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The Psychology of the Western

*How the American Psyche
Plays Out on Screen*

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The Civilized and the Savage

"I've killed women and children. I've killed just about everything that walks or crawled at one time or another. And I'm here to kill you, Little Bill, for what you did to Ned."

— William Munny (Clint Eastwood) in *Unforgiven* (1992).

In his "frontier thesis," Frederick Jackson Turner described the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." The Western is the setting where these primal forces clash. The meeting of the savage and the civilized takes on various forms in the Western: cowboys versus Indians, cavalry versus Indians, marshal versus outlaws, etc. As the genre progressed and grew in sophistication, the definitions of savagery and civilization were called into play. Often, characters that had typically been depicted as savage—Indians and outlaws—began to be portrayed more sympathetically, while characters that had always been painted as representatives of civilized society—lawmen and cavalry officers—were revealed as savage and barbaric. At times, it became difficult to differentiate between the heroes and the villains. The Western anti-hero was born. And as the psychological Western reached its peak, we began to see characters whose natures were a complex and conflicting mixture of both savage and civilized elements.

In his book, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, John Cawelti develops a tripartite distinction of Western characters, based on Turner's notion of the savage and the civilized. On the civilized side are the settlers and townspeople. On the savage side are the villains, traditionally played by outlaws or corrupt officials, and occasionally by hostile Indians. And in the middle,

functioning as a mediating force, is the hero, whose character is an amalgamation of both savage and civilized elements.

Unlike the hero and outlaw, the homesteaders and townspeople are immobile, tied down to their land or town, and incapable of movement. They're often depicted as cowardly, because they have families and property to worry about as well as their own lives. They need to be inspired or provoked into violence, even in their own defense. These harbingers of civilization are interested in taming the west, establishing civilized society, creating law and order, and modernizing the environment. They are generally motivated by the needs of the community, as represented by the institutions of the church and state, and they openly deride individualism and independence, whether it is depicted in the hero or the outlaw. In fact, the townspeople often mistrust or fear the hero almost as much as the outlaw, not only because he is a stranger, but because, like the outlaw, he is unsettled. The hero isn't constricted by the borders of the town or to the ancient rituals and principles of civilization as they are. He represents freedom, which is associated with both wildness and violence. Hence, the hero is both a savior and an outcast within civilized society.

Examples of this conflicted relationship between the townspeople and their hero can be seen in two classic films that were both released in 1952, *Shane* and *High Noon*. In *Shane*, the homesteaders mistrust Shane because of his past as a gunfighter. Though he is an honorable man, they fear his knowledge and mastery of violence. When he is able to identify the villain's hired gunman, Wilson (Jack Palance), the homesteaders confirm their mistrust of Shane, as his knowledge of the killer gunfighter establishes his own relationship with the savage. At the end of the film, even though he saved the town from the evil cattle baron in a cathartic shootout, Shane must leave the town. "There's no living with a killing," he tells Little Joey. "There's no going back from one. Right or wrong, it's a brand ... a brand sticks. There's no going back." A similar denouement is depicted in *High Noon*. Throughout the film, the marshal, Will Kane (Gary Cooper), tries to rouse the townspeople to help him fight a band of outlaws who are coming to town to kill him. Each of the representatives of civilization—the priest and churchgoers, the judge, his own deputy, and even his mentor, the former sheriff—refuse to help him. In the end, he kills the outlaws himself. But he won't stay in the town that he risked his life to defend. He throws his badge into the dirt, preferring exile to the company of civilized cowards.

The classic Western villain is a ruthless outlaw. Not tied down by wife, business, or home, he's mobile, able to move in and out of town at will. He's wild and uncontrollable, like the wilderness itself. In certain ways, he's more



Searching for Honor. Gary Cooper (right) as Marshal Will Kane, being disappointed by his embittered mentor, Lon Chaney, Jr., as former marshal Martin Howe, in Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952, Stanley Kramer Productions/ United Artists).

like the hero than the townspeople, especially in his response to danger. He's no coward. If anything, he's too easily moved to brazen displays of bravery and violence. Like the hero, he usually has a sense of honor, but the honor is misdirected or mistaken. The outlaw seeks out violence, rather than avoiding it, which is the critical difference between the gunfighter hero and the outlaw villain. While the hero is reluctant to kill, the villain relishes the act, and provokes it.

The hero, as Joseph Campbell wrote, has a "thousand faces." In the Western, the hero is usually a cowboy or lawman, occasionally he is a cavalryman or homesteader, and sometimes he is a "good badman," an outlaw or gunfighter who is nevertheless a decent and honorable man. Like the villain, he has the power of movement, but he can also settle down, though he usually chooses not to. In order to stay true to his wild, restless nature, the classic Western hero turns his back on civilization after the hostile forces of the wilderness have been subdued. He rides off into the sunset, more comfortable in the wild open plains than in the confines of the inert town.

With his combination of civilized and savage elements, the hero represents a mediating force between the passive stillness of civilization and the violent wildness of the frontier. Though he's motivated primarily by individual honor, he typically chooses to be on the side of law and order. Nevertheless, when the chips are down, he often has to go outside the law to find justice on his own terms. And though he defends the townspeople, his heart is set against the destruction of the wild frontier via the establishment of towns and railroads. Like the savage, he mourns the death of the open range and fears the loss of freedom and independence that will come as the result of the fencing in of the frontier. In the end, the hero and the townspeople, including his love interest, are often incompatible. He plays a sacrificial role, risking his life to save a town that he cannot stay in. Instead, he ascends from town to wilderness, vanishing into the setting sun, like a savior of Biblical or mythical proportions.

John Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950) offers an excellent example of Cawelti's tripartite distinction. The film is a nation-building picture, glorifying the pioneers who trail-blazed the first paths into the wilderness and opened up the frontier. In nation-building films, while the homesteaders in the wagon trains are seen as the heralds of civilization — the people who will eventually inherit the West — it is their frontiersmen guides who take on the role of the hero. The frontiersman hero belongs to the wilderness, and it is his task to lead the emissaries of civilization past the dangerous elements within the frontier and deliver them to the chosen land. Hence we see the frontiersman hero in the nation-building picture stuck in the middle of Cawelti's tripartite distinction. In *Wagon Master*, Travis (Ben Johnson) and his faithful sidekick Sandy (Harry Carey, Jr.) are horse traders hired as wagon masters by a wagon train of Mormons seeking passage across the wilderness to their new homesteads. On the way, they must encounter both Indians and outlaws. The Mormons are Christian fundamentalists. They are extremely conservative. The outlaws are sinners and the Indians are heathens in the eyes of the Mormons. The frontiersmen are in the middle. While the frontiersmen respect the Mormons and doubtless have Christian backgrounds, they also have respect for the Indians, as they are more akin to the Indians in their reverence of nature. Also, in their freewheeling attitude towards life, the frontiersmen are also more akin to the outlaws, as opposed to the rigid, austere pious Mormons. As the wagon train makes its way across the wilderness, the wagon masters play the role of mediators between the civilized Mormons and the wild inhabitants of the frontier.

Their first act of mediation occurs when the wagon train comes upon a broken-down wagon full of dance-hall girls and a patent medicine sales-

man who's addicted to his own product. These two archetypes of the West, the golden-hearted whore and the disgraced drunken doctor, are rejected by the uptight Mormons. The irony is that the Mormons themselves were just exiled from town by the leery Protestant townspeople, who mistrust the strict practices of the Mormons. The Mormons, for their part, fail to see this irony. In the first act, the frontiersmen helped the Mormons by agreeing to become their wagon masters, despite the prejudices of the Protestants. Once again, in the second act, they play the role of cultural mediators by letting the ailing whores and drunken doctor join the wagon train, despite the objections of the stuck-up Mormons. As representations of the middle ground, the frontiersmen were able to bridge the gaps between the prejudiced, the pious, and the promiscuous.

Later on in the second act, the wagon masters help the wagon train avoid conflict with a tribe of Indians by mediating a parley, which allows for safe passage through Indian territory. And finally, in the end, the frontiersman heroes save the Mormons from the dangerous outlaws who have hijacked the wagon train, in the only way that outlaws can be dealt with. The fatal climactic shootout could not have been performed by the Mormons, whose religion forbids violent acts. Only the frontiersmen had the essential balance of violence and honor that allowed them to live with one foot in the civilized world and the other in the wild. Hence, in the Western genre, it is the frontiersman hero who serves as both gatekeeper and guide for any Easterners venturing out west.

The Outlaw Hero

The outlaw brand of Western hero traces his heritage back to the Robin Hood legend of medieval England. Though he is a thief and a wanted criminal, the Western Robin Hood is a hero because his criminal acts are directed against a greater evil, which invariably takes the form of a greedy and autocratic tyrant. While the outlaw hero has been portrayed countless times in Western films, the most romantic and lionized version is Henry King's 1939 classic, *Jesse James*, starring matinee idol Tyrone Power in the title role, with Henry Fonda as his equally heroic brother Frank and Jane Darwell as their mother. The villainous tyrants are the railroad barons, portrayed as scalawags and carpetbaggers, who send their ruffian goons out to the small farmers on the Missouri frontier, forcing them to sell their land to the railroad for a pittance. Though his backstory is not mentioned in this film, the real Jesse James was a Southern boy who, at the tender age of sixteen, fought with William

Quantrill's band of Confederate raiders. This troop of guerrilla fighters was infamous for their terrorist tactics and their vicious, bloodthirsty attacks. Many of the later versions of the Jesse James legend focus on these early days, understanding Jesse's outlaw career as a product of a traumatic and violent youth, rather than as a heroic vengeance quest.

In the 1939 film, Jesse's motivations towards crime are mainly personal but also political. After Jesse and Frank fight the railroad goons in defense of their home, Barshee (Brian Donlevy), the head railroad goon, returns to their farm with the law, in an attempt to "arrest" them. However, Jesse and Frank are not there, and Barshee winds up killing their mother by mistake. Jesse, of course, must defend the family honor by killing Barshee, but even though he does so in an honorable showdown, he is now wanted by the law. He and Frank decide to make a living as outlaws and choose to rob trains, as they blame the railroad as the root of their problems. In seeking vengeance against the railroad, the James brothers become folk heroes, as they represent a front of individualistic defiance against the tyranny of the railroads. This type of movie outlaw was particularly resonant in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, when the average American felt cheated by the foreclosing banks and Wall Street fat cats. Audiences could experience catharsis vicariously through the violent thievery of the outlaw. The Depression-era gangster hero, epitomized by Hollywood actors such as Humphrey Bogart, George Raft, and James Cagney, was easily transferable to the Western scenario.

As subtext, we also understand that Jesse represents the South, defeated in the Civil War but still clinging to its honor, while the railroad represents the North, the ruthless, greedy, industrialist power that wants to rob the poor Southerners of the only thing they have left: their land. In this film, the outlaw-versus-railroad theme is symbolic of the continuing conflict between North and South throughout the Reconstruction Era. Though Power and Fonda forgo the Southern accent, their obsession with personal honor certainly has a Southern feel to it, and the James family still has a "slave"—a black servant they call Pinky (Ernest Whitman)—who clearly represents an artifact of the old glory days of the South. (In real life, the James family owned a small tobacco plantation and seven slaves, before the turmoil of the Civil War drove the family to ruin.) The James gang even perform their robberies with a flair of Southern gentility and charm, saying "Thank you, Sir," and "Much obliged, Ma'am," as they rob the train passengers. They refuse to take the women's jewelry. When they're done, they remind the passengers to "sue the railroad" for their losses, thus ridding themselves of the guilt of robbing innocent people and shifting the blame squarely onto the head of the Northern railroad barons.

The South vs. North subtext is even more explicit in the sequel to *Jesse James*, Fritz Lang's *The Return of Frank James* (1940). In the film, Frank embarks on a vengeance quest to kill his brother's murderer, while being pursued by the Railroad. Unable to track him down honestly, the Railroad soups up a phony charge against Pinky, the Jameses' faithful servant/slave, and threaten to hang him unless Frank turns himself in. Frank surrenders to the law. The court scene is a public spectacle, but to the Railroad's dismay, the tide turns in favor of the James boy. His lawyer is a newspaper editor and also his deceased brother's father-in-law (Henry Hull). He paints Frank as a hero for sacrificing himself to save Pinky: "...you'd risk your own neck to save the life of a poor, innocent old darky." The case becomes increasingly more about lingering political difficulties, as the Southern jury and judge become more and more resentful of the Northern prosecuting attorney, who is clearly representing the Railroad's interests. When the "Yankee" lawyer refers to the Civil War as the "rebellion," the judge takes grave offense and sternly corrects him: "Rebellion, did you say, sir! If you are, by any chance, referring to the late unpleasantness between the States, that, sir, was a war for the Southern Confederacy!" Frank's lawyer has little difficulty convincing the jury of ex-Confederate soldiers that Frank's service with Quantrill's Raiders merits him the status of war hero and that his subsequent battle against the Railroad is but a continuance of his brave actions against the pillaging Northern invaders. He is found "not guilty of anything," even to the charge of robbing a railroad office, which Frank openly confessed in court that he committed. When the verdict comes in, his lawyer shouts out: "We licked 'em! The dad-blasted Yankees! We licked 'em!"

The traditional aspects of the outlaw struggle are also clearly laid out in *Jesse James*. Besides the struggle for personal honor and vengeance and the subtext of North versus South, there is the typical conflict between imperialist tyrants and individual men, most often portrayed as the cattle baron versus independent ranchers or homesteaders, or in other cases, the banks and/or railroads versus the homesteaders. In the latter case, we see a representation of East versus West, as the banks and railroads are based in the Eastern metropolises. They see the frontier as a storehouse of unlimited resources, a means of increasing their own wealth. They want to rape the land, fence off the frontier, and claim everything within it for their own. They will not stop until the entire nation, from sea to sea, is nothing but a sprawling metropolis, with no natural beauty and no peaceful stretches of open plains, and all of it owned by a few greedy tycoons. In opposition to the Eastern city folk stand the noble Westerners, the independent ranchers and homesteaders, as well as the outlaw gunfighters.

In the final act of the film, it becomes clear that the outlaw life of constant running, killing, and robbing, is fast turning Jesse from a country gentleman into a man who is "crazy wild." (In other renditions, it is Jesse's formative youth as a guerrilla warrior with Quantrill's Raiders that turns him wild.) In any case, we do get the sense that the life of the outlaw always foments deep conflict within the individual. One cannot kill continually and retain one's sanity. Eventually, the killing becomes a pattern of behavior that the killer needs and craves, a killing sickness that consumes the soul, and can only be cured by death. This awareness of how an ordinary man can turn into a psychopathic murderer seems implicit in Westerns and is almost always delivered as a plea for reformation to the outlaw hero, made by his female love interest. As the figure representing the hero's anima — the feminine qualities of tenderness and love — only she can persuade the savage beast to tame himself. She does this by convincing the outlaw to turn himself in (allowing the beast to have himself caged), so he can redeem himself for his sins and rejoin society as a normal man, healed of the killing sickness. This plot twist, which could also be seen in some of the various "biopics" of Billy the Kid, never comes to fruition. As the outlaw hero is in essence a tragic hero, his story invariably ends in tragedy. In *Jesse James*, Jesse tries to turn himself in, accepting a plea bargain, but is betrayed by the railroad baron (Donald Meek), who goes back on his word and tries to hang him. Jesse escapes, but eventually is convinced again by his love interest (Nancy Kelly) to give up his violent ways. Jesse goes into hiding, but is quickly betrayed by a member of his own gang (John Carradine), who shoots Jesse in the back for the reward money. The fact that Jesse is done in by a traitor within his own gang, rather than a lawman or railroad goon, draws a parallel between the Jesse James legend and the Jesus myth. Like Jesus, Jesse was a hero to the oppressed, a folk hero. He was hated by tyrants but loved by the poor. He rebelled against imperialism, and although he was betrayed by a Judas figure, his legend lives on till this day.

The Curse of the Gunfighter

Eleven years after he directed *Jesse James*, Henry King made *The Gunfighter* (1950). Thematically, the film starts off in the third act of the Jesse James story. Ringo (Gregory Peck), an infamous gunfighter, comes to town to see his wife (Helen Westcott), the village schoolmarm, and their son. He wants them to escape with him to California, but he is haunted by the sins of his past. No matter where he goes, some young hotshot with a pistol



Curse of the Gunfighter. Gregory Peck (left) as Jimmy Ringo, faces Skip Homeier as Hunt Bromley, the reckless youth looking to make a name for himself by tangling with the infamous "Ringo Kid," while Karl Malden, as Mac the bartender, looks on impassively from the background in Henry King's *The Gunfighter* (1950, 20th Century-Fox).

wants to challenge him to a gunfight, merely to make a big name for himself. He is also hunted by the brothers of men that he killed, caught in the incessant cycle of retributive violence, which ends only in death. This is the curse of the gunfighter, which has become part of the mythos of the Western genre, and could be attributed in large part to Nunnally Johnson, who penned the script for *Jesse James* and co-wrote *The Gunfighter*. The curse is the fate of doom that befalls anyone who chooses the shadowy path of gunfighting. The outlaw cursed with this fate is a combination of archetypes. He is both hero and shadow. He is also known as the anti-hero.

California is often represented as the outlaw's fantasyland. It is the farthest west you can get, a place where a man can escape his past identity. In this sense, it is the frontier of the frontier, the west of the west. Other outlaws, such as Jesse in *Jesse James* and Will (Clint Eastwood) in *Unforgiven* (1992), saw in California the same dream of redemption and new beginnings. The dream of California in the minds of movie outlaws set in the 19th cen-

tury was doubtlessly relevant to the fantasies of 20th-century moviegoers, who saw in California the place where dreams could come true, whether it was the Depression-era farmer's dream of economic salvation or the young actor's dream of Hollywood stardom.

In *The Gunfighter*, the housewives in the town condemn Ringo and join together as a unified voice against him, forcing him to leave. This familiar theme of town banishment represents the feminization of the frontier. Once the West has been settled and civilized, there is no more room for the type of men who fought to conquer and tame it. As Slotkin (1985) noted: "...in the backwash of a closing Frontier, traits that had been productive and heroic might become antisocial and dangerous." The gunfighter, once a hero, is now perceived as an element of the savage, rather than a protector from it. Within this zone of the feminine, the outlaw — who represents the undomesticated (or un-emasculated) male — is no longer welcome. Like the whore and drunken doctor who are banished from society in films like *Stagecoach* and *Wagon Master*, it is the collective moral voice of female society that builds the final fence along the frontier. It is the influence of domesticity that exiles the feral relics of the frontier era from civilization. The outlaw cannot exist in a place where the domestic needs of the feminine predominate over the freedom and independence of the masculine. For a while, Ringo holes up in the saloon (the last bastion and refuge of masculine territory in the town), but in due time, he must go.

After meeting his son for the first time, Ringo leaves with the vague promise from his wife that she'll see him in a year and possibly go with him to California, if he's truly reformed. But before he can ride away, he's shot and killed by Hunt (Skip Homeier), a young hotshot trying to prove his mettle. Ringo lies to the sheriff (Millard Mitchell), telling him that he drew first, so that Hunt may avoid being hanged. In this way, he passes the curse of the gunfighter on to the man who killed him. This is a much more fitting revenge, as the curse, in Ringo's experience, is a fate far worse than death. In the final shot of the film, we see Ringo's ghost riding off alone into the sunset. Similarly, at the end of *Jesse James*, we see Jesse's father-in-law, a newspaper editor, eulogizing Jesse at his funeral, praising him as a folk hero: "He was one of the doggone-est, gawldingest, dadblam-est buckaroos that ever rode across these United States of America!" The implication is that he will use the power of the press to redeem Jesse's name. As the outlaw hero is cast in a sympathetic role, even his death cannot impede the sentiment of potential redemption, which is at the heart of his character.

The Marshal Hero

There is a fluidity in which the gunfighter makes the transition from outlaw to lawman and vice versa. Of the many examples, it can be seen in the marshal/sheriff characters in *The Gunfighter*, *One Eyed Jacks* (1961), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), *Unforgiven*, and *Wyatt Earp* (1994). This easy shift is facilitated by the fact that the two archetypal characters require the same skills of violence, domination, and gunmanship. The only difference is that they practice these skills on opposite sides of the societal fence. In essence, the outlaw and lawman represent two sides of the same coin. Whether the critical roles of persona and shadow are depicted as a conflict between two characters (lawman vs. outlaw), or as one character conflicted within himself (the good badman, the anti-hero), it is the struggle between the civilized and savage elements of human nature that is at play.

In most of the film versions of the Billy the Kid legend, we see two characters that are equally conflicted. Billy (Jack Buetel in *The Outlaw* (1943), Paul Newman in *The Left Handed Gun* (1958), Kris Kristofferson in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), is a good badman, an essentially decent kid with a wild streak who takes the code of the West to its logical extreme. He kills to avenge the death of his father figure and then kills anyone who threatens his freedom or his honor. He is a savage young man with a good heart. His pursuer and antagonist, Pat Garrett (Thomas Mitchell in *The Outlaw*, John Dehner in *The Left Handed Gun*, James Coburn in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*), is a former outlaw turned lawman. He has taken on the persona of a civilized man, but his duty as a sheriff requires a savage act—the killing of his good friend, Billy. In completing this dark task, Pat Garrett encounters the savage element within his own psyche and destroys a part of himself that is both wicked and pure.

Cowboys and Cattlemen

The cowboy character, in all his variations, represents an interesting mix of the civilized and savage. Like the townspeople, homesteaders, and settlers, he is engaged in honest work. He makes his living by the sweat of his brow, providing a useful product for a developing nation. But unlike the more civilized types, the cowboy is not tied down to a specific spot. He is always riding the open range, engaged in herding or on long, extended cattle drives. Out in the wilderness, he has no recourse to the law and is at all times beset by the dangers of the wilderness: Indians, rustlers, wild animals,

rival cattlemen, outlaws, and even the hazardous elements of nature itself. He must defend himself and his stock with violence; therefore he must retain an element of savagery within himself. Justice on the range involves either a bullet or a rope, with few alternatives. When he comes to town, it is not to act civilized, but to act wild, in a juvenile spree of drunkenness, promiscuity, gambling, and fighting. The cowboy is just as likely to be a hero as a villain. He treads the line between the different sides of frontier society.

A staple of the Western genre is the aged cattle baron and his feral cowboys. The cowboys who do his evil bidding are typically his sons, or young men who play the role of adoptive sons. The cattle baron is interested in power, which to him is represented by massive tracts of land on which to graze his limitless herds of cattle. From a mythical perspective, the cattle baron is derived from the primordial dragon of medieval legends. The dragon is emblematic of greed. He terrorizes the villagers, demanding regular tributes of gold and virgins, which he hordes in his lair. This act is the essence of greed, because the dragon has no use for either gold or virgins, yet he demands much of both and hordes them to himself, where they can do no good. Similarly, the cattle baron has more land and stock than any one man can use, yet he constantly yearns for more and uses vicious, ruthless, and dishonorable tactics to attain them.

Walter Brennan played the cattle baron most memorably in *My Darling Clementine* as Old Man Clanton. In a telling scene, he flogs his sons with a bullwhip when they have an interchange with Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday that doesn't end in violence, even though guns are drawn. "When ya pull a gun," he shouts at them, "kill a man!" Clearly, the wild barbaric sons learned their manners from their father, who always prods them towards violence rather than teaching them diplomacy or restraint. In a similar scene in *The Big Country* (1958), the cattle baron (Burl Ives) is sorely disappointed when his sons tell him that a rival cattle company drove his herd away from water and no blood was shed. "Why ain't you dead?" he asks them, without a hint of irony in his voice. "You let 'em run my cows off, and you come back standing up!"

The notion that a group of men, isolated in the wilderness and devoid of the civilizing influences of women, religion, and town life, would regress into a clan of savage barbarians is evocative of the belief that the wilderness itself has the effect of turning human beings into savage beasts. As proof of this belief, the clan of barbaric brothers will frequently rape any woman who crosses their path. Their quickness to rape is indicative of their lack of connection with a feminine figure (typically there is a conspicuously absent mother figure in the clan), resulting in a maximization of masculine aggres-

sion, unchecked by feminine empathy or sensitivity. In Ford's *Wagon Master*, the Clegg clan are a band of wild outlaws. Even though they are trying to lay low as they hide out within the Mormon wagon train, one of the barbaric brothers can't help himself. He rapes an Indian girl at a powwow with the local tribe. In Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962), the Hammond clan live in a remote mining camp. When one of the brothers takes a wife, the others all assume that it will be share and share alike. The poor girl (Mariette Hartley) is still in her wedding dress when the brothers try to rape her. Similar themes of barbarity and rape at the hands of a band of feral brothers can be seen in *Will Penny* (1968) and Anthony Mann's *Man of the West* (1958).

The Killing Sickness

The theme of regression to savagery is perhaps the signature motif in the Psychological Western, which tends to focus on the internal struggle between violence and restraint within the conflicted hero's psyche. The character driven to psychopathological madness by a killing sickness — a Thanatos obsession or a daemonic compulsion to kill — is qualitatively different from the hero seeking honor through revenge. The vengeance quest is specific, directed at the particular man or men who killed the hero's loved one(s). In contrast, the object of the psychopath's killing sickness is vague, generally directed at entire categories of people, for instance Indians, whites, Mexicans, or anyone who pushes his buttons, like father figures, authority figures, demurring women, and other threats to his masculinity or dominance. Also, the hero's vengeance quest has a definite beginning and end. After the hero finds and destroys his quarry, he will presumably resume a normal life, his thirst for blood quenched forever. The psychopath's killing sickness, on the other hand, is incurable. His bloodlust will only continue to intensify with each man that he kills, and his thirst for death will only be quenched when he himself dies.

There are a limited number of character types who are afflicted with the killing sickness. The sickness can come about as a result of witnessing and engaging in the horrors of war — the "psychologically wounded" type. Frequently, the killing sickness is seen as the driving force behind outlaws and juvenile delinquents who kill for the thrill, or to prove their manhood by destroying other men — the "psychopathic killer" type. Another character commonly afflicted with the sickness is the persecuted Indian who wants to wipe out all white people and, his counterpart, the prejudiced or

traumatized white man who wants to wipe out all Indians — the "genocidal" type. Each of these psychopathological character types will be explored within the context of a few representative films in which they are depicted. Examples of the psychologically wounded type are Lt. Crofton (Addison Richards) in *Northwest Passage* (1940) and Col. Owen Devereaux (Glenn Ford) in *The Man from Colorado* (1948). Examples of the psychopathic killer type are William Munny (Clint Eastwood) and The Schofield Kid (Jaimz Woolvett) in *Unforgiven* (1992). And examples of the genocidal type are Major Rogers (Spencer Tracy) in *Northwest Passage*, Ed Bannon (Charlton Heston) and Toriano (Jack Palance) in *Arrowhead* (1953), and Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez) in *Ulzana's Raid* (1972).

The Psychologically Wounded Type

The elaboration or fabrication of Indian atrocities against white people as a justification for war was a political tactic that hearkened back to the original captivity narratives of the 17th and 18th centuries. Ironically, far more atrocities were committed by whites than by Indians. Even the trademark atrocity of scalping, universally associated with Indians, was a European invention, introduced by French and Belgian fur traders, who would pay hired killers for the scalps of enemy Indian tribesman. The barbaric practice was later adopted by the territorial governments of the southwest, as depicted most vividly in Sydney Pollack's *The Scalphunters* (1968). Slotkin (1992) noted that the intensification of fighting in any war is fueled by reports of atrocities committed by the enemy. The witnessing of war atrocities and acts of savagery increase the hatred and aggression already felt towards the enemy to a state of frenzied hostility. It literally drives soldiers to madness, inspiring reciprocal acts of psychopathic savagery and leading to an escalating cycle of brutality, in which atrocities on one side lead to atrocities on the other, and so on. At an early point in this cycle, distinctions are drawn along racial lines, dehumanizing the entire enemy race, in part because of the inhuman atrocities they commit. Paradoxically, the rationale behind a stance of dehumanization (atrocities committed by the enemy) also becomes a rationalization for committing atrocities (genocide of the subhuman savage race).

Slotkin referred to the primal aggressive drive to meet savagery in one's enemy with equal amounts of savagery as "genocidal rage" — a hatred so intense that a soldier wants not only to kill his enemy, but to wipe his kind off the face of the earth. He will kill women and children, decimate entire

civilian villages, and commit the most repugnant acts of savagery in order to satiate this genocidal rage. In Slotkin's view, it is this state of psychopathic madness that leads to "the horror" — the stark realization of the bestial depths that human beings can sink to. The horror is at its most profound when a soldier not only witnesses the atrocities of others, but partakes of them himself, committing acts so foul and degraded that he cannot believe what he himself is capable of doing. In this sense, Slotkin's use of the word "horror" is a reference to the age-old expression, "the horrors of war." It may also be a literary reference to Kurtz's famous final words — "The horror! The horror!" — in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad's work, the horror revealed within the heart of darkness is the "darkness of barbarism" in the heart of every man, which is only slightly covered by a veneer of social order, the "light of civilization." Francis Ford Coppola adapted Conrad's novella to the screen in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by transferring the scenario to Vietnam. But the theme of Conrad's novella — civilized man encountering and integrating atrocities, barbarism, and "the horror" in the land of the savage — is a dominant theme in the Western.

Soldier Blue (1970), a revisionist anti-Western made during the Vietnam War era, revisits the issue of atrocities in the Western scenario in light of the contemporary revelations of war atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, specifically the massacre at My Lai in 1968, in which hundreds of peaceful Vietnamese villagers were slaughtered, mostly women and children. There were numerous reports of rapes, dismemberments, mutilations, torture, and other acts of barbarism committed by U.S. soldiers. In the first act of the film, a Cheyenne attack on a U.S. Cavalry payroll dispatch results in the death, dismemberment, and mutilation of 21 cavalrymen. The cavalry's punitive action against the Cheyenne, depicted in the third act of the film, is taken despite the call of surrender made by the Cheyenne chief, who rides out before the cavalry attack carrying a white flag of surrender and an American flag of truce. The cavalry troop decimates the tribe, killing hundreds of women and children. The vivid depictions of gang rapes, dismemberments, mutilations, torture, and the ruthless slaughter of helpless innocents and little babies, are shocking and revolting. The viewer's horror is amplified when the film's epilogue reveals that the cavalry attack in the movie was based on a true event, the 1864 massacre of a Cheyenne village in Sand Creek, Colorado. The unavoidable associations with the My Lai massacre that viewers must have made at the time of the film's release were doubtlessly exacerbated by the fact that the court-martial proceedings for the army soldiers indicted for war crimes in Vietnam were being held at the same time that the film was out in theaters.

Soldier Blue's revisionism also extends to the most ancient artifact of the Western myth, the figure of the white woman captive. Candice Bergen plays the young woman who was taken captive by the Cheyenne. Rather than losing her mind, she gains an appreciation for the Indian way of life and sympathizes with their plight. Though she's "gone native," her state of mind is not depicted as the psychopathological consequence of repeated rape and torture. Rather, after living amongst both whites and Indians, she has realized that while both cultures partake in atrocities and massacres, it is the white man who is exponentially more brutal and savage.

Northwest Passage

King Vidor's *Northwest Passage* is a Colonial-era Western that tells the tale of Rogers' Rangers, a troop of American soldiers who battle hostile Indians on the wild frontier of upstate New York. Robert Young plays Langdon Towne, a civilized young man (a Harvard educated artist), who will encounter and integrate the horrors of savagery while serving with the Rangers. Spencer Tracy plays Major Rogers, the leader of the troop who uses tall tales of Indian atrocities to spur both his British commanders and his American soldiers to war. He tells a British officer: "Those red hellions up there have come down and hacked and murdered us, burned our homes, stolen our women, brained babies, scalped stragglers, and roasted officers over slow fires for five years!" This is enough to convince the officer to commission a preemptive attack on an Indian village. Later on, Rogers calls on a comrade to remind his soldiers why they're fighting. Lt. Avery (Douglas Walton) recounts a past experience with Indians to his men: "Philips had a piece of skin torn upwards from his stomach. They hung him from a tree by it while he was still alive. They chopped his men up with hatchets and threw the pieces into the pines so there wasn't any way to put 'em back together again. They tore my brother's arms out of him! They chopped the ends of his ribs away from his backbone, and pried them through his skin one by one...."

The sequence in which the Rangers massacre an Indian village, literally slaughtering hundreds of men, women, and children, is unique in its era for its stark depiction of brutality and unflinching ferocity. Some of the Rangers revel in the horror, their genocidal rage revealing itself as psychopathic, ghoulish bloodlust as the white man regresses to savage, engaging in mutilation and atrocities and turning their hatchets on women and children. To provide retroactive justification for the massacre, Rogers interviews a

female white captive, who says: "They took me seven years ago, killed my husband and knocked my baby's head against a tree. My husband's scalp is over there with seven hundred others." She refers to a drapery of scalps adorning a side of the village. The other white captive woman has seemed to suffer an even worse fate. She's gone native. She curses the major, calling him a "white devil," but the major is unfazed. "She's white," he says, "so she goes back!" The Rangers take her with them against her will. She is a victim of so much savagery that her mind has accepted what the white man perceives as the ultimate madness — the rejection of her own whiteness and the subsequent identification of herself as an Indian. This is the ultimate horror.

On the return journey, the major makes a gruesome joke to his men who complain of having nothing to eat but dried corn. While they at least have the corn they pillaged from the French/Indian village, their French pursuers will have to resort to cannibalism if they want to survive. He tells his Rangers: "What'ya think the French are gonna find when they get to St. Francis? Nothing but roast Indian!" Later on, Langdon Towne witnesses the essence of "the horror" firsthand — Indians engaging in a retributive action against some white captives. He reports what he saw to the major: "When they cut up Dunbar, he was still alive and screaming... They killed them all! They were playing *ball* with their heads!"

The most fascinating character in the film is Lt. Crofton (Addison Richards), a soldier who has not only seen and engaged in the horror, but relished it and completely identified himself with it. He has crossed over the line into psychopathology, his ego so intertwined with the savage that he derives a primal, psychosexual thrill from the atrocities of war. He carries with him a garish "souvenir," a decapitated Indian head, which he's saving to eat once the troop's supply of corn runs out. The difference between this type of ghoulish degenerate and the macabre, disturbed serial killers of modern horror movies is that the former is an American soldier fighting for his country. His cause justifies his actions, though the film stops short of praising his excesses. The lesson is that one must become a savage to defeat the savage, but after the battle, one must return to normalcy. For those who cannot make the psychological return trip, they are the "walking wounded," the psychologically traumatized victims of war. In modern parlance, we call this illness post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When Crofton literally goes over the edge, jumping off a cliff in a psychotic frenzy, Rogers stands on the edge and offers a solemn salute to the soldier's memory, signifying that the wounds of war are psychological as well as physical. Shortly after this scene, another soldier manically takes off into the woods, "running home."

He is the victim of a psychotic break, another member of the walking wounded.

The Man from Colorado

In the opening scene of *The Man from Colorado*, we find Colonel Devereaux (Glenn Ford) commanding a regiment in the Union army. He has a defeated troop of Confederates pinned down in a gorge. Though they raise the white flag, he orders his artillerymen to wipe them out. The use of artillery, as opposed to rifles, represents dishonorable killing in the West — a slaughter rather than a fight. Upon viewing the consequences of his orders, the carcasses of dead rebels strewn over the rocks, a trace of guilt gleams in Devereaux's eyes. He returns his regiment to its fort, only to learn that Lee had surrendered at Appomattox while he was away. The war was over, making the massacre doubly pointless. That night, he writes in his journal: "I killed a hundred men today. I didn't want to. I couldn't help myself. What's wrong with me? I'm afraid. Afraid I'm going crazy!"

Devereaux returns to his hometown of Yellow Mountain, Colorado, fearing for his own sanity and haunted by the atrocities he witnessed and committed during the war. On his first night home, he's confronted by a ghost of his past, a rebel soldier who survived the massacre. The man accuses him at gunpoint of butchery: "...you killed them under a flag of surrender. You killed a hundred decent men. What for, Colonel? For a morning's entertainment? For pure, crazy love of killing? You're no hero. You're an insane murderer." The word "insane" is an emotional trigger for the self-doubting Devereaux. He disarms the rebel with a sucker punch and shoots him twice with his own gun, once again engaging in unnecessary killing, proving the dead rebel's point that he is an "insane murderer."

Devereaux's psychopathy is referred to as a "sickness" by his wife and friends. The film, made directly after World War II, is clearly an attempt to deal with the many veterans returning home with "combat fatigue," a psychological illness now referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder. The film also deals with other social problems relating to veterans, as the plot revolves around a group of disenfranchised miners whose claims were taken over by a gold baron while they were serving in the army. The theme is representative of the plight of contemporary veterans, who lost their jobs while fighting on the European and the Pacific fronts and returned home to face unemployment and poverty. Devereaux in particular represents the plight of the walking wounded, men who turned savage while engaging in the hor-

rors of war, and then had trouble with the transition back to normalcy after returning home to civilization.

The consequences of Devereaux's killing sickness rises in intensity through the course of the film. Because he was appointed a federal judge of the territory, he literally has the power of life and death over the men in his jurisdiction. He wields this power with little restraint. His first violent act is to have a highwayman hanged, though the process seems more like a lynching than a legal execution. Then he has an innocent young man hung. His attempt to hang six more innocent men is thwarted. He goes to the mining town where the men are hiding out, but when the townspeople refuse to surrender the men, Devereaux burns down the town. This act of urban terrorism is clearly an allusion to the infamous atrocities of another Union commander, General William Tecumseh Sherman, who was also called "crazy" by many of his contemporaries. Sherman's strategy was called "total warfare." He burned down entire towns and plantations, displacing and killing many civilians on his "scorched earth" campaign through Georgia and South Carolina, leaving much of the South in ruins and cinders in his wake. In contemporary terms, Devereaux's torching of the town may have been a reference to the "war crimes" and atrocities committed against civilians during World War II. Certainly, the horrors of the Holocaust committed by the Germans and their collaborators is brought to mind, but other savage attacks against civilians — the attack of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, the air bombardment of Stalingrad by the Germans, the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo by allied forces, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans — were all recent enough to be associated with Devereaux's criminal act of arson. The point made by the film is that war is Hell, as it makes devils out of men.

The Psychopathic Killer Type

In Clint Eastwood's last Western to this date, *Unforgiven*, Eastwood plays an elderly outlaw, Will Munny, who is looking back at his life in retrospect. Though he has reformed his ways, he is still trying to come to terms with the flaws of his own character, as well as the guilty conscience that results from a life of killing. Will's antagonist is a brutal and corrupt sheriff named Little Bill (Gene Hackman). As indicated by their sharing of the same name, Will and Bill represent different sides of the same coin. Both men are former outlaws trying to become settled men of property. Will is struggling to start a pig farm. Little Bill has a steady job as a lawman and is

building his own house. Will, however, is a horrible pig farmer, and Little Bill is a total failure as a carpenter. They both have trouble breaking the mold. In fact, Little Bill's dying statement — "I don't deserve this.... I was building a house!" — testifies to his belief that he was somehow redeeming his life of violence by settling down and upholding the law. Just like his counterpart, Will, Little Bill remains unforgiven for his past sins.

But while Little Bill finds death at the end of Will's shotgun barrel, Will does seem to find some kind of redemption, as the closing epilogue states that he ventured to California with his children, and prospered in dry goods. As California represents the land of redemption for ex-outlaws, we wonder if Will actually does find forgiveness within himself in the far western frontier. Perhaps it is his self-knowledge that merits his redemption. While Bill was fooling himself as town marshal, promoting himself as a man of law and order, while he was actually a tyrant, a brutal bully, and a sadist, Will was torturing himself over his deep conflicts regarding his violent past. When he replies to Bill's last words, "Deserves ain't got nothing to do with it," he drives home the fact that Bill has been denying his sins, while Will has been revisiting his crimes and repenting for them. However, following the bloodbath of the final scene, in which Will single-handedly kills a half-dozen men in



Western Anti-Heroes. Clint Eastwood (right) as William Munny and Morgan Freeman as his friend Ned Logan in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992, Malpaso Productions/Warner Bros.).

cold blood, it remains doubtful that he will ever escape the demons of his own savage acts.

Even before the many killings in the latter half of the film, we see that Will is tormented by the horrors of his own misdeeds. In a telling scene, we see Will confessing to his friend Ned (Morgan Freeman) that he is still haunted by his past: "Ned, you remember that drover I shot through the mouth and his teeth came out the back of his head? I think about him now and again. He didn't do anything to deserve to get shot, at least nothin' I could remember when I sobered up." For Will, killing is always associated with drinking. He has to be drunk in order for his civilized inhibitions to be let down, allowing his savage aggressive instincts to take over. When he was reformed by his wife, he gave up both drinking and killing. But with his wife long dead and his pig farm failing, Will takes on a job as a hired killer, in order to make enough money to start fresh and support his two kids. As he descends into the moral abyss of killing, he begins drinking again. He uses the whiskey as both a facilitator and an anesthetic. The liquor allows him to access the dark area of his soul where Will the Killer resides, and afterwards, it relieves the pain and guilt that arises as a result of what Will the Killer does. Prior to the final showdown, he drinks an entire bottle of whiskey before riding down to the saloon to kill Little Bill, in revenge for torturing his friend Ned to death. Upon entering the saloon, Little Bill confronts Will with his sordid past. "That's right," Will admits. "I've killed women and children. I've killed just about everything that walks or crawled at one time or another. And I'm here to kill you, Little Bill, for what you did to Ned." When drunk, Will becomes a stone-cold killer, free of all the self-doubt and empathy that hampers him in his sober state.

The role of the innocent young man who encounters the savage is played by The Schofield Kid (Jaimz Woolvett), a partially blind adolescent who wants to become a vicious gunfighter like Will once was. The Kid's blindness is symbolic of his lack of understanding of what it means to be a killer. He is nearsighted, unable to see things for what they are, and unable to see what lies in front of him if he continues on his reckless path. The Kid entices Will to join him on his mission as a hired killer. He pretends to be an experienced gunfighter ("I'm a damn killer myself, 'cept I ain't killed as many as you because of my youth"), but he is really a novice, a virgin in the sphere of killing. He thinks that killing is exciting and glorious. Instead, he learns that killing is neither noble nor gallant, it is ugly and sickening. After he kills his first man, he admits to Will: "I ain't never killed no one before." The reluctant mentor to the youngster in the field of savagery, Will stoically replies: "Well, you sure killed the hell outta that guy." The Kid continues

with his confession: "That was the first one ... first one I ever killed. You know how I said I shot five men? It weren't true. That Mexican that come at me with a knife, I just busted his leg with a shovel. I didn't kill him or nothing, neither." In pity, Will finally gives forth the only wisdom he has about the act of killing: "It's a hell of a thing, killing a man. Ya take away all he's got, and all he's ever gonna have." Following this bit of existential insight, The Kid gives up his dream of becoming a gunfighter. "I ain't like you, Will," he says. Having had his first taste of the horror, as well as the guilt and pain that ensues from it, The Kid chooses a lighter path, a path which will one day lead to the forgiveness of his sins. As for Will, he will probably always remain unforgiven for what he has done. But at least he provided the opportunity for a new beginning for his own kids in California, while also fostering a new beginning for the kid who mistakenly wanted to be like him, The Schofield Kid.

The Genocidal Type

In *Arrowhead*, Ed Bannon (Charlton Heston) is a cavalry scout who has an extremely conflicted attitude towards the Apache Indians. His father was killed by the Apaches. He was taken captive as a young boy and raised as "the adopted son of an Apache medicine man." As an adult, he hates the Apaches to the last drop of his blood and wants nothing more than to see their kind wiped off the map of America. His position as a cavalry scout allows him to use his knowledge of Apache traditions and tactics against them. In Bannon's own words: "Ya gotta think like 'em to lick 'em!" However, because he was raised among Indians, and because he is a civilian scout rather than a soldier, the cavalrymen distrust him, referring to him as "the white Apache." He is a man torn between two worlds. He is white and hates Indians, but he's not accepted among his white brethren. And while he directs all of his energies into the fighting of the Apaches, he has a profound and abiding respect for their culture and ways — a much deeper respect than any of his white compatriots.

Bannon's identity conflict is represented in his divergent romantic interests: a genteel white lady (Mary Sinclair) and an Apache half-breed (Katy Jurado). The external love conflict symbolizes the internal conflict between his preferred persona of a pureblooded white man and the haunting shadow of his Apache upbringing. In the end, he must integrate both sides of his torn identity in order to defeat Toriano (Jack Palance), the Apache leader who represents the physical incarnation of Bannon's shadow, his dark-skinned

“blood brother.” Like Bannon, Toriano hates his enemy with every ounce of his being. He lives only to see the day in which his enemy is driven off Apache land forever. Realizing the futility of this dream, he will settle for spilling the blood of as many treacherous “white devils” as possible

Bannon’s attitude towards the Apache, while reverential, is also hateful. He wants nothing more than to destroy them, to wipe them off the land completely, using any means necessary. The hunger to avenge the death of his father, his need to wipe out the psychological stain of his own captivity, and the disgrace of having to come of age among the savages, provide more than enough motivation to justify his thirst for Apache blood. As with the settlers and soldiers of the 18th and 19th centuries, it is not the ethnocentric philosophies of white supremacy or “Manifest Destiny,” nor is it the practical rationalizations of expansionism and imperial domination that provide the justification for the genocidal policies of Native American relocation and elimination on the Western frontier. It is the motivations of vengeance, hatred, and anger — aroused by the captivity narratives and tales of atrocities — that fuel the fires of U.S. aggression and hostility against the Indian peoples.

It is significant to note that in the final battle between Bannon and Toriano, Bannon does not confront and kill his shadow in the white way (he doesn’t shoot him). Rather, they fight in the traditional Apache way — no weapons — in a hand-to-hand wrestling match, in which Bannon breaks Toriano’s back. Even when ridding himself of his shadow, Bannon shows more respect for the Apache tradition than for the white tradition, which would have involved the use of heavy guns and artillery, and which would have resulted in the needless destruction of hundreds of soldiers and warriors of low rank, rather than just the death of one leader. The Apache style of battle between two men of high rank stands in stark contrast to the European style of battle between numerous men of low rank. While the Apache method of warfare, though brutal and bloody, resulted in the survival and coexistence of both warring tribes, the white European method resulted in the wholesale slaughter and virtual extermination of the entirety of the weaker people. Which method of warfare is more savage?

Ulzana’s Raid

Western film directors before the late 1960s had to be very careful in their references to atrocities. In the days before film ratings for adult content, it was understood that children would be viewing any movie released

by a studio, so themes such as rape, torture, and mutilation had to be approached with much tact. In essence, the method was to show the disgusted and appalled faces of the people witnessing the horror, rather than the actual horror itself. This method began to change in the 1960s, when film violence and sexual themes started to become more graphic. *Ulzana’s Raid*, released in 1972, depicts explicitly the horror and savagery that was only alluded to in earlier Westerns.

The tagline for the film expressed the notion that both Indians and Whites on the Western frontier were guilty of acts that could be called savage: “*To Defeat the Apaches, They Had to Be Just as Savage.*” In one of the first scenes of the film, a cavalryman outnumbered by Apaches shoots the white woman he is escorting and then himself. The act at first seems overplayed, even with the tacit understanding of the “last bullet” theme, but his fateful decision is quickly understood when we see the Apaches, led by their chief, Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez), mutilating the cavalryman’s body by cutting out his liver and playing catch with it, while nearby, the sole survivor of the attack, a little boy, is left weeping by the side of his dead mother. Later on in the film, the Apaches flay and burn a settler alive, shoving his dog’s tail in his mouth to stifle his screams, and gang-raping his wife to the brink of death. When we see this poor woman beaten and ravaged and driven to madness by the horror of her attack, we understand both the rationale for the last bullet and how the aura of savagery and horror created by this method of terrorism can be used as an efficient means of gaining psychological power over an enemy with superior numbers and arms.

But the Apache rationale for savagery is mystical rather than practical. In the film, the role of the young civilized man who encounters the savage is played by an idealistic cavalry lieutenant, DeBuin (Bruce Davison). When he asks his Apache scout, Ke-Ni-tay (Jorge Luke), why Ulzana and his warriors torture and mutilate their victims for hours on end, the scout replies: “To take the power. Each man that die, the man that kill him take his power. Man give up his power when he dies. Like fire give heat. Fire that burn long time, many can have heat.... Here in this land, man must have power.”

As a prelude to Ulzana’s genocidal raid, he was stripped of his ego identity by the white man who robbed his land, destroyed his people’s traditional way of life, and forced him and his tribe to live in poverty and disgrace on the reservation. His raid was a means of redeeming his own sense of psychological power, a way to die with honor. Each white that he killed and tortured added an ounce of self-respect to his fractured identity. In contrast, the cavalrymen who engaged in the mutilation and scalping of Apache corpses did so for the more ignoble purposes of vengeance, intimidation, and spite.

Upon witnessing his own cavalymen mutilating the body of Ulzana's young son, DeBuin is shocked and dismayed. His white scout, McIntosh (Burt Lancaster), remarks: "You don't like to think of white men behaving like Indians. It kind of confuses the issue, doesn't it?"

The Terminal Environment

A common element in all of the Western character types is the fact that they exist in what Slotkin referred to as "a terminal environment," a place in time that is fleeting. The Wild West was only wild for a brief period in history, a few decades between the end of the Civil War and the closing of the frontier at the end of the 19th century. The men who became heroes in that environment either died young or lived to see the end of their own era, when civilization closed the mythological frontier in a cloud of railroad smoke and auto engine exhaust. The cowboy hero was no longer able to move his cattle freely along the prairie, as the closing of the frontier heralded the end of open range "free grazing," an issue dealt with in *Shane*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), and most recently, *Open Range* (2003). In the modern era, the marshal hero's brand of individual justice would become anachronistic. When the towns they protect become civilized, the townspeople demand a style of justice that is less violent and more bureaucratic. The demise of the marshal hero as the lone crusader of justice is represented in the theme in which the marshal must leave the town that he has just saved, as he is no longer needed or wanted (for instance, *High Noon*, *My Darling Clementine*, *Invitation to a Gunfighter...*).

In the case of the gunfighters and outlaws, because they fight against their destiny, trying desperately to change themselves in the last act of their stories, their fate is typically death or disintegration into the vast emptiness of the frontier, as symbolized in the traditional ending in which the hero rides off into the sunset. As Slotkin noted: "Their story will have to reach its climax in a fast-draw shoot-out, in which their calling will reach its pinnacle of achievement — followed by its exhaustion. And they will become critically conscious, before the end, of just what has gone wrong with them and their world." Death meets the title characters of *Jesse James* and *The Gunfighter*, as well as most of the Billy the Kids and other outlaw characters in numerous film depictions. Riding off into the sunset, as in the endings of *Shane*, *Rancho Notorious* (1952), and countless others, is only a more glamorous and romantic depiction of death, as we can only assume that the gunfighter/outlaw will continue to ride on his path of violence, which can only

end in his own demise. However, it is this critical awareness of their own imminent doom which makes all of the Western hero types so romantic and so intriguing. In living and triumphing within the terminal or "fatal" environment, the Western heroes teach us how to live with honor and how to face death with courage and integrity.