Title
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Publication Date
2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film & Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Fall 2020

Abstract

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In its analysis of four postwar Westerns (the films *The Last Sunset* and *Gunman's Walk,* and the television Westerns *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *The Rifleman*), this dissertation finds a contradictory ideological strain intrinsic to the genre's frontier legacy, as well as a critical semiosis specific to its production era. By centralizing the postwar era's domestic concerns over and against the genre's typical emphasis on the frontier mythos associated with Theodore Roosevelt, these Westerns subvert the stereotypical frontier/civilization dyad. By reconceiving the genre in a way that privileges "civilization" over "frontier," this dissertation shows that the crucible of "savage" Nature, which formerly determined the exceptionality of the Westerner's masculine character (as a synecdoche for an exceptional national one), is a cultural production that turns against civilization itself. Denuded of their naturalizing origin, and depicted as social productions within the dramatic action, the gunmen protagonists of each of these four Westerns additionally appear as complex gender constructions. By juxtaposing allusions from each Western to the ideological and aesthetic history of the genre and the socio-political context of the postwar era, the dissertation approaches the Cold War era as similarly mythological, constructed, and contradictory. I demonstrate that the conventions of the genre correspond with the conventions of domestication and nuclearization specific to the postwar era. In the process, this dissertation locates and defines a semiotic function for, and of, each Western that highlights the distinct narrative modalities respective of their mediums. In this sense, Coming Home: The Western, Media, and Masculinity continues a scholarly tradition suited for American studies and gender studies, while approaching the genre via the modalities of comparative media studies and television studies.

For my father, Seymour Gendelman, M.D.

January 16th, 1932–November 24th, 2020

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Introduction

Overview

This dissertation analyzes the Western, media, and masculinity during the years 1957 to 1963. Organized around four objects produced during this period—the films *The Last Sunset* (Aldrich 1961) and *Gunman's Walk* (Karlson 1958), and the television series *Have Gun—Will Travel* (1957–1963 Sam Rolfe, Herb Meadow) and *The Rifleman* (1958–1963 Arnold Laven)—my work analyzes how the postwar era's domestic orientation inflects the already fraught generic legacy of the Westerner as a white masculine hero both free from, and tethered to, the civilization he ostensibly produces. By centralizing the postwar era's domestic concerns, these Westerns invert the order of the genre's emphases and challenge Theodore Roosevelt's dominant influence on the Hollywood film Western and the dialectical exchanges that accompany it. While the postwar era brings returning veterans "home" (from World War II and the Korean War, both ideologically and literally), its film and television Westerns, similarly, bring the Westerner home. Placing pressure on a characterization already riddled with ambivalence, the postwar Westerns under consideration here express a critical reappraisal of the genre instanced by a critical encounter with the era.

This dissertation focuses on Westerns that centralize the ideological construction of masculinity now coded with the civil and familial disposition reflective of the postwar era. While each of these Westerns magnifies and complicates the characterization of the Westerner, their thematic magnification of the Westerner induces a formal magnification as well. As a gender construction, the Westerner implicates the film and television Westerns of the study as productions specific to the fiction-bearing structure of their respective mediums. By situating these four Westerns within both the broader context of the era's ideological changes and two hundred years of frontier allusions from the genre's formative legacy, this project locates a self-destructiveness at the nation's cultural and socio-political core. The four Westerns interface with the social, commercial, and martial tendencies of the postwar era, and reveal the characterological and national progress story attendant to the genre and the era.

A Brief Cultural History

Coming Home: The Western, Media, and Masculinity grounds itself in the dominant political and aesthetic paradigms that respectively influence and organize the cinematic A-Western and its televisual counterpart for the postwar era. The late nineteenth century produced historical narratives emphasizing the centrality of the American "frontier." As originally thematized by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the mass development of the American landscape over the country's first two centuries had "closed" the frontier that nourished the country's core democratic values.[1] Setting the foundation for Turner's subsequent work on the economic history of cultivatable land and its industrialization and corporate centralization, the initial essay champions the country's agrarian past and the

[1] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3, 29.

yeoman farmer with his self-sufficient homestead as cultivating and sustaining the nation's nascent democracy via an evenly distributed and modest share of wealth.[2] Contemporaneously noting the importance of the early American frontier, Roosevelt alternatively valorized the lost warrior culture he recounted in his Indian War histories.[3] Turner's focus on a social and civil collective supported by peaceful communal relationships stood in sharp contrast to Roosevelt's focus on the heroic travails of an early "hunter/Indian fighter" whose individual prowess in an unforgiving and violent frontier produced the exceptional man capable of leading a burgeoning nation.[4] Developmental myths emphasizing Turner's civic beneficence (the symbiotic relationship between man and land) and Roosevelt's martial imperatives (the almost primal conflict between savagery and civilization that produces vigorous American masculinity) inflect the characterization of the Westerns I analyze in this project. Where Western scholar Richard Slotkin has stressed the legacy of Roosevelt's writing as largely defining and determining the generic story form of the A-Western,[5] I argue that the Westerns under consideration here re-establish Turner's homesteader past. Reversing the terms of the frontier/civilization binary, Westerns such as *The Last Sunset* and *Gunman's Walk* reanimate the civil compact central to Turner's vision by positioning its Westerner protagonists as enmeshed within the social fabric of a settled nation; the influential landscape the Westerner now traverses is a civil and socio-cultural field.

Throughout the dissertation I apply aesthetic scholarship related to the Frontier Thesis and its central influence on the Hollywood Western. While this dissertation largely hews to Western scholar Jim Kitses's thematic and formal rubric for the study of the A-Western, my study, nonetheless, alters its emphasis. Kitses organizes his taxonomy around the central pairing of "The Wilderness"/"Civilization" as an almost identical continuation of Roosevelt and Turner's respective formulations, while retaining Roosevelt's predominance for the film Western. Delineating and parsing his central heading, Kitses includes a series of related subheadings relevant to the Westerns I discuss that retain and elaborate the binary emphasis of the original Frontier Thesis. In accordance with my dissertation's inversion, subsidiary pairs like "The Individual"/"The Community," "Nature"/"Culture," "the nomadic and the settled," and "the masculine and the feminine"[6] are to varying degrees reversed, conflated, and/or interspersed by the Westerns, whereby a pairing's distinctiveness becomes challenged and modified in lieu of the analysis of each Western. Kitses's example additionally informs my close readings of all four Westerns in applying the motifs and conventions of the genre for positing how and what the Westerns signify. In this sense, the dissertation applies Kitses's semiotic sensibility for gaging the intersection between Western action and critical expression.

The dissertation further augments the Civilization/Wilderness binary by applying scholarship on the subgeneric "domestic Western." While the violent necessity of the Westerner's frontier skills provides a protective umbrella for the civil and familial growth

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[2] Ibid., 32–33.
[3] Slotkin, 34–35.
[4] Ibid., 33.
[5] Ibid., 26.
[6] Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 13.

of a burgeoning nation, the Westerner's exposure to the nation's domesticated manners and conventions threatens to diminish the rugged determinism that sanctions his manly vigor in the first place.[7] While this tension expresses the domestic Westerner's ambivalence toward family and civilization, the dominance that civilization holds for the dissertation Westerns exposes the contradiction at the core of the Frontier Thesis and the broader frontier legacy that influences and predates the Thesis. The violent martial instincts of Roosevelt's masculine typology play out as destructive and self-destructive (to varying degrees) in the feature-length Westerns and television series I discuss. The Westerner's inbred aggression plays out against the civil manners and institutions alongside which he resides, just as it plays out against himself as a social product of, and participant within, the body politic.

I focus on *The Last Sunset*, *Gunman's Walk*, *Have Gun—Will Travel*, and *The Rifleman* precisely because they flip the emphasis of the genre's legacy from Frontier/Civilization to Civilization/Frontier; in turn, they revise the genre's orientation from nature to culture. The "man" is no longer made by his exposure to the wilderness from a determinant past: he is seen as produced by the civil body of which he is a part. This dissertation finds in its Westerns an analytic foothold from which to investigate and elaborate the constitutive ideological and aesthetic elements of the genre expressive of an equally constructed (and thereby subject to modification and change) political and social landscape. The Western's bare-bones action, in this sense, is both semiotic and critical. However narrow the six-year window my dissertation covers, and however modest this analysis of four Westerns may be, the reanimation of Turner's focus in each Western as a dominant one exhumes both a latent self-reflexivity endemic to the genre and a latent self-destructiveness intrinsic to its frontier legacy.

The literalness of a closed frontier that spurred the reconceptualization of the genre for the late nineteenth century is replaced by the expansion of an audiovisual frontier of Westerns for the mid-twentieth-century United States. The naturalizing function of the earlier century's ideology gives way to an emphasis on a larger cultural formation respective of the Western's popularity in the postwar era.

The Western on Film and Television

The study's Westerns were produced within an almost three-decade span that witnessed an unprecedented level of popular and critical success for the genre in both cinema and television.[8] Considered "the Golden Age of the Western," the period roughly lasted from 1948 to 1973 for film, with a slightly shorter run for the Western serial, from 1955 to 1973.[9] More specifically, the years the dissertation covers (1957–1963) witnessed the beginnings of the network era and the proliferation of the medium within the American home.

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[7] Christopher Sharrett, "Family, Frontier and the Destruction of the Social Order," in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home,* ed. Murray Pomerance (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 123.

[8] Slotkin, 347–349.

[9] Ibid., 347.

By the end of the 1950s, ninety percent of American homes owned televisions.[10] As the communications appliance manufactured for the suburban home, television provided an immediately accessible entertainment system that catered to the postwar era's changing demographics; the mass production of suburban neighborhoods and the emergent prioritization of the nuclear family was proportionate to the consumption of television programming.[11] Produced during the consolidation of the network-television system (1955–1965), this study's television Westerns were beholden to the regimented production formulas and exhibition schedules indicative of the network model's vertical integration.[12] Concurrent with the rise of network television was, conversely, the decline of the Hollywood studio system and the loss of the domestic exhibition chains that had all but guaranteed profits and industry consolidation for the major film studios.[13] Losing a significant percentage of the market due to competition with emerging postwar entertainment options (television being one among many), and the loss of their own industry power,[14] Hollywood studios invested in cinematic innovations that highlighted the singular qualities of film in contrast to the smaller and (mostly) black-and-white televisions of the era. The application of Technicolor (for richer and brighter color images) and the implementation of a variety of widescreen formats[15] suited the Western and created a scenography of picturesque natural settings on an epic visual scale; inventive cinematography combined Technicolor and widescreen technologies to convey a "monumental" vision both of the old West and of the Westerner. This study further investigates the combination of arresting cinematography with more complex narrative situations and characters with which to engage "social and psychological tensions."[16]

Adapting to postwar trends, Hollywood established a symbiotic relationship with broadcast television. Responding to the programming needs of network television, Hollywood studios began renting out production equipment and sets to television studios and, in 1955, began selling the rights to its film library. Additionally, from the late 1940s onward the majors established their own ancillary television production companies.[17] The relationship between Hollywood and the networks was noteworthy for sustaining the Western's popularity; the two mutually "reinforce[d]" the genre's visibility for the

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[10] David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction, Third Edition* (New York: McGraw Hill Higher Edition, 2010), 301.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States, 4th Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 186–187.
[13] Bordwell and Thompson, 300. In lieu of the 1948 Paramount Decision, the consolidation and control of every aspect of the film business (from production, to distribution, to exhibition) by the major Hollywood studios was deemed a monopoly practice and dissolved. The major studios were forced to divest their decades-long holdings in theater chains, paving the way for the emergence of smaller independent studios and talent-oriented production companies (fronted by the stars, writers, and directors formerly under studio contract) to enter the market.
[14] Ibid., 301.
[15] Ibid., 301–302.
[16] Ibid., 314.
[17] Ibid., 306.

postwar public. While production of the film Western boomed from the late 1940s to 1955, the reduction in Westerns produced in the six years of this study was a consequence of a decrease in overall industry production and not a lack of interest in the genre.[18] And while the Western took time gaining a popular foothold on television, the networks piggy-backed on the success of Hollywood Westerns from the first half of the decade and, through the years of this study, regularly featured Westerns with high ratings; the Western garnered a significant percentage of the television-consuming public and exhibited "a phenomenal level of audience interest" for the era.[19]

While *The Last Sunset* and *Gunman's Walk* employ the era's screen innovations and exhibit the narrative complexity previously mentioned, *The Rifleman* and *Have Gun—Will Travel* tweak the regimentation and formulaic trappings of the network teleplay and, however differently, produce equally compelling Westerns. This dissertation analyzes the creative ways the four Westerns experiment with the format of their respective mediums to distill what the confluence of the genre's cultural tradition means for its domestic era.

The Social and Political Climate

While my interests are largely theoretical, they are nonetheless grounded in the social and political context of the postwar-era United States. The Westerns under consideration here mediate the contradictory strains of a postwar era dominated by peacetime domestic appeals under the shadow of a Cold War era steeped in martial scenarios verging on the apocalyptic. The reorientation of the frontier legacy thereby coincides with Cold War–era policies, tying social planning to military defense initiatives. Beginning with 1948's Levittown development in Long Island as the model for single-family housing, the United States experienced a construction boom centered upon the creation of suburban enclaves as a response to an immediate postwar housing shortage.[20] Federally subsidized construction, along with guaranteed low-interest mortgage rates, incentivized builders and investors while catering to the young families of returning veterans.[21] Expanding residential living space away from densely populated urban centers and instituting policies meant to produce racial uniformity outside of them, the era's domestication initiative was predicated upon an idealized American family of white middle-class consumers;[22] the ensuing rise in suburban family incomes over the 1950s produced a readymade market for an emergent leisure culture.[23] Closely tied to domestic redevelopment were the military studies conducted at the close of World War II and the lobbying efforts that followed to implement their findings.[24] Strategies focused on bombing Axis cities in Germany and Japan had hastened the war's end; the devastation of

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[18] Slotkin, 348.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 234–237.
[21] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 16.
[22] Ibid., 168–169.
[23] Hilmes, 177.
[24] May, 169.

cities from above proved the vulnerability of concentrating a country's industrial and political power within a handful of urban centers. The suburban sprawl of the postwar years and the consequent construction of the domestic superhighway system was based on civic planning protocols emphasizing "decentralization";[25] the more diffuse and varied the sites of manufacturing, and the more dispersed the country's population, the more likely the country would survive a war largely based on aerial attacks specific to an anticipated nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union.[26] The irony of peacetime domestication as preparation for an apocalyptic war pairs with contradictions attendant to the dialectic between Civilization and Wilderness. My analysis of the Westerns finds in their combustive plots a series of links between the cultural history of the genre and the political/ideological trappings of the postwar era; the parallels clarify and underscore self-destructive tendencies intrinsic to both.

However ironic decentralization as a social model may have been, its perceived success likewise depended on the concurrent development of a fluid communications network from which disparate municipalities could interact and thereby sustain the functional integrity of a nation. This study incorporates theories of electronic communications contemporaneous with, and integral to, the era investigated. Marshall McLuhan's influential work on television, and scholarship related to the intellectual and historical emergence of Cybernetics, are not only valuable historical touchstones further contextualizing this study's film Westerns but also applicable theories for my close readings of the television Westerns. The theories thereby engage with film and television genres related to the Westerns; the integration of media theory and genre studies thereby allows for a more dynamic analytic framework from which to proceed and broadens scholarship on the Western by advancing the genre as suited to the study of comparative media.

Media Scholarship

Throughout I situate the Western alongside two film genres and two television genres that were also critical of the postwar era: film noir, the domestic melodrama, the "fantastic family sitcom," and the science-fiction anthology serials of the early- to mid-1960s. While the film genres are notable for the intricacy with which they wed narrative content to formal structure, the television shows are notable for a self-reflexivity that ties television as the communications technology for the home to the discursive white and middle-class suburban audience who watched it.

As Western scholar Scott Simmon notes, Westerns of the immediate postwar era incorporated and reflected the dark tonality (thematically and formally) of contemporaneous film noir. Moving from the pioneering idiom to a "town-taming" one, the A-Westerns of the late 1940s transitioned from the epic travails of winning the West to the complexities of civilizing it. The smaller scale required to dramatize the latter instanced a formal schema of darkened interiors and narrow corridors; in turn, the "emptiness" of the landscape outside became incorporated into the existential and social conflicts indicative of "the hazards of community" within.[27] As a historical corollary to

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[25] Peter Galison, "War Against the Center," in *Grey Room* 4 (Summer 2001), 6–33.
[26] May, 169.
[27] Simmon, 207.

the noir-Western, Simmon notes contemporary criticism of the Levittown development of the late 1940s as "built without a community focal point."[28] The civic hollowness of burgeoning suburbia offers an analogue to the "emptiness" found in the noir-Western. By the time that the Westerns I analyze were produced, suburban expansion was a mass-produced fact of the US landscape. Noting postwar development as a response to the country's housing shortage, Vivian Sobchack traces the generic relationship between film noir and the pastoral idyll as referring to an idealized past. Film noir's urban alienation and drift expresses a melancholy loss associated with a bygone century's agrarian family home.[29] Images referencing the agrarian past additionally evoke an anxious look back at the drift and poverty of the Great Depression. Film noir, in this cultural context, anticipates suburbanization as a desire to reconstruct the pastoral as a balm against the economic anxieties surrounding postwar capitalism and the fears associated with dislocation and homelessness. Replete with idyllic allusions to suburbia, the Westerns I analyze employ elements of film noir to evoke the pastoral as a proto-Western akin to Turner's retrospective vision of a lost agricultural community. While I employ the pastoral as a figure for exploring postwar domestication, I additionally explore the cultural history of the pastoral as a proto-generic influence upon the Western. This parallelism further establishes Turner's civil orientation for the study's Westerns and adds an additional theoretical perspective of the frontier legacy's cultural/historical lineage.

As a genre largely about, and critical of, suburbanization and the family structure at its core, the domestic melodrama of the 1940s and 1950s employs a distinct "expressive code"[30] whereby the psychological interiority of its characters finds expression through specific formal elements meant to amplify a film's tonal quality. While only explicitly applied to my analysis of *The Last Sunset* in chapter 1, the domestic melodrama's "emotional-pictorial décor"[31] inflects and resonates with *Gunman's Wal*k and (if we flip emotional-pictorial emphasis into a pictorial-emotional one) resembles the use of setting and mise-en-scène in television Westerns.

The "fantastic family sitcoms" of the early- to mid-sixties **(**such as *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched, The Jetsons,* and *Lost in Space***),** in tandem with the largely contemporaneous "haunting" evocations of science-fiction anthology serials like *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*, tarry critiques of suburbia by emphasizing television as a "new frontier" resting within the domestic hearth itself. Respectively "satirical and

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[28] Ibid., 248.
[29] Vivian Sobchack, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 138–139.
[30] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 375.
[31] Elsaesser, 372.

critical"[32] and "disturbing and apocalyptic,"[33] the two genres represent television as the communications technology made for the home; the symbiotic relationship between domestication and transmission evinces their mutuality as infused frontiers of experience. While the genies, witches, and aliens of the sitcoms embody the extra-human qualities of the era's technologies, the gunmen of the Westerns I discuss embody and demonstrate the (superhuman) speed associated with television transmission and the annihilating power of a thermonuclear explosion. Like the powers possessed by protagonists in fantastic family sitcoms, the extra-human capabilities of the era's technologies are incarnated in the protagonists of this study's Westerns. In turn, the Westerners' exceptionality (as pioneers, gunslingers, and cowboys) makes them socially anomalous within the social/civil worlds they inhabit. Their mediating "in between" status, in this context, matches the familiar/defamiliarizing position television occupies for the science-fiction anthologies. Formal compositions specific to the television Westerns, likewise, align the protagonists with transmission and amplify the association the gunman holds for the era as a thermonuclear weapon.[34] The Westerns I analyze thereby confer the haunting quality of the anthologies as a mutual "void" of electromagnetic and atomic frontiers.[35] More specifically, the signature meta-address of the "[d]o not attempt to adjust the picture" credit sequence of *The Outer Limits*[36] is anticipated by the direct address of both television Westerns' credits some six years earlier. By breaking the fourth wall, the opening credit sequences of both *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *The Rifleman* equate the fictional screen with the home-bound television screen, thereby leveling a critical meta-address at the rhetorical suburban audience. This reflexivity further "defamiliarize[es]"[37] the Westerns, both as alternative worlds set in the past and as transmissions broadcast across the airwaves.

Additionally, both *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *The Rifleman* were critical and popular successes and have been well-documented as exemplary telefilms of the era in Wayne State University's TV Milestone Series by, respectively, Gaylyn Studlar and Christopher Sharrett. In concert with these studies, this dissertation re-evaluates the Western telefilm's scholarly reputation[38] by distinguishing the critical merits of these series. While my project benefits enormously from both Studlar's and Sharrett's studies, I add to and complicate their work with analysis of the shows' cultural-historical relevance by focusing on the expressive link between the Western as a genre and television as an electronic transmission.

Dissertation Structure

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[32] Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 108.
[33] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 138.
[34] Slotkin, 383.
[35] Sconce, 137.
[36] Ibid., 136.
[37] Sconce, 138.
[38] John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 50–51.

Centralizing the aesthetic reflexivity of the study's television Westerns, this dissertation analyzes the narrative structure specific to the network era's episodic "telefilm." While the telefilm applies a rudimentary narrative arc to each of its episodes, their standalone narratives produce a set of terminal storylines whose bracketed expression emphasizes the formulaic quality of their arcs. Repetitions of plotlines across the episodes thereby underline the formal and ideological signs that make for the Western's legibility. The consistent engagement with familiar motifs and tropes foregrounds the Western's semiotic expression as it meshes with the action-orientation of its telling. Deferring the realist emphasis of Hollywood continuity, *Have Gun* and *The Rifleman* momentarily (to begin each episode) emphasize the fictional quality of their address by underscoring the compositional elements that construct the gunman as a figural assemblage and thereby pronounce how the genre "makes the man." While the gunmen-protagonists operate as mediating proxies for the gendered and civil contradictions of a domesticated nation, they no less "bridge" the fictions they inhabit to the home as characterological and televisual ciphers for each. In the process, I show, they emphasize the mediation attendant to television as an electronic medium and delineate cultural transmission as an expressive semiosis.

The repetitive quality of the telefilms intensifies the repetitious character of the frontier legacy. The telefilms that I study amplify the association of the Western telefilm with transmission by employing compositional strategies to create a funneling effect between its fiction and its audience in the form of a cultural "transmission." The creative framing of objects in the mise-en-scène to approximate the contours of the screen emphasizes the alignment between the Western genre and television broadcast technology. The confluences suggest an intimate and tactile relationship between culture and consumer, as well as a traffic in cultural and ideological information between the fiction and the home where it is broadcast. While the repetitive structure of the telefilm Westerns discerns the signs that produce the genre, the repetition-heavy plotting of the film Westerns functions to similar effect.

The narrative structures of *Gunman's Walk* and *The Last Sunset* are circular. The incest at the core of *The Last Sunset* and the filicide at the heart of *Gunman's Walk* are predicated on the destructive repetitions of their protagonists. *The Last Sunset* begins with outlaw/gunman Bren O'Malley's attempt to reclaim his (now married) ex-lover, the failure of which causes him to turn his affections to the ex-lover's sixteen-year-old daughter. On the brink of running off with the daughter, the gunman discovers he is the girl's father and willingly allows himself to be killed in the film's final duel. The film's focus on the patriarchal family disrupts its protagonist's seemingly itinerant nature. The romantic obsessiveness of his pursuit turns on the almost identical resemblance his daughter bears to her mother when he first met her. His romantic inclination is thereby reproduced as an impulse to fix and sustain the original moment; in this respect, Roosevelt's naturalized frontiersman returns in the film as a deluded and tragic fetishist. And while the film's compositional style is coded with formal cues that resemble the costuming of its protagonist, the Western, in turn, reproduces a host of allusions to the genre's history. Haunted by a memorial fixation, the alignment of the protagonist with the film's style and aesthetics broadens into a "trail" of cultural and historical allusions seen to construct him as gunslinging frontiersman.

Gunman's Walk also scrutinizes the Western hero's mythologization by the genre through the staging of family conflict and collapse. The competition between the legendary gunman/father Lee Hackett and his gunman/son Ed, in *Gunman's Walk*, leads to the film's penultimate duel in which the father shoots his son dead. The film traces the pedagogical lessons of its patriarch, and the father is seen to create and cultivate his son's "savage" homicidal behavior. Produced as a typological compendium of Western heroes (pioneer, "Indian" fighter, cowboy, and gunman), Lee Hackett's patriarch functions as a synecdoche for Roosevelt's genealogy of the hunter/warrior. In turn, the film sketches repetitions particular to its soundtrack and its two-shot duelist compositions to denote the ideological and formal repetitions of a destructive legacy. Haunted by the father's legacy as a storied gunman, *both* father and son duel with the father's past image as an overwrought one constitutive of the frontier legacy and the postwar era's gunfighter typology.

In their repetition-heavy address, *Gunman's Walk* and *The Last Sunset* emphasize the destructive return of the warrior tradition. Both films imply that the Westerner never leaves civilization. The family ties and civilized mores that the films' protagonists seemingly shun (as itinerant outlaws and as gunmen outside the law) are rearticulated as the return of the repressed. Just as O'Malley is defined by an overripe romantic fetish, so in turn is the Westerner. Similarly, the emphasis on Lee Hackett's pedagogical lessons on frontier masculinity emphasize that the latter is learned and not the result of natural instincts arising from a primal association with the land. While the Westerns develop their characters through convincing psychological motivation, the films' family and civic plotlines further undercut the genre's naturalization of the frontiersman's bearing. To represent the idea that the Westerner is enmeshed with social institutions (the family, the law) that are impossible to escape, *Gunman's Walk* and *The Last Sunset* associate their protagonists with their own formal and stylistic components. But the themes of haunting in these films are intensified to an almost Gothic degree. Defined by deftness and anguish, both characters articulate the larger ideological contradictions of the Frontier Thesis's continual return. The film Westerns reframe the frontier legacy as civil and domestic in order to mirror the shifting domestic landscape of the postwar era. They portray the civil society and the domestic sphere as threatened by a patriarchy allegorically informed by the era's Cold War aggression. *Gunman's Walk* and *The Last Sunset*, I show, define their anti-hero protagonists as predisposed to prey on their own families. While these chapters focus on films that dramatize returns which result in the destruction of the family, the dissertation's overarching structure and order traces a historical movement toward an elusive "home."

Order of the Chapters

Each chapter is organized around an extended study of each Western, the detailed analyses of which broaden out to engage with the historical and formal concerns of the dissertation. Organized to correspond to the frontier taxonomy's "nomadic"/"settled" binary opposition, the first section, "Itinerant Gunmen," pairs *The Last Sunset* and *Have Gun—Will Travel* to focus on the nomadic quality of gunmen protagonists and their seeming move away from civilization, while the second section, "The Domestic Westerner," is characterized by the all-male families of *Gunman's Walk* and *The*

Rifleman, each of them led by a patriarch gunman living within the civic confines of a small frontier town. Both *The Last Sunset* and *Have Gun—Will Travel* emphasize a movement, respectively, toward and through civil and familial worlds. Bren O'Malley's on-the-run outlaw in *The Last Sunset* matches Paladin's bounty-hunting sojourns in *Have Gun—Will Travel*. However, the seeming wariness both characters harbor toward civilization (indicated by their seeming distance from it) is belied by their respective characterization as dandies, and by the fundamentally civilized nature of their pursuits. Each character is noteworthy for his self-described style as a gunman. The flamboyance of each man's all-black garb speaks to the intentionality of a fashionable dandy who, as Gaylyn Studlar perceptively notes about Paladin, produces himself.[39] As evidence of each man's connection to civilizing forces that call into question his itinerancy, O'Malley (unknowingly) travels with his own family for the entirety of the film, and Paladin's insistent quotation of various philosophers, poets, and statesmen transforms him into a veritable encyclopedia of cultural reference.

The second section of the dissertation is, centrally, "settled" and focuses on Westerners positioned squarely within the civil and familial world of a domestic home front. The all-male gunmen families of the film *Gunman's Walk* and the Western telefilm, *The Rifleman*, respectively restrain and remove the wilderness from the Westerner. Constrained by the law and by social mores, members of the Hackett family long for the wilds of "Indian" fighting and gunfighting. In contrast, the McCains are defined by their embrace of domestication. The various gunmen, outlaws, and bandits who drift through the McCains' town are anti-social anomalies that the series frames as either sympathetic or toxic, and the threats that they pose to the home front are consistently annihilated by father/gunman Lucas McCain's rifle-toting prowess. While varying degrees of sympathy and threat drive *The Rifleman's* dramatic action, they pair with the contradictory tendencies of postwar domestication and Cold War nuclearization.

As the Western most explicitly evocative of the postwar and Cold War era's historical shifts in housing and domestication, *The Rifleman* represents the culmination of my dissertation's concerns and is an amalgam of the study's theoretical and cultural stakes. The series' suggestiveness offers a more explicit exploration of gender identity, and it engages in detail the homosocial relationships central to the A-Western's masculine formation. Lucas McCain's status as widower, and the show's homesteader logic, map feminine traits associated with the trope of woman-as-civilization and the postwar era's discursive construction of the woman-as-homemaker-and-caretaker onto his character. This absorption/appropriation of the feminine, in turn, disturbs the presumed respectability and integrity of the nuclear family. *The Rifleman*'s episodes are structured around both the melodramatic intimacy between the McCains and the carnage of the show's gun-fighting violence. While the former suggests a host of transgressive associations impossible to contain, the latter alludes to the nuclear countermeasures of contemporary civil defense and the annihilating scenarios of nuclear war.

The binarism of the section pairings generates a series of thematic dyads reminiscent of the Frontier Thesis and its dialectical legacy; the associations similarly resonate with pairings specific to the postwar era. While the first section's Westerns

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[39] Gaylyn Studlar, *Have Gun—Will Travel: TV Milestones Series* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 15–45.

foreground a criticism of postwar domestication, those of the second section foreground a more sympathetic view of the domestic and civic/public spheres. Throughout I aim to discern the original ways the four Westerns construct their fictions in accordance with the formal requirements of their respective medium's industrial conventions and standards. In turn, my emphasis on semiosis and the Western as a meaning-making machine reveals the degree to which suburbanization and nuclearization operated as constitutive ideological and political creations in the postwar and Cold War eras.

As a forthright rendition of the era's contradictory social mandates, each of the Westerns I analyze ironically reveals the fluency of a genre made for incarnating and dramatizing the country's ideological fissures. The Westerns thereby indicate the aesthetic and ideological construction of the era's Westerner as a contradictory embodiment of the country's polity and distill the skewed characterological and national progress story of its present. Through a detailed analysis of *The Last Sunset*, *Have Gun—Will Travel*, *Gunman's Walk*, and *The Rifleman*, this dissertation investigates a distinct cultural and historical moment through which to revise our understanding of the genre.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for their patience and commitment in sticking by me for the duration. I could not have finished without their unfailing support over the long slog. Specifically, I'd like to thank Gail De Kosnik for her like-mindedness, inspired scholarly suggestions and generosity, and endless enthusiasm; Scott Simmon for his brilliant scholarly example, in-depth engagement, and always helpful feedback; Mary Ann Doane for joining the party late in the game and jumping right in with incisiveness and encouragement; and, finally, my committee chair, Kristen Whissel for her beyond-belief faith, hard work, and dedication to this project. I cannot thank you enough.

Section One

Itinerant Gunmen

Chapter 1. *The Last Sunset:* Screening Incest

Introduction

Foregrounding Western romance as overtly incestuous, *The Last Sunset* (Aldrich 1961) depicts an outlaw who (however unknowingly) falls in love with and makes love to (however couched in innuendo) his own daughter. While the Western has been analyzed as portraying a necessary violence perpetually at odds with civilization building,[1] it repeatedly expresses the legacy of civil and temporal contradictions built into the origin story of the United States. The film, however, marks a particular shift in emphasis. Given its incest plot, the image of civilization's social kernel (a family breached by misconceptions of its proper roles) and the image of time (the past expressed in the present) become ineluctably confused. The film emphasizes that the Western's contradictions are inscribed within the American patriarch himself. *The Last Sunset's* plotting expresses those contradictions as intrinsic to the film's production era.

While the suburban redevelopment project of the postwar era envisioned turning soldiers into peaceful domestic homesteaders, the film's outlaw/father protagonist similarly inhabits polarized roles. On the run for murder, outlaw Bren O'Malley (Kirk Douglas) stops at a ranch in Mexico hoping to reclaim the love of the girl he left some sixteen years earlier. As the film progresses, the outlaw transfers his affections to his ex-lover's adolescent daughter, Missy. It is not until the end of the film, however, that O'Malley realizes the girl he intends to run off with is, in actuality, his own daughter. Distraught, he knowingly enters a duel with an unloaded gun and is subsequently killed. While O'Malley's desire signifies the conflation of social roles and temporal registers, it also denotes a broader misrecognition built into the patriarchy of 1961 America. The ideological legacy of the Western expresses the era's masculinity as blind to, and troubled by, its own domesticity.

The film demarcates a transition in the Cold War era of which it is a part. It negotiates the ideological contradictions of its specific cultural-historical moment by way of a generic characterization (O'Malley's Westerner) whose thematic tensions are principally suited for dealing with contradictions. As Western scholar Richard Slotkin has noted, the genre serves as an expressive signpost for the country it almost exclusively depicts. Ideological standards are perpetually (generically) renegotiated to serve the era in which they are produced.[2] *The Last Sunset* poses the question of what temporal and spatial "movement" means for the era's domestic redevelopment, as one concerning patriarchy. The tension between originary moment and future imperative, which marks the Western's generic legacy, is embodied by O'Malley as a fraught double bind. While O'Malley's inability to identify his paternity subverts the domesticity he seeks, the misidentification amplifies the tension associated with the Westerner as both on-the-range and at home. The promise of security that drives both O'Malley's patriarch and the era's home redevelopment is hounded by the persistence of the drift and violence they are bound to. The film's contradictory temper additionally matches the opposing images of the two decades it lies between.

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[1] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 4.
[2] Ibid., 6.

Produced between the decades following a civic and social reformation of the landscape itself (the mass suburbanization beginning with 1948's Levittown Long Island experiment, which largely overdetermines the image of the supposedly conservative 1950s) and the technological and social promise of President John F. Kennedy's "new frontier" (the proceeding radicalization of the earlier decade's youth culture and the politicized narratives of the 1960s), the historical context of the film's production and release is defined by extremes. Like the border characterization of *The Last Sunset's* outlaw/father protagonist, the era of the film's release borders rhetorically polarized midcentury epochs. And while the film lies between these overdetermined moments, it no less harkens back to the fraught ideological legacy of the Frontier Thesis summarized in the introduction to this study. Retaining Roosevelt's masculine typology, *The Last Sunset* nonetheless resuscitates Turner's civil orientation and continues the postwar trend indicative of the shift.

Scott Simmon has explored the late 1940s "town taming"[3] Westerns as negotiating the tensions surrounding mass suburbanization. To Simmon's incisive observation, I would add the genre's shift toward the agrarian homesteader. The Westerns of the immediate postwar period redefined the frontier in more domestic terms. Films such as *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946), *Sea of Grass* (Kazan 1947), *The Angel and the Badman* (Grant 1947), and *Rachel and the Stranger* (Foster 1948) all stressed the civil and social reconstruction of what it meant to be "at home." The subgenre expressed the "restor[ation]" of "family and community"[4] indicative of the immediate postwar era, its heroes preoccupied with the potential domesticity offered by a love interest while also fighting off threats to the larger civic body. In this sense, Roosevelt's call for a perpetual "regeneration" through violent imperial conquest, which so dominates the Western's generic expression, is complicated by the Westerns I discuss in this study. Stories of an untamed land in need of conquest collapse into stories about civilized landscapes that involve the home itself.

However much the film foregrounds embattled masculine Westerners defined by their exceptional skills on an unforgiving and hostile landscape, *The Last Sunset* positions them as beholden to, and desirous of, a domesticity they long for. The film revamps the rhetorical legacy of a late-nineteenth-century United States in order to address the historical context of the immediate past and the coming future of a mid-twentieth-century United States and the suburban orientation toward settling.

While most of the film's action depicts a cattle drive from Mexico to the States, it is nonetheless centrally concerned with reformulating the meaning of home; the familial uprooting and the incest central to its plot evinces a threatened domesticity. *The Last Sunset* reimagines the idyll of the proto-Western's pastoral in all its domestic emphasis while, simultaneously, representing the promise of suburban redevelopment as similarly problematic. O'Malley's appetite for frontier romance triggers the incest at the film's core, his combination of father and outlaw expressing a contradiction intrinsic to the genre. The visionary excess his characterization borrows from the American pastoral tradition fuses with the violent aggression of Roosevelt's frontier paradigm. Projecting

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[3] Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.
[4] Ibid.

the earliest manifestations of the frontier's generic iconography onto the 1961 of its contemporary redevelopment, *The Last Sunset* illustrates the patriarchal contradictions of their recombinant union. The film registers its engendered national character as "naturally" against itself, and the incest at the film's core is an unconscious drive intrinsic to its unwitting patriarch-protagonist. *The Last Sunset* expresses the turmoil built into the cultural legacy of a larger patriarchal-national character.

The Drive Home

Produced and released in 1961, the film debuted in the wake of a decade spent redeveloping the national landscape. As Scott Simmon notes, the "classical" Westerns of the late 1940s and 1950s were centrally inflected by anxieties surrounding the image of American "development" conditioned by the suburban mandate of the era. Generic expression about the civilizing process was infused with contemporary mores about domestic redesign. The aforementioned films about taming reflected the suburban expansionism authorized and generated by low-cost Government loans. The boomtown scenarios tended toward narrative endgames that produced ideal communities modeled on the era's imagined nuclear family.[5] By the time of *The Last Sunset's* production, the suburb that began with the paradigmatic Long Island Levittown development of 1948 was an established fact, and the suburban home its concrete exemplar.

And in keeping with the era's obsessions, the film action begins with the outlaw O'Malley and his nemesis, the lawman Dana Stribling (Rock Hudson), converging on a *home*. Specifically, it is the home of O'Malley's former lover, Belle (Dorothy Malone), now married to drunken cattle rancher John Breckenridge (Joseph Cotton) and mother to a sixteen year-old daughter Missy (Carol Lynley). Both outlaw and lawman find themselves employed by Breckinridge and agree to set aside their differences until entering the States; O'Malley has been employed as a hired gun for protection while Stribling is hired as an able trail boss to lead the herd. The family abode is seen just long enough for the action to leave it: though the beginning of *The Last Sunset* is set "at home," home is nevertheless left behind. The opening implies a reverse historicism about the civilized present once the drive sequence abandons the stability of home for the fugitive desert. When Breckinridge is killed early on, the already creaky familial edifice is broken. His death serves to emphasize a division between O'Malley and Stribling and the types of masculinity they embody. As outlaw and lawman, gunman and cowboy, the drama in which they find themselves enmeshed is paradoxically domestic. Each one auditions for the dead character's role as family patriarch. They perform as substitute nurturing father and loving romantic husband.

And as the role demands, each character gifts Missy a paternal lesson on family caretaking. At the outset of the drive, Stribling and Missy spot a hobbled and deserted calf. Stribling covers the calf's eyes and has Missy blow into its nostrils while repeatedly petting it. He explains that cows don't see very well, and that they rely on their sense of smell to recognize other cattle. He states that "when a calf loses its mother we need to give it a new smell to follow. You're his new mother." Stribling then puts the calf on its feet and asks Missy to ride slowly, the camera tracking as the calf rises in tandem with Missy's movement until they vanish aligned off-screen. While the calf is bonded to

[5] Simmon, 248.

Missy as if it were a human infant, Missy is temporally reframed as both mother and daughter. Her transitional status as a sixteen-year old girl is assuredly hinged by both family roles, while an animal serves as a substitute (enabling object-lesson and learning vehicle) for her future maternal role. Stribling isn't only instructing with paternal gentleness and knowledge; he is also teaching Missy what constitutes the coding of "family." Additionally, the scene cuts back and forth between an observant and beaming Belle, her own warm gaze bestowing approval upon a potentially new father for Missy and new husband for herself. The lesson in domesticity points to the Western's past in two regards. It alludes to the silent film narratives that served as one of the genre's earliest cinematic examples, and to the literary pastoral as an influential proto-Western.

The scene's idyllic, grassy glade is an abrupt shift from the barren vistas depicted in the cattle drive scenes. This setting harkens back to the early silent "Eastern Westerns" largely shot in the lush locations of New Jersey or upstate New York, such as *The Redman and the Child* (Griffith 1908) and *The Girl and the Outlaw* (Griffith 1908). The scene's tree-limned backdrops and its mirror-shade pool hint at the early pastoral forest settings that marked both early-nineteenth-century pioneering *and* early-twentieth-century filmmaking.[6] The image alludes back to the genre's lost setting. The shift to location filmmaking in the West (roughly announced by *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* [Griffith 1913])[7] coincided with the genre turning toward a harsher landscape suitable for "how to narrate killing"[8] (centrally, of Indians) reflective of Roosevelt's contemporary frontier theorizing.[9] The Western complicated its link to the late-nineteenth-century pastoral tradition by centralizing progress myths of frontier conquest and violence. The scene between Stribling and Missy recoups the pastoral, the interlude moving away the frontier paradigm that set the standard for the Hollywood Western. With its family motifs and peaceful lush glade, the scene evinces the stable and domestic image of the yeoman farmer. It positions the land as a tranquil and fertile Eden, a self-yielding and sustaining home.[10] The scene recasts the Western as both pastoral and familial. The fertility of its setting also implies the era of its production. Part lush manicured lawn and part Cinemascope long shot, it is a color-coordinated golf course expanse in miniature. Wed by a mirroring glade, the frame is cut between the blue sky-speckled white of clouds and the green sheen of open prairie grass (figure 1). The reflective pool that merges sky to ground operates both as stylized invention and as naturalized artifice. It calls attention to the cinematic innovations of the 1950s (Technicolor and Widescreen) as well as to the suburban tract itself. For Missy and for the screen itself, there is a pedagogical reinscription. As with the film's broader historical context, home is remodeled as an originary tracking shot, a school of sorts on the making of the family.

But while Stribling's guidance implies a nurturing fatherly example for Missy, O'Malley's parallel scene with her implies a forbidding transgression. As the camera tracks O'Malley moving ahead of a roped stray calf, he overtakes Missy on horseback. O'Malley stops her and offers to show her something. As the two move from horseback

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[6] Simmon, 5.
[7] Ibid., 38.
[8] Ibid., 45.
[9] Ibid., 49.
[10] Slotkin, 34.

to the ground, O'Malley says, "Look," picking up a bird's nest lying immediately in front of her horse. He states that while a horse "can see a gopher hole about a mile off . . . he can't even see a bird's nest under his nose" (figure 2). As with Stribling and the calf, O'Malley comments on animal vision. And as in Stribling's earlier scene, there is an allusion to family nurturing by way of O'Malley rescuing the nest. However, as Missy and O'Malley gently caress the nest in close-up, the audio rises to catch the sound of hoofs approaching. As O'Malley impulsively turns he draws his gun on a horseback Stribling, who chides him, "Don't be nervous, I said I'd take you alive"—Stribling's association as substitute father overtly challenges O'Malley's deployment of the role. Further, Stribling and Missy have been framed in long-shot with a continuous shot-counter-shot to not only Belle's approving eye but also a group of smiling field hands; the action is clearly acknowledged, sanctioned by public recognition as approving social witness. However, O'Malley and Missy caress the nest in a cloistered two-shot close-up, their faces taking up the entire frame, their cheeks and hands almost touching. Stribling's intrusion interrupts an illicit secretive act that the startled O'Malley seems to confirm by drawing his gun. While Stribling seeks a recognized and conventional role as father and husband, the shot composition and editing here foreshadow that O'Malley is an uncomfortable fusion of *both* potential father and courting lover. Additionally, the setting contrasts with the earlier scene (figures 3 and 4). The landscape is harsh, a desert of only scattered spiky sage and cactus, the wind whistling and kicking up dry sprays of sand. The desert coding posits O'Malley as sympathetic with the attacking Indians that marked the Western's initial turn toward the martial influence of Roosevelt's Frontier Thesis, but also the shepherding associated with the earliest rendering of the pastoral found in Virgil's *Eclogues*.

As Leo Marx has noted, the pastoral operates as a structural motif for the literary and political life of America.[11] The idea of the United States as a "virgin continent"[12] evokes the country's utopian promise as a natural and political preserve, while no less evoking the threat of its failure. Like the ideological ambivalence built into the Western it influences, the pastoral's harmonizing register channels the tensions that subvert it. Likewise, the shepherd, as "[t]he ruling motive"[13] for the genre, incarnates two opposing characterizations. Where one shepherd epitomizes the harmonious reciprocity between man and land, the other is an exile, forced into shuttling his flock through the wild of less fertile environments.[14] One's "embod[iment] of the pastoral ideal"[15] contrasts with the divestment found in the other. The dual characterization maps onto Stribling and O'Malley. While Stribling's role as lawman emphasizes the civil unity between the patriarch and the law, his role as shepherd-father evokes the domestic harmony between father and daughter. Inversely, O'Malley's outlaw expresses a civil estrangement that paces the incest to come, the lawful transgression coded as familial. O'Malley's scene

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[11] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 21.
[15] Ibid.

expresses the "qualifi[ication]" built into the pastoral.[16] Likened to the dispossessed shepherd whose passage through the idyll disrupts its harmony, O'Malley's growing intimacy with Missy implies that is "presence alone" threatens the family's integrity just as Stribling's intrusion "check[s]"[17] that the family remain unspoiled. O'Malley *is* (however unknowingly) Missy's real father. And as a lawman intruding upon a more primal and illicit union, Stribling's interruption serves as a reminder of a more broadly netted social-familial "Law" extending from the polarization of their shepherd roles. In this regard the second scene's bird nest implies not only a home under duress but also one under scrutiny. In close-up, the nest's fragile arrangement of grainy dirt and spiked twig is foregrounded over and against the giant-sized human faces. The frame's magnification inflates the skewing of O'Malley and Missy's roles, the pronouncement of the incest threat surveilled by the telescopic monitoring of Stribling's lawful guardian. Without the earlier scene's more distant view—which assigned particular roles and inscribed boundaries between human and animal, father and daughter, husband and wife—borders begin to blur; they are "seen" to be under observation, scrutinized for potential transgressions. The fundamental structure of what designates family is threatened and in need of constant surveillance.

Vivian Sobchack has noted Hollywood's negotiation of the family in postwar film noir as similarly expressed in pastoral terms. As the sequence designates familial roles as confused and its nurturing home as to-be-determined, film noir of the late 1940s depicts a no less troubled figural home. For Sobchack, the figural idyll with its agrarian and pre-industrial homespun settings serves as an ambivalent placeholder for a postwar America whose image of home is nostalgic and pastoral. The figural home in popular films noirs of the late 1940s is at once a fetishized "topophilia" that forever seeks spatial substitutes for its loss and a "retroactive fantasy" whose image haunts all presents.[18] As Sobchack implies, an imaginary loss haunts an entire national ethos that propelled the suburban expansionism of the next decade. The pastoralism of the shepherding sequences similarly evokes the lost idyll as synonymous with the loss of home and the family at its core. The dispossession associated with O'Malley's outlaw (as exiled shepherd) is indicative of the postwar era. While the home-as-idyll is obviated and in need of restoration, family roles no less lose their definition and become confused. Like the films noir from a decade earlier, *The Last Sunset* convenes home as itinerant and broken.

Literally "on the trail" and nomadic, the family searches for stability and reestablishment. While O'Malley is an autonomous drifter and Stribling his dogged tracker, each one's desire for Belle and their respective auditions for the role of husband imply a redeployment of familial roles that continually seek a stable home. As either yearning, passionate romantic or eager, stalwart guardian, they look at a past family neither can claim (at this point in the film) as his own. Furthermore, their overt auditioning for the role of patriarch emphasizes its conventional character as a "role." The father, in this instance, lacks both natural privilege and original claim. As the

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[16] Marx, 25.
[17] Ibid., 23.
[18] Vivian Sobchack, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 138–139.

biological father is seemingly dead, his authority is up for grabs, to be performed by a stand-in. Similarly, the suburban mandate of the era is an attempt at redefining the home and the patriarch's place within it. The shepherding scenes enact the exhaustion with a decade that incessantly encoded home and domesticity as the latest version of an ever-renewable American dream. As either watchful warden or longing romantic, Stribling and O'Malley preside over a family legacy authorized by a look back. Stribling's abiding protector hovers over the family's broken ruins while O'Malley's impassioned nostalgist pines for a romantic return to the past. In either case, they are both drawn toward reclaiming and reconstituting a broken family. The film's trek toward a potential home and family implies a respective image that critiques the era of its production. It looks back while it moves forward. In this way the film reflects post-WWII imperatives impelled by anxieties over changing family roles and how its prospective home would function.

The postwar era was uncertain of its civil formation and roles;[19] returning veterans were redeployed as sedentary peacetime professionals and a newly skilled female workforce was expected to settle back into pre-war maternal domesticity. The film updates and engages these contradictory appeals. The stalwart and able Belle is compelled to choose between the men, her independence relinquished by the need for a husband. It seems expected and conditional to her role as mother. And though Missy longs for sexual and romantic freedom, her slavish devotion to the older O'Malley implies subordination. Similarly, while Stribling and O'Malley measure up in the wild (adroit in a savage lawless frontier), the paternal auditioning their shepherding implies and the plot's direction back towards the States, emphasizes a stronger domestic and civil inclination in each. While Stribling pursues O'Malley, and O'Malley is on the run, their "chase" is converted into a return journey home (for an awaiting family). But however much family roles are emphasized, their definition is troubled by the plotting's insistence on a broken home. Stribling and O'Malley's arrival aggravates the integrity of an already fragmented family. Breckinridge's death simply allows for a more direct pursuit of his role. A feckless and irresponsible alcoholic in a loveless marriage, Breckinridge presides over a broken home. Its stability is in the past.

The home is characterized via both the old adobe ruins where the principals encamp and the shots of Belle at the helm of the chuck wagon. It is expressed as either a past rubble or perpetually on the move (figures 5 and 6). While this repetition marks the family as broken and in need of repair (the ruins a bare-boned substitute shelter from exposure), Belle's framing at the wagon's helm positions her matriarch as carrying the home's remains on her back. At its most pronounced, following Breckinridge's murder, the framing foregrounds Belle against an upright upholstered chair in the middle ground between her and a canted bed frame inside the wagon. Figured as mourning widow and frontier matriarch, Belle is as much adrift in her quasi-roadhouse home. In either instance, the Breckinridge family signifies a fugitive domesticity framed within foreboding tableaus of blown-out edifices left barren by time and/or a past calamity.

As the on-the-range paternity lessons, the ruin settings, and the wagon-as-set-motif mobile home all imply, the frontier/home dyad is countervailed throughout the film. From jaundiced desert wilderness to lush, verdant landscape, these contrasts

[19] Sobchack, 131.

abound. In terms of setting, the barren and bare hostility of the yellow-tinted wilderness is marked by surprising bursts of refulgent greenery. The contrasting color schemes conflict with figural impropriety. Centrally, however, they are colorations that express O'Malley's desire. Though O'Malley's return to Belle implies an attempt at domestic happiness (a sympathetic purchase on the 1950s suburban promise), it is nonetheless compromised by his unyielding intensity and aggression; the film's color-coded mismatch, likewise, resembles the discord in O'Malley's passion. The green that registers a nostalgic look back home (toward its imagistic idealization) is of a piece with the staining yellow taint O'Malley can't see. Like the animals, his sight is limited. Ironically imbued with the Western's romantic promise of discovery and adventure that literally propels him forward, setting suggests that O'Malley is incapable of discerning (and thereby negotiating) his conflicting passions. But what distinguishes his bearing in the film is not his behavior or some implied moral rut. He is genuinely unaware of the carnal impropriety at the film's core. He cannot restrain his own impulses and "settle down" because he is *too* Western.

O'Malley's "blindness" to his own paternity is worth noting here. While *The Last Sunset* relegates any allusion to the Indian plains wars (*the* frontier episode for its popularization in the Gilded era and the initial West-coast film Westerns that followed) to its periphery, the one scene where it is conveyed is of note given that it highlights O'Malley's limited sight and erotic myopia. When a starving Yaqui Indian approaches the group to barter for food, O'Malley guns him down without a thought, both violently misinterpreting the situation and unnecessarily endangering his family. Interceding, Stribling quickly rides off, ordering O'Malley to brace the herd for an impending attack. While Stribling successfully negotiates with the tribe offscreen, O'Malley organizes the remaining principals around the wagon as a makeshift bunker. Replacing Belle at the chuck wagon's helm, O'Malley's position implies his paternity by placing him at the threshold of the setpiece. Readying himself for a possible skirmish, O'Malley (clutching an anomalous rifle) no less resembles a pioneer (figures 7 and 8).

Enframing O'Malley as the center of the suspended action and within the wagon's paradoxical "mobile home," the sequence occupies both poles of the Western's frontier motif. As Jim Kitses notes, the Western's frontier logic plays out as a "dialectical . . . grid," the polarity between the wilderness and civilization "captur[ing] the . . . profound ambivalence that dominates America's history and character."[20] The Western offers fertile room both for ideological excavation and for a thematic and aesthetic "openness"; the plasticity of its dual substrate indicates a "shifting ideological play" and "diversity of forms" specific to the nuances of its fraught invective in whatever era it is found.[21] The sequence foregrounds O'Malley's fraught position in its action by aesthetically coding him as *the* iconic frontiersman. Standing in for Belle, O'Malley is framed as husband and father at the exact moment his poise evokes the Western's pioneer hero. Framed against the storm clouds and above his family, the image positions O'Malley as entrenched between the frontier's dual poles. He mirrors the sky as both foreboding storm and sheltering envelope. The scene's suspended outcome additionally

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[20] Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 13.
[21] Ibid., p. 13.

frames O'Malley along the horizon line expressing an ambivalent tethering between the infinite sprawl of sky and the grounding domesticity of family, the freedom of one set in contrast with the ties of the other. The ambivalence suggests Simmon's discussion of the pioneer image found both in the influential early-nineteenth-century frontier sagas of James Fenimore Cooper and in subsequent pioneer films like Raoul Walsh's early sound offering, *The Big Trail* (Walsh 1930).

Piggy-backing on the American pastoral imagery set forth by Thomas Jefferson in his *History and Present State of Virginia*, Cooper's fiction reimagined the natural-civil union of Jefferson's agrarian idealism. Fluctuating between eloquent descriptions of lushness reminiscent of Jefferson's pastoral and scenes of graphic violence, Cooper's Leatherstocking novels offered a "complex assessment" of the pastoral, the violent depictions of the early American Indian wars offering "a pessimism about American pioneering."[22] The implicit critique in Cooper's fiction was that the democratic virtues Jefferson associated with the farm family harbored an expansionist aggression that belied its self-sufficient integrity. While Cooper's fiction partially retained Jefferson's pastoral by way of the verdant descriptions of the Hudson Valley, he all but jettisoned the utopian politics associated with Jefferson's work. Contrarily, *The Big Trail* (however influenced by Cooper's pioneer adventures) relinquished Cooper's critical ambivalence. By characterizing its settler farm families as beholden to the wilderness man who leads them West, the film projects a moral hierarchy that subordinates the family farmer to the Indian "fighting trailblazer" associated with President Andrew Jackson's early-nineteenth-century military career.[23] The film thereby transferred the family farm's moral authority to the violence and individualism found in John Wayne's frontiersman hero. O'Malley's iconic tableau conflates the image of Jeffersonian democracy with the Jacksonian one. At once abiding patriarch and frontier hero, O'Malley expresses their awkward fusion for the 1961 film.

The paradox built into the era's suburban domesticity (the mobility of suburban expansionism terminating with the stasis of its hearth-and-home creed) finds a sympathetic recoding in the scene's tableau and subsequent action. While the position at the wagon helm distinguishes O'Malley as synched with the mobile overtones of his outlaw, the pose stills with an almost iconic arrest. No matter his itinerant wayfaring, the image fixes O'Malley's Westerner as bound to a family home. Interestingly, the film sends Stribling's more adept trail boss (who most resembles both Cooper's hero, Natty Bumppo, and John Wayne's pioneer leader in *The Big Trail*) off-screen, centralizing O'Malley's iconographic pose as, ironically, *the* pioneer "hero" in the sequence. The scene codes O'Malley as the progenitor of a frontier violence graphically brought home. *The Last Sunset* amplifies the tableau's contradictory coding by alluding to similar tensions found in American pastoral literature.

As Jefferson's Virginia pastoral stems from his own knowledge of and "admir[ation]" for the classical pastoral poetry found in Horace and Virgil,[24] O'Malley's characterization approximates the poet-as-shepherd found in Virgil's *Eclogues*. Where the shepherd operates as a stand-in for its author's poetic voice, the figure is additionally

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[22] Simmon, 21.
[23] Ibid., 134.
[24] Ibid., 132.

a musician whose playing is "echo[ed] back"[25] by the natural retreat. The harmonizing motif indicates an ideal reciprocity between both man and land, and culture and nature—the exchange at the heart of the motif informing Jefferson's image of the United States as a civil-political utopia. While the two scenes that find O'Malley waxing poetic are respectively addressed to Missy and Belle, the shepherd's dialogue with nature (in all its utopian implication) is reconvened as a patriarch's fraught relation to his own family. The motif of family-as-civil-embryo is redressed by O'Malley's own voice; he intones a dystopian undercurrent the incest will ultimately realize.

Where O'Malley delivers a fanciful verse on a sea-horse family to Missy, he similarly rhapsodizes with quasi-poetic naturalism about the first moment he fell in love with Belle. Playfully expressing to Missy the importance of "get[ting] to know the sea," O'Malley rhapsodizes "the sea is a place where the seaman shoes the hooves of the wild sea mare in the heart of the cold sea stream. Not many people have seen it nor caught the faintest gleam of the ice green cave in the deep green sea, where the sea mare hides her sea-colt wrapped in a shy sea-dream." The verse's lyrical-fantastical allusion to the sea-horse ties the pastoral's verse tradition to the mid-twentieth century's familial credo; the sea-horse dreamscape is converted into a parable of domestication. Later, while he and Belle rest after the drive, O'Malley recalls the first time he saw Belle. With an unguardedness whose tone belies the aggression and arrogance of his manner up to this point, O'Malley describes the "golden" hue of Belle's hair as she descended down a staircase. Recalling the reflection of her hair in candlelight as if a "shooting star fell and crashed, scatter[ing] its glow all over," O'Malley figures Belle along the bannister as a kind of celestial supernova. The metaphor equates the personal memory's love-at-first-sight to the apocalyptic inference of the crashing sun. In both instances O'Malley's imagination is an ironic one. Where the sea mare's fostering of its colt is threatened by the "shoeing" associated with the seaman, the context of the seaman's undersea aggression implies his own drowning. Likewise, O'Malley's love for Belle is complicated by the emotional intensity and overwhelming scale the destructive metaphor implies. The loving expression central to each is infused with connotations of violence both domestic and elemental. O'Malley's romantic imagination expresses the tranquility and domesticity of the pastoral as possessed by a sublime destructive force. O'Malley's rhapsodizing gives voice to the tensions associated with a larger American cultural romanticism. He speaks to the "dissonance" found in major American authors of the mid-nineteenth century.[26]

Intrinsic to the American pastoral is the "contrast between two consciousness."[27] The genre expresses the fertility of its landscape as ever-accompanied by a technological presence that interrupts it. Bespeaking the "complex" pastoral found in American letters,[28] Leo Marx finds its most acute articulation in the mid-nineteenth century. The writings' "prevailing ebullience" expressed the influence of the era's popular enthusiasm for progress exemplified in "the image of the machine."[29] The literature evoked the

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[25] Marx, 23.
[26] Ibid., 30.
[27] Ibid., 28.
[28] Ibid., 15.
[29] Ibid., 193.

"rhetoric of the technological sublime"[30] that extended the pastoral premise by way of a pitched fervor associated with the midcentury's industrial boom. The mythic nostalgia associated with the pastoral ideal was undercut by a progress-imbued futurity that complicated it. And just as O'Malley never exhorts the technological, his tone, like the American vernacular, carries its cadence; the "meaning of the machine . . . carried not so much by express ideas [about technology] as by the evocative quality of the language, by attitude and tone."[31] O'Malley's cadence fuses the "security and repose"[32] derived from the early pastoral's naturalist appeal with the intensity associated with the complex one's technology. The domestic odes reassemble the pastoral's conflicted timbre into a "single pattern of meaning"[33] and reverberates with the characterological tension between wilderness and home built into O'Malley's Westerner. While O'Malley characterizes the ideological strains of each genre, his patriarch is, relatedly, blinded by their scale.

O'Malley incorporates the temperament of the pastoral legacy (if not its deftness), and projects its intensity onto the family. The general tone of his voice and the inadvertent identification with the mare's "shoe[ing] seaman," whose proximity enables him to see her "hidden" colt, foretells O'Malley's movement toward incest. The elemental evocations lack self-recognition, implying that they as much overwhelm O'Malley as blind him from the very family he yearns for. The beauty and scope of the Western's natural setting is converted into an excess desire for the family home. The sheer enormity of feeling he carries blinds him from recognizing his own family; his vision, like the scope of the complex pastoral, overwhelms him. While the pioneer tableau frames O'Malley as sharing the sky's celestial scope, his obsessive vision constricts omniscience into a myopic "over-sight," implying that the magnitude of his vision contracts into the narrowness of his desire.

Additionally, while O'Malley's hybrid Westerner drifts through a host of nomadic appellations specific to the Western (outlaw-on-the-run, gunman-on-the range, and cowboy-on-the-trail), the pioneer-father allusion advances them as a patriarch's own itinerant drift toward the civilized home that Turner's frontier coding championed. As the pioneer image denotes a backtracking through the Western's proto-generic influences, it revisits the Westerner's domestic origins just as O'Malley's characterization literally gives voice to the pastoral's visionary excesses. While O'Malley's Westerner rushes home blind to his own position in the family, the characterization over-identifies with the visionary content of the film Western as a techno-cinematic image of nature. The misapprehension of his patriarchal role persists alongside the stylized naturalism of the film Western as a quasi-elemental/technological sublime. As both patriarch pioneer and rhapsodizing romantic, O'Malley's characterization stresses the paradoxical domestic and aesthetic qualities of the Westerner on film. The obsessive drive home that defines O'Malley's character projects an unconsciously destructive patriarchy.

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[30] Marx, 195.
[31] Ibid., 193.
[32] Ibid., 28. Marx's paragon for the complex pastoral stems from his analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's notes from 1844 in Concord, Ma. Where Hawthorne writes of the quietude of the largely agrarian setting, its disruption by the sound of a passing locomotive denotes the signature moment for the attitude's articulation (11–33).
[33] Ibid., 30.

The Indian scene additionally shifts the film's focus onto O'Malley. While Stribling's frontier diplomacy with the Indians is elided into an off-screen periphery, the iconic pioneer pose that hints at O'Malley's paternity marks the moment he becomes the film's protagonist. And as *The Last Sunset's* central protagonist, he represents the film's own qualities as a cinematic Western. O'Malley's obsessive poet-outlaw persona both motivates the film's plot and cues its formal expression.

O'Malley's memory of Belle paces the cultural allusions that mark *The Last Sunset* as a Western. The event from the past that motivates the character is likened to the ideological tension that informs the Western as a composite cultural legacy. From the distinction between Virgil's two shepherds and the opposition between Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, to the complex pastoral and the melancholy loss of home that informs postwar film noir, *The Last Sunset* excavates a larger cultural memory in contradistinction to O'Malley's memorial fixation. However, O'Malley's characterization as an aesthete underscores the film's own expression. His lack of self-awareness is proportionate with an inflated self-expression that the film's formalism approximates. In this regard, his tribute to Belle is given a fuller and more direct expression as O'Malley soon transitions into singing-cowboy mode.

A Yellow Era

The tinted gold of the Technicolor prairie coded into O'Malley's nest scene with Missy, and also into his description of Belle's glowing yellow hair, operates as a thematic signpost for O'Malley's transgression. At once a narrative trigger and a figural denominator, yellow marks the character's longing as it articulates the film's critique of domesticity. For the entirety of the film (from O'Malley riding up the entrance to the Breckinridge ranch, to inside the Breckinridge home, and throughout the drive), O'Malley whistles the song "Girl in the Yellow Dress." The song both harkens back to the dance where he fell in love with Belle (operating as a sort of emphatic back-story) and also sympathetically codes the screen with a color that corresponds to his longing for the past. As the song describes his chance meeting with "the pretty little girl" at a dance with whom he falls in love, each whistled note replays O'Malley's desire back to him. But it is not until a good two-thirds into the film that O'Malley actually sings the song. At the end of the drive, Belle plans a fiesta along the river bordering Mexico. A series of intervals that structure the Western are activated at once; Belle's dialogue implies that the "real fiesta" is between two languages and therefore two cultures. While the "savagery" of the desert is being left behind, the supposed civilized "home" of commerce and family lies ahead.[34]

The scene opens with the fiesta in full swing, as the Mexican cowboys sing and dance along with Stribling and Belle. As the camera's focus shifts from the festivities, it hovers over a peripheral O'Malley who looks off screen right. Flanked by back-lot desert palms and low-lit shadow-play nocturnes, the camera cuts to Missy wearing the fabled yellow dress (figure 9). Emerging from the background where Belle's now-illuminated

[34] Slotkin, 13. As the dominant frontier thesis promulgated "visions of the border" that divided savagery from civilization, its border motif was re-appropriated to a host of cinematic contexts away from the wilderness. The Hollywood Western ever-reinvents and experiments with the motif in terms of subjectivity, race, and class.

wagon glows with yellow light from within, Missy is centrally framed along O'Malley's leering gaze. As their looks meet Missy freezes, her eyes locked on O'Malley's awe-struck stare. The entire moment *stills* in a stylized instant of temporal suspense. As Missy approaches and the screen cuts to a two-shot of the characters, she says "I'm only a sham," and the camera cuts from her backlit dress to her bare feet. The stylized rhetoric of the scene is fundamentally artificial and expressionistic. It fuses the material of film production (set, costume design, color, lighting) with O'Malley's desire. Having found and put on the dress she has discovered in an old trunk of her mother's, Missy not only conflates the temporal-generational gap (the difference between herself and her mother) but also flattens time for O'Malley. As the rhetoric of the scene and its complicit plot alignment suggest, it is not so much Missy that shocks O'Malley into stunned silence but the dress itself. Missy is uncannily centered in the frame, as actress Carol Lynley hits a mark between foreground desert and background fill-light wagon. As both the object of the outlaw's desire and the screen's centerpiece, she is narratively and formally in-between. As the film's centerpiece, this shot gives expression to the affective resonances of its characters while announcing the medium's discursive signposts. While the shot displays O'Malley's longed-for fetish object, it also foregrounds the material of film production. O'Malley's gaze "looks" back and fixates on an image from his past that initiates, defines, and advances his passionate behavior (the actions that set the plot in motion). The rhetoric of the scene advances and highlights the skeletal lineaments that produce cinematic images. As a 1961 Western, the conflation bespeaks the intersection of human desire and screen language. What O'Malley loves, what the screen spotlights, is simulacra—the image whose unmoored polarities (as both past and present, mobile and immobile, cinematic construction and affective engagement) entwine.

Missy and O'Malley's dance acts as a figural lynchpin signifying that the family (as civic embryo) latently bears the seeds of its own incestuous implosion. As Simmon has noted concerning Westerns of the classical period, "the dance sequence convenes community."[35] By way of the dance scene from John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946), Simmon notes the motif's attempts at mitigating the frontier binary. While the Bible reading that precedes the scene makes it "moral enough," the wild rabble of the film's actual dance plays as "decently hedonistic."[36] As a town-taming Western, the motif's use in *My Darling Clementine* is wildly ambivalent. Shuttling Wyatt Earp's Westerner away from the "destructive temptations" of vengeance he veers toward in the film, the burgeoning romance with the film's eponymous heroine codes the potential union as partially castrating.[37] What signifies the civil world's beginning denudes its hero of the necessary violence that makes for the town's emergence in the first place.

A full fifteen years removed from Ford's postwar Western, *The Last Sunset* is more firmly entrenched in the era's domestic parlance, the "domestic logic buried within" the dance even more pronounced. As O'Malley and Missy approach one another, they literally and figuratively collapse the space between them. In keeping with the stylization and gestural emphasis of the scene, the cowboy band begins to play O'Malley's song as if his own desire transparently spelled itself with note-for-note telepathy. While the two

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[35] Simmon, 249.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 250.

sway gently to and fro, O'Malley breaks into serenade mode. He sings, "pretty little girl in the yellow dress, when you gonna give your heart to me. I intend to keep on askin' until you answer 'yes,' pretty little girl in the yellow dress." "Yes" implies the inevitable marriage that constitutes a legal monogamous union, placing O'Malley squarely within the borders of normative desire. Here the implication of "community" signaled by the dance is given its romantic recompense, but only as a critical indictment of that which constitutes the community. O'Malley's obsessive longing and dandy performance implies that *he* wrote the song and, likewise, that he is the author of his own family transgression. The "yellow dress" is a distortion; O'Malley's ballad resuscitates the image as a fixation, its phantasmatic memorial more an objectifying reflex than a genuine romantic feeling for Missy. Again, what violates the sanctity of the family is not what remains "outside" it but what constitutes it, what legitimates and authorizes it: the father figure. O'Malley's repetition of the chorus activates the present as a directly transferable past, thereby conflating nostalgic yearning with actual incorporation. But O'Malley's idealization can only repeat the past. It cannot broker change. O'Malley's longing is obsessive and rigid, his romanticism unswerving in its exacting repetition. Like the generic ethos the character thrives on, he is rigidly ideological. But by way of its mannered stylization, the performance undercuts Roosevelt's more demonstrative ideological legacy. In effect, Missy's self-effacing "sham" entrance in the scene points more to the hyper-aestheticism of O'Malley's singing cowboy performance style as pronouncing a broader ideological sham; the persona's subgeneric addition to *The Last Sunset* updates its prior use in the 1930s as undermining the frontier warrior's sensibility.

Film scholar Peter Stanfield notes the evolution of the singing cowboy type popularized in the late 1930s and early 1940s by film star Gene Autry. A product of the complex compendium of Southern vernacular music originating in early-twentieth-century medicine shows, Autry's emergence and performance style marked the popularization of the subgenre for the Depression era. Frequently derided for an "inauthenticity" that lacked the requisite frontier masculinity formalized and conventionalized in Owen Wister's fiction and Roosevelt's tomes on ranching and frontier history over a half century or so earlier, the hyper-aestheticism of Autry's presentation undermined (or, as it were, revealed) the Gilded Era's ideological invocation regarding frontier masculinity. Autry's singing cowboy subverted the roughhewn established manner of the frontiersman's "ideal" legacy.[38] By centralizing the performance numbers, Autry emphasized the masquerade of his cowboy figure whose dress-up iconography served his contemporaneous radio stardom. And though Autry's appropriation of the cowboy type allowed for a more conventionalized entry to a larger modern audience, the persona nonetheless "defied both stereotypical gender readings and the dominant conception of the Western as a frontier narrative."[39] The staged quality of Autry's address called attention to the cowboy figure's "costum[ing]"[40] for its Depression-era audience, his hero often ridiculed by other men in the action for his

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[38] Peter Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys & Blue Yodels: The Strange History of The Singing Cowboy," in Edward Buscombe and Roberta Person, eds., Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 114.
[39] Ibid., 115.
[40] Ibid., 110.

dandified archaism. Not unrelated, the films offered women a crucial role as active agents in the plot, their casting as Depression-era members of farm families in plight thereby underscoring Autry's "concern with the domestic sphere," further denuding the films of "an absolute embrace of patriarchy."[41] As both pomaded balladeer and family-oriented modern champion for a Depression-era audience whose concerns were (like his original audience) rural and poor, Autry's singing cowboy pushed the earlier century's frontier Western by centralizing an aestheticism whose appeal was largely feminine and domestic, rural and familial. Given its overt concern with patriarchy and the broken family at its core, O'Malley's singing number recalls the Autry type for a commentary on the postwar era's concern with familial redevelopment.

The Last Sunset's appropriation of noir idioms for conveying the anxiety associated with the Depression era is compounded by the appropriation of Autry, from whom the film is only a quarter century removed. By reclaiming Autry's balladeer, O'Malley's number acts as an ironic composite of different eras. Informed both by the freedom that defined the frontier hero for the late-nineteenth-century Gilded Era and by the uprooting associated with the next century's economic collapse, O'Malley's love ballad uneasily combines the scope of each. As outlaw on the run, O'Malley's shift into a singing cowboy further intensifies and complicates the already ambivalent domestic predilection of *The Last Sunset's* era. The nonconformist ramble of the Gilded Era's cowboy image mingles in O'Malley with the forced dislocation and drift of the Depression audience that Autry addressed. The different generic images coalesce within O'Malley as a historical-characterological composite that expresses postwar anxiety in relation to home and family. The performance expresses O'Malley's narrow obsession as an all-encompassing passion on the range. O'Malley's psychological motivation structures the film's entire action, and the cattle drive emerges as a backdrop to the more decisive psycho-drama the song's cornball blush ironically unveils.

The chaste gentility of the musical number's Tin Pan Alley allusion is similar to the conscious watering-down of Autry's own music for a broader appeal. But while Autry moved away from the innuendo-laced suggestiveness of his early 1930s recordings toward the broader mainstream appeal his later cowboy image allowed for, the sweet croon of O'Malley's song infuses the singing cowboy's innocent patter with anxious impropriety. In the context of the film's incest plot, the performance speaks to a series of socio-cultural erotics. The number's innocence is belied by the budding romance of its father-and-daughter dance partners, as O'Malley's shifting romantic affections are now firmly focused on Missy; the unconscious motivation of his desire edges ever-closer to incest. The aggression of O'Malley's romantic pursuit of Belle now mingles with the genteel trappings of O'Malley's pursuit of Missy. Just as the cowboy persona denuded Autry of his Southern vernacular music roots,[42] O'Malley's appropriation of the role inversely raises the specter of a forbidden sexual desire that underlies the era's patriarchal regime. The searching romanticism of the song marks (however unconsciously) a predatory invective within O'Malley. While O'Malley forever longs for an ideal love, the America with which he is allegorically aligned forever looks to the past for its ideality (as family, as community, as nation-state). The yellow that "taints" his world implies an

[41] Stanfield, 111.
[42] Ibid., 100.

ideological fixation particular to the film's domestic era, and a latent one ingrained within the Western's generic mythos. While O'Malley demands the same sixteen year-old "girl in the yellow dress," America longs for and insists upon an unrealizable image of civilizing. As O'Malley and Missy kiss passionately at the siesta scene's end, the film moves into a generic mode that seemingly belies the action-oriented masculine heroics of the Western. While the film critiques the previous era's unbridled suburban expansionism and the unconditional "love" at its core, it pursues the critique by borrowing from the previous decade's most critical genre, becoming a melodrama.

As Thomas Schatz has noted, the 1950s Hollywood melodrama was predicated upon the proliferation of a social world (the massive suburban developments already mentioned) as well as upon the genre's expressive critique. As mentioned, the postwar socio-economic order that emerged at the end of the 1940s schematized a new world privileging family and home. But by mid-decade it likewise straitjacketed gender roles into the strictly conventionalized home-and-hearth credo of middle-class suburbanization. Between a bureaucratic corporate work-world and a domestic home-and-hearth caregiving one, the decade's utopian formula left no room for the personal dissent and larger political-economic realities that put stress on the era's conventionalization.[43] Though *The Last Sunset* is entrenched within the developmental mythos of the Western, it borrows the melodramatic idiom of an *immediate* past. At the most superficial level, the film's casting of melodrama stalwarts Rock Hudson and Dorothy Malone is an overt reference both to the past era and to the melodramas that most acutely critiqued it. It spotlights (with glaring yellow filtration) a familial world as originally tainted by its own passionate and conventionalized will.

Additionally, Thomas Elsaesser has noted the era's domestic melodrama as utilizing a distinct "expressive code" that emphasizes the formal and tonal materials of a given medium over and above a plot's more uniform narrative sense.[44] Pushing the sensual parameters of cinema, the genre utilized its era's audio-visual innovations for expressing the psychological stresses of its domestic era. The conscious integration and manipulation of sound, color, and widescreen as technological innovations helped produce a more "sophisticated" variety of effects, their formal entwining relaying complex "aesthetic patterns" beyond the meaning-making deliberation of a more "autonomous semantic discourse."[45] In this sense, the aesthetic overdetermination of O'Malley's singing cowboy synchs with the popping golds and yellows of Missy's dress and the matched chiaroscuro-black of O'Malley's duds, the contrast underlying the conflicting emotional tenure of O'Malley's character. Likewise, the flitting polarity of O'Malley's mercurial nature (all aggressive fury one minute, gentle playfulness the next, etc.) contrasts with the gentle glide of the dance. As Elsaesser notes, audio inflections around dialogue and song offer a "plasticity" of design. The timbre of Douglas' voice in the soundtrack plays off the sequence's other formal devices, his vocalization offering a

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[43] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).
[44] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 375.
[45] Ibid.

"'melodic' dimension" to the action, where "diction" produces the symmetry between "emotional resonance and dramatic continuity."[46] Where the scene's color and lighting are buoyed by the literal sound of O'Malley's singing voice, the vocal modulations are mobile-tracked with the burgeoning romantic pair, their to-and-fro sways across the widescreen structured around the repeat chorus. Peaking at "yes" only to descend again into the hopefully insistent "asking," the vocal "orchestrates" the emotional tone of the sequence. The seeming sweetness of its undulating scale traverses O'Malley's own emotional "pitch," and its repetitions enunciate the affective dissonance of his fixation and the incest to which it leads.

The scene suggestively inverts Western tropes. It takes the open spaces and free individuals that are the hallmark of its generic unity and folds them back onto a family set-piece. O'Malley's longing for his lost first love maps onto the monogamous dream couplings critiqued by the era's melodramas. By incorporating the aestheticism of the singing cowboy with techniques specific to the era's melodrama, the scene sketches a broader generic convection around patriarchy. Now centralized around O'Malley (the dance sequence spot-lit in color-melding filtration as the obsessive "yellow dress" he desires), the film's formal schemes literally fall from his voice; the material composition of the film issues from O'Malley's own psyche. As O'Malley gives voice to his central desire, the film matches its central character's psychic interiority with the film's graphic composition. The manly attributes of O'Malley's composite Westerner coalesce with the "reality of the psyche" the domestic melodrama revels in. Rendering O'Malley's Westerner as a figure under cinematic analysis, *The Last Sunset* "explores" the era's patriarchy by formally scaling its "emotional-pictorial décor."[47] But as (centrally) a Western, *The Last Sunset* transforms the mise-en-scène of a domestic space's decorous objects[48] with the staged dramaturgy of a gunman on the range. *The Last Sunset* takes the individualist Westerner and tweaks his *dramatis personae* by way of the techniques commensurate with the domestic melodrama, thereby magnifying the contradictory turmoil of the era's patriarchy.

The yellow that consumes O'Malley's psychological palette literally *colors* the film. From the jaundiced outcroppings of desert mesa to the screaming bandana around O'Malley's neck, to the golden hair of actors Douglas, Lynley, and Malone, the yellow of the girl's memorialized dress suffuses the film's mise-en-scène as the palette that defines O'Malley's desire. The first scene between O'Malley and Belle alone in the Breckenridge barn links color to desire. By way of a contrived yellow lantern that casts a golden luster, the entire interior is aglow with the color (figure 10). From Douglas's slick glazed hair, to

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[46] Elsaesser, 375.

[47] Ibid., 372.

[48] Ibid., 366. Defining the American family melodrama as stretching from 1940 to 1963, Elsaesser's historical coverage entails the thematic/cinematic concerns of this chapter. From the drift and anxiety of the prewar and immediate postwar noir to the psychosexual and social themes of the 1950s Western, to the formal melodramatic flourishes mentioned herein, *The Last Sunset*—while its core a Western—is imbued with a hybrid generic energy. Its 1961 release dovetails with the end of the family melodrama as a cultural/historical moment, typifying the maturation of the postwar redevelopment project.

Malone's twirling ringlets, to the bricks that jut out from the adobe interior, to Douglas's color-tipped gun belt bullets, the entire scene is tinted "yellow." The color is even more pronounced given the scene's contrasting blacks. Shadowed crevices lay low in menacing cobalt allied to O'Malley's omnipresent jet-black shoulder-to-boots costume (figures 11 and 12). The costume conflates the golden thrush of O'Malley original passion with the funereal black of the suicide that awaits him. As a characterological coating, the outfit expresses the spatial breadth of O'Malley's on-the-run outlaw as a terminal condition he cannot escape.

O'Malley's cowboy romance recompenses with the family melodrama's material attributes; the frontiersman's freedom is expressed as the sign of the domestic body incarnate, O'Malley's manly grace formally conditioned as an "aesthetic effect."[49] Denuding him of his ethos, the formal technique reclaims the Westerner as a specific cultural production. O'Malley's gold-and-black costuming additionally updates the hybrid generic association between the Western of the late 1940s and film noir of the immediate postwar era. As Simmon postulates, Westerns of the immediate postwar were renewed by film noir's formal influence, the noir look providing the Western with "homeopathic doses of darkness."[50] *The Last Sunset's* color-scheme combines the noir-ish chiaroscuro of the Westerns of the immediate postwar moment with the vibrant Technicolor of the 1950s melodrama. The union augments the formal legacy of each to the 1961 of the film's production. The barn scene emphasizes (as does the film as a whole) a similar cross-pollination for the Western. Cornering Belle, O'Malley states, "I can't leave you Belle, I never did really. All these years I've remembered you as you were that night; a pretty girl coming down the steps in that yellow dress." While O'Malley can't distinguish past from present, daughter from lover, the screen idiomatic implies a rhetorical confusion as well. The gold and black tints reference Hollywood's own history. They rhetorically fuse the affective menace of postwar drift found in noir with the smoldering claustrophobia of domestic melodrama. By intertwining the dread of one era with the excess of another, the black-and-yellow color scheme critiques its own era's suburban ethos.

In the context of the film, the swagger and fury that make for O'Malley's action are here rendered as the conflicting tonal shades that formally and literally "color" his attitude as a cultural production. The screen symmetry between O'Malley's consuming desires as a character and the hyperbolic rhetoric of the mise-en-scène imply a broader cultural evaluation. O'Malley's psychodynamic tension foregrounds a fictional character's aesthetic design with a medium's technological material, the imbrication offering up a broader critique of what masculinity means for the era. The freedom that typifies the Westerner is in service to the same urgency that compels him home. The film's cultural/technological color-coding indicates a larger ideological infusion that directs the patriarch's combustible makeup. The origin of O'Malley's original violence confirms this. Implying that it is the jealous rage that compelled the fit of violence that made him a wanted murderer in the first place, the memorial love for the "girl in the yellow dress" is one soaked in the blood of a proprietary monogamy more geared toward aggression than union. O'Malley's love is as all consuming as it is self-indulgent. The

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[49] Elsaesser, 376.
[50] Simmon, 208.

contradictory psychic temperament that drives the narrative also determines the look of the entire film as a *possessed* expressive body.

The film here tweaks what Jim Kitses notes in the Western's genre era practitioners, Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher. Closely associating the central hero and villain of their films, each director complicates the antagonism by stressing the connection that binds them. Where Mann's films position both hero and villain "on a moral and psychological grid," the tipping balance of the association necessitates "resemblance" as much as ethical polarity.[51] Similarly, Boetticher's films are marked by the symmetry between "hero and villain," the respective strengths that speak to their "parallel stature" offset by the asymmetry of their moral demeanor.[52] While the hero is defined by a laconic temperament that paces his moral steadfastness, the villain is distinguished by a personal magnetism that paces the reach of his ambition.[53] While the doublet at first seems apt given Stribling's lawman and O'Malley's outlaw, the shifting formal and narrative focus toward O'Malley collapses the hero/villain dyad onto the outlaw-father. While O'Malley and Stribling are cross-cut into dual symmetry at the film's outset (the volatile outlaw tracked by the resolute lawman), the match-cutting and O'Malley's early comment that Stribling's the "fella [I'm] pretty much bound up with" certainly attests to Kitses's observation. But *The Last Sunset's* formal strategy collapses the "psychological" dyad onto O'Malley as a single character, more overtly instancing Kitses's observation about Boetticher's Ranown cycle of Westerns that "the villain . . . is the true hero."[54] Where the film as a whole operates as the character's formal-psychological refraction, the exchanges between hero and villain that typify both auteurs' films are reregistered in *The Last Sunset* as an exchange between character and film. The film's formal conceit intensifies the redoubled characterization by making the entire film body an expression of O'Malley's tensions, the film itself a techno-aesthetic rendering of his Westerner's fraught persona. When *The Last Sunset* foregrounds character psychology through its mise-en-scène, it expresses the narcissism of O'Malley's main character.

Color schemes in the scene are narrowly sympathetic; O'Malley is the source of the color scheme because the scene is made to look like him. The screen isn't just a figural marker of the action, it is a characterized and psychologized expression that aggressively insists on mirror images. While O'Malley is initially attracted to Belle, if he redirects his love to Missy, it is because they both *look* like him. And this holds true formally as well. The film sympathetically tracks O'Malley's alignment with the film screen as apparatus, the character's self-indulgent desire implying a magnified self-infatuation. The formal motif that refracts with characterological passion no less mirrors an entitled self-obsession. Like characters in the domestic melodrama, O'Malley is "locked in a universe of real and metaphoric mirrors."[55] As O'Malley's "love" drives the plot, his self-love transforms the film, the film's excess expressionism a transposition of

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[51] Kitses, 148.
[52] Ibid., 175.
[53] Ibid., 182.
[54] Ibid., 181.
[55] Elsaesser, 381.

O'Malley's narcissistic theatricality. Significantly, O'Malley's first full dialogue scene with Missy is staged in front of a mirror.

O'Malley's impulsivity is in keeping with a narcissistic infatuation with style. His color-coordinated costuming matches that which makes him a gunfighter. Before leaving for the drive, O'Malley is seen shaving and whistling *his* theme while Missy watches, enthralled. As Missy rarely averts her eyes from O'Malley he, in turn, barely averts his eyes from himself. And, likewise, the entire conversation revolves around his gun. Answering that he carries a Derringer because he "can wear it in [his] belt [and] feel it up against [him] all the time," he additionally mentions that "no holster gun can draw as fast as a Derringer"—its "slug" being "bigger" than that of any other gun. He describes himself to Missy by way of his gun. He doesn't just wear the gun; it is both intimate partner ("up against me . . . all the time") and prosthetic extension. His preference is also notable. Carrying the snub-nosed and dandyish gambler's gun, he is replete in spandex-like black suede and shiny black leather boots, the clandestine gun literally bulging (however slightly) out of its crocheted holster. His outfit emphasizes his fetishistic character. As his obsessive longing is driven by a resemblance to the "pretty little girl," it is the substitute he seeks, not the thing in itself (Belle). His decked-out, stylized image announces his own constructed nature. Performance *is* his identity. While the shed scene pronounces O'Malley's desire as wed to formal cinematic tropes, the mirror scene signifies a canonical-figural trope as centrally material. He identifies with what he shoots with, what he sees through to center a target. The film's stylistic excesses here pronounce an overt element of the genre with an overt element of cinema. O'Malley's identification with the gun of his trade sympathetically aligns with the camera that records images,[56] and by extension, the projected image as an attraction that collapses time and space.

While O'Malley defines his own stylized construction, the specificity of his gunfighter performance demands attraction. O'Malley makes an alluring object out of himself; his attention-seeking is proportionate with the magnetism central to his characterization. The conceit that enables his murderous efficiency (the speed and close range he manipulates and schematizes as a proficient killer) matches the charming magnetism of his no less romance-compelled wayfarer. As the scene that marks the beginning of the attraction that will ultimately culminate in the film's incest, the shooting that makes O'Malley's killer is synonymous with the costuming that figures his attraction as a Westerner and, more broadly, the Westerner's popularity as a historical fiction. The time/space *contraction* that defines his quick-draw killer meshes with the *attraction* that draws Missy toward him—the doublet pronouncing the action-orientation of its cinematic Western as predominantly aesthetic.

In this regard, O'Malley's stylish grooming, and the narrative inversion that adjusts his would-be villain into a tragic quasi-hero, further suggest the "narcissism" Kitses notes as central to Boetticher's bad guys. Filled with charming verve, the villains "need to entertain and dazzle," their flamboyance proportionate with the force of their attention-seeking appetite, their exhibitionism underscoring the need to "dominate," to "impos[e] [themselves] . . . on the world."[57] Given the film's formal-characterological

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[56] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), 11.
[57] Kitses, 182.

conceit, *The Last Sunset* codes O'Malley's flamboyance as a partially ideological one built into the Westerner. The frontier legacy (with all the force of its expansionist doctrine) directs O'Malley's character as a formal design. Figured as O'Malley's unconscious drive, the legacy extracts a yellow that, likewise, colonizes the film. The yellow optic suggests O'Malley is in the throes of a subsuming instinct; his dexterity as a gunman is reduced to a reflex muscle-memory more reactionary than willful. Yellow converts the taint of the genre's ideological violence (perpetuated by a man on the range) into the sexual stain of a patriarchy at home. While the film expresses incest as an unconscious wish-fulfillment for its patriarch protagonist, it infers that the suburban "nuclear home" of its era harbors a sexual energy as cataclysmic as the atomic threat that hovers over it. O'Malley, figuring *The Last Sunset* itself, expresses the era's idealized home as a veritable psycho-sexual centrifuge always about to implode.

Shot at the Border

By fusing the Western with the period melodrama, *The Last Sunset* traces a thematic through-line characterizing O'Malley as a border character who exhibits the qualities of each genre. And as Simmon similarly notes for the Westerns of the era, the genre adapted a "border" thematic that evolved beyond the frontier's mid-nineteenth-century origins.[58] Simmon ascribes the popularization and "revitaliz[ation]" of the border motif, which begun to take shape in the 1960s Spaghetti Westerns (and in Sam Peckinpah's contemporaneous and ever-increasing oeuvre), as envisioning (to paraphrase the historian, Patricia Nelson Limerick) "the other side of the border."[59] Eschewing the horizon-line expansionism that distinguished the early frontier saga (whose image legitimized the advent of the early-twentieth century's cinematic "A" Western), the border Western pushed beyond the empire-building proxy esteemed by early frontier modes. The cattle drive back to the States signifies a reverse passage back to the border where its principal characters originate. Additionally, the border town they cross into further exacerbates O'Malley's schizoid tension. Reentering the States as an outlaw, O'Malley's alluded-to pioneer father is now expressed as "other" to himself, his outsider status intensified by having entered lawman Stribling's jurisdiction and facing potential arrest. O'Malley's border-crossing movement positions his patriarch both as a "savage" outside the town's civilized bounds and (like the Ranown Westerns of the era) as the magnetic villain within them. The character figures a predatory invective he is unable to either discern or stymie. In this context, O'Malley's loving obsession is more a patriarch's ideological haunting, a latent homing that returns with a vengeance.

The narrative comes full circle as its principals cross the Mexican border into the States; the drama of family passage is now, ostensibly, home. The wide-open desert expanse that characterized the drive becomes literally enclosed and corralled. Further, the town seems both swallowed by the river and emerging out of its muck, projecting a temporal indeterminacy that matches O'Malley's own generational confusion in terms of mother and daughter. The redevelopment scenarios that rhetorically and literally mark the era intersect with the plot's repetition compulsion; O'Malley's own confusion between past and present, lover and daughter, is restaged by the town setting's temporal

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[58] Simmon, 109.
[59] Ibid., 108, 109.

indeterminacy as both submerged and emerging, as much natural encroachment as civil bastion. And here, in keeping with its protagonist, the film's narrative and formal parameters collapse. O'Malley's love signifies a confused temporal index that likewise conflates determinate conventional roles. The Western border is always-already erased. The exceptional status that marks the Westerner's border individuality becomes, in O'Malley, an inevitable transgression. The entrance to the border town brings the film to its conclusion because it announces O'Malley's passage homeward is at its end, the unconscious domestic return-of-the-repressed the character latently harbors finally actualized. O'Malley's coded psycho-sexual fixation matches similar characterizations found in James Stewart's performances in Mann's Westerns of the era. The borderline "madness" exhibited by Stewart's heroes (from deliberate and measured poise to violently explosive hysteria)[60] obtains a more combustible energy via O'Malley's paradoxically coded domestic/outlaw. Additionally, the film's movement north, and the primordial wash of the muddy entry into the border town, illustrate O'Malley's fixation as resembling characters in the period's domestic melodrama who evince "a strong subterranean current" as "inhuman" as it is "poetically apt."[61] While geophysically below the States, O'Malley's journey is, likewise, defined by a chthonic undercurrent. By replacing the frontier movement West with the border movement North, O'Malley's crosshatched misdirection cancels both out. Indicative of the "neutralizing movement" of Mann's "moral and psychological grid"[62] and the wild swings in mood more generally associated with the melodramatic "graph,"[63] O'Malley goes nowhere but deeper into his pathological desire. And as with O'Malley's fraught psyche, so goes the direction of the film. It moves toward the scene that prototypically ends the Western, and heads into a duel.

O'Malley's movement within the border town plays as a cyclical dead end. As the final two scenes track O'Malley, they represent his suicide as a consequence of his incestuous realization. On his way to meet Missy, O'Malley moves through a makeshift narrow corridor established by the fences that partition the large stockades where the herd now resides (figures 13 and 14). Organized by a single cut-on-action, O'Malley is dimensionally halved. While the first shot serves to ground him to the setting via the level long-shot framing he centrally fills, the second conversely denudes the first's implied agency. The second framing positions O'Malley within an extreme long shot whose overhead purview of the stockades and the town reduce O'Malley's size given the frame's scale. The perspective expresses O'Malley's movement as fated, inscribing him within a larger totality that determines him. And as per the film's form, the setting resembles O'Malley himself, the color of the stockade saturated in sun-tinted yellow, the herd's now corralled movement kicking up billows of dust into a golden haze that match O'Malley's scarf and hair while the deep afternoon shadows and the cobalt-pitch steers are graphic-matched to his black attire. Made to resemble the steers and their confining environment, O'Malley is additionally hemmed in with constricting precision. O'Malley is equated with the constrained magnitude of the herd and their approaching end in the

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[60] Elsaesser, 383.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Kitses, 148.
[63] Elsaesser, 376.

slaughterhouse. While the level grounding of the first shot allows for the willful direction O'Malley's purposeful stride expresses, the sheer saturation of the second shot's atmospheric hue implies that the force of his own movement "kicks up," as it were, an overwhelming desire that engulfs him.

As the shots outline the unconscious desire that drives O'Malley toward his inevitable end, Belle's revelation seals his fate. Before reaching Missy, Belle intercepts O'Malley by a cabin near the corralled herd. As she tells O'Malley that Missy is *their* daughter, the scene goes from a two-shot to a shot-counter-shot, the shocking revelation formally splitting the characters apart. Further, Douglas's performance in this scene echoes his performance in the yellow-dress sequence as he repeats the astonished facial expression of the earlier scene. The graphic-matched resemblance of the stunned recognitions is formally presented as the same (figures 15 and 16). The overt parallelism between O'Malley's response to the sight of Missy in the yellow dress and his response to Belle's revelation implies that shock governs both. While the shots' mutual astonishment waylays the clarity of their respective emotional definition, their symmetry ties the ecstasy of seeing Missy in the dress with the anguish of the realized incest. The stunned recognition of each thereby equates romantic love with familial transgression. Further, the respective shocks mark the confluence of extreme emotions, the overjoyed astonishment of one figured as of-a-piece with the crushing shame of the other. The formal conceit combines the epic scale of the Western with the emotional smoldering of the domestic melodrama. While O'Malley's manifold skills define him as the possessor of an almost superhuman agility during the cattle drive, his emotional trajectory projects an equally inflated scale. The aggregate breadth of O'Malley's journey on the cattle drive matches the scope of his emotional careening. The culmination of the journey home to the states (the totality of its grand scale) is experienced by O'Malley as an equally epic "shameful[. . .] personal stigma"[64] stemming more from a domestic body's family ties than the independent resilience of the Westerner's individualism.

Belle's revelation of his desire as incestuous leaves O'Malley with nowhere to go but toward the inevitable punishment he demands from his own transgression: death. The return to the States is a return to Stribling's jurisdiction; it is a return to the rule of law and the inevitable showdown between lawman and outlaw. However, the Law that O'Malley faces goes beyond Stribling. O'Malley now faces the Law towards which his own romantic inclinations tend: he has betrayed the dictum of his love. But what is most shocking in the film is that even *after* the revelation, O'Malley goes to Missy for one last interlude. Intoning declarations of "love," and pressed against a grass bed flush in green, their clutching intimacy in the scene tilts the film into full-on domestic melodrama. High-key lit in sharp focus, the sequence pops with the yellow and gilt tones that radiate off the couple, just as the grass plumes with a light-infused sea green (figures 17 and 18). The scene screams with ironic cadences, its idyllic excesses mirroring the earlier plain scene's pastoral allusion but with an artificial finish that belies its naturalism. The conscious decorousness of postwar suburbia conflates with the pastoral vestiges of early Eastern-Westerns, the scene's melodramatic temper intensifying each by the lighting's glare and the sponging of its Technicolor mise-en-scène. The scene's romantic finish bursts with an overripe aestheticism; the grass blades shining in chrome-plated turquoise as a

[64] Elsaesser, 392.

background brook reflects the setting's colors with a prismatic purple incandescence in keeping with the scene's tone. Piqued by the Technicolor sheen of the grass glade's widescreen display, O'Malley's final missive reels with an overwrought romanticism. The bed of grass swallows the illicit pair with a bizarre elemental overtone that recalls O'Malley's earlier sea verse. While O'Malley and Missy now play out the poem's alluded-to undersea romance (the seaman's uncanny perspective now uncomfortably enjoined with O'Malley's knowing incest), the interlude gives rise to a queasy unease made all the more anxious given O'Malley's reversion back to the lyrical romantic mode that drove him to the incest in the first place.

As O'Malley stays true to his nature and waxes romantic on their "love," the scene expresses a vertiginous sense of impropriety. O'Malley performs his role with committed brio because the affective parlance both of the Western and of the domestic melodrama reads true for the character. The ensuing monologue demonstrates how his romanticism always plays out in destructive extremes. Highlighting the difference in their ages and the fact that he most possibly will die first, O'Malley states that "love means to go right on loving" even after he dies. He describes his own happiness in heaven upon watching her future marriage where he'll "hear the chiming wedding bells and go asleep again, content." Sensing his preparation for death, Missy grabs his hand and makes O'Malley promise to "come right back to her." As O'Malley responds the scene abruptly cuts from its trim artifice to the shot of an actual sunset sinking beneath the horizon line. Following the disorientation produced by the edit's contrast, O'Malley responds, "When that sun goes down just below the rim of the hills, I'll come back to you." And then he strides off to meet Stribling.

While the anecdote of his death is meant to distract/comfort Missy from the truth of their incest and his own soon-to-be suicide, the scene pushes the drama as far as it can go by portraying his love in all its vanquished taboo. It pushes the truth of the incest not for some frivolous/gratuitous effect but for the resonance that it yields because the protagonist's disposition makes it so. O'Malley is in love, and he knows it is with his own daughter. By patching the emotional intensity of the domestic melodrama onto the visionary cadences of the pastoral, the scene is both emotionally resonant and intellectually critical. Because it paces O'Malley's misdirected passion in all its earnest hyperbole, the scene evinces the crushing sadness of his realization. And while it indulges the over-investment that typifies each genre (the indulgent natural rapture of the pastoral; the inflated mise-en-scène of the melodrama), it measures the self-delusion to which ideology is vulnerable.

While the cut to the sunset plays into a different emotional pitch, it no less evinces the frontier thesis's polarizing extremes. The awkward juxtaposition of the glade's formal overdetermination with the diurnal sunset's naturalism elicits a comic dissonance that speaks to the frontier thesis's own ideological impasse. The contradistinction of the cut positions the glade's love scene as a perverse take on Western endings that played for "romantic . . . conciliation" between the opposite sexes in early pioneer films.[65] As Simmon notes, the motif was a conscious attempt to assuage the poles of its wilderness/civilization dyad by tapering them over with a monogamous "perfect union."[66]

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[65] Simmon, 109.
[66] Ibid.

The union was signified by an embrace that closed the film and, likewise, served to paste over other vexing tensions. The climatic coupling thus provided the Western with "fables of reconciliation between the sexes, the economic and social classes, and various subsidiary oppositions."[67] The motif sidestepped confronting what an actual union might look like by eliding its civilization-bearing monogamy into the fade-out at the film's end. By exaggerating the romance's conciliatory efforts, *The Last Sunset's* incest plot foregrounds the contradictory logic that made the motif an unconvincing finale in the first place. *The Last Sunset* inflates the motif's failure by positioning it as a taboo implosion that ironically destroys O'Malley's Westerner. The film updates the colonializing/civilizing tendency that typifies Roosevelt's masculine warrior as partaking in the very "abduction" scenario the Westerner's initial characterization was meant to prevent. As the scene alludes back to early sound film's attempts at reconciling the antagonism intrinsic to the frontier divide, it also alludes to an even earlier engendering that served to establish the frontier dyad in the first place.

The film incorporates the two types of narratives that served as proto-motifs for the Western's fuller incarnation in the late nineteenth century. While Mary Rowlandson's first-person account of her Indian captivity during King Philip's War of the late eighteenth century established the "soft" captive perspective, accounts of her contemporary, Benjamin Church, helped establish the image of the frontier warrior incarnate.[68] Where Rowlandson's account set the standard for the requisite strength and virtue of the civilized white Christian woman faced with madness and worse in the clutches of her "savage" Indian abductor, accounts of the Church's knowledge of the wilderness and its native tribes (knowledge that enabled King Philip's ultimate defeat) helped establish the template for the prototypical hunter/warrior. The emergent typology provided the foundation for Cooper's fiction, its ambivalent byplay between the civilized and the savage subsequently inspiring the cultural and political imaginary of Roosevelt and his contemporaries. *The Last Sunset* transposes the racial vitriol inscribed within the earliest accounts of the frontier, and reorders them as an ironic "natural" tendency within the patriarch himself. And by way of its formal-psychological projection, *The Last Sunset* calls attention to a larger cultural transference built into the contradictory character of its era. The film inverts the legacy of the captivity narrative. The savage other is the father himself; the wildness of the Indian's elemental nativity is transposed to O'Malley's homeward-obsessed outlaw/father. The abduction conceit taking place on the plains becomes a seduction story within the settling family itself. O'Malley's trauma is amplified by the allusion to the origins of the Westerner's characterization, their incorporation implying a broader cultural/ideological trauma.

Film scholar Slavoj Žižek has noted that the late 1950s witnessed the theoretical popularization of philosopher-psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's notion of the "second death." For Lacan, before mortal death, the second death is an ideological death. It is an individual's realization of the arbitrary and codified makeup of the symbolic order—the constructedness of what can broadly be termed "law." The insight that the social and its undergirding everyday regulations are nothing but a mechanical injunction signifies a "traumatic event." By destroying the illusion of civil discourse as natural, second death

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[67] Simmon, 110.
[68] Slotkin, 14, 15.

reveals that "there is nothing behind the fantasy of civilization."[69] And this is exactly O'Malley's trauma when faced with Belle's revelation. What kills O'Malley isn't Stribling (the active and literal progenitor of the law) but his own realization that the fundamental object of his desire, his own self-generated longing, is itself impossible. His own desire is rendered ambivalent. It is both impossible (given the ethics of his own romanticism) and traumatic (given his allegiance to its affecting role). He cannot love his daughter as his wife because the Law prohibits it, and he can't live with himself as the agent of his own transgression. O'Malley is additionally (literally) shot near the tracks. He is killed within a short distance of the railroad that marks the civil industrial image of America's development, its presence negotiating the equally elided drive east for the herd's slaughter. Collapsed dead a few feet from the tracks, O'Malley dies along its rigid linear emplacement, the figural and literal rails that move it.

The film implies an ideological *derailing*, an "obliteration of the signifying network itself."[70] The rhetoric that marks O'Malley as incestuous is tied to the iconic alignments of what an articulated national body looks like. It is a negotiated mobility determined by a static image. However seemingly *natural* by way of an actual desert landscape and *linear* by way of its past setting, *The Last Sunset* projects the Western as subject to a paradoxical image of culture and time. Like *The Last Sunset*, Lacan's notion of what is "second" toys with conceptions of progress and historical veracity. By unveiling the lineal rudiments of how time is read, Lacan unveils the edifice behind civil discourse. And the film likewise unveils the rudiments of the era's developmental myths constructed around family. By foregrounding the generic rhetoric that disguises the Western as bound to historical progress and natural order, *The Last Sunset* reveals the props of national expression. As with the very title of the film, Lacan's conceptual term inverts and problematizes the temporal order of things. Given the domestic temper of the era, *The Last Sunset* returns the repressed domesticity back onto its outlaw-father as an unconscious carriage that destroys him. Desire is a self-immolating image: it runs in place, it collapses time. The desire that convenes community is the incest that destroys it.

Conclusion

In *The Last Sunset*, historical romance is converted into family drama. The film takes the expansive visual register of the Western and distills it. It takes the genre's immense vistas in space and sweeping epic events in time and formally reinscribes them as an all-consuming narcissism. And it does so as a reflexive enjoinder to an American era saturated by images of its own civil idealization. In some ways *The Last Sunset* expresses a Western that, like its protagonist, catches up with itself. Holding up a figural mirror, it allows viewers to see the contradictions of a developmental drama that insists on a progress narrative. However, the film does put forward a complex recursive temporal expression where past and present commingle, where time can't be told. From within the incestuous desire at its core, *The Last Sunset* offers a more complex and creative temporal imagination; it envisions a way to experience change and difference because it leaves linear intractability "in the past." As Gilles Deleuze notes, instead of reading cinema as a rigid binarism between true and false, inside and outside, present and past, or

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[69] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 133.
[70] Ibid., 132.

reality and screen, films that perform "contractions" point toward new images, new ways of seeing.[71] And *The Last Sunset* does so precisely because it resists a resolutely progressive and necessary linearity. O'Malley's limited sight ironically unveils a symptomatic insight. "Coming back" after the sunset implies a return that O'Malley's imbroglio renders impossible. But, however shocking, O'Malley's final scene with Missy pronounces what is labile about time. The moment conveys the multiple temporal registers intrinsic to the Western. The scene expresses a past-presence that opts for imaginary futures. As doomed as O'Malley might be, returning implies that culture is an ever-malleable act. That which returns does so differently. *The Last Sunset* doesn't so much convene a critique of the Western as present the inverse image within it. The genre's naturalist tendency is seen to be its historical masquerade. The film's plasticity belies its naturalism.

In this way, the film performs an ironic semiosis. Providing a legibility to the shooting and tracking built into the cinematic Western, O'Malley's Westerner is coded within predetermined poses, the medium's aesthetic material making visible the ideological heritage of the Westerner-as-patriarch. While O'Malley's gunman characterization expresses an obsession with appearance and comportment that speaks to the Westerner's violent mise-en-scène, his peripatetic outlaw codes him as carrying said violence both away from, and towards, home. The film allows for an experience of ideological acculturation specific to the patriarchal tensions of its era and the thematic and aesthetic legacy of the genre. While *The Last Sunset* traces the ideological vector of both its generic legacy and its rhetorical era, the vividness of O'Malley's psycho-sexual physics on the range recalibrates the seeming intractability of the two historical registers by converting its anti-hero's tensions into the medium's expressive material.

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[71] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 68.

Figures to Chapter 1

Figure 1.

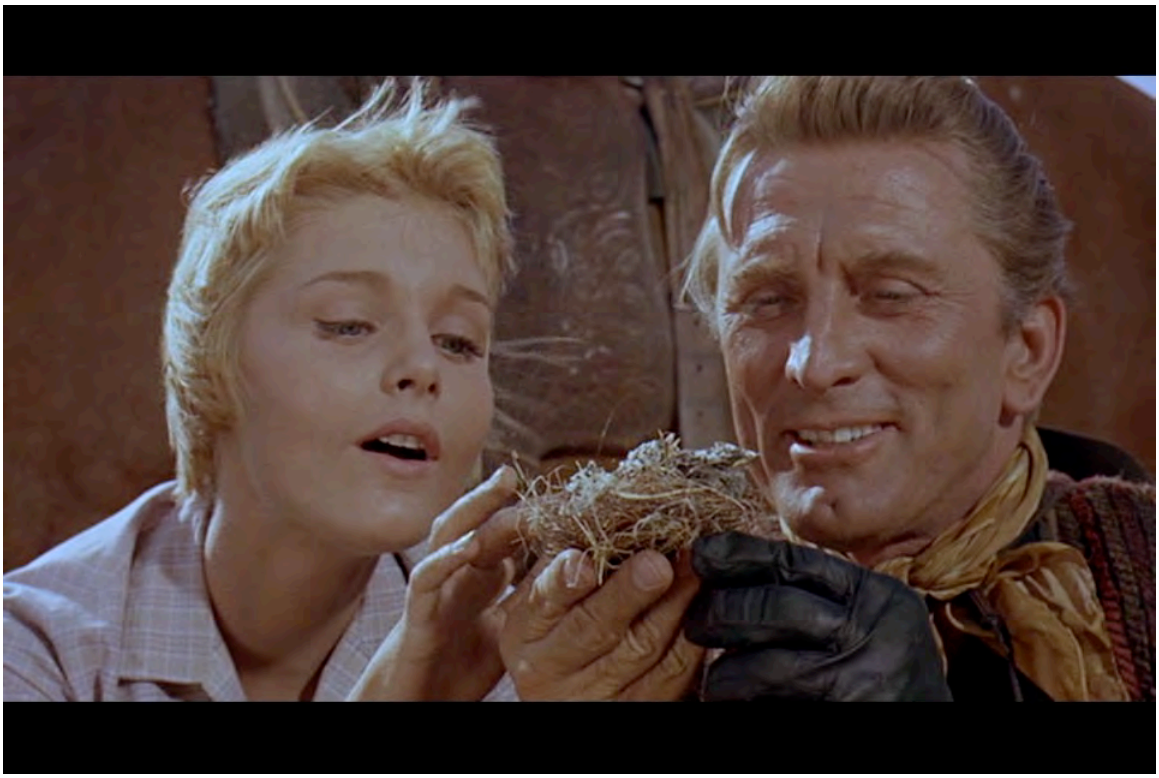

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Figure 13.

Figure 14.

Figure 15.

Figure 16.

Figure 17.

Figure 18.

Chapter 2. *Have Gun—Will Travel*: Televising the Gunslinger

> The Great Man . . . is colder, harder, less hesitating, and without fear of "opinion"; he lacks the virtues that accompany respect and "respectability," and altogether everything that is the "virtue of the herd." If he cannot lead he stands alone . . . He knows he is incommunicable.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche

> The destructive character is a signal.
>
> —Walter Benjamin

Introduction

The television Western *Have Gun—Will Travel* (Rolfe and Meadow 1957–1963) has much in common with *The Last Sunset*. The show's black-clad, poetry-spouting, Derringer-toting, cosmopolitan protagonist, "Paladin," bears a striking resemblance to *The Last Sunset's* Bren O'Malley. He ambivalently straddles the culture in which he participates. Where O'Malley is both flesh-and-blood father and incestuous homewrecker, Paladin is both social-civic savior and social-civic parasite. A gun-for-hire, Paladin is repeatedly misapprehended as a "killer" or mercenary out for himself. And while his standard $1,000 fee certainly attests to this, he is no less a "do-gooder." Saving townsfolk from all forms of predator, proving unfairly accused men and women innocent, and brokering peace between Whites and Native Americans, his self-styled sense of justice is as essential to his characterization as his ethically questionable profession. And while its generic motifs, plot lines, and storied textures share much with *The Last Sunset*, *Have-Gun—Will Travel's* format on television announces it as markedly different.

Have Gun—Will Travel is a thirty-minute Western "telefilm" series produced by CBS Television. Initially broadcast in the fall of 1957, *Have Gun—Will Travel* was scheduled to feed off the success of the network's signature hour-long Western, *Gunsmoke*, as another industry-hyped "adult Western" in contradistinction with the decade's earlier fare targeted at an adolescent market.[1] While *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s action hewed to Hollywood film's continuity-based narrative system, the show's stories, conversely, lack clear sequential relationships. As formulaic narratives varying in genre, the telefilm featured a stable set of characters and locations, offering a series structure whose formula suited weekly time-slot schedules that operated as niche delivery systems for the era's dominant network television mode. Standalone stories from these familiar fictive worlds established an episodic format, allowing for predictable narrative routines and inevitable closure. As narrative pallets, each episode operated as a self-contained satellite world with little or no connection to other (similarly) structured episodes.[2] However, the seeming simplicity of the telefilm's structure belies *Have Gun—Will Travel's* expression. Consciously foregrounding aesthetic material, *Have Gun—Will Travel* interrogates the rudimentary characteristics of television storytelling and privileges the constructed bearing of its production as a prerequisite for narrative content. *Have*

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[1] Gaylyn Studlar, *Have Gun—Will Travel: TV Milestones Series* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 3.

[2] Jeffrey Sconce, "What If: Chartering Television's New Textual Boundaries," in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 97.

Gun—Will Travel zooms in on compositional material and amplifies the film Western's already iterative and trope-heavy indices. The show foregrounds the "material" expression of its generic and electromagnetic stage.

The pronounced formal elements of *The Last Sunset* are brought into even greater relief by *Have Gun—Will Travel.* Where O'Malley's sensual yellow palette infuses the film's look so that his subjectivity literally "colors" the film, *Have Gun—Will Travel's* expression inverts the process. Paladin is a formal component of the small screen before he is a moral interlocutor of an ethically fraught environment. In a reverse anthropomorphism, the signs that make the gun-"man" precede an identifiable character. While *The Last Sunset's* cinematic reality-effect is informed by the compositional material that signifies its protagonist, the centrality of its formal elements are, at first glance, seemingly subsumed by the transparency of its action. *Have Gun—Will Travel*, inversely, begins by emphasizing the formal components that provide character legibility. The show immediately announces and foregrounds itself *as* a fiction. It declares its own nature as a telefilm.

While the credits pose Paladin in acephelic address to its audience, the show defers his characterization to elaborate the signs that construe a gunfighter figure. In a related fashion, the partial articulation is met with a line of dialogue from the first episode intoning the figure's relation to the weapon *and* the character's relationship to the ensuing drama. Though initially divorced from the action, the credit's introductory slew of media (written, spoken, and audiovisual) sets up the connection between figure and fiction and marks *Have Gun—Will Travel's* central interest in aesthetic and ideological construction. The initial wealth of signs likewise harken back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Baroque drama's interest in written and visual language as materially coated to the physicality of its action, the drama's stylized language befitting the hyperbole of its violent content. While Baroque expression engages its dramatic language as coextensive with its characters as vulnerable political agents of history, the Western is, similarly, a mythic conflagration of fiction and politics.

The orientation continues into the narrative opening. Where Paladin is identified by the ostentation of his business card, its "Wire Paladin" stenciling (in concert with a set of compositional motifs which the opening elucidates) signifies the character's connection to telegraphy (specifically) and electricity (generally). While the inscription dovetails with questions of electronic media specific to Marshall McLuhan's contemporaneous theorizing, the relationship broadens the link between characterological and narratological elements begun in the credits. In this context, Paladin's gun-for-hire dovetails with Theodore Roosevelt's lasting influence on the genre and denotes his contribution to the Frontier Thesis as matching Paladin's gendered bearing. However, the Rooseveltian persona is short-circuited both by Paladin's feminization as a stylized dandy and by a technological allusion linking him to nineteenth-century female mediums.

Paladin's complex media engendering as a character is met with an equally complex mode of serial storytelling. The repetition-specific requirements of *Have Gun—Will Travel* as a telefilm coincide with the serial quality of contemporary photography. Paralleling photographic experiments in repetition, the show similarly combines a "serial attitude" with an "in-series" disposition. While the credits explore figural iteration as a closed conceptual set of media relative to the serial attitude, the reality-effect *Have Gun—Will Travel* borrows from Hollywood continuity practice (which embellishes the genre's roughhewn timbre) approximates the realist concerns of the in-series. Equally interested in media as it is in expressive form, *Have Gun—Will*

Travel applies (however indirectly) both serial schemas to episodic drama as a no less experimental tele-fictional practice.

This chapter's final section finds in Peter Brooks's work on melodrama a related structural and characterological nexus. While Paladin operates as a moral interloper, testing and criticizing the character of the frontier denizens he meets, he exhibits a Manichean posture distinct from the melodramatic condition of the frontier's flailing citizenry. The frontier setting is, likewise, a proximate index to the social and civil environs of the contemporary postwar moment. In concert with *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s frontier concern is John F. Kennedy's 1960 "New Frontier" speech as a direct evocation of Roosevelt's progressive standard a century before. The ethically questionable valences of Kennedy's rhetorical flourish and its direct appeals to the Western revisit Paladin as a characterological descendent of the genre's suspect moral regeneration. Kennedy's application of the frontier works as a contemporaneous reapplication of the motif *Have Gun—Will Travel* had begun to critically reappraise some three years earlier. While Paladin questions the value-laden assumptions of the character's progressive forebears, *Have Gun—Will Travel* no less questions its protagonist as (in keeping with the ambivalent status of the Westerner) an ethically complex interloper for the genre.

Figurations of Media: The Anatomy of a Gunfighter

The first episode begins outside of the narrative requirements of Hollywood film and (at the outset) replaces transparent action with mysterious incongruity. The screen fades in on an extreme close-up of a gun holster revealing an emblazoned silver chess knight incised onto the cobalt holster. The image is accompanied by a menacing four-note orchestration, the brassy punctuations a sort of music track alarm. As the succinct and yet emphatic phrases recede, the camera slowly pulls back, revealing the holster attached to a black-denimed right leg until it stops in a medium close-up of Paladin's partially visible body. From knee to shoulder, the frame presents an accented and protracted (readily revealed) gunfighter pose. As both conventionalized costumed trope (a gunfighter waiting to draw) and unconventional staged address (a subversion of continuity action), the opening flips the focus of the genre. While eliding the rudiments of setting and character central to Hollywood narrative,[3] this shot further undermines their arrangement by accentuating the gunfighter posture as an image. Fixing on Paladin's costumed regalia, the camera sketches the gunman figure as a production. The camera's deliberate movement and concentrated focus delineate the posture as a constructed one particular to the effects of cinematography and mise-en-scène. But the sequence doesn't wholly elide the dramatic situation of genre. The opening does not abandon the illusion of its narrative continuity. Seemingly mannequin-modeled and inert, the figure's right hand breaks from its static pose and slowly, deliberately, draws a gun from the holster and points it squarely at the audience/camera (figure 1). In tandem with the draw, the music fades, replaced in the mix by a voiceover that cues the association between voice and body even while still withholding narrative context. However bracketed and formally distilled, it no less reveals a sort of character. With the gun now squarely, centrally, held in frame, the voiceover states,

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[3] David Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 20.

> I'd like you to take a look at this gun. The balance is excellent, this trigger responds to a pressure of one ounce. This gun was hand-crafted to my specifications and I rarely draw it unless I mean to use it.

The figure then re-cocks the gun and holsters it. As the camera closes on the holster the music is repeated. And with inverse symmetry the camera re-fixes in extreme close-up on the figure of a chess knight that adorns the holster. The holstered icon is now accompanied by both the music and the credits. Foregrounded rustic white and incised with graphic tasseled sagebrush wisps, the credits are stamped with the same bold stylization that introduced the black clad figure. The credits over the iconic chess piece read, "Richard Boone in Have Gun—" (a brief suspended pause) ". . . Will Travel" (figure 2). With the music now cued to the credits, the sequence constructs a parallel discursive emergence with the earlier gun-drawing figure. The credits centralize the signs that construct Paladin's gunman as a generic figure to whom his action hero is beholden.

Mise-en-scène as object-orientation prefigures subjectivity, just as credentialed language trumps characterization. At the outset of the show's run (all the credit sequences that will begin each episode), Paladin's fictional figure is sketched as a contextless spate of signs. By dislocating the "frontier" from the Frontier Thesis that alludes to the ideological and aesthetic bedrock of the film Western, *Have Gun—Will Travel* announces its interest in semiotic material. Overtly staged, Paladin's partial figure is silhouetted by a whiteout studio backdrop that highlights the knight figure, the gunmen garb, and the drawn gun as the space's sole iconic cues. The sparseness of the set amplifies the presence of the partial figures and doesn't access character so much as precede one, or (more emphatically) envelop one. The credits belie film Western conventions by indicating the authenticity-effect of its expression. The effect is all the more stark given that many of *Have Gun—Will Travel's* episodes were filmed in a variety of Western locations outside of Hollywood and strove for an authenticity in keeping with the cinematic Western's legacy.[4] But the contrast neither sanctions authenticity nor undermines *Have Gun—Will Travel* as a Western so much as it underscores and engages aesthetic material as a central theme for the show personified in the action by Paladin's cosmopolitan aesthete. The credits replace the naturalizing bridge between man and land[5] with an aesthetic ellipsis between the signs that prefigure Paladin's gunfighter-as-dandy and his bearing in the fiction that follows. The effect both obscures and suggests the semiotic connection between figure and character. Isolated on a soundstage, preceded by visual motifs that only hint at a human presence and

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[4] Studlar, 39–41. The show pushed the limits of the small screen and was often shot on location. This move was principally motivated by its star's desire to lend authenticity to the scripts he liked and avoid the meddling of producers whom he did not.

[5] Slotkin, 244–245. Boone's interest in Western authenticity speaks to the influence of star/director William S. Hart. Hart's silent film Westerns did much to promulgate the vogue for authenticity and its lasting influence on the film Western. Made famous for his cowboy roles, Hart was, originally, a New York–born stage actor who had little experience with the West. But as his popularity in the genre grew, he consciously attempted to duplicate the "real" experience of range cowboys and promoted an on-screen persona that worked as a "compromise" between the West he researched and his "understanding of formal conventions" as a director of many of his own films. Personifying the rugged and uncompromising nature of the cinematic West, Hart successfully characterized the association whereby "[m]an and landscape complete each other."

framed as a fragmented body, the opening defers characterization and skews the focus of Hollywood film's traditional expression.

The Last Sunset's credits, in contrast, provide formal strategies that push towards naturalization. The film employs an extreme-long-shot framing that silhouettes seemingly endless desert vistas with rocked outcroppings for cordoning off a narrative frame. The use of jutting canyon shelves, in contrast to the movement of actors Kirk Douglas and Rock Hudson within the frame, harkens back to the early silent-film innovation that helped signify an authentic American "West." As Scott Simmon has noted, D.W. Griffith's *The Battle at Elderbush Gulf* (Griffith 1913) is the first "Western Western" to successfully deploy the motif. By combining the aforementioned juxtaposition of rock shelf and flat land popularized by midcentury survey photography with a "prospect shot" (characters ascending or descending on incline), the narrative union between man and land was established. The formal strategy enframed a human dimension with a natural setting, affording a way to shoot the seemingly empty desert expanses that resisted narrative formulas situated around character driven stories.[6] *Have Gun—Will Travel's* credit sequence partially elides *both* setting and character.

While *The Last Sunset's* use of the extreme long shot is, by 1961, so conventionalized as to be wholly "invisible," *Have Gun—Will Travel's* opening is formally declarative and marked. It demonstrates how the genre signifies its own materialization. It literally foregrounds what "shoots." The generic formal emplacements that characterize the Hollywood Western are, on television, the pronounced tropes that signify a different medium and fictional approach. Where *The Last Sunset's* credits nodded to the genre's process of naturalization, *Have Gun—Will Travel* announces what is "unnatural" about the Western. While it reveals the latent constructedness at the core of the Western as a motion-picture genre, it also announces its figural logic. It anatomizes the process by which the episodic Western signifies. *Have Gun—Will Travel* foregrounds both how and what its fiction is to be "read." It is emblematic.

In his study of German Baroque drama, Walter Benjamin has noted the "emblem" as a device that challenges the conventions of figurative construction. Eliding the psycho-dynamics of dramatic "personification," Baroque plays are marked by their complex language. Mixing figurative and literal meanings, spawning a whole range of neologism, and confusing the register between graphic imagery and written word, Baroque drama problematizes the form of communication "in order to see everything in terms of figures (not souls)."[7] Baroque drama unveils the arbitrary "concrete" substance of language and forces the reader to confront communicative material directly. "Realized in the external appearance as script," the emblem emphasizes the sign of expression.[8] Spotlighting written and visual language as an expressive conduit from which content arises, *Have Gun—Will Travel* similarly provides "a drama for the reader" where the medium-specific signs are infused with the dramatic action.

By highlighting the black outfit, holster-studded knight, and gun (the piecemeal object fabrication that inevitably sparks action—the activity of "drawing"), the opening both obfuscates and teases the question of character. It favors the objects that "make the man." As with the holster stitched knight piece that begins the sequence, *Have Gun—Will Travel's* opening stresses the embossed signifiers that construct a gunfighter personage. They are the incomplete fragments

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[6] Simmon, 41–42.
[7] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 187.
[8] Ibid., 184.

that associatively fill out the figured man. Additionally, the figure remains partial. His "headless" address implies dissociation from individuated identity; it substitutes object correlation for personal interest. And while the voice demands a "look," it is the cocked gun that confronts the viewer. As with the emblematic "objects [that] stare" out from Baroque drama, the weapon appears to speak without a fully embodied human form.[9] By postponing the plotted action, *Have Gun—Will Travel* dramatizes the "process of giving form,"[10] and focuses on the piecemeal fabrication of a world. That which constructs precedes human characterization. And this is the show's logic for its entire run. The opening is an inverse prosthetic that announces the focus of the show, its literal "sightlines." The gun draws, aims, and shoots. It enumerates and marks how one is able to see. By foregrounding the objects that construct meaningful expression, *Have Gun—Will Travel* begins its run by exploring what the Western telefilm does and how it works. Segueing into more conventionalized action, the show's first of 238 episodes ("Three Bells to Perdido") both extends the formal tropes of the credit sequence and sets the thematic tone for the series' six-year run. While projecting a screen protagonist as a telefictional cipher, the credit sequence lingers on images of human subjectivity. It juggles each register by formally targeting how structure is capable of reevaluating subject-object relations.

The Information Dandy and the Episodic Man-Hunter

While the credits concentrate on media to parse and tease Paladin's gunfighter figure, the first episode's opening scene establishes Paladin as a character tied to electricity and information. The show begins with the arrival of newspapers at a hotel foyer as a well-tailored Paladin intercepts a bundle. Neatly coifed and attired, he is found in his "home," the swanky San Francisco–based "Hotel Carleton." In top hat, bow tie, and an immaculately tailored three-piece suit, Paladin is as ornamental and layered as the setting he retires to. Grabbing a set of newspapers, he saunters to a gilded parlor, rests on a plush divan, and begins to read. The scene then dissolves in extreme close-up onto the strewn (presumed read) papers. Tracking up from the variety of bold front-page headlines, the camera revisits Paladin intently reading another paper. Abruptly (given the continuity-charged character bracketing), Paladin's voiceover reads a headline and part of an article. Reaching into his vest he takes out a jet-black leather pouch containing a card and proceeds to place it on private stationery. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of the business card reading in finely etched Engravers MT font enormously centered to the frame and sound-tracked to the opening's thundering brass beats: "Have Gun Will Travel, Wire Paladin San Francisco" (figure 3). Centered in the background behind the first line is a graphic of a chess knight's piece, stylized to match the shadowed recesses of the font's foreground letters. And like the credit sequence's emblematic address, this sequence emphasizes what is "read." As the letters are matched with a figural illustration (the linguistic with the graphic), mediation is highlighted and magnified. The three-dimensional black borders of the lettering match the expressive object orientation of the opening credits. Both emphasize material that communicates. The card further implies a script that, like the credit sequence, has "voice." Paladin's voiceover delivers (like the newspaper's delivery to his own door) the episode's dramatic backstory. As Paladin scours the papers for stories that might produce a job, the voiceover conveys the forthcoming narrative as bundled information. Additionally, the speed of the voiceover, the impacted proximity between voice and news, body and paper, dense ostentation and packaged

[9] Benjamin, 186.
[10] Ibid., 183.

information implies symmetry between objects of information and Paladin. While the mise-en-scène's ornamentation drapes him in dandyish aplomb, the news speaks through him in automated clipped cadences; it is literally "at his fingertips." Additionally, Paladin's business card (as his means of identification for the series) performs as a prosthetic media filter for his persona. The "wire Paladin" inscription more explicitly associates Paladin with electricity—the speed and range of the telegraph the central means of communication for his itinerant business.

Paladin adroitly accesses communication systems both immediate and dense. Further, the contracted tempo of the twenty-minute telefilm formula necessitates a rapid and economized tempo to the show's narratives. Like the character at its core, the show's structure likewise condenses and syncopates content. *Have Gun—Will Travel* bears down on the rudiments of audio-visual storytelling and contracts the information of its fictional content as a product of the accelerated flow of its action. The episodes literally announce (in Paladin's speed-reading voiceovers) an endless series of signal-to-receiver correspondences that continuously provoke Paladin into action. Paladin both speaks a message, sends a message via his codified business cards, and with almost immediate instantaneity contracts the process with arrivals that initiate each episode's action. Paladin is not a character in between continuity-bound locations, but an iteration of the flow itself. Foregrounding Paladin's iconicity and fluid channeling, *Have Gun—Will Travel* highlights the regulative efficiency of the broadcast technology with which the show is bound. Unlike earlier montage practices that centralized character transition, *Have Gun Will Travel's* openings highlight a non-human transmission as the baseline context for character action. Additionally, the repetitions of these diegetic introductions call attention to Paladin as a signal of volume and magnitude.

The character acts as both a telemetric nodule of information and a signal vector contracting time and space. In this way *Have Gun—Will Travel* presages the massive information systems that Marshall McLuhan noted would follow in television's wake while conveying the tactile relationship McLuhan theorized for television and its proximate audience. For McLuhan, electromagnetic technology operates as both a "total field" of communications expression[11] and a human "extension" of the central nervous system.[12] The sheer breadth of its volume and the speed of its transmission change the ontological register. They produce a "linea of force" that alters signifying processes.[13] And while McLuhan gave no thought to stories on television, *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s credit opening and Paladin's voiceover reading express televisual information as a contraction in keeping with transmission speed. While the credits condense Paladin's gunfighter into a rash of signifiers, it brackets the wellspring of media that go into making television a legible expression. The foregrounded amalgam of compositional material thereby works as a prologue to the network practice of truncating story into episodic units. *Have Gun—Will Travel* waylays narrative by underwriting its content as beholden to the structure that produces narrative. The shot-counter-shots between Paladin and the business card create a byway

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[11] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 13.

[12] Ibid., 3–4, 57. McLuhan playfully teased this idea as at once literal and metaphorical. While the literal connotation naturalizes by conflating the neurological with the electromagnetic as interwoven fibers of a mutually occurring current, the figural connotation likens an emergent communications system with cognitive processes as two approximate systems of information storage and distribution.

[13] Ibid., 13.

that enjoins Paladin with the paper; the scene scrutinizes the signifier that conveys legibility and brings the character "into" the writing on Paladin's business card just as the "wir[ing]" inscribed on the card denotes the speed of telegraphic communication for the fiction. In this way *Have Gun—Will Travel* is a novel exemplar of McLuhan's famous dictum, "the medium is the message."[14] To the extent that Paladin conveys what an instantaneous information system "acts" like, the episode's narrative opening (the first of many that begin in the hotel this way) is infused with television transmission as a bundled stream of electronic information; the fiction performs as an indistinguishable effect of the medium's transmission.[15] As Paladin writes out the address of his future employer he slowly reads out the words, "Jess Reed, Portalas New Mexico." The screen dissolves away from Paladin and emerges over a shot of Reed's rancher sitting at a desk entering figures into a work ledger that further associates characterization with information. As Reed answers the knock at his door there is a cut to the embossed knight piece on Paladin's holster as the camera quickly tracks up to Paladin's face as he introduces himself to Reed. As with the broadcast transmission targeted to the suburban audience the television was made for, Paladin, similarly, enters the wealthy rancher's *home*. Paladin pairs with both the fictional telegram and the era's broadcast transmission. But the speed of his draw and the wealth of his education denote a reflexive relationship between Paladin as a character and Paladin as a synecdoche for electronic media.

Within the overall scope of the show, the speed of Paladin's draw emblematizes the processing current of automation systems. Likewise, the duels distinguishing his master gunfighter match the monologues that denote his intellectual élan. While the former is a standard feature of many Westerns of the era, the latter is of note for its infrequency in the genre.[16] Throughout the show's run, Paladin quotes philosophers, poets, and historians—through the sheer wealth of knowledge, he confers a sort of canonical digest of cultural and intellectual history. By suggesting Paladin's ties to telegraphy, the show repurposes the association by synching them to his attributes as a gunman. While the speed and targeting of the broadcast era is proportionate with Paladin's skill as a gunslinger, the volume of a signal's information is proportionate with his erudition and scholarly breadth. And in concert with his encyclopedic knowledge as a quasi-information-archive, the distance Paladin covers in his titular "travel[s]" is akin to the distance covered by telecommunications of the nineteenth century and the show's own era. By synching frontier passage with informatic correspondence, *Have Gun—Will Travel* further revises the intrinsic bond between man and land. However much a stylized compositional invention of early silent filmmaking, the connection between the Westerner and the landscape was ideologically introduced by Theodore Roosevelt's popular books on the West—the work substantially comprising his contribution to the Frontier Thesis.

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[14] McLuhan, 9.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Simmon p. 222–223. As Simmon notes, the Hollywood Western, with the exception of *My Darling Clementine* and a handful of other films, was averse to overt sorts of cultural and intellectual content—though it should be mentioned that the more recent *Tombstone* (Cosmatos 1993) offers something of a return-of-the-repressed in this context. While gunslinger antagonists Doc Holliday and Johnny Ringo square off in an expected duel near the film's close, the saloon standoff midway through the film finds them threateningly exchanging Latin verses to the drunken awe of outlaw onlookers—the sequence posing a decidedly different kind of duel for the genre.

In many ways Paladin's character epitomizes the self-reliance, toughness, and grit set by Roosevelt as the Western's late-nineteenth-century progenitor. In the wealth of books and speeches on the West that served as the foundation for his successful political career,[17] Roosevelt promulgated a standard for manhood based on the skills and freedoms associated with the American wilderness, whose natural crucible, in turn, revitalized the primeval instincts of a "natural" man. Crossing the educated and cultivated bearing of an aristocrat with the "savage" bearing of the Western men of yore (the "natural aristocrats" of hunters, settlers, and warriors), Roosevelt established a virile paradigm for modern American masculinity.[18] And as a skilled rider, marksman, and fighter, Paladin seemingly typifies the exceptional persona. But where Paladin most resembles Roosevelt's masculine paragon is in his besting of other men. The chapter organization of Roosevelt's first book, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), systematizes Roosevelt's hunts as involving ever more dangerous prey. Segueing from his penultimate chapters on the big game hunting of bears and panthers, Roosevelt ends with his experience as a deputy marshal in South Dakota where the figure of his "man-hunter" represents the apogee in stages of hunting. The hunting associated with the frontier thereby stands in for a larger American "Frontier" as the "progressively higher stage" of racial and national achievement that both proves and guarantees the exceptionality of its white male progeny.[19] Measuring himself by his gunfighter code, Paladin consistently confronts the lack of integrity he finds in other male characters; their moral deficit is often paired against Paladin's presumed superiority in the form of a gunfight. In this context, Paladin is a man-hunter par excellence and attests to the characterization. His knowing deliberation on the trail and strength in the besting of other men in the occasional fistfight, coupled with the civilized bearing and ethics that speak to the breadth of his education, would seem to fit Roosevelt's ideal. While Paladin's strength and skill mark him as exceptional, both his heterosexual appetite and his coiffed dandyism put him at odds with Roosevelt's manly paragon.

Paladin's exceptional "man's man" on the frontier is additionally, as Gaylyn Studlar notes, a cosmopolitan pleasure seeker whose "connoisseurship" extends to the bedroom.[20] In contradistinction to Roosevelt's Victorian who embraced the values befitting a dedicated and disciplined father and husband,[21] is Paladin's libertine whose idea of sexual freedom has more in common with popular contemporary discourses around the playboy bachelor.[22] While Roosevelt tailored his life to match the mythic dimensions of the Westerner, the image was in accord with the discourse on manliness he did much to define.[23] Combining the rugged and powerful image of the warrior/hunter with an updated image of a "chivalr[ous] medieval" knight, Roosevelt's ideal matched a physical superiority on the plains with the moral superiority of a disciplined

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[17] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 171.
[18] Slotkin, 35.
[19] Ibid., 38–41.
[20] Studlar, 8.
[21] Bederman, 171.
[22] Studlar, 8.
[23] Slotkin, 37–41, 51. Delivered to an audience of wealthy aristocrats at a Chicago gentleman's club, Roosevelt's 1899 speech on "The Strenuous Life" did much to cement his persona as a cultured, yet virile, warrior.

Victorian.[24] In contrast, Studlar explains, publisher Hugh Hefner's conscious development of the playboy, in the eponymous magazine a half century later, valorized a man's sexual freedom as a counter-narrative to the idealized postwar family man strapped to the conformity-laden role of a "responsible [and] domesticated breadwinner."[25] Repurposing Roosevelt's frontier reinvigoration, and the violent conquest scenarios it prepared men for, was Hefner's nonconformist "man of the world" whose sexual conquests reclaimed the "autonomy" and "individuality" lost to the conformist era.[26] Roosevelt's manly conqueror is supplanted by Hefner's sexual one. Like Hefner's tailored image of a fun-loving bachelor "surrounded by women," the opening of "Three Bells for Perdido" finds Paladin sauntering through the Carleton lobby exchanging whispers and winks to two adoring women; one on his arm and the other casually passing him with an askance look of knowing familiarity. The opening operates as a scenographic trope for the show; Paladin's magnetism in urban San Francisco is equally found in the less refined climes of the frontier. In either environment, Paladin's sexual allure is as constant in the show as his gunman skill. As both peerless man-hunter and lady's man, the combination of two centuries' worth of idealized "man" make him something of a super one. But the naturalizing quality of Paladin's embodied heterosexual is offset both by the characterological appeals of his nineteenth-century dandy and by the related technological suggestions that privilege (like the credit opening) the character's constructed quality.

Paladin's infatuation with style complicates the masculine engendering Roosevelt associated with the male body. As noted, the ostentation of the Carleton lobby matches Paladin's immaculately polished tailoring; his top hat and white gloves, and the carefully printed engraving of his business card, denote the tastefulness and particularity of a dandy. Likewise, the sleek prairie ensemble of gold and black worn by Bren O'Malley's poetry-spouting raconteur in *The Last Sunset* is a stylized brethren to Paladin's cosmopolitan intellectual. Similarly attired on the trail, Paladin's sophistication and refinement confound the muscularity of his frontier bearing with traits largely associated with the feminine.[27] Paladin's characterization offsets the naturalizing proxy of Roosevelt's racialized Social Darwinian man with an embroidered and performative masculinity "more constructed . . . than . . . assumed."[28] Additionally Paladin's association with electronic technology further ties him to nineteenth-century movements characterizing women as sensitized channels to otherworldly ether realms.[29]

Consigning an intrinsic relationship between the telegraphic message that contracts time and space and the human medium as a "celestial telegraph" to the afterlife, the mid-nineteenth-century Spiritualist Movement aligned the former's transmission with the latter as an "enhanced . . . receiver" to the realms of the dead.[30] The presumed feminine attributes of passivity, sensitivity, and emotional acuity allowed for an "impressionable" disposition suited to the medium where her "refined nature" was sympathetically disposed to a "refined plane of

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[24] Ibid., 37.
[25] Studlar, 42.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 7.
[28] Ibid., 7–8.
[29] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 12.
[30] Ibid., 44–45.

existence."[31] Falling into fugue-like dissociative communion with a distant spirit, the medium took on the role of "trance speaker" whereby they conferred the deceased's messages from an electromagnetic beyond. As Jeffrey Sconce notes, this provided an ironic foothold for political agency; many female mediums voiced their own opinions (while seemingly entranced) about a range of issues that concerned them, from unequal economic opportunity to the dangers of sex work.[32] While not overtly characterized as a medium, Paladin's figural relation to electronic transmission, and the admonitions he lavishes on the variety of unworthy lawmen and citizenry in the towns where he finds himself, present him as, similarly, a technological and critical voice. Further, while Paladin's womanizer might suggest a one-dimensional rake, the character (and the series as a whole) is remarkably sympathetic in regard to its female characters. Whether allied to women he treats as equals in episodes like "The Return of Dr. Thackery" (S1:E25), "The Teacher" (S1:E27) "Killer's Widow" (S1:E28), and "Memories of Monica" (S6:E7), or in the deference he shows to women he admires in "Lady on the Wall" (S3:E23), Paladin's respect for women and his ease in their company conveys the familiarity of a friend and confidante; the consistency of the portrayal makes his attractiveness all the more convincing. "Lady on the Wall" is particularly striking in this context. Concerning an older woman ("Jevanita Felton") who reclaims a painting of herself against the wishes of the scheming art collector who covets it, and the gawking older men who worship it, the episode is interesting both for its sympathetic take on Felton's sexuality (she is the famous portraitist's former lover) and labor (she works unrecognized in the bar where the portrait hangs), as well as for its pointed criticism of sexual and commodity fetishization. Like the spiritualist medium-as-receiver, Felton's central presence in the painting both veils her agency and allows for it; her ironic invisibility as an older woman laborer gives way to her presence as a desiring one with a right to her own image. And as Paladin aids her efforts, his camaraderie with Felton matches the criticism he levels at the men in the episode. Their mutuality as media ciphers and critical agents in the fiction marks Paladin and Felton as characterological allies. But Paladin's presence as a spur to the social and ideological hypocrisy he finds in the townships of his travels, express *Have Gun—Will Travel's* criticism of the postwar era.

Manichaean Object Lessons

As noted by Lynn Spigel, the emergence of television as a popular medium is coextensive with the suburban expansionism of the 1950s. If by 1950 the Levittown developments that began the federally subsidized housing boom included a customized television literally "built into" the livings rooms of all its homes, by 1960 up to 90% of all suburban homes had a television—albeit a free-standing one.[33] While the suburban expanse of America perpetuated an idealized domesticity, it did so in part by way of the communications technology materially rooted within the topography of a postwar world. And while the suburban home catered to images of social mobility and the consumerism at its core, the television "delivered" those messages by way of the sponsored advertising central to its broadcasting regimen. The suburban development that restructured an entire national landscape was sympathetically aligned with the visual pleasures

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[31] Ibid., 49.

[32] Sconce, 49. These appeals were often made in public forums, in keeping with the female medium's popularity, and conveyed an authority and advocacy difficult to voice "in character."

[33] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

and advertising imperatives of the television screen.[34] Social and cultural idioms were atomized and concentrated in the home. In tandem they produced an "upscale fantasy" that intermingled domestic ideology with material accumulation.[35] As early conceptions of the suburban home stressed, the stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines that structured the home as a paragon of "modern labor-saving appliances" and the couches, easy-chairs and sofas situated for leisure were contiguous with the television itself.[36] With television as its central node, the home resituated American ontological positions as largely "object" centered. And, as Vivian Sobchack has argued, postwar suburbia's idealization was equally wed to a re-"idyllization."

The exodus away from industrially oriented urban settings evidenced a naturalization process infused with pastoral images of a bygone agrarian past. But it was a "past" circumvented and enabled by modern machine conveniences. Suburbia fundamentally meshed nostalgic pastoralism with technological prefabrication. Its literal material construction was indistinguishably synthesized with its figurations. The Futurist cathode ray tube was enjoined to the Edenic dream home. Like Slotkin's evaluation of the Western genre with its harried temporal appeals and its fraught ideological conceits, the suburbia of the late 1950s and early 1960s was contradictory.

Both Lynn Spigel and Jeffrey Sconce have shown that, around the late 1950s and early 1960s, the contradictory strain of suburban expansionism was becoming evident. As outrage over the racial and economic inequality that all but guaranteed the bedrock of a "white" suburban haven was gathering strength, the cultural and social homogeneity demanded by a suburban lifestyle was experienced by many as stifling.[37] While racial homogeneity was guaranteed by federal housing policies that explicitly excluded minorities from entering burgeoning suburban enclaves, these "lily-white neighborhoods" afforded a restrictive set of social and professional options for the idealized family. Where employment opportunities for men (as presumed "bread winners") offered a rigid careerist path within an emerging corporatist culture, women were expected to stay at home as domestic custodians; the narrowly prescribed roles and the high expectations that came with middle class existence found "the postwar cult of domesticity . . . wearing . . . thin."[38] Additionally, the consumerist demand that predicated the housing boom of the decade saw American private debt rise to record levels.[39] The late 1950s saw a critical retrenchment of the policy imperatives and economic investments that formed the foundation of the suburban ideal. And *Have Gun—Will Travel* is indicative of this retrenchment. In each episode Paladin accepts a job that inevitably concerns some form of social, civic, or family division. Invited into a home for work (or an Indian territory for mediation, or a town for taming), he is no less uncovering/resurrecting the broken familial, social, or civic structures that lie at *Have Gun—Will Travel's* core. But, as with the differentiated plots of each episode, the show renders these conflicts as singular storylines and portray a series of civil-social-familial contexts distressed and fragmented.

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[34] William Boddy, *Fifties Television* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 162.
[35] Spigel, 5.
[36] Ibid., 75.
[37] Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 111.
[38] Spigel 2001, 111–112.
[39] Ibid., 112.

The late first-season episode, “The Teacher,” highlights Paladin as a telefilm cipher while also foregrounding the fraught features of the American suburb. By situating Paladin within a pedagogical struggle about historical and civic construction, the episode convenes its own critique of America’s ideological foundations and epistemological traditions. The episode finds Paladin intervening in a small town’s conflict. “Passing through” on his way back to San Francisco, he comes across an imperiled schoolmarm. Teaching an episode from the Civil War, Mollie Stanton (Marian Seldes) refuses to censure what she deems to be the “facts” of history. Noting that “all war is terrible,” she teaches atrocities committed by both Northern General William Sherman’s notoriously violent campaign across the South, and William Clark Quantrill’s infamous guerilla tactics against the North. In response, a town faction made up of former Quantrill “Raiders” threatens to burn down the schoolhouse unless she revises her lesson plan. Paladin finds himself sympathetically aligned with the educator and intercedes on her behalf.

Paladin’s active opposition to the former Raiders is one of the many examples of *Have Gun—Will Travel’s* critical perspective on rigid social and political values. The safety-in-numbers the town initially conforms to, and the broken nature of a Raider family Paladin comes across, typifies the kind of reactionary entrenchment and civil disenchantment that crowd the wilderness of the show’s late-nineteenth-century context and stand in for disillusionment with the postwar era. But while the episode redresses the broken structural and social integrity of the United States, it offsets the effect by highlighting the soundness of the telefilm as a foundation for its critique. The episode opens in a store where its owner, Mr. Coldwell, describes Stanton’s plight to Paladin. Given that Stanton’s intractability threatens the town, Coldwell believes she should simply “change her story.” Counting the cartridges from the box he’s just bought, Paladin says, “One and one make two. Do you believe that?” And the keeper nods. Loading his gun and cocking it, Paladin states, “One and one make five,” and points its muzzle directly at Coldwell’s face. The action then cuts away to an extreme close-up of the gun pointed *at* the audience (as if Coldwell) as Paladin rhetorically queries, “Care to argue with me?” Cutting back to a two-shot of the barrel in Coldwell’s face, the storekeeper demurs. The shot composition of the gun matches that of the credit opening. Holding the audience at gunpoint in both the fiction and the credits conflates the audience with the shopkeeper as aligned in passivity and bad faith. Additionally, while conveying the fraudulence of the Raiders’ position (“might makes right”), the sequence inadvertently expresses the telefilm’s episodic logic. Though “two” might be a “fact” of arithmetic (what 1+1 equals), Paladin inadvertently conveys the show’s episodic structure as fundamentally different from addition. For example, watching the first two episodes of *Have Gun—Will Travel* will not necessitate the continuity-bound logic of a third. It is not necessary to watch episodes in order to understand a self-contained story as there is no narrative arc connecting them. It is possible to watch the first episode twice (1+1) and then leap to the fifth (=5) without losing any of the narrative cohesion necessary for viewing. As a telefilm, *Have Gun—Will Travel* resists sequential storytelling and aligns with contemporary serial photography as a practice.

Summarizing the theoretical and aesthetic strategies employed by avant-garde photographers since the late sixties, writer-artist Kim Schoen notes their fascination with repetition. Discerning two different aesthetic procedures, she cites the distinction between “serial attitude” and “in-series” resemblance. The serial attitude is “parsimonious and fundamentally self-exhausting” and operates by truncating “the possibility of never-endingness.” Circumventing

realist concerns, it scrutinizes the conceptual foundations of art.[40] Conversely, the in-series is typified by its tendency toward a "realist art" that operates on the principle of likeness. The former operates by way of "tautology"; it demands a systemization of its own constructed formal dynamics. It is wholly exclusive of referential indices. The in-series, however, toys with the associative tendencies of things that resemble. One insists on a closed system of defined and calibrated structural organization as its sole logic, while the other incessantly repeats through a potentially never-ending iteration generated by similarity-with-a-difference. The former operates exclusively. It is only tied to the logical requirement of a wholly fabricated aesthetic method and initiates a formulaic logic that produces its own end.

Existing between hermetic avant-garde technique (as an aesthetic method) and the infinite proliferation of the similar (as a realistic effect), *Have Gun—Will Travel* straddles both logics. This is what Schoen finds in contemporary photography. The repetitive strain that fluctuates between the two practices (while being qualitatively distinct) is nonetheless intrinsically linked. While the telefilm melds the self-contained grid-like rigidity of serial "attitude" (as cloistered and formulaic episodes and seasonal runs that "end"), it also continues ad infinitum with variable changes attendant to the "in-series." As a telefilm, *Have Gun—Will Travel* highlights the structural exclusivity of a closed set and the never-ending variability that forever tweaks the associative familiarity of its continuity-bound generic world. Paladin is the figural and dramatic recursion who makes both legible. As a formulaic agent of a discrete and regimented set of stand-alone episodes whose logic demands its own termination, his repetitions denote an alien and self-contained closure. But as a typically context-bound gunfighter in the old West he perpetually reconvenes new adventures from a recognizable genre setting. Paladin's bipartite seriality marks him as a confluence of episodic and generic convention. He is both a figural automaton (a terminal episodic code) and a recognizably human character in a historical genre (a narrative index to the gunfighter as Westerner). His characterological status operates as a juncture between the serial types. Tying the Western to the telefilm as a structural serial, Paladin's in-between narratological status echoes his status as a Westerner between frontier lawlessness and civilized culture. The mediating quality of the latter designates his sympathetic relation to Ms. Stanton and further determines their alliance.

Both standing apart from and within culture, Paladin and Ms. Stanton are similar. Without families, they are both anomalous actors on the frontier while their respective positions as educator and intellectual find them, however differently, imparting knowledge. Partnering up against the Raiders, Paladin moves in with Ms. Stanton for the duration of the conflict. Sharing the same bed (at different times) and meals in the small room in back of the school that serves as Ms. Stanton's "home," the two form an anomalous union. As principled arbiters in this dispute, the two are readily akin. Before sitting down for a shared meal, Paladin explains why "he must" help her. He explains, "A teacher is something very special. Without teachers every generation would have to start by discovering fire and inventing the wheel." While his explanation suggests a progress-bound "invention" of intractable forward momentum (an ever-evolving linearity), it equally suggests the show's serial function. Within the bounded space-time of *Have Gun—Will Travel's* nineteenth-century West, both "fire" and the "wheel" exist without the need for original recuperation as a continuity-inclined cause and effect. Paladin might intone Roosevelt's evolutionary progressive and the show might engage the realist aspirations of continuity editing, but *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s closed narrative sets impart a fascination with narrative structure as

[40] Kim Schoen, "The Serial Attitude Redux," in *X-TRA* 12:2 (Winter 2009), 20.

a fiction-bearing scaffold. The outcome, as with types of serial photography, "divorce[s] the image from its reality effect" [41] and partially defers Roosevelt's naturalizing legacy for the genre. Lessons from history coincide with episodic formulation as, respectively, discursive and aesthetic processes. Both are produced in the midst of a corresponding procession whose origin lacks witness and depends on repetition as its expressive foundation (as a taught lesson; as an episodic series). In this sense, *Have Gun—Will Travel* confers its own mediation as a Western telefilm and denotes the signifying order of things as a necessary fiction allowing for historical and narrative articulation. The show expresses the signifying rudiments of its narration as pervading the fiction itself. This effect is amplified by the sequence's interest in Paladin and Ms. Stanton as exhibiting a social mediation, in contrast to the roles ascribed to postwar domesticity.

As much sexual as social, Paladin's "love" for women is manifest in the episodes where female characters demonstrate an integrity and independent-mindedness similar to his own. Ms. Stanton's teacher typifies the characterization. Paladin ends his mini-speech on teachers by gently putting his hands on the back of a seated Stanton's chair. Staring seductively down her back (practically breathing down her neck), he finishes his barely concealed come-on. Framed in a two-shot that positions his standing body as an extension of her reclining posture, the camera dissolves away from them. While the dissolve implies a wholly different coupling away from the strict parameters of the family, Paladin and Stanton's partnership belies the suburban codes of home and marriage. The sequence implies an erotics outside of socially proscribed images, the two characters unified by their social and pedagogical twinning. Single and without family, they are bound by professional roles outside the home. As ennobled gunman for hire, Paladin mitigates social/familial conflict, while as schoolmarm, Stanton sutures the civil and cultural knowledge that binds generations. In either instance they mediate; they are both inside the communities they entreat while forever independent of the social and political mores of those communities. But their mediating nature is augmented by their central and active presence in the episode. Their mediation performs action just as their function as heroic protagonists recasts their social anomalousness. In this way they (along with the "lessons" Paladin repeats from episode to episode) incarnate and enact moral "object lessons." They are Manichean, not melodramatic.

Noting a strict binarism in nineteenth-century literary melodrama, Peter Brooks describes its "moral Manicheanism."[42] Distinctly caught up in ethical dyads, melodrama expresses narratives of moral polarization. It presents "a world subsumed by . . . the conflict of good and evil"[43] which by structural necessity must unveil a "moral occult."[44] Melodrama incessantly convenes worldly details to work through and bring to the surface of everyday life a revelatory ethical dimension that lies concealed beneath the manners of its social décor. Melodramatic fiction penetrates "the surface of reality . . . to locate and articulate" the moral plight at its core.[45] Brooks notes, however, that the melodrama's "dramaturgy of hyperbole, excess, [and] excitement" (its "acting out" in the psychoanalytic sense) can also be devoid of "ethical imperatives."[46] However much he implies the fusion between melodrama and the Manichaean,

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[41] Schoen, 24.
[42] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 6.
[45] Ibid., 5.
[46] Ibid., viii.

Brooks nonetheless accedes to their difference. As Paladin and Stanton convey a similarly ethical staunchness, their posture is overtly Manichaean. They are the good guys. Their performance and expression is devoid of the clandestine and circuitous "masking" found in, say, a densely plotted Balzac novel, or the psychological quandaries of a Henry James character ensnared in "an intense inner drama in which consciousness must purge itself."[47] What is "purged" in "The Teacher" is the centrality of subjective depth. "Acting out" in the psychoanalytic sense becomes bracketed as a learned behavioral reflex, subject to the weak ethical dimension of a given social setting. *Have Gun—Will Travel* centralizes Paladin's Manicheanism while distributing its melodramatic turmoil to the secondary characters who flit by from episode to episode. Invested with the emotional and psychological burdens that carry over from their distorted civil imagination, secondary characters exemplify the melodramatic type. Their melodramatic bias rests beneath Paladin's Manichaean moral coda. In this way *Have Gun—Will Travel* is in stark contrast to the foregrounded family romance of *The Last Sunset*.

Paladin and Stanton share a Manichaean ethos. Their alignment with communications marks them as "other." Like the telefilm (any and all modes of communication), their function is to mediate. As, respectively, cosmopolitan intellectual and disciplined pedagogue, they are cultural arbiters for the town. While Stanton narrates histories and recites multiplication tables, Paladin incessantly cites historical events and quotes poetry. Their pedagogical lessons offer a corrective to the toxic virulence of the community's bad faith. But the bearing of their Manichaean characterization is distinct. Upon meeting Ms. Stanton, Paladin tests her moral code by pretending to be outraged by her lesson on the violent and marauding tactics of the Unionist Jayhawkers. She mocks the hypocrisy and bias of Paladin's performance and therefore passes his ethical test. Paladin then drops his ruse as Stanton relaxes and the two become allies in an attempt to keep the school standing.

But where Paladin "pretends" an overarching prejudice, Stanton is completely without guile; convinced by Paladin's performance, she is his dupe. Paladin explains his dissimulation by telling her he "was only trying to make sure you were telling both sides of the story." Stunned by the lie, she tremulously asks, "Who are you?" Paladin responds by handing her his manicured business card, cut-flush magnified with her hand (figure 4). The "masked personage" that worked to veil Manichean dilemma is here the ruse that filters melodrama. While Stanton is marked as "emotional" in the scene, she expresses an identity. As the dramatic actor within the episode, she tilts toward the emotional excesses of melodrama and loses "composure." The Manichaean modality articulates and illuminates the subjective, civil, and narrative conditions of their conventional formation. This is what Paladin does as a character and a structural cipher. And he does so repeatedly. Unlike Stanton, Paladin is capable of acting. His performances test the soundness of the social conditions of the respective settings in which he finds himself. His masquerade interrogates the integrity of social mores writ large while adding a further nuance to the performativity indicative of Paladin's dandy persona.[48] And if the show's broadness speaks to Manichaean content, it doesn't attest to the show's thematic "simplicity" or a lack of character sophistication. Its moral isn't moralizing. Rather it provides a narrative analytic to the teleplay's expression. *Have Gun—Will Travel,* as a formal mechanism, articulates the codes of dramatic expression in the midst of its action.

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[47] Brooks, 5.
[48] Studlar, 44.

Week to week, Paladin serves as both action hero and analytic engine. While saving the day with all manner of the gunfighter's adroit heroics, he additionally tests the integrity of the towns he passes through and the people he meets. Heroic knight errant to its dramatic action, he is likewise Manichaean probe to its civil and social structure. His dissimulating provocations are meant to expose the bad faith of other characters' reactionary bluster. The cool detachment he brings as an outsider foregrounds his analytic intellectual imperative. The imperative exposes psychological and behavioral sensitivities not as personal truth but as symptoms of ideological fissure. The temperaments he unveils and the dramatic situations he uncovers are characterized as psyches determined by their creaky social and civil foundations.

Natural Histories and New Frontiers

The rest of the episode differently inflects the elements of Baroque drama that the credit opening implied. Accounting for a host of Baroque inflections inside the action, "The Teacher" transposes the violent content central to the historical drama to the equally violent frontier of *Have Gun—Will Travel's* nineteenth-century Western. In keeping with his civic analytic/active hedge, Paladin explains his plan of action to Stanton. He tells her that by appealing to the town's families he'll establish a communal front against the encroaching threat of the former Raiders. Paladin arrives at the home of the Weavers. An all-male family of Civil War Southern veterans, the fractured family also has a younger son who is Stanton's student. And it is this student who opens the door when Paladin arrives to state his case to the boy's father. Weaver and Paladin remove themselves to the fire at the far end of the home, and the interior of the house is represented through an extreme tracking long-shot. As the two slowly make their way to the fireplace, they begin a discussion whose split register seems to fuse the school conflict with past civil strife. Traversing the entire length of the dark and dank cabin, Paladin is contrasted with all three of Weaver's sons and, of course, Weaver himself. While the youngest son is all youthful impression, the older sons are battle-scarred and wary. While one son is framed in extreme close-up cutaways, he literally twitches and recedes into the room's darkened cornices. The other son is an amputee, framed on a bottom bunk sewing his torn and frayed clothes with his single arm. At one point his younger brother offers his own hand to, almost literally, suture the amputee whole. As the brother in the background shrinks away into shadow, the foregrounded son is literally in need of mending. Spatially in the middle of the room, Paladin occupies the second plane of action in the frame. He lies sandwiched between the backgrounded trauma of one son and the foregrounded maiming of the other. As a Northern veteran without visible scars, Paladin visually and thematically mediates their wounds. He sutures them whole. As Weaver notes, "Joe there left that arm in Chickamauga. Frank got shot up in Gettysburg." Physically and psychologically broken, the sons are wounded, shattered men. Additionally, there is no female present. Unable to land wives and without a mother, the idealized unified family is in ruin. A Southern family now on the fringes of society (as Paladin notes the cabin is "the furthest South and the last on my list"), they signify a fragmented home. As Paladin faces Weaver, their ensuing dialogue becomes an antagonistic debate that mirrors their past status as (respectively) Northern Yankee and Southern Rebel. The internecine conflict of the past repeats itself in the narrative present, its violent legacy so pervasive as to be legible on the body and minds of the family.

The visual syntax is tied to a historical accounting of the war. While Weaver notes Sherman's devastation of his land, Paladin assures him that this is something Ms. Stanton teaches as well, a fact corroborated by Weaver's young son. As a sequence overtly centralized

around themes of national history and images of ruination, the scene, like the show's instructive opening, is Baroque. As Benjamin notes concerning the mise-en-scène of Baroque drama, "the allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history . . . is put on stage . . . in the form of the ruin."[49] As dramas that recast the fall of historical monarchs from a variety of medieval and classical examples, Baroque theater performs the ontology of its own era. Written largely between the late sixteenth and early- to mid-seventeenth centuries, these "*Trauerspiel*" (translated as "mourning plays") dramatize the foibles and ambitions of monarchs conceived as both all-powerful political operatives and fallible humans. Without a fate-shaping God, the plays stress political agency and the passage from eminent divine force to immanent human actor. The eternal condition of souls is replaced by the ephemeral condition of bodies. It is the drama of political will that takes center stage in the *Trauerspiel*. As Benjamin notes, "the word 'history' stands written on the countenance of nature."[50] If regimes fall, nobles die, and nation-states vanish, it is due to the violent upheavals of politics subject to time. The political is conditioned by transience, the passing of specific eras. Divorced from eternal presence, the *Trauerspiel's* mise-en-scène is marked by an excess of vulnerable bodies and violent acts. The shape of the world is a man-made political charnel house, the ruin and the fragment the central figures of its expression. By centralizing its drama on violent temporal passage, the scene (like Baroque theater) animates the constructed project of history. The limping Weaver, his amputee son, their tattered clothes, and the discussion of their violent infusion with political history, all express the theater of ruination. This is what Benjamin calls "natural history." Charged with the transience and violence besetting a human body, it is a world transfigured into "a picturesque field of ruins."[51] But in "The Teacher," ruination is proscribed by a 1957 Western telefilm. The episode expresses the violence indicative of the Western as a mythic tragedy that litters the mise-en-scène of the family home with the broken bodies of American men.

The legacy of violence attendant to the scene's home transitions to a violent scene inside Ms. Stanton's school; the contiguity of the two scenes expresses an incipient cycle of violence that subsumes the body politic. Soon after Paladin joins Ms. Stanton's cause, an emissary from the Raider gang pays a visit to the school. As Stanton goes through the multiplication tables reciting the ever-increasing integer of three with the children, the school door is suddenly kicked open. Shocked by the intrusion, the screen cuts to Stanton in a medium shot in the right of the frame, the blackboard background held in deep focus. Promising his gang's arrival and the burning of the school, the Raider looms over the teacher. Stanton defies his threats and proclaims, "I will not change history for you." The screen then cuts to a shot of Stanton from behind, as if looked at by the blackboard. The Raider then proceeds to turn Stanton's desk over and approaches her with menace. The Raider crosses a line. Overrun by violence, the imaginary line between student and teacher is trespassed just as Paladin's partial figure breaks the credit opening's fourth wall and holds the audience at gunpoint. While the reframing holds the action in extreme long shot, the entire classroom is in deep focus as Paladin enters the frame from what is now its furthest point in the background (figure 5). Paladin's entrance synchs with the frame's perspectival composition and cues the violent gun duel to come.

Angular and symmetrical, the frame is fashioned with perspectival clarity. In parallel alignment, two rows of desks set the lower tier of the frame in angular upward procession as a

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[49] Benjamin, 177.
[50] Benjamin, 177.
[51] Ibid., 178.

window in the frame's upper left corner forms a contiguous receding line with a book rack it bestrides angling downward. Paladin enters the frame as the meeting point of the receding lines. Emerging flush at their intersection, Paladin is the vanishing point of the pictorial action. Approaching the Raider, he coolly asks him to "pick up the desk." As he refuses, the action cuts between the two figures in classic shot/counter-shot "dueling" posture. Drawing on Paladin, the Raider is shot down by the gunslinger. While the action of the scene represents a conflict-ridden duel, the scene is also temporally divided. The perspectival depth of the framed classroom visually aligns with the dueling shot/counter-shot classicism of the cinematic Western. The European West's sixteenth-century perspectivalism conflates with the Western's nineteenth-century American motif. The strategy that enabled picture making as depth illusion conflates with the ideological legacy of the American Western. The sequence binds the tradition that enabled Baroque painting with Western genre's (arguably) most resonant tableau—a gunfight. Whether Baroque or Western, historical myth is imbued with the political rhetoric that structures a violent present.

The scene stages America as formally and ideologically at war with itself. Enacted at the center of a classroom, in mid-lesson, and by way of a gun (what in the sequence's aftermath Paladin will refer to as "the necessity of *this*"—the smoking gun), the educational setting implies its violent content is learned. The scene is additionally split down the middle of the frame, further amplifying America's internal rift. The Raider stands foreground between the desk rows, visually halving the classroom. And as Paladin approaches him by way of its aisle, he simultaneously ushers the children out of their seats and away from the action, further dividing the frame. Additionally, the sequence images its own construction. The frame of action is implied to "witness." The gunfighting sequence seems to look out from the blackboard. The camera's vantage point is aligned with the chalkboard that stares out at the classroom (figures 6 and 8) as a conflated point-of-view. It implies that the board's multiplication lesson is infused with (related to) the screen action. Like the frame halving, the blackboard suggests split functions. Stanton's multiplication tables render endless mathematical trajectories memorized ad infinitum. Violence as an ideological imperative multiplies. But the position of the blackboard implies that its discourse bears witness to the destructiveness of its own content. Via its conflation with the televisual screen, the chalkboard *sees* the outcome of the Western as a pedagogical legacy. Violence is a textually coded formula that envisions the character of its own destructive imperative. Likewise, the contrasting point-of-view cutaways of the dueling antagonists merge with both a chalkboard directly behind Paladin and the one already mentioned behind the Raider. While the two chalkboard framings further halve the room into violent opposition, they sandwich it and project the violence in *mise en abyme*. The dueling match-cut tableau is converted into an exponential mirroring, an infinite internecine regress (figures 7 and 8). The divided frame, the internecine plotting, and the perpetuity of conflict implied by the mirrored chalkboards formally distill the Western's violence as an aesthetic and ideological reflex. In an ironic turn, "The Teacher" converts Paladin's progressive paeon into an allegory about historical and generic cycles of violence. The episode critiques the triumphalism of perpetual conquest associated with Roosevelt's manly virtue by foregrounding masculine debilitation and civil strife as its products.

While *Have Gun—Will Travel* paradoxically reappraises the progressive oratory that influenced the popularization of the Western a century earlier, it anticipates a similar political rhetoric convened by John F. Kennedy a mere three years after "The Teacher" aired. Both Lynn Spigel and Richard Slotkin have analyzed John F. Kennedy's famous "New Frontier" speech. As

Kennedy's 1960 victory speech made after garnering the Democratic nomination, it both borrowed from mythic imagery associated with the Western while valorizing technological advancements. For Slotkin the speech reanimates the "frontier" figure central to the Western since the turn of the century. It denotes the exceptionalist character of an America whose historical progress was intimately tied to the taming of an almost primordial wilderness. It borrows from a discursive past to project the nation's identity onto a rhetorical future. With the bravado and assurance befitting a Western hero, Kennedy conveyed a Manichaean struggle of Democracy against Communism. Describing the Cold War as "morally" justifiable, the speech was saturated with martial imperative and set the political tone for legitimizing new military campaigns in figuratively "untamed" new frontiers. For Slotkin, the speech's rhetoric and influence helped spawn future third-world "counterinsurgency" conflicts against Communist interest and influence.[52] Kennedy repurchased the frontier's central ideological function, and he did so to brand a national identity. The international political struggle is grounded in atavistic terms. Intrinsic to American vitality is the violent necessity of ever-expanding frontiers of conquest. The episode's post civil-war frontier operates as a usable past that dramatizes the conflicts of its own cold-war/postwar present.

For Spigel, Kennedy's rhetoric is infused with more technologically oriented frontiers. The civil orientations of home that characterized the earlier decade's domestic agendas of development are abandoned for a "new utopian future" emblematized by "the discourse of science and technology."[53] The exhausted literal and figural dimensions of suburban domesticity are replaced with another figure: outer space. Military expansionism in foreign territory is sibling with the emerging space program's literal flight. In either instance, "the new frontier" is a charged rhetorical engagement against suburban interiority, "the doldrums that 1950s life had come to symbolize."[54] And if Spigel notes the numerous situation comedies that rendered the domesticity of suburbia with a newer fantastical "nature" that followed in the wake of the Kennedy years, she likewise notes their critical slant. Kennedy's speech was made at exactly the midpoint of *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s run, at the interval of its televisual expression. Where Paladin emerges as a visual vanishing point, he fuses martial engagement with pedagogical development; *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s run acts as an equally sympathetic confluence between serial telefilm and historical event.

Where *The Last Sunset* looks back at suburban developmental progress, *Have Gun—Will Travel* both looks backward and forward. The serial sweep of its run enacts "history" while it passes through history. As Kennedy's speech lands exactly in the middle of the show's passage, *Have Gun—Will Travel* performs a movement that situates as much as it passes. It indicates a mid-twentieth-century America whose signifying indices (as televisual) are anterior and posterior to it. The show has its own history. As its episodes are completed objects in time, they nonetheless are reproduced and continually broadcast in time. They actively repeat. They disengage and revive temporal coordinates between experienced past episode and suspended future ones. This temporal juggling serves to further confound linearity. Where Stanton's blackboard screen projects an infinite product of the same integer multiplied into perpetuity, it performs an ironically static infinite regress for the genre. Like the martial figurations of frontier stories the genre is flush with, the multiplication table enacts a repetition of the same. The scene

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[52] Slotkin, 3.
[53] Spigel 2001, 112.
[54] Ibid., 113.

visualizes the violence endemic to the Western's mythologizing. But blackboard-as-screen also *witnesses* the internecine division at the heart of the genre. It "reads" the rudiments of its own figural construction. Unlike the Baroque ruin, it doesn't represent the material transience of a distinct political order but its reiteration. The sequence expresses philosopher Gilles Deleuze's theorizing on repetition.

For Deleuze, repetition is situated around its "two forms."[55] Signs exist as static images guided by resemblance *and* a reduplication that engenders singular and labile images. Likewise, *Have Gun—Will Travel* renders a martial ideological attitude addicted to the inevitable violence it demands as its frontier birthright *and* a telefilm that re*images* screen logic. The blackboard sequence both enacts the violence inherent to the Western as a progressive drama while discerning the rudiments of its rhetorical aggression. The show has a unique relationship to its broadcast screen. Paladin "holds up" the viewer in the credit sequence, as the blackboard sequence both projects Western violence while critiquing it. As a telefilm, *Have Gun—Will Travel* infuses its address with what is Other. Paladin's direct address and the instances of framing that suggest an uncanny screen apperception each attest to the foregrounding of figuration over and above character-driven action. "The Teacher" is more emphatic in this regard given its interest in pedagogy. As Deleuze notes, "to learn is . . . to constitute [the] space of an encounter with signs."[56] It is to make contact with the process of signification, to articulate an ideological position alongside the emission of signs themselves. The blackboard, Paladin's gun, and his provocative "acting" are all differential sign encounters. But Paladin is the signatory thread from which analysis convenes. As an active signifying spine to the show's drama, he is the constitutive material that screens its drama. *Have Gun—Will Travel's* seriality presents a way to read electronic screens.

Conclusion

The fused register between articulating address and analytic deciphering in *Have Gun—Will Travel* repeats the exceptionalist credo of the American Western differently. The hinge between civil inception and social aggression is allied to a complex rhetorical address. The American frontier the show maps with its seriality binds an active expression with an ontological mandate. Televisual being-in-the-world bears witness to the process of ideological inscription. It interrogates the codes of legible becoming. *Have Gun—Will Travel* deciphers its own perpetual inception not only by exposing the static discursive rudiments of a past generic and historical imperative, but also by implying an equal imperative to change. As a serial attitude the show repeatedly *shows* the figural details that make up American cultural and political impulses and contains them as terminally coded set pieces. But as an in-series expression, *Have Gun—Will Travel* offers a way to reconvene the progressive address of the country's discursive legacy. It does so by centralizing what is "in between."

While *The Last Sunset* performs the contradictory tangles of a midcentury rhetoric whose legacy strains the conceit of being at home, *Have Gun—Will Travel* stresses the frontier imperative that can't stay at home—that eschews and criticizes the legacy of being at home. The drift and cosmopolitan flavor that Paladin brings to each town is attendant to both his critiques (a rigorous intellectual dissuasion) and the deadly skill of his profession (a threatening and

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[55] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23.
[56] Ibid., 22.

unwavering aggression). As *The Last Sunset* ends at a border, it implies a reinterpretation of American social development always at a crossroads. Its allegorical reach conveys a broad critique of a historical and discursive weight whose static lineaments must change. *Have Gun—Will Travel* reverses the order and presents a protagonist whose contradictory blend of pedagogue and killer perpetually passes through towns and homes. It addresses another set of developmental myths and their relationship to the mid-twentieth century. While O'Malley runs both toward and away from home, Paladin's sightlines intercept the equally fraught ideological bearing of being American. One's contradictory crossroads is the other's paradoxical crosshairs. The itinerant and ambivalent appeals they share, the fixed sights they unveil, demonstrate that the sedentary home and the frontier expanse are inextricably bound and deadly. One protagonist's suicidal impulse is the other's homicidal career. However on-the-move, both protagonists are brought "home." As either dead-end incestuous self-creation or perpetual internecine civil immolation, the characterization of each Western demands a renegotiation of America's ideological structure.

Static and yet unrelenting, Paladin is both recursive terminal evaluation and propulsive logging. The iteration of his adventure-interventions are both discrete set-pieces subject to evaluative closure and ever renewable settings-as-episodes, perpetually challenging the integrity of a democratic frontier. Likewise, *Have Gun—Will Travel* reflects the frontier imperative of Kennedy's address and updates it. As Kennedy's speech sets the stage for the ensuing decade's conflict in Vietnam and the war's attendant social/civil divisions, it looks back at Teddy Roosevelt's late-nineteenth-century appeals with all their endemic violence. Paladin's serialized intercessions are prey to the violence of his profession. But the redresses to each town imply a renewed and invigorated address. As much as midcentury America is prey to expansionist rhetoric, it is also open to critical reevaluation. As Paladin chides and sets right the badly erring towns and homes through which he passes, his own past-presence equally endangers them. And this is the central conflict at *Have Gun—Will Travel's* core. As renewable screen ideograph to the country's quandaries, the show demonstrates its exceptionalist character as both deciphering critique and static endgame. The show provides an analytic to a legacy of violence reaching critical mass.

Inextricably caught in generic flux from within the codified episodic framework that demands its own closure, *Have Gun—Will Travel* distills a fraught ideological legacy indicative of a cultural and social hinge. Its central character expresses an ever-fluctuating agenda between different imperatives. At once a critical pedagogy and an assassin's creed, the show transforms the cultural and historical legacy of the genre at midcentury. *Have Gun—Will Travel* screens paradoxical ideological agendas to foreground what the mediation of American culture looks like.

Figures to Chapter 2

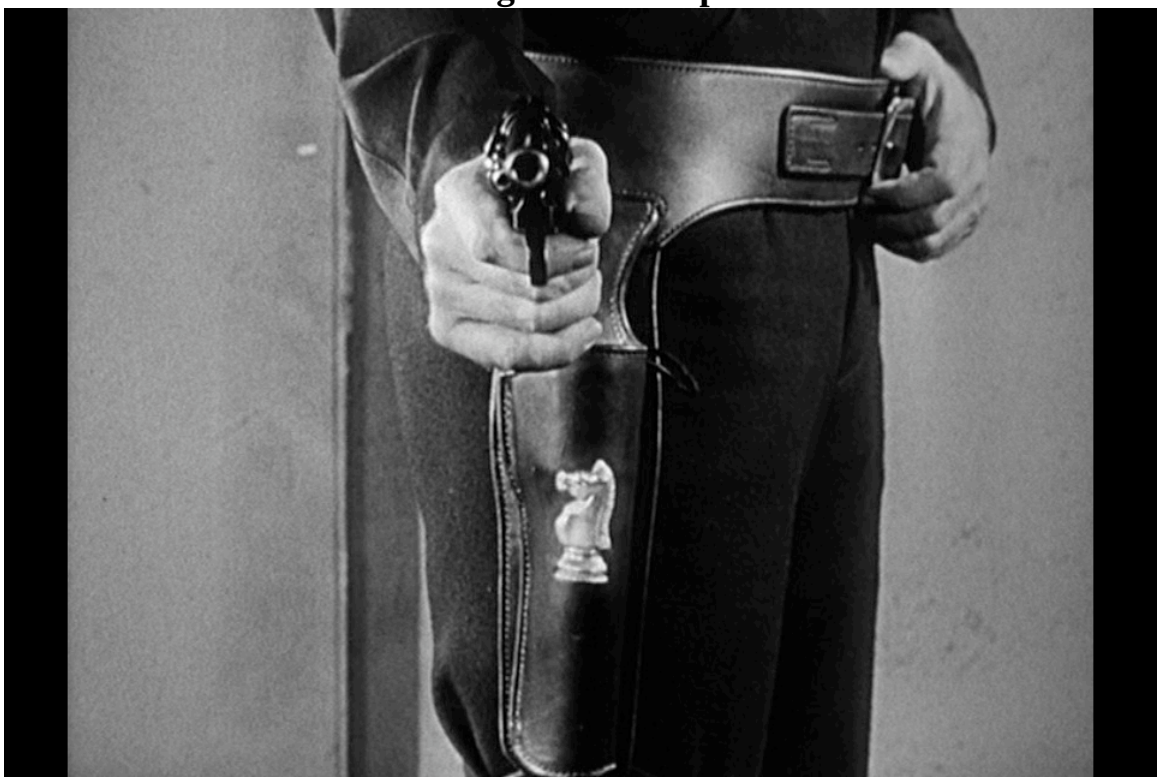

Figure 1.

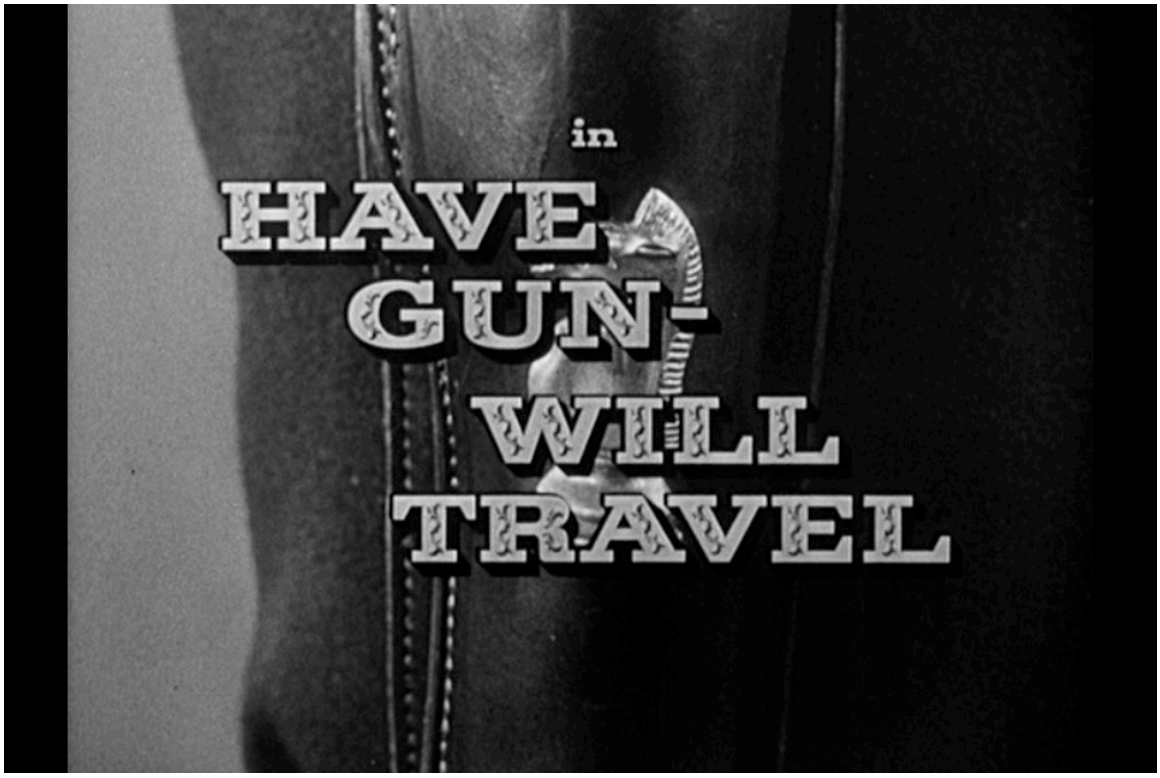

Figure 2.

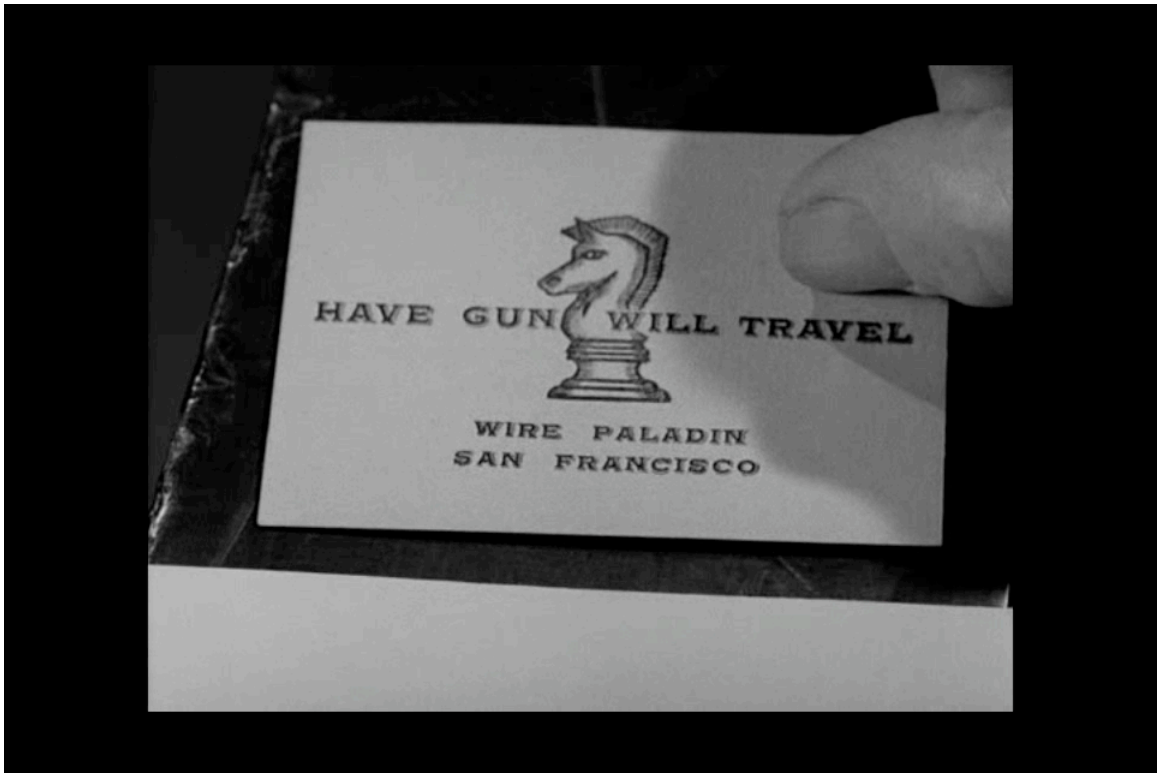

Figure 3.

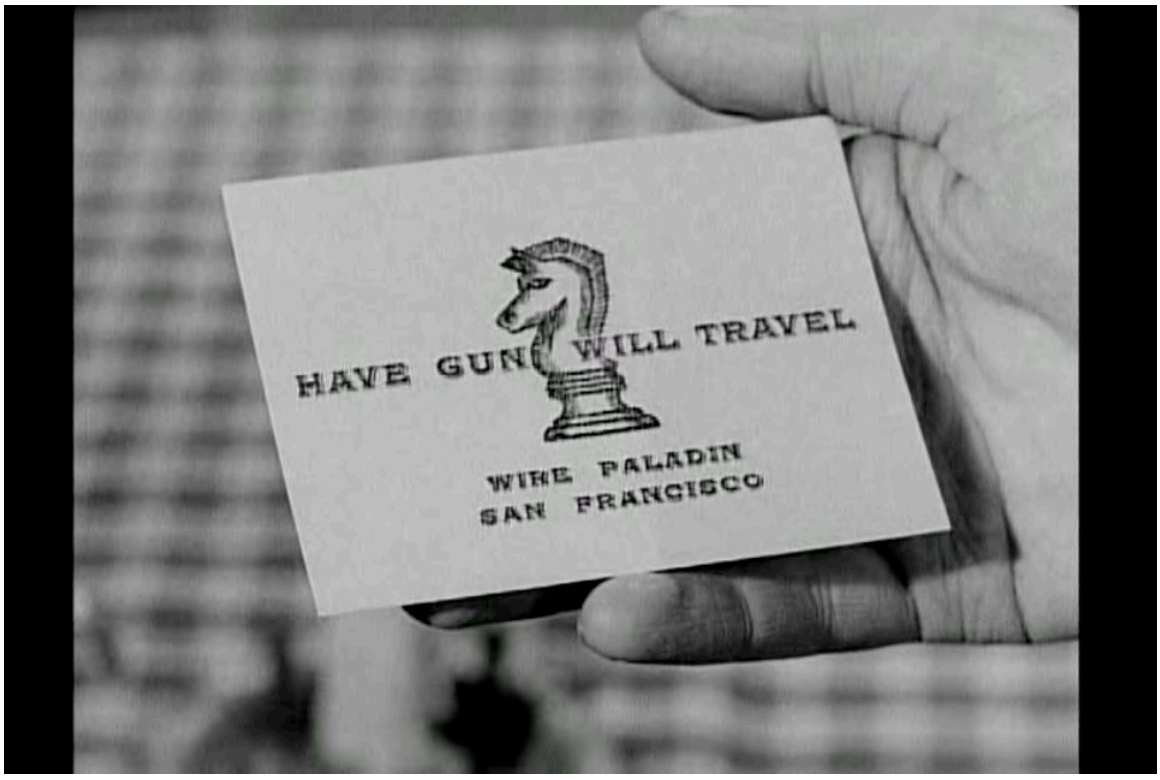

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Section Two

The Domestic Westerner

Chapter 3. Screening American Filicide: Masculine Generation as Media Contraction in *Gunman's Walk*

> It comes as a great shock to discover that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians—when you were rooting for Gary Cooper—that the Indians were you.
>
> —James Baldwin

Introduction

This section explores the domestication of the Westerner. While the extreme individualism of O'Malley's convention-eschewing outlaw and Paladin's critical and deadly gun-for-hire perform a critical juxtaposition with the familial and civic straits they differently engage, the central characters of this section are explicitly family-centric. The male families of the film *Gunman's Walk* (Karlson 1958) and the television series *The Rifleman* (1958–1963) further exacerbate the legacy of the Frontier Thesis's two poles. The objects of this section bring the martial imperative of Roosevelt's legacy to a home front more in keeping with the civic-mindedness of Turner's thesis, the conflation providing the dramatic conflict relative to each Western. Additionally, the gunman subgenre central to *Have Gun—Will Travel* continues, albeit in keeping with the family-centric orientation of this section. And subsequent to the entrenched domestic and civil milieu within which the characters find themselves, the Westerner's masculine typology more explicitly engages patriarchy. Where *The Rifleman* offers ideological compromises (however halting and complex) with the genre's feminine-oriented homestead, *Gunman's Walk* expresses its patriarchy as at war with civilization and family. The film pushes the tension between domesticity and violence that the Westerner's ambivalence typifies, and inflates the tension into contradictory extremes. *Gunman's Walk* pits the manly legacy of Roosevelt's "savage" crucible (the generic typology that defines the Western at midcentury) against a historical moment defined by domesticity.

As a midcentury Western about a widower-gunfighter and his sons, *Gunman's Walk* explores the relationship between genre, masculinity, and film by centralizing the trope of the gun. It positions a father and son as dual protagonists whose obsession with the weapon as a determining object of identity inversely situates them as dueling antagonists. The prosthetic dexterity that "makes the man" as a pedagogical/patriarchical legacy and the almost instantaneous speed of the gunshot that kills express a dual temporality. The speed of the draw and gunshot infer a temporal contraction between generations, whereby patriarchy functions as a cyclical and mortal duel. By centering on the internecine conflict between the father and his eldest son, both of them gunfighters, *Gunman's Walk* juxtaposes the question of what male and generic "generation" mean. The film scrutinizes how the Western's weapon-oriented trope inflects the cultural patriarchy specific to the era of its cinematic production.

The Last Sunset portrays a nomadic and broken familial order, in which family roles are misaligned and/or misrecognized. By contrast, *Gunman's Walk* revolves around the rigidity and astringency of familial positions. The film's late-nineteenth-century setting focuses on the conflict between Lee Hackett, a wealthy rancher, and his two sons, Ed and his younger brother Davy. Throughout the film Lee harangues his two sons with lessons about the characteristics that define a "man." His pedagogical hectoring and overbearing nature ultimately pit him against his two sons. While Ed emulates his father

with unerring idolatry, Davy questions the logic of following in his father's footsteps. But it is the conflict that arises between the father and his elder son that dominates the film's action and drives its story.

In competition with his father's legacy, Ed's attempts at being a better rider, rancher, and (crucially) gunfighter set up an eventual duel between father and son. While strictly adhering to his father's pedagogy and legacy, Ed seeks to match his father's vaunted accomplishments. The scenes representing Ed's persistent competition with Lee portend violence; his emulation is expressed through his hostility toward the town his family practically owns, its inhabitants, and (most centrally) his father. Beginning with a playful target practice where he almost shoots Lee, Ed's pathological need to prove himself superior to his father becomes increasingly dangerous for the rest of the film. From the murder of a ranch hand during a competition to catch a prized mare, to a seemingly playful horse race against his father, to the cold-blooded shooting of an unarmed horse-trader, to the final and deadly standoff against Lee, Ed's ambition paces the Westerner's legacy as commensurate with an endless violence against the familial and civil world it refuses to share. Finally forced to stop Ed from doing any more damage, Lee chases down his son, now a fugitive. The scene ends with a piqued Ed drawing on his father, in turn leaving Lee with no choice but to gun him down in self-defense.

The image of the father's legacy suffuses the film's drama and its narrative backstory animates it. The town the Hacketts reside in, much like Ed and Davy themselves, is conditioned by Lee's mythic stature and control. The town is both enthralled by Lee's storied heroism and cowed by his present-day wealth. The history of the town is the history of a particular man. As frontiersman, Indian fighter, and gunslinger, Lee embodies a century's worth of Western stories. He is freighted with a genre-defining heroism that, in turn, figures an entire national-historical mythos. While *The Last Sunset* is haunted by a past secret that tragically comes to light in its present, the time-space of its action is fraught with confused romantic entanglements and family roles. Conversely, in *Gunman's Walk*, the past is ever-present in Lee's mythic history, in the accomplishments and heroic feats he recites ad infinitum. As *The Last Sunset* foregrounds a plot conditioned by forgetting, *Gunman's Walk* creates a world haunted by the excess of memory. While Lee struggles to shape his two sons in his own image, they struggle to live up to their father's past. Shaped by Lee's stringent patriarchal orthodoxy, the Hackett family is predicated on the doctrinaire tropes of the Western genre's masculine legacies. The film both inflates and provides a microscopic view of the patriarchal tendencies imbedded within the Rooseveltian frontier hero—but it does so by updating them. *Gunman's Walk* reinvests the Western hero's generic marker in its late 1950s conventions. As a film about a father *and* his maturing son, the film is marked by a stark juxtaposition. Set as a late-nineteenth-century Western about the conflict between generations, the film addresses through the Hackett family a mid-twentieth-century postwar America coming of age. As tragic Bildungsroman, *Gunman's Walk* allegorizes the legacy of the Western's cultural origins with a look back at the historical emergence of its postwar patriarchy. As Lee's middle-aged hero coheres with the returning veterans from WWII, the Hackett boys anticipate the coming-of-age of the postwar's male baby boomers. The patriarchical orthodoxies that define the Hackett family inflect the era of the film's production.

Like *The Last Sunset*, *Gunman's Walk*'s family psychodrama places pressure on its formal design. The film's critical dramaturgy heightens the formal aspects that make for its legible expression as a Hollywood narrative; the foreground of the film's narrative content calls attention to the background of its mise-en-scène. The content's driving masculine pedagogy calls attention to the film's own constructive legibility; the plot's developmental drama informs a heightened observance of what makes for screen articulation. From the shooting practice Lee attempts to school the boys in, to the horse chase that leads to Ed's first murder, to the penultimate scene's duel, pedagogical lessons shape formal elements specific to the genre. What makes a man, in other words, also makes the formal and aesthetic features of this particular instantiation of the Western.

Masculine Legacies: The Penultimate Still

Gunman's Walk begins with a formal inversion of the genre's iconography. While *The Last Sunset* opened with Stribling in pursuit of O'Malley across a vast, craggy canyon ravine, its environment alluded to the suspended violence between men. The landscape framed O'Malley's incipient destructiveness as both predator and prey. But the opening of *Gunman's Walk* finds Ed and Davy riding upon a Western spacious expanse subject to their father's ownership. While *The Last Sunset*'s opening alluded to a harsh landscape that defines the man, *Gunman's Walk* opens on a landscape where the one who owns the land shapes those who travel upon it. The film's third scene more explicitly renders this situation clear. Framed within extreme long-shot, the sons ride through a weakly erected cordon of wood planks whose top beam bears the family name in roughhewn, knife-etched scrawl (figure 1). The name identifies the environment as property just as the camera's tracking movement finds the sons subject to the boundaries of the gate they pause to open. However much the scene depicts a wilderness, it is a wilderness-modified runway to the Hackett ranch. The frontier's wild is made of a piece with the wealth of the man-made landscape, and the tracking shot positions the sons as belonging to the proper name that guides them home. In short, the Hackett name has enunciative power that claims and conditions the prairie and the boys riding through it.

As Lee Clark Mitchell has noted about James Fenimore Cooper's generic frontier hero, Natty Bumppo, masculine identity is "fully . . . tied up with the continent's native scenes."[1] Cooper's novels produce an originist frontier hero by stressing the symbiosis between man and a landscape of fertile promise. While Bumppo's skills in the wild are proportionate to his exposure to the wilderness, Cooper's style presents him as a stylized frontiersman. Cooper's writing hovers between dense descriptive passages of natural, effulgent beauty to eruptive passages of "frenzied" violence—two stylistic cadences that define his wilderness hero. The tranquility of the former presents a "stillness" whose concentration enables success within the latter's brutal scenographic action. This stylized union constitutes the generic fiction that follows.[2] Cooper establishes a paradoxically coefficient style as an "unusual relation between settings and actors."[3] Written in the 1830s, it is, like its cinematic counterpart, originally "Eastern," as its Hudson Valley

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[1] Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9.

[2] Ibid., 33.

[3] Mitchell, 44.

location provides a territorial image whose character-building sets the foundation for a nation's broader exceptionality.

Cooper's sagas conflate wilderness sublimity with moral uprightness, the stillness of the natural environment making for the hero's bearing. But, as mentioned, his self-control engenders a set of deadly skills. The frontier makes for the figural hero who carries the properties of the wild within him. The steadfast man is conditioned for a no less requisite (necessary) violence.[4] As adroit man-of-action, the Westerner's deftness lies in reading and hence adjusting to the contingency of the frontier. The frontiersman is afforded a literate temperament; his epistemological discernment guarantees his survival just as it sets his moral temperament. Stillness affords the frontiersman an attentive fixedness, a concentration and perceptive acuity in his reading of signs in nature. The frontiersman's origin story is tied to the authorial landscape from which his exceptionality (as both savage and civilized) springs. As Mitchell notes, Cooper identifies the Westerner as an intercessor between land and man; he is the majestic point of a primal union. Cooper's novels produce a figural consummation that generates "the youthful origins of an American Adam."[5] The manned landscape is both "constituent" setting and primal architecture. It sets the foundation for manhood as much as it articulates the Westerner's generic masculine form. As an incarnation of the elemental continental forces with which he contends, the original Westerner is writ large in its landscape. The frontier's figuration is the stylistic necessity that sanctifies masculine construction.

The opening of *Gunman's Walk* bears the imprint of Cooper. As the two sons enter beneath the "Hackett Ranch" sign, the proper name of the man is afforded an accredited post within the scorched landscape of which he is a piece. Moreover, the extreme long shot of the two Hackett sons dwarfs them on approach. As Mitchell notes, the land that denotes authorial influence offers a stylistic division where "descriptive passage" subordinates character, where "individuals . . . are displaced, thrust into subsidiary roles attendant on the landscape, swallowed up by the terrain."[6] But the sons are positioned by way of the land as property, not natural expanse. As newly minted "Adams," they are "displaced" by their father's legacy. Unlike the terrain in Cooper's literature, the terrain in *Gunman's Walk* is about the man himself. Landscape is codified by the proper name, marked off and possessed by the "Hackett" legacy. The film replaces the influential landscape with the domineering patriarch. As the two sons pass through the Ranch's creaky border, they emphatically announce the generic inversion. The man-made landscape is what conditions the man.

The shot strategy further affirms Lee's presence as overshadowing the land. As the two brothers pass through the barbed-wire cordon that announces the ranch, three extreme long shots of the boys are meshed together in fluid dissolve. Where the two sons are obscured by the still frame of the opening ranch shot, the ensuing shots conversely mark their passage by way of a horde of hailing ranch hands who acknowledge Ed and Davy with friendly recognition and call them by name. The shots emphasize their prominence as coded (named and thereby well-known) within the plotted action. But the

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[4] Ibid., 9.
[5] Ibid., 42.
[6] Ibid.

shots also imply confinement. The vast spread of the scene's concomitant edits implies that their paths are negotiated. The tracked passage concludes with a white-picket pronouncement of the ranch home that points to Lee.

For all the focus on Ed and Davy at the beginning of the film, the introduction to the Hackett Ranch is an introduction to Lee. Their passage begins and ends with him. Lee's voice precedes his countenance as shot from behind, the viewer can only hear him by way of the series of assignments he gives to his ranch hands. In front of the gables of the main ranch house, and positioned with his back to the camera, Lee is both conflated with the home and positioned as a screen coefficient. While he "casts a shadow" of influence, his back catches the viewer's attention. As the ranch-hands are marked by their passive anonymity, the film viewer is captive to Lee's screen presence. He commands both views.

Lee is immediately situated as the "voice" of authority, and this authority is wielded with unrelenting frequency to his sons. Scolding Ed for allowing his foreman to bed down his horse, Lee states, "I've told you before, this family doesn't accept favors unless we're willing to pay it back double or triple!" In response, an embittered Ed storms off. Affronted by his son's petulance, Lee heads his son off. Stilled in a tense two-shot, the father and son stare one another down as the camera slowly approaches. Stuck on the path leading up to their house, Lee's demeanor abruptly changes. Resting a beseeching hand on Ed's shoulder, Lee's tone shifts from one of angry remonstration to one of gentle chiding. He states, "if you let a man do things for you, things you should be doing yourself . . . he'll get the idea he's a better man than you." Lee's chiding is first and foremost about being self-reliant. The "do-it-yourself" ethos privileges a self-sufficiency that denotes an industrious and able-bodied autonomy with the self-possession that determines a stable, unwavering morality. This formulation, in essence, echoes C.B. Macpherson's work on the roots and legacy of seventeenth-century liberal political philosophy.

The equating of autonomy as self-possession and property[7] is the contradictory tangle of liberal market societies. Individualism's benchmark autonomy is compromised by "proprietorship as [its] general form," where freedom is determined by an ownership that wields the power to subjugate others of lesser means. For an individual to "have[. . .] exclusive control of (right in) his own person" is to wield a "capacity" dictated by ownership. Subjectivity skews toward a market relationship dictated by a propertied class that can afford it. Similarly, Slotkin's formulation of late-nineteenth-century corporate industrialism as straining the "enterprising individualism"[8] associated with the frontier thesis reaches a contradictory zenith in Lee Hackett's characterization. In this context, Lee's manly demeanor is legitimized by wealth and the influence of his horse and cattle empire. As a Westerner, Lee's exceptionalism (the mark of his identity as a commanding and authoritative personality) is contradictory. Additionally, while Lee champions the virtue of a replete and bounded man whose integrity is writ large around declarations of "self," the plot identifies him as a panoply of Westerner types. His championing of a staunchly determinate ethos contrasts with his other personas. As the plot unfolds, we see

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[7] C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 263.

[8] Slotkin, 30–31.

Lee as frontiersman, skilled cowboy, successful rancher, and (most importantly) legendary gunman. His character is a palimpsest of serial and historical heroic postures; he is a composite, abounding in Westerner typologies. The personal autonomy Lee esteems in the plot is belied by the persona reservoir he encompasses in the story. The defined supposition of a singular man is ironically marked by a series of masculine subject positions. Lee's autonomy is circumscribed by the multiple mythic backstories that make up his characterization.

Lee's scolding, moreover, is contradicted by a formal displacement. As the two Hacketts face one another, they are framed in a medium two-shot (figure 2). While Ed is framed left alongside a hedge-plank, Lee is aligned right of the house's main path, halving them into mirror-imaged symmetry. Their antagonism is undermined by the decorous domesticity of the lawn. The action's thrust towards the stoop and the dual outlines of the paths "point" them in the same direction; they are pointed toward the same goal. As the formal outline towards the ranch home implies, the determination of what it means to be "better men" is more about similarity than difference. Their antagonism visually stills them on one and the same spot, a well-tended and manufactured path demarking a civil (not natural) passage. The conflict that affixes them visually aligns them on the path implying that their drive to be "real" men is more rhetorical than natural.

Their stalemate situates them within Roosevelt's ideological legacy, particularly in terms of their appetite for conflict and their unwillingness to give ground. As Gail Bederman notes, the cult of "manliness" informed Roosevelt's political and scholarly life. Influenced by the millennial evolutionism of the late nineteenth century, the cult idealized the virtues of "the highest form of manhood."[9] Famously promulgating the rigors of ranch life as the guarantor of manly development in his books, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885) and *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), Roosevelt conflated such virtue with the conquest of the American frontier in *Winning of the West.* Roosevelt saw the rigor of ranch life as a necessary aggression-generating tonic for civilized guardianship at home; the violence that established civilization was reanimated by ranch life for sustaining and spreading the moral ascendancy of a present-day American character.[10] Personal vigor on the plains cured the over-educated and coddled civilized man of a range of modern ills, just as it established the necessary strength that Roosevelt saw as an answer to the "crisis" scenario that his interpretation of the Frontier Thesis called for. "[T]ransform[ing] the effeminate dude to the masculine cowboy," ranch life offered a reenergizing dip back into originary frontier exposure itself, providing the vigor and moral uprightness that legitimized conquest scenarios for the future.[11] The Hackett standoff evinces the aggression cycle built into Roosevelt's paradigm. The faceoff between father and son illustrates how manly conquest scenarios are replicated within the era's A-Western.

The framing of father and son situates Roosevelt's aggression-based competitiveness as within the patriarchal family. The refusal to cede territory updates

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[9] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27.
[10] Ibid., 190.
[11] Ibid., 175.

Cooper's stillness motif as the penultimate threat of violence, a violence privileged by Roosevelt's pulp histories. The pause in action creates a formal motif for the film that anticipates the coming violence. Additionally, while the tight two-shot framing accentuates generational difference as the source of their disagreement, they are nonetheless on the same path leading home. In other words, the resemblance that spurs their antagonism also stops them in their tracks. Lee's movement as civilization builder retards his son's development. It is only Lee's overtures regarding what it means to be a "better man" that gets Ed to acquiesce to his father.

As the characterological embodiment of Roosevelt's Indian-war victor, Lee's authority is historically justified. He wins because he demonstrates what "winning" looks like. Perpetual self-improvement is an equally incessant competitive mode to be "better" than the next man. But what alters the meaning of both interpretations is the absence of a wilderness. The tailored hedge and the well-tended path denote the comfort of a more-than-civilized home. More pronouncedly, Lee (the authority/authorial "man") is flush right with the well-maintained decorousness of his ranch home. However much Lee rails against civilization, he nonetheless lives within the walls of a cultivated domestication. The "stillness" that afforded restraint and moral self-possession is converted into an always-about-to-erupt domestic violence predicated on the imperatives of what the signature man "is." The silent standoff between father and son is the first of a series of suspended stalemates between the two that continue throughout the film. At its outset, *Gunman's Walk* portrays the masculine family as perpetually on the brink of violence. The successive standoffs imply the violent imperative built into the film's generic patriarchy. The masculine orthodoxy of incipient conquest is brought home.

The tension of the Hackett stalemate signals a "stillness" that alters what Mitchell gleans from Cooper. Where Mitchell's interpretation of Cooper negotiates the associative stillness between man and wilderness, the former was fashioned as a kind of reader who "knows" precisely "from having read" the latter's "landscape [as] a conduct book."[12] The wilderness is first and foremost an aesthetic and discursive construction. The first standoff scene makes manifest what is implicit in Cooper's literature; it is as learned as much as it is performed. At its outset (as either literary or cinematic), "Western" virtue as natural origin veils medium specificity; it subsumes the material of its own construction beneath the naturalism of its content. Deliberative moral codes of conduct are equally deliberate tropes of screen articulation. While Roosevelt's influential tomes refashioned Cooper's stylized sagas into pulp history, *Gunman's Walk* reanimates the lacunae by reframing stillness as a prerequisite for the Western's cinematic duel. But in this scene, providential Cooper-like stillness (the self-possession of a "poised" steadfastness) is replaced by violent provocation. Poised self-rectitude is rife with antagonism. The frame that opposes the Hacketts persists as a mirror relation screened in anamorphic tension; while father and son reflect one another, they also threaten to cancel each other out. Additionally, their mirroring replaces the primal singularity of the relationship between land and man. As they face off against each other, it is not the land they are up against but the image of Lee's legacy. Natural origin is registered, and ironically situated, within the bounds of its man-made domain. The first face-off between the Hacketts, as mirror image, confuses both what and who is being reflected. Seen at the beginning of the film,

[12] Mitchell, 52.

the confrontation occurs *in medias res* and lacks a clear origin. Through masculine posturing, each threatens to cancel the other out. The "conduct book" that initiates the Western as masculine discourse in both Cooper and Roosevelt is re-screened as pedagogical invective and recounts a land without natural dimension. In an ironic inversion, the proper name as signifier denotes the "man." The film foregrounds meaning-making as a constitutive remainder beholden to the effects of discourse. Its plastic form paradoxically constitutes manly corporality.

The ensuing action is organized around the dual positioning between Lee's past and Ed's present behavior. As his sons approach, Lee comments on the challenge of "keeping up" with them, to which his listening foreman responds, "You're not satisfied with keeping up. You need to stay ahead." Both "keeping up" and "staying ahead" figure the patriarch as determined to "stay" in the space/time of his past. Although he is determined to remain ahead of his sons, it is by way of a contradictory insistence to look back, to arrest time and sustain his own youth. And he does so by continually performing his past accomplishments. Never missing an opportunity to remind his sons of his heroic legacy as liberator of the land, Lee's past heroics condition both his behavior toward his sons and the town's behavior toward him. Whether confronted by a remonstrating judge who accedes to Lee's in-court outbursts "because [he's] Lee Hackett," a worried sheriff explaining his out-worn patience for Ed's law-breaking as "bend[ing] over backwards . . . because" Ed is Lee's son, or a doctor's disinterest in retrieving bullets from more Hackett gun-downed corpses as "another collection for your son," civil authority couches its critique by way of an homage to the past that tempers critique of the present. As Lee's heroic stature affords respect, it also implies a debt. Lee precedes and is therefore above the Law. Like O'Malley in *The Last Sunset*, both Lee and Ed are against the Law. But unlike O'Malley, Lee (and Ed, by way of mimetic resemblance) is superior to it. The Law is seen as a secondary effect of Lee's reputation and exists by way of his beneficence. Lee's past virtue sanctions Ed's current criminality. The terms of symbolic manhood undermine the authority of its larger symbolic organization. Originary manhood is structurally combustible; it is made to break the Law. Additionally, the breadth of Lee's iconic stature is measured by his skill with a gun.

As Lee's mythos is most lauded by way of his storied gunfighting prowess, the weapon figures as an instrument of both nation-building and man-making. While Lee lectures Davy on the necessity of carrying a gun, he brandishes his weapon, exclaiming, "we're the ones who got here first and we got here with this!" Lee continues to rail against the encroaching "sodbusters . . . trying to push us off our land," whose lack of fighting experience resembles Davy's own implied emasculation as a civilized mollycoddle. While Lee chides Ed for his lack of self-sufficiency, he chides Davy for his cowed passivity. Bringing Davy his gun belt, he remonstrates his younger son for yet again "leaving" it behind. As Davy sarcastically points out, brandishing his weapon seems inconsequential if not completely gratuitous. Querying to know "when the attack begins?" and if "the Sioux have gone on the war path," Davy's sarcastic barb calls attention to Lee's posturing. Davy likewise notes his awkwardness at being stared at by the local townsfolk when wearing a gun. While Lee is as stern with Davy as he is with Ed, the mention of the townsfolk sends him into a more animated rage. While scolding his son for "forgetting" his weapon, he likewise disparages the town folk as "Johnny come-latelys" whose civilized timidity contrasts with Lee's past. Lee's self-inflating

history lesson maps onto the originist mythos of Roosevelt's rhetoric. Laying claim to the Historical is simultaneously masculine reclamation. The scene's dialogue fits squarely into Roosevelt's "lives" as an author. Introduced as present-day rancher, Lee here identifies himself as the embodiment of a specifically violent past that makes history as much as it distinguishes masculine identity. But it is an identity guaranteed by the gun.

While emphatically brandishing his own weapon, Lee notes that it serves as a "reminder that some of us got here first . . . [and] with this." Being "first" is allied with being violent. The gun is an emblematic history lesson; Davy's "forgetting" is aligned with the town's own failed memory. If they forget the past, the gun reminds them of its ever-threatening persistence in the present. Lee rhetorically asks, "Where do you think I'd be if I hadn't worn this gun and learned how to use it?" and punctuates his point by suddenly drawing and skillfully blowing a grounded can into flight, answering his own question with the adroitness of drawing and shooting. For Lee, gun "learning" is both a historical and developmental necessity. But as an originist imperative defined by necessity, the gunman's posture is undermined by the weapon's visual omnipresence. The gun's authority is defined by its sight, its use a display and not as an actual self-defense. The past's visage is what cows social convention. The "stares" the gun elicits mark present-day social construction as ill equipped, as lacking in "self-sufficiency" because it does not identify itself with the past. If the gun provokes gawking, it is because weapons are out of fashion. Its adornment is an anachronism. The "sight" of Lee as a gunman is the thing-in-itself. Signified by a marked visibility that swarms with backstory and the accoutrements of his out-of-fashion vestiges, Lee's identity finds expression through visual design. The self-consciousness of his vigilance lays claim to his authorial manhood. Additionally, the setting of the dialogue between Lee and Davy is without frontier. Bordered by the twin white doors of an opened barn where Lee and Davy have just corralled their horses, the two are silhouetted by the stable's dark interior (figure 3). Like curtains pulled back to make "room" for Lee's nostalgic boasting, the barn doors imply an ironic staging. Patriarchal authority is undermined by a dominant mise-en-scène. "Action" and "identity" are situated as screen performance, issuing from a darkened interior. The sequence questions the nature of who and what "shoots." Pedagogical manhood is associated with cinematic becoming.

As Slotkin has noted, the signature generic innovation of the Western at midcentury is the repackaging of the gunfighter. A fiction consciously constructed by writer/director Andre de Toth at the bequest of 20th Century Fox producer Daryl F. Zanuck, the gunfighter was meant to extend the "prestige" A-Western into new terrain and extend the financial and critical success of 1940s Westerns such as *The Ox-Bow Incident* (Wellman 1943) and *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946).[13] While the former dealt with frontier justice and lynch-mob murder, the latter was noted for its accomplished aestheticism. Combining social drama and formal design, de Toth's characterization legitimized the gunfighter figure for the genre as a rebranded Westerner. Largely borrowing from the dubious historical merit of Eugene Cunningham's *Triggernometry: A Gallery of Gunfighters*, de Toth's original screenplay for *The Gunfighter* (King 1950) deliberately borrowed mythic figures from the genre's "history"

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[13] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 383.

and inflated their relation to the weapon. De Toth ultimately extrapolated a figure that blended mythic characterization with the trappings of a more modern media spectacle. De Toth's gunfighter is prey to the fame that forever hounds him. He is perpetually sought after by other gunslingers looking to make a "name" by outdrawing him. The gunfighter is defined by the unparalleled skill that melds embodied reflex with technological precision. The gunman's mythic proportions demand a requisite muscle-memory, and his historical image is bound up with the agility of a modern machine calculus. The Western hero transitions away from a character conditioned by natural exposure toward one defined by technological reciprocity. But the character's relationship to his 1950 invention was by 1957 already overstuffed. *Gunman's Walk* takes de Toth's mold and festoons it with a century's worth of older typologies implying a heightened sense of modern obsolescence. As the film looks back and refigures the textual origins of the Western hero, it likewise looks back at the decade's most established generic contrivance. What is seemingly "new" is already an overwrought anachronism struggling to "keep up." As an adept modern mechanism whose speed contracts time and space beyond the capability naked human eye, Lee's gun enacts the means for staying ahead of his much younger sons.

The history lesson that justifies Lee's authority to Davy now turns into a gun lesson. Uncovering his gloved gun hand, Lee draws and repeatedly shoots a tin can, jettisoning it into perpetual flight. And as he instructs Davy during his son's turn, the can's shot-assisted flight "keep[s] it movin!" Gun fighting is essentially about motion (figures 4a and 4b). Lee's insistence on movement is predicated by what aims and shoots; he demands the coordinated reciprocity between man and gun. And if Lee maps onto imperatives that define masculinity, the sequence maps onto the fictional era's inauguration of cinematic movement. Anson Rabinbach has noted that Étienne-Jules Marey's late-nineteenth-century photographic motion experiments prefigure modern cinematography. The inventor's obsession with visually indexing the "animal machine" led to a variety of motion-capture apparatuses that "analytically decomposed" animal and human movement.[14] Photographically stilling the gamut of mobility, Marey sought to analyze, and thereby optimize, human activity. The scene juxtaposes two modern origin stories. While Lee's personal past intercepts an entire range of nineteenth-century Western personae, his dexterity with the weapon maps him onto a late-nineteenth-century technological origin story.

Gun lessons are imbued with historical valences, wedding gender to technology. The sequence, shot to align flush with the frame's bottom tier, begins with an extreme close-up that "grounds" its action. Cutting back behind Lee's continued shooting, the shots jettison the can into perpetual flight until the sequence cuts back to its original level position, the can coming to rest just as Lee finishes shooting. The sequence produces a horizon line that bounds American modernity. The extended shot of the can's bullet-propelled movement is similar to the blurred kinetic of Marey's object-animated photos. The take harkens back to the original ground of cinematography. Lee's gun is likened to Marey's *camera fusil* that transforms action into a blurred afterimage. Davy's learned practice for the future is conflated with Marey's proto-cinematic camera. But the

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[14] Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 87.

sequence also intercepts the provisional trope of the frontiersman's visually compelled eye-line. Like Bumppo's, Lee's shots move "quick as thought." While Bumppo is defined by "the capacity to see clearly, to hit the most distant targets," Lee (as an updated Westerner) is equally oriented around speed and accuracy.[15] The frontiersman's physical agility is not noteworthy unless it is combined with the gun's characteristic speed and precision. Heroic stature falls from a "true eye" that coordinates the hunter-warrior's dexterity with the instrument's sightline. They are one and the same. Additionally, Bumppo's sight carries a moral dimension. It harnesses an "equal. . . capacity to draw sharp ethical distinctions."[16] The sequence augments the central visual trope of the Western. It reposes nature's exemplary reciprocity between man and land with the gun's prosthetic reflexivity. Furthermore, the two frames that bracket Lee's shooting lesson are two-shots. As Lee shoots, Davy watches. Lee's pedagogy is a lesson in ethics, and his gunman posture (as a disciplinary virtue) is a ideological one. The exactness of his aim is commensurate with the narrowness of his past-present purview. Techno-rationalism conflates with masculinity as a single monolithic view is patterned with unerring deadly aim. Lee's monolithic character composition insists (as pedagogical gun lesson) on a monologic identity formation. The American "man" (like the mechanical gun he is commensurate with) is made—or, more precisely, is *manufactured*. The sequence announces the textual and technological substrate that fixes the Western's generic development. But it also amplifies the kinesthetic charge shared by cinema as a medium and the Western as a genre.

As an overtly pedagogical moment, the scene "focuses." It brackets what it means to read an image and situates itself in relation to both Marey's analytic instrumentalism and Cooper's literary idealism. Marey's animal-machine maintains a parallelism between the organic and the inorganic, predicated on the latter's readily analyzable "mechanical laws."[17] Where the *camera fusil* produces a "variant" for each movement, its tracings inaugurate a kind of language that registers the body as a set of "physiological sign[s]."[18] Cooper's marksman-tracker is likewise capable of discerning "all but invisible signs of an enemy."[19] Where Marey's *camera fusil* traces the flux of muscular activity and nervous energy in a stilled graphic image, Cooper's literary devices offer a "combination of frozen *tableau vivants* and brisk cinematic action."[20] Although Mitchell confuses the cinematic apparatus with Hollywood scenography, his juxtaposition of a still moment with the heroic action of an exigent counterpoint is similar to Marey's frozen instant of motility. Both are forms of sight that juxtapose sensual motility (as physical reflex) with interpretive acuity (an analytic reading). The sequence updates the generic legacy of American masculinity by way of a visibility at once embodied and coded. Cooper's sightline unfolds as Marey's instant. The sequence presents a targeting that combines the aggression of the land-man's strenuousness with the precision economy of the animal-machine. As Lee teaches Davy, the *tableau vivant* bifurcates with the modern cinematic

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[15] Mitchell, 29.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Rabinbach, p. 91.
[18] Ibid., 95.
[19] Mitchell, p. 29.
[20] Ibid., 30.

image. His pedagogy "stills" his heroic past as an ever-consonant *in medias res* moment capable of being revivified.[21]

The revivification, however, is positioned as a deadly and mortal one. When Ed enters the scene, its tone changes. As Ed chides Davy for his maladroit shooting, he also brazenly challenges Lee by proceeding to quick-draw and dead-eye shoot every object-target Lee presents. However, when Lee challenges his "speed" Ed impetuously shoots the tin can out of an unsuspecting Lee's hand. A stunned Lee collects himself and yells, "If you were anyone else, I'da drilled you dead center!" The gun that contracts time and space compels a violence ironically seen to draw the Hacketts closer. Both Ed's ploy and Lee's threat imply sightlines that tend toward deadly aim at one another. No matter their generational difference, their purviews are the same. While Lee recites his own past as present, Ed emulates Lee's past in the moment. The speed of the draw and their perfectly synched ideological sight narrows the distance between them. It provides, ironically, an intimacy that brings them closer. The scene initiates a lesson in how the "gun-man" develops. The violent imperative that contracts space is imbricated within a visual condensation that targets objects/bodies in space. The developmental symbiosis between land and man is replaced by the speed and instantaneity of the weapon's prosthetic deployment. The gun that destroys lives is here the same camera that tracks moments of discrete space-time.

The second of the two standoffs between Lee and Ed, the scene overtly positions their conflict within the trope of the gunfighter duel. And, as mentioned, if Cooper's stillness is updated as suspended standoff it is figured as the penultimate showdown. Between Lee's incessant summoning of the past and Ed's obsessive determination to manifest the past, what is emphasized is what precedes action. Just as the rancher functioned for Roosevelt and stillness for Cooper, the gun, in the mid-twentieth-century United States of *Gunman's Walk*, becomes the proximal point of mediation. But it is a mediation grounded by contention. Modernity's proto-cinematic technology maps onto the ideology of an American origin story. The gun's mortal sight is as exacting as the cinematographic eye. Ideological exposure is emulsified as a process coming to light. The scene sketches the becoming of an image. It frames "real" development as the construction of a "stilled" ideological reflex.

Cowboy Murder: Optics on the Edge

The shooting sequence traces masculine generation. It relates the developmental man as martial machine. But it is a man-machine whose image is predicated on posturing. As Davy sarcastically notes about Ed's gun skill, it is mostly "practice[d] in the mirror." And the mirror, here, is Lee's masculine legacy. Though Lee and Ed resemble one another, it is only by way of their slavish regard for a wholly embodied violence that seeks a perfect

[21] It is worth noting, however, that the sequence centralizes what exceeds both nineteenth-century views. The kinesthesis of its action sequence is proportionate with the shot's magnetism as an arresting *mobile* image. Like the discontinuous final frames that follow *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter 1903), the shooting cowboy figure calls attention to its own construction. In this regard, Lee's pedagogical shooting quotes the formal dynamism of early narrative cinema. The lesson sequence particularizes the cinematic Western's original unity as a signifying expression by similarly centralizing what "shoots."

iteration. Infinite practice implies an attempt at ideal personification. Masculine action becomes a sought-after static repose that seeks absolute identification. The rudimentary "active man" is reduced to the gunman's pose. He impersonates; he grasps at a rigid identification whose literal aim is murder.

And in keeping with the inclination, it does not take Ed long to claim his first victim. During a drive to get Lee's horse herd to town for auction, Ed comes into direct competition with a half-Native, half-white cowboy, Paul Chouard. At one point, the two come across a white mare dashing across the plains. As the two spring into heated chase, Lee and his foreman look on from afar. Noting that the two will not "give an inch," the foreman wonders aloud why they "can't call it a draw." To which Lee giddily responds, "Not my boy. I didn't raise him that way, you just watch." Like the gun practice, action is presaged by Lee's pedagogy. He authors his son's behavior and demeanor. Additionally, the action privileges sight. Lee's announced spectatorship situates the scene as just that, a scene. "Just watch[ing]" suggests action as something rehearsed, something ultimately staged for performance. Lee's teaching plays out as predetermined. Its pedagogy informs Ed's attitude and aggression; it choreographs an ensuing masculine performance, one advertised before its reception. Neither catches the mare, and Ed, losing control of his own horse, wipes out in a nearby creek, the water serving to break his fall. Humiliated by potentially being bettered by Paul, Ed spurs his own competitive ire by claiming the mare as belonging to Davy, a "gift" he promises his younger brother after having seen it the previous fall. As Lee's sight registers a past coaching, Ed's own sight is equally inclined toward the past. "Seen last fall" implies an inaugural vision both possessive and predatory. It causes a moral collapse that the season's autumnal figure registers. Ed's sight of the horse and his desirous response imply a possessive vision of the world.

As with the gun practice, Lee's pedagogical legacy motivates violence. Beginning with an extreme long shot, the mare is seen chased solely by Paul's cowboy. But from an upward sloping hill positioned in the frame's foreground, Ed ascends into the action (figure 5). Arriving late into the action and at a sharper angle, Ed's interception is a cheat. Entering the sequence in the middle of its action, he arrives from a foreground juncture seen to head off the ensuing cowboy. The abrupt arrival implies a broader intrusion, and the scene's drama meshes with its formal dynamism: Ed takes up space he has not earned. As the camera tracks the speeding mare, it cuts between the two cowboys until their corresponding trajectories converge along a canyon edge (figure 6). Cutting back into an extreme long shot that denotes the space's rapid retreat by way of their speeding and unflinching pursuit, the two literally cross each other's path. As the figures draw closer together, the cuts become more frequent until the riders are framed as a pursuing two-shot. Warning Paul to move away (impossible given his proximity to the ledge), Ed shouts, "Then I'll make you move!", and edges the cowboy off into the ravine below.

The chase itself is played out twice. The dialogue that announces the competition is positioned between a quizzical and wary foreman and the aggressive, boisterous Lee. But it is also marked by sight: if the first chase is "watched," the second is witnessed. Two Indian cowboy hands are seen to look on as the violent action unfolds. Their smiling enjoyment at its outset is replaced by grim resignation at its end. The murder converts passive spectacle into knowing tragedy. The Indians' perspective implies a historical purview both temporally and racially inverted. Racialist origin stories are homicidal

postscripts. Ushering the cowboy off the cliff to his death, Ed's murder updates the rhetoric of a "closing" frontier as at once racial and sexual.

Popularized by both Roosevelt and American historian Fredrick Jackson Turner, the Frontier Thesis summarizes a late-nineteenth-century America as one in crisis. As either yeoman farmer who tends toward the self-sufficiency achieved via the bounty of his/her own cultivated property or the hunter/warrior who harnesses the contingent wilderness for the strength that guarantees an emerging civilization, the exigencies of environmental development breed the exceptionality of the American character. Both Roosevelt and Turner theorized that their era witnessed the depletion of its revitalizing frontier. As overdeveloped and exhausted, the natural terrain's depletion was seen as proportionate with moral decline. And although the veracity of this claim was contradicted by early-twentieth-century boom economies in Alaska and California, the notion gained ideological traction. It especially held sway given the racial vitriol of Roosevelt's political discourse. Roosevelt positioned frontier conquest as being of a specifically racial order; the aforementioned books that made for part of Roosevelt's four-volume *The Winning of the West* conflate nation building with a decidedly "white" male identity. As Bederman notes, Roosevelt saw frontier conquest as "a site of origins of the American race," where "manhood and national worth were proven by their ability to stamp out competing savage races."[22] The violent contestation indicative of "settling" proved racial superiority. And if Ed's competitive spark is fashioned by Lee's insistence that he be a self-reliant "man," it is set ablaze by Lee's equally assertive and insistent racism. Though dominated by Ed's constant racial barbs and epithets, the film all but cites Lee as its author. Confronting the local Indian agent who notes the Indian cowboys as having witnessed Ed's deliberate murder, Lee explodes, "You're calling my son a liar on the word of two stinkin' Sioux!" When the sheriff attempts to take Ed to jail for the murder, Lee threatens violence. Surrounded by a cadre of armed men, Lee barks, "When a son of mine is taken in for killing a damn half breed it's high time this state started remembering its history!" As the contrite and hesitant sheriff later notes, Lee's estimable position as "a respected man" is predicated on being "part of [the state's] history." Lee's status is determined by his storied past. He is at once Indian fighter and civil engineer. For Lee, as for Roosevelt, civilized progress is equated with racial violence. As historical actor, Lee's exceptionalist precedent excuses and legitimizes his son's criminality. Lee justifies Ed's actions as within the bounds of historical necessity. As with Davy's lessons, Lee's mythic self-aggrandizing "reminds." Reproaching Davy with the paternal assurance of his gunfighter legacy, Lee ridicules the Law as subordinate to his nation-making Indian warrior. And as with the armed men who accompany Lee into town in protest of Ed's potential conviction, their racism is afforded an armed coercion. Just as Ed "cuts off" Paul's cowboy, Lee heads off the Law, before which Lee's posture has moral authority. His original character lays claim to authorial privilege. As with Roosevelt's polemics, Lee's dialogic pedagogy positions racial superiority as political necessity. Lee's past achievements are so far beyond reproach as to inflect the present situation. Mythologized masculinity privileges its murderous history as unassailable while positioning its aggression as above the Law.

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[22] Bederman, 178.

Lee's patronage pays "savage" dividends. It authorizes (however indirectly) the cowboy's murder and inverts the relationship between strenuous white breeding and "savage" Indian nativity. It is worth noting that in *Gunman's Walk* the only major female character is Chouard's sister, Clee.[23] Half-Native and half-white (like her brother), Clee (unlike her brother) is sometimes mistaken for white. The sexual implication of the mare scene is all the more pronounced given that the film's second scene finds Ed hitting on Clee. Becoming more brazen and cavalier in his overtures once told Clee is biracial, his pursuit of her reads as sexually entitled. The racist innuendo he levels at Clee as promiscuously "savage" reconvene and continue Macpherson's critique of individualism. Coming across Clee at a Lakota trading post in which she works, Ed sees her (like the store goods) as a commodity he can afford or perhaps feels has already paid for (on the cheap, given that his racism denotes she's of little worth). Engaging her as potential property, Ed's pursuant bravado veils a foreboding sexual aggression and demonstrates that his self-possession operates as a function of his father's wealth. The mare operates similarly, but in a more pointed and ruthless way given Chouard's murder. The barbed rejoinders Clee offers in response to Ed's unwanted advances match the threat her brother poses to Ed as a more accomplished cowboy. Resistance, as either sexual or competitive, threatens to neuter Ed's identity as an exceptional white man. Risking the loss of the self-possession he esteems as his natural birthright, Ed becomes more agitated and aggrieved the more likely his rejection by Clee and loss to Paul. In this context, the imposture of Ed's individualism is both racist and proprietary, and broadly parallels the larger pattern of institutional "redlining" that prohibited black families from suburban enclaves before and during the postwar era.[24] Where the separation between the Lakota reservation and the town plays this out in a rather obvious way, it resonates more forcefully given the suggestiveness of Chouard's murder. Literally refusing to share space or compete on equal ground, Ed's murder of Chouard amplifies the era's racism by tying the character's violence to themes of sexual propriety and racial purity in keeping with aspects of the Western's cultural legacy. The chase scene thereby augments generic valences specific to the Western with contemporary ones specific to the era.

The intimation of the horse as potential property and the preceding scene's aggressive advances charge the chase scene with sexual implication (albeit a coded one).

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[23] A much smaller subplot in relation to Lee and Ed's competition, Davey and Clee's burgeoning interracial romance echoes a number of Westerns from the era. Where Lee's mythic past pronounces the genre's allegiance to Roosevelt's manly ideal, the Chouard siblings could be the offspring of the frontier romances between white men and Indian women featured in the decade's Westerns, themselves redolent of Cooper's frontier drama (however uprooted to the West and the Indian Wars). Raised by Indians, Cooper's Natty Bumppo is, culturally and experientially, an Indian. His romance with the white Cora Monroe in *The Last of the Mohicans* implies an interracial romance and thus operates as a precursor to the more sympathetic and critical tradition the cinematic Westerns of mid-century pay homage to. Films like *Broken Arrow* (Davies 1950), *The Indian Fighter* (de Toth 1955), and *Run of the Arrow* (Fuller 1957) all demonstrate the trend for the era as an offshoot of Cooper's legacy.

[24] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 197, 208–209.

Paul Chouard's "half breed" status emphasizes the miscegenation his potential roping of the mare implies. As Slotkin notes, inaugural frontier adventures began with the abduction of the white woman popularized around the late seventeenth century before evolving into the more heroic masculine narratives introduced in the early eighteenth century.[25] The two narrative forms are doggedly "systematized" by Cooper's literary ambition; his novels proscribe a gendered accounting of American foundations. The captivity myth at the frontier narrative's beginning continues in the sequence as a codified sexual conquest. Ed's obsessive pursuit is, likewise, a competition for white women experienced as a race for safeguarding racial integrity.[26] But the mare's pursuit problematizes the gendered binarism of passive captive and active warrior. The equivalence in the working relationship between the cowboy and Ed, coupled with the violence of Ed's brazen racism, imply an inversion of the originary fictions. White patriarchy is the original savage. If Lee is absent from its action, his presence as its inadvertent author is more than realized. But Lee's authorship is also realized by way of the scene's formal dynamics. What guides the sequence's ideological critique is motion itself.

As the white mare is the first mobile image that enters the frame, "she" directs the scene's action. While situating its context, the mare likewise organizes screen space. Her movement halves the frame from two directions. Initially cutting from left to right in extreme long shot, the mare prompts the entrance of both the cowboy and Ed. She revamps American history as she re-adapts its narrative staging. Beginning in extreme long shot, the mare streaks toward the upper right quadrant of the frame, demarking the angle of intersection for the action's mobile figures while coordinating the kinematic cuts that follow (figure 7). The confluence of action is the point of visual articulation. It centralizes what is attractive about the screen as substance, as measured and material point of action. As the figures disappear through the frame's lower left corner see (figure 6**)**, the camera cuts on action, situating an impossible point of view just this side of the canyon shelf; the frame's lower axis a formal shelf grounding the action's flow (figure 8**)**. While the staged trajectories are kept in motion by the running mare, she is never caught. The subject of motion never stops. And while the cowboy dies from the fall, it is the distended orbit of the mare's movement upon the Panavision screen that allows for the illusion of his depth-descent. The camera's overhead extreme long shot counterintuitively flattens the canyon shelf onto the screen, disallowing the perspectival depth that would allow for a discrete point-of-view. As organizing and articulating action in the frame, the white mare foregrounds the kinesthesis of cinematic mobility while conveying the film's feminine absence as, ironically, compelling. The intensity of the sequence's chase reveals the lack at the core of its overdetermined masculine story. Movement is equated with a delimiting masculine propriety that ironically closes the frontier of its action.

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[25] Slotkin, 14, 15.

[26] Ibid., 467. Slotkin notes that *The Searchers* (Ford 1956) recast the captivity myth by historically grounding it. Seen as tainted by their exposure to Indians, many rescued white women were treated as outcasts. Their reentry into the white Christian culture from which they came met with "the very same racial antipathies that had been invoked to motivate their rescue."

The scene plays off the era's screen experiments in Widescreen and stereoscopic 3-D as specific kinds of "spatial" expansion. Refashioned to intensify and display more action, widescreen helped revitalize the genre's popularity in the 1950s. But the distending propensity of the effect is ironically circumvented by Ed's overweening self-image. The breadth of Ed's imagery is afforded an ironic screen "expansion" so that the centrality of the Western's setting is buoyed by the particular movement that organizes its logic. Cinematic mobility calculates the optic surface as the confluence of viewing eye and animating screen, and performs as a visceral analogue to how generic meaning is conveyed. As a kind of allegorical cipher, the mare visually traverses the contiguous crevasse of negative evidence. The sequence unveils the exclusion of gender and technology as a product of the genre's naturalizing tendencies. If pursuit of the mare is code for the ideological relegation of white women by way of a wholly masculine discourse, it reciprocally positions the screen as "her" coaxial (technological) counterpart. Both are obscured Others. The imperative toward masculine autonomy obscures and represses. Masculine sight is as incapable of recognizing its own manufacture as it is of seeing the different vicissitudes of its own present.

The sequence retraces the legacy of the "original" man by way of its tracking shots. It "retracks" masculinity as a racial-sexual covetousness whose contradictory impulses are decidedly homicidal. Autonomy becomes a nonsense code for exclusivity just as individuality codes a proprietary right of possession. The sequence suggests that frontier closure has more to do with a specific identity politics allergic to difference than it does with any real scarcity. Identity in *Gunman's Walk* is absolute identification. It scans the ideological edge of its own widescreen action as an already overcrowded coercion. The sequence's spatial protraction thereby becomes ironic. It is not so much a rapidly closing space that threatens but an aggressive refusal to share space.

Lee's vitriolic self-assertions place him and Ed in an ironic "no man's land." While they assert themselves in a space that is exclusively temporal, the space positions their exemplary racial and sexual status as desensitized to change. Neither Lee nor Ed can tell time. The film situates its dramatic leads as wholly without a legible historical ground. The confusion of their "when and where" implies a semiotic myopia. Although they appear to dominate the film's space, their dislocation in time marks a broader symptom that ironically situates the film in the era of its own production. Swamped by images whose definition confuses past with present, Lee and Ed implode. They symptomatically frame the midcentury as a coded centrifuge.

Gunmen on the Town: Apperception at Play

The race that precipitates the cowboy's murder is paralleled with a later race between Ed and Lee. Having finished a drive directly outside of their town, the two begin a dash into town, the loser set to pay for drinks at the town's local saloon. While the gun practice threatened a mortal competition structured around the weapon as technological cipher, this race places them against the civil present they are wary of. The gun gives way to an aggressive confrontation with civil structure. An extreme long shot frames them as they gallop flush with the right side of the frame, along a dusty path where the race begins. The sequence then dissolves into a graphic match that sees father and son entering the town. The graphic match suggests a foreshortening of physical distance and implies a time/space contraction. The cut elides the landscape that separates the ranch from the

town while relaying a new (and antagonistic) mirror relation. And as the two enter the town, they come into contact with its characteristic phenomenon. Waylaid by a series of slow-moving wagons, pack-mules, and pedestrians, the enclosed bustle of the town contrasts with the expansiveness of the drive. And just as Ed and the cowboy ran out of room along the canyon edge, this scene is beset by spatial limits. As Lee adroitly traverses the town's traffic, Ed is stymied by it. Lee unhitches a wagon filled with beer barrels and they stop Ed in his tracks. Not to be outdone, Ed then dashes onto the wood-planked scaffolding of the town's pedestrian walk while townsfolk are seen to leap away from his mad dash. In both instances, the Hacketts' intrusion emphasizes their sense of entitlement. Accompanied by the film's soundtrack, whose tempo is jacked up with sympathetic jauntiness, the race is seemingly played for humor. But as the two toy with the town's infrastructure, their antics occur not long after the cowboy's murder. Toying with the town's rules threatens its security. Their privilege justifies a potentially violent civil conflict. The film's backstory catches up with civilization. Suffused with images of the mythic frontier life they valorize, the two Hacketts carry it into town, forcing it to make room for their competition. The scene tracks differently than its earlier race. The immediacy of the dissolve and the stark contrast of its mise-en-scène speak to a broader movement specific to the era of the film's production.

As Edward Dimendberg has noted, the massive development of the postwar era continued into the late 1950s, culminating with the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, legislation which provided the necessary funding for completing the country's interstate highway system.[27] The suburban enclaves that sprung up across the country were accompanied by the continuation of an equally massive interstate highway program. Although interstate construction had begun as early as the 1910s, its midcentury expansion corresponded with a massive boost in automobile manufacture commensurate with both the era's spending boom and suburban sprawl.[28] The density and organization that marked urban traffic gave way to a more diffuse sense of space emphasizing freedom and speed.[29] An infrastructural logic organized around the centripetal space of close-knit pedestrian traffic transitioned to an abstract one conditioned by technologies of speed. The dense regimentation of a city "scaled to the human body" was replaced by the automobile windshield as much as mediated by the television screen.[30] The speed and disorientation of labyrinthine highway systems and communications networks produced a centrifugal orientation that changed how space and motion were experienced. Films like *Thieves Highway* (Dassin 1949) and *Plunder Road* (Cornfield 1957) displaced the city's alienation and isolation onto the expansiveness of the newly designed transportation networks. Seemingly limitless freedom on the road portended increased financial freedom. But these films noir troubled the fiction of the highway as "frictionless utopia."[31] The appetite indicative of noir's big-score logic found traction with the

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[27] Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 195.
[28] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1994), 487.
[29] Dimendberg, 172.
[30] Ibid., 205.
[31] Dimendberg, 204.

superhighway's unbounded flows, and the fusion produced an "uncanny" unreadability that heightened the genre's anxiety. The tragic criminal enterprise of the big score meshed with the nebulous encounter between literal space and abstract screen surfaces.[32] The urban setting gave way to a visual field of abstract signifiers that forestalled the perceptible value of bodies and distinctive material forms. By way of the dystopian motif of the traffic jam (the era seeing an increase in highway congestion commensurate with its expansion), highway noir suggested a metaphorical "gridlock" indicative of the midcentury.[33] The films expressed the anxiety of an unwieldy and disorienting field of abstract signification.

The Hacketts' entrance into town registers centrifugal spatiality noted by Dimendberg. But as a Western, it repositions noir's alienated criminal anti-heroes with the Westerner. As the Hacketts' entry into town implies, the gridlock they encounter is both literal and psychological. The Hacketts are not just oblivious to this, they perceive themselves as outside of its legal constraints. The scene meshes the horizon line as a figure of limitless scope in the Western with the "horizontal sprawl" of the postwar boom as a point of ontological congestion.[34] The Hacketts' reckless movement through town is motivated by the spatio-temporal misperceptions of its protagonists. The Hackett ranch operates as a central vessel that encompasses the town, and its commerce flows from the ranch to the town. The Hackett's movement into town performs their own commercial passage.[35] The Western expanse they traverse is conditioned by the commercial traffic they are seen to own. The "town taming" aspect of the Western's postwar position is, by 1957, "tamed." And like both the late nineteenth-century discourses around the Western and the emerging rhetoric that preceded the highway system, the Hacketts sustain their own mythic origins. Lee and Ed's expansion, like super-highway commerce, happens across the imaginary "topoi [of an] open road."[36] The physiognomy of bodies valorized by the Westerner comes into conflict with the "signs" that forestall his vigor. Like the crisis rhetoric of Turner's Frontier Thesis and Roosevelt's Western tomes, the midcentury era of *Gunman's Walk* marked a "a crisis of belief in the possibility of spatial mastery."[37] Like the highway noir, *Gunman's Walk* sees spatial drift as commensurate with illegibility. The movement into town depicts "a confusion between space and surface."[38] As Lee and Ed run roughshod over the town, their careless aggression is symptomatic of the Western as generic vehicle.

The popularization of the superhighway that reached its legislative zenith in 1956 dovetails with the cinematic Western's peak production year of 1955. As Slotkin notes, even the genre's decline in production during the years surrounding the release of *Gunman's Walk* (1955–1962) was indicative of the studio system's decline more than any decrease in the Western's popularity. And even with the industry-wide reduction in all

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[32] Ibid., 200.
[33] Ibid., 204.
[34] Ibid., 176.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 198.
[37] Ibid., 204.
[38] Ibid., 200.

genres, the Western proportionately saw a relative "trend upward" in its production.[39] Additionally, those same years witnessed the massive popularity of the Western on television; these are the years encompassing both television shows examined in this study.[40] The uptick in production of the highway system and the genre at midcentury suggests a kind of "jam" between literal and figural denominations. Like the fraught paradoxical tensions Dimindberg finds in the superhighway's emergence, the sequence into town navigates an ironic "friction" between freedom and congestion. The signs of the Western's fictive origins in the past grind against the presence of frontier masculinity in a civilized present. The film's generic character plays with time.

The sequence recodes action as centrifugal. The race denotes two types of centrifugal space. It transitions from a flight commensurate with the self-identifying "free"-way to the codes of a no less contradictory social front; it is propelled by generational conflict and ends in spatial confinement. As Ed's aggressive sprint along the pedestrian walkway suggests, there is a dangerous overlapping between the freewheeling man and the civil restraint of the social order. As the Hacketts justify their violation of social codes by way of their manly exception, their behavior in town changes the ideological register. As their competition converges on the town, the careless disregard they demonstrate for its civil order implies a masculinity at war with itself. It denotes a broader contradiction at the heart of American culture. As the film implied for its mid-twentieth-century audience, American masculinity is, at core, a violent endgame perpetually against itself. The figural man of action is at war with the cultural life of his own "story." The two Hacketts cannot share the same figural ground of action. The myth of the frontier hero's strenuous physicality necessitates active contestation with the progeny from whom it demands an exacting imitation. The strict application of Lee's moral *verities*, the exclusive tropes of independence and autonomy, stymies the generative will they seemingly call for. Frontier masculinity cannot stomach its own legacy. As Lee and Ed bring their competition to the town, they represent a broader antagonism embedded within American masculinity and the genre that privileges it. As the Westerner is prior to civilization, he is outside of its process of acculturation. As product, as residue, as "second"-level reality, culture (like Ed) is an ever-diminishing return.

While entering town connotes entering culture for the Hacketts, the discord intensifies between the exceptional past that positions Lee above the law and the ever-growing infamy of Ed's position as subordinate to the law. As Ed becomes increasingly aggrieved by his father's legacy, *Gunman's Walk* amplifies the genre's cultural legacy as a no less freighted masculine influence upon the domestic era Ed more centrally occupies in the film. Waylaying Ed with his savvy tricks, Lee beats his son to the bar. Lee keeps to his competitive posture and "stays ahead" of his equally competitive son. Seeing Ed "finally" arrive, Lee exclaims, "I was starting to worry, son, I almost sent out smoke signals!" Met by an eruption of laughter, Lee's humiliating barb incenses an already piqued Ed. And if Lee's stereotypical allusion mirrors the Roosevelt era's none-too-subtle racial vitriol, it also signals a time-space contraction. The smoke "signal" operates as a sign of Lee's historical displacement. His Indian-fighter legacy mirrors his

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[39] Slotkin, 347.
[40] Ibid., 347, 348.

overinvestment in Roosevelt's mythic histories of the West while foregrounding the processes of signification. Ed's belated entrance into the bar is expressed via a wide-angle overhead shot whose spatial breadth serves to at once spotlight and dwarf him, the entrance both a disappointment to himself and a comical interlude for Lee **(**figure 9**)**. As Lee breaks off from teasing his son and continues sharing stories of his past adventures with the saloon crowd, the shot excludes Ed. The framing encapsulates the breadth of Lee's historical worldview. Cued to Lee's barb, the scene cuts to a 180-degree reorientation situated around Ed's level position (figure 10). Ed's entrance is not only too late, but it is also an interruption. While he was born after the era implied by Lee's stories, he also intrudes upon its mythic cadences. Incapable of measuring up to Lee's mythical dimensions, Ed is a poor imitation of Lee. Additionally, the scene's editing strategy denotes a vertiginous and conflicting set of perspectives. Flitting between single shots of Lee and his carousing buddies, to one-shots of a sullen and isolated Ed, to match-cuts along the sightline of Ed's perspective, the scene is organized around competing points of view. Between Lee's stories and Ed's self-reflective point-of-view, the scene literally mirrors its characters' impulses and obsessions. While the shot-counter-shot positions the mirror as the hinge joining and dividing father and son, Ed's position and perspective isolate him into one-shots of sullen resentment (figure 11**)**. Further, the bar walls bear numerous paintings depicting the West. The deep-focus framing of Ed's initial perspective scans an entire series of graphic mini-figurations of the Western: a lone bull on the prairie, a series of cowboy drives, an Indian skirmish, and so on. The paintings visually cordon space, even as their iconicity expands it. While Ed is haunted by the mirror image of Lee, Lee longs for the iconic corralling that the saloon's portraits envision. In both instances, the ground of perception is defined by narcissistic closure. Because subjectivity is patterned on a father's reflection, history is denoted by way of the pictorial imaginary with whose mythic decorousness Lee commiserates. The scene acts as a sense-memory archive of the rhetoric of masculine vitality. While reminiscent of the work of Roosevelt's friend Fredric Remington, the paintings are graphic placeholders to the earlier century's generic visual tropes. The bar as a public space is Lee's "space." The mise-en-scène that surrounds Lee with painterly historicism synchs neatly with the sound of hoots and hollered yelps in response to Lee's storytelling. The space is marked as a nostalgic one. The film moves from the sweeping breadth of the Western landscape to the plush interior of an expansive iconography. Its world is an excess of images that signify an illustrated and illustrative backstory.

The saloon space offers up a different kind of conflict. The iconicity Ed longs to embody overlaps with the nostalgic memory Lee forever reclaims. The space codes both as surface residuum. It clouds each character's desire as situated within, and stimulated by, the syntax of the West's mythic dimension. Fenimore-Cooper's "land-man" is replaced by an image charter both Ed and Lee esteem. Here, character is determined by an exposure to images, not frontiers. A perceptual sense that marks a clear distinction between self and other gives way to an apperception respectively insistent and haunting. Lee's self-mythologization is Ed's desire to incarnate myth. Mythic icon mandates slavish devotion. The imagery that divides them is what paradoxically binds them. The older man's nostalgia is situated in the same space as the younger one's yearning; however enmeshed, they are nevertheless distinctly separated by the past.

Because the Westerner's heroic legacy magnifies Lee's stature in the present, it all but squashes Ed. The intensified shot-counter-shots between Ed at the bar and his view of Lee emphasize an excess of reflection, one matched by Ed's drinking. At each cutaway, Ed downs another whiskey. From the patronizing comments offering him "soda pop" or a "glass of milk" to the wash of stories that exclude him, Ed is either belittled or ignored. Furthermore, Ed's bitter mimicking of "remembering like it was only yesterday" and the impossibility of "forget[ting]" are spoken solely to himself. Strenuous action is replaced by an excess of self-reflection. Ed's isolation and its bristling meta-commentary is intensified by Lee's boisterous self-aggrandizement. Keyed to each shot-counter-shot (between Ed isolated at the bar and his mirror-view of Lee), Ed repeatedly loads up his shot glass and downs another whiskey until the camera cuts to a new angle behind him. Held level to Ed's back in extreme long shot, the shot breaks from its intensified cutting just as the younger Hackett grabs his whiskey bottle and throws it directly at Lee's reflection (figure 12**)**. As the mirror shatters, an addled Ed draws his gun and dead-eye shoots two holes through the painted steer's tail and horn tip shouting, "I put the Hackett brand on him, Lee!" At which point, a stern Lee yet again engages Ed in a tense standoff. Backing away from his father, Ed shouts with mock contrition, "My apologies, gentlemen, I shoulda known better than to try to top Lee Hackett!" The staged standoff is different from the earlier one in two ways. The saloon abridges the exteriority and strenuous physicality of the first third of the film. It replaces its strenuous action with semiotic conduits that speak to fiction, identity, and time. Secondly, Ed's violent outburst and Lee's bloated frivolity speak to heightened emotionality. Excitation and agitation supplant the poised self-control of Cooper's frontier hero. The vigorous yet austere outdoor man is replaced with an indulgent emotional one. Control is counter-posed with its loss.

For Mitchell, the saloon is the Western setting that defines what a man means for the genre. The location directs attention to the Western hero's stylization, one that bespeaks his self-control and adroitness, and articulates his "moral and emotional stature."[41] The saloon reemphasizes his self-control: the man can hold his liquor or simply refuses to imbibe. In contrast to the Westerner's steadiness is the town drunk. As coward, overwhelmed mollycoddle, or self-medicating type, the drunk contrasts with the poise and assurance of the hero's man-of-action. Control is offset by its "shadow image."[42] Where the "man of composure" steels himself "under vivid sensation . . . the marginalized man [is defined] by hypersensitivity, social affectation, and verbal exorbitance."[43] As inverse mirror of ideal masculinity, the drunk's presence expresses what is "unworkable" about the man. Ed plays out Mitchell's observation in two opposed ways. Exemplifying the drunk's self-indulgence, he loses control. But Ed is equally reminiscent of the social recognition that makes the man. The Westerner figures his own self-"restraint" by consciously holding himself up against "the chaos of the non-man," the contrast "dramatiz[ing] the Western hero's sense of being watched, of creating

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[41] Lee Clark Mitchell, "Violence in the Film Western," in *Violence and American Cinema,* ed. J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2001), 178.
[42] Ibid., 179.
[43] Ibid.

himself as a self-consciously social process."[44] Aware of his own seeming debility, Ed's drunkenness exemplifies the saloon's generic function from both directions. But in Ed's case, the Westerner's conscious recognition of what "makes" the man is agitated by an overproduction Lee and the coefficient bar incarnate. The effect of each one's idealization crushes Ed. Either as a self-same recognition that equals Lee or as a domineering competitor who must win lest he be erased, Ed is all deficit, defined by an image he cannot keep up with. Like the ushering of the cowboy out of the seemingly generous breadth of its wide-screen framing (an ever-expansive and rich visual frontier), Lee's image shuts Ed out. As deficient, self-recognition for Ed is defined by his lack. But it is a lack proportionate with violent compensation. Ed's mirror smashing denotes self-disgust; it is his only means of self-reflection. Like the bullet's trajectory, Ed projects violently. Unable to reconstitute himself as the idealized man, Ed is beholden to its devouring image. His overwrought self-consciousness makes him abhorrent to himself. He becomes, so to speak, "hysterical."

Tania Modleski has noted the alignment between Sigmund Freud's formulation of hysteria and its narrative organization in cinematic melodrama. The genre that "gives the impression of a ceaseless returning to a prior state" is likened to the patient who "suffers from reminiscences."[45] A compulsion toward rehashing the details of a former experience parallels a plotting "where the only major events are repetitions of former ones."[46] Hysterics haunted by the settings and objects that mark melancholy loss are, like Freud's hysterical patient, guided by a vestigial imagination. As prey to the vision he/she is beholden to, the hysteric is a compulsively "visual" personality. He/she strives to replicate the images to which he/she is bound. In this context, Lee's memorial presence fosters a similar compulsion in Ed; the bar's paintings visually amplify Ed's fixation on Lee's heroic exploits. Psychologically preyed upon by Lee's mythic image, Ed's drunken outburst reads as hysterical. But unlike the saloon drunk in the Western, the hysteric is historically and clinically deemed the psychological condition of women. As a social actor reduced to secondary citizen, the woman's social and cultural "lack" figures a return of the repressed. Characterized as the feminine hysteric, Ed has no control and, likewise, loses composure. But Ed's adroitness at riding and shooting pushes the two distinct generic motifs he represents. Not only can Ed shoot, he can shoot drunk. His accomplished ardor is sibling to his addled affect; the duress he suffers from is Lee's exemplary presence. In contrast to his father, Ed is only remainder; as such, he is defined by limit, by his status as a devalued simulation. Ed's performance of masculine style (no matter how deft) is paradoxically deficient. As adroit gunman and skilled rider, Ed is "all man," but his lack of control indicates he is, nonetheless, a "woman." The production of manhood is prefigured as a Janus-faced hermaphrodite, a supplementary lack that longs for idealization.

Ed is beset by the affectation Mitchell implies. Although the cowboy's conscious recognition positions him as inter-subjective in relation to his drunken counterpart, it is

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[44] Mitchell, 179.
[45] Tania Modleski, "Time and Desire in the Woman's Film," in *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 330.
[46] Ibid., 330.

guided by a gaze that others him. Ed's obsessive reflectivity amplifies the cowboy's self-surveillance while it undermines his poise. As identity loses its social ground, characterization distorts hallowed figuration. The subjective recognition that safeguards the cowboy from the debilitating lures of social excess is muddled by the image-reserve Ed runs up against. He is haunted by the image of the social. His mirroring inflates the self-consciousness of the cowboy hero while conflating him with the drunk's debilitation. What piques Ed are not the jibes, or even losing to Lee. It is being in the shadow of the Westerner's iconography. Lee's stories told against the backdrop of the paintings are distended by the bar's mirror. Ed's point of view is a visual expansion of the setting's action. Ensnaring Lee, his yelping cronies, and the saloon paintings, the mirror paradoxically extends a series of static positions. From Ed's point of view, the scenography projects generic set pieces of intractable iconicity. The urgency of the depicted action is replicated as the stasis of its frozen tableau. If Lee is the exaggerated personification of the Westerner, the saloon space is its overwrought historiographic. The saloon in *Gunman's Walk* operates as a much different "reminder" for Ed and Lee than it does for Mitchell's cowboy. Its generic density compels social and subjective behavior. As pulp archive, it attracts and influences. While Lee attempts to "keep up" with his young sons and Ed attempts to out-man Lee, the scene expresses the masculine Westerner as an image ahead of them both.

In *Gunman's Walk*, the frontier is supplanted by the story-form. The intensified "sensation" the Hacketts guard against is implied to be the story of their own masculinity. As backstory compels Lee and Ed, it refigures the frontiersman's perception of an exterior field. In contradistinction to the frontiersman, Lee and Ed are beholden to an apperception that projects subjectivity on to an ever-present narrative field. While Lee is concerned with reimagining his mythic exceptionalism, his son is concerned with its developmental perfection. In both instances, they are their own targets.

Literature's early-nineteenth-century frontiersman, with his forest-borne concentration and detached cool, is replaced by the mid-twentieth century's hyper-conscious gunfighter. As Slotkin notes, the gunfighter is characterized by notoriety. He is conditioned both by his stylized penchant for a gun and by his self-conscious wariness around his fame. And as the earlier shooting lesson implied the gunman's imbrication with the visualizing tendency of his own weapon, this scene reemphasizes the draw characteristically practiced, as Davey jibes Ed, "in the mirror." The gunman haunted by notoriety becomes, in *Gunman's Walk*, the gunman crippled by self-consciousness. As either storied gunman or fledgling gunfighter, the Hacketts are self-obsessed. The frontiersman's concentrated gaze, conditioned by his natural setting, is refigured as an intent self-image. Cooper's naturally mediated action hero becomes a hyper-visible screen actor. His valorized sight morphs into the implied techno-cultural optics of its Hollywood design. The saloon sequence revamps the cinematographic resonances of the gun practice scene. Symbiosis with the camera (as gun) is extended as imbrication with the screening image (as mirror). As gunfighters beholden to images, the Hacketts are the objects of their own vision.

As Walter Benjamin has noted, film "deepen[s] apperception throughout the entire spectrum of the optical."[47] For Benjamin, apperception is distinct from (and in some ways antagonistic to) self-consciousness. The technological reproducibility of images at once nullifies the ontological regime of selfhood (it famously denudes the authentic character of a unique identity, its essential "aura") while nonetheless opening subjectivity toward a social awareness signified by productive relations. "Watching oneself" in the strict sense of psychological projection gives way to a cinematic "optics" that alters perceptual relations. The tractable veracity of one's self (its substantive and relational distinctiveness from the world) loses its autonomy. Exposed as film, "the everyday necessities of our lives" become an uncanny residuum in which we are inscribed. Just as the close-up "accentuat[es] . . . hidden details" of a seemingly banal object, quotidian settings are transformed from "commonplace milieu" into "a vast and unsuspected field of action."[48] Similarly, the scene's central props are visual conduits that "speak." Offering up a conglomeration of image residues that cobble masculinity into a naturalization effect (by way of the saloon paintings amd Lee's enumerated stories—the hyperbole of the Western as a digest), the scene has much in common with a cinematic practice that enables "a person [to] see himself becoming part of a work of art."[49] Given the affective "assemblage" conditioned by film production (the camera set-ups and the piecemeal construction of editing), the actor resides in "empathy" with the camera.[50] He/she is conditioned by its technological optics. Likewise, an audience's viewing experience is inflected by the cinematography and edits that constitute film projection. Mechanical film projection parallels social self-projection. He/she becomes aware of his/her own "production" as a social being. The natural eye gives way to a more critically charged "optic" one. The saloon sequence speaks to masculine construction. It operates as an ideological sense-directive. As the paintings sketch the platitudes of mythic conquest, they circumscribe the legacy of the Westerner as an evolving figure. The scene privileges the demonstrative mythos of the genre (and the singularity of gender) by way of its cinematographic representation. Just as Benjamin likens a screen performance subject to cinematography with a patient under a scalpel during surgery, the scene's cinematic unfolding analytically cuts away the mythic masculine tropes at the heart of the genre.[51] While Ed is waylaid by his looks at Lee's reflection in the mirror, the film addresses the combustible tenets of American masculinity's social imperatives by way of an optical apperception. The American man visualizes the stranglehold of his figural legacy. The amassed visuals of the scene and Ed's attempt at emulation suggest he is slave to an astringent sight. What he misconstrues is the sense parameters of his own world. He does not sense his own graphic comportment. It is not so much that he does not see; the sight of Lee is all Ed has. However much his conflict with Lee drives the film's action, it is Ed's devotion to his father's platitudes that crush him.

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[47] Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 265.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 262.
[50] Ibid., 260, 261.
[51] Ibid., 263.

Gunman's Walk traces the inflated characterological backstory to which the two Hacketts prescribe and thereby reads the aesthetic effects and ideological ramifications of what manliness means for the domestic era. The competitive ardor of being the better man expresses the apperceptive verites of a Hollywood Western steeped in the corporate mores of postwar consumption. The narrow masculine typology that ties Lee and Ed to the past is likened with a postwar cultural milieu that veils a rampant consumerism. While narratively and terminologically "the Hackett brand" aligns manly virtue with incorporation, patriarchy similarly reads as a cinematic/cultural production. As the scene confounds the clarity and specified certainty of a man's "life-time," it disrupts the evolving breadth of "time-lines." The scene problematizes the horizon-line logic of historical passage and its progress initiative. The backstory that structures the first third of the film is transformed into a picturesque graphic impression. As the backstory justifies Lee's self-congratulatory demeanor, it twists Ed into an incommensurable future perfect. While the scene engages its backstory, it pursues themes at the level of form. Fredric Jameson has noted that the late-twentieth-century "conspiracy genre" is predicated upon discerning the labyrinthine codes, signals, and immense grids of an information-based corporate economy. To negotiate and discern the schema of its Byzantine logic and the diffusion of its infinite and yet minute archive, narrative activity becomes a process of deciphering. Figures that connote historical value or are wrapped anachronistic trappings of the past are prioritized. They point to a record, the immense archiving that characterizes and determines the function of informatic economies of scale. In the conspiracy genre, any and all characters, images, and objects inexorably point toward a vast figural reservoir that underpins their activation "betray[ing] the need to incorporate history."[52] And this is no less true of *Gunman's Walk*. Via the mirror that reflects, the paintings that represent, and the stories that repeat, the film catalogues the mythic proportions of the Westerner. By centralizing generic tropes, the scene foregrounds a "corporate" body difficult to recognize in the swirl of abstract codes that delineate value. The scene's generic mise-en-scène deciphers the surplus of images as a compendium of related ideological impressions. Arcane corporate displacement is recognized by the saloon as generic and archaic set piece.

By shuttling the film's action from expansive range to claustrophobic interior, *Gunman's Walk* reconfigures its generic setting. Vivian Sobchack has suggested that films noir of the 1940s and early 1950s express the emergent leisure values of their era. The bars, motels, and nightclubs where action unfolds denote a "lounge time" that signifies the broader consumerism of the immediate postwar period.[53] But noir mitigates the consumerist appeal of its era by transposing the family-oriented home with the transient "house." While organizing its action around leisure space, noir betrays a melancholy yearning for the past. Noir plotting is strewn with appeals revolving around lost homes and ruptured family ties. Similar to Turner's hypothesizing of the lost farming family at the end of the nineteenth century, noir figurations long for agrarian simplicity. The diners and roadhouses that stud its landscape emphasize the home's demise as much as they materialize a consumerist regime. The image of a prewar family "idyll" with its

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[52] Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 17.
[53] Sobchack, 156.

agrarian temporality is transposed onto the nocturnal play of noir's makeshift spaces.[54] Like the noir film's anti-hero, at this point in *Gunman's Walk* the Hacketts never return to the film's early "home on the range," which is left behind for the motel rooms and saloon foyers where the central characters spend their time. As with the ambiguous ground of Sobchack's postwar home, familial integrity drifts toward the leisure vacuum left in its wake. As noir posits a "fixed . . . [paradoxical] moment [that looks] back toward a retrospectively idyllic world,"[55] it positions itself as "a patriarchal American home . . . held hostage to a domestic future beyond its imagination."[56] *Gunman Walk* envisions the stalemate legacy of Sobchack's description as a masculine one; Lee's overweening past ferries along the impressionable Ed into an impossible future predicated on outmoded values. The film critiques the era's patriarchy by staring down the conventions the Western associates with American masculinity. The exclusivity of its masculine plotting and the hysterical returns it expresses are in keeping with the consumerism of the film's historical context. The moment the Hacketts enter town is the moment the film positions itself as a "product" of its own era; it situates the Hacketts' masculine ethos at war with the consumerism of its present day and represents the generational discord between postwar middle-agers that grew up with the Depression and postwar baby boomers coming of age. At its midpoint, *Gunman's Walk* screens the masculine tensions of its own era.

The Hacketts' "leisure" is predicated upon an altogether petit-bourgeois wealth, defined by appetite. They are, in a word, consumers. The scene of leisure (the saloon) that leads to Ed's emasculation motivates Lee's hearty public celebration for "drinks on the house!" The gratuitousness of Lee's largesse points to his own consumption and inaugurates him as a different kind of powerful man. As Ed is tried for the cowboy's murder, his exoneration is paid for. Blackmailed by a scheming horse trader for Lee's prize horses, Lee pays for the false witness that frees Ed. Lee's autonomy is undermined by capital, and his relationship with Ed is exposed as transactional. Lee buys his son's innocence and pays for his son's good character. Money sustains (for Lee) and establishes (for Ed) the value of the Hackett brand and its ethical stature.

The film recasts Roosevelt's mythical rancher. The ranch life that reinvigorates the American man is undermined by Lee's incorporation as a wealthy and influential rancher. Just as Roosevelt's own claim of being *the* revitalized man at the ranch was meant as a rhetorical means of recasting his former political identity as spoiled wealthy easterner,[57] Lee is compromised by capitalist privilege. If he is singularly "Lee Hackett," he is also identified in the film as incarnating the "Hackett Brand." His declarative "firmness" is more in the shadow of the Hackett firm he is a part of and his position as a capitalist enhances his reputation as a legendary Westerner. If the town "owes him a debt" of gratitude for his past action, it never stops paying its due to the present-day influence of his business. Historical accounting gives way to ideological practice: *Gunman's Walk*, at its outset, collapses the man with the corporation. Roosevelt's figuration (separated from the film by a century) is updated by the film's plotting. The

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[54] Sobchack, 158, 159.
[55] Ibid., 165.
[56] Ibid., 167.
[57] Bederman, 170.

film's generic historicism demonstrates masculinity's own mythic framing and hints at the imposture of its mid-century constitution.

Luce Irigaray theorizes masculinity as an ideological rubric that finds its modern equivalent in the corporate rationality which unifies the proper name with the incarnate body.[58] As the mechanism for "branding" women as a form of property, defining her in the circuit of exchange as a valuable possession, the proper name stands in for the corporate entity that controls and maintains market relations. Masculine authority, as with corporate authority, determines her character as an object on the market, as an obtainable commodity. She is defined by her "value in sexual commerce," her character no more than the "competitive exchange between two men."[59] But the name that affords and marks possession equally restricts and delimits itself as an individuated unity. As masculinity excludes the feminine as a value-determined possession, it nevertheless narrowly proscribes itself by demanding the exclusive form that its proper name denotes. Feminine exclusion is proportionate to masculine definition. In the context of *Gunman's Walk*, the "Hackett brand" is Lee's legacy as masculine identity. As with Irigaray's estimation of masculine incorporation as a calculable "inventory" that adds up to an "adequate definition," Lee's insistence on what makes a man demands a self-identical register. In his insistence that his sons add up to a man, Lee's upholds Irigaray's description of masculinity as "the only definable form."[60] As the proper name demands of itself a "proper meaning" and an "adequate definition," masculinity's denomination tends toward absolute identity.[61]

While Lee is implicated within the abstract network of a wholly corrupt exchange, his bribe diminishes his principled manliness. In an ironic affront, it is Ed who calls Lee out in this regard. Their intimacy (whatever the strains of their competitive bond) becomes both more attenuated (Ed's bewildered disappointment in his father's hypocrisy) and enflamed (Ed's realization that Lee's affection is, at best, tempered by commodification). It is not that Ed simply languishes under his father's codified and rigid patriarchical authority, but that even with the knowledge of its bogus imperative he is still without recourse. Understanding that his father's corruption is also his own only serves to send Ed into a distraught nihilism. The forbearance and endurance demanded by the Rooseveltian ethos (the ability to read, anticipate, and circumvent the exigencies of the wild) is here a fixation without compromise.

The film goes from prioritizing exterior shots of aggressive contestation to nighttime interiors fraught with foreboding tension, and shifts its thematic focus from the anxious economic and gender questions of the immediate postwar period to the flush economic boom of its late-1950s leisure remove. Catching Davy brooding in an unlit hotel room, Lee chides his son for his sullen lack of vigor while nevertheless encouraging him to "hav[e] a good time." While Lee coaxes Davy into following his increasingly unpredictable older brother, Davy reminds Lee that he will "need money" for the excursion. A buoyed Lee retorts, "That's what money's for!" The dialogue characterizes

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[58] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26.
[59] Ibid., 27, 28.
[60] Ibid., 26.
[61] Ibid.

Gunman's Walk as the paradoxical past-present of a leisure economy coming of age. While situating Lee as present to the consumer appeals of the 1950s, it nonetheless, as a Western, privileges a past-present haunted by a static prescription for masculinity. As the bar sequence catches Lee in consumerist leisure, this moment marks him as its authority. He shifts from strenuous rancher to boisterous consumer while losing none of his masculine imperative. As he says to Davy, "You wouldn't catch me sulking around in a dark room when I was your age." Davy's "sulking" is proclaimed as being both unequal to the past and the present. If Lee and Davy are conscious that their own leisure time is enabled by money, the "dark" of the hotel room they share implies a more pronounced formal leftover from the noir era. The pitch of the unlit room is made to cast stark shadows when Lee turns on the light, setting the tone for the second act of the film; film noir's influence on Westerns of the immediate postwar era lingers in *Gunman's Walk*.[62] While Sobchack notes noir's ability to map the tension of its era, it is pronounced by the contradictory imperatives of its masculine protagonists. Gendered threats incarnated by hyper-sexualized, devious femmes fatales are commensurate with the greed and paranoia of an approaching capitalism. While *Gunman's Walk* borrows noir's most trenchant formal feature, it announces newer social and psychological tensions. While the film's first act positions the Hacketts as more at home "on the range," Ed's wild carousing implies they are more at home "on the town." As generational cipher, Ed is the contemporaneous child born of commercialized leisure and coming of age.

David Halberstam has noted the adolescent as a privileged social target of the 1950s, the figure emerging as constitutive both of a "new consuming class" and a rhetorical public type.[63] Disposable income became proportionate with the adolescent's identity politics. His/her consumer ability was commensurate with the rhetorical emergence of a host of ideational descriptions; his/her spending habits were paralleled with "who" or what they were as emergent social-actors. The anxious codifications of the immediate postwar period morphed into anxieties about the potential dissonances and dangers of this new social type. While discourses around the adolescent marked attempts at defining and describing what the teenager meant (as a vied-for consumer, as a mass social type), Ed is no less "followed" by Davy and the deputy as he parties across town. The surveillance that Ed's burgeoning criminality demands in the narrative also conveys the suspicion of what his character means as a developing male for the era. While Lee dominates Ed for the film's first act, it is now implied that Ed "moves" in his own space, converting anxious lounge-time into alienated consumer space. Followed both by a beseeching Davy and by the sympathetic deputy, Ed is "tracked" by agents of the family and the law. The generic trope usually equated with distinguishing the movement of a supposedly "natural" wild is also brought home. Dangerous Indians and deviant outlaws are supplanted by the threat of progeny "on the prowl." Social trouble is born within the borders of a leisure economy. Wrangling saloon girls, provoking the deputy with insults, and mocking Davy's insistent shadowing, Ed is all boisterous bravado. Outside of the "outside" (the rough expanse of landscape with its commensurate able-bodiedness), he is a figuration of the era's youthful consumerism.

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[62] Simmon, 207.
[63] Halberstam, 473.

As Davy walks along the now shadow-cast darkness of the town streets, the glare from its windows betrays the glowing night "life" it is awash in. Leisure is a lit setpiece that commands attention. Coming across another saloon in town, Davy hears his brother's whistling and singing from within. Just as the film's introduction to Lee was afforded a shadow cast preamble to his frontier home, this scene prefigures Ed's presence via his "echo." As the deputy notes, "he's in there." Ed's presence, however, is registered by infamy and not fame. As Davy and the deputy enter the saloon, an extreme long shot finds Ed singing and playing piano. The camera immediately cuts to a close-up of Ed as his voice orchestrates the action. Caught in mid-chorus, Ed sings, "I'm a runaway, I'm a runaway." Just as Lee's introduction to screen action was presaged by the ranch hands and the sprawling hacienda bearing his name, Ed is similarly positioned as "before" the action he is centrally signified in. Transitioning from the song's chorus, Ed sings, "I'll beg or steal or borrow. I'm heading for tomorrow and I'm never looking back. Follow my tracks and you will find broken hearts I've left behind cause I'm just not the marrying kind, I'm a runaway, I'm a runaway." As the song rushes headlong into its "runaway" title, it reemphasizes Ed's rush to grow up. The speed of his draw is commensurate with a developmental acceleration that exceeds his grasp. His ambition is overtly announced as "runaway." Furthermore, the lyrics align Ed with a desire to leave the past behind. Ed is situated between memory and its total erasure. "Tomorrow" is predicated upon "never looking back." As Ed is haunted by Lee's legacy, he is bent on erasing its memorial imprint.

Presaged by Hollywood youth idols and rock 'n' roll icons of the decade's first half, gunman Ed is figured as juvenile delinquent. The casting of would-be teen idols James Darrin and Tab Hunter further attests to the mold of the character. Additionally, the singing cowboy of Hollywood B-films from the previous decade is updated to the rock 'n' roll posture that Tab Hunter's Ed (however awkwardly) attempts. Caught between raucous teen rebel and freewheeling cowboy/gunfighter, Hunter's off-key, flat warble makes for a grotesque indeterminacy that satisfies neither role. Neither conveying the square B-film stylization of Gene Autry nor the magnetic sex appeal of Elvis Presley, Hunter's performance expresses a forced contrivance. His performance lacks the smooth stylization of both the former's yearning camp adventurer and the latter's erotically charged, interracial androgyny. But the film's A-Western "prestige" release positions him closer to the roles of the era's teen rebel incarnate, James Dean. Like Dean's characters from his first two films (*East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause*), Ed persists as a wounded, temperamental teen. The scene's off-kilter performance presents Ed/Hunter as an awkward Westerner, simultaneously Autry's cornball crooner and Dean's tortured teen. One's overstylization as frontier troubadour is met with the other's teeming self-consciousness. In either instance, Ed/Hunter is a working "persona."[64] The rhetoric of his performance precludes his performance. Furthermore, the troubled and alienated personage Dean engenders is suggestively overcharacterized. The social outcast is figured as an ironic, self-dramatizing casting agent for himself. Like the performance rhetoric around Dean, Ed's Westerner is swallowed by "self-absorption."[65] The gunman's hyper-aware notoriety meshes with the teen idol's hyper-sensitive insecurity. Like Ed

[64] Halberstam, 485.
[65] Ibid., 484.

practicing his gunfighting in the mirror, the rhetoric around Dean privileged stories of him studying photographic self-portraits and absorbing the Method styles of Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift. Ed similarly practices at imitating Lee's gunfighting pose just as Hunter's performance rehashes Dean's persona. And like Lee's storied past, Dean's death in 1955 after only three major roles engendered an immediate "myth" and "legend." This is not to say that they are not, respectively, accomplished Westerner and angry rebel. As plotted motifs, they are. What they do is project. Authoritative braggadocio is likened to youthful bluster. From different temporal indices, their similarity lies in civic indifference. They stand against the culture of which they are intimately a part. They likewise resist the acknowledgement of their own era.

The song's lyrics serve as both a narrative directive that muddles time and an ironic index that foretells it. As the theme song for the film, "Runaway" intermittently plays for the entire film and serves as *Gunman's Walk*'s leitmotif. During the film's opening credits, throughout the race to town, and after Ed smashes the saloon mirror, it persists. But as both non-diegetic soundtrack and diegetic sound, it keeps changing. From the suspenseful menace it connotes before Ed shoots the swindler, to the thunderous orchestral crescendo as Ed smashes the mirror, to the jaunty ramble of the race into town, the song is a malleable trope. Furthermore, the echo-effect whistle that plays over the opening credit sequence implies the tune is both well-known and yet subject to change. At the film's outset, the Western is seen to echo, and as the whistle slowly fades out from the repeating bars of its chorus, its haunting tone is what bleeds into the film's opening action. The score operates as an affective meter. And this holds for its diegetic use as well. Memorized by Ed, it is perpetually repeated. While O'Malley's singing of "Girl in the Yellow Dress" in *The Last Sunset* signified a longing for the past that disrupts the progressive connotations of Roosevelt's Westerner, Ed's crooning of "Runaway" ironically magnifies both his and Lee's inability to escape their violent legacy. Like O'Malley, neither Hackett consciously comprehends the tragic returns their fixation on the past ensures. However, because "Runaway's" melody repeats throughout *Gunman's Walk*, the theme produces a series of alternating tonalities in contrast to the obsessive identity politics of the film's two protagonists. The theme, like the film as a whole, belies the stasis the two Hacketts insist upon.

As Stan Link notes, musical leitmotifs originated in nineteenth-century German romantic music as a play on repetition.[66] Most commonly associated with symphonic music and opera, their recurrence expressed an "idée fixe" usually associated with romantic or sexual obsession.[67] The use of "Runaway" matches the film's plotting. As declarative legitimacy for Lee, it is a resounding obsession for Ed. Similarly, the theme marks time. As iteration, it "accumulates." While the leitmotif "carries associations of previous statements," it comments "on the present moment."[68] In *Gunman's Walk*, the score's recurrence points to a masculine legacy that, like the motif, "inherent[ly]

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[66] Stan Link, "Leitmotif: Persuasive Musical Narration," in *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media: An Overview*, eds. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty, and Jochen Eisentraut (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), 181.
[67] Ibid., 182.
[68] Ibid., 188.

historiciz[es]."[69] The present for each character is an ever-determinable future perfect. However, the marked changes in its tempo and orchestration are different from the film's static protagonists. Its repetition signifies difference, which the Hacketts paradoxically resist. The repetition that ossifies character privileges a complex temporality in the viewer. Western expansion is reframed—"refrained"—by a dual temporality. As Ed's voice joins the film's pervasive melody, it replicates an already troubled haunting he cannot shake. But while Ed's literal "voice" converges with the score, the originist complexion of generation and chronology is inverted. The melody that haunts Ed also redirects the viewer's attention to the differences specific to each moment the melody is invoked.

The song's repetition in the film's diegetic and nondiegetic soundtrack paradoxically suggests both the cultural lability of the Western as a genre and the Hacketts' characterological intractability for the drama. The juxtaposition between the leitmotif's protean repetitions in the soundtrack and the stagnant characterological repetitions in the action perform the genre's complexity and troubles the distinction between progressive and regressive values. While Ed's troubled access to an original masculine subject position persists, the viewer revisits scenes where the melody occurs. The melody that proffers a harried and exacting replication for Ed offers a set of differently repeated narrative instances for the viewer. "Runaway," as a leitmotif, repeats from a variety of plot positions, conditioning the audience's awareness of its changes in mood and dramatic direction. The theme song performs an affective and analytic variation that Ed is unable to experience. The viewer hears how time moves and changes. As leitmotif for the audience, "Runaway" performs the "sound" of temporal registers while nonetheless pinpointing its melody as persistent ideological imperatives for Ed that will not change. While demonstrating the ideological rigidity to which Ed is beholden, it simultaneously demonstrates the complexity of duration. The song sound-"tracks" back to different episodes that witness both its diegetic and non-diegetic use. More specifically, Ed's initial whistling outside the saloon door transitions back to the film's opening credit sequence to question the primacy of what "begins." Now colored by Chouard's murder and the falseness of Ed's acquittal (operating as a quasi-sanction that implicitly justifies Ed's ensuing murders), the whistle's juxtaposition instantiates a look back to the film's beginning as a differently experienced temporal moment. The melody's repetition challenges the primacy of an originary moment as it challenges the masculine orthodoxy that Ed's characterization imports from the late nineteenth century. The film's logic tends toward excavating chronology by puzzling over the formation of its narrative. At the outset, the theme resonates as a hymnal procession. Its melody is funereal and in tone maps onto the lyric's "heartbreak." Sung by Ed, the "heart break[ing]" he leaves in his wake is caused by murder, not intimacy. Ed's violence belies the lyrics' reference to romance and looks back to the homicidal imperative at the "heart" of American exceptionalism. Ed's singing foreshadows his next two murders.

While "Runaway" as a leitmotif troubles the integrity of a progressive linear history steeped in presumptive origin, the violence the song ironically alludes to paces an increase in Ed's body count. *Gunman's Walk* replaces progress as a social/moral corollary to the Westerner's masculine development with murder as a quantifiable ledger

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[69] Link, 189.

that gauges the genre's violence. As the horse-trader's successful blackmail serves to unman Lee's dignified rustic, it further incenses an already piqued Ed, who stops him on his way out of town. Demanding the horses' return, Ed artfully outdraws and disarms the con artist's reach for his gun. But Ed then shoots the unarmed man. As the huckster falls from his horse, an ecstatic Ed dashes into the saloon that saw his earlier humiliation. Calling for "drinks on the house!" Ed's rousing celebration imitates Lee's earlier merriment in the same saloon. Met with a terrified bartender who slinks out of a now-emptying saloon, Ed bitterly drinks alone and apes accomplishment. Announcing his triumph to an almost empty bar, he performs solely for himself and is likewise his own fawning audience. Disarmed and waylaid yet again by Lee, Ed is trundled off to jail to await another trial. But after pretending to hang himself while in jail, Ed's ruse catches the sheriff and his deputy off guard, and he steals and cold-cocks the former with his own gun. Ed capably feigns his own death because it is implied he already knows what absence from the present means. Impossibly trying to compete with and replicate the conditions of his father's vaunted past, Ed is anomalous to the civil present. Formed into an aggressive simulacrum of the past, and left unable to tell time, Ed devolves into reactionary violence.

The absence Ed feels in the present (the dislocation and intensifying dissociation his character experiences) is further expressed by a set of formal conventions specific to postwar Hollywood. Held at gunpoint by Ed, the deputy pleads with him to surrender. All but ignoring him, Ed shoots the unarmed deputy point blank. As Ed escapes, the scene cuts from cloistered and low-key compositions of the jail's interior to a number of extreme-long-shot cutaways where we see the town awaken to the moment's violence. In high-angle crane shot, the camera scans the townspeople's convergence on the jail and witnesses the deputy's spasmodic death throes as a level, graphic view. The transition makes for a squinting return to daylight and a jarring return to the violent imperatives that literally ground the Westerner in contradictory lurching between individual and civic demands. The chaotic discord of Ed's behavior is matched by the sudden juxtaposition. The formal contrast between the jail's shuttered interiority and the exterior shots animates the historical and cultural distance between manly exception and civilization. The ideological gulf is likewise amplified by a narrative distance so extreme it posits a psychotic break for Ed's Westerner. The escape scene's shadowy mock-nocturnal noir is now starkly retrofitted to the natural light of the Western. The lighting contrast implies a temporal confusion the film's play with genre amplifies.

As Sobchack notes, the immediate postwar noirs of the late 1940s collapsed nostalgia for the family idyll with the menace of an emergent consumerism. The diurnal image of a laboring farm family, conflated with the endless nocturnal wandering of "lounge time," highlights time as cyclical.[70] The transience of an anxious world ruled by money is ironically posed as being of the same temporal order as one grounded in the necessary tie between family and land.[71] The lighting strategy of Ed's escape similarly matches criminal transgression to natural "regeneration." Ed's presence as "lit" in both generic worlds underscores the cyclical continuum. Stymied between rhetorical agendas that ally the frontiersman's vigor with the commercial man's appetite, Ed is "brought to

[70] Sobchack, 162.
[71] Ibid., 162, 163.

light" as the union of each. As a 1957 film Western, *Gunman's Walk* rescales the genre's "natural" past by way of present day commodification. Between an overburdened past and acquisitive future, Ed incarnates the rhetorical poles of midcentury masculinity. The yawing breach makes a living duration impossible to bear just as a stark resemblance intensifies civil contempt for civic life. The exceptional man does not just break the law. He kills it.

Staging the Nuclear: Collapse and the Split-Adam

While Lee tracks and ultimately catches up with Ed (their fateful reunion making for the film's penultimate gunfight), the narrative catches up with the martial associations a potential nuclear war holds for the era. *Gunman's Walk's* final scenes narrativize the A-Westerner's contradictions by portraying manly reinvigoration as a kind of patriarchal self-annihilation. In the hope of intercepting Ed before the gathering posse can catch him, Lee sets out to take Ed back to town. As the camera tracks Ed's symbolic and literal escape from the Law, it also positions Lee as its punitive executor back on the range. Escape stresses what returns. Lee's pursuit implies he is coming back to the frontier. As Ed evades the Law, he attracts his father. Symbolic cadences cycle around one another, further amplifying the film's contradictory thematic. While clashing generational imperatives converge on the home front, the chase scene synthesizes suburban expansion with the military expansionism of the Cold War period. The scene tracks the aggressiveness of the Westerner's primal psyche as a mobile contestation that reads as a late-1950s ideological Cold War, more native than international. The action's regressive patriarchy is embedded in the period's novel domesticity. As Lee tracks Ed, their approaching intersection conveys the Westerner's ideological return is a regressive one at war with the utopian values of family life enshrined at midcentury.

Following Ed back into the wilderness, Lee is ironically recast as frontier hero. Seeking his own fugitive son, he is Simmon's "town tamer." And, ahead of the posse, he is (again) "before" the law. However, his masculine exceptionality is re-coded as familial transgression. As Lee retraces his son's steps, he retraces his own history, ironically returning to the past he so desperately wants to relive. Advancing toward a gunfight, he literally follows in his son's footsteps. Reliving his past means coming to terms with the dissonance of his legacy. The stark inversions of the scene and the inevitable duel they anticipate further dislodge chronological time. As a Western steeped in overburdened presentiments of its backstory, *Gunman's Walk* toys with the Western's time keeping. The inevitability of the duel and its nostalgic fixations similarly tap back into 1940s noir. Just as noir privileges the flashback whose formal rearrangement suggestively haunts its characters, *Gunman's Walk* stresses the repeat instances of its trope-filled regimen. Chasing his son through a dusky backcountry, Lee outskirts his own obsolescent backstory. As masculine emblem, his tracking implies a "perverse formal manifestation."[72] The homicidal path of Lee's overbearing influence signifies a "regeneration" that "overcomes history" as it erases "the possibility of change."[73] Ed and Lee are directed by a cycle that contradicts the chronological rudiments of the Western. They lie between two distant and yet duplicate generations, "forever fixed . . . in a

[72] Sobchack, 163.
[73] Ibid.

transitional moment."[74] But unlike noir, Ed and Lee are never seen to revisit the past. They have no flashbacks. They reproduce the originist virtues of a bygone era while despising the time of its passage (as temporal) and the traces of its acculturation. However beholden to an image of history, they are contemptuous both of the passage of time and of the fictional index at the heart of its memorial. The two Hacketts embrace an extreme autonomy at once devoid of duration and outside of culture. Their radical individualism mandates disdain for civic life as it aggravates Oedipal drama. It cleaves at the heart of the national origin story to which American masculinity hews.

The legendary stories of Lee and allusions to the past are transposed to tracking as a formal device specific to the Western. Lee's reading of Ed's trail, in turn, reads like the burning of a narrative and ideological fuse. Masculinity as patriarchy cannot sustain the tensions associated with man-making and civilization-building. Masculine crucibles associated with violence bear down on patriarchical legacies of development; Lee's history as a deadly Indian fighter and gunman are seen as catching up to the masculine family. Ahead of the posse and Lee, Ed is first seen riding within the splashing furrow of a small stream. Seeking to wash away his tracks, he nods with self-congratulation before riding off into the open terrain; Lee is seen in ensuing cuts to recognize the ploy. It is implied that Ed was taught the ploy by Lee and knows his father will follow him. Ed's homage plays out as memorized challenge that Lee does not forget. And as Lee now tracks his son as prey, amplifying his desire "to keep up" into a mortal one, it is implied that his own cultural imperative is always-already reactionary. The chase scene tracks a penultimate mobility, mapping the legacy of the primal American man onto the midcentury's domestic agenda. Lee's older legacy conflates with Ed as his progeny; their magnetism is a contracting antagonism. The tracking suggests that the hegemony of cultural history (as naturally coded frontiers/idylls/men) resembles its contemporary cold-war mobilization. The tracking scene is an extended penultimate suspension that sets the stage for the duel that is, coincidentally, the film's penultimate scene. Overtaking Ed atop a rock-cropping incline, Lee pleads with his son to surrender. But Ed insists on finally seeing which one of them is the faster draw. As soon as Ed draws on Lee, the gunfight is over. Sudden and abrupt, the duel is also bizarrely anticlimactic. Lee guns down his son with shocking ease. Shot dead, Ed sprawls prostrate on the mesa top, his gun barely out of his holster. Where the time between generations has accelerated, the final gunshot registers as an instantaneous contraction; both men have run out of room (they are stranded at the top of the mesa's circumscribed ridge), and the shot converts spatial finitude into temporal collapse.

In Deleuze's semiotic work on film, he notes an "image" specific to subjective fixation whose signaletic rudiments convey a heightened sense of temporal contraction. Driven by narrowly prescribed desires stemming from an obsession with the past (a trenchant desire that inflects present-day milieu into aggrieved and forced resemblances), characters personify a self-destructive "impulse" that is both "radical beginning and absolute end."[75] The world of these films thereby express a paradoxical temporal charge that accelerates time, but only as a heightened insistence to reduplicate regressive

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[74] Sobchack, 163.

[75] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 124.

longing, to convert the world into its lost object. Expressing "the steepest slope" of time, these films insist on the manifestation of the obsessive trace; they express the revivification of an "originary world" for which their characters long.[76] The impulse image expresses a willfulness that converts its characters and their related environments into "the destiny of the impulse and the becoming of its object."[77] The duel situates *Gunman's Walk* as the impulse image par excellence. As both Lee and Ed demand a past masculinity whose premise is steeped in the necessity of a violence informed by voracious and boundless appetites, their mutually desired "object" is the strict code of an earlier era's masculinity. And if both Lee and Ed perform the generic masculine tropes of a bygone era, they insist on an acceleration of time. As with Deleuze's impulse, the Hackett duel performs an inescapable and violent "convergence" that exhibits "a great death impulse."[78] The structure of *Gunman's Walk* contracts into an inevitable point of conflict. The image of masculinity that motivates each character accounts for its mortal endgame. Without a necessary space to conquer or a necessary enemy to vanquish, the plot stages an internecine conflict intrinsic to the masculine norm. *Gunman's Walk* expresses masculinity as beholden to a legacy that insists on murdering its own resemblance.

While *Gunman's Walk* illustrates the calamitous legacy built into the A-Western's identity politics, the Hackett's characterological incorporation suggests a similarly self-destructive operation within the era's brand of capitalism. As trace-obsessed impulse images, the Hacketts resonate with their own contradictory era. As historian Lawrence Grossberg notes, the "real prosperity" of the decade was predicated upon an "unstable" foundation. The postwar period rested upon a tenuous reciprocity between production and consumption.[79] While the demand for a diversified military industry troubled the spending policies of its three subsequent presidencies, higher wages propelled a burgeoning consumer market. An increasing sphere of military influence was reciprocal with a growing consumer public. While always troubled by a perceived increase in military spending, budgetary investments sought to spur the economy toward reciprocal production and consumer booms. The foreign detainment strategy that threatened unwieldy expenditures was commensurate with the potential domestic debt that threatened to stymie postwar consumption.[80] And as consumer debt rose 55% between 1952 and 1954, the debates around military costs became more intensified. Subject to the rigid accountability of a financial ledger, America positioned itself as a "debtor" nation. The private and public excess in expenditures suggests a broader cultural debt. America persistently owes. As mobile characters that are compelled by a "corporatist compromise," Lee and Ed stage the incommensurability at the heart of the era.[81] Their confrontation emblematizes the combustible "commerce" between martial necessity and consumer identity, a contestation played out within the familial straits of the plot's home

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[76] Deleuze, 122.
[77] Ibid., 127.
[78] Ibid., 124.
[79] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Post Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 138, 139.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., p. 139.

front. While Ed "pays attention," he more noticeably "pays a price." Likewise, while Lee and Ed are motivated by their masculine ideals, they are no less destroyed by them.

As the era's political economy precariously balanced the contradiction of military expenditure and peacetime commerce, the era's Cold War policy tenuously skirted the possibility of nuclear war. The self-destructiveness *Gunman's Walk* discerns within the era's A-Western stems from the genre's ambivalence in regard to the legacy of manly virtue. While war serves as the ballast that makes the man (if it doesn't kill him), it also makes for the civilization whose softness robs him of his vigor. In this context, the film's duel plays out as an apocalyptic scenario and depicts self-abnegation as central to the subgenre's gunfighter persona. The scene refigures the threat of nuclear war for the era by performing its annihilating action within the aesthetic gesture of the era's Westerner. The scene expresses the gunfighter's reflex as a self-annihilating one. Lee's legacy produces generational violence within the home just as the era's atomic centrifuges weaponized fissile material. The scene stages the centrifuge; the family's gunfighter figures an imploding device that updates the Westerner's pulp origin into cold-war parable. It projects the era's nuclear containment strategy as an apocalypse-enclave. It suggests that annihilating conflict resides inside the nuclear home itself. The split atom is conditioned as an American "split Adam." As Jean Baudrillard has noted, nuclear war persists as a simulation strategy predicated on "deterrence."[82] The reality of nuclear war is that it is an impossible instant: to achieve it is to achieve an imperceptible total annihilation. Civilization's *ex post nihilo* posture annuls its experience. And as perpetual simulation, the nuclear is identified by (lives as) a surface effect. Its apocalypse resists a living denomination and persists only as a set of military scenarios sketching possible outcomes. *Gunman's Walk* ironically achieves its apocalyptic effect because of its generic baseline. Like the image of a lingering atomic apocalypse that hovers over the era of the film's generic production, the Western is always-already a simulation. Like Cooper's inaugural protagonist who reads the landscape as if a "conduct book," the Western "reads" its own action. The genre's articulating tropes (its incessant tracking and shooting) are indicative for the era because its past-presence as a fiction sympathetically maps onto the postwar moment as a discursive social reconstruction. Ed's mortal collapse evinces an allegorical collapsing intrinsic to masculine formation.

Ironically employing the generic armature of the gun duel, the film's last two scenes critique Lee's patriarchy in cinematic terms applicable to the gunfighter. Formal tropes specific to the gunfighter film read as tragic consequences of a rigid patriarchy. Following Ed's death, a cutaway positions his body as supine-reduced to the horizontal frontier of action, the naturalizing proxy that demanded violence from him (figure 13). As the penultimate moment of the film, the scene segues to an ending that finds Lee likewise collapsing under the weight of his contradictory legacy. As temporal relations and generations collapse, so do bodies. Riding back into town with Ed's body laid across a horse, Lee finds Davy and Clee, now his girlfriend, awaiting a confrontation given Lee's disapproval. Framed like a shootout on main street, the scene cuts between Lee and Davy with the familiar shot-counter-shot of approaching duelists (figures 14 and 15**)**. But

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[82] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, 276.

a contrite Lee instead asks Davy and his "lady friend" if they would accompany him as he takes Ed "home." As the two hesitate in surprise, Lee breaks down crying and falls into Davy's arms. Choked with grief and barely able to stand, Lee literally collapses. The guilt over his son's death is equal parts disillusion with his own patriarchical legacy and with its uncompromising pedagogy. Lee's alignment with a rigidly constraining Rooseveltian ethos plays out as both homicidal and unendurable. Under the strain of his own overwrought demand for a past image's ethos of perpetual conquest and radical individualism, he falls into the arms of a more diverse family designated by difference. The urgency that demands an ever-renewable manly "body" *as* history is thwarted by the couple's marked difference. Davy's romance provides a more hopeful alternative to the film's filicide.

The figural collapse of time and space implied by the duel and Lee's literal collapse in the film's finale are both punctuated by rising crane-shots that close each scene's respective action (figures 16 and 17). A standard Hollywood trope by 1957 for signifying film finales, the iteration of the convention implies that *Gunman's Walk* ends twice. While Ed's dead body is shot from a level perspective, it matches the earlier target practice that found Lee blasting away at the cans **(**see figure 4**)**. Positioned as both target and pupil, Ed is flush within the earlier scene's sightline; he is Lee's target. The graphic juxtaposition denotes masculine development as being of a piece with its homicidal endgame. While the ground-level shot of the lesson scene is a formal presentiment, the level shot of Ed's body is its dramatic result. The image that makes the man condemns him to death. But the crane's sudden elevation in the final two scenes marks a distinction with the level images. The shot acts as a structural gaze embedded within the semiotic markers and cues of the film. It escapes both Roosevelt's frontier agenda (implied by the literal ground of action in which the scene begins) and the flattening equivocations that suggest an imploded field. The vertical motion hovers over the action, reemphasizing a semiotic function that moves from the ground. Immanent in the drama, the crane relates that which conditions the collapse of American masculinity. The crane is both visual gauge to the action and a structural condition of its articulation. It is both critical and active. If it scans the action of which it is a piece, it additionally (like "Runaway's" leitmotif melody) implies a rescanning through the film's narrative. The crane shot provides an analytic balm to the coded violence it frames. Baudrillard's deterrence is visually manifested just as Roosevelt's frontier masculinity is analytically neutered. From either direction, the presentiment of nuclear annihilation plays as a violent outcropping from within the patriarchical home. While the level shots denote the proscribed dead-end outlines of masculine developmental scenarios, they nonetheless provoke a composite social and civil gaze, which the crane administers. The crane shots bypass the naturalization effect of the sublime frontiersman by heightening the cinematic Western's formal dimension as a kind of cultural exertion. While the crane's usage in both instances implies no character point-of-view, it skirts altogether the subject-heavy codes of masculinity. As a collateral-literal heightening from the film's ground of action, the crane shots enhance the melodramatic intensity of the scenes by providing gazes at once expansive and retrospective. Panoramic action shifts attention to the panoramic material that signifies the cinematic Western's epic spatial and temporal rudiments. Cued to "Runaway" as differently arranged tones (the former crane shot accompanied by a slowed echo-effect whistle, the latter swelled into bittersweet orchestral resonance announcing

the film's end), the crane shots provide paradoxically critical witness to the Western's breadth. The crane's formal iteration suggests a vertiginous palimpsest whose sightline (like Natty Bumppo's rifle) "reads" the cultural scope of action with deliberating precision. In *Gunman's Walk*, the patriarchical frontier family might collapse under the weight of its own obsessive legacy, but it alternatively discerns the rudiments of its own indices; it rises with the storied formation it indexes.

Conclusion

The crane shot and leitmotif that signify developmental tragedy in the film's finale is a synecdoche for the film as a whole. *Gunman's Walk* discerns the semiosis of a living cultural body by mapping the anxieties of its development plot onto its own material formation. Formal indices persist as critical indices. The signifier that coordinates the image conditions the "rise and fall" that posits its cultural imaginary (as masculinity, as nationhood). As signifying gesture, the combination of crane shot and leitmotif denote the perpetuity of a violent masculine endgame that the genre is expert at evincing. While the formal confluence signifies a rise that stems from bodies fallen to the ground, it ironically figures a developmental cycle whose ground of action is the exact spot of its demise. *Gunman's Walk* visualizes the collapse intrinsic to its gendered proxy and is constitutive of its own critique.

But the formal confluence also implies the cultural-historical sweep of the genre. As an extreme long shot and omnipresent score, the audiovisual breadth of the formal confluence intimates that the mythos surrounding Lee coincides with the Western's larger cultural history. The audiovisual purview coextends with the historical-cultural moments in which the Western finds itself, as well as with the respective influence of aesthetic material and ideological investment specific to the given era. As a leitmotif "Runaway" synchs with Ed's and Lee's collapse as, likewise, it signifies the historical ground of the film's production. The crane's retrospective function for determining the past as a consequent barometer for the film's tragic ending additionally implies a generic/narrative future signified by Davey and Clee, which the leitmotif's inclusion intensifies. The scene's formal confluence expresses the temporal weave the genre establishes as a singular aesthetic and ideological vernacular. In this context, gunman "shots" in the film operate as instances of the domestic and martial cadence particular to the postwar moment; gunshots convey the era as grounded in the dissonance between utopian domesticity and apocalyptic nuclear war as inflated contradictory appeals for midcentury patriarchy. Similarly, the formal combination "tracks" a series of historical-generic allusions that contribute to the film as an agglomeration of cultural influences. The ending further marks *Gunman's Walk* as a repository of aesthetic and ideological investments particular to the genre and the larger social/political fabric of the country it describes.

Figures to Chapter 3

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4a.

Figure 4b.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

Figure 12.

Figure 13.

Figure 14.

Figure 15.

Figure 16.

Figure 17.

Chapter 4. *The Rifleman*: Masculine Spines and Electronic Mediations

Introduction

More than any other Western in this study, the plot of *The Rifleman* (1958–1963) resembles the postwar era's rhetorical ethos. The loving bond between the show's eponymous hero, Lucas McCain, and his son, Mark, evenly braids with the postwar era's "new suburban family ideal [as] a consensus ideology."[1] The family mores they exhibit and the related rituals the McCains perform in and around their late-nineteenth-century New Mexico homestead thematically parallel "the reconstruction of family life" generated by postwar government initiatives and the mass production that ensured suburban domesticity. While postwar suburbanization exacerbates the already conflicting ideological valences of the Frontier Thesis for the Westerns of this study, *The Rifleman* is unique for its explicit interest in the home. In keeping with its domestic plot, pastoral allusions such as those exhibited by *The Last Sunset*, as well as concepts and themes aligned with Fredrick Jackson Turner's yeoman farmer, abound in the show and foreground the contradictory valences of a Westerner brought home.

At first glance *The Rifleman* offers a reassuring image of patriarchy for assuaging anxieties attendant to postwar domestication.[2] Played by former professional athlete Chuck Connors,[3] Lucas maintains virile disposition as an assured and able-bodied Westerner who vouchsafes an enduring image of patriarchy. In a related fashion, *The Rifleman* incarnates what television scholar Lynn Spigel describes as "the dialogical relationship" between television and the broader culture.[4] Created as *the* communications appliance for the home, television fostered the "middle class mores"[5] of the postwar era while responding to critiques decrying its inadequacy for conveying the ideal. While popular discourses about postwar television were wary of the medium's ability to foster family integrity,[6] there remains a similarly reductive tendency in contemporary television scholarship to generalize the Western telefilm as a "nostalgic fantasy" where the heroic vestiges of masculine independence and autonomy safeguard a larger nation.[7]

Whether derided as an unenlightened relic of masculinity or a weak imitation of its cinematic counterpart,[8] the Western telefilm's aesthetic and intellectual merits have been overlooked by scholars. However, such criticism ignores the complexity of the telefilm as an aesthetic model and the Western's ambivalence as a frontier genre. While the characterization of the McCains within the teleplay might appear to valorize patriarchy and manly virtue because of the absence of women, the McCains absorb

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[1] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.
[2] Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States, 4th Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 193.
[3] Christopher Sharrett, *The Rifleman* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 29.
[4] Spigel, 3.
[5] Sharrett, 64.
[6] Spigel, 55.
[7] Hilmes, 193.
[8] Gaylyn Studlar, *Have Gun—Will Travel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 129–130.

rhetorical feminine traits thanks to *The Rifleman*'s domestic concern, which complicates the teleplay's articulation of gendered, patriarchal norms. Additionally, episodic repetitions specific to *The Rifleman* as a telefilm formalize a set of motifs that bracket and underline the Westerner as a figural embodiment of ideological values; the formal effect translates a host of holdover symptoms indicative of the genre's late-nineteenth-century legacy and its enduring masculine ethos. The show's formal motifs further outline a channeling effect indicative of how the telefilm transmits aesthetic and ideological content to the twentieth-century home. Outlining how the telefilm *moves*, the effect suggests a dynamism redolent of electronic media as a phenomenon in contradistinction to the identity politics of the Westerner.

Premiering a year after the release of *Gunman's Walk*, *The Rifleman* similarly concerns an all-male family structure. But the modest homesteader logic of the McCain family replaces the epic Oedipal infighting that defined *Gunman's Walk*. The show champions the small rancher's life of domestic chores and responsibilities, as well as the intimate bond between father and son. *The Rifleman* establishes this figure as centrally at home, thereby mitigating the gunfighter characterization of my earlier objects of study. The show outfits the gunslinger with a paradoxical (according to genre prototype) dedication to family and home and augments the figure's expression as formerly defined by his weapon and masculine solitude. The Rooseveltian legacy of the strenuous/violent individualist that dominates the genre's classical iterations merges with Turner's agrarian one. The self-sufficient homesteader who tends to his ranch refigures the warrior's persistent violence. Specifically, Lucas's groundedness replaces the mercenary professional characterized by Paladin's cosmopolitan style, the dissociative longing of O'Malley's outlaw romantic, and the corporate sprawl of Lee's capitalist conquest of his town. In contrast to these, Lucas brandishes his weapon only as last resort and eschews the privileged choice and professional necessity of the gunfighter's midcentury characterization. Despite this, however, Lucas still fits the warrior model. Although the story privileges the agrarian legacy of Turner's frontier myth, it also sustains Roosevelt's martial leanings via the duels that mark many of the penultimate scenes. Despite this ambivalent relation to violence, however, *The Rifleman* offers a domesticated Westerner more inclined to represent the civil and familial ideologies that were the era's present-day suburban codes. *The Rifleman's* domestic mitigations replace the contradictory masculine logic critiqued by *Gunman's Walk*. The show assuages the conflict between gunfighter and family that mark this study's earlier objects (the chastising-threatening arbitrations of Paladin's omnipresence; the rigid paternal-pedagogy of Lee's mythic warrior) via the palliative lessons of a responsible and present (albeit no less "manly") father.

And yet, an overdetermined maternal absence complicates the genre's traditional focus on exceptional men as well as the contemporary suburban logics. Father and son Lucas and Mark alternately fulfill the companionable roles of loving wife and care-giving mother for each other, allowing gendered permutation to replace stringent stereotypical family organization. And while gender positions are renegotiated, the technological mediations that inflect the era pronouncedly inflect subjectivity. Like *Have Gun—Will Travel*, *The Rifleman*'s tele-fictional form mitigates the genre's familiar humanist reductions.

The Rifleman's credit opening emphasizes the shot composition and mise-en-scène that undergird the gunman figure as a constructed one; the credits foreground the

aesthetic and ideological material that code Lucas as a complex semiotic production. As with Paladin's partial figuration in the credits of *Have Gun—Will Travel, The Rifleman*'s credits present Lucas as a figural object whose form puts pressure on the reality-effect his characterization performs in the ensuing episodic fiction. As with *Have Gun—Will Travel,* the repetitive introductory sequences foreground the generic signs whose conventionality allows for the Westerner's subject-oriented naturalism. The focus on Lucas's firing rifle, his lack of a gun belt, and his Main Street framing all accentuate objects in the mise-en-scène as constitutive formal material seen to make the man. Emphasized as under construction, Lucas is an object-oriented figure before he is a subject-oriented protagonist in the drama, and this emphasis lingers into the action. But although the stark formalism and formulaic narrative that foreground *Have Gun—Will Travel's* object-orientation persists, they are attenuated by Lucas's family orientation. *The Rifleman* tempers its object-orientation by way of the psychodynamics of its domesticity. The schematic repetitions in plot and mise-en-scène that announce television as a distinct expressive medium persist alongside the subject-orientation concerning family roles. *The Rifleman* more evenly braids the object-orientation of its medium platform with the subject-oriented fiction of a domestic drama. While Paladin's figuration privileged his loner travails and gun skills, the narrative iterations suggest a superhuman automaton. Paladin's archival knowledge base is aligned with an uncanny physical dexterity, the breadth of his intelligence commensurate with the deftness of his skill and the sheer expansiveness of his nomadicity. Likewise, his character serves as a synecdoche for television. The romance of Paladin's pulp-heroic travails meshes with the otherworldly flux of the medium's collapsing time-space transmission. The McCain's domesticity contrasts with Paladin's fluid mobility. At home, the McCains align with the sight/site of mediation. Transitioning away from the fugitive impermanence of Paladin's flight, the McCains abide and thereby amplify the paradoxes characterized by television's rhetorical and literal position in the home. By bringing its Westerner home, *The Rifleman* confronts the persistent contradictions that plague the figure while elucidating (in its meta-dialogue between the McCain's figural home and the audience's literal one) electronic broadcast as an aesthetic and technological conduit.

Establishing Shots: The Domestic Westerner *In Medias Res*

Like *Have Gun—Will Travel, The Rifleman's* credits features a breach of the fourth wall that introduces its character and star. While Paladin's introduction focuses on his draw, his gun, his holster's knight icon, and a snippet of dialogue from the upcoming episode, the credits magnify compositional elements central to the character, thereby accentuating the show's interest in audio-visual language and the mysterious nature of its protagonist. Similarly truncating Lucas's characterization around predominant elements in the mise-en-scène, *The Rifleman* shares the formal attribute and underscores the signifying material that constructs the gunfighter figure. However, while Paladin's acephalic personage held the audience at gunpoint from a nebulous sound-stage devoid of setting, the partial characterization is as mysterious as it is threatening. In contrast, Lucas blasts away on a familiar-looking Main Street and turns to face the audience. The familiar Western setpiece, while accentuating the deadliness of a gunfighter personage, projects a civic orientation that makes eye contact. The drift and mystery that distinguished Paladin as a magnetic cipher contrasts with Lucas's protagonist who, like its ideal audience,

abides at home. In stark contrast with Paladin's enigmatic introduction is Lucas's identifiable one.

Likewise, the opening that precedes the credits begins with a home. Cutting away from an extreme close-up of a "for sale" sign, the show's first episode begins with a short scene that finds a saddled gang of outlaws outside a ruined ranch home discussing how they intend to rig a turkey-shoot competition to win the property. The scene is followed by a short-form credit sequence naming its star ("Chuck Connors as . . .") alongside the show's titular action (". . . The Rifleman!"). Like *Have Gun—Will Travel,* the credit sequence finds its eponymous character enunciated in a decontextualized action tableau until fading into the commercial time typical of the network era. Like *Have Gun—Will Travel,* the opening credits "set the stage" for its episodic action. Contiguous with the brief narrative opening that centralizes the sign of the home, the title sequence pronounces the signs that make the man as the home's coefficient.

From the outset, *The Rifleman* emphasizes how formal expression constructs the domestic Westerner. The mini-credit begins in a closeup on explosive action. Centrally framed around his rifle-toting midsection, Lucas's posture is acephalic, as he walks along the town Main Street while continually firing his brandished rifle from waist-high. While the figure is flush with the left of the frame, the rifle protrudes from his midsection at a stark 90-degree angle, the horizontal axis of which extends right from the rifle's muzzle (figure 1). As the radial point of intersection, Lucas's trigger finger overlaps with his belt buckle, forming a crosshatched overlay that coordinates his dual figuration as composite "rifle-man." Framed on the town's main street, Lucas embodies an array of interstitial positions. Rifle shots are symbiotic with the coordinated control and agility of Lucas's rifle-bearing body; the *in medias res* framing conveys how generic action works along the set's Main Street corridor. Man meshes with mechanism just as his action posture fuses with formal arrangement. As an introduction that coordinates the pose of its central protagonist, *The Rifleman* opens as a quasi-immersion with the formal motifs that mark the Westerner as town-taming gunslinger. Gunslinging composure meshes with the frame's composition to articulate how violent action moves on Main Street. At the same time, the opening credit also questions the developmental story and seeming autonomy of the genre's masculine legacy.

In the title sequence, masculinity's original unity is repositioned as without either clear origin or distinct form; Lucas is both firing without cause and blasting away in acephalic anonymity. Just as the intro sequence of *Have Gun—Will Travel* synched weapon to character, this moment similarly presents us with a hybrid. While Paladin's voiceover described his own intimate relationship with his weapon ("hand crafted . . ."), in the first episode of *Have Gun—Will Travel*, Lucas no less explains his rifle's personalized configuration in *The Rifleman*'s second episode. Resetting the rifle's cocking mechanism to its trigger, Lucas refashions the weapon into a machine-gun-like repeating rifle that the credit sequence's explosive barrage illustrates. The re-engineering particular to Lucas's prosthetic relationship with the rifle is emblematized by the credit sequence's controlled frenzy. But its exemplary pyrotechnics also emphasize a similar relationship between genre and medium. Lucas's Westerner inhabits the technologic of his weapon, and his posture is both automated and iterative. His bearing as contemporary gunman suggests the broadcast medium's telefilmic address to be both electronic and repetitive. His position in the credit sequence expresses the channeled electronic surge

specific to broadcast television while also emphasizing the formulaic code of the program as a genre-specific series.

The credits additionally call attention to a movement particular to *The Rifleman* as a telefilm, emphasizing how formal composition dynamizes the small screen. The opening tracking shot truncates its episodic design onto the broadcast screen. While the buckle-trigger acts as the radial point of intersection, it reframes the quadrangle of the television screen. Framed action reorganizes the logic of a visually rectilinear "space" of expression. Projecting off screen right, the rifle's automated firing line is congruent with the mobile track that follows its lead. The buckle and coextensive muzzle make for a horizontal line that roughly cuts the frame in half, while the firing line directing the mobile tracking's forward propulsion is held in place by Lucas's composite carriage. The line of action is borne by the rigidity of the human dimension's flush left verticality. While a tracked action figure, Lucas's forward movement is offset by the eclipsed space he passes and the unwavering (almost statuesque) bearing of his countenance as a tracked one-shot. He conveys a paradoxical persistence which, like television in the home, is both static and mobile. Further, the propulsive movement traces two invisible lines projecting from the left-handed muzzle grip. As one line traces up toward Lucas's white-shirted torso, the other traces down, swallowing the screen's lower right quadrant, the lines producing a triangular arrowhead whose pronounced forward movement is no less mitigated by the quasi-trail of the movement itself. The inverse traces that Lucas's movement leaves in its wake subtend the action's forward momentum. Joisted to Lucas as a formal device, the horizontal firing line props the introduction's action with strenuous activity; the introduction traces the formal arrangement that makes for the Westerner as a singular man of action. Figural symmetry subtends physical exertion; Lucas as a synchronic action-figure cuts through the makeshift set, both projecting into future episodes and simultaneously leaving them in the past. As a distilled action posture, Lucas's dual temporality is both generic and medium specific. The introduction is at once a generic setpiece that outlines the formal indices that comprise the Westerner and a medium-inflected suggestion of television as a technological implosion in space and time. The introduction announces the distinct iconic modes particular to both the Western and broadcast fiction.

The credit sequence reframes the gunman's shooting posture as machinic. While Lucas's figuration initially lacks character, the intro's symmetry between weapon and reflex extends into one prolonged display of virtuosity that esteems bio-technicity. The credit sequence positions story and character as beholden to an effects-laden audio-visual eruption more usually associated with the techno-futurist appeals of science fiction. Because the rifle guides the action of its gendered Westerner, it suggests Lucas is constitutive of a techno-formal expression over and above his placement in the past, his generic exceptionality as a man. While the rifle centralizes kinesthetic action on screen, it obscures both the temporal address of the genre and the masculine distinctness that sets the Westerner apart. It muddles the time of its offing while privileging choreography before character. The sequence begins by esteeming the genre's techno-aesthetics while muting its emphasis on time and gender. Before the introduction of a setting in the past or the hero of the action is the kinetic display that informs both. As a prolonged and concentrated tracking shot, the credit sequence begins by centralizing a fascination with the epiphenomenal effects of the gunfighter's deft kinesthesis. By privileging a

biomechanics specific to the Western's formal design, the title sequence highlights the affecting technicity integral to its action. Distilled gunman technique holds fascination for the novelty of its arresting technological display as a distinct medium expression in the present.

McLuhan notes that as an immediate and instantaneous technology, television recasts signifying order. Beyond "the fragmented and sequential" mechanics associated with film and the "the principles of uniformity, continuity and lineality" associated with typography,[9] television produces an association between audience and medium that privileges the tactile immediacy of the screen. Television's "instant sensory-awareness" as an enveloping experience thereby short-circuits the meaning-making function and code-bearing acquisitiveness necessary for literate fluency in typographic print. Devoid of print's sequence-oriented lineal patterns on the page and the abstract signifying particular to its grammatical rubric, the speed of television transmission produces an all-at-once "total field."[10] Likening the medium to analytic Cubism, McLuhan stresses a mosaic-like iconicity whose totality disrupts perspectival illusion as it eschews typography's literate skill-set by "giving the inside and outside, the top, bottom, back and front" all at once. Subsequently producing "[the] sense of the whole pattern, of form and function as a unity," television replaces the abstract distantiation of print with the gestalt of its transmission.[11] Televisual immediacy (as a constant presence) involves the viewer in the medium's operation as a manifest quotidian experience.

While pronouncing television's intimate surface-effect, the rapidity of the rifle shots likewise emphasizes the medium's broadcast speed; the effect condenses the gunslinger into an abbreviated formal pyrotechnic that (however momentarily) divorces figure from plot with iconic intensity. The decontextualization emphasizes screen expression centralizing gunslinging action as a compositional effect defined by speed. But however much the opening indicates the iconicity and speed McLuhan defines as central to televisual experience, it is still tied to the episodic storyline of its narrative. Conveying the totalizing tendency McLuhan sees in television, the credits no less illustrate the shortcomings of his hypothesis. While McLuhan privileged television's form-infusing experience as a total environment, he all but ignored the discrete function of how the medium tells a story. He ignored the telefilm as a producer of "sequences" that (however truncated by their lack of plotted arcs) express a rudimentary continuity.

The opening is nothing without the generic motifs that pronounce an emerging fiction. While it reverberates with the rifle-bearing legacy that goes all the way back to Natty Bumppo, the image additionally quotes John Wayne as arguably *the* film Western star of the century. By blending the actor's penultimate rifle-bearing gait on a town's Main Street from *Stagecoach* (Ford 1939; see figure 2) with the highly aestheticized framing of his hip-blasting rifle posture in *The Searchers* (Ford 1956; see figure 3), the title sequence's opening salvo absorbs two decades of the genre's modern expression.[12]

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[9] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 14.

[10] Ibid., 13.

[11] Ibid., 13.

[12] The Ford quotations also bracket Wayne's two Westerners as, respectively, before and after family. The emergence and continuation of the Western family is central to the

Updating the era's town-taming motif by way of Wayne's popular generic tableaus, the sequence fuses television iconicity with the star's generic iconography. Lucas's image amplifies the "instant" of the show's association as both technological and generic. *The Rifleman*'s opening credit sequence tethers the era's generic expression with television as a medium-specific technology. The Western film's legacy is altered by the telefilm's broadcast. The opening does not breach the line between Hollywood continuity and television instantaneity; it negotiates their tendencies. Sandwiched between a host of episodic positions, the opening's kinesthesis flits in and out of plots that, like the Main Street of its action-tableau, happen on the home front. While the credit sequence activates a host of generic motifs for establishing its hero as a redolent generic figure enmeshed with the small screen's formal/technological aspect, it nonetheless emphasizes the sedentary and civic dimension indicative of the domestic era. Lucas's furious introduction might equate a gunman fusillade with the speed of electronic transmission, but it resonates with the rhetorical domestic appeals central to *The Rifleman*'s postwar era. While the Housing Act of 1949 incentivized contractors to manufacture suburban homes on a massive scale, the financial boost of the GI Bill (augmented by federally funded mortgage loans) allowed returning veterans with families to buy them. The combination produced a "cultural revitalization of domesticity," albeit one idealized as white and middle-class.[13] Lucas-on-Main-Street squares *The Rifleman*'s historical context with the gunman figure; the credit sequence's composition brings the composite veteran-gunman into a domestic milieu. Like the television literally built into the walls of early suburban homes,[14] Lucas is formally installed on North Fork's fictional thoroughfare.

The moment Lucas comes into focus as a character synchs with the moment the setting establishes itself as a civic one. Continuing his stride, Lucas's figure is cut into a broader Pan-American shot that both more clearly characterizes Lucas (we now see his face) and more centrally puts him on North Fork's Main Street. The formal shift establishes the masculine hero as typified by a town-taming scenario. Immediately after the barrage ends, a nondiegetic announcer resoundingly declares "the Rifleman!" as the camera tilts up, revealing Lucas's stare into the camera; the sound design likewise shifts from the diegetic gun blasts to a non-diegetic orchestration of a bravura brass soundtrack that follows in Lucas's stead. The soundtrack is met with Lucas as he one-handedly twirls his weapon with a chamber-freeing "cock" as the announcer-barker proclaims, "Starring Chuck Connors!" with equal fanfare (figure 4). Foreground flush with the sequence's mobile framing, Lucas emerges alongside North Fork's medium-longshot background in the familiar Western setting. By situating Lucas's Westerner within the social and civil

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revenger plots of both films. Where the Ringo Kid must first avenge his brother's killers before settling with Dallas (Claire Trevor) at the end of *Stagecoach*, Ethan Edwards's pursuit of his Indian-abducted niece in *The Searchers* is overshadowed by the revenge he seeks upon the tribe that slaughtered the rest of his brother's family. Lucas's Main Street forbearance in the credits replaces the itinerance of Wayne's obsessed revengers. Unlike the film characters, Lucas's civil/familial stewardship begins on the home-front he rarely leaves. The credits inscribe Lucas's Westerner as within the material fabric of the fiction's civil setting and carries over into *The Rifleman's* dramatic action.

[13] Spigel, p. 33.

[14] Ibid., 1.

parameters of a town's Main Street, the credit opening's non-diegetic conceit typifies the violence of the rifle eruption as issuing from within the era's domestic rhetoric. *The Rifleman* incorporates the ensuing narrative setting as the sight/site of a civil contestation. The ambiguous and abstract set that began *Have Gun—Will Travel* is replaced with North Fork as a domestic set, locating the new medium as commensurate with the new "home" the McCains will proceed to win in the ensuing first episode. Television as a living space is commensurate with North Fork as a designed space. Staging seen to make the man in *Have Gun—Will Travel* is replaced by North Fork's set design as a continually pronounced civil presence. The address's aesthetic emphasis additionally carries over to Lucas's clothes; the costume functions as an allusion to the gunfighter Western *Shane* (Stevens 1953) and continues the thematic contradictions central to the film.

Lucas's emergence in the credit sequence quotes *Shane*'s combustive masculine conflict, and Lucas resembles Van Heflin's denim-clad homesteader from the earlier film. But the controlled reflex of his shooting and the deft twirl of his weapon suggest his allegiance with the poise and flair of Alan Ladd's titular gunfighter. Both homesteader and gunfighter, Lucas meshes the two figures, attempting reconciliation for the Westerner's bipolar legacy. Likewise, Lucas's outfitting is sympathetic with the intro's generic iconicity. The hybrid costume's pronounced "style" denotes the intrinsic link between generic character and formal design. As critic Robert Warshow noted about *Shane* a year after its release, the Westerner's moral stature gives way to his aesthetic presentation. Incarnated by Ladd's gunfighter, the Westerner achieves an almost ethereal beauty whose "serene unworldly[ness]" makes him more "aesthetic object" than knight errant.[15] Combining Heflin's family-grounded ethics with Ladd's stylized gunman, Lucas erases the divide between them.

But if the opening analyzes the domestic warrior's carriage, it is a carriage seen to stare back from the screen. Like Paladin's direct address to the audience at gunpoint, Lucas's stare into the camera breaks the fourth wall. With a sidelong grin that inspects the audience while reloading his rifle, Lucas's look is both a friendly acknowledgment and a provocative sizing-up. The fourth-wall breach that announced Paladin as an inhuman serial cipher is here replaced by a more direct "eye contact." The rifleman's gaze is both a companionable entreaty and a discerning appraisal. If the audience presumes to knowingly engage what Lucas's graphic comportment as domestic gunslinger means, Lucas in turn seeks to familiarize himself with us. Lucas's assured bearing suggests a performance style whose look through the screen troubles the border of its distinction. While Lee collapsed under the weight of his own exhausted countenance, his defeated bearing was as much emotional character-driven as generically characterological. Lucas's confident gait, however, is subtended by a formal comportment's uncanny agency. Lucas doesn't just hold our attention; he returns our gaze and turns a knowing eye back upon the rhetorical audience that can no longer consume images from a safe distance, implicating the audience as equally bent to the contours of the screen image. If the homesteader-gunslinger looks back, it is from an image-saturated environment the audience shares. Their shared living space is the

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[15] Robert Warshow, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshal Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 664.

contiguous television screen from which they make contact. Lucas's gaze (like the episode[s] to come) tests the integrity of an ideological artifice no less living at home. The Westerner demands image-work from the audience whose home he shares.

Pastoral Noirs

While the credit sequence announces *The Rifleman*'s fraught domestic theme by way of its weaponized pyrotechnic, the first episode as a whole further compounds it by combining the Westerner's proto-generic pastoral with the immediate postwar noir's domestic longing. Where the first episode finds Lucas and Mark winning the home that will serve as its core setting for the series, *The Rifleman* reanimates the domestic husbandman at the core of the early American pastoral by way of a more overt reclamation of the lost home-as-idyll found in noir. As influential generic precedents for the show, the pastoral (as before the Western's emergence as a defined and discrete form) and noir (as immediately before and during the suburban expansionism more fully realized by the 1958 of *The Rifleman's* first broadcast) express patriarchy as demonstrably at home.

And in keeping with the formal emphasis of the credit opening's central view of Lucas on Main Street, the show's first view of our stars privileges their mobility as akin with their sight; Lucas's gaze at the audience segues into his and Mark's hopeful gaze at a ranch home. Entering the frame's upper right corner, Lucas and Mark are seen riding down a tree- and grass-lined valley toward the earlier scene's ranch. The shot's low angle naturalizes their descent by funneling the visuals via the tracking shot's alignment with the sloping road (figure 5). The visuals navigate the passage's direction by overemphasizing the hills' incline, its sloping direction calling attention to the choreography that naturalizes it. Cutting from the McCain's passage, we see an alternate view of the ranch in extreme long shot that emphasizes the interval between approach and arrival. In contrast with the Westerner's earlier ties to the wilderness and the respective visuals that measured their picturesque union, this scene centralizes the homestead as the Westerner's point of identification. The image of domesticity motivates the McCains and sets the foundation for the drama to follow. Stopping under the shade of a nearby set of trees, the McCains peruse the ranch below them and hesitate before the setting that will be their home for the remainder of the show's run. The suspended violence of *Gunman's Walk* is replaced by a thoughtful respite at the home's threshold.

While the pause signifies *The Rifleman*'s generic transition from range life to domestic life, it additionally emphasizes a temporal suspension. The dialogue that begins the McCains' first scene together is measured by the formal strategy of the sequence and their hesitation before the home. The penultimate suspension of the duel between the Hacketts is revisited as a penultimate promise before a home for the McCains. The sight of an aggressive stalemate transitions to the site of an intimate bond. Framed in a tight two-shot that parallels their dual look toward the implied off-screen ranch, Lucas looming in the frame's left half as Mark sits match-imitation posed in the frame's right half (figure 6), Lucas states "[W]ell, it's new and mighty fine country son." The tight two-shot symmetry that mirrors them transitions into a series of shot-counter-shot match-cuts between father and son, serving to mark their resemblance. The formal strategy that enjoins them paces the intimate bond between them, the symmetry codifying their emotional tie. While Mark distractedly turns around in response to Lucas's hopeful quip,

Lucas notes his son's pause and gently chides, "There's no looking back; we've come too far"—to which a cutaway Mark responds, "I wasn't looking back so much as remembering back." The spatial limit Lucas affords their journey is refigured by Mark. Lucas's widower position and the spatial limits he sets ("too far") is counterposed by Mark's implied maternal memory. Mark recoups the lost mother not as an overburdened demand, but as a temporal reminder. Mark's memory of his mother suggests a difference to which the show's episodes will continually allude. The mother's absence isn't an exclusion. It operates as a persistent difference that her indeterminacy will re-occupy for the show's run. The ambivalent direction of Mark's "looking back" implies a dynamism all its own. At its outset, *The Rifleman* centralizes a family issuing from a complex gendered history. The "new country" they approach isn't enshrouded in maternal loss but buoyed by its acknowledgement. Moving forward always looks back toward a difference reabsorbed by narrative action in the present; the McCains look both forward and back, generating a multiplicity of temporal gazes negotiated by the difference they recoup. The threat of violence that began *Gunman's Walk* is replaced with a reflective mediation that grounds the difference *The Rifleman*'s maternal memory privileges. The calm of the sequence's meditative embrace and the lush setting of its verdant plain additionally borrow from a legion of "pastoral" motifs. More specifically, they map onto Thomas Jefferson's ruminations on America as a germinal nation.

Signified by the ideality of its natural preserve, Jefferson championed America's rural bounty as the singular virtue of a burgeoning democratic state. In 1780's *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson describes the agrarian husbandman whose self-sufficiency provides the ethical foundation for American democratic life writ large.[16] Shielded from the rapacious appetites of large-scale manufacturing and its subsequent market relations, the modest industry of the land avoids the taint of class divisions in which Jefferson saw Europe to be engulfed.[17] Stylistically fusing the detail-oriented and matter-of-fact accounting of actual agrarian operations of the time (a precise rendering of Virginia's raw materials, labor regimen, and geography) with the promise he surmised from this labor, the work unifies "topographical fact" with "utopian speculation."[18] Evading the back-to-nature appeals of Roosevelt's "savage" crucible, Jefferson in contrast highlights rural life as supplanting dire contingency with a civilization-binding invention that the rustic context enables and values. Jefferson's pastoral sidesteps the Frontier Thesis's "crisis" terminology of ever-diminishing resources by resisting progress imperatives altogether. Unlike the Thesis's trenchant literalism that saw the land as an ever-diminishing resource (necessitating an ever-colonizing developmental expansionism), Jefferson abhorred the financial and technological straits of "economic growth," opting instead for the modesty of the yeoman family farm as a self-sufficient vessel.[19] Jefferson's pastoral vision poses a different kind of American exceptionality, the self-sustenance of agrarian life eliciting the promise of a ripe imaginary "plasticity" from the "virtual stasis" of a husbandman's preserve. Both a literary figure and a literal condition, Jefferson defines Virginia as a

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[16] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122.
[17] Ibid., 127.
[18] Ibid., 118.
[19] Ibid., 119, 127.

quintessentially American imbrication. Expressing the "syntax of the middle landscape," Jeffersonian pastoralism belies both the primitive regress of an idealizing nativity and the obligatory expansionism of progress imperatives.[20] Neither inured nor withdrawn from the robust necessity of labor, nor withered from exploitation or pitiless necessity, the husbandman's life provides "a happy classless state in the farmer's actual possession of land."[21] Spawning the figure of the American "common man," the modesty and utility of Jefferson's pastoral sows the seeds of a larger civic generosity that the farmer patriarch incarnates.[22]

Premiering around the maturation of suburban development projects, *The Rifleman* recoups Jefferson's proto-Western pastoral by way of its era's domestic creed. The sequence collapses the distance between centuries as a geo-cultural graphic match. While Lucas and Mark descend into the verdant promise of their potential new home, televisual sight intersects with the American pastoral. As the McCains' look is cutaway-matched with the extreme long shot of the ranch, the shot that establishes Hollywood narrative context now changes by way of the show's episodic scope—the scene evincing a different generic direction for its signified (the Western itself) via the self-sustaining ranch home that the McCains will inhabit for the show's run. The telefilm's self-contained episodic arcs amplify the delimited and yet expansive narrative transformation for the Western. The sequence's marked generic contrivances (expansive extreme-long-shot beginning, natural set location, tracked horse-bound mobility, obscure albeit determinate backstory) coalesce at the show's opening upon the home that serves as the family vessel. As rustic Jeffersonian hearth, the McCain home is a civil foundation for the show; Lucas incarnates the moral stature of the noble "democratic Everyman" whose presence (like the husbandman he so resembles) "disseminates germs of virtue"[23] that both keeps North Fork together as a healthy municipality and guides Mark's development into manhood. *The Rifleman* tweaks its generic and medium specific modalities as a unique expression of a national era at home that, like the pastoral Everyman, "nurtures" a familial and civic body.

The formal strategies that denote the McCains as intimately bound to one another (the tight two-shots and cutaways that graphic-match their family resemblance) and the ranch (the point-of-view shots that magnify their naturalized direction toward the home) signify the show's pastoral themes. The covetous and competitive identity politics that drove *Gunman's Walk* towards destructive collapse gives way to *The Rifleman*'s episodic lability. The repetitions of the Hackett face-offs unfold with more aggrieved and insistent calls for violence, whereas *The Rifleman*'s pastoralism inflects its episodic structure differently. The formulaic arcs that repeat from episode to episode parallel the foundational "stasis" of Jefferson's idealized family pastoral while nonetheless directing each narrative with a difference that tweaks the soundness of its pastoral license, checking its integrity with "plastic" increments. Similarly, the compositional devices that emphasize the resemblance between the McCains alternatively sketch the stark generational difference between them, compounded by each character's different take (no

[20] Marx, 121.
[21] Ibid., 127.
[22] Ibid., 130.
[23] Ibid.

matter how frequently punctuated at the end of each episode by Lucas's paternal lesson) on respective narrative action. Like the "doubleness" of Jefferson's thesis,[24] *The Rifleman* checks its theoretical utopianism by earning its moral high ground. As with the practicality that found Jefferson augmenting his idealized fervor for the rural life with the facts of its geography and the technical maintenance of the land, the show likewise quasi-"fact-checks" (however fictional and figural) its own utopian impulse. Moreover, in episodes like "End of a Young Gun," "The Deadeye Kid," and "The Silent Knife," it is Mark who first discerns the decency and/or worthiness of outsider characters Lucas all too readily judges out of a pious vigilance more paranoid than just.

By centralizing the reciprocity between the McCains, *The Rifleman* replaces the narrow binarism to which the frontier motif so often falls prey. Subtending the relationship between father and son, the ranch home formally and narratively structures the show. While the McCains descend toward the ranch, the two-shots and shot-counter-shots that serve to mirror them shift into an overt third relation implied by their direction home. Their intimacy is strengthened by the emergent ranch, the home's distinctness as a set-motif projecting an almost characterological presence. Riding into a more demonstrative long shot, the McCains come into contact with the ranch house and its "for sale" sign. Descending from his horse, Lucas proceeds to its bedraggled porch. Pulling on its loosened beams and broken planks, he tests the weight-bearing integrity of its material while Mark herds the stray cows and chickens that run along its perimeter. Lucas's investment in the home's material condition is commensurate with Mark's corralling of its livestock. The McCains live in the space; they infuse it with dialogic symmetry. Extending from the bond between them, their seamless correspondence with the home makes it (like the pastoral) a palliative "middle landscape" that further connects them. The McCains imbue the sign of the home with their seamless activity at its site. The sociability of their tie reanimates the home as the central hub for the show; the home's idealization as updated pastoral is reemphasized as *the* sign for America at midcentury. The coordinated symmetry between Lucas and Mark (between them and the home, between them and its sign) extends the dualism of their initial pairing. The home becomes the environment that alters masculine mirroring. The McCain ranch suggests a harmonious (if you'll excuse the pun) "plotting." Mark's easy confidence when corralling the animals matches Lucas's careful estimation of the home as extensions of themselves. In either instance, the Westerner's autonomy isn't compromised by the homestead but, conversely, augmented as coextensive—in relation to a host of objects/animals that alters the Westerner's characterization. As the point of ever-negotiable interactions between the McCains and the various episode characters who flit through its foundational domesticity, the ranch further updates the genre's "domestic Western."

As Christopher Sharrett notes, masculinity (in all its fraught displacements) is the subject of prewar sound Westerns bringing him home. Exemplified by the heroic "Yancey Cravat" of *Cimarron* (Ruggles 1931), the primacy of the Westerner's "free spirit" is measured against the "the irrelevance or evil of the female in the Western," their union paradoxically bequeathing the civilization of the nation. Based on the Edna Ferber novel, *Cimarron* is a precursor to *The Rifleman* that similarly fuses the "gunfighter and

[24] Marx, 117.

settler forms."[25] Like Lucas, Cravat is both "master of the fast draw" and "bearer of Enlightenment values," Cravat's characterization a classic mitigation of the contradictory types the Frontier Thesis established. And like Lee Hackett's domestic Westerner, Cravat is an "amalgam" who absorbs a host of Western types. But unlike Lee, Cravat's characterological largesse includes civil typologies that partially harmonize the Westerner's social exclusion; Cravat is the incarnation of a natural family legacy. As "pioneer" reformed outlaw, "lawyer, . . . preacher" and (most notably) "husband and father," Cravat exhibits an alternative to Roosevelt's narrow masculinity.[26] Inverting the Rooseveltian type, Cravat is the righteous protector of less vigorous minorities and women from the overt threat of a savage racism, incarnated by Cravat's in-laws as coiffed and privileged aristocrats and less privileged "white trash types."[27] Cravat expresses a democratic breadth that eschews class and race distinction. But however much the character morphs into a new type that shirks off the racist tangle of Roosevelt's frontier exegesis, the Rooseveltian ethos persists, given that Cravat's lengthy spells away from home indicate that his roaming "free spirit . . . want[s] no part of" the civilization he enables.[28] The purifying freedom that Cravat's character incarnates (that "cleanses" civilization of its indulgent biases and fey weakness) must avoid the very domesticity he courts or risk a tainting inertia that would all but neuter the virtues his wayfaring characterizes. Cravat's domestic Westerner is undermined by the inevitable return of an over-civilized indulgence, personified by the homebound wife and mother.

Expressed as a sort of viral gestation at the core of the American home, the wife/mother breeds the indulgence and weakness that erodes the foundation Cravat's strength establishes in the first place. Although idealized by Cravat's dying "romantic paean" to his wife regarding her inherent virtues as "wife" and "woman," *Cimarron* stresses his necessary absence from the home life she oversees. The distance his roaming demands belies the supposed virtues of her static repose at home. For the Western, the woman implicitly subsists as a "poisonous influence" compromising the civilized legacy the Westerner insures. The wife/mother's generic expression personifies a demure and distant relation from the world's roughhewn realities that promises "the beginning of the end" of American civilization, feminine domesticity the dysfunctional root at the center of the developmental home.[29] The emergence of the bourgeois family, which the generic Western woman expresses, corrupts the solitary virtue of the Westerner's itinerant wayfarer. Broadly put, the feminine enfeebles the nation's patriarchical character; she fundamentally disables the virtuous freedoms the Westerner personifies. As a domestic Western, *Cimarron* expresses the enervating soft compromise at the core of American life, feminine domesticity the self-defeating order that ensures its collapse.

The family-oriented pastoralism the McCains express, however, mitigates the underlying erasure of the domestic Western. By fusing Jefferson's rustic yeoman with the

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[25] Christopher Sharrett, "Family, Frontier and the Destruction of the Social Order," in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home,* ed. Murray Pomerance (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 122.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 123.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 124.

era's gunslinger, *The Rifleman* imports the former's self-reliance while sustaining the latter's martial force and thereby relieves the autonomy depleting weakness suggested by its feminizing hearth. The McCains replace the debilitating "stasis" of domesticity with a newer, more nuanced patriarchy that paradoxically issues from the feminine domestic—but they do so by ironically reincorporating the largely suppressed feminine. While Lucas figures a democracy-germinating "everyman," it is by way of a homebound stability making for Mark's development. The generic accommodation points to an gendered flexibility for patriarchy.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has discussed the transitional image of family expressed by the nineteenth-century English novel. Shifting from situations that pose family labor as agrarian and fluidly "elastic" in its gendered designation to labor seen to be exacting and rigidly proscribed by the Victorian's proto-nuclear family, the accounts expressed the ideological "fulcrum" between preindustrial and industrial organization.[30] Broadly put, the novels depict the transition from an "omni-industrious household" where work roles between genders are shared (equally distributed and practiced) to the strict division of labor mandated by an emerging industrial capitalism. While skirting the neat categorization of either the preindustrial or industrial moment which the novels straddle (idealizing the pre-industrial era as some kind of gendered utopia), the narratives nonetheless centralize a shift in gendered power relations where men preside over a public realm's work-related production and women are relegated to the private family home as subordinated domestics.[31] Women become social acquisitions who sanction patriarchal power relations, marriage primarily positioning them under capitalism as an acquisitive investment. As the desired object informing the rivalry between men, "she" structures patriarchical authority along what Sedgwick analyzes as a "homosocial . . . continuum" where women are conduits for establishing the social commerce between men.[32] Like the home to which the woman is uniformly appended, the feminine is both the man's property and the legitimating private commodity authorizing patriarchical power. By coupling the autonomy associated with the agrarian feminine laborer to the frontiersman's warrior virtue, *The Rifleman* positions both as reinvestments specific to the mid-twentieth-century United States. Bringing the masculine warrior home reanimates the strength of the feminine as a domestic presence; Lucas and Mark are engendered as recombinant hybrid figures. And while the absent mother seems archetypical of the "traffic" in women that Sedgwick describes as "interchangeable, perhaps symbolic property"[33] and which cements the McCain relationship, the scene's domesticity reanimates/articulates her absence by absorbing it. The seamless correspondence between the McCains is negotiated by the home as a third term that repurposes masculinity as domestic and agrarian; the exclusivity of their sex is differentiated by a feminine position they inhabit. As with the absent mother, so with the

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[30] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 134–135.
[31] Ibid., 138–139.
[32] Ibid., 2.
[33] Ibid., 26.

emergent home; each offers an alternative that both elucidates and reinscribes the characterization of the McCains.[34]

The scene's quasi-utopian promise (as regendered family) additionally points to the ranch home as the idealized model for suburban development, its initial conception the paradigm for midcentury American reconstruction. The postwar home's mass production made for an affordable variation on the "spatial aesthetics" of international modernism. While a conscious take on modernist design, suburban "picture-windows [and] glass wall[s]" stressed a porous inclusivity whose hoped-for effect "merged spaces."[35] The otherwise confining home was idealized to "mov[e]" with the world. Utopian dream homes operated as "space-binding" assemblages, with the suburban home offering pastoral sights/sites by way of what they borrowed from modernism's experimental design practice. Similarly, the suburban view as architectural picture-window-to-the-world meshed with television's own utopian rhetoric. Suburbia's promise of vista-visionary "housing utopias"[36] map onto McLuhan's techno-utopian discourse of the late 1950s and early 1960s, valorizing television's global interconnectedness. While offering a more totalizing collapse between the "private and social" sphere via television's broadcast of social realities from around the world, McLuhan shared architectural modernism's utopian interest in "eras[ing]" the division between private and public spaces. Where postwar marketing around both the home and television watered down the social critique built into both international modernism as an architectural practice/style and McLuhan's celebration of television as a medium whose emergent "social consciousness"[37] dissolved the distinction between private and public altogether, the commercial appeals of the era retained the utopian tilt of each. Suburban "housing utopia[s]" and televisual "technological utopia[s]"[38] were related rhetorical sites/sights for the era. The porosity of small-scale panoramic "picture windows,"[39] looking out onto the

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[34] It is worth noting that the 1950s Western featured a significant amount of starring roles for women, the woman-Westerner becoming a frequent protagonist for the decade. Beginning with her starring role in *The Furies* (Mann 1950), Barbara Stanwyck was a staple of the Western; *Forty Guns* (Fuller 1957) helped to revitalize her career, just as *Rancho Notorious* (Lang 1952) and *Johnny Guitar* (Ray 1954), respectively, featured Stanwyck's 1930s contemporaries Marlene Dietrich and Joan Crawford. The centrality and autonomy of these characters contrasts with the discursive place to which women were ideologically ascribed, i.e. as domestic caregivers. While *The Rifleman* pursues characterological reconciliation for both the genre's frontier ambivalence and the era's suburban ethos, the era's contradictory appeals (the peaceful private respite of suburban dream homes entangled with a chthonic Cold War aggression) pressurize a masculinity bound up with extreme civil and martial evocations. The woman-Westerner, in this context, begs for a companion study. Her independence on the range poses an inverse figuration at odds with the period's narrow feminine engendering.

[35] Spigel, 104.

[36] Ibid.

[37] McLuhan, 47.

[38] Spigel, 104.

[39] Spigel, 104.

neighborhood of the home's own public design, found in television the perfect companionable communications vessel, already positioned in its living room.

The initial view that ties Lucas and Mark with their home (and to each other) suggests the era's discourse on television and suburbia, as Mark responds to Lucas's query with an assuring affirmation that the spread "*looks* fine." The "looks" that negotiate their relationship subsist as emblematic "views" augmenting the pastoral past with the rhetorical suburban home of the era. Lucas's testing of the home's foundation (its integrity as literal edifice) is no less the show's proximate test of television as a sound investment for the future of American life. But however utopian the opening's appeals, the contradictory effects of the actual ranch in the mise-en-scène project a more foreboding domestic undercurrent.

By flitting between naturally lit idylls and the opaquely cloistered shadows that characterize the ranch, lighting becomes a motif for the show, an ambivalent graphic match from episode to episode that plays out the contradictions of what "home" means. While Lucas walks along the home's front stoop, its roofed outcropping casts him in a menacing shadow, further cued by the soundtrack's subtly foreboding transition away from the upbeat soundtrack that opened the scene (figure 7). The peaceful respite suggests that the home is accompanied by a darkness projected from the home itself, just as the McCains' initial descent was steeped in tree-lined shadow. As the chiaroscuro of its contrast-lighting persists even in the show's natural light, the McCain's introduction harbors a foreboding similar to that of *Gunman's Walk*; the lighting's stylistic polarity a presentiment that *The Rifleman*'s pastoral is infused with noir's anxiousness. The idyll's more promising pastoralism is beset by the lingering threat of the earlier decade's homelessness and violence. The Western as national origin story is, once again, haunted by loss—by threats of itinerant drift, homelessness, and a related unhinging both literal and moral. *The Rifleman*'s midcentury expression of homesteading can't shake the precarity of Sobchack's leisure spaces as characterized by loss and grift. The patrilineage that *The Rifleman*'s episodes idealize is suggestively menaced by the home's black-and-white finitude; noir's hallmark chiaroscuro style repeats in the show as a stark reminder that the McCain home is potentially compromised or threatened.[40] The show renegotiates the optimism of Jefferson's pastoral from two centuries before by way of noir's cryptic counterpoint. Throughout the show's run, the McCains stand as intermediary sentinels in plots that lurch from reconciliation to violent tragedy. As the McCains' hopeful optimism tips toward the home's pastoral promise, the anxiety around the home's potential corruption or loss persists.

The motif of corruption is incarnated by the first episode's other all-male family, the Tipperts. Comprised of drunken old swindler Uncle Wes and his slick-suited gunslinger nephew Vernon, the Tipperts are hired as stringers to win the ranch property for the town boss in an upcoming turkey shoot. Seen earlier in the show's opening arranging the fix (by testing Vernon's gunslinger prowess), their introduction finds the home in a more dilapidated and ruinous heap. All broken-planked and vine-overgrown,

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[40] Sharrett, 28. Noir stylist Joseph H. Lewis directed fifty-one episodes of *The Rifleman* and helped design the show's distinctive visuals. Along with Sam Peckinpah's early presence as a writer/director and producer Arnold Lavin's presence for the show's entire run, Lewis stands as one of *The Rifleman*'s most important creative forces.

the house is a hollowed shamble. Initially dissolved from a natural high-angle perspective that shares the McCains' idyllic perspective, the Tipperts emerge from a cutaway that locates them in front of the ranch home, shot on an artificially lit studio lot. The mercenary Tipperts threaten the home's hopeful purity and the promise of the McCain's home, their presence registering the home as differently "for sale." Noir's pervasive criminality immediately extends into *The Rifleman.* The Tipperts are an introduction to the stock character types that repeat for the show's run. The older Uncle Wes (as drunken parasite) extends to an ever-infinite number of aging drifters who pose threats in episodes like "The Judge," "Eight Hours to Die," and "The Babysitter," just as similar versions of the younger gunslinger Vernon (in "The Letter of the Law," "Boomerang," and "Face of Yesterday") pass through North Fork in pursuit of revenge or fame, or simply propelled by their sheer waywardness. Likewise, episodes such as "The Patsy," "The Blowout," "Seven," and "The Man from Salinas" feature adult male gunfighters as composite versions of the Wes/Vernon pair, characterized as respectively desperate, burned out, or just plain lethal in varying degrees of sympathy. As either violent gunman defined by their pasts or juvenile gunslingers veering toward a destructive fate, they all contrast with the McCains. The McCains are forever up against their counterparts. Vernon and Wes are prototypes for the series, characterized by their potential toxicity as dangers to civil life. They can either be reformed or face punishment.

The threat Sobchack discerned in noir's makeshift periodization (1945–1958)[41] finds *The Rifleman* beginning the same year of noir's end, the scene a generic hinge between early postwar anxiety and a late 1950s marked by the socio-cultural maturation of suburbia and television. Noir's contradictory urban-idyll becomes *The Rifleman*'s pastoral noir; the hope of the McCains' agrarian promise as domestic Westerners is countered by the Tipperts' inverse-presence as a compromised broken family. The noir association is further emphasized by the families' contact at the town diner; the setting is emblematic of Sobchack's postwar "lounge space." While Mark sits alone (as Lucas briefly arranges for his place in the contest), Vernon introduces himself and, momentarily, takes Lucas's place. Given the approaching competition and his brief criminal introduction as a deadly gunslinger, Vernon's substitution implies a direct threat to the family. Paradoxically, however, Lucas becomes the real threat. Overhearing Mark and Vernon from his adjoining table, the sheriff huddles with the town's mayor in clandestine whisper. Realizing Lucas is "*the* Lucas McCain," whose vaunted skill with the rifle is proven by its omnipresence at his side, the two bet on Lucas tipping the rigged turkey shoot's odds out-of-whack. The town boss's fix is threatened, which forces him to double down on his bet. Threatening Mark's life if Lucas wins, the boss blackmails Lucas into throwing the shoot. Inadvertently imperiling his own family, Lucas's predicament harkens back to the Frontier myth. Likened to the frontiersman whose deadly skill in the wild enables an ambivalent civic formation, Lucas's sharpshooting potentially wins the homestead while nonetheless courting the violence that threatens it. *The Rifleman* conflates noir anxiety concerning the home's instability with gunman notoriety found in the era's Westerns, an incommensurability the show tries to reconcile.

While Lucas's violence is mitigated by his nurturing relationship with Mark, Mark no less elicits warmth from Vernon's deadly gunfighter—the dialogue between the

[41] Sobchack, 131.

younger characters illustrating the McCains' ongoing negotiation of these positions throughout the series. Though Mark and Vernon's discussion begins on the topic of the contest (weapon choice, draw speed), it soon moves toward family. While Mark notes his mother's death, Vernon likewise notes the loss of both his parents, a situation that "sometimes disturbs me considerably." Momentarily returning Vernon to the silent withdrawal of his first scene at the ruined ranch house, he just as quickly shrugs it off as Lucas arrives. Warm and congenial, Lucas welcomes Vernon's acquaintance. He assures Vernon by convening *both* parental positions. As the shared meal offers up a three-tiered generational balance between "men" (mature Lucas, adolescent Vernon, and boy Mark), it implies an alternate space for masculine identification. Oedipal competition is repositioned by the shared meal; *The Rifleman*'s first episode positions its Westerners within a cluster of settings that resemble Sobchack's "idyll of the idle."[42] While the episode alludes to Jefferson's homespun pastoral, it equally alludes to patriarchy within the postwar leisure economy. As a residual set-motif from noir, the hotel diner is a revisionist update of what leisure space means for *The Rifleman*. By shuttling through different combinations of the scene's three male characters, the scene presents them as a quasi-family.

Updating the idealism of the early American pastoral, *The Rifleman*'s aesthetic dramaturgy equates masculine development to civic design. The diner scene charts the Westerner's masculine carriage by scaling its growth. The diner functions as a transformative space. From child to adolescent to adult, the dining room graphically scales male generation. Centralizing Mark as the scene's figural magnet, the scene lends him a paradoxical authority over the other males that belies Mark's age and experience. While Mark attracts the lonely and conflicted Vernon, he additionally introduces Lucas with ease; Mark's warmth and inclusion defines the space as a generous one that subverts the competition between the older males. Mark's engaging directness forestalls the rivalry between Vernon and Lucas. Mark's social entreaty of Vernon pairs with his family tie to Lucas, the two relationships signifying a larger civic connection. Mark exerts a dual generic influence. The alienation that defines the diner in noir as a market-drenched leisure space becomes a connected social one, while the self-reliance and autonomy found in the Westerner is augmented with generosity and inclusion. As a child, Mark proffers a kind of inverse inheritance of values and influence. Mark's characterological presence redirects antagonistic masculine relationships toward inclusive communal ones. While Mark's vulnerability reforms Lucas's Westerner with parental care, his hospitable and curious disposition attracts characterological outliers. In either instance, Mark characterizes domesticity as relocating the Westerner at home. But Vernon's ambivalent presence, both drawn to the McCains' law-abiding domesticity and tied to his uncle's criminality, illustrates a characterological binarism the show inherits from the Western's late-nineteenth-century popularization. For all its plastic connotations, the show plays on a lingering Manichean absolutism where male characters in varying degrees of homosocial integrity are formally paired with North Fork's literal architectural façades, the juxtapositions implying an antagonistic civilizing design.

Totemic Traces and Object-Oriented Dimensions

[42] Sobchack, 167.

While the credit sequence ties Lucas's gunman to North Fork's setting, *The Rifleman* introduces its shift toward civil and domestic concerns. But the show differently extends the juxtaposition of character and setting into its episodic action. Foregrounding its characters in relation to North Fork's variety of settings (the Marshall's office, the bank, the general store, etc.), the reframed motif suggests an affinity with Roosevelt's equation between man-making and nation-building. The juxtaposition of male characters with town façades defines a figural *patri-architecture*—the neologism indicative of how *The Rifleman*'s formal logic traces Roosevelt's ideological influence. Through sheer repetition, the strategy encapsulates the genre's interest in defining progressive and regressive types of masculinity; the difference reveals the value-laden presumptions indicative of the genre's legacy and the era's own middle-class conventionality.[43] While a historical/ideological graphic, the motif's repetition additionally outlines how the telefilm operates as an aesthetic and technological transmission. The motif reveals how the Western telefilm is organized as an audiovisual experience. The requirements of its fiction-making (the aesthetic regiment that elicits ideological symptoms) indicates a larger technological dynamism at work.

The characterological integrity of *The Rifleman*'s Westerners is formally tethered to the civil soundness of North Fork as the show's setting. Thematic Manicheism matches a formal Manicheism juxtaposing character with setting; the two are entwined in a serial mise-en-scène that gages moral disposition. Extending from the generational triangle of the diner scene, the older, recurring character of Marshall Micah is repeatedly framed with Lucas and Mark in a quasi-generational evolutionary design. The McCains' place in the action, as an ever-aspired-to patriarchical ideal, sustains the progressive optic the show borrows from its late-nineteenth-century precedent. As a graphic composite, the images sketch what ideal, successive patriarchal generations look like, with the moral rectitude of the McCain/Micah triad continually juxtaposed to a series of counter-framings signifying their antithesis (figures 8 and 9). The formal motif counter-poses an exemplary moral generation with a "retrograde" degeneration;[44] the Manichean lensing figures masculine bodies of starkly different moral regimes.

Sharrett notes the emergence of the "monstrous" frontier family as specific to the postwar Western. Continually pitting various monster-man-family designations against their seemingly righteous counterparts, the Westerns of the era express a precarious social order. The moral polarity exhibits a paradoxically aligned/allied antagonism where "much about the family . . . as an institution" possesses "[the] source of [its own] discontent."[45] Patriarchy abides, in the postwar Western, as at war with itself. While the conflict between the "righteous" lawmen of the Earp family and the "aberran[ce]" of the rancher Clanton family—found in town-taming themes attendant to the immediate postwar's *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946)—exemplify this polarity, the hysterical

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[43] Christopher Sharrett, *The Rifleman: TV Milestone Series* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 64.
[44] Ibid., 52.
[45] Christopher Sharrett, "Family, Frontier and the Destruction of the Social Order," in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home,* ed. Murray Pomerance (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 128.

and violent Tobin gang of *Man of the West* (Mann 1958) intensifies the motif.[46] Absorbing the savagery Roosevelt associated with native American Indian tribes, the monstrous family recasts the settler story as an isolationist masculine one; patriarchal civilizing is beset by a rival proxy intent on its debasement. The conflict recasts the social Darwinism endemic to the genre's late-nineteenth-century reemergence,[47] making of its racist platitudes a toxic doppelganger.[48] Indicative of the motif's postwar influence, *The Rifleman* integrates the type in all its Manichean distress. More specifically, the show distills what masculine generation/degeneration (as generic and ideological) looks like for the era's Westerns.[49] The reoccurrence of man-family pairings structures *The Rifleman*'s design as a television Western. *The Rifleman* pursues the question of patriarchy by using the monstrous frontier family as a touchstone. Repetitions specific to the show's episodic format coextend to visual patterns that gage differences in the nature of the homosocial

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[46] Mann's casting of Gary Cooper, in place of his erstwhile collaborator James Stewart, relocates the flailing, near-hysteric characteristic of Stewart's Westerners to the more iconic legacy Cooper holds for the genre. From the early sound adaptation of *The Virginian* (Fleming 1929) to his portrayal of Wild Bill Hickok in *The Plainsman* (DeMille 1936), to his eponymous genre incarnation as *The Westerner* (Wyler 1941), to the isolated Marshall Will Kane of *High Noon* (Zimmerman 1951), Cooper's decades-spanning career reads as a cultural compendium for the sound Western. And likewise, as Cooper's character in *Man of the West* is an ex-gang member whose attempts at reform and civil integration are compromised by a happenstance pitting him against the very outlaw "family" that raised him, the film's central action depicts the character as both a "civilizing force" and a "savage killer" (Sharrett 2008, 129). The characterization backchannels Cooper's A-Western performances as an intertextual family of men, his Westerners an accretion of cultural symptoms that explode to the fore in *Man of the West's* scorched-earth violence.

[47] Slotkin, 42.

[48] Sharrett 2005, 52, 69, 98. However antipathetic to the McCains they are, given their "barbaric appetites" and depraved "psychopathology," the monster-men nonetheless express a latent undercurrent in Lucas. Connors's dual role as a "monstrous doppelganger" in the episode "The Deadly Image" suggests a contained "id" Lucas unconsciously harbors. The association is amplified by Connors's performance in *The Big Country* (Wyler 1958), the same year as *The Rifleman*'s premiere. As the only son offspring of Burl Ives's frontier patriarch, the violent frenzies that define Connors's character are implied to fall from his near-constant denigration by Ives's abusive father. The confluent casting further implicates Lucas's patriarch as *culturally* related to the monstrous frontier family, the savagery of the frontier an inbred tendency always about to erupt.

[49] Sharrett, 26, 30. Sam Peckinpah's influence on the development and production of the show in its first season was significant. Peckinpah wrote the original script for "The Sharpshooter" (26) as well as several other episodes, and was enthusiastic about producer Arnold Lavin's idea of positioning the show as "a kind of bildungsroman" about masculinity (30). The presence of monstrous "clans" throughout *The Rifleman*'s first season (throughout its run) is indicative of Peckinpah's lasting influence on the show and offers a look at the director's own early exploration of the motif.

family. Episodes like "The Shivaree" (S1:E19), "The Challenge" (S1:E28), "The Woman" (S1:E32), "The Patsy" (S2:E1), "Bloodlines" (S2:E2), "Tension" (S2:E5), and "The Prodigal" (S2:E31) all attest to this visual pattern (figures 8 and 9). In this sense, *The Rifleman*'s man-families are totemic. Bearing on the Westerner as the symbolic incarnation of a larger American polity (of an exclusively patrilineal Caucasian variety), the all-male families incarnate "a way of signifying the ongoing life and identity of the clan."[50] The images read as ideological family portraits distilling the conflicted character of American patriarchy. Nationhood, for the Western, is recalibrated as a larger family of men perpetually set against one another. *The Rifleman*'s masculine families respectively eye one another with wary concern or (depending on the relative state of their righteousness/degeneracy) sinister design. The pairings express the ideological residue of the nineteenth century's frontier thesis and the Westerner, specifically, as its white masculine avatar. The conflicting man-families thereby characterize "a collective representation . . . where the nation becomes . . . genetic, genealogical, and (of course) racial."[51] By importing the signs that esteem/demean the Westerner as the incarnation of civil life, *The Rifleman* illuminates the genre's legacy as an "instrument . . . by which cultures and societies naturalize themselves."[52] The totemic images coextend to story lines that circulate with antipathetic/reconciliatory consistency. Masculinity in *The Rifleman* lingers both as the healthy paragon of civic formation and as the diseased rot of moral decay. The show's tableaux figure the Westerner as incarnating the lifespan of the civic "man." They outline a patriarchal body politic whose character is vexed by a polarized loop between moral ascendency and moral degradation. The moral emphasis is of the same ideological fabric; the repeat framings highlight the aesthetic production that underwrites the genre's ideological agonism. As a formal device, the pairings express the Law, ideologically speaking, as an aesthetic production, as an always-fluid imbrication between an architectural/civil body and a masculine, engendered one.

The McCain ranch as an inclusive quasi-pastoral corresponds to Lucas's gunfights as blood-letting expiations. The two operate as related, naturalizing codas that define Lucas's patriarch as one "rooted in . . . soil [and] land . . . like a territorial animal."[53] As principled agrarian yeoman, Lucas equally channels a herding animal's protective furor. Whether in scenes of the McCains preparing and sharing a home-cooked meal with a troubled sympathetic outsider, or the violence-imbued gunfights the monster-men initiate, generic motifs are decidedly totemic. The scenes function as paradoxical "ritual[s]" where "the communal meal" exists alongside the "ritual sacrifice;"[54] the conciliatory bread-breaking of the McCains' civility exists alongside Lucas's perpetual showdowns. While the man-families distill/incarnate the lingering status of an antagonistic white patrilineage, Lucas centralizes the double status as homesteader and gunman.[55] Spoked with episodic motifs both formal and narrative, *The Rifleman* continually tests the

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[50] W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 101.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Sharrett 2005, 69.

domestic bearing of Lucas's Westerner. The scenography pinions the persona to dramatic loops; *The Rifleman*'s episodic structure serves as a playbook that tests the integrity of the Westerner as a cultural personification come home. While the male family tableaux function as ideological cues, the drama they inhabit is, inversely, ambiguous. Characters like Vernon (who have a foothold in both worlds) generate the show's dramatic action while the domestic rituals of the ranch home mitigate and push Lucas's masculine status as a deft gunslinger/warrior. Characters are at once contestable vessels and mutable ones. Plot taxonomies continually trifurcate and push the strict moral binarism of patriarchy's "double" identification. Owning the contradictory strains of the Western's patriarchical origin story, *The Rifleman* telescopes the paradoxes afforded its white homosocial Westerner. But the tableaux also imply the connection between the nation-building specific to the Western and the "world building" associated with serial television's late-twentieth-century emergence.

The repetition-specific requirements of the episodic drama give *The Rifleman* its singular aesthetic character by advancing the show's patri-architecture as a particular compositional motif. At the same time, the show's ensuing drama depicts the Westerner as a compendium of symptoms, and stresses that his newly entrenched civic position brings with it. By foregrounding its masculine mise-en-scène as aesthetic material, *The Rifleman* underscores the Westerner as a constructed figuration; his production is proportionate to a malleability specific to each episode's dramatic action. Enhanced by its iterative logic, the show denudes the series of a continuity imperative whose narrative direction works to naturalize action. In this context, the show prefigures the seemingly more sophisticated "series architecture" Jeffrey Sconce assigns to post-network serial television for its intricately plotted storylines and complex characterizations/relationships that project a fictional world's complex duration.[56] *The Rifleman* binds the corporeal standard the Westerner traditionally occupies as a characterological body with the "world-building" that tele-fictions generate over time. The combination of the show's compositional patri-architecture with its developmental, progress narrative plotting expresses a larger thematic production concerning masculinity, nationhood, and telefiction. Compositional elements conflate with developmental scenarios and express the construction of related narrative and ideological conceits endemic to the Western. By way of its imbricated generic and discursive architectures, *The Rifleman* expresses what a living cultural body looks like as a telefilm.

The Rifleman pushes cinematic conventions into "tele"-iterations specific to the Western as an engendered proxy for nation building. The show's singular aesthetic belies the thematic and compositional shortcomings leveled against the midcentury telefilm as, generally, a "mass produced . . . formulaic style,"[57] or the Western telefilm more specifically "as [a] mindless . . . but efficient replication" of its cinematic counterpart.[58]

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[56] Jeffrey Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition,* ed. Lynn Spigel, Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press 2004), 95.

[57] John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 54.

[58] Caldwell, 50–51. Though Caldwell does well to note the handful of telefilms that effectively integrate cinematic elements, he overemphasizes film's influence on the

Additionally, *The Rifleman*'s repetitive character as a telefilm earns (however differently) the "narrative sophistication" and "complexity"[59] which Sconce ascribes to later serial television and its immediate precedents. As both a genre-based reinvention and a telefilmic expression, *The Rifleman* gauges its own movement as a cultural production made specifically for the home. If the McCains are at home on the ranch, the ideal rhetorical family is at home on the couch. The emergent McCain ranch dovetails with the newly minted suburban audience. Principally championing the home for which its medium was made, *The Rifleman* expresses the era's patriarchy as, ironically, subject to television as the confluent agent that signifies emerging worlds even as it binds them.

Formal strategies that bind character to setting tether North Fork as a fictional civic world to midcentury America as a suburban one. In figure 8, Lucas's prominence in the upper-left foreground establishes a graphic match with the hatted personages of Mark and Micah and produces a descending/ascending depth-vector as much terminating at the Micah's office window as rising from it. But Micah's inadvertent stare at the camera attracts the viewer's attention to the screen by flattening his relation to the office background with a telephoto pinch. This, in turn, produces a paradoxical incline across the screen back to Lucas; Lucas's foreground position is seemingly adjacent with the two-dimensional screen. The telefilm's three-dimensional action inflects a two-dimensional scansion, their simultaneity producing a movement both into the action and onto/across the broadcast screen. The bipartite dimensional effect continues throughout *The Rifleman*'s run and emphasizes how a fictional mise-en-scène coextends with a literal one in the suburban home, and gauges electronic immediacy as a socio-cultural tether.

A still from "Seven," in season 3, exemplifies the compositional effect by explicitly connecting the show's fictional home with the era's suburban one via the scene's mirror (figure 10). Surprising an onlooking Lucas by discerning his father's plan to go into town for dinner and a new lever for his rifle, Mark's assured primping is in advance of the upcoming trip. His postulating on the variety of clues that led him to figure out Lucas's plan for the evening (a ruse, given that Mark has earlier overheard Lucas discussing his dinner plans with Micah) emphasizes a broader reading of images. Implied to be in thrall to the tenets of a leisure economy determined by images, Mark likewise reads plot as a larger design of images indicative of the adolescent as a targeted consumer of its own subjectivity for the postwar 1950s.[60] Marks's self-conscious "slick[ing] up" positions his Westerner as tied to the variety of images his age denotes. And while Mark doubles both as a foreground character and as a middle-ground mirror

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telefilm as a totalizing one and misreads repetition's function as an aesthetic category particular to episodic drama. By envisioning the telefilm as a second-tier Hollywood simulacra, Caldwell fails to recognize the singular structural and intellectual effects episodic drama yields.

[59] Sconce 2004, 109. Sconce casually hews to continuity forms and misses the specific formal cues that enhance the telefilm as a fiction. Because Sconce only engages narrative, he misses how compositional material works in the telefilm. Ironically, Sconce's myopia illustrates the progress-oriented distortions that *The Rifleman* discerns in the A-Western. By defining television's latest cumulative era as superior to its network one, Sconce's logic displays the progressive fallacy that *The Rifleman's* aesthetic structure gauges.

[60] Halberstam, 473.

reflection, he is both the subject in the action and a feature of the mise-en-scène. But Mark's doubling in the mirror suggests a more precarious position for Lucas.

Where the doubling suggests Mark's more adept and fluid exchange with the domestic front, Lucas's inverse mirroring puts him in the mirror's background. However much a domestic Westerner, Lucas's reflection figuratively places him between the ranch home and the outcropping frontier, as his position at its front stoop implies the traditional ambivalence the genre holds for its Westerners as between two worlds. But as an image within the mirror's inverted background, Lucas's relaxed self-possession is, paradoxically, captured in, and subordinated by, the mirror. While Mark's preening intimates his association with an emerging postwar adolescence, Lucas's position in the reflected background implies that he is both a residual image of the masculine Westerner and one brought home *as* an image. Cordoning off both its protagonists as subject to the prop's position in the mise-en-scène, the mirror implies that image work is done by the prop itself. In the midst of a subject-oriented Western about masculinity, the mirror subordinates characterization by instantiating how the telefilm as an audio-visual process works.

As a formal synecdoche to the show, the mirror outlines and performs electronic immediacy. Like the earlier image of the McCains and Micah as a man-family, the mirror produces a visual movement from Mark's dominant position in the screen's right foreground to his reflection in the mirror's middle-ground, then to Lucas's threshold reflection and beyond into the background plains. The reflection's ascending/descending planes of action simultaneously pull the audience's sightline upward through the television screen and back toward them by way of the ridges behind Lucas. The movement thereby seems to originate from both Mark's combing foreground *and* the reflection's distant background. While the vector's simultaneity determines an uncanny three-dimensional current, it nonetheless produces a two-dimensional conflagration wherein the mirror's middle-ground correspondingly flattens onto the broadcast screen. Right angles at the mirror's upper right and lower left correspondingly perform a lateral two-dimensional slant across the surface of the television screen, similar to the function expressed by Micah's background pinch with the office (figure 8). Unlike the earlier framing, however, the mirror's confluence with the screen is an explicit association between the fictional and literal home, and measures television's flow as an electronic signal. Formally centralizing the mirror-as-screen, the image denudes the psychological and subjective cues the-mirror-as-prop holds for the era's domestic melodrama.[61] The confluent mirror/screen operates as a complex hybrid-object that distills television as an electronic transmission. In this sense, television as a technology persists alongside *The Rifleman's* generic fiction as equally object-oriented distillations.

As new-media theorist Ian Bogost notes, object-oriented ontology (OOO) "puts *things* at the center of being."[62] As a larger philosophical enterprise, the movement opposes all theorizing that posits humanity at the center of the universe, as well as its

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[61] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 381.

[62] Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology: or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 6.

related descriptive anthropomorphism.[63] The presumption of a necessary human arbiter as a precondition for relationality in any regard suggests the "correlationism" that stems from the "human-world" binary[64] that Bogost rejects as a philosophical model. For OOO, "[h]umans" are "things" among many, just more "stuff" that abounds irrespective of "size, scale, or order."[65] Freed from a species-bound refraction of a discrete and cordoned selfhood (or objecthood, for that matter), any*thing* (whether animal, object, idea, cell, planet, etc.) subsists as a agglomeration of relationships within the bounds of a given context. As a metaphor for his particular brand of OOO, Bogost seizes upon the notion of the extraterrestrial.[66] Borrowing from philosopher Nicholas Rescher's critique of the 2009 SETI project "Earth Speaks" as an attempt to contact and communicate with possible alien life, Bogost instead conceives of extraterrestrial life as "so alien" that it "escapes" human "comprehension" altogether.[67] For Bogost, "the true alien" is a broader designation where a thing is distinguished by its opacity and incomprehensibility and suggests something that "might not be life at all."[68] In this context, the mirror/screen projects a byway that sketches the trajectory of a marshalled electromagnetic signal, as well as television's technical interplay between electron gun and the phosphorescent screen that produces its image.[69] While the mirror/screen affects television instantaneity as a graphic corridor, it performs the function Bogost ascribes to computation as an analytic "machine."

As a signifying conduit that endeavors to "replicate" a thing's remote context and thereby "capture and characterize an experience [the philosopher] can never fully understand,"[70] the analytic machine proffers a thing's activity to thereby speculate on its approximate ontology. In his attempts at rendering the activity of the oscilloscope in relation to early Atari gaming protocols, for example, Bogost developed a graphic software that enacts the literal technical process.[71] The enaction thereby provides the context for philosophical speculation on the oscilloscope as an alien phenomenon. Supplementing the formal strategies offered by *The Rifleman* for the dense technicity of Bogost's example, the show performs as a different kind of analytic machine whereby objects of the mise-en-scène suggest television's activity as a medium. Unlike Bogost's computer, *The Rifleman* graphically traces its own operation as a domestic technology.

The mirror/screen projects television as an electronic transmission by effectuating the motility of its operation as an impossible-to-conceive experience. Where the compositional effect of the patri-architectures traces the Western's cultural legacy, they additionally figure the imbrication between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space subsequent to the images' dynamism. However narrowly channeled as a tandem mise-en-scène that outlines broadcast television, the mirror/screen isolates and effectuates the

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[63] Bogost, 4–5.
[64] Ibid., 29.
[65] Ibid., 6.
[66] Ibid., 33–34.
[67] Ibid., 34.
[68] Ibid., 33.
[69] Ibid., 101.
[70] Ibid., 100.
[71] Ibid., 101.

flow of electricity invisible to the human eye. The formal technique demonstrates television as a technological thing whose epiphenomenal operation exceeds human perception and experience. While an invested cultural genre about masculinity targeted to an ideally homebound viewership, *The Rifleman* additionally expresses television's own operation as an electronic communication that exists beyond the existential and phenomenological range of the human sensorium. It isn't that we don't experience television images or derive meaning from broadcast content, or that one cannot fathom the specificity of its maintenance or the rudiments of its scientific operation; rather, it is that the electromagnetic wave and the material subunits that comprise broadcast television not only resist our experiential capacity but do so as independent actors whose function can only be speculatively broached.

While the sequence continues the doubling motif of the Western (in terms of both Mark's self-aware countenance and the suggested contrast between him and Lucas as distinct generational reflections), the mirror/screen suggests a finely braided imbrication between *The Rifleman* as a fiction and as a technology. Just as *The Rifleman* intensifies the frontier binary by conflating Lucas as, equally, frontier warrior and yeoman farmer as combined characterological positions, the mirror/screen yields the imbrication between fiction and transmission as, explicitly, an association of objects. While *The Rifleman* foregrounds its formal elements as communicative material, the mirror/screen projects characters as, equally, objects of both a fictional and a technological scenography played at home. The reflection of the McCains in the image only serves to underscore this point. Television's ubiquity belies its technology. Like the true alien, television as an electronic medium "recedes interminably even as it surrounds" the postwar's suburban milieu "completely."[72] *The Rifleman* suggests a technological condition not so much occluded in wraith-like abstraction but integrally infused with its fiction. *The Rifleman* illuminates television as a quotidian commodity whose existence as a communications technology hides "in plain sight."[73]

Conclusion

By centralizing the ideals of its domestic era, *The Rifleman* generates a series of generic and historical allusions that rearticulate the cultural past while ironically challenging the postwar present. The show reconvenes the association between the pastoral as a proto-Western and film noir as an influence on the postwar Western. While the McCain ranch reanimates the Jeffersonian pastoral and its appeals to self-sufficiency and modesty befitting the Democratic everyman, the paranoia and domestic longing associated with film noir lingers. A bridge between Jefferson's pastoral meditation on late-eighteenth-century Virginia and the postwar's idealization of the suburban family home, the McCain home nonetheless revisits anxieties concerning capitalism consistent with both eras. Under threat from criminal antagonists, the McCains struggle within the rapacious encroachments of capitalism. While *The Rifleman* never entirely shirks the contradictions associated with capitalism, the McCain home denotes a complex engendering that paradoxically renegotiates patriarchy and the Western's masculine legacy.

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[72] Bogost, 34.
[73] Ibid.

Lucas's status as a widower challenges the ideality of the postwar family unit and the legacy of the Westerner. By absorbing the traits and roles associated with the domestic feminine, the McCains reanimate the importance of domestic agrarian labor for the mid-nineteenth century and, by association, the mid-twentieth century's domestic suburban labor. The McCains centralize domestic labor for the era while challenging the narrowness of gender roles afforded the suburban ideal. Additionally, the homesteader ethos redresses the ambivalence associated with the domestic Westerner. Reigning in the waywardness associated with the literary and cinematic depiction of Yancey Cravat in *Cimarron*, Lucas's dedication to domesticity and child-rearing both legitimizes domestic labor and removes the emasculating stigma the Western associates with the home.

The Rifleman's embrace of domesticity further accentuates the importance of television as a suburban conduit. While the plot emphasizes Lucas's commitment to the family home and the broader civil machinations that stem from it, *The Rifleman* coextensively underscores the formal dynamics that outline the telefilm as a fictional broadcast for the suburban home. The show's aesthetic both distills and accentuates the ideological wares and Manichean attributes of the Western's masculine legacy (as a naturalizing totemic genre) while nonetheless implying an ideological corridor that tethers *The Rifleman's* fictional home to the rhetorical environs of a suburban one. But by intimating electronic broadcast as an aesthetic effect, *The Rifleman* suggests transmission as a discrete technological function devoid of the subjective stamp the Westerner relies as a liberal humanist ideal. Likewise, in concert with the show's compositional emphasis on mise-en-scène as the constitutive material that constructs the Westerner, the effect distills an inhuman operation that further obscures the naturalization the Western relies on as an ideological reality-effect.

In concert with *The Rifleman's* episodic plotting, the images ironically make for an elastic dramaturgy suited for challenging masculine virtue while illustrating television as a technological verité that transforms the home. The show distills the Gilded era's idealist trappings by repeatedly testing the Westerner's newly emphasized domestic rectitude. *The Rifleman* amplifies the subjective stamp of the Westerner's identity politics by way of the midcentury telefilm as a proscriptive aesthetic technique that waylays it. Compositional strategies specific to the engendered character of the domestic Westerner dovetail with television as a medium produced for the suburban home. *The Rifleman*'s formal motifs demarcate the complex ideological traffic specific to the show as a domestic Western.

Figures to Chapter 4

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

Chapter 5. Queering the Cold Warrior: The Domestic Western Embraces Influence in *The Rifleman*

Introduction

Lucas McCain's characterization in *The Rifleman* adjusts to a century of influence that the late nineteenth century holds for the postwar Western. Characterized as both homesteader and gunfighter, Lucas's character updates the ambivalence of the Frontier Thesis to pose questions about gender and technology for its postwar era. While Fredrick Jackson Turner's yeoman farmer roughly parallels a postwar reconstruction steeped in patriarchical domesticity, Theodore Roosevelt's theorizing about warrior virtue resonates with the gunfighter as a weaponized Cold Warrior.[1] In accord with the era's gunfighters and their alignment with the precarity of thermonuclear war, Lucas is at once "supremely powerful and utterly vulnerable,"[2] and his commitment to family only increases his emotional and physical exposure. While Lucas seesaws between deadly omnipotence and loving care, his role as resolute combatant can give way to panicked father at any time. Further complicating his characterization, Lucas as patriarch is faceted by the domestic characteristics his widower status demands.

The loving bond between father and son, in this context, possesses the romantic overtones of a monogamous union that implies a host of family transgressions. The suggestiveness speaks to a difference ironically stemming from *The Rifleman*'s expression of patriarchy; the anomalous father/son pairing amplifies the show's concern for, and sympathy with, non-normative masculinities. While the McCains (as a different kind of monogamous couple) resist the normativity the show seems to conventionally rectify (as an explicit story of patrilineage), they resist the strictures of the era's family ideal and "reveal [. . .] the instability and performativity of nuclear family roles."[3] The variety of family roles the McCains perform, and the difference the roles negotiate, posit a queer reading about gender. But queerness in *The Rifleman* is proportionate with the show's violence. Queerness generates a masculine overcompensation commensurate with the show's body count. Lucas's intimacy with Mark triggers the penultimate orgies of violence that further distinguish the show and satisfy the martial imperatives characteristic of Roosevelt's Westerner. Generic paradoxes correspond to gendered ones brought on by the ideological affront domesticity poses for the Westerner as a proxy for masculinity. And, correspondingly, the McCain home becomes a figural crucible for the genre and the era of its association.

Compositions similar to the mirror/screen as a coterminous formal effect, suturing the McCains' fictional home with the literal suburban home, persist in *The Rifleman* and continue to outline the movement of a broadcast signal. The effects suggest television as an "intermediate point" between a nebulous electromagnetic ether and the home, reminiscent of science-fiction anthologies of the 1960s and popular cultural discourses depicting transmission as an invasive

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[1] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 383.
[2] Ibid.
[3] "Allegories of Queer Love: Quality Television and the Reimagining of the American Family," in *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays,* eds. Pamela Demory & Christopher Pullen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121.

otherworldly agent.[4] With compositions equating transmission with disease and contagion relative to its plots, *The Rifleman* differently convenes the tension, suggesting that electronic transmission is both infectious and inoculating. The show similarly convenes postwar debates about transmission specific to cybernetics as an emerging discourse.

Hypothesizing the ways electronic networks within the body politic approximate autonomic organic processes in the human body, cybernetics sought to model the two as a sympathetic human/machine nexus. But by theorizing a fluid dynamic between the two, cybernetics initiated a counter-narrative about freedom and control. Communications technologies were perceived either as prosthetic extensions of an autonomous rational subject or as directed by autonomic functions that subverted the paradigm of liberal human subjectivity[5] reminiscent of the Westerner's own ideological makeup. Transmission, in this context, troubles the Westerner's identity politics by collapsing debates about autonomy and influence relative to cybernetics with questions about subjectivity prevalent in the genre. Beset by influences that trouble Lucas's individuality (domesticity, femininity, and a formally implied transmission relative to the fictional homestead and the literal suburban home), the character careens between a defense of civil society and the family, and an anxious, paranoid suspicion of outsiders. The characterological ambivalence no less recalls a postwar reconstruction as a consciously planned diffusion network necessary for Cold War defense.

While *The Rifleman*'s compositional strategies suggest the theories and debates around transmission for the postwar, the telefilm's episodic structure expresses municipal diffusion as the prototype for suburban reconstruction. Studies of World War II bombing sites in Germany and Japan demonstrated that centralization as a functional requisite for urban planning made the countries vulnerable to pinpoint attacks. Concentrating government, production, and communications centers within a set of tightly regimented urban sectors made cities an easy target for aerial bombing missions, which wreaked havoc on the Axis countries' operational integrity.[6] Consequently, postwar reconstruction was conceived as a dispersion network,[7] where a multiplicity of production sites throughout the country was seen to ensure the nation's survival if attacked. Postwar investments in construction, housing, and transportation were consciously implemented for achieving diffusion as a defense strategy anticipating aerial attacks. While *The Rifleman* broadly outlines invasion scenarios featuring deadly antagonists who threaten North Fork, Lucas continually responds to them as a quasi-countermeasure. As a civilian sentinel, he steadfastly lays waste to the variety of enemies he comes across. While North Fork appears as a single concentrated setting for the show's action, the repetition of North Fork's mise-en-scène expresses a model civil design replicated in stand-alone story arcs specific to the telefilm's episodic format. Like functional municipal sectors distributed for the survival of a larger body politic, terminal plot arcs end only to begin again in another episode. Lucas incarnates an ever-shifting set of martial maneuvers from episode to episode, reminiscent of Cold War diffusion as a national defense strategy. *The Rifleman* operates as a figural testing-ground for municipal dispersion; its life/death struggles register as a Cold War in miniature. By transposing the

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[4] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 134.
[5] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.
[6] Peter Galison, "War Against the Center," in *Grey Room* 4 (Summer 2001), 13.
[7] Ibid., 14.

ideological legacy of the domestic Western onto postwar reconstruction, *The Rifleman* elucidates the connections between the genre and the era. As a Western telefilm about domesticity, the show augments a set of aesthetic strategies that creatively dialogue the genre's legacy with debates about gender, transmission, and diffusion specific to the postwar moment.

Terminal Gunmen and Broken Men

As discussed in chapter 4, doubling in *The Rifleman* functions both as a plot device that drives its drama and as a graphic effect that designates the difference between Manichean families of men relative to the midcentury Western. The motif no less implicates Lucas as a patriarchical split vessel relative to his homesteader/gunman figuration. In a related fashion, the mirror/screen discussed at the end of chapter 4 formally sutures *The Rifleman* to its suburban audience and aligns the two as mutually constitutive ideological images of domesticity indicative of the postwar United States, while simultaneously outlining television as an electronic broadcast targeting the rhetorical suburban home. While doubling persists in the show's drama, it poses a specific set of contrasts relative to Lucas and other gunfighter types. Dramatic conflicts, in turn, pose a variety of ideological questions reminiscent of the historical and cultural roots of the late-nineteenth-century Western and popular discourses of the mid-twentieth century about patriarchy and television. By narratively and theoretically bridging the two centuries, *The Rifleman*'s doubling motif renders the ideological and cultural issues relative to the Western's legacy and television's advent.

For example, "Sins of the Father" (S2:E30) contrasts the McCains with another all-male gunfighter family and convenes a set of ideological concerns particular to both the domestic Western's legacy and popular discourses of the postwar era surrounding patriarchy, the home, and television. Beginning with a saloon scene, the episode continues the show's use of the mirror prop but as witness to the action. While a drunken young man taunts a renowned gunman (who we soon find to be the infamous "Andy Moon") into drawing on him, the gunslinger is forced to kill the youth. Wounded in turn, Moon flees. Edited into *The Rifleman*'s by now well-established credit-intro, the scene continues in two regards. While it is a formulaic narrative juncture, it also establishes the telefilm's point of narration; it functions within the strictures of episodic television. Secondly, it works to initiate a sequel-of-sorts to the gunfighter films of the era. It suggests both *The Gunfighter* (King 1950) and the more overtly patriarchal role the figure takes on in *Gunman's Walk.* The telefilm begins after its cinematic counterpart ends. Moon's stoicism contrasts with his young antagonist's indulgence, and the contrast alludes to the rivalry between Ed and Lee Hackett in *Gunman's Walk*. By cutting in extreme close-up between Moon's steely detachment and the latter's overflowing shot glass (held in twitching anxious hands), editing polarizes their affects. But the generational divide that defines their antagonism (by 1958 a standard trope of the Western at midcentury) is renegotiated by a shot-strategy that gages the conflict as overdetermined. Positioned from behind the bar, the camera is implied to extend from where a saloon mirror would usually reside (figure 1). Further, the action's two principals are edited into a series of one-shot closeups that further pronounce their proximity to a would-be mirror perspective; the shots replace a mirror's reflection with an uncannily conscious deliberation that observes the unfolding action. While the position behind the bar has no mirror (instead, there is a wood-planked backdrop with the odd picture), it no less projects action aligned from the audience's viewing position. The combustible masculine duel is repositioned as a residual image that the television screen identifies. Reflection is replaced by a screen that gazes out at the action of its own content—a content reciprocally aligned with the home viewing

audience. The television screen's perspective obviates what Mitchell notes as the Westerner's vigilant self-reflection. The screen as substitute-mirror spies masculine action, just as it replaces a character's self-reflection with the televisual projection that coextends into the home.

The mirroring motif is further emphasized when a wounded Moon (now accompanied by his helpless son) collapses upon the McCain stoop. Setting off into a series of graphic matches between the father and son pairs, the episode's editing and composition emphasizes parallelism. While Lucas tends to the wounded Moon, Mark and the gunfighter's son go outside to perform Mark's chores. Between extreme-close-up shot-counter-shots of the two men in Lucas's bedroom (figures 2 and 3) to two-shots of the sons doing chores (figure 4), the fathers' difference is paired with the sons' amiable association. Mirror motifs extend into spatializing motifs that sketch the home's arche-logic. The McCain stoop (as a boundary dividing the ranch from the world) transitions to the boundary between the bedroom and the larger adjoining rooms that serve as kitchen, dining room, and living room. The house subdivides into a world unto itself while condensing (given its modest size) with an ironic expansiveness. Similarly, Lucas notes that the lodged bullet will compromise the Moons' persistent "drifting," which, Moon notes, has persisted "for some time." The Moons operate as a mobile action orientation, brought home and suspended. As Mark repairs the fenced corral with the help of Moon's son, Lucas no less mends the wounded Moon. Disabled by his own skill and forced into an endless nomadicity, Moon's movement is brought to a deleterious stasis. The exceptionalism that defines him threatens to destroy him, as his body is unable to continue the relentless violence required by the frontier. Gunfighter skill is proportionate to gunman vulnerability. The gunfighter prowess that guarantees civil security via the era's generic "town tamer" is now in need of a home that guarantees *his* safety.

Thus Moon incarnates the gunfighter as an exhausted one, bound up within a tired story. Assured by McCain's attention, Moon unburdens himself and tells Lucas "the whole story." Referring to himself as "the infamous Andy Moon," he recounts his own story over and against the reputation that precedes him. Referring to himself in the third person implies that Moon is Other to himself and is hounded by an identity he cannot shake, an infamy that demands exacting performances. Confounded by Lucas's generous nursing as well as his stern warning that Moon must change for his son's sake, Moon utters "You're a strange man," implying that the "Wanted" violence hounding Moon's masculinity is surprised by the difference Lucas personifies. The man consumed by his own past is waylaid by the labile, care-giving one; Moon's overcodification as a gunslinger is supplanted by Lucas's counsel, which offers both remedy and renewal. The difference Moon acknowledges in Lucas sparks his confession.

While Moon recounts his past, he sketches the contradictions of the gunman's cultural-historical definition by telling the story of his time spent as a gun-for-hire in the infamous "border wars." Released from a territorial prison after six years in custody, his time served is likened with the legacy of generic violence ascribed to the Westerner. By way of Moon, heroic disposition is refitted with apologia while, by way of Lucas, it is redrawn via the domestic care-giving attention that nurses the Westerner back to health. Moon is haunted by guilt, and his confession operates as a broader generic accountability that redresses the Western's nation-building myth. The exceptional man who lays the foundation for nationhood is, in Moon, repurposed both as the anguished accomplice and as the self-condemning witness to his own destructive past. Moon's story sketches the gunfighter's legacy as a crippling one whose destructive tendencies are proportionately self-destructive.

The episode performs a historical intertext. While it recalls the Johnson County Wars of 1892 between the big business interests of grazers and small ranchers/homesteaders, it nods both to Owen Wister's landmark Western novel, *The Virginian*, and to the 1952 postwar film Western *Shane* as two fictionalized versions of the war. While the central action of each roughly sketches the violence of the conflict, "Sins of the Father" places the central action both of *The Virginian* as the "paradigm text [for] the Western film,"[8] and of *Shane* as one of the most popular Westerns of the 1950s,[9] in the past. The episode stresses the cultural legacy of (respectively) *the* Western novel that helped cement the cowboy as Roosevelt's frontier paragon for a progressive and manly (national) virtue, and the postwar gunfighter whose deadly adroitness keeps pace with the nuclear potential of a Cold War sensibility "at once supremely powerful and utterly vulnerable."[10] While Moon's regulator past associates him with the corporate trust that employed him, the exceptionality of his gunman status is commensurate with his fungibility as a hirable one. The singularity of his ability is undermined by the transactional nature he incarnates. And while commodification makes him a tool of competing financial interests, his criminality in the conflict (as well as the related notoriety and violence that follows him) positions him as a scapegoat for the interests involved. Literally wounded in the episode, Moon's injury both diminishes the "virile" legacy that Wister's frontier cowboy enshrined, and tips toward a broader "vulnerability" that a domesticated postwar masculinity finds itself in.

Conversely, Lucas's characterization fuses the gunfighter Shane with the husbandman, Joe Starrett, from the film. While both characters stand against the wealthier and more powerful cattlemen, their combination in Lucas, as well as Lucas's distance from the conflict altogether, indicates a healthier accommodation of roles whose independence stems from his domestic grounding. Where the exclusivity of Moon's skill makes of him both a puppet and victim haunted by his killer legacy, his character redresses the idealization of virility and autonomy found in Wister's Virginian, as compromised and debilitated by the vested corporate interests he served. Lucas's characterological reinvestment (as a figural expression of the era's domestic charge) nurses Moon back to physical health and enables him to take responsibility both for his past crimes and for his present family. Moon's recovery speaks to a broader convalescence the show offers to the masculine legacy of the Frontier Thesis. Rearticulating the Westerner by way of the domestic appeals of the Cold War era, Lucas's characterization tips the Frontier Thesis back toward Turner's neglected domestic premise. And given that 1893 saw Turner's much-publicized version of the Frontier Thesis, Moon's description of his incarceration in a "territorial prison" speaks both to the Johnson County War's crimes and to Turner's repressed thesis as respective legacies that still resonate for the 1958 of *The Rifleman*'s production. Moon's notoriety punishes him, and the gunfighter trope continues to lay claim to broader American cultural and social structures. *The Rifleman* seeks to remedy this by addressing the Western's generic contradictions. "Land war" gives way to telefilmic amelioration. Lucas's nurturing of Moon parallels his fostering of Mark. While Moon's gunman is defined by his vulnerability, Lucas's rifleman functions as a domestic caregiver. The paired association ironically marks both rhetorically as women.

As Lynn Spigel notes, television advertising of the era principally targeted the image of the stay-at-home wife/mother. As consumer conduit to its world, the woman was rhetorically,

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[8] Slotkin, 169.
[9] Ibid., 306.
[10] Ibid., 383.

economically, and physically positioned with home appliances. Maintenance of the home and its related advertising regimen (regarding meal preparation, child-rearing, cleaning, etc.) concentrated on the woman. This overinvestment likewise saw an explosion of sitcoms notable for emasculated, "henpecked" men.[11] Television criticism, similarly, associated television with femininity. Rife with chauvinist platitudes, perceptions of inverse power dynamics between the sexes redrew gender around negative poles; its reactionary polemics cast women as henpecking shrews and men as their powerless nebbishes. "Disdain for mass culture" was gendered. As Spigel shows, popular discourses held the televisual home in contradistinction to lost patriarchal modes of action befitting a man's "natural" composure, and imagined his agency as thwarted by a television culture steeped in feminizing "momism."[12] Such discourses warned that while "real men" were reduced to squirming husbands, their sons were destined to become coddled weaklings. Television's emergence saw the discursive creation of women as the medium's shrill fellow-traveler and redefinition of the husband as a waylaid "dupe."[13]

Lucas's characterization in the scene recoups manly strength by way of maternal virtue, his nurturing disposition so ironically potent it umbrellas Moon's waywardness and enables his recovery. Lucas's care-giving recasts the value of both parental positions. By absorbing maternal domesticity, Lucas (by association) offsets the era's misogyny. Correspondingly, Lucas's assured care denudes the era's rhetorical emasculation by positioning paternal domesticity as strength, while Moon's ensuing honesty and vulnerability offsets the weakness associated with the henpecked nebbish; his convalescence offers a reflection on, and reparation of, his masculine persona. By blurring the lines between maternal and paternal roles, "Sins of the Father" repositions the relationship between the medium and the man as a sympathetic one. While the episode repositions masculinity with labile inferences that associate him both with the feminine and with the medium, "Sins of the Father" additionally challenges the rhetoric surrounding child-rearing and television. The cutaways between the fathers and their sons are, additionally, rhetorical pivots expressing television's relation to gender and generation.

Popular magazines of the era positioned the child as a contested vessel falling somewhere between parental and televisual influence. Appeals around parental nurturing as the cornerstone of suburban domesticity dovetailed with the child as television's newly minted consumer byproduct.[14] Therapeutic discourses pitted childrearing regimes against television's debilitating influence; from either direction, the child is characterized as impressionable. Paranoid discourses around control and infection (amplified by equally dueling discourses on Cold War ideological imperatives) posited "[s]timulating activities" away from the television against "overstimulating" habits in front of it.[15] An object of influence, the child's development story redirects the Frontiersman's generic figuration in the wilderness. The child as the home's hyper-susceptible receiver resembles the land-man's ambivalence both as an agent of influence and as the kernel of civilization. The television and the parent replace the influential primacy of the frontier; the child

[11] Spigel, 61.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 62.
[14] Ibid., 59.
[15] Ibid., 58.

as burgeoning civil denizen is shaped by either parental or technological influence and not the land's exposure.[16]

The episode resituates the era's popular discourse by suggesting a gender hybrid's potentially liberating alterity. While Lucas and Mark entertain a host of guests who pass through North Fork for the show's run, they do so by way of the McCain ranch and the hospitality of a home-cooked meal; the generosity with which they unswervingly come to Moon's aid supplies a dramatic intensification/demonstration of the civic-mindedness that stems from their homosocial intimacy. But while Lucas's care-giving domesticity complicates the Westerner's generic/gendered bearing, his gunfighting prowess further assuages television's rhetorical threat for the man. As gunslinging father, Lucas assures the home's safety; his skill continually vanquishes violent threats, providing the room necessary for Mark's development. As a paradoxically gendered father on television, Lucas combines parental influence with medium influence and projects a child-rearing ideal.

While the sequence checks the disabled gunslinger by way of the pastoral home, it no less suggests Spigel's insight regarding suburban architecture's "indoor /outdoor . . . space binding" and its related televisual implosion of the outside world into interior domestic space.[17] While Lucas treats the wounded Moon with adept care-giving, the largesse and "largeness" of the homesteader's place in the world is centralized. Masculine convalescence is proportionate to the frontier's contraction into the home. The signal that shoots through the home is commensurate with the father, whose deftness "controls" its trajectory and whose correspondence signifies his sympathetic association with television as the medium that broadcasts his paternal image. Lucas arbitrates; his generic figuration mitigates masculine anxiety around television by positioning the Westerner as the medium's ably rendered companion. Lucas's Westerner-as-homemaker works through masculine anxieties via television as the home-bound communications medium from which they are imagined to stem. Lucas "mans up" (as woman, as a technology).

The Rifleman's compression of stylistic and narrative mirroring works through the broken identity politics that haunt both the Western and the suburban era of its broadcasting. Moon's past crimes are implied to be the accruing ideological repetitions that regiment character and which demand an ever-renewed moment of violence that Lucas's difference intercepts and mends. By addressing subjectivity (Andy Moon's guilt), family (the life of itinerant violence thrust upon Moon and his son), and history (the county border wars), this episode seeks to revise overdetermined points of identification. The episode performs the work done by ideological frameworks that tend toward cultural inoculation. As a telefilm, *The Rifleman*'s episodic structure makes this possible. The telefilm isolates generic ideograms by imbedding them within sets of bounded narrative. The McCain home provides the site/sight of ideological tensions

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[16] "The Rifleman Takes Aim at Parents," in *The Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1959. In a brief interview for *The Rifleman*'s second season, Connors ties his character's paternal values with his own as a parent of two. Taking a cue from his character, Connors teaches his sons "the meaning of bravery, and courage, the necessity of tolerance, and the wisdom behind justice." A parental interloper with his own character, Connors's paean suggests television's own positive moral influence as a medium. By likening the challenges facing "both parents and children in this era" with those faced by "Lucas and Mark . . . [on] the new frontiers of the West," the interview conflates the dual frontiers of television and the West as symmetrically ennobling parental examples.

[17] Spigel, 104.

indicative both of the Western's cultural history and of its historical context. Secondary family configurations act as critical barometers for the show; they demonstrate either the capacity for mending or its flipped status as residual. The McCain home functions as a ground for determining what developmental masculinity means to its era. "Sins of the Father" is exemplary of *The Rifleman* in this regard. As allegorical/episodic floorplan of the show's domestic ethos, the McCain home grids the masculine tensions of its domestic era.

The Rifleman characterizes what the domestic Westerner looks like in the home. Whether the men are ensconced in the McCain home, like the Moons, or dramatized in their own abodes, the show differentiates a compendium of masculine typologies that express the manifold anxieties that domesticity holds for the era's masculinity. A sequence from the episode *Heller*, for example, isolates its monster-man patriarch as the author of, and mirror to, the broken home over which he presides. Tracking on the domestic abuse the episode concerns, the sequence finds a stepfather returning home after a drunken afternoon ramble. Deriding his wife as a life-sucking parasite and his stepdaughter as "a teasing flirt," the shrillness of his misogyny paces the impotence of his situation as unemployed and drunk.

The sequence's cutting and framing formally tracks masculine hysteria as a motif for the show; the scene gauges his violence as a reaction-formation to domesticity. Three cuts organize the scene. Where a three-shot closeup finds the inebriated stepfather on the front stoop (figure 5), a cut into long-shot finds him thrashing through the yard toward his stepson (figure 6) until a final cut to a low-angle shot as the camera peers up at the fury of the attack (figure 7). The compositions convey the propulsive hysteria of masculine failure as a domestic one; the planes of action are tethered to the force of the father's rampage signifying a proprietary violence. Literally dragging the entire family through the paroxysm of his emotional unhinging, the cutting and subsequent framing fall forward from the weight of his raging bulk. Where the first take ends on the father bent forward in a sweat-drenched furor (figure 8), his tilted head and upturned eyes synch with his downturned nose approximating an arrow-sloped descending momentum. The effect is enhanced by the collar folds of both the shirt and jacket, their wide-winged spread separated by a fat fall of chin whose drop narrows into the V-pattern of his shirt buttons. Taking up the entire frame, the figure's heaving mass portends the enormous weight of violence that bears down on the family and issues from the patriarch's unwieldy bloat. The downward trajectory of the framing evokes the father's devolutionary regression; it marks him as a generic relation to the monster-man families. Likewise, as the cut-on-action from the porch sees the stepfather stamp through the neatly manicured row of crops (figure 6), the tilt of his movement graphically matches the broken fence to his right, the tessellating splay of overgrown weeds that crawl above and through it, and the flimsy drop of cloth meant to bandage a broken windowpane lying above it. His actions literally break apart the home from within it. Contrasted with the home as moral edifice, the monstrous patriarch's rot positions him as a toxic antagonist. While *The Rifleman* is essentially about the domestic Westerner, this episode's violence stands out all the more, given that "Heller" lacks the stylized gunfighting for which the show is infamous.

Lucas's gunfighting prowess is the measure of both his righteous stewardship (his moral superiority) and the sign of his exceptionality (the mark of individuality that sets him apart). However distinct, Lucas and the stepfather are both violent men. And the stepfather's implied rape of his daughter (however ironically) implicates Lucas. The emasculating epithets Lucas absorbs as a family farmer/rancher are proportionate with the violence he rains down on his antagonists. His violence implies that the domestic Westerner springs into action to defend his masculinity as much as to defend the civil/family structure. While Lucas's violence shields him

from the insinuations directed at him, the violence equally suggests domestication that robs him of his manhood. Just as the stepfather's drunken harangues blame the family women for his perceived emasculation (as the precondition and justification for his violence), the epithets that suggest Lucas is less than a man are met with a commensurate violence. The epithets persist as a prelude to (and a provocative condition for) Lucas's ensuing violence. Lucas's tie to the home suggests an ever-threatened unmanning that the triumphalism of his gunfighting prowess continually extinguishes. Like the slow burn the stepfather performs on the home stoop, Lucas's show of restrained dignity veils the doubt his show of force is meant to offset. Lucas steels himself against the epithets until the plot allows him the moral green light to mow down his detractors as monstrous adversaries. Lucas's domesticity compels a manly overdetermination that the explosive set-pieces accommodate. Omnipresent domesticity demands an equally omnipresent violence to justify it.

The show's seemingly wholesome domesticity belies the excess eroticism at its core. Violent bodies become signs of sexual panic for the show: these spasm choreographies situate the McCains as the proximate source of an always-anxious masculinity. The very site/sight of them reads as a generic flashpoint whose anomaly underscores the agitation the home poses for the Westerner. While the McCains absorb the domestic characteristics of the deceased mother, they additionally absorb the romantic connotations to which a loving monogamy would have spoken. Lucas's largely single status for much of the show only amplifies the suggestion. Similar to the unconscious incest of *The Last Sunset*, *The Rifleman*'s central plot harbors a repressed erotic entanglement that the Western suggests exists between male characters. The McCains replace the exceptionality of the Westerner's loner characterization with an anomalous family one and lends them a decidedly queer disposition.

Contemporary queer theory positions the term as indicating broader differences that "challenge [. . .] not only heterosexuality's claim to naturalness but also the operation of all forms of sexual normativity."[18] "Queer" posits a liminal field of social frameworks that trouble or simply persist, in contradistinction to traditional modes of patriarchy and the orthodoxy of heterosexual monogamy. Queerness in HBO's *Big Love*, for example, is expressed through tensions surrounding its central Mormon family's belief that they are the paragon of conservative family values but who, nonetheless, practice a polygamy that subverts those values. By equating their taboo social currency with a larger patriarchical legitimacy from which they deviate, the show's characters underscore the pretense of naturalized social roles. Their "desire to pass as normative" generates a series of character performances whose masquerade "reveals the instability . . . of nuclear family roles."[19] The alterity they incarnate in no way hinders their passionate self-identification as "white, middle class, middle American, patriarchical, and patriotic" Americans.[20] The perceived commensurability of incommensurable passions and values highlights the fragility of heteronormative convention. *Big Love* frames the "recognition" of familial legitimacy as no different from the "misrecognition" that the characters' contradictory social manner embraces.

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[18] Jessica Murrell and Hannah Stark, "Allegories of Queer Love: Quality Television and the Reimagining of the American Family," in *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays,* eds. Pamela Demory & Christopher Pullen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 122.

While engaging both normative and alternative images of what a conventional family looks like, *The Rifleman* confers a similarly queer reading. The McCains' homosocial standing thematically flirts with an incestuous union. While the plot attempts to recoup patriarchy for its domestic historical context, the revaluation is replete with an inverse suggestiveness. Rife with an undercurrent of implied transgressions, *The Rifleman* persists as a paradoxical family drama. In this context, the barbed use of the term "sodbuster" as a frequent insult in the genre (the homesteader signifying a neutered masculinity softened by his ties to the feminizing home) acts as a more pointed, albeit veiled, epithet for the show. *The Rifleman*'s square-jawed earnestness exponentially increases the queer provocations inferred by the contemporaneous and seemingly more sophisticated sensibility of *Big Love.* While the McCains esteem the values of a closely-knit, developmentally sound, and cohesive nuclear family, the singularity of their association belies the wholesome environs of suburban domesticity to which the show plays. While ensnared in a more overtly modern suburban setting of the Utah foothills, the surrounding mountain vistas imply that the Mormons of *Big Love*, like the Western family of *The Rifleman*, "rest precariously on the edge of the American frontier."[21] But unlike "the boundary between suburban space and the wilderness"[22] that situates the Hendrickson clan of *Big Love*, North Fork's setting conflates the suburban ethos of the day with the generic ethos of the Western as a past-present. However committed *The Rifleman* is to the middle-class values of the era's white suburban ethos,[23] the McCains (like the Mormon family of *Big Love*) "liv[e] at odds with the norm."[24]

As a domestic Western, *The Rifleman* reveals a marginality that the Westerner's exceptionality obscures. The mother's absence confers an anomalousness that belies the patrilineal generation the McCains seemingly incarnate. The civil formation that *The Rifleman* showcases paradoxically reinforces the outsider status of the traditional frontier hero. However veiled and unintended, the show's queer intimations suggest that the Westerner's individuality harbors a larger social difference, threatened by conventional failure and institutional exclusion.[25] Bringing said difference home, *The Rifleman* confronts the intrinsic marginality that the Westerner's exceptionality on the frontier obscures. The McCains' unconventionality attributes a queer disposition to their fictional family; their own difference generates a sympathetic link to outlier characters. The McCain home, by extension, becomes a social threshold, a space whose

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[21] Murrell and Stark, 120.
[22] Ibid., 121.
[23] Christopher Sharrett, *The Rifleman* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 64.
[24] Murrell and Stark, 120.
[25] John Wayne's Tom Doniphon, in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford 1962), personifies the type for the era's Westerns. Passed over by the woman he loves for the articulate civic-minded dedication of lawyer/tinhorn Ransom Stoddard, Doniphon's able and rugged Westerner languishes against the encroaching ethical stewardship Stoddard typifies. Cut off from the settled family life his courtship promised, and from the stalwart Law to which Stoddard hews, Doniphon is reduced to an enshrouded back-alley assassin; his eponymous Westerner is left to flail in a drunken despondent rage that finds him burning down the home he'd built for his hoped-for family. Desirous of the conventions that civilization offers, Doniphon's canonical Westerner falls short of accessing them. Doniphon *fails* to be a domestic Westerner and slips into obscurity. Without a family, Doniphon becomes defined by loss and exclusion. While the film is suffused with a melancholy longing that stems from Doniphon's disappointment, the film's flashback structure positions his social failure as a larger institutional one that leaves him behind.

mise-en-scène stages the ideological limit of a narrow patriarchy. Domestic difference piques *The Rifleman*'s dramatic action as at once defensive (the overwrought violence of Lucas's eruptive fusillades) and sympathetic (the encounters with outcast typologies that resonate with compassionate kinship). The show centralizes a broader institutional failure whose casual indifference and/or pointed aggression breaks men.[26] *The Rifleman* repurposes the relationship between mise-en-scène and masculinity in the service of a broader critique about the violence that harms men. Episodes centered around older male characters denote the isolation and transience indicative of an accrued history of disenfranchisement. Subsequent compositions likewise suggest an impersonal institutional bludgeon from the past whose effects dislodge them from the civil present. Where "Shotgun Man" finds a decade-long prisoner freshly out of the joint and seeking revenge on the eponymous hero who put him there, "The Sheridan Story" follows a traumatized Civil War veteran's respite at the McCain homestead.

The dilapidated home the ex-con returns to at the start of "Shotgun Man" materializes, as ruin, the character's decline (figure 9). The dust-and-cobweb-laced interior intimates an abandonment equal to the duration of the convict's sentence. Further, the canting of the ceiling beams, the ajar door, and the man's figure all express the disequilibrium caused by his fixation upon revenge and fit with the scene's chiaroscuro lighting and the man's key-lit face, which registers the character's half-blind condition. The cavernous quality of the house projects a graphic shroud that further isolates the figure to imply his broader social isolation. While the decade-long incarceration suggests eyes wasted from disuse, the character's time-worn carriage prefigures a backstory of punitive abuse exclusive of, and disproportionate with, the original crime. The total effect suggests that the convict's "blind rage" is not entirely unjustified. Although he might be a rightfully convicted felon, his domestic loss formally reads as a melancholy disenfranchisement.

The shed/barn scene in "The Sheridan Story" offers an equally dynamic framing and thematic tone. The work and lodging Lucas offers the veteran is at odds with the trauma the veteran endures in the scene **(**figure 10**)**. While the level framing matches the width lines across the door, the tool shed top in the frame's right background, the strut of plank that connects the ceiling with the shed's far wall, and the tool-pleated beam that supports the veteran match the vertical tiling that run throughout the shed interior. The composition produces a series of crosshatched right angles that attest to the structural soundness of the McCain shed as a synecdoche for the integrity of the developmental home; the equilibrium of the shed's planar design and its even-toned lighting are set in stark contrast to the veteran's outburst. And while the veteran's clinging posture matches the beam he hangs from and the brim of his hat matches the shed's interior width lines, the agonized outburst suggests his discomfiture within the larger civil and familial institution which the McCain ranch denotes. Traumatized by the war, the veteran cannot cope in the domestic present. The contrast between the veteran's anguished paroxysm and the shed's structural integrity elucidate both his alienated position outside the home and a family-centric world's inability to accommodate his injuries (the shed tools are incapable of "fixing" him).

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[26] While the war-ravaged character of Old Mose in *The Searchers* exemplifies the figure as a Western type for *The Rifleman*'s era, the type extends from the hobbled cantankerous sidekicks popularized by Gabby Hayes in the 1930s and 1940s in B-Westerns and legitimized by Walter Brennan in A-Westerns throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Struggling in the shed projects the character as an outgrowth of the Western's late-nineteenth-century influence. While the veteran's head cranes upward as he pleas to God to alleviate his pain, he simultaneously collapses along the beam. The throes of the trauma contort the veteran into a contradictory posture befitting the tumult of his alienation. Both lurching upward for solace and sliding down in agony, the veteran's body figures the ideological strains intrinsic to the Western's cultural origin. Roosevelt's frontier doctrine returns as a war on the Westerner himself; the crucible that makes the man maims him. The conquest central to Roosevelt's frontier doctrine returns as one that feeds off the masculinity it was meant to revitalize.[27] Regenerative warfare is reimagined as a debilitating one, and masculinity is reinterpreted as the sacrificial grist that propels civilization's progress initiative. The "savage" war is always a civil one. The veteran figure replaces the Westerner's vitalism with exhaustion and damage, as the Westerner's evocation of freedom is rendered as an instantiation of homelessness.

The two older characters read as ravaged bodies of history. However much *The Rifleman*'s medium-specific imbrication suggests a newer and sturdier cultural/civil bond, the poverty that inflects its secondary characterizations exhibit an anxiety that undermines its surety. The Westerner as the incarnate body politic is both preyed on, and preys upon, the very institutions he cannot access. He is torn from himself. The unemployed stepfather preys on his family, the incarcerated ex-con stalks Lucas as a father, and the homeless veteran's internal traumas besiege him. As an aesthetic scold, the characterizations define patriarchy as a riot of institutional violence. The dregs of unemployment, incarceration, and war locate the calamities that the Westerner's token iconography affords. Their bodies read as the incarnation of a collapsed patriarchy that culminates with the veteran's breakdown. The adroitness that typifies the Westerner's relation to the natural environment gives way to an anxiety concerning masculinity and capitalism. In this context, Mark's development to manhood paces Lucas's struggles as a working patriarch. They register a tremulous accord with a present domesticity always threatened by failure.

If the McCains denote a middle-class ideal, it is one defined by impossible alternatives. Threatened by an ever-present decline into poverty expressed in terms of domestic violence, homelessness, and morally dubious social alternatives, and an ironically decadent ascent into a corrupting wealth (expressed in terms of the greed and manipulation of the town bosses who the McCains are up against in the show's first season), their middle-class status demands middling stasis. However heroic and kind, they are conscripted to a class ambivalence whose generosity and openness can only exist within the static parameters of yeoman self-sufficiency as a moral imperative. Their middle-class security demands middle-class insecurity; the McCains' integrity is ironically sanctioned by, and freighted with, the threat of an ever-present loss that Lucas's widower status incarnates. In terms of masculinity, economic failure paces social emasculation; Lucas's queer suggestiveness intensifies the burden of heterosexual success by equating economic precarity with gender anxiety.

Inoculating Portals

Scrutinizing masculinity as a central theme, *The Rifleman* tips toward rectifying bonhomie. While the show repeats generic moments infused with violence, it nonetheless tweaks them with reparation. The show as a whole speaks to the Western's masculine story as a sort of ideological

[27] Slotkin, 37.

virus. While Mark and Lucas make their home in North Fork, the town is their figural staging point. The McCains determine the narrative ingress into North Fork by sharing (however briefly in the first episode) the itinerant drift of the show's secondary characters. At *The Rifleman*'s outset, the McCains resemble the flood of nomadic wayfarers who generate the show's ensuing drama and empathize with those who share this fate. The McCains' generosity toward drifters implies that they never lose their outsider status; the movement into North Fork is a crossroads the McCains know well. The ingress-egress sketches the arc of the show's distinct episodes. *The Rifleman*'s town setting is designed as an allegorical off-ramp that facilitates the movement of the series' flow. The McCain home affords aid to the settlers, drifters, and outlaws who cross its threshold, and offers the proportionate strength to withstand the repeat violence that drifts into town. As a Western that negotiates the polarity between an emergent domesticity and violent gunfights, *The Rifleman*'s generic premise maps onto the Cold War. The McCain home is a Cold War in miniature, and North Fork is its toy testing ground. The suburban migration of the era's postwar redevelopment plan inflects North Fork as a site of infection and inoculation. The hospitality of the McCain home belies an always about-to-erupt violence. If the McCain home offers a point of homey refuge, Lucas's vigilance eradicates the threats offered by deadlier trespassers, and because of this, *The Rifleman*'s narrative logic lurches between scenarios of social generosity and civil carnage. *The Rifleman*'s broad-minded inclusiveness paces its home-bound defensiveness as the show continually seeks a balance between these competing impulses. The narrative tendency toward equilibrium is reminiscent of postwar cybernetics and subsequent debates surrounding subjectivity and transmission. While Lucas's characterization flits between domestic and martial extremes specific to the era, the tension intensifies the Westerner's ambivalence in regards to the sacrosanct autonomy that defines him and the civilization that diminishes him. Similarly, the emergence of postwar communication technologies as an ever-present influence on the American public puts pressure on individuality as the theoretical cornerstone of liberal humanist democracy.

Katherine Hayles has noted the similar tension in the Western and the theorization of the cyborg in *The Rifleman*'s production era.[28] While its emergence roughly stretched from 1945 to 1960, cybernetic discourse came of age at exactly the point of the television Western's maturation. A coordinating logic that coalesced around neuro-science, computation, and cellular biology, cybernetics roughly likened code-bearing systems with human beings. Theories of the cyborg sought to alter ontological paradigms by conceptually tying machines as "information-processing entities" to humans as motivated individuals.[29] The relationship between an autonomic technological-biological system with an autonomous individuality was conceived as bi-valent, while their convergence was hoped to more firmly support a cohesive body-politic. But, however integrated, the cyborg was theoretically grounded in liberal humanist paradigms that conceived of the larger machine world as a more sophisticated and sustainable version of "enlightened self-interest."[30] For foundational cybernetic theorist Norbert Wiener, the union was ostensibly "self-regulating"; cyborg ideality was fundamentally maintained by the "agency" and "freedom" of an integral self and the rational subjectivity it afforded.[31] Just as the land provided Jefferson's yeoman a self-sustaining harvest that in turn nurtured the independence of the

[28] Hayles, 108.
[29] Ibid., 7.
[30] Ibid., 86.
[31] Ibid., 7.

democratic common man, Wiener envisioned a system's self-regulation as fostering the social and political virtues of a deliberating individualism. But Wiener's initial conception proved difficult to maintain. Cybernetic cohesion was always troubled both by conceptual "boundary disruptions" threatening to dissolve human autonomy and integrity altogether, and by a related fear that the "thinking machine" would circumvent or override the very liberal imagination that created it.[32] The imagination that safeguards an enlightened individualism (which projects a commensurate civil integrity) is predicated upon influence and exposure. Like the cyborg, the land-man's hybridity suggests susceptibility.

The liberal subject conceived by Wiener shares much with the Westerner's cultural legacy. Both valorize exceptional unions. As both Roosevelt's frontier warrior and Turner's agrarian homesteader are socialized by an exposure to land as (respectively) a primal wild and a natural fertility, contact with the frontier insured the well-being of a larger body politic. The landscape that insured a rational and progressive character in the Frontier Thesis is similar to the debates around "homeostasis" that early cybernetics hoped the machine/human union would provide.[33] *The Rifleman* expresses the legacy of an American cultural vernacular rife with symbiotic exchanges at once necessary yet forbidding, imperative yet threatening. The show foregrounds the threat of influence that masculinity forever defends against; it sketches the incursions that produce the authority and legacy of its enduring identity politics.

While every one of *The Rifleman*'s episodes is flush with the infection motif, the plots concerning actual contagions are the most overt—none more so than the Season Two episode "Panic." The episode deals with a couple Lucas and Mark find stranded on their property, sick with yellow fever. Fading in from black, we see Lucas and Mark in extreme long shot trundling across the plains by way of a buggy in bright natural light until they come across the couple's stranded wagon. Alarmed by the sight, Lucas investigates. The cut-on-action that finds Lucas entering the wagon is framed around the narrow iris of the wagon entrance (figures 11 and 12). Movement along the road home is formally arranged as an ever-narrowing visual corridor. Both the spatial contraction and the narrowing visual scale suggest the implosion and transmission rhetoric of television.

Jeffrey Sconce has noted how science-fiction anthology series of the early 1960s dealt with the ambiguous character of television. With their standalone plots, both *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* explored television as a "mediated void."[34] The danger scenarios involving alien invasions and encroaching nether-dimensions suggested the ethereality of television's own electromagnetic transmission. The shows offered a meta-speculation on their medium, where—in the "nanosecond separating transmission and reception" (to borrow from a description of an *Outer Limits* episode)—some otherworldly spore eked out of television's interval.[35] The serials captured an era's uneasiness with television as an uncanny technology that seemingly "lives" inside (and is infused with) the era's homes. "Panic" similarly takes on the medium of its broadcast era. The iris portal through which Lucas enters the wagon operates as the threshold that weds inside with outside, mobile figures with immobile ones and healthy bodies with infected ones. Like the medium's broadcast screen, the wagon portal illustrates (as Sconce suggests for *The Outer Limits*) "the betwixt and between" suggestive of television's liminal

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[32] Hayles, 85.
[33] Ibid., 66.
[34] Sconce, 132.
[35] Ibid., 143.

nature.[36] Television is portrayed as the suspect threshold between a matter-of-fact, quotidian world and a nebulous one of unknown menace. While Lucas crouches above the feverish wife, his health is threatened with an exposure more formally aligned with the television broadcast.

As the anthology plots served to uncover television's uncanny residual presence within the seemingly innocuous setting of its domestic location, its science-fiction trappings discerned television's meta-menacing broadcast. Paradigmatic is the opening-credits sequence of *The Outer Limits*, which represents a television screen bursting into static as a disembodied voice advises "not to adjust your television screen." The screen itself is portrayed as *the* central feature of *The Outer Limits* as a show. As a Western, however, *The Rifleman* veils its technological base. The naturally lit vista that opens the episode, and the physicality of the wagon's passage through the neat pastoral, mask its fantasy trappings. The Western cloaks its predominant status in the twentieth century as a technological expression with its natural settings and strenuous action. And while satires of the Western stress its anachronistic trappings, offering oddball juxtapositions that go as far back as *Wild and Wooly* (Emerson 1917), the mostly dramatic lilt of the two telefilms discussed here plays it straight. Marking *The Rifleman* as a reflection upon its medium (as much as anything else) is the dynamism of its opening.

Like *The Outer Limits*, both *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *The Rifleman* announce their televisual presence via their credits. They reveal themselves as inside the home, as positioned within the viewer's world. The fourth wall they redress highlights a direct contact with the audience; each one of their episodes establishes a built-in recall to their opening acknowledgment. Respectively either "holding" the viewers at gunpoint or staring them down with wary deliberation, *Have Gun—Will Travel* and *The Rifleman* cross-reference their dramatic content back to the address of their opening credits. Like the science-fiction anthologies, the Westerns position themselves both in the quotidian space of the suburban home and in the electronic "elsewhere" of broadcast technology, the television set expressed as a hinge/corridor between worlds. Establishing television as an uncanny divide, they likewise tap into the Western's temporal dualism as an animated past-present, revealing the genre as an already temporal-figural "elsewhere" whose operative logic reanimates a dead world that (like television for Sconce) is both "apparently living" and "yet something less than alive."[37] Like early-twentieth-century discourses about television, the Western telefilms of this study express television as "'factual' prediction" and "'fictional' prognostication" that "provide[s] . . . a "'living' link" to unknown worlds and "distant vistas."[38] By conflating the Western's speculation on the past with television's technological expression in the present, the natural vista that opens "Panic" is revisited as a defamiliarizing one. The marked pronouncement distinguishes the two telefilms from the era's films by revealing both the uncanny status of television as a medium and the Western as a fiction; that is, the shows emphasize the other-worldly content of both their medium and their genre. The shows technologically and generically "prognosticate" over what "distant vistas" (respective to each) look like. Like *Have Gun—Will Travel, The Rifleman*'s ever-terminal arcs are speculative fictions about the past; they are science fiction backwards.

For film theorist Andre Bazin, the Western isn't interested in discerning the distinction between historical fact and theatrical fiction but, instead, in expressing an "alloyed myth" whose

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[36] Sconce, 133.
[37] Ibid., 127.
[38] Ibid.

sprawling natural settings express the emergence of civilization as a quasi-elemental "amoeba."[39] The genre's mythic rudiments engage the dimensions of a contestable "moral and . . . technical order" specific to the Western as a civil digest.[40] As epic morality play, the Western provides an imaginary view of civilization coming-into-being and speculates on the soundness of its inaugural formation as a "natal state . . . in all its primitive rigor."[41] *The Rifleman*'s developmental drama (what a burgeoning home-on-the-range looks like; what the integrity of a town's civil structure is; how a child grows) taps into Bazin's description. But the show also highlights television as a singular medium of expression for the Western; it engages the form that the medium takes as a specific fiction-bearing vehicle. While *The Rifleman* expresses the Western as epic homesteader story, the nation-building at its core equally inflects the telefilm's emergent broadcast vernacular. The show is both a fraught origin story and a nascent technological expression. Coincidentally, Bazin also notes the Western's "purity," its ability to "resist . . . passing moments of contagion."[42] For Bazin, the Western's foundational evocation proves difficult to alter. The primal ethos at its core immunizes it from the lasting influence of other genres. While perhaps a symptomatic response to the Cold War era Bazin lived through, he found the Western capable of warding off other generic influences "like a vaccine."[43] The viral plotting of episodes like "Panic," along with the peripatetic recurrences of its passing secondary characters, conversely suggests that *The Rifleman* indulges in exposing itself to other themes. The interception that opens the episode (making the McCains susceptible to the fever) is indicative of television's own malleability and breadth. It expresses a technological scale whose influence is coded into the show's generic expression.

Passage through North Fork formally aligns with the broadcast that passes through the family home: they intercept one another. Evidenced only in the symptoms of the frontier couple, the yellow fever's infectious identity is masked by its airborne invisibility. Likened to the stationary television set that accesses a mobile signal, the wagon-port-as-screen visualizes the invisible ether that channels broadcast signals into the home. The sequence intensifies the idea of a viral electromagnetic exposure by formally inverting Lucas's position in the action as through a similarly mobile and ambiguous portal. The cut-on-action that sees Lucas's entrance into the wagon announces the confluence between the two families as, like the broadcast circuit, an influential exchange. The stark visual transition between the natural lighting of the low-contrast plains and the darkness of the opaque wagon interior further suggests the sight of an electronic implosion binding outside and inside (figures 11 and 12).

But if the wagon entrance suggests a technological movement indicative of television's ambiguous corridor, it additionally elicits an erotic tension expressive of the domestic Western. Shot from the wagon's furthest anterior recess, we see the supine, sweat-drenched wife in the foreground contrasted with Lucas's entry into the wagon. Starkly lit and semi-conscious with fever, the woman is rumpled up with the desultory mise-en-scène of pillows and quilts that awkwardly prop her up. Centralized by the key light that spots the whiteness of her blouse with the sweat of her face, her dark hair and the blanket that covers her legs shadow-match the

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[39] Andre Bazin, "The Western: Or the American Film Par Excellence," in *What is Cinema? Volume II*, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 145.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 147.
[42] Ibid., 140.
[43] Ibid.

wagon's depth-recession, inviting a sightline into the wagon's occluded interior. The pinioned pivot of the woman's legs in the lower left tier of the frame's foreground, and the black cast-shadow of her hair in the lower right, direct the viewer's eye-line from the wife's prostrate position at the wagon's back to the portal's reverse-girded depths, terminating on the brightly lit portal-peephole. The jarring contrast in perspective is pronounced by Lucas's inverse positioning in the frame. Iris-alighted into obscure silhouette at the extreme background of the shot, Lucas's charitable entrance formally inverts him into an anonymous figure of menacing trespass. While he approaches the wife from the darkened background, he appears surprisingly creepy (no matter how noble we know Lucas to be), an effect heightened by the husband's all-but-unseen form and the wife's sweat-drenched, splayed body; each character's position momentarily suggests sexual impropriety. The suggestion is further amplified by two later scenes that find widower Lucas hovering over the wife's bedside recovery with an almost too-intimate concern and attentiveness (awkwardly comforting her while the husband lies unconscious across the room perilously close to death). The implication calls to mind Sharrett's own insight regarding *The Rifleman*'s stark sexual confusion.

Engaging with a series of types for the show's run (from "femme fatale temptresses" to more appropriate mother/wife fodder), Lucas always rejects the female characters as potential partners in any form.[44] As a "bizarre interloper" whose repeat interest in rescuing women is met with a proportionately equal "disinterest" in them as love interests, Lucas's ambivalence betrays a sexual inertia somewhere between attraction and repulsion; the more overt a sexual overture, innuendo, or tension, the more Lucas recoils as if from "a slowly encroaching disease."[45] By way of the wagon as meta-formal conduit and the infection scenario of the episode's plot, Lucas's entrance into the wagon implies a charged techno-sexual erotics that fuses Sconce's reading of the era's science-fiction anthologies with Sharrett's reading of the show as a domestic Western. The obscurity of the wagon's interior matches Lucas's ambivalent position in the action as both a desirous widower and a Western do-gooder while also implying television's amorphous movement through the home as an ambiguous *alien* exposure. Both Lucas and the electronic signal express a veiled and conflicting sexual-technological presence. The wagon portal that enjoins the episode's two families formally amplifies the hints built into the episode's drama, in which a potentially illicit intercourse is thematically matched with a potentially insidious electromagnetic funneling; the woman's presence elicits a potentially combustible sexuality that is matched by television's equally threatening presence as an electromagnetic deluge. The port's ambiguous juncture implies both a too-close intimacy and an electronic permeation, together suggesting that a larger promiscuous tension hovers over the family and television. The iris's narrowly conveyed circumference formally implies Lucas's passage into the infected wagon as a confused and troubled one; the uncanny motility of television's broadcast is allegorically expressed as both sexual and alien.

By inverting the stay-at-home valance of the show, the episode flips its narrative focus. Outside the home and literally exposed to fever, Lucas's position in the action corresponds to the viewing audience's exposure to television and illustrates the infused/confusing passage of an electromagnetic signal. But the formal effect becomes even more pronounced as Lucas drives the couple's rig to the McCain ranch. While Lucas commandeers the wagon and races it toward his home, the portal frames a formal symmetry with him. Lucas's point-of-view is inscribed in the

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[44] Christopher Sharrett, *The Rifleman* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2005), 84.
[45] Ibid., 85.

wagon's movement (figure 13). The wagon's motion, in turn, appears to mobilize an electronic signal. While the wagon portal (like the earlier described mirror/screen) affects a transmission's phenomenological motility, the sequence's mobile framing explicitly animates the effect. The left part of the frame curves up as a cropped partial iris outlining the wagon's canopied threshold with a rise of trees and a hill, which the wagon point-of-view scans in extreme background. The sloping background hill tilts downward toward a canted frame-right tree and a set of branches which follow along the outline of Lucas's sloping shoulders, completing the iris effect in graphic contiguity. As a semi-circular formal arch, the portal redistributes the naturalizing effect of the prairie and Lucas's robust protagonist as elements of its narrow visual channel. Both the seemingly natural setting and seemingly autonomous man are tied to the image's configuration; they are material for the graphic comportment of the portal's scanning eyeline. Contiguous with the inward-curving slope of trees, Lucas operates as a formal border that completes the iris effect. The background leaves act as dark graphic blots matched with the sloping shadow that runs from Lucas's hat to his shoulder, terminating the portal's arc at the base of his spine. His action hero becomes a formal component of the action; the aestheticism of the image syncopates Lucas with its graphic design. Further, audience perception conflates with the mobile image's visual interception of the oncoming space, suggesting both the diminished distance between them and the action *and* the diminishing space between Lucas and his home. The image shares the "road" with its audience just as the iris frame conditions the viewer's sight around the uncanny scopism of its broadcast eyeline. The spinal shroud that terminates at the right side of the frame pronounces both Lucas and the audience as implicated within television transmission. The portal perspective implies a scopic refraction that replaces subject-position with techno-cultural motility. Subjective purview (Lucas's, the audience's) morphs into conveying projectile. The subject of action is reframed as electronic activity where Lucas and the audience are, broadly, "carriers."

The couple's infected wagon implies a twofold mobility. As cross-country trek, the wagon expresses the settler story for the Western. It expresses the mythic American origin story Bazin found central to the Western as a discrete and unalloyed genre. But the wagon's infectious carriage also implies writer William Burroughs's insight regarding postwar media in general as viral.[46] The wagon portal is infectious; Westward expansion, in this instance, implies a broader ideological influence both generic and technological. The portal makes visible the "sight unseen" of electronic transmission while visualizing the ideological passage of the Western. And while the contagious couple and the McCains become the object of fear for the townsfolk (who will later form a sort of lynch mob to burn down the McCain ranch in hopes of preventing the spread of the fever), North Fork as a figure for nation-building shudders from fear of exposure. Extending Burroughs's thought with the transmission motif of the wagon portal, what the town-folk fear is cultural influence. Spheres of influence specific to the era are incarnated by the wagon's movement. The wagon marks both the technological and ideological influence with which the era is rhetorically obsessed, just as it refutes Bazin's idea of the Western's generic purity. The contagious wagon visualizes how cultural material moves; the portal discerns how a body of culture operates, expressing the flux of audio-visual information as a porous exchange. Techno-cultural movement is always contagious. As a sort of value-laden carrier of meaning that is both contaminating and filtering, the portal envisions the show's own epistemological carriage.

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[46] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post-Modern Science Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 78.

The portal traverses the minutia of its own import as a communications vessel that always acts upon the larger body politic with which it comes into contact. The sequence neuters both the cultural purity that Bazin ascribes to the genre and the natural exceptionality of Roosevelt's Westerner by suggesting that the ardor of the genre's content is, paradoxically, a pathogenic cultural physics. "Carrying" anatomizes ideological movement by framing the byway of a related generic and rhetorical transmission. The reduction of time and space implied by the wagon's movement thematically transforms the sequence, the portal point-of-view expressing both the porous relationship between television and the home and the temporal-ideological channel the Western always conveys.

The Rifleman's formal design negotiates the contradictions and paradoxes subsequent to both the genre of its telling and the medium of its expression. By conveying the set-pieces and generic motifs that thematically convey its characters' lives (the saloon-as-mirror, the gunman haunted by his past, the town-taming associated with the gunslinger, the homestead as an engendering hearth, and the wagon as pioneer vessel) as symmetrically aligned with the questions surrounding television as an ambiguous electromagnetic technology, the show engages in a thematic excavation of what each means to its specific postwar moment. The show takes the violent masculinity that typifies the Frontier Thesis (which sets the foundation for its subsequent fictions) and formally integrates it with the rhetorical legacy that characterizes the domestic technology, finding in each a fear of the influence *The Rifleman*'s fiction seeks to remedy. The notoriety that haunts and imperils the gunman-on-the range is remedied within the McCain's home, just as the nebulous electromagnetic condition that sets television apart as a communications vessel is denuded of its haunting and/or infectious carriage by way of the McCains' homey familiarity. The paranoid symptomology of exposure imbedded within the Western as a genre, and within television as a medium, is explored as it is redressed. While *The Rifleman* expresses the Western's respective generic legacy and television's respective technological condition as related domestic formations, the contained intimacy of the homo-social bond between Lucas and Mark paces the developmental logic of its Cold War era. Both secure and yet always on the brink of extinction, the paradoxical logic built into the show's patriarchy articulates the symmetry between the cultural engendering specific to the Westerner and the social development specific to the postwar.

Embracing the Domestic Westerner: Town Taming and the Techno-Erotics of Collapse

While "Panic's" wagon suggests techno-cultural influence, the saloon of "The Sharpshooter" scans masculine formation. Both the site/sight where Uncle Wes is murdered and the site/sight of the penultimate gunfight setpiece, the saloon setting inverts what masculine action means for the genre. Like the McCain home, it absorbs feminine absence. The threat to Mark's life that compels Lucas to throw the shooting competition is paralleled with the murder that impels Vernon's attempted revenge for Wes's murder. Homosocial pairs are distinguished by the strength and skill of gunfighters *and* the vulnerability and dependency of their family charges. Lucas's guardian and Vernon's avenger are propelled into action by an intimate familial connection they share with their less able male counterparts; they are counterparts for, respectively, the flailing of Wes's debilitated alcoholic and Mark's inexperienced innocent. Incapable of defending themselves, Wes and Mark are rhetorical Western women. But as literally male, their subordination is based on, respectively, indulgence and immaturity.

The saloon that measures the Westerner's manly self-recognition according to Mitchell is, in "The Sharpshooter," the threshold where the gunfighter proves (or fails to prove) his value

to the family he is tied to. Frustrated by the town boss's withholding of the money owed Vernon for winning the contest, Wes drunkenly demands payment. As Wes and the boss stand beside one another at the bar in the foreground of the frame, they are sandwiched between a large painting depicting a pair of lions mauling their prey in the extreme background and the looming witness of the offscreen bar backdrop situating the camera's point-of-view (figure 14). In response to Wes's demand, the town boss instead offers the inebriated Wes a "bet." Nodding toward the off-screen backdrop, the boss states that if Wes can hit the "picture" only a few feet away from the bar, he'll pay what is owed. Cutting away to another painting pinioned upon the bar wall, the action then cuts back to a beady-eyed Wes provoked into action. Wes's ensuing gunshot (his gun barely out of his holster) is audio-matched with the town boss shooting Wes at close range. Wes's drunken failure is juxtaposed with the pretense of the boss's murderous cheat. From the two-shot that centralizes the men in the scene's action, the camera cuts away to a medium shot of the painting the two men eye and back to an extreme close-up of the boss's smoking gun. The saloon as a set motif that gauges masculinity finds both Wes and the town boss to be failures. Their foreground framing in the action magnifies their faults; Wes's implied alcoholism is formally level with the boss's murderous cheat. The former's self-indulgence is witnessed as on par with the latter's greed, their contiguous exchange measuring the moral deficit they share.

Doing away with the saloon mirror from *Gunman's Walk*, the backdrop's camera perspective replaces the reflection from which a drunken Ed perceived dramatic action in the film. The view from behind the bar conflates camera position with viewer sight via the screen that intercepts them. Unlike Mitchell's reading of the saloon setting and *Gunman's Walk*'s related action, this sequence lacks *self*-reflection from either direction (as character self-perception; as audience identification). Human apperception is replaced by the screen as conduit. Lack of manly virtue is witnessed by the backdrop's non-human optics; what is behind the bar in the saloon's mise-en-scène becomes conflated with the television screen, and their confluence as a shared space expresses the telefilm as seeing action differently. Further, the unmanning is announced by the painting that hangs behind the bar, from the cupboarded backdrop that uncannily spies action. Depicting a Rubenesque woman in a state of ecstasy (figure 15), the painting's content meshes with the boss's provocation, suggesting Wes can't even "nail" her. Drunken Wes's inability to hit the target-as-woman calls attention to his general impotence as a man. But Wes's impotence is seen to be of a piece with the town boss's murderous cheat, a view the backdrop, likewise, witnesses. While the foregrounded men are visually aligned with the background painting's violent mauling, the action is formally matched as savage; the scene's deep focus visually synchs them in direct lineage. Present-day criminal characterization stems from the composition's primal content; the symmetry outlines a shared rhetorical history. While Wes is positioned as an indulgent weakling whose failure is conditioned by the incommensurability between actuality and criminal appetite, the show's consumerist present implicates the boss's cheat as a contemporary corporate one.

The blackmailing that impels the contest's fix in "The Sharpshooter" parallels the false witness of the blackmailing wrangler in *Gunman's Walk*. But the corruption is expressed differently. As incorporated family business, the Hacketts own the town. The breadth of their business influence defines the injustice of their corruption. The McCains, in contrast, are looking for a home-as-business. The McCains are at war with the influence of a present-day incorporation that the boss and the Hackett brand incarnate. The McCains' attempt to be at home (as active masculine business; as feminized homebody) is countermanded by the boss/Lee's

incorporating influence. The McCains' fused gender roles are counterposed by the more stringent (narrowly aligned) masculinity of Lee Hackett's proscriptive manhood. The fluid McCain family inverts the overdefined Hackett brand. The consumer home front serves as homosocial remediation away from an incorporated patriarchy. Likewise, the horse-racing cheat that leads to Ed's first murder, and the imposture of his bogus self-defense as justification for the horse wrangler's murder, contrast with the righteousness of Vernon's potential revenger.

As gunfighters, Ed and Vernon differently express the postwar juvenile delinquent, just as Lee and Lucas split their identities between incorporation and domestication. While an enraged Vernon sets out to avenge the killing of his uncle, Lucas intercedes. Aggressively pinning Vernon to the hotel-diner's stairway, Lucas answers Vernon's question as to whether he threw the contest, yelling "Why you wet-nosed two-bit punk, you couldn't whip me in ten years!" A whole head taller than Vernon, Connors's aggressive framing contrasts with actor Dennis Hopper's much smaller Vernon. The tight two-shot size difference underscores the dialogue. Lucas's height is commensurate with the time of his experience; Lucas's worldly exploits represent an experiential breadth Vernon could never hope to match. Like Lee, Lucas's Westerner is nonpareil; defined by his mythic stature (as "*the* Lucas McCain," i.e. "the Rifleman"), Lucas's exceptionality is guaranteed by his relation to an authentic past. But unlike the freighted heritage of Lee's masculine preeminence, Lucas is characterized by a conscious masquerade. While it is implied that he could (however reluctantly) live with the secret of throwing the turkey shoot, it is also implied that Lucas's sudden outburst is a calculated ploy. While throwing the competition safeguards Mark, the show of bravado is meant to cow Vernon. Lowering his tone, Lucas no less changes his temperament. He firmly, albeit respectfully, says to Vernon, "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. If I don't come out of that saloon take care of my boy for me." As much desperate plea as firm resolve, Lucas's need belies the aggression of his request. While Lucas and Vernon are able gunfighters, the vaunted skill they share is secondary to the family bonds that principally compel their gunfighting in the first place (for Lucas, the last resort needed to protect Mark and North Fork; for Vernon, the only way to make a living for himself and his uncle). Lucas convinces Vernon to look after Mark because he understands Vernon's grieving for Wes. In *The Rifleman*, the gunfighter's defining exceptionality as a Westerner is in equal accord with his commitment to family. The Westerner's definitive force is allied with a loving paternity; Lucas's dynamism both guarantees Mark's safety and lends Vernon the more responsible and stabilizing family access that his relation to Mark would provide. The natural man's ambivalence to civic formation gives way to the family-man's emotional investment with it; the former's unyielding individualism is mitigated by Lucas's hearth-keeping vigilance. Strapping, skilled father is as much nurturing, protective mother.

Lucas's standoff in the saloon fuses the man's public stature and presentation with the woman's private and practical concern for the family's well-being. Lucas enters the saloon by way of the camera point-of-view from behind the bar. Scanning the length of the bar, the camera tracks along its distention, identifying the relative positions of Lucas, the boss, and his cronies. Resting his rifle upon the surface of the bar's cornice (pointing at the boss), Lucas's unarming harkens back to the show's opening credit sequence, the momentary relinquishing suggesting the hesitant and yet resolute guardedness that stares down the audience with measured alertness. While the unarming suggests Lucas would rather avoid the violence about to erupt, the rifle's aim at the boss suggests his firm commitment to it (figure 16). Like the Westerners before him, Lucas refuses to give ground. But Lucas's pause before the boss is reminiscent of the credit sequence's withering and yet withholding gaze at the audience that opens the show. Lucas's

opening gaze breeds a familiarity for the viewing audience as already partially cued to his status as a domestic Westerner, the rhetorical family audience further sharing a home (the literal one they watch from; the dramatic one the McCains inhabit) with its fictional family. Lucas is always within the home's civil confines. The formal cue that connects him to the viewer paces Lucas's family-oriented resoluteness in the saloon scene's action. Lucas's domestic gunman brings the Westerner literally home, just as the gang boss updates the necessity of Roosevelt's expansionism to the home front.

Lucas's loving investment (for Mark and their home) is paired against the town boss's greed. In stark contrast to Lucas's vested interest in the family home, and the burgeoning community it sustains, stands the boss's appetite for more of it. *The Rifleman*'s first episode witnesses the image of the Western's contradictory violence as within its own municipal design. While Lucas's characterization reforms and attenuates the Westerner's warrior posture by way of Jefferson's democratic everyman, the boss conveys Roosevelt's revitalizing imperialism[47] as preying on the civil front itself. But at the heart of the combustive standoff is the cheating that organizes the episode's central action. Before Lucas arrives in the saloon, the town boss tells his cronies to open up on Lucas the moment the boss slides a whiskey bottle toward Lucas in hopes of distracting him. The audience sees the plan's treacherous conception both within the action and before its emergence. The bar-backdrop's epistemological agency suggests the industrial and civic planning protocols of the immediate postwar.

Peter Galison has shown how patterns of strategic dispersion in the postwar era were based on scenarios derived from studies of WWII bombing sites. Created in 1944 from a brain trust comprised of military and civilian personnel, "The Strategic Bombing Survey" authored a series of studies seeking the most efficient ways of bombing Germany into submission in hopes of accelerating the war's end.[48] The success of the Survey's analysis and implementation led to a continuing series of studies on devastated Axis bombing sites, the findings overtly inflecting postwar America's own conceptual and actual development. The findings produced a sort of graphic charter against potential nuclear threats and outlined the postwar era's civil defense structure. From its close analysis of the large-scale bombings of German industrial centers in Hamburg and the nuclear attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the study concluded that economic debilitation from within was symmetrical with military aggression from above. The devastation caused by the respective aerial attacks was proportionate with the concentration of urban design on the ground. Noting the largely undamaged sites of industrial and social life on the periphery of the bombing sites, the study championed "the value of decentralization" that in turn signaled a "dramatic shift in the way . . . cities were conceived."[49] The sites of literal devastation provided evidence for future civil design. Urban planning for the future was based on signs of vulnerability from the past, the studies' rationalist analysis indexing the susceptible weaknesses of a socio-political body. The account of midcentury urban ruin provided its planned alternative; the destroyed Axis cities signaled a peacetime stability based on projecting a constant state of war. The growth of suburban communities noted in chapter 1 and the superhighway projects in chapter 3 were a related consequence of perceived martial interests based on "multiplying targets [for] diminish[ing] the vulnerability of any one [area of] concentration."[50] The integrity of a

[47] Slotkin, 51.
[48] Galison, 8.
[49] Ibid., 13.
[50] Ibid., 14.

nuclear state's future was conceived on perpetual annihilation, a nation state's survival paradoxically based on preparation around municipal devastation where dispersion (of ever-alternating micro-communities) safeguarded civil continuity. The study as "bomb sight mirror" to the past mapped in "transparent overlay" sites for a civic and industrial futurity where distinct pockets of undeveloped land were perceived as ideal tract formations for suburban and industrial economies of diffusion.[51] Devastated "area study" was proportionate with "satellite town planning," just as anticipatory "target zones" gave way to zoning protocols for future municipalities—the projection of Atomic targets driving the logic of postwar redevelopment.[52] Irradiated sites of devastation were reimaged as projected spatial networks, outcropping tertiary hubs that guaranteed the preservation of a functioning national apparatus.

Like the Bombing Survey that prefigured dispersion strategies for postwar development projects, the saloon gunfight is anticipated by the camera's point-of-view. While the bar-backdrop witnesses the boss's plan as the civic corruption that Lucas's vigilant domestic Westerner must forever hold at bay, it scans the technocratic imperative built into its own era's descriptive self-destruction. The codes that set the proverbial civic table for the show express the Bombing Survey's polarized commerce. Dispersion scenarios were ratio-based guarantees that, however many sites were successfully targeted, there would remain outlying sectors enabling a productive and functional state. Vernon's promise to Lucas to care for Mark should Lucas die likewise envisions a replacement father just as the cronies (as enemy combatants in inverse proportion) scatter throughout the saloon, their strategic distribution in the space reducing Lucas's chance of survival. Channeled through the McCains, itinerant secondary characters in each episode similarly read as ever-fluid family role-players beset by the ever-repeatable antagonists (or, like Vernon, a complex amalgam of both) who continually plague North Fork. The show's formulaic conceit replays the Survey's supplemental protocol; the repeat-pronouncement of *The Rifleman*'s episodic breadth confirms the logic of the Study's dispersion strategy. The show's stand-alone episodes are terminal plot arcs on the survival of the domestic Westerner's homesteader creed. Like the Survey's dispersion scenarios, *The Rifleman*'s episodic adventures operate as repeat guarantees for the domestic Westerner's value-laden continuity. Seen to embody the site of a vulnerable municipality as much as insurance for a surviving one, *The Rifleman* plays out the era's imagination as one long annihilation/continuation scenario. North Fork is a perpetually targeted municipality Lucas continually saves; the vulnerability incarnated by Mark is offset by the able guardianship of Lucas.[53]

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[51] Galison, 17.

[52] Ibid., 20.

[53] *Variety,* December 26, 1973. In December of 1973 Chuck Connors visited the Soviet Union at the personal invitation of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Connors had met Brezhnev at President Richard Nixon's San Clemente mansion the previous June, wherein a widely circulated photo was taken of Connors lightheartedly lifting Brezhnev off his feet. In Russia ostensibly for the filming of a joint production by Connors's production company and Russia's state-run Sovinfilm, footage was shot for a feature entitled *Chuck Connors Visits the Soviet Union*. The ensuing cultural collaboration provided an actual diplomatic function. The production's publicity junkets served to tamp down tensions between the superpowers that had intensified during the previous October's Arab-Israeli War. Connors's public summaries of his conversations with Brezhnev emphasized the Soviet leader's commitment to détente, and two upcoming visits to the States were meant to strengthen relations between the superpowers in the wake of the proxy

Further, the gunfight's choreography emphasizes Lucas's own plan of action as infused with the action itself. The moment the town boss slides the bottle toward Lucas, Lucas snatches and quick-finger triggers his rifle from the supine position it belied; the shot explodes through the whisky bottle and kills a gun-drawing crony. Lucas's ruse counters the boss's attempt to cheat; his relaxed pose hides the violent dexterity with which he springs into action. The domestic Westerner is an instantaneous response arsenal who reads the strategic condition of his site. Aligning with the saloon foreground as visual witness, Lucas's poise implies an epistemological vision that anticipates the action's violence. The dueling parameters of the Western are recoded by way of the symmetry between Lucas's action-oriented protagonist and the scene's choreography. Further, Lucas's shot is audio-matched to the crony's shot at Lucas. Unlike Wes, Lucas understands the ploy of the second audio match. Lucas sees through (shoots through) the boss's cheat. As with the Bombing Survey's projections, the camera's position behind the bar "mirrors" Lucas's own knowing estimation of his antagonist's ruse and formally synchs with his sight. As the gun battle begins, Lucas dives behind the bar for cover. He repositions himself more overtly within the sightline of the camera and, by association, becomes visually proximate with the television screen. Lucas's new position foreshortens the telefiction's action in relation to its audience by formally bringing the viewer closer to Lucas. The contraction effect adjusts the mirror's generic function into an epistemological riposte similar to the automation of the Cold War's defense matrix. Characterological action conforms to screen information. Lucas intercepts the offering seen to make a man (hold his liquor and remain in control) because he is the signature element of the telefiction's mise-en-scène.

The suggested confluence between character and screen additionally aligns the Bombing Survey's civil defense system with the domestic Westerner's homosocial regeneration. While Lucas lies pinned behind the bar as the action continues, an offscreen gunshot fells another antagonist as the action cuts to a smoking gun followed by a mobile track upward identifying Vernon as the shooter. Vernon's interdiction synchs with an ensuing cutaway that finds the now allied gunmen framed in a two-shot, Lucas foregrounded behind the bar while Vernon stands at the saloon's entrance in the background (figure 17). Their two-shot symmetry aligns them as elastic figures in the fiction; Vernon's boy-man saves the composite rifle-man whose guardianship begins the action. While it is the setting where Uncle Wes is murdered as well as the action set-piece for the episode's gunfight, the saloon performs an ironic regeneration for the domestic Westerner. While Ed's smashing of the saloon mirror in *Gunman's Walk* anticipates the inevitable duel with Lee (the reflection both a contemptuous projection toward Lee, and a self-contemptuous disgust with himself), Ed's iconoclasm expresses patriarchy's intrinsic destructiveness as a perpetual contest between masculine generations. Conversely, Vernon's rescuing of Lucas assures the homosocial family's continuation. The saloon mirror's would-be position in *The Rifleman* witnesses homosocial regeneration while (as an object of the mise-en-scène) the mirror's sight attenuates characterological self-reflection. But if the sequence assures

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war's hostility. While some fifteen years removed from *The Rifleman*'s premiere, Connors's renewed stardom in syndication provided a public forum for actual Cold War policy. Where gunfights in *The Rifleman* evoke the Bombing Survey's diffusion scenarios as a generic mise-en-scène, Connors' Soviet trip highlights Lucas's lingering status as a principled cold warrior. *The Rifleman*'s cultural/political influence in the 1970s speaks to the show's resonance as an allegory for a precarious deterrence strategy.

the homosocial family's continuation, it is a passage as hazardous as the destructive endgame of *Gunman's Walk.*

The Rifleman transforms Slotkin's thesis about the film Western's preoccupation with regenerative violence as a paradoxical generic reflex. Like postwar dispersion scenarios, Vernon's introduction to the scene acts as a safeguarding addition. The proliferation of homosocial characters that the McCains embrace are no less safeguarding guarantors of their domestic survival. Similar to postwar mobile defense alignments, Vernon's shot expresses a martial adjunct that saves Lucas's patriarch and serves to continue the survival of the homosocial family. The scene microscopes the complex firing trajectories indicative of the choreography of shootouts to come. While the McCains' caregiving assures an influence that converts would-be antagonists into allies, the benevolence of domesticity functions as a kind of ideological transfusion. Kindness at home inoculates ambivalent figures into surefooted combatants whose transformation in the plot matches their strategic transposition in the gunfight set-pieces. However, where Roosevelt found in ranch life a pseudo-historical regression (a virility-inducing "barbaric" trace of blood and land) as guarantor for the future of American civilization,[54] *The Rifleman* distills a never-ending present for its homosocial family. The shootouts as repeat triumphs for Lucas are, narratively and allegorically, terminal. The McCains might persist (as survivors on the range, as characters in a series) but *The Rifleman* (as a truncated episodic narrative and generic version of strategic defense scenarios) figuratively stabilizes a catastrophic nuclear war. The eternal Now the show expresses (as an instantaneous televisual portal, or a narrative safeguarding of America's civil integrity) is one with no future.

The shootout recuperates Cold War deterrence as a larger motif for the show. The action choreography extends out toward episodes to come. Tensions particular to standalone episodes express the myriad ways homosocial bonds are respectively drawn, redrawn or undone. The characterological configurations likewise determine the composition of ensuing gunfights as culturally expressive specs that resonate with the era's martial polity. *The Rifleman*'s unfolding gunfights resonate with the myriad scenarios that the era's civil defense apparatus produces. Terminal arcs suggest a perilous repetition forever on the brink of failure; the threats Lucas continually repels remain at his doorstep. Poised in paranoiac recoil, *The Rifleman* mirrors the era's national defense initiatives. Like the Westerns before it, *The Rifleman* attenuates the contradictions of the contemporary social/political body it anatomizes. A repeat plotting that pronounces the homey resilience of a Jeffersonian pastoral (as suburban return-idyll) enmeshes with gunfighter fusillades reminiscent of the Bombing Survey's design. The valorization of a terrestrial life's self-sustaining bounty is up against a terminal one threatening its erasure. But however fraught the site/sight of *The Rifleman* as an allegorical deterrence network, the saloon gunfight is the penultimate point from which a more conciliatory homosociality issues.

The final scene restages the era's town-taming scenarios from a host of cinematic Westerns of the period (*Warlock*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, *Man of the West*, and *Forty Guns*, to name a few). It repurposes the gun-toting aggression of the genre's Main Street face-off by both highlighting and differently configuring the process of suspension and resolution that the duel provides. While Lucas and Mark are seen to face one another both immediately before and after the saloon gun battle, their intimacy reorients what the gunfighter duel means. About to leave Mark at the hotel before going into the saloon gunfight, Lucas tells Mark to "get the horses packed and wait for me, you hear?" While the music slows into a tense

[54] Slotkin, 38–39.

rendition of the theme's melody, Lucas kneels face-to-face with his son as the camera lingers on what is potentially the final look the two will ever share (figure 18). Suspended in yearning abeyance, the moment is reminiscent of the tragic-romantic overtones of the final interlude between O'Malley and Missy in *The Last Sunset*. Like O'Malley's promised "return" to Missy, Lucas's suggested "wait[ing"] attempts to shield Mark from the realization Lucas might not return; the longing of their silent stares are infused with a foreboding melancholy. The moment's intensity designates a freighted interval. The unspoken silence between them is compounded by being the penultimate moment before the duel. While both a spatial interval (Lucas holds Mark at a distance) and a temporal one (the outcome of the duel is withheld), the scene pronounces the affection between the McCains. O'Malley and Missy's suggested lovemaking before the duel that ends *The Last Sunset* is revisited by the quasi-romantic yet non-sexual farewell between Lucas and Mark. Just this side of *The Last Sunset*'s incestuous transgression, the McCain relationship underscores a differently coded desire. Holding Mark at a distance with both hands, Lucas steadies himself as much as Mark before grabbing his rifle and taking off for the saloon gunfight. As much content-coded assurance of father to son, the distance is a more suggestive assurance for the audience that their bond is non-romantic.

The provocative suggestiveness of the romance between father and son is compounded by the melodramatic lilt that follows the gunfight. As Lucas survives, the waiting ends. Cool during the gunfight, Lucas's exit from the saloon doors is anything but. Initially descending from the saloon stoop with a confident gait similar to the opening credit, Lucas's face suddenly drops as he looks up toward an awaiting Mark (figure 19). At first cutaway-framed in extreme long-shot across the street, Mark is suddenly jump-cut in inverse proportion with his approaching father (figure 20). The startling cut to Mark *cues* the shock on Lucas's face. Reminiscent of O'Malley's dumbfounded realization that Missy is his daughter in *The Last Sunset*, the plotting that found the Breckinridges at home in America no less finds the McCains winning the home that sets the series in motion. Like the stunned realization that hobbled the cavalier swagger of O'Malley's romantic, Lucas seems to lose composure. While Lucas steadily approaches Mark, Mark's own hesitant approach is broken by a mad dash into his father's arms. The suspenseful silence that saw their lingering looks gives way to the overarching melodrama of their embrace, an embrace initiated by Mark. Held in a tight two-shot, the overwhelming urgency of Mark's sprint to his father is more than met by Lucas who swallows his son up with desperate abandon. The tautness of Mark's embrace is matched by the steady stream of kisses with which Lucas covers Mark's face, his final one landing flush on Mark's mouth (figure 21). Mark's desire is as infectious as it is active. The cutaway that sees Mark's more direct and unflinching look at Lucas is additionally matched by the urgency that sees him leap into Lucas's arms. The distance between them that begins the sequence ends in a rapturous clenching, denoting their connection as a mobile one. While O'Malley's impulse is self-destructive and Lee ends up literally collapsing on himself, Mark and Lucas are repeatedly seen to fall into one another's arms. The "reunion embrace" repeats throughout the show's run, from season one's "The Surveyor" and "8 Hours to Die," to season two's "A Time for Singing," season four's "Vaqueros," and perhaps most notably in the finale of the extended separation witnessed in season three's two-part "The Wyoming Story: Part 2." Episode after episode ends with an affirmation of their bond, stressing that whatever distance exists them between them will be closed by an embrace. The motif's repetition further emphasizes the stylistic devices that make for its separating/binding movement and the elasticity at its core. Articulating what lies "between" the McCains, the embrace traces what gender formation looks like.

As Mary Ann Doane notes in her application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to film, gender positions are delegated by way of their relation within a signifying chain whose access depends on the designation of a lack.[55] Perceived as a subject over and against the world it is situated within, masculinity is ironically undergirded by a "loss or lack (of the referent)" that structures subjectivity. Masculinity asserts itself as the subject of discourse to maintain its reality-effecting image; it repeatedly recoups the loss that language (as substitute formation) unconsciously indicates for him. The linguistic field that holds him at a distance paradoxically precipitates his active orientation in the world; its nexus thereby "maintain[s] the gap between subject and object," both withholding and grounding the self-perception that triggers agency.[56] Watching the object at a distance provokes action within any signifying social context; the seamlessness of its transference initiates desirous activity. As Lucas's initial point-of-view attests to the cinematic equivalent that marks him as the active figure of identification, the suddenness of the cutaway to Mark startles him. The sight of Mark disturbs the assuredness of Lucas's deliberating vision just as Mark's pronounced dash toward his father usurps Lucas's active position. In terms of Lucas's generic function as a Westerner, his assured autonomy is undercut by the surprise of his affecting tie with Mark; the sight of his son stuns him. The sightline that goes all the way back to Natty Bumppo's cool and deliberate aiming is afforded a meta-figural new beginning that startles the Western hero. Lucas's masculine position in the mise-en-scène possesses a civil bearing that disturbs his autonomy as it modifies his desire. He hesitates at the threshold of his desire for Mark, just as the show inaugurates the plane of action as a domestic one. The embrace visualizes the invisible tether between its protagonists by recouping the "division and splitting" that situates the Lacanian subject as an always-overcompensating figural reinvestment for a maternal loss coded into language (in a word, "castration").

The sequence traces gender formation as the plastic point from which desire moves, from which social relations tense and flex. While an already suspended interval in space and time, the embrace is pronounced by the exclusivity of the McCains' masculine pairing. Their mutually reinforcing magnetism cancels them out as desiring *male* figures by reabsorbing the very absence situated by the maternal role. They resemble Doane's description of the feminine situated in discourse, their embrace evoking "a body wrapped up in itself."[57] As Doane notes, if the feminine is defined as language itself, then her position in a signifying chain lacks an assured point-of-view; it is devoid of a subject position from which to "desire." Equated with the signifier, the feminine has no distance from language; she accesses no subject attribute from which agency expresses itself, and by extension her subjectivity lacks a defined social dimension from which to project desire. Without an enunciative position, the feminine can only desire to desire; its ontological position a paradoxical "overpresence" trapped "in a kind of signifying limbo."[58] Her position as a reader (of language, of images) is thereby complicated by a "spectatorship . . . conceived temporally as immediacy . . . and spatially as proximity."[59] What makes the sequence so compelling is its delineation as exclusively between two male characters. If the sequence unveils the phantasmatic lack that male signification depends on, it also alters its

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[55] Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 12.
[58] Ibid., 10.
[59] Ibid., 13.

exclusive engendering. By suffusing gaps both temporal and spatial, the embrace (as the culmination of the McCains' reunion on Main Street) renegotiates the alienation on which signifying depends. While the sequence begins by complicating the exchange of gazes between Lucas and Mark, it likewise renegotiates the stability of their active and passive roles. While Lucas is shocked out of his confident rifleman bearing by the sight of Mark's stare back at him, his point-of-view *reacts* to Mark as the object of his gaze. Additionally, the forthright emotional urgency of Mark's sprinting leap into his father's arms *initiates* Lucas's own emotional outpouring. Lucas is shocked because he recognizes in Mark his own vulnerability. Lucas doesn't see the lack associated with figural castration but an ironic difference stemming from the posture of his own false totality. Lucas recognizes his own vulnerability as the point from which his sense of self issues. In acknowledging his tie to Mark, he acknowledges his broader commitment to North Fork as a community that the show will elaborate for the rest of its run. Lucas's familial recognition illustrates a broader social one that transforms castration anxiety (as an ever-overcompensating lack) by way of connection to the Main Street theatre of the town setting. While the action of the sequence stresses separation and reunion, the embrace centralizes the McCains' imploding parity, their love for one another instancing a larger embrace of North Fork as a larger civic digest with which they are no less associated. Waylaying the exclusivity of a masculine identity politics that establishes subjectivity and agency as the acquisition of an external object, the scene expresses the McCains as objects of association. While the embrace's dramatic denouement resembles Doane's characterization of the feminine's "excessive closeness to the body,"[60] the McCains, like the feminine as a symbolic "over-presence" equated with language, are rendered as differently coded signifying material.

Mark's sudden sprint toward Lucas's established point-of-view plays as a rush toward the screen and, by extension, the viewing audience. The embrace connects Mark and Lucas as formal components of the action and coextends toward the viewing audience. The cutaway from Lucas to Mark that begins the reunion sequence recasts Lucas's backdrop bar position in the previous sequence's gunfight; Lucas's point-of-view is, once again, confluent with the television screen. Mark's sprint toward Lucas is a sprint toward the audience, while the cutaways that end in the embrace suggest a no less intimate connection between screen and viewer. The sequence expresses televisual exchange as a transformative experience, an acculturation within the family home the show's germinal sequence instances. The sequence's renegotiation of masculine engendering entwines with the telefictional exchange taking place in the home, and the embrace's "overpresence" likewise reads as a covalent tele-human association. The scene illustrates the infinitesimal movement between broadcast and reception as a complex engendering that troubles masculinity's narrow signification. Where the delimiting gradations that instruct masculine signifying are exposed by the embrace, the threatening rhetorical image of television is divested of its infectious overtones. The embrace denudes the alienation effects built into masculine formation (as an exclusive male one based on an interminable exclusion and acquisition) by positioning the McCains as an integral part of the cultural material (the feminine; language) that masculine engendering withholds.

Similarly, the sequence outs the "erotic anxiety" Hayles finds in her study of Norbert Wiener's early cybernetic theorizing. Describing information access and exchange as indicative of "couplings" and "interpenetration[s]" within the larger body politic, Wiener sexualizes

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[60] Doane, 13.

information systems.[61] While the rhetorical tendency indulges sexual metaphor, Wiener's language no less amends its inference by muting the question of how these unions unfold as desiring activities. He thereby sidesteps the autonomy-tainting influence that the metaphors suggest. The erotic indulgence of his language continually retreats toward an inverse prudishness, a "withdrawal" indicative of a larger "coitus interruptus."[62] Wiener backpedals from the autonomy-diminishing penetration that his discourse provokes by describing the connection between vessel and code as a "loose coupling" waylaying the suggestion of the code's control-determining permeation.[63] By way of analogy, Wiener reasserts the liberal subject's autonomy by providing, as definitive, an unspoken albeit meaningful encounter between himself and an imaginary "intelligent savage."[64] The scenario depicts an exchange whereby the lack of a shared language is overcome via a series of concentrated gazes whose interplay potentially produces "a language varied in possibility."[65] For Hayles, the example's communicable seamlessness betrays the latent cultural erotics of a "deferred intimacy between men," a "fantasy" with which American literature is replete.[66] Taking the relationship between Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook in Cooper's frontier sagas as archetypical, she notes that Chingachogook's "savage" surrogate father informs the agile frontier cool of his white charge where the transmission of knowledge between them esteems the very penetrating dialectic Wiener obscures.[67] Natty, as the Western's generic prototype, figures a body under influence; he is exposed to Chingachogook's knowledge. At its inception, the Westerner is coded within a rhetoric of susceptibility; his mastery is paradoxically accessed by giving himself up to another. While his control is gained through acquiescence, his autonomy is enabled by a pliant intimacy.

More overtly indulging the erotic suggestiveness of the frontiersman's origin story and the cybernetic discourse of its own era, the McCains' embrace suggests the "dangers of a tight coupling"[68] that Wiener feared would subsume (or at least theoretically trouble) the liberal humanist subject he idealized. The embrace belies the "masculine autonomy and control"[69] of both the Western's inaugural pulp hero and early cybernetic theorizing's staunch individuality. Their respective discourses (as generic, as theoretical) are paradoxically characterized by an impressionable subjectivity. From its own recoding outset, *The Rifleman* outs the generic privilege of the Westerner as a homosocial affiliation tending toward the intimate coupling that its legacy camouflages. *The Rifleman* unveils the eroticism of an essential contact between males at the heart of its generic expression and dovetails with Hayles's analysis of information systems as "permeable membrane[s]"[70] whose flow through a larger body politic is fraught with a paranoia-fueled surplus violence.

While the Westerner is characterized by autonomy and mobility, Lucas's embrace of Mark implies an estrangement from himself. If Lucas as a Westerner is stunned upon seeing his

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[61] Hayles, 108.
[62] Ibid., 109.
[63] Ibid., 111.
[64] Ibid., 109.
[65] Ibid., 110.
[66] Ibid., 109.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 111.
[69] Ibid., 109.
[70] Ibid.

son following the shootout, it is because his need for Mark positions him within an acculturating process; he persists as influenced (driven) by an integral civil association. The anxiety indicative of sensing one's own identity as constructed (as a makeshift ground necessary for being in culture) is ironically diverted by an estranging embrace. Placed within a signifying movement, the McCains are commensurate with the cultural material that makes meaning. Lucas's shock upon seeing Mark is his recognition that he is a part of culture; he witnesses his own engendered procession within it. The prolonging of the embrace between the McCains as an expressive movement across North Fork's main drag sketches gender construction as akin to civic formation. The sequence anatomizes a process of exchanges and permutations attendant with the related social and cultural formations that make for civil discourse.

The show perpetually scans what lies between the McCains. The invisible umbilicus that drives their affective bond (and that sketches gender formation) is likewise the interval the show insists on measuring (as techno-cultural telefilm); the gendered torsion that culminates in the embrace is indicative of a broader world-building in the Western as a generic convention. By traversing the audio-visual process of the Western's gunfight set-piece, the Main Street embrace sketches the formal effect of an ideological production. The embrace convenes a third term that sidesteps masculinity as a subjective process defined by lack and acquisition, and television as a technological one defined by infection and control. As an episodic recompense, the embrace motif undergirds the action that changes from week to week. While the distance between the McCains collapses, the show's narrative and formal procedure "spells out" the engendering process as a particularly contemporaneous one. Via Main Street as an acculturating figural corridor, this collapse (as engendered, as nuclear, as episodic) illustrates the tension between creative appellation and destructive imperative. It sketches a Cold War culture perpetually "on the brink" of either.

Lee's collapse at the end of *Gunman's Walk* is indicative of a false front with nowhere left to stand. It is in response to the deadly consequence of a patriarchy at war with its own progeny. And (like the embrace between Mark and Lucas) Lee collapses in the middle of Main Street. But while *Gunman's Walk* staged collapse as the tragedy of a patriarch's unyielding Oedipal rivalry (Lee's storied identity-politics compelling a mortal endgame with his own son), *The Rifleman* inverts its conclusion. While Lee and Ed fight for the limited space of an identity, the civic space Lucas and Mark share is a measured limit they absorb. The masculine family that cannot share space is inverted by the companionship that always does. The McCains are, as Mark states in a later episode, "partners." *The Rifleman* challenges the stakes of an ever-appetitive contest between men by revealing the legacy of the Western's identity politics. The show reevaluates the absolute province of frontier contestation its genre enshrines. The McCain embrace signifies collapse as generative, not generational—the aesthetic material the show foregrounds divests the Western of a naturalizing tendency to which it is susceptible by stressing the semiosis particular to the show's aesthetic expression as a telefiction. Characterized in the action, the McCains are semiological material of television's signifying expression.

With the concluding sequence of the first episode, the embrace establishes civic virtue as its main theme while likewise beginning its episodic trajectory. The melodramatic excess of the embrace suggests that its gushing interlude "pumps blood" through the town's central artery as it gives life to *The Rifleman*'s particular form. As the sheriff notes, "North Fork is gonna grow and we need people like you to help it." While Lucas and Mark need each other, the town in turn needs them for establishing its future. Unlike the narcissistic yield of O'Malley's desire to go back or Lee's unyielding identification with his past exploits, *The Rifleman* "grow[s]" with and

not against the civil environment. Lucas, unlike O'Malley, not only returns but continually returns an embrace expressing both the acknowledged difference between him and Mark *and* the larger difference their union suggests. However much an allegorical wish fulfillment of the domestic initiatives of the show's late-1950s cultural-social environment, the kiss (as well as equally melodramatic moments of rescue and reunion repeated throughout the series) indicates a care and connection that trumps the cul-de-sac options demanded both by the rigidity of Lee-Ed's identifications and by the impulsivity of O'Malley's narcissism.

The shock on Lucas's face infers the broader shock of a Westerner who needs family, who desires community. While the McCains traverse and eclipse the distance between them, masculinity as a signifying unity additionally collapses. *The Rifleman* renegotiates the endless process of objectification and possession that makes for masculine subjectivity. While the scene bears the excess nomenclature of a burgeoning melodramatic intensity (the orchestral swell of intensified cutaways), it likewise highlights the Westerner's masculinity as incapable of sustaining the burden of its radical individuality. Like the distance between episodes, gaps between males (between the perpetuity of its drifter co-stars) play out as test-case reinscriptions. Establishing community for the show is an experimental iteration of gendered and civil reconstruction. The distance between the McCains and their ever-incipient reunions is the distance between episodes and their recouped broadcast; the characterological conceit is matched to the show's seriality. While the embrace trumps the duel, it also needs the duel. The sequence witnesses what social and cultural bonds look like for the genre; its excess compulsion toward violence is inversely proportionate with a tactile cultural contiguity. The structural parameters that ground a civil edifice are expressive of cultural flexibility. The embrace is indicative of North Fork's civil movement, its trajectory establishing a more labile cultural erotics for the Western.

Conclusion

Like Lucas's promise to Mark, the inevitability of conflict around the home they seek incarnates the imaginary surplus of nuclear war. The threatened productive economy of Cold War patriarchy is refigured. While Lucas flits between hybrid parental positions in relation to Mark, Mark is at once protected son and adored wife. He operates as both nurtured child and beloved/loving partner. The tripartite organization of the show is built into the McCain family. If it lacks a wife/mother, the McCain family offers ever-alternating third roles designated by each episode's triangulation of characters. And just as Lucas's posture changes in relation to Vernon, he is seen to more overtly perform (inhabit) a different set of affective roles. The lack of a pitched conflict that made for the Bombing Survey's postwar reconstruction is commensurate with the lack situated within the McCain family. Both missing war and absent woman call attention to the creative appellation that undergirds American "construction" writ large. Divesting masculinity of its proscribed autonomy (Mark and Lucas are intimately bound protagonists) and the freedom of nomadicity (they are staunchly domestic), the show reinvents masculinity by way of absorbing the function of the missing wife/mother. While partaking of the steadfastness and deliberateness that makes the Western man, Lucas no less eschews its definitive characterization. Unlike Mitchell's iconic Westerner, Lucas is both "conspicuously" with "family" and formally/thematically infused with the town and ranch-home that position him

"within the domestication of space" largely associated with women in the genre.[71] What the McCains ultimately lack is the "fixed gender proscriptions" that mark the genre for Mitchell. The rigid characterological investment that precipitates Lee's collapse in *Gunman's Walk* is, in *The Rifleman*, the absorption and exchange of gender positions. While the McCains are males, they are aesthetically protean ones.

The Rifleman entertains fabulations instead of natural conditions, formulated processes instead of essential/originary forms. But central to the Cold War predicaments that situate civic planning with plotted action, the show is compelled toward scenarios of violence. The stark rhetorical coding that "plans" violence is afforded a generic vehicle that critiques it and reads the combustive formation specific to the era. *The Rifleman* articulates the mediate point of a televisual divide and makes apparent the activity of making meaning, the intercession-procession of becoming culture, as becoming gender.

[71] Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 162.

Figures to Chapter 5

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

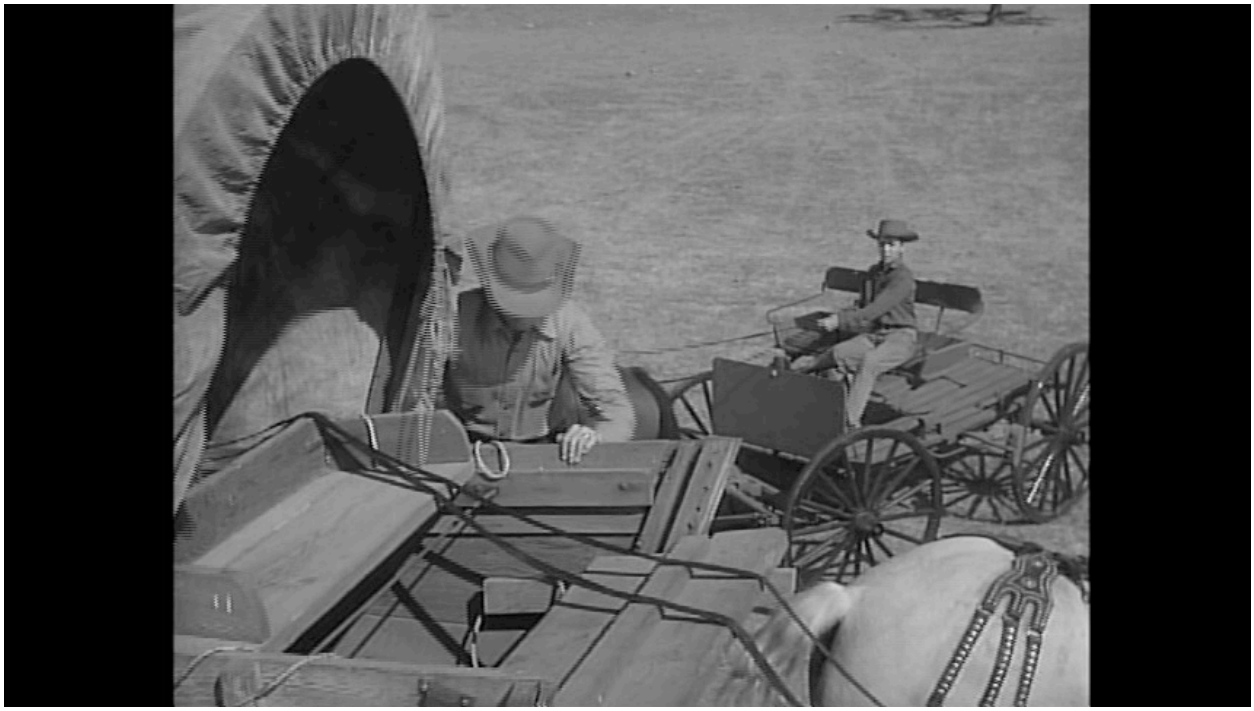

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Figure 16.

Figure 17.

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Figure 19.

Figure 20.

Figure 21.

Conclusion

By juxtaposing the contradictory characterization of this study's four Westerns onto the precarious context of the postwar era in which they were produced, *Coming Home: The Western, Media and Masculinity* confronts the destructive returns of the genre's ideological roots as seeded within the social and political foundation of postwar redevelopment. But Lucas McCain's exceptionality as both homesteader and gunfighter intensifies the antipathy between the Frontier Thesis authors and brings their opposing positions to a standstill of nuclear proportions. Nonetheless, Lucas's absorption of feminine characteristics and the show's queering of the Westerner pushes the genre's predominant masculine typology and thereby broadens the characterological expression of the figure. Like the other three Westerns I analyze in this study, *The Rifleman* foregrounds the reemergence of Turner's legacy (the civic-mindedness it champions) against Roosevelt's overdetermined frontier masculinity and thereby visualizes the combustible ideological framing of the Westerner and the frontier legacy from which he emerges. But unlike the other Westerners analyzed in this dissertation, Lucas's conflation as both family-oriented homesteader and nonpareil gunman most resembles the postwar era and the intrinsic link between domestication and nuclearization at its core. By demonstrating the ideological parallelism between the Western as a cultural legacy and the Cold War as a socio-political organization, *The Rifleman* most clearly expresses the cultural and ideological "civil war" endemic to each. The show, in this sense, is the critical apotheosis of my study. Chapters Four and Five revisit and clarify the ideological contradictions and the aesthetic originality of *The Last Sunset, Have Gun—Will Travel,* and *Gunman's Walk. The Rifleman* captures the fragile détente between civilization and "savagery" that the Westerner struggles to maintain throughout the A-Western's sound history.

Surveying this study from the vantage point of its final chapter brings *Coming Home: The Western, Media and Masculinity* full circle. While Lucas's shocked look at Mark after the saloon gunfight exemplifies vulnerability and a civil/familial reinvestment for the Westerner, it references the shock conveyed by O'Malley's incestuous realization cited in Chapter One. The Westerner who needs family is counterposed with the Westerner who both challenges the integrity of one (O'Malley's incestuous relationship with his daughter Missy) and forfeits the possibility of another (the possibility of a life and future with Missy). While the literal transgression of *The Last Sunset* precipitates the Westerner's self-destruction (O'Malley's suicide), it is counterposed by the suggested transgressions of *The Rifleman* and the queerness that challenges the narrow parameters of masculinity and patriarchy. Similarly, Lucas's nurturing, and his protective guardianship of Mark and North Fork (however persistently imperiled by threats from within and outside the town), contrasts with the Oedipal competition and filicide of *Gunman's Walk*. While Lucas cares for and safeguards Mark, his familial commitment departs sharply from the aggression and competitive ardor of Lee Hackett's manly lessons to his sons and the internecine struggle it provokes between him and Ed Hackett. On the side of the law and consciously invested in the well-being of his son and town, Lucas' mutually dependent relationship with Mark and North Fork contrasts with O'Malley's narcissistic and self-indulgent outlaw and Lee's self-aggrandizing and entitled rancher. Lucas's characterization more decisively breaks with the loner travails and ambivalent posture of the traditional A-Westerner while, nonetheless, flirting with the self-destructive premises of this study's film Westerns. Cycles of civil/familial violence and the identity politics of masculine

overdetermination in the films contrasts with the repetition of totemic violence and the labile gender role-playing of *The Rifleman*.

The domestication that sets Lucas's patriarch-gunman apart from O'Malley and Lee matches the characterological unconventionality expressed by Paladin's gunman sophisticate in *Have Gun—Will Travel*. The McCains' queerness as an unconventional family pairs with Paladin's dandy as an intellectual/aesthete gunman. Denuding the Western of its tendentious naturalizing, *The Rifleman*'s emphasis on a gunman's social construction parallels *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s emphasis on a gunman's self-production. In this sense, the two Western telefilms are resolutely "civilized" and reset the conflict within the genre to a wholly cultural one bereft of its naturalizing pretense. But *The Rifleman*'s emphasis on social reconciliation and its costs and compromises is the very thing Paladin skewers for its general failure in *Have Gun—Will Travel*. And while the shift to the domestic front, broadly speaking, precipitates and generates the semiotic formal structure of all four Westerns as analytic signs to their own aesthetic and ideological character, the telefilms' central emphasis on Paladin's cultured gunman and Lucas's homesteader-gunman distinguish the postwar era's investment in, and concern with, television as the premier cultural technology made for the home. But as (respectively) domestic and cultural "exceptions" to A-Western protagonists, Lucas and Paladin's signature styles as gunmen express a conflict befitting the gunman subgenre and poses a "duel" of sorts between the two Western telefilms. While *The Rifleman* flits back and forth between gender roles particular to the genre and the postwar era, the series troubles the norms of both. Nonetheless, *The Rifleman* occasionally offers up paeans to middle-class morality, evident in Lucas's closing remarks to Mark about the lessons learned in the wake of an episode's adventure. As an inverse mirror to *The Rifleman*, *Have Gun—Will Travel* levels critiques of middle-class values borne out by the deft intellectualism of its newly-minted Westerner—whose profession, nonetheless, convenes an unending cycle of violence that strains the honor of Paladin's gunfighter code. However creative and critical in regards to masculinity and the Western, *The Rifleman* is shadowed by a trenchant socio-cultural conservatism particular to postwar patriarchy, while *Have Gun—Will Travel* flirts with a creeping nihilism paradoxically intrinsic to Paladin's gunfighter code. The central difference between *The Rifleman*'s engagement with civil rectitude and responsibility and its critique in *Have Gun—Will Travel* demands a brief study that explores the theoretical tensions their explicit pairing elicits, while offering a further opportunity to explore the Western telefilm as an incisive form of expression formerly neglected by scholarship on the genre.

While *The Rifleman* premiered a year after *Have Gun—Will Travel*, two of the show's early episodes delivered seemingly conscious critiques of Paladin's characterization. Sharply attired in black, with well-groomed mustaches, the doomed and notorious gunmen of these episodes, "The Money Gun" (S1:E33) and "The Blowout" (S2:E3), taken together, resemble Paladin in *Have Gun—Will Travel*. The combination of gun-for-hire in the former and chronically ill lawyer/gunman in the latter represent, respectively, corrupt and dissolute versions of Paladin's erudite gun-for-hire; their isolation and decadence contrast starkly with Lucas's disapproving and upright community-centric gunman. Like the Andy Moon character discussed in Chapter Five, the gunman characters are offshoots of the quick-draw types popularized in *The Gunfighter* (King 1950) intermixed with allusions to Doc Holliday's Shakespeare-quoting consumptive in *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946). Characterized by infamy, alone and fated to die, the hybrid stock type would seem a coincidental reference to Paladin, were it not for the fact that they are both played by frequent Western character actor John Dehner. Dehner was hired after *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s first season success to play the role of Paladin for CBS radio's

national affiliate in its version of *Have Gun—Will Travel*. Add to Dehner's casting a series of deliberate closeups on "The Blowout" character's holster (similar to compositions in the opening credits of *Have Gun—Will Travel* and its continual use as a stylistic/thematic motif in early episodes of the series), and the reference seems more than coincidental. The rivalry motif for the Western's gunman subgenre, in this context, expresses a larger ideological conflict between the shows borne out of the larger competition between CBS and ABC for the lion's share of ratings for the Western telefilm. In a related fashion, *The Rifleman*'s deliberate barb is something of a competitive riposte to *Have Gun—Will Travel*'s penchant for critiquing the whiffs of "pioneer rectitude" and "middle-class conformity"[1] that *The Rifleman* exhibits to varying degrees. While Dehner's presence in *The Rifleman* episodes indicates an unusually explicit antipathy toward *Have Gun—Will Travel*, Richard Boone's career prior to his casting as Paladin provides a further divide between the Western telefilms.

Boone's casting as a heroic lead for the series appears a conscious decision for accentuating Paladin's character as a contradictory one. Boone was a stalwart heavy in the period's film Westerns (his bad guy opposite Randolph Scott in *The Tall T* [Boetticher 1957] is arguably the most "magnetic" of the succession of bad guys to grace the Boetticher film Westerns noted in Chapter One). Boone's intertextual association with film Western villains is borne out in episodes like "The Outlaw" (S1:E2) and "Killer's Widow" (S1:E28) in which Paladin, respectively, guns down an outlaw in front of his family and attempts to make amends to a widow for killing her gunslinger-husband. Paladin's position as a destroyer of the flawed families he encounters and criticizes in the show carries with it a something of the "savage" connotations discussed in relation to Ed Hackett in Chapter Three. In addition, while Lucas's character is a composite of both gunfighter Shane and homesteader Joe Starrett from the Western *Shane* (Stevens 1953), Paladin resembles both Shane and the film's murderous gun-for-hire, Jack Wilson. The stylized black of Wilson's outfit resonates with Paladin's fashion-conscious dandy, and the character's gun-for-hire profession matches (*sans* the ethical conscience) Paladin's own. Further, the antinomy between Lucas and Paladin, per the allusions to *Shane*, necessitates further research on the Johnson County War of 1892 (the conflict on which *Shane* is based) and the incident's novelization in Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, briefly summarized in Chapter Five. As a point of comparison for the two telefilm Westerns, the historical conflict and subsequent novel provide a built-in nineteenth-century parallel for further research that adds to my work on the Cold War era while providing the additional opportunity to explore the novel's legacy on both Westerns. Specifically in regard to *Have Gun—Will Travel*, the telefilm borrows the novel's correlation between its cowboy hero and knight-errantry, and complicates the comparison by speckling Paladin's hero with villainous associations from both Boone's career and the frontier legacy.

The chivalry denoted by Paladin's name, and the ethical dilemmas with which the character is often confronted, sustain Wister's vision of the West as a testing ground for virtue and character. However, while looking nothing like Gary Cooper's eponymous hero in the early sound adaptation of *The Virginian* (Fleming 1929), Boone's Paladin instead resembles Walter Huston's criminal cattle-rustler, Trampas. Outfitted in black and sporting a dark manicured mustache, the style-conscious villain's resemblance to Paladin positions Paladin as a composite legacy bearing the marks of both cowboy nobility and cattle-rustler corruption—suggestively

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[1] Gaylyn Studlar, *Have Gun—Will Travel: TV Milestones Series* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 9.

complicating Paladin's knight errantry on the plains from the start. Moral steadfastness and surety, in this sense, are perhaps better ascribed to Lucas's unwavering dedication to Mark and North Fork. While Paladin's characterization reanimates Wister's hero as a conflation of Manichean oppositions, Paladin's extreme individuality reads as a morally compromised rendering of frontier heroes *and* villains. In this respect, Paladin's characterization is similar to the composition of Lee Hackett's character in *Gunman's Walk*—i.e. he is a progressive amalgamation of the Western warrior-types outlined in Chapter Three. In this context, the false fronts Paladin performs to test the ethics of characters outlined in Chapter Two is a figural interrogation that the show continually performs on its protagonist.

The question of morality in the Western, then, suggests a continued application of the distinction between the Manichean and the melodramatic outlined in Chapter Two; the characterological distinction between the two gunmen, respectively, correlates with Paladin's virtue-testing performances in *Have Gun—Will Travel* (as Manichean) and the family romance of *The Rifleman* (as melodramatic). The proposed comparison study thereby extends into a scholarly engagement with the ideological and aesthetic stakes associated with each emphasis as an exploration of the questionable moral frontier[2] intrinsic to the Western. Scott Simmon notes the contradictory Puritan strain endemic to the A-Western. As work is the hallmark of Puritan virtue, the public display of labor must furnish the proof of inner worth. In the context of the Western and the wilds of its frontier, violence stands in for work. The poise and deliberation of enacted violence is the sign of a steadfast moral spirit. In the context of the telefilm comparison, gunfighter style offers a way of engaging the question of morality and ethics as distinct conceptual spheres. American exceptionality, in this sense, suggests a lingering thematic/cultural confusion between spiritual purity and worldly exhibition.

An analysis of each gunfighter's weapon offers a way of further exploring the moral/ethical "character" of each gunslinger. Paladin's personally crafted Colt and Lucas's jerry-rigged rifle are marked prosthetic figures, further indicating the characterological/ideological differences between the protagonists. The related analysis of gunfights for each show offers both a way of discerning thematic and aesthetic motifs particular to each show while more broadly exploring the gunfight as a signature feature of the Western genre. The Western telefilm's penchant for isolating and indicating ideological and aesthetic motifs, cuing semiotic analysis and synching characterological and figural material together, offers a built-in critical model for analyzing each show's gunfighting sequences. By extension, an analysis of the particular style of each gunfighter and the choreography of their duels affords a broader engagement with the gunfight as singular epiphenomenal attraction specific to the genre and as a subgeneric iteration of, and sign for, exceptionality; the physicality and dexterity specific to each gunfighter offers a further way of comparing their social exception (as queer, as performative) against the inflections of warrior virtue bespeaking Roosevelt's influence.

Finding in the Western's frontier legacy a contradictory civil/self-destruction endemic to the genre, this study locates a parallel destructiveness within the socio-political organization of the Cold War United States. Rearticulated as a tension between exceptionality and the exception, the telefilm Western can be productively approached as a resonant critical expression for the genre and the particular frontier masculinity the A-Western expresses.

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[2] Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126–127.

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