# Writing the West: Critical Approaches to *Shane*
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**Abstract**

Representations of the American West have perhaps resonated most strongly in the western film genre, yet at the same time, the literary Western is a highly developed and sophisticated genre in its own right. Meanwhile, critical approaches to the West have become increasingly wide-ranging, spanning historical/literary studies; film/cultural studies; genre; gender studies; philosophy, structuralism and, most recently, post-modernism.

In light of such critical diversity, this article places a literary text alongside a Western film in order to illustrate and demonstrate potential critical approaches to the western. To this end it takes Jack Schaefer's novel *Shane*[1] as its case study with two main organising principles in mind. Firstly, analysis of the text demonstrates the ways in which critical methods and theoretical debates can be applied to the literary Western. As a result, I assess, for example, the convention which applies historical co-ordinates to fictional representations, as well as the challenges posed by alternative modes of critique. Secondly, the novel is placed alongside the filmic adaptation[2] in order to demonstrate the fluid nature of western forms and the critical approaches which can be used to analyse them. Finally, I offer my own perspective, suggesting that the methodologies and textual forms explored in the article signal the need for trans-disciplinary critical approaches which reflect both the simplicity and the diversity of the western as a whole.

**Full Text**

The primary purpose of this article is to demonstrate the ways in which critical methods and theoretical debates can be applied to the western. To this end, it will place the literary form alongside its filmic counterpart in order to offer an overview of the range of theoretical approaches which can potentially be applied to them. The textual and thematic space occupied by the western genre is wide-ranging and so a case study, namely the novel and film adaptation of *Shane* will provide the necessary anchorage for this diverse field of study.

Before embarking on this critical review, however, I wish to begin by offering a rationale for the selection of *Shane* as an appropriate case study for analysis. In what ways can it be seen as relevant for the kind of analysis undertaken in this article? Most importantly, *Shane* in many ways typifies the western genre,[3] encompassing as it does familiar themes such as homesteader/rancher conflicts, freedom and individualism versus civilisation and community, the hero protecting the settlers. In this way, it seems reasonable to suggest that those critical approaches which can productively be applied to *Shane* may well also be of use for those seeking to analyse alternative western texts. Secondly, the fact that the text appears in both

literary and filmic form partly accounts for my choice, for I wish to draw on both texts in order to broach as many critical perspectives as possible. That said, inevitably the relevance of the critical approaches varies according to the precise form taken by the western text under investigation. *Shane* is, after all, only one in a wide range of possible western variants.

The fact that *Shane* contains fairly stereotypical character types (mysterious–but ultimately benevolent–hero figure, the domesticated family group, rapacious villains) also makes it a useful case study, for it can be seen to bridge, 'the western literary-critical divide...between two literatures: popular and...serious...where the popular myths are stated with such artistry and economy that the novel has been taken very seriously indeed'.[4] These characteristics enable critical perspectives to be identified and applied to a generic text by an author who can convincingly be categorised as 'one of best post-war writers of Westerns'.[5] After all, it makes little sense to apply such approaches to a text which substantially departs from the generic rubric. To do so would be to risk rooting the analysis in shifting sands. After all, my overarching concern is to bring together and apply critical approaches which may potentially—though not exhaustively–be applied to a wide range of western texts. That said, I do set out to provide a substantive account of the specificities of the genre itself. Nor do I attempt to map the western genre as a whole, a task which would, in any case, constitute sufficient material for another article at least! Many books and articles set out to do just that, some of which are referred to either/or in the article and the bibliography. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the genre is a very diverse one, ranging from simplistic black hat/white hat good versus evil scenarios to highly complex and sophisticated works and, in the case of films at least, European western variants and generic hybrids as well. The middle ground occupied by *Shane* however, means that it can usefully reconcile fairly diverse elements of the genre.

Bearing these points in mind, what I wish to do here is to introduce the reader to what can be termed an analytical tool-box, an array of perspectives and analytical possibilities which are tested against–and applied to–the case study book and film. To this end, at least some of the approaches included here will be of some use to those who wish to pursue their own research and analysis of alternative western texts. As such the case study approach is, I hope, a productive one, since it offers a practical demonstration of the critical methodologies which may be applied to western texts.  That said, this should not be seen as an exhaustive account or, indeed, analysis of the literary and filmic text, *Shane*. Instead, I present the insights into the text which the critical approaches make possible. As such, the case study operates as the text against which the utility of potential critical approaches to the western are measured.

The western can be viewed from a wide range of (intersecting) perspective including historical-mythological perspectives; cultural studies; genre; gender; structuralism and philosophy. The

relevance of these differs according to the particular text at issue. In light of this, I intend to demonstrate the contribution that these are able to make towards an overall critique of *Shane*. At the same time, as I suggest in the conclusion, they become more powerful when employed in a fluid way rather than as distinct areas of study. As will become clear, it becomes impossible to formulate rigid distinctions between the perspectives on offer here.

**The Historical Approach**

I wish to begin to map the critical terrain of the western with the historical perspective, emergent from the genre's (ostensibly) historical setting. As its name suggests, the historical approach concentrates principally on the western's historical and ideological co-ordinates and their impact upon representations of the American West. Such approaches either stem or, as in the case of the New Western Historians, distinguish themselves—from Frederick Jackson Turner's famous essay (1893), The Significance of the Frontier in American History',[6] which can be seen to represent 'the frontier experience as a process that transformed Anglo-Europeans into one distinct race...those who explored and settled the West were collectively defined by the process of finding new land. Paradoxically, through the act of taming the wilderness, frontiersman were freed...liberated by a democratizing process that enabled all people...to share equally in the struggle as well as the benefits of Manifest Destiny...[identifying] these men as uniquely "American"'.[7]

Historical approaches take a number of forms and apply equally well to literary and filmic westerns. Douglas Pye, for instance, combines historical and allegorical interpretations stemming from the text's cultural and historical context. He argues, for example, that '*Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) is perhaps the locus classicus of the Vietnam Western, not only because of its scale and ambition, but because it very clearly exemplifies the reversal of values and some of its attendant dangers'.[8] Meanwhile, Jennifer Peterson connects the western *Johnny Guitar*'s[9] narrative themes directly to the cultural concerns of the decade of production, writing that, 'Such a conflict between a righteous individual wrongly scapegoated and an angry community is particularly significant to the film's early 1950's context as an implicit (and explicitly stated) critique of McCarthyite anti-Communist fervour'.[10]

In contrast, Jon Tuska concentrates on ideological elements in a way that applies to the western genre in general. As such, he concerns himself, 'with the social and psychological aspects of the systematic distortion and misrepresentation of our past and the possible influence this common practice in Western films exerted, and continues to exert, on the national character of Americans'.[11] He goes on to note that, 'it is my intention to employ the concept of historical reality as my basic standard of evaluation [of westerns]'.[12] This conception of historiography poses philosophical questions, however. Can historical "reality" be accessed in this way? It can

feasibly be argued, for instance, that 'Reality is an inference–often a shaky one, always a problematic one. It is becoming more difficult, even for practitioners of the craft resistant to theory, to confide in an epistemology of documentary realism that presents the text as a simple transparency'.[13] This highlights one of the inherent flaws in the historical approach, for it is virtually impossible to excavate the "objective facts" of the historical American West besides those of a critically unproductive kind, dates of battles and the like.[14] Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that the western genre does not constitute appropriate source material for investigations into historical "fact", since fictional texts are not–and make no claims to be–unmediated historical sources.

That said Tuska's attempts to interrogate the western in terms of both representational and actual historical context and content are not therefore necessarily rendered invalid. As he admits: 'the historian must be willing to admit that this historical construction is at best only probable and provisional'.[15] Significantly, though, he distinguishes his approach from another common approach to the western, the mythological approach, which downplays the western's historical basis by concentrating instead on its mythological co-ordinates. For Tuska, these approaches are necessarily oppositional, evidenced by his response to a mythological critique of the film western *The Searchers*:[16]

> In his [Pilkington's] view Ford's film was a myth about the past and, as such, has no relationship whatsoever to historical reality and cannot be approached in that fashion. I must disagree and one of my most fundamental reasons for disagreeing is that Native Americans were not, and are not, *mythical*. A film about the righteousness of killing Indians is making an ethical statement and the significance of such a statement must play an integral part in any critical approach to the film.[17]

Meanwhile, Richard Slotkin adopts an ideological-historical approach in his book *Gunfighter Nation*.[18] However, his methodology differs for he draws parallels between the western and contemporary contexts, rather than attempting to contextualise the western purely in terms of history. As a result, Slotkin's analysis interweaves ideology and American history with the notion of frontier and its significance for Americans, arguing the western's ideology to be inextricably linked with national identity. For example, he writes that 'Hollywood preferred, as always, to assimilate competing ideologies to a common language of myth and genre. The new wave of Western features drew on both Beardian progressivism and Popular Front populism to produce three different ways of resolving the problem of making movies out of American mythology'.[19] For Slotkin, then, this culturally specific, historical concept of frontier has attained the status of myth and in this way, his work demonstrates that historical and mythological approaches need not be oppositional as Tuska maintained.

With this in mind, Slotkin analyses the western as an exemplar both of frontier ideology and its mythological resonances, attributing the genre's narrative impact to the mythological significance of the frontier and its connotations. These connotations include the interlinked imagery of freedom and geographical space which figure so prominently in western narratives. However, while these connotations indubitably derive from a specifically American historical moment—the winning and closing of the frontier—it should be noted that the western's global appeal suggests a broader context than Slotkin's nationalistic and, perhaps, limiting argument allows for.

In light of the variants in the historical approach discussed so far, then, it seems that the mytho-ideological variants of the historical approach are likely to yield more in relation to *Shane*'s narrative than a purely historical interpretation of its context and themes, for the novel's historical substance has nothing particularly new to say about the historical conflicts between cattle barons and homesteaders. As is the case with the western genre in general this is not, after all, its purpose. Of more interest is the text's historical and cultural situated-ness. *Shane* can be seen to simultaneously invoke the American ideologies highlighted by Slotkin and re-play the western as America's foundation myth, one that is rooted in the notion of Manifest Destiny. This evolutionary trajectory begins with a wilderness inhabited by native inhabitants who have no God given right to the land (according to the concept of Manifest Destiny). The wilderness is subsequently tamed by gunfighter heroes (Shane, both in his mysterious past and later when forced to defend the Starretts) and so made safe for the process of settlement (the Starretts, who do have a God-given right to settle the land) prior to frontier closure and the subsequent onset of "civilisation" (land enclosure and the growth of domestic communities).

Alongside this, we can also see specific contemporary American ideologies at work, such as the individual's right to deploy firearms in defence of person (Shane and Joe Starrett, the badman, Wilson and the Rykers) and property (Starrett and The Rykers) as enshrined in the American constitution.[20] Moreover, the narrative is, again typically, underpinned by the mythological notion of an intrinsically violent American West in contravention of the historical evidence:

> Although statistical studies have proved time and again that (after 1850) only a small minority of Americans ever went to the frontier—and that the West, as a region, was far less violent than the cities of the Northeast or certain counties in the South—popular myth continues to assert that the frontier was pre-eminent in the realm of violence. Similarly, both journalistic and official surveys of the causes of American violence persist in asserting that the present rate of violent crime and domestic bloodshed derives in significant measure from America's frontier origins.[21]

**New Western History**

Meanwhile, New Western History sets itself apart from what it deems to be conventional historical approaches, which privilege dominant ideologies such as capitalism, western "civilising" processes and white, heterosexual masculinity. Instead, it seeks 'to re-tell regional history from the point of view of the oppressed, colonized and conquered; ...speak out for the interests of women, minorities, and the environment'.[22] To this end, New Western historians attempt to de-mythologize and deconstruct accepted notions of western history. They do so by identifying the ideological assumptions underpinning historical perspectives such as those outlined above which they argue to map the settling of the west in terms of Turner's vision of achievement and progress, crucially, of the white male. They argue that this vision excludes women and minority groups as well as effacing the exploitation and/or destruction of human and environmental resources necessitated by Manifest Destiny and, subsequently, the American Dream. With such concerns in mind, it seems that New Western historians seek to reveal the dark side of American triumphalism although their claims to originality have inevitably been contested, since they controversially presuppose that previous historians failed to criticise–or even notice–such ideological assumptions. As Robert Wooster sensibly points out, New Western History's 'emphasis on environment, race, class, and gender helps to fill important gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the West... [although] their proclivity for investigating social and environmental issues occasionally proves obsessive, making it difficult to discern the West's importance to the broader past'.[23]  Bearing such criticisms in mind, I now turn to two brief dialogic extracts from our case study, *Shane*, in order to demonstrate the ways in which conventional and 'New' Western History may differ in their analysis of ideologically imbued material.

In a key ideological moment, Joe Starrett urges the pioneers to stay and fight rather than abandon their homesteads in the face of the ranchers' draconian tactics, which include killing one of their number, Ernie, burning down homesteads and employing a deadly gunfighter, Wilson. Significantly, though, this highly polemical speech, which constitutes a dramatic turning point in the film, does not appear in the book. Instead Joe is depicted in placid mode as seen through the eyes of Joey junior: 'Father had his pipe going. "Maybe it's a lucky break for the rest of us", he said mildly, 'that Shane here has been around a bit. He can call the cards for us plain"'.[24]  Moreover, in Schaefer's version the homesteaders' change of heart is prosaic rather than cathartic: 'They were ready to leave it to father. They were decent men and good neighbours. But not a one of them, were the decision his, would have stood up to Fletcher now. They would stay as long as father was there. With him gone, Fletcher would have his way. That was how they felt as they muttered their good nights and bunched out to scatter up and down the road'.[25]  This rather low-key

presentation becomes what might be termed an ideological insert in the film version, though. In fact, the action grinds to a halt when Joe utters his motivational speech to the homesteaders, inspired by Shane, who immediately beforehand quietly reminds them of their responsibilities not only to themselves but to those who come after:

**Joe**: [Sitting down in contemplative pose] "We can't give up this valley and we ain't gonna do it. This is farming country, a place where people can come and bring up their families. Who is Rufus Ryker or anyone else to run us away from our own homes. [Stands up, gripping the back of his chair, as conviction and dramatic tension increases]. He only wants to grow his beef and what we want to grow up is families, grow 'em strong, the way they was meant to be grown. [Music surges] God didn't make all this country for one man like Ryker".

Viewed from a traditional historical standpoint, this speech reiterates ideas about Manifest Destiny, the God-given right to the land, the right to build America, whatever that may entail. This is seen as an intrinsically progressive process, one which involves cultivating the wilderness so that the land can be populated and thereby regenerated, a right, moreover, granted by God. Viewed in this way, the concept of Manifest Destiny assuages any guilty or, indeed, responsibility for the human and natural consequences of land settlement.

New Western Historians, on the other hand, seek to excavate the ideology underlying such ideas of progress, the American Dream whereby everyone (man, in this case) is accorded the right to individual freedom, to a home and family awarded on a meritocratic basis, whatever the environmental costs may be. After all, argue the New Western Historians, land cultivation entails environmental exploitation and depletion, at its most extreme resulting in the Dust Bowl phenomenon of the 1930s, whereby huge areas of the Midwest were reduced to virtual deserts as a result of massive over-cultivation of areas whose climate and environment were only marginally suitable for such agricultural activity.[26] Furthermore, the attention is all on men here, another manifestation of dominant ideology, this time privileging the white male at the expense of all others. While women are expected to take responsibility for the domestic dimension of such lofty settlement plans, they are effectively effaced in this scene. The set-up frames Joe as the central figure. Yet Marian stands at his side, the faithful wife and help-meet, her face virtually hidden by an oversized hat as she submissively gazes at the floor while her husband speaks. Traditional roles and dominating masculinity are therefore once again reinforced.

Indeed, the process of Manifest Destiny–which for New Western historians informs standard historical perspectives to the American West–is even more strongly invoked by a previous scene, which occurs before Ernie is killed by the gunfighter Wilson. Ryker offers to buy Joe's homestead and give him a job in an attempt to win him over and so diffuse the conflict between ranchers and homesteaders. (Unsurprisingly, Joe isn't interested). This scene occurs in both the novel and film versions. The film supplements this, however, by including an ideologically loaded exchange in which Ryker presents the case for the ranchers' right to the range:

**Fletcher** [framed against the night sky, staring sternly at Joe]: "We had rough times, me and other men that are mostly dead now. I got a bad shoulder yet from a Cheyenne arrowhead. We made this country. We found it and we made it, worked blood and empty bellies. The cattle we brought in were hazed off by Indians and rustlers. Don't bother you much no more cos we handled 'em. We made a safe range out of this. Some of us died doing it but we made it...
**Joe**: I'm not belittling what you and the others did. At the same time, you didn't find this country. There were trappers and Indian traders here long before you showed up. They tamed this country more'n you did..."

This extract effectively encapsulates Turner's vision of progress, the stages by which America was won and which the western genre charts so evocatively. According to New Western historians, the conception underpinning this dialogue would be consistent with conventional historical accounts of The West, invoking as it does the standard trajectory of western settlement, from mountain men and trappers to ranchers and town tamers to the pinnacle of "civilisation", land enclosure and the settlers. Viewed from the perspective of New Western History, however, such representations point to the essentially exploitative relationship of the United States to settlement, predicated as it is upon genocide (signified here by "the Indians", the shoulder wound), and rapacious capitalism. 'A safe range' is only the starting point in a "civilising" chain of events which may begin innocuously enough with cattle rearing but has the potential to lead to exploitation of land (over-cultivation, deforestation), the wholesale slaughter of inhabitants and animals ("Indians" and buffalo), and the plunder of natural resources such as gold and oil, at its extreme resulting in environmental disaster.

Indeed, the consequences of such attitudes are invoked right from the opening sequence of the film. Young Joey points his gun at a deer drinking from a river against the lavishly beautiful backdrop of mountain range later, and mimics shooting it. At the same time, he gets his first sighting of Shane riding into view. In this way, two frames effectively distil the

taming of nature, the allegedly God-given subjugation of natural resources: the deer, representative of nature drinks, innocent of the young human's evil intent. Then a reaction shot of Joey's predatory, watchful expression. He is holding a gun. Simultaneously, the heroic man materialises, the one who will "tame" the land and those who stand in the way of settlement, "progress": the ranchers. (As we have seen, the previous link in the chain of resistance, "The Indians", were despatched by the ranchers who are ironically themselves now at risk from their successors). The gunman clears the way for the settlers who will eventually replace him in the chain of "civilisation". We later learn that the gun is not loaded, not potent with bullets as are his father's and later in the film, Shane's.[27] That said, Joey is already in the frame, as it were, for the dominant ideology's ideal of active and dominating masculinity in contrast with his novelistic counterpart who is a distinctly passive figure at this point, lazing as he is 'on the upper rail of our small corral, soaking in the later afternoon sun'.[28] Indeed, patriarchal succession is underscored later in the film.  As a result of Joe Senior's rejection of his job offer, Ryker perhaps surprisingly goes on to make the same offer to Joe Junior, this despite the fact that, as Joe Senior points out, he "ain't quite of age...'

It seems, then, that both the "traditional-ideological" and "New" historical approach can function as useful critical tools for the analysis of the western, in particular its ideological content and associated thematics and style. That said, there are dimensions that both approaches inevitably overlook and so we now turn to another perspective which is able to complement the ideological insights offered by a historical critique.

**Cultural Studies Methodologies**

Cultural studies methodologies may reasonably be linked to the historical approach on at least one level, since they too seek to connect text and context. Furthermore, the historical and cultural spheres are inextricably linked, evidenced by Slotkin's ideological analysis. In view of this diversity, then, I am only able to provide an overview of the multiple components which constitute a broadly cultural studies approach.[29] As such, subsequent discussions include references to cultural theory, structuralism, gender genre, audiences and, in my concluding remarks, philosophical approaches.

Generally speaking cultural theorists undertake detailed textual analysis and then map their findings onto cultural and social developments. Alternatively, this process may be reversed, involving a detailed investigation of the cultural context itself, which are then mapped onto likely contemporary texts. Either way, cultural theory principally contextualises cultural issues, such as ideology, which are argued to underpin narratives. In this way, text and cultural context are in dialogue and so ostensibly "historical" texts such as the western are thought to reflect

contemporary culture rather than their apparently historical location in the Wild West. It is important to note that this does not suggest a deterministic attitude. Instead, cultural theorists excavate cultural dimensions by fluidly relating text to context, thereby acknowledging processes of mediation and contestation. This has resulted in an inclusive attitude towards apparently diverse modes of critique. For example, cultural theorists frequently employ psychoanalytical concepts to uncover sub-textual elements of narratives and so mirrors can be seen to perform an essentially symbolic function.[30] At the same time, though, there are potential pitfalls in non-specialists/practitioners harnessing wide-ranging methodologies like this. As Peter Lehman reflects in his piece, 'Looking at Look's Missing Reverse Shot: Psychoanalysis and Style in John Ford's *The Searchers*': 'If we are going to apply psychoanalysis as a cultural tool to the study of films, we have to be very careful in discriminating between levels of application... Much as the clinical institution of psychoanalysis turns largely on the sensitivity of the analysts, the same will be true for psychoanalytical film criticism'.[31] While his comments relate specifically to western films here, they apply equally to the western form in general, for cultural theorists frequently harness other disciplines to their own disciplines when analysing cultural artefacts as will become increasingly evident as this critical review unfolds.

**Gender and Ideology**

Jane Tompkins's book *West of Everything*[32] takes issue with the (traditional) historical approach, which she argues to simplistically overlook the genre's meta-narrative elements. Instead, echoing the mythological-ideological perspective, she argues it to ideologically re-present masculinity:

> Most historians explain the fact that Western takes place in the West as the result of the culture's desire to escape the problems of civilisation. They see it as a return to the concept of America as a frontier wilderness and as a re-enactment of the American dialectic between civilisation and nature... The Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such. It isn't about the encounter between civilisation and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the western tirelessly reinvents.[33]

This style of analysis can certainly be applied to the narrative of *Shane*, in particular the bar-room sequence. Indeed, bar-room brawl scenarios between gunfighters and opponents function as one of the western's key plot devices, and *Shane* being no exception. Here, as always, the confrontation becomes a battle of will between contestants, an arena in which heroic dominance can be achieved and sustained, as revealed by the scene's opening dialogue in which two men, Chris and Shane, circle one another warily, testing each other's mettle: 'Chris waited until he [Shane] had his whisky... Then he deliberately looked Shane over like he had just spotted him. "Hello, farmer," he said. He said it as if he did not like farmers. Shane regarded him with grave attention. "Speaking to me?" he asked mildly and finished his drink. "Hell, there ain't no-one else standing there. Here, have a drink of this." Chris shoved the

bottle along the bar. Shane poured himself a generous slug and raised it to his lips. "I'll be damned," flipped Chris. "So you drink whisky." Shane tossed off the rest in his glass and set it down. "I've had better," he said, as friendly as could be. "But this will do"...[34]

Moreover, such devices provide both rationale and backdrop for the violent activities integral to both generic trajectory and, crucially for Tompkins's argument, reinforce the western's ideological presentation of masculinity, foregrounding as they do "desirable" masculine competencies such as physical strength. For instance, Joe Starrett's enemies mock the (apparently reformed) gunfighter, Shane for his subsequent consumption of soda pop, intended to provoke the others. However, this has a dual purpose. On one level it is intended to be the catalyst for action (violent activity or, as here, to provide a pretext for future violence). At the same time, however, Shane's deliberate refusal to comply both with the codes of masculine alcohol consumption (which insist solely upon whisky) and the subsequent challenge to his dignity are intended to signal cowardice–submission–[35] to the onlookers as well as drawing attention to the incontrovertible nature of such masculine codes. Furthermore, the drink is loaded with non-"masculine" properties, being not only non-alcoholic but also loaded with juvenile connotations as evidenced by young Bob's (also the novel's narrator) observations of the barkeeper's reactions to Shane's order: 'Will hesitated, looked kind of funny and scuttled past me into the store room. He came back right away with a bottle of pop Grafton kept there for us school kids'.[36] As such, these connotations enable Shane's opponents to signal his subordinate status during subsequent visits to the bar. For them, Shane's manhood is called into question by his unconventional choice, which by its very nature challenges the convention dictating that the ability to consume large quantities of undiluted whisky signifies a fully evolved "masculine" male.

On an ideological gender reading such as this, then, the dynamic of the bar room confrontation is essentially that of an aggressive, power-orientated competition for status between rival males. Nor can the power balance between hero and opponent be too great without sacrificing dramatic tension and the veracity of the ensuing violent confrontation. As a result, Shane's prime opponent is an evil and highly effective gunslinger, Wilson, described as 'a gun-fighter said to be just as good with either hand and as fast on the draw as the best of them'.[37] Importantly, however, the significance of masculine heroism for the western is also reinforced. Shane's heroic nature is revealed via his self-restraint, which, while seen as cowardly by his enemies, draws on qualities of heroic control. And so, he does not respond to childish jibes. Instead he is motivated by loyalty, intervening on a friend's behalf to the satisfaction of both codes of honour and audience expectations. This in turn enhances the generic requirement that heroes exhibit courage in the face of injustice, the nature of heroism itself giving rise to another critical approach, namely the philosophical approach broached in

my concluding remarks. Either way, as Robert Warshow puts it in his important work, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*:

> the values we seek in the Western...are in the image of a single man who wears a gun on his thigh. The gun tells us that he believes in a world of violence and even that he "believes in violence." But the drama is one of self-restraint: the moment of violence must come in its own time and according to its special laws, or else it is valueless.[38]

Indeed, the emphasis that the western places upon the image and physical appearance of the western hero has caused writers such as Richard Dyer,[39] Blake Allmendinger[40] and Peter Lehman[41] to adopt a gendered mode of critique which draws attention to the predominance of male relationships in the western and the consequent marginalisation of heterosexuality. This emphasis may seem at odds with the apparent machismo of the western hero. Yet he is frequently almost dandyish in his self presentation, which has led to inquiry into the homosexual connotations of cowboys and their costumes, as well as the precise nature of their relationships:

> It is difficult to imagine a male costume that lends itself more to eroticisation than that of the gunfighter, and it is not surprising that the iconography of the low-slung, skin-tight trousers and cocked hat, the texturing of raw and smooth cowhide, is one of the favourite costume repertoires of gay male pornography, lending itself to fantasies of soft flesh concealed and protected by leather.[42]

This is further evidenced by the emphasis on Shane's appearance in both the film and book versions which I go on to discuss shortly in relation to genre. Moreover, for Dyer and Lehman in particular, such representations of masculinity are deeply ideological, in particular the fact that the western hero is so rarely naked and thus vulnerable as Dyer points out:

> The white man has been the centre of attention for many centuries in Western culture... A naked body is a vulnerable body. This is so in the most fundamental sense–the bare body has no protection from the elements–but also in a social sense. Clothes are bearers of prestige, notably of wealth, status and class: to be without them is to lose prestige. Nakedness may also reveal the inadequacies of the body by comparison with social ideals... The exposed white male body is liable to pose the legitimacy of white male power: why should people who look like that–so unimpressive, so like others–have so much power?[43]

Peter Lehman makes such ideological linkages even more explicit when he writes that, 'the silence surrounding the sexual representation of the male body is itself totally in the service of traditional patriarchy'.[44]  Since, 'only after thus centering on the male body will it be possible truly to decenter it',[45] he argues that extensive analysis of male bodies is justified even 'if this...risks replicating patriarchal viewpoints'.[46]

In a similar vein, Allmendinger focuses on the homosocial aspects of the novel's representation of Shane and Joe Starrett's relationship. He argues this to be articulated as much as it can be within the constraints of a hegemonic narrative: 'Schaefer considers but finally refutes the idea that the hero's friendship with Joe might be homosexual'.[47] Taking the tree-hewing scene as a case in point, Allmendinger explores the ways in which Joe's wife, the acceptable love/sex object for Shane, operates as a 'mediating presence... [who] enables readers to interpret male same-sex relationships as manifestations of homosocial desire'.[48] Moreover, 'In the process of competing for Marian, Shane and Joe establish an erotic rivalry that binds them to each other as well as to the woman they love...use Marian as a medium through which to channel their own same-sex love'.[49]

Certainly, there is a case to be made for viewing the scene through this particular lens. In fact, the visual nature of the filmic medium distils the scene's homosocial elements, rendering its representation of the two men more explicit than its novelistic counterpart. As a result, it becomes even more essential to disavow any possible homosocial/sexual connotations. In this way, while the novel makes the emotional connection between the two men plain: 'They both looked up and their eyes met and held as they had so long ago in the morning hours',[50] and refers to their physicality: 'the strength building up in his [Joe's] legs and broad shoulders and big corded arms',[51] the emphasis on the physical becomes even more overt in the film version. This is achieved via the sweaty physiques and rhythmic grunting of the two men culminating in the perhaps orgasmic, certainly cathartic, uprooting of the tree root. Despite the strenuous nature of the work, however, the fact that the scene cuts from Shane fully clothed to Shane with his shirt off, (the crucial stripping taking place off camera), while Starrett fails to do so at all is perhaps indicative of the ideological ambivalence which mainstream cinema habitually displays towards male nakedness. Ideologically speaking, this also lends credence to Dyer's previously mentioned male vulnerability and power matrix argument. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that it remains unacceptable for two men to strip off in each others' presence in an early 1950s film, and as a result, realism is to be sacrificed on the alter of ideological artifice. This is further underscored by the surging triumphalist music and ideologically loaded shots of both Joe and Shane in medium close-up framed against the wide blue sky for no apparent reason during the tree felling exercise. At the same time, concerns about the possible homosexual connotations of two half naked men enjoying each others' company—as well as the potential dangers inherent to male spectacle which can be seen to resonate throughout the western genre as a whole—are also brought to the fore. There is only room for one male sex/love object here, and he is solely for heterosexual consumption (or is he?). Likewise, the sparse nature of the dialogue draws attention to the essentially physical and spectacular nature of this male bonding scene, thereby supporting Allmendinger's contention that it references forbidden love at the same time as disavowing it.

Moreover, Starret's response to Marian's eminently sensible suggestion that he hitch up a team to extract the stump (the phallic connotations of the stump need not detain us here), also lends weight to a possible homosocial subtext: "Sometimes nothing'll do but your own sweat and muscle..." an overly macho statement possibly intended to disassociate the pair's endeavours from the taint of homosexual mating ritual. Likewise, Starrett puts his arms around his wife once the job is done, once again reinforcing his heterosexuality in an ideologically heavy-handed manner. The novel, on the other hand, confines itself to merely descriptive detail: 'father turned and came towards mother',[52] and we may assume that Joey's wish that after the cathartic moment, 'they should join hands so close on the bole of the stump...should at least say something to each other',[53] would be unacceptably intimate. Instead, the book contents itself with the safe option: 'they stood quiet and motionless'.[54]

Analysis of this kind along gender lines, then, once again serves to highlight the ideological dimensions of *Shane*, as well as foregrounding its emphasis on specific forms of masculinity which can also be applied to the western genre as a whole. Further, comparisons between the book and film versions highlight the particular anxieties surrounding male spectacle and, in turn, homosexuality that specifically visual mediums are wont to invite. Tompkins's approach towards ideological analysis, meanwhile, reveals possible limitations in the empirically orientated historical approach by minimising the western's historical dimensions in favour of sub-textual and contextual co-ordinates. In this way, she foregrounds those elements which transcend textual subject matter in a way that arguably draws on the structuralist strand of cultural studies as promulgated by the work of Roland Barthes, to which we now turn.

**Structuralism**
For Barthes, myths can be processed and transmitted through a text's deep structures, which involves uncovering the ways by which ideological messages come to be propagated, circulated and naturalised via cultural artefacts:

> the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions... Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time. For the Nature, in which they are locked up under the pretext of being eternalised, is nothing but a Usage.[55]

Specifically in terms of the western, however, structuralism finds one of its most influential practitioners in Will Wright, who critiques the western in terms of its plot structures in his highly influential work, *Sixguns and Society*.[56] Here, Wright maps the variations in, and development of, these plot structures onto cultural, social and ideological shifts. As such, he demonstrates the operation of myth by defining the process as, 'a communication from a society to its members:

the social concepts and attitudes determined by the history and institutions of a society'.[57] He also excavates the deep structures embedded within generic narrative/plot formations, and the myths that these reinforce[58] for he argues them to reveal, 'a clear pattern of change...within each period the structure of the myth corresponds to the conceptual needs of social and self understanding required by the dominant social understandings of that period; the historical changes in the structure of the myth correspond to the changes in the structure of these dominant institutions'.[59]

Wright identifies four categories of plot in light of his findings, arguing them to correspond with the appropriate historical period:

> the classical plot–extends from 1930 to about 1955, when the Western revolves around a lone gunfighter who saves the town...the vengeance variation–overlaps the end of the classical period and continues till about 1960, with later recurrences. This plot concerns an ill-used hero who can find no justice in society and therefore becomes a gunfighter seeking vengeance...the transition theme– which is more logical than temporal, [and] includes three films in the early fifties; the story centers on a hero and heroine who, while defending justice, are rejected by society...the professional plot–extends from 1958 to 1970 and involves a group of heroes who are professional fighters taking jobs for money.[60]

Wright's innovative attempt to categorise an entire genre according to temporal and structural co-ordinates generates its own set of problems, however. Significantly, he has to include a number of adjustments and exceptions in order to make his "typical" texts fit, evident in his reference to 'the transition theme–which is more logical than temporal, [and] includes three films in the early fifties'.[61] That said the essence of *Shane*'s narrative as summarised towards the beginning of the article, can be comfortably mapped onto the classical plot category thereby working to reinforce its generic credentials.

In 'Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western', meanwhile, Jim Kitses breaks down the western's narrative into a series of binary oppositions around which representational and ideological components pivot:

| THE WILDERNESS | CIVILIZATION |
| --- | --- |
| The individual | The community |
| freedom | restriction |
| honour | institutions |
| self-knowledge | illusion |
| integrity | compromise |
| self-interest | social responsibility |
| solipsism | democracy |

| NATURE | CULTURE |
| --- | --- |
| purity | corruption |
| experience | knowledge |
| empiricism | legalism |

| | |
|---|---|
| pragmatism | idealism |
| brutalisation | refinement |
| savagery | humanity |
| **THE WEST** | **THE EAST** |
| America | Europe |
| the frontier | America |
| equality | class |
| agrarianism | individualism |
| tradition | change |
| the past | the future[62] |

These categories can also be applied to the narrative structure of *Shane*'s plot. We can see, for example, the operation of divisions between the individual (Shane) and the community (the ranchers and homesteaders); heroic freedom (Shane, 'riding a lone trail out of a close and guarded past',[63]) versus domestic restrictions (the married Joe Starrett); honour (Shane's heroic code) versus encroaching institutions. Such institutions remain embryonic in this particular narrative as suggested by Shane's own acknowledgement and even promotion of the onset of civilisation in the valley and, correspondingly, his own inability, as "masculine" man–in the western's gender universe, fixed and unified–to adapt to such developments: 'A man is what he is, Bob, and there's no breaking the mould. I tried that and I've lost. But I reckon it was in the cards from the moment I saw a freckled kid on a rail up the road there and a real man behind him, the kind that could back him for the chance another kid never had... There's no going back from a killing, Bob. Right or wrong, the brand sticks, and there's no going back'.[64] In this way, Shane represents the left hand column of categories, the lost past West, and young Bob the right, namely the future West, destined to be corrupted by "Eastern" values.

This application of Kitses's categories, then, renders them effective for analysis of *generic* texts such as *Shane*. At the same time, however, it tends to be overly rigid in its categorisation of the western's narrative structure as does Wright's work. As a result, such categorisations are less productive for generically deviant texts. Both, however, continue to be a productive starting point for analysis of the western for they highlight its generic aspects as well as unwittingly revealing possible limitations in genre analysis of the kind practiced by, for example, André Bazin.

**Genre**

In common with structuralism, genre studies tend to de-centre the author as source and centre of a work's meaning. They do so by examining its deep structures and forms. With this in mind, the western's self-contained stylistic boundaries appear to be highly suited to genre analysis. For Bazin, the western involves, 'galloping horses, fights, strong and brave men in a wildly austere landscape...'[65] Further, he argues the form's narrative evolution (highlighted by

Wright's work) to principally derive from generic processes rather than cultural and social factors. At the same time, he emphasises the western's historical roots: 'The Western is the only genre whose origins are almost identical with those of the cinema itself and which is as alive as ever after almost half a century of uninterrupted success'.[66] Moreover, he argues the genre form to have reached the classic stage of its evolution in the 1930's, peaking with films like *Stagecoach*,[67] and at risk of decline thereafter. As a result, it became necessary to revitalise the genre through increasingly sophisticated plots and characterisation. And so, a new type of western emerged: 'the 'superwestern'...a western that would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some additional interest to justify its existence–an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political or erotic interest, in short some quality extrinsic to the genre and which is supposed to enrich it'.[68]

Bazin contrasts these self-reflexive 'superwesterns' with formulaic productions existing alongside the mutant superwesterns. These rely on generic effects rather than intellectual aspirations, and so possess '"sincerity"...the directors play fair with the genre even when they are conscious of "making a western"'.[69] Significantly, in relation to my classification of *Shane* as a generic text, Bazin argues the film version of the novel[70] to be a 'superwestern' which, 'set out to justify the western–by the western',[71] noting that the film version 'combines two or three basic western themes, the chief being the knight errant in search of his grail'.[72] Moreover, 'so that no one will miss the point, Stevens dresses him in white. White clothes and a white horse are taken for granted in the Manichean world of the western, but it is clear that the costume of Alan Ladd carries with it all the weighty significance of a symbol'.[73]

This does not apply to the novel, however, in which a dark Shane (contrasting with Ladd's luminous blondness) is depicted solely in black, highlighting possible discrepancies between Bazin's genre analysis and fiction and film variants: 'He wore dark trousers of some serge material tucked into tall boots and held at the waist by a wide belt, both of a soft black leather... A coat of the same dark material as the trousers was neatly folded and strapped to the saddle-roll. His shirt was fine-spun linen, rich brown in colour. The handkerchief...was black silk. His hat...was a plain black'.[74]

According to Bazin, then, this emphasis on symbolism signifies that for the film version the West is only a contingent context, and may just as well be transferred to an alternative generic framework. However, this conclusion diverges from my analysis of the novel so far, which instead suggests the book's narrative to be strongly rooted in the western genre, containing as it does a number of generic conventions and at the same time devoid of the meta-narrative apparently purportedly imposed upon the film version. Further, Bazin's systematising approach suffers from the same flaws as Wright and Kitses's categorisations. In fact, Bazin describes his

own categories as 'inevitably arbitrary',[75] since many westerns fall between the two extremes. In addition his classifications depend upon necessarily subjective distinctions. After all, Bazin defines and analyses westerns in terms of characteristics which are at the same time argued to be aspects of the western genre itself, a characteristic flaw of genre criticism, as Bazin himself explains: 'I must no longer explain the evolution of the western genre by the western genre itself'.[76] Andrew Tudor goes further than this in a summary which typifies criticisms of the genre approach, his comments applicable to the western as a whole:

> They [genre critics] are *defining* a 'Western' on the basis of analysing a body of films which cannot possibly be said to be 'Westerns' until after the analysis....To take a *genre* such as a 'Western', analyse it, and list its principle characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are 'Westerns'. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principle characteristics' which can only be discovered *from the films themselves* after they have been isolated.[77]

Christian Metz, on the other hand, analyses genre in terms of discourse and the concept of myth previously discussed in relation to Barthes. He writes that, 'It [the western] belonged to the category of the great controlled genres, those genres that, plausible or not in the details of their peripatetics, in any case never seem true, for they never pretend to be anything other than discourses–the fairy tale, the epic, the myth, the oriental theatre etc as well as large portions of classicism'.[78] In this way, Bazin and Metz's views can be said to exemplify the two extremes of western genre analysis; one culturally contextualises it while the other sees it in purely formalist, structuralist terms, as do Wright and Kitses.


**Audiences**

The genre approach also overlooks readers/audiences, a key focus for cultural theorists such as David Morley[79] and Stuart Hall who explored the notion of textual consumers as producers as well as recipients of meaning in a way that applies equally to visual and written material. This process is said to occur through the individual intent of either producer or audience via the ideological messages encoded in and/or transmitted by, the text. Specifically in relation to the television text, for example, Hall accounts for the ways in which media messages can be encoded by producers and/or decoded by audiences by identifying three hypothetical positions. These are dominant-hegemonic (those who decode the intended message); negotiated (a negotiation of the array of possible meanings); and oppositional (those who resist and oppose the dominant message).[80] As such, audiences actively construct meaning, rather than passively consuming as argued by Frankfurt School mass culture critics Max Adorno and Theodor Horkheimer. For the latter, genres (such as the western) are industrialised vehicles for oppression which enable jaded workers to energise themselves by partaking in formulaic narratives. They can then reassume their place in the highly exploitative capitalist system with renewed vigour. At the same time, political apathy is reinforced for,

> Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanised work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same time, mechanisation has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardised operations. What happens at work, in the factory or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation to it in one's leisure time. All amusement suffers from this incurable malady.[81]

Such views can be contrasted with those of Antonio Gramsci[82] who saw genre as a tool of hegemony rather than domination, namely as 'a formidable complex of trenches and fortification of the dominant class'.[83] Meanwhile, viewed in purely historical terms, developments in the western genre can be mapped directly onto increasing audience sophistication and, indeed, literacy. Specifically in cultural studies terms, however, we can compare the novel and film versions of *Shane* in order to discover their intended audience.

Tudor cites, 'ritualistic gun-fights, black/white clothing corresponding to good/bad distinctions, revenge themes, certain patterns of clothing, typed villains',[84] as characterising the typical western, and *Shane* is no exception. It is interesting that ethical elements are highlighted, however, because it is here that the key to *Shane*'s audience may be seen to lie. I have already mentioned the metaphorical and literal darkness of the novelistic hero when placed alongside his filmic counterpart, and this darkness extends beyond mere appearance and clothing, since here, Shane is an object of fear as well as that veneration, admiration and affection so evident in the film version. Hero worship is certainly present in both texts, but alongside this, the novelistic Shane's enigmatic qualities take on a darker hue than those invoked by the film's optimistic music and heroic white garb when first sighted by the boy. Shane's enigmatic nature has certainly not been effaced by the film but rather re-cast in terms of a mysterious past and consequent self-restraint, both typical of the generic western hero. Meanwhile, throughout, the novel places much more emphasis on the dangerous and ambivalent nature of its hero, so blurring the distinct ethical boundaries offered by Tudor's definition of the genre. On first encounter, for example, once the boy (the narrator) has noted the stranger's dark appearance, he begins to sense an underlying dimension:

> His eyes seemed hooded in the shadow of the hat's brim. He came closer, and I could see that this was because the brows were drawn in a fixed and habitual alertness. Beneath them the eyes were endlessly searching from side to side and forward, checking off every item in view, missing nothing. As I noticed this, a sudden chill, I could not have told why, struck through me in the warm and open sun. He rode easily, relaxed in the saddle, leaning his weight lazily into the stirrups. Yet even in this easiness was a suggestion of tension. It was the easiness of a coiled spring, of a trap set.[85]

Again, he feels 'that sudden chill'[86] when the stranger first looks at him, despite the fact that 'his voice was gentle and he spoke like a man schooled to patience'.[87] These feelings increase when Shane encounters his father shortly afterwards:

> I had to hold tight to the rail or I would have fallen backwards into the corral. At the first sound of father's voice, the man and the horse, like a single being, had wheeled to face us, the man's eyes boring at father, bright and deep in the shadow of the hat's brim. I was shivering, struck through once more. Something intangible and cold and terrifying was there in the air between us.[88]

This suggests an underlying tension in Shane's persona which fails to appear in the filmic version, where it becomes diluted into heroic self-control and exceptional combat skill, both merely pre-requisites for western heroism.

Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that the novel's ethical ambiguities failed to be translated into the film version due to their differing intended audiences. The novel was, in common with the western genre in general, primarily aimed at an adult (masculine) audience (though not, of course, necessarily confined to these in practice) and so ethical ambiguities were acceptable, perhaps desirable. In contrast, the film is family orientated, though there is of course scope for it to be decoded on a variety of levels by differing audience members in the ways that Hall and Morley indicated. As such, the film has distinct ethical boundaries and a suitably heroic protagonist, who is compelled to be a force for good rather than, as in the novel, possibly otherwise. Indeed, Alan Ladd's portrayal is almost angelic by the close of the film, having won the romantic and filial love of two members of the Starrett family respectively, and saved the life of a third.

While this is also true of the latter part of the novel wherein the reader is assured of Shane's heroic nature, such affections are downplayed. In the closing scene of the novel, Young Bob doesn't run after Shane's retreating figure, calling out the resonant words, *Come back Shane…. We want you, Shane. Mother wants you. I know she does*![89] as he does in the film. Rather, Shane's departure is comparatively muted, and he does not slump dramatically in the saddle suggestive of serious injury, perhaps death, as he does at the end of the film. Indeed, a further two chapters follow Shane's departure, and its closing phrase, 'He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he came and he was Shane',[90] is evocative as befits its (primarily) male reader rather than potentially heartrending, as the film's sentimental final sequence is undoubtedly intended to be. Divergences such as these signal just some of the discrepancies which signpost the intended audiences for novel and film.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that the various critical methods discussed in this article have strengths and weaknesses when taken as distinct entities in relation to the case study text. This is perhaps inevitable for no single approach can encompass a text in its entirety, but is instead intended enhance our understanding of it. Likewise, the boundaries between them are rarely, if ever, clear, in particular the cultural studies sub-sets. As a result, textual and authorial concerns are likely to inform final critical directions. Taken as a whole, they offer a range of productive critical perspectives, interrogating as they do the historical dimensions and constituents of *Shane*. They do so by drawing out cultural and social context and issues of reception, together with the deeper structures which can be said to inform its narrative form.

I have interpreted the concept of text in a fluid manner by adopting a comparative approach to the literary and filmic versions of the case study. I have done so because the critical approaches covered by the article are intended to relate to as wide a range of readings and western texts as possible. As such, it becomes clear that the western genre need not be indelibly anchored to one particular form, but rather invites possibilities, opens up a space, for trans-disciplinary research. For example, it becomes possible to take a philosophical approach which combines the cultural context of the western (the dynamic of cultural exchange between The US and France during the production of westerns) and a philosophical critique (existentialist analysis of the western hero and narrative). Viewed in this way, the bar room confrontation previously discussed in relation to ideological masculinity is reconfigured as a conflict between the in-itself (the authentic hero, Shane) and the-one, (the mode of the crowd, the inauthentic mass which threatens heroic autonomy; the onlookers). Shane's refusal to comply with the norms of masculinity and drink whisky therefore signals his autonomous state of being, the in-itself, which precludes his acting in accordance with the wishes of others, namely the mode of the-one. The bar-room, then, becomes a space where alternative modes of being-in-the-world can be displayed and tested to the detriment of the inauthentic, societal self. This signifies the western's investment in authentic, autonomous heroes. Western scholarship generally attributes such characteristics to the ideology of individualism. An existentialist analysis such as this, however, is able to supplement this via a philosophical mode of critique. Further, while the text apparently treats authenticity positively, its authentic hero returns to a state of exile and possibly, alienation, on leaving the community. He is also wounded, perhaps fatally in the case of the film, thereby potentially adding another layer of theoretical abstraction, because the possible demise of the in-itself invokes the ultimate negation of existence. If this is the case then *Shane* acknowledges the successful incursion of societal beings upon the in-itself in a way that challenges the generic convention that the heroic autonomous self always wins. Further, the ultimate threat to the in-itself is signalled not by the mode of the-one, in this case, the group of villains, but rather the mode of being-for-others as represented by Starrett, his wife

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and his son, the settlers who seek to tame Shane, and who eventually replace the in-itself (Shane) in the western's trajectory of civilising processes, previously broached in relation to the historical approach.[91]

In light of this array of potential critical perspectives, then, it seems reasonable to suggest that the approaches included in this article should be viewed not as distinct entities whose boundaries should be respected but instead, as interlinking methods by which justice can be done to the complexities–as well as the potentially formulaic–elements of both the case study in particular and the western genre in general, a genre which is itself a sophisticated fusion of fact and fiction.

## Notes

[1] J. Schaefer, *Shane and Other Stories*, (Middlesex: Peacock, 1963 [1949]).

[2] G. Stevens, *Shane*, (USA: Paramount, 1953).

[3] I go on to discuss the concept of genre later in the article.

[4] C. A. Milner. II et al eds., *The Oxford History of the American West*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 708.

[5] E Buscombe ed. 2nd edition. *BFI Companion to the Western*, (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 215.

[6] F. J. Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', in, ed. H. P. Simonson, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 44.

[7] B. Allmendinger, *Ten Most Wanted: New Western Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 7.

[8] D. Pye, 'Ulzana's Raid', in I. Cameron & D Pye, eds., *The Movie Book of the Western*, (London: Studio Vista, 1996), p. 263.

[9] N. Ray, *Johnny Guitar*, (USA: Republic, 1953).

[10] J. Peterson, 'The Competing Tunes of *Johnny Guitar*: Liberalism, Sexuality, Masquerade', in J. Kitses, & G. Rickman, eds.,. *The Western Reader*, (New York: Limelight, 1999), p. 322.

[11] Extract from the introduction to J. Tuska, *The American West in Film: Critical Approaches to the Western*, (London: Greenwood, 1985), p. xiv.

[12] Ibid., p. xv.

[13] From the introduction to D. LaCapra, *A Preface to Sartre: A Critical Introduction to Sartre's Literary and Philosophical Writings*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 21.

[14] Even such apparently objective data as this may be open to debate, however.

[15] Tuska, *The American West*, p. xv.

[16] J. Ford *The Searchers*, (USA: Warner Bros., 1956).

[17] Tuska, *The American West*, p. xix.

[18] R. Slotkin. *Gunfighter Nation*, (New York: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[19] Ibid., p. 286.

[20] See http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html for the full text of the American Constitution, instituted in 1791. Significantly, the right of the citizen to bear arms detailed in the Second Amendment of the American Constitution is second only to freedom of speech.

[21] Buscombe, *BFI Companion*, p. 233.

[22] Robinson, F. G. *The New Western History: The Territory Ahead*, (Arizona: University of Arizona Press 1998), p. 5.

[23] Robert Wooster, quoted in F. G. Robinson, *The New Western History: The Territory Ahead*, (Arizona: University of Arizona Press 1998), p. 9.

[24] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 87.

[25] Ibid., p. 88

[26] This land was over-cultivated first in response to the demand for wheat in the First World War and then due to the falling prices of the Depression.

[27] Shane relinquishes gun-fighting and so his weapon when he undertakes farming. However, he straps on his gunbelt again when honour requires it, namely, in defence of his friend Joe Starrett later in the narrative. His philosophy is that a gun is a tool, as good or bad as the man who uses it.

[28] Ibid., p. 7.

[29] Moreover, since film studies approaches are often rooted in cultural analysis, and further relate mainly to film texts, I will only refer to them as they pertain to the film version of *Shane* (Stevens).

[30] Cracked mirrors, for example, can be seen to symbolise the psychological fragmentation of the self/identity.

[31] P. Lehman, 'Looking at Look's Missing Reverse Shot: Psychoanalysis and Style', in John Ford's *The Searchers*', in Kitses & Rickman, *Western Reader*, pp. 266-267.

[32] J. Tompkins, *West of Everything*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[33] Ibid., pp. 44- 45.

[34] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 54.

[35] Shane's real motivation is a refusal to return to his "old ways" as a gunfighter, ultimately blocked owing to generic demands for heroic action. At the same time, it serves to generate tension until the inevitable showdown.

[36] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 53.

[37] Ibid., p. 82.

[38] R. Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*, (New York: Anchor, 1964), p. 205.

[39] See R. Dyer, 'The White Man's Muscles' (1997), in R. Adams & D. Savran, eds., *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 262-273.

[40] See in particular Allmendinger, 'The Queer Frontier', in *Ten Most Wanted*: *New Western Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 153-170.

[41] P. Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

[42] J. M. Gaines & C. C. Herzog, 'The Fantasy of Authenticity in Western Costume', in E Buscombe & R. E. Pearson eds., *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 179.

[43] Dyer, in *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, pp. 262-263.

[44] Lehman, *Running Scared*, p. 4.

[45] Ibid., p. 5.

[46] Ibid., p. 5.

[47] Allmendinger in *Ten Most Wanted*, pp. 156-157.

[48] Ibid., p. 157.

[49] Ibid., p. 157.

[50] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 30.

[51] Ibid., p. 30.

[52] Ibid., p. 30.

[53] Ibid., p. 30.

[54] Ibid., p. 30.

[55] R. Barthes, 'Myth Today', in M.G. Durham, & D. M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 126.

[56] W. Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[57] Ibid., p. 16.

[58] A comparison may also be made with Vladmir Propp's functionalist analysis of the fairy tale in V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, (London: University of Texas Press, 1968). Propp identifies a series of plot devices which he argues to have universal functions within adventure narratives. The methodology is undermined, however, by its attempts to universalise a range of diverse devices, since Propp includes so many variations/exceptions that the initial categorisations become questionable.

[59] Wright, *Sixguns*, p. 14.

[60] Ibid., 15.

[61] Ibid., p.15.

[62] J. Kitses, 'Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western', in J. Hollows et al eds., *The Film Studies Reader*, (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 90.

[63] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 33.

[64] Ibid., p. 109.

[65] Ibid., p. 142.

[66]A. Bazin, 'The Western: Or The American Film Par Excellence', in A. Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, (London: University of California Press, 1972), p. 140.

[67] J. Ford, *Stagecoach*, (USA: United Artists, 1939).

[68] Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Western', in *Cinema?* pp. 150-151.

[69] Ibid., p. 155.

[70] Stevens, *Shane*.

[71] Bazin, *Cinema?* p. 152.

[72] Ibid., p. 152.

[73] Ibid., p. 152.

[74] Schaefer, *Shane*, p.7. I return to this shortly in relation to western audiences.

[75] Bazin, *Cinema?* p. 156.

[76] Ibid., p. 153.

[77] A. Tudor, 'Critical Method: Genre', in Hollows, *Reader*, p. 96. Those interested in genre studies should refer to the work of Steve Neale, one of its main practitioners. See, for example, S. Neale, *Genre*, (London: British Film Institute, 1980), partially responsible for a resurgence of interest in genre criticism.

[78] C. Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 248.

[79] See 'Interpreting Television: the Nationwide Audience', in D. Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 75-118.

[80] S. Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Durham & Kellner, *Keyworks*, pp. 166-176.

[81] T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in Hollows, *Reader*, p. 11.

[82] See A. Gramsci, 'History of the Subaltern Classes', in Durham, & Kellner, *Keyworks*, wherein he states that 'the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership"… A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power…it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to "lead" as well', p. 44.

[83] Gramsci, 'Cultural Themes: Ideological Material', in ibid., p. 46.

[84] Tudor, 'Critical Method', in Hollows, *Reader*, p. 96.

[85] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 8.

[86] Ibid., p. 9.

[87] Ibid., p. 9.

[88] Ibid., p. 10.

[89] Stevens, *Shane*.

[90] Schaefer, *Shane*, p. 114.

[91] R. E. Griffin, *The Eternal Outsider*: *The Western Hero as Existential Archetype,* Ph. D thesis, (Nottingham Trent University, 2004).

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