

NOTES

1. Sandra L. Myres, *Western Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982). Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).
2. For example John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1971).
3. Mandy Merck, "Travesty on the Old Frontier" in *Move Over Misconceptions: Doris Day Reappraised* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).
4. Jacqueline Levitin, "The Western: any good roles for feminists?," *Film Reader* no. 5, 1982.

SALOON GIRLS AND RANCHERS' DAUGHTERS: *The Woman in the Western*

Blake Lucas (1998)

Of all the misconceptions which have come to attach themselves to the Western, none is more saddening or wrong-headed than the notion that women are unimportant in it. When they are conceded a place in accounts of the genre, it is customarily a marginal one or at best a significant but strictly symbolic role. The myth that the traditional heroine of a Western is a passive and pallid figure has inevitably led to the belief that her role must be subverted, and it can be interesting for a woman to literally shoot her way into the center of the action. But scorn of the more familiar types of Western women presents to us the depressing possibility that the classical Western—a genre without equal in its 1946-1964 golden age—may come to be undervalued and rejected as a model, and that along with this many Western heroines who have never been truly appreciated and celebrated will be forgotten. It's time to see the Western in a different light—not as a masculine genre but as one supremely balanced in its male/female aspect and one of the finest places for women characters in all of cinema.

Some kind of alchemy blesses artistic forms which are especially rich—think of the sonnet or the string quartet—and of narrative forms, the Western movie is one of the most satisfying. Its combination of landscape and dramatic motifs endlessly stimulating. Here and in the older forms cited, expressiveness and invention go hand in hand with a respect for the specific limitations of the form. So the best Westerns tend to cleave closely to familiar outlines, the same basic characters and situations steadily recurring but revitalized by individual artists and at times given the force of revela-



"A genre supremely balanced in its male/female aspect": *Job Rand* (Robert Mitchum) and *Thorley Callum* (Teresa Wright) in *Pursued*.

tion. This ritual quality is an overriding one which suggests that something very universal is at work; and without doubt, the genre is not just about specific American history, or even the interplay of history and myth, but a *form* which gives a supple choreography and voice to everlasting archetypes and to archetypal human experi-

ence. We will be more rewarded if we think of characters in Westerns in these terms rather than taking the facile approach of labeling them as stereotypes. Let's keep this in mind as we look at the saloon girls and ranchers' daughters and the many variants of these types of women who have populated Westerns.

The rancher's daughter/saloon girl duality reaches far back into all forms of narrative and cultural consciousness—she is in essence the madonna or whore, settling down here on the American frontier with a specific yet still eternal resonance. The insightful artist sees something of each archetype inside all women, but also understands that respect for archetypal models encouraged the genre to evolve. Discerning practitioners have always handled both types of women with empathy and creative attentiveness, and it's hard to think of a good Western from any period in which the wholesome heroine is pure and simple or the "bad girl" fallen forever.

In the single film which did most to revitalize the Western in the sound period, *Stagecoach* (1939), director John Ford cannily realized he could cover the most ground by assertively bringing together all the archetypes he could crowd into and onto a single stagecoach, doing especially well with good outlaw the Ringo Kid (John Wayne), disillusioned gentleman gambler Hatfield (John Carradine), and the two women. So Louise Platt's Lucy Mallory, an army wife, is of one type, and Claire Trevor's Dallas, a prostitute, is of the other, and they are wonderfully signaled in direction, acting, writing (the estimable Dudley Nichols), and character-defining costumes by Walter Plunkett. Like many directors, Ford shows more empathy for the prostitute, but he does not lack a measure of sympathetic feeling for Lucy, too. Both characters remain as vivid as ever and resonate in harmony with Hatfield and Ringo, often in unspoken ways, as in that nocturnal walk through Lordsburg of the main couple.

It's intriguing—and one of the sources of tension and richness in relationships between men and women within the genre—that hero and heroine are not usually so linked in perfect harmony of purpose as Ringo and Dallas. Though it's a wonderful and never-stale motif to intimate the settling down of the couple on a little ranch after the fadeout, the essential natures of male and female are defined as different in the Western: the man is the restless wanderer and figure of action, while the woman is physically more passive and can embody the values of civilization while standing in the doorway of her homestead. Resolution for the couple can as often mean separation as union, though some Westerns neatly evoke the feelings of both endings, as in *My Darling Clementine* (1946, directed by John Ford), *The Man From Laramie* (1955, directed by Anthony Mann) and *Seven Men From Now* (1956, directed by Budd Boetticher).

In many Westerns, the hero simply rides off, seemingly never to settle down. Not so in the neglected *Saddle Tramp* (1950), in which Joel McCrea's persona turns this loner into the gentle Chuck, but here, ironically, the happy ending provides a deeper sense of how hard ambivalence is to tame. In Harold Shumate's deceptively easygoing screenplay, realized with characteristic grace and precision by Hugo Ferguson, the protagonist rides into the landscape of the opening scene musing in an inner monologue about wild geese and how free they are, concluding "That's me." But involvement with orphaned children and prey heroine Della (Wanda Hendrix) inevitably changes this, and so, in the movie's piercing last scene, Chuck sends the boys off to school telling them how good it is to settle down, then stands in the yard

of his ranch with Della and looks up to see those geese passing once again. I cannot evoke the look on his face and sound of his voice as he watches them, momentarily possessed of an almost inexpressible yearning, but what makes this one of the great moments of the genre is that Fregonese keeps the couple in two-shot as Della picks up and concludes his thoughts while both look at the sky in one accord, tenderly observed from overhead. Chuck has picked the right girl—the one who understands the part of him that still wants freedom. But are people's natures settled so easily? And doesn't Della's empathy for Chuck's wanderlust suggest that, just maybe, women too have a part of their souls that wants only to be wild and free?

At the least, the *Saddle Tramp* epiphany suggests that the heroine is more interesting than most accounts of the Western suggest. Still, the Fregonese film is about the male journey and not woman's destiny. Yet that destiny has always been just as viable a subject, as readily proven by one obvious but still magical example—*Westward The Women* (1951). This female journey is made by a multiplicity of variations on the two basic archetypes, all capable, physical and sexual—rounded figures of heroic will (and brought to life with a wonderful vitality by Denise Darcel, Lenore Lonergan, Marilyn Esckine, Hope Emerson, Julie Bishop, Renata Vanni, Beverly Dennis, et al., none of whom ever had another opportunity this good). Director William Wellman and cinematographer William Mellor fill the work with eloquent black-and-white images of women in command of their own fate—pulling a wagon up a mountain with ropes or pushing one across the arid flats after it has lost a wheel or leading the men they've chosen into a graceful dance at journey's end.

Even if heroines don't usually step out into the center so forcefully, in the classical period they are commonly treated with the same stimulating flexibility, as is evident in the works of acknowledged masters of the genre. John Ford, for example, had known how to bend archetypes since his earliest films. This is well-demonstrated in *Hell Bent* (1918) in which Cheyenne Harry (Harry Carey) meets the decent heroine Bess (Neva Gerber) when she goes to work in a dance hall—a subtle, sophisticated relationship forms between them, and her presence in his life determines the flow of the narrative. In the Western's mature years, archetypes continue to recur in Ford—notably in *My Darling Clementine* with its reconceived saloon entertainer (Linda Darnell) and girl from the East (Cathy Downs), both sympathetic and engaging—but the earlier films had proven how perfectly he understood them and they are now only a starting point. So, he is free to go on to things that interest him more—ideas, moods, spiritual states.

Types of women in Ford are as diverse as there are characters. He's matchless in his appreciation of mature women, as shown in his marvelous portraits of cavalry wives—Mrs. Collingwood (Anna Lee) and Mrs. O'Rourke (Irene Rich) in *Fort Apache* (1948) and Abby Alishard (Mildred Natwick) in *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* (1949); and he can still elicit pleasing contrasts between different types, as with aristocratic captive Elena (Linda Cristal) and wholesome if troubled rancher's daughter Mary (Shirley Jones) in *Two Roads Together* (1961). Continuity within life is the constant of the Ford woman—he sees the dreams and sexual yearning of youth, mature love and marriage which can host a range of complex feelings and be troubled in some ways yet fulfilling in others, motherhood with its joys and heartbreak, and the spiritual example a

woman can become who really knows life. Ford is interested in families and communities, so he tends to favor women whose journey has brought them to a place where they are likely to be a part of those families and communities. But he never suggests that their journey has been naive and that they are not whole women. A shining example is Carroll Baker's Deborah Wright in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964)—a Quaker, she is this film's spiritual center, balancing her priorities, both intimate and communal, with beautiful poise, and its single character who tries to look beyond the troubled present to a better tomorrow.

If the Ford heroine is characteristically the enlightened good girl who seeks a place in the wider community, the Raoul Walsh heroine is most strongly felt as an individual whose worldly experience is considerable and needs no apology. Warm and honest, she is comfortable within her body and at ease with her feelings. As surely as his male heroes, she is an adventurer who will ultimately wind up side by side as an equal partner with a sympathetic man who prizes her independent nature and has no wish to steal any part of it. Walsh's is the cinema of the couple to an extent that no other director can claim. All of his Westerns bear this out; they even tend to rise and fall in interest and stature according to how compelling the couple is and how well their story is told.

Walsh tends to take the characters as the scripts come to him, so there are plenty of examples of both female archetypes in his films. He can do well with the lady, but the more worldly the woman the more likely she will be the heroine (almost invariably true in his work when both archetypes are present). Rosie (Julia Adams—Julie after 1954) in *The Lawless Breed* (1955) is introduced in a saloon, in the same scene in which trouble begins for John Wesley Hardin (Rock Hudson); we feel immediately her capability for traveling the hard road with him as a soulmate in a way his homespun fiancée (Mary Castle) never could. She is also like Colorado (Virginia Mayo) in *Colorado Territory* (1949) in having a story of her own which runs parallel to that of the hero. For Rosie, it's the progression from woman on her own in a rough world of saloons, to outlaw's lover enjoying the good life his gambling provides, to a wife who discovers settling down is what she really wants, to a mother raising on her own a son obsessed with his father's reputation, her wholeness and centeredness making possible a family reunion that is finally joyous rather than tragic. For half-breed Colorado, it's the return to sources—the land she grew up in; here, she "lives over" the life that had led her low with a new result—true and eternal love with Wes (Joel McCrea)—in much the same way he "lives over" his outlaw life to finally transcend it as time and space reunite them in death.

So it is with the purest Walsh Western, *The Tall Men* (1955). Again, the parallel stories of hero Clay (Clark Gable) and heroine Nella (Jane Russell) are given equal weight, so that a richly satisfying third story, of their evolution as a couple, is traced as an intimate journey against the narrative's more expansive one. The heroine is especially interesting—a synthesis of the two archetypes, though closer in spirit to the saloon girl, she is sexually experienced and anxious to find a rich and powerful partner but finally elects to hang her hat at Prairie Dog Creek with Clay, who dreams small but is the right guy if there ever was one. She also gets to be a kind of one-woman Greek chorus singing about her own story ("I want a tall man, don't want a

small man...”), and it’s this delightful running commentary, with the content of the lyrics changing depending on how she’s feeling about men at any given moment, which gives the film its special charm. *The Tall Men* is a pleasing example of how the production code couldn’t keep a good relationship down—the couple clearly sleeps together early on while sharing a little cabin along the trail, and Walsh amusingly seals the breach which follows as they each move to their own corners of the vast Cinemascope frame to retire separately. The film celebrates the mutual sexual enjoyment in their lusty, humor-inflected relationship, especially when her change of heart reunites them at the end. For Walsh, the moment when strong men and strong women find each other is the moment of highest emotion.

Then there’s Anthony Mann. Even his name evokes for many the masculine conflicts which seem almost invariably to animate his world. Yet this is one director who actually said: “Without a woman, the Western wouldn’t work.” And sure enough, the heroine figures strongly in every Mann Western and tends to have a decisive influence on how the narratives play out. Mann’s heroes, especially as played by James Stewart, readily compel attention—they’re driven, obsessive, divided men of clear dramatic dimension—and the same goes for his villains, so often charismatic and engagingly amoral when they are not powerfully evil or driven by their own demons. By contrast, the Mann heroine often plays in a quieter or “lighter” register, as is com-



“Mutual sexual enjoyment”: *The Tall Men*.

monly true within the genre, but this should not be treated dismissively. The reflective and gentle side of a Western is as valuable and important as the most violent and cathartic action. In fact, the counterpoint of the two tones, and how well it is handled by a director, may be more essential to the Western than anything else.

With that thought in mind, let’s consider that for all his acknowledged brilliance with space and landscape, revenge motifs, and climactic gunfights, Mann would not deserve his place as a key figure and defining force in the genre’s classical maturity if his women were as weakly drawn as some have alleged. The limitation, though, is in those who take that view, for it’s hard to think of a director who has given us a more fetching and varied group of women (all played by different actresses) within one decade’s worth of Westerns—from Paula Raymond to Julie London by way of Barbara Stanwyck, Shelley Winters, Julia Adams, Janet Leigh, Ruth Roman, Corinne Calvet, Cathy O’Donnell, Alme MacMahon, Anne Bancroft, and Betsy Palmer, they are all effective. In Mann’s first Western, *Devil’s Doorway* (1950), Paula Raymond sets the tone with her pensive, handsome portrait of frontier lawyer Orie Masters, a woman of intelligence, insight and courage as well as ladylike composure and adult passion. Betsy Palmer’s Nora Mayfield in *The Tin Star* (1957) has an essential place in the story—widow of an Indian, mother to a half-breed boy (Michel Ray), sympathetic and warming confidante to another outcast, bitter bounty hunter Moryg Hickman (Henry Fonda)—if very few scenes in which the actress can flesh her out. Palmer gets the job done, though, as her director allows her those few vital extra moments within the scenes for a feeling to be lyricized, a look or gesture or word to reveal substance, unforced allure, and a complex nature. Then there’s Corinne Calvet’s disarming and humorous Renee Vallon in *The Far Country* (1955), wandering the Alaskan goldfields with nerve and verve, a touch of naiveté, and wonderfully uncultured charm; here is arguably Mann’s freshest and most endearing heroine, as subtly sexy as she is obviously the movie’s moral voice.

As the Mann villain doubles the hero’s darker, more violent side, the heroine mirrors the life-affirming energy of his nature—she is the one who calls with the voice of finer, more decent impulses and of romantic yearning and so reawakens feelings in the male hero which rebalance him. There’s surely no question that the most powerful example is Janet Leigh’s Lina Patch in *The Naked Spur* (1953)—a woman alone among four men in a rugged and perilous wilderness, she is the one of five characters who is truly the strongest, able to make this story change course so that Howard Kemp (James Stewart) will not be consumed by his bitter past. The movie peaks not in its stunning climactic sequence of rocks, river, and death, but in the aftermath. It’s an achingly beautiful moment when Howard turns to face Lina, his eyes full of tears, and sees in her face the light of unconditional love and a new beginning, and if it’s mainly Stewart’s moment—one of his greatest ever—it wouldn’t be nearly as moving without the softer yet no less vibrant intensity of Leigh. Again and again, the woman in Mann registers in this way. Try to pull her out of the film and all that would be left is men giving in to their basest impulses—a spectacle of slaughter awash with pessimism instead of these finely wrought moral dramas in which men and women alike seek a wholeness of existence within the emerging communities of the frontier.

From the beginning of the great post-war years, this interaction of men and



Canyon Passage. "a film equally about women and men." Susan Hayward and Dana Andrews.

women in emerging communities is an essential element of the Western. *Canyon Passage* stands with *My Darling Clementine* as a seminal 1946 work and has some remarkable resemblances to that film. In each, there are two male friends—one a natural leader working out private concerns as well as communal ones (here Dana Andrews' Logan) and the other self-destructive, or in this case, simply weak (Brian Donlevy's George, who loses his moral sense), while the heroine (Susan Hayward's Lucy in this instance) moves from the second man to the first. *Canyon Passage* places its central triangle within an even more elaborate weave, for Logan is engaged to a farm girl, Caroline (Patricia Roo), loved by still another man, Vane (Victor Cutler), while George is attracted to gambler's wife Martha (Rose Hobart) and seems ambivalent about Lucy—in an especially amusing moment, Logan shows George how she should really be kissed. It is surely no accident that this wonderful portrait of an Oregon settlement just finding its way—a film equally about women and men, with some lives in renewal and others in decay—would attract the brilliant Jacques Tourneur to the genre at this point in his career. The source material was by Ernest

Haycox, who originated *Stagecoach*, and the producer, Walter Wanger, is the same as on that film; it plainly aspired to the same level of nuance and maturity and needed a director of Tourneur's subtlety and sensitivity, one not so interested in who is hero or villain but in how each one plays his part, gracefully observed with the director's special synthesis of quiet sympathy and calm dispassion in a way that mirrors the wry yet lovely commentary within the film of Hy the balladeer (Hoagy Carmichael).

The two 1946 films underline what many other examples confirm: romantic triangles in Westerns, if marginally less plentiful than climactic showdowns, are just as vital to the character of the genre. Women in these triangles are sometimes perceived as overly reticent, but a film like *Shane* (1953, directed by George Stevens) shows that notion is at best a half-truth while presenting a vision of the triangle which often has a special depth and poignancy within the genre—all three characters are decent and sympathetic and the woman loves both men in different ways. A woman in this situation must balance the intensity of the unexpected attraction against deeply held ideas about her life. She can let herself feel romantic feelings for the outsider, as Marian (Jean Arthur) does for Shane (Alan Ladd), without being able to hide them from her husband (Van Heflin), yet act so unassailably within a personally felt code of conduct that she cannot be reproached. Marian has to reconcile all of this within herself, and it's clearly a painful process. She has to let her yearning side hang out a bit in order to come to rest, then makes a believable choice. What Westerns which dramatize this kind of triangle can show so expressively is the heartrending intimate spectacle of complex feelings absorbed into the flow of history and the nurturing of a land which could one day become a paradise if faith is kept.

If this kind of willed repression of desire is one motif of the genre, eroticism and passion are also familiar faces, and the Western has boasted memorable physical love scenes as well as quietly tender communions. An example of the former is the moody nocturne of *Yellow Sky* (1948, directed by William Wellman), with its eloquently erotic images of the sudden expressiveness with which miner's daughter Mike (Anne Baxter) responds to outlaw leader Stretch (Gregory Peck). Another magical, if much quieter, discovery of love occurs in an ineffable moment midway through *The Outriders* (1950, directed by Roy Rowland), when Jen (Arlene Dahl), who has offered to break her ladylike reclusiveness and dance with all the men on a wagon train after an especially hard day, finally gets her chance with Will (Joel McCrea); she changes her shoes and the music changes to a gentle waltz, and as she and Will dance away from the others, a romantic spell lifts this obscure movie, sealed as Will speaks softly: "You never showed yourself like this before." Scenes like these often don't get the attention they deserve because the Western never lingers on anything too long. There's a train to catch or meet, cattle to be taken to journey's end, an outlaw double to be vanquished—but a good filmmaker can always poetically charge the moment where intimate feeling is revealed or expressed.

Love—sexual, romantic or spiritual—is only one face of the male/female communion so essential to the genre. But the impulse to love, which typically feels so natural to the characters in a Western, always prompts that communion into being. The hero will talk to the heroine as he has never talked to anyone, haltingly perhaps but very eloquently. Wonderful examples of this occur in the cycle of Randolph Scott

movies directed by Budd Boetticher, notably in scripts by Burt Kennedy. In the revelatory journey of *Comanche Station* (1960), Cody (Scott) tells Nancy Lowe (Nancy Gates) that in the long years he has been searching for his lost wife captured by Comanches, the first ease he has felt has been in the time spent traveling with her. This is a film which treats with great sophistication the theme of masculinity—gentle natured Dobie (Richard Rust) becomes a man when he turns his back on doing wrong, costing him his life at the hands of Ben Lane (Claude Akins), while the husband who did not try to rescue his own wife from the Comanches turns out to be blind. In this context, the quiet registration of Cody's flash of tender feeling—a side of this stoical hero that longs for a woman's gentle gaze and loving touch rather than an endless quest in hard, forbidding country—is both affecting and crucial to the expressiveness of the whole. A more elaborate instance of a man showing a deep, hidden part of himself to a woman occurs in *Jubal* (1956), in a scene especially well-realized by director/co-writer Delmer Daves. This occurs when the eponymous hero (Glenn Ford), who now wants to solve his problems, tells Naomi (Felicia Farr), the rawhide heroine, how his father's death by drowning provoked his mother to express her wish that it had been Jubal, then a boy, instead. The revelation explains a lot about this trouble-prone character, but it's the scene's visual mood which seals its effectiveness—Jubal stands beside a softly flowing river as he tells his story while Naomi stands away from him listening sympathetically and attentively. As in *Comanche Station*, the contrast between the rugged action of the narrative and the unaccustomed voice of the hero's introversion suggests that the women have drawn these men into an unusually impressive and powerful intimacy.

Make no mistake about these "listening" scenes: the ability to listen to a man does not make a woman a passive vessel. It is only in naïve perspectives on the American cinema that women are respected in relation to how much they are imitative of men as figures of action. It is this view that has dismantled a formerly fine tradition of women's roles in American movies, with the Western in particular now pretty much bereft of the kinds of heroines I have been describing. World cinema as a whole has always understood the nature of a heroine. While men have commonly driven the action of a film in an external way, women have often driven it from within themselves (in films by Renoir, Rossellini, Ophüls, Mizoguchi, Naruse, et al.). *L'Histoire d'Adèle H.* (1975) does not have the content of a Western but it has the dramatic momentum of one, with director François Truffaut's heroine (Isabelle Adjani) moving toward a climactic moment as cathartic as a well-staged gunfight. And what about *L'Avventura* (1960)? Of its two adventurers, it is clear that director Michelangelo Antonioni conceives of the woman (Monica Vitti) as the stronger and that she is the one who both centers and leads the narrative. One film that has deep affinities with a Western is *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978)—here, there is a listening woman (Aurore Clément) who is also a figure on a journey. Just as Randolph Scott or James Stewart might sit by the campfire at night drinking coffee and engaging in unaffected philosophical conversations with the villains and other traveling companions, director Chantal Akerman's heroine lends herself to transient social interaction without straying from an essentially solitary path—a perfect alternative title would be *Anna Rides Alone*.

So the woman in the Western can act on its narrative with a subtle but real

forcefulness, helping the hero to his destiny while also finding her own. And in the process, archetypes often intriguingly merge. Army wife Ellen Colton (Julie London) in *The Wonderful Country* (1959), a magnificent achievement by director Robert Parrish, is promiscuous and might be seen as a bad woman looking like a lady, except that the truth is more complex—a man to her is someone who can lay down his guns, something Martin Brady (Robert Mitchum) finally does. The marvelously moody opening scene of *Joe Dakota* (1957, directed by the talented Richard Bartlett) finds a stranger (Jock Mahoney) riding into an almost-deserted town in which the sole inhabitant, young Jody (Luana Patten), looks like she might be the town trollop as she leans provocatively against a wall—but she's really a good girl (though branded by a mysterious event which lies at the film's heart), whose unusual ideas about life make her a good soulmate for the hero, with whom she quickly bonds. Then there's Mariette Hartley's Elsa in *Ride The High Country* (1962, directed by Sam Peckinpah), memorably at the center of one of the Western's finest sequences—her wedding in a brothel, with its nightmare atmosphere, subjective shots, comic yet perceptive speech about marriage by drunken judge Edgar Buchanan, and above all, the spectacle of a wholesome and innately sensible girl, who has remained in touch with herself despite



Elsa (Mariette Hartley) and the wedding in the brothel in *Ride the High Country*. "Romantic dreams broken against frontier realities."

her father's attempts to totally repress her nature, seeing her romantic dreams broken against frontier realities.

As the experience of many of these movies suggests, the heroine does not easily move to the center of a Western, and is usually a little off to the side of the hero, but good filmmakers have traditionally compensated by becoming palpably sensitive to her, so that she registers far more affectingly than her place in the narrative might suggest. Naturally, not every outstanding Western is a model. Sometimes a character is good enough but the actress is weak—*The Bravados* (1958, directed by Henry King) has a viable heroine, an old flame of the revenge-obsessed hero (Gregory Peck) with whom he shares the film's more reflective moments, but Joan Collins fails to animate her (imagine Ava Gardner in this role). On the other hand, women may be decently realized yet still pale in interest beside the male characters, as in *Yera Cruz* (1954); here the two women (Denise Darcel and Sarita Montiel) contrast with each other and serve the story well, but there's no question that it's the interaction of affably wary comrades-in-arms Joe Erin (Burt Lancaster) and Ben Trane (Gary Cooper) that makes this one of the most enduring works of director Robert Aldrich. Still, it is the rule rather than the exception that the strongest Westerns tend to be those in which women are most well-realized and vital to the whole.

That's confirmed, often in a negative way, in post-classical films, especially those of the so-called "revisionist" phase. Forcefully executed but at heart simple and sentimental, a film like *The Wild Bunch* (1969, directed by Sam Peckinpah) is more full of sound and fury than substance and reflection, and it's surely significant that in all of Peckinpah, women are at their most peripheral and one-dimensional here. I find it depressing that this film—so representative of the "Men without Women" sub-genre that has pervaded these later years—is so often taken as one of the genre's touchstone works, but at least Peckinpah has real feeling for the West. A director like Arthur Penn seems not to belong in the genre at all, and the caricatures of *Little Big Man* (1970) are only one indication of his failure to imbue women in his Westerns with the dimension they often have in other of his films; far more serious is the hip, smirking attitude of *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), which dooms any chance of giving the rancher's daughter archetype a new vitality despite the presence of an actress, Kathleen Lloyd, who might have thrived in a good Western. Somewhere between Penn and Peckinpah is Robert Altman whose *McCabe And Mrs. Miller* (1971) shows a genuine understanding of the contours of the genre but is undone by the director's characteristically cynical and contemptuous attitude toward the characters, their feelings and dreams, and, by extension, the frontier world of which they are a part (compare the treatment of an emerging community, as well as the male-female relationships, in a classical work like *Canyon Passage*). With Constance Miller (Julie Christie), Altman rings a fresh if finally opaque variation on the saloon girl archetype—replacing any vestige of warmth with cold-blooded pragmatism and emotional vacancy. We are a long way from the great couples of the Western at this film's denouement, with McCabe (Warren Beatty) dying in the snow while Constance lies in an opium den, oblivious.

In the better films of these later years, archetypes and motifs evolve, but the filmmakers treat both genre and characters with the sensitivity and respect of their

predecessors, and like Peckinpah, they are best when the female presence is strongest. So, in *Will Penny* (1968), director-writer Tom Gries recalls a classical model like *Saddle Tramp* in his character study of a wandering cowboy (Charlton Heston) and the woman who would settle him (Joan Hackett), but the love story has a rueful resolution which conveys painful emotional limitations as an aspect of the hero's rootlessness. *Unforgiven* (1992, directed by Clint Eastwood) takes up the related theme of restless, wild hero coupled with stable, moral heroine through the powerfully evoked relationship between Will Munny (Eastwood) and his dead wife Claudia—the movie's central one—but the film is darker than the models because remorseless outlaw Will's redemption through love of Claudia may finally have been only one episode in a never-resolved odyssey of unsettled identity. These movies are exceptions to the general tendency of recent Westerns, which derives in part from a symbiosis between filmmakers and criticism rooted in ideology and psychoanalytic theory. It is not politically correct to embrace any concept of the traditional woman, and feminist naiveté will only tolerate "empowered" women who can masquerade as men or shoot it out with the boys. Never mind that in classical Westerns, we often admired male heroes for the power they gave up, like turning away from gunplay; for the ideologically conditioned Western heroines of recent years, power is a goal—the key to female identity. It is these years—and most of the Westerns produced within them—which have, in most people's minds, marginalized women within a genre in which they once thrived.

There is a female iconography in the Western as much as a male one, at least in the classic era, which includes actresses like Susan Hayward, Virginia Mayo, Julie Adams, Julie London, and a range of others—among them Olive Carey, Debra Paget (in her Indian roles), and Kay Jurado. Heroines can be as young as Kim Darby's Mattie in the still underrated *True Grit* (1969, directed by Henry Hathaway), a prim but game girl, mercifully naive and mature by turns, and so well-realized that she stands as one of the genre's freshest figures. With archetypes as a starting point, Howard Hawks brought his kind of woman to three great Westerns—*Red River* (1948), *The Big Sky* (1952), and *Rio Bravo* (1959)—with *Rio Bravo*'s Feathers (Angie Dickinson) the apotheosis of the director's type. There have also been some memorably malevolent women pushing the action of certain Westerns, like Veronica Lake's Connie in *Rancho 1947*, directed by Andre de Toth) and Millie Perkins's mysterious lady in *The Shooting* (1966, directed by Monte Hellman), though the standout in this group is an easy choice: Mercedes McCambridge's Emma in *Johmy Guitar* (1954); within Nicholas Ray's inspired *mise en scène*, McCambridge has created a mesmerizing antagonist who fills the drama with warped passion and a strong if twisted will worthy of any of the great male villains. In general, though, it is the traditional heroine who has been served best by the Western—without moving too far from the archetypes, she has shown how well the natures and experiences of women have been served by a genre that really cares about them. Here, in ascending order, is a personal choice for the best of all.

10. Lolly (Colleen Miller) in *Four Guns To The Border* (1954). Lolly, a girl poised between late adolescence and womanhood, is traveling home with her tough, protective father Simon (Walter Brennan). The two encounter a group of four outlaws,

including Cully (Rory Calhoun). Later, all six wind up at a desert way station, where Cully catches Lolly in a disturbing kiss. What happens at the 26 minute mark is extraordinary. In a nocturnal storm, Lolly, unable to sleep and dressed in a white cotton slip, moves through the store in a choreographic manner, pausing by a line of rain leaking from the roof and touching her face with the water, then goes out to the shed to comfort the horses. Cully follows her. Aroused but uncertain, she retreats shyly, then kisses him happily, then withdraws fearfully as he becomes more ardent, then, regretful after she throws a pitchfork at him, comes into his arms with abandon in a riveting rainswept embrace. Cut to Simon and a tense resolution, followed by a coda which finds Lolly back at the window looking out as she was when the sequence began. In just over six minutes and 37 shots, this lyrical love scene in an obscure programmer from Universal-International describes the moment of sexual awakening in a young woman with matchless intensity and insight, a fine cinematic suppleness, and a rare command of mood. The brilliant direction is by actor Richard Carlson, who realized only a few movies but here created one of cinema's most erotic sequences. As for Colleen Miller, who plays Lolly with such affecting naturalness and vibrancy, at least one viewer who saw *Four Guns To The Border* on first release is still enamored of her.



Lolly (Colleen Miller) and Cully (Rory Calhoun) in *Four Guns to the Border*.

9. Catherine (Jenny Agutter) in *China 9, Liberty 37* (1978). In her yearning spirit, she might be an older sister to Lolly, but Catherine is married, and the story describes an interlude in her life—after Clayton Drum (Fabio Testi), a gunfighter hired by the railroad, chooses not to kill her husband Matthew (Warren Oates), she stabs Matthew in the back and runs away with Clayton. Director Monte Hellman's portraits of women can be harsh, but *China 9, Liberty 37* reveals what's really in his heart. The warmth and sympathy with which he realizes Catherine—glowingly interpreted by Jenny Agutter—is everywhere evident: in her captivating "Red River Valley" duet with sister-in-law Barbara (Isabel Mestres) at a family picnic, in her little girl happiness watching a circus rehearsal, in the laughter she shares later with the husband she thought she had killed, and in sad, intimate exchanges with Clayton during the most beautiful stretch of the film, the lovers' last night together. The romanticism of *China 9, Liberty 37* was antithetical to the cynicism of the 70's Western; sadly, it went virtually unreleased in America.

8. Kathleen (Maureen O'Hara) in *Rio Grande* (1950). The last film in John Ford's beloved cavalry trilogy registers the same finely shaded complexity of feeling about the processes of history as its predecessors while narrowing to an intimate focus on three members of a family broken apart. The estranged wife of a devoted-to-duty but affectingly vulnerable Lt. Col. Kirby Yorke (John Wayne) and protective mother of a still soft but very determined tooper, Jeff (Claude Jarman, Jr.), Kathleen is like them a character of mingled qualities and attitudes. Too proud of her Southern past but rightfully demanding her deep feelings for it be acknowledged and still in love with her husband but also profoundly let down by his failures within their marriage, this is a woman seen whole. It's hard to convey the singular way she inclines her head toward Kirby, in a quiet rush of feeling unobserved by him, when the regimental singers serenade the two with "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen," or her sly look as she wirts her parasol during the concluding "Dixie." The entire presentation of Kathleen is studied with this kind of behavioral beauty. Ford here paired O'Hara with Wayne for the first time, and the palpable chemistry between them not only makes for a stirring love story but enhances both of their characters even when they are not together on screen.

7. Thorley (Teresa Wright) in *Pursued* (1947). Screenwriter Niven Busch gave his stories a basis in modern psychology and linked them to the great dramas of antiquity, and like director Raoul Walsh, he was one of the first to thrive when the post-war Western turned to specifically adult subjects. Here, because of a forgotten traumatic event in his childhood, Jeb Rand (Robert Mitchum) is so reticent and passive that he ends up taking actions he would not choose. By contrast, his adoptive sister Thorley moves decisively through the narrative at every turn, even if wrongly at times—her feelings are always open and projected with an admirable intensity. The differing but complementary registers in which Wright and Mitchum play contribute much to a sense of these characters and their unusual relationship, and they are alike in radiating sincerity. *Pursued* is deepened even more by the genre's most imposing, complex mother—Judith Anderson played Medea around this time and one feels Euripides himself would have liked her Ma Callum. Women in Westerns are often fig-

ures of light, but here Ma shadows the action in an unhappy way; her climactic action finally links her in a positive way to her daughter, giving extra dimension to a final image which finds a Walsh couple riding away, not into the sunset, but out of the darkness.

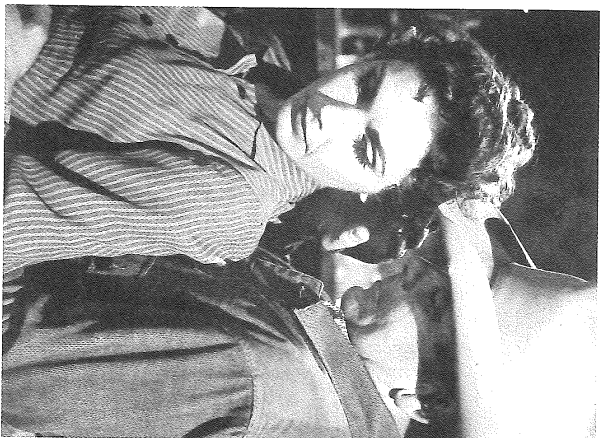
6. Callie (Lee Remick) in *These Thousand Hills* (1959). Made when the genre had reached a peak of refinement and emotional suppleness, *These Thousand Hills* is representative of how the Western at its most mature could still do everything it needed to do with the basic archetypes. Here, a warm and open dance hall girl and a ladylike banker's niece are both present in the melancholy character study of a flawed hero, Lat (Don Murray), cowhand turned powerful rancher. Callie is the dance hall girl and sometime prostitute who falls in love, and the sequence in which she takes Lat home is beautifully observed; though he wants her, he's too reluctant about it to stray, and her realization that she is the more sophisticated of the two and has found a different kind of man than she's used to is perceptively played by Lee Remick, who uses the moment to artfully signal her character's dimensionality. Once the affair does begin, Callie finances his start, but the sexually troubled Lat marries Joyce (Patricia Owens), who appears to be as repressed as he is, and in his puritanism pulls away from his best friend Tom (Stuart Whitman) as well as from Callie. Finally, he does defend Callie by fighting Jehu (Richard Egan), her jealous and brutal tormentor, but this ends with Callie shooting Jehu in the back to save Lat's life. That moment is the film's true emotional climax—as Callie looks at Lat, her face shows the sad knowledge that she has given away all she is out of love for a man who could never really respond in kind, but that her own nature made no other choice possible. *These Thousand Hills* does not play as downbeat despite its subject, a tribute partly to Alfred Hayes' fine adaptation of A. B. Guthrie, Jr.'s novel but even more to the direction of Richard Fleischer, who finds just the right tone to unite action and landscape with a reflective treatment of relationships.

5. Denver (Joanne Dru) in *Wagon Master* (1950). Worldliness and unapologetic sexuality may go hand in hand with the saloon girl archetype, which traveling show-girl Denver fits at least visually, but John Ford neatly dissolves the difference between archetypes with this character, who, however different in style and experience, is as much a down-to-earth girl looking for love with one of the two heroes, Travis (Ben Johnson) and Sandy (Harry Carey, Jr.), as her Mormon counterpart Prudence (Kathleen O'Malley). Joanne Dru is wonderfully alluring in the role, fleshing out the character with an uncommon subtlety—she surely has no more than twenty lines of dialogue in the whole movie. With a knowing look or in confident but oddly awkward movement, Denver displays a natural eroticism as well as an appealing blend of vulnerability and resilience, never more than in the magical scene in which Travis proposes to her: she reacts with an inarticulateness equal to his, stumbles as she moves away from him, and then is seen in close-up riding away on the back of a wagon, her eyes reflecting her thoughts as she smokes a cigarette in provocative reverie.

4. Emmy (Felicia Farr) in *3:10 To Yuma* (1957). In the little town of Bisby on a

near-still, sun-baked afternoon, within a saloon given a special ambience by Charles Lawton, Jr.'s moody black-and-white images and George Dunning's haunting music, one of those erotic encounters which always have a special charge of feeling in the Western takes place, and this one—between Emmy, sad but sweet young barmaid with brown eyes, and Ben Wade (Glenn Ford), a ruthless outlaw who is tender with women—stands by itself in lyricizing the quiet yearnings of the day and evoking how much the experience of an hour can play into the essence of one's self and one's whole life. The last of three appearances by Felicia Farr in the Westerns of Delmer Daves is the shortest but most memorable—a singular portrait of a romantic sensibility seeking expression on a lonely frontier. Emmy is the character who shows most affectingly how well the two archetypes can merge in one appealing young woman—in looks, dress, and manner she seems in every way the wholesome good girl, yet in conversation with Ben, she happily acknowledges that she once sang at the Blind Irishman in Dodge City; the saloon girl has come to a dryer climate for her health. But there's no one to sing for in Bisby, just a chance for a moment of love and a memory. For all its brevity, the sequence is so suggestive that one almost feels one has seen the character's own journey retraced. Daves seems acutely aware of this, punctuating its end with a loving flourish: he cranes up as the stagecoach carrying the captured Ben leaves town, cuts to a reverse angle—craning down and facing a solitary Emmy who stands in the middle of the street watching, then cuts back to the first shot—from overhead and behind Emmy as the coach disappears amidst dust swirls in the distance.

5. Alice (Leora Dana) in *3:10 To Yuma*. With two great heroines to its credit, *3:10 To Yuma* takes pride of place here. Made in the genre's best decade, it's as close to perfection as any Western, with a screenplay by Halsted Welles at once concise and allusive, and masterly direction by Daves. Its subject is the natural order of things and how it both challenges and nurtures relationships between men and women, especially in marriage. As drought is the central visual metaphor, marriage is the motif—it's in the central relationship between ranching couple Alice and Dan Evans (Van Heflin), in the honeymoon suite in Contention City where Dan and his prisoner Ben wait for the train, and even in the amusing exchange in which a hotel clerk (Guy Willerson) and outlaw Charlie Prince (Richard Jaeckel) wonder why wives run off. It's also the relationship Ben and Emmy will never have; and the connection between the two couples, stable but dispirited husband and wife with two sons, and free-spirited but drifting outlaw and barmaid—nicely underlined in a scene where, for a few moments, the captive Ben charms Alice too—is vital to the whole. The two women resemble each other, giving continuity to the suffusion of female energy which is felt throughout, but the film can invest more in Alice, whose sorting out of priorities is so eloquently felt in Dana's superb performance, because for all that she and Dan are a couple in crisis, she travels with him spiritually throughout these tense hours. The action builds to a natural miracle, and the powerful images of both drought and rain—from opening crane shot which begins on parched earth and moves up into a pale sky to final shot of the train rushing through the pouring rain on its way to Yuma—show in the purest way why a subject like this one can achieve fullest expression in a Western. The metaphor is so unstrained, so naturally poetic, and so perfectly attuned



"Two great heroines": Emmy (Felicia Farr) with Ben Wade (Glenn Ford), and Alice Evans (Leora Dana) and her husband Dan (Van Heflin) in 3:10 to Yuma.

to the relationship. Daves' ultimate crane shot—moving up from an overhead view of Alice as she gazes rapturously up at Dan passing on the train, the rain pouring down on her face—not only provides the unifying stylistic moment but instills in the film a profound eroticism which traverses the space between temporarily separated husband and wife and imbues their sustained love with uncommon emotion.

2. Jill (Claudia Cardinale) in *Once Upon A Time In The West* (1968). An awesome heroine, Jill, rather than three strongly realized male characters, is the expressive central presence of this operatic Western. In her unusual relationships with each of the men and in the way her personal odyssey intersects the playing out of the greater myth of the frontier, this prostitute who has married and come West to share in a vision of the future and who must then begin again is arguably the single character to show most effectively how a woman can be placed in the genre in a transfiguring way. Compare this film to director Sergio Leone's three previous "male" Westerns: texture and tone—and even Ennio Morricone's music—are completely different, as a sardonic attitude transforms into a gentle humor, violence becomes less pervasive and more purposeful, and irony gives way to an expansive romanticism.

1. Hallie (Vera Miles) in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). The Western's best heroine may seem prosaic. In the flashback of her younger days which makes up most of this film, she works in a restaurant, must learn to read and write, and wears only a few costumes (albeit designed by Edith Head). Yet this is the kind of character many artists dream of creating, unaffected but evocative of a whole world: Without bravura but with quiet daring, John Ford here deals out his best cards from the top of the deck—the communion on a buckboard of an older Hallie and ex-town marshal Link Appleyard (Andy Devine) as they ride out to a burnt-out house and look at the cactus roses takes place within the first ten minutes, yet it has the emotion of the whole film behind it. As exquisite as anything in cinema, the sequence benefits from its simplicity, grave pacing, concise dialogue, the sublime acting of Vera Miles and Andy Devine, and the wistful Ann Rutledge theme of Alfred Newman, but most of all from a cut to a different, slightly lower angle of the same two-shot that occurs



"The Western's best heroine": Vera Miles as Hallie in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, returning with her husband Ranse (James Stewart) to Shinbone, greeted there by Link Appleyard (Andy Devine).

between Link's line "There's his house down there... what's left of it... blossoms all around it" and Hallie's "He never did finish that room he started to build on, did he?" The cut is almost invisible, yet in a moment quiet, intimate, personal feelings become elevated, heroic, transcendent—it's a stroke of genius comparable to what one would expect of a Bach or a Rembrandt in their late works. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is about many things, all consciously drawn from the motifs of the genre, but most of all it is about a woman between two men, of how her feelings for each man answers a deep part of herself and so can never be dispelled, and how the tragic irresolution has pervaded her life and theirs as well. What is so admirable about Hallie is not her sadness but that she bears the choice she made with such grace and dignity. In this, she is profoundly suggestive of the heroine (Nina Pens Rode) of a work far from the Western, *Gertrud* (1964, directed by Carl Dreyer)—which *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* anticipates by two years—and the affinities of the two films are indeed great, in specifics like the even, incantatory line readings and old age makeup of the respective framing scenes and epilogue, and beyond into the bold stylization and uncommon soulfulness of each. Finally, though, Hallie is firmly of her world, the prairie flower blossoming through all the seasons: "It used to be a wilderness . . . now it's a garden." The line evokes the course of her life, but it goes far beyond this, resonating with an empathy for the West rare in any character—for what it was in the past, for what it has become, and for what it may still be someday.

THE COMPETING TUNES OF JOHNNY GUITAR: *Liberalism, Sexuality, Masquerade*

Jennifer Peterson (1996)

Nicholas Ray's eclectic 1954 western *Johnny Guitar* has supported dramatically divergent readings by its critics over the years. American journalists at the time of its release were disappointed by *Johnny Guitar*'s nontraditional use of generic conventions. "It has not only male, but female gunfighters," a writer for the *New Yorker* sneered, declaring: "It was probably inevitable that sooner or later somebody would try to change the pattern of Westerns, but I can state authoritatively that this twist is doomed." *Time* proclaimed it "a crossbreed of the Western with a psychoanalytic case history," while *Commonweal* criticized it for self-parody, "refusing[] to take the script or . . . actors seriously," and *Variety* accused it of having too much "pretentious attempt at analysis."¹ In fact these critics were correct in apprehending the film's revisionism, for Ray indeed set out to challenge convention by making his hero female (and by casting Joan Crawford to play this heroine!) and by turning the paradigmatic western conflict between individual and community into an anti-McCarthyist allegory. What is less perceptible and more symptomatic about the above criticisms is their disapproval of this generic revisionism.² These critics, in fact, represent just the attitudes about convention that I will argue *Johnny Guitar* wants to challenge. Contemporaneous with and in direct contrast to the film's American critical rejection, French New Wave critics applauded it, celebrating Nicholas Ray as an *auteur*, a "poet of nightfall." François Truffaut praised the film as "a Western that is dream-like, magical, unreal to a degree, delirious."³ This positive appraisal demonstrates a concern with poetics and paths rather than aesthetic conventionalism and seems inspired by the film's overinscribed stylistic elements (figh-