fulfil the wish of their bosses.

Hill is strategic in his depiction of the Hole-in-the-Wall gang. Before introducing Harriman's posse, he ensures that the audience grasps the might of Butch's gang. From the beginning of the film, members of the gang are free to do as they please, but they quickly become trapped in the vast West when Harriman's men start chasing them. The swift relegation of members of the gang from powerful to helpless is only made possible because of money- the strength of capitalism. This strength is also what makes Lord Baltimore and Joe LeFors change their lifestyles to hunt Butch and Sundance day and night. Both Leone's and Hill's films show how the changing economic landscape of the West from one dominated by outlaw gangs and frontier justice, moves into the modern era where capitalism begins to determine the fate of cowboy culture and becomes the new frontier.

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Cowboy Masculinity Redefined: From 'Hollow Masculine Icons' to a new 'Anguished Taciturnity'

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The cowboy image has been used to sell products like alcohol, cigarettes, and guns along with the ideas about American exceptionalism, rugged individualism, and male superiority to the point that word 'cowboy' is considered by many as synonymous with 'masculine.' Generations of young men impacted by the masculine standard set by the Hollywood cowboy have struggled to live up to them even during times when they no longer fit and have passed their currency. With this historical image of the cowboy still lingering in the minds of many, the most significant cultural contribution "Alternative Westerns" have provided lies in their reimagining of the cowboy persona. One primary method for altering the cowboy was to disconnect him from stale concepts of masculinity

and portray him in a more humane, natural manner. By showing cowboys who express emotion, engage with and care about the people around them, develop affection for each other (romantic or otherwise), and struggle with their own identity, many Alternative Westerns gave new life to the Western genre and ushered in a progressive era for the cowboy by allowing him to finally enter the modern world and find his place in it.

Fairly or not, for most Americans, the image of the cowboy can be traced back to one famous figure: John Wayne. There were earlier depictions of the cowboy, but his became iconic, lasting, almost visceral. From this image many societal beliefs about masculinity were developed, and when people long for "the good old days when men were men and women were women," it is John Wayne's era for which they are nostalgic. While, obviously, this era never actually existed and nontraditional lives and lifestyles were simply being ignored, this notion has still stuck with a large swath of the American people, and "anti political correctness" and "MAGA" (Make America Great Again) movements of today have found traction in this traditionalist mindset. As Stephen Metcalf of *The Atlantic* wrote in "How John Wayne Became a Hollow Masculine Icon," Wayne "was the apotheosis of a Cold War type—unsentimental, hard, brutal if necessary, proudly anachronistic, a rebuke to the softness of postwar affluence." It is clear this image developed to specifically match a historical time period that many have never moved beyond. Metcalf goes on to argue that Wayne "succeeded in defining an ideal of American masculinity that dominated for nearly half a century." This ideal included men who were "Stoic, humble, gallant, self-sufficient, [and] loyal" among other things. These ideas can be directly traced to misogynistic resistance to Women's Liberation and homophobic reactions to Queer Pride. Only recently has society begun to separate men from this antiquated version of masculinity, and that process has been helped considerably by Alternative Westerns and their ability and wide-ranging efforts to challenge the traditional myth of the cowboy.

THE END OF STOICISM: *High Noon* (1952) / *Shane* (1953)

Stoic? Humble? Gallant? Self-sufficient? When watching *High Noon*, Sheriff Kane initially checks all the boxes of a Wayne-esque cowboy, but it does not take long to realize there is much more subtlety to him. The first shifts away from the stereotypical cowboy were not seismic, but they allowed for future alterations simply because change begets change. As Dominic Lennard writes in his review of the film, *High Noon* "is more than a straightforward male fantasy; it takes us on a fascinating emotional and intellectual journey, lingering at a number of psychic places that we would probably prefer not to visit. If we are to share in Kane's triumph, the film still asks we share in his doubt and, at times, piercing vulnerability." It is this "piercing vulnerability" that marks the major change in Kane's cowboy. Gone are the days when five on one were odds in favor of the lead; gone are the days when everyone rallies to the sheriff's side to take on evil; gone are the days when unnecessary risk taking was celebrated and rewarded with miraculous victories. In Kane's West, he worries about his abilities, is betrayed by the town he's defended his whole career, and is challenged by his wife at every step. There is an entire world telling Kane that he is wrong and he doesn't need to stay for this last fight -- that he doesn't have to be killed for his masculinity. Now, Kane does eventually win, so the film doesn't completely reject the miraculous victory, but the battle is fraught, and he is helped by the bravery of his wife. But the end isn't what is memorable about *High Noon* (except

Paramount Pictures, 1953

the disgusted throwing of his badge); it is the doubt and fear seen from Kane throughout that mark this as an alternative version of the cowboy. Here is a cowboy who feels emotions and worries about his future. It was really that simple. Once these cracks were put in the "masculinity dam," anything became possible.

In many ways, 1953's *Shane* is a continuation of this shift away from stoicism; however, this time the doubt is less about whether the lead cowboy *can* complete the task in front of him and more about whether he *should*. Again, a subtle but profound difference in the way "duty" had been portrayed. Allowing the cowboy to question his purpose or even his existence, allows Shane to step away from the unwavering strength often seen in masculine identity. He desires domesticity, calm, negotiation, and he directly expresses regret for his past and disgust with the act of killing. Shane loses some of the "cool factor" that cowboys are popularly known to have -- he even orders soda at a saloon -- and no longer falls into the "men want to be him" category.

Shane is also *physically* different from the usual cowboy.

> He is frankly seen as a neat, compact man, no physical match for hired guns like Wilson and Calloway who tower over him. He rides into town with a buckskin fringe on his jacket, looking a tad precious to my eyes, and goes to the store to buy a new kit--dress slacks and a blue shirt with an open collar that makes him look almost effeminate in contrast to the burly, whiskered gunmen who work for Ryker and live, apparently, in the saloon. (Roger Ebert)

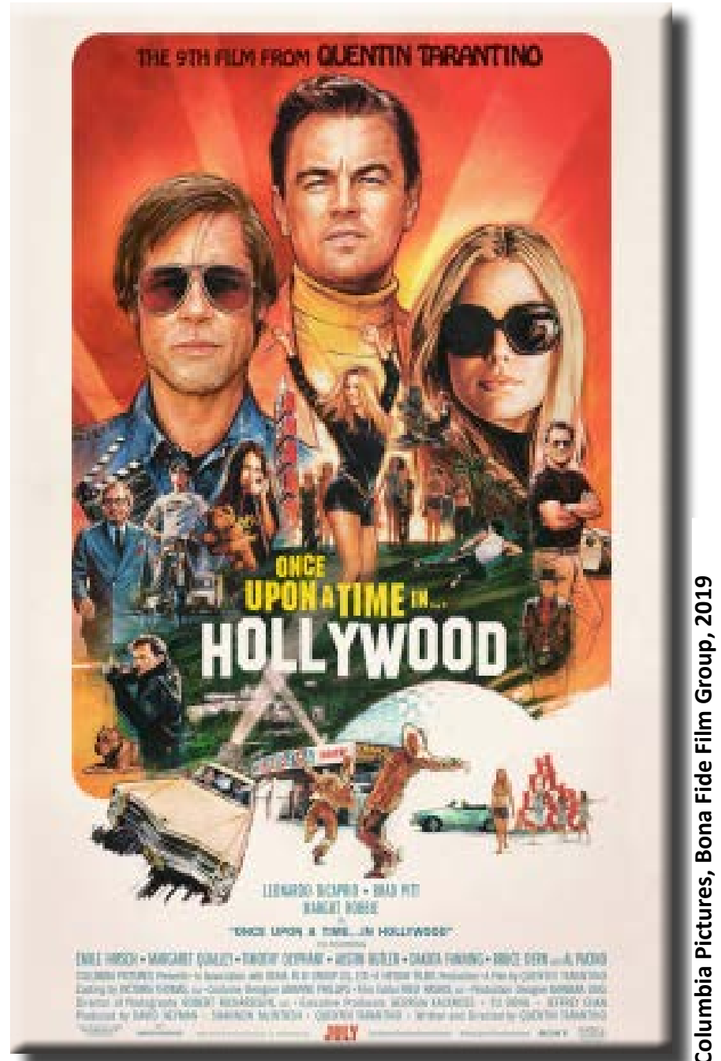
Though he may look a "tad precious," anyone who pushes him too far soon learns there's a fast draw waiting under that fringe. Ebert's description of Shane can be read as slightly homophobic and shows the resistance many had to any change in the way the cowboy behaved or looked. Ebert makes the claim that Shane looks "almost effeminate" in contrast to the *real* men around him. This critique does not seem to consider that this juxtaposition was the entire point, and that *Shane* is making a statement on the absurdity of seeing clothing as any sort of indication of ability or toughness. Ebert may not have appreciated it fully, but now there has been a shift in both the emotional and physical depictions of the cowboy, so the genre can truly begin erasing boundaries.

AFFECTIONATE DUOS: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1971) / *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019)

For the John Wayne and Clint Eastwood types, *rugged individualism* was an

integral part of being a cowboy. As Lois Tyson explains in *Critical Theory Today*, this is an ideology that romanticizes the individual who strikes out alone in pursuit of a goal not easily achieved, a goal that often involves risk and one that most people would not readily undertake. [. . . Rugged individualism] puts self-interest above the needs - and even the survival - of other people (57-58). For most traditional Hollywood cowboys, it would have been sacrilegious to rely on the help of a partner because that would indicate an inadequacy. Cowboys were beaten and shot and dragged by horses, but they always got up, dusted themselves off, and sought revenge. Alone. This intense individualism became a cornerstone of their masculine identity and still affects young men today. This is the mindset that prevents men from seeking help, so they end up throwing out their backs lifting something heavy or struggling with depression because they want to be seen as tough and capable and never in need of assistance.

One of the most famous Alternative Westerns to destroy the concept of rugged individualism and create a duo that supported each other, confided in one another, and chose to die together is *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Because of previous breakthroughs in Alternative Westerns, emotionally vulnerable cowboys were possible, but expressing that emotional vulnerability to another man was novel and effective. Whether it was something small like Sundance's inability to swim or something major like Butch's admission to never having killed a man, these two were open books with each other. They teased and played and rode bicycles. When being chased, they stayed together; when leaving the country, they stayed together. They wanted to move through the world together (and with a girlfriend -- Westerns haven't gone *that* far yet). The relationship was not based on business, nor was it a friendship of convenience. These two men truly cared for one another and it shows, right up to their last moments alive. Choosing to die together has to be one of the strongest rejections of rugged individualism possible. Reviewing *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* Donald Clarke calls it a "Western for people who don't like Westerns." He sees it as a film that "is about little else but the relationship between its two stars, [...] a near-homoerotic mutual reliance, in which the quarrelling is as binding as the back-slapping." This Alternative Western took ideas about cowboy masculinity further by allowing "mutual reliance" and removing the concept of rugged individualism of the past. Healthier, less lonely, cowboys emerged to ride off into the sunset together, even if it was to their deaths. Jump forward about fifty years and a modern-day Butch and Sundance take the screen in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth have been lucky enough to find each other in the isolating and lonely world of Hollywood, and while there is a financial component to



Columbia Pictures, Bona Fide Film Group, 2019

their relationship, they have clearly developed a friendship beyond a typical stuntman-actor experience. The two take the mutual reliance concept even deeper and express even more complex vulnerabilities with one another. Rick uses Cliff for emotional support akin to a girlfriend, and the two are virtually inseparable. If Rick is the "lead cowboy" in this story, then he is an emotionally unstable wreck of one, and if Cliff is the lead, then he is somehow leading from the shadow of a larger figure. The reality is that neither is the complete cowboy, but they complement or "complete" each other. They present a complex, unusual, and entirely original relationship that serves as an example of two men who have spent so much time together that, when it's just the two of them, their masculine identities become secondary and their affection primary. They often interact almost as young boys do before societal expectations twist natural homosocial friendships into something potentially "deviant." Rick and Cliff are how adult males would be if homophobia never existed, if masculinity was never constructed.

A major caveat is needed when discussing the two preceding examples of affectionate duos: they are still tough. While they may rely on a partner and be comfortable showing emotion and confiding in that partner, at the end of the day, they are all "badasses" who can shoot and drink and kill. It takes a literal army to kill Butch and Sundance; while Cliff and Rick destroy some of history's greatest monsters and use a massive flamethrowing penis to do it. The films go out of their way to show this toughness, to reaffirm the masculinity of each duo. The directors of both films spend ninety percent of their films deconstructing the notion of rugged individualism only to replace it with rugged duo-ism. It is unfortunate that there is an apparent fear to cross the finish line and to let men be fully demasculinized.

A NEW LOOK COWBOY: *Midnight Cowboy* (1972) / *Dead Man* (1995)

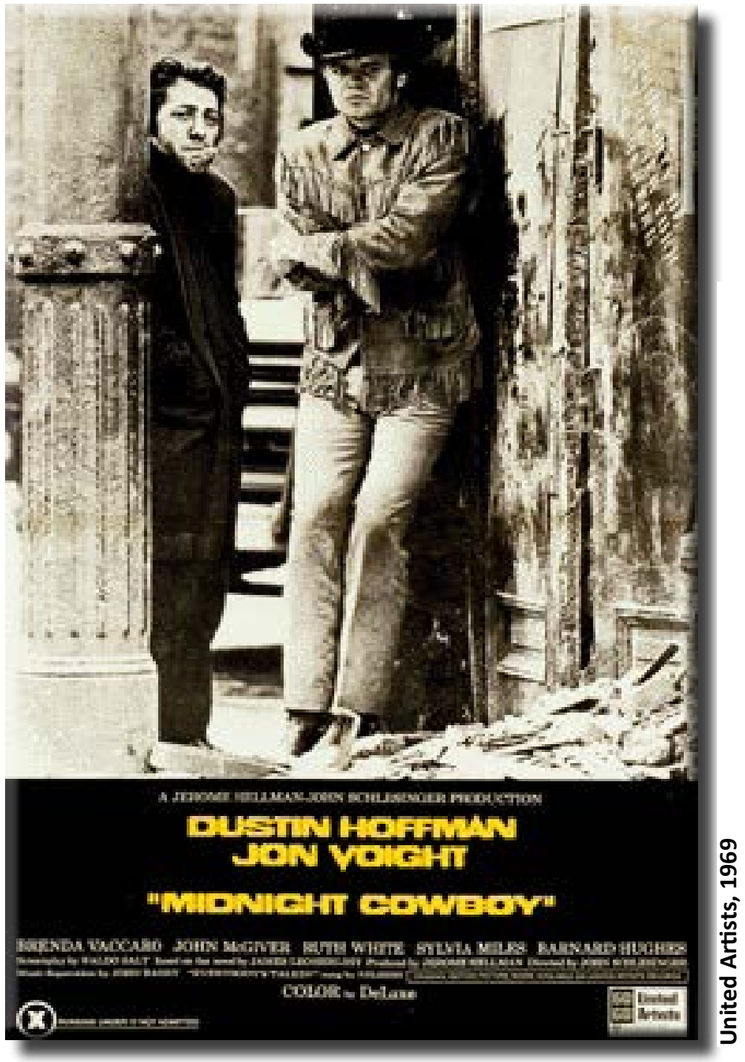
Midnight Cowboy literally stripped away the last remaining vestiges of what it meant to be a cowboy and threw them in a trash can. Joe Buck had the look perfected - blonde hair, blue eyes, big hat, tight leather, sharp boots - and more importantly, he truly *believed* in the power of the image. As a young man struggling with his sexuality and his perceived "effeminate" nature, Buck believed turning cowboy would provide him with the aura of masculinity he sought. He represented the generations of young men who were told to model themselves after the rugged gunslingers of Hollywood, and when he faced a serious identity crisis, he adopted the one identity he considered unshakeable. He wanted to project the confidence and strength he'd seen on movie screens his whole life; what audiences saw instead was the ridiculous performative nature of the cowboy, and thus, of masculinity as well.

In Judith Butler's seminal piece on gender, "Performative Acts and Gender Construction," she serendipitously uses an acting metaphor to explain her concept:

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (272)

This could not describe Joe Buck more precisely. He has rehearsed his entire cowboy

performance and seems genuinely shocked when it fails to deliver the results he expected. John Schlesinger, the director, geniusly places a poor example of a cowboy in a completely foreign terrain to help heighten the absurdity of the image Buck is trying to pull off. When audiences see a cowboy walking the streets of New York City, it is, in many ways, laughable. This forces them to reconsider every aspect of the image and to see how antiquated the notions it represents have become. Buck's failure to fit in as a cowboy in New York City reveals how the persona doesn't fit into modern society anymore. When towards the end he takes off his iconic cowboy hat and boots throwing them into the trash, he is throwing away societal expectations of the cowboy and the image of masculinity. He replaces this with a Hawaiian shirt - light fabric, bright colors - as a way to symbolize the acceptance of his more feminine qualities. It's the end of multiple eras in one impactful moment.



United Artists, 1969

Dead Man continues to play with the cowboy persona by dramatically changing the typical origin story with its lead, William Blake. The John Wayne cowboys appeared to have always been cowboys, whose fathers were cowboys and their fathers before them. It was as if they were born in boots and spurs. This made them feel natural in every Western trope: on the range, on a horse, in a gunfight. They had been made for this, and audiences were comfortable that they would be able to get out of any jam in which they found themselves. This fed the mystique of masculinity and rugged individualism. When *Dead Man* came along in the mid-nineties, it showcased a lead character that was very un-cowboylike; Depp is skinny, pretty, witty; he uses his brain more than his brawn mostly because he has no brawn to speak of. As a character, "Blake is an unintentional outlaw, an introverted Eastern accountant who takes a job by mail [...]; he's an outsider trapped between heaven and hell, anxiously observing as the train fills up with shaggy ruffians and the landscapes outside get bleaker" (Wilmington, *Chicago Tribune*) . Blake arrives on screen the first time wearing a ridiculous suit and bowler hat, projecting the energy of a weak and unimpressive man. There is little about that image or origin story that would inspire confidence in Blake's abilities; however, throughout the film, his abilities prove time and again to exceed expectations. By the end of the film, Blake is unrecognizable as a character, and Depp all but disappears as an actor. It's a reverse of *Midnight Cowboy*: this time the societal construction is removed and a cowboy remains. But this "creation of a cowboy" from such prosaic beginnings, again challenges what it even means to be a cowboy/outlaw/man. Why put your faith into an idea that was so malleable? If an "introverted Eastern accountant" can be molded into a classic gunslinging tough guy, then couldn't anyone?

WOMEN TAKE THE REINS: *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971) / *True Grit* (2010) / *Jane Got a Gun* (2015)

At this point, the John Wayne cowboy is no more, and any number of replacements are possible. There are the duos and the emos and weirdos, but the most obvious next step in the evolution and demasculinization of the cowboy is very clear: women. Female characters have always been present in the Western genre, and many of them are even strong, independent, and central to the main storylines. The first film discussed, *High Noon*, had two well-developed female characters who each played critical roles in the outcome. But the Western has always been an undeniably sexist genre, and female characters, even when crucial, have existed in relation to the main cowboy character. They function more as moons to the planet cowboy in most early films. However, as the cowboy himself began to change and be "feminized" in many ways, it was only logical that women would begin taking more central roles in the genre. Unfortunately, to counter the feminine qualities of some of the new cowboys, many of the females who become central figures of Western stories exhibit strong masculine qualities. While this does little to extinguish the masculine stereotypes of the mid twentieth century, it at least broadens the definition of who can fill these stereotypes. Maybe not a complete win, but an interesting deconstruction of gender and the cowboy nonetheless.

McCabe & Mrs. Miller represents a step in this direction. There are many of the previously mentioned alterations to the cowboy in this film: McCabe is weak, wears ridiculous clothes, is not a killer, expresses doubt, and relies on others. The film also functions as a "buddy film" in the vein of Butch and Sundance, with the buddy being a woman this time. Beyond that it subverts the genre because, as Martyn Concerio analyzes for *Little White Lies*, "Westerns are nearly always about proficient men. Those most capable thrive and survive in frontier environments or become heroes" but in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* "the traditional role is switched to a female character. McCabe is less than capable: he's a fool and no hero. Constance sees the guy for what he is: a tinhorn chancer with little ambition and no vision" (Concerio). Many of the female characters in these films exhibit impressive capabilities, but they are in the areas of housework, raising children, or having sex, mostly duties of a woman. But Mrs. Miller exhibits skills in areas of economics, physical strength, and leadership. Allowing this shift of capability away from the typical cowboy and into the hands of a woman is significant and goes to the very foundation of the cowboy ideal. Though Miller is "a strong-willed sex worker who refuses to play the role assigned to her by society, [...] McCabe does attempt to assert authority over her" because "her forthright personality and sharp intelligence begins to gnaw at his sense of masculinity, as well as confront his privileged position in the community" (Conciero). So, while *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* depicts a woman who surpasses the male lead in almost every way, she is still never seen as equal by him. This, like the duo films reinforcing their characters' toughness, shows that this film wasn't ready yet to go all the way and make the female the hero. By opening this door (or cracking this glass ceiling), however, the character of Mrs. Miller allows for more complete exploration of the female cowboy in the future.

While there have been female leads in Westerns such as the 1950 production of *Annie Get Your Gun*, it is still a relatively rare occurrence. The Western terrain is brutal,

Relativity Media, 2015

tough, and unforgiving. It requires the masculinity of a cowboy to survive, and there aren't many things further from that than a woman, at least in the misogynistic eyes of many people. So having a female lead is, in some ways, the deepest subversion of the genre yet. This can be seen in the modern Western *Jane Got a Gun* starring Natalie Portman as the lead in a violent, barren, dusty portrayal of the West. The film begins by showing Jane, "a slightly built but formidably resourceful pioneer woman" (Leydon) as easily victimized and in need of male help, as her husband is badly wounded and a gang of outlaws is heading to finish him off. As Joe Leydon writes for *Variety*,

> Jane is not your grandfather's Western heroine: She can fire bullets into bad guys just as efficiently as she can take them out of her husband. Granted, she may not be the world's surest shot when it comes to hitting a long-range target. But when she's facing a foe in close quarters she shoots and she scores.

Making her slightly less skilled than her male counterparts ties into a predictable character arc for females: the "toughening up" process. As Jane works at becoming more masculine, through a series of flashbacks, the audience learns her motivation for staying with her husband and desire for vengeance: children.

It is no surprise that the loss of a child would be a main motivation for a female lead because, though Jane develops into a good shooter and tough figure, the genre still wants to keep her rooted in motherhood. With her victory "Jane demonstrates that maternal rage can be every bit as lethal as a quick draw" (Leydon), but it is unfortunate that a motherhood/lost child angle feels necessary for a female lead to be believable. A deeper subversion would have a female lead looking for nothing more than money, as many male cowboys seek. Overall, centering a Western on a woman is still an alternative that shifts the way the story is told and how the tropes of the genre are seen.

Another unique infusion of a female - and this time a female *child* - occurs in the Cohen brothers' modern remake of *True Grit*. The film has plenty of stereotypical male Western characters played by Rooster Cogburn and La Boeuf and Tom Chaney, but the entire story centers around the character of Mattie, the fourteen-year-old girl seeking justice for the murder of her father. Mattie exhibits the self-assuredness, know-how, and singular purpose audiences would expect from a male lead. Because of these masculine traits, Mattie's role does not seem out of place after some work to prove herself. The men of the film resist her initially (even spanking her -- but that is more about her age than her sex) but each grows to respect, trust, and admire her, eventually risking their own lives to save her. This film is dark and bloody and violent, but Mattie belongs largely

because she has been masculinized. This fits the pattern seen in many previous films of only straying away from the typical cowboy slightly. Yes, Mattie is technically a young girl, but everything about her says otherwise, so audiences are comfortable accepting her in the Western world. Again, while this may not be a departure from masculinity, it is somewhat progressive to allow female characters to enter male-dominated spaces and stake a claim.

THE LAST FRONTIER: *Brokeback Mountain* (2006) / *God's Own Country* (2017)

When discussing issues of masculinity and ways to deconstruct it, the logical end point would be homosexuality. Beyond showing emotions and developing male friendships, beyond dressing differently or coming from different origins, beyond even being a woman, the one thing masculinity has demonized more than anything is the romantic and sexual attraction between men. Homosexuality has, for decades, been considering the weakest, lowest, most inappropriate thing a man could take part it, an automatic disqualification of masculinity. Masculinity and homosexuality simply do not connect in many minds, even the woke ones. So, when *Brokeback Mountain* came along it represented possibly the greatest deconstruction of the cowboy myth and the stereotypes of masculinity imaginable. A truly groundbreaking film that was made possible by the many Alternative Westerns before it and the work done to modify the cowboy image in significant enough ways that the world could conceive of a gay one.

Ricky Moody does not hold back on his feelings about the significance of *Brokeback Mountain*, when, in his review for *The Guardian*, he writes

> The western in American cinema is one of the foundational genres. It's the bedrock on which the language of film was constructed. It's the genre on which American identity was staked. Rugged individualism! Life outside the law! Manifest destiny! To tell this western as a movie is an audacious, ambitious thing. To tell this story as a movie is to tilt at the very history of the cinematic form. One of the incredible parts of the movie is just how traditional it is.

If a viewer did not know what they were watching, they would see two fairly predictable cowboy figures. But, as Moody points out, it is the traditional aspect of the film that makes it so revolutionary. The Western had tolerated many changes over the decades, but this was seismic. It was striking at the core of what it meant to be a cowboy, a man, and even an American, and it was doing so with authentic, empathetic characters who fit perfectly in the sparse Western setting. Any additional changes to the genre would have been too much for most audiences.

Ennis Del Mar, played by Heath Ledger, was every bit the Hollywood cowboy. "His anguished taciturnity seems both consonant with some of the finest performers in cinematic westerns - Henry Fonda, John Wayne - and entirely plausible - according to a more realistic code of the cinematic west" (Moody). And Jake Gyllenhaal "moves without a cowboy's easy grace. He moves, as Jack Twist, like someone for whom the trappings of western masculinity are indeed trappings" (Moody). They are emotionally vulnerable, they are a duo, and they have sex with each other -- this is peak deconstruction of all things masculine. The fact that both characters are able to "pass" as heterosexual males,

even raising families, goes to show how traditional they were in most ways and how easy performative masculinity is to accomplish. Once again it begs the question, if changing only one thing (with whom they have sex) destroys the entire construct, how legitimate is it in the first place?

On some level, the masculinity of Jack and Ennis could even have been reestablished if they had never thought of each other again. A "one-time thing," as Jack claims this will be, would fit in the "experimental" or "just a phase" categories that are redeemable in the eyes of masculine society. But *Brokeback Mountain* did not simply portray a story of two cowboys who fuck because no women are around; it continues the story over the course of decades and shows the deepening *love* they have for one another and *need* they have to be together. This is where the film transgresses past the point of no return, shattering what it means to be a cowboy and forever altering viewers' perceptions of what those men were doing out on the range that whole time.

Another "gay cowboy movie" was made a decade after *Brokeback Mountain* and did not receive the attention or the pushback. *God's Own Country* made by British director Francis Lee tells the story of Gheorghe, a Romanian migrant worker, who stops on a family's farm to work and eventually begins engaging in a sexual relationship with the family's troubled son, Johnny. The story takes place in modern Northern England, so it adds the additional layer of British emotional detachment as Johnny works to express his sexuality in healthy ways. The film parallels *Brokeback Mountain*, but does not expand the time frame of the relationship and instead stays focused on the immediate after effects of the sexual encounter and the romantic feelings that develop from it. As a conclusion, the film

British Film Institute, 2017

has Johnny track Gheorghe down at a factory (very manly) and confess his love for him within earshot and view of several coworkers. It is a heartwarming and powerful ending to watch two men overcome racism, homophobia, and Britishness to finally accept themselves and begin to share their lives together. The two characters are even more masculine than Jack and Ennis, so this continues to force audiences to reevaluate their notion of masculinity and sexuality; thankfully, this time around people seemed more ready for it.

The cowboy is one of the most iconic and memorable figures in cinematic history. A classic backyard game and an easy Halloween costume for 1950s suburban moms. A figure that spoke through the television screen and told the viewer to buy cigarettes or big trucks or chewing gum. He may have shaped generations of young boys into emotionally stunted men, but he did so with honor and dignity. Looking at the cowboy

with a modern perspective, it is not difficult to understand why this character became so influential - his moral clarity is refreshing in some ways - but it is also validating to watch the deconstruction and reimagining of a character that has caused so much damage. The cinematic world and the world at large are indebted to the work done by Alternative Westerns, which pushed John Wayne out of the way only to find a long line of fascinating, charismatic, and inspirational cowboys (and cowgirls) waiting behind him.

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Slashing Genre Lines: Viewing The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Films as Weird Westerns

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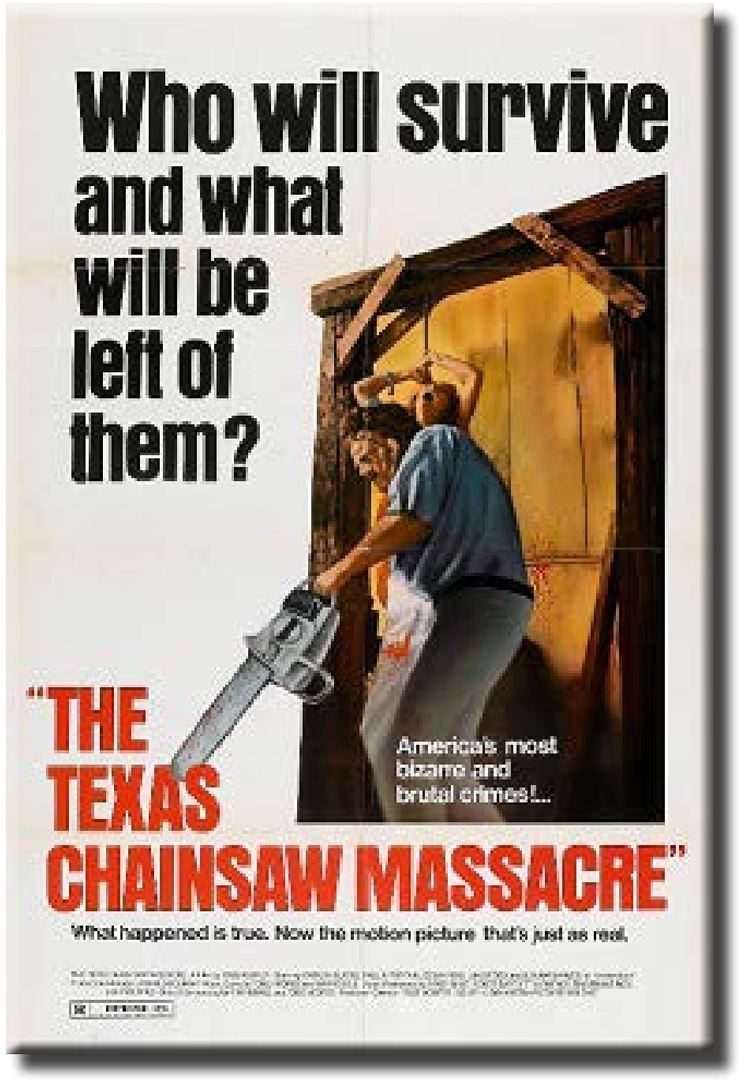
Introduction

Susan Kollin notes that "the popular Western is not a monolithic genre but a divided and contested form that has the ability to articulate ideas across the political spectrum" (1), while Tony Williams says that "many horror films are hybrid formations using motifs found in other Hollywood genres" (22). Other Western scholars, Kerry Fine, Michael K. Johnson, Rebecca M, Lush, & Sara L. Spurgeon writing about "weird" Westerns define them as "texts that utilize a hybrid genre format, blending canonical elements of the western with either fiction, fantasy, [or] horror" (2). By acknowledging that films (and novels, television shows, etc.) across multiple genres can be read as alternate Westerns

through their employment (or contortion) of classic Western tropes, the range of films that can be identified as westerns, expand exponentially. Along these lines, I argue that Tobe Hooper's slasher film *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and its subsequent sequels, prequels, and remake have "affinities to the western" (Williams 22) and can be read as alternate/weird Westerns. When reading them as such, the films become decidedly more nuanced than your run-of-the-mill slasher franchise.

In 1974, director Tobe Hooper and producer Kim Henkel released *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre,* a fictional horror film poised as being based on true events, in which five youths travel down a backroad in rural Texas and unwittingly stumble upon a family of cannibals. The cannibals, known as the Hitchhiker, the Proprietor, and Leatherface, subsequently murder and/or torture the five, for both their own enjoyment and for sustenance. Sally Hardesty, the female lead who would become the prototype of the final girl for the slasher



New Line Cinema, 1974

genre (Clover 1992), is ultimately able to escape the family, the inspiration for whom is said largely to be from real life serial killer Ed Gein (Rose,10). Leatherface, who is usually presented as an oversized and mentally challenged brute, is the only character who actually kills in the film and has now become a slasher icon. He is also the only character to appear in each of the seven subsequent films.

Following the success of the original film, Tobe Hooper returned with a sequel in 1986, entitled *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, which makes the shift from straight horror to black comedy-horror. In 1990 the series returned to straight horror with *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* and was followed by *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* in 1995. A remake of the original film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* premiered in 2003, which was followed by a prequel in 2006, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*. A direct sequel to the original film ignoring those made prior came out in 2013, titled *Texas Chainsaw 3D*, and the final installment as of 2020 was a prequel to that film, simply titled *Leatherface*.

While each of these films are unique in their own way, they each follow similar narratives that feature young Americans attacked, captured, tortured, and murdered in the boondocks of Texas. Leatherface is a pivotal figure in each film, as is the presence of a final girl who outlives her friends, and with the exception of *Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006) and *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017) is able to escape to safety. In *TCM III* (Burr, 1990), final girl Michelle is accompanied by fellow survivor Benny, and in the 2003 remake, final girl Erin escapes with an infant she had rescued from the murderous family. Each film also features extensive scenes of torture and varying amounts of gore

and utilizes both its Texas setting and various contorted Western tropes that enhance their respective storylines. There are five main Western tropes that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise has coopted that make it viewable as a Weird Western series.

Rural Aesthetic and Protecting the Frontier Homestead

In each of the eight films in the franchise, the rural Texas setting plays an integral part of the narrative, just as rural settings are integral to most Westerns. After an opening narration, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) opens with an extreme close-up of a corpse that has been unearthed and posed in a graveyard. The color saturation of the film gives it a bright and overexposed yellow, with some hints of red, which continues throughout the rest of the film. The overall coloring recalls the color saturation of the classic Western *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966), especially in the landscape shots. As the camera pans outward, the cemetery is shown, with dust rolling past the corpse. This particular scene recalls the graveyard scene from another classic western, *Django* (Corbucci, 1966), with the tombstones in full view of the camera. As we are introduced to the main characters, the audience is informed of how broiling the temperature is in Texas, with main character Franklin complaining the most about not being able to handle the heat. The characters, traveling in an Econoline van, pass numerous cattle and an eventual slaughterhouse, with the camera focusing on a landscape that resembles the desert of the West. Tony Williams (2015) refers to this, talking of "connections between Western frontier imagery" and its "influences [on] 1970s horror films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*" (129). Adam Rockoff also discusses how "Hooper combines the desolation of the barren Texas locale with a renegade style filmmaking" (42) and references critics who thought that "Hooper was only effective when working in some desolate Texas-outback like milieu" (108).

Similar frontier imagery is used in later films in the series as well. The final scene of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper, 1986) features lone survivor Stretch dancing with a chainsaw atop a rock tower that resembles a desert mountain with a Texas flag mounted on it as the camera pans out. James Rose writes of the cinematography of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Nispel, 2003), noting that "the images Nispel creates of the American landscape are both beautiful and resonant, an environment baking in a hazy heat and one drained of colour" (103). In an integral scene in the same film, the main character, Andy, flees from the villainous family's homestead with Leatherface in pursuit and runs through the white sheets hung up to dry in the field. Darren Elliot-Smith writes that the "mise-en-scene is passionately evocative of a dusk-set romance" (191). The scene in question ends in bloodshed, but the dusk-set romance Elliot-Smith mentions is more so evocative of the Western classic *High Noon (*Zinnemann, 1952), with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly departing the town at dusk. The severing of Andy's leg by Leatherface effectively ends his life, much as Cooper and Kelly end their life in the town of Hadleyville. The difference of course is that Cooper and Kelly will start a new life elsewhere, which creates an interesting equation of death to life between the Western and the horror genre.

Much as in *High Noon*, the sun itself is an important motif in all of the films in the series, with the characters entering danger as the sun sets and escaping (if they can) as the sun rises. The original 1974 film ends with Sally having escaped and, according to Joseph Lanza, "the fat killer danced against the sunset" (155), although it actually was against

the sunrise, with Leatherface being the killer in question, angry that Sally has escaped. Nightfall is equally important across both genres, as the dangers of the Western town and the horrors of the slasher homestead are unleashed in the darkness. A prime example of this is the final shootout scene in *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992), and the terrors that exist across all eight films in the *Chainsaw* franchise.

The frontier aesthetic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* films employ extends beyond the outdoors and into the frontier-style homestead. Referring to the farmhouse homestead of the original film, W. Scott Poole writes that the "interior looks like a fever dream of the American west with skeletons of animals transformed into furniture and floors littered with feathers and teeth" (para. 7). This description is accurate across the series, even as the homestead briefly shifts to an abandoned amusement park in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper, 1986). In this instance, the amusement park itself takes on a Western tone, with murals of cowboys and Indians adorning its walls and cowboy statues guarding the outside of it.

In the Western, with the importance of the frontier homestead comes the importance of guarding it. Films such as *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) and *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960) center on protecting rural homes and towns, and so do nearly all the films in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series. This time, however, the villains are the protectors. In the original film, characters Pam and Kirk wander onto the Sawyer homestead looking for fuel. As Kirk enters the farmhouse-style home without permission, Leatherface appears and murders him before retreating with the body behind a metal door. When Pam, and eventually Jerry (the final main character) appear looking for those of their group who

are missing, Leatherface does not attack until they have entered his home. James Rose draws attention to this, noting that "Leatherface's house is not only trespassed upon but seemingly invaded" (64). After these three murders Leatherface is shown frantically searching the house for any others, looking out the window for more people, then sitting and rocking back and forth in fear and agitation. The film therefore paints the simple-minded Leatherface as the victim of invaders, albeit in a twisted way compared to the majority of Westerns. This invasion narrative continues through the rest of the subsequent films, although it begins to expand to not just the homestead but the town as well. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper, 1986), *III* (Burr, 1990), and *Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006) the villains attack once the "invaders" drive through on the main town road, with the remake (Nispel, 2003) and *Next Generation* (Henkel, 1995) returning to the invaded homestead. *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017) remains a unique film in the series as an adolescent Leatherface lures the initial victims away from the main road and into a barn that doesn't appear to belong to the family's homestead. The majority of the film's narrative then shifts to the young Leatherface being sent to a mental institution and his subsequent escape. This narrative will feature later in this study.

Texas Chainsaw 3D (Luessenhop, 2013) also adheres to the homestead invasion narrative but ups the ante in regard to Leatherface and his family being the victims. Directly following the events of the original, *3D* picks up with the sheriff and local townspeople converging on the family homestead in an attempt to arrest Leatherface, now identified as Jedidiah Sawyer, for his crimes. Initially resistant, Drayton Sawyer claims that Leatherface was "protecting the house and the family," suggesting he was heroic for

his actions. Despite the Sawyer family agreeing to surrender Leatherface, the drunken townspeople open fire on the homestead and kill all of its inhabitants, which includes extended family not seen in the original film. The only survivors are Leatherface and his infant cousin, who grows up to be the main character Heather. Leatherface is ultimately not the villain of this film. Similar to the original, he only attacks Heather and her friends when they enter his house, newly inherited by Heather. Later in the film, once Heather identifies herself as his cousin, Leatherface begins to protect her. Each of Leatherface's victims are now emphasized to be the villains. These "villain-victims" include hitchhiker Darryl (who attempts to rob the house), Heather's boyfriend Ryan and best friend Nikki (who are carrying on an affair behind her back), Mayor Burt Hartman and his associate Ollie (both of whom took part in the murder of Leatherface's family), and Heather's abusive foster parents. His other victim is Nikki's seemingly innocent boyfriend Kenny, who nonetheless is killed after entering Leatherface's home. Leatherface's anti-hero status is elevated by Heather's decision to aid him in his murders and ultimately live with and take care of him. By the end of the film, Leatherface is presented not as a villain, but as the hero of a cruel Western town that massacred his family. Just as how the Western is a "genre obsessed with the violence necessary to police the borders" (Johnson, Lush, and Spurgeon 4), so is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series.

The Wilderness: Harsh but Conquerable

W. Scott Poole remarks that the original film puts its characters in "danger in an American wilderness [that] still evokes everything from the terrors of a closed frontier to the brutal violence that originally opened that frontier" (para. 4). This idea of brutal violence exists in each of the eight films in the series through their graphic depictions of torture, murder, and cannibalism. While *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) showed very little blood and gore, the subsequent films increased it. Some examples include the decapitation of the female lead in *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017), a full bisection of a man impaled on a hook at the waist in *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (Luessenhop, 2013), the bisection of a man's head in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper, 1986), and several disembowelments in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Nispel, 2003) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006). The violence of the Wild West has become much more heightened in this series, with more emphasis placed on gore as opposed to the adventure.

Tony Williams relates the Texas wilderness where Leatherface and his family remain isolated directly to that of the Western, citing its relation to "the isolated wilderness awaiting Shane and Ethan Edwards at the conclusion of *Shane* and *The Searchers*" (194). The reason for the setting being an isolated and harsh wilderness is explained in the *TCM* movies as relating to capitalism. It is explained in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) that the Sawyer family (occasionally renamed the Slaughters or Hewitt's in later films) was once successful in the meat industry and were quite good at killing cattle with a sledgehammer. When the captive bolt pistol became popular, it eliminated the need for as many slaughterhouse workers and drove the family members out of their jobs. This narrative reoccurs throughout the majority of the subsequent films. Speaking again of the wilderness in the original film, Tony Williams makes the claim that Sally and her friends "venture into a wilderness area that was devastated after fulfilling its use-value"

(190). As a result of unemployment, the family must become uncivilized and attack those who represent this new future, represented by the youth passing through their wilderness. This "civilized vs. uncivilized conflict" (Rockoff 97) lays the base foundation for the family's violence in the series. Now "struggling to survive in a rural environment, the men have responded to their rejection through violent retribution" (Rose 43).

The "frenetic primal violence" (Rockoff 48) of Leatherface's family in the films is often compared to that of the stereotypical Indians in older westerns such as *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* (Griffith, 1913). Carol Clover mentions that "the rednecks of modern horror even look and act like movie Indians" (136). Joshua T. Anderson takes this a step further, claiming that "these monstrous, rural white families… bear striking resemblance to the savage and static Indians of the Hollywood Western" (126). This further develops the representation of the family, as they are now savage Indians attempting to protect their land from invaders. While it's an admittedly "nihilistic vision of the family" (Williams 195), Richard Nowell importantly notes that "*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was lauded for critiquing American institutions, particularly the family" (60). With our current understanding of the negative representations of Native Americans in the Western genre, it makes sense that the later films would paint the Sawyer/Slaughter/Hewitt family as sympathetic. This "special connection between the country folk of the urbanoia films… and the Indians of the settler-vs-Indian Western" (Clover 136) in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise is yet another way that the series represents the Weird Western.

The harsh wilderness represented by the villains of the franchise, however, is deemed conquerable much like the frontier of the West was for the settlers who survived. In every film in the series sans *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006) and *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017), at least one survivor is able to escape, albeit not unscathed. Chronologically, survivors Sally, Stretch, Michelle and Benny, Jenny, Erin and infant, and Heather are all able to find safety by the end of the film. Much in how an injured Alan Ladd limps away in *Shane*, these survivors are able to conquer the wilderness and live to die another day. Final girls Chrissy and Lizzy are unable to survive, and both succumb to the brutality of the West. In both the Western and the slasher, it's about survival of the fittest.

Cowboys and Sheriffs

The key component in the Western is that of the cowboy. The moral and steadfast characters portrayed by actors such as John Wayne, Alan Ladd, and Gary Cooper are inarguably the main reason why the genre has persisted for so long. While the Sawyer/Slaughter/Hewitt family may act like stereotypical Hollywood Indians, several characters in horror films take on the persona of the cowboy. This is most prominent in *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Burr, 1990) with the character Tex, portrayed by Viggo Mortensen. In his appearance alone he fits the image of the modern cowboy: boots, Stetson, bandana, and acid washed blue jeans. In his initial conversation with lead character Michelle at the "Last Chance Gas Station," Tex oozes Southern charm as he comments on Michelle's beauty. He also appears to be an honorable man as he protects Michelle from Alfredo Sawyer, the gas station attendant who, along with Tex, would later be revealed to be Leatherface's brothers. When Alfredo is caught by Tex leering at Michelle through a secret peephole as she uses the restroom, Tex attacks him to defend

her honor. When Alfredo appears to shoot Tex in response, Ryan, Michelle's boyfriend, references Tex's role as the films cowboy, shouting "The cowboy! He shot the cowboy!" (*TCM III*, Burr, 1990). As Michelle and Ryan flee the gas station, he then screams "Take the cowboy's route!" referencing the road Tex had told them was a better way to take.

In discussing the film, Tony Williams addresses how the narrative's "links between family horror, Vietnam, and Westerns develop" (210). With the Western link established through Tex, the family horror begins when Michelle and Ryan crash their car and stumble upon the Sawyer home. As Michelle is held captive in the dining room with an unconscious Ryan and the rest of the Sawyer family, Tex's calm and cool Cowboy demeanor fades away. It is revealed that his real name is Eddie Sawyer, and that the masculine "Tex" persona is fabricated. Williams notes that Tex/Eddie "reacts angrily when addressed by his actual name, Eddie, preferring the Western masculine style he adopts" (211). The anger Williams notes, however, is tinged with a meek pain, as Tex/Eddie's voice breaks when he admonishes his brother Tinker for calling him Eddie. While still retaining some of this persona, Tex/Eddie appears in the kitchen wearing an apron, which presents him as being in a subservient role to the other men in his family, and more so presents a kind of soft cowboy masculinity compared to the hardened characters of most classic Westerns.

The second most prominent appearance of a cowboy in the series comes in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper, 1986) with Lieutenant "Lefty" Enright, portrayed by Dennis Hopper. Enright is introduced as a former Texas Ranger out to discover the fate of his nephew Franklin, a victim from the first film. Williams makes an immediate Western connection with Enright: "Recalling John Wayne's Texas Ranger associations in *The Searchers* and *The Comancheros*, Enright is a latter-day Ethan Edwards searching for his lost relative" (207). A detective that Enright encounters at the start of the film also references this, stating "Remember the Alamo, cowboy" when Enright walks away from him. Unlike the cowboy characters he has been associated with, Enright is not the most morally upright. Halfway through the film he uses final girl Stretch as bait in order to lure out the Sawyer family from their amusement park hideaway. He also isn't the sanest of characters, drinking heavily, muttering religious sayings, and not being particularly effective at combatting his enemies. Enright arms himself with chainsaws much in the way a cowboy would arm himself with firearms and attacks the Sawyer family with little care for Stretch's or his own fate. Adam Rockoff refers to him as "a severely demented Texas Ranger" (165), which is reflected in the final fight scene between him and Leatherface. The scene takes a twisted form of a cowboy standoff, with Leatherface and Enright battling each other and using chainsaws like swords. Williams also classifies the fight as that of a Western, observing that "Enright enacts a 20th century Western version of a gunfight between him and Leatherface" (208). However, as Carol Clover states, "the Texas Ranger proves so utterly ineffectual that he cannot save himself, much less the girl" (38). Enright ultimately dies via a grenade that Leatherface's brother Drayton uses to kill himself as well. While most of the female characters don't take on cowgirl personas, there are two female lead characters in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Pepper and Erin (Nispel). Erin wears a Stetson hat while Pepper dons cowboy boots through the entire film. Just like how in most slasher movies women feature heavily, "plenty of Westerns have featured women in prominent roles" (Johnson, Lush, and Spurgeon 8).

Nearly as important as the cowboy in the Western is the sheriff. The character of Sheriff Hooper plays a minor but fundamental role in *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (Luessenhop, 2013). Hooper appears at the start of the film attempting to arrest Leatherface/Jedidiah Sawyer for the murders in the original film but is unable to as the townspeople arrive and kill the majority of the family while Hooper watches. Sotiris Petridis mentions how "Sheriff Hooper (Thom Barry) …is negatively represented by his neutrality" (100). Hooper is later vindicated by refusing to save the guilty mayor right before the mayor is murdered by Leatherface and his cousin, Heather. While this doesn't represent justice by most Western movie standards, the slasher film adheres to a different set of morals that demand death.

A much more negative representation of the Western sheriff comes in the prequel to the original film, *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017). Sheriff Hal Hartman, portrayed by Stephen Dorff, is originally presented in a sympathetic light as Leatherface and his family murder his daughter at the start of the film. After the film jumps ahead ten years, it is shown that he is now completely unhinged and will stop at nothing to punish the Sawyer family. He achieves this by first sending a young Leatherface to a mental institution for children. After Leatherface, now named Jackson, escapes with several other inmates, Hartman tracks them down and eventually finds Clarice, one of the inmates. After briefly torturing her, he executes her in cold blood with zero remorse. Shortly afterwards, he shoots Jackson/Leatherface in the head, leaving him mentally damaged. As a result, Jackson, who up until now had been portrayed as benevolent, succumbs to his murderous family's wishes and becomes the Leatherface we now know from the earlier films. Hartman takes on the role of Dr. Frankenstein, with Leatherface as his monster. Hartman receives his comeuppance at the end of the film, when he is violently disemboweled with a chainsaw by Leatherface. An interesting piece of casting comes in *Texas 3D* (Lussennhop, 2013) in the character of Carl Hartman, the grandson of Sheriff Hal Hartman. Carl is portrayed by Scott Eastwood, the son of legendary Western actor Clint Eastwood. Eastwood's character in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* remains an indispensable example of a Hollywood cowboy, and Scott's role in this film attributes yet another connection the *TCM* series has to the Western genre.

The final and most negative representation of the Western sheriff in the series comes through the character of Sheriff Hoyt, portrayed by R. Lee Ermey in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Nispel, 2003) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006). R. Lee Ermey is introduced as a corrupt lawman who appears to help the main characters of the 2003 film clean up the dead body of a hitchhiker that had killed herself in their van. Morgan, one of these characters, sarcastically refers to him as their "Lone Ranger," a sardonic comment on his unprofessionalism. Hoyt begins to enact mental torture on the main characters, such as making Morgan reenact the hitchhiker's suicide, before they escape from him and stumble upon the Hewitt family (renamed from the Sawyers of the earlier films) home. Hoyt is revealed to be the patriarch of the Hewitt family and the older brother of Leatherface. He spends the rest of the film killing the main characters and attempting to kill main character Erin, who ultimately kills him instead.

Hoyt returns in the 2006 prequel, where his origins are revealed. Hoyt took his

name from the actual sheriff of the town, who he murdered for trying to arrest Leatherface after his first kill. Hoyt's real name is Charlie Hewitt, and he's been posing as the sheriff in a twisted attempt to control their dying Texas town and allow the Hewitt family to murder and consume those who pass through. He attempts to take the moral stance of the traditional Western sheriff, lambasting the main characters in the 2003 film for smoking marijuana and one of the main characters of the 2006 film for trying to evade the Vietnam War draft. Hoyt speaks of attempting to protect the town from hippies and bikers. Of course, his way of protecting the town is by murdering them and consuming their flesh. Perhaps the most heinous moment of the series comes in the 2006 film, where it is implied that Hoyt has raped main character Bailey off-screen. This recalls the rape/captivity narrative of *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), in which John Wayne's character discovers the presumably raped Lucy's body. As the perpetrators of the crime in that film are Native Americans, the previously discussed alignment between Hollywood Indians and the villains of the *TCM* series coalesces with Hoyt's presentation of a potential rapist.

While the cowboys and sheriffs of the *TCM* franchise may have outward appearances similar to those of the Western genre, their morals reflect the opposite. This creates an intriguing dynamic within the genre: whereas these characters represent life in the traditional Western, they represent death in the slasher film.

Captivity Narratives

Much as in how "captivity narratives have often played a crucial role… by contributing to myths of the frontier" (Kollin 2) in the Western, they also play a crucial role in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series. In each film, a group of young characters are taken captive by the Sawyer/Slaughter/Hewitt family to be tortured and eaten, and in almost every instance they must rely on their own wits in order to escape.

In order to break down the execution of the captivity narrative, I focus on *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* (Henkel, 1995) as each film follows a nearly identical base story structure. High schoolers Jenny, Heather, Sean, and Barry leave their prom and wind up crashing their car down a backroad in rural Texas. Attempting to find help, they stumble upon a real estate office manned by a woman named Darla, who calls her boyfriend Vilmer to tow their car. The teenagers separate, with Barry and Heather entering the Slaughter family home where Barry is murdered by Leatherface. Meanwhile, Sean is killed by Vilmer at the crash site, and Vilmer chases Jenny back to the real estate office where she is captured by Darla and Vilmer. Upon arriving at the Slaughter home, Jenny and Heather are held as hostages by Vilmer, Darla, and Leatherface. Heather is subsequently murdered by Vilmer, with Jenny successfully absconding to freedom. Her escape is facilitated by a mysterious man named Rothman, who murders Vilmer and claims to work for the government. He informs Jenny that the Slaughter family was hired to torture her and her friends in order to elicit a "spiritual experience." She is then dropped off at a hospital, where she witnesses a nearly comatose Sally Hardesty, the victim of the original film's captivity narrative, wheeled by on a gurney.

With the exception of *Next Generation* (Henkel, 1995) and *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Burr, 1990), in which main character Benny (played by horror legend Ken Foree) helps final girl Michelle escape, most of the final girls have to escape

on their own. However, the successful rescues by Benny and Rothman and the "self-rescues" by the others align with "the Western's classic plot device of captivity and rescue" (Kollin 91).

The *TCM* franchise alters its traditional captivity narrative in the most recent entry in the series, *Leatherface* (Bustillo and Maury, 2017). In this film, the captors are not the Sawyer family but in fact the state, with the main Sawyer (Leatherface) now becoming the captive. After Sheriff Hartman sends a young Leatherface to a mental institution following his involvement in the death of Hartman's daughter, Leatherface (now named Jackson) is held captive at the Gorman House for ten years. The rescue aspect of the narrative comes in the form of his mother, Verna Sawyer (played by Lili Taylor), who creates a riot in order to draw Leatherface/Jackson out. In the ensuing riot, Leatherface and fellow inmate Bud are able to escape with a new nurse named Lizzy. However, they are once again captured, this time by inmates Clarice and Ike. This second captivity carries through the majority of the film, with Lizzy, Leatherface/Jackson, and Bud attempting several escapes that are unsuccessful. Ultimately, Sheriff Hal Hartman kills Clarice, Bud kills Ike, and Lizzy and Leatherface/Jackson escape. However, Hartman shoots Leatherface/Jackson in the face and recaptures Lizzy and Leatherface/Jackson for a third time. The Sawyer family eventually arrives and frees Leatherface for good before taking Lizzy hostage yet again along with Hartman. This complicated captivity narrative ends with the now mentally damaged Leatherface murdering the captive Hartman and decapitating Lizzy in what is the most heartbreaking death of the franchise. By combining the captivity narrative of the classic Western with the horror tropes of the slasher genre *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise reveals that the TCM films become even more identifiable as Weird Westerns.

The Western Saloon versus the Horror Filling Station

A fascinating connection between *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series (and horror films in general) and classic Westerns such as *Shane* is the inconspicuous relationship between the filling station commonly found in horror films and the saloon found in Westerns. In the aforementioned Western film, just like many others, the saloon is the place where information is relayed, human connections are made, altercations happen, and the story progresses. In *Shane*, Alan Ladd's titular character encounters Ryker's man Calloway, who antagonizes him and propels Shane's involvement in protecting the Starrett's and neighboring homesteads. Upon Shane's second visit to the saloon, a brawl occurs that furthers the antagonism between Shane and Ryker's men. Several more integral scenes take place at this saloon, including the murder of Torrey and the final duel. The importance of this location is echoed through many of the films of the Western genre often forming the crux of the Western's narrative structure.

In horror films, the filling station takes the place of the saloon. Like the saloon, this is where the plot of the horror film's story progresses. The first appearance of the filling station in the *TCM* series comes in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) where it doubles as a barbeque restaurant owned by the Sawyer family. Sally and her friends stop here on their trip and meet Drayton Sawyer, Leatherface's brother who would later take part in their torture and murders. Joseph Lanza notes that "In many gas station

scenes from movies past, the symbols, signs, and subtexts are hidden in plain sight" (69). One of the signs is a literal one, with the filling station's sign reading "We slaughter." This tongue-in-cheek reference to the family's cannibalism corresponds to the human BBQ being peddled at the station. Drayton, who functions as both the harbinger and the bringer of doom attempts to warn the youths away from their destination, the "old Franklin place," but in reality is doing so to try to manipulate them into staying so he can kill them earlier. Similar gas station scenes occur in nearly every film in the series. Another prime example is in *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Burr, 1990), where the filling station is called the "Last Chance Gas Station." This is the location for the start of the conflict for main characters Michelle and Ryan. They learn of the route that takes them to the Sawyer homestead and meet villains Alfredo and Tex for the first time. As a result, their horrific captivity narrative begins.

The filling station elicits the conflict as well in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006). It's here that the main characters encounter motorcycle gang member Alex, who follows the group and attacks them on the road. This interaction draws the attention of Sheriff Hoyt/Charlie Sawyer, who kills Alex and begins torturing the main characters. Without the filling station being a part of the story, the main characters would have safely gotten out of town, thus strengthening the argument that its existence is crucial to the narrative. This same filling station had previously been seen in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Nispel, 2003), where it was the location of the final battle between final girl Erin and Sheriff Hoyt.

This relationship between the filling station and the saloon is perhaps the most surprising connection between *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Series* and the Western. The utilization of two extremely different settings that drive the plot of the film in almost identical ways represents a harmonious association between the horror genre and the western, thus establishing a final trope that shows how the *TCM* films are Weird Westerns.

Conclusion

Within the realm of horror, the subgenre of slasher cinema remains quite new, having been effectively established in 1974 with Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Later films within the subgenre would take the tropes pioneered by this film in order to duplicate its success. However, the series remains unique as the only slasher/western hybrid franchise, and as such embodies the definition of the Weird Western. With all eight films in the series come deep rooted, intriguing, and unique connections to the Western that provide a nuanced look at a series often overlooked by those outside of horror criticism. The use of a rural frontier aesthetic that extends into the homestead exists in each film in the series, and the villains of the narrative all fight to protect it from outside invaders. In order to do so, they utilize incredibly harsh and gory methods to kill their invaders that evokes the brutality of the Wild West, and in doing so they begin to resemble the static Indians of old Hollywood. Furthering this comparison is the use of captivity narratives that exist within each film, much as how they exist in classic Westerns. Amongst both the villains and heroes are cowboy and sheriff figures who run the gamut between good and evil. Finally, much as in how there is always a saloon waiting for the Western hero, there is a filling station waiting for the slasher hero/heroine.

The examination of how the amalgamation of Western tropes exist within the series goes beyond showing that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series are Weird Westerns; it shows that this series is more than worthy of critical attention, and shows that the lines between film genres aren't quite as broad as one might think.

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So Far West It's East: Asia and the West(ern)

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Asia and the American West, often seen as polar opposites because of their two very distinct locations, often are not thought to have strong associations with one another. Yet, historically many points of contact between Asia and the American West exist; and, more recently their confluence and relationship has begun to be recognized in revised historical accounts and in both American and East Asian popular culture. In this analysis I draw on the historical context of the centuries-old relationship between the United States, specifically "the West," and Asia in order to focus my discussion on connections found in four contemporary East Asian Westerns viewed for Dr. Khani Begum's "Alternate and Global Westerns" course at Bowling Green State University during the Fall Semester of 2020. The East Asian films I analyze here are primarily Takashi Mieki's *Sukiyaki Western Django ; The Good, The Bad, The Weird; Kung Fu Hustle;* and *Tears of the Black Tiger*.

Historical Context

Christopher Columbus, who sailed the ocean blue in 1492, was looking for easy access to the Far East, to the presumed riches of India, China, Japan, and the Spice Islands, when he found himself on the shores of what is now San Salvador in the Bahamas, what was originally believed to be named Guanahani by the indigenous people of the island. From the early days of the founding of the United States of America, the Founding Fathers yearned for trade with China as well. On February 22, 1784, just five months after the official end of the Revolutionary War, the *Empress of China* was the first American international commercial ship after independence to leave New York for Canton, China.[1] Following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent out the Lewis and Clark Expedition whose main objectives were not just to get an idea for what exactly existed in this new 827,000 acre swath of land the United States had just purchased, but to find a quicker trade route to China.

The idea of manifest destiny, generally believed to be coined by John O'Sullivan in 1845, was the widespread belief that American settlers had not only the ability, but were destined by God to spread across the North American continent east to west and spread Christianity, democracy, and capitalism with them. The racism and White supremacy that was inherent within manifest destiny led to the displacement and genocide of the indigenous peoples of the continent and the other non-White residents of the interior of the continent, such as Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

1. Dave Wang, "The US Founders and China: The Origins of Chinese Cultural Influence on the United States," *Education About Asia* 16, vol. 2 (Fall 2011): 8.

On July 8, 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, brother of Oliver Hazard Perry, who was a commanding officer of the Navy during the War of 1812, sailed into Edo Bay (now known as Tokyo Bay) and forcibly opened trade with Japan with his gunboat diplomacy. This would be the first time in 200 years that Japan would engage in regular trade and interaction with the western world, save for a few Portuguese and Dutch traders before that. The first Japanese diplomatic mission to the US was initiated just seven years later in 1860. However, before reaching Washington, D.C., the Japanese diplomats visited Hawaii, San Francisco, and Panama. According to the Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the diplomats on the trip, while the party was in San Francisco stayed across the Bay in Vallejo at a military base. It had recently been Rancho Suscol, General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's land only 9 years prior. Fukuzawa recollects in his memoir that while stationed there, the Japanese diplomats better learned how to ride horses and utilize firearms.[2] This location now holds the California State University Maritime Academy, the only maritime academy on the West Coast.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the frontier was officially considered to be closed. In 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that a frontier line, across which population density was less than two persons per square mile, no longer existed. By 1890, the trans-Mississippi west was not only the country's most culturally diverse region but, ironically, also its most urbanized.[3] Just three years later, in 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner would give his frontier thesis to the meeting of the American Historical Society in Chicago. In his thesis, Turner argued that everything in American history up to the 1880s related to the frontier and that the individualism fostered by the frontier led to American exceptionalism and was directly complimentary to democracy – somewhat of a take on Jeffersonian agrarianism.

During the last few years of the nineteenth century, in 1898, the United States participated in the Spanish-American War which not only ended the colonial rule of superpower Spain in the Americas, but also gave the United States' its first taste of overseas imperialism. The Treaty of Paris had Spain renounce all claim to Cuba and gave Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the U.S.[4] Since the American frontier was closed, American imperialism decided to move even farther west: east.

The Gold Rush, Asian Immigration to the United States, and the Yellow Peril

Asian immigrants, mainly Chinese, mostly from Canton, and almost entirely male, immigrated to the West Coast during the Gold Rush to try their hand at staking a claim. These immigrants called California "Gold Mountain" (金山 [*Gāmsāan*]), and San Francisco is still referred to as "Old Gold Mountain" by some. Initially, the Chinese were not seen as much of a threat as they did not fall into the racial categories already designated in the U.S. or that were present in California at the time (White, Black, Native American, Mexican, etc.) and Chinese food was initially welcomed by White residents in San Francisco with open arms as an alternative to the stale and bland cuisine of Gold Rush-era Anglo-Americans. This, however, quickly changed, and the Chinese

2. Yukichi Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
3. "Closing the American Frontier," Digital History, University of Houston, last modified 2019, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=2&psid=3154.
4. "Treaty of Paris of 1898," The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War, Library of Congress, last modified June 22, 2011, https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/treaty.html.

soon came to be heavily discriminated against on the West Coast. Largely barred out of mining by the California Foreign Miners' Tax Act of 1850, which imposed a tax of $20 per month on all foreign miners, Chinese immigrants were forced into more gendered work such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry. The California Workingmen's Party and others rallied heavily behind mottoes such as "the Chinese must go!" Chinese cuisine even fell out of style as the Chinese were accused of eating all sorts of strange animals such as rats and puppies, and it would not become popular again to Americans until the middle of the twentieth century. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, which prohibited all continued immigration of Chinese laborers but allowed for some diplomats, teachers, merchants, and travelers for 10 years. From 1900-1904, a bout of the bubonic plague that originated in Chinatown ravaged San Francisco, which only heightened anti-Chinese sentiment.

With the introduction of the Chinese Exclusion Act, many Japanese individuals took advantage of the labor shortage and immigrated. However, shortly thereafter, the victory of the Japanese over the Russians during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the first time in the modern world that an Asian power defeated a European power, not only caused a spike in anti-Japanese suspicions but multiplied Yellow Peril-induced xenophobia.[5] The League of Nations' denial of Japan's Racial Equality Proposal following Japan's involvement in World War I as one of the Allied Powers did not help either.

During World War II, once the Japanese had become our enemy, fighting them in the Pacific Theater was often compared to fighting off Indians back on the old frontier. Henry Luce, publisher of *Time-Life* during World War II, said that while "Americans had to learn to hate Germans, but hating Japs comes natural – as natural as fighting Indians once was."[6] While Westerns had been filmed since 1903, they started to become more popular, and more accessible, during the Great Depression and World War II and became most popular during the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s. At the same time, the old imperial regimes and cultural significance of Britain and France were being displaced by that of the United States, who by no doubt came out on top following World War II. The American empire expanded its grasp and initiated occupations in Germany and Japan. The United States expanded its cultural hegemony across the globe and along with it went the American icon: the cowboy. In the 1950s, during and following the Occupation, Japan would see a boom in Country and Western music and by the 1960s Italy would begin its export of Spaghetti Westerns. Since then, wherever American hegemony was present around the globe, the image of the cowboy would follow.

In this article, I discuss four East Asian Westerns from different countries created and directed by East Asians during the 2000s, namely *Sukiyaki Western Django* (Japan, 2007); *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (South Korea, 2008); *Kung Fu Hustle* (Hong Kong, 2004); and *Tears of the Black Tiger* (Thailand, 2000). I discuss them individually in this order, which is roughly the chronological order in which they are set and include some historical context before analyzing their overarching themes.

Sukiyaki Western Django

Sukiyaki Western Django is a Japanese Western directed by Takashi Miike with

5. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 156.

6. Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

an all-Japanese cast speaking in English, save for a cameo by Quentin Tarantino whose heavily-accented English, is far more accented than that of its Japanese actors. The film is set a "few hundred years after the Genpei War," which lasted from 1180-1185, so we can assume this film is set in 1880s in terms of its Western reference. It is set in a Japantown named Yuta, which is located somewhere in Nevada.[7] The story revolves around an unnamed cowboy, a nod to the Man with No Name archetype of the character that Clint Eastwood played in Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns. This Man with No Name finds himself in the town of Yuta, which is home to two warring clans, the Genjis who wear white and the Heikes who wear red, a reference to the English War of the Roses. However, in this western setting this rivalry also has a Hatfields vs McCoys kind of feel to it in addition to a reference to the Japanese epic of the *Tale of the Heiji*. The town of Yuta was previously a very prosperous mining town. One can presume that Yuta must be located somewhere around Virginia City, which is southeast of Reno, about equidistant between Reno and Carson City, as that is where the Comstock Lode, a rich deposit of silver, was found in 1856. The Comstock Lode and Virginia City peaked between 1876-1878 when about $36,000,000 worth of silver was extracted annually, less than a decade before the approximated time *Sukiyaki Western Django* is set.[8] By the time of the film, the rivalry between the Genjis and the Heikes and their fight over gold, perhaps paired with

Sedic Internation, Geneon Entertainment, Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2007

the drying up of the Comstock Lode, drove away most of the population of the town. The Man with No Name becomes friendly with and gets most of his information from an older woman named Runriko who is the grandmother of little Heihachi, a young boy whose father was Heike and mother is Genji. Little Heihachi is mute due to the trauma of having watched his father being killed. Heihachi takes care of a set of red and white rose bushes behind his grandmother's home, a homage to himself being of mixed Genji-Heike blood.

In this film, the clans argue over a wagon, which contains a gatling gun hidden inside of a coffin, an obvious reference to the original 1966 Sergio Corbucci's *Django* film. In this scene, the wind is used to direct the movement of a bullet. Can this be a reference to the Japanese concept of *kamikaze*, or divine wind? While most individuals today understand the reference of *kamikaze* to be that of the Japanese fighter pilots in

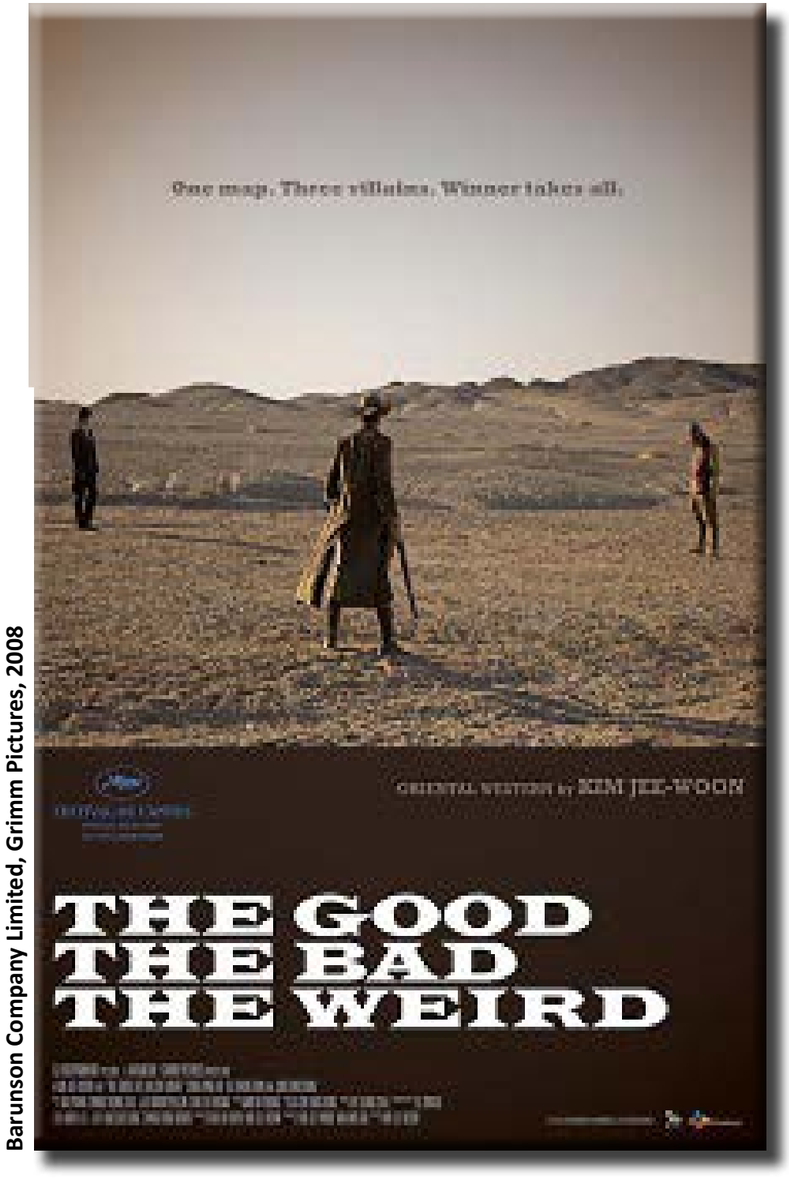
7. "Sukiyaki Western Django," Wikipedia, last modified November 4, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukiyaki_Western_Django.

8. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Comstock Lode," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed December 7, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/place/Comstock-Lode.

World War II who flew suicide attacks, the concept of *kamikaze* dates back almost 700 years earlier. On two different occasions, in 1274 and 1281, Kublai Khan attempted to invade Japan, but typhoons harshly damaged the Mongols' ships and drowned many of the attackers. After the second attempted attack in 1281, the Mongols never attacked Japan again.[9]

In *Eastern Westerns: Film and Genre Outside and Inside* Hollywood, Stephen Teo discusses food metaphors present in *Sukiyaki Western Django*, and that the word sukiyaki actually has an even deeper meaning in regard to the United States' and Japan's relationship, particularly since the Cold War. In 1963, just 11 years after the end of the American Occupation of Japan, Kyu Sakamoto would become the first Asian recording artist to have a number one hit in the United States with his song「上を向いて歩こう」("U*e o Muite Arukou*") which roughly translates to "I Look Up As I Walk." It is a love ballad about a man who looks up as he walks along so the tears he is crying will not roll off his face. In the West, particularly in England and the United States, the song was nicknamed, or bastardized, to just "Sukiyaki." This was largely because a British record label executive thought that British and American listeners would not care about or be able to pronounce the original title, so they used the word sukiyaki because it was a beef dish that many Allied soldiers were familiar with and used to eating after being stationed in Japan during World War II. Kyu Sakamoto, who was 21 at the time of his visit to the United States, was heavily orientalized by the American public. The word "sukiyaki" was also utilized because it was unique, easy for westerners to pronounce, and, simply, sounded very Japanese.

9. Mark Cartwright, "The Mongol Invasions of Japan, 1274 & 1281 CE," Ancient History Encyclopedia, last modified July 2, 2019, https://www.ancient.eu/article/1415/the-mongol-invasions-of-japan-1274--1281-ce/.



Barunson Company Limited, Grimm Pictures, 2008

The utilization of sukiyaki in *Sukiyaki Western Django* ties in not just the fusion of Japanese characters in a Wild West town but also the cultural exchanges and fusions that have been taking place between the US and Japan since the end of World War II. The significance of the term "sukiyaki" regarding US-Japanese relations ties in well with what Teo discusses of how Quentin Tarantino's appearance in the film overshadowing both director Takashi Miike and many of the Japanese actors can be seen as a metaphor as how the United States has always acted as the protector and "big brother" of Japan.[10] Also, in regard to the timeline of the American West and US-Japanese relations, as discussed earlier, Japan only "opened" to the west in 1853 but just 7 years later, in 1860, the first Japanese mission to

10. Stephen Teo, *Eastern Westerns: Film and Genre Outside and Inside Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 45.

the United States was initiated. While the Japanese rapidly industrialized and became a world power, they were still looked down upon by the West and requests for racial parity with the League of Nations would be denied through the 1920s. Tarantino's appearance and dominance in this film, even though he does not have very much screen time, is a perfect metaphor for the United States' relationship with Japan.

The Good, The Bad, The Weird

The Good, The Bad, The Weird is a Manchurian western from South Korea directed by Kim Jee-woon. It is largely centered around bandit and hitman Park Chang-yi (the "Bad") finding a treasure map he acquired while harassing and killing some Japanese officials travelling by train. "The Weird" is Yoon Tae-goo, a thief who ends up stealing the map away and "The Good" is Park Do-won, a bounty hunter searching for Chang-yi. Tae-goo believes that the map's treasure is gold buried by the Qing Dynasty. However, after chasing and fighting their way away from everyone from Manchurian bandits to the Imperial Japanese Army, The Good, The Bad, and The Weird find themselves to be the last ones standing at where the treasure is supposed to be. After a Mexican Standoff style ending, they find themselves beaten, laying in the sands of the Manchurian desert, as crude oil begins to bubble up from under the ground.

The Good, The Bad, The Weird is set in late 1930s Manchuria, right before the outbreak of World War II. During this time period, Manchuria, which is now a part of China, was very much a contested land. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria initiated in 1931, and by 1932 it had become the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. While it may not seem as such on the surface, Stephen Teo discusses in *Eastern Westerns* how, during the years leading up to World War II, Manchuria, somewhat similar to the American western frontier, serves as a geographic and cultural parallel in many ways. Manchuria was a relatively barren, desert-like land; it was diverse in the sense that people of many ethnicities lived and labored in the area; it was resource-heavy, which is one of the reasons why imperial and industrial Japan wanted it so badly (we see this in the film with the striking of oil); and there was a sense of hegemony of one group overtaking if not all at least many others, as this was during the height of Japan's empire building, similar to America and its burgeoning imperialism developing with manifest destiny in the West.

In perhaps one of the most visually delightful scenes of the film, director Kim Jee-woon shows off a "Ghost Market," which is where "The Weird," Yoon Tae-goo, seems to be largely based. As stated in *Eastern Westerns*, the film features not only Korean actors but also Chinese and Japanese characters as well as Korean inhabitants of Manchuria. The film was filmed on location in China, in the deserts of Dunhuang, which in the days of old was traditionally on the Silk Road. Director Kim Jee-woon is quoted as saying that Manchuria has always been "a melting pot of all races and various cultures." Especially during the time period prior to World War II, people and political dynamics in Manchuria include those from China, Korea, Japan, and Russia. The Ghost Market scene depicts a highly transcultural space full of multiethnic interactions. Japanese soldiers, Chinese bandits, and Russian faces are included in the individuals who chase the Korean protagonists. According to Stephen Teo, "The Manchurian Western shows a geographic space in which border-crossing is endemic and imperial-national interests

(traditionally involving Russia, China, Japan, and Korea) are intertwined"[11] … much like the American West.

Regarding geographic space, another significant scene, also significant to Stephen Teo, is when the "Weird" character, Yoon Tae-goo, finds himself in an opium house. The owner of the establishment attempts to get the map from Yoon by posing as an independence fighter against the Japanese. He shows Yoon a different map of Korea and Manchuria in an attempt to appeal to Yoon's patriotism. Large swathes of land within Manchuria are shown to belong to China, which Koreans still regard as rightfully belonging to them. While Yoon did not seem very moved by this map, it did, according to Teo, "define a national construct that reminds us of… [the] concept of the 'geo-body.'"[12] This is a concept presented by Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul in his work *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. According to Winichakul, benevolence, justice, individualism, loyalty, courage, truthfulness, and a disregard for wealth and desire for glory. While upholding this code, the protagonist often mends the ills of *jianghu*. As of works of art since the 20th century, *jianghu* now often refers to individuals who are a form of social and political outsider who become corrupted by the sheer power they can wield while utilizing martial arts.[13] While there may be some similarities in *wuxia* to Westerns, the young man overcoming a difficult task is also just the typical story arc of the hero's journey. *Wuxia* and Westerns aesthetics can be mixed, such as in the tabletop role-playing game Far West, but Kung Fu Hustle is not a work that is meant to do this.

11. Teo, *Eastern Westerns*, 63.
12. Teo, *Eastern Westerns*, 58.
13. Wuxia," *Wikipedia*, last modified November 26, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuxia.

Tears of the Black Tiger

Tears of the Black Tiger is a tragic romantic western from Thailand directed by Wisit Sasanatieng that seems to be set sometime ranging from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s. In this film, we see Rumpoey, a rich girl from the city, waiting in a sala, or gazebo, in a lotus pond for her supposed love, Dum, a darker-skinned boy from a rural paddy village. We find out that Dum is off with another gunman and friend named Mahesuan, and they are both decked in cowboy hats, fighting some unknown shooters. By the time Dum returns to the sala, Rumpoey has returned home to the city where her father, the governor of the province, arranges her marriage to the young police captain. Meanwhile, Mahesuan and Dum seem to fit the archetype of the cowboy "buddy"/sidekick film perfectly as they spend a lot of time together and Dum saves Mahesuan's life by killing a venomous snake that would have bitten him. They swear a blood oath in a Buddhist temple in front of a statue of Buddha. Eventually, Dum and Mahesuan make it back but it turns out that Dum actually was not willing to be with Rumpoey again at all. She, quite aggressively and annoyingly, berates Dum for having waited for him but he reminds her of the time that he defended her when they were children and she was on vacation in Dum's village. They were bullied and hurt by some other children Dum knew and Dum stood up to defend Rumpoey. It took the children several hours to get home and Dum was severely punished with whippings for keeping Rumpoey out. At the end of the film, Rumpoey commands Dum to take a drive to the beach with her, as he had never seen it before, which she is not supposed to be doing as her driver informs her, who she threatens to fire if he does not comply. They drive off to the beach, with Dum looking

quite glum about the whole situation.

As Stephen Teo states in *Eastern Westerns*, *Tears of the Black Tiger* seemed to have a "cowboy vs. bandits" kind of organization, and even plays into the "Asian Gringo vs. Asian Mexican" concept he presents.[14] We see the lighter-skinned, "civilized" city-dwelling folks were fighting off the less civilized invaders and it was the richer, light-skinned, city-dwelling men who were police captains and governors while Dum and Mahesuan seemed to be nothing more than simple gunmen and outlaws. Teo also argues that Rumpoey personifies the Thai "geo-body" in this film as she is the Thai antithesis to Dum's cowboy-esque character. The geo-body includes the Thai class conflict seen between the characters of Dum and Rumpoey as well as the history of European colonization being still present as seen in the scenes of the city.[15]

As a southeast Asian country, Thailand's movie industry is influenced by both South and East Asian film cultures, as is quite apparent especially in Rumpoey and Dum's supposed love interest as the rich girl/poor boy situation which is often a staple of South Asian Bollywood films. More towards the end of this film, during some of the romantic scenes, Dum is quite reminiscent of Yuzo Kayama in his role as Wakadaisho in the Japanese midcentury film series of the same name. He is tall, protective, and a fighter, but seems to only do so in self-defense or in defense of a lady. Teo references a quote from Jeffery Sconce where he talks about the concept of "paracinema," which includes a variety of what would probably be referred to in the United States as cult classics and B films, one of which is "Elvis flicks."[16] While *Tears of the Black Tiger* was probably not directly influenced by Elvis movies, as the Wakadaisho film series is, there could possibly be some inspiration drawn from the Wakadaisho series into *Tears of the Black Tiger*, which were heavily influenced by Elvis' films.

14. Teo, *Eastern Westerns*, 9.
15. Teo, *Eastern Westerns*, 20.
16. Teo, *Eastern Westerns*, 20.

Theme Comparisons Across Films

A few themes seemed to permeate through at least two or more of the films discussed above. One of the most obvious and significant was much more of a reverence for nature than found in American Westerns, despite their wide panoramic landscape shots. We see the utilization of nature even in killing another human being, such as in the *kamikaze* scene in *Sukiyaki Western Django*. There also seems to be inclusion of more and different animal imagery. In both *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tears of the Black Tiger,* snakes make an appearance. While in the West snakes are often associated with bad luck, treachery, and sin, in Eastern cultures it is quite the opposite and they are often considered good luck.

Flower symbolism is also seen in three of the four films: *Sukiyaki Western Django* utilizes Heihachi's red and white roses to symbolize his parents' love for each other and his mixed Genji and Heike blood, along with connecting back to the War of the Roses. *Kung Fu Hustle* utilizes the image of the lotus flower when Sing transforms Beast's weapons. Lotuses often symbolize purity, enlightenment, self-regeneration, and rebirth, and that is what Beast realized he needed when he asked for Sing to mentor him. In both *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tears of the Black Tiger*, the sala flower appears. They were mentioned

in the 14th century Japanese work *The Tale of Heike*[17], and it is believed that Buddha was born under a sala tree.[18]

Another overarching theme we see in these westerns, particularly *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*, is the idea of some form of treasure or gold. As mentioned above, many Asian, particularly Chinese, immigrants first immigrated to the American West in hopes to succeed in the Gold Rush. Outside of that, the West has also been home to treasure hunting for centuries, be it rumors of Indian or Aztec gold or scavenger hunts individuals plan for once they pass away.[19] Greed also makes for a good backdrop to place feuds and fights against, such as the long feud between the Genjis and the Heikes in *Sukiyaki Western Django*.

Sukiyaki Western Django, *Kung Fu Hustle*, and *Tears of the Black Tiger* all seem to have at least one moment in the film that is somewhat cartoonish. The bullet scenes in both *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tears of the Black Tiger* both strike me as very self-aware and tongue –in-cheek, especially the one in *Tears of the Black Tiger* where after bullets ricochet off walls and barrels several times to kill the bandits, the narrator says something along the lines of "Wow! Did you see that? Let's play that back again," and the scene is repeated. The whole of *Kung Fu Hustle* seems not only like a comedy but a parody of the kung fu/*wuxia* genre and several of the actors in the film are retired actors from those kinds of films in the 1970s. The scene where Beast shows off his toad/frog style of fighting, where he gets on all fours, hops around, and the base of his neck swells like that of a croaking frog, is extremely cartoonish.

In *Sukiyaki Western Django*, during the sukiyaki scenes, and in *Tears of the Black Tiger*, during the Buddhist temple scene, we see the utilization of Japanese *kabuki* style of art utilized for backgrounds. While these backdrops are not only beautiful, they remind us of Japan's own manifest destiny and colonial past, as Japan invaded Thailand in 1941. As mentioned before, *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* also contains commentary on Japan's imperialism in Manchuria.

Conclusion

While the American West and Asia may seem like polar opposites, the fact is that they are much more connected than they may at first appear. The connection was first established by the United States' desire for trade. As trade flourished and immigration from Asia to the United States began, cultural exchanges and fusions were initiated. By the end of World War II, with American political and cultural domination in the Pacific Theater, the popular American genre of the Western was introduced to many Asian locations. From Country and Western music to Samurai Westerns, Japan was the most susceptible to the influx of the Western genre, largely due to the Allied Occupation following World War II. While the Asian Western may seem like a bizarre one-off, Asian-Western fusions are becoming more common in the present day. Popular video games such as the *Red Dead Redemption* series and role-playing games such as *Far Western*

17. Masayoshi Hirose, "Temple of Sala Tree – Torinin Kyoto," JapanTravel, last modified September 4, 2014, https://en.japantravel.com/kyoto/temple-of-sala-tree-torinin-kyoto/14975.
18. Tangmo, "Beautiful Sala Flowers in the Center of Bangkok," Steemit, accessed December 7, 2020, https://steemit.com/nature/@tangmo/beautiful-sala-flowers-in-the-center-of-bangkok#:~:text=They%20are%20called%20%E2%80%9CSala%E2%80%9D%20flowers,normally%20planted%20in%20Buddhist%20temples.&text=It's%20amazing%20that%20there%20are,beautiful%20flowers%20in%20bright%20color!.
19. "Treasure-Hunting in the American West," The Economist, November 24, 2016, https://www.economist.com/united-states/2016/11/24/treasure-hunting-in-the-american-west.

address these fusions. The Asian Western also allows for those living in Asian countries to comment simultaneously on Western *and* Japanese cultural and political hegemony while it allows Asian-Americans, who were heavily marginalized during the time period of the "Wild West" to reinvent and reclaim the era to reflect how involved they really were in it since this is often erased in American history. Perhaps as we move further into the "Asian century," as some call the 21st century, and learn more about the diverse history of our country, the Asian Western will find its well-earned place among other popular culture genres.

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Essays should range between 15 and 25 pages of double-spaced text in Word, and all images (JPEG) and source citations. Longer and shorter submissions also will be considered. Bibliographic citation should be the standard disciplinary format.

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