

# Cowboys and Comedy: The Simultaneous Deconstruction and Reinforcement of Generic Conventions in the Western Parody

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Almost as long as the Western has existed as a genre in film, there has been a sub-genre of Western comedies to parody the generic conventions inherent in the form. From as far back as the 1920s with Buster Keaton, continuing down to the present with Jackie Chan, the Western has been a target of satire and a rich source for comedy. Comedy relies, to a large extent, on the reversal of expectations. Because of the highly formalized and codified conventions of the Western, it becomes a prime target for reversals of those expectations. By studying a representative sample of Western parodies from the 1940s through 2000, this paper will examine how Western parodies subvert the conventions of the Western in ways that breathe new life into the genre. Although the Western parody undermines the conventions of the archetypal Western, it should be classified as a Western sub-genre. While the Western parody mocks conventions of the Western, it ultimately reinforces them through its acceptance of a shared set of codes.

Although many different definitions have been created for the phenomenon that is the Western film, it is difficult to find one that is comprehensive enough to include the Western parody. Mity describes a Western as a “film whose action, situated in the American West, is consistent with the atmosphere, the values, and the conditions of existence in the Far West between 1840 and 1900” (qtd. in Altman 30). Although this definition is generally appropriate, it becomes somewhat problematic when it is applied to the Western parody. While the geographic localization of the Western in the definition is appropriate, the Western parody does not seem to be consistent with the atmosphere and values of the Western. The Western is a complex set of codes and images, and although the Western parody does not reflect the prevailing dramatic mood of the Western, it does still adhere to the setting and incorporates the codes that constitute the traditional Western even if it is only for comedic and satiric purposes.

## Origins of Western Parody

A parody is a comical imitation of a genre that uses its existing codes to examine the subject in a humorous way. Parody often exists simultaneously in conjunction with satire, but can be distinguished from satire, which is designed more specifically to point out vices, follies, or problems with conventional beliefs while parody is generally more lighthearted. Despite Western parodies’ tendency to undermine or make fun of the codes of the Western, they are still situated within the Western genre. That Western parodies are a sub-genre of the Western is supported by Cawelti’s argument that parodies are an inevitable part of the life cycle of a genre:

One can almost make out a life cycle characteristic of genres as they move from an initial period of articulation and discovery, through a phase of conscious self-awareness on the part of both creators and audiences, to a time when the generic patterns have become so well-known that people become tired of their predictability. It is at this point that parodic and satiric treatments proliferate and new genres gradually arise. (244)

Here Cawelti suggests that genres eventually become stale and new genres arise to take their places. Harries, in a slightly different take on the subject, believes that “film parody can be seen as a source of renewal by breathing new life into worn-out canons without specifically burying that tradition” (123). The continued popularity of the Western and the Western parody seems to indicate that the latter is the case.

It seems obvious that the Western needs to have established generic conventions before those conventions can be parodied. For this to occur, something like the life cycle of the genre that

Cawelti describes must have happened to the Western, and it seems that this progression through the cycle happened quite quickly. The first Western parodies take place early in the history of film. Fenin describes the existence of satires of the Westerns by Mack Sennett and Douglas Fairbanks as early as the 1910s. Buster Keaton was in comedies with Western settings, specifically *The Paleface* (1922) and *Go West* (1925). Laurel and Hardy also got into the Western parody movement in 1937 with their film *Way Out West*. Numerous others have contributed their own Western parodies including: Abbott and Costello in *Ride 'Em Cowboy* (1942); Bob Hope in *Paleface* (1948), *Fancy Pants* (1950), and *Son of Paleface* (1952); and Martin and Lewis in *Pardners* (1956). Fenin describes these films as opportunities for “comedians to go through their established patterns against Western backgrounds” (254). Indeed a look at these films shows that the focus of many of these comedies was on the comedian, rather than a specific focus on making a parody of the genre.

## Parody Goes West

Although the purpose of a Western parody is often to gently satirize the generic conventions of the Western, Western parodies exhibit their own conventions and clichés in that satirization. A representative sample of Western parodies including *Go West* (1940), *Cat Ballou* (1965), *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *Rustlers' Rhapsody* (1985), and *Shanghai Noon* (2000) was chosen for study not only for their variety, but for the similarities between the films as well. This will allow for a more careful study of the conventions that Western parodies use to satirize the Western. This will also show that the Western parody is actually a sub-genre of the Western with its own set of rules and codes.

The Marx Brothers' film, *Go West* is one of the important early Western parodies. Even though the film is still largely focused on the brothers and their comic personas, there is evidence that a more systematic parody of the genre is taking place. Fenin states that the film is “making short work of Western plot and dialogue clichés. Even the inevitable romantic interest was played for its cliché value” (254). Indeed, the film satirizes everything from saloons to shootouts in a very self-conscious style. The basic comic premise of the film lies in a common conflict in Westerns. It is a clash that occurred between Westerners and Easterners when the Easterners came west. Typically the Easterner will stick out because his attitudes and beliefs conflict with the reality of the West. In this case, the Easterners stick out even more because they are the Marx Brothers. The plot is fairly formulaic, centering on a young couple that the brothers help to protect from an unscrupulous saloon owner who wants to strike it

rich by stealing the deed to their land and selling it to the railroad. Far from falling into the clichés of the Western, however, the brothers' satire constantly overpowers and deconstructs the generic conventions. Harpo refuses to shoot or get shot in a showdown; instead he produces a whiskbroom and brushes off his adversary. Although the threat of violence exists in the film, it has no real power over the brothers.

A later and more subtle parody of the Western shows up in the 1965 film *Cat Ballou*. The film is much more serious in its adherence to Western codes than many other Western parodies. It plays up the comic possibilities of the genre, but does not deconstruct the genre as later films like *Blazing Saddles* and *Rustlers' Rhapsody* do. One reason that this film tends to play the Western mostly straight may be that it is an adaptation of a serious novel, *The Ballad of Cat Ballou*, by Roy Chanslor. According to Manchel, the film satirized the Western formula, but still followed “the conventional revenge theme” (134). *Cat Ballou's* father is murdered for not selling out to the railroad and she becomes an outlaw, forming a gang in order to get her revenge. While the film is at times serious, it does not try for the gritty realism of many Westerns. It is still situated firmly within the comic mode.

A good example of this comic restructuring of the Western is the dance scene in the film. While no doubt an homage to John Ford and his dance scenes, the film uses the dance in a very different way. For instance, Ford's sequences tend to interrupt the main narrative in films like *My Darling Clementine* (Pye 194), but in *Cat Ballou* the dialogue and action during the dance forward the plot and set up some important later developments (such as Cat meeting the villainous sheriff for the first time and her enlisting the two inept outlaws to protect her father). In addition, Ford's dance scenes tend to emphasize community and civilization, while the dance scene in *Cat Ballou* ends in a brawl with everyone, including women and children, participating in the violence. This is a clear comic inversion of Ford's established codification of the dance.

The Western parody that is widely considered to be the *magnum opus* of the genre is Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*. The film follows Bart, a black man, as he is elevated from railroad worker to sheriff of a small Western town. The townspeople have demanded a sheriff for protection from outlaws, who are really employees of the railroad company that wants their land. The villains get Bart appointed as sheriff hoping that the racist townspeople would be further disheartened and abandon the town. In the film, Brooks systematically dissects all the clichés of the Western in a deconstructionist attack on its very premises. While an in-depth study of all the techniques that Brooks uses in his satire



Kid Shelleen (Lee Marvin) from *Cat Ballou*.

Courtesy of Photofest.

of the Western would be too lengthy here, it is appropriate to say that he uses every gag and trick in the book and even invents some as he goes along. There are no conventions that are sacred and no joke too easy or too obscure for him to use in his satire. The last extended sequence of the film, in particular, is notable for its deconstruction of the Western and its use of metafilmic inversions. During the final fight scene, the camera pulls back to reveal the studio lot where the film is being shot. The combatants break into other sets and eventually the villain and the two heroes end up in a movie theater watching the film *Blazing Saddles*. After the final shootout, the two main characters watch themselves at the end of the film. Rushing states that the film was “recognized for a while as the final statement of the meaninglessness of the Western myth” (22). As is evidenced by the number of popular and critically successful Westerns and additional Western parodies since *Blazing Saddles*, it seems that the Western continues to prove to be a viable genre.

Perhaps the most unduly overlooked Western parody is Hugh Wilson’s *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*. The film appears to have garnered relatively little critical or popular attention during its release in 1985 and continues to remain relatively obscure in the video market. This is somewhat puzzling since the film is a complex and clever examination and satire of the Western that “specifically targets the ‘singing cowboy’ sub-genre” (Harries 33). There are several possible reasons for the film’s relative obscurity. One reason that the film was not popular could be due to its rather narrow focus. Harries explains that “many viewers might recognize that *Rustlers’ Rhapsody* is a parody of the Western genre, but few may notice its spoofing of a particular sub-genre of the Western – the ‘singing cowboy’ Western” (108). Because it so narrowly focuses on this particular (and no longer popular) sub-genre, it seems that many viewers would not be able to appreciate the subtle undermining of generic conventions particular to the “singing cowboy” Western. An in-depth examination of how *Rustlers’ Rhapsody* satirizes this sub-genre is in order.

*Rustlers’ Rhapsody* follows Rex, the clean-cut singing cowboy, as he protects shepherders from cattlemen and the railroad company. The film identifies itself with the “singing cowboy” sub-genre by introducing the hero, “Rex O’Herlihan the Singing Cowboy.” This is his moniker throughout the film. He introduces himself as “Rex O’Herlihan the Singing Cowboy” and even signs a letter home to his mother as “The Singing Cowboy.” The opening voice-over narration also specifically references the “singing cowboy” movies. The simplistic and clear-cut conventions of the “singing cowboy” movies are central to the film. There is no trace of the later development of the

Western anti-hero with his questionable morals. Rex is as clean-cut and squeaky-clean as any Boy Scout and adheres closely to Gene Autry’s “Ten Commandments of the Cowboy”:

1. A cowboy never takes unfair advantage—even of an enemy.
2. A cowboy never betrays a trust.
3. A cowboy always tells the truth.
4. A cowboy is kind to small children, to old folks and to animals.
5. A cowboy is free from racial and religious prejudices.
6. A cowboy is helpful and when anyone is in trouble he lends a hand.
7. A cowboy is a good worker.
8. A cowboy is clean about his person and in thought, word and deed.
9. A cowboy respects womanhood, his parents and the laws of his country.
10. A cowboy is a patriot. (qtd in Rushing 18)

Examples of Rex’s adherence to this code are numerous. He never draws first, even when his life is in danger. He only shoots bad guys in the hands. (His target practice consists of shooting wooden cutouts of hands holding guns.) He helps out others even when it means telling the bad guys that they could hurt each other when they surround him and threaten to shoot him. He is even seen rescuing a cat from a tree. Rex is also a clean and snappy dresser who does his own washing and ironing and has a wagon that serves no other purpose but to carry his prodigious and immaculately clean wardrobe. He, in short, embodies all the ideals of the good cowboy in a highly exaggerated manner.

The hero’s relationship to the villain is also simplistically portrayed, as in earlier Westerns. Fenin describes the cliché which is being satirized in *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*: “In these films, the hero battles outlaws (bank robbers, cattle rustlers, stagecoach bandits) simply because good must fight evil—and triumph. Motivation for both sides is simple and clear-cut” (31). The humor in the

film relies on the fact that not only the audience, but also the characters in the film are aware of the generic clichés that control the action. Characters are introduced as “the town drunk,” “the evil cattle baron,” “the prostitute with the heart of gold,” and the like. Rex states that each Western town is identical, and to prove his point he tells the town drunk that they have “a very pretty, but somehow asexual schoolmarm.” Rex’s knowledge, of course, shocks the drunk, but shows Rex’s awareness of and subordination to the codes of the Western.



Rex O’Herlihan, The Singing Cowboy from *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*.

Courtesy of Photofest.

Rex is not the only one aware of the conventions of the Western. The evil Colonels in the film recognize that they cannot beat Rex because he is good and they are evil. To beat Rex, they decide to hire another good guy, the idea being that the “goodest” good guy will win. Bob Barber, the other good guy, dresses all in white and informs Rex about some of the generic codes of the Western. “In order to be a good guy you have to be a confident heterosexual.” This creates a problem for Rex, because he is not confident in his heterosexuality. He still lives the code of the Western that states: “The frontier hero protects women but does not become too intimately involved with them, lest he lose his individuality” (Rushing 23). Rex suffers from a lack of confidence, but is eventually able to defeat the enemy through his recognition of the conventions of the genre. (He knows that his sidekick always gets killed, so he protects him with a bulletproof vest.) *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*, through its subtle manipulation and reversal of the generic codes of the Western, creates a very effective satire and self-reflexive look at the Western.

Tom Dey’s *Shanghai Noon* is an interesting departure from many of the other Western parodies. Like *Cat Ballou*, it attempts to play the story relatively straight, but is interesting in that it is primarily a vehicle for Jackie Chan’s Kung Fu comedy. It also provides an interesting interaction between the West with one set of conventions and clichés, and the Far East with its own set. It is aware of the Western genre and tends to look at things through the lens of an Eastern perspective. The cultural conflict and interplay is an interesting addition to the Western parody genre.

*Shanghai Noon* also consciously transposes the Western by showing a markedly different landscape from other Western parodies. While ostensibly set in the arid West, the movie was filmed in Alberta, Canada, showcasing green and mountainous landscapes rather than red deserts. This setting combined with the location shooting in the Forbidden City in China lends a very different feel to the film. This film perhaps represents an evolution in the Western parody that treats the Western humorously, but modifies it in a way that breathes new life into the genre.

## The Western Parody as a Sub-Genre

When these parodies are examined together, certain patterns begin to emerge. These patterns indicate that the Western parody is in itself a generic form. Most Western parodies (in the act of mocking Western codes) end up creating their own set of generic codes to which they more or less adhere. In the act of parodying Western clichés, these films tend to reinforce the ideas that are already present in Westerns, but do so in a new way.

One of the most immediate and obvious characteristics that Western parodies share is their reliance on and reference to earlier Westerns. While this is also true in straight genre Westerns, which often refer to specific earlier Westerns, this tendency ap-

pears to be more dramatic in the parody, which, by definition, has to have an existing text to parody. This reference to earlier Westerns takes place in several forms.

## Reliance on Established Western Conventions

One of the most immediately obvious references to earlier Westerns is in the title of the films. Each of the films studied somehow refers to an earlier Western film, often in a comedic way. *Go West*, as mentioned earlier, takes the same title as a Buster Keaton film and notably refers to Horace Greeley’s famous quote “Go West young man.” The title from *Cat Ballou* came from the book on which it was based, *The Ballad of Cat Ballou*. *Blazing Saddles* is a deliberately strange juxtaposition of words from other titles. It could be referring to any of a number of earlier films including *Blazing Arrows* (1922), *Blazing Barriers* (1937), *Blazing Six Shooters* (1940), *Blazing Across the Pecos* (1948), *Hearts and Saddles* (1917), *Empty Saddles* (1936), *Songs and Saddles* (1938), or *Saddles and Sagebrush* (1943). *Rustlers’ Rhapsody* harkens back to many early Western titles, three of which are particularly similar: *Rustlers’ Ranch* (1926), *Rustlers’ Roundup* (1933), and *Rustlers’ Ransom* (1950). *Shanghai Noon* is a reference to Fred Zinnemann’s *High Noon* (1952). The title *Shanghai Noon* not only conjures up images of Zinnemann’s landmark Western, but also emphasizes the cross-cultural dynamics that the film presents.

In addition to borrowing titles, Western parodies borrow settings and numerous conventions which they appropriate and transform for comedic purposes. In doing this, they reinforce the conventions and their presence as central elements of the Western. Tudor argues that such conventions are necessary for the humor of the Western to work (5-6). He describes a sequence from *Cat Ballou* where Lee Marvin’s character transforms himself from a drunk to a classic gunfighter. “Starting very humorously with Marvin struggling into a corset, the transformation not only alters him but brings out a response in us as piece by piece the stereotyped image appears” (6). One way in which generic conventions are transformed is by exaggeration. They become so extreme that they become humorous.

Another method for the satirizing of conventions is to demythologize them. Cawelti explains this process by describing how “a situation that we are ordinarily accustomed to seeing in rather romanticized terms can be suddenly invested with a sense of reality. This is how the famous campfire scene in *Blazing Saddles* operates” (236). The campfire scene becomes humorous because the Western convention of the campfire is serene, often accompanied by the lonely sound of a harmonica. In Brooks’ film, however, he recognizes that the evening meal would have probably consisted of beans and exaggerates the effect of those beans on the characters’ digestive systems. Because viewers ex-

pect the typical camp scene, but are greeted with the sound of flatulence, the situation becomes comic. The humor from the reversal is, no doubt, augmented by the uncomfortable laughter that flatulence jokes traditionally receive.

Many of the Western conventions are satirized in the Western parody. Among the most important in both the Western, and consequently the Western parody, is the classic shootout. Violence is a central element in the Western and continues to be one in the Western parody.

“But it is hard to think of a western in which there is at least no threat of violence. [. . .] Because the guns are there as part of the formal structure, there will be, characteristically, a dilemma that either can only be resolved by violence or in which the violence would be a solution” (Buscombe 16). In the Western parody, however (as an exaggerated version of the invincibility of the Western hero), the violence is typically much less threatening to the heroes because of its comic treatment. The shootout is, of course, the climactic representation of this violence:

At a certain mystical point in the interaction between two opposing forces, the western version of the duel becomes morally acceptable; both the villain and the hero know immediately when this point comes, as they do not exist as psychological entities apart from the code—rather, they embody the code. (Wright 43)

An examination of the Western parody’s treatment of the duel will reveal how this sub-genre deconstructs while simultaneously reinforcing this convention.

*Go West* provides Harpo, the silent Marx brother, an opportunity to get into a duel with the villain. They square off in typical fashion, but when they pull their weapons, Harpo has a small whiskbroom which he uses to brush the dust off of his adversary. Then, in typical Marx Brothers fashion, as a topper, the brush



Campfire scene from *Blazing Saddles*.

Courtesy of Photofest.

fires off a round of ammunition. Mel Brooks uses the shootout to defeat the villain. Although the death scene is played up for its comic effect, it still represents the victory of the good over evil and determines



Marx Brothers *Go West*.

Courtesy of Photofest.

the outcome of the film. Rex’s character defeats the other good guy in the final shootout of *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*. During the shootout it is revealed that the other good guy is, in reality, a bad guy, thus reinforcing the notion that the good guy always wins the shootout.

The shootout in *Shanghai Noon* is a bit more complex. There are actually two major shootouts between the cowboy Roy O’Bannon and his nemesis Marshall Nathan Van Cleef. The first is interrupted by Chan’s character, Chon, who throws a

sheriff’s badge like a Chinese throwing star into the Marshall’s hand. O’Bannon complains about this interruption of the duel because he recognizes that a code of the West has been violated. The Chinese character’s interruption of the shootout emphasizes the interaction and cultural conflicts that this film tries to portray. The second duel occurs at the end of the film. While the action leading up to this shootout is also comic, the shootout definitively defeats the Western bad guy. (The Eastern bad guy is defeated in an extended Kung Fu battle.) In these films, the shootout is parodied, but ultimately plays a crucial role in the outcome of the plot. Thus the convention of the shootout is simultaneously undercut and reinforced.

Each of the films has the railroad as an important part of the plot, usually associated with the villain. *Go West* and *Blazing Saddles* are centered on a piece of land through which the railroad is going to pass. The heroes in both *Cat Ballou* and *Shanghai Noon* are train robbers and the final climactic scene in *Go West* is a chase involving a train. In *Rustlers’ Rhapsody* one of the evil Colonels is bringing the railroad to town and the Chinese villain in *Shanghai Noon* is also a railroad baron. Again these elements are typical of Westerns and the parody uses these conventions in mostly conventional ways, reinforcing its adherence to the Western generic code.

## Riding Off Into the Sunset

Typically, these films have the hero or heroes riding off into the sunset, the traditional exodus of the cowboy when justice has been served. The ending in *Shanghai Noon* is conventional. Roy and Chon ride off into the setting sun although they are ostensibly after some train robbers. The ending was included specifically to conform to the genre since there is no plot or theme-mandated reason for them to ride off into the sunset. The ending of *Cat Ballou* also has the gang riding off into the sunset, this time to escape to freedom. Cat and her love interest, Clay, lie together in the back of a hearse wagon as they ride into the distance. Rex points out the sunset and comments on how great it is at the end of *Rustlers’ Rhapsody*. He must not get too attached to the people and must go on to do good elsewhere. Wilder and

Little's characters in *Blazing Saddles* are similarly motivated to leave at the end of the film. They mount their horses and ride down the hill where they are met with a limousine. The limousine then drives them out into the setting sun.

## Conventions of the Western Parody

Western parodies will go a great deal further than borrowing conventions from the Western. In order to ensure authenticity or tie themselves more tightly to the drama they will often use sets, costumes, and even actors from other Western films. Parts of *Cat Ballou*, for instance, were filmed on the same set as *High Noon* (Callan and Hickman). *Rustlers' Rhapsody* employs a similar technique to associate the film with its Western antecedents. "One of the frontier sets utilized was originally built by Sergio Leone in Almeria, Spain almost twenty years prior for his own series of 'spaghetti Westerns'" (Harries 43). Both *Blazing Saddles* and *Rustlers' Rhapsody* have a character that is an imitation of Marlene Dietrich's can-can singing character in *Destry Rides Again* (Harries 45, 47) and *Rustlers' Rhapsody* also clothes Rex's sidekick in "Smiley Burnett's sidekick outfit from the early Roy Rogers film, *Under Western Stars*" (Harries 47).

Western parodies also tend to cast many Western genre actors to ally themselves more closely with the Western and sometimes use those similarities for comic purposes. John Carroll and Robert Barrat from *Go West* each had appeared in several Westerns. Lee Marvin, Arthur Hunnicutt, and Bruce Cabot from *Cat Ballou* all had many roles in serious Westerns under their belts. Slim Pickens from *Blazing Saddles* is also a very familiar face in the Western. *Rustlers' Rhapsody* does some interesting things with this idea. Bob Barber is played by John Wayne's son, Patrick Wayne. His presence conjures up the memory of his father who is, in many ways, synonymous with the Western. Jackie Chan's character in *Shanghai Noon* is named "Chon Wang" which is pronounced almost identically to "John Wayne." His partner Roy says that this is a terrible name for a cowboy, providing a nicely ironic moment. One of the villains in *Shanghai Noon*, Marshall Nathan Van Cleef is a homage to Lee Van Cleef, another familiar icon in the Western.

Western parodies also tend to follow a convention of establishing the humorous tone of the film early on, usually in the opening credit sequence. *Go West* opens with a title quoting Horace Greeley's famous phrase "Go West Young Man, Go West." The subtitle states "This is a story of three men who made Horace Greeley sorry he said it." *Blazing Saddles* opens with the burning of the Warner Brothers logo symbolizing how it will burn or destroy all Western clichés (Harries 61). The opening to *Rustlers' Rhapsody* starts in black and white, but then has a jarring change to color and a comic turn of events when the bad guys that Rex is chasing turn around and start chasing him.

Most of these films also use a comic technique that dissociates the film with its Western conventions and makes the viewer aware of its construction as a film. The introduction of anachronistic elements (or elements from outside of the film's historical period) to the film or to the dialogue calls attention to the conventions by associating them with chronologically disparate elements. Harries explains this phenomenon: "Through the method of inversion, parodic dialogue can be created by inverting the syntactic time period and the lines delivered to generate a heightened level of historical disjuncture" (58). In other words, by introducing elements to the films that do not belong in its historical time frame, the film establishes its non-realistic and comic nature.

Groucho Marx in *Go West* dances in a style much later than the Western era to which he supposedly belongs. He also makes references to filmic conventions: "Any resemblance between these two characters and living persons is purely coincidental." He even refers to events in the future. "Telephone? This is 1870. Don Amici hasn't invented the telephone yet." (This line refers to *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* which came out the previous year and starred Don Amici as Bell.) *Blazing Saddles* has numerous examples of anachronisms. Harvey Korman's character, Hedley Lamarr (a reference to actress Hedy Lamarr, in itself an anachronism), hires a group of thugs to drive out the townspeople. This group includes Hell's Angels and Nazis. He also makes reference to the possibility of getting an Academy Award for best supporting actor. The film contains many other anachronisms too numerous to mention here.

*Rustlers' Rhapsody* also employs anachronisms for comic purposes. The town Rex goes to does not conform to the stereotypical Western town name, but instead is called "Oakwood Estates," a very modern suburban sounding name. Rex, at one point, reminds his sidekick that he holds the copyright on his theme song.

The music in Western parodies is often comic and many times anachronistic. Sheriff Bart, in *Blazing Saddles* has a jazz theme played by an orchestra in the middle of the desert and the townspeople sing commentary on the movie, complete with profanity, as one of their church hymns. In *Rustlers' Rhapsody*, Rex eats a hallucinogenic root and imagines back-up singers and instruments which appear on the soundtrack. *Cat Ballou* includes two balladeers who, like a Greek chorus, sing a commentary on the action of the film.

Closely related to the anachronisms of the films are their self-reflexive qualities. Each of the films is highly aware of the generic conventions of the Western and often openly acknowledges them. Harvey Korman's character at one point in *Blazing Saddles* states, "I hate that cliché." Sheriff Bart's plea for help by stating "You'd do it for Randolph Scott" not only connects the film with a high profile Western actor, but also shows Bart's awareness of the genre he is in and its construction as a film. Within the context of the film he is aware that he is an actor in the same way

that Randolph Scott is an actor, and that they are both playing in a Western film. Rex in *Rustlers' Rhapsody* keeps repeating, "Believe me I know," because he is intimately aware of the conventions of the Western. He seems to have a sixth sense that allows him to know when he is going to have a showdown with the bad guys, and that sixth sense is his intimate knowledge of the genre.

In addition to all the generically specific techniques that these films use for comedic purposes, the films also rely heavily upon cross-genre comedic techniques. Several of the films use fast motion projection to capture the comedic image of early silent films. They often use traditional build up of jokes, reversals of expectation, non-sequiturs, and witty word play. All of these elements are non-genre specific tools in the parody of the Western, but, nevertheless, indicate a pattern or set of conventions in the Western parody.

The Western parody mocks the codes and conventions of the Western. Nevertheless, in the act of subverting those conventions and calling attention to their constructedness, the Western parody creates its own set of conventions that are closely allied to and often rely heavily upon the conventions of the Western. The Western parody admits that the paradox of a code that is arbitrary, but nevertheless binding, is inherently humorous. This satiric attitude however does not let it stray too much from the generic form. Whether the cowboy rides off into the sunset on a horse or in a limousine, he still rides off into the sunset.

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