

READING AGAINST GENRE: CONTEMPORARY WESTERNS AND THE  
PROBLEM OF WHITE MANHOOD

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

August, 2013

Nashville, Tennessee

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For my families, the one I was born into  
and  
my chosen family who chose me back

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Vanderbilt's English department showed great confidence in me by investing in my career for the last five years, and the added boost of a semester's teaching relief was exactly what I needed to complete this project. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the insistent confidence and curiosity of my advisor, Michael Kreyling. Throughout this rather tortured process, he has been every metaphor for stability and calm that a graduate student could hope for: a port in storm, a lighthouse in fog, rock impervious, somehow, to the erosive effects of time and wind and water. Many thanks to my committee members, Dana Nelson, Paul Young, and Sarah Igo, whose doors were always open for conversations about white men and their feelings and who helped pry loose the ideas buried beneath the rubble of writer's block.

My writing group with Matt Duques, Elizabeth Barnett, Chris Pexa, and Nikki Spigner was awesome. Y'all's patience and feedback and support and cheerleading and, in particular, Matt's regular requests that we meet, kept me in the race.

I am most grateful to my chosen family. Katie Kelly was steady, though not very tall, and helped me slog through the longest distance with great patience and love. My friends, my many amazing friends—Nikki, Deborah, Destiny, Diana, Matt, Sarah K., Sarah N., Shannin, Letitia, Monte, Elizabeth B., and so many others—thank you for your love and support, especially in the final sprint.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my niece, Mariah, my nephew, Makii, and the awful dogs I call my own, Chuck and Puppies, for giving me a reason to wake up and do something with my life.

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## INTRODUCTION

What happens when an Irish-Nebraskan hotelier and his family host a cowboy, an Easterner, and an anxious Swede during a snowstorm? The situation of Stephen Crane's 1899 short story "The Blue Hotel" initially sounds like the setup to a bad joke, but the narrative that evolves from this situation is decidedly unfunny. From the moment he walks into the hotel, the Swede fears the other men plan to kill him simply because this is the West. When he supposes that "there have been a good many men killed" in the hotel, the men in the common room greet his supposition with confusion. He then accuses the Easterner and the cowboy of plotting to kill him, and he fears Scully, the owner, means to poison him. His accusations generate confusion among the men until the Easterner realizes that "this man has been reading dime novels and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it—the shootin' and stabbin' and all." As the cowboy knows, however, Nebraska in 1899 is not "*out West*"; it's civilized place (106).

After surviving one card game and an encounter with Scully, the innkeeper, in a darkened bedroom, the Swede realizes he is in no imminent danger and instantly transforms into a bully. He rightfully accuses the innkeeper's son, Johnny, of cheating at cards, the two men engage in a ferocious brawl and the Swede emerges victorious. When innkeeper, Scully, the cowboy, and the Easterner band together and refuse to engage with the Swede, he packs his valise and makes the trek into town where he stops at the local saloon. There, he again provokes the men in the bar, ordering them to fraternize with

him, and when they fail to comply, he forces a small, unassuming man to drink with him. That man then sticks a knife in the Swede's chest.

From the beginning, Crane's story is one of misreading and alienation. New to the West and unsure of what to expect, the Swede relies on information gleaned from dime novels to guide his interactions with the other men. As a result of this faulty framework, the Swede baffles the other men in his company. But he, too, is baffled by the men who do not play their part in the western script. The West that exists inside the hotel is at odds with the construction of the West found in the Swede's dime novels. Instead, of rough and tumble men, he finds a family establishment, where the women stay in the kitchen and the men are content to play a friendly game of cards near the fire. More problematically for the Swede, the hotel's apparent isolation from the town reinforces his assumptions about the hotel as a generically western space.

The misreading doesn't stop once the Swede leaves the hotel because the town is not the dime novel version of the West either. It is a new West, where money and fraternity are deeply intertwined and there is no visible differentiation between types of men. Unlike the hotel, where the Swede begged the reluctant Scully to take his money, the saloon appears firmly entrenched in market capitalism, and the bartender keeps a running tab on the Swede's liquor consumption. Crane draws our attention to the "highly-nickeled cash machine" and the four men playing cards in the back of the room, two town businessmen, the district attorney, and a scrupulous professional gambler. Although the Swede reconfigures his assumptions about western men based on his interactions at the hotel, this reconfiguration cannot account for these less generic forms of white manhood. Though they seem disconnected from the men in the hotel, these men maintain a

communal loyalty to Johnny and Scully, and the Swede's bragging and bullish ways earn him the gambler's knife in his chest.

"The Blue Hotel" provides us with an imperfect but useful schema for how *not* to read white manhood. The Swede repeatedly misreads the men at Scully's hotel because he cannot see past his own assumptions about the West and the type of men who inhabit its forlorn spaces. He is fluent in myth rather than lived experience, and his expectations persist despite mounds of contradictory evidence. Crane initially encourages readers to enact the same kind of misreading by refusing to name his characters beyond ethnicity, work, and region, which keeps the tone of the story at the register of a joke until the moment the Swede is murdered. Beyond the figure of the Swede, however, the story also provides a framework for challenging key assumptions about the western, from the unreliability of genre and archetypes, the role of money in the western, even its own geography and history, to how persons can act in domestic and commercial spaces.

#### RADICAL EMPATHY

In an effort to avoid the Swede's mistakes, I employ bell hooks' theorization of the oppositional gaze in order to analyze the western and white manhood.<sup>1</sup> Black lesbians are not the target demographic for any of the texts under analysis in this dissertation. Consequently, I am under no obligation to "identify with the film's [or text's] imaginary subject," i.e. white men.<sup>2</sup> From my own subject position within dominant American culture, however, I recognize the damaging practice of classifying people by race, class, and sexuality. This practice results in monolithic cultural narratives that elide

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115-131

<sup>2</sup> hooks, 122.

commonalities between groups of people *and* differences within particular groups. In resisting, as hooks argues, the “imposition of the dominant ways of knowing and looking,” I argue that white American manhood operates under generic conventions that obscure the nuances of contemporary white manhood.<sup>3</sup> Arguments that denaturalize race and gender and sexuality are familiar, even naturalized, yet when it comes to straight white men, those arguments seem not to apply. We, and by “we” here I mean American society generally and the academy specifically, are happy to analyze white manhood, occasionally using class or sexual orientation to qualify our observations and arguments, while generally speaking of white men as monolithic. To be sure, white men are complicit in and reify the dominant, normative construction of their manhood. After all, there is privilege, even if it is only ideological, to be claimed. But that doesn’t let us, as thinkers and people in the world, off the hook.

A project that denaturalizes white manhood is both narcissistic and ethical. As a black lesbian poet and critic, I struggle with being seen. That is, sometimes I am seen as black, sometimes as a black woman or black lesbian, other times as a black poet, still other times as lesbian poet. I could go on. None of the labels is “normative,” yet they all come with their own conventions and assumptions. The categorizations and labels that I actively claim are limiting, but even more, I cannot be any of them without being all of them without being any of them. By which I mean, I don’t *actually* know what it means to be, by definition, a black, lesbian, poet, critic. The terms are occasionally useful shorthand, but they don’t say anything about the kind of person I actually am. The ethical component, then, is one of parity. If I am interested in my own intertextuality, then I must

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<sup>3</sup> hooks, 128.

see and try to account for the intertextuality of others. To assume a straight white middle-class man always occupies the tiny triangle at the top of the race/gender/sexuality hierarchy, is to refuse to see that which makes him a person.

The primary aim of this dissertation can be simply summarized as follows: in disaggregating white men's lives from the conventions of white manhood, I argue that we can make a more accurate assessment of the effects of white, heterosexual privilege on "normative" and "non-normative" bodies. More importantly, I want to begin to think about white men as people, and the ways in which manhood works both for and against their (and our) interests. To that end, I contend that whiteness is an ideological structure and white manhood is a material one. Whiteness is the structure that enables white privilege and white manhood is tied to white male bodies that benefit, to varying degrees, from the privileges of whiteness. Whiteness is a structure white men are born into but did not build, and white manhood is a process of negotiating those structures. This dissertation will not valorize or vilify white manhood, but rather it will demonstrate that white manhood is not monolithic. "Normative" or "normal" are dangerous terms. Normativity is a performative category used to oppress those persons who are "abnormal." There is nothing but averages at the center of normativity, and if the most "normative" people simply cannot be "normal," then why use them?

*Reading Against Genre* challenges the simple but persistent assertion that white men do not talk to each other. I turn to the contemporary western as a site of assumed male silence and show that men are talking to each other in private spaces, and talking a lot. Contemporary westerns provide access to men conversing with each other about love, loss, family, and business. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the layers of cinematic and

literary artifice that frame this access indicate the larger cultural importance of these conversations. Undoubtedly, men have always talked to each other, but in a grand failure of imagination the contemporary American narrative of manhood insists that men do not talk about matters of emotional substance. To find, in westerns, imagined conversations between men, requires what Walter Ong calls a restructuring of thought. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong argues that pure orality leaves no trace and little evidence of its existence. The artifice of writing “opens up possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing.”<sup>4</sup> Because written texts must be related, “directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meaning,” we imagine the characters speaking these conversations aloud.<sup>5</sup> The technologies that give readers and viewers access to imagined conversations expand that audience’s ability to imagine real male bodies engaged in conversation with one another.

From this project, then, emerges a strategy of radical empathy. Although I am under no obligation to identify with the subjects of these texts or their intended audience, I find, as reader and spectator, multiple points of identification generated from shared human experience. Reading, as hooks puts it, “against the grain” is the methodology that enables cross-racial, cross-class, cross-historical identification without sacrificing a critical examination of dominant American culture. Westerns and whiteness encourage us to be lazy readers, to see what we expect to see. Why should we accommodate either when neither works as it would have us believe?

#### THE PROBLEM OF WHITE MANHOOD

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1982), 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ong, 8.

Last summer, *The New York Times* hosted a virtual roundtable titled, “Are Modern Men Manly Enough?”<sup>6</sup> Spurred on by concerns about men “spending too much time at the spa and the gym in lieu of grittier, manlier pursuits,” contributors were culled from all corners of the internet to weigh in on this pressing matter. Beneath the titles “Where are the Meat and Potato Men,”<sup>7</sup> “Outliving Our Usefulness,”<sup>8</sup> “Rediscover the Don Draper Within,”<sup>9</sup> “We Need Nuance, Not Lumberjacks,”<sup>10</sup> “Stop the Madness,”<sup>11</sup> “Manly Is a Lifestyle, Not a Look,”<sup>12</sup> “The Fathers Who Need to Man Up,”<sup>13</sup> and “He-Man Hulks Are People Too,”<sup>14</sup> contributors attempted to answer the century-old question about the fraught status of (mostly) white manliness. The bar of manliness against which contemporary manhood is judged seems rooted in a late nineteenth century ideation of how men should look and what they should do. Manliness is imagined in stereotypically corporeal terms, “sweaty, peppery armpits; fistfuls of dark, untamed chest hair”<sup>15</sup>—and in ideological and genealogical terms—“Your dad was manlier than you. His dad was manlier than him. And so on, for all of history back to the Stone Age.”<sup>16</sup> But hope glimmers in two dissenting voices. Mark Simpson argues that the “continued acceptability of this question in regard to men represents a cultural time lag,” and that instead of bemoaning the loss of the traditional man, we should “get used to” men’s

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<sup>6</sup> “Are Modern Men Manly Enough,” *The New York Times*, 12 Jul 2012, web.

<sup>7</sup> Natasha Scripture, a *Huffington Post* contributor.

<sup>8</sup> Marty Beckerman, author of *The Heming Way: How to Unleash the Booze-Inhaling, Animal-Slaughtering, War-Glorifying, Hairy-Chested, Retro-Sexual Legend Within, Just Like Papa!*

<sup>9</sup> Joel Stein, *Time Magazine* columnist and author of *Man Made: A Stupid Quest for Masculinity*.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Simpson, coiner of the term “metrosexual,” and author of *Metrosexy: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Self-Love Story*.

<sup>11</sup> Loni Love, comedian.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Schollossman, contributor to *How to Talk to Girls at Parties*.

<sup>13</sup> Shawn Taylor, author of *The Alphabet for New (and Soon to Be) Daddies, Papis, Babs, Fathers and Old Men: Notes on Contemporary Fatherhood*.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly Turnbull, animator and cartoonist and creator of the really excellent webcomic *Manly Guys Doing Manly Things*.

<sup>15</sup> Scripture.

<sup>16</sup> Stein.

interest in childrearing, emotional health, and domestic chores. Lawrence Schlossman resists the “macho archetypes” that “haven’t changed much,” and encourages men to “be a good guy, a good person,” by being “honest, kind, tolerant, open, intrepid, self-aware, inquisitive, etc,” because these are the qualities that have made “our greatest men (and greatest anyone) great.” The discrete conversations of the manliness “debate” represent two strains of thought about the manhood. The most recognizable strain is the one that turns to manly archetypes in order to understand the problem of men. The other strain suggests that the real question is not about the state of “manliness” but the persistence of anxiety about manliness?

One of the cornerstones of my argument is the contention that traditional white manhood is as much of a construct as the generic West and the masculinities in it. More, the genre of white manhood is one in which the majority of Americans are fluent because it stands as the dominant norm. The scholarly discourse of American manhood from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century tends to focus on middle-class, urban, heterosexual, educated white men, and in doing so, establishes a normative standard against which non-white men are judged.<sup>17</sup> In order to maintain the myth of white manhood as a normative category, the discourse would also have us ignore white men who do not meet the criteria. Poor and working-class white men, gay and bisexual white men, and uneducated white men are often mentioned in passing, and then ignored in favor of analyzing the men who should fit the normative category. The discourse reflects a culture that imagines white manhood solely in traditional terms, and I argue that

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<sup>17</sup> I’m speaking here of the curious tic of the academy in which “manhood” or “masculinity” with no qualifying adjective generally defaults to straight white urban manhood. When non-white, non-urban, non-heterosexual manhoods are the subject of texts, the titles tend to reflect with great specificity the group of men under discussion, whether they are black, Hispanic, Asian, queer, or rural.

these terms form the basis of the myth of white manhood. To bolster these claims, I turn to three historians, E. Anthony Rotundo, Gail Bederman, and Amy Greenberg, all of whom track the shifting terrain of manhood beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth. Together, they dispel the three myths of traditional manhood: that white manhood is monolithic; that white manhood is a stable, closed system; and that white manhood is a natural presentation of manhood rather than a reactive one.

E. Anthony Rotundo's 1993 monograph *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, begins with the assertion that manliness is a "human invention" based on biological differences, yes, but also on "elaborate stories." Rotundo recounts three phases of middle-class American manhood in New England—communal, self-made, and passionate—that came about as responses to cultural and economic changes. Over time, middle-class men's ties to community eroded in the face of a growing market economy, and new emphasis was put on individual achievement, strength, and appearance. Even in this story about middle-class manhood, Rotundo notes that the experience of young men searching for middle-class success did not take the same routes and they didn't all enter into the middle-class. The story that unfolds in *American Manhood* shows how young men in the nineteenth century struggled to navigate the shift from boyhood to manhood, especially in their changing relationships to one another, as they attempted to find and provide nurturing spaces for themselves and one another. From this story emerges the contestation that there is nothing natural or inevitable about white manhood, and that one of its germinal, but seemingly forgotten, characteristics is the ability to adapt to changing times.

In *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (2005), Amy Greenberg suggests that in the middle of the nineteenth century, there existed two types of white manhood that struggled for primacy in the burgeoning U.S. empire. Here, as with Rotundo, white manhood is presented as a reaction to political and cultural times, rather than an intrinsic characteristic of white men. The first type, restrained manhood, refers largely to middle- or aspiring middle-class men, and “was practiced by men in the North and South who grounded their identities in their families, in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith, and in success in the business world,” and valued expertise, domesticity, and “true womanhood.”<sup>18</sup> The second type, martial manhood, “rejected the moral standards that guided restrained men; they often drank to excess with pride, and they reveled in their physical strength and ability to dominate both men and women.”<sup>19</sup> Often, the practitioners of martial manhood struck out into the harsh landscapes of the West and south into Latin America during the greatest period of U.S. expansion, while restrained men sought other, more ideological or institutional, methods of expansion. Greenberg charges the Civil War with the cultural instantiation of restrained manhood as normative after the war, but clearly martial manhood would continue to exist. Like Rotundo, Greenberg demonstrates that the normative category of middle-class white manhood was neither stable nor monolithic, but instead contained men with multiple interests, concerns, and abilities that determined how they moved through the world.

Finally, Gail Bederman demonstrates the contingent position of traditional manhood. Bederman begins *Manliness & Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and*

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Greenberg, 12.

*Race in the United States, 1880-1917* with an anecdote about Jack Johnson's unexpected defeat of white heavyweight fighter Tommy Burns and his subsequent defeat of Jim "The White Hope" Jefferies in 1910. Because the myth of white manhood depended on a belief in the intellectual and athletic supremacy of the white body over all other bodies, Burns' loss of the heavyweight title to a black man, and Jefferies' inability to win it back, had a metonymic effect in which all white men's bodies were made vulnerable. Throughout *Manliness and Civilization*, Bederman shows how white male supremacy relied on narratives that were constantly challenged and revised in the face of cultural, racial, and economic threats.

While these histories do not provide a single comprehensive history of traditional white manhood, they do gesture to the fissures and fictions that are often elided when popular discussion of normative manhood abounds. Histories of the development of white manhood are important because the version of normative manhood that dominates the twentieth century emerges from the crucible of the nineteenth century. They encourage us to acknowledge those disruptions that call into question the integrity of the narrative of white manhood. My dissertation responds to this call by drawing on histories, sociological studies, and literary texts in order to make the rather straightforward argument that normative or traditional white manhood is not and has never been an inhabitable identity, and it certainly does not apply to all white men.

#### WESTERNS AND THE WEST

Contemporary westerns prove analogous to contemporary white manhood in a number of surprising ways. In my rough calculus, westerns : whiteness :: individual texts : white

manhood, where the structures over-determine the reception and the materials disrupt and complicate the structure. Both have changed without anyone seeming to have noticed. Like westerns, the generic conventions of white American manhood were set at the end of the nineteenth century, and during the twentieth century, those conventions have become ingrained in the American imagination.<sup>20</sup> The western genre's archive, its history and reception, over-determines audience expectations of what can happen over the course of the narrative, much as the Swede's literacy in dime novels over-determines what he expects to find in the not-quite-West. As a result, individual texts can resist or refuse generic conventions without disrupting generic expectations and with ambivalent results.

The western depends on audience recognition of the West as wilderness. I contend that classic Hollywood westerns trained audiences in a syntax of images that were then legible in pulp and literary westerns. In the classic Hollywood western, the opening sequence often situates the viewer in the stark, arid landscape of the American desert, visually establishing the geographic and cultural hardships the characters must endure. We are sure there is danger in the hills, perhaps in the form of hostile Indians, and we are also sure that the white male hero will emerge victorious, whatever victory might mean. From the moment we are treated to the extreme long shot of some desert or mountain range, we are enmeshed in a closed system where the cultural construction of wilderness functions as an imagined remnant of the culture that produced it. Unless otherwise indicated, the terms "wilderness" and "the West" mean to account for the many iterations of sparsely occupied landscapes prevalent in the western *and* the cultural expectations, both ideological and geographical that are tied to the space and genre. My

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<sup>20</sup> So much so that I, who had not seen or read a full length western before 2005 or so, knew how they worked.

use of the terms means to suggest that there is no American wilderness without people, and that it can only exist under the aegis of civilization. Thus, when the Swede misreads Scully's hotel as the wild west and the town as a civilized space, his assumptions are based on the proximity of people and buildings to each other. The western's wilderness is both a physical and ideological space, and within the cinematic western, it is layered construction that is mediated through editing and the diegesis in order to suggest a causal relationship between encountering the West and becoming an ideal American.

My argument for the relationship between white manhood and westerns hinges on acknowledging the intrinsic artifice inherent in both. We must contend with the generic conventions of westerns, to be sure, but in order to understand how a contemporary moment manages the "wilderness," we must look to the cultural and technical apparatuses that produce the text. The archive of westerns, as products of industrial popular culture, produce and reproduce a language of images that have come to signify a kind of historical "wilderness."<sup>21</sup> In the nearly one hundred years since the first full length Western film was produced, a popular history of the wilderness has developed that depends on the cinematic language of the exterior extreme long shot to show the landscape as both empty and overwhelming, though still occupied and in the process of being tamed by people. The technology of the cinema mediates the wilderness through images composed by a director, shot through the lens of camera, and projected onto a screen.<sup>22</sup> The process of reproducing the wilderness for popular consumption has two

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<sup>21</sup> I am borrowing Richard Slotkin's term from *Gunfighter Nation*, which accurately describes the cinema, where films are like the artifacts that "are produced primarily by a commercial culture industry but whose symbols become active constituents of a *popular* culture—that is, the belief and value structures of a national audience or public" (9).

<sup>22</sup> My thinking here is informed by Walter Benjamin's discussion of the decay of the aura and film in "Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility," *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4.

effects. First, it naturalizes an idea of wilderness that is disseminated in the highly artificial space of the movie theater. Second, the naturalized wilderness depends on the perceived authenticity of the landscape being filmed, information which often comes to us extra-filmically. The visual accretion of wildernesses has worked to naturalize our conceptions of the western wilderness, be it the aridity of Monument Valley or the verdure of the Tetons. If we imagine the wilderness as untamed, under-inhabited space, and the West as a geographical place defined by landscapes that are rocky and/or arid, we must also acknowledge that our idea of western “wilderness” is a construct. Monument Valley is legible as western wilderness because westerns have taught us to read it as such.

To understand what is at stake in how these films construct the wilderness, and thus civilization, we begin, as we often must when discussing the West, wilderness and frontier, with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).<sup>23</sup> Although historians such as Patricia Limerick, Gerald Nash, and Richard White have refuted or complicated Turner’s nostalgic idealization of the West, I find Turner’s discussion of the frontier ideologically useful in that it clearly articulates a mythology of westward expansion predicated on the inherent right of white men to civilize the wilderness.<sup>24</sup> For Turner, “the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the

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<sup>23</sup> First presented in 1893 at the Chicago World’s Fair, then revised for inclusion in *Frontier in American History* (1921). Here Turner argues that “The most significant thing about the American frontier is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land. In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile,” suggesting that civilization and wilderness hinge on quantity (38-39)

<sup>24</sup> Most notably, see Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* 1987, and *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West*, 2000; Richard Whites’ *It’s your misfortune and none of my own’: A New History of the American West*, 1991, where he never uses the word “frontier”; and *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, edited by Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin feature a number of essays that engage with Turner or take another tack entirely, and features essays by Peggy Pascoe, Limerick, and Donald Worster, who makes note that, “Turner never stopped believing that the old story was literally true. Returning to the wilderness, men could be restored to the innocence of their youth, sloughing off the blemishes of age” (9).

meeting point between savagery and civilization,” where the underlying assumption is that savagery, which he locates in both landscape and peoples, is inevitably tamed by civilization (58). As Turner understands this civilizing process,

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and the Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the condition which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. (39)

It is important to note that the American wilderness is not empty but populated by various indigenous peoples, and it is through interactions with those tribes that European settlers are overwhelmed into a more “savage” state. The wilderness, however, cannot overwhelm the settler forever, and eventually the always-male settler “transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe [...] The fact is, that here is a new product that is American” (39). Turner’s conception of wilderness as a crucible for the development of white American manhood establishes an equation where white male Europeans *plus* nearly any kind of Indian *plus* an “uncivilized” landscape eventually equals an ideal American man. Turner’s wilderness, however, is static; the Indians and the landscape are constants to the variables of whiteness.

Richard Slotkin, too, understands this wilderness/white-American-manhood equation within the context of the American frontier myth. In *Gunfighter Nation*, he argues that conflicts “with the Indians defined one boundary of American identity: though we were a people of ‘the wilderness,’ we were *not* savages.” He goes on to draw a connection between this key component of the myth of western expansion and the myth

of white manhood, arguing that the “‘American’ of the Myth was one who had defeated and freed himself from both the “savage” of the western wilderness and the metropolitan regime of authoritarian politics and class privilege” (11). In the mythology, the white settler’s successful navigation of the wilderness depended on a “‘regression’ to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the ‘metropolis’ can be purged and a new, purified social contract enacted” (14). In the frontier mythology, then, the progression from former city dweller to ideal American is contingent on a regression, characterized by Turner as distinctly Indian in nature, in the wilderness, then, a progression into ideal Americaness. Turner’s “history” and Slotkin’s analysis of the mythology of the American West suggest that by turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the conceptual and physical Western wildernesses were functionally intertwined as a litmus test for a distinct version of white American manhood.

Although this dissertation focuses on spaces that fit a version of the West that hews toward a Turnerian model, I want to stress the important recuperative work of New Western historians that foregrounds the diversity of the West in terms of geographies and people. Doing so further demonstrates the implausibility and fantasy of a coherent space. The watershed moment for New Western history occurred in 1987 with the publication of Patricia Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest*. Other historians picked up the mantle, but Limerick’s argued for a shift in the historical focus on the West from Turner’s construction of the frontier as a process that proceeded in waves and ended in the late 1890s, to a construction that foregrounds the importance of conquest of Western America.<sup>25</sup> For Limerick, Turner’s use of the term frontier limits western history and locks it in the past, while she is very much vested in what happens in the West in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1987), 18.

century. Limerick's definition of the West rejects the claims of aridity and includes diverse geographic spaces that included California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota, as well as Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas. This West, as defined by place, also contained natives and migrants for whom the West was center, not periphery.<sup>26</sup> Her main tenets, that the West was an "important meeting ground" where Indians, whites, blacks, and Asian intersected and mingled; that conquest links these peoples; and that the "evolution of land from matter to property" led to a "contest for cultural dominance," all work to resituate the West within the whole of American history.<sup>27</sup> In pulling together three decades of scholarship and journalism in order to produce a synthetic history of West, Limerick's agenda, to repeat what needed repeating, is clear, and for her, the stakes are very present: the current West is not Turner's frontier, and she's not sure it ever was. She further synthesized her conception of the West in "What on Earth Is the New Western History?" (1991), and her terms are the same as those in *Legacy of Conquest* as she continues to push against Turner.<sup>28</sup> She reiterates the inefficacy of the term "frontier," but "process" is still flexible enough to account for the history of conquest, colonization, exploitation, etc. Echoing her position in *Legacy of Conquest*, she notes that the frontier did not close in 1890, but that the issues at play in the late nineteenth century still have resonance in the twentieth. Her investment lies in the West, and her mission is to restore the nuance and dignity to those who inhabit

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Limerick, 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, ed. by Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, (Lawrence, KS: UP of Kansas, 1991), 81-88.

the place. In *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (2000),<sup>29</sup> Limerick argues, with clarity and power that that the history of the West is continuous, that the West is a place of convergence and conquest, and that history is inextricable from how we understand the land.

Multiple frontiers and points of settlement that often anchor the narrative settings of the westerns in this dissertation are interstitial places, like the titular blue hotel, that suggest the frontier is a contingent space that exists only in relation to the structures of civilization. Instead of an even westward progression, we might imagine civilization as a rock thrown into a pond, with the frontier rippling out and away from the center. The size and the proximity of the town or settlement to other towns, as well as the historical moment in which the town is observed, results in intersecting ripples that create layers of westernness. Westerns reproduce the unevenness of the frontier, and the imagined West can be, simultaneously and across time, Monument Valley on the Arizona/Utah state lines, Fort Smith, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, Nebraska, Montana, and so on.<sup>30</sup> The West, then, is not a static place, nor does it belong solely to the late nineteenth century.

#### GENERIC FABRICATION

Westerns and traditional white manhood are performative modes that require and result in what Judith Butler calls “*fabrications* manufactured through corporeal signs and other discursive means.”<sup>31</sup> While Butler here refers to gender expression, the concept of fabrication can help us understand why westerns and white manhood are so often

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<sup>29</sup> *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West*, (New York: Norton, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Here I am referring to John Ford’s catalog of westerns, Charles Portis’s novel *True Grit* (1968), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2008), *Lonesome Dove* (1985),

<sup>31</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 185.

misread. Thomas Schatz's description of genre accounts for how generic fabrications in westerns function. He argues that in genre films, the characters, setting, and plot, "have prior significances as elements of some generic formula, and the viewer's negotiation of a genre film thus involves weighing the film's variations against the genre's preordained, value-laden narrative system."<sup>32</sup> Through repeated engagement with the genre films, viewers develop expectations "which, as they are continually reinforced, harden into 'rules.'"<sup>33</sup> As result, each successive western speaks back to an enormous archive of print and filmic westerns and cannot be easily disaggregated. The texts are read against each other and accrue meaning or resonance through this practice. This dissertation contends that traditional white manhood and westerns rely on the mechanism of storytelling and rules that develop over time. The traditional requirements of American manhood include compulsory heterosexuality, membership in the middle-class, marriage, family, and consistent employment.<sup>34</sup> The images and rhetoric of traditional manhood form an archive against which men and their actions are read. Few images of this process have been so powerfully used as that of the cowboy.

As an oft-touted member of traditional, all American manhood, the cowboy's inability to enter into the domestic and economic structures that undergird traditional white manhood encodes a productive dissonance into the genre of white manhood. Just as there is no perfect western that fulfills every generic requirement, there is no white man who can meet all the criteria of traditional white manhood, not even the celebrated

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Schatz, 18.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the requirements of this script, see, Steven Nock, *Marriage in Men's Lives*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), Nicholas Townsend, *Package Deal: Marriage, Work, and Fatherhood in Men's Lives*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, (New York: Haper, 2008), and Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

man of myth and legend. Though he maintains the same shape, the mythic cowboy differs fundamentally from the quotidian western man. Left uninterrogated, the mythic American cowboy stands as an imposing figure, for as Guy Garcia asserts:

The American cowboy is stoic, fearless, and self-sufficient. He is an expert horseman and knows how to live off the land. He sleeps under the stars and sings ballads by the flickering campfire. He is equally adept with a branding iron and a gun. He works on ranches and moves with the herds, or wanders from town to town, seeking adventure and dispensing justice. Sometimes he wears a sheriff's star, but the law he most represents is moral, personal, absolute. He speaks bluntly and keeps his word. He will fight for what he believes is right.<sup>35</sup>

Garcia's description reads as a script for the cowboy, but it is clearly one that not all cowboys can follow. Susan Kollins further argues that "the western hero with his rigid code of honor has become saddled with a Boy Scout image."<sup>36</sup> The mythic cowboy is charged with embodying white American ideals, while eliding his own history; he is a descendant of Spanish conquest and inherited the skills and customs of the vaqueros of northern Mexico, the Carib Indians of the West Indies, and Louisiana Creoles and Cajuns, but that history, that plurality is whitewashed.<sup>37</sup> Over time, the iconic cowboy comes to stand as the symbol and agent of manifest destiny, and he connotes a time when men were men, women were women; a time when there were savages to fight, women to rescue, a sunset to ride into, and no need to worry about a paycheck. He is a "restless, roaming, and sublimely lonely" figure who exists at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a figure without a landscape to give him purpose, removed from the time that defines him.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Guy Garcia, *The New Mainstream*, (New York: Rayo, 2004), 141.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Kollins, "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western," *Contemporary Literature* 42.3 (2001): 564.

<sup>37</sup> Garcia, 143.

<sup>38</sup> Barclay Owens, 94.

As wage workers laboring in the isolation of the West, cowboys were often economically unable to enter into the systems that Greenberg, Rotundo, and Bederman outline. In *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture*, Blake Allmendinger argues that cowboys who worked on ranches were excluded from the middle class lifestyle that would allow them the luxury of domesticity. These bachelors did not have access to women, and most visited prostitutes or paramours once a month when they cashed their checks. According to Allmendinger, “they remained temporarily celibate men who dammed their sex drives and unleashed them infrequently.”<sup>39</sup> The cowboy’s economic displacement “took the form of sexual disempowerment not only in the quarrels engaged in by men and women, but also in communities lived in by members of the same male sex. Hence cattlemen economically subordinated cowboys by making them, in effect, sexually nonfunctional.” It would be nearly impossible, then, for a cowboy to ground his identity in family and economic success. In Allmendinger’s account, ranchers hired more single men than married men because they would send these men “away on trail drives, cattle roundups, and extended explorations of range land.” Instead of men more closely aligned with traditional white manhood, they preferred men “who could leave the ranch without disrupting family relationships.” Ranchers provided accommodations for cowboys—“single sex bunkhouses and line camps”—but “made no provisions for married men, who left ranches, moved to town, and tried to commute to work, therein donating to cattlemen only part of their time.”<sup>40</sup> For ranchers, married cowboys were less effective *and* more expensive workers because

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<sup>39</sup> Blake Allmendinger, *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 51.

<sup>40</sup>Allmendinger, 50.

“in addition to dividing their loyalties between family and work, these men needed separate housing to shelter and higher wages to support wives and children.”<sup>41</sup>

Privileging the single men over the married meant privileging the “non-normative” over the “normative.” Their economic and social isolation transformed them into “nonmen,” men who were economically, socially, and biologically non-viable.<sup>42</sup> If, by the end of the nineteenth century restrained manhood was the one, legitimate way to be white and male in the U.S., Allmendinger shows us it would be nearly impossible for a cowboy to attain the social and economic capital necessary to enact that masculine identity.

#### THE WOMEN

Women occupy a disruptive position in the contemporary western. Unlike the women in “The Blue Hotel” who are content to remain in the kitchen until they are needed, many of the women in the texts under analysis in this dissertation resist confinement to the domestic sphere and insist on establishing and maintaining some modicum of financial independence. As with many women characters in westerns, these contemporary figures are either sex workers or wives, or a combination of the two, they are afforded little to no interiority, and rarely speak. However they are diminished in these texts, western women enact an important temporal disruption in the fantasy of the West. When juxtaposed with the fantasy of nineteenth century white manhood, their decidedly late twentieth century concerns about the importance of marriage and entering the workforce exposes the western as a site where late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century male anxieties about

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<sup>41</sup> Allmendinger, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Allmendinger, 68.

changing gender roles are processed. Quite powerfully, the women in these texts have moved on from traditional nineteenth century womanhood and reshaped their lives in such a way that men are no longer necessary but are desirable. The men, however, are left to negotiate the increasingly untenable terrain of traditional white manhood at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter one denaturalizes the core assumptions that the outlaw poses a symbolic threat to virtue and morality within westerns. Instead, the outlaw's key function is as a threat to domestic infrastructure, revealing that westerns are about money. Reframing the integral conflict of the western illuminates the sliding scales of good and evil, where it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between heroes and villains. In *3:10 to Yuma* (Mangold, 2007), *Appaloosa* (Harris, 2008), and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Dominik 2007), the outlaw characters undermine generic constraints by passing as citizens, maintaining homes, and substantive ties to family and communities. I then direct a similarly reoriented gaze toward white manhood in order to demonstrate the relationship between manhood and money that undergirds generic expectations about white men and privilege. The economic instability of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and the distinct shift in the labor market from manufacturing to the service industry, necessitates a fresh look the uneven access white men have to privilege and their subsequent inability to meet generic ideals.

The second chapter takes on the unnoticed cowboys who fill in the western's backdrop. As neither hero nor villain, these men have often been portrayed as flat

characters with little or no interiority. Contemporary westerns challenge this generic assumption by pulling these characters closer to the narrative center and devoting substantive time to these men and their private concerns. The portrait of manhood presented in Annie Proulx's short story "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" (1999), Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* (1983), and Billy Crystal's film *City Slickers* (Underwood, 1991) is diverse and often problematic. These texts depict men within a larger community of men where they talk to each other about moral, emotional, and interpersonal matters, and attempt to negotiate established traditional narratives of manhood. Work and financial matters emerge as key factors in the development and maintenance of men's self-esteem and their desirability as partners. The texts establish the existence and importance of interpersonal communication between men, a move that is at odds with much of the contemporaneous masculinities criticism of the time. I use the three westerns to read against the conceptualizations of manhood that depend more on cultural assumptions and less on men's lived experiences.

In the third chapter, same-sex partnerships take center stage as examples of men's friendships that are nurturing and complex. Historically, partnerships within westerns are not uncommon, but in contemporary westerns, these relationships shift from a hero/sidekick configuration to equal partnership. *Lonesome Dove* and *Appaloosa* return with a focus on the main characters, who reminisce about or try to negotiate the marriage gauntlet. Despite masculinities scholarship's insistence that men are compelled to abdicate or neglect their friendships once married, the partnerships in these texts exist before, alongside, and after marriages. The men in these texts view their partnerships as compatible with rather than threatening to heterosexual relationships.

The final chapter shows what happens when white men attempt to fully embody the generic sketch of the cowboy in the twentieth century. Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1993), Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain" (1999), and *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2007), challenge the strategy of reading against genre in that their main characters appear to conform so closely to the archetype of the cowboy. The seeming coherence between performance and men is a red herring that draws attention away from the emotional complexity of these characters. Only by keeping the lessons of the previous chapters in mind can one enact the practice of empathy with men who, with their entire bodies, erect emotional and psychological barriers to being known.

The strategies outlined in this dissertation suggest that recognizing racial, sexual, or class difference highlights the heterogeneity of categories that seem homogenous. From this position, one can begin a practice of radical empathy that develops strategies for theorizing white manhood that are more local than generic. In nearly all of these texts, there is a Swede-like figure, usually a young male, whose literacy in westerns predetermines how he experiences the West. Robert Ford, William Evans, Allison Finch, the trio of friends in *City Slickers*, and John Grady Cole, must adjust to the realities of the West, sometimes with devastating consequences. Better to approach the West and white manhood from a position that is informed by the genre, yes, but is also cognizant of the myth of averages that undergirds the genre. I contend that radical empathy is a portable strategy that can be used to disaggregate groups of people who are often swept into monolithic categories and read without compassion. To read with empathy does not mean ignoring the parts of claimed identities that are problematic, nor does it mean ignoring the

structural inequalities that privilege certain bodies over others. To read with empathy *requires* acknowledging inequality and privilege, as well as recognizing shared points of personhood, to see structures and people as disparate rather than representative of one another.

## CHAPTER I

### OUTLAWS

When I began this project, I had two major hypotheses about the outlaw homodestic. First, that clear boundaries separated the outlaw homodestic from the heterodestic and that the outlaw homodestic was always contained and neutralized by the genre. That is, the outlaw homodestic resided outside the town or city limits that define the heterodestic, and it was never intact by the narrative's end. Second, that the outlaws threatened the town at a microscopic level via sexual violence against women and the pillaging of personal property, and at a macroscopic level via crimes that threaten heterodestic infrastructure like bank, train, and stagecoach robberies by destroying property, stealing money, and generally creating an atmosphere of fear. Yet again the threat was always contained by the genre. From these two hypotheses, I concluded that the paradox of the outlaw homodestic rested in its ability to appear threatening without ever really posing a threat. The inevitable containment of the outlaw homodestic might alleviate anxieties about the integrity of the nuclear heterodestic, but it also reveals an insecurity that needs reassurance. Although the contemporary western might offer a more sympathetic portrayal of how the men in this iteration function, it usually fulfilled its generic duties and neutralized the outlaws in order to protect the town and its citizens.

Generic conventions only buttressed my assumptions. The outlaw is an extralegal man or group of men who live somewhere outside of the heterodestic limits of western

towns. He wears a black hat and he's good with a gun. He has little or no family, and his loyalty to his men depends almost entirely on his men's competency in criminal activities. As a rival to a marshal or sheriff tasked with protecting some arid town, the leader of the outlaws is usually white, unkempt or conspicuously neat, and charismatic. They threaten individual heterodomic families, as well as the structures that make the heterodomic possible in the west. Banks, stagecoaches, citizens, working men, and travelers are all vulnerable to the outlaw's gun. Outlaws typically target white fathers and husbands and rid these family men of their monetary wealth and, possibly, their manhood. They target white wives and mothers who are vulnerable to either seduction or rape. And, deliberately or no, they capture the imaginations of young children who find the outlaw heroic and daring. The outlaw also captures the imagination of a public who hears of his exploits from dime novels and newspaper articles. Stories about Jesse James, Billy the Kid, and fictional outlaws circulated via publications like *Beadle's New York Dime Library* (1878-1905), *The James Boys Weekly* (1903-), and *Five Cent Wide Awake Library* (1878-1897). However, the outlaw is most often celebrated by the adoring public when his exploits are experienced indirectly.

However, further investigation into texts that depict the outlaw homodomic reveal that in contemporary westerns there are few clear boundaries between homodomic and town. The boundary between the outlaw homodomic and the town he threatens is permeable, and men move across it sometimes as a ruse and other times in earnest. These outlaws may also belong to the heterodomic in very traditional ways. They might be married or live in towns pretending to be legitimate business men. Yet even when they live outside the town limits, the outlaw homodomic might present as a

legitimate business, such as a ranch that employs men as both ranch hands and troublemakers. As important, I misunderstood how much the men of outlaw homodestic depend on the heterodestic not only as the site where its work is done, but also as a generator of technologies of representation that helped shape their reputations as bad men. Newspaper reports and telegrams often supplemented word of mouth in constructing the narrative of the outlaw as ruthless and heroic, vicious and tragic.

Reading the outlaw not as archetype but as a person disrupts the categories established by the genre and creates space for the outlaw to exist as multilayered and human. Although the outlaw is far from invisible in traditional westerns, he often acted as little more than a plot device. As Philip French suggests in his germinal text on the genre, *Westerns*, “The villain [...] is the embodiment of evil” and “he is only concerned with advancing his own cause but beyond that has a positive commitment to destruction.”<sup>43</sup> Because the genre insists on flattening our reading of the outlaw, we are likely to make sweeping generalizations about his motives for undermining the heterodestic, even when faced with evidence to the contrary. Whether figured as heroic and romantic or vile and bloodthirsty, the outlaw is destined to be at odds with or threatens outright the heterodestic. Thus, while specific texts may flatten or deepen the outlaw’s character to varying degrees, popular conception of the outlaw remain simplistic. Through my reading of the outlaw homodestic, I similarly call for a denaturalization of the discourse that frames our discussion of white manhood.

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<sup>43</sup>Phillip French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, (Manchester, GB: Carcanet Film), 30. Though this edition was published in 2005, it was originally published in 1973, then revised in 1977, and French marks the changing landscape of the genre after the Vietnam war.

Were we to shift discursive terrain from westerns to masculinity studies, we would need only to change the terms from *outlaw* to *white manhood*, and a conventional reading would hold. Despite differences across socioeconomic and sexual orientation, and in the face of lived experiences, white manhood continues to be conceptualized in categorical terms. Even when critics suggest that white manhood doesn't conform to the cultural norm, the framing discourse remains uncritiqued. Within popular discourse like Susan Faludi's *Stiffed* (1999), Hannah Rosin's *The End of Men* (2012), and Guy Garcia's *The Decline of Men* (2008), white American men are analyzed without interrogating deeply ingrained cultural assumptions held by men and women about the roles of men. In masculinity studies, scholars focus on "normative" young or middle age white men, where anyone who does not fit into that very narrow category, i.e. working class or poor, gay or bisexual, or any person of color, is classified as "non-normative." As we move from unexamined generic assumptions about how white manhood works in American culture to a more nuanced reading of white manhood's cultural contradictions, we begin to see the flaws in the base hypotheses about white manhood.

This chapter attends to the multiple and changing roles of the men in the outlaw homodestic. Because the men of the outlaw homodestic also have lives as husbands, fathers, legitimate employers and employees, I argue that denaturalizing the outlaw homodestic is an analytical mode for understanding the diversity of white men's lives outside of a the traditional framework of white manhood. Men with jobs in fields as diverse as nursing, retail, or professional sports are outlaws because jobs in the service or entertainment industry have been conceived as frivolous in the larger culture.

Yet these jobs are available, are perhaps more enjoyable than the 40 hour week, and speak to changing economic times.

The novels and films in this chapter are often two sides of the same titular text. In reading these forms alongside one another, I capture the changing topography of white manhood and the outlaw across time and formal genre. In each text some generic facet of the outlaw is challenged or undone. The changes are sometimes subtle and indicate the texts are making adjustments to the concept of the outlaw. The changes are especially visible in each text's (non-) engagement with the history and myth of the outlaw. As the historical engagement in each text deepens, the outlaw becomes more complex and less generic. The 2007 remake of *3:10 to Yuma* portrays a complex relationship between the outlaw Ben Wade and his first lieutenant, Charlie Prince, that simply does not exist in the original 1957 version. Moreover, the remake imagines manhood as a performative mode made legible through dress and comportment. Robert B. Parker's 2005 novel *Appaloosa* aligns a new term with the outlaw homodestic and offers a more empathetic portrayal of the main outlaw, Randall Bragg, than the 2007 film, yet both texts do much to reimagine the place of the outlaw in the West. Ron Hansen's 1983 novel *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* provides the discursive backdrop for the enigmatic men who inhabit the 2009 film, where domesticity, not robbery, becomes central to the film. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) anchors this chapter in that it illustrates the tension between history and myth, and the struggle between the idea of man and his actual life.

TOWARD UNTRAINING THE EYE OR READING AGAINST GENRE

Just as contemporary westerns destabilize the outlaw, so too do they affect how we understand non-outlaws. When, for example, an outlaw throws on the duster of a townsman and impersonates a cowboy, he demonstrates the fluidity of manhood. When the hero also wears a black hat, he unseats our assumptions about who can wear which hats, while also pointing to the slim distance between hero and outlaw. Audiences can remain lazy readers and dismiss these disruptions as glitches, which the genre has trained them to do, or audiences read against the genre and take the disruptions seriously in order to account for what the changes might signal.

Westerns set up a false dichotomy between good and evil. The conventional wisdom about heroes and villains in Westerns contends that the line between good and evil is stark. The hero, whose job it is to secure the heterodomestic, may cross the line into evil but only in service of the greater good of the town. A metaphor might best illustrate what I mean here. Imagine a ruler. At either end of the ruler are the men in white hats and the men in black hats. In the middle of the ruler are citizens. Now, if the western is analogous to white manhood, then we might be tempted to read the men in white hats as men who embody the ideals of white manhood and the men in black hats as men whose values are antithetical to white manhood. But we would be wrong. The men in hats are white manhood concentrate, the ideals of white manhood distilled to its most basic formula, and the many, and more common, permutations of white manhood lay somewhere between the two ends.

The depiction of the outlaw in contemporary westerns is ripe for this reading strategy because the boundary between black hats and white is hazy at best. In fact, the contemporary western muddies the very binaries that undergird the genre. Where

audiences might expect to find a clear oppositional line between outlaw homodestic and the heterodestic, or more commonly, no outlaw homodestic at all, contemporary westerns smear that line. Given our training and fluency in the genre, audiences might find it tempting to assume that the outlaw homodestic is a form of homodesticity that opposes and threatens the township. As I have argued, however, this formulation does not account for outlaw homodesticity's dependency on the heterodestic and its attendant cultural scaffolding. Without banks, trains, townships and cities, gold and silver, the outlaw homodestic would be unemployed. Moreover, in these new texts, the outlaw has a home; not a lair or a hideout or some other den of inequity, but a home. The spaces may be more transient than those found in the town, but they are conceptualized as homes. When they are on the move, outlaws, like the cowboy, cook and converse around campfires, and discussions of plans and schemes are peppered with talk of love, marriage, and family. Legitimate and illegitimate labor both come under the category of work, perhaps even wage labor, in contemporary westerns. We might theorize the labor of banditry as contract work, and all the murder and mayhem create a space for these men to talk to each other. Like cowboys they chat around campfires, bunk together, and ride across vast spaces with one another. Even when they work other jobs as cattlemen, cowboys, grocers, and hoteliers, their known histories mar the legitimacy of their legal work and they maintain their identity as outlaws.

In the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the outlaw experienced a moment of dynamism within the genre. We might visualize the outlaw's growth as movement toward the center of the ruler, toward the more conventional, and less exciting, roles of white manhood in a heterodestic society. He is changing and

being changed by the merchants, bartenders, business owners, and small town officials, the tertiary characters who provide the financial and cultural support for the town where the symbolic drama between good and evil occurs. Within the confines of the genre, the outlaw remains contained, yes, yet the genre allows the outlaw some measure of growth that washes against the other constructions of manhood. In this way, he erodes and carries with him some elements of white hat manhood and civic manhood, but he also leaves something of himself behind.

To be clear, the lines in traditional westerns were not always stark, but the genre trained its audience to *see* the line as sharp. Westerns such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *Shane* (1953), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and *True Grit* (1969), feature characters who toe a murky moral line, but we are not privy to these men's personal lives. Instead, audiences were asked to focus on the hero's work, which was coded as good, and the outlaw's actions, which were coded as bad. In contemporary westerns, audiences are given access to lives which were once private. The lived experiences of outlaws provide ample evidence for reformulating audience expectations, pushing us to think of them not as mythic anti-heroes but as people.

Consider, for example, the 1953 classic western, *Shane*, in which the very white families squat on the perceived outlaw Morgan Ryker's land. With little effort, the families' whiteness and domesticity convince viewers that they are in need of protection even though they are trespassing on Ryker's property. The griminess of Ryker and his gang coupled with the families' cleanliness, not to mention their blondness and blue eyed-ness, reinforce the familiar white/black binary central to the function of the western. This familiarity discourages audiences from interrogating the implausibility of the

conflict. As a result, we do not question the white families' right to squat, we even become outraged when Ryker threatens them, and we do not question Shane's role as hero and protector. Were we to read against the genre, however, and identify with Ryker, who owns the land on which the families are trespassing, we would be less inclined to see Shane as a hero or the families as innocents. We would see that at heart, Ryker's anger is not unreasonable or amoral, it's legal. We identify with the Starretts and their neighbors because they *look* like good Americans, even if they are not.

On the surface, westerns locate conflict between abstractions or symbols: good and evil, the town and what lies outside its limits, white hats and black hats. The town is understood to be inherently good, especially if it is inhabited by white families and some number of women who are not prostitutes. More, audience identification is manipulated by the familiar semantics of those abstractions and symbols. Audiences are more likely to identify with cleanliness, good capitalists, families, and whiteness than unkempt single men whose lives appear deprived. As the character that is the most venal, the most concerned with basic desires, the outlaw is uniquely positioned to show the lie of the genre: the central conflict is not about the battle between good and evil, but rather the protection of commercial infrastructure, the infrastructure that constructs and is constructed by the heterodomic. This truth becomes clearer when the hero and outlaw are indistinguishable and are made legible only by their relationship to the town.

The aforementioned claims about outlaws provide a strategy for reading the outlaws of white manhood so that we might begin to understand the lie of white American manhood. The lie, America's nostalgic version of traditional white manhood, what Michael Kimmel calls "artisanal manhood," elevates white manhood into

implausibility and abstraction, without accounting for the dearth of economic capital in the volatile economic climate of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In attending to a white manhood that refuses or cannot conform to the rigors of nostalgic manhood, we refute the outdated construction of manhood and account for the interdependence of labor, money, and dress in the performance of white manhood.

In order to engage in an oppositional reading of outlaws and white manhood, I draw our attention what Faludi calls, “ornamental masculinity,” where manhood becomes less about actions and more about merchandising. Metrosexuals, Marlboro men, frat boys, and even the invisible, normative white man in the form of a character like *Mad Men*’s Don Draper, are all brands of manhood defined by a preoccupation with appearance, and maintaining appearances takes money. Cultural critics, both popular and academic, make the argument that manhood is about money. The model of “normative” manhood relies on men’s abilities to support themselves and their households. Without money and its attending ideological structures, manhood becomes “non-normative,” or to use the parlance of the western, outlaw. If most men are outlaws against the “norm,” either because of education, employment, race, sexual orientation, or class, then what is the “norm” but a town of false fronts?

The specter of idyllic white manhood is not a new phenomenon. In the 1996 monograph *Manliness and Civilization*, Gail Bederman demonstrates that “true manhood” was important to white middle-class consciousness throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> As men began to earn “comfortable livings as entrepreneurs, professionals, and managers” they began to claim superiority by way of “gentility and respectability.”<sup>45</sup> By

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<sup>44</sup> Bederman, 11-12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 11.

the end of the nineteenth century, however, changes in the economic landscape made white middle-class manhood difficult to enact, because nineteenth century middle-class white manhood was inextricably linked to money. When the markets wobbled, so too did the security of white manhood. Bederman argues that at the same time that middle-class “manliness was eroding from within,” working class men, primarily immigrants, began to challenge middle-class men’s political authority and white middle-class women were agitating for access to all-male arenas.<sup>46</sup> In response, white middle-class men turned to race and narratives of civilization to legitimate their authority, while simultaneously co-opting and commercializing working class masculinity, turning to sports, like boxing, to bolster their manhood bona fides.<sup>47</sup> In linking white middle-class manhood to bodily superiority, non-white, non-middle class men and women were given an avenue through which to challenge white middle class men’s ideological superiority.<sup>48</sup> Where we to replace the phrase “white-middle class men” with something like “hero,” we would have the basic setup of many westerns.

At the end of the twentieth century, middle- and working-class white men were faced with a similar challenge. The men Faludi interviewed for *Stiffed*, had “lost their compass in the world. They had lost or were losing jobs, homes, cars, families. They had been labeled outlaws but felt like castoffs. Their strongest desire was to be dutiful and to belong, to adhere with precision to the roles society had set out for them as men.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bederman, 13-14.

<sup>47</sup> As Bederman describes it, the prevailing narrative was “white male bodies had evolved through centuries of Darwinistic survival the fittest,” and were “the authors and agents of civilized advancement” (42).

<sup>48</sup> Bederman recounts with some relish Jack Johnson’s win against Jim Jeffries, the Great White Hope, and white men’s visceral and violent response to Johnson’s win. I want to suggest that by linking their manhood to sports, white men made their ideological position vulnerable to non-white, non-middle-class men and women.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), 9.

Despite their economic hardships, formerly working-class men were expected to remain masters of their fates, to remain active doers. Commercial depictions of manhood in the late 1980s and 1990s presented contradictory messages. They were bombarded with images of a white manhood that was more about *looking* the part than *doing* anything. Men were being sold an image of self-sufficient loneliness, ahistorical disconnection, and stark objectification that insisted they were still required to remain aloof from society, “to travel unfettered, beyond society’s clutches, alone—making or breaking whatever or whoever crosses his path.”<sup>50</sup> In analyzing the commercialized archetype of the isolated white man, Faludi turns to images of the mythic western frontier, specifically the silent icon of the Marlboro Man, “presiding over an emptied-out Western landscape,” and the cowboys of Death Valley and Monument Valley who were “judged by their ride out into the wasteland, not their return; they were measured by the control they achieved over their environment through gunplay, not husbandry.”<sup>51</sup> The picture she paints of white manhood is bleak and unrealistic.

Mark Simpson, British journalist and coiner of the term “metrosexual,” argues that in the mid-1990s, men were being sold to themselves. The metrosexual man was a “single young man with a high disposable income, living or working in the city (because that’s where all the best shops are)” who became “perhaps the most promising consumer market of the decade.”<sup>52</sup> Ten years later, Simpson would expand his conception of this market, arguing that its creation meant “to replace traditional, repressed, unreflexive, unmoisturized masculinity, which didn’t go shopping enough, and which thought—ha!—

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<sup>50</sup> Faludi, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Faludi, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Simpson, “Here Come the Mirror Men,” *Independent*, 1994.

that it was enough to earn money for wives and girlfriends to spend.”<sup>53</sup> At the heart of Simpson’s argument is the contention that in making manhood a commodity, the markets have queered nostalgic white manhood on either side of the Atlantic:

It’s passive where it should always be active, desired where it should always be desiring, looked at where it should always be looking. That most metrosexuals aren’t gay or bisexual only makes things even queerer. A hetero metrosexual checks out 1) himself, 2) other metros — how else to know what’s “in” this season? — and 3) women that match his key colors. Not necessarily in that order, but then not unnecessarily in that order either.<sup>54</sup>

He asserts that this version of manhood is not about class or morality, but rather spending power, and men are purchasing the “last frontiers”: the male body.

Cheekiness aside, Simpson pinpoints the source of some anxiety found in white masculinities scholarship: white manhood looks and behaves differently because the financial and ideological markets have changed. Among others, Kimmel, who has written about white American manhood for two decades, seems concerned for the latest generation of men. In *Guyland* (2008), he defines traditional American manhood by what young men are not doing:

In another era, these guys would undoubtedly be poised to take their place in the adult world taking the first steps toward becoming the nation’s future professionals, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. They would be engaged to be married, thinking about settling down with a family, preparing for futures as civic leaders and Little League dads. Not today.<sup>55</sup>

Kimmel’s markers of manhood are fairly familiar—they speak to Townsend’s sociological script of manhood, where men work, marry, and parent, and Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker’s five elements of adulthood, which include economic independence from one’s parents, residing outside of their home, conclusion of schooling (and

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<sup>53</sup> Simpson, “MetroDaddy Speaks,” Salon.com, 5 Jan 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, (New York: Haper, 2008), 3.

commencement of work), marriage, and children. Using Simpson's formulation, one might argue that manhood is changing, shedding the constraints of historical adulthood. One might even suggest that in doing so, these men are queering manhood. I would go so far as to argue that the seemingly normative criteria of manhood no longer work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and there is nothing concrete to queer.

Instead of interrogating the criteria, however, Kimmel creates a new category for the young men who fail to meet them: Guyland. The men who occupy Guyland are usually white, middle-class "kids" between the ages of 16 and 24, on their way to, in, or recently graduated from college. They aren't married, have crappy jobs, live with each other or their parents, and like to party.<sup>56</sup> They are, essentially, Joey and Chandler from the 1990s sitcom, *Friends*. Kimmel focuses on "guys'" sexual proclivities, social lives, and their living arrangements and cites a diminishing sense of responsibility that demotes young men from men to guys. He does not, however, account for a collapsing economy, where men, more often than women, lost their jobs.

Kimmel isn't alone in recategorizing young adulthood; Regnerus and Uecker do as well, though perhaps there is less anxiety in their estimation. Although they begin as many sociologists do with a "normative" framework, they account for larger cultural and economic changes that affect how people enter or fail to enter into adulthood. They argue that American children are urged into adolescence and adulthood at earlier ages, but take longer to recognize or accept their adult status. They name the holding pattern "emerging adulthood," a period in a young person's life of fluid boundaries where they can "try on

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<sup>56</sup> Kimmel, 8.

responsibilities for size without having to commit to them.”<sup>57</sup> They suggest that increased education, “expanding career pathways,” and an emphasis on friendship and “self-actualization” contribute to the extended span of emerging adulthood.<sup>58</sup> But what if the category of “emerging adulthood” is simply one version of “adulthood”?

In westerns, the domestic is one avenue for growth or change. The economic structures that enable and undergird domesticity are integral to understanding how the role of the outlaw in contemporary westerns reflects cultural change. In looking at a small cluster of films from the mid-2000s, I suggest that the outlaw’s development within the domestic sphere destabilizes the categories of insiders and outsiders and troubles conventional wisdom that dictates how men can move in and out of these categories. Released between the fourth and sixth years of the war in Iraq and the sixth and eighth years of the war in Afghanistan, the films in this chapter chart a growing disinterest in and disenchantment with martial manhood. The films’ preoccupations with money and gainful employment also reflect an increasingly unstable economic landscape in which men faced massive job loss in multiple sectors, including manufacturing, construction, and finance. As cultural barometers, these westerns draw our attention to the destabilization of families and towns when their economies are threatened, and the multiple roles outlaws inhabit. As representations of the outlaw changed in a peculiarly domestic vein in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, so too have the parameters of 21<sup>st</sup> century white manhood. Unlike the outlaw, however, men are slowly but inexorably rewriting the script of white manhood in order to adapt to economic, cultural, and ideological changes in American society.

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

#### MONEY AND MERCURIAL MEN IN *3:10 TO YUMA*

James Mangold's film *3:10 to Yuma* is a curious western. For the majority of the film, Mangold's West hews toward a more geographically and historically accurate, rather than mythic, portrayal of Arizona and the surrounding territories after the Civil War. Yes, there's a stagecoach outfitted like a tank, but every man works, characters argue over water rights, and they are forced to weigh their morality against their survival. Only in its final scenes does the film revert to a fantasy of the Western where, improbably, a hero emerges and good triumphs over evil. At the film's opening and close, it operates along the ruler of good and evil, where the lines between outlaw and hero are intact. For the majority of the film, however, there are no heroes, only a handful of outlaws and men who are "bad" to greater or lesser degrees. *3:10 to Yuma* demonstrates the mutability of outlaws *and* ordinary men (i.e. not heroes), suggesting that though the boundaries between them seem clear, they are quite permeable.

The remake pays homage to the original film, honoring, as *New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott suggests, "the unpretentious sprit of the original."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Halstead Welles, the original screenwriter, retains screenwriting credit with Michael Brandt and Derek Haas, and whole passages of dialogue remain from 1957 script. However, as an adaptation of an adaptation, the 2007 film manages to capture some of the financial starkness of the original short story, even as it diverges wildly from the narrative.

Daves' film is an adaption of an Elmore Leonard short story title "Three-Ten to Yuma." Published in *Dime Western Magazine* in 1953, "Three-Ten to Yuma" bears scant

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<sup>59</sup> "In the Ol' West, a Very Tough Commute." *The New York Times*, 2 Sep 2007.

resemblance to either film.<sup>60</sup> There is no poor rancher in the form of Dan Evans, no Pinkertons, and, perhaps most astonishingly, no Ben Wade. The only character who remains constant throughout is Charlie Prince, perennial first lieutenant. In Leonard's tale, a lone Bisbee deputy named Paul Scallen escorts Jim Kidd to Contention to be put on the train to Yuma. The primary setting of the story is a hotel room, where instead of attempting to bribe Scallen, Kidd asks the deputy questions about his job and family. The bribe, which functions as a moral litmus test in the both films, is unnecessary in the short story. Scallen sits on no moral high ground with Kidd. Scallen will do the job he was hired to do, a job he joined for the salary of "a hundred-fifty a month...some expenses, and a dollar bounty for every arrest against a Bisbee ordinance in the town limits" (183). Kidd quickly does the math and figures out that his captor brings home about forty dollars a month with which to support his wife and three kids. Scallen earns his "hundred and a half" by being good at his job. He protects Kidd from the brother of a man Kidd murdered, but he doesn't hesitate to threaten him with his shotgun if Kidd doesn't cooperate. Scallen puts Kidd on the train to Yuma after killing the only thing that stands between Kidd and the railcar, Charlie Prince.

A man simply doing his job does not make for much psychological drama, and so the changes to the story are understandable from an entertainment perspective. The story echoes through both films through economics and the concerns about money and the ability to provide adequate support for one's family. Scallen's dissatisfaction with his pay grade is lost in Van Heflin's portrayal of Dan Evans. Though he is in debt to the sheriff/loan officer, he is not alone, and the communal struggle caused by the draught

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<sup>60</sup> Elmore Leonard, "Three-Ten to Yuma," *The Complete Western Stories of Elmore Leonard*, (New York: Harper Collins E-books, 2004), 179-193.

eases Evan's feelings of domestic failure. Evans' sons are sympathetic to their father's financial difficulties; they understand money is tight, and they never challenge or chastise their father for failing to provide for his family. Christian Bale's Dan Evans, however, seems to stagger under the weight of his role as provider because he, and his oldest son William, see his inability to take care of his family as a personal and isolated failure. Gone is the sense of communal struggle, and in its place is an expectation of personal exceptionalism despite concrete environmental obstacles.

In the film, there is no traditional hero. Instead, there is a conglomeration of men who have personal or financial interests in seeing Ben Wade hanged. Those with personal or generic reasons for joining the posse die en route while those with financial motives survive. Tucker is the hired muscle of the town's land baron, Glen Hollander, and he accompanies the guard for pleasure. Wade stabs him in the neck with a fork after Tucker taunts him over the campfire. Byron McElroy, Pinkerton and bounty hunter, has a reputation to redeem since the stagecoach Ben Wade robbed was under his guard. Wade strangles him after McElroy calls his mother a whore. Doc Potter comes along to tend the wounds McElroy received during the firefight between the Pinkertons and Wade's crew. He is killed by members of a rail crew who want to torture Wade in retribution for previous crimes. Dan Evans, Civil War Union veteran, an amputee, a husband, father, and poor farmer in debt to Hollander, gives his word that he will help take Ben Wade to Contention, Arizona and put him on the train to Yuma for the princely sum of two hundred dollars. He is killed by Wade's lieutenant, Charlie Prince, right after he gets Wade on the train. Southern Pacific's railroad agent, Grayson Butterfield, cites Wade's crimes against property and business as the reason he should be hanged:

22 robberies. Over \$400,000 in losses. More in delays. The Southern Pacific will have Ben Wade convicted in a federal court. Hanged in public. An example made. And we will pay to make it happen.<sup>61</sup>

He is the requisite East Coast milquetoast, and surprisingly, he, along with Wade, survives the trip.

Read within the context of westerns as a genre, the previous paragraph charts a generic destabilization. Instead of valor or integrity, the most successful characteristic of white manhood in the film is money, or, rather, the backing of a national corporation willing to dispense capital to protect its assets. The very mention of money seems antithetical to a genre where abstract concepts like good and evil, honor and dishonor, and an idealized white manhood reign. Yet money, and with it land rights, water rights, mineral rights, are integral to the history of the West. New Western historians argue against the work-free depictions of the West in the American imagination, and the provenance of the western is labor.<sup>62</sup> Manifest Destiny depended on money as much as ideology because money enabled the establishment of infrastructure that made the West habitable. Read within an historical context it should come as no surprise, then, that the two men with the most economic capital, Butterfield and Ben Wade, emerge unscathed.

The film offers several brands of white manhood defined by economic capital, and, oddly, cleanliness. As a general rule in the film, grooming and hygiene are indicators

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<sup>61</sup> To which Ben Wade responds, "Y'all notice he didn't mention any of the lives I've taken."

<sup>62</sup>For a more historically accurate portrait of the West, see: *Legacy of Conquest* (1987), Patricia Limerick dispels the notion of a wage-free West. She argues that to move "from natural resource to commodity to profit, the West's holdings clearly had to be transformed by investment of capital and labor."<sup>97</sup> For more on New Western Historians see like Donald Worster's *An Unsettled Country: Changing Landscapes of the American West*, (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1994); Richard White's "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*": *A New History of the American West*, (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1991); Peggy Pascoe, Walter Nugent, and Gerald Thompson whose essays are featured in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, edited by Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin. Lawrence, (KS: UP of Kansas, 1991); and Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1978), *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992), and *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (1998).

of class and profession. At the top of the economic hierarchy is Grayson Butterfield, nattily dressed in a blue three-piece suit, gray bowler, and wool overcoat for the majority of the film. His mustache is waxed and his cheeks are clean shaven. Dan, while relatively clean, is not particularly well groomed. His duster is grimy, his beard is patchy, and his undershirt is a dingy gray. A.O. Scott suggests that Dan's "gaunt, haggard face and wide awe struck eyes" corresponds to his position as a struggling farmer.<sup>63</sup> A similar sartorial dynamic occurs with the outlaws. A well fed Ben Wade wears a silk vest under a cropped black jacket. His hat is closer to a bowler than a cowboy hat, and he is rather neatly groomed and manicured. The rest of his gang seems to be coated in grit and dirt, though, for the most part, their beards are nicely trimmed. The costuming in the film reinforces the relationship between money and survival in the mythic west.

A character's physical appearance in the film has little to do with his place along the ruler of good and evil, and it can be difficult to tell a poor worker from a working outlaw. Charlie Prince is a versatile character in that he is a menacing, cold-blooded outlaw who pretends, convincingly, to be a cowboy. His versatility is rooted in his whiteness—he is blond haired and blue-eyed—and in the labor conditions that result in strangers coming into towns because they are miners or cowhands. The ubiquity of strangers in town means that an unknown man might be looked upon with suspicion that is easily cleared. To the townsmen of Bisbee, Charlie Prince is unknown, though he has some reputation as an outlaw. McElroy, the Pinkerton hired to secure the coach that Wade's men rob, recognizes him as a "balled-up whore named Charlie Princess," but other than that rather charming moment, no one seems to know who he is. His reputation

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<sup>63</sup> A.O. Scott. "In the Ol' West, a Very Tough Coummute," *The New York Times*, Sep. 7, 2007.

is overshadowed by the boss, Ben Wade, and as a result, Wade's first lieutenant can move with more discretion.

Charlie Prince, however, cannot pretend up, only across. Because he is dirty from crown to spur, he can manipulate his attire only so far. Understood in socioeconomic and professional terms, Prince cannot impersonate a marshal, railroad agent, bartender, etc., because they are figures who hold more secure employment and ties to communities or business. They also tend to be a bit more fastidious than a man like Prince. Impersonating a man who performs labor that is also dirty and temporary is no stretch for this outlaw. He simply walks into town, borrows a drunken man's duster, punches out the crown of his black hat before plopping it on his head, and strolls into the marshal's office. Gone is the swagger of a seasoned outlaw, and in its place is a curious shuffle as he bringing news of the robbery he just committed: "I think maybe a coach headed for here got itself held up in the canyon about 10 miles back [...] by Mr. Ben Wade himself." When asked how he knew it was Wade, Prince identifies the only two outlaws in the gang who are not white, an Apache and a Mexican sharpshooter. He identifies himself as a cowboy hired by Tom Conrad, a figure unknown to the audience but clearly known to those in town, to bring a thousand head of cattle in from Mexico. No one questions him about his identity any further than that. When asked by Butterfield why he didn't intervene, Charlie Prince replies, "They had a lot of weapons, mister, and they were shootin' bullets." He implies that "doing something" is outside his purview as cowboy, that it wasn't a job he was equipped for or paid to do.

Prince's cowboy impersonation suggests that the outlaw is not as visible as the genre would have us believe. Though he is a villain, he is able to fade into the

background like the cowboys in the next chapter. How is it possible that Prince, whose charisma and bravado rivals Wade's, can make himself invisible? The answer lies, not in the costuming, but in the mutability of white manhood. Work and the evidence, or lack thereof, of economic capital function as the agents that camouflage Prince's role in the film. Nor is he the only character who can shift ideological allegiances in the film. In the final scenes of the film, Charlie Prince turns the townspeople of Contention, Arizona into murderers for hire. In fact, nearly everyone in Contention is willing to do anything for the right price, including the marshal. Dan is the lone holdout, and I suggest that this is at the root of his death.

Hours before the train arrives, Dan and Ben Wade are holed up in the hotel's bridal suite, and if there is any homodestic space in this film, Contention's bridal suite is it. In the bridal suite, these two characters devolve from ambivalent characters into hero and villain. Here, Wade tries to persuade Dan to free him, even going so far as to offer Dan a thousand dollars cash to release him, which Dan refuses. Dan sheds his pragmatic rancher skin and throws on the tattered cloak of the hero and Wade gets his black hat back once Charlie returns it to him. When, William, Dan's son, tries to appeal to Wade's good side, Wade corrects his misreading of the outlaw's actions thus far:

William: Call 'em off.

Wade: Why should I?

William: Because you're not all bad.

Wade: Yes, I am.

William: You saved us from those Indians.

Wade: I saved myself.

William: You got us through the tunnels. You helped us get away.

Wade: If I'd had a gun in them tunnels, I would have used it on you.

William: I don't believe you.

Wade: Kid, I wouldn't last five minutes leading an outfit like that if I wasn't as rotten as hell.

William's disbelief is, perhaps, a product of his youth, but his insistence that Wade might actually be as much a hero as he is a villain reflects audience assumptions about Wade. Like William, we are reminded that while the film may not have a proper hero, it does have a superlative villain. And it is Wade's commitment to his generic role that enables the film's unlikely conclusion.

In the final moments before they make a mad dash to the train, Dan and Wade, the main players in the bridal suite, shift from operating under a fiscal paradigm to an ideological and generic paradigm. Charlie Prince, however, remains constant as ever, and has blazed a bloody trail in pursuit of his boss. He and six other gang members ride into town, and after ensuring Wade's safety, Prince offers "two hundred cash dollars" to anyone in the town who shoots any of Wade's captors. Despite Marshal Doane's reassurances that, although it might not seem like it, there is "law and order in this town, just like any other," the townspeople, including at least one woman, cock their guns. Marshal Doane and his two deputies, understanding that the odds truly are against them, desert the men they've been hired to protect, and are gunned down on the hotel's steps in an attempt at peaceful surrender.

How does the promise of two hundred dollars turn a town full of seeming civilians into a murdering hoard? The answer might lie in Richard Stott's notion of jolly fellowship. In *Jolly Fellows* (2009), Stott describes jolly fellows in the West as men who left the rigid morality of the East for the chance to drink, fight, play pranks on, and commune with one another. They often congregated in places where "white women were so few as to be inconsequential," such as oil, cattle, and mining towns, and were more

interested in a barroom than a church.<sup>64</sup> Though shootouts were quite rare, many of these fellows carried some kind of firearm and “the homicide rate was extremely high: fifty to one hundred per one hundred thousand in some mining and cattle towns.”<sup>65</sup> Stott’s research suggests that there was no aversion to violence in the wild and wooly west. More, the jolly fellow went west in order to indulge in violent behavior with little expectation of reproach. Payment, especially in the exorbitant sum of two hundred cash dollars, would simply be icing on the cake. The transformation of Contention’s civilian population into an armed mob reveals that while one might assume set character types in the western, even the most stock character is mutable for the right price.

When the fiscally oriented paradigm outside the hotel meets the generic devolution that has occurred in the bridal suite, confusion reigns. Wade’s men do not understand why he would help Dan take him to the train. Charlie’s consternation is palpable in his frantic cries of “Boss! Boss!” The citizen-mercenaries have no stake in the outcome, and so they continue raining down bullets on hero and outlaw alike, despite Charlie’s orders to aim for the rancher and not the metonymic black hat. For his part, Wade seems invested in securing a generically satisfying conclusion, which means he must get on the train. If Dan “puts” Wade on the train, the railroad will pay Dan’s family a thousand dollars, and his ranch will be secure from Hollander’s schemes. Dan creates a situation where he has everything to lose, from his family to his farm to his life, and he needs Ben Wade’s cooperation if there is to be any chance of success. Wade has escaped the train to Yuma several times before, and so he recognizes that his role in protecting Dan’s family means he must follow the script. By the end of the chase sequence, he and

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male milieus in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), 136.

<sup>65</sup> Stott, 202

Dan are, improbably, sprinting together across roofs and through mercantile stores. Even after Charlie kills Dan, Wade stills boards the train—after killing Charlie—thereby completing the generic circle.

The tension between these the financial and ideological ways of being suggests the implausibility of either a black or white hats. Successful western or no, one can't help but feel confusion about how the film ends. Like Charlie, we don't understand why Wade would act, even momentarily, against his own interests. Some might not understand why Dan refused Wade's thousand dollar offer in the bridal suite. And still more, like Wade, might scoff at Dan's claim that he's "never been a hero." More realistic, if less heroic, is Butterfield's response, or the marshal's, or, even, the townspeople's. The two-dimensionality of the black or white hat cannot account for how men must navigate the world.

#### AN OUTLAW'S HOME IN *APPALOOSA*

*Appaloosa* (2005, 2007) aims squarely for the generic formula, and thus assumes a great deal of about the state of good and evil.<sup>66</sup> Narrated by Everett Hitch, the novel and film adaptation of *Appaloosa* tell the tale of Virgil Cole and Everett, two lawmen for hire who come to the New Mexico territory to safeguard the town of Appaloosa from the dissolute rancher, Randall Bragg and his men. The novel and film both indicate a domestic change in the role of the outlaw, but they depict different actions as the initial crime that marks Bragg and his men as outlaws. Early on, Bragg's men kill a couple from Chicago, raping

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Parker, *Appaloosa*, (NY: Berkley Books, 2005). All quotes from the novel are taken from this edition.

the wife in the process, and Bragg kills the marshal, Jack Bell, and one (in the film) or both (in the novel) deputies. There are the requisite two women in the film, Allison French, who becomes Virgil's and Bragg's love interest, and Katie, a prostitute with whom Everett consorts. There are the requisite black hats, an almost hanging, betrayal by Allie and the townspeople, and two (count them: two!) shootouts.

The alternate openings demonstrate the level of justification needed to convince audiences of a character's criminality, but also suggest something about what audiences can bear witness to. In opening scenes of the novel, the outlaws are determined by their participation in crimes against persons, both male and female, as well as crimes against the state. An italicized prologue recounts two of Randall Bragg's men entering town, murdering Clayton Johansson, a white male citizen, and raping his wife. Readers might be tempted to view these men as two bad seeds acting on their own; when Marshal Jack Bell and one of his deputies attempt to apprehend the murdering rapists, however, readers come to recognize Bragg's role as leader and his influence over his men. Bell expects that Bragg, as a business man, *not* an outlaw, will recognize his authority outside the town limits even though he and his deputies have no jurisdiction. Yet Bragg calmly kills him and one of his deputies before finishing his morning coffee.

In the film, the murders of Jack Bell and his deputies mark Bragg and his men as outlaws. Because the murder and rape of the couple from Chicago are mentioned only in passing, those actions are relegated to hearsay. Bragg's crime, then, is one against the state and the town's wellbeing. The film makes the viewer complicit in Bragg's crime in a way that the novel does not, and the how we are meant to perceive Bragg's actions is unclear. From the beginning, the viewer is on Bragg's side via the narrative and editing.

We watch Bell and his deputies ride into Bragg's ranch from inside the ranch's gates. Bragg informs the marshal that the ranch is outside his jurisdiction and that they are trespassing. The multiple point-of-view shots from Bragg's perspective tag Bell and his men as outsiders encroaching on Bragg's land, and encourage us to sympathize with the rancher who can't spare two of his "hands."

The sympathetic shots foreshadow the ambiguous and mutable morality that characterizes the film. The POV shots foreshadow that Bragg is not the genre's typical villain, and the specter of sympathy functions as a red herring meant to prepare the viewer for the hero, Virgil Cole, who we are trained, by the genre, to identify with. Curiously, audiences are not encouraged to identify with the townspeople, who seem craven and weak-chinned. Because viewers are encouraged to identify with Bragg, however briefly, and Virgil and Everett, viewers have the opportunity to understand that the relationship between Bragg and the peacekeepers as more associative than oppositional. More simply put, we are shown through editing that Bragg and the lawmen are more similar than not.

Though audiences are never really unsure of whom to root for—Virgil and Everett are positioned as the steady moral compasses of the film—the costuming creates a fissure in the bedrock of the genre. Before he kills the marshal and deputy, Bragg is described in the novel as “a spare man, wearing a black duster and a high-crowned black hat,” and later we are reminded that his “high, black hat was set square on his head.”<sup>67</sup> The black hat places him rather predictably at one end of the ruler of good and evil, yet Virgil Cole, the hero, also wears a black hat, complicating the conventional equation. Virgil is the town's hired gunman, meant to protect them from Bragg and his men. Later

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<sup>67</sup>Parker, 4, 31.

on, Bragg hires two more gunmen, both known to Virgil, and they, too, wear black hats. As in *3:10 to Yuma*, the costuming is used, initially, to draw a line between hero and villain, only to discard it later.

The premise of *Appaloosa* suggests that the town is uninterested in the extremes of white manhood. In hiring Virgil and Everett, the town aims to rid itself of the problem of jolly fellowship, and then, once they fulfill the terms of their contract, Virgil and Everett would be free to go on their way. The examples of jolly fellowship in both the novel and film run the gamut from buying supplies and not paying for them, using but not returning horses from the livery, not paying for meals and drinks, and having drinking contests.<sup>68</sup> Bragg's men are hired, but remain idle, hands on a ranch with few cattle and thus little work. The town's proximity to potentially lucrative copper mines could have offered the men some work in mining, but the murder of Jack Bell scared off investors. Instead, these men are bound together by misdeeds and petty criminality. Bragg's men, Bronc, Charlie, and Dean, as well as Tub, the teamster Virgil "busted up," might not understand jolly fellowship as "morally menacing," but as an adventure where "traditional eastern moral rules simply did not apply."<sup>69</sup> The quality of eastern morals in *Appaloosa*'s upright citizens, however, is slight. The town's aldermen mask their concerns about the interruption of commerce under the guise of concern about the rape and murder of tourists. However, they are concerned about the tourists only because their rape and murder scared off investors who might have developed the mines. If the townsmen represent eastern morals, then both eastern morality and western banditry are more interested in financial gain than the integrity of human life. Certainly, the

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<sup>68</sup> Parker, 15

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 136

Appaloosan version of eastern morality is more invested in the structures that undergird the heterodomestic than in the interpersonal dynamics of the heterodomestic.

More than the ambiguous costuming and somewhat craven townsmen, the depiction of Bragg's ranch creates the most surprising generic rupture. Located in the hills above Appaloosa, the ranch and its occupants come under Virgil and Everett's policing gaze, and the isolated locale reinforces the legal and ideological separation between ranch and town. However, the novel insists that this is a legitimate home, not a lair or hideout, not a camp or temporary shelter. Bragg and his men have observable morning routines at odds with the conventional generic characterization of the outlaw. Virgil and Everett know, as Jack Bell and his deputies knew, that the ranch is outside their jurisdiction, yet in the novel they spend incalculable amounts of time surveying the property and eventually apprehend Bragg just outside his private outhouse. They stake out the outlaw and his men from atop a hill overlooking the ranch. Situated outside Appaloosa's limits, the ranch features an "upland meadow with a stream" lined with trees. Even Virgil acknowledges that it's a "pretty place" (78). As he and Everett look down at the ranch in the early morning, they note the weathered buildings, barn and corral, the "bunkhouse on the other side of the barn, with a cookshack angling off it," and "two outhouses: a big one near the bunkhouse, and another smaller one near the ranch house" (79). The ranch rumbles to life, smoke "wisp[s] up out of the cookshack," and they smell wood smoke, coffee, and bacon. Bragg and his men attend to their toilette. The presence of Virgil and Everett marks the ranch and its inhabitants as other, subject to the pressure of their gaze, yet even as the marshal and deputy function as metonyms for a normative ideological order, they understand the ranch's appeal. They are struck not just

by the pretty rivers and trees but by the weathered buildings and standing horses, the evidence of cooking and morning routines. Their gaze becomes our gaze and for a moment, they give us permission to admire the beauty of the ranch, which is inextricably tied to those who live on and maintain it.

The film is perhaps more radical in its permissiveness because it relies on cinematography to portray Bragg's ranch. Though the film uses voiceovers to provide expository details, the technique is not brought to bear on the ranch. As a result, viewers who are not as well versed in the genre might not see anything special about the ranch, viewing it as a series of clapboard and graying buildings among a host of clapboard and graying buildings. The film's inability or reluctance to mark the ranch as strange has the effect of naturalizing Bragg's homodestic space.

For the majority of the novel and the entirety of film, Bragg's ranch is scantily cloaked in the guise of a business and situated outside of Appaloosa's jurisdiction. I have argued that these designations disrupt the western's conventions, creating a space for the audience to view it as a criminal domain, yes, but also a domestic space framed in no small amount of natural and manmade beauty. The novel goes one important step further in distorting the generic conventions that bind the outlaw when Everett calls the ranch a home. He and Virgil transport Bragg to be hanged in the Yaqui prison, and as they pass the ranch he wonders "what it might look like to sit in shackles on your way to hang and look out at your home and not be able to go there" (145-146). This is a remarkable statement to be uttered by a western protagonist. Bragg has a home to lose, and this potential loss elicits sympathy in a seasoned lawman who aided in Bragg's capture from his home.

I would ask us to consider what has been lost, and, moreover, why are we provided an avenue through which to sympathize with that loss. Our potential sympathy is sanctioned by Everett, metonym for the long arm of justice, the moral bent of civilization, and seemingly normative white man, though he decides there is “nothing to be gained thinking about that” (146). What *we* gain in thinking about “that,” about Bragg’s home, his loss, is a fuller conceptualization of Bragg as human. To be sure, he’s a “fast gun who hired fast hands,” but he is also a person capable of making something so sentimentalized as a home.

However much his villainous persona disturbs the generic waters, Bragg’s ability to transform into something other than outlaw is contained by the genre. He escapes from Virgil and Everett with the help of two hired guns not unlike Appaloosa’s marshal and deputy, seeks and receives a presidential pardon, and returns to Appaloosa a fiscally solvent citizen. The town lauds his return as a one-man economic stimulus package when he begins buying and renovating property in town. *Appaloosa* suggests, however, that Bragg remains a threat to the established order and, more specifically, to the marshal. He threatens Virgil’s relationship with Allie and his relationship with the town. Suddenly, we are back where we started, but this time, the deputy, Hitch, restores order by killing Bragg in a classic shootout. With Bragg’s death, the mantle of outlaw is passed to Everett who must leave Appaloosa and Virgil, riding off into the sunset. Were Everett to stay, Virgil would have to arrest him in order to restore order. Everett cannot linger outside the city limits because, again, Virgil would be forced to contain him. Everett’s flight frees Virgil of that responsibility.

We must also account for the ideological fickleness of the townsmen who live somewhere between good and evil. Throughout the film, Bragg's character, his morals and values, do not change, only his financial and cultural status. Similarly, Virgil and Everett do not undergo some dynamic shift in character. Only the townsmen have changed. They fear Bragg until Bragg saves the town. They fear and revere Virgil and Everett until Bragg is no longer a threat. But perhaps what I've here called ideological fickleness is more like ideological consistency. Perhaps adaptation or mutability is a characteristic of a broader version of white manhood, such that it celebrates whatever incarnation of manhood that best fits its most immediate purposes.

#### JESSE JAMES AND THE MYTH OF FATHERHOOD

*The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* eschews completely the generic model of good versus evil.<sup>70</sup> Quite simply, there are no heroes in either text, and instead we are given detailed insight into the domestic lives of men who chose to live both inside and outside of the law. Ron Hansen's 1983 novel and Andrew Dominik's 2007 film adaptation instead focus on humanizing the familiar myth and legend of Jesse James. Both texts tell the story of the last days of Jesse James's life and his symbiotic relationship with the young Robert "Bob" Ford. Hansen's version of James is painfully unromantic—at 34, Jesse James' body is failing, and his paranoia, brutality, and mental instability are uncomfortably married to the image of a devoted family man. At 18, Bob Ford idolizes Jesse and yearns for the kind of fame Jesse has achieved. Lacking the opportunity or gumption to become an outlaw, Ford assassinates his idol for a reward and

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<sup>70</sup> Ron Hansen, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1983). Quotations from the novel are taken from this edition.

a pardon for his association with Jesse's gang, but also because he wants to be remembered celebrated.

Ron Hansen's novel is granular in its attention to detail in a way the film cannot afford to be, and as a result, the reader and Jesse James are always historically situated. Each chapter of the novel is dated, with most including the months in addition to the year. Chapters can cover a few months, especially those leading up to the assassination, or a few years, in the case of Bob's life post-assassination. The detailed structure of the novel echoes the narrative scope. Hansen paints a granular picture of Jesse and focuses not only on his earlier and more famous feats with the Younger brothers, but also on the smaller, seemingly insignificant acts, such as robbing the Second Presbyterian Church on Christmas Eve in 1881 with Charley Ford. Similarly, Hansen depicts Jesse with his children, and he does appear to be a doting father, and the evolution of his marriage with Zerelda "Zee" James. We see more of his family overall in the novel, including his mother, his brother Frank, and some members of his extended family. Hansen also tells this new story of Jesse James as family man and a successful outlaw alongside the story of the trial of Charles Guiteau, the man who assassinated James A. Garfield. Jesse's absorption with Guiteau's trial parallels Bob's obsession with Jesse, but this strain of the story is absented almost completely in the film. The picture that develops of the final months of Jesse's life becomes, in many ways, less extraordinary than the myth would suggest. Jesse's life is inextricably bound to myth, and it is the myth, Hansen suggests, that Jesse desperately wants to escape.

In 1983, the year of the book's release, Peter Prescott, book critic for *Newsweek* suggested that Jesse James's life was fiction while he was still alive, but even Prescott

could not see the slippery ways that the fiction persists. In Hansen's novel, the sympathetic dime novel version of James, described by Prescott as a "Robin Hood of the railroads" who gave to those in need, refused to "steal from Southerners and clerics," and once "taught hymn singing" is shown to be a murderous and unstable man who eventually "consents" to be assassinated by the equally unstable, yet even more craven Robert Ford.<sup>71</sup> Also in 1983, Sam Cornish, current poet laureate of Boston and former instructor at Boston University, reviewed Hansen's novel in *Christian Science Monitor*, and praised the stark deglamorization of the "Old West." He hailed Hansen for depicting the "slender margin separating farmers, lawmen, and shopkeepers from ill health and abject poverty," and celebrated Hansen's ability to create characters that "exist both as ordinary people in history and as the figures of legend."<sup>72</sup> Cornish also notes the commodification of Jesse James after his death by his wife, who turned their home into a tourist attraction featuring twenty-five cent tours—a fact conveniently absent from the film.

Set against the novel, the film undoes much of Hansen's work of grounding and deglamorizing the James myth. Starring Brad Pitt as Jesse James and Casey Affleck as Robert Ford, the film traffics in the mythmaking that Hansen seems to critique. Time and place are ambiguous. Jesse's relationship to the region, his engagement with history, and his family fade in the glare of his interactions with Bob Ford. Moreover, the mere presence of Brad Pitt both disrupts and reifies the notion of celebrity as a guise that can be shed through a lived life because at no point can one confuse Brad Pitt for anyone other than Brad Pitt, no matter how good the acting is. Instead of complicating and

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Prescott, "A Moveable Feast of Fiction." *Newsweek*, 14 Nov 1983.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Cornish, "The Old West is Deglamorized in Stark, Convincing New Novel." *Christian Science Monitor*. 28 Dec 1983.

humanizing his character, the introduction of family and fatherhood function as yet another layer of myth tied to the Jesse James canon. Jesse becomes as human as Brad Pitt, which is to say, not very. They remain both more than human and, sadly, less than. As Manohla Dargis, writing for the *New York Times*, puts it,

For all their exploded bone and ravaged pulp, their trickles and rivulets of blood, the men in this film aren't as much bodies as beautiful, empty signifiers. [...] This isn't just Jesse James— it's also Jim Morrison at the Whisky in 1966 with a dash of Laurence Olivier, a touch of Warren Beatty and more than a hint of Ralph Lauren. It's the beautiful bad man, knowing and doomed, awaiting his fate like some Greco-Hollywood hero, rather than the psychotic racist of historical record.<sup>73</sup>

Christopher James, writing for *The Times* in London, even goes so far as to confuse Jesse James and Brad Pitt for one another:

James can't escape his own myth. The paranoia works on Pitt like a disease; he looks haunted and ill. The practical jokes where he wraps a knife around a loyal throat no longer raise howls of laughter. But his death is still a trembling shock and Ford's fleeting glory after putting a bullet through his hero's skull quickly sours.<sup>74</sup>

Who is haunted, James or Pitt? Who wraps a knife around a “loyal throat,” James or Pitt? And whose death shocks us, even though we know, from the title, that it is coming? Pitt confuses us because we confuse him with Jesse James. They are interchangeable because celebrity and legend have emptied them of their humanness.

Absent the novel, however, as most viewers experienced the film, *The Assassination of Jesse James* does some work to humanize Jesse through an increased focus on his life that means to offset his legendary criminality. In place of the traditional conflict between good and evil, is a structure that asks the audience to broaden their perception of the outlaw by introducing a destabilizing narrative that pairs an emotive

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<sup>73</sup> Manohla Dargis. “Good, Bad or Ugly: A Legend Shrouded in Gunsmoke Remains Hazy.” *The New York Times*, 21 Sep 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher, James. “Pitt’s Cruel Villainy Is Bang on Target.” *The Times* (London). 5 Sep 2007.

heteronormative family structure with that of the outlaw. Audiences are not allowed to forget that Jesse is a loving father *and* a cold blooded killer, and must wrestle to reconcile both sides of his identity. Bob's integration into the James family reinforces his connection to Jesse and concretizes their similarities by translating them into the syntax of the familial. Bob is no more of a coward than Jesse; he is what Jesse would have been had he been born a generation later.

The text is psychologically oriented rather than action driven, and James' last train robbery in Blue Cut, Missouri is the pivotal case in point. Much like Randall Bragg's establishing crime in *Appaloosa*, audiences witness a robbery that establishes James' outlaw *bona fides*, but the robbery is not nearly as brutal as some of James' other crimes. To begin, no civilians are murdered. In fact, no civilians are killed in the film, only other outlaws, and Jesse's actions are thereby contained and, I would argue, are made more palatable within the film. That Jesse is a criminal cannot be overstated, yet his criminality, his history of violence, is weighted against his role as an integral part of a nuclear family.

*The Assassination of Jesse James* is an elegy to the end of a legend, even as it suggests the legend was never quite what we supposed. The film reveals Jesse's assimilation into the very economic structures that threaten. As a white man of means, Jesse is able to move, much like Charlie Prince, though in much more fashionable clothing. Jesse James has it all: a lucrative job, a beautiful wife and children, the esteem of city businessmen, and the adoration of a nation. But for Jesse, having it all is predicated on being able to live two discrete lives. Unlike Ben Wade or Randall Bragg, Jesse does not circulate as a criminal. He is no Liberty Valance, threatening and bullying

a vulnerable town. Jesse employs the strategy of leaving work at work. His reputation is linked to that of Jesse James, not Thomas Howard, his alias, and the outlaw name and reputation circulate primarily via texts and word of mouth. Only when he works are Jesse's crimes attributed to his body. The compartmentalized roles speak to a more urban phenomenon, where one's profession and one's identity are not necessarily one. The scale of rural or small towns of the other westerns in this chapter cements labor to bodies, whereas St. Joseph, Missouri, the last place Jesse lives and raises his family, boasted a population over 60,000 people in the 1880s.<sup>75</sup> The city is an easy enough place to perform as a businessman of leisure within the city limits, while allowing him to outlaw in the backcountry.

The opening sequence of the film is a montage of Jesse James in an anonymous city and a field. Both locales are coded as domestic. Many of the shots bear blurred edges reminiscent of photographs from a pinhole camera or a daguerreotype and give the sequence a dreamlike quality. As the voiceover relays the facts of Jesse's life, we see Jesse sitting in a rocking chair, playing and cooking with his kids, and standing, inexplicably, in a field of wheat as the sun sets. We are also treated to scenes of Jesse walking about a Missouri city, meetings in dimly lit bars, and, also inexplicably, time lapsed footage of clouds. The layering of fragmented images evokes the narrative of man fluent in the performance of citizenship, and not one moment depicts James as an outlaw.

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<sup>75</sup> This according to the St. Joseph, MO city website, <http://www.ci.st-joseph.mo.us/history/history.cfm>. Principal channels of distribution were established in the 1870's with St. Joseph becoming a leading wholesale center for the building of the West. The 1880's and 1890's were the Golden Age of prosperity, whose mansions and traditions remain a part of the City. In 1886, the Chicago Times reported that "St. Joseph is a modern wonder--a city of 60,000 inhabitants, eleven railroads, 70 passenger trains each day, 170 factories, thirteen miles of the best paved streets, the largest stockyards west of Chicago, a wholesale trade as large as that of Kansas City and Omaha combined..."

The voiceover also defers Jesse James role as an outlaw, and in effect diminishes that which made Jesse James a legend. The facts about Jesse according to the narrator proceed from his home(s), to his city life, to his wounded and aging body, before finally mentioning his outlaw status. I quote this opening monologue at length to emphasize how much the audience must be *told* about Jesse. These *facts* are not a part of the myth; they were perhaps known at one point but have faded from our collective memory. However, they subsidize a narrative that hinges on the audience understand James outside of the legend:

He was growing into middle age and was living then in a bungalow on Woodland Avenue. He installed himself in a rocking chair and smoked a cigar down in the evening as his wife wiped her pink hands on an apron and reported happily on their two children. His children knew his legs, the sting of his mustache against their cheeks. They didn't know how their father made his living, or why they so often moved. They didn't even know their father's name.

He was listed in the city directory as Thomas Howard, and he went everywhere unrecognized and lunched with Kansas City shopkeepers and merchants, calling himself a cattleman or commodities investor, someone rich and leisured who had the common touch. [...]

He considered himself a Southern loyalist and guerrilla in a Civil War that never ended.

He regretted neither his robberies nor the seventeen murders that he laid claim to.

He had seen another summer under in Kansas City, Missouri, and on September fifth, in the year 1881, he was thirty-four years old.

The film uses the domestic to humanize Jesse James. His competing roles as family man and outlaw destabilize each other. In order to live as Thomas Howard, he must subordinate his outlaw status and appear to perform a legitimate role as business man. To do otherwise would endanger his family. In order to work as Jesse James, he must threaten the very domestic structures that make the performance of Thomas Howard possible. His work is named only at the end of the voiceover, and the last three sentences abruptly deliver a summary of the legend as Jesse James stares off into the setting sun.

Though more than a bit heavy handed, the opening sequence telegraphs that the film will introduce another myth, that of the family man, in order to reset our understanding of James and the last months of his life.

The next sequence of the film belongs to Robert Ford (Casey Affleck), a sly, simpering, wan young man, eager to become a part of the James' gang. Bob is the viewer's conduit to the inner sanctum of the remnants of the Jesse James's gang, and the world of the outlaw is grungy but congenial to its own members. Bob has not yet proven his loyalty to Jesse and so remains outside the core community of outlaws, desperate to gain admittance. As Bob moves among the men the afternoon before the robbery at Blue Cut, the camera tracks him like a lost puppy, mirroring Bob's position within the group. Each tracking shot of Bob attempting to engage the group of outlaws, camped out in the woods of Blue Cut, ends with a shot that pans across each man who moves away from him, echoing Bob's longing join the core group of outlaws.

The outlaws do not brood about the campfire or sit mulishly waiting for nightfall. Instead, they palaver. They eat food that they cook, and they talk about crazy Abraham and Mary Lincoln; they sing Confederate songs; they talk about sex, with white and non-white women; they speak of marriage and love and courting, of making their mark, and of course, robbery. A number of men described in the novel as "croppers and clerks and hired hands, aged in their late teens and twenties" in patched clothes, "hooligans, mainly boys with vulgar features and sullen eyes and barn-red faces capped white above the eyebrows," swell the outlaws' ranks, but they were not the core of the gang (8). The men at the center, Jesse James's "current apostles" as they are labeled in the screenplay, are

Robert Woodson “Wood” Hite, Jesse’s cousin, Bob’s brother Charley, Dick Liddil, and Ed Miller.

Bob is more sycophant than apostle. He knows everything about Jesse James and the James brothers, information gleaned from newspapers and dime novels. Early in the film, he is eager to share his list of facts about the James boys, and in one cringe-worthy scene, pulls forth an actual clipping that he rattles off as soon as he gets Jesse alone. Sitting on Jesse’s porch post-robbery, smoking a celebratory cigar that has him a bit green around the gills, Bob relays the information Jesse already knows:

Jesse James, the youngest, has a face as smooth and innocent as a schoolgirl. His blue eyes, very clear and penetrating, are never at rest. His form is tall and graceful and capable of great endurance and great effort. Jesse is lighthearted, reckless, and devil-maycare. There is always a smile on his lips— [...] You know what I’ve got right next to my bed? *The Train Robbers, or a story of the James Boys*, by R.W. Stevens. Many’s the night I’ve stayed up with my mouth open and my eyes open, reading about your escapades in the *Wide Awake Library*.

Bob engages Jesse as a living legend, an empty signifier on which he can project his own fantasies. No longer does he need the texts of *Wide Awake Library*; he has chosen his own adventure. As the narrative unfolds, however, and Bob burrows deeper into the disintegrating James gang, he comes to know the intricacies of Jesse’s life. Jesse welcomes Bob and Charley into his life, but he berates them, threatens them, attacks their young cousin, and holds a knife to Bob’s throat. Bob becomes embarrassed at his earlier infatuation, less eager to demonstrate his knowledge of the legend he thought he knew. But here I’ve misrepresented Bob, perhaps painted a more sympathetic picture than is warranted. Bob does not idealize Jesse James, the aged, wounded, father, husband, and outlaw; he aches to become Jesse James, the legend. He wants to be the subject of myth

and novels and songs, and he will do anything, including turning over his idol to the authorities, to become a celebrated man.

Living one's own mythology is dangerous. Late in the film, there is a rather disturbing exchange between Charley and Jesse, where Jesse displays a moment of fracture in his identity. Jesse wakes Charley in the middle of the night to recount how he killed Ed Miller for possible betrayal. He begins the story by explaining why he took Ed for a ride, and then says, "Ed and Jesse, they argued on the road..." and there is a flashback where Jesse shoots a terrified Ed in the back and then in the head. He concludes the story by explaining that "when push came to shove, Jesse shot and killed him." Charley replies, "Jesse did?" to which Jesse replies, "You got it." Jesse's use of the third person suggests a desire to put some distance between him and his more heinous actions. Whether it's shooting a former employee in the back or robbing and killing a friend's nephew for several thousand dollars, Jesse James turns to his own mythology as a repository for his more troubling actions. There's the "real" Jesse who is father, husband, friend, and there's the "mythic" Jesse, responsible for outlawing. Doing so is not a disavowal of his actions—that would be too simple a reading. Instead, Jesse's narrativizing of his actions elevates them and introduces doubt about their veracity.

Rather than a simple disavowal, the introduction of doubt places an onus on the listener, or in this case viewer, to decide what is or is not true. The composition of the scene in which Jesse murders Ed subtly reinforces this doubt; though it is dark out, there is a preternatural light that glances across Jesse, Ed, and their black horses. The edges of the frame are dark, as if we've been given access to the recesses of Jesse's memories. Jesse blurs into the background, while Ed, his fear, and the looming knowledge that

judgment has come dominate the foreground. When Jesse tells Charley, “Yeah, just ain’t no peace with old Jesse around. You ought to pity my poor wife. [...] You ought to pity me, too,” he is right. Not that we should pity Jesse James, but we might consider myth of white manhood an actual burden that men bear, that men might want to unload.

Bob eases Jesse’s burden of having it all with a .44 caliber bullet, in part because he believes the burden is one he is destined to carry. He also kills Jesse because Jesse gives him no other choice.<sup>76</sup> Jesse consents, through voluntary disarmament, to his own death. We might also entertain that idea that there is more than consent at play. Perhaps Jesse’s behavior is more agentive, akin to a demand that he be put out of the misery of “having it all.” After all, Jesse takes Bob and Charley into his home. He gives Bob the gun that will be used to kill him: a pearl handled .44 caliber, Smith and Wesson number 3. He confesses to Bob that he hasn’t been “acting correctly,” that he “can’t hardly recognize [himself] when [he’s] greased.” He tells Bob, “I go on journeys out of my body and look at my red hands and my mean face and I wonder about that man who's gone so wrong: I've been becoming a problem to myself.” He solves the problem on April 3, 1882, when Jesse removes his own guns and turns his back on the Ford brothers so that one of them might put him out of his misery.

The day before the assassination, Palm Sunday, 1882, the Jesse and his family, and Charley go to church while Bob plays at being Jesse James. We watch as Bob performs the actions narrated for him:

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<sup>76</sup> This is different than the novel where Jesse tells Bob shortly before he is assassinated, “You can go away right now if you want. You can say, ‘Jesse, I’m sorry to disappoint you, but the Good Lord didn’t put me here to rob the Platte City Bank.’ You can go inside and get your gatherings and begin a lifetime of grocery work. I’m roped in already; I don’t have my pick of things; but you can act one way or another. You’ve still got the vote. That’s a gift I’d give plenty for” 205.

He walked into the master bedroom and inventoried the clothes on the hangers and hooks. He sipped from the water glass on the vanity. He smelled the talcum and lilacs on Jesse's pillowcase. His fingers skittered over his ribs to construe the scars where Jesse was twice shot. He manufactured a middle finger that was missing the top two knuckles. He imagined himself at thirty-four. He imagined himself in a coffin. He considered possibilities and everything wonderful that could come true.

Bob's mimicry foreshadows the reenactment the assassination that Bob will perform in the years to follow. In this moment of Bob playing Jesse, however, it is not Jesse James, dime novel outlaw, but rather, Jesse James, father and husband. Bob performs, in private, the Jesse that few people have seen, a man mortal and full of possibility, and he becomes, for that moment, a man full of possibility because he is unscathed by years of battle, limbs intact. He is not invincible but his end is not near.

The day of the assassination is a day of reckoning between old and new manhood. Over breakfast with the family, Jesse reveals his knowledge of the arrest and confession of Dick Liddil, former member of the James' gang, and the three men understand that today it will all come to a head. The Ford brothers arm themselves and enter the living room, but they are visibly distressed. Bob is red and shaky in the face, and Charley can hardly stand. Both breathe heavily. Jesse asks, "You two ready?" startling Bob and Charley. Jesse and Charley have planned a bank robbery in Platte City, Missouri, and they are set to leave at noon, but everyone, including the audience knows Jesse's question refers to something more immediate. As Jesse walks into the living room, the camera pans around Bob in a point-of-view shot from Jesse's perspective, indicating that Jesse and Bob will settle this.

The moment at which Jesse removes his guns, he becomes more father than outlaw. He stands at a window while his daughter, outside, recites a poem that is just audible to the audience, but cannot be audible to the men inside the house.

I know not if I sink or swim  
The water is wide, I can't cross o'er,  
And neither have wings to fly.  
Give me a boat that can carry two,  
Both to row my love and I.  
For love is gentle and love is kind,  
The sweetest flower when first it's new.  
But love grows old and waxes cold  
And fades away like morning dew.

And here, watching his daughter through the window, Jesse removes his guns. We understand that Bob's love for Jesse was initially gentle and kind, but over time, it has withered, though it is not yet cold. In a line described in the screenplay as one "that seems composed just for Bob," Jesse says, "I guess I'll take my guns off for fear the neighbors might spot them." He places his two holstered revolvers on the daybed, guns which he has not been without for the entirety of the film. His daughter's recitation continues to drift into the room, repeating the same lines again and again before being overtaken by a solemn piano score. Jesse approaches a "dusty" picture of the thoroughbred Skyrocket, turning his back on Bob and Charley. He climbs onto a chair. Bob and Charley draw, aim, and cock their guns. Jesse and viewers see Bob's reflection over Jesse's shoulder, revolver raised, like a sepia memory in the picture glass. Jesse looks down, Bob pulls the trigger, and Jesse's face slams into the framed glass. The film makes it clear that Bob has killed both versions of Jesse James: the man and the image in the picture glass, the outlaw and the family man, the body that could balance, if only for a little while, being good at both.

For years after Bob kills Jesse, he continues to reenact the assassination, stuck in a feedback loop. Over eight hundred theatrical performances of the assassination garner Bob some celebrity, and the narrator tells us that Bob was as “renowned at twenty as Jesse was after fourteen years of Grand Larceny,” and “could be identified correctly by more citizens than could the President of the United States,” but his reputation is built on a “publicly recapitulated...act of betrayal.” Repeatedly “killing” his idol locks Bob in a moment where he kills the man he wanted to be. Instead of representing a moment of triumph, Bob’s performance reinforces his failure to become the man he wanted to be. His inability to *be* his idol is as much about his character as it is about the moment in history in which Bob lived. Unlike Jesse, Bob could not have served in the Civil War, he could not have run with Quantrill, and Missouri was no longer the wild and woolly West.

In order to move on, Bob must abandon the fantasy of being Jesse, and he does so by moving even farther west to Colorado where he opens a bar. Only at this point can Bob admit that he expected people to applaud the assassination. At twenty, he was surprised the applause didn’t come because he didn’t understand how it “would look to people.” The narrator reveals that Bob’s sentiments went a bit deeper:

He was ashamed of his persiflage, his boasting, his pretensions of courage and ruthlessness; he was sorry about his cold-bloodedness, his dispassion, his inability to express what he now believed was the case. That he truly regretted killing Jesse, that he missed the man as much as anybody and wished his murder hadn't been necessary.

Bob mourns Jesse and his own emotional dysfunction. Yes, the murder had been necessary—Jesse would surely have killed Bob and Charley if Bob had not killed him—and moreover, Jesse consented to and provided the means of his own execution.

The eventual assassination of Robert Ford is nowhere near as lucrative as that of Jesse James. Photographs of Jesse were sold for “two dollars apiece” and were made into

lithographed magazine covers; the man who tried to buy Charles Guiteau's corpse for thirty thousand dollars offered "fifty thousand for the body of Jesse Woodson James so that he could go around the country with it or at least sell it to P.T. Barnum for his 'Greatest Show on Earth'"; another photo was available in "sundries stores and apothecaries to be viewed in a stereoscope alongside the Sphinx, the Taj Mahal, and the Catacombs of Rome"; and his home was the site of pilgrimages for "thousands of strangers." After Bob's assassination by Edward O'Kelly, there were no eulogies, "no photographs of his body" sold in "sundries stores," no crowds marked his funeral, "no biographies would be written about him, no children named after him, no one would ever pay twenty-five cents to stand in the rooms he grew up in." The monetizing of Jesse's body further entrenched him in the collective memory of nation as type, a wonder of the earth. Bob's more humble endings speak to the quotidian existence common to most people, despite his brief engagement with fame,

The relationship between Bob and Jesse schematizes the dilemma of contemporary white American manhood. The traditional script of manhood is so untenable for most men, white or otherwise, as to be dead. The manhood that can take its place has at least two paths it can follow. The first is a path of emotionally stunted repetition and despair at the inevitable failure to achieve "normative" white manhood. The second path begins at recognizing the need to grieve, perhaps, and in doing so let go of the ideology that binds men to myth. The goal could be to build a life that is adaptive, where one's manhood is not tied to one's income but rather one's communal relationships. Like Bob, we must venture closer to the myth in order to see which path contemporary American manhood has taken. I am not suggesting that this is a simple

process, but the following chapters address multiple strategies for seeing how contemporary white men are adapting to the moment in which we live.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BUNKHOUSE

The men who live in the bunkhouse or make camp on the range function as the most visible but least noticeable figures of the western. Found in nearly every western these men create a seemingly radical formulation of the domestic, yet they are rarely main characters and rarely draw much attention to themselves. They drive or roundup cattle, castrate steers, and when they receive their wages, they go into the nearest saloon to spend that money on liquor, prostitutes, or the occasional card game. In classic westerns, little narrative time is spent on the men who make up the cowboy homodestic. These men are relegated to background noise or an additional element of the scenery. The westerns of the mid-1980s into the 1990s, however, devote more narrative time to the cowboy homodestic, foregrounding the interpersonal relationships between men who are neither protagonists nor villains. These men and the bunkhouse domesticity they create constitutes the focus of this chapter.

The nearest analogs to the men of the cowboy homodestic in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are the roughnecks on oil rigs, the firemen in the firehouse, soldiers on military bases, and the fraternity brothers in the frat house. The men who make up these organizations share the threads of labor with and dependence on one another that fosters fraternity. In contemporary westerns, the cowboy homodestic, or bunkhouse, is important in understanding later, and perhaps more complicated, iterations of the homodestic, because it demonstrates the basic principles of multiple manhoods, where

labor is the primary mechanism for homosocial relationships and privacy is mobile. The developments of fraternity via labor and pleasure, as well as the bunkhouse's contingent relationship to the heterodomestic, provide a framework for theorizing the relationships between men who are both visible and unacknowledged in the western.

The bunkhouse differs from the outlaw homodomestic in several significant ways. Rather than maintain an antagonistic but symbiotic relationship to the township, cowboys have a peripheral and somewhat neutral relationship to the township. To be clear, the cowboys in the bunkhouse are not the freewheeling mythic symbols of Manifest Destiny riding unencumbered across the West. They are neither that abstract nor that monolithic. The bunkhouse is inhabited by a number of men who demonstrate multiple models of manhood that do not necessarily cohere to normative constructions of American manhood where "real men" are white, heterosexual, middle classed, and patriarchal. Although they are predominantly white, these cowboys repeatedly demonstrate the diverse ideological, socio-economic, and material positions that real male bodies occupy. As a result, the bunkhouse serves as point of intersection for men who occupy a range of perspectives on manhood and "civilization."<sup>77</sup> As a site where white manhood contests and resists the calcified notion of American manhood with little material risk, the bunkhouse provides a discursive space in which men can develop and acknowledge emotional connections to one another without the threat of being noticed.

Hidden in plain view, the cowboy in contemporary westerns escapes the charges of homosexuality despite his resistance to the normative script of manhood. The label homosexuality is mitigated within contemporary westerns by three elements: temporality,

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<sup>77</sup> Bederman argues that in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, middle-class manhood and whiteness were framed within the rubric of civilization in order to cement white male superiority.

labor, and iconography. Temporality mitigates the threat of homosexuality because many westerns are set in the late 1800s before sexual activities constituted identity.

Homosexuality and its attendant cultural anxieties rarely constituted men's identities or described their friendship in the nineteenth century because men were freer to express their emotions with other men. As E. Anthony Rotundo explains in *American Manhood* (1993), same-sex romance was understood quite differently in the nineteenth century because these types of relationships were compatible with heterosexual relationships.<sup>78</sup>

Most importantly, romance was not the only possibility for emotional intimacy between young unmarried men; it was merely one option among many. Friendships could be close or superficial, and bonds could be long lasting or short lived. Physical intimacy could be sexual, yes, but these young men also fostered intimacy through competition and physical, sometimes bloody, sport.<sup>79</sup> Stott similarly describes a culture in which nineteenth century men privileged their bonds to one another and the sport of jolly manhood by venturing West as a means of escaping the stultifying heterosexual culture of the East.<sup>80</sup> Labor tempers the threat because men's bonds formed during the hard physical, dangerous work cowboys performed adequately accounts for the fraternity and intimacy that developed once work was done. Finally, the iconography, until quite recently, has relied on an assumption of compulsory heterosexuality dependent on men's emotional isolation from anyone but a spouse. These three elements form a substantive cultural barrier against reading the bunkhouse as a space of resistance to compulsory

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<sup>78</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) 83. Rotundo focuses specifically on Northern, middle-class white boys and men in the nineteenth century, but his assertions are echoed in other scholarship about manhood, including Richard Stott's *Jolly Fellows*.

<sup>79</sup> See Rotundo, *American Manhood*, Chapter 3: Male Youth Culture.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Stott makes the case for this in *Jolly Fellows*.

heterosexuality, and render the domestic unit a safe space for men to connect with one another.

The cowboy homodestic is not unproblematic; there is no doubt that men in the western have deeply flawed relationships with women and persons of color. However, to focus solely on the cultural privilege these men possess distracts from the unexpectedly intimate relationships they have with one another, relationships that counter American cultural expectations about both whiteness and maleness. White manhood has what we might consider generic conventions or scripts that enact a kind of cultural sleight of hand that discourages the casual viewer from accounting for divergence from that script. Instead, we are urged to focus on how white manhood conforms to our expectations. Taken alone, divergences from the script might be considered anomalous glitches in the matrix. But taken in concert, these departures reveal that white manhood is not monolithic, and there are multiple manhoods available to white men at any given moment.

This chapter argues that these emotional bonds, hidden in plain sight, shed light on another lie that both the genre of white manhood and the western share: men do not talk to each other. The issues raised in Chapter One, particularly that of money and the proximity of the township, still apply, though to lesser degrees. The relationships in *Lonesome Dove* (1985), *City Slickers* (1991), and “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water” (1999) foreground these often invisible characters, and provide audiences with access to an emotional and moral interiority. They also place special emphasis on cowboys creating and maintaining intersubjective relationships that can be either productive or destructive. In Annie Proulx’s 1999 short story “People in Hell Just Want a

Drink of Water,” the Dunmire brothers form a hybrid of white manhood and the regulatory responsibilities of the mythic cowboy, and their actions reveal the impossibilities and undesirability when those two identities mix. Larry McMurtry’s iconic western, *Lonesome Dove*, redefines the contours of domesticity from the Texas borderlands to edenic Montana, and treats as a major element the domestic aspirations of several of the men who work for, but do not own, the Hat Creek Cattle Company. *City Slickers* argues for the importance of men’s friendships and sees the nurturing potential of space and time in the commercialized and mythologized west. In foregrounding the homodomestic, these three texts reflect incremental but important change in white manhood at the end of the twentieth century, when traditional benchmarks of manhood were seen as unreachable or undesirable. In these texts, men negotiate their shifting cultural positions in the background, attempting to figure out what it means to be white, straight, and a man in a society that privileges the attributes of traditional white manhood differently.

#### THE SCRIPT OF WHITE MANHOOD

The benchmarks for “normative” manhood outlined by sociologists provide the needed context for understanding the version of manhood being negotiated by the men in this chapter. Most striking is how static the script remains even in the face of substantial ideological changes, and the path for the young straight, middle-class white American men is bound by generic constraints. In *Marriage in Men’s Lives* (1998), Steven Nock argues that the social institution of marriage is “the venue in which adult masculinity is

developed and sustained.” He describes the criteria for “normative marriage” that “Americans generally agree about,” and what emerges is a short but powerful script:

1. Marriage is a free personal choice, based on love.
2. Maturity is a presumed requirement for marriage.
3. Marriage is a heterosexual relationship.
4. The husband is the head, and principal earner, in a marriage.
5. Sexual fidelity and monogamy are expectations for marriage.
6. Marriage typically involves children.<sup>81</sup>

Normative marriage enables men to enter into a larger community in more formal ways, and older, informal ties, especially friendships, diminish, while familial ties become stronger. Because this outline is a familiar one, men can “judge themselves as good or bad husbands,” and they can rest assured that if they are good husbands, they are good men.<sup>82</sup> Nock concedes that in the late 1990s, normative marriage was changing even though cultural expectations about the institution were not keeping pace. Women’s increased presence in the workplace, marrying later in life, high rates of divorce and infertility undermine the bulwark of the normative. Four years later, in *The Package Deal: Marriage Work and Fatherhood in Men’s Lives* (2002), sociologist Nicholas Townsend outlines a script that parses middle-class white men and women’s relationships within the heterodomestic.<sup>83</sup> Townsend focused on straight middle-aged white men in his study, and he found that they generally subscribed to a similar rubric. The preferred residential and family arrangement was the nuclear family living in a single-family home. They assume the couple should make decisions about reproduction and child rearing.

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<sup>81</sup> Steven Nock, *Marriage in Men’s Lives*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Nock, 8.

<sup>83</sup> Nicholas Townsend, *Package Deal: Marriage, Work, and Fatherhood in Men’s Lives*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002). Townsend interviews men born in the 1950s who graduated from in the same class from the same San Francisco Bay area high school. These men were primarily white, middle-class, and married. Townsend’s study explores how these men understand fatherhood as inextricable from marriage, work, and home ownership, or what he calls package deal. Though Townsend’s study is in not comprehensive, his work on men and fatherhood provides a baseline for understanding men who marry and their reasons for doing so.

Once children are born, wives are responsible for childcare and keeping up the home. Husbands are responsible for working outside the home and providing for their children, and material success is an important indicator of success as a father.<sup>84</sup> Changes in the economy necessitated dual incomes, but the participants continue to operate under an outdated ideology. As Townsend suggests, these men, as husbands and fathers, are locked—or lock themselves—into a course that means they must work to provide for their families. Six years later, Michael Kimmel would castigate young white men for failing to follow a similar course, “taking the first steps toward becoming the nation’s future professionals, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. They would be engaged to be married, thinking about settling down with a family, preparing for futures as civic leaders and Little League dads.”<sup>85</sup>

A key component to this generic script is the necessity of downgrading same-sex friendship in favor of companionate marriage, and as a result, men’s friendships were considered anemic, by men and women alike, when compared to women’s friendships. Sociologist Karen Walker asserts that the broad questions researchers asked respondents, “elicited good representations of what respondents *believe* their behavior is—beliefs shaped by respondents’ own ideologies.”<sup>86</sup> Examples of the prevailing ideologies that frame men’s friendships can be found in Peter Nardi’s 1992 essay collection titled, quite simply, *Men’s Friendships*.<sup>87</sup> Within this anthology’s pages, men, primarily sociologists,

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<sup>84</sup> Townsend, 25. In this first chapter, Townsend is very careful not to generalize or to accept this script as “morally desirable or statistically sound”; he merely suggests that this script functions as an “ideological code” (6).

<sup>85</sup> Kimmel, *Guyland*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Karen Walker “I’m Not Friends the Way she’s Friends’: Ideological and Behavioral Constructions of Masculinity in Men’s Friendships,” *Men’s Lives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Eds. Michael Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998,) 223.

<sup>87</sup> In the introduction to the anthology *Men’s Friendships*, Peter Nardi observes that “studies of friendship today consistently argue that close friendship is rarely experienced by men in our culture,” 3.

both challenge and accept the status quo regarding their friendships. In “Rejection, Vulnerability, and Friendship,” Victor Siedler rather bleakly argues that American manhood requires men to protect themselves from intimate, emotionally affective relationships.<sup>88</sup> Friendships must be “marginal” to men’s identities, and men must learn to “do without others.” He alternately designates men’s friendships as public and private, but in either case they function in the background, because white American men cannot risk being vulnerable with one another. Theodore Cohen similarly finds that men do not “nurture or maintain” their friendships once they marry because those relationships lack the “cultural legitimacy” of marriage and work.<sup>89</sup> When compared to the standard of women’s friendships, men’s friendships could seem, as Michael Messner suggests, “impoverished.” In a 1992 essay, Messner argues that “it is valuable and important to understand how men experience and define their own friendships.”<sup>90</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the mythopoetic men’s movement sought to address the problem of primarily white, primarily middle-class manhood. The problem with the 90s man was, quite simply, that he was a wimp, content to kowtow to wife and mother, and he needed other men and ancient archetypes to reinvigorate his manhood. Centered around texts like Robert Bly’s *Iron John: a Book about Men* (1990), Robert A. Johnson’s *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology* (1989), and Michael J. Meade’s *Men and the Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of Men* (1994), the mythopoetic

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<sup>88</sup> Victor Siedler, “Rejection, Vulnerability, and Friendship,” *Men’s Friendships*, ed. Peter Nardi, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992), 15-34. This essay is notable for the use of the first person, and the sadness that pervades the essay. One finds a longing in Siedler’s claims that a need for friends is often regarded as a “sign of weakness,” and the fear of entering into intimate relationships because one might be abandoned or hurt, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Theodore Cohen, “Men’s Families, Men’s Friends: A Structural Analysis of Constraints on Men’s Social Ties,” *Men’s Friendships*. (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992), 129.

<sup>90</sup> Michael A. Messner, “Like Family: Power, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Male Athletes’ Friendships,” *Men’s Friendships*, 217.

men's movement encouraged men to purge their emotional baggage and get in touch with their essential masculinity through initiation rites and ceremonies rooted in myths. For between two and five hundred dollars, middle-class white men, ages 20-40, gathered together for weekend retreats where they shared their psycho-sexual trauma and joy, and sought the validation of the other participants. Their hope was to cure the enervated late twentieth century man and restore him cultural health by retrieving masculine archetypes from myth.<sup>91</sup> The movement's concerns were not new. Rotundo argues that the men involved with the mythopoetic men's movement in a "search to recover a lost essence of manliness" had a century's old history. Over a hundred years ago thousands of men such as Theodore Roosevelt, Owen Wister, and Frederic Remington, "were questing to reconnect with primitive roots of their maleness through ritual and writing."<sup>92</sup>

Many feminists took issue with the mythopoetic men's movement, contending that it was nothing more than a backlash against feminism, and that while the straight middle-class white man might feel powerless in the face of advancing women's and gay rights, they were "everywhere in power."<sup>93</sup> These critics were not entirely wrong, yet the movement had identified a key source of white male anxiety, namely, that the world had changed but they still faced the same demands but were unable to fulfill them. Faludi noted that contemporaneous discussions of how men exercise or abuse control obscured how their "lack of mooring" created distress for men about their role in society.<sup>94</sup>

Although in aggregate they benefited most from the dominant hegemonic culture, as

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<sup>91</sup> For a glimpse into an all male debate about the mythopoetic men's movement, see *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*, Ed. Michael Kimmel, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995).

<sup>92</sup> Rotundo, 2.

<sup>93</sup> See Michael Kaufman and Michael Kimmel. "Weekend Warriors: The New Men's Movement." *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*, 15-43.

<sup>94</sup> Susan Faludi, 13.

individuals many white men struggled with what it meant to be a man in relation to other people as the century came to a close.

Marriage, money, friendships, work, and emotional unmooring intertwine in the following pages with mixed results. The men in the bunkhouse are not ideal models of manhood, especially in relation to women, but that is precisely the point. Understanding the ideological landscape men traverse enables us to see these characters as complex individuals despite impulses to the contrary, and we can use this strategy of seeing and accounting for what is seen when it comes to contemporary white manhood.

#### DANGEROUS AND INDIFFERENT GROUND IN “PEOPLE IN HELL JUST WANT A DRINK OF WATER”

Readers would be hard-pressed to differentiate between the men of the previous chapter and the Dunmire brothers in Proulx’s “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water.”<sup>95</sup>

When Rasmussen Tinsley returns home to Laramie after being horribly disfigured in a car accident in New York, and terrorizes the women of Laramie by showing them his penis, the Dunmires literally take matters into their own hands and castrate Ras with a dirty knife. Proulx lulls readers into a false sense of generic familiarity before denaturalizing everything that seemed normative. “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water” both engages with and counters the mythopoetic reception of the west, drawing our attention instead to the harsh austerity intrinsic to both the mythic west and the people who inhabit it. While this harshness is neither more nor less mythic than the recuperative West of more traditional westerns, we must ask how the violent encounter between the Dunmires and Tinsleys mediates and manipulates cultural expectations of

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<sup>95</sup> This story appears in E. Annie Proulx, *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, (New York: Scribner, 1999), 97-117. All quotations will be taken from this text.

American manhood. At the heart of this destabilization of genre, both of westerns and white manhood, is Proulx's insistence that we see these characters as persons rather than archetypes. She accomplishes this feat through misdirection and the use of caricature before forcing the reader to confront the frailty of the human body in the face of indifferent cruelty.

The story is framed by a desolate prologue that locates the reader within a geography and temporality of current or imminent ruin. The scope of the prologue belies the narrow parameters of the story that follows, foregrounding instead Proulx's insistence that readers understand the breadth and significance of geographical time:

against its fixed mass the tragedies of people count for nothing although the signs of misadventure are everywhere. No past slaughter nor cruelty, no accident nor murder that occurs on the little ranches or at the isolate crossroads with their bare populations of three or seventeen, or in the reckless trailer courts of mining towns delays the flood of morning light. Fences, cattle, roads, refineries, mines, gravel pits, traffic lights, graffiti'd celebration of athletic victory on bridge overpass, crust of blood on the Wal-Mart loading dock, the sun-faded wreaths of plastic flowers marking death on the highway are ephemeral. Other cultures have camped here a while and disappeared. Only earth and sky matter. Only the endlessly repeated flood of morning light. (99)

This sweeping meditation on the ephemeral nature of human existence informs the reader that what she is about to read is ultimately inconsequential when considered within the whole of time. Nothing matters but land and sky and the cycles of nature, and all the graffiti, fences, mines, traffic lights, and Wal-Mart's will not arrest the earth's rotation and the coming of the day. Simply put, whether people are present for the rising of the sun simply does not matter to the rising sun. But what does this bleak and ruinous prologue have to do with white American manhood? O. Alan Weltzien identifies the elevation of the landscape over the characters that populate it as a recurring narrative strategy in

Proulx's work. In "Annie Proulx's Wyoming: Geographical Determinism, Landscape, and Caricature," Weltzien argues that Proulx's focus on the landscape as an indomitable force corresponds to a reduction of "character to caricature."<sup>96</sup> As a result, there are few, if any, rounded characters in Proulx's fiction; instead flat characters rest against the landscape as flimsy and disposable as paper dolls. Using Weltzien's theory of character reduction in Proulx's work, we can extrapolate from her depiction of both the Dunmires and the Tinsleys a caricature of white American manhood that is more appealing in myth than it is in real life.

In the three texts under consideration in this chapter, the Dunmire home is most clearly an indisputable bastion of manhood, yet it is arguably the most disturbing for the terrifying consensus on the rights and responsibilities of white manhood found there. The Dunmire practice of domesticity is as much a product of practical economy as it is of fraternity and labor. As children, the Dunmire boys were "money in the bank in that country and Ice brought them up" to be "bone-seasoned, tireless workers accustomed to discomfort" who "took their pleasure in drink, cigarettes, getting work done. They were brass-nutted boys, sinewy and tall" (101). As adults, they chose between the hetero-and homodestic. Pet and Kemmy married and moved away, but the remaining brothers "stayed at home and single, finding ceaseless work and an occasional group visit to a Laramie whorehouse enough" (103). Proulx places special emphasis on the Dunmire kitchen. In doing so, she destabilizes cultural assumptions about the kitchen as a traditionally feminized space:

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<sup>96</sup> In his essay, published in *The Geographical Imagination of Annie Proulx* (2009) and edited by Alex Hunt, Weltzien defines caricature as a mode that "sacrifices complexity for selective emphasis and intensity. It reduces and exaggerates, simplifying and distorting, often with the effect of derision or humor. It reveals character by stripping away like the Wyoming wind, exposing essential facets or lines, the grooved creases on a face's map or smears of caked mud festooning a battered old pickup" (103).

a greasy leather sofa, worn as an old saddle, stood against the wall [...] The plank table, twelve feet long and flanked by pant-polished benches, held a dough tray filled with forks and spoons. The iron sink tilted, a mildew smell rose from the wooden counter. The dish cupboard stood with the door off, shelves stacked with heavy rimnicked plates. The beehive radio on the wall was never silent, bulging with static and wailing voices. A crank telephone hung beside the door. (111)

There is little that can be categorized as feminine in this space. Concisely described and practically outfitted, the Dunmire kitchen reflects an emphasis on utility and comfort that overrides aesthetics. The kitchen is the domestic center for this family of men. The benches are polished from use, not care, and there's no need to set the table or put a door on the dish cupboard. Everything is within easy reach, including a napping spot, which Ice often takes advantage of, the radio, and telephone. The brothers take turns cooking, and they eat together. And it is in the kitchen, where the Dunmires prepare and share meals and relax, that they decide they must "Do something about" Ras's sexual predations (112).

As regulators of another man's sexual indiscretions, the Dunmires are practitioners of a rural manhood founded on what Jo Little identifies as a "strong assumption of traditional, family-based heterosexuality." As Little reminds us, however, the specificity of space and place influences the development of rural manhoods.<sup>97</sup> Weltzien's emphasis on Proulx's geographic determinism is again helpful in understanding the Dunmires' relationship to place. He argues that there are "no giants in her earth, only pygmies; landforms and weather, not people, embody the heroic," even as the Dunmires' initial characterization seems counter to this assertion.<sup>98</sup> The relationship between the Dunmires and Laramie is clear: the harsh landscape shaped and suited the

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<sup>97</sup> "Embodiment and Rural Masculinity." *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*. Eds. Hugh Campbell, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Margaret Finney. University Park: The University of Pennsylvania UP. 2006. Print. 184

<sup>98</sup> Weltzien, 100

Dunmires, and “if they loved anything that was it and they ran that country because there were eight of them and Ice and they were of one mind” (103). As a domestic unit, they are as intimidating and frighteningly monolithic as the land, and any Dunmire man can and will stand for all the Dunmire men. The Dunmires’ synecdochal position within the texts evokes the western genre’s shorthand and encourages only a glancing recognition of the Dunmire brothers as individual men. The conflation of the land and the Dunmires evacuates the brothers of personhood. The land and its inherent disregard for humanity is the mechanism by which Dunmires approach a mythological manhood. They are not the land, however, and their final cruelty cannot be read as indifference but as a failure of mythic white manhood.

The Tinsleys’ are a “different kind” of domestic unit: unbalanced, impractical, and pitifully human (101). Although neither family adheres to the traditional script of American domesticity, the Tinsleys are thin foils to the robust Dunmires. Unlike the Dunmires, however, the Tinsleys do attempt to play the part of nuclear family but are thwarted by an incompatibility with an indifferent landscape. Horm is a failure as a stockman and is regarded by other men with “contemptuous pity for his loose control of his home affairs and his coddling of his crazy wife” (104). He arrived in Laramie from St. Louis expecting “quick success,” but he was “lanky and inattentive,” couldn’t read the land or weather, and eventually gave up ranching altogether (104). En route to Laramie, his wife murdered their infant daughter Mabel by throwing her into the Little Laramie river, and in penance Mrs. Tinsley became neurotically overprotective of her other two children, Rasmussen and an unnamed daughter. Like his parents, Ras is unable to embody an inconspicuous rural manhood. As a child, Ras was smart and possessed some

practical abilities, though he behaved as if “the practical problems of life were not to be resolved but teased as a kitten is by a broom straw” (105). His brand of rural masculinity is impractical, intellectual, and definitely at odds with local expectations, and Ras eventually leaves Laramie for “San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, Boston, Cincinnati” (105). Odd as the Tinsleys are, however, their problems do not draw the attention of the Dunmires until Ras’s becomes a public threat.<sup>99</sup>

The Dunmires and Tinsleys collide when Ras returns from back east after being horribly disfigured in a car accident. The implicit comparison between the able bodied Dunmires and Ras is an epistemological trap. The Dunmires read as knowable, especially since readers are given access to their inner sanctum. Ras’s disfigured embodiment of manhood, however, is theorized as unknowable to either his parents or the larger populace. Because of his mutilation and his inability to speak his father does not know what Ras thinks, and he wonders, “Who could tell how much he understood? When he sat silent and unmoving was he thinking of the dark breath under the trees or the car bucking off the road, metal screaming and the world tipped over” (110). After Ras regains ownership of his old horse Bucky and can travel at will, he roams “all day and all night, then away for two or three days, god knows where, elusive, slipping behind rocks, galloping long miles on the dry, dusty grass, sleeping in willows and nests of weeds, a half-wild man with no talk and who knew what thoughts” (110). Ras’s actions eventually become known, and the stories that he “rode into Shawver’s yard and jacked off in front a the girl,” eventually reach the Dunmires. They fear that it’s only a “[m]atter of time until he discovers it’s more fun to put it up the old snatch,” and they decide over biscuits and

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<sup>99</sup> The Mrs. Tinsley drew a great deal of public disapproval when she threw her infant child, Mabel, into a river where she drowned because her mother couldn’t stand the sound of her crying. And the unnamed daughter, who marries a cowboy and moves away, never to be heard from again.

“Billy Gill’s Picalilli” relish that they should “[do] something about that” (112). The Dunmires feel compelled to address the immediate danger Ras poses to the women in the community, and perhaps more importantly, they feel compelled to protect to the community’s normative whiteness. To do so, they need to ensure that Ras doesn’t “breed no more half-wits” (114). They order Horm to intercede, and when he fails to halt Ras’s ramblings, the Dunmires castrate Ras with a dirty knife.

The affective reaction generated in readers when Ras’ punishment is revealed upends assumptions about the role of the mythic white man. Until Horm returns to his kitchen after giving his feverish son a sponge bath, the Dunmires mythic manhood is understood to be valorous and admirable, if unlikely. Written in the late 1990s when white manhood seemed tentative and commercial, the Dunmires in all their rurality evoke the axiom found in Hugh Campbell, Michael Bell, and Margaret Finney’s introduction to *Country Boys*, “Real men are rural men,” where the “real man” is white and as hard as the land.<sup>100</sup> The Dunmire’s all male enclave might seem to put them at ideological odds with the larger, heterodomic community, but as “real men” the Dunmires benefit from social practices that “advantage some men over other men, and men as a whole over women as a whole.”<sup>101</sup> Benefitting from such privilege obligates them to protect the cultural institutions, namely marriages and ranch families, that engender their position within the community.

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<sup>100</sup> Campbell, Hugh (soc. anthro), Michael Mayerfeld Bell (rural sociology), and Margaret Finney. “Masculinity and Rural Life: An Introduction.” *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*. Eds. Hugh Campbell, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Margaret Finney. University Park: The University of Pennsylvania UP, 1-21. 2006. Print.

<sup>101</sup> Campbell, et. al., 7

Proulx implicates readers in the practice of bestowing privilege onto the Dunmires through her manipulation of the syntax of the western. The contrast between the two families relies on the Western's core dichotomy, good vs. evil, and invites favorable evaluations of the Dunmires. Their skill and integrity are admirable, especially when compared to the inept and predatory Tinsleys. Moreover, Ras is a sexual predator in a community with no institution to regulate him. When their brutality is finally revealed to us, we must reevaluate why we identified with or idealize the Dunmires, and thus, their version of white manhood.

*LONESOME DOVE* AND A HOME ON THE RANGE

Published nearly fifteen years before Proulx's story, the 1985 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Lonesome Dove* serves as an extended meditation on manhood and domesticity, and opens up new possibilities for manhood in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the epic nineteenth century cattle drive from Texas to Montana may seem antithetical to the very idea of domesticity, McMurtry forces us to reconsider the physical and ideological structures that delimit the domestic. He does so by forcing the reader to recognize even tertiary male characters as vulnerable and uncertain when faced with the prospect of marriage.

Our first introduction to the men is not through the work which might define their identity, but through their interactions with one another after work. The novel opens, not on a rider crossing the arid desert landscape or a tidy homestead or a bustling Western town, but on the ramshackle home of the men who own and work for the Hat Creek Cattle Company as they come in from work to eat dinner. On the front porch of the Hat

Creek Cattle Company, one of the owners, Augustus McCrae, watches a sow and a shoat eat a rattlesnake. As Roger Walton Jones argues in *Larry McMurry and the Victorian Novel* (1994), the porch and pigs further code the space as domestic, though not exactly as Walton suggests. Walton asserts that the hogs are a symbol of civilization, while the rattler they tug on represents the frontier. He goes on to suggest that it is no mistake that the sow has the snake by the neck; after all, women were a prominent force in civilizing the frontier.<sup>102</sup> But this porch and the Hat Creek Cattle Company as a whole are missing the “civilizing” force of women—despite the presence of the sow—and we must ask what makes this ramshackle house a home?

The pigs are the first clue that the Hat Creek Cattle Company wants little to do with the heterodomic. Yes, the pigs, a sow and a shoat, might normally indicate the penultimate wave of civilization, farming. However, these pigs do not follow the natural order of things. They do not mate, they are not for sale, they are not for rent, and as long as Augustus McCrae is alive, they aren't for eating.<sup>103</sup> With few exceptions, the men who make a home together just south of Lonesome Dove, Texas are similar to pigs in that they don't mate for reproduction, they are not for sale, and they belong exclusively to the company.

The Hat Creek Cattle Company, headed by Augustus and Woodrow Call, two former Texas Rangers, is a domestic and civilized space structured around labor and fraternity rather than marriage. The company is the mechanism that allows the men of the core homodomic, Call, Pea Eye, Josh Deets, Newt, and Bolivar, the Mexican cook, to live together in fraternal harmony. More a front than a thriving operation, the company

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<sup>102</sup> Roger Walton Jones, *Larry McMurry and the Victorian Novel*, (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1994,) 31-32.

<sup>103</sup> *Lonesome Dove*, 89.

owns cattle and horses intermittently and is staffed by a handful of men. In the years before the novel opens, the company occasionally had cattle when they rustled it from across the border, but they didn't drive the cattle anywhere; they sold it to other outfits heading north. Work on the ranch primarily consists of maintaining the rundown buildings that constitute the ranch. Even Call is surprised that "such a small operation could keep three grown men and a boy occupied from sunup until dark, day after day, but such was the case" (57). Augustus and Call don't do much ranching, and Pea Eye, Deets, Newt, and Bolivar don't do much wrangling. These men, do, however, live together under one roof, take their meals together, they talk or don't talk to each other both during and after work, and they take care of one another.

The labor of driving the cattle from south Texas to Montana occasions the expansion of cowboy homodomestic. They exchange the bunkhouse for the campfire, engendering a mobile domesticity and privacy that binds the men to one another. If Jake Spoon, the fugitive and former Texas Ranger, had not come along and given Call the idea to start a ranch in Montana, these men would have continued eating Gus's biscuits and Bolivar's beans, sweating under Call's laborious eye and the Texas sun, and living together for the rest of their lives. But Jake does come along and as a result, the Hat Creek Cattle Company expands to include horses, hundreds of heads of cattle, and the core domestic unit acquires another fifteen men. McMurtry devotes the majority of the narrative to the relationships among male characters, both during and after work. In the novel, the twenty-one men of the Hat Creek Outfit divvy up domestic tasks, bed down in the same space, cook, eat, and play cards together, and the surviving members make a home in Montana by the end of the novel. The emphasis on male-male interactions that

are not centered on work suggests that readers are given access to a space that was once off limits.

Privacy is a key component of the homodestic but it is not identical to heterodestic privacy. Nineteenth century notions of public and private spheres would suggest that a man did not attain manhood until he had a private life separable from his work life. Privacy, predicated on a heterodestic construction of companionate marriage and the presence of a wife and children, is an integral component of both nineteenth century and twentieth century manhood. In a traditional calculus, a wife equals privacy which in turn equals normative manhood. In this construction, privacy privileges heterodestic space over spaces marked primarily by same-sex interactions. Ideologically, men could possess secrets and rituals with other men, but not privacy.<sup>104</sup>

Contemporary westerns offer readers access to moments and conversations that were previously inaccessible. Earlier westerns focus on male-male interactions primarily during work-related duties, but we as readers and viewers were rarely privy to the details of non-work scenes. From *Wild and Woolly* (1917) to *Shane* (1953) to *The Wild Bunch* (1969), men's primary diegetic space was work, and same-sex privacy is hinted at, but never breached. Take, for instance, the scene in Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian* in which the Virginian hangs his beloved friend Steve.<sup>105</sup> Readers do not witness the Virginian and Steve's final conversation, just as we are not privy to the bulk of their friendship. Their relationship is private and inaccessible to us, though it haunts the Virginian's relationship with Molly, the school teacher. Even as early as 1902, then, the genre gestured toward the importance and sacredness of same-sex privacy. A

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<sup>104</sup>Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, Yale UP, 1991.

<sup>105</sup>In *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins' analysis of this scene gestures towards an implicit privacy between the Virginian and Steve, but veers off into an interrogation of Wister's sexuality.

contemporary western like *Lonesome Dove* provides access to homodomesic privacy and in doing so makes visible the structure and importance of men's friendships.

McMurtry finds in the homodomesic a permanence that is consensual, desirable, and culturally unscripted. Within the novel, men, when given the choice between marriage and homosociality, most often go with the latter. This is not an absolute, however, which is made quite clear in existence of marriage in the novel, but married couples are easily outnumbered by single, working men. McMurtry repeatedly demonstrates the desirability of the cattle company over married life. The relationships between men in the Hat Creek Cattle Company are not homogenous, however, and the intensity of men's ties to each seem dependent on how long they have been members of the company, whether or not they want to marry or have been married, and their sexual experiences with women. Two members of the company, Pea Eye Parker and Dishwater "Dish" Boggett, represent this diversity. Pea Eye is a longtime member of the company and Dish is a recent addition who only wants to work off his debt to Gus. Their experiences as skilled laborers who are relatively low in the company's hierarchy suggest that the cowboy homodomesic initially acts as porous structure that men can move through, but over time, as the bonds between men mature, it can become impermeable.

Pea Eye Parker, a former corporal in the Texas Rangers under Gus and Call, is a man with limited sexual or social experience who has worked with the men of the Hat Creek Cattle Company for the majority of his life. As a result, Pea Eye's relationship to the heterodomesic is practically non-existent. His world has been so dominated by labor and fraternity that women and marriage are alien concepts. Pea Eye understands his place within the Hat Creek Cattle Company's hierarchy, and years of service have naturalized

his life within the company wherein Pea Eye finds multiple fulfilling companionate relationships. He respects and admires Call's competency, stoicism, and firm hand, and he is happy to serve under him. He respects Gus as well, though he has no idea why Gus talks so much. His respect for Deets, the company's black scout, comes from decades of working together, and he maintains an avuncular relationship to the fatherless young Newt.

So normalized is the homodestic, that Pea Eye cannot fathom what marriage would mean for him, let alone what a man and woman would do together when alone under the same roof. Pea's question is both an ontological and phenomenological one: within a marriage who would he *be* and *how*? He knows how to be a ranch hand and a ranger, two roles in which he is quite skilled, but the role of husband is uncharted territory. How would a wife expect him to act in bed or during meals? Would she expect him to talk? What would being a woman's companion and husband look and feel like? Pea Eye has no conception of or desire for what Townsend calls the package deal, and aside from Gus teasing Pea from time to time, there is little social or cultural pressure to marry. To marry would require Pea to shift his understanding of his most central relationships within the Hat Creek Cattle Company from primary to provisional. He is content to remain single—or more accurately, he is content to remain bound exclusively to the men who make up the core of the Hat Creek Cattle Company.

Marriage, however, is a routine topic of discussion in the first third of the novel, and the views of the men in the Hat Creek Cattle Company are wide ranging. Call and Pea Eye never planned to marry. Gus has been married twice, and according to him Deets had always intended to marry, though he never does. Dish wants to marry Lorena, while

Newt just has a lot of feelings for everyone and no firsthand experience with women. Bolivar's wife and daughters live just across the border, but he only sees them once a year, which seems to satisfy all parties. The post-dinner discussions between the men often turn to marriage, and one night, Gus teases Pea by suggesting that he should marry the widow Mary Cole, a suggestion strange enough to unsettle Pea Eye. Because Pea Eye's entire life is constructed around work, and he cannot recall "spending ten minutes alone with a woman" in his adult life, women are alien to him, and the Widow Cole presents a particularly "troublesome puzzle" (135). Generally, whenever the "thought of women entered his head all on its own," it lingered for hours like a "cloud of gnats," yet the puzzle of marriage and the Widow Cole linger for days in Pea Eye's consciousness (133).

Pea Eye's concerns about the possibility of a relationship with Mary Cole stem from his loyalty to the company, and Call in particular. He knows that marriage would mean "leaving the Captain, and Pea didn't plan to do that." Despite the proximity of Mary's home, he reflects that "Captain always liked to have his men handy in case something came up sudden" (135). Here, the historical cowboy rears his head. Blake Allmendinger's work on the cowboy situates the cowboy as a wage laborer, often required to live on the ranch where he worked, and Allmendinger found that irregular hours, long cattle drives, and roundups made single men more fiscally attractive than those who were married.<sup>106</sup> Thus Pea, unlike the mythologized cowboy who is

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<sup>106</sup> In *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1992.) Allmendinger writes, "Historical accounts of the range industry indicate that cattlemen tended to hire only unmarried men. The owners sent cowboys away on trail drives, cattle roundups, and extended explorations of range land, preferring to employ single men, who could leave the ranch without disrupting family relationships. On ranches, owners maintained single sex bunkhouses and line camps for cowboys" (50).

independent and rootless, recognizes that he has a duty to both labor and fraternity, and he has no interest in shirking his responsibilities.

Rather than give up on the prospect of marriage entirely, Pea attempts to “puzzle” through the possibility of having both domestic spaces. In his imagined pitch to the widow, he would agree to marry her on the condition that he wouldn’t have to live with her. If she agreed, “she might allow him to continue to live down the street with the boys, that being what he was used to. He would plan, of course, to make himself available for chores when she required him—otherwise life could on in its accustomed way” (138). Pea Eye conceptualizes marriage as all labor without the kind of companionship that he finds within the Hat Creek Cattle Company. He simply cannot imagine relating to Mary Cole in any kind of meaningful way, and thus he reasons that he should not live with her because he is not worthy of her. Pea is not suited to Mary and marriage because he cannot give up the men of the Hat Creek Cattle Company. Though he doesn’t understand much about marriage, Pea implicitly knows that as his hypothetical wife, Mary would be the gatekeeper of his extra-marital relationships, and as such, she would dictate how much time he could or could not spend with the men with whom he is emotionally and vocationally bound. That Pea Eye cannot imagine maintaining those bonds without living with the outfit suggests that an established homodomestic unit like the one found in the Hat Creek Cattle Company normalizes homosociality in such a way as to make the marriage a non-normative institution for the men who inhabit that space. Pea Eye’s inability to understand how marriage must work or why he would be expected to abdicate his friendships indicates that his decades-long membership to a cowboy homodomestic has reoriented his understanding of the expectations of manhood.

As one of the newer members to the Hat Creek Cattle Company, Dish Boggett is uninterested in forging lasting bonds with his coworkers. His insistence on labor over fraternity is at odds with the paradigm under which the company functions and creates a barrier between him and the other cowboys. He enters into and experiences the homodominant quite differently than the core members of the Hat Creek Cattle Company. First, his employment is not entirely voluntary. Unlike the Spettle and Rainey brothers who are from Lonesome Dove and whose parents agree to send them on the drive, Dish is conscripted to work for the company because he borrows money from Gus in order to “buy a poke” from Lorena. Because Dish can only repay Gus with labor, he joins the company just weeks before they hit the dusty trail.<sup>107</sup> Second, Dish, who has a skilled hand with horses, is the only “real” cowboy in the Hat Creek Cattle Company. The other members of the company are either former rangers, greenhorns like Newt and the Spettles and Rainey, or single men like Lippy and Soupy Jones who have few discernible skills other than a desire to leave Lonesome Dove. Dish is a valuable commodity but he chooses to stand apart from the other men, and over the course of the novel, Dish forms no lasting intimate relationships with any male characters.

Dish also differs from the other men in the company in that he wishes, quite clearly and quite desperately, to marry Lorena, the only white prostitute in all of Lonesome Dove. His desire for her is predicated on her whiteness and her blondness, rare features so close to the Rio Grande. Lorena’s beauty haunts Dish and he carries with him the “vivid memory of how white she was: moon-pale and touched with shadows, like the night outside” (49). But Dish knows little about Lorena as a person, and he is as

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<sup>107</sup> Dish complains bitterly throughout the novel that he never signed up to leave Texas, and he regrets ever borrowing money from Gus.

impervious to her desires as she is to his, though he believes persistence is the way to her heart. Lorena finds little if anything appealing about marriage in general and Dish in particular. Despite the mythological appeal of the cowboy, Dish's profession undermines his ability to woo Lorena. As one of only three women who play a significant role in the novel, Lorena is the repository of the men's longing for marriage—both temporary and long term—yet she is physically removed from the domestic space of the Hat Creek Cattle Company and is unavailable for or interested in procreation or marriage. Dish's desire to marry her holds no temptation because she assumes he wants the "little marriages" that most cowboys expect, marriages that would "last until they started up the trail." Although she knows some girls who are interested in these temporary unions that lasted "a month or six weeks," Lorena thinks the whole endeavor is silly (43). The risk of marrying a cowboy lies in the slippage between fantasy and reality, and she has witnessed other girls who believed they were "respectable," only to return to the brothels once their cowboy husbands headed out on the trail.

As importantly, Lorena privileges her labor over the development of intimate relationships. Her interactions with men are sexual and economic and she does not blur the line between them for the average cowboy interested in a poke. Lorena collects her fees upfront, keeps to herself, and rarely socializes beyond the occasional game of cards. She is more interested in a man who can help her escape Lonesome Dove than in marriage, and sets her sights first on the charismatic Jake Spoon, and then on Gus. At twenty two, Dish cannot compete with Jake's reputation as a gunslinger or Gus's financial independence and charm. There is nothing exceptional or mythic about Dish—he is all cowboy and no gunslinger, and Lorena cannot or will not allow him to

differentiate himself from other cowboys, and with good reason.<sup>108</sup> Dish fits Allmendinger's profile of historical cowboys: a wage laborer without property whose work restricts his access to women and reproduction. Consequently, Dish's inability to play the part of father and husband grows directly out of the biological and financial restrictions inherent to the profession he has chosen.<sup>109</sup>

Dish's transient position within the company, precipitated by his desire to be with Lorena, means that his loyalty is unfixed. He refuses to give his loyalty to Gus and Call beyond the length of the ride, and Lorena won't take it. He begrudgingly completes the drive to Montana, thus fulfilling his obligation to Call and Gus, and after he collects his wages, he hurries to Lorena who has become a part of another woman's home in Ogallala. There he enters into another primarily homodestic space, occupied this time by Clara, Gus's lost love, her daughters, and Lorena. As one of Clara's two male employees (the other is a Mexican man named Charo), Dish is obligated to live outside of Clara's home, and thus he has access to neither fraternity nor heterodesticity.

Dish's and Pea Eye's heterodestic imaginaries are similar in that neither really considers the needs and desires of their potential mates. In both cases, Mary's and Lorena's desires do not matter. Marriage to Lorena or Mary is little more than a step to be taken if Dish and Pea wish to enter the final stage of conventional American manhood. This disregard or failure to account for women's desires appears to be a key characteristic of the men who inhabit the company because when men's relationships are primary and

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<sup>108</sup> This is true despite Dish's desire to kill Jake Spoon. As McMurtry writes: "Dish was no gunfighter, but some things could not be borne. He took out his pistol and checked his loads, surprised at how fast life could suck you along; that morning he had awoke with no plans except to be a cowboy, and now he was about to become a man-killer, which would put his whole future in doubt." (95)

<sup>109</sup> In this way, Dish recalls James LaGrinder in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* (1927). LaGrinder is highly skilled and desperately in love with Cogewea, but cannot convince her of his suitability because of his wage labor as a cowboy.

require extended cohabitation, it becomes difficult for them to consider what women might want. As a result, it becomes ideologically tricky for these men to even imagine entering the heterodomeestic. However, Dish and Pea Eye's seeming disregarded for these two women may be linked to their inability to understand how women have changed. The cultural conditions in which *Lonesome Dove* was written were shaped by the multiple women's movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that increased economic, social, and political access for women, encouraging them to rewrite their roles or throw out the antiquated heteronormative script completely. *Lonesome Dove* reflects the changes in women's understanding of themselves, and men's inability to keep up with those changes.

The novel also makes visible changes in how men understand their relationships to one another. As the earliest text under analysis in this dissertation, *Lonesome Dove* represents a watershed moment for the western because it does more than simply privilege the intimate bonds fostered and nurtured by men's work and friendship; the novel argues that men can choose to value and foster their relationships with one another, and this idea is nearly antithetical to contemporaneous criticism on men and masculinity. Ultimately, the difference between Pea Eye and Dish is one of priority. Both men work hard, but where Dish self-isolates, Pea Eye embraces the cowboy homodomeestic with no anxieties or concerns about how a larger culture will interpret his loyalty to his friends. Having spent the majority of his life in the company of men, he is as uninterested in marriage as the women in the novel. Pea's greatest fear about marriage is that he might lose the men in his life, and the arc of the novel encourages us to consider why his position seems non-normative and strange. Prominent sociologist and leading critic on

American manhood Michael Kimmel might be inclined to read Pea Eye's commitment to his friends instead of a wife as a resistance to normative manhood and a desire to remain a boy or child. But what if Pea Eye is simply reading from a different script that does not privilege the heteronormative markers of manhood?<sup>110</sup> Pea Eye, a retired corporal for the Texas Rangers who is gainfully employed and content with his life, is no Lost Boy, but a man who has chosen a different script that privileges fraternity and homosociality over heterosexual relationships, and what's so wrong with that?

#### *CITY SLICKERS* AND WHAT THE WEST ALLOWS

In Ron Underwood's 1991 comedy, *City Slickers*, the question of manhood and the recuperative power of myth take center stage. Billy Crystal teamed up with Underwood to create a film about "friendship, about trusting your friends with your pain,"<sup>111</sup> but according to scholars of men's friendships in the early '90s, men's friendships were difficult to account for, in part because men themselves subscribed to and parroted contemporary stereotypes about their relationships with other men. *City Slickers* suggests that while both men and women assume that emotional vulnerability between straight white men is a cultural impossibility, it can be vital. Underwood and Crystal are committed to *showing* us the possibilities found in the hidden and transformative work of men's retreats.

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<sup>110</sup> In Kimmel's *Guyland*, he argues that young white men are reluctant to become "men," which he defines as one who is married, has a job, owns a home, and is prepared to support his family. Instead, he contends that young white men are content to live in "guyland," doing entry level corporate or low paying retail work, living with one another in small apartments, and having lots of sex but few committed heterosexual relationships.

<sup>111</sup> Gary Arnold, "Billy Crystal expands his range in 'Slicker,'" *The Washington Times*. 6 Jun. 1991.

Hailed by movie critics as a “cattle-driving adventure that gives new meaning to midlife crisis”<sup>112</sup> and a “poignant meditation on the aging process,”<sup>113</sup> the film celebrates the emotional importance of men’s friendships and imagines fraternity via the myth of the cowboy as a practice that can rejuvenate the heterodomestic. Three married, middle-class, middle-aged New Yorkers, Mitch Robbins (Billy Crystal), Ed Furillo (Bruno Kirby), and Phil Berquist (Daniel Stearn), travel to a New Mexico dude ranch in order to process their mid-life crises. The men go west and play cowboy because the western provides a safe homodomestic space for them to do the difficult emotional work that will ultimately benefit their heteroromantic relationships.

Underwood is in no hurry to rush west. He and Crystal are more invested in the motivations that push men westward and what they might gain from the journey, than they are in the West itself. The film begins in Pamplona, Spain and the running of the bulls. Only after the bulls are loosed do we glimpse the main characters, centered on the screen and as yet unnamed, running for their lives amid a crowd of thrill seekers. Ed, who, as we discover later, enjoys “authentic” costumes, wears a traditional white shirt and pants with a red sash and blends in with the crowd. Mitch wears a New York Mets jersey with a red neckerchief— his only concession to the occasion, while Phil wears a faded polo shirt and jeans. One by one the men are overwhelmed by the rush: Phil grabs a flag pole to escape the trampling bulls; Ed leaps into the spectators clustered on the side

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<sup>112</sup> Jeannie Williams, “Crystal is at home on the range in ‘Slickers,’” *USA Today*, 31 May 1991, Web.

<sup>113</sup> Craig McInnis, “Chrystal (sic) rides off with funny-warm horse tale,” *The Toronto Star*, 7 Jun. 1991. Web.

of the road; and Mitch runs directly ahead of a dappled bull that eventually gores him in the butt before the screen cuts to the animated credits.<sup>114</sup>

In the first act of the film, Mitch, Phil, and Ed each express a desire to diverge from the heteronormative script, but they feel, as middle-aged men, that it is too late to change course. Instead, they take fantasy vacations, occasionally with their wives or children, but always together. In New York, however, these men are in crisis. Ed owns a sporting goods store with his brother, and recently married Kim, a lingerie model a decade his junior. Though he seems fairly happy, anxieties about fatherhood and marriage simmer under the surface. Phil works as a grocery store manager for his father-in-law, and he is so routinely emasculated by Arlene, his terrifying wife, that he often pretends to be asleep so that he won't have to talk to her.<sup>115</sup> Phil is involuntarily pitched off track when a 20-year-old store clerk crashes Mitch's fortieth birthday party to announce she's pregnant, and his life and marriage subsequently fall apart.

As the film's lead, Mitch is the unhappiest, and it's his crisis around which the film turns. He is infantilized by his mother, demoted by his boss, and generally unhappy. More than Ed or Phil, he is the film's mythopoetic wimp. During career day for his son Daniel's sixth grade class, Mitch performs a monologue that, according to one reviewer, "saturates the room in hopelessness"<sup>116</sup>:

When you're a teenager, you think you can do anything, and you do. Your twenties are a blur. Thirties, you raise your family, you make a little money and you think to yourself, "What happened to my twenties?" Forties, you grow a little pot belly, you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud. One of your

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<sup>114</sup> In the DVD cast commentary Ron Underwood reveals that the animated titles, which feature a cowboy and cows on a black screen performing tricks, "Allowed us to get the western part of the story in earlier because it takes a little while through the first act to get to the West."

<sup>115</sup> Phil's sleep maneuver is reminiscent of Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, who also sleeps to avoid his shrewish wife. Crystal, Stern, and Underwood all talk about how scared they actually were of Karla Tamburelli, the actress who played Arlene.

<sup>116</sup> Gary Arnold, "Billy Crystal expands his range in 'Slicker'," *The Washington Times*, 6 Jun 1991.

old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. Fifties, you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure but it's a surgery. Sixties, you'll have a major surgery. The music is still loud, but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway. Seventies, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale. You start eating dinner at 2:00 in the afternoon, you have lunch around 10:00, breakfast the night before. You spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate soft yogurt and muttering, "How come the kids don't call? How come the kids don't call?" The eighties, you'll have a major stroke. You end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call "Momma." Any questions?"

There are no questions because the script Mitch relays to the bewildered 11-year olds is fixed and finite. This is the tract of white, middle-class American manhood, and like the men Faludi interviewed in the late '90s, Mitch feels compelled to "adhere with precision to the roles society had set out" for him, yet he still feels lost.<sup>117</sup> As Mitch prepares to exit his thirties, he has raised his family and made a little money, but he has little to show for it. He laments to his wife Barbara that he sells air, unlike his father, an upholsterer, who made "something tangible." He wants to quit his job but he can't because she wants to send their daughter to a performance high school, and "that school costs money. Everything costs money." Quite simply, Mitch feels trapped, running a course with the bull of cultural ideology at his back.

To escape, Phil and Ed offer to take Mitch away from city and family for a two week cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado, but Mitch initially privileges family over friendship because that is what the script demands. Ed, crestfallen, asks if Mitch is sick, and Phil counters Mitch's refusal with indignation and hurt because he "worked every weekend for a year to get this." Clearly, they need take advantage of the safety valve of the west. Toward the end of act one, the three friends find themselves at the crux of late twentieth-century manhood and friendship: should men turn to their romantic

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<sup>117</sup> Faludi, 9.

partners or to their friends when they need emotional support?<sup>118</sup> *City Slickers* suggests that there isn't a zero sum game when it comes to emotional need, and it is Mitch's wife who urges him to join his friends on their fantasy trip west:

*Go away with Ed. Take Phil.* I am giving you these two weeks. It's my present. Go and find your smile. (emphasis added)

Barbara recognizes that she cannot help her husband because she is inextricably linked to the ideological structures that make him feel trapped. Like many a white man before him, including Owen Wister, Teddy Roosevelt, and Frederic Remington, Mitch needs to rejuvenate his manhood by roughing it in the harsh landscape of the West, riding, roping, and sleeping under the stars. His wife hopes the trip West with his friends is the push Mitch needs to get out of the heteronormative doldrums.

That it takes the men so long to head West is indicative of Underwood's and Crystal's commitment to developing a fuller depiction of men's friendships.<sup>119</sup> Though the men seek a *Lonesome Dove* experience, where they pay to play the parts of the greenhorns, their friendship already depends on an unacknowledged need to create a contingent domesticity. Their immersion in the generic constraints offered by the dude ranch becomes a mechanism for them to spend time with each other, developing and nurturing their fraternal bonds. Within the remaining two thirds of the film, the featured trio, along with five other would be cowboys, inhabit a transient homodomesticity that engenders enough privacy for Mitch, Ed, and Phil to share their feelings and find their smiles.

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<sup>118</sup> This question emerges from Theodore Cohen's discussion of the temporal demands on men's time, especially with regards to marriage and friendship.

<sup>119</sup> Underwood acknowledges that many studios would have wanted to get to the West sooner. In the DVD commentary he lauds Castle Rock for trusting him and Crystal in taking time to "really develop the characters before we got out west."

Act two of *City Slickers* is full of feelings, and the cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado becomes a generative site for Mitch, Ed, and Phil's white manhood. The triumph of bringing in the herd is presented as evidence that Mitch, Ed, and Phil have finally been initiated into white manhood. However, this generic triumph distracts from the recuperative power of the West and the nurturing friendship that emerges during the drive. Without the cultivation of their friendship, the final initiation of bringing in the herd would simply result in what Paul Wolf-Light calls a passive dependence on "a collective approval based upon the prevailing cultural stereotypes of men."<sup>120</sup> Because the West is so empty, and because the men have so much empty time as they herd cattle, the diegesis focuses on their talking to one another about their feelings instead of fast-paced action. The emptiness of time, geography, and myth create a safe space removed from contemporary dominant ideologies about manhood where these three men can work out their anxieties. This safe space is only as productive as the men who inhabit it, however, and Mitch, Ed, and Phil take full advantage of its potentiality in order to heal some of their psychic wounds. The seemingly innocuous second act conversations between Ed, Phil, and Mitch, while superficially unmanly, prepare them to return to or develop healthier heteroromantic relationships.

I want to be clear, however, that though these men engage in difficult emotional work on the trail, they are not resisting in totality the ideological power structures that

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<sup>120</sup> In "The Shadow of Iron John," *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*, ed. Michael Kimmel., (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995), Wolf-Light argues that Bly cannot have it both ways. If the point of the mythopoetic men's movement is to help men become independent of women, the movement cannot ignore that it is trading dependency on women for dependency on male archetypes. Wolf-Light rather persuasively argues "With men's identity and status so bound up with their gender role rather than their personal sense of self this confusion and uncertainty is understandable. But it needs to be tolerated and explored so that a more genuine sense of self as a man can emerge, rather than being fled from in a desperate attempt to recreate a bygone age of certainty" (218).

benefit them. Because *City Slickers* is set in the 1990s and not the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century and depicts men who challenge traditional notions of manhood, I find it imperative to acknowledge how the characters resist and reify normative masculinity. While they do share their feelings and cry with one another, the characters repeatedly make sexist remarks and continue to valorize many of the characteristics of traditional manhood. Michael Schwalbe's 1998 article "Mythopoetic Men's Work as a Search for *Communitas*," stresses that "[mythopoetic] men's work may open men to seeing things in themselves and help them make connections with each other, but it also blinds them to seeing important connections between themselves and society," namely that in "a male-supremacist society, there can be no innocent celebration of masculinity."<sup>121</sup> However, Schwalbe also emphasizes how the mythopoetic men's movement has allowed men to "begin to see that they don't have to live out traditional masculinity and can even cooperate to heal the damage it causes."<sup>122</sup> The manhood that emerges in *City Slickers* is hampered by the myth and nostalgia that frames it, yet this manhood does represent an incremental and important change in how white manhood is imagined by white men at the end of the century.

Interestingly, the people who have paid for the privilege of herding cattle through the desert are not necessarily legible white men. Mitch and Phil's understated Jewishness and Ed's New York Italianness, are complemented by two black dentists, Ben and Steve Jessup (Bill Henderson and Phill Lewis), the almost painfully stereotypical Jewish brothers Ira and Barry Shalowitz (David Paymer and Josh Mostel), and the "one chick"

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Schwalbe, "Mythopoetic Men's Work as a Search for *Communitas*," *Men's Lives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, editors Michael Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 576.

<sup>122</sup> Schwalbe, 576.

Bonnie Rayburn (Helen Slater).<sup>123</sup> Of the eight labor tourists, Mitch, Ed, and Phil are arguably the most white, although not as white as the “professional cowboys” Curly (Jack Palance), T.R. (Dean Hall), or Jeff (Kyle Secor). Out West, ethnic white people are transformed into normative white people through a mutually constitutive interaction between the land and people, primarily through labor. Although the men and Bonnie have paid to play cowboy, Clay Stone, the owner of Stone ranch, informs them that “this is not pretend. This is a real working ranch.” The cowboy experience is framed in myth, but the work is real. The cows are real. The desert is real. Over the next two weeks, they round up the herd, go after strays, and ride “in some country that’s just as pretty as heaven.” He promises the motley crew that though they “came out here city slickers,” they’re “gonna go home cowboys.” Unlikely as it may seem, this folksy and worn pronouncement implies that two weeks of laboring like cowboys is enough to turn the labor tourists, which include two black men and a white woman, into rugged white men. Under the tutelage of Jeff and T.R., the greenhorns take crash courses in horseback riding, roping, and pitching camp. They are informed by the cook, Cookie, that they “ain’t gonna be getting no nouveau, almondine, thin crust, bottle water, sautéed city food. Food’s brown, hot, and plenty of it.” Like the men of the Hat Creek Cattle Company, these weekend cowboys will take their meals together, bunk together, and work together, and those who finish the journey are changed by the landscape. Like Turner’s European immigrant pioneers who become whiter and more American in the West, Mitch, Ed, and Phil’s completion of the cattle drive solidifies both their whiteness and their manhood.

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<sup>123</sup> In the DVD commentary, Billy Crystal refers to Helen Slater as the “one chick,” proving that recuperative manhood is not necessarily synonymous with feminist manhood.

The three friends harbored different expectations about how their foray into the cowboy homodestic will change them. More than Phil or Mitch, Ed expects to find the answers “out there” in the dark and arid landscape, led by Curly. He sees in Curly a romantic masculinity quite at odds with his own middle-class ‘90s manhood. When Ed says “[Curly’s] a real cowboy. One of the last real men. He’s untamed. A mustang. We’re trained ponies. It’ll do us good to be in his world for a while,” he sums up nearly a century of repeated diagnoses and the prescription for white manhood in crisis: middle-class white men enervated by modernity need to go “out there” and develop a rugged, or primitive masculinity. Phil, who will later confess that here in the liminal space before divorce and alimony payments and custody battles, he is lost, doesn’t have much to say on the matter. He nods knowingly at Ed’s proclamations about Curly and the “out there.” Mitch is not so convinced that Curly is either “normal” or the cure for his enervated manhood, and it is clear that he sees only a caricature of manhood in Curly’s weathered face. Mitch maintains that the West holds no answers for him, and he cannot foresee how the drive will change him.

The labor of driving cattle creates the possibilities for change as Ed, Phil, and Mitch to talk to and learn from one another. Before Curly dies and the cowboys abandon their charges, the trio finds time while on horseback to share their best and worst days, their feelings for their fathers and kids, and their feelings for their wives, and make themselves emotionally vulnerable to one another. In the DVD commentary, Billy Crystal echoes Siedler’s claims about male vulnerability as an integral component that is often missing from male friendships because “you think you’re really close, but then we’re hearing stuff for the first time and we all knew each other for so long.” Crystal

counters Siedler's resignation by imagining a world where men can change, and he insists that "part of the beauty of the screenplay was that we were finding out about each other, too." They men "find out" about each other in three distinct instances where they share common anxieties and seek help from one another.

These conversations share several characteristics. First, each conversation begins with one man asking another a banal question that leads to a conversation about interpersonal relationships. The questions mimic the structure of the mythopoetic retreats, as described by Schwalbe:

[Men] often made personal statements that revealed something shameful, tragic, or emotionally disturbing about their lives. [...] Before any statements were made, the leader of the retreat or gathering would remind the men of the rules to follow in making statements: speak briefly, speak from the heart (i.e. focus on feelings), and speak to the other men—who were supposed to listen intently, make no judgments, and give no advice. The idea was that the statements should bring the unrehearsed truth up from a man's gut, since this would stir feelings in him and move other men to speak their "belly truth."<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, the conversations between Mitch and Ed, Mitch and Curly, and Mitch, Ed, and Phil are brief, each man takes his turn speaking, their speech is directed to each other (though riding horseback makes eye contact difficult), and they are full of feelings.

Second, each conversation either begins or takes place on horseback, while the men are working with the cattle, but the horses rarely share the frame with the actors. Underwood notes that in traditional westerns, cowboys never do dialogue while on horseback, that "they come to a stop then talk," and for good reason. Filming dialogue while moving cattle is very difficult. Underwood's commitment to dialogue on horseback decenters the action, the drive itself, as the focus of the film. Underwood intensifies the effect of fraternity over action by consistently framing the men in medium close shots

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<sup>124</sup> Schwalbe, 569.

that show the actor's body from the elbows up, or two shots, which frame two actors in a single shot, indicating that diegetic focus rests on their psychic and emotional health rather than on the drive.

Finally, the blending of labor and pleasure in the New Mexico desert make these conversations possible. Because driving cattle is not actually their job, the would-be-cowboys don't hold the same economical stakes in the drive as Curly, Jeff, T.R. or Clay Stone. As labor tourists, their interest is in avocation and leisure. And unlike sky diving or baseball camp or scuba diving, the amount of time spent on horseback while herding cattle provides ample opportunity for conversation. The noise of the cattle combined with the vastness of the landscape creates a mobile privacy that is an integral component to the cowboy homodestic. In the mobile domesticity found in being on horseback and around campfires and in tents, Mitch, Ed, and Phil form and nurture the interpersonal bonds that will benefit each man's heterodestic partnership.

In the first conversation, Ed turns to Mitch for advice about being a good father and husband. On the first day of the drive, Ed asks Mitch if he would ever cheat on Barbara, even if she would never find out, and even if that woman was an alien who wanted to have the best sex in the universe before she left Earth forever. Mitch responds that "it wouldn't make it all right if Barbara didn't know. I'd know, and I wouldn't like myself." Curly interrupts them, but Ed returns to the same subject later that night around the campfire. While they might look like boys at camp, the conversation is serious. Because Mitch has been married for over fifteen years, Ed, a newlywed, wants his advice on marriage and fatherhood. Kim, Ed's twenty-four year old wife, wants kids, but Ed sees fatherhood as a "real commitment." Phil doesn't understand what Ed's problem is, but as

an adulterer, his opinion only enrages Ed. Later, Ed will reveal that the worst thing he thinks a man can do is “screw around” like his father did, but he doesn’t feel safe enough to share his painful past with Phil and Mitch just yet.

The second conversation occurs between Curly and Mitch, and highlights the distinction between the mythic cowboy and the ‘90s weekend warrior. The entire conversation takes place entirely on horseback as they lead some strays back to the herd, and the primary shots are medium close ups or two shots. Mitch begins with Ed’s question about space alien women asking Curly if he’s ever been in love. Curly responds,

Once. I was driving a herd across the Panhandle. Texas. And passed near this little dirt farm ‘round about sundown. Out in the field was this young woman, working down in the dirt. Just about then, she stood up to stretch her back. She was wearing a little cotton dress, and the setting sun was right behind her, showing the shape that God had give her.

Then he just “turned around and rode away.” Mitch is appalled. This scene suggests a dichotomy between how a myth loves and how a sensitive ‘90s man loves. The heterodomeestic is not for Curly because “a cowboy leads a different kind of life,” and the image of the woman in the field is more emotionally satisfying than *knowing* the woman in the field. For Mitch, the idea of “[passing] up something that might have been terrific” is just wrong. Where the myth functions on certainty, for the woman was certainly something to behold, the ‘90s man functions on possibility, for the woman could have been terrific. And therein lies the difference. In both work and love Curly’s life “makes sense” to him, while Mitch “[worries] about a lot of shit.” Curly’s advice to Mitch is to figure out the most important thing in his life and focus only on that.

In the final conversation, Mitch, Ed, and Phil share their best and worst days. More than any other conversation, this one seems invested in cultivating vulnerability in

a particularly mythopoetic fashion. Phil's question about their best and worst days is indicative of something the men would find impossible to answer while at home. The answers yield a deeper sense of intimacy between the friends that then becomes constructive in their later relationships. The men listen closely, do not judge, and get to the "belly truth." As the initial interrogator, Phil prohibits them from talking about fatherhood because "that's too easy," although their own childhoods are fair game. Mitch's best day happened when he was seven and his dad took him to a game at Yankee Stadium.<sup>125</sup> His worst day was when Barbara found a lump in her breast, which turned out to be nothing. Phil's best day, his wedding day, surprises both of his friends, but it should not have. On his wedding day, Phil achieved several markers of American manhood, including marriage and a "real job," and received his father's approval. He thought, "I'm all grown-up. You know? I'm not a goofball anymore. I made it. I felt like a man." Every day since his wedding, though, has tied for worst, and we can assume they are the worst because he no longer feels "like a man" under Arlene's tyranny. Ed reluctantly shares his best and worst days, which are the same day, and Phil and Mitch come to understand that Ed's anxieties about being a husband and father stem from his relationship with his father who cheated on his family. At fourteen, Ed confronted his father, who then left. From that point on, Ed took on his father's role, taking care of both his mother and sister.

To balance the outpouring of feelings that comes with emotional vulnerability, violent and strenuous action ensues. With the emotional work done, the men are finally free to get on with the action. Cookie gets drunk and runs the chuck wagon into a ravine, breaking his legs, and the two dentists leave the herd to transport him to the Colorado

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<sup>125</sup> Billy Crystal reveals that this is a true story.

ranch. T.R. and Jeff threaten Mitch at gunpoint before Phil wrestles the gun away from them and runs them off. Without the “professional cowboys” to help, the Shalowitzes and Bonnie decide to leave the herd and make it to the ranch on their own. Mitch, Ed, and Phil drive the hundreds of head of cattle through the mountains, cross a raging river in a thunderstorm, and triumphantly bring in the herd while vigorously humming the theme to *Bonanza*. The thought of “tenderfeet bringing in a herd” astounds Clay Stone, especially when two weeks ago, he thought the three men were as “worthless as hen shit on a pump handle.” Their western transformation is complete, and as Billy Crystal observed while watching himself, Bruno Kirby, and Daniel Stern crest the hill overlooking the ranch, “we were men now.”

The personal conversations that happened on the range help the three friends develop clarity about their heterodomic relationships. The resolutions made in the West are meant to directly benefit their homes back East. Phil promises to stop being a schmuck and feeling sorry for himself, and he ends up sharing a cab with Bonnie once they return to New York. Ed emphatically declares he will go home and “get Kim pregnant.” Mitch finally figures out his one thing, and he returns to New York happily prepared to get back on script.

In the case of *City Slickers* the cowboy homodomic is not a long term option for men, but one meant to bolster the middle-class heterodomic. Where marriage is depicted as dysfunctional in *Lonesome Dove*, in *City Slickers* it is relatively unproblematic as long as men can untie the knot of enervating manhood from time to time. Most importantly, *City Slickers* proposes the specific geography and temporality of the generic West allows contemporary middle-class white men to do the

underappreciated work of nurturing their friendships, and although their resolutions don't challenge hegemonic structures, the film's emphasis on the importance of men's feelings is substantive and hopeful. However, the film suggests that the privilege of fostering friendship is the province of those who have the means to do so.

## CHAPTER III

### COMPANIONATE PARTNERS

The subject of this chapter is companionate male-male partnerships. I use the term companionate partnership in order to accommodate the platonic and/or erotic intimate bonds between men. This type of friendship is distinct from the hero/sidekick paradigm in that the sidekick is not the feminine counterpart to the hypermasculine hero. The focus of this chapter differs from the others in that I see in the genre of the western a working model of same-sex friendship based on respect and mutual dependency between two men. This model of friendship is absent for the outlaw and budding, though shallow, for the cowboys of the previous chapter, where there is always a boss and employee. I seek to explore why this model succeeds in fantasies of the past and fails to work in westerns set in the twentieth century.

In this chapter, I will look at the more successful models of companionate partnerships in *Lonesome Dove* and *Appaloosa*, both set in the late nineteenth century. The next chapter will deal with the troubled same-sex relationships in *All the Pretty Horses* (1993) and *Brokeback Mountain* (1999, 2005), both of which are set in the middle of the twentieth century. I suggest that the difference between success and failure lies in the space between *being* a cowboy and performing *cowboyness*. Being a cowboy necessitates men relying on each other in order to get the job done. Cowboyness requires a willing isolation in the tradition of John Wayne and the Marlboro Man. I in no way mean to assert that there is some kind of authentic or essential quality to being a cowboy;

rather as I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the job of being a cowboy and the lifestyle it entailed were necessary because of the material and ideological conditions in the West, both of which had changed dramatically between 1875 and 1940. The texts in this chapter are written in the twentieth century, but are set in the late 1800s during the twilight of the cowboy.

This chapter marks a return to two texts discussed earlier in the dissertation, and examines the partnerships in *Lonesome Dove* (1985) and *Appaloosa* (2005, 2007), where the men work together and, like the cowboys of the previous chapter, are bound to one another via the conditions of labor. To each man, his work as ranchers or peacekeepers feels meaningful and fulfilling, and each man depends on the other for emotional and physical support. Gus and Call (*Lonesome Dove*) and Virgil and Everett (*Appaloosa*) have spent more than decade together, and their history, mutual admiration, and skill form the bedrock that allows the relationship to extend beyond workplace. Important to each text is how women affect the contours of the same-sex partnership. Each text features a male-male partnership that exists in seeming opposition to a heteronormative union. The nature of opposition depends on the text, and while the male-male partnership is often conceptualized as a threat to the burgeoning heterosexual relationship and vice-versa, occasionally, the oppositions counterbalance each other. However the relationship between men and the women who would come between them is conceived, the endings are the same: the partnerships end, with one man either dead or a newly minted member of the heterodomestic, and the other left to ride into the sunset alone.

The questions I explore in this chapter and the next mean to provide a way to think through the paradox of being and performing in order to understand how same-sex

partnerships can work in concert with other relationships. Where does the partnership physically exist? And where is the heterodome located? When work does not provide a satisfactory point of identity formation, as is the case in the twenty-first century, what will come in to take its place? How does sexuality and class complete the triad of white manhood, and why do they matter?

#### GENDERING FRIENDSHIP

Much of the research about white men's friendships is often not labeled as such, for it often elides race, sexuality, and class. Instead, researchers are typically given to speaking about men's friendships in a general way, unless they explicitly address non-white, non-middle class, non-heterosexual friendship formations. In many cases, however, models for meaningful friendships are gendered constructs, where women's friendships function as the gold standard. Men's friendships in comparison are seen as shallow and underdeveloped interactions that can hardly be described as friendship. In this gendered construction of friendship, women *talk* to their friends while men *do* things with their friends. *Talking* is privileged over *doing* because there is a cultural assumption that talking signifies intimacy in more valid ways than doing can. This understanding of friendship is broadly held by men and women alike despite evidence to the contrary.

In "Like Family: Power, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Male Athletes' Friendships" (1992), Michael Messner suggests that "if we judge men's friendships through an idealized feminine standard, men's friendships will appear impoverished. It is valuable and important to understand how men experience and define their own friendships."<sup>126</sup> Yet when men talk about their friendships, they reinforce the stereotype. In a review of

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<sup>126</sup> In *Men's Friendships*, ed. Peter Nardi, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992: 215-237), 217.

literature on gender differences in friendships, sociologist Karen Walker found that “ideology has been mistaken for behavior,” in part because researchers asked general questions about friendship. Results provided researchers with respondents’ beliefs about how they behaved in friendship, beliefs shaped by the respondents’ ideologies.<sup>127</sup> Walker attributes men’s ideological belief that they are “inexpressive and find intimacy difficult” to their identification with masculinity, even when they individually fail to conform to the construct.<sup>128</sup> She found that when men talked about their individual friendships, there “many other activities of friendship that men preferred to emphasize” because talking about “personal matters or sharing feelings constituted a small portion of friendship interactions.”<sup>129</sup>

In order to begin to think through the contingent nature of men’s friendships in a dominant framework, a return to Victor Siedler’s essay, “Rejection, Vulnerability, and Friendship,” (1992) is in order. Siedler emphatically states:

Friendship grows out of shared interest and otherwise is often marginal to our identity. The meaning of our lives is given by the ends and goals that we have set for ourselves through reason. This means we learn to do without others. We learn to do without friends. We learn to identify ourselves with the work that we do within the public realm. Much of our sense of ourselves is drawn from our achievements within this public realm of work, and we use this to help us deal with our feelings of guilt and isolation when it comes to our friendships. We learn not to acknowledge our need for friends and at some level to regard this need as a sign of weakness.<sup>130</sup>

And:

A focus upon activities has become central to dominant forms of masculinity. As men we are left feeling that we have to be doing things. This helps structure our

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<sup>127</sup> Karen Walker, “‘I’m Not Friends the Way she’s Friends’: Ideological and Behavioral Constructions of Masculinity in Men’s Friendships,” *Men’s Lives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, eds. Michael Kimmel and Michael A. Messner. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 223.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>130</sup> Victor J. Siedler, “Rejection, Vulnerability, and Friendship,” *Men’s Friendships*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992), 15.

friendships as a constant set of demands and activities. Simply to *be with* our friends is difficult because being in this way can make us anxious.<sup>131</sup>

I quote Siedler at length because his description of the ideological construction of men's friendship is at once stark and full of sadness and longing, and the sadness is about not having access to the feminine idealized form of friendship. In discussing the barriers to friendship, Siedler first locates work as the site of male identity formation, where work appears to be a stable category. However, the 1990s saw the beginning of downsizing, rightsizing, and efficiency management that would continue into the next decade and beyond, rendering corporate and manufacturing jobs were less stable. Siedler's claims about men in the public realm are haunted by guilt and shame and anxiety about not having the right kind of friendship. The problem with men's friendships is Siedler's second point, that activities are necessary to justify male bonding, and, again, this claim is haunted by a confusing desire to "be with" friends, as if doing and being are mutually exclusive categories.

Theodore Cohen (1992) attributes the marginal position of men's friendships to demands imposed on men's time, specifically work, fatherhood, and marriage. He augments Nan Stein's four barriers to men's friendship—competitiveness, "lack of male role models in intimacy, homophobia, and a need to be in control"<sup>132</sup>—by accounting for outside demands as factors equal to men's emotional and social capacities in determining how they manage social ties.<sup>133</sup> In Cohen's exclusively heterodomestic paradigm, informants disclosed that marriage was the place where men were expected to find

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Nan Stein, cited in Cohen, 116.

<sup>133</sup> Theodore Cohen, "Men's Families, Men's Friends: A Structural Analysis of Constraints on Men's Social Ties," *Men's Friendships*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992: 115-131), 117.

“companionship, intimacy, and emotional support,” not same-sex friendships.<sup>134</sup> But even this sanctioned intimacy is shunted to the periphery because of work, which shapes family interactions. He argues that these cultural and ideological constraints translate into a temporal constraint on men’s time. As a result, work and family possess a “degree of cultural legitimacy and structural dominance” that friendships cannot approach.<sup>135</sup>

In his scholarship, Kimmel elucidates a telling distinction between how men of the nineteenth century are imagined and the men of the late twentieth century are critiqued. He weighs in on the effect of work and friendship in *Men in America* (2006) and *Guyland* (2008). In *Men in America*, he finds that mid-nineteenth century industrialization forced white men together in the workplace, while increasing “the distance they felt from one another.”<sup>136</sup> With the increased fragmentation among men came the loss of communal checks on behavior. This fragmentation and loss of community wore on men in the nineteenth century, and they “yearned for a place where they could reestablish their manhood and replace market competition with camaraderie.”<sup>137</sup> And so they ran west. This rather romantic view of men’s lives in exile from each other and family works when contained in the nineteenth century and their flight west is lauded, but Kimmel’s view of the twentieth and twenty-first century “guy” who privileges friendship over “adulthood” is seen as a problem. In another era, the diminutive “guys” would have been “poised to take their place in the adult world taking the first steps toward becoming the nation’s future professionals, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. They would be engaged to be married, thinking about settling down

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<sup>134</sup> Cohen, 122

<sup>135</sup> Cohen, 129.

<sup>136</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 38.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

with a family, preparing for futures as civic leaders and Little League dads.”<sup>138</sup> While manhood in the nineteenth century could unproblematically revolve around “a flight from women” and their emasculating clutches,<sup>139</sup> contemporary “guyhood” that revolves “almost exclusively around other guys” is deemed a Peter Pan fantasy.<sup>140</sup>

Kimmel’s competing views on the subject of white manhood and friendship hints at a looming issue that Cohen, Walker, Siedler and their subjects also implicitly identify: the impossibility of imagining and validating contemporary male friendships. Because the intimacies of nineteenth century are safely stowed in the past, their relationships are easy to romanticize and envy. Yet when men in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries attempt to foster intimate relationships, they are faced with an ideological and cultural backlash that insists on delegitimizing them. Michael Messner (1992) found that in doing things together, the men he interviewed had developed “covert intimacy.”<sup>141</sup> But why must contemporary male-male intimacy be “covert” when covertness was not always necessary? Peter Nardi, editor of *Men’s Friendships* (1992) suggests in his introduction that “friendships between men in terms of intimacy and emotional support inevitably introduce—in ways they never had done before—questions about homosexuality.”<sup>142</sup> He echoes Rotundo in his argument that the “romantic nature” of middle-class white men’s friendships in the nineteenth century was possible because the concept of homosexuality, as a category of identification, did not exist and so was not a threat to the heterodomestic.

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<sup>138</sup> Kimmel, *Guyland*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Kimmel, “Born to Run’: Nineteenth-Century Fantasies of Masculine Retreat and Re-creation (or The Historical Rust on Iron John),” *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*, ed. Michael Kimmel, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995: 115-150), 115.

<sup>140</sup> *Guyland*, 13

<sup>141</sup> Michael Messner, “Like Family: Power, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Male Athletes’ Friendships,” *Men’s Friendships*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992) 232.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Nardi, “Seamless Souls”: An Introduction to Men’s Friendships,” *Men’s Friendships*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992), 1.

Physical affection between men and “even the sharing of beds were not uncommon between young men.”<sup>143</sup> Unmarried persons of the same sex out West often shared beds because bed space was limited, and this phenomenon is depicted in classic westerns such as *The Virginian* and Charles Portis’ *True Grit*. Contemporary society, Nardi claims, “holds a set of social meanings and prohibitions about homosexuality to such a degree that ordinary touches, and certainly the act of ‘sleeping together,’ are often interpreted as homosexual when they occur between two men.”<sup>144</sup> Thus, the threat of being labeled homosexual is enough to send men’s friendships into the closet.

This is where cowboys and westerns come in. If late twentieth century and early twenty-first century white male friendships are constrained by the threat of appearing to be gay or illegitimate because they don’t meet the gold standard set by women’s friendships, then the late nineteenth century of the western functioned as a place where friendships could and did flourish, if only fictitiously. In *Queer Cowboys* (2005), Chris Packard focuses specifically on white male cowboy partnerships in the literary West, and at the core of his argument is the assertion that locating a “homoerotic core” in one of the most enduring myths about the “supremacy of white American masculinity,” implies that American audiences accept the practice of “nonnormative desires.”<sup>145</sup> Packard finds that nearly every western features a “love story between friends drawn together under dire circumstances,” and this forged-in-fire friendship holds the cowboy to “communal standards without relinquishing his identity as a nomad.”<sup>146</sup> In the western, then, men, particularly white men— could still retain their independence while gaining a partner

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<sup>143</sup> Nardi, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>146</sup> Chris Packard, *Queer Cowboys*. (New York, Palgrave, 2005), 7.

who would hold them accountable for their actions. Packard goes on to explain that there is a difference between bachelorhood and a hermitage, arguing that these partnerships were formed around an “unspoken attachment resembling a blood tie, and involving loyalty, not fidelity.”<sup>147</sup> The difference between loyalty and fidelity is minor, but significant. Where fidelity signals an exclusionary faithfulness, loyalty means that cowboys in westerns are rarely, if ever, alone because they have a partner to console them. Packard claims a queer identity for these figures because they don’t want to settle down, but instead choose to keep moving, working, and “affirming his ties to the wilderness and his male partner.”<sup>148</sup>

While I find Packard’s reading of male partnerships in westerns as sites of emotional and physical intimacy is fruitful, I continue to resist the labeling of cowboy partnerships as queer. The repeated presence of these friendships in westerns undermines his claims that the “cowboy is queer because audiences want him to be queer.”<sup>149</sup> I understand Packard’s project as a means of resisting the heteronormative reading of the cowboy and his partners, but the abundance of evidence regarding same-sex partnerships would suggest that the homoerotic nature of those bonds is a normative characteristic in the space of the literary western. The more radical reading, as I have argued and will continue to argue, is one that eschews the heteronormative frame and instead accounts for a proliferation of normativities with the intended effect of rendering the word meaningless. To do so would help alleviate the pressure for men to conform to the gendered, normative model of friendship that Siedler describes. Moreover, it would

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<sup>147</sup> Packard, 7

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 13

alleviate the pressure on a multitude of “non-normative” bodies to conform to the larger dominant narrative of “normativity” as straight, white, middle-class, male.

This chapter does not intend to sound the alarm about white men’s impoverished friendships. Contemporary popular culture would suggest that white men’s friendships are blossoming, that they are communicating and doing and reaching out to each other.<sup>150</sup> Rather, this chapter is a way of seeing those friendships, of making one model of them visible. The friendships between Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call in *Lonesome Dove* and Everett Hitch and Virgil Cole in *Appaloosa* are companionate partnerships, and the next two sections detail how they negotiate and nurture the central relationship in each text. Their partnerships do not exist in a vacuum—there are women and marriages and other men and mortality—but rather they embody Packard’s distinction between loyalty and fidelity.

#### NOT SO *LONESOME DOVE*

At the time of the novel’s opening, Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae had been friends for over thirty years, though it is unclear when their friendship shifted into a domestic partnership. Their friendship endured years as captains in the Texas Rangers, which meant protecting settlers from Indians and bandits, and during the Civil War, the governor of Texas charged them and a handful of men with protecting the new Mexico border from being recaptured. They ended up in Lonesome Dove, and once the war was over and the cattle market boomed, they stopped rangering. According to Gus, he and

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<sup>150</sup> See every Judd Apatow movie ever, specifically *Leaving Sarah Marshall* (2008), *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (2006), and *The Forty Year Old Virgin* (2005). But also any Simon Pegg film, superhero movie, or action movie. Make no mistake, the genre films are alive with same-sex friendship and feeling.

Call “prospered in a small way,” and they had enough money in a joint account in San Antonio to “consider themselves rich, had the notion interested them” (81). Their friendship endured through Gus’s two marriages and broken heart, Call’s heartbreak, and the rearing of his son, Newt.

In an easy reading of Gus and Call’s partnership, each man occupies a stereotypically gendered role within the partnership. Call is the masculine partner who goes out to work every day, whether there’s work to do or not. He doesn’t talk very much. He makes work, which at the beginning of the novel means digging a well. The entire cattle drive to Montana is Call’s idea, an elaborate scheme to fend off boredom from being in one place for too long with little to do. Gus, meanwhile, spends his time at home or in town gambling. He wakes up every morning at 4 a.m. to make breakfast of sourdough biscuits from a starter dough that had been “perking along happily for ten years,” because breakfast is “too important a meal to trust” to Bolivar, the Mexican cook (53). Gus also values conversation from men and women. Most importantly, Gus doesn’t want to leave Lonesome Dove and travel into the frontier again; he values civilization and its comforts, and he suggests that Call, Pea Eye, and Deets “go on up there to Montany and build a nice snug cabin with a good fireplace and at least one bed, so it’ll be waiting when I get there” (82). There are obvious problems with this reading, which I will get to shortly, but it is nonetheless a reading the novel both fosters and resists for over eight hundred pages.

A more compelling reading of Gus and Call looks past what Lera Patrick Tyler Lich calls the “archetypal nature” of the heroes, and begins by understanding them as individual men. Read together, Lich suggests, Call’s “[h]ardworking and puritanical”

streak that never allows him to slack off, “even when duty is unnecessary,” combined with Gus’s “[g]allant and lighthearted” ways and his “supreme exploit[s]” in crises, “embody essential traits of archetypal Western heroes—bravery, loyalty, and individualism.”<sup>151</sup> Together they comprise a singular archetypal figure, but separately, Lich argues, “they become credible, ordinary men with the virtues and vices of ordinary men.”<sup>152</sup> My reading of the Gus and Call’s partnership is consistent with Lich’s reading that yes, read separately, Gus and Call become more like ordinary men, but I go a step further by arguing that even when read together, they are more ordinary than not.

Under close examination, Gus and Call’s relationship resists the feminization or masculinization of one over the other, where the masculine is privileged over the feminine. Their partnership is based on mutual respect in the others’ abilities, seasoned with irritation at one another’s shortcomings. When it comes to labor, Call believes in Gus’s competence, and there were times in the past he wondered if he would be able to keep up with Gus if Gus tried, though Gus seldom did much. Call imagines them as a perfectly balanced pair, where “he did more than he needed to, while Gus did less” (167). Gus cosigns this assessment, joking that if Call died, he “might get in a righteous frame of mind,” but because Call isn’t dead, there’s not much point.

Their seeming incompatibility, especially on the issue of conversation, is one that recurs throughout the text. In fact, silence and speech are used as points of contact and absence, and can signal loneliness in rather unexpected ways. Jane Tompkins pointedly describes the function of silence in westerns as an issue of education and class:

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<sup>151</sup> Lich, 54. Lich, Lera Patrick Tyler. *Larry McMurtry’s Texas: Evolution of the Myth*. Austin: Eakin Press, 1987.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 55

the men who are the Western's heroes don't have the large vocabularies expensive education can buy. They don't have time to read that many books. Westerns distrust language in part because language tends to be wielded most skillfully by people who possess a certain kind of power: class privilege, political clout, financial strength.<sup>153</sup>

In addition, talking in westerns is a fault attributed to women, Easterners, and villains, because "words are weak and misleading...immaterial."<sup>154</sup> The distinction Tompkins outlines broadly applies to Gus and Call. Gus was educated in Tennessee and enjoys reading and talking, points which are reiterated throughout the text. Call's level of education is unknown, but he is as comfortable with silence as Pea Eye and Deets. McMurtry's westerns have no fear of language, however, though the language is plain and straightforward down to the conversation tags, which are often simply "[character name] said."

Gus is the primary generator of conversation, and he is at turns annoying in his palaver and missed when silence swells in his absence. His primary targets of conversation are Call and Lorena, but he values nearly all conversation. Aside from assuaging Call's need for adventure, he agrees to go on the cattle drive in hopes of seeing his long lost love, Clara Allen. He hoped that upon seeing her, he would finally have someone to talk to about the "events of the times" (276). Call's disinterest in current events, and the other men's general ignorance about the news, engendered in Gus a desire to "chat regularly with a woman who kept up" (276). When he ventures out onto the *llano* to rescue Lorena from Blue Duck, an Indian he and Call had failed to kill, he marveled at a level of silence that he'd forgotten existed:

After all, for years he had lived within the sound of the piano from the Dry Bean, the sound of the church bell in the little Lonesome Dove church, the sound of Bol

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<sup>153</sup> *West of Everything*, Oxford, 51

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 49

whacking the dinner bell. He even slept within the sound of Pea Eye's snoring, which was as regular as the ticking of a clock.

But here there was no sound, not any. The coyotes were silent, the crickets, the locusts, the owls. There was only the sound of his own horse grazing. From him to the stars, in all directions, there was only silence and emptiness. Not the talk of men over their cards, nothing. Though he had ridden hard he felt strangely rested, just from the silence. (422)

Gus doesn't differentiate between domestic noises like church bells, Bolivar hitting the dinner bell, Pea's snoring, or men at cards because they all signify a non-wilderness. His conception of men's noise as domestic goes against the popular conception of the frontiers as all-male, uncivilized spaces, instead suggesting that there are degrees of "civilization" in Lonesome Dove and on the trail. All that's required is a companion or two for company and conversation. When he finally battles Blue Duck and his grungy gang, Gus longs for someone to talk to. Hiding just out of range of Blue Duck's men, he notes that his colleagues made battle interesting, not his opponents, because "even desperate battle was lacking in something if there was no one to discuss it with" (439).

The pleasure Gus derives from conversation and company is quite at odds with Call's need for silence. Gus notes the oddness of their partnership and remarks: "If we was to meet now instead of when we did, I doubt we'd have two words to say to each other," to which Call replies, "I wish it could happen then, if it would hold you to two words" (222). Because Call dislikes men's chatter, he often eats alone. Often, men brought themselves down in his esteem when he listened to them talk, and they "made him feel more alone than if he were a mile away by himself under a tree" (217). Call also blames listening to men's talk for his heartbreak, though he would never describe it as such. Maggie, a young prostitute who lived in Lonesome Dove nearly twenty years before the book begins, fell in love with Call and he broke her heart. Call initially visited

Maggie “out of curiosity to find out what it was that he had heard men talk and scheme about for so long.” Sex with Maggie was a “brief awkward experience, where the pleasure was soon drowned in embarrassment and a feeling of sadness,” yet he returned again and again, drawn to her helplessness and her need for him. When he visited her, she would “talk constantly,” and sometimes he would sit for “half an hour, for he had come to like her talk, though he had long since forgotten what she said” (356). After Call forced himself to stop visiting her, she began drinking and died four years later. He carried the weight of her death and a deep sadness with him from then on, much to his shame. As Call sees it, men’s talk wasn’t the cause of his sadness and Maggie’s death; listening to men and being taken in by their conversation was the problem. Listening to men had caused Call to feel “empty and sad when he thought of himself” (360).

Throughout the novel, Call talks with Gus, and occasionally Deets. Gus is the person to whom Call is accountable, morally and emotionally. Gus’s words get under Call’s skin and force him to confront his feelings for Maggie, his role in her death, and the responsibility he bears in raising Newt, Maggie’s son. Gus is able to challenge Call because their partnership is coequal and non-hierarchical. In the following passage, Call recounts a heated discussion about Maggie:

“You take care of her, if you’re so worried,” he said to Gus, but Gus shrugged that off.

“She ain’t in love with me, she’s in love with you,” he pointed out.

It was the point in all his years with Gus that they came closest to splitting company, for Gus would not let up. He wanted Call to go back and see Maggie.

“Go back and do what?” Call asked. He felt a little desperate about it. “I ain’t a marrying man.”

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“I don’t want nobody needing me,” Call said.

“Then why do you keep running around with this bunch of half-outlaws you call Texas Rangers? There’s men in this troop who won’t piss unless you

point to a spot. But when a little thing like Maggie, who ain't the strongest person in the world, gets a need for you, you head for the river and clean your gun."

"Well, I might need my gun," Call said. But he was aware that Gus always got the better of their arguments. (358)

Gus challenged Call to look at himself and his failings despite Call's fear of doing so.

Call was unable to do what he considers the "proper" thing by marrying Maggie because it would mean no longer being a Ranger, and he was also unable to forgive himself for how he treated her. Unlike Pea Eye, Call cannot and does not imagine himself as a husband and father. Perhaps his failure of imagination is caused by a fear of being seen as fallible in the eyes of anyone, let alone a woman, and thus vulnerable. As likely, the thought of marriage and all it entails would mean becoming a part of what Gus calls the "settled fraternity," where he would no longer have the privilege of leading groups of men who find him infallible (81). Twelve years after Maggie's death, Call still wrestles with the memory, and he is finally able to understand his actions through talking with Gus.

Gus is a sentimental man who is unafraid to have or show his feelings. In a revelatory moment that eventually helps Call validate his own feelings, Gus cries in front of Call. On their way to Austin, they pass by a small creek where Gus courted Clara Allen, the woman who got away. Call is bewildered by the tears that "wet [Gus's] cheeks and glistened on the ends of his mustache." When Gus reveals that he calls this small grotto "Clara's orchard," Call replies, "I might have known it would have something to do with her. I doubt there's another human being over whom you'd shed a tear." His emotional reaction is unclear, elided as it is by the simple dialogue tag, "said." Gus's response, however, seems damning, though perhaps it too is simply matter of fact: as he wipes his eyes he says, "Well, Clara was lovely.... I expect it was the major mistake of

my life, letting her slip by. Only you don't understand that, because you don't appreciate women" (339). Gus rather unexpectedly asks Call when he was happiest, a question which Call cannot answer.<sup>155</sup> Gus can pinpoint his happiest moment here in Clara's orchard, and though he "fell short of the mark and lost the woman...the times were sweet" (340). Call finds it an odd choice since Gus had been married twice. When he raises the question with Gus, Gus replies:

"People do odd things, all except you. I don't think you ever wanted to be happy anyway. It don't suit you, so you managed to avoid it."

"That's silly," Call said.

"It ain't either," Augustus said. "I don't guess I've watched you punish yourself for thirty years to be totally wrong about you. I don't know what you done to deserve the punishment." (340)

Gus's observation about his own idiosyncrasies relieves the tension, and he takes the opportunity to invoke his right as Call's oldest friend to call him out. Though Gus insists on Call being accountable for his treatment of Maggie, the goal is not castigation or absolution but personal responsibility. The scene at Clara's orchard has the perfect mix of elements to help Call begin to treat himself better. When Gus, the most nonchalant man Call knows, "[cries] over a woman who had been gone fifteen years and more," he provides Call with a "role model of intimacy" who is vulnerable and fallible and validates Call's need for self-reflection.<sup>156</sup>

Because of their partnership, Call's derision of men and talking does not extend to Gus. He relies on Gus's companionship such that when Gus goes to rescue Lorena, Call misses him and worries about him. Call misses arguing with Gus, and testing opinions against him. He worries that Blue Duck will be too much for his friend and fights back the nagging feeling that he should have gone with him. Call fears Gus is dead and regrets

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<sup>155</sup> This question reemerges in *City Slickers*.

<sup>156</sup> Nan Stein's term qtd in Cohen.

that they “had not had much of a talk before Gus left. Nothing much had been said” (463). Without Gus, Call finds the whole endeavor worthless and absurd. Once Gus returns with Lorrie, Call asks Gus if he has any suggestions, considering that Blue Duck is still alive, several of their crew members have died, and a longtime friend has “proved a coward and would never be a part of the old crew again.” Gus replies rather pragmatically:

“Take these cattle over to the nearest cow town and sell them off. Pay off whatever boys is still alive.”

“Then what?”

“I’ll go deal with the ladies for a while,” Augustus said. “You take Pea and Deets and ride up the Purgatory River until you find Blue Duck. Then either you’ll kill him or he’ll kill all of you.”

“What about the boy?” Call asked.

“Newt can go with me and learn to be a ladies’ man.” (486).

But with Gus’s return, Call is bent on continuing north to Montana, even though the drive has upset the old order, and with Gus’s approval, they head into Nebraska.

McMurtry contrasts Gus and Call’s partnership and the cattle drive with several subplots that depict the institution of marriage and images of the heterodomic. The marriages of July and Elmira Johnson and Clara and Bob Allen suggest that dysfunctional communication is a characteristic of the heterodomic. Indeed, McMurtry locates within his female characters, be they prostitutes or proper women, a kind of weary and recurring cynicism with the institution of marriage. The Johnson and Allen marriages both suffer from the specter of cultural expectations, and there is an implicit, normative script underwriting each relationship that is nearly impossible to perform. This normative script, outlined in the previous chapter, dictates how men and women must act in order to be functional members of American society.

McMurtry's construction of marriage in *Lonesome Dove* reveals something false or less than permanent built into the foundation of the heterodestic, though the cultural script would suggest otherwise. The nuclear family script, or an eerily similar one, haunts the men and women of *Lonesome Dove* despite their geographical and ideological remove from the East. Under ideal circumstances, this is difficult enough to adhere to, but in the novel all marriages fail to follow the script. The perfect wife or husband, mother or father, are non-existent in the novel because wives or husbands leave, children die, and some characters want nothing to do with their scripted roles. Yet when female characters fail to perform their role their male counterparts become uneasy. In the case of July Johnson and Bob Allen, both assume that their partners know something that they themselves do not, or even more, that their partners expect something of them that they are either unwilling or unable to do.

The Johnson marriage suggests that the legal and social contract that binds man to wife cannot do enough to ensure a healthy relationship. Elmira, a former prostitute and adoptive mother of a young boy named Joe, married July because she was afraid of her last customer, a "big and rough" buffalo hunter who had taken a "fancy" to her.<sup>157</sup> She finds July easy enough to marry because though he served as the sheriff of Fort Smith, Arkansas, he was similar to the "young cowboys who had never touched a woman or even spoken to one" (237). Their courtship was brief, their marriage quick. Ellie soon finds herself bored with July and irritated by his consistency, while July can't quite figure out why he irritates Ellie so much. On the surface, Elmira and July perform traditional domestic roles: July is the breadwinner who provides for Elmira and Joe, and Elmira is

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<sup>157</sup> Joe is not Elmira's son, but belongs to the man she truly loves, Dee Boot, who left her in Missouri and ends up dying in a jail in Ogallala.

the housewife who takes care of the small house just outside of town. However this marriage is far from functional, and though each follows the script dictated by cultural norms, neither Ellie nor July finds this arrangement particularly fulfilling. Elmira is deeply unhappy, and July is an idealistic bystander in his own relationship. Ellie longs to escape her domestic responsibilities and return to her life as a “sporting girl,” even as July struggles to figure out what heterodomesticity actually entails. When Jake Spoon accidentally shoots and kills July’s brother, the Johnsons’ heterodomestic union dissolves completely. July and Joe head west into Texas, while Ellie heads northwest in search of Dee Boot, the man she loves. McMurtry seems to suggest that a functional heterodomestic requires a static, private domestic space that is occupied by both parties, and when that space is vacated, so too is the heterodomestic. Moreover, a successful heterodomestic relationship requires that each partner find some satisfaction in her or his role, and though July seems happy enough, Elmira bucks the constraints of traditional marriage. As a result, Elmira dies after giving birth in Ogallala, Nebraska, Joe dies in the wilderness at Blue Duck’s hand, and July ends up as a hand on Clara Allen’s horse farm.

The dysfunction in the Allen marriage suffers from the same underlying fault: a failure of communication and thus companionship. While the mismatch between July and Elmira is quickly evident and their union dissolves fairly swiftly, Clara and Bob’s marriage is initially presented as ideal. Clara and her marriage appear fairly early in the novel when Jake arrives in Lonesome Dove to tell the Hat Creek men of his travels. Gus, who knew and loved Clara when they were both young, asks Jake if he’s seen her. Jake, who also knew and courted Clara in their youth, reports that Clara has two daughters, two dead sons, and she is “[n]ot as pretty as she once was.” Gus bemoans Clara’s rejection of

him, as he will throughout the first two-thirds of the novel, and hopes for news that Bob has died. When Gus arrives at Clara's farm, her relationship with Bob is not as clear-cut as Gus might have hoped.

The final section of the novel opens just outside of Ogallala, Nebraska at Clara's horse farm. Through close third person narration, McMurtry writes both Clara and Bob's recounting of their marriage. Three months before, a mustang mare had kicked Bob in the head fracturing his skull and putting him in a vegetative state. With Bob incapacitated, Clara must be a mother and caregiver for Bob and their two girls, Susan and Betsey, as well as manager of the horse farm that she once helped Bob run. Clara appears to be a loyal wife, with mixed feelings toward her husband, but as she remembers their marriage, Clara recalls her expectations and the failures of marriage. These expectations are nearly identical to the script: Clara desires a house to tend to, children to take care of, and a husband who will provide for his family. Instead, for the first fifteen years of their marriage the Allens live in a sod house that Bob dug into the hill. Clara hated the constant trickle of dirt onto everything. She blamed the house, and consequently Bob, for the death of their three sons, Jim, Jeff, and Johnny. She finds some fault in Bob's clumsy, often violent hand with the horses, and the "unspeaking way" in which he loves his family. In terms of companionship, Clara thinks of their marriage as relatively unchanged after Bob's accident. Bob's persistent silence reminds her "too clearly of their years together, for she had liked to chatter, and Bob never talked" (600). In short, Clara considered Bob an adequate husband but a poor companion.

Like July, Bob considers his wife something of a mystery. The shift in point-of-view from Clara to Bob is strange in that Bob's recollection of his life before the accident

is contained within Clara's recollection. Nevertheless, Bob reveals that though he had tried to be a good father and provider, Clara unnerved him. He doesn't know why she married or stayed with him, and the thought of her leaving him worried him. Unlike July, however, Bob understands a part of what feels odd about his marriage. Though Clara is a good wife and a respectable woman, Bob feels that he is somehow extraneous in her life. She had money from the sale of her family's business in Texas that she did not allow him to access, she made decisions independent of his, and she often got her way. He was unable to say as much to Clara because "he was not good with words," but Bob believed he was "left out of the life of his own family" (587). McMurtry never reveals Bob's present thoughts, if there are any, about the current state of his marriage, but his confinement and probable lack of brain activity places him even further away from his wife and daughters.

Both marriages end with one partner dying, and the surviving spouses settling on the Allen's horse farm. Bob's illness and eventual death render the Allen home a homodestic space occupied by Clara, her daughters, and Lorena, who decides not to go any farther. With Elmira and Joe dead, July comes to work for Clara. He, Dish, and Clara's top hand Cholo, lodge in a domestic space outside the primary home. The gendered segregation of spaces suggests that the heterodestic can be as temporary and liminal as the homodestic.

When Gus and Call's partnership engages with the teetering heterodestic, sparks fly when Clara reveals why she refused to marry Gus. Clara sees Gus's long term relationship with Call as a threat to marriage because she could not imagine a time when Call would not be central to Gus's life. The language she uses to describe Gus and Call's

partnership is decidedly marital; she wants to “divorce” Gus from Call, and it galls her that Call “got so much of [Gus]” while she “got so little” because she feels she “had the better claim” (699, 687). When Gus and the crew prepare to leave Ogallala, Clara attempts to persuade him to stay nearby, arguing that there’s “cheap land not three days’ ride” from her farm. Gus agrees that going to Montana doesn’t make a “damned bit of sense,” but he can’t stay because he and Call always liked to finish what they had started. Faced with the insurmountable evidence that she would never be Gus’s primary source of “companionship, intimacy, and emotional support” in a companionate marriage, Clara comes to despise Call and view him as an undefeatable rival.<sup>158</sup> When Call returns to Clara’s farm en route to fulfilling Gus’s deathbed wish, her rage dumbfounds him. Clara attempts to delegitimize his partnership on the grounds that it violates the heterodomic script. In Clara’s case, the violation is not theoretical but concrete:

“And I’ll tell you another thing: I’m sorry you and Gus McCrae ever met. All you two done was ruin one another, not to mention those close to you. Another reason I didn’t marry him was because I didn’t want to fight you for every day of my life. You men and your promises: they’re just excuses to do what you plan to do anyway, which is leave. You think you’ve always done right—that’s your ugly pride, Mr. Call. But you never did right and it would be a sad woman that needed anything from you. You’re a vain coward, for all your fighting. I despised you then, for what you were, and I despise you now, for what you’re doing.” (831)

Clara charges hit at the center of Call’s insecurities about his own morality and send him into a tailspin of doubt, which is heaped atop his grief. Perhaps her accusation that he’s “never done right” triggers his feelings about Maggie, but the real target seems to be his relationship with Gus that, in her eyes, can never be normal.

To outside observers, Call becomes even more archetypal in his grief, but such an assumption elides Call’s immense pain. The day after Gus dies, Call feels resentment at

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<sup>158</sup> Cohen, 122

his friend's death. As always, Gus had left him to do the work, but this time Call "no longer believed in the work" (791). His work hadn't been able to save Gus or Deets or Sean O'Brien or any of the other men who died on drive. In fact, the work seems to be the thing that ended their lives. Instead of conveying his emotions through speech or bodily expression, Call retreats. When he returns to the outfit in Montana, Call rarely speaks, isolates himself the men who expect him to lead. Whenever he is alone, Call is haunted by Gus's absence. In his dreams, Gus returns to "josh and tease" as he had when he was alive. When spring arrives, he makes an epic journey, at Gus's behest, from Montana to south Texas to bury Gus in Clara's orchard. Gus's last wish forces Call into several difficult situations. He enters into a business partnership with Lorena when Gus leaves her his half of the herd. Clara berates him and his entire way of life, even going so far as to blame him for Gus's death, abuse which Call absorbs. He witnesses Blue Duck's suicide and is nearly given the Ransom Stoddard<sup>159</sup> treatment when a young reporter attempts to wrangle an interview with Call, whom he calls a "man of vision" (838). On the trail, his mule dies and the casket breaks apart, and he finally buries Gus in Clara's orchard. Because his grief is illegible to others, he is misread. Clara's final unwillingness, or inability, to recognize his loss because she refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of their partnership, is the result of heteronormative tunnel vision. Fortunately, Clara's vision isn't the dominant way of seeing in the novel.

McMurtry sounds the depths of friendship and partnership through multiple interiorities and counters the myth of manhood as lonely and unfeeling. Audiences are given access to a grief that is inaccessible to characters in the novel, and we are

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<sup>159</sup> Ransom Stoddard is Jimmy Stewart's character in John Ford's 1962 film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The film begins with Stoddard's return to Shinbone and reveals the truth behind the legend.

challenged to do better than the characters in the novel who privilege affect and normativity over feeling.

#### *APPALOOSA: LOYALTY OVER FIDELITY*

Twenty years after *Lonesome Dove*, Everett Hitch and Virgil Cole provide a contemporary update to the companionate partnership in Robert Parker's *Appaloosa* and the subsequent film adaptation. We've seen Everett and Hitch in Chapter One, where the focus was on Randall Bragg, but here they take center stage. Narrated by Everett, this first installation of a four part series reveals the duo has a substantive history as partners and coworkers.<sup>160</sup> For fifteen years, they have worked together as marshal and deputy, fixing towns in the West. The town of Appaloosa, which straddles the New Mexico/Arizona territories, hires them to take care of Randall Bragg, who killed the last marshal and deputies, and restore order to the town. At the same time, Virgil falls for Allison French, a young widow who moves to town, and they begin to build a home together. Bragg is apprehended and tried, but he escapes capture with the help of the Sheltons, hired gunmen who use Allie as collateral. While she is in their control, she has sex with Ring Shelton before she is rescued. She and Virgil eventually get back together, Bragg returns, and Everett turns outlaw by killing Bragg so that Virgil and Allie might live in heterodomestic bliss. At the center of this tale is Everett and Virgil's enduring friendship.

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<sup>160</sup> Virgil and Everett's friendship continues beyond Virgil and Allie's marriage in three subsequent novels. In *Resolution* (2008), Everett and Virgil clean up the town of Resolution and protect it from immoral ranchers, and in *Brimstone* (2009), they pair up yet again to find Allie, who has run off with another man. In the final posthumous novel, *Blue-Eyed Devil* (2010), Everett and Virgil return to Appaloosa to deal with a corrupt sheriff, Amos Calico.

The novel details how Everett and Cole met, although these details do not make it into the film, and the establishment of their relationship is erotically charged. They meet in a town called Trinidad where Cole served as the town marshal. Everett backs him in a deadly shootout with a buffalo hunter, and afterwards Virgil summons him to his office. The interview initially possesses an erotic subtext, in which Everett gives his name and Virgil repeats it as if he were “tasting it,” but neither Parker nor his characters make much of this description (13). Virgil requests and receives Everett’s qualifications as a West Point graduate who is good with an eight gauge shotgun and knows who Virgil is, before offering him a job as his deputy, which Everett duly accepts. In the film, Everett (Viggo Mortensen) provides a brief sketch of how he and Virgil (Ed Harris) met, their partnership in the peacekeeping business, and he voices the expectation that they would be “doing just that for the foreseeable future.”

From novel to film, Everett and Virgil’s friendship shows the signs of longevity. They trust each other, they back each other up, and they apologize when they cross a line. The partnership struck a resonant chord with reviewers because of its cultural lineage in westerns and popular culture. Colette Bancroft of Florida’s *St. Petersburg Times* finds Parker to be a “master at showing us the camaraderie among his male characters, an honor among killers that transcends which side they may be on at a given moment.”<sup>161</sup> But what does that honor look like? Film critic A. O. Scott of the *New York Times* likens Virgil and Everett’s relationship to that of marriage, “with Everett as the patient helpmeet, backing up his partner’s gunfighting bravado with quiet competence and helping him with

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<sup>161</sup> “A smooth transition to a different era,” June 5 2005, *St. Petersburg Times*.

difficult Latinate words.”<sup>162</sup> Roger Ebert compares them to Gus and Call, “not only in their long-practiced camaraderie, but also in their conversations about women,” the primary difference being that Virgil “abandons his tumbleweed ways and starts building a house for the widow.”<sup>163</sup> Phillip French of *The Observer* associates their friendship with an even older pair, Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp, because they are “complementary, mutually respecting men of honour. Hitch is introspective, articulate, educated, reserved, while Cole is compulsive, explosive, an autodidact who knows little of himself.”<sup>164</sup>

The temptation to read Everett and Virgil’s relationship through a heteronormative lens persists, where one partner is masculinized and dominant and the other is feminized and submissive, because of the marshal/deputy configuration. However, that reading would be unaccountably reductive. Audiences might also be tempted to label the film a buddy movie, which again depends on a power dynamic between partners in which one partner is more dominant than the other. But audiences need only turn to Roger Ebert to learn the distinction between buddies and friends: “This has been called a Buddy Movie. Not at all. A buddy is someone you acquire largely through juxtaposition. A friend is someone you make over the years. Some friends know you better than you know yourself.”<sup>165</sup> Ebert’s description of friendship coincides with Ed Harris’s take on the men’s relationship:

They’ve been riding together for years and they just know each other. They don’t have to talk about their feelings necessarily. There’s a lot of unspoken understanding between them. They’re very, very comfortable with one another. They respect each other. And they have a sense of humor together.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> [http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/09/19/movies/19appa.html?\\_r=0](http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/09/19/movies/19appa.html?_r=0) Gunman Meets Widow. Trouble Starts. September 18, 2008

<sup>163</sup> <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081002/REVIEWS/810020301>

<sup>164</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/sep/28/drama.actionandadventure>

<sup>165</sup> Ebert.

<sup>166</sup> See the DVD Special Feature, “Bringing the Characters of *Appaloosa* to Life.”

In work, Virgil is the boss, the point man, and Everett is in his service, but work is merely the mechanism which brought them together. Work is not their entire lives. In friendship, they are partners. They provide emotional support to one another, they consider the other's feelings, and they apologize quickly when apologies are necessary.

The nature of their work is brutal. They are what the dime novels would have called "town tamers," a task that involves gun work and lots of waiting. Both Everett and Virgil have a practical attitude about what their work. Allie asks both men what they do and why, and their responses are quite similar. In a scene found only in the novel, Everett compares it to "driving a nail, splitting firewood. It's work, it's quick" (42). Virgil replies that he doesn't "kill people for a living. [He] enforces the law. Killing's sometimes a sort of side thing of that." Everett does acknowledge that a man who makes his living doing gun work is crazy, an admission Virgil never makes. Both men are good at what they do, though Virgil sees a weakness in Everett that keeps him from being as good as Virgil. In the film, they sit at a campfire, a brief respite from their trek to recover Bragg and rescue Allie from the Shelton brothers. In the long shot, Everett sits centered in the frame behind the fire and is just visible, but Virgil, tucked into the lower left hand corner of the frame and dressed in all black, is just a voice in the darkness:

Everett...we've been together now a while. Can't exactly say how long, but long. Ain't anybody I'd rather do this work with. You're as good as anybody I've seen, except maybe the Shelton boys and me. The reason you ain't as good as the Sheltons or me...ain't got nothing to do with steady or fast or fortuitous. The reason the above-named folks are better than you is because you got feelings.

Everett replies, "everybody's got feelings," but Virgil isn't talking about feelings in a general way. Everett's weakness is having feelings during work. Of course Virgil has feelings; he cares for Everett, and while they are in town, he cares for Allie, but in the

desert, while they are working, he is focused on doing his job. Virgil's insistence on compartmentalizing work from other parts of his emotional life should be familiar to those who remember the heterodomesic script for it speaks to an older model of manhood that depends on emotional repression. Everett's failure to repress his feelings is, perhaps, a sign that what was once static, no longer is.

The introduction of the young widow Allison French upsets the configuration, but not the character, of their friendship. From the moment she steps off the train from St. Louis, Virgil is immediately taken with Allie, whose fine manners and terrible piano playing differentiate her from the other women in Appaloosa, many of whom are prostitutes. Here Virgil bears some resemblance to Call, who was blindsided by his feelings for Maggie, in that he too is blindsided by Allie. Unlike Call, however, Virgil does not flee Allie's charms but chooses instead to build a home with her in Appaloosa. Their relationship is not easy—Allie has a gift for making Virgil uncomfortable—and Everett provides much needed support and counsel to his twitterpated friend.

Everett's primary role is as medium between Allie and Virgil, and Virgil and the town. In a bit of flirtation gone awry, Allie makes the mistake of teasing Virgil about sex, and he attacks an innocent bystander. This is a telling scene about the dynamic between the trio: Allie provokes, Virgil reacts, and Everett corrects. Everett, as the locus of communal masculine accountability, drags Virgil off the unconscious teamster:

I got my arms around Cole's waist and picked him up off the ground and walked backward with him. He was still pumping his fist.

"Virgil," I said. "Virgil."

He didn't fight me. He seemed unaware of me, as if his focus on the teamster was so enveloping that nothing else was real.

"Virgil," I said.

He stopped moving his fist and held it, still cocked but still. I held on to him, listening to his breath snarl in and out of him. It felt as if there were something popping inside him, at his center.

“Virgil.”

His breath slowed. The popping eased.

“You can let go,” he said to me.

I relaxed a little but kept my arms around his waist.

“You can let go,” Virgil said. (54-55)

The manner in which Everett extracts Virgil from the altercation is both firm and intimate, and the novel captures several levels of that intimacy, including Everett’s thoughts. Virgil relies on Everett to stop him when he goes too far, and no other character is allowed such intimacy or has the strength to stop Virgil when he loses control. The extended intimate embrace enables Everett to become aware of Virgil’s body, and the scene has more than a tinge of the sexual. The intensity of this moment is even more palpable in the film because of the effort and tenderness Everett extends to Virgil, and Virgil’s subsequent acquiescence. In the novel, Allie asks Everett why Virgil attacked the teamster who was only “drinking beer and having a good time.” Everett replies quite simply that Virgil was in fact “mad” at Allie, not the teamster (56).

The expectation of heterosexuality in western heroes also comes under pressure in the text, primarily through Everett. As the first person narrator in the novel and the narrator of the film, Everett’s thoughts and observations are available to audiences. Despite having access to his thoughts, the three instances of potentially non-heteronormative behavior are revealed in conversations with Allie and Virgil. In speaking about desires for other men, Everett makes his desires, which would be marked as non-normative during the time of the novel’s and film’s release, a part of a larger public discourse within the text. Moreover, the expression of his desires does not determine his or Virgil’s manhood.

In the first scene, which occurs only in the novel, Everett reveals his attraction to other men. As he escorts Allie to the only hotel in town, she notices that he has freckles, “sandy hair and freckles,” and she remarks that she finds those features “so cute in a man.” Everett replies, “Me, too,” meaning that he too finds sandy hair and freckles cute in a man (38). Allie makes no further comment on the matter, and Everett doesn’t register any change in her disposition toward him. Rather, this exchange is followed by Everett’s increased awareness of Allie’s body, a rhetorical move meant, perhaps, to ameliorate this potential disruption of heteronormativity. Were this the only incident in which Everett reveals an attraction to men, an ameliorative reading would be plausible, but it is not.

The next instance takes place in the home Virgil and Allie are building in town, and ostensibly introduces a love triangle. Persuaded by Virgil to go see how the house is progressing, Everett ventures down to the house and Allie. While giving him a tour of the house, complete with projections of how it will look in the future, Allie complains that Virgil is never around, that he’d rather be a marshal than be with her. She then turns to him and says, “I want you to kiss me, Everett,” before initiating a kiss. The ensuing conversation bears a full quotation:

“I’m with Virgil,” I said. “And so are you.”  
“Virgil’s not here,” she said. “Mostly, Virgil’s never here.”  
She was trying to press back against me.  
“Ain’t true, Allie,” I said. “But even if it was, we ain’t with each other.  
We’re both with him.”  
She was silent; her face had turned white. She was pressing hard against my hands as I held her away. (105)

Everett’s emphatic claim, that he is with Virgil just as Allie is with Virgil, is a fascinating admission that calls into question the compulsory heterosexuality associated with western

men. In a post-*Brokeback Mountain* landscape, however, the heterosexual requirement had already been impinged, but I contend that what is happening here is a horse of a different color. Unlike the men in “Brokeback Mountain,” Everett’s straightforward statement does not reflect any shame, nor does this seem to be information that he is deliberately hiding. Allie becomes enraged because Everett rejects her, but more because in the rejection chooses Virgil over her.

She does not retaliate by stigmatizing Everett or Virgil as non-normative men. Instead, she attempts to make Virgil jealous and imperil his friendship with Everett in order to save face after she is caught up the creek, quite literally, with another man. Virgil asks Everett if he thought Allie would run off with Ring Shelton if Virgil dies in the inevitable gunfight, and Everett thinks, “Allie needs to be with a man.” Allie takes umbrage at this assessment and tells Virgil that Everett “tried to put his hands on me when I showed him our house.” Note that she locates the heterodomic as the site of transgression, and more that Everett “tried” to touch her, implying that she was able to stop him. Everett responds that he did not. Virgil turns to Allie and says, “No, Allie. Everett didn’t do that.” Like Clara, Allie believes she has the “better claim” on Virgil, and that she can break his ties to Everett with one accusation, but she is wrong. Unlike Allie, Everett has a history with Virgil that, in the parlance of Roger Ebert, allows them to know each other as well as they know themselves.

I am not suggesting that Everett and Virgil are gay. There seems to be no word for what they are or aren’t, perhaps because their identities are not consolidated around their possible sexual preferences. What is important here is that compulsory heterosexuality is not the only sexual identity available for these men. Moreover, they and the women with

whom they are involved do not expect a man's sexual desires have a predetermined, in this case negative, effect on his manhood. Thus, Virgil's relationship with Allie and Everett's with Katie, a local prostitute and co-owner of the town brothel, determines as much about their manhood as their relationship with one another.

The final scene occurs more explicitly in the film, but in both texts, Virgil asks Everett what happened with Allie in the house. In the novel, this scene takes place on the front porch of the hotel they are staying in the night before the shootout with the Shelton brothers. Everett tells him what happened, and Virgil "nodded slowly as he listened. If he felt anything, he didn't show it. He sat with his chair tilted back, looking up through the clear night at the stars. After a while, he shook his head as if answering a question no one had asked" (208). Virgil's calm acceptance of "what happened" might suggest that their relationship bears nothing of the erotic, or that their relationship is not abnormal and in need of hiding. The film opens *in medias res* inside a hotel room where Everett and Virgil are in the process of preparing for the impending shootout with the Shelton brothers. Everett sits on a bed in his undershirt, hatless, with his hands clutched in his lap as he explains:

"...kind of hard not to kiss her back a little...seeing's her lips were on mine. But I held her off. Told her we weren't with each other. We were both with you. She didn't care for it. Got kind of fitful."

Virgil's reaction is opaque. Everett's actions clearly meet his expectations of loyalty, but beyond that, his non-reaction proves puzzling. Packard's terms, loyalty and fidelity, are useful in understanding how Virgil and Everett conduct interpersonal relationships.

Because their relationship is based on loyalty but not necessarily fidelity, they can be

emotionally and physically intimate with women without imperiling their friendship. As importantly, they hold the women in their lives to the same standard.

In the aftermath of both versions of the scene, Virgil turns to Everett for guidance. In doing so, Virgil debunks his previous self-assessment, that he only has feelings for Allie in town, not during work. Does Allie love him? Will she leave him for another man? Will she “fuck anything that ain’t gelded”? In the novel, Everett registers Virgil’s embarrassment at his own uncertainty, and it is the first time Everett has witnessed such a display. Everett never claims to know Allie’s feelings, but he encourages Virgil to think about how he feels about Allie. Allie baffles Virgil, but he likes being with her. Does she love Virgil? Everett suggests that Virgil should know the answer. When Virgil isn’t around does Allie love Everett? Everett thinks not. Virgil could have asked Allie, but the uncertainty that causes him embarrassment in front of his closest friend stops him from taking that risk. As a result, we never know if Allie loves Virgil, only that Virgil believes that she does. Virgil eventually applies the same loyalty logic to Allie once he understands that her behavior is motivated by fear, not malice. Ed Harris claims that it would be easy for Allie to come off as a “manipulative bitch, and the character was never intended to be that.”<sup>167</sup> She tells the men she is afraid of everything, of “being alone...being with the wrong man... Not having any money, a place to live.” Virgil vows to take care of her for as long as she needs him. Implicit in his promise is Virgil’s acceptance that Allie may remain loyal but not faithful.

Allie’s fears raise two issues, love and money, that are gendered in unexpected ways. In the novel, love and money are discussed openly, but with the exception of the

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<sup>167</sup> See the DVD Special Feature, “Bringing the Characters of *Appaloosa* to Life.”

aforementioned scene, those discussions did not make it into the film. Per the novel, only men love in *Appaloosa*, and Katie explains why to Everett:

“Out here, love’s pretty hard for a woman,” Katie said. “Mostly it’s the men worry about love. You know how many miners and cowboys told me they loved me before they, ah, emptied their chamber?”

...

“Men maybe can worry ‘bout love,” Katie said. “Most women out here got to think ‘bout other things.” (236)

In relegating love to the male sphere, Katie re-genders love. The ability to love and to think about love becomes a privilege that one can afford when all other needs are met. Men who have the money to spend on “emptying their chamber” can also afford the fantasy of being in love and loved in return. Women, who are dependent on the men’s business, do not have the luxury of fantasizing about love. This is a harsh formulation, but it is one that recurs in westerns, including *Lonesome Dove*. Like Lorena and nearly all of the prostitutes in McMurtry’s novel, Katie’s formulation also upsets received notions of who experiences love and how.

As Katie implies, having one’s basic needs met is often a matter of money, and having money is both moralized and gendered. The women have none and so use their bodies to generate income (Katie) or stability (Allie). The townsmen have some but want more, and thus are craven and weak. Bragg’s eventual wealth and ability to revitalize the town’s economy threatens Virgil and Allie’s relationship and his livelihood. As a pair, Virgil and Everett are content with what they have and are considered virtuous. In a conversation toward the end of the novel, the men discuss Bragg’s return, money, and work. Neither man claims to have ever had much money, because if he lives alone, “there ain’t that much a fella needs.” According to Everett, all a single man needs is a place to sleep, whiskey and food, feed for the horse, and in his case “a pump from Katie Goode,”

a description that seems as if it were lifted from *Guyland* (264). The costuming in the film would suggest that a single man also needs stylish boots, tailored clothes, good hygiene, and a groomed visage.

Virgil's entrance into the heterodomeestic appears to be a catalyst for change. The novel and film diverge in how Virgil becomes a person of property. In the novel, Everett muses that he spends more time marshaling than Virgil, because Virgil and Allie were "building a house and he spent a lot of time at it." The happy couple had chosen a "a lot on the corner of First Street and Front Street, which put them at the very edge of town and would give them a back-window view of the easy upslope of the hills" (101). From Everett's perspective, Virgil is involved from the first in building a home away from work. He is an active participant invested in creating a firm foundation with Allie. In the film, Virgil seems more of a passive participant for two reasons. First, Allie, not Virgil, tells Everett that they are buying a house together that will "be the most beautiful house in town...with a parlor and a white picket fence. And a big porch so we can see who's coming to call." Everett is speechless and turns a beseeching gaze toward Virgil's sheepish countenance. Their reactions suggest the approach of an inexorable change in their friendship, and there is little they can do to stop it. Second, Virgil seems more given over to fate is that he and Allie did not decide to build a house from the ground up. One of the aldermen in town was having it built for his daughter and son-in-law, but they decided to move to Virginia. Allie and Virgil buy the unfinished house and make plans to complete it. This minor change in detail changes the resonance of the scene from an observation of change in the novel to a moment of betrayal in the film. The final straw in the novel comes when Virgil reveals that Allie wants him to get another job, even though

he has a passion for peacekeeping. In considering Allie's needs before his own and Everett's, Virgil expresses an inclination toward commitment and a new way of life, and heralds the physical separation of a long friendship. For Virgil to settle down would mean that Everett would have no work and no way to support himself, and this practical concern drives Everett's departure. To be clear, Virgil's entrance into the heterodomic, however, does not mean the dissolution of his partnership with Everett.

*Appaloosa* ends, as many westerns do, with a shootout meant to protect the heterodomic. Like the other gunfights that come before it in *Appaloosa*, it is decisive and brief. Everett calls out the now affluent and socially powerful Bragg in order to "save Virgil's career as a lawman and give him another chance with Allie." Virgil is in a vulnerable position because his continued employment depends on the townsmen, who, along with Allie, are drawn to the heady combination of wealth and political power that Bragg possesses. Virgil's ties to Allie and his new domicile make it impossible to continue his old way of life with Everett. Everett sees no other choice but to leave. In doing so, however, he takes the opportunity to protect his friend's happiness and humiliate, then kill, Bragg in the process. Outside of the recently renovated Bragg Hotel, Everett stands in the burnishing light of sunset. When Virgil questions his actions, Everett murmurs softly, while drawing his gun and striking a rather dashing pose, "I ever ask you for anything? Well, I'm asking you now. Just leave it alone. Just once, Virgil. One favor." When Bragg comes out and raises the gun Everett left at the bar for him, Everett shoots him in the chest and he dies. He exchanges a knowing nod with Virgil. The heterodomic remains intact, and Everett heads "straight into the setting sun and rode west at an easy pace. It was gonna be a long ride and there was no reason to hurry."

The ride doesn't take him very far, just the next town over, and though the ending of the novel might seem like the end of the friendship, it is not. Parker writes two more novels featuring the duo. In *Resolution* (2008), Everett and Virgil clean up the town of Resolution and protect it from immoral ranchers, and in *Brimstone* (2009), they pair up yet again to find Allie, who has run off with another man.

The friendships of Gus and Call and Everett and Virgil are models of male friendship predicated on time spent together. Because their relationships begin out of the necessity of partnership for work, the evolution of their relationship seems natural. They are unconcerned about normative models of friendships, i.e. women's friendships, and they are unconcerned about the threat of being labeled gay. The setting of the texts is not the sole determinant for the longevity and depth of the friendships. *Lonesome Dove* and *Appaloosa* were released published as novels and released as films in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century during a time when scholars are arguing about the paucity of men's friendships. They are, in effect, the nostalgic nineteenth century men that Kimmel imagines, *and* the contemporary white men that he castigates for shirking their traditional role.

## CHAPTER IV

### LONELY RANGERS

The men of this chapter are out of time. This is not to say that they have no time left, but that they are attempting to inhabit an identity that is no longer available because of historical and technological advancement. Consider again Jesse James' assassin, Robert "Bob" Ford. You might recall from Chapter One that Bob wanted to be an outlaw of Jesse James' caliber and notoriety but because he was born too late, he settled for killing his idol. You might also recall that after assassinating Jesse James, Bob Ford found himself stuck in a feedback loop, "killing" Jesse James in over eight hundred performances. Though these performances were financially lucrative and brought Bob some notoriety and celebrity, they arrested him in a moment of unfulfilled desire—the desire to be the man he had to kill. Bob's unfulfilled desire is underscored by his performance of himself, a man in full pancake makeup with china doll red cheeks, reenacting a moment that has long passed. He escapes performance limbo only after he retires from the stage, when he no longer performs a version of himself in a moment that is no longer accessible. Bob's initial predicament and eventual evolution illustrates both the problem of how white manhood is often theorized and direct our gaze toward a potentially new road to understanding.

The men in this chapter are twentieth century versions of Robert Ford. Set in 1949, Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) follows a John Grady Cole, a young man who longs to be a cowboy as his grandfather was in the late 1800s. Ang Lee's

adaptation of Annie Proulx's 1999 short story "Brokeback Mountain," tells the story of Ennis Del Mar, who inhabits a skeletal identity as a cowboy, and his turbulent relationship with Jack Twist. I choose to focus on McCarthy's and Lee's texts because their stylistic decisions bar audiences from accessing the main characters' interiority. Billy Bob Thornton's adaptation of *All the Pretty Horses* (2000) and Proulx's original text hinge on the protagonists' ability to foster and maintain interpersonal connections over time, and as we have seen over the course of this dissertation, this strategy is deployed across a range of westerns among several western types. Read against an array of westerns, McCarthy's and Lee's texts demonstrate that performances of cowboyhood are doomed to fail because the performance demands isolation from structures of support that were integral to *being* a cowboy in the late nineteenth century.

Where the last chapter focused on same sex partnerships, this chapter turns its attention to another type of partnership composed of young men, one of whom clings to the archetypal cowboy figure as a model of manhood, and the other who is hurt by the performance. In the latter iteration, labor does not undergird the partnership, and in place of work other, less stable, connections provide a shaky foundation for the central relationship. Left untended, these connections wither away, and the partnerships collapse, suggesting that the performance of cowboyhood cannot sustain rich, intimate relationships. These men's inability to depend on each other and their own lived experiences results in a retreat into the skeletal, and ultimately uninhabitable, world of myth.

The men of this chapter turn to cowboyhood as a means of protection against or refuge from modernity and emotional, interpersonal vulnerability. I argue that prevailing

ideology about white manhood and masculinity use a similar strategy when reading white men. The move is an isolating one, but not in the manner that one might expect. Instead of charting men's isolation from one another, dominant ideology about whiteness insists on *isolating* men from each other in order to preserve broad ideological claims about white men and their relation to the non-normative other. *All the Pretty Horses* and *Brokeback Mountain* serve as critiques of myth and genre. Cormac McCarthy recasts the myth of the cowboy and reveals its incoherence in the twentieth century. *Brokeback Mountain* demonstrates, with damning poignancy, the ways in which ideological pressures can weigh and break a supposedly privileged body. Neither text allows us much access to men's inner lives, but I will demonstrate that such access is not necessary to one's ability to *see* these young men as people who possess emotional complexity, even if they cannot articulate their emotions through speech.

#### DANGEROUS GAMES IN *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES*

Cormac McCarthy traffics in the business of destabilizing the myths of the American West. His novels interrogate the cultural narratives that form white, male subjects within the landscapes and temporalities that define the West. In *All the Pretty Horses*, the first novel of his Border Trilogy, McCarthy undertakes the western as a site of cultural production that works on male bodies to produce particular kinds of subjects, namely that of the cowboy, who are dislocated in time.<sup>168</sup> *All the Pretty Horses* is divided into four major movements: the journey to Mexico, life on the hacienda, life in prison, and John Grady's return to Texas. In both the beginning and the end, he is more superficially

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<sup>168</sup> *The Crossing* (1994) and *Cities of the Plain* (1998) complete the trilogy. All quotations are taken from *All The Pretty Horses*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

performative than not, but in the middle of the novel, John Grady attempts to negotiate which ratio of real to iconic will yield him a more sustainable life. The narrative arcs from the mythic ideal to the corporeal dangers of reality as John Grady Cole and his best friend, Lacey Rawlins, travel to Mexico from Texas in order to live as real cowboys. Along the way, they meet Jimmy Blevins, an unstable, abused 13 year old, who involves them in the recovery of his horse in Mexico. They soon part ways with Blevins, and find work on a hacienda as cowboys. John Grady falls in love with the hacendado's daughter, Alejandra, but the idyllic sojourn falls apart when the trio is apprehended for their part in the horse robbery. Blevins is executed, and John Grady and Rawlins fight for their lives in prison before they are released and return to Texas.

This particular novel has been read as a disruption of a number of cultural narratives, including the myth of American Exceptionalism, the fall of the American Adam, and indictment of the Western genre as a whole. While these narrative frameworks investigate the many levels of destabilization that McCarthy incurs, they often fail to interrogate the connection between the dominant narrative about whiteness and the failures white manhood that proliferate over the course of the text. In *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy creates a character who is engaged in a layered performance: that of being a real cowboy while simultaneously attempting to perform iconic cowboyhood. In unpacking the figure of the cowboy, he renders this figure as a both visibly performative and ultimately uninhabitable.

As a site of idealized white manhood, the cowboy is especially seductive. In *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* (2008), Cant suggests that McCarthy uses the mythic form “in such a way as to point out the destructive

consequences of structuring the consciousness of individuals by means of powerful mythologies which they are not in a position to live out.”<sup>169</sup> But where does this destructive power lie? Cant argues that McCarthy uses the failing cowboy figure as a critique of a culture that would position men in relation to such a figure even though at this point in history (1949), men cannot *be* the historical cowboy. Cant points repeatedly to the thematic failures that populate McCarthy’s novels as a whole, and identifies as a unifying theme “the failure of the ‘grand narrative’ of American Exceptionalism.”<sup>170</sup> The destructive power lies in the inability of men to fully inhabit the mythic cowboy identity or to be exceptional Americans because as seductive as these categories are, there is no there there. Judith Butler’s notion of the fabrication of identification is helpful here in understanding that the series of gestures that produce cowboyness on the surface of the body.<sup>171</sup> Even more so than most gendered identities, the mythic cowboy’s fabrications of coherence exist only on the surface of the body, but are embedded deep within the figure itself. As such, the mythic cowboy rarely purports to be a habitable identity; he is intrinsically incoherent and fails readily, visibly.

As a national icon and failing figure, the mythic cowboy becomes a site of identification for John Grady Cole. McCarthy’s use of the sixteen year old, white male as a vehicle to destabilize the mythology of the cowboy is unexpected, in part because John Grady fits the type so well. John Grady’s prowess lies in his Western stoicism, a quality that is repeatedly commented on as one that is “a good trait to have,” his ability to decode the natural world, his marksmanship, and his seemingly preternatural ability to break

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<sup>169</sup> John Cant, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

<sup>170</sup> Cant, 5

<sup>171</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 125.

horses without traumatizing them (19). But, in Susan Kollins's terms, he "suffers from an anxiety of belatedness."<sup>172</sup> He is a working, white, skilled cowboy who, in the face of post-war modernity, desires the atemporality and romance associated with the iconic cowboy. His way of life is vanishing, the landscape has changed. Despite his prowess and his honor, Kollins is right to suggest that McCarthy reiterates "the ways John Grady is caught up in an impossible dream."<sup>173</sup> In order to attain his desire, he flees to Mexico, a geographical space whose temporality in the novel is imagined as behind that of the U.S. In his movement from the United States to Mexico and back again, John Grady attempts to negotiate the boundaries between a possible life and the iconic one. He is a white male performing a particular reiteration of white manhood. However, the performances fail to cohere over the course of the novel, and both sites of performance work to destabilize not only John Grady's personal identity, but to denaturalize the very identities he attempts to inhabit.

As a whole, *All the Pretty Horses* resists the temporality in which it is set.

McCarthy never states outright that the year is 1949, and recent historical events, such as WWII and the Korean War, are conspicuously absent. John Grady is deliberately detached from the modern U.S. The novel opens with the death of John Grady's maternal grandfather, whom he idolized for his tenacity in holding on to the ranch and for his laconic manhood. His grandfather's death marks the end of an era that John Grady desperately wants to access: the era of the frontier and cowboys and large ranches. His parents are divorced and virtually absent from his life, but their absence also speaks to their connection to contemporary times. His father, a veteran turned drifter, is unable or

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<sup>172</sup> Susan Kollins, "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western," *Contemporary Literature*, (42.3 (2001): 557-588), 570.

<sup>173</sup> Kollins, 571.

unwilling to help John Grady buy the family ranch from his mother, and his mother would rather pursue a career in acting in San Antonio than live on a failing ranch in San Angelo. For John Grady, modernity signals the end of familial ties to land, and his parents' absence only reinforces his assumption. In an authorial and visual rebuttal of his father's name and lifestyle, John Grady Cole is referred to as John Grady. His rebuttal functions as a refutation of the martial manhood that his father represents while reinforcing his connection to his grandfather and the Grady moniker. His grandfather connotes a connection to the land and a romanticized past where the possibility of living as a cowboy still exists. In this renaming, he becomes analogous to his grandfather, his grandfather's ideals, and the resignification of John Grady Cole as John Grady binds him, inextricably, to that buried way of life. His desire to cowboy as his grandfather cowboied in the early 1900s, to break horses, to be in and of the land, forces John Grady to leave the family homestead in search of the seemingly more hospitable territory in Mexico.

Mexico functions as the perfect backdrop for the disarticulation of the figure of the cowboy. Because it is a geographical space with cultural ties to the United States and the fantasy of the West, Mexico seems the perfect proxy for an older, imagined Texas to John Grady, and it is only a day's ride away. As Cant argues, John Grady "has been ill prepared for life in modern Texas," and his flight to Mexico is "a romantic quest to regain the lost world of the cowboy."<sup>174</sup> However, the decision to site the boys' journey in Mexico is an odd one. As Barclay Owens notes, "[u]nlike the West, which Anglo-Americans assumed from early on extended from 'sea to shining sea,' Old Mexico has always been viewed as a badlands, an empty space, a rough place of bandits and

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<sup>174</sup> Cant, 180.

criminals and the evil, foreign Other. It is a place beyond the pale of American law.”<sup>175</sup>

Thus, the construction of Mexico as proxy to the Old West has its limitations, the biggest being that Mexico is simply not the United States and the same rules and ideology do not apply. At the outset of the novel, Mexico’s temporality and modernity are understood through John Grady’s idealized perception of that blank space on the map:

There were roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map as far south as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white.

It dont show nothing down there, does it? said Rawlins.

No.

You reckon it aint never been mapped

There’s maps. That just aint one of them. (34)

John Grady and his best friend, Lacey Rawlins naively, and perhaps insidiously, assume that in 1949 Mexico would remain unmapped, that it is veritable New World, despite the debt they owe vaqueros for their own identity. Comfortable in his cowboyness, and its colonial privilege, John Grady never imagines that by relocating his fantasy from the American West to Mexico, he further destabilizes the myth—rendering the cowboy, and its synecdotal reference the United States, other—while at the same time he reifies the conflation of the cowboy and the U.S. John Grady simply assumes that Mexico will unproblematically allow him to enact his dream of working on a ranch without the intrusion of modernity. McCarthy reveals the instability and heterogeneity of the white male body and renders white manhood vulnerable to critique.

Through the embodied performances of John Grady, McCarthy destabilizes the assumption of white men as normative bodies. John Grady troubles the normative by actively choosing to perform as both a “real” cowboy and an iconic one. In order to do both, he passively disidentifies with both. As José Medina suggests, “the normative

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<sup>175</sup> Owens, *Cormac McCarthy’s Western Novels*, (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2000), 65.

frameworks that shape the different aspects of our identity interpenetrate each other, forming a normative blend that regulates our practices and structures the contexts in which they take place.”<sup>176</sup> But what are these regulatory frameworks? Medina argues that identities are shaped by “[r]acist, masculinist, and heterosexist ideologies” and that “the more one’s identity deviates from this blend of normative frameworks, the more disempowered one is” (671). This raises yet another question: what if a person does *not* deviate from these “normative” spaces but remains disempowered? As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, a person who meets the normative criteria can still fail to embody and capitalize on normative privilege. In the case of John Grady, the normative frameworks, white man and cowboy, that McCarthy interrogates virtually mirror one another, and it becomes difficult to parse out the distinctions between the performances. It is quite clear, though, that it would be impossible for both performances, in their distilled iterations, to cohere within a single body because though they are similar, they are just different enough to make coherence untenable.

In recognizing John Grady’s disidentification, and in reading his layered performance as such, the normative becomes visible as a construct that is vulnerable to destabilization. I have argued that on the surface John Grady is the embodiment of normal—he is a white, heterosexual, American male—but as his character attempts to negotiate being a living person in the world who desires companionate, filial, and romantic relationships, and living the romantic idealized life of the American cowboy, he ultimately fails to do either, and the entire normative construct comes under scrutiny. Bluntly put, if John Grady cannot inhabit the role of the cowboy, then no one can. John

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<sup>176</sup> José Medina, “Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, (29.6 (2003): 657-682), 671.

Grady's body becomes a discursive battle field where the privileged invisibility and mobility of white manhood is simultaneously made visible and vulnerable. Medina's notion of blindness can help us understand John Grady's primary strategy of disidentification. He is blind to the "differences and similarities in the contexts of, and of the purposes of, identification and counter-identification" such that he does not always know how the performances differ.<sup>177</sup> He is, in fact, unaware that he is performing at all, and his blindness might be the very technology that allows him to move between the two performative roles. His blindness, however, is not our blindness. John Grady inhabits at least two performative identities simultaneously, and as a result there are visible fissures in his identity.

McCarthy places John Grady in the center of a performative continuum. Like the ruler of good and evil mobilized in Chapter One, this limited spectrum contains on one end the working cowboy and on the other the mythic cowboy. Diametrically situated on either side of the continuum are the other American boys, Lacey Rawlins and Jimmy Blevins, who function as foils to John Grady's hybrid performance. Rawlins is John Grady's best friend and traveling companion in Mexico. He is more practical than idealistic, and appears to see the trip to Mexico as a lark. He is capable of forming sustainable bonds with his family and the men he works with on the hacienda, and as a result, he has a home to return to and elicits the concern and affection of the other workers. Unlike John Grady, Rawlins bunks with the other men and works alongside them, and as a result, he becomes a part of their community. Rawlins does not seem to forge relationships with women, sexual or otherwise, which points to the conditions of labor associated with being a real cowboy. His white Americaness does not hinder his

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<sup>177</sup> Medina, 665.

ability to work as a “real” cowboy, and though he is well versed in the mythology of the American cowboy he doesn’t buy into it to the degree that John Grady does. Without the veneer that comes in the performance of the iconic cowboy, Rawlins’s body is more vulnerable to the state’s actions, and when he and John Grady are arrested for associating with Blevins, it is Rawlins who is physically, and possibly sexually, violated by the captain.

Blevins, on the other hand, is a strange and hollow iteration of the cowboy. Although his time with John Grady and Rawlins is abbreviated, he manages to disrupt their seemingly clear path to cowboy happiness. The boys meet Blevins just before crossing the Rio Grande and he tags along until he loses his horse and most of his clothes during a thunderstorm. When they locate his horse in a small town, Blevins goes rogue, steals his horse back and kills a man in the process before disappearing into the brush. He reemerges in prison toward the end of the novel, bruised and beaten, and is executed shortly thereafter. Owen Barclay sees in Blevins a kind of “unbridled idealism,” but I would suggest that Blevins is not so much idealistic as he is loose cannon.<sup>178</sup> He is very young, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, and when John Grady and Rawlins first meet him, he is riding alone on an enormous, beautiful bay and he carries an improbably large gun. Like the mythic cowboy, Blevins can shoot, he can ride, and he can cook. He is also poor and uneducated and exploits his position as white and American when John Grady and Rawlins ask why they should keep him around. His response is simple: “Cause I’m an American” (45). Their shared identity as white American males automatically affords him their protection and because they come to represent the nation itself through the signifier of the cowboy, they must stick together. Even Rawlins, who knows Blevins is

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<sup>178</sup> Owens, 77.

no good, cannot dispute this logic. This logic is a key part of John Grady's performance of cowboyness. Kollins contends that "[p]laying cowboy means that John Grady must carefully abide by the hero's codes. His refusal to abandon Blevins...eventually costs him greatly" but he cannot "disregard the code and abandon another man in need."<sup>179</sup> John Grady is incapable of *not* identifying and sympathizing with the unstable young man. Blevins's performance is the likely product of sexual abuse, which he intimates when he explains why he's on the run, and his cowboyness is a hypermasculine identity that is meant to render him impenetrable. Absent his cowboy paraphernalia, Blevins needs John Grady to wield his identity to protect him from a group of Mexican candle and soap makers who want to purchase him, possibly for sexual purposes. During the exchange between John Grady and the men, Blevins is unaware that his bodily integrity is in jeopardy, and it is shortly thereafter, once they decide to help Blevins retrieve his horse, that Rawlins makes his most dire and pragmatic prediction to John Grady:

Ever dumb thing I ever done in my life there was a decision I made before that got me into it. It was never the dumb thing. It was always some choice I'd made before I made it. You understand what I'm saying.

Yeah. I think so. Meanin what?

Meanin this is it. this is our last chance. Right now. This is the time and there wont be another time and I guarantee it.

Meanin just leave him?

Yessir. (79)

Rawlins is able to read Blevins' actions and John Grady's response, and he knows that nothing he says will change John Grady's mind. For Rawlins, Blevins is expendable in order to maintain the security and primacy of their relationship. Blevins only cares about his gun and his horse, and when both disappear after an intense thunderstorm, he is obsessed with getting them back. For Blevins, those two items, more than anything else,

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<sup>179</sup> Kollins, 573.

define him. Blevin's reckless performance fails, and he is captured for murdering the man who had his gun. John Grady and Rawlins are guilty by association, though they are not executed as Blevins is.

McCarthy dismisses out of hand the possibility that one can *only* perform iconic cowboyhood as one's identity. To do so would result in certain, violent death. There has to be another, more substantive layer, over which the performative can be laid if there is to be any possibility of success. John Grady is the embodiment of both Rawlin's vulnerability and Blevin's rashness, with the capacity to form relationships and the capacity to rely on his whiteness. John Grady has more flexibility than either Rawlins or Blevins, and his position on the real/iconic cowboy continuum depends on where he is in the narrative.

As John Grady and Rawlins ride their horses south through the Texas/Mexico borderlands, they imagine that they understand how they will fit into the landscape that they are moving through. McCarthy's landscape overwhelms its characters and their concerns. They expect to go to Mexico and find a ranch to work on, and initially, things go well. They are able to ride down through Texas, singing cowboy songs and thinking about their future. Their conversations are light but spare, as is most conversation in the novel. McCarthy does not use quotation marks, and the terse lines of dialogue are a narrow intrusion into lengthy descriptions of the land and the characters' actions. One can imagine that the boys go hours without talking. In this regard, the film fails to capture the silences that define the novel, and increased emphasis is placed on John Grady and Rawlins's interactions and conversations. The end result is a narrative that is scaled down to the human instead of rising to the grandeur of the mythic. In privileging the landscape

and action over the interiority of his characters, McCarthy creates a world dependent on one's ability to decode what is written on the surface of the body. The extent of their performance of cowboyism consists of joking about their appearance—"You do look like some kind of desperado, John Grady said. You don't look like no choir director, said Rawlins"—or wondering when exactly their cowboy paradise will appear (36). Behind the jokes the stakes are very high for John Grady. Unlike Rawlins, he has no family or home to return to, and it is impossible for him to exist as he desires in Texas.

Technological encroachment on the land—roads and cars and towns and oil wells—transformed Texas into world that is inhospitable to the iconic cowboy.

In juxtaposing John Grady and Blevins, McCarthy begins to reveal the fissures in the performance of mythic cowboyism. Blevins instability—performative and mental—is the root of the collapse of John Grady's fantasy of performance. Though Rawlins, as the voice of reasons, repeatedly states that he has an "uneasy feelin about that little son of a bitch," John Grady is incapable of abandoning the boy, and it is as much about the implicit mythic cowboy code as it is John Grady internal moral center (43). He cannot help but see himself in the boy who is running away from his past, armed with the veneer of cowboyism to protect him.

John Grady and Rawlins are eventually separated from Blevins after he recklessly recovers his horse from the sleepy town of Encantada, and their journey into myth is on track. John Grady and Rawlins easily get jobs at the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, a sprawling ranch owned by Don Hector Rocha. Both John Grady and Rawlins live in the bunkhouse, a "long adobe building of two rooms with a tin roof and concrete floors," where one room held "a dozen bunks of wood or metal" and the

other was outfitted with a long table, cookstove, dishes and utensils. (95). The men they bunk with are as ignorant about the U.S as John Grady and Rawlins were about Mexico. The vaqueros have many questions about the country to the north that was “little more than a rumor,” and John Grady, the only member of the duo who speaks Spanish, does his best to answer them (95).

John Grady’s separation from Rawlins is peculiar. The Americans soon distinguish themselves by breaking a herd of sixteen wild mares in four days. They do this together, with shared responsibility, though the stunt is John Grady’s idea. Rocha notices this unlikely feat and pulls John Grady aside for further inspection:

Why are you here?

...

I just wanted to see the country, I reckon. Or we did.

May I ask how old you are?

Sixteen.

The hacendado raised his eyebrows. Sixteen, he said.

Yessir.

The hacendado smiled again. When I was sixteen I told people I was eighteen.

John Grady sipped his coffee.

Your friend is sixteen also?

Seventeen.

But you are the leader.

We dont have no leaders. We’re just buddies.

Of course. (113-114)

Rocha is impressed with John Grady, but not with Rawlins, though they possess comparable knowledge about horses and participates in the breaking of the herd. Perhaps John Grady’s ability to speak Spanish is the tipping point, or perhaps Rocha recognizes him as a man of impulse. However he decides, Rocha pegs John Grady as the leader, despite John Grady’s claims to the contrary, and he is removed from the common bunk area to a room just off the stables. His relationship with Rawlins seems as deep as it ever was, though it takes up less room in the text, but we see John Grady branching out to

form relationships with Alejandra, Rocha's daughter, and with Don Hector himself. In his element, John Grady does not long for the romantic cowboy past because he is living in a remarkable present. He works with the horses, is in love with a beautiful girl, and there is no pesky modernity on the horizon—aside from Rocha's cars and private airplane.

From this position of seeming fixity, John Grady attempts to redefine the mythic cowboy's relation to non-white people, and it is in these moments where we really see the distinction between the real and iconic cowboy. Although John Grady and Alejandra love each other, their relationship falls prey to the trope the cowboy and the Mexican woman. As José Límon argues, "these relationships are not culturally meant to last. [...] More often than not, our cowboy must take up romantic permanency with his own racial-cultural kind."<sup>180</sup> Similarly, his relationship with Hector Rocha is necessarily impermanent. He will never be Don Hector's son. In addition to sleeping with Rocha's daughter outside the bounds of marriage, John Grady is landless and poor, and in no way a suitable match for the hacendado's only daughter. Perhaps equally as damning, John Grady lies to Rocha about his connection with Blevins, even though John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins are inextricably and visibly linked across the nation by their white Americanness. John Grady and Rawlins' eventual expulsion from hacienda is a direct result of John Grady's failed relationships with Alejandra and Rocha.

Perhaps John Grady's greatest flaw is his blindness to how Mexico works. It is not simply a blank spot on the map waiting for some idealistic white American male to project his fantasies onto it; it a space inhabited with its own cultural productions and concerns and in McCarthy's iteration, it is brutally violent and incredibly unforgiving. He

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<sup>180</sup> José Límon, "Tex-Sex-Mex: American Identities, Lone Stars, and the Politics of Racialized Sexuality," *American Literary History* (9.3 (1997): 598-616), 599

runs to Mexico for a more romantic kind of life, but he is not prepared for the limits imposed upon sexual freedom and honor. He sees everything through a particularly American ideology, an ideology that privileges his white, straight, male body, and one that undergirds the American dream: if you work hard enough, then anything can be yours.

Once she hears that John Grady is sleeping with her great-niece, Dueña Alfonso quickly disabuses John Grady of those ideological notions. As the overseer of Alejandra's virtue, the dueña speaks from position of great power. When she says, "There is no forgiveness. For women. A man may lose his honor and regain it again. But a woman cannot. She cannot," she also means the powerless, the landless, those consistently at the mercy of men and the wealthy, regardless of gender, are vulnerable, and she has enough power to take John Grady's honor and to refuse to allow him to earn it back (137). As Phillip Snyder suggests, their love for Alejandra "sets them at odds despite their obvious affinity" for one another, and Alfonso is adamant in her claim to John Grady that "it's not a matter of right. You must understand. It is a matter of who must say. In this matter I get to say. I am the one who gets to say" (McCarthy 137).<sup>181</sup> Owens argues that "as his benefactress, [Alfonso] sees a parallel between her own youthful idealism in Alejandra's situation, but as a surrogate mother and member of aristocratic society, she knows John Grady is unfit to fill the position to which he aspires."<sup>182</sup> John Grady's observation, "that don't seem right," echoes his frustration at Alfonso discounting him as a suitable beau for Alejandra later on in the novel because he

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<sup>181</sup>Phillip A. Snyder, "Cowboy Codes in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy," *A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*, eds. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, (Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 198-227), 217.

<sup>182</sup> Owens, 92 .

does not have land or money or horses. Like Dish Bogget of *Lonesome Dove*, John Grady's decision to become a cowboy limits his ability to be an acceptable mate and participate in the heterodomeestic. Moreover, his position as lowly cowboy in Mexico, places him at the mercy of Alfonsa and Rocha and anyone else with power or money.

After Rocha's and Alfonsa's rejection, John Grady's world, and his performance of cowboyness, begins to crumble. He and Rawlins are arrested for their connection to Blevins. The captain and the brother of the man Blevins killed execute Blevins in the Mexican desert, while John Grady and Rawlins are forced to sit passively by. They are imprisoned, and both nearly die, Rawlins from a knife wound, and John Grady from a fight with an assassin. In prison, John Grady is repeatedly told that he does not understand how the prison and, by extension, Mexico work. The most powerful inmate in prison, a man named Pérez, psychologizes the mind of the white American male as such:

Even in a place like this where we are concerned with fundamental things the mind of the anglo is closed in this rare way. At one time I thought it was only his life of privilege. But it is not that. It is his mind. [...]  
It is not that he is stupid. It is that his picture of the world is incomplete. In this rare way, he looks and only where he wishes to see. (192)

John Grady can never admit to the truth of this statement; he persists in imposing his ideology on the world, even when the world resists. By putting these words in the mouth of an inmate, McCarthy tips his hand to the reader, and provides a discursive space for us to consider the implications of John Grady's blindness.

The most devastating result of his blindness is the loss of interpersonal bonds. Once John Grady and Rawlins are released from prison, via Alfonsa's reluctant largess, they part ways. Rawlins, who has the privilege of home, returns to Texas and the life he had before his ill fated adventure. John Grady, on the other hand, returns to the hacienda,

and eventually attempts, and fails, to reestablish his relationship with Alejandra. No matter his arguments, she refuses to leave her family to be with him. She has sacrificed any chance they might have had for love in order to obtain his release from prison. If John Grady were not a cowboy, or if he had enough money negotiate his own release, then, perhaps, they might have had a chance. But as one of the poor children John Grady meets on his way to his rendezvous with Alejandra knows, “the family was rich and he was poor” (244). Despite his pleas, Alejandra tells John Grady that she loves him, but she cannot leave her family. John Grady then realizes that his decision to perform cowboyism has “led only to this moment and all after led nowhere at all” (255). At the train station, John Grady sheds some of his stoicism as “she put her face against his shoulder and he spoke to her but she did not answer” (255). Physically damaged and emotionally scarred, John Grady Cole finds it impossible to function in the liminal space between performances—where every interpersonal relationship fails—and by the end of the novel, he is subsumed entirely by the performance of cowboyism.

By the end of the novel, John Grady is in pure mythic cowboy mode; he is solitary and powerful, and does not need anyone. The working cowboy is gone, for there are no more ranches or men to work with. The wild mares are no longer under his purview. In this mode, John Grady focuses on recouping the three horses, his, Rawlins’s, and Blevins’, that are being held in Encantada as state property. Owens contends “John Grady’s idealistic desire for success in a desperate venture quickly transfers from Alejandra back to the storybook horses.”<sup>183</sup> The horses are the link to John Grady’s cowboyism, for it not just American property that John Grady is attempting to recover, but the American cowboy who has been wounded in the disappointing Eden of Mexico.

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<sup>183</sup> Owens, 92.

Cant appropriately describes this later John Grady as a “Blevins-like desperado, a man of death,” and we are reminded of Blevins’ recklessness and tragic failure.<sup>184</sup> Owens also argues that in “the sequence where he takes the captain hostage, recaptures the horses, and evades the posse, we see the classic “good” American defeating the foreign enemy.”<sup>185</sup> Despite the fact that Owens replicates John Grady’s reading of the captain as foreign even though the captain is, in Mexico, normative, it is quite clear that John Grady’s storming of Encantada is meant to be a final assault on the particular space that stopped him from living his dream. In the siege of Encantada, John Grady is mythically amazing: he captures the captain, steals three horses, and manages to escape across the Mexican desert with a bullet wound in his thigh. He cauterizes his own wound with the barrel of his gun and fixes the captain’s dislocated shoulder. He is ruthless and uncaring. A far cry from the idealistic boy who first crossed into Mexico at the beginning of the novel.

In the end, McCarthy does not destroy white manhood, but he does make its fault lines and its performance visible. John Grady moves through the world in the shape of a cowboy, but he really has nothing to show for it. In sloughing off the working cowboy in favor of the brittle armor of the iconic, John Grady must also accept that he has no place in either Mexico or Texas. He felt “a loneliness he’d not known since he was a child and he felt wholly alien to the world though he loved it still” (282). During his journey north to Texas, McCarthy renders John Grady a vanishing figure time and again, riding forever into the sunset. This is the impossibility of the mythic cowboy: even when John Grady finally manages to inhabit the figure, it vanishes. Inherent to the figure is the fiction of

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<sup>184</sup> Cant, 190.

<sup>185</sup> Owens, 92.

coherence, but he is also temporally uninhabitable. No modern country will have him, and he will have no modern country.

### **The Brokeback Mountains**

Proulx animates a different strategy to demonstrate the incompatibility of myth and the present. She does not let us or her characters escape into an ahistorical fantasy about the West, but rather she shows that the time in which the story takes place is directly linked to Ennis Del Mar's failed relationships. Although Ang Lee sublimates some of this historical grounding within the film, he, the screenwriters, Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, and the production crew are also invested in grounded, historical representation. A brief sketch of the cultural landscape helps contextualize the history that undergirds the narrative and helps audiences understand the scope of characters' actions and idiosyncrasies. In doing so, I also hope to protect against a critical blindness that the film, more than the story, invites.

"Brokeback Mountain" takes place between the 1963 and the mid-1980s. During this time the nation experienced Kennedy's assassination (1963), the Stonewall Riots (1969), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the continuation of the Cold War, multiple civil rights movements, Watergate (1972), multiple sexual revolutions, and the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. In particular, the time period that the story and film span encapsulates a tremendous time for the gay rights movement, as do the time in which the story was published and the film released. From the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, who were active in attempting to protect and secure gay rights in the 1950s and 1960s, to the lesbians who were affiliated with NOW and the women's movement, to the Stonewall riots in the

summer of 1969, and the Gay Liberation Front that came into power shortly after, the sixties alone were a heady time for the movement. Gay men and women agitated for basic civil rights, and the right to serve openly in the military throughout 1960s, '70s and '80s.<sup>186</sup> In addition to the passage of now overturned Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the policy that restricted the military's right to out closeted servicemen and women, without decriminalizing homosexuality, the late 1990s saw an increase in positive and negative visibility. Proulx's short story was published in 1997, a year before Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered in Laramie Wyoming. Though she could not have foreseen Shepard's murder, her reasons for choosing rural Wyoming in the sixties was clear:

The two characters had to have grown up on isolated hardscrabble ranches and were clearly homophobic themselves, especially the Ennis character. Both wanted to be cowboys, be part of the Great Western Myth, but it didn't work out that way.... Although there are many places in Wyoming where gay men did and do live together in harmony with the community, it should not be forgotten that a year after this story was published Matthew Shepard was tied to a buck fence outside the most enlightened town in the state, Laramie, home of the University of Wyoming.<sup>187</sup>

Proulx is keenly aware, unlike many reviewers of the film, that homophobia is not a relic of the past, and though Ennis lives in isolation, the story does not. Diana Ossana, who co-wrote the screenplay with Larry McMurtry saw in Shepard's death a reflection of Proulx's story and their screenplay.<sup>188</sup> Shepard's death reverberated through the nation and was the impetus for the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which was signed into law 28 October 2009, and provides federal protections for gays and lesbians against hate crimes (Matthew Shepard).

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<sup>186</sup> For a brief sketch of the LGBT rights movement, the PBS documentary *Before Stonewall* is an excellent resource that outlines the movement from the 1930s—1969.

<sup>187</sup> Proulx, "Getting Movied," *Brokeback Mountain: Story To Screenplay*, (New York: Scribner, 2005. 129-138), 130.

<sup>188</sup> Diana Ossana, "Climbing Brokeback Mountain," *Brokeback Mountain: Story To Screenplay*, (New York: Scribner, 2005. 143-52), 146.

The film itself was released in a contentious political environment where gay rights occupied a significant amount of media attention. In their 2004 bid for a second term, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney used the specter of gay marriage to distract the country from other, more concrete domestic and foreign issues like the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2005 alone, California approved gay marriage<sup>189</sup>; some states, like Illinois<sup>190</sup> and Maine<sup>191</sup> banned discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in both the public and private sector, while others, like Kansas, banned civil unions and same sex marriages.

Against this backdrop of political, social, and cultural change, Proulx insists we keep track of these men, their age, and their fallibility. The story opens in an amorphous temporal space in which Ennis reminisces about his and Jack Twist's life together. The story flashes back to 1963 when Jack and Ennis first met outside of Joe Aguirre's trailer, both in search of some kind of ranch work for the summer. Aguirre hires these poor Wyoming natives to herd sheep on Brokeback Mountain, a job that, according to Proulx, "most real cowpokes despise."<sup>192</sup> Their sexual relationship is confined to Brokeback Mountain, and at summer's end they part ways. The next part of the story spans four years, beginning in December of 1963 when Ennis marries Alma Beers and has "her pregnant by mid-January" (9). He works at Elwood Hi-Top place through September when his first daughter, Alma Jr., is born and shortly thereafter, her sister. The summer of 1967, Ennis and Jack reunite for the first time and five years later, 1972, Ennis and

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<sup>189</sup> Joe Dignan and John Pomfret, "California Legislature Approves Gay Marriage," *Washington Post* (7 Sep 2005).

<sup>190</sup> "STATE LGBT Non-Discrimination Law Enacted!" *Illinois Gender Advocates*, (4.2 (2005).

<sup>191</sup> Joan Pearson, "Alert - New Maine Human Rights Act Orientation Protection Takes Effect; Includes Gender Identity and Expression," Press release from Pierce Atwood, LLP, (18 Jan 2006).

<sup>192</sup> Proulx, "Getting Movied," 130.

Alma divorce. After the divorce, Proulx becomes considerably less specific, but we do know that for “[years] on years they worked their way through the high meadows and mountain drainages,” though “they were no longer young men with all of it before them” (17). The last date Proulx marks is May 1983, the last time Jack and Ennis meet. In November of that same year, Ennis finds out that Jack has died, or was possibly murdered. After Jack’s death, the story returns to the opening frame, placing Ennis sometime after 1983.

Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana are even more exacting in their timekeeping in the screenplay. Per convention, each new shot is labeled with time and location, beginning with an exterior shot of a Wyoming highway near dawn in 1963.<sup>193</sup> When Jack visits Aguirre’s trailer the following summer, the scene is marked, “EXT: SIGNAL, WYOMING: EARLY SUMMER: DAY: 1964.”<sup>194</sup> The years accounted for in the script include 1964, ’66, ’67, ’69, ’73, ’75, ’77-’79, ’81, ’82, and 1984. This meticulous marking of time has practical applications in the production of the film: those creating costumes and choosing locations and props need to know the time period so that they can set the scene accurately. Read against the script, however, the film loses some of this historical grounding in the visual translation from screenplay to film, and it hardly seems that twenty years have passed in the diegesis. By and large, the passage of time is not marked by commentary on major historical events; instead, time is marked by characters’ bodies and the bodies’ accessories. Attentive viewers will note the changing length of sideburns, Jack’s 1970s model Ford truck, or a paunch in his last scene with Ennis.

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<sup>193</sup> McMurtry and Ossana, *Brokeback Mountain: The Screenplay*. *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay*, (New York: Scribner, 2005), 1.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

Time has another important function that is, I argue, integral to understanding Ennis's relationships with Jack and Alma and his children because unlike many of the westerns under discussion in this dissertation, "Brokeback Mountain" and its film adaptation *Brokeback Mountain* takes place in the twentieth century. The insistent temporality marks the archetype of the cowboy as out of place. Ennis attempts to perform a manhood that is inaccessible to him, and further, one that is out of place in the middle of the twentieth century. A more expected incarnation of manhood would be one that reacted to the Vietnam War, but the extended Southeast Asian conflict and its troubled manhood are nowhere on Ennis's radar. Timing is also important when one considers how much time Ennis spends with any given person. He and Jack are initially together for a handful of months and then off and on for twenty years; his marriage to Alma lasts about nine years, though he seems to spend a great deal of that time working on various ranches; and he spends very little time within the narratives interacting with his children. Although we rarely see him at work, we are meant to understand that work defines the contours of his life, but in fact it is his dedication to that work, his willingness to shunt all other commitments to the periphery, that defines the increasingly barren terrain of his life.

Alongside time, we must consider geography and Proulx's fixation on place. Most of the story takes place in Riverton, Wyoming, also known as the "Rendezvous City,"<sup>195</sup> and while Riverton may seem isolated, it is not completely disconnected from the rest of the country. In concert with Ennis's reluctance to leave Wyoming, the primary setting of the narrative evokes a stultifying feeling of regional claustrophobia. However, Jack makes the ten hour drive from Childress, Texas to Wyoming several times over the

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<sup>195</sup>From the Riverton City Website, <http://www.rivertonwy.gov/departments/index.php>.

course of the text, he and Ennis discuss the possibility of living in Denver or Lightning Flats, Wyoming, the dangers of Mexico, and they allude to the Vietnam War. The nominal presence of these locations and events serves to link rural Wyoming to an urban and broader political landscape, even if these locales are confined to the periphery.

The narrow geographical and temporal scope of the story mirrors the narrowed options that seem to be available to the characters. Proulx, like McCarthy, subordinates her characters to the landscape. O. Alan Weltzien critiques Proulx's leveraging of the harsh landscape against the small lives of the characters in her Wyoming stories:

Proulx's geographical determinism, essential to understanding her fiction, explains the elevation of landscape imagery to a dominant, inhuman force, and a corresponding reduction of character to caricature. That landscape imagery contains and belittles, most of the time characters, defines Proulx's aesthetic. It doesn't inherently follow that big landscapes nurture little people, but Proulx employs that formula. There are no giants in her earth, only pygmies; landforms and weather, not people, embody the heroic.<sup>196</sup>

The landscape effectively reduces her characters to caricatures, an effect that is harmfully rendered across the body and psyche of Ennis del Mar. Weltzien goes on to suggest that character complexity is sacrificed in favor of "selective emphasis and intensity"; furthermore, the juxtaposition of the land against characters exposes "the grooved creases on a face's map or smears of caked mud festooning a battered old pickup," distancing the reader from the character's subjectivity.<sup>197</sup> This effect is well suited to a reductive understanding of the genre western, where the figure of the cowboy evokes images of a past that never quite was.

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<sup>196</sup> O. Alan Weltzien. "Annie Proulx's Wyoming: Geographical Determinism, Landscape, and Caricature," *The Geographical Imagination of Annie Proulx: Rethinking Regionalism*, ed. Alex Hunt, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009) 100.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

The film adaptation also engages in a kind of geographical aggrandizement that signals an affiliation with the genre, while also challenging the ideology that undergirds our understanding of the genre. In his 2007 article “All That Brokeback Allows,” Jim Kitses sees in the geographical iconography,

the American wilderness, the grandeur, beauty, and isolation of the film’s setting echoing the language John Ford had helped to shape with the buttes and mesas of Monument Valley. It is the world of the pioneer and the nomad, of adventure and adversity, the vessel that shaped American character [...] the Western’s settings gave it a unique power to express in what became coded aesthetics the ideological promise of America—freedom, openness, redemption, reinvention.<sup>198</sup>

Kitses’ invocation of Ford and the generic constraints of the western suggest that the story functions within a paradigm of generic nationalism, which, like the figure of the cowboy, cannot be isolated from the nostalgic, “normative” conceptualization of America. The film goes a step further in the reductionist calculus by rendering Riverton in rather absolute terms, and it accomplishes this feat by trafficking in the generic syntax of the western. Ennis always wears a light colored hat, though it is never white, while Jack consistently dons a black hat. The style of the hats may change, but the color coding remains the same. Similarly, Ennis’ attempts to embrace heterosexuality mark him as good, while Jack’s desire for a homodestic life with Ennis marks him as bad. Arguably, this hero/villain formulation represents only one route of analysis, primarily one that privileges a heteronormative paradigm.

The film’s release in 2005 prompted a firestorm of debate, and this debate revealed the archetypal cowboy’s hold on the American imagination. Lee’s invocation of the mythic cowboy, particularly via the use of the hats, invites a reading rooted in the mythical rather than the historical. But myth here means more than the black or white

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<sup>198</sup> Jim Kitses, “All That Brokeback Allows,” *Film Quarterly* 60.3 (Spring 2007), 25.

hats because it includes the myth of compulsory heterosexuality ascribed to white men who live in rural spaces. In “Embodiment and Rural Masculinity,” Jo Little argues that “rural sexual identity is underpinned by a strong assumption of traditional, family-based heterosexuality,” and this assumption codes rural spaces as “unscary.”<sup>199</sup> This pervasive ideological assumption exists uneasily alongside what David Bell calls the “erotic topography” of the rural that is associated with “modern gay life.”<sup>200</sup> The material conditions of production, which include Heath Ledger’s and Jake Gyllenhaal’s avowal of their own heterosexuality during publicity events, are another factor that must be accounted for when analyzing the film. The intersection of the unscary and the erotic in *Brokeback Mountain* outs alternative versions of manhood that were once closeted because the film was released by a major studio and starred two good looking, well known, lauded actors. Had Lee cast more obscure actors, or actors more in keeping with Proulx’s description, which is to say homely, or had the film been a low budget art house feature, its impact would have been mitigated by these factors.<sup>201</sup> These competing narratives— mythic versus historic, the unscary and the erotic, and the cowboy and homosexuality— are a bit unwieldy and ideological traps abound. The film was too gay or not gay enough or not gay at all; it was a romance and a tragedy and a triumph; they were cowboys or not cowboys at all. In the immediate aftermath of the film, popular and scholarly critics alike turned to a heteronormative framework whose terms were oppositional absolutes.

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<sup>199</sup> Jo Little, “Embodiment and Rural Masculinity,” *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*, eds. Hugh Campbell, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Margaret Finney, (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania UP, 2006: 184-201), 184, 188.

<sup>200</sup> David Bell, “Cowboy Love,” *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*, (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania UP, 2006: 163-180), 165.

<sup>201</sup> Based on Proulx’s description, imagine a young Steve Buscemi as Jack and a young Gary Bussey as Ennis. A far cry from the dewy beauty of Ledger and Gyllenhaal.

Popular responses to the film, those found on blogs and in reviews and parodies of the film, fell into three major camps. The first was the right wing reactionary camp that argued that the film was part of the left and the gay agenda to target a perceived moral vulnerability of America via the cowboy. Michael Jensen of Afterelton.com, a popular gay entertainment news site, reported,

FOX commentator Bill O'Reilly can scarcely imagine himself catching the movie, but if he did, he imagines that when the romantic scene in the pup tent occurs he will find himself wondering what would happen if the cowboys from *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* were to stumble upon Jack and Ennis. Says O'Reilly, "Gunfire would be involved I imagine." MSNBC's Chris Matthew and radio personality Don Imus referred to *Brokeback* as *Fudgepack Mountain* among other derogatory comments they offered on-air.<sup>202</sup>

David Kupelian penned, "*Brokeback Mountain: Rape of the Marlboro Man*," a vitriolic op-ed piece published on the ultra-right wing website WorldNetDaily.com, wherein he argues that the film is a brilliant piece of propaganda for the gay agenda, and that it is effective because it rapes the Marlboro Man. He writes:

It has taken a revered symbol of America – the cowboy – with all the powerful emotions and associations that are rooted deep down in the pioneering American soul, and grafted onto it a self-destructive lifestyle it wants to force down Americans' throats. The result is a brazen propaganda vehicle designed to replace the reservations most Americans still have toward homosexuality with powerful feelings of sympathy, guilt over past "homophobia" – and ultimately the complete and utter acceptance of homosexuality as equivalent in every way to heterosexuality.<sup>203</sup>

In response to the conservative hysteria, Kitses observes that "American cowboys—of all people—have no business falling in love with each other. Practical and conservative

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<sup>202</sup> Michael Jensen, "Has American Passed the Brokeback Test?" *afterelton.com*. AfterElton.com. Web. 27 Feb. 2006. 09 Dec. 2008.

<sup>203</sup> David Kupelian, "*Brokeback Mountain: Rape of the Malboro Man*," *WorldNetDaily*, (27 Dec. 2005).

types of a rough and ready manhood are by no means ready for man-love,” and neither are upper-middle class political pundits.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the right wing hysteria, the majority of film critics gave *Brokeback Mountain* a positive review, even as they struggled to reconcile the seeming paradox of a gay romance with cowboys. In their 2008 study of 113 reviews, Brenda Cooper and Edward Pease found that though reviewers supported the film, they created “three complementary but conflicting frames that direct attention away from the movie’s core theme of destructive rural homophobia.”<sup>205</sup> According to Cooper and Pease, “reviewers framed the film as a ‘universal’ love story while simultaneously encouraging audiences to read it as a ‘gay cowboy movie.’”<sup>206</sup> They go on to suggest that this universal frame “un-queers” Ennis and Jack by situating them within the “boundaries of familiar heterosexual cinema.”<sup>207</sup> However, in reading Ennis and Jack as conversant with icons of the West, i.e. John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and the Marlboro man, figures who are hypermasculine but only assumedly heterosexual, Cooper and Pease suggest that reviewers elide or diminish Ennis’s and Jack’s queerness, in effect, closeting them.<sup>208</sup> The resulting tension between these two frameworks results in a “paradoxical invisibility for queer identity, and yields a third frame in which homophobia is represented as a relic of the past.”<sup>209</sup> This act of relegating homophobia to the past elides the very real material conditions of contemporary gays and lesbians who fought, and still fight, for basic civil rights, and

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<sup>204</sup> Kitses, 25.

<sup>205</sup> Brenda Cooper and Edward C. Pease, “Framing *Brokeback Mountain*: How the Popular Press Corralled the “Gay Cowboy Movie,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25.3 (2008): 249

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 259. It’s important to note that however compulsory the cowboy’s sexuality, his reproduction is limited even as he limits bovine reproduction. As Michael Kreyling has pointed out, the Duke and Eastwood never get the girl.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 249.

served to reassure potential heterosexual viewers that they were not complicit in the homophobia that runs through the film.<sup>210</sup>

The final camp responded to the film with parodies, including film shorts such as “Brokeback to the Future,” “Broke Trek,” and “Brokeback Fightclub,” all of which run Gustave Santaolalla's score over a trailer-style mashup of each film, as well as parodies of the iconic poster. Unlike the reviews, which suppress the homosexual narrative, these parodies reveal that strains of the homosocial run through nearly all popular representations of masculine friendship, be it commercial or presidential. Like the film shorts, these posters, in particular, *Blowback Mountain*, starring George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, and *Brokeback Obama*, starring Barack Obama and Joe Biden, riff on preexisting masculine relationships, like that between Marty McFly and Dr. Brown or Spock and Kirk, and challenge compulsory heterosexuality by association. B. Ruby Rich argues that the “relentlessness of the satires, parodies, and jokes indicated a classic and transparent use of humor to alleviate anxiety and offer symbolic protection,” but Joshua Clover and Christopher Nealon have a different take.<sup>211</sup> They suggest that these parodies “omit tragic death entirely to make two related points: first, that any Hollywood narrative can be made queer with a slight nudge and some very cheap technology and, second, that gay-boy love stories can be built more quickly from iconic materials than from tragic ones.”<sup>212</sup>

In some ways, the scholarly response to the film mirrored the popular, especially when we consider how the film was framed. Some critics found the film progressive, an

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<sup>210</sup> Cooper and Pease, 259.

<sup>211</sup> B. Ruby Rich, “Brokering Brokeback: Jokes, Backlashes, and Other Anxieties,” *Film Quarterly*, 60:3 (Spring 2007): 44-48, 45.

<sup>212</sup> Joshua Clover and Christopher Nealon, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Me,” *Film Quarterly*, 60.3 (2007), 63.

important step in increasing gay visibility, while others castigated the film as conservative and not gay enough. Still other scholars chose to read the film as an interrogation of masculinity or class, separate from its queer context. In “*Brokeback Mountain* as Progressive Narrative and Cinematic Vision: Landscape, Emotion, and the Denial of Domesticity,” Christopher Pullen places the film in context with a larger narrative about gay rights. He argues that Matthew Shepard’s murder “sensitize[d] audiences to *Brokeback*’s narrative,” and “caused the American public, and also the wider world, to consider the tragedy of hate crimes against gay people.”<sup>213</sup> Pullen is optimistic about how the film functions, and he goes on to suggest that both the story and film versions of *Brokeback Mountain* challenge “homophobia by employing the narrative dynamics of the frontier landscape and the connotations of nature, working towards normalizing homosexual identity.”<sup>214</sup> Pullen does not account for the hollowness and fear that seem to define Ennis’s existence in both film and story.

That is the question that Ara Osterweil, Clover and Nealon, and Kathleen Chamberlain and Victoria Somogyi seek to answer. In “Ang Lee’s Lonesome Cowboys,” Osterweil acknowledges the significance of a mainstream gay love story, but she recognizes that the impact of the film is mitigated by the formal constraints of Hollywood melodrama, which “ultimately contains the radicalisms of its subject matter through generic conservatism.”<sup>215</sup> She credits Ang Lee with “breaking the mainstream Hollywood taboo on homosexuality,” but asserts that he does so “at the expense of creating a truly

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<sup>213</sup> Christopher Pullen, “*Brokeback Mountain* as Progressive Narrative and Cinematic Vision: Landscape, Emotion, and the Denial of Domesticity,” *The Geographical Imagination of Annie Proulx: Rethinking Regionalism*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington books, 2009. 155-167), 155, 158.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>215</sup> Ara Osterweil, “Ang Lee’s Lonesome Cowboys.” *Film Quarterly* 60.3 (2007): 38-42, 38.

radical film.”<sup>216</sup> Similarly, Clover and Nealon argue that the film exists in a space that is neither progressive nor wholly conservative. They argue that in mainstream cinema “queer love must be punished by fatal violence. In recompense, the film contrives a real sweetness: that, as the other desired/repressed, erotic love is also a true ground for relations between men.”<sup>217</sup> In working within the mainstream system, the filmmakers concede to cinematic convention (that the queer character must die), but we would not care about Jack’s death and Ennis’ isolation if their story had not been told. If the film were more radical, then, perhaps a major studio would never have produced it and fewer people would have seen it. Its power, according to Clover and Nealon is “the power of having exhausted itself exactly such that it enabled the surrounding culture to reach through it, past it.”<sup>218</sup> Osterweil and Clover and Nealon recognize the cultural ambivalence that defines the film, and though they critique it, they also understand how fruitful it can be.

Chamberlain and Somogyi, however, have a more polemical understanding of the film’s relationship to gay culture. In “‘You Know I Ain’t Queer’: *Brokeback Mountain* as the Not-Gay Cowboy Movie,” they argue,

*Brokeback Mountain* should not be called a gay cowboy movie because it’s not a gay cowboy movie. Not only are there virtually no cows, but no one is gay. Certainly no one is gay in the post-Stonewall sense of the term that signifies a shared political activism and sense of community. Nor is anyone gay in the more general sense of the term to designate a constructed identity that is not limited to sex acts.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Osterweil, 42.

<sup>217</sup> Clover and Nealon, 62.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>219</sup> Kathleen Chamberlain and Victoria Somogyi, “‘You Know I Ain’t Queer’: *Brokeback Mountain* as the Not-Gay Cowboy Movie,” *Intertexts* 10.2 (2006): 129-144. (130).

This argument is more than a bit disingenuous; after all, “cowboy” is a broad term used to describe nearly any kind of ranch hand, or character in a western, and it hasn’t been tied solely to men working cattle since the early 1900s. Similarly, in claiming that “no one is gay in the post-Stonewall sense of the term,” they assume an essentialized or homogenized gay identity as defined by one’s cultural-political affiliation with the U.S. gay rights movement. They also seem to forget that Jack desires a relationship with Ennis and a home to call their own. That more than meets their “general sense of the term.”

However, Chamberlain and Somogyi gain some traction in their critique of the setting:

The time and place in which the story is set also helps produce a film more reassuring than challenging. By placing the story in the rural West and having it being in 1963, the writers have created an understandable reason for the characters to eschew any gay identity. But in portraying a relationship which extends to 1983, they have separated the characters from the historical development of identity and community.<sup>220</sup>

Here, they are exactly right. Though this temporal remove is one of the key features of the western genre, it functions here to isolate and dehistoricize the characters in the film. For Chamberlain and Somogyi, the implications of this temporal isolation are enormous, and they are unwilling to entertain the notion of this film as progressive because the film is ultimately so conservative.

Teresita Garza dismisses the importance of the gay love story all together in her article, “Outing the Marlboro Man: Issues of Masculinity and Class Closeted in *Brokeback Mountain*,” opting instead to focus on the detrimental effects of an idealized rugged masculinity on both Ennis and Jack. She suggests that “closeted in the rugged individualism and majestic landscape is formal rhetorical commentary about serious social issues and discursive convictions regarding the cultural constraints that

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<sup>220</sup> Chamberlain and Somogyi, 136.

idealizations of masculinity and class place on people and life situations.”<sup>221</sup> Garza is most certainly right to focus on the damaging results of limiting one’s identity to such a narrow category as white, rural masculinity, but why do so at the expense of the gay storyline? How is it possible to read Jack’s “inability to shoot a coyote in broad daylight” as a sign of his questionable manhood, without discussing how Jack is figured in the film as the bad gay character?<sup>222</sup> His manhood is in question not just because he is characterized as a “piss-ant who used to ride bulls,” but also because he is the one who initiates sex with Ennis the first time and it is he who is penetrated when he and Ennis have sex. Even his entrance into the heterodomestic troubles traditional model of manhood in that it Lureen who pursues him, not the other way around. What jeopardizes both Ennis’s and Jack’s manhood is precisely the thing that Garza shunts to the backburner, their desire for other men.

These popular and scholarly responses to the film reveal a fissure between the film’s subversive or progressive potential and its actual effect on the American imagination. Some people were appalled. Still others recognized and built on the progressive possibilities in the film and, in contextualizing the narrative, discovered how *Brokeback Mountain* engaged with larger narratives about gay life. Popular and scholarly critics alike, however, responded from within heteronormative framework, where same-sex desire is oppositional, invisible, or always present, but is never conceived of as potentially “normative.” This heteronormative framework appears to slip neatly over the armature of the western, but as I have previously argued, normativity is a false front that

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<sup>221</sup> Teresita Garza, “Outing the Marlboro Man: Issues of Masculinity and Class Closeted in *Brokeback Mountain*.” *Uncovering Hidden Rhetorics: Social Issues in Disguise*, ed Barry Brumet, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008, 195-214), 198.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

fools the eye. *Brokeback Mountain* is neither as radical nor as conservative as its critics charge. We see this most clearly in Ennis's inability to *be* a cowboy in the nineteenth century sense or perform cowboyism with any success in the twentieth century.

In the opening shot of the film, Ennis Del Mar hops out of a tractor-trailer and into a landscape of manmade borders rendered in black and white. There is a concrete traffic pole, as high as Ennis's waist, painted in thick black and white stripes. Telephone poles rise like crosses and diminish toward the horizon. As Ennis moves away from the truck, he aligns himself with the rigid order of the Wyoming landscape. Ennis's lack of mobility, vehicular, financial, and otherwise, suggests that he is rooted to the land and its harshness not by choice but by circumstance. Whereas Jack, who travels first with the rodeo, then lives in Texas and drives north whenever Ennis will have him, has a more fluid understanding of how people relate to one another, Ennis has a narrow conception of how a man can *be* in rural Wyoming.

Ennis's affect, the stoicism and practical costume, signifies cowboyism, but we must recall that underneath the performance is a person. In contrast, Jack's emotional openness foregrounds his personhood, and he seems more adept at balancing work and life. As I have suggested, Lee's use of the semantics of the cowboy can lead to a misreading of Ennis. His abilities and financial limitations, however, align him more closely with a cowboy like Dish Boggett in *Lonesome Dove* than with the rather exceptional John Grady Cole. He is industrious, honest, good with animals, and fair. He comes from more than humble beginnings: his parents died in a car accident early in his adolescence, the bank seized the family ranch, and his brother and sister raised him until they married, and then he was displaced. Having only completed a year of high school,

Ennis ends up, at the film's opening, applying to herd sheep on federal land for Joe Aguirre. Ennis, however, does not have unrealistic expectation about his social position. He does not think he is going to marry into money or acquire a large spread by being a cowboy. Though he tells Jack he's saving up for a spread, he seems uninterested in land or money or owning anything. He does not break horses, he herds sheep or cattle, and he never seems to move up in the ranks.

His dependence on silence evokes Woodrow Call's strained relationship to language, and we must be careful not to misread him as Clara judges Call. Unlike many of the other texts examined in this dissertation, *Brokeback Mountain* bars access to Ennis's inner world and thus might seem not to fit into this minor pantheon of western men. There is no confessional voiceover as there is in *Appaloosa*, and even Proulx, in the story, does not gift the reader with extended passages of her characters' inner thoughts as McMurtry, Hansen, Parker, and others do. It doesn't help that Heath Ledger's portrayal of Ennis is so stoic. He does not speak often, and when he does, his lips barely move, and his voice ekes out in a deep mumble. Speech, however, is not the only route to emotional expression, and Ennis's body and his actions communicate much more clearly than his words. When he speaks, he rarely looks anyone in the eyes. Conversations are directed toward a turned back or a shared horizon. When he and Jack part ways after their summer on Brokeback Mountain, Ennis, in silhouette, dry heaves with sorrow in an alley near Aguirre's trailer. The framing of the shot in which Ennis is abstracted into shadow adds another posture to the archetypal cowboy: grief. More familiar, perhaps, is Ennis's reaction when he suffers emotionally in front of others, he wants to fight. And when he

finds his shirt tucked inside Jack's, grief and happiness compete for primacy across the weathered landscape of his face. Ennis is a man full of feelings.

The film suggests that Ennis is as vulnerable to men as the landscape in which he lives. He is figured early on in the film as pure and innocent. Sitting around the campfire, Jack jokes, "I guess it's when the world ends and fellas like you and me march off to hell," and Ennis replies, "Speak for yourself. You may be a sinner, but I ain't yet had the opportunity." Later that same night, Ennis, who is supposed to sleep at the grazing site with the herd, is too drunk to leave camp, and they have sex, which Jack initiates. This is the first, but not last, time the herd has been left unattended, and the morning after, Ennis returns to tend the flock and finds that a lamb has been eviscerated. The lamb (Ennis) has been violated by the coyote (Jack). Even though Ennis penetrates Jack, we are meant to understand that it is Ennis who has been ruined. Jack's violation of Ennis would seem to echo the generic premise that the town (Ennis) is always vulnerable to attack from outlaws (Jack) and thus needs protection. In a striking reversal of normative roles, the often privileged straight white male body is vulnerable and in need of protection.

His brief affair with Jack notwithstanding, Ennis strives towards and achieves some semblance of the heteronormative when he marries Alma and they have two daughters. However, Ennis cannot follow the script of normative manhood. His choice of profession limits his means of production and how well he can support his family, though he doesn't seem to mind the long hours or endless roundups. Rather than eliciting camaraderie with the other men he works with, his labor conditions provides limited access to the domestic. In the four years between the summer on Brokeback and Jack's

first visit, Ennis's marriage functions fairly well, in part because Ennis's ties to Jack are in limbo. As a result, Ennis exhibits a de facto commitment to the heterodomeestic. Once Jack contacts him, his marriage begins to erode. Jack is not the only reason Ennis's marriage is in danger. Ennis is incapable of balancing the domestic and work. He is committed to being the family's breadwinner, and as a result he routinely privileges his work over all things. This older model of manhood might be more plausible if they lived in an earlier time or, more realistically, if Ennis made more money. Alma's job at the grocery store provides necessary added income, but Ennis has not adjusted to the new normal. His irregular hours make domestic scheduling difficult. For instance, he drops off their two toddler daughters at Alma's job, explaining, "My boss called, and, well, he wants me to go up to the ranch. I guess all the heifers must've decided to calve at the same time. I figured I could drop the girls off with you." Alma is exasperated because her job is as necessary to their livelihood as Ennis's, yet he does not seem to understand. After he and Alma finally divorce, she remarries Glen, who manages the grocery store and can provide financial, emotional, and domestic stability for Alma and the girls.

Even when he attempts to fulfill the role of protector, Ennis's actions seem to serve performance first. In the Fourth of July picnic scene, he assaults two foul-mouthed bikers in an effort to reassert his manhood, traditional American values, and his role as the hero. In the low angle shot, Ennis dominates the screen while fireworks explode behind and above him. Kitses asserts that Ennis's "imposing stature and righteous demeanor bespeak a character absolutely certain of who he is and of his role and power. He is the Western hero incarnate, America's defender of family and community, a

transcendental figure of agency and action.”<sup>223</sup> However, it is unclear whether Ennis, in this moment, is meant to embody the very spirit of an American hero or if he has become a menacing figure who is as out of place as the two leather clad bikers. Alma’s and the girls’ peripheral position in the right hand corner, out of focus and small, counter the heroic narrative, and point to a fissure between western hero and family man. Few, if any, western heroes are fathers, because in order to be a hero, a man must be unencumbered by family ties. More succinctly, perhaps, Ennis cannot be both Shane and Joe Starret, which accounts for some of the cinematic ambivalence. As a result, family is not the thing that needs protecting. Instead, family acts as a catalyst for Ennis to perform as the archetype might. His actions are predictable, yet uncomfortable and stiff. His boot to the face of the biker severs triple duty: it’s a blow against the type of man who would reduce women, including little girls, to “pussies,” while highlighting Ennis’ need to prove his manhood, and alienating him from his family.

Ennis’s actions in Jack’s absence suggest that his performance of the archetypal role of cowboy is not simply about protecting himself from the brutal rural homophobia that Proulx wants us to focus on. Rather, the performance, which includes the retreat into work and the occasional fistfight, is meant to protect Ennis from interpersonal interactions where he might become vulnerable. Of his many childhood traumas, perhaps the most striking is the story he tells Jack about a rancher who was dragged around by his penis until it was pulled off. The story is really not about the rancher, who lived with a male partner and was, by current standards, out. The story is really about father who took him to see the tortured and mutilated corpse, and who, Ennis postulates, might have done participated in the castration. Christopher Pullen explains that Ennis has “internalized his

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<sup>223</sup> Kitses, 23.

homophobia,” and it is “untenable that two men might live together for economic and domestic partnership, let alone a sexual relationship” in this rural space.<sup>224</sup> Instead of modeling his manhood on his father, Ennis turns to the iconography of the cowboy to fill the gap made by his father’s death and his brother’s abandonment. As important, the culturally available, if not particularly viable, cowboy figure is always coded as heterosexual, providing yet another layer of protection that is more important to him than money, property, love, or happiness.

Jack Twist and the desire he elicits disrupts the closed system in which Ennis operates. While Ennis is equipped to deal with or deflect the demands of the dominant culture, he does neither with Jack. Instead of dealing with or deflecting the problem of Jack, Ennis keeps his relationship with Jack in limbo. Ennis and Jack’s time on Brokeback Mountain is the only instance of coequal partnership that Ennis ever experiences. They alternate campsite duties, which include cooking two meals a day, and they switch off tending the herd. They wrestle together, they talk to each other, and in a blatant dereliction of duty they eventually spend their nights together. Brokeback Mountain’s isolation from the real world makes his ongoing relationship with Jack possible. The isolation, Kitses argues, “and the utter loneliness of their lives both make possible the love that overwhelms these two men and also renders it intelligible, for us if not them. In open range, feelings, gender, and sexuality cannot be fenced in or legislated.”<sup>225</sup> Despite the minor fact that the open range in this case is federally managed land, Kitses’ point stands: the hyper-rural location frees the men to be with each other in a way that Ennis can understand. Twice over the course of the film Jack suggests that

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<sup>224</sup> Pullen, 162.

<sup>225</sup> Kitses, 25.

they buy a ranch and live together, openly, but the thought of their relationship existing publically is impossible because Ennis returns again and again to the image of the castrated rancher. The rancher and his part were “a joke in town even though they was tough old birds,” and Ennis does not want to be a joke; he wants to live.

The film does much to villainize Jack, but what is the nature of his villainy? Why does Jack wear the black hat? To begin, he is not a particular good cowboy. He would rather rodeo than get a steady job. But being a poor cowboy doesn't seem like a good enough reason to label Jack the outlaw. No, Jack's villainy lies in his self-acceptance. He appears to have no desire to enter into the heterodomeestic, and Lureen, barrel rider, heir to a farm equipment empire, the woman he eventually marries, makes all the moves in their courtship. Jack initiates sexual contact with Ennis that first summer. He attempts to secure another summer on Brokeback. He comes to Ennis over and over again for nearly twenty years. He accepts himself and his desires and doesn't seem to see himself as queer or non-normative. Jack, in fact, believes that he deserves a domestic life partner who will help him rebuild and modernize his family farm. Again, Christopher Pullen argues that Jack's desire to “live with Ennis on the ranch where he hoped to modernize and improve the family land, directly locates them as able to be part of the normative productive arena.”<sup>226</sup> The two men, however, do not share the same desire. Ennis's inability to imagine a non-archetypal form of manhood forecloses his future with Jack, and in this failure to venture outside the closed system of cowboyess he retains his white hat. Jack ends the relationship with Ennis on an isolated site in the Tetons—though Ennis seems not to know that it's over. Both men are softer with age, paunchy but still tough, and Jack's exasperated, “I wish I knew how to quit you” would become one of the most

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<sup>226</sup> Pullen, 162.

quoted lines from the film. In the months before his death, Jack does figure out how to quit Ennis and the limbo of the Tetons, and he finds another lover, a Texan this time, with whom he wants to rebuild his family home.

Because he cannot commit to either the heterodomestic or the homodomestic, he alienates everyone to whom he is connected. Or rather, he's alienated himself from the outside world. Unlike Jack, Ennis cannot balance work and domesticity from his retreat in the caricature of the cowboy. He moves to a trailer park on the outskirts of town and sees his daughters every other weekend. As they grow older, Alma Jr. asks to live with him, but Ennis invokes the roundup to evade his parental duty. Ennis learns of Jack's death from Lureen, who informs him rather dispassionately that Jack died while changing a tire and "drowned in his own blood." Ennis, haunted by the dead rancher, imagines men wielding tire irons rather than an accident.

Jack's death does have one unexpected effect: Ennis travels beyond Riverton's city limits to the Twist family farm in Lightning Flats, where Lureen sent Jack's ashes. Ennis's journey from the small town in central Wyoming to the family farm near the Canadian border is fraught, and his attempted retrieval of Jack's ashes also fails. Jack's father insists that they have a family plot where Jack will be buried. But he also reveals that Jack had stopped talking about Ennis and had begun to tell his parents he and another man were going to help run the ranch. In that moment, Ennis understands the finality of his loss, that there is little, if anything to recover. He does find a memento from that first summer on Brokeback in Jack's closet: his old shirt nestled inside Jack's blue shirt. Jack's mother allows Ennis to take the shirts, even encourages him to "come again." Ennis's recovery of the shirts is a hollow recuperation of love. Had Ennis been willing to

drop the veneer of iconic cowboy, he and Jack might have had the kind of life the shirts represented; one where they could have been together and protected one another. Instead, they had the kind of life represented by the space where Ennis found the shirts: closeted and hidden.

In the final scene of the film, Ennis is framed in a box full of other boxes. His shirt holds Jack's shirt below a postcard of the mountain where they met. However sad Ennis's life appears to be, he is alive. When we think about what is at stake and what needs conserving, the answer is a man's life. The film evokes the Hollywood tradition of gay men or sissies dying at the end of films because those figures transgressed by acting on their non-normative desires. By making these characters visible and asking audiences to sympathize with them, the film does upset many conventions about what "gay" looks like in the dominant culture. However, as D. A. Miller argues, the film does not privilege homosexual desire but rather Ennis's "agonized attempts to fight it—touching proof of a certain devotion to normality after all."<sup>227</sup> But Ennis's life does not resemble any recognizable "normal." His survival depends on his existence outside of both the heterodomic and homodomic. The periphery contains the trailer park that contains Ennis who contains his love for Jack who is dead. Little boxes, indeed.

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<sup>227</sup> D. A. Miller, "On the universality of *Brokeback Mountain*," *Film Quarterly* 60:3 (Spring 2007): 50-60.

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