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The Hero and Villain Binary in the Western Film Genre

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Abstract

The Western hero has been an established film icon since the early 1900s and the particular brand of masculinity he embodies has represented a set of values and beliefs around what it means to be a man in American society. These resonated into other countries such as New Zealand where this representation also became an accepted view of manhood. Based on a colonialist ideology, the cowboy hero's original role in the frontier of the Hollywood Western was to protect the new settlers and to remove any barriers to their settlement. The first of these was the Native American who was presented as an uncivilised savage to justify conquest. Conflicts such as these created the use of binary oppositions that became an established part of the Western narrative as they provided a contrast between civilisation and wilderness, and good and evil. These oppositions could also take the form of a villain or ideological perspective that didn't fit the ethos of the frontier life the hero was protecting.

Throughout its history, there have been many adaptations and changes made to Western film genre to keep its relevance but the white male figure of the hero has remained a constant presence. In reflecting societal and cultural trends this character has also been adapted as he continues to represent ideal masculinity. The frontier of the American West is presented as a male domain and the figure of the hero is also utilised for the purpose of ensuring threats to male power from minority racial groups or females are minimised. The aforementioned groups, whether good or evil, were never given an equal status to the white hero in this film genre. By having different villains to defeat the hero has been able to prove his superiority in a variety of ways and in becoming more villain-like himself, his power is maintained.

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Introduction

This thesis is about the hero and villain characters in the Hollywood Western film genre and how these characters eventually blurred in response to cultural and social changes in America. The image of the cowboy hero has been carefully constructed to create an idealised version of masculinity and changes to the hero and villain have also reflected broader transformations in race relations and constructions of 'whiteness' in America. This has happened because the Western film genre has successfully adapted and changed throughout its history to remain viable and relevant. The theoretical framework I have developed is based on the development of the Western film hero, the representation of the 'Other', and how the portrayal of the cowboy hero has perpetuated a particular type of masculinity. So it is primarily grounded by the concept of representation and issues of cultural representation. The Western film has presented a way of life that has appealed to generations of film audiences both in America and abroad, and has remained relevant by incorporating societal changes and attitudes, and using new modes of production. This has also caused transformations in the portrayal of the idealised masculinity of the male hero which is based on a 'white' masculinity set against a villainous man of colour or one of lesser masculinity. From the 1950s the line between good and evil in the Western becomes increasingly unclear and it becomes difficult to distinguish who the heroes and villains are. I will examine the reasons why this occurred and trace the evolution of ideal heroic white masculinity from the early Westerns to the present day.

I will outline how the cowboy figure of the West was turned into a male hero by the Hollywood film industry as he became part of Western folklore through various settings and storylines. Also, how the Western narrative is based on a familiar format of conflict and resolution and where the hero is always torn between the two worlds of wilderness and civilisation. This opposition forms the basis of the Western film formula and creates the binary oppositions the hero must engage with as he attempts to live in-between these two worlds. As a hero he must emerge triumphant at the end of the film and to perform at his best he

must remain alone and unencumbered by societal constraints. This means he can live alongside the community but not as part of it to give him the isolation and freedom he needs to defeat the villains. I will point to how the villain took various forms, starting with the Native American who was replaced by white men in the form of outlaws when it became unacceptable to show overt negative portrayals of racial minorities in films. Also, how the white, male cowboy hero was developed to embody the ideal image of masculinity which gave him superior powers over the villains he fought against. The second stage of my research will explore how as part of his evolution, the hero was portrayed as a man with a flawed and troubled character but this did not diminish his power. This was assisted by placing him within the framework of the Western film genre and with its familiar iconography and formula any deviations that were made to his character did not radically alter his status as the 'ideal' man. Overall, I will argue that changes to the hero and villain binary opposition took place within a genre that carefully made adjustments to keep its relevance and to ensure the status of the hero was not compromised.

The thesis consists of four chapters and the first is titled the Origins of the Western Hero where I will outline how the character of the hero originated and provide the background to a white male emerging as the central figure in the genre. In this chapter I will also point out the factors that led to the Native Americans being portrayed as the first villain in the Western. Chapter two is titled, Dualisms, Oppositions and Construction of the 'Other' where I discuss the dual roles of the hero and the oppositions he must overcome. Also, how these oppositions are used to provide the necessary sources of conflict for the Western hero by giving him an enemy to fight. I will also cover how oppositions have been created and changed over time in response to cultural and social movements in America and as a way of highlighting the hero's supremacy. In chapter three, The Idealised Masculinity of the Western Hero I identify the attributes of the Western hero and how this character was developed into an ideal representation of masculinity. The topic of chapter four is, The Blurring of the Hero and Villain, where I will outline the factors that led to the hero taking on more villainous characteristics that eventually resulted in the blurring of the two roles, thereby creating a more violent and self-serving Western hero.

The qualitative data I have used as evidence to build my argument is sourced primarily from Western films which I have chosen to illustrate the changes that occurred to the hero and villain binary and the representation of ideal masculinity. A film that shows the early hero/villain binary is *Buffalo Bill* (1944), which gives an historical interpretation of the life of a real-life Western hero, William Cody. The Native Americans in this film are portrayed as villainous and a threat to the establishment of the new territory of the West. Cody is called Buffalo Bill because he hunts and kills the buffalo for money and in doing so, also destroys the main source of food for the Native Americans. When Cody leaves the West he creates his version of the frontier with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show which shows the Native Americans in clear opposition to white settlers. A film that features the story of another real-life Western hero is *Jesse James* (1939) which is about the brothers Frank and Jesse James who fight against an ideological villain in the form of a railroad company which is bringing unwanted progress and mechanisation to the West. They take up arms against this intrusion by robbing the trains and even though they are breaking the law, they are seen as heroic figures. A film that clearly illustrates the hero/villain binary in another era is *Mackenna's Gold* (1969) where the hero, Marshall Mackenna needs to use more than force to defeat the villain, Colorado. The culmination of the blurring of hero and villain roles is seen in *No Country for Old Men* (2007) where the traditional Western heroes are defeated by a nondescript villain. In *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011) which attempts to blend the Western and Science Fiction genres, it is necessary for the established Western heroes and villains to combine forces to defeat a new villain to the West in the form of aliens from outer space.

Many actors have played the role of the cowboy hero but for the purposes of providing a cohesive argument about the representation of ideal masculinity I have included films John Wayne and Clint Eastwood appeared in. The films I have chosen show how these actors embodied the attributes of the Western hero and the adaption's they made in relation to the hero/villain binary. The first of these is *Stagecoach* (1939) where Wayne stars as the Ringo Kid, and whose role it is to protect a community that is represented by the occupants of a

stagecoach, from the Apache tribe as they travel further into the West. Wayne also appears in *Rio Grande* (1950) where he plays the part of a cavalry hero who is able to transcend the worlds of wilderness and domesticity. In this film the Native Americans are portrayed as the villains and the place of women in the Western is highlighted. Another of Wayne's films, *True Grit* (1969) shows him playing a hero who has outlived his usefulness but during the course of the film, proves he is still capable of defeating villains and saving lives. The Spaghetti Westerns¹ introduced Eastwood to the Western genre where he created a more cynical version of the hero who was only interested in serving his own interests and fought anyone who presented an obstacle to this. In *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) which is set during the Civil War, Eastwood plays a hero seeking revenge against the Union soldiers who murdered his family. This film shows a hero at odds with the worlds of wilderness and civilisation and in seeking the solitude of the 'Indian lands' after the War, he is waylaid by a group of settlers who need his help. The villains in this film are evil white men and the Native Americans are presented as suffering from the consequences of the War as they are pushed further and further off their lands. In *Pale Rider* (1985) Eastwood dons a white collar for his atypical hero, known as Preacher as he fights an ideological villain in the form of a corporate mining company trying to drive a small community of gold miners out of the area. The Preacher only uses violence as a last resort in helping this vulnerable community and this hero demonstrates how the Western film genre continues to adapt and change to keep its relevance. I have also included *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) to illustrate how variations can be made to the character of the Western hero within the Western framework that haven't diminished his masculine power. Another of Eastwood's films, *Unforgiven* (1992) clearly shows when the blurring of the hero and villain characters occurred because Eastwood plays this hero as a cold-blooded killer who is acting purely for material gain. In addition to this, the Sheriff character that normally represents the side of "good" is corrupt. This sample of films provides excellent examples of the workings of the hero and villain binary and the representation of ideal masculinity through the character of the Western hero.

¹ These films were made in Italy and directed by Sergio Leone.

The Western film genre has presented mythical stories from a time in history where life was based around the settlement of a new frontier and this theme found universal appeal with film audiences. The Western shows a masculine individual who developed his own moral code and superior fighting abilities, to carry out the job of protecting the freedom and openness of the West. The role of the Western film genre in developing and sustaining this heroic figure in opposition to villainous 'Others', is central to my argument.

Literature Review

This literature review outlines the areas of research that support my thesis of how the hero and villain binary blurred in response to social change and representations of masculinity. I will examine how a white male hero came to symbolise a hegemonic ideal masculinity which was contrasted with negative representations of ethnic groups and women as a way to accentuate white male power. This contrast was also used as a way to mark difference in the Western with dualisms and oppositions such as wilderness versus civilisation themes forming the basis of a narrative style. I will discuss how the construction of the 'Other' was used as a way of representing good and evil through the hero and villain characters and to establish a white male hero as the dominant identity. I will examine notions of ideal masculinity and how they are articulated via the figure of the hero and the reasons behind the blurring of the hero and villain characters. The key areas of scholarship that are contained within the literature review include genre theory and how the Western genre provided a suitable framework for the development of a white male hero. In addition to this, I will outline how binary oppositions underlie the structure of the Western film and provide the hero with the tension and conflict he must overcome to maintain his superiority. Also, I will point out that by locating the hero in the wilderness this enabled the Western to retain an emphasis on action and physicality which suited the development of a particular type of masculinity. The 'Other' can be defined as anyone who doesn't fit the dominant group and for the purposes of my argument I will focus on minority ethnic groups that are used as oppositions to the hero and presented as villains in Western films. The authors I have researched for this literature review support the main themes of my thesis; the origins of the Western hero within the Western film genre, dualisms/oppositions and constructing the 'Other', theorising ideal masculinity, and the blurring of the hero and villain characters.

The Origins of the Western Hero

To make my argument that the hero and villain roles blurred it is necessary to firstly examine how the character of the Western hero originated and this

provides the background to how he became such a prominent figure in the Hollywood Western. This rise to prominence was also assisted by the development of the Western film genre as a uniquely American product and Belton outlined how the Western film became “synonymous with the definition of America”. (p. 223) The personality and look of the Western hero was established from the earliest Westerns and was in clear contrast to the villains. As this character developed over time the authors have outlined how this reflected attitudes to race and the dominant representations of masculinity in American society.

The Western as an Emblematic Genre

Sobchack and Sobchack (1987) argued that for a film to be considered part of a genre it need not include all the conventions of that genre but it “should include enough generic elements to cause the viewer to associate it clearly and consciously with other films containing similar elements”. They also defined genre as “a group of films that are extremely similar in their subject matter, thematic concerns, characteristics, plot formulas, and visual settings”. (pp. 223 and 226). Corkin (2004), Belton (1994), and Maltby and Craven (1995) all described how frontier stories had emerged in plays, books and films in the late 19th Century at the same time as North America was propelled toward industrialisation and urbanisation. The result of this was that by the time Western films were produced, audiences were already viewing them nostalgically because the reality of modern life was becoming incompatible with what many saw as the American ideal, making the Western a panacea to the adjustment of modern living. Maltby and Craven also outlined how “Western films were easily identified by the actors and recurrent situations such as gunfights and saloon brawls, which occurred with sufficient consistency to override historical distinctions, which established the Western as a trans-historical phenomenon”. (p. 118). According to Neale (1990), “film audiences have a particular familiarity with the Western genre through their prior experience with it” and so have formed certain expectations of what each Western film will be about. Neale also attributed this to how the narrative formula is repeated over and over again, resulting in “inter-textuality and generic themes”. (p. 49). Maltby and Craven described how Hollywood’s commitment to

establishing “causal relations between the elements of a movie ensures that the audience’s experience of its story will be one of clarity”, and where “the movie assumes the audiences competency in dealing with the material through its reliance on conventions of spatial representation, temporal organisation, genre and star recognition”. (pp. 335 - 336) The consistency and familiarity of the Western film genre enabled the hero to be surrounded by relevant themes and images providing the ideal setting for the development of an idealised version of masculinity.

The Western film genre has survived over many years due to making changes and adaptations to maintain its relevance but it has never departed from the setting of the historical West. As Keller (2005) outlined, “whether or not Westerns referred to actual events and people, they claimed an affinity with authenticity through an explicit grounding in ‘history’, not in all individual texts but in the genre as a whole”. (As cited in Rollins and O’Conner, 2005, p. 241) Nachbar (1974) also contended that during the “progressive era from the 1890’s to the Great War the West as a physical and spiritual frontier was an important symbol of freedom and individualism that had to be preserved for Americans”. (p. 21) The Western also often reflects current issues and Simmon (2003) described how it is made up of “a dichotomy of retrograde and contemporary themes”. (p. 49). Nachbar also pointed out how the Western has “to some extent related past to present conflicts”, and for example “film’s made during the Depression often showed the villain as a banker or businessman”. (p.123) According to Wright (1975) the Western is “a myth or rather a set of myths which bind the viewer/audience to a particular social order” (p. 14), and this social order was also reflected in the role of the hero. For instance Nachbar described how in the era from 1890 to 1910, which was known as the “strenuous age”, the films showed a hero “eager to combat any foe regardless of the odds”. (p. 20) Current issues were also reflected during the 1920’s and 30’s and according to Simmon during the 1920’s “most Westerns were biographies of legendary westerners or tales of landmark events in pioneering”, (p. 99), and the B (Budget), Western films that were made during this time “had little to do with the frontier spirit and everything to do with federal intervention”. (p.166). Loy (2003) argued that in the 1930s & 40s bad men were glamorised in

numerous Westerns such as in *Jesse James (1939)* which in reflecting the depression years “depicts the outlaw as hero as he resists the evil influences of greedy industrialists”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 579). Birdwell (2003) also outlined another example where in the original *Daniel Boone (1936)*, the “can-do spirit of new deal America where people pull together for the common good”, is portrayed and the next version, *Daniel Boone Trailblazer (1957)*, reflected the unease that gripped a “Cold War America yearning for dependable heroes and clearly identifiable villains”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p.140)

By keeping to an established and popular formula but at the same time making variations that reflect current concerns this enabled the Western film genre to not only survive but also develop a male hero that supported a dominant American ideological perspective on power relations.

The Early Heroes and Villains

In the early Western films, the hero was originally part of an ensemble of characters and as Brodie-Smith (2004) outlined, early filmmaker, Gilbert M Anderson made “simple, melodramatic and comedic Westerns that did not depict the cowboy as a serious dramatic hero”, and where “he regularly cast himself in non-white parts”. (pp. 38 and 57) Brodie-Smith described how this changed when:

complaints about the sensationalism and sexual suggestion in Westerns featuring Native Americans and Mexicans made Anderson stop using them as central protagonists and instead he abandoned race, created Bronco Billy and fore-grounded his white hero's moral and psychological conflicts. (p. 58)

In addition to basing his films around this central male figure he also established a particular look and role for Bronco Billy that was based on a rodeo cowboy. (p. 63) According to Brodie-Smith, Bronco Billy embodied the new ideal “masculine domesticity” and as the central figure for the audience to get interested in began “imbuing the frontier drama with traditional middle-class ideals of morality, manhood and character.” (pp. 135 and 151) Although Anderson's films still featured Western villains they did not “challenge traditional ideals”. (Brodie-

Smith, pp. 137 and 141) The reasons why the hero was developed to embody a particular type of masculinity is also outlined by Brodie-Smith who described how the early Western actors were “indigenous heroes, white men who had served in the military, with impressive war records had excellent horsemanship and did their own stunts” and for this reason “strength, endurance, athleticism and a lack of focus on sensuality became the hallmarks of the Western hero in the 1920s and these ideals reflected the new notions of masculinity that were popular in the US at the time”. Brodie-Smith also argued that these heroes made up “for standardised plots” and were “placed in films where their presence dominated all other elements of the narrative” and “physical prowess and dexterity became the keys to a Western actor’s success and dramatic talent became less important than an ability to ride a horse, fight and endure physical punishment”. (pp. 188, 202, 205 and 209) This led to the development of an acting style that Simmon described as a “series of codified gestures and conventional poses” (p. 174), and with the actors relying more on their physical prowess than acting skills this meant using dialogue presented a challenge so this acting style continued even after the introduction of sound. By the late 1930s film audiences had become bored with this type of hero and they had also been over saturated with the mass-production of B Westerns, so the future of the Western looked uncertain. This is when John Ford changed the Western when he made *Stagecoach* (1939) a film that helped to reinvent the genre and also established actor John Wayne as a new Western hero. Dagle (2001) described how Wayne was a “classically balanced Westerner” when he appeared in *Stagecoach* and also according to Dagle this film “developed the racial other” in the form of the Native American Apache tribe. (As cited in Studlar and Bernstein, 2001, pp. 104 and 108)

Rainy (1996) outlined how writer Frederick Faust had established the “simple story formula of the Western” (p. 3), and this was seen in the first Western film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) which according to Nachbar had the “successful combination of broad physical action and the suspense of the chase that became the basis of many future Western film plots”. (p. 2) This shows how the story formula for the Western was established very early on in its history and its simple linear plot mainly dealt with stories about oppositions for the hero

and wilderness and civilisation themes. An important change for the Western occurred when the stories became based on what are known as the Plains Wars. These were a series of battles between the Native Americans and the US Army from the 1840s to 1890 and the most famous of these was the defeat of General Custer at Little Big Horn in 1876 and another major uprising took place at Wounded Knee in 1890. The Army had met resistance from the Native American tribes because they wanted to move them off their lands and force them to live in reservations to separate them from the new settlers. When Hollywood filmmakers chose to use the Plains Wars as the predominate theme in the Western, according to Belton the Native Americans were then generally presented as, “an unruly force of nature resisting the ‘natural’ development of the West into an agrarian paradise”. (p. 217) Bataille and Silet (1980) also argued how the “Western froze the Native Americans in a time between 1850 and 1900”. (As cited in Miller, 1980, pp. 41 - 42) Most importantly for the Western, by achieving supremacy over the Native Americans as Busby (2003) outlined the cowboy hero then came to be an “American icon and symbol of frontier freedom and independence”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 489) Dagle also pointed out how the hero was portrayed as superior to the Native Americans through his “native intelligence and fighting skills”. (As cited in Studlar and Bernstein, 2001, p. 108) Brookman (1984) argued that the popularity of the hero arose from “America perpetuating the myth of the Renaissance man”, (p. 185), and similarly Pierson (2005) described how:

the open frontier was more than a geographic location – it symbolically expressed the still ‘open’ opportunities and possibilities available to individuals before the West was finally closed off by the progression of modern communities. Westerns evoke nostalgia for a mythic time and place where many possibilities were still open to people. (As cited in Rollins and O’Conner, 2005, p. 290)

Through the character of the hero film audiences could live vicariously as he came to represent a nostalgic past and way of life that had appeal to people feeling disempowered by the modern world. The Western also kept its simple storylines based on action and adventure which then developed into ‘cowboys versus Indians’ which established the first hero/villain binary in the genre.

Dualisms/ Oppositions & Constructing the 'Other'

As the authors in the previous section have pointed out, the Western film genre presents a nostalgic view of the past but also made adaptations and changes to keep its relevance. The Western presents a world where the white male hero has complete dominance by having the ability to adjust to different circumstances and by overcoming challenges to his supremacy from villains, in whatever form they may take. The hero must face oppositions and conflict and these could come from a variety of sources as he moves between the worlds of wilderness and civilisation. The authors in this section of the literature review discuss the ideological tension that arises for the hero from these two oppositions and how alongside this another opposition based on good versus evil themes was established. The authors also provide the background to why people of Native American and Mexican ethnicity were used as the villainous 'Others' to the white male hero and how this led to negative stereotyping in the Western for these groups.

Schatz (1981) described the setting of the Western as a place where "civilisation and savagery are locked in a struggle for supremacy" (p. 47), and Tompkins (1992) also argued that the interaction between hero and landscape lies at the genre's centre where "there is a tremendous tension between the landscape and the town with the genre pulling towards the landscape". (pp. 71, 81 and 85) This is set out in more detail by Jim Kitses (1969) as he compared the themes of wilderness and civilisation, and where the wilderness is concerned with the individual, and encompasses, freedom, honour, self-knowledge, integrity, self-interest, nature, savagery. The West symbolises America, the frontier, equality and the past. The community is expressed as, restriction, institutions, compromise, social responsibility, culture, corruption, refinement, humanity. The East symbolises Europe, class, industrialism, change and the future. (As cited In Hollows and Jancovich, 1995, p. 69) Similarly to Tompkins, Kitses argued that the appeal of the Western lies in the cowboy hero's constant struggle between these two worlds. Cook and Bernink (1999) further contend that Kitses's thematic concerns show a shift in meanings where the wilderness starts with the individual and freedom, and ends with tradition and the past. Civilisation starts with the community and restriction and ends with

change and the future, “demonstrating the flexibility of the structure, and the ideological tension that it embodies”. (pp. 150 -151)

Hollows and Jancovich (1995) outlined that when filmmaking moved to the West the new setting was “more likely to deal successfully with stories about the opposition between man and nature, and the establishment of civilisation”. (p. 68) Schatz argued how these themes were supported by a film industry actively participating in a “gradual refinement and evolution of the Western’s narrative formula” that created a “mythical reality”. (p. 47) Similarly, Simmon outlined how the Hollywood film industry “deliberately represented existing social tensions and oppositions” in the Western to “perpetuate an established narrative structure which is based on good versus evil and straightforward for film audiences to follow”. (p. 27) This meant there needed to be a hero representing the good side and an evil villain but because the hero often needed to break the law to defeat this villain, he had to remain independent from civilised society. Also, according to Schatz although the hero has a “relationship with the natural world and with the community in some form, he must confront these oppositions as they bring a deeper meaning to the relationship between the hero and villain”. (p. 40) This could mean the hero may have more in common with the villain character than with the community he protected but with his superior powers he had the ability to transcend both. However, this still presented a challenge to the hero as the villain could take many different forms including an ideological opposition such as progress. Plantinga (1998) described the traditional Western as “an embodiment of an American ideology of redemptive and purgative violence because it cleanses society of the ‘Other’ in eliminating the outlaw or savage”. (p. 65) The hero must engage in violent behaviour to defeat the villains and although he is regarded as a hero for saving everyone because of the violence he is still considered an outsider. Belton describes the hero as a “social outcast who rides in from the wilderness”, enters the community and “leads it in its struggle to civilise the frontier”, helps to defeat the villains or Native Americans and returns to the wilderness. He “functions as a force of nature in purging the landscape of corruption however the hero is unable to enter the community because it can no longer tolerate the excessive violence which he, like his former enemy, remains identified with”. (p. 211). This

situation requires a special individual who can survive and thrive as a loner but rather than retreat to the wilderness, he must stay connected to civilisation so he is ready to confront any threats to the community. This is why he is perpetually on the move, bereft of home, family or possessions and in addition to confronting villains he also needs to confront his own inner turmoil that results from this lifestyle.

Constructing the 'Other'

Brodie-Smith outlined that by 1913 the “vanishing Native American had become the pre-dominant stereotype in the Western” (p. 72), and Simmon also argued that by the end of the silent film era Native Americans had “vanished from the genre as anything like individualised characters”. (p. 157) Brodie-Smith also pointed out that after the Plains Wars narratives were adopted “this was when the Cowboy appeared as a hero on horseback and gunfight violence was the pattern Hollywood adopted”. (pp. 4 and 45) According to Baird (2003) this also led to representations of the Native American becoming dominated by the Plains Indians. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 162). This representation was described by Bataille and Silet (1980) as, “a man wearing a wig, war bonnet, breech-coat, moccasins, and phoney beadwork”. (pp. 41 - 42) Kilpatrick (2003) also argued how the Buffalo Bill Cody Wild West Show that ran from 1883 to 1913 “provided the simplified, standardised and largely erroneous conceptions of what a Native American ‘is’ for American and European audiences”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 279) Bataille and Silet also pointed out how the Native American was viewed as an “obstacle to progress” and a “savage who needed civilizing” and like Kilpatrick, argued that the Buffalo Bill Show presented an image of the Native American that most people thought was accurate which made it easy for “stereotypes to be transferred to the screen, resulting in the ‘homogenised’ Native American”. (pp. 37 and 39) Kilpatrick also maintained that the “one-dimensional stereotyping of Native Americans was largely due to the melodramatic nature of early cinema” and because “he was a man of physical action it made him the perfect foil for the heroic white man in the silent films”. (p. 280) The effect of this was that to follow the simple Western action narrative the Native Americans were typecast into the role of evil and presented as uncivilised, primitive, killers. This typecasting also supported a colonialist

ideology as outlined by Said (1978) “a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the non-white world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are”. (As cited in Lodge and Wood, 2008, p. 284) Delgado and Stefancic (1995) described how this ideology was reflected in property relations because “the Discovery Doctrine gave any European person or nation the right to land”. (p. 215) Also, according to Kilpatrick, property is one of the “fundamental notions upon which the American ideal of freedom is based” and because the settler was always seen as the “natural proprietor of land”, the Western became a “system of symbols supporting a self-justifying history”. (p. 282)

Similarly to Simmon’s description, Prats (2002) argued that the Native American vanished by simply becoming “a collection of fragments”. (p. 23) Bataille and Silet also described the Native American as a man with “no tribe or identity” and who is presented as “savage, stoic, or drunk”. (p. 41) Kilpatrick outlined how the “stereotyped signs from silent films”, such as the “scowling face and rigid body”, were carried over to the sound Western as the “natural pose of a Native American” and this resulted in the “othering of them for mainstream audiences”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 281) Baird also contended that the perception of the Native American came from the “Plains Indian’s typical iconography” and that this became a “generic model in motion pictures for all Native Americans”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p.162) Sandos (2003) pointed out how “A” Westerns had the army rather than the cowboy or settler in battle with the Native Americans and pointed to the John Ford trilogy of *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), and *Rio Grande* (1950), as examples of this. (p. 104). According to Bataille and Silet the Western film genre “froze the Native Americans in a time between 1850 and 1900 in films”, and that it was not until the 1970s that “pro-Native American” films such as *A Man Called Horse* (1970) and *Little Big Man* (1970), appeared. (As cited in Miller, 1980, pp. 42 and 44) However, even when a film has a positive portrayal of Native Americans the negative stereotypes can still exist and a film that is an example of this is *Dances with Wolves* (1990) which according to Sandos “reversed typical story lines where whites were recast as villains and while the Sioux are sensitively portrayed, their enemies the Pawnee are moulded into the old bloodthirsty

savage stereotype". (pp.104 and107) Sandos also outlined how this stereotype was established early and that Fenimore's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) gave Hollywood two Native American types "the noble forest dweller and the brutal savage". (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 104)

Negative portrayals of ethnic groups were not limited to the Native Americans and Delgado and Stefancic described how the Mexican in the Western was portrayed as the "harmless innocent" or "wily villain". (p. 217) As pointed out by Corkin, filming techniques assisted with these negative portrayals such as in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) wealth disparity is shown by:

almost always shooting the Mexican peasants in a way that accentuated their lesser physical stature, resulting in a decrease in social gravity and significance. When the white men sit, the Mexicans sit lower and when the whites stand, the Mexicans squat. (p. 180)

This lesser physical stature was also conveyed through the Mexicans usually riding smaller horses or mules, and the Native Americans riding bareback on piebald ponies. Dyer (1997) described how the West came to represent the white world and how it acted as a "divide between 'white' and 'red' peoples". (p. 35) Bhabha (1983) outlined how "the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction". (p. 371) Bhabha also argued that "stereotypes require for their successful signification a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes, meaning the same old stories must be told again and afresh". (p. 376) This repetition is a feature of the Western genre and as outlined by Berger the "dominant narrative is slow to change". (1995, p. 218)

Villains

The following authors have outlined what differentiates the hero from the villain in the Western. Mark and Pearson (2001) described the hero and villain as being "archetypes cut from the same cloth, where the negative pole of the hero bleeds into the outlaw"; however the villain acts as a "disruptive force", "wants to be feared," and "violates the rules for personal gain", or out of a "feeling of

alienation". (pp. 101 and 103) Cawelti (1974) argued that because the villain is subject to "rages of greed, lust or hatred" his power is diminished. (As cited in Nachbar, 1974, p. 114) Finally, Plantinga pointed out that the villain engages in violence out of "excitement or self-assertion" but the hero always engages in a "fair fight". (p. 72) The villain is a necessary character to illustrate the good versus evil opposition and as Hall (1997) argued "the simplest way of marking difference is a binary opposition like East/West, where the meaning often is defined in relation to its direct opposite". (pp. 31 - 32)

The authors have outlined that within the Western film genre a narrative formula was established that provided opposing forces for the hero as he moved between the worlds of wilderness and civilisation. While the Native Americans were portrayed as the noble or bloodthirsty savage even then they were never a complete character and never of equal status to the white hero. The character of the hero was formed by giving him superior physical powers and by contrasting him with 'Others' who took the role of villainous characters. After film production moved to the West the Western themes reflected Said's description of how there were "native peoples to be dominated, variously exterminated, and variously dislodged." Said also argued how this narrative came to dominate the Western for some years because "American attitudes to American greatness and hierarchies of race have remained constant". (pp. 6 - 7) The use of oppositions and villains in whatever form they take provides the essential conflict that forms the basis of the Western story and gives the hero the justification to act as he does.

Theorising Ideal Masculinity

The Western film genre's use of oppositions is also demonstrated by the often contradictory nature of the Western hero where he represents the establishment but owns nothing, is a hard worker but unemployed, represents good but uses gratuitous violence, is attracted to women but refuses to settle down. The authors I have referenced in this part of the literature review discuss how the male hero represents a type of hyper-masculinity that is based on heterosexuality, physicality, violence, and individualism.

According to Lenihan (1985) the hero had a “natural awareness of right and wrong” and as he was “serving society’s best interests his spirit of individualism had to be respected”. (p. 15) The hero is described further by Brookeman (1984) as:

an individual emancipated from history happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race, an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. (p.185)

Warshow (1992) also outlined how the Western hero is jobless with few possessions but can outshoot and outride any opposition with his “unshakable control”. He also contended that the “point of the Western movie is to convey an image of a man with a style that expresses itself most clearly in violence”. (pp. 454 and 457) The Western film genre has played a major role in creating and perpetuating an image that Neale argued supports “current ideologies of masculinity” which are about “aggression, power and control” and they became the “hallmark of the Western hero”. (p. 11) However, as pointed out by Plantinga the hero only “reluctantly enters in to violence, doesn’t revel in mayhem and kills in accordance with strict conventions and protocols”, and also outlined how:

if he kills, this is seen as appropriate punishment for the villain and his personal qualities such as; skill with a gun, cunning and intelligence and stylish demeanour are celebrated as essential elements of his identity as defender of the good community. (p. 72)

Sobchack and Sobchack (1987) described the Western hero as a man who “hates fences and boundaries, rejects the stability of marriage and home, and where his true home is the rapidly diminishing wilderness and his only property is his horse”. (p. 226) Corkin outlined how he risks his life for the common good but by seeking nothing in particular in return, such actions marked him as the “ultimate in individualism”. (p.101) Also pointed out by Corkin is that for the Western actors “under-acting became a form of expression in itself” (p. 64), and this is the style Clint Eastwood introduced to the Spaghetti Westerns. Busby

attributed the Spaghetti Westerns to “rejuvenating the Western genre” (p. 492), and according to Hayward, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) “signalled a change where the Western was no longer about nationalism and optimism”, and where they all “poked fun at the iconography of the Western” which was “no longer about optimism, puritanism and nationalism”. (pp. 420 - 421)

Rainy (1996) explained how the “American propensity to venerate folklore enshrined the hero as a creature beyond and above the law” and described him as a “mounted prosecuting attorney, judge, jury and executioner who dispatches all cases on the spot”. (p. 4) According to Smith (1995) the “orthodox structuring code” for Westerns is the “solidity of masculine presence, demonstration of masculine destructibility, and recuperability” and where these representations in films act as a “demonstration of how masculinity is supposed to work”. (As cited in Berger, Wallis, Watson, 1995, pp. 81 and 99) Savran (1996) outlined that masculinity is such an “unstable concept” it has to be “constructed and reconstructed repeatedly in the mass media”. (p. 34) The Western film genre has played a major role in a construction of masculinity and Wood (1977) in outlining the “values and assumptions embodied in classical Hollywood cinema” described how the “ideal male” is the “the virile adventurer, the potent, untrammelled man of action”. (As cited in Braudy and Cohen, 2009, p. 593)

Threats to Masculinity

Women are relegated to minor roles in the Western and Mulvey (1975) outlined how there are two narrative functions in the Western with the hero “split in two” with one “celebrating integration into society through marriage, and the other celebrating resistance to social standards”. (As cited in *Screen*, 1975, p. 17) To keep his place in the wilderness the hero must stay single and by showing women as weaker characters, this helps to demonstrate his superiority. It also helps to build the image of the hero as a powerful male because according to Savran masculinity “is only understood by what’s excluded” (p. 7), and Connell (2005) also argued that masculinity is “defined through an opposition with femininity”. (p. 189) Wood, Bazin, Connell, and Brodie-Smith all described how the imbalanced sex ratio in the Western led to a categorisation of females into

two types, the domestic wife or mother, and the saloon girl and Corkin contended that the Western presents “normal Americaness as male” (p. 65), and Connell also argued that “masculinity is in effect, defined as not-femininity”. (p. 70) Neale argued that Peckinpah’s Westerns *Guns in the Afternoon* (1962), *Major Dundee* (1965), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) have “an obsession with images and definitions of masculinity and masculine codes of behaviour, and with images of male narcissism and the threats posed to it by women, society and the law.” (p. 15) The Western according to Wood is “generally structured on wandering, settling tensions”, (p. 595), and is a place where “women and minorities are distrusted”. (p. xxvii)

The authors have argued that heterosexuality is assumed when it comes to an ideal representation of a man in Hollywood films. According to Connell “heterosexuality is part of manliness” (p. 196), and similarly to Smith, Savran, and Wood, Connell also argued that “exemplars of masculinity are men of the frontier”. (p.186) Wood (2003) also pointed out how the “Great White Heterosexual Male is still the rightful Lord of the Universe”. (p. xxvii) For these reasons the Hollywood Western hero was based on a heterosexual masculinity because as Neale (1983) outlined this is the “structuring norm in relation to images of women and gay men”. (p. 115) According to Neale the use of violence in the Western mediated any chance of homoeroticism (pp.13 and 16), making it safe for heterosexual males to view the male hero in a non-sexual way. Connell also argued that most heterosexual males are not threatened by portrayals of gay characters in films because they perceive this as “only concerning a minority”. (p. 196) Dyer (1993) described how in the Western film male sexuality is “goal-orientated” and that “if one compares the underlying structure of most narratives in Western fiction it is about the pursuit of a goal and its attainment, usually through possession”. (p. 41) Wright (1975) stated that the Western is a “myth related to how society sees itself” (p. 14), and within this myth the Western hero has been developed into an ideal image of masculine power by mostly excluding strong female and gay characters.

According to Connell the hero engaged in a “rationalised violence” (p. 192), and this “violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military; and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in

European and American culture". (p. 213) Corkin described how John Wayne and Clint Eastwood served as "icons of masculinity" because when they appeared in Westerns "they brought something of themselves to the role that was right for the times and the genre". (p. 65) The authors have all highlighted the solitary nature of the hero and the reasons why he needs to remain separate and apart from civilisation. They also support my argument that by locating the hero in the wilderness he needed to have certain attributes and skills that were developed into an idealised form of masculinity. According to Simmon the Western hero is part of the "iconography and landscape" of the West (p. 454), and Busby described this character as an "American icon and a symbol of the frontier" (p. 489). The authors also identify how threats from homosexuality and femininity were overcome in order to enhance and perpetuate the ideal masculinity this character embodied. Warshow described the hero as a man of "personal nobility" (p. 457), which is indicative of his status in American society and unlike most film genres; Savran identified how the West is a place where "men can get old without losing power". (p. 42)

The Blurring of the Hero and Villain Binary

Rollins and O'Conner (2005) argued that Westerns are a "touchstone to understanding the nations concerns" and that "almost every issue in our contemporary existence surfaces in Westerns". (p. 31) The Western hero has played a key role in reflecting the social and cultural shifts in American society as he went through his various transitions. This also happened with the villain when this character changed from being ethnically Native American or Mexican to the white male outlaw. This change also coincided with the hero having an identity crisis because he had to start contending with his own conscience as he increasingly represented his own interests rather than that of the community. The authors in this part of the literature review outline how the Western film genre went through changes as it struggled to maintain its relevance. For this reason new types of Westerns were developed such as those with a professional plot, "spoofs" such as the Spaghetti Westerns, counter culture films and comedies. To retain his place in this new environment the hero had to become like his opponents and to defeat them he needed to use a greater level of violence which caused the hero and villain characters to blur.

According to Costello (2005), the 1950s were a time of “political, economic and cultural ferment” and that the cold war era of 1947-1963 was a time of “social change, with an emerging post-industrial economy, new planned communities and the rise of a national security state of unprecedented power and scope”. Costello also argued that “within this context of change a new politics of group interests emerged, including the civil rights movement, a politics of gender, and early signs of a youth movement”. (As cited in Rollins and O’Conner, 2005, pp. 175 -176). The hero struggled with his own inner conflicts in the films known as the Psychological Westerns which according to Schatz arose from the hero’s neuroses that made him “incompatible with civilisation and societies unreasonable expectations”. (p. 58) Wandtke (2007) also argued that during the 1950s there developed a “cynicism and a fragmentation” of Western heroes as they “began to fight against even their own mythic identities. The cowboys themselves grew darker, more violent, and more divided within themselves”. (p. 204) Rainy described the Psychological Westerns as a “cinematic attempt to talk out historical neuroses and psychoses”. (p. 34) The Westerns of this time are described by Slotkin (2006) as when “professionalism in the art of violence” became the “heroes defining characteristic, the image of a gunfighter as a professional of violence for whom formalised killing was a calling and even an art, is the invention of movies”. (p. 111) This was supported by more films being shot on location which according to Hayward (1995) “increased visual realism alongside greater psychological realism”. (p. 420)

Busby argued how the films, *The Misfits* (1961) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962) were the “harbinger of the anti-hero and outsider, instead of the traditional hero” and the film *Rio Bravo* (1959), has a professional plot where “the heroes are hired to protect a society incapable of defending itself”. (pp. 491 - 492) According to Loy (2003) in the early 1960s, Westerns returned to the “images, myths and legends that had shaped the genre of an earlier era with *The Alamo* (1960) and *How the West Was Won* (1962) reflecting the renaissance of national pride during the Kennedy era.” (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 580) Lovett (2003) also pointed out “the films of the 1960s attempted to depict a new age of redefinition, liberation and social activism in a visualisation and celebration of change”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 34)

Hasan (2003) argued that the social changes in the 1970s centred around the Vietnam War, Watergate, anti-nuclear sentiment, the TV generation and women's liberation. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, pp. 37 and 40) Savran credited the mid-seventies as the time when there was:

a shift within capitalism where the power that once rested in individual hands was removed to institutions and individual males felt passed over. In order for masculinity to hold on to power it distanced itself from the femininity of women and the effeminacy of certain men and the power the tactics had to change. (p. 16)

Savran also argued that the stars who became successful at the box office from the late 1970s stressed physical size, strength and the ability to use violence effectively which "suggested that masculine identity was being linked with the use of the body as an instrument of power and control, and viewers liked that link". (As cited in Mackinnon, 2003, pp. 15 – 16 and 37) Thompson identified how the Western genre had always merged the on and off screen identities for Western actors and that this continued into the 1980s with Ronald Reagan and Clint Eastwood (p. 33), and also argued that "fears of feminisation caused a construction of manliness that not only reasserted a sense of cultural and social authority but that was also hyper-masculine". (p.103). According to Palmer (2002) during the 1980s, a new threat emerged which was known as the "international villain sponsored by national entities". (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 42) This international villain was not as easily identifiable as the traditional Western villains of the past and this presented a new challenge to the Western hero.

Krapp (2006) argued that Eastwood resurrected the traditional Western formula with *Unforgiven* (1992), and described the film as being about money which "determined the value of everything including human life". (p.195) Michaels (1996) outlined how *Unforgiven* presented an "unusual Western hero" because he was seeking gain in the "material economy". (pp. 1 and 9) Plantinga also described how this film represented a pivotal moment in the role of the hero because he had, "no personal stake in his mission" and that *Unforgiven* was about "senseless revenge and retribution which destroys easy moral distinctions

between hero and outlaw". (As cited in *Cinema Journal*, 1998, pp. 68 and 71). The authors support my argument that *Unforgiven* marked the point where the blurring of hero and villain characters occurred to such a degree it made it difficult to discern who is good or evil. The character of William Munny played by Eastwood, engages in very un-hero like behaviour with his cold-blooded proficiency in killing. All the characters, including Munny, are corrupt in some way and the only redeeming quality Munny has is that he is trying to create a new life for his children.

The authors I have referenced in this literature review help to trace the factors that led to the hero becoming a professional in the art of violence rather than working for the good of the community. The hero originally shared the wilderness with the Native Americans but went to war against them as he defended the colonial ideology of a settler's right to land. He also perpetuated the myth of a frontier life at a time when technology and progress were becoming prevalent in society. As a man more closely connected to the wilderness he needed to be a rugged individual and free from the restrictions of home and family. An integral component of the Western formula is the hero engaging in a fight with someone or something and to keep the hero/villain binary the genre had to adapt and change so this opposition remained relevant. This is seen when the hero's role changed from being on the side of good to representing his own interests which caused the personal turmoil that is reflected in the themes of the Psychological Westerns. The character of the Western hero continued to adjust especially in response to the cultural shifts of the 1960's, as this marks the time when the roles of hero and villain began to merge. The authors have identified what contributed to this change and how the distinctions between the sides of good and evil became blurred. By the time this occurred Hollywood had already successfully developed a hyper-masculine white male hero with a mythical status who was set to continue to serve a larger purpose in American society, than simply providing entertainment at the cinema.

Chapter One

The Origins of the Western Hero

The Western as a genre has provided enough consistency and repetition to enable filmmakers to make changes that haven't compromised the status of the hero. This has also been achieved through the use of the Western iconography with its familiar set of meanings which provide an easily recognised set of symbols for film audiences. These symbols include cactus plants, desert landscapes, a solitary ranch house or cabin, the saloon, the horse at the hitching post, the stagecoach, the railway track, railway station, trains, tumbleweed, jail house, wanted posters, hanging rope, the graveyard cross, the campfire, coyote noises, the wagon train, smoke signals, cattle, horses and guns. The Western hero is an integral figure within this setting and has also become part of the Western's iconography. Since its inception the Western film genre has acted as a reflection of American culture and one of the ways this has been achieved is through its representation of heroes and villains. This is why the binary opposition between the hero and villain is such an important part of the Western genre as it often underpins the narrative structure. Drawing from the past, the Western genre has created its own unique version of history and by presenting racial and gender stereotypes it has helped to entrench and enhance the superior status of white masculinity. This chapter traces the origins of the Western hero and how the Native Americans were presented as villains in the Western.

The Western hero first appeared in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, and one of his most successful novels *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) was later made into four film versions in 1920, 1932, 1936, and in 1992. Fenimore located his stories on the East coast of America in a setting of forests, rivers and lakes and where the hero was portrayed as an adventurer and friend to the Native American inhabitants. The first Western film *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), was based on a true story written by Scott Marble and the adventures of Buffalo Bill were also originally recorded as stories by Edward Judson in *The King of the Border Men* (1869). Rainy argued that another writer Frederick Faust set the formula for the Western as "good man turns bad, bad man turns good, there

has to be a woman, but not much of one, a good horse is much more important". (p. 3) These early stories established a straightforward narrative formula for the Western that was based on physical prowess, action and adventure in the wilderness.

When Western film production moved from the East to the West Coast of America the hero was portrayed differently and he stopped living in harmony with the landscape and the Native American inhabitants, to fighting to survive in a harsh, hostile environment. This is also when the opposing themes of wilderness versus civilisation in the Western became more apparent because in this new frontier any signs of people or settlements contrasted very markedly to the wide open desert landscape. This location also provided a perfect setting for an expansive storyline and most Westerns then became based on the Plains Wars showing the hero in battle with the Native Americans. Also, the wide open spaces gave the hero a freedom of movement that reinforced his transient nature and somewhat mysterious loner lifestyle. Nachbar described how this new environment suited the "intermediate quality of the hero, and that by lying between two ways of life, he transcended the restrictions and limitations of both". (p. 62) This freedom of movement was often conveyed by the hero being on a continuous journey but one that he could deviate from to undertake a new adventure or task. This meant the hero is often located in the landscape for most of a Western film and this is where he returns to when the story concludes. When he is located in a township he is usually just 'passing through' and is residing at the saloon or hotel. Except for a bath and a change of clothes this contact with society does not alter his personality in any way and he remains an individualistic outsider.

In the West, the hero's original role was to protect the new inhabitants from any threats to their settlement they may encounter and this mainly came from the Native Americans. The books and stories the hero originated in had accentuated action and adventure and this required him to be unencumbered by property or family responsibilities because if he ever did 'settle down' he effectively retired. This means the hero must keep his independence from society to ensure that he has the freedom to act when called upon and while violence and killing are part of his role, this is mediated by his individual moral

code that in protecting vulnerable people, he is representing the side of good. This helps to justify his violent behaviour but his code also has guidelines such as rarely attacking or shooting first and only acting out of self defence or on behalf of the community. Conflict is a fundamental theme of the Western genre and this is expressed with the oppositions the hero must overcome and which also provide the challenges he contends with. The sources of conflict could be human or ideological in nature and both have been altered to reflect individual eras throughout the history of the Western film genre. However, these alterations have been carefully managed by filmmakers to ensure there is always balance between repetition and difference in Western films. One theme that has remained constant is that whatever conflict or opposition the hero is confronted with, none have compromised his status as the most masculine of men. Outlined in this chapter is how three early Western film heroes contributed to establishing an identity for the hero that clearly set him apart from the villain characters. They are Gilbert Anderson's creation of the first central male character in the Western, Bronco Billy and Buffalo Bill Cody as he is portrayed in the film *Buffalo Bill* (1944). This portrayal is based on the latter part of Cody's life after he had killed buffalo and fought the Native Americans and highlights how he established the Wild West show. This show presented Cody's version of the Western frontier to people on the East Coast of America and further abroad and showed the victorious white men in battle with the Native Americans. The Ringo Kid, as played by actor John Wayne, in *Stagecoach* (1939) brought another version of the hero to the screen. Like Cody, this hero also demonstrated his superior knowledge of the villainous Native Americans and showed his independent spirit by secretly prioritising a revenge plan of his own over and above protecting the stagecoach passengers.

Bronco Billy

The first Western film hero Bronco Billy was created by filmmaker and actor Gilbert Anderson and appeared in *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Anderson appeared as Bronco Billy in the many silent Western films he made which Brodie-Smith described as being "melodramatic and comedic" (p. 38) Also, according to Brodie-Smith, Anderson had used a variety of Native American and Mexican characters in his films but complaints regarding the

“sensationalism and sexual suggestion” forced him to abandon race and instead he “fore-grounded his white hero’s moral and psychological conflicts”. (p. 58) With Bronco Billy, Anderson also established an acting style that Brodie-Smith described as a “studied quietness, slow and deliberate movements, intense gaze, and stone faced expressions”. (p. 173) This became so entrenched there was very little deviation from this acting style in the Westerns of the future and it established a format for all other actors to follow. As Bronco Billy, Anderson dressed like a rodeo cowboy with a hat, spurs, waistcoat, boots and this also became the standard for the style of dress for the Western hero. According to Nachbar this dress code “happened quite deliberately and added to the development of his aura”. (p. 62). Nachbar also described the costume as being “based on Native American and Mexican models but differentiating it from them both by its resemblance to civilised dress and by its greater restraint and decorum”. (p. 62) Another filmmaker, William S Hart made more elaborate Western films with higher production values which again changed the image of the hero and Brodie-Smith argued that these films were “designed to appeal to middle-class men where strength and virility were celebrated as the basic qualities of man-hood” and that the hero had come to dominate “all other elements of the narrative to make up for what had become a standardised formula”. (pp. 158 and 202) According to Nachbar by the 1920s the Western film hero had developed such a profile that “the plot mattered less than who appeared in them”. (p. 34) In the Western film genre because it is common to see integration between an actor’s real-life and their film roles, and Brodie-Smith described how the early actors were “white men who had served in the military, were excellent horsemen and did all their own stunts”. (p. 195) Some of the men who appeared in Westerns were also real-life cowboys such as Wyatt Earp who appeared in *The Half Breed* (1919) and William Cody who appeared in *The Adventures of Buffalo Bill* (1917).

Buffalo Bill Cody

William Cody is depicted in *Buffalo Bill* (1944), a film that illustrates how this early Western hero was in conflict between his life in the wilderness represented by the West, and the civilised world of the East. It also clearly shows the hero/villain binary between a white hero and the Native American

inhabitants. Cody is described in the film as the “best shot, best scout, best man” on the plain and this ideal was a very important influence on the development of the Western film hero. Cody had all but destroyed the buffalo; the main source of food for the Native Americans, and was seen as a heroic figure by making the West a safe place for new settlers. The film gives an historical background with black and white footage of flashbacks of Cody’s legendary days on the plains where he was leading the charge against the Native Americans. He is then shown in residence at an army fort where he is employed as a scout and advisor to the troops. While he is there he meets his wife, Louisa, a lady from the East and they get married. Although they are happy together he discovers domestic life is not for him so when the Native Americans launch a protest against the killing of the buffalo he heads off to fight them once again. Louisa is not happy with him doing this and because she feels vulnerable being left alone with their young child she heads back to the more civilised East.

When Cody finds out he has been awarded a medal from the US President for his brave exploits and because he has nothing else to do, he decides to go to Washington to collect it. Whilst undertaking this journey he discovers to his surprise there are comic books about the adventures of Buffalo Bill, and that he has become famous. He also develops a new perspective on protecting the freedom of the West especially when he sees the advancement of the railroad which he feels will drive out the original inhabitants. He believes the West is falling victim to the wealthy railroad owners and starts to feel guilty about his role in ‘civilising’ the West and how he treated the Native Americans. This prevented him from returning there after collecting his medal and instead starts working at an amusement park in New York and reunites with Louisa. Cody believes he can help the Native Americans by educating people about their way of life and decides to bring the West to the East and creates the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. This show presented Cody’s version of the West based on the frontier of freedom, adventure and fair play and ran from 1883 to 1913, touring the America and other parts of the world.

Buffalo Bill depicts Cody as a hero at odds with the worlds of wilderness and civilisation and when he is unable to continue his role in the West he tries to

create his own 'Western' world with his show. In this creation of the 'Wild West' Cody wanted to give an accurate depiction of the Native Americans and although they travelled with, and appeared in the show, he actually created negative stereotypes. Audiences thought the Native Americans presented in the show were realistic and Bataille and Silet described how this image was easily "transferred from the dime novels and the drama of Wild West shows to the screen, resulting in the 'homogenised' Native American". (pp. 37 and 39) The 'cowboy versus Indians' themes of the Wild West show were also adopted by Hollywood filmmakers and became the basic plot of the Western story. Also, Buffalo Bill Cody was portrayed as a hero with superior abilities who could out ride, out shoot and outsmart the Native Americans and this set the formula for future Western heroes to follow.

The "B" Westerns to *Stagecoach*

During the 1930s the Western was mass-produced with over a thousand "B" (Budget) Westerns made primarily for commercial reasons and to attract people to the cinema with an extra show. Being only an hour long, they all had uniform storylines, the same actors, and very little dialogue and for this reason they were cheap for filmmakers to produce. Simmon describes how the B Westerns had "slapdash production methods and formulaic plot lines" and where the focus had "little to do with the frontier spirit and everything to do with federal intervention, especially in land distribution and water rights". (pp.100 and 166) The result of the mass production of these poorly made, repetitive films was that film audiences became bored with the Western and the future of the hero was beginning to look uncertain. This changed when John Ford made his first sound Western, *Stagecoach* where he incorporated popular elements of previous Westerns such as gunfights and stunts, and added some new variations. To live up to the legendary real-life heroes who had appeared in the Western it was essential to find an actor who had the right attributes and who would bring credibility to the role. Ford chose John Wayne who was already a well known actor and had appeared in many B Westerns and according to Simmon his casting provided a "shorthand way to bring into *Stagecoach* the associations of the "B" Western heroism he had developed for audiences over the previous decade". (pp. 169 -170) With his physical stature and personality Wayne

managed to encapsulate the traditional features of the Western hero when he appeared as the Ringo Kid. He also brought an updated version of the hero to the screen in playing a lone gunman on the run and intent on revenge.

The Native Americans are portrayed as the villains in *Stagecoach* and the community that needs protecting is represented by the occupants of the stagecoach. This film is a good example of the wilderness/civilisation and hero/villain oppositions because as Busby argued it “clearly turns on the civilisation/savagery dichotomy as the agents of savagery, both Geronimo (and his Apaches) and the murderous white men, the Plummer’s, are counterpointed by representatives of civilisation”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 489) Geronimo and his warriors have left the reservation and are on the ‘war path’ and because of this the stagecoach is escorted by the cavalry for part of the journey. Although, at first, the Apache are not shown there is still evidence of their presence through smoke signals and the attack on Lee’s Ferry where the settlers have all been killed and the ferry destroyed. The stagecoach is undertaking a journey that takes it from the civilised East to the dangerous, uncivilised West and as the journey proceeds it becomes more vulnerable to an attack from the Apache. Dagle outlined how the “landscape and the Apache are set in a clear opposition to the coach and its inhabitants” and where “whiteness is constructed in opposition to what lies outside” and the Apache “function as purely alien figures as the racial ‘Other’ to the white community”. (As cited in Studlar & Bernstein, 2001, p. 104) The film uses more characters than previous Westerns by incorporating the occupants of the stagecoach into the story. They are described by Kalink (2001) as a “veritable who’s who of Western stereotypes initially defined by their occupational roles, but their fates are ultimately determined by their social roles and by the extent of their ability to participate in and serve the community”. (As cited in Studlar & Bernstein, 2001, p. 182) A typical loner, the Ringo Kid keeps his distance and is described by Busby as also acting as a “mediating figure” where he, “sits symbolically on the floor of the stagecoach and talks of borders”. (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 490) As the story unfolds and as the stagecoach moves further towards the West the surroundings become more intimidating and threatening for the travellers. At the coach stop of Apache Wells they encounter a group of Mexicans and a Native

American woman who rides off to tell Geronimo, the Apache chief, of the coach's arrival. In the film she is presented as untrustworthy and appears to have more in common with the Mexicans although she is married to a white man. Following this betrayal her husband describes her as a 'savage' and seems to be more concerned that she took one of his good horses. When the stagecoach is eventually attacked by the Apache it looks certain they will all be killed but the cavalry arrives to rescue them just in time.

By appealing to both men and women, the character of the Ringo Kid, created a renewed interest in the Western film hero. This character is described by Dagle as the "classically balanced Western hero, poised between garden and wilderness and civilisation and savagery". (p.108) This film presents him as a somewhat mysterious character where he is a 'wanted man' yet also helps to defend the passengers when they are attacked, but as it transpires, his real mission is to avenge the killing of his father and brother. While Wayne kept the traditional man of few words persona he brought a new style and look to the character of the Western hero that was an ideal representation of masculinity for the times. According to Dagle, Ford wanted Wayne as the leading man in *Stagecoach* because he "could express great strength and willpower without much talking". (p. 273) Wayne was tall and good looking and this was exploited by Ford at every opportunity and according to Simmon "there were more close-up shots of Wayne in *Stagecoach* than in all of his previous films combined". (p. 172). However, Ford did not portray the Ringo Kid as an all-American hero and Kalink identified how he "had a darker side to his character when he puts vengeance first by saving his three last bullets for the Plummer boys he eventually kills in a shoot out". (p. 183) This introduced a new aspect to the Western hero where even though he was essentially representing the good side, this didn't necessarily mean he couldn't pursue his own interests or be motivated by other factors besides the role of protecting the community. As an actor, Wayne went on to become an established and popular Western film hero and made many successful films such as *Rio Grande* (1950) and *True Grit* (1969) both of which will be discussed in later chapters.

The characters of Bronco Billy, William Cody and the Ringo Kid captured the excitement of the Western frontier life and although they presented a world that

only a few people ever experienced, this found a universal appeal with film audiences. From the beginnings of the Western film genre the hero was presented as a lone individual and when the hero/villain binary started to dominate the narrative he was portrayed as a man with extraordinary and superior powers over his enemy. According to Dagle the character of the Ringo Kid “understands more readily than any other white character the skills necessary to survive and shows his superiority over his enemy by deciphering the meaning of the Native American smoke signals”. (p. 16) The characters of Buffalo Bill and the Ringo Kid even though extraordinary were still believable because they weren’t perfect individuals and by having human flaws and troubles they bring an element of tragedy to the Western. According to Bazin we “identify with the epic and tragic hero as a universal character” (p. 148), and this may explain why the Western film hero gained such popularity with film audiences inside and outside America.

Belton described how the Western “helped to define America to Americans” and to overseas audiences (pp. 223 and 225), and it also defined a type of masculinity that a man should have. From the earliest days the Western film hero was portrayed to be the manliest of men as he dominated the establishment of a new frontier and Busby outlined how “the Western actors, by staying true to the role of the traditional hero, resulted in the Cowboy hero becoming internationally recognisable as an American icon and a symbol of frontier freedom and independence”. (p. 489) Keeping this freedom and independence is something the hero must fight for as there are many factors that could undermine and threaten it. These are often represented as the oppositions that create conflict for the hero and they appear in many different forms. Like the hero they also have adapted and changed over time and this has ensured there is an ever present villain for the hero to fight.

Chapter Two

Dualisms, Oppositions and Construction of the 'Other'.

Part of the mythology of the Western hero has arisen out of the unique way he has been able to transcend the realities and restrictions of everyday life. In the previous chapter it is outlined how the Western hero was originally a man of action and adventure who lived in harmony with the wilderness and as one with its inhabitants. In the West he then became a protector of the new settlers and this meant he went to war against the Native Americans and anything else that could threaten the establishment of this new community. To carry out this role he needed to use violence and this kept him apart from the genteel townsfolk meaning he could not live in civilisation. Kitses (1969) argued that the appeal of the Western lay in the “underlying tension between the hero’s personal freedom and entrapment” (p. 69) and this is an ongoing source of conflict for the hero as he is torn between the worlds of wilderness and civilisation. The hero is in the unenviable position of protecting a community that he cannot live in because he needs freedom and independence to do his job effectively. Schatz described him as having an “unspoken code of honour that commits him to the vulnerable community and at the same time motivates him to remain distinctly apart from it”. (p. 51) I will also outline how oppositions are used to structure the Western narrative and present good versus evil themes that are represented by the hero and villain. Busby described the Western story as having “oppositions about characters either inside or outside of society, good or bad, strong or weak” and those that “most importantly, enact a struggle between wilderness and civilisation”. (p. 489) As part of their formation ‘Others’ based on racial origin were also created to contrast with the white male figure and the ideology he represented. The films I have chosen to illustrate the hero/villain binary are *Jesse James* (1939) which pits the hero against an ideological opposition represented by a railroad company, and *McKenna’s Gold* (1969) which shows a hero and villain competing for gold.

Oppositions

According to Hall (1997) oppositions are the “simplest way of marking difference” (p. 32), and they were used in the Western to cause the tension and

conflict that became an integral part of the narrative. They were also used to build a clear identity for the Western hero so he was seen as the central character in the story. Maltby and Craven described the Western as “the arena in which Americans examine the relationship between individuals and society, and the tension between individual and community priorities”. (p. 92) The hero was at the centre of this arena and by keeping his identity intact he had a standing in American society that went beyond just being a film character. The plot of the Western film is described by Simmon as “good versus evil, a showdown, and a happy ending where order is restored” (p. 27), and this plot although predictable, did not become boring because all eyes were on the interaction between the hero and villain. Villainous characters usually in the form of Native Americans and Mexicans gave the hero a variety of opponents to overcome and provided various sub-plots for the audience to follow. Also, when the hero rebelled against ideological issues he was able to do this on behalf of the film audience because he was not bound by any restrictions from the law and community.

Schatz has described the Western as a “world of precarious balance” (p. 47) and the hero exists to ensure this balance is not compromised by evil forces in whatever form they might take. Kitses in his “thematic concerns for the Western” elaborated on how oppositions were used as themes in the Western, where the wilderness (West) is concerned with the individual and encompasses; freedom, honour, self-knowledge, integrity, self-interest, nature, savagery and symbolises America, the frontier, equality and the past. The community (East) is expressed as restriction, institutions, compromise, social responsibility, culture, corruption, refinement, humanity and symbolising Europe, class, industrialism, change and the future. (As cited in Hollows and Jancovich, 1995, p. 69) These oppositions can be illustrated in many different ways and as already outlined, were the central themes in *Buffalo Bill* with the hero in conflict between the worlds of wilderness and civilisation. According to Cook and Bernink (1969) the meanings within the oppositions can shift with the wilderness starting with the individual and freedom and ending with tradition and the past, and where civilisation starts with the community and restriction and ends with change and the future which “demonstrates the flexibility of the structure and the ideological

tension it embodies". (pp. 150 -151) The themes of the past and tradition versus change and the future, are common in the Western with the hero working to safe-guard the past.

Oppositions in *Jesse James*

In the film *Jesse James*, a real-life Western character of the same name was shown to be in conflict with the past and future as he tried to protect a poor community of landowners from a railroad company. James is portrayed as fighting against a villain in the form of an unscrupulous business owner trying to bring progress to the West. According to Mark and Pearson (2001) the hero can be seen as a "romantic figure ready to disrupt a society that has succumbed to tyranny, repression, conformity or cynicism" (p. 123), and this is an apt description of the portrayal of James. In the film the exploits of this legendary hero are shown as he wages a war against the railroad and robs the trains that are encroaching on his territory. Although James is breaking the law, he is regarded as being on the side of good because he is protecting a community who is being pushed off their land by a large corporation. Belton described how the railroad came to "symbolise the taming of the wilderness" and the "linking of the West to the East" and attacks on trains were "figured as defiant gestures against the inevitable progression of the West into the 20th Century". (p. 216) This defiance is also reflected in the film's preamble where the narrator outlines how:

the advance of the railroads was, in some cases, predatory, and unscrupulous. Whole communities found themselves victimised by an ever growing ogre – the Iron Horse. It was in this uncertain and lawless age that gave to the world for good or ill, it's most famous outlaws, the brothers Frank and Jesse James.

The film begins by showing how the railroad company is trying to bully the homesteaders into selling their land for just one dollar an acre. When the company's representatives arrive at the James house to buy their land they are fought off by the two brothers. As a result of this rebellion, they become 'wanted' men so they go into hiding and as they do this their house is burnt down and their mother dies. In retribution for their mother's death Jesse shoots

one of the railway men and then becomes more of an enemy of the railroad company when he starts to hold-up and rob, the trains. Jesse James becomes a popular figure and is the subject of frontier legends because he never takes any personal belongings from the passengers and steals only cash. In the film, he is portrayed as a brave man who is only motivated to commit unlawful deeds because of a desire to protect the vulnerable community rather than act out of personal gain or greed. When compared with the unethical behaviour of the railroad company his attacks on trains are seen as justified and deserved by the community. Jesse James's story reflects the "struggle between the old West and the impersonal but efficient anonymity of the forward looking new West." (Belton, pp. 220 - 221)

James is unlike most heroes because he gets married and has children and this provides another source of conflict because his wife Zee pleads with him to give himself up. When it appears he has every intention to give up his outlaw life he is murdered by Robert Ford, a member of his gang. This is not done in the traditional Western shoot-out and instead he is shot in the back as he hangs up a picture at home. It is ironic that a hero like Jesse died in such a passive way through the betrayal of a villainous coward who was seen as doing society a disservice. The film *Jesse James* shows a hero struggling with the oppositions of, past versus future, freedom versus domesticity, and wilderness versus civilisation. On the run for years, he eventually meets his demise in a domestic setting which reinforces the reasons why the hero must remain unattached and aloof from people and places that could affect his ability to do his job. This hero resists an ideological villain in the form of progress and the film shows that he does not need to be law abiding as long as he is representing the interests of the community.

The Native American and Mexican as 'Others'

In Westerns, the hero evolved from a one dimensional action man into a more complex person and this happened in direct contrast to the Native American who was effectively devolved to be a one dimensional, silent man. According to Kilpatrick (1999), the stereotyping of Native American characters was due to the melodramatic nature of early cinema where they were set up to be the "perfect

foil for the heroic white man". (p. 280) Kilpatrick also contended that Buffalo Bill's Wild West show had provided a standardised image of the Native American that was carried over to the sound Western, resulting in the 'othering' of them for mainstream audiences. (pp. 279 and 281) After filmmaking moved to the West the image of the Native American became limited to portrayals of primitive, aggressive men dancing around a camp fire or attacking the cavalry or settlers. These underdeveloped, fragmented characters never appeared as individuals or in close-up shots and were usually pictured as groups in the distance. Sometimes they did not even appear on screen and the hero and audience was only alerted to their presence by smoke signals, the sound of drums or by discovering dead bodies that had been scalped. There is scene like this in *Stagecoach* when they reach Lees Ferry and find the bodies of dead settlers and the destruction of the town at the hands of the Apaches. The Native Americans presented in the Western lived in tepee villages and all dressed in the same way, usually in moccasins, breeches, and animal skins, and some also wore feather headdresses and beads. They were rarely given any speaking parts and if so, these were usually limited to single words or signs and signals. Baird (2003) argued how these images came to "dominate popular culture representations, serving as a generic model". (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 162)

According to Said (1978) negative portrayals of the Native Americans also supported white colonialist ambitions where it is considered a right to not only "manage the non-white world but to own it". (As cited in Lodge and Wood, 2008, p. 284) Bhabha also argued that it was necessary to "construe the colonised" as degenerates based on race in "order to justify conquest". (p. 371) These views also supported American attitudes towards property ownership because as Kilpatrick outlined, the settler was seen as the "natural proprietor of land". (p. 282) This originated from the Discovery Doctrine which according to Delgado & Stefancic (1995) gave any "European person or nation the right to seize Native American lands" and:

when the new settlers faced resistance, writers began to depict Native Americans as menacing, hostile, threatening, looters, burners and killers and for this reason, early filmmakers featured Native Americans usually

played by whites, dancing war dances, launching surprise attacks on innocent or heroic whites, and engaging in other ruthless behaviours. (p. 215)

Little regard was given to accuracy when representing the Native American on screen, for example in *Buffalo Bill* one of the Native American characters was played by white actor Anthony Quinn. This was quite common in the Western and according to Belton even when a Native American “achieved recognition as a heroic symbol, or was a figure of empowerment on the screen they were still often played by white actors such as Burt Lancaster in *Apache* (1954)”. (p. 218) This misrepresentation of a Native American was also seen in *Stagecoach* where the villainous Apache tribe were actually played by “Navajos who lived in the valley, with a few actual Apaches for close ups”. (Hughes, 2008, p. 4)

Kilpatrick described how the Western became a “set of symbols” that supported a “self-justifying history” (p. 282), and this happened after film production moved to the West when the Native Americans were presented in films as an “unruly force of nature”. (Belton, p. 217) This also meant the interracial themes and relationships that had been present in some Westerns previously, practically disappeared. The fear and anxiety around this was so extreme it is outlined by Delgado & Stefancic that in the film, *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* (1913) the men who are defending a white woman in “danger of sexual violation” by Native Americans deliberate on whether it is better to kill her first rather than risk the possibility of this happening. (p. 215) A similar dilemma occurs in *The Last of the Mohicans* when the Native American character Magua wants to take one of the white women captive but this is resolved when she commits suicide. The presentation of the Native American as a menacing, brutal savage became the predominant image in Westerns and according to Belton this “betrays his status more as a figment of the imagination of white culture rather than as an authentic inhabitant of the frontier”. (p. 218) Even in films where there are more positive portrayals of Native Americans, this was largely negated by contrasting them with less likeable Native American characters. Again, in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) there is a ‘good’ Native American family protecting the settlers but Magua demonstrates the bloodthirsty stereotype by killing one of them. Also, another Native American tribe burn one of the army soldiers at the stake.

Sandos also outlined that in *Dances with Wolves* (1990) even though it has a sympathetic Native American storyline, the Pawnee tribe are still portrayed as bloodthirsty savages. (pp. 104 and 107)

In reality, the Native Americans had long ceased to be any threat to white society by the time they were presented as the villain in the Western film genre. The misrepresentation of the Native Americans may have continued because they had become so marginalised and physically absent from mainstream society that no one really challenged the images that were presented. Also, according to Berger (1995) “we simply do not see the racism of our time and only see it years after the paradigm has begun to shift and society has adopted a different view of the group in question”. (p. 217) The Native American, by always being shown as incomplete and located in the distance or in the background in the Western did not get any sympathy from film audiences and so became the perfect opposition for the white hero. They were mostly portrayed as uncivilised, bloodthirsty savages who raped white women and this image justified them being shot and killed indiscriminately by the hero or cavalry. In reflecting the Plains Wars this portrayal of the Native American had a historical grounding which gave it an element of authenticity which may help explain why this image is generally not questioned by white society. Berger also outlined that “predominant images of men of colour in any era are apt to be intensely negative because the dominant narrative of race is slow to change”. (p. 218) Berger’s statement is very accurate because it wasn’t until the 1970s when Native American protests such as Wounded Knee created a wider awareness of the injustices they had suffered. In the same year actor Marlon Brando declined his Best Actor Award at the Academy Awards in protest at the poor treatment of Native Americans in the Hollywood film industry. Brando sent a Native American woman Sacheen Littlefeather, to the stage to deliver his message which highlighted how re-runs of the Western on television were continuing to perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Barthes argued that stereotyping “tends to occur when there are gross inequalities of power and that power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group”. (As cited in Hall, 1997, p. 258) For this reason Mexicans were generally typecast as easy-going, duplicitous bandits and although

dangerous, less of a threat to the hero. Although they weren't portrayed as primitive like the Native Americans, they still had no power or status and generally worked for someone else or were part of a gang. Delgado and Stefancic described how Mexicans became "part of the romance and mythology of the West" generally appearing as "the harmless innocent or the wily villain, a shiftless but happy-go-lucky lover of song, dance, and food, or as a mysterious tall, dark, handsome, "Spanish type". (p. 217) They were more likely to be found drifting from town to town, and wherever they were located, they were portrayed as being of poor status in a community. Mexicans also come from 'South of the Border' which in the Western is usually associated with corruption, crime, and loose women. Busby argued that there have been "few attempts to change the image of the white hero" (p. 493), and there is generally a negative depiction of race in the Western. Also, Dyer (1997) outlined how the "basic symbolic connotation of white is fairly clear, its most familiar form is the moral opposition of white equals good, and black equals bad", and an example of this type of symbolism is how "black and white hats were used to distinguish the villains from the heroes in early Westerns". (pp. 58 and 60) Mexican characters are present in the film *McKenna's Gold* where the leader of the outlaw gang is Mexican and also has several Mexican bandits working for him. The connotation of using colour to differentiate between the hero and villain is also evidenced in this film where the villain, who could be described as a Spanish type, wears a black costume throughout the film.

The Hero/Villain Binary

In the Western the good versus evil binary opposition is generally illustrated by contrasting the hero and villain characters and for this reason the two are given different characteristics. Mark and Pearson described the villain as a "disruptive force, violating cultural norms and rules for the good of others, for adventure and personal gain, or out of desperate alienation". (p. 103). This means the villain does not have the same altruistic motivations as the hero and rather than accept his place in society like the hero, he rebels against being an outsider. Mark and Pearson also argued that it is enough for the hero to be admired and that he takes action when he is "outraged by injustice" conversely the villain "wants to be feared and his anger tends to be provoked by being slighted as a

person". (pp. 123 -124) According to Cawelti (1974) what differentiated the hero from the villain was the hero's "coolness and lack of violent emotion where the villain is typically given to rages of greed, lust or hatred, which prevent him from effectively using the tools of power". (As cited in Nachbar, 1974, p.114) Similarly Baugh (2003) outlined how the attributes of the villain were also applied to ethnic groups where the "stereotypes give over-simplified and one-dimensional characterisations, but worse yet they unfairly define natives as being ruled by their passions both violent and romantic". (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 270) By possessing a similar ability to use violence the hero's advantage over the villain really lies with having a different emotional make-up and this is why he can ultimately defeat him. The hero can be as violent as the villain but as pointed out by Plantinga he:

only resorts to violence when conventional justice demands its use to resolve conflicts or to make just retribution but the villain seeks out violence as a means of self assertion or excitement. The hero may kill but only in accordance with strict conventions and protocols, he never shoots his opposition in the back or launches a surprise attack, he only engages in a fair fight which is normally the shoot out. (p. 72)

The differences between the hero and villain are clearly illustrated in *McKenna's Gold* where the two men are locked in a battle of wits over who will prevail in the quest to find Canyon Del Oro. Marshall McKenna, played by Gregory Peck, through his encounter with an old Native American Chief has seen a copy of the map to the canyon which is the site of a legendary gold mine located in Apache territory. McKenna is able to memorise the map before he burns it which is done just in time to prevent the outlaw Colorado, played by Omar Sharif, from taking it from him. Colorado is leader of a gang that is made up of several Mexicans and Native American men and women who are searching for the canyon. As McKenna is now the only person besides the Apache, who knows how to find the canyon he is taken prisoner by Colorado and is taken to his hide-out in the hills. This place fits Mark and Pearson's description of "natural habitat for the outlaw" as being "hidden and shadowy, out of the way". (p. 124)

Another outlaw, the dandyish Ben Baker hears about the existence of the map and arrives at Colorado's hide-out with a group made up of two Englishmen, a storekeeper, a newspaper editor, a preacher, a blind man and a child. Each of these characters is given an opportunity to explain why they should be able to join in the hunt for the gold. The blind man says even though he has had his eyes burnt out by the Apache he can still testify that the gold really exists. These characters are used in a similar way to the group in *Stagecoach* where in representing different people from the community, the film audience can judge who is worthy of survival. Colorado agrees to let them all join the gang and they head off to find the gold but through their various trials and adventures and attacks by both the Apache and the cavalry, only McKenna, Colorado, HeshKe and Inga survive. When McKenna sends Inga back to the supposed safety of the cavalry she unexpectedly returns with Foxy, the commanding officer. Foxy has succumbed to the lure of the gold, shoots his own men and deserts because he sees no future for himself in the army. When the group eventually finds the canyon and the gold they are attacked by the Apache, but before they are defeated, nature intervenes and an earthquake destroys the canyon. The Apache manage to retreat before access out of the canyon is blocked and HeshKe in her attempt to kill Inga, falls off the cliff so the only ones who survive the attack and earthquake are McKenna, Inga and Colorado. Colorado decides to give McKenna and Inga their freedom because he sees no point in killing them and he is unaware that McKenna has a saddle bag full of gold.

This film shows the different personalities of the hero and villain quite clearly as they use different methods to try to outwit each other. Colorado tries to play McKenna off against the female characters and only keeps McKenna alive because he is relying on his memory of the map to guide them to the gold. McKenna being well aware of this only lets directions out a bit at a time ensuring he stays on the journey to the finish. Colorado and McKenna are well matched adversaries but McKenna does not show the vanity and emotions of Colorado who fantasises about himself as a man of means living in Europe. The Native Americans in the gang are portrayed as being untrustworthy, stoic, drunk and sexually threatening to the white women and this is demonstrated when one of the Native Americans from the gang tries to rape Inga and McKenna has

to fight him off. The Mexicans appear to be good natured but are also portrayed as untrustworthy, and this is seen when they all drink together but they have an underlying purpose to get one of the Native American women drunk so they can use her as a decoy for the Apaches. The Apache have no role other than being known as the protectors of the canyon and are only seen as faceless, marauding, killers riding in unison on horseback. Ben Baker's group shows how the greed for gold has outweighed their idea of respectability and personal differences, and any fear of danger. As it turns out they are unfit to cope in the wilderness and all perish at the hands of the Apache. McKenna and Colorado have a guarded respect for each other but in the end by showing greater patience and intelligence, McKenna gets the gold and rides off with the girl. This is a typical ending for a Western film where the hero has triumphed over his adversaries and heads off to the next adventure.

Oppositions give the Western film its narrative structure and create tension and excitement for the audience as the hero finds a way to overcome the conflicts that surround him. Dyer described the Western as a "success myth" (p. 36) where the hero is the master of the wilderness and its inhabitants. In *McKenna's Gold* when Marshall McKenna is first seen in the film he is travelling alone on his horse in the vast wilderness and Dyer described this type of setting as "the idea of a landscape, framed and perspectively organised, suggests a position from which to view the world, one that is distant and separate". (p. 36) This distant and separate land was the ideal setting for action and adventure with the sparse, desert landscape acting as a metaphorical canvas for stories of man versus nature, White/Native American battles, the encroachment of the railroad, and new settlers arriving on stagecoach and in wagon trains. It was also a place where violence prevailed and most disagreements were settled by a shoot out or hanging. Oppositions and the 'Other' were used to help create a Western story but they played an even bigger role in creating a white male figure of unquestionable power. Rainy described how the hero became a "creature beyond and above the law" (p. 4) and in the next chapter I will discuss how he achieved this status and came to represent an ideal form of masculinity.

Chapter Three

The Idealised Masculinity of the Western Hero

This chapter explores how the Western hero, as a man of the frontier came to represent what it meant to be a 'real man' in American society. Also, how he embodied a particular type of masculinity that reflected the dominant ideologies about male power and effectively marginalised any group or person that posed a threat to this. From the early Westerns onwards the hero was presented as a unique individual and is described here by Sobchack and Sobchack as a man who is:

reluctant to settle down, hates fences and boundaries, rejects the stability of marriage and home because it would rob him of freedom, and force him to conform and where his true home is the rapidly diminishing wilderness; his only property is his horse and gear. (p. 226)

These characteristics embody the image of a restless individual who travels from one adventure to the next. To survive in the wilderness the hero must be able to take care of himself and those he protects which requires him to have almost supernatural abilities when it comes to anticipating danger. Also, he must be able to ride a horse, shoot a gun, go without sleep, win a fist fight, and track or out manoeuvre his enemies so they are defeated. Naturally only a few men can live up to the demands of being a Western hero and this chapter describes how this character was developed to represent an ideal form of masculinity. I will outline how the films, *Rio Grande* (1950), and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) presented different versions of the hero that assisted with the construction of ideal masculinity. Also, how in *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) the gay heroes challenged the assumed heterosexuality of the hero but didn't undermine his masculinity.

The Traditional Cowboy Hero

The character of the Western hero is based on the Cowboy, a person Busby defined as "a Texan and South-western figure that emerged after the civil war when some enterprising veterans began to round up the cattle roaming the land" (p 489), beginning the "trail drives that are at the heart of Cowboy legend".

(p. 489) Busby also outlined how the life of the Cowboy on the range only lasted for “twenty five years from 1870 to 1895 when barbed wire, the opening of the train service, and economic downturns ended the golden days of trail driving”. (p. 489) In the Western, the Cowboy lived up to Wood’s description of the ideal Hollywood hero and he also identified another important Hollywood film value of a “work ethic” and the Cowboy was certainly a hardworking man who simply moved on to the next job as required. (As cited in Braudy and Cohen, 2009, p. 593) According to Corkin the hero is prepared to risk his life for the “common good” but seeks “nothing in particular in return” (p.101), and he does this with a modesty that never allows him to bask in the glory of his accomplishments or take any credit or reward for his victories. The hero is essentially a loner although at times he may enlist a ‘partner’ or other cowboys to help him, however once the task is completed, they generally go their separate ways at the end of the film. The hero does not appear to be religious or educated but he is not ignorant, always well spoken and polite, and between adventures he appears content to pass his time at the hotel or playing cards in the saloon. This man of few words, unencumbered by relationships, possessions, or the constraints of community life, likes his freedom but this does not mean he lives a carefree existence because the hero takes himself and his role quite seriously. Showing little or no emotion, Western heroes are calm under pressure, not afraid of anyone and are central figures in the Western film as outlined by Simmon:

by appealing to both men and women, they have been able to portray the image of a genuine Westerner displaying not some changeable role but their unalterable self and where their sheer physical presence allows these men to exist as an inherent part of the Western’s iconography and landscape. (p. 177)

The Western hero is an individual who conveys a sense of isolation and loneliness and views the civilisation of the community as a constant threat to his well-being. Lacking sentimentality, he will kill whoever needs killing in a fair and open way and could never be accused of shooting anyone in the back the way the villains do. Guided by his own moral code, according to Warshow “no matter what he has done, he looks right, and he remains invulnerable because without

acknowledging anyone else's right to judge him he has already judged his own failure and has already assimilated it". (p. 461) The hero does not place himself above anyone socially and is not seen as inferior either and with his unassuming style can easily mix with people from all parts of society. Nachbar described Western heroes as the "men in the middle" and outlined the typical storyline for them in the Western as:

protecting the townspeople, becomes an ally of the townspeople, revenge against an outlaw or Indian, hero seeks material gain, hero is caught in the middle between need for his savage skills and the townspeople's rejection of his way of life, destruction of hero or voluntary exile. (p. 62)

Exile is a common outcome in the Western story because the underlying dilemma for the hero is that he must protect a community that he must ultimately reject. This also explains why he enlists his own rules on right and wrong rather than live by the law, to justify his use of violence. This also means that ambition and materialism are irrelevant to the hero as he already has everything he needs because he is able to live as he pleases. Simmon describes the West as "the place where men are allowed to have no past and to start life anew" (p. 177), and this is a common theme because the hero usually comes from a troubled background so he never talks about it much and this often explains his choice of lifestyle. An event or tragedy can also lead to this choice and this may be the loss of a wife, family or friend, sometimes at the hands of the enemy he is pursuing.

Clint Eastwood as Josey Wales

In Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns Eastwood had returned the hero to the original version of the man of few words and was cynical in nature. With little dialogue, the films relied on close-ups of Eastwood's facial expressions, or grunts, to convey whatever message needed sending. These films signalled the time when Eastwood began to emerge as an actor and he went on to become a major star and director in the Western film genre. One of his films, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) explores the theme of a hero starting life anew with a story about disenfranchised people such as Civil War veterans, Native Americans,

and settlers coming together to establish a new community of their own. This film is important because it shows how the hero Josey Wales was originally motivated by a mission to avenge his family's death but is able to undergo a personal transformation to find his humanity again. In reflecting the times Eastwood, who plays the part of Wales, shows several different aspects to his personality which is indicative of the mid-seventies which Connell described as when men were encouraged into "using therapy, consciousness raising groups, and political discussion, role-sharing in marriage or self-help". (p. 24) In adding some new dimensions, however introspective, to this hero, Eastwood is still able to bring a violence and toughness to this role that far outweighs any doubts about his power.

The Outlaw Josey Wales is set during the time of the Civil War and the film begins with a group of soldiers from the Union Army destroying Wales's house and murdering his wife and son. With nothing left and intent on revenge, Wales joins the Confederate Army in the hope he will eventually track down the killers. When his unit is defeated he refuses to surrender and wants to escape to the 'Indian lands' to hide out. On his journey he meets an old Native American called Chief who tells him that he wants to go to Mexico, and they decide to travel together. They come across a Native American woman who joins them, and they discover some settlers who have been attacked by a group of bandits. Wales rescues them and decides to escort the group to their destination which is a ranch located in Cherokee country which means Wales must negotiate with the Cherokee chief, Ten Bears, to get permission for them to stay. Ten Bears, according to Chief, is very hostile towards white men who he thinks are "liars with forked tongues" and also explains that Ten Bears is angry because he moves his people to new lands and every year the government people tell him to move further until he has finally said he won't move any more. The meeting between Ten Bears and Wales is a frank and open discussion between two brave men who are trying to protect their respective groups. Ten Bears believes Wales is a man of his word and gives permission for them to stay because he recognises that Wales is also looking for a home for his people. As a result of helping to settle his new friends Wales's escape is delayed and the Union soldiers catch up with him at the ranch but they are fought off. This enables

Wales to carry out the revenge he has been seeking when he finds and kills the men responsible for his family's death. In spite of these murders, the townsfolk create an alibi for him and Wales, who by this time has had enough of killing, is allowed to go free. *The Outlaw Josey Wales* presents a villain that is in the form of 'evil' white men and like other counter culture films of the time which will be discussed in the next chapter, presents a sympathetic view of the Native Americans.

Warshaw argued that one of the reasons we like to watch a Western is because the hero is on the "side of justice and order and he presents an image of personal nobility that is still real for us". (p. 457) Although for a time Wales had lost his humanity and was acting as a cold-blooded killer he still possesses personal nobility because he overcame adversity, refused to surrender to the enemy and respected the place of the Native Americans. Through the various adventures and trials he goes through Wales forms an unlikely bond with various individuals that in effect become a new family for him. Eastwood still plays the character of Wales in much the same way as all his Western heroes, a spitting, grunting, man of few words that shoots everyone with a seemingly endless supply of guns. He also appears to be devoid of any emotional connection to people until he helps the vulnerable group of settlers and by doing this, he finds a reason to live again. The repartee between the characters of Wales and Chief is an endearing feature of this film where the Chief is able to provide a Native American perspective on the loss his people have suffered. Baird described how the Chief's "character and performances cut against the grain of the stereotypically stoic, suffering, silent Indian and indulged humour, self-depreciation and playfulness". (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p. 162) In this film the Native Americans are not the enemy and they are presented as clever, brave, proud people who have been let down by successive governments. This also reflects the counter culture and peace movements of the sixties and seventies with the hero acting as an anti-establishment outsider protecting a vulnerable community from corruption and evil. Eastwood described in an interview that this film was about the futility and consequences of War as he presents a hero from a by-gone era but one that is still relevant and credible for the time.

Rio Grande

One of the hero's important roles is to rescue or protect female characters from the villains and although women have a minor role in the Western, they are necessary because they are generally portrayed as weak, helpless characters and this helps to accentuate the manliness of the hero. A woman may also be a source of a romantic distraction for the hero but whatever feelings he may develop for her, he must give her up if he wants to retain his role. Women in the Western either need to be rescued or as Wood outlined they could take the form of the "erotic woman such as a saloon entertainer", (p. 593), or what Bazin described as "the saloon B-girl". (p. 173) This incomplete, one-sided portrayal of women may also have been due to the frontier environment which Connell argued created the imbalanced sex ratio that allowed a "cultural masculinisation of the frontier". (p. 194) However, women are often the reasons behind the hero acting as he does and an essential part of his role is to make "frontier settlements inhabitable for virtuous white women". (Brodie-Smith, p.166)

The contrast between men and women is seen in the film *Rio Grande*, depicting a cavalry hero in battle with the Native Americans and at the same time being able to transcend the worlds of domesticity and wilderness. John Wayne plays the part of Lieutenant Colonel York and Maureen O'Hara plays his estranged wife, Mrs York. The film begins with their son Jeff, who the Colonel has not seen for fifteen years, enlisting in the army unit. Through his horse riding and fighting skills Jeff proves he is strong and able enough for army life but Mrs York has unexpectedly arrived to take him back East. Jeff refuses to go with her and rather than accept his decision Mrs York decides to stay until she can convince him to change his mind. She sets up home in the Colonel's quarters where she unpacks silverware, tablecloths and tea sets that have been stored away. When *Rio Grande* was made women were not in the workforce in great numbers and in keeping with the times, Mrs York keeps herself occupied with domestic tasks and even helps the other women do the men's washing. Before the army unit has to leave on its mission to fight the Native Americans the Colonel calls in to see his wife with a bunch of flowers and finds her ironing his uniform. They have a romantic dinner together and the scene ends with them in a passionate embrace.

In this way the film reflects the early 1950s, when women were expected to practice domesticity in the home while the men went out to work. Once Mrs York is convinced that Jeff will be taken care of by his father she leaves the camp and returns to the safety of the East. The interactions in the film between the Colonel and his estranged wife helped to enhance his masculine status because it is made obvious that a woman like her has no place in the male domain of the army and he convinces her their son should be left alone to get on with his coming of age and of fighting the villainous Native Americans. *Rio Grande* clearly illustrates Mulvey's argument about there being two narrative functions in a Western "marriage and, hence social integration and not marriage" causing the hero to be "split in two". (As cited in *Screen*, 1975, p.17) Wayne manages to show the Colonel as a hero who can move between the two worlds of wilderness and civilisation without diminishing his masculine power. This is because by that time Wayne had firmly established himself as a Western hero and he had nothing left to prove in terms of his ability to defeat villains. Once his wife had left the camp Colonel York preceded on to finding and defeating the Native Americans in keeping with the Western formula.

Gay Cowboys

Connell argued that from the "point of view of hegemonic masculinity" there was "no mirror-type of the heterosexual; rather heterosexuality became a required part of manliness". (p. 196) For this reason the heterosexuality of the hero was taken for granted until *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) was released. This film, directed by Ang Lee, presented gay heroes which changed the status-quo because as outlined by Benshoff and Griffin "Hollywood doesn't normally produce films with gay men as protagonists." (p. 260) However, changing the sexuality of the hero did not really affect his masculine power because it was contained within the structure of a Western narrative. The film still contains common heterosexual assumptions about gay men such as ending up alone, being at risk of feminisation and having aloneness as a feature of their lifestyle and these are also established themes for the Western hero. The heroes in *Brokeback Mountain* were at their happiest in the wilderness where they had the freedom to act on their feelings for each other and felt constrained and unhappy in the community. They were also unhappy in the relationships with

their wives who were still presented as weak female characters who were even more disempowered by the gay affair. Connell's description of the "very straight gay" (p. 202), can be applied to the characters of Ennis, played by the late Heath Ledger and Jack, played by Jake Gyllenhaal, who both had the hero's history of dark and troubled pasts, were good with horses and guns, and men of few words with few possessions. They also had the necessary physical attributes of a Western hero being tall, good looking, fit and strong. By presenting the characters within this Western framework their sexuality did not pose a great threat to the masculinity of the hero. According to Connell this happens because "most heterosexual men are able to marginalise this challenge" as they regard it as an issue that does not affect them. (p. 202) Also, as Neale outlined the male hero avoids being "the object of an erotic gaze" because "this is heavily mediated by the looks of the character involved" and is "marked not by desire but rather by fear, or hatred or aggression". (pp.13 and 16) The characters in *Brokeback Mountain*, by staying true to the overt masculinity of the hero and by them demonstrating physical prowess at fighting and engaging in traditional Western activities, did not subvert the character of the hero and male dominance is still maintained.

Ideal Masculinity

The early Western heroes were all about physicality and living a way of life that suited the settlement of a new, somewhat hostile frontier and for this reason they needed to be strong and single minded as any sign of weakness could threaten their survival. After the real-life Western heroes had retired Hollywood filmmakers continued to develop this 'ideal man' through using particular actors, and by placing them within the framework of the Western film genre they had an unsurpassed influence over establishing a dominant view of masculinity. According to Warshow actors like Wayne and Eastwood not only possessed the appropriate physical attributes required of a hero, they also played their roles with a style that "expressed itself most clearly in violence". (p. 454) In order to keep his extraordinary status the hero underwent certain transformations but did not deviate too far from the established attributes or roles of the traditional hero. The films discussed in this chapter highlight how the Western film genre provided a framework that enabled the character of the hero to represent

masculinity in a variety of ways and sometimes even challenge assumptions about it. *Rio Grande* highlighted gender differences when the hero is placed between the female world of the 'East' and the male world of the 'West'. In *The Outlaw Josey Wales* the hero is seen to question the traditional representation of Native Americans as villains and fights new and different villains. *Brokeback Mountain* challenges the assumed heterosexuality of the hero but without undermining his masculinity. These films also demonstrate how Western filmmakers have been prepared to take some risks with the hero character which continues to evolve in response to cultural and societal trends. In the next chapter I will examine how the hero, in order to maintain his masculine superiority, needed to become more villain-like and how this resulted in a greater use of violence.

Chapter Four

The Blurring of the Hero and Villain

In order to prevail in the way he always has the Western hero needed to become more like the villains as they evolved into new and more dangerous forms. The Western has always acted to mirror the ideologies of the time and most importantly maintains the dominance of a white male perspective. It has also acted as a vehicle to explain or justify past events or present a historical point of view that supports the dominant power structures. Wright argued that “historical changes in the structure of the myth correspond to the changes in the structure of those dominant institutions”. (p. 14) This is why the Western has made adaptations and changes to remain relevant but at the same time, continued to perpetuate a white male perspective delivered through the character of the Western hero. After World War II things had started to change for the Western hero because America had been threatened by enemies outside the United States. National security became important and the Cold War developed resulting in a fear of communism that was evidenced in the McCarthy trials as a new threat of the ‘enemy within’ emerged. Also, during the war years, women had entered the workforce in greater numbers thus threatening the male role of traditional breadwinner. These, and a new frontier to conquer offshore caused major threats to the hegemony of the hero’s ideal masculinity and his status as an American icon and this required a renegotiation of his character. Through the Western, the status of the white male was reinforced and this is especially evident during the 1950s when a record number of Western films were made. The renegotiation of his character started in the Psychological Westerns where the hero is portrayed as a troubled character struggling with his identity and role and the creation of this anti-hero helped to bring a greater sense of realism to the Western genre.

As Connell pointed out masculinity is often defined in relation to femininity, and as a result of the second wave of feminism from the late 1960s there was a need for men to reclaim their source of power, and this coincided with the hero becoming a professional gunfighter asserting his power through violence. Also, in a reaction to movements such as the Civil Rights and Native American

uprisings the villain started to take the form of white men rather than the traditional 'Others' which also assisted with the blurring of the hero and villain characters. However, it is worth noting that although the Civil Rights movement made it unacceptable to have negative portrayals of minority ethnic groups, rather than see these groups integrated into a Western story as equals, they all but disappeared. As the focus of the Western became more about using greater levels of violence to defeat new villains this required the hero to show negative characteristics as a way of ensuring he kept his position as the ideal man. He still retained the emotional attributes that set him apart from the villain however he was required to be a more efficient, cold blooded killer thus becoming more villain-like in his behaviour. His place as an outsider continued because in breaking the law, respectable society still could not be seen to condone his actions. This chapter will trace how the Western hero developed into this type of character and what influenced the transformations he went through. I will discuss how the Psychological Westerns led to a professional plot being introduced to the Western and three films that demonstrate how the hero and villain roles blurred. These are *True Grit* (1969) which shows a traditional Western hero as he reaches the end of his frontier life, Eastwood's films *Pale Rider* (1985), where a supposedly reformed ex-gunfighter protects a community against a mining corporation, and *Unforgiven* (1992) where the hero uses gratuitous violence purely for personal gain. Finally, in the film *No Country for Old Men* (2007) the transition of hero to villain is complete where at the end of the film the villain emerges triumphant.

The Psychological Westerns

The Psychological Westerns appeared at a time when the hero needed to adapt and change to maintain his authenticity and relevance. Schatz outlined that this happened because:

after World War II American audiences had become saturated with the classic Western formula and also more aware of socio-political realities and this meant a redefining of the hero's motivation and his sense of mission. For this reason the Psychological Western traced his neuroses

stemming from his growing incompatibility with civilisation as well as the cumulative weight of society's unreasonable expectations. (p. 58)

These unreasonable expectations had arisen from how the hero was now located in a global environment because after the war, the world had effectively expanded for Americans. This brought new threats from racial 'Others' located outside the United States who could be of Eastern European, Cuban, or North Korean origin. There was also a fear of new ideologies such as the peace movement and communism undermining the establishment and this was shown in near paranoia of the McCarthy trials in the early 1950s. Also, during this time urbanisation, technology and materialism were increasing at a rapid rate and these and more women in the workforce, threatened traditional male roles. These factors combined were too much for the Western hero to confront at once so instead he turned on himself, gave up his traditional role of protector and became an introspective man. Wandtke (2007) described how from the 1950s there was a:

shift from idealistic heroes with simple ideological goals to personal, darker themed, revisionist revenge tales resulting in a cynicism and a fragmentation of the Western hero as they began to fight against their own mythic identities and where they grew darker, more violent, and more divided within themselves. (p. 204)

Never given to many words or emotions, the hero was portrayed as even more introverted and repressed and according to Rainy this was when the "non-hero" was created. (p. 34) This was a key period for the destabilisation of the hero and villain binary and as Rainy argued since the late 1950s Western heroes have often been presented as "obsessed, neurotic characters whose motives are questionable and whose means are despicable, and as men who live by their own rules rather than society's". (p. 34)

The 1960s

According to Lovett (2003) by the 1960s "the film industry was dominated by filmmakers seeking to give meaning to the social revolution taking place." (As cited in Rollins, 2003, pp. 29 and 34) For this reason, films such as *Butch*

Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) reflect the anti-establishment feelings of the time. This film had two heroes, played by actors Robert Redford and Paul Newman, who robbed trains and like Jesse James, were regarded as legends of the West because as stated in the film, "they never shot anyone". When they reach the end of their careers and are hiding out in South America they face their final battle and choose a suicidal death rather than be taken prisoner. As 'wanted men' Butch and Sundance have been continually on the run for some years and this lifestyle reflects their unwillingness to give up their freedom, enter civilisation and conform.

True Grit, directed by Henry Hathaway, was also made in 1969 and had John Wayne playing the role of Deputy Marshall Rooster Cogburn. He is first seen in the film in the middle of a courtroom drama because even as a Deputy he takes licence with the law and has shot twenty-three men in four years. This hero is portrayed as being past his usefulness and now spends most of his time drinking whiskey and sleeping it off in a storeroom behind a store. With no money or job, Cogburn has become a gun for hire and he accepts a job from a young woman wanting to avenge her father's death at the hands of a villain, Tom Chaney. The woman, Mattie, also enlists the help of a Texas Ranger who appears to act as a chaperone for her and in contrast to Cogburn, represents the new style of law and order coming to the West. As the story unfolds we hear about Cogburn's past adventures, his loneliness and lack of family life, and he and Mattie form an unlikely bond with each other. They eventually track Chaney down and kill him, and his gang of villains in a shoot out. As part of the action Mattie falls down an old well shaft and is bitten by a rattlesnake. Fortunately, Cogburn is able to rescue her and then shows how he is a Western hero after all by saving her life in a daring ride to safety. This film shows how the hero's identity was in crisis as he searched for a meaningful role in the new West and in this case, he had succumbed to alcoholism as a way of coping with his loss. *True Grit* shows a hero with no cause to fight for, no community to protect and working for money, food and board. Wearing an eye patch, Cogburn comes across as a weary, wounded hero but during the film his sense of purpose is reignited as he protects a vulnerable person and we see aspects of how he must have been in his former glory days. He not only defeats the villains but

also overcomes his own insecurities and doubts about his usefulness and is thus able to reinstate the Western hero to his rightful place.

Counter Culture Films

During the 1970s the Western was not the predominant film genre of the time as it struggled for relevance and to find new oppositions for the hero. The superiority of the white male hero had been undermined by America's defeat in the Vietnam War and women had begun to re-assert themselves which is shown by many films of this decade being about modern women and male/female relationships. This subverted the traditional masculine ideals of the Western genre with a hero who was not interested in forming relationships with women and settling down. Although the Civil Rights movement had removed the barriers for discrimination Kilpatrick argued that "many Americans in the late 1960s and early 70s were not yet willing to pay to see a film about an oppressed African American and one safe way to tell the story of society oppressing a minority was to make a movie about a Native American". (p. 283) These counter culture films used "images and stereotypes of Native Americans" as "poor and oppressed but also mystical and natural" people. (p. 283) The Westerns that were sympathetic to the Native Americans included *Little Big Man* (1970), and *A Man Called Horse* (1970). Also according to Kilpatrick, *Little Big Man*, "used a white hero to depict the Indian experience" (As cited in Rollins, 2003, p.p. 283 - 284) and starred Dustin Hoffman. This unlikely hero had survived Custer's last stand by chance and underwent many Western adventures including living with a Native American tribe. *A Man Called Horse* starred Richard Harris as an Englishman who was initiated into the Sioux tribe and this provided an insight into the Native American culture by showing all the rituals he had to go through.

Further to this, Westerns of the time included comedies such as *Blazing Saddles* (1974) directed by Mel Brooks, and starring African American Cleavon Little as Bart, which satirised the racism inherent in the Hollywood Western. Turner (2005) described *Blazing Saddles* as a "parody of the Western" where "the villains get Bart appointed as sheriff, hoping that the racist townspeople will be further disheartened and abandon the town" and as it turns out that the

villains are actually employees of the railroad company that wants the land. Turner also outlined how Brooks “questions and undermines every established convention of the Western”. (As cited in Rollins and O’Conner, 2005, pp. 223 - 224) *They Call Me Trinity* (1971) and *Trinity Is Still My Name* (1974) were comedies made in Italy and directed by Enzo Barboni. These comedies did cause an identity crisis for the Western hero who had been made fun of and where his traditional opponents were shown in a positive light. Western heroism did continue however where elements of this appeared in different film genres successfully as Wood outlined “in the classical Hollywood cinema motifs cross repeatedly from genre to genre.” (p. 595) Western hero-like behaviour was seen with actor Harrison Ford who starred in films such as *Star Wars* (1979), and *Bladerunner* (1982) both of which contained many references to the Western genre. For example, in *Bladerunner* Ford plays a bounty hunter, lives alone, and uses violence to defeat the villains. In this way during a time when the Western film genre was seeking relevance the hero lived on the science fiction genre which helped to minimise any threats to his survival.

Changes to the Hero and Villain Binary

During the 1980s Eastwood appears again in *Pale Rider* and this time plays a hero with a difference when he dons a white collar and goes by the name of Preacher. By using the religious iconography Eastwood’s hero has the aura of reformed respectability and there is a mysterious quality around whom or what he is. The Preacher appears in a new location for the Western of mountainous terrain which is far away from the usual desert landscape and this distance is further exaggerated with a snow falling. Similarly to *Jesse James* this film has the theme of the individual making a stand against a corporate company. Like most heroes, he is just passing through town and is only forced into violence when he discovers the injustice of how the prospecting villagers are being run out of the district by the corporate mining company. The Preacher takes on the traditional role of the hero by helping the townsfolk defend themselves against this villainous corporation with no expectation of personal gain. As a Preacher it may be seen as fitting that he takes no personal reward when he defeats this opposition and because he is moving on he also empowers the villagers to stand up for themselves. The female characters are attracted to him but like all

Western heroes he prefers his isolation, and once his job is done he rides off alone at the end of the film. *Pale Rider* is an important film because it creates incongruence with the character of the hero which is partly balanced by the familiar attributes that Eastwood brings, however the religious connotation makes this an unconventional Western hero. The confusion this caused did not necessarily weaken the status of the Western hero but the combination of preacher and Western hero iconography resulted in a blurring of the traditional hero.

Eastwood resurrects the all powerful hero in *Unforgiven*, a film that he directed and also starred in. This film demonstrates the extremes of male power and has a level of violence that makes it difficult to discern who the hero and villains are. The hero William Munny, played by Eastwood, is working on his own behalf to make a new life for his children after his wife has passed away. His main adversary, Sheriff Little Bill has established himself into a position of power in the community through a reign of fear and corruption. Krapp (2002) described how this film was “driven by the desire for money that determines the value of everything including human life”. (As cited in Magee, 2006, p. 195) It is made obvious that human life has little value for Munny who easily reverts to a cold-blooded killer and where he indiscriminately kills anyone who could present an obstacle to his objective of getting paid. According to Plantinga this “problematizes our allegiance with the hero through its representation of Munny as a clearly human, flawed, mentally and physically weary man” and where he had “no personal stake in his mission as he does in *Josey Wales*.” (pp. 68 and 71) At the beginning of the film Munny is living on a pig farm with his children and after burying his wife, he is offered a job to avenge an attack on a prostitute. This happens because Little Bill has not arrested anyone for the attack so the group of prostitutes have decided to take the law into their own hands and hire someone to kill the offender. With no wife as a civilising influence, Munny accepts the job in order to raise the funds to move him and his children to a new life on the West Coast. To assist him with this task he recruits his old friend Ned, played by Morgan Freeman, and they set off to the town of Big Whiskey. Both men having aged in the interim are unpractised at long distance horse riding, are uncomfortable camping and fending for themselves

because they have both been living a comfortable domestic life for some time. Ned is not as motivated as Munny is to carry out the task and really only acts out of loyalty to his old friend.

Munny and Ned travel to Big Whiskey, a town that Plantinga described as a “corrupt version of American society”. (p. 68) This corruption is mainly conveyed through the character of Little Bill, played by Gene Hackman, who has established himself as the local sheriff simply to improve his own prospects. He and Munny are acquainted with each other from the past, and Bill shows he is just as ruthless and cold-blooded when he kills Ned as a lesson to anyone who attempts to defy him. Little Bill has taken the role of the sheriff, usually a good man in the Western, and turned it into a position of power where he rules the town with fear and violence. He doesn't follow the rules of the law and decides not to punish the man responsible for the attack on the woman as he should have done. Another character, English Bob, played by Richard Harris is also known as a killer of ‘trouble-making Chinamen’, and he arrives in town hoping for a share of the money. Bob has a new veneer for a villain with his civilised demeanour and according to Plantinga, “he represented a European society based on rigid distinctions between races and classes”. (p. 70) However, after a beating from Little Bill he is forced out of town and when he leaves he describes the townsfolk as, “bloody savages, with no law or honour”. (p. 70)

English Bob is lucky to escape as Munny, now also intent on retribution, seeks out those responsible for Ned's death. In the final shoot out in the saloon he gives the men the opportunity to save themselves “if they don't want to die” by letting them escape. For those who stay, no one is spared as Munny kills everyone in an efficient and clinical fashion to fulfil his motive for revenge and personal gain. Unlike Ned, who lost his desire and aptitude for killing, Munny has no conscience about it and simply views it as a means to an end and so is as dispassionate about it as any villain. In *Unforgiven* to maintain his superiority, the hero needed to be a more cold-blooded and mercenary killer than the villains and this makes it difficult to distinguish who hero and villain really are. Even Little Bill said he, “didn't deserve to die like this, I was building a house” and according to Plantinga, *Unforgiven* “represents a violence that leads to a

cycle of senseless revenge and retribution which destroys easy moral distinctions between hero and outlaw". (pp. 71 and 79) Michaels (1996) outlined how Eastwood had said in an interview that *Unforgiven* presented an "unusual Western hero" and that the film "broke new ground in the genre because the action of the film was motivated by the desire for gain in the material economy". (pp. 1 and 9)

Palmer's fear of the "international villain" (p. 42), come to fruition in the Western with *No Country for Old Men*, directed by the Coen Brothers, this film showed what can happen when a villain slips under the radar of the traditional heroes. The villain, Anton Chigurh, is played by Spanish actor Javier Bardem and it seems he has no recognisable cause of any kind except a life or death ritual he applies to his victims. Through his unorthodox use of violence he is able to defeat and thus subvert all the traditional white male film heroes. This man works in a similar way to Munny in *Unforgiven*, of killing for revenge, or if anyone breeches his moral code or presents an obstacle to him achieving his goal. If the character of Munny blurred the lines between hero and villain, Chigurh with his extreme use of violence and his cunning and skill in eluding and defeating his enemies, effectively removes them. As the villain he brings a new level of evil to the Western, and is described by Woody Harrelson's character, ex-Colonel Carlson Wells, as someone "you can't make a deal with, even if you gave him the money he'd still kill you. He's a peculiar man. You could even say he has principles, principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that".

The action in *No Country for Old Men* starts in West Texas when a drug deal has gone wrong and the aftermath shows a group of Mexicans all dead or dying in the desert. A Cowboy and Vietnam War veteran Llewelyn Moss, played by Josh Brolin, comes across this group when he is out hunting and he also finds a suitcase full of money which he decides to keep. He narrowly misses Chigurh who is on his way to retrieve the money and who has already killed two law men on his journey to the desert. The local sheriff, Ed Tom Bell, played by Tommy-Lee Jones, is trying to figure out what has happened to the Mexicans, the men Chigurh has recently killed and where the money is. The sheriff comes from a long line of law men but he is at a loss on how to solve this mystery because he

does not understand who this new enemy is and what the new rules of combat are. In the film he is always one step behind Chigurh because the best he can do is to trail him, hopefully stay out of his way and retire in one piece. Ed Tom Bell represents the old West and admits he does not belong in this new arena but interestingly he is the only character whose life is spared by Chigurh. Moss is a naive but determined man who tries everything in his power to keep the money and by doing this he violates Chigurh's code which results in his death and also his girlfriend. Carlson Wells, now a bounty hunter, is hired to track Chigurh down and even though they know each other personally, Chigurh does not hesitate in killing him.

No Country for Old Men uses the Western iconography to background a modern day story but there are familiar elements such as a typically negative portrayal of Mexicans. It also introduces a villain who has the familiar Western hero iconography of ignoring the law, is a loner, is guided by his own moral code and has the ability to defeat anyone who stands in his way. Bardem plays this character in typical Western hero style as a man of action and few words and yet when compared with the traditional heroes in the film he appears to be physically smaller and weaker. However, as the action of the film unfolds we see they are no match for him as he goes about his mission with business-like efficiency, forming no relationships, being answerable to no one and departing like a ghost at the end of the film. As Wells tells Moss, "he's not like you. He's not even like me". This film reflects how the hero/villain binary changed to a point where the traditional heroes cannot match the tactics this villain engages in. Also, it appears that where emotion has always differentiated heroes from villains, in this film Chigurh appears not to possess any, even when he is confronted with injury and pain.

The transformations that are outlined in this chapter reflect how the Western hero from the 1950's had to continually change to ensure his survival and that of the genre. When Wayne departed from Western films it could have signalled the end of the Western hero but this character has managed to survive through various adaptations and transitions including becoming more villain-like in his behaviour. Plantinga describes how our "allegiance with a star often transcends the bounds of a single film" (p. 79), and this is seen with actors such as Wayne

and Eastwood who played a major role in continuing to create and re-create a masculine identity for the hero at a time when this was under threat. While responding to social change in the films I have outlined, the hero has still retained his individualism, remained aloof from the community, shunned domesticity and continued to live by his own rules. While the Western film genre created new narratives that questioned and at times confronted the very foundations it is based on to remain viable, two things did not change, the hero remained white and male. For this reason the Western has remained the arena where Americans can still examine the relationships between hegemonic masculinity and those who are not. Most significantly for the hero, violence rather than athleticism became the way to measure a man's strength, power and ability to overcome oppositions. This required the setting of new rules around the ethos of what it means to be a Western hero including being more of a villain in order to ensure traditional 'Others' and women did not enter his territory.

Conclusion

The Western film genre with its unique iconography, nostalgic storylines and mystical setting provided the ideal backdrop for the development of a mythological hero. This hero had to carry the weight of a society trying to come to terms with the fast developing modern world and changes in American society. The interpretation of historical events or cultural trends was often left to the hero to demonstrate or decipher as he became an agent of change. The villain often represented a greater source of evil than a particular film character and so the hero was given licence to do whatever was required to defeat him. Rather than be repelled or outraged at the gratuitous violence of the hero it was seen as necessary to protect society and this meant the hero became a man of unquestionable power in keeping or restoring order. Wandtke outlined how this iconic status was established “through the genre conventions of the Western and our own expectations as honed by those conventions, the image of a man with a gun is imbued with cultural, historic meaning”. (p. 205) From his original incarnation, the Western hero was the embodied a frontier spirit that was recycled and replayed in countless films which resulted in what Neale described as “a process of intertextuality” which defined and circulated, “generic images and labels that the audience understands”. (p. 49) Over time this established the Western hero as a legendary figure of the West as he came to symbolise personal freedom, action and adventure. Film audiences became so familiar with the role of the Western hero that they could be assured that no matter what form the villain took he would be defeated and the community made safe, even if the hero sacrificed his own life in the process. Rather than remain static, the hero/villain binary opposition has been continually adjusted to suit what is culturally appropriate for the time and to ensure there is someone or something to contrast with the superiority of the white male hero. The themes of wilderness versus civilisation that run parallel to the hero/villain binary form the basis of the Western narrative and Pierson described how “the Western’s dramatic structure, with its inherent conflict between civilisation and nature, has enabled countless creators to link contemporary conflicts and concerns to a vision of the American past.” (As cited in Rollins and O’Connor, 2005, p. 298)

In the earliest Westerns there was no hero/villain binary and the hero lived in harmony with the local Native American inhabitants. This was a reflection of the era of assimilation and in these silent films it was common to have a Native American either play the hero or be a friend to the white hero, and what was emphasised were action, adventure and exploring the wilderness. These themes are expressed in stories and Connell outlined how “the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and the Wild West show of Buffalo Bill Cody were early steps in a course that led to the Western as a film genre and its self-conscious cult of inarticulate masculine heroism”. (p. 194) As I have outlined when filmmaking moved to the West this was a pivotal point in the development of the hero/villain binary because the Western then became based on the Native American Plains Wars. Defeating the Native Americans placed many demands on the Western hero and so he had to locate himself outside the community and keep his distance from people that could be a distraction or weaken his ability to perform. He also needed to have an emotional aloofness and maintain his independence from relationships so he is always ready to perform his duty. This solitary nature contributed to the hero’s mythic status as he became a protector of territory for the new settlers for little or no, personal gain other than the greater good.

Numerous actors played the role of the Western hero but in particular John Wayne and Clint Eastwood made an extraordinary contribution to the development of this character. Wayne’s acting style became integral to the development of the Western film hero and he became such a familiar figure to film audiences that according to Sobchack and Sobchack, he

didn’t need many lines of dialogue for the viewer to understand, to know intimately, who or what the character is, what he believes in and how he will act in a given situation. When he appears on the screen he signifies a whole set of ethics, a predictable range of behaviour, and a wonderfully familiar sense of a human character. (p. 234)

As I have outlined, in the 1960s when the Western was struggling for relevance Eastwood brought back the traditional silent hero in his performances which Neale described as being “marked by an emotional reticence, also silence and a reticence with language”. (p.12) Through his continual reinvention of the hero

Eastwood brought the Western into the modern era and as Belton outlined, he is an:

anti-star who prefers to play anti-heroes, part of the reason for his popularity was that he was able to play the part of the male hero but also manage at the same time, to convey his vulnerability without appearing weak. He also took parts that explored the hyper-masculinity of his screen image, but questioned its rigidity and exposed its flaws. (p.108)

Schatz argued how the Western “reached a mass audience that actively participated in the gradual refinement and evolution of its narrative formula, creating a mythical reality more significant and pervasive, perhaps in some ways more real, than the historical West itself”. (p. 47) This evolution is still happening and is evidenced in *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011) where the hero was able to mobilise the traditional ‘Others’ to work for him to defeat the villains. Harrison Ford and Daniel Craig from the *James Bond* films star in this film directed by Jon Favreau, where Ford plays the ‘old’ man of the West, and Craig the cowboy hero. Like a lot of Westerns, it is based on a comic book story where the community is under threat from a new form of villain the aliens from outer space. This film, in its merging of the Western and Science Fiction genres, suits Ford as a hero because he brings with him the iconography that is common to both. The cowboys, outlaws, Native Americans, ranchers, townsfolk, women, and children all join forces because this is the only way to defeat the aliens and in doing this they put aside their personal differences, prejudices, self interest, and fears for the greater good. The combination of these traditional opponents is a strong force for the hero to mobilise and help him to confront this new and threatening force. This film shows the hero in his rightful place as protector of good over evil and continues to maintain his superiority over the traditional and new villains.

Connell stated that the history of masculinity is not linear and that “complex, subordinated and marginalised masculinities are in constant interaction, changing the conditions for each other’s existence and transforming themselves as they do”. (p. 198) This helps to clarify how the hero/villain binary worked and why it underwent constant transformations to preserve and enhance white male

dominance. These transformations are based on the hero defeating villains that threatened or compromised his status as the defender of the territory. The hero/villain binary not only relies on changes to the villain to maintain the hero's superiority but also requires a hyper-masculinity that contrasts with the majority of men and femininity. The hero/villain binary opposition props up the framework for the Western film genre and often underpins the narrative and Lenihan described how the Western "offered a clearly defined natural order conducive to clear moral choices and the triumph of good over evil." (p. 11) This narrative generally presents a version of history or events from a white colonialist perspective which is conveyed through the character of the hero. For this reason it is important that the credibility and relevance of this character is maintained because his view supports the dominant ideologies and power structures in American society.

Minority ethnic groups are placed firmly in the background or on the fringes of the Western and have always appeared as anonymous, one dimensional characters. Throughout the history of the Hollywood Western the status of the Native American didn't really change and even when they were given roles of some prominence these were often played by white actors. Any Native American character that took the role of a hero, such as Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans*, was usually an ethnically white person who had been assimilated into a tribe. This was also the case with interracial relationships between Native American women and white men which only occurred if the women were ethnically white. The development of the Western genre even with its changes, still worked to exclude any Native American, African American, or member of a minority racial group from being a Western hero. This is interesting because film audiences appear to find this underlying racism acceptable, or they don't really recognise it as such because the use of commonly accepted stereotypes made these portrayals look normal. According to Perkins (1996) "stereotypes short-circuit critical thinking" and their "effectiveness depends in part on our willingness to short-circuit" and he goes on to add that "stereotypes are selective descriptions where they select those features which have particular ideological significance. Hence, remarkably few stereotypes refer to such qualities as kindness, compassion, integrity or even honesty". (p. 22) This partly

explains why ethnic groups have negative portrayals in the Western film genre and this played a major role in naturalising an image that became predominant in white American society.

From the 1950s the life of the Western hero changed from one that had a clearly defined role of looking after vulnerable new settlers to an expanded one as America found itself in an increasingly global world. The added responsibilities of his role caused a change to his psychological makeup where he needed to be more clinical and proficient at using violence. This also coincided with a society that was becoming increasingly violent and self-serving in nature leading to concepts of good and evil becoming confused and where people were more cynical and distrustful of the establishment. The hero needed to find his own identity in this world of rapid change and unpredictability and rather than use negotiation as a tactic he used force and engaged in a new level of violence. According to Connell “hegemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represent the interests of the whole society”. (p. 164) This is to a large extent why the hero is trusted to do what he must do and explains why those who watch a Western can be reassured that any disruptive force will be dealt with and disposed of as they always have been. This familiarity for the audience has built up over time and also brings a nostalgic element to every performance of the hero where the idea of his free and independent lifestyle in the wilderness resonates in an increasingly constrained world. The certainty the hero brings explains why remakes of old Western classics such as *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), and *True Grit* (2010), are still popular at the box office. However, it should be noted that in re-telling these traditional stories they also perpetuate established racial and gender stereotypes and reinforce the superior status of the white male hero. According to Connell in a “patriarchal ideology men are rational while women are emotional” (p. 164), and this differentiates the hero from the female characters in the Western. This lack of emotion is also the hero’s main source of strength and the key difference between him and any villain.

Savran outlined how the Western is the “supreme genre for the depiction of traditional, laconic, dominating masculinity” as it combines all the “themes of the

cowboy and his relationship with the frontier, of male potency and youth". (p. 41) Also, as seen with Wayne, Eastwood, and Ford men in the Western "experience ageing without losing their power and authority". (As cited in MacKinnon, 2003, pp. 41 and 42) Rather than cause offence, as one might expect, the character of the hero with all its flaws and use of violence as a solution is a likeable character because he has stayed true to himself. The audience always knows what to expect from a Western hero so like him or loathe him, it makes no difference as he has never needed society's acceptance or approval to be whom, or what he is. By living outside society he does not pose a threat to the safety or security of the community, only those who threaten it, so like the townsfolk he protects while we cannot condone what he does, neither can we condemn him. The hero with his extraordinary power has always identified and defeated new and different villains and this has ensured his survival as a film character. Western actors like Wayne and Eastwood and most recently Ford played the hero with a certain irony and humour that makes him an authentic, human character and in becoming more like the villain this was yet another necessary sacrifice the hero had to make as he faced new forms of evil.

As I have outlined in this thesis, not everyone is on equal terms in the Western and as a film genre it has been able and continues to accentuate white male power. The placing of an ideal form of white masculinity at its centre at the expense and exclusion of 'Others' that do not fit this ideal has not been detrimental to its success and longevity as a genre and this is because the Western has always presented a predominant view through the hero/villain binary that is relevant for the time. From the representations of Native Americans, through to Mexicans, women, and finally aliens, the Western remains current. Throughout the history of the genre, Western villains have highlighted the racism, sexism and fear of progress experienced by Americans; sometimes seriously, and sometimes subversively while the hero has consistently reinforced the power of white masculinity.

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