

cycle of its growth. The scenarios of detective stories have developed rapidly, and it is still possible to rediscover an aesthetic of violence within the framework of the criminal adventure which they share with *Scarface*, we would be hard put to see in the private eye, the journalist, or the G-man the reflection of the original hero. Furthermore, if there is such a genre as the American detective film one cannot attribute to it the independent identity of the western; the literature which preceded it has continued to influence it, and the latest interesting variants of the crime film derive directly from it.

On the contrary, the durability of the western heroes and plots has been demonstrated recently by the fabulous success on television of the old Hopalong Cassidy films. The western does not age.

Its world-wide appeal is even more astonishing than its historical survival. What can there possibly be to interest Arabs, Hindus, Latins, Germans, or Anglo-Saxons, among whom the western has had an uninterrupted success, about evocations of the birth of the United States of America, the struggle between Buffalo Bill and the Indians, the laying down of the railroad, or the Civil War!

The western must possess some greater secret than simply the secret of youthfulness. It must be a secret that somehow identifies it with the essence of cinema.

It is easy to say that because the cinema is movement the western is cinema *par excellence*. It is true that galloping horses and fights are its usual ingredients. But in that case the western would simply be one variety of adventure story. Again, the continuous movement of the characters, carried almost to a pitch of frenzy, is inseparable from its geographical setting and one might just as well define the western by its set—the frontier town and its landscapes; but other genres and schools of filmmaking have made use of the dramatic poetry of the landscape, for example the silent Swedish film, but although it contributed to their greatness it did not insure their survival. Better still, sometimes, as in *The Overlanders*, a western theme is borrowed—in this case the traditional cattle drive—and set in a landscape, central Australia, reasonably like the

THE WESTERN: OR THE AMERICAN FILM PAR EXCELLENCE

THE WESTERN is the only genre whose origins are almost identical with those of the cinema itself and which is as alive as ever after almost half a century of uninterrupted success. Even if one disputes the quality of its inspiration and of its style since the thirties, one is amazed at the steady commercial success which is the measure of its health. Doubtless the western has not entirely escaped the evolution of cinema taste—or indeed taste, period. It has been and will again be subjected to influences from the outside—for instance the crime novel, the detective story, or the social problems of the day—and its simplicity and strict form have suffered as a result. We may be entitled to regret this, but not to see in it a state of decay. These influences are only felt in a few productions of relatively high standing and do not affect the low-budget films aimed principally at the home market. Furthermore, it is as important for us to marvel at the western's capacity to resist them as to deplore these passing moments of contamination. Every influence acts on them like a vaccine. The microbe, on contact, loses its deadly virulence. In the course of fifteen years, the American comedy has exhausted its resources. If it survives in an occasional success, it is only to the extent that, in some way, it abandons the rules that before the war made for successful comedy. From *Underworld* (1927) to *Scarface* (1932) the gangster film had already completed the

American West. The result, as we know, was excellent. But fortunately no attempt was made to follow up this paradoxical achievement, whose success was due to an unusual combination of circumstances. If in fact westerns have been shot in France against the landscapes of the Camargue, one can only see in this an additional proof of the popularity and healthiness of a genre that can survive counterfeiting, pastiche, or even parody.

It would be hopeless to try to reduce the essence of the western to one or other of these manifest components. The same ingredients are to be found elsewhere but not the same benefits that appear to go with them. Therefore, the western must be something else again than its form. Galloping horses, fights, strong and brave men in a wildly austere landscape could not add up to a definition of the genre nor encompass its charms.

Those formal attributes by which one normally recognizes the western are simply signs or symbols of its profound reality, namely the myth. The western was born of an encounter between a mythology and a means of expression: the saga of the West existed before the cinema in literary or folklore form, and the multiplication of western films has not killed off western literature which still retains its public, and continues to provide screenwriters with their best material. But there is no common measure between the limited and national audience for western stories and the worldwide audience for the films which they inspire. Just as the miniatures of the *Books of Hours* served as models for the statuary and the stained-glass windows of the cathedrals, this western literature, freed from the bonds of language, finds a distribution on the screen in keeping with its size—almost as if the dimensions of the image had become one with those of the imagination.

This book [J.-L. Rieupeyrou's *La Grande aventure du western 1894-1964*, for which Bazin was here writing the Preface] will emphasize a little-known aspect of the western: its faithfulness to history. This is not generally recognized—primarily, doubtless, because of our ignorance, but still more because of the deeply rooted prejudice according to which the western can only tell extremely puerile stories, fruits of a naïve power of invention that does not concern itself with psychological, historical, or even material verisimilitude. True, few westerns are explicitly concerned with historical accuracy. True, too, these are not the only ones of any value.

It would be absurd to judge the characters of Tom Mix—still more of his magic white horse—or even of William Hart or Douglas Fairbanks, all of whom made lovely films in the great primitive period of the western, by the yardstick of archeology.

After all, many current westerns of honorable standing—I am thinking of *Beyond the Great Divide*, *Yellow Sky*, or *High Noon*—have only a tenuous relation to historical fact. They are primarily works of imagination. But one would be as much in error not to recognize the historical references in the western as to deny the unabashed freedom of its screen-plays J.-L. Rieupeyrou gives a complete account of the birth of its epic-like idealization, based on comparatively recent history, yet it could be that his study, concerned to recall to us what is ordinarily forgotten, or even not known, and confining itself to films that justify his thesis, dis-cards by implication the other side of the aesthetic reality. Still, this would show him to be doubly right. For the relations between the facts of history and the western are not immediate and direct, but dialectic. Tom Mix is the opposite of Abraham Lincoln, but after his own fashion he perpetuates Lincoln's cult and his memory. In its most romantic or most naïve form, the western is the opposite of a historical reconstruction. There is no difference between Hopalong Cassidy and Tarzan except for their costume and the arena in which they demonstrate their prowess. However, if one wanted to take the trouble to compare these delightful but unlikely stories and to superimpose on them, as is done in modern physiognomy, a number of negatives of faces, an ideal western would come through, composed of all the constants common to one and to the other: a western made up solely of unalloyed myth. Let us take one example, that of the woman.

In the first third of the film, the good cowboy meets the pure young woman—the good and strong virgin, let us call her—with whom he falls in love. Despite its chasteness we are able to guess this love is shared. However, virtually insurmountable obstacles stand in its way. One of the most significant and most frequent comes from the family of the beloved—for example, her brother is a sinister scoundrel and the good cowboy is forced to rid society of him, man to man. A modern Chimène, our heroine refuses to see in her brother's assassin any sort of a fine fellow. In order to redeem himself in his charmer's eyes and merit forgiveness, our knight

must now pass through a series of fabulous trials. He ends by saving his elected bride from a danger that could be fatal to her person, her virtue, her fortune, or all three at once. Following which, since we are now near the end of the film, the damsel would indeed be ungrateful if she did not feel that her suitor had repaid his debt, and allow him to start dreaming of lots of children.

Up to this point, this outline into which one can weave a thousand variants—for example, by substituting the Civil War for the Indian threat, cattle rustlers—comes close to reminding us of the medieval courtly romances by virtue of the preeminence given to the woman and the trials that the finest of heroes must undergo in order to qualify for her love.

But the story is often complicated by a paradoxical character—the saloon B-girl—who as a rule, is also in love with the cowboy. So there would be one woman too many if the god of the screenwriter was not keeping watch. A few minutes before the end, the prostitute with the heart of gold rescues the man she loves from some danger or another, sacrificing her life and her hopeless love for the happiness of her cowboy. This also serves to redeem her in the eyes of the spectators.

There is food for thought here. Note, first of all, that the distinction between good and bad applies only to the men. Women, all up and down the social scale, are in every case worthy of love or at least of esteem or pity. The least little prostitute is redeemed by love and death—although she is spared the latter in *Stagecoach* with its resemblance to de Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*. It is true that the good cowboy is more or less a reformed offender so that henceforth the most moral of marriages with his heroine becomes possible.

Furthermore, in the world of the western, it is the women who are good and the men who are bad, so bad that the best of them must redeem themselves from the original sin of their sex by undergoing various trials. In the Garden of Eden, Eve led Adam into temptation. Paradoxically Anglo-Saxon puritanism, under the pressure of historical circumstances, reverses the Biblical situation. The downfall of the woman only comes about as a result of the concupiscence of men.

Clearly, this theory derives from the actual sociological conditions

obtaining in primitive western society which, because of the scarcity of women and the perils of a too harsh existence in this burgeoning world, make it imperative to safeguard its female members and its horses. Hanging was considered enough punishment for stealing a horse. To engender respect for women more was needed than the fear of a risk as trifling as the loss of one's life, namely the positive power of a myth. The myth of the western illustrates, and both initiates and confirms woman in her rôle as vestal of the social virtues, of which this chaotic world is so greatly in need. Within her is concealed the physical future, and, by way of the institution of the family to which she aspires as the root is drawn to the earth, its moral foundation.

These myths, of which we have just examined what is perhaps the most significant example (the next is the myth of the horse) may themselves doubtless be reduced to an even more essential principle. Basically each of these particularize, by way of an already specific dramatic plot, the great epic Manicheism which sets the forces of evil over against the knights of the true cause. These immense stretches of prairie, of deserts, of rocks to which the little wooden town clings precariously (a primitive amoeba of a civilization), are exposed to all manner of imposing on it man's order. He who lived in this world, was incapable of imposing on it man's order. He mastered it only by identifying himself with its pagan savagery. The white Christian on the contrary is truly the conqueror of a new world. The grass sprouts where his horse has passed. He imposes simultaneously his moral and his technical order, the one linked to the other and the former guaranteeing the latter. The physical safety of the stagecoaches, the protection given by the federal troops, the building of the great railroads are less important perhaps than the establishment of justice and respect for the law. The relations between morality and law, which in our ancient civilization are just a subject for an undergraduate paper, were half a century ago the most vital thing confronting the youthful United States. Only strong, rough, and courageous men could tame these virgin lands. Everyone knows that familiarity with death does not keep alive the fear of hell, nor do scruples or moral debate. Policemen and judges are of most help to the weak. It was the force of this conquering humanity that constituted its

weakness. Where individual morality is precarious it is only law that can impose the order of the good and the good of order.

But the law is unjust to the extent that it pretends to guarantee a moral society but ignores the individual merits of those who constitute that society. If it is to be effective, this justice must be dispensed by men who are just as strong and just as daring as the criminals. These virtues, as we have said, are in no way compatible with virtue in the absolute sense. The sheriff is not always a better person than the man he hangs. This begets and establishes an inevitable and necessary contradiction. There is often little moral difference between the outlaw and the man who operates within the law. Still, the sheriff's star must be seen as constituting a sacrament of justice, whose worth does not depend on the worthiness of the man who administers it. To this first contradiction a second must be added, the administration of justice which, if it is to be effective, must be drastic and speedy—short of lynching, however—and thus must ignore extenuating circumstances, such as alibis that would take too long to verify. In protecting society, such a form of justice runs the risk of unkindness to the most turbulent though not perhaps the least useful nor even the least deserving of its children.

Although the need for law was never more clearly allied to the need for morality, at the same time never was their antagonism more concrete and more evident. It is this which provides a basis, within a slapstick framework, for Charlie's *Pilgrim*, at the conclusion of which we see our hero riding his horse along the borderline between good and evil, which also happens to be the Mexican border.

John Ford's *Stagecoach*, which is a fine dramatic illustration of the parable of the pharisee and the publican, demonstrates that a prostitute can be more respectable than the narrow-minded people who drove her out of town and just as respectable as an officer's wife; that a dissolute gambler knows how to die with all the dignity of an aristocrat; that an alcoholic doctor can practice his profession with competence and devotion; that an outlaw who is being sought for the payment of past and possibly future debts can show loyalty, generosity, courage, and refinement,

whereas a banker of considerable standing and reputation runs off with the cashbox.

So we find at the source of the western the ethics of the epic and even of tragedy. The western is in the epic category because of the superhuman level of its heroes and the legendary magnitude of their feats of valor. Billy the Kid is as invulnerable as Achilles and his revolver is infallible. The cowboy is a knight-at-arms. The style of the *mise en scène* is in keeping with the character of the hero. A transformation into an epic is evident in the set-ups of the shots, with their predilection for vast horizons, all-encompassing shots that constantly bring to mind the conflict between man and nature. The western has virtually no use for the closeup, even for the medium shot, preferring by contrast the traveling shot and the pan which refuse to be limited by the frame-line and which restore to space its fullness.

True enough. But this epic style derives its real meaning only from the morality which underlies and justifies it. It is the morality of a world in which social good and evil, in their simplicity and necessity, exist like two primary and basic elements. But good in its natal state engenders law in all its primitive rigor; epic becomes tragedy, on the appearance of the first conflict between the transcendence of social justice and the individual character of moral justice, between the categorical imperative of the law which guarantees the order of the future city, and the no less unshakable order of the individual conscience.

The Corneille-like simplicity of western scripts has often been a subject for parody. It is easy to see the analogy between them and the text of *Le Cid*: there is the same conflict between love and duty, the same knightly ordeals on the completion of which the wise virgin will consent to forget the insult to her family; the same chaste sentiments which are based on a concept of love subordinated to respect for the laws of society and morality. But this comparison is double-edged: to make fun of the western by comparing it to Corneille is also to draw attention to its greatness, a greatness near perhaps to the child-like, just as childhood is near to poetry.

Let there be no doubt about it. This naive greatness is recognized in

westerns by simple men in every clime—together with the children—despite differences of language, landscape, customs, and dress. The epic and tragic hero is a universal character. The Civil War is part of nineteenth century history, the western has turned it into the Trojan War of the most modern of epics. The migration to the West is our Odyssey.

Not only is the historicity of the western not at odds with the no less evident penchant of the genre for outlandish situations, exaggerations of fact and the use of the *deus ex machina* (in short, everything that makes for improbability); it is, on the contrary, the foundation of its aesthetic and its psychology. The history of film has only known one other epic cinema and that too is a historical cinema. Our purpose here is not to compare epic form in the Russian and in the American film, and yet an analysis of their styles would shed an unexpected light on the historical meaning of the events reconstructed in the two of them. Our only purpose is to point out that it is not their closeness to the facts that has given them their styles. There are legends that come into being almost instantaneously, that half a generation suffices to ripen into an epic. Like the conquest of the West, the Soviet revolution is a collection of historical events which signal the birth of a new order and a new civilization. Both have begotten the myths necessary for the confirmation of history, both had to reinvent a morality to rediscover at their living source and before mixture or pollution took place, the foundation of the law which would make order out of chaos, separate heaven from earth. But perhaps the cinema was the only language capable of expressing this, above all of giving it its true aesthetic dimension. Without the cinema the conquest of the West would have left behind, in the shape of the western story, only a minor literature, and it is neither by its painting nor its novels that Soviet art has given the world a picture of its grandeur. The fact is that henceforth the cinema is the specifically epic art.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE WESTERN

BY THE EVE of the war the western had reached a definitive stage of perfection. The year 1940 marks a point beyond which some new development seemed inevitable, a development that the four years of war delayed, then modified, though without controlling it. *Stagecoach* (1939) is the ideal example of the maturity of a style brought to classic perfection. John Ford struck the ideal balance between social myth, historical reconstruction, psychological truth, and the traditional theme of the western *mise en scène*. None of these elements dominated any other. *Stagecoach* is like a wheel, so perfectly made that it remains in equilibrium on its axis in any position. Let us list some names and titles for 1939-1940: King Vidor: *Northwest Passage* (1940), Michael Curtiz: *The Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *Virginia City* (1940); Fritz Lang: *The Return of Frank James* (1940), *Western Union*, (1940); John Ford: *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939); William Wyler: *The Westerner* (1940); George Marshall, *Destry Rides Again*, with Marlene Dietrich, (1939).*

This list is significant. It shows that the established directors, having perhaps begun their careers twenty years before with serial westerns made almost anonymously, turn (or return) to the western at the peak of their careers—even Wyler whose gift seemed to be for anything but this genre.

* A disappointing remake of this film was shot in 1955 by the same George Marshall, with Audie Murphy.

This phenomenon can be explained by the widespread publicity given westerns between 1937 and 1940. Perhaps the sense of national awareness which preceded the war in the Roosevelt era contributed to this. We are disposed to think so, insofar as the western is rooted in the history of the American nation which it exalts directly or indirectly.

In any case, this period supports J.-L. Rieupeyrout's argument for the historical realism of the western.*

But by a paradox more apparent than real, the war years, properly so-called, almost removed the western from Hollywood's repertoire. On reflection this is not surprising. For the same reason that the westerns were multiplied and admired at the expense of other adventure films, the war film was to exclude them, at least provisionally, from the market.

As soon as the war seemed virtually won and even before peace was definitely established, the western reappeared and was again made in large numbers, but this new phase of its history deserves a closer look.

The perfection, or the classic stage, which the genre had reached implied that it had to justify its survival by introducing new elements. I do not pretend to explain everything by the famous law of successive aesthetic periods but there is no rule against bringing it into play here. Take the new films of John Ford. *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *Fort Apache* (1948) could well be examples of baroque embellishment of the classicism of *Stagecoach*. All the same, although this concept of the baroque may account for a certain technical formalism, or for the relative preciousness of this or that scenario, I do not feel that it can justify any further complex evolution. This evolution must be explained doubtless in relation to the level of perfection reached in 1940 but also in terms of the events of 1941 to 1945.

Let us call the ensemble of forms adopted by the postwar western the "superwestern." For the purposes of our exposé this word will bring together phenomena that are not always comparable. It can certainly be justified on negative grounds, in contrast to the classicism of the forties and to the tradition of which it is the outcome. The superwestern is a

* *Le Western ou le cinéma américain par excellence*, Collection Septième Art, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1953.

western that would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some additional interest to justify its existence—an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political, or erotic interest, in short some quality extrinsic to the genre and which is supposed to enrich it. We will come back later to these adjectives. But first we should indicate the influence of the war on the evolution of the western after 1944. The phenomenon of the superwestern would probably have emerged anyway, but its content would have been different. The real influence of the war made itself deeply felt when it was over. The major films inspired by it come, naturally, after 1945. But the world conflict not only provided Hollywood with spectacular scenes, it also provided and, indeed, forced upon it, some subjects to reflect upon, at least for a few years. History, which was formally only the material of the western, will often become its subject: this is particularly true of *Fort Apache* in which we see the beginning of political rehabilitation of the Indian, which was followed up by numerous westerns up to *Bronco Apache* and exemplified particularly in *Broken Arrow* by Delmer Daves (1950). But the profounder influence of the war is undoubtedly more indirect and one must look to find it wherever the film substitutes a social or moral theme for the traditional one. The origin of this goes back to 1943 with William Wellman's *Oxbow Incident*, of which *High Noon* is the distant relation. (However, in Zinnemann's film it is also a rampant McCarthyism that is under scrutiny.)

Eroticism also may be seen to be at least an indirect consequence of the war, so far as it derives from the triumph of the pin-up girl. This is true perhaps of Howard Hughes' *The Outlaw* (1943). Love is to all intents and purposes foreign to the western. (*Shane* will rightly exploit this conflict.) And eroticism all the more so, its appearance as a dramatic springboard implying that henceforth the genre is just being used as a foil the better to set off the sex appeal of the heroine. There is no doubt about what is intended in *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946) whose spectacular luxury provides a further reason, albeit on formal grounds, to classify it as a superwestern.

Yet *High Noon* and *Shane* remain the two films that best illustrate the mutation in the western genre as an effect of the awareness it has gained

of itself and its limits. In the former, Fred Zinnemann combines the effect of moral drama with the aestheticism of his framing. I am not one of those who turn up their noses at *High Noon*. I consider it a fine film and prefer it to Stevens' film. But the great skill exemplified in Foreman's adaptation was his ability to combine a story that might well have been developed in another genre with a traditional western theme. In other words, he treated the western as a form in need of a content. As for *Shane* this is the ultimate in "superwesternization." In fact, with it, George Stevens set out to justify the western—by the western. The others do their ingenious best to extract explicit themes from implied myths but the theme of *Shane* is the myth. In it Stevens combines two or three basic western themes, the chief being the knight errant in search of his grail, and so that no one will miss the point, Stevens dresses him in white. White clothes and a white horse are taken for granted in the Manichean world of the western, but it is clear that the costume of Alan Ladd carries with it all the weighty significance of a symbol, while on Tom Mix it was simply the uniform of goodness and daring. So we have come full circle. The earth is round. The superwestern has gone so far beyond itself as to find itself back in the Rocky Mountains.

If the western was about to disappear, the superwestern would be the perfect expression of its decadence, of its final collapse. But the western is definitely made of quite other stuff than the American comedy or the crime film. Its ups and downs do not affect its existence very much. Its roots continue to spread under the Hollywood humus and one is amazed to see green and robust suckers spring up in the midst of the seductive but sterile hybrids that some would replace them by.

To begin with, the appearance of the superwestern has only affected the more out-of-the-ordinary productions: those of the A-film and of the superproduction. These surface tremors have not disturbed the commercial nucleus, the central block of the ultracommercial westerns, horseback or musical, which may even have found a second youth on television. (The success of Hopalong Cassidy is a witness to this and proves likewise the vitality of the myth even in its most elementary form.) Their acceptance by the new generation guarantees them several more cycles of years

to come. But low-budget westerns never came to France and we have to be satisfied with an assurance of their survival from the personnel of American distribution companies. If their aesthetic interest, individually, is limited, their existence on the other hand is probably decisive for the general health of the genre. It is in these "lower" layers whose economic fertility has not diminished that the traditional western has continued to take root. Superwestern or no superwestern, we are never without the B-western that does not attempt to find refuge in intellectual or aesthetic alibis. Indeed, maybe the notion of the B-film is open to dispute since everything depends on how far up the scale you put the letter A. The productions I am talking about are frankly commercial, probably fairly costly, relying for their acceptance only on the reputation of their leading man and a solid story without any intellectual ambitions. *The Gunfighter*, directed by Henry King (1950) and starring Gregory Peck, is a splendid example of this attractive type of production, in which the classic theme of the killer, sick of being on the run and yet forced to kill again, is handled within a dramatic framework with great restraint. We might mention too *Across the Wide Missouri*, directed by William Wellman (1951), starring Clarke Gable, and particularly *Westward the Women* (1951) by the same director.

In *Rio Grande* (1951), John Ford himself has clearly returned to the semiserial format, or at any rate to the commercial tradition—romance and all. So it is no surprise to find on this list an elderly survivor from the pioneer days of old, Allan Dwan, who for his part has never forsaken the old Triangle* style, even when the liquidation of McCarthyism gave him the chance to broaden the scope of the old-time themes (*Silver Lode*, 1954).

I have still a few more points to make. The classification I have followed up to now will turn out to be inadequate and I must no longer explain the evolution of the western genre by the western genre itself. Instead I must take the authors into greater account as a determining factor. It will doubtless have been observed that the list of relatively traditional pro-

* An amalgamation of three American film-production companies, Keystone, KayBee, and Fine Arts.

ductions that have been little influenced by the superwestern includes only names of established directors who even before the war specialized in fast-moving adventure films. It should come as no surprise that their work affirms the durability of the western and its laws. Howard Hawks, indeed, at the height of the vogue of the superwestern should be credited with having demonstrated that it had always been possible to turn out a genuine western based on the old dramatic and spectacle themes, without distracting our attention with some social thesis, or, what would amount to the same thing, by the form given the production. *Red River* (1948) and *The Big Sky* (1952) are western masterpieces but there is nothing baroque or decadent about them. The understanding and awareness of the means matches perfectly the sincerity of the story.

The same goes for Raoul Walsh, all due allowances being made, whose film *Saskatchewan* (1954) is a classical example of a borrowing from American history. But his other films provide me—and I am sorry if it is a little contrived—with the transition I was looking for: *Colorado Territory* (1949), *Pursued* (1947) and *Along the Great Divide* (1951) are, in a sense, perfect examples of westerns just above the B-level, made in a pleasantly traditional dramatic vein. Certainly there is no trace of a thesis. We are interested in the characters because of what happens to them and nothing happens that is not in perfect accord with the western theme. But there is something about them that, if we had no information about their date, would make us place them at once among more recent productions, and it is this “something” that I would like to define.

I have hesitated a great deal over what adjective best applies to these westerns of the fifties. At first I thought I ought to turn to words like “feeling,” “sensitivity,” “lyricism.” In any case I think that these words must not be dismissed and that they describe pretty well the character of the modern western as compared with the superwestern, which is almost always intellectual at least to the degree that it requires the spectator to reflect before he can admire. All the titles I am about to list belong to films that are, if not less intelligent than *High Noon* at least without *arrrière-pensée*, and in which talent is always a servant of history and not of the meaning behind history. There is another word, maybe more suitable than

those I have suggested or which provides a useful complement—the word “sincerity.” I mean by this that the directors play fair with the genre even when they are conscious of “making a western.” At the stage to which we have come in the history of the cinema naïveté is hardly conceivable, but although the superwestern replaces naïveté by preciousness or cynicism, we have proof that it is still possible to be sincere. Nicholas Ray, shooting *Journey Guitarr* (1954) to the undying fame of Joan Crawford, obviously knows what he is about. He is no less aware of the rhetoric of the genre than the George Stevens of *Shane*, and furthermore the script and the director are not without their humor; but not once does Ray adopt a condescending or paternalist attitude toward his film. He may have fun with it but he is not making fun of it. He does not feel restricted in what he has to say by the limits of the western even if what he has to say is decidedly more personal and more subtle than its unchanging mythology.

It is with an eye on the style of the narrative, rather than on the subjective attitude of the director to the genre, that I will finally choose my epithet. I say freely of the westerns I have yet to name—the best in my view—that they are “novelistic.” By this I mean that without departing from the traditional themes they enrich them from within by the originality of their characters, their psychological flavor, an engaging individuality, which is what we expect from the hero of a novel. Clearly when one talks about the psychological richness of *Stagecoach*, one is talking about the way it is used and not about any particular character. For the latter we remain within the established casing categories of the western: the banker, the narrow-minded woman, the prostitute with a heart of gold, the elegant gambler, and so on. In *Run for Cover* (1955) it is something else again. The situation and characters are still just variations on the tradition, but what attracts our interest is their uniqueness rather than their generosity. We know also that Nicholas Ray always treats his pet subject, namely the violence and mystery of adolescence. The best example of this “novelization” of the western from within is provided by Edward Dmytryk in *Broken Lance* (1954), which we know is only a western remake of Man-kewicz’s *House of Strangers*. For the uninformed, *Broken Lance* is simply a western that is subtler than the others with more individualized charac-

ters and more complex relationships but which stays no less rigidly within the limits of two or three classic themes. In point of fact, Elia Kazan has treated a psychologically somewhat similar subject with great simplicity in his *Sea of Grass* (1947), also with Spencer Tracy. We can imagine many intermediate grades between the most dutiful B-western and the novelistic western, and my classification is inevitably arbitrary.

Nevertheless I offer the following idea. Just as Walsh is the most remarkable of the traditional veterans, Anthony Mann could be considered the most classical of the young novelistic directors. We owe the most beautifully true western of recent years to him. Indeed, the author of *The Naked Spur* is probably the one postwar American director who seems to have specialized in a field into which others have made only sporadic incursions. In any case, each of Mann's films reveals a touching frankness of attitude toward the western, an effortless sincerity to get inside its themes and there bring to life appealing characters and to invent captivating situations. Anyone who wants to know what a real western is, and the qualities it presupposes in a director, has to have seen *Devil's Doorway* (1950) with Robert Taylor, *Bend of the River* (1952) and *The Far Country* (1954) with James Stewart. Even if he does not know these three films, he simply has to know the finest of all, *The Naked Spur* (1953). Let us hope that CinemaScope will not rob Anthony Mann of his natural gift for direct and discreet use of the lyrical and above all his infallible sureness of touch in bringing together man and nature, that feeling of the open air, which in his films seems to be the very soul of the western and as a result of which he has recaptured—but at the level of the hero of the novel and no longer of the hero of the myth—the great lost secret of the Triangle days.

The above examples show that a new style and a new generation have come into existence simultaneously. It would be both going too far and naïve to pretend that the novelistic western is just something created by young men who came to film-making after the war. You could rightly refute this by pointing out that this quality is evident in *The Westerner*, for example, and there is something of it in *Red River* and *The Big Sky*. People assure me, although I am personally not aware of it, that there is

much of it in Fritz Lang's *Rancho Notorious* (1952). At all events it is certain that King Vidor's excellent *Man Without a Star* (1954) is to be placed in the same perspective, somewhere between Nicholas Ray and Anthony Mann. But we can certainly find three or four films made by the veterans to place alongside those that the younger men have made. In spite of everything, it is chiefly the newcomers who delight in the western that is both classic and novelistic: Robert Aldrich is the most recent and brilliant example of this with his *Apache* (1954) and especially his *Vera Cruz* (1954).

There remains now the problem of CinemaScope. This process was used for *Broken Lance*, *Garden of Evil* (1954) by Henry Hathaway (a good script at once classic and novelistic but treated without great inventiveness), and *The Kentuckian* (1955) with Burt Lancaster which bored the Venice Festival to tears. I only know one film in CinemaScope that added anything of importance to the *mise en scène*, namely Otto Preminger's *River of No Return* (1954), photographed by Joseph LaSelle. Yet how often have we not read or have even ourselves written that while enlarging of the screen is not called for elsewhere, the new format will renew the westerns whose wide-open spaces and hard riding call out for wide horizons. This deduction is too pat and likely sounding to be true. The most convincing examples of the use of CinemaScope have been in psychological films such as *East of Eden*. I would not go so far as to say that paradoxically the wide screen is unsuitable for westerns or that it adds nothing to them, but it seems to me already an accepted fact that CinemaScope will add nothing decisive to this field.*

The western, whether in its standard proportions, in Vistavision, or on a super-wide screen, will remain the western we hope our grandchildren will still be allowed to know.

* We have a reassuring example of this in *The Man from Laramie* (1955), in which Anthony Mann does not use CinemaScope as a new format but as an extension of the space around man.

What Is Cinema?

THE WESTERN: OR THE AMERICAN FILM PAR EXCELLENCE

Preface to J.-L. Rieupeyrou's *Le Western ou le cinéma américain par excellence*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1953.

P. 142, books of hours.

A form of prayer book, originating in the Middle Ages, giving the hymns, psalms, and prayers to be recited at certain times of the day. Some, made for the rich and noble, were beautifully illustrated, notably that of the Duc de Berry.

P. 143, Chimène. See note for *The Outlaw*.

THE ENTOMOLOGY OF THE PIN-UP GIRL

From *Ecran Français*, December 17, 1946.

P. 161, Princesse de Caraman-Chimay.

The princess, from a Belgian family, was an individualist who shocked society at the turn of the century by claiming her right to do anything she liked, including posing in the nude. This was at a time when appearing before an audience in a tight-fitting bathing costume was considered the height of nudity.

THE OUTLAW

From *Revue du Cinéma*, August, 1948.

P. 164, the quest for the Holy Grail.

Some have also seen resemblances between the western and Greek tragedy. This is one of several occasions on which Bazin draws a parallel between the western and courtly romances (see also "Eroticism in the Cinema").

P. 165, Chimène.

Chimène, the heroine of Corneille's *Le Cid*, was in love with a young

soldier, who kills her father. Despite her continuing love, she demands the soldier's death.

EROTICISM IN THE CINEMA

From *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April, 1957.

P. 169, Eroticism and courtly love.

The reference here is to the fact that the relationship of courtly love had of necessity to be adulterous. In order to be "worshipped" the lady had to be above her lover in rank. Usually, the object of the knight's devotion was the wife of his feudal lord, as with Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, or in the *Châtelaine de Vergy*.

P. 170, Lo Duca [Joseph-Marie].

Born Milan 1910. Author, journalist, and director of shorts, among them one about Louis Lumière (1949). He was an original member of the editorial board of *Cahiers*, from which he withdrew in 1957.

P. 171, Mrs. Grundy.

The French term Bazin uses is "Anastasié"—a name given to the censorship by artists and writers. She is usually depicted as an ugly old woman armed with an enormous pair of scissors.

P. 172, Jean Domarchi.

Author of a study on George Cukor in the Editions Seghers series, and a contributor to *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

P. 173, Palais Royal.

A Parisian theater with a long and varied history from 1783 to the present. Since 1830 it has been the home of vaudeville.

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FOREWORD

by *François Truffaut*

ANDRÉ BAZIN wrote about film better than anybody else in Europe. From that day in 1948 when he got me my first film job, working alongside him, I became his adopted son. Thereafter, every pleasant thing that happened in my life I owed to him.

He taught me to write about the cinema, corrected and published my first articles, and helped me to become a director. He died only a few hours after I had finished my first day's shooting. When, on being sent for by his friend Père L'Éger, I arrived at his home in Nogent, he looked up at me but could no longer speak and was in acute pain. The previous evening he had been watching *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* on television and making notes for the book he was preparing on Jean Renoir.

If I were asked to give a picture of André Bazin the first thing that would occur to me would be a caption from an American magazine: "The most unforgettable character I've met."

André Bazin, like the characters in the plays of Giraudoux, was a creature from the times before Original Sin. Although we all knew him for a good and honest man, his goodness was nevertheless an endless surprise, so abundantly was it manifest. To talk with him was what bathing in the Ganges must be for a Hindu. Such was his generosity of spirit that I some-

WHAT IS CINEMA? VOL. II

by ANDRÉ BAZIN

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520

essays selected and translated

by HUGH GRAY

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