New Wests and Post-Wests

New Wests and Post-Wests:
Literature and Film of the American West

Edited by

Paul Varner

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INTRODUCTION

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As we are now moving well into the first quarter of the 21st century and past the turn of the century, I am seeing a rapidly changing paradigm in literary and film studies of the American West. In the early years of our present century the scholarship was dominated by the crucial work from the 1990s that brought serious study of the West to academic respectability. Scholars from the 1990s such as Richard Slotkin, Jane Tompkins, John G. Cawelti, Lee Clark Mitchell, Christine Bold, and Robert Murray Davis developed new ways of looking at the canonical Western literary texts and the Classic Western films. These scholars' work has proven invaluable and is still foundational to any serious approach to Western literature and film. But new scholarship is moving well beyond the work of the 1990s. Outstanding scholars of the new century such as Valerie and Blake Allmendinger, Susan Kollin, Stephen Tatum, and Neil Campbell are changing the paradigm of Western studies, often basing their ideas on the evolving and expanding scope of theories from New Western History originated by Patricia Limerick.

Since the days of Frederick Jackson Turner, studies in the American West have been dominated by a rigidity of geographical place. The West was seen to consist of a specific area in the United States beyond the Mississippi River. Mexico and Western Canada were not traditionally considered part of "the West." For the most part, the West in media representation was seen as a testing ground for the national experience and for one's masculinity. It was a playground for young men, as Owen Wister once remarked. Most 20th-century scholarship of the American West in literature and film worked within paradigms that either reinforced these traditional views of the West or attempted to debunk them.

But here we are well into the 21st century, and I have been observing a number of clearly different critical approaches to our interpretations of the literature and film of the American West. So I have gathered in these chapters what I hope will be seen as new scholarship tending in very different directions from much of the scholarship of the past.

The writers of these chapters often are working with changing assumptions about literary and media interpretations of an American West. Here we see critical approaches to a West that never was, a West of myth so enduring that the myth dominates nearly all artistic representation about this place that never was. In this collection we see critical approaches to a New West, a West that is a state of mind, not a geographical place but a mythic space with no boundaries and no political inevitabilities. These New Western studies accept the idea of a West that includes Canada, Mexico, Alaska, and, in the case of the US, every geographic and historical point west of the historic founding settlements. The West we study today is a post-West, an idea of the West past the traditional views of an old West dominated by white US nationalism and gendered as uncompromisingly masculine. The idea itself of a single West no longer holds validity. We now understand that all renderings of the West are renderings of multiple Wests, Wests constructed by American nationalists, Wests constructed by European writers and filmmakers, Wests constructed by native peoples, or Wests constructed outside the geographical boundaries of the US.

In this collection, then, I present an eclectic array of new scholarship ranging freely over the New Wests and Post Wests. Neil Campbell, one of the major voices in early 21st-century Western scholarship, begins Part One by defining the genre concepts of postwestern and post-Westerns by examining John Huston's film set in the West of Mexico. Melanie Marotta treats the literature of a 1950s California West, and Stephen Cook examines Chris McCandless' trek into the Western wilds of Alaska. The idea of a West informs Charlotte Beyer's interpretation of eco crime genre fiction. Traditional "cowboy and Indian" stories may be what many associate with the American West, but Len Engel shows a Western set in the oil fields and Todd Womble looks at Larry McMurtry's coming-of-age story set in the flatlands of 1950s west Texas. The Beat Generation of the 1950s has always been associated with the western US but not usually with the West. My essay on Edward Dorn examines a Beat version of the West and of Westerns. Salwa Karoui-Elounelli, in a major new study, shows how western writers are reinventing a West from scratch.

Part Two presents new studies of several specific issues of Western studies. Angie Kirkpatrick looks at images of prostitution in California Gold Rush literature. The subject of representations of Native Americans in Western films and novels has certainly been an important one for scholars, but Kathleen German shows European perspectives on film representations of the first peoples. John Gourlie, then, rounds out Part

Two with an account of perhaps the one item most associated with the traditional American West – the six shooter itself.

Part Three consists of three essays presenting new scholarship on genre Westerns. Nicole Perry writes about German Westerns, and Allessandro Alfieri writes about Italian Westerns. Allison Sauls provides new information on classic Hollywood and Marlon Brando's and Sam Peckinpah's efforts to turn a novel into a film.

Unique to this collection, I hope, is the range of writers interpreting the American West in film and literature. Besides those of us writing from within the United States, five of the writers provide international perspectives. Neil Campbell and Charlotte Beyer write from the Universities of Derby and Gloucestershire, respectively; Salwa Karoui-Elounelli writes from the University of Tunis; Nicole Perry writes from the University of Vienna; and Allessandro Alfieri writes from the University of Rome.

I have asked all writers to include reviews of relevant scholarship in their subject area and bibliographies that are extended beyond the works cited in their essays in order to provide readers with a fundamental starting point for further research.

I thank each of the contributors. It is my hope that readers will find much here to inspire new ways of thinking about the way the West has been interpreted and that later scholarship will find some of its beginnings with these essays.

PART I

LITERATURE AND FILM OF THE AMERICAN WEST

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING POST-WESTERN CINEMA: JOHN HUSTON'S *THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE* (1948)

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There is a pre-history to the term "postwestern" within American Western Studies and a brief discussion of some of its differing uses will help to explain my development of the concept when applied to certain films emerging after 1945.[1] In 1973 British film critic Philip French applied the term "post-western" to films dealing with "the West today, and [which] draw upon the western itself or more generally 'the cowboy cult'," and in particular "the way in which the characters are influenced by, or victims of, the cowboy cult," and to do this, "they intensify and play on the audience's feelings about, and knowledge of, western movies" (French 2005, 84, 85). However, more often the notion of the "postwestern" relates to a broader consideration of historiography or periodization, such as in Virginia Scharff's 1994 call for "a postwestern history" taking mobility seriously and questioning "the stability of our most cherished historical categories of analysis" in order "to imagine history anew" and, most significantly, to *both* recognize "the weight of the western frame" and to simultaneously treat it with a certain scepticism, or, in her words, to be "alert, edgy and restless" and "burst the boundaries of region" (Scharff in Matsumoto and Allmendinger 1999, 167, 166). Scharff reminds us of the extent to which the concept "West" is a "totalizing and value-laden" term

[1] I employ the spelling "postwestern" to refer to the broader historical or cultural use of the concept as a period of historical time during which the USA moves beyond thinking about the "West" as a frontier culture. When applying it to specific films, however, and in order to differentiate the two terms, I spell it "post-Western." See my book *Post-Westerns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013) for more discussion of the topic.

and that more nuanced and subtle approaches would always expand and cross-refer it in complex but meaningful ways (ibid., 166). By implication, Scharff urges critics to get "outside" the "weight of the western frame" with its inherent and deep-rooted cultural myths and national identity markers, so as to see it differently and askew, taking a "deterritorialized" position or "a sort of conceptual trip," as John Rajchman calls it, "for which there preexists no map – a voyage for which one must leave one's usual discourse behind and never be quite sure where one will land" (Rajchman 2000, 21-22). In the wake of this initial exploration, other critics continued to define and explore notions of the postwestern (see Klein 1996, Knobloch 1996, Cawelti 1999, Baym 2006, Campbell 2008); however, it was in Susan Kollin's edited collection *Postwestern Cultures* (2007) that the term was finally understood as "an emerging critical approach" working "against a narrowly conceived regionalism" and with a distinct awareness of how the West has been seen as a "predetermined entity with static borders and boundaries" with the book as a whole making a determined call for a method based on the "critical reassessment of those very restrictions, whether they be theoretical, geographical, or political" (Kollin 2007, xi). She explains very clearly how the problem manifests itself:

> … in dominant national discourse, the American West has been imagined and celebrated largely for its status as "pre" – for its position as a pre-lapsarian, pre-social, and pre-modern space … so that like the very spaces of an idealized western geography, some literary and cultural scholarship about the region has adopted a pre- or even anti-theoretical stance, as if regional studies could offer a similar retreat or refuge from a dehumanizing culture (ibid., xiii).

Thus Kollin invokes the "post" as a counter-balance to this "pre-lapsarian, pre-social, and pre-modern" vision, reminding us that the West persists as a real and imagined cultural space to be fully and critically engaged with within a global context. Similarly, I would argue, classic cinematic Westerns too often reproduced this sense of "retreat or refuge" into a "pre-modern" community and region governed by specific values and ideologies, such as the valorisation of the hero's actions, the promotion of unanimity, settlement against the odds, establishing familial and domesticated roots, transforming the earth from wilderness to garden, taming land from its "savage" populations, expressing a renewing masculinity as the engine for these actions, domesticating the feminine within this new western world, and confirming through the combined power of these acts a national identity forged in the West.

To varying degrees, the post-Western films that I am exploring deterritorialize the classical form by questioning these intrinsic values, and by implication, the myths of the region itself as so often projected in the "most coded of cinematic genres," as Jacques Rancière called the Western (2006, 15). Indeed, the classic Western's world-view or "distribution of the sensible," to borrow another phrase from Rancière, was defined through "engaged heroes who morally ensure the rule of right," as Stanley Corkin puts it, and could be found in iconic films such as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *Red River* (1948). Such "Cold War Westerns" were "concurrently nostalgic and forward looking. They look back upon the glory days of western settlement as they look ahead to the expression of US centrality in the postwar world" (Corkin 2004, 9). Like Rancière, Corkin saw this process as creating a "map for a great many Americans that helped them navigate the stresses and contradictions of Cold war life" and enabled them to believe in a unifying frontier dream of building a nation-as-one, a just consensus for an audience now living increasingly ordered and gendered lives in the post-war suburbs (ibid., 10).

As Corkin notes, such visions both look back and forward, but simultaneously films appeared that were uncertain of this map's "moral order" and were more intent on exploring a sense of "living in *the aftermath of loss*" (Tatum 2006,127), looking back towards some (imagined) moment of wholeness and goodness now threatened by an emergent post-war US culture defined by consensus, militarism, and renewed expansionism. Between 1946-56 came *My Darling Clementine*, *Red River*, *High Noon, Shane* and *The Searchers,* all regarded as examples of a golden age of classical cinema, and yet in this same period Hollywood also produced post-Westerns like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *The Lusty Men* (1952) and *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1956), which, in differing ways, explored aspects of a troubled and problematic modern West living in the aftermath of the frontier dream with a tangled and complex history ignored in earlier films.

The very stark, simple landscapes of the classical Western of desert, mountains, homestead, or an incipient town epitomized a particular vision of entrepreneurial, settler culture, whereas, increasingly the landscape that cinemagoers in the 1940-50s actually experienced in the West was in transition, modernising and affected by shifting national and global economies, militarization, suburban development, and the Civil Rights movement. Films of the West could no longer be defined through John Ford's Monument Valley when the cultural and political landscape was urban, multi-racial and globalized, juxtaposing traditional forms of life with an ever-changing, contingent experience. As Rancière puts it in a

memorable phrase, there was the need to "leave to its ghostly destiny the by now provincial world of the Western" (Rancière 2006, 89). Thus post-Westerns emerged to explore "western" themes in new contexts, casting fresh light on the provincial ideologies that gave rise to the fabled West in the first place; becoming generic mutations of sorts, following "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy … a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" in Jacques Derrida's words (1980, 55, 59). Thus post-Westerns "participate" in many of the formal, thematic and tropic discourses of the genre whilst "not belonging" entirely within its borders, offering instead a challenge through interruption; unsettling through its "minor" language the dominant forms of the forms of established Western.

Indeed, post-Westerns are a good example of what Deleuze would call "minor," precisely because they are aligned with the genre whilst folding outward; maintaining a vital connecting tissue to its "inside" whilst simultaneously allowing reflection *and* critical interaction upon it. Thus post-Westerns function "to send the major language racing*"* by stretching and interfering with generic frameworks and expectations, and ultimately, by causing us to question the values endorsed by the traditional Western (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 105, 99). Like Rancière's concept of the "distribution of the sensible" which explains how dominant, visible forms of discourse define and constrain what is thought and felt, "major language" is the dominant form and ideology of the classic Hollywood Western which sustained and promoted a particular imagined American national identity at the heart of which existed a traditional "movement-image" (as Deleuze called it) of hero-based situations and resolutions. Deleuze argues, however, that within this patterning can coexist, in tension and dialogue, *another* or minor language – a "creative stammering" – "whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 98,106). Significantly, this dynamic critical process aims for "a state of continuous variation," of "stretching" which is, they assert, *in parenthesis* "(the opposite of regionalism)" (ibid., 104-5) thereby advocating a re-thinking of conventional western regionalism and of its expression in its dominant form, the Western.

Thus the post-Western, as minor, acts in relation to the classic Western, like "a foreigner, but in one's own tongue," "uprooting [the standard forms] from their state of constants," and creating a "cutting edge of deterritorialization of language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 103, 98, 99). Post-Westerns, therefore, contribute to a critical regionalist rethinking of

the Western's place in the assertion and reproduction of national ideology. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze coined the term "neo-Western" for films deterritorializing an "already given" and unanimous sense of American identity and community defined in earlier films. The *pre*-given or *pre*-defined mythology of a triumphalist America formed in the frontier West was interrogated in neo-Westerns which were not "addressing a people … *presupposed already there*, but of contributing to the invention of a people" (Deleuze 2000, 217). For Deleuze, classical Hollywood asserted a unanimous vision of an American "people" through Westerns like *My Darling Clementine* (1946), where communities were shown being built and settled through the struggles of individuals in and against the wilderness (ibid., 216). Cold War Westerns *presupposed* community as ultimately orderly and resolved embodying the needs of a post-war ideologically defined community: European, white, male, entrepreneurial, and imperial.

So in watching these "unanimist" Westerns, as Deleuze calls them, because they promote a set of unified, agreed notions of community and nation, it is as if "the [American] people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract," as though cinema was the perfect medium with "the masses a true subject" for nation building and identity formation (Deleuze 2000, 216). For Deleuze the "neo-Western" questioned "the movement-action-image" version of cinema which sustained these concepts of unanimism and "the people" and with it "the universal triumph of American cinema" (Deleuze 2005, 145). As David Martin-Jones puts it, "in the movement-image characters are able to act in order to influence their situation, usually to their advantage. Accordingly, the time of the narrative is edited around the actions of the protagonist … continuity is created by the actions of characters whose stories we follow … time is predominantly linear, with the outcome of the narrative (the bad guy dies, the world is saved …) coherent with the logic of the narrative world" (in Buckland 2009, 215). For Deleuze the Second World War changed these assumptions, through Hitler and Stalin's appropriation of the masses for undemocratic ends, as well as, "the break-up of the American people, who could no longer believe themselves to be either the melting-pot of peoples or the seed of a people to come" (Deleuze 2000, 216). Deleuze believed "the neo-Western … first demonstrated this break-up," questioning ideological frameworks "presupposed already there" so that this "modern political cinema," as he called it, developed in a post-1945 climate of increased social and political movements, challenging "unanimity"; rejecting *one* "people," asserting "several peoples, an infinity of peoples," and refuting "tyrannical unity" (ibid., 216-17, 220).

If the classic Western had moved through heroic action toward resolution, community definition, and national identity, by aggregating "a voice above and beyond style, as a universal subject prior to any of its expressions," then the post-Western in the spirit of minor cinema, sought to stress the "provisional" and the contingent, the unfinished aspects of a people not already defined and labelled, but still emerging and creating itself (Colebrook 2002, 119). If the classic Western had represented the past as knowable and conquered, as a chain of events leading to the inevitable position of the white man as central and originary of the nation, then the post-Western functions to question these taken-for-granted mythic discourses and framed hierarchies. Hence when the post-Western "repeats" or remembers tropes and styles established under earlier forms of the Western, it does so not to emphasize their timelessness, continuity, or essential significance to identity, community, or nation, but to re-focus attention upon them in order to critically reflect and disclose their assumptions.

Deleuze is, therefore, always directing us to the construction of a historically informed American national identity, both through montage and narrative content within movies. Thus as montage edits together linear sequences of action within the classic Hollywood film, it simultaneously constructs an imagined narrative of unanimous nationhood sutured together from its constituent parts – in many the one, *E Pluribus Unum*. The classical Western forms America's creation narrative and with it "the triumphalism inherent in the belief in Manifest Destiny" played out in the "unbroken sensory-motor continuity … that informs the structure of US montage (expression of the whole)" (Martin-Jones 2011, 30). Consequently the "settler individual (as representative of the collective) in his duel with the milieu (the harsh landscapes and border worlds) is precisely the product, and expression, of westward expansion" and through such structures, Martin-Jones asserts, the Western, constructs and endorses a particular national identity (ibid., 30-1).[2] In Sam Peckinpah's work, however, as Deleuze argues, the certainty and fixity of "milieu" is gone and so any sense of "a [True] West" (singular) is replaced by "Wests … totalities [*ensembles*] of locations, men and manners which 'change and are eliminated' in the same film" (Deleuze 2005, 172). In terms of American Western history in the same era, this relates to the awareness of multiple stories that needed to be told and which had, for so long, remained buried or silenced. The "legacy of conquest," as Patricia Limerick termed it, was an unnoticed broken line in history constituted by

[2] See also David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Film and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008), 121-53.

the ghostly voices of the dead and the repressed: women, Indians, immigrants, Mexicans and the environment itself (Limerick 1997). The multiple Wests invoked by Deleuze and traced, I would argue, in the post-Western, critique and counter the classic Western with its drive to unanimity and consensus, towards *settlement* and coherence of an American ideal community.

This post-war shift away from the "movement-action-image" with its linearity, predictability, and presentation of "all things in One" moved the Western toward a more irresolute form with a greater complexity, "like a knotted rope, twisting itself at each take, at each action, at each event" (Deleuze 2005, 191, 172). As I will suggest in the second part of this chapter, such a "knotted rope" can be seen in works such as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* with its hybrid mix of action-image and time-image cinema. The creative space of these films, freed from the absolute authority of the classical form is defined as "skeleton-space" by Deleuze showing "the articulation, the joints, the wrinkle or broken stroke" – suggesting its gaps and openings, "missing intermediaries, heterogeneous elements" which work to conjure "vectorial space" set against the classic Western's "encompassing stroke of a great contour" (ibid., 191, 173). Such vectorial space, as we shall see in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* has the capacity to challenge established lines of thought, to deterritorialize expectations and shift us between generic modes.

Deleuze's Cinema books argue ultimately that American cinematic genres like the Western can never avoid a retreat to the American Dream and so always, as he puts it, "collapse and yet maintain their empty frame," reasserting the ideological values that these genre films could never unhinge (ibid., 215). For Deleuze, the Western was destined to re-tell the same stories of expansionism and Manifest Destiny, often parodying, but ultimately asserting the values embedded in its creation story, its version of the American Dream in the West. This chapter contends that Deleuze was wrong and the Western lived-on beyond its supposed death, posthumously reconfigured and renewed within and outside Hollywood, thereby reframing the audience's critical sense of the region of the West and its place in the world. I wish to examine how this can be seen in a very early example of the post-Western, John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), a film that both works with and against the Western so as to present the "skeleton-space" of myth, "the articulation, the joints, the wrinkle or broken stroke" of its formation as central to the American psyche.

"Skeleton-space": John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)

> "He moves half a step towards the gutter …" (Naremore1979, 47).
>
> "Dobbs gets down on his hands and knees studying the map. His face is haggard; the cheekbones more prominent than before and there is a frightened, haunted look in his eyes" (ibid., 177).

Broken, lost, and haunted, Fred C. Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart), the would-be focus of John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* ends the film macheted to death amid the ruins of some forgotten Mexican village, his bones scattered like his ill-gotten gains in the dust of a foreign land. The movement-action-image that dominated Hollywood was based on the continuity of hero and action, but in a time of post-war uncertainty and doubt was becoming untenable. The non-heroic Dobbs epitomizes the post-Western shift because his actions cannot, finally, affect the situation or pave the way for the future within this conventional framework, and instead throughout his journey, the audience is confronted by a different vision of time, one unhooked from the progressive inevitability of Manifest Destiny. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is a spectral Western echoing back through time and the history of the West wherein border-crossing adventurers went looking for gold, got attacked by bandits, used guns and knives, had their masculinity tested by landscape, and their greed exposed in spaces without women or home.[3] The film *remembers* the Western, utilising that memory as a back-drop and sounding board for its own vectorial narrative and, in so doing, comes *after* and *goes beyond* the classical genre, creating its own theatrical space or "skeleton-space," to interrogate universal themes that have *roots* in and *routes* through the Western. In this sense, it is an early example, perhaps the earliest, of the post-Western offering critical reflections upon regional ideologies represented through this most American of cinematic genre.

[3] John Huston, as director, writer and actor, has a spectral role in the development of the post-Western, emerging at significant moments as filmmaker with *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, The Misfits,* and *Fat City,* actor in *Chinatown*, as well as point of reference in *The Last Movie*, demonstrating across his own career a fascination with the geography and identities of the West, but more specifically with exploring the region critically as "New" and post-Frontier. He directed *The Unforgiven* (1960) set in the post Civil War West, and *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972). Paul Thomas Anderson's, *There Will Be Blood* was highly influenced by *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.*

Jacques Rancière refers to "someone who knows the gestures and codes, but can no longer share the dreams and the illusions" (of the Western) (Rancière 2006, 87) and this characterizes Huston's approach to *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* as he works with the Western in order to interrogate its underlying value system so fundamental to American national identity. As James Naremore points out, Warners' advertising for the film emphasized "a montage of colourful scenes … a band of sombreroed horsemen … a handsome, moustachioed rider in the act of rescuing, or perhaps capturing, a dark-haired, big-breasted woman in a low-cut blouse." Few of these images relate directly to the film itself, but they do "vaguely suggest a western" (Naremore 1979, 22). Within the film, Huston employs familiar tropes of and scenes from the Western genre: border town, down-at-heel wanderer, saloon fight, barbershop, dreams of gold, mining camps, train journeys, campfires, double-crossing, bandits, gunplay, ambushes, Indians, absent women, and death.[4] This conventional Western familiarity is twisted by Huston, displacing events into the border zones of Mexico where these recognizable signifiers are interrogated to reveal their underlying ideologies and historical echoes.

The Greater West of Mexico is a new or last frontier where Manifest Destiny continues in its rawest, imperial form, as capitalist exploitation and economic slash-and-burn. There is no domestic settlement or civic economy on *this* frontier, for what Huston dramatizes instead is a cutthroat masculine world of mistrust, anger and scheming, epitomized through Dobbs's unsympathetic character, a desperate, ironic "pioneer" on the make. We see him early in the film, unkempt, living from hand to mouth, begging from rich Americans and trying his luck on the lottery to survive, and yet his dream, carried south across the border, is still of unimagined wealth and "lighting cigars with $100 bills." This is a get-rich-quick world *in extremis*, where human value is defined only by what you possess; the kind of frontier suggested, perhaps inadvertently, by Frederick Jackson Turner's belief that "The West was another name for opportunity. Here were mines to be seized, fertile valleys to be pre-empted, all the natural resources open to the shrewdest and the boldest" (Turner 1961, 69). At the frontier, according to Turner, "the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant" (ibid. 61-2); an idea pushed later to its transgressive limits in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*.[5]

[4] The film was shot on location in Mexico and at 30 Acres, a site owned by Columbia Pictures that had been used for the western *High Noon*.

[5] See my 'Liberty Beyond its Proper Bounds: Cormac McCarthy's History of the West in *Blood Meridian*' in R. Wallach (ed.), *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 217-226.

In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, Huston's second feature after *The Maltese Falcon*, he returned to themes of greed and quest amongst a "small, eccentric group at the margin of ordinary society" whose activities stand for a broader satiric commentary upon the values of "the whole culture" (Naremore 1979,13). John Engell defines them as men "on the fringes of modern capitalist society who are radically alone: friendless, penniless, without family, virtually without identity," and yet through them Huston turns his critical eye on the very forces of the capitalist dream of success that created them (Engell in Studlar and Desser 1993, 82).[6] Huston's left-leaning views critiquing American capitalism and individualist greed, are reflected in his films' themes, their "gritty, anti-Hollywood 'realism'" (ibid., 13), and their re-working of literature by authors such as Dashiell Hammett (*The Maltese Falcon*), Arthur Miller (*The Misfits*), and Leonard Gardner (*Fat City*), and B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* Traven's American prospectors crossing the border remind us of the long, painful history of "colonial, Roman Catholic, and capitalist exploitation of Mexico" (Naremore 1979, 14), of the South/North divide, and the cultural differences of such proximate neighbours. Elsewhere in the film, Traven's most pointed anti-capitalist, anti-colonial critique is removed, such as in one scene from the published script where Howard (Walter Huston) comments that when you "Come round down to it we are bandits of a kind. What right have we got to go looting their mountain anyway? About as much right as the foreign companies that take their oil without paying for it … and their silver and their copper' (Naremore 1979, 141). One might argue, however, that elements of this critique nonetheless remain in the systematic stripping down of greed and the exposure of "banditry" (of all kinds) that haunts the film, played out in its relentlessly grimy, broken and desperate landscape.

The use of close-ups, night settings, and sweat-soaked confrontations give the film a certain slow weight through which the viewer finds little release or digression. Although clearly working within a Hollywood system at Warner Brothers, Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is "more in the tradition of Flaherty and the neo-realists than in the line of classic Hollywood directors," enjoying working outside the studio back-lot with actors in natural locations and settings: the mountains of Mexico in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, and later the deserts of Nevada in *The Misfits* or the urban wastelands of *Fat City* (Naremore 1979, 31).

[6] This is similar to the approach he took with his later post-Western film *The Misfits* and which I discuss at length in *Post-Westerns* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2013)

Significantly, Deleuze argues that neo-realism in European directors like Rossellini and De Sica, marked the shift away from the "movement-image" towards the "time-image" after the Second World War giving greater attention to odd spaces or "any-spaces-whatever" in which "we no longer know how to react," including those which are "deserted but inhabited, disused … waste ground," where the "sensory-motor" link between heroic actions and narrative continuity is weakened and less significant in contrast to "optical and sound situations" (Deleuze 2000, xi). Applied to *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the border towns, mountains, and deserts function in this way, taking characters and audience beyond familiar timespaces in order to analyse their responses and relations. In these "emptied or disconnected" spaces of the post-Western, like the dismal town of Tampico at the opening of the film, what Deleuze calls the "already specified" (ibid., 5) begins to loosen, so established codes, values and frames of reference are more readily scrutinized. This recalls my earlier definition of "postwestern" as where "one must leave one's usual discourse behind and never be quite sure where one will land." In such alien spaces and under such situations of "crisis" where the old system of action-resolution and linearity was questioned, Deleuze suggests people see differently, questioning the structures that had pre-existed because "situations could be extremes … or … those of everyday banality" (ibid., xi). In turn, cinema's established formulaic action-image will "collapse" or "lose its position" so that "time … rises up to the surface of the screen" in moments of "tiredness and waitings" or through "subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies" (ibid., 6). In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the American characters are constantly duped or wary and paranoid, seemingly unable to direct their own lives as they stumble from one crisis to the next. In Tampico, Dobbs repeatedly approaches a prosperous American in a crisp white suit (played by John Huston) for spare change, immediately disrupting the audience's sense of normal order. For this is an American begging from an American in Mexico! Such extremes of wealth and poverty are used to establish the destitution of Dobbs whilst simultaneously unsettling the audience's sense of normal cinematic codes and cultural mythologies. Thus the audience is alerted that this film will see things differently and expose alternative perspectives.

The subsequent journey into the desert reveals the types of hallucination and fantasy that Deleuze argues mark off this shift away from action towards a greater apprehension of time and inwardness. The "optical drama" replaces the action-image in significant parts of the film, with theatrical scenes in tight close-up, in claustrophobic spaces, or with

moments of intense paranoia or fantasy that alter our perceptions of typical action-driven cinema. Consequently, Huston seems to assert a primary conclusion in Deleuze's work, that "there is no present which is not haunted by a past and a future … [and] each present coexists with a past and a future without which it would not itself pass on" (2000, 37). Accordingly the actions of these Americans, Dobbs, Howard and Curtin (Tim Holt), are shown within relations of the past, present and future, but unlike pure "movement-image" films, are "not locked into a certain past and a clarified present" (Rushton 2012, 60), for it is this instability of time that generates the film's unsettling power.[7] In this I disagree with Engell's reading of the film as entirely devoid of all "social and political material" and merely a "traditional bourgeois moral fable" (Engell in Studlar and Desser 86) wherein Huston "deletes" all the anti-capitalist and radical themes evident in Traven's novel. All three central characters, as Martin Rubin has argued, are unconventional because "the film steadfastly withholds the creation of a stable or clearly defined hero position" and instead engages the audience precisely because, as we have seen, they are "suspended" in time and "remain in a state of almost constant circulation and redefinition" (Rubin in Studlar and Desser, 147). Thus, without such clear markers of identity and motivation the audience is emancipated to situate them into a context beyond the typical movement-image film, to exist in their "present … haunted by a past and a future." In my terms this is constituted by the absent presence of the West and the very "social and political material" that has formed these broken-down men; a frontier mythology of Manifest Destiny, dominant individualism, and strident capitalist economics.

Thus, when Howard, the "old gnawed bone" of a man (Naremore 1979, 63), holds forth at the Oso Negro flophouse he invokes this haunted past whilst over-heard by Dobbs and Curtin, who immediately relate his words to their present and their desired future. Dobbs and Curtin are, after all, desperate men driven by a broken American system southwards in search of their fortunes. The scene is shot in shadowy light and in tight close-ups suggesting both the ominous impact of these words but also their undeniable influence on their audience, who despite the obvious warnings, hear only the tales of unimaginable wealth they want to hear.

> I've dug in Alaska and in Canada and Colorado. I was with the crowd in British Honduras where I made my fare back home and almost enough

[7] Tim Holt, the actor who plays Curtin was associated almost exclusively with Westerns, having roles in both classic action-image Westerns *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine* (as Virgil Earp).

> over to cure me of the fever I'd caught. I've dug in California and Australia, all over the world practically. Yeah, I know what gold does to men's souls … That's gold, that's what it makes of us. Never knew a prospector yet that died rich. Make one fortune, you're sure to blow it in trying to find another. I'm no exception to the rule … I'd rather go by myself. Going it alone's the best way. But you got to have a stomach for loneliness. Some guys go nutty with it. On the other hand, going with a partner or two is dangerous. Murder's always lurkin' about. Partners accusin' each other of all sorts of crimes. Aw, as long as there's no find, the noble brotherhood will last, but when the piles of gold begin to grow, that's when the trouble starts (Naremore 1979, 63).

Of course, he predicts the whole film ahead in this early scene and his "I know what gold does to men's souls … That's gold, that's what it makes of us" establishes its inward turn, from the movement-image and towards the psychological voyage from "noble brotherhood" to individual paranoia, in the full knowledge of the global political and cultural networks that dictate such desire. These men are, in one sense, "made" by their lust for gold, but as this speech underlines, this is a "making" with a particular history in colonial, capitalist adventure and exploitation ("the crowd in British Honduras"), and it is this that has already produced the minds and bodies of men like Dobbs who are now enticed by the promise they *hear* in Howard's words.

For him, however, wealth has no other purpose than individual pleasure: Turkish baths, "brand new duds," a "swell café, and "a dame" (Naremore 1979, 98), whereas Curtin's dream is a childhood memory of community, a fruit farm in the San Joaquin Valley with "whole families working together" (ibid.). What Engell calls the film's "Jeffersonian" vision of the yeoman farmer was, of course, the seed of westward expansion and this juxtaposition of Dobbs's dream alongside Curtin's highlights Huston's interest in interrogating the cultural and individual consequences of that vision in the wider world (Engell in Studlar and Desser 1993, 88).

These tensions between competing visions of the individual and the community are played out in different ways throughout the film as suspicions arise over the gold and how it should be divided up, or whether one man should save another's life, or, ultimately if it is right to murder to increase your share of the spoils. What Huston's film permits is a dramatic examination of these motivations, always aware of their roots in a Manifest Destiny ideology exported south to Mexico, and how they are bound into contrasting interpretations of a type of displaced westward dream. As I suggested earlier, following Deleuze, when these visions are removed (or "suspended") from the familiar and reassuring context of the

movement-image Western, with its heroic actions leading to resolution and closure, they "remain in a state of almost constant circulation and redefinition," and are thus open to closer analysis and interrogation. So the pastoral dream of Curtin – later supported by the letter found on the dead Cody and its promise of "life's real Treasure of the Sierra Madre" in the gathered harvest and a good wife back in Texas – stands alongside Dobbs's hedonism and both contrast with a romantic tribal life that finally embraces Howard when he is taken in as a medicine man by local Indians. All three outcomes seemed flawed for different reasons and these positions are held up for analysis in Huston's film, whereas in Traven's original novel there is a greater celebration of the communalism of the natives as a more approved and desirable life.

Ultimately, however, it is Dobbs's actions that drive the film and yet he cannot sustain his role as motivating Hollywood protagonist, and so it is through him that the film's post-Western qualities can best be traced. Increasingly, it is Dobbs whose suspicion and paranoia over the gold he so craves turns him ever inward to a delirium manifested as feral violence and insane self-conversations. In this ever-confining world of shadows and extreme heat Dobbs is overcome by his conscience and having killed Curtin (as he thinks) Huston frames him in a shot seen through a raging campfire as if he is in the inner rings of Hell. Now alone and broken, driven on by greed and fear, he moves to his inevitable death at the hands of the Mexican bandits he had overcome earlier in the film. Ironically the earlier scene was a classic action-image moment of gunplay wherein the Americans defeated the "indigenous" peoples to establish their illegal "rights" to the land and its contents. However, as we shall see, in his final scene Dobbs is far from this earlier figure, becoming instead a lost and aimless man buffeted by fate and tormented by guilt as if the living embodiment of Howard's previous warning of an undone "noble brotherhood." This is exemplified as Dobbs draws his gun in the pose of the Western gunfighter, only to find he has no bullets left to defend himself. In this poignant moment of impotence his status as hero evaporates and he understands he has no power to affect his situation or to solve the crisis he is in. The chance lottery win that accelerates his initial journey and the many references to gambling in the film underscore the irony of his luck running out in these final scenes. There is no divine plan, no real Manifest Destiny, just the terrible recognition of loss, failure, and imminent death.

So *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* ends, as I intimated earlier, with violence, waste, and ruins as Dobbs is macheted to death alongside a drainage ditch on the edge of an abandoned village. In these scenes of

desolation, in the midst of a windstorm (ironically named a "Norther"), surrounded by ruins and the desert scrub, Huston reminds us of failure and loss, of the broken and the incomplete, of the underside of regulation, order and fixity. The fragmented scene reminds us that the past cannot be denied or buried under the seamlessness of the present for it returns through the smooth surfaces of things as an excess or remainder, a disruptive, awkward trace. In the frontier dream of the American West the urge to tame, order, purify and regulate ran in parallel with the surveying of the land and the mapping of the wilderness. *Settling* as a concept embraces more than just establishing people in space, for it also suggests the actions of stabilising, resolving, and reconciling; of bringing the world into classified shape, of fixing the past and the future in place, typified in the gridded western landscape or the structured order of the map like those that Dobbs and Howard examine in the film. Ruins, however, remind us of antithetical forces, of the inability to fix the past, of the buckling of the grid and the failure of the map, which cannot maintain its shaped, constrained, and domesticated order. The dream of untrammelled wealth held by all three men following their conditioned belief in their assumed right to success, has come down to *this* place and *this* moment of withering irony as the gold, so painfully taken, scatters into the dust of the desert floor and Curtin and Howard can only laugh "Homerically" at the joke played on them (Naremore 1979, 194).

Dobbs provides the dominant narrative of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* dramatising the absolute ruination of dreams through what Rancière calls a "fiction of collapse" (2006, 90). As Dobbs approaches his end, no longer equal to his milieu, the script describes him "moving in a nightmare" of such proportions that the very earth that had been the focus of his lust for gold seems to conspire against him; "Every so often the ground he is walking on rushes up at him and deals him a vicious blow in the face" (Naremore 1979, 180). These are the ruins of men and the worldview or mythology that created them; of Manifest Destiny and the dream of success stripped away in the course of the film just as the bandits strip away Dobbs's boots and trousers at the moment of his death. Although not present in the script of the film, its climax takes place near and then amid actual ruins; reminding us intentionally or subconsciously of the past, of another "civilization" and their attempt to draw wealth out of this very same landscape, like the conquistadores searching for the Seven Cities of Gold in the very hills staked out by Fred C. Dobbs in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

The new conquistador Dobbs is murdered near the ruins, ironically returned to the earth like the gold he has stripped from the mountainside of

the Sierra Madre and his story placed alongside the others who came and failed before him.[8] Just as the gold is blown back by the wind to mix with the dust and dirt, Dobbs's bones are broken by machetes, his blood flowing into the driest desert ground. The borderlands reclaims his colonial presence – the "West" that Dobbs represents – and a different, purer (and better) dream remains in the viewers' imagination, Curtin's dream of Paradise – growing peaches in California, or redeeming himself by returning to Cody's widow in Texas and growing fruit with her. His is the approved settler dream washed clean of Dobbs's brutal capitalist quest for money at all costs. Not present in Traven's more radical novel, this pastoral dream of a lost America is added by Huston as a nostalgic reminder of an idyllic West of the imagination, the "real" The Treasure of the Sierra Madre exemplified by home, family, settlement and nature (and echoed by the romanticized "natives" in the film who finally embrace Howard as a tribal healer lavishing gifts upon him). Naremore terms this compromise by Huston "a rather complacent morality" (1979, 20) and Engell calls it "comfortably bourgeois" (Engell in Studlar and Desser 1993, 86) because, they both argue, he shifts away from Traven's withering attack on capitalism towards a more generalized commentary on materialism and its human losses. This might be seen as a sop to the studio and to the expectations of a post-war American audience who wanted to be reassured about their core values, but as I have argued throughout this chapter, one might see it as Huston's attempt, within the constraints of Hollywood, to portray the various consequences of Manifest Destiny. Rancière refers to a "contract" between director and audience (2006, 76) which, as we have seen in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, supplies the frameworks and tropes of a recognisable genre, but within which occurs "an essential gap" serving to "supplement and thwart … narrative continuity and the rationality of the goals by not aligning two visibilities" (ibid., 16). Thus, despite the fact of Howard's colonial survival and Curtin's imminent return to an American Eden, these seem, in the context of the film, asides to the almost Shakespearean demise of Dobbs and all he represents. Rather than John Engell's "traditional bourgeois fable" (Engell in Studlar and Desser 1993, 86), these contesting elements give rise to what Rancière terms *une fable contrariée* or a "thwarted fable," becoming within itself "a critical object, a site where *conflict promotes interpretation* and interpretation gains access to an arena in which politics and aesthetics are set in play in multifarious ways" (emphasis added). As Tom Conley explains, "Rancière understands a 'fable' to be a narrative composed of

[8] Director Sam Peckinpah paid homage to Dobbs in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), including a character with the same name.

visual and discursive elements that move with and against each other. The 'tracks' along which stories unwind are at odds with their own form and that of film" (Conley 20006, n. p.). For Rancière Westerns exemplify this definition following certain established genre "tracks" (as in the case of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*) only to diverge and "thwart" our expectations and the genre's norms. Thus, the aesthetic power of Dobbs's story and in particular his delirious demise, with its intense close-ups, claustrophobic paranoia, and concentrated physicality are at odds with the more fabled myths of Curtin's and Howard's "happy endings," and ultimately, therefore, "thwart" them, making them seem as questionable as Dobbs's own. In different ways, they seem unreal and dream-like, just the consequent fantasies of mastery over tribal people or the land itself, both perhaps as dangerously flawed as Dobbs's selfish vision of wealth.

Through these three endings: Dobbs mad and destroyed, Howard submerged by a colonial fantasy, and Curtin retreating to a dead man's pastoral, family narrative, I sense a deep melancholy in Huston's film made at the close of World War II, and derived from a "anticipatory shiver of disappointment" in never having got the utopian dream right, of missing the great American opportunity for transforming the world for the better (Papanikolas 2007, 16). In Papanikolas's words, there "is a kind of longing, a sense of something lost, lost perhaps even at the moment of gaining it, and possibly irretrievable. It was a silence as compelling as all the myths of success you grew up with and believed, and perhaps inseparable from them" (ibid.:19). That dream is usurped here by the "nightmare" of Dobbs's quest "lost perhaps even at the moment of gaining it," which is reflected in his near ecstatic outburst at the end of his trek when he cries out, "Made it. I made it," which is immediately dampened by the reflection of the bandit Gold Hat in the water he kneels over. In the silence at the end of the film, as the camera closes upon a torn gold sack hooked on a cactus plant, following the brutal killing of Dobbs by his alter ego Gold Hat, the execution in turn of the bandits for their crimes, and the ironic scattering of the gold back into the desert, we are reminded finally of Papanikolas's "figure of silence" as a trace of the "palpable absence and sense of loss" haunting the American Dream of success and its "dream of conquest … like a dark thread" and, which, with all its critical brutality imagines too the necessary advent of the post-Western (Papanikolas 2007, 20).

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