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Costanza Salvi

Up and down the Rio Grande: mapping out the U.S.-Mexico border in the Classical Hollywood Western, 1930-1960

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Fadda, Michela
Deleyto Alcalá, Celestino Sigifredo

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Costanza Salvi

Director/es

Prof. Celestino Deleyto Alcalá
Prof. Michele Fadda

Filosofía y Letras / Estudios Ingleses

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Regime of visibility: The importance of reversing the lens 3
The Frontier and la frontera 7
Historic borderland 14
South-of-the-Border-Westerns 18
Greater U.S.-Mexico 21
The territory ahead 23

1. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Hollywood cross-border encounters 28
Bandits and heroes 37
"In landlessness alone resides the highest truth": Looking for cosmopolitan sensibilities 47
The cultural framework of cosmopolitanism 52
Mapping out the southwestern borderland 54
Western, South of the Border Western, New Western, Global Western
1. The importance of the notion of function and the limits of the national paradigm 62
Wilderness/Civilization: Rick Altman, John Cawelti, Will Wright, Jim Kitses
2. The evolutionary paradigm: Tag Gallagher, Matthew Carter, Andrew Patrick Nelson 72
3. Nation/Genre, Transnational/Genre Hybridity: Rick Altman, Neal Campbell, Josh Garrett-Davis 75

2. THE AMERICAN DESERT

Elegies for a national landscape 80
Dust and sun-baked faces: the 1930s landscape 84
The study of two Americas 87
Cimarron (1931) and the emergence of 1930s SBW 91
Political allegories and social responsibility 95
The symbolic value of the desert in *Three Godfathers* (1936) 98
John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), the American desert and the dream of a Mexican garden 104
The legacy of the 1930s study of two Americas 113
1. John Ford, Pedro Armendáriz, and the SBW: *Fort Apache* (1948) 117
2. John Ford, Pedro Armendáriz, and the SBW: *3 Godfathers* (1948) 122
3. John Huston's study of two Americas: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) 127

3. THE MEXICAN GARDEN

Landscape art: the notions of picturesque and sublime 137
Picturesque Mexico 142
Small productions of SBW: the long life of picturesque Mexico 149
The Cisco Kid cycle 156
Gene Autry goes south of the border 163
The first big production of a SBW featuring a picturesque bordertown: *San Antonio* (1945) 168
The A-Feature SBW: Selznick presents *Duel in the Sun* (1947) 171

"Borderland Crossties" 177
Wardrobe Plot: The McCanles 183
Wardrobe Plot: The Chavez 188
Emile Kuri and the social values of objects 193
Border crossings and picturesque landscape: the dance at the pond 197
Border crossings and sublime horizon: Squaw's Head Rock 202

4. THE FENCE: SOUTH-OF-THE-BORDER *NOIRISH* WESTERN

Intimate frontiers 209
Black mood, existential cool, figurative motifs: the noir 210
South-of-the-Border *Noirish* Westerns 213
The margins acquire center stage 221
Two incidents 225
1. *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1942) 225
2. *Border Incident* (1949) 234
Noiring a South of the Border Western: *The Furies* (1950) 242
The Furies, Mexico, Charles Schnee and Niven Busch 245
Juan Herrera/Gilbert Roland 250
Character in space: a dark version of the U.S.-Mexican borderland 254
Man in the Shadow (1957), Orson Welles, and the visual motif of the fence 261

5. THE RIVER: RUNAWAY HOLLYWOOD, MEXICO

Runaway Hollywood 270
Border River (1954) 275
Sympathetic portrayals of Mexicans 281
The Mexican savior in *The Ride Back* (1957) 286
Gilbert Roland 292
Four SBW projects 298
Mercenary-into-friendship plot: two films starring Gilbert Roland 303
Bandido! (1956) 309
Budd Boetticher's Mexico 314
Budd Boetticher's South of the Border Westerns 316
Buchanan rides back from Mexico 319
Vera Cruz (1954) and the Mexican landscape 324

CONCLUSION 330
APPENDIX
BIBLIOGRAPHY 346

INTRODUCTION

As America was made, it can be unmade
Greil Marcus

Regime of visibility: The importance of reversing the lens

The representation of the U.S.-Mexico Border in classical Hollywood western as the object of study in a doctoral thesis spans different disciplines and areas. It requires an awareness of Hollywood cinema, past and present, and an adequate familiarity with the history, politics, and society of the extremely complex area of the U.S.-Mexico border. The description of immigration, the war on drugs, and issues linked to the relationship between these two different countries, the U.S. and Mexico, are beyond the scope of this study. I am aware of the risks involved in undertaking such a project. My aim in this thesis is to analyze a genre, the western, in light of the most recent social and cultural theories on the borderland—both in terms of past history and present situation. I am also aware that in the field of Cultural Studies, as Pierre Sorlin shows (1977; 2015), we cannot expect a direct mirroring of the real world within the limits of the screen: the interrelation is more complex than a mere reflection of the former on the latter. If a relationship exists between historical/social events and what is shown on the screen, its nature is often incidental and winding; in many cases, the search for traces of historical events or sociological and political discourses on the screen is possible only by focusing on what is invisible, left outside, kept mute or inarticulate. The relationship between what we can see and abstract ideas, social behaviors, and intellectual history results in the crucial concept of the *regime of visibility*. We can interpret the visible, sometimes even reveal unexpected connections through the paradigm of a certain period, an overarching *Weltanschauung*. My engagement with the topic stems precisely from this point. Like a detective looking for clues, I seek what is mainly absent, obscure or left unexpressed. In a word, a cultural analysis of an historical phase of Hollywood emerges from the folds of the screen, surfacing more as a symptom than a direct response to contemporary issues. Susan Sontag would call it the sensibility of an era (Sontag [1966] 2004: 293–304).

The current situation of the U.S.-Mexico border hardly offers clues of reciprocity and mutual sensibility between these two diverse nations to scholars interested in drawing connections and interchanges. This is one of the most severe and brutal in the list of global border-spaces all over the world. The accurate analysis offered by the Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS), a binational research project started in 2007 and supported by diverse departments of the University of Arizona in collaboration with some Mexican universities, attests to this massive complexity. The MBCS points to the unprecedented level of violence and mass incarcerations induced by a "punishment-focused enforcement apparatus" (Slack, Martínez, Whiteford 2018: 7). The authors argue that U.S.-Mexico border-crossing is one of the most dangerous experiences that unauthorized migrants have to face: during their attempts, "the typical migrants walked through the desert for 2.2 days, with 40 percent running out of water and 31 percent running out of food" (Ibid. 4). They basically encounter three main sources of danger induced by various border actors with decidedly different agendas: *coyotes* (or guides, who request an average payment of $2,300 to cross); *bajadores* (stick-up crews or bandits, robbing, kidnapping migrants, or sexually abusing the women in the group); and the drug cartels' mules (or *burreros*, who recruit the immigrants to smuggle marijuana using them as decoys to escape apprehensions). The worst form of violence against migrants is the "structural violence" that maintains the marginalization of crossers, exposing them to an everlasting chain of recrudescence and lack of opportunities (Ibid. 43–62). Instead of providing support and protection, respecting migrants' basic human rights or answering to asylum seekers' requests, the increased border enforcement induced by various agencies of the Department of Homeland Security tends to stigmatize the migrants as criminals with no rights, persons who can be mistreated and abused, whose possessions are taken and never returned, and whose family ties are irremediably broken. The MBCS has demonstrated how mass trial programs such as Operation Streamline (2004–2005) rarely succeed at the task for which they were created: to deter migrants from attempting to cross the border again. Evidently the American Dream is still flourishing, leading people to search for a better life on the other side of the fence.

In the field of migration studies, few works have focused on the multiple reasons that American citizens have to cross the border in the opposite direction. In *Run for the Border*, for instance, Steven Bender, a Professor of Law at Seattle University, enumerates various aspects inducing migrants to illegally escape to Mexico, a phenomenon that persists since the period before the Civil War but that remains largely unexplored. Bender argues that in reversing the lens, scholars obtain a perspective on the mutual interdependence of the two nations. The public opinion in the U.S. would be better equipped to understand the hypocrisies that pervade the general debate against Mexican migrants, acknowledging that Mexicans had—and still have—more edifying and honest reasons to cross the border (Bender 2012: 3). At the beginning, Anglo citizens validated the American Dream, yet those who have most profoundly interpreted the virtuous hope of economic survival and prosperity the Dream originally contained are not the Anglos.[1] Bender calls for a process of assumption of responsibility, arguing that models for bilateral cross-border cooperation that punish bad intentions and cherish good ones are more effective than extraditions and mass trials. Sheila Croucher, author of *The Other Side of the Fence*, moves the focus to a different point. She describes the life conditions of respectable Americans living in Mexico, specifically in Guanajuato, a central state east of Chapala Lake. In this case, we do not have dangerous criminals or lawbreakers on the lam looking for salvation on the other side of the fence but decent citizens—mainly retired professionals—enjoying a pleasant and inexpensive life in Mexico. A comparative analysis of the hopes and fears that characterize these two different directions in crossing the boundary allows us to better understand the complexity of a transnational borderland where different interests intertwine. Many comparable aspects spur an association between the different trajectories of a border-crossing. For instance, trigger mechanisms that lead people to move to another country influence migration decisions in both directions and in the same way. Even immediate reactions on the other side are comparable: in 2004, Samuel Huntington identified six aspects of Mexican immigration that were particularly threatening to the

[1] There are many who think otherwise. In *Who Are We?* (2004), for instance, Samuel P. Huntington discusses the risk of losing American identity under the pressure of dramatic rises in immigration from Hispanic countries. He insists that there is "no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by the Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (Huntington 2004: 256).

U.S. (contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence; Huntington 2004: 221–257). Croucher argues that the same aspects can be attributed to the massive southbound migration of Anglo retirees and young professionals, demonstrating how potentially threatening to Mexicans a massive arrival of Anglos on their turf might be (Croucher 2009: 2481–2489).

In reversing the lens through which we tend to analyze the U.S.-Mexico border, this thesis aims to encourage a perception of the intertwining of two different cultures, the U.S. and Mexico, their language, music, food, history, and architecture, as a process that people unconsciously promote by simply wearing the border as a second skin. Embracing the culture of others and looking for chances to blend our visions into a transnational perspective is the best response to a global situation desperately calling for dialogue and openness. Economic, social, and cultural connections between diverse peoples living in the same place elicit positive views on mutual understanding, responsibility, and similarity. Whether we like it or not, living in the same place and sharing the same food means working out clashes through the simple ethos of getting along. Judging from their inhabitants' behaviors and pragmatic attitudes, the U.S. and Mexico are already inextricably intertwined. Bender emphasizes aspects such as "neighborliness", "cultural blending", "economic interdependence", and "cross-border travels" insisting that

> differences in law will fade with the intermingling of people and cultures. Perhaps, eventually, the border will become less of the open wound that Gloria Anzaldúa wrote of, where 'the Third World grates against the first and bleeds'. Rather than a horizontal gnashing, the border might become a cultural waterway, navigable with ease as local economies, cultures, and priorities dictate (Bender 2012: 184).

The enormous complexity of transnational exchanges indicates new potentials and suggests that the fence can be transformed into a fluid waterway to a different world. Croucher further introduces a notion central in this thesis, the idea of cosmopolitanism. In her view, a cosmopolitan approach allows the creation and promotion of a sensibility based on reciprocity and cross-cultural attitudes of openness, proposing an idea of universality interested in broadening our national or local horizons. We have to negotiate between two opposite directions: on the one hand, the need to maintain freedom

for personal values and specific identities; on the other, to transcend the concept of the self as pure essence. Cosmopolitanism is not simply a call for the rights of world citizenship but a recognition of the associated responsibilities that everybody should assume when confronting others (Croucher 2009: 2815–2816).

The utopian colors in which classical Hollywood films dress controversial issues are often repudiated by social scientists along with its stereotypical portrayals and pro or anti-immigrant caricatures. However, cultural historians and social scientists describe their belief in the powerful instrument of dialogue in discursive codes similar to those utilized in cinema. Whatever affiliations (big or small) we hold or identities we claim, we share with others a common humanity and will benefit from respecting each other accordingly. The collective imagination usually delivers and promotes similar perceptions. Hollywood often casts new light on a peculiar condition or situation, showing diversity or minority, regardless of gender, class, nation, or ethnicity, with universal overtones. Such cinematic processes are powerful fuel for creating new ideas of neighborhood and equal exchanges in cross-border relationships. As historical events in the past show, it is during traumatic phases that human beings confirm their capacity to react in a substantially positive way. They have the power to affect events and not just to be affected, changing the present and acting instead of being acted. The cinema works in this direction.

The Frontier and la frontera

Given this premise, the main interest of this thesis is in finding a cross-border dialogue within the cultural framework of Hollywood, isolating one of the genres that, at first sight, is the farthest from this kind of sensibility, the western. However, not all westerns are alike. What is astounding in this genre is its capacity to contain an unlimited number of perspectives and contradictions linked with American[2] culture and history, questioning more than confirming its values and assumptions. From the beginning, in literature and in the Wild West Shows, in dime novels and during the silent era, the

[2] Although Mexico is also part of what we define as North America, I use these terms, "Anglo American" or "American" in the general meaning of "what is related to the United States of America". In this specific phrasing, it excludes Mexico.

western has received the influence of different cultural forces, often placed in mutual contradiction, forces that have contributed to questioning issues related to the discursive representation of history and myth. The motif of vanishing Americans; the issue of the discursive representation of history; problems related to land ownership, rights, and speculations; ideas about nature and culture or about nature and politics; geopolitical balances; drives toward a community versus individualist aspirations: the issues at stake are various, and they never result in a conclusion that can be taken for granted. The scope of those arguments is surprising given the notoriously limited repertoire of elements—characters, locations, actions, plots—that have characterized the genre since its beginning. Incidentally, the western is one of the most recognizable film genres: a man, a horse, a landscape. However, the number of themes, tropes, and issues created by the combination of those elements is potentially unlimited, allowing for a variety of cultural dialogues and arguments. Clear proof of this vital flexibility is that in none of the decades generally indicated for the classical period did the western remain untouched by hybrid connections with other genres: in the 1930s with musicals, in the 1940s with noirs, in the 1950s with melodrama.

In the following part of the introduction, I want to focus on the historical values attributed to the frontier, which has found in Hollywood westerns its most conventional and familiar definition as a zone of open opportunity and economic growth. My intention is to understand how the emergence of cultural discourses about *la frontera*—the borderland between Mexico and the U.S.—in the classical Hollywood western and in the political debate off the screen changed those established tropes. But to give an answer to this question, it is first necessary to understand what we are referring to when we talk about the Frontier.[3]

[3] In this case I spell the term with capitalization because I am referring to the specific articulation of the concept delivered by Frederick Jackson Turner at the meeting of the American Historical Association, held at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, on July 12, 1893. Later in this thesis, I use the term without capitalization to identify the subsequent development of Turner's thesis within popular products depicting the geographical territory West of the Mississippi in the historical period between 1870 and 1890. Further, I use the term *la frontera* to identify the ideological and filmic discourse related to the geographical space of the U.S.-Mexico border in media products both in national and transnational cultural contexts.

One of the most convincing arguments in validating a text as a western is the presence of the geographical, political, and national feature of the frontier. The Frontier Thesis originates in the well-known meeting of the American Historical Association during the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893). Frederick Jackson Turner presented his thesis on the significance of this concept in American history, illustrating its link with a democratic civilization. "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward", Turner writes, "explains American development". The nation's growth coincides with this "perennial rebirth", whose main character is represented by constant fluidity. The expansion westward coincides with new opportunities offered by the "continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society" (Turner [1920] 1986: 1–38). From the Alleghenies to the Mississippi, from the Missouri to the belt of the Rocky Mountains, the Frontier moves with a productive individualism, a selfish intolerance for administrative experience, high education, and governmental affairs (Ibid. 3–6). Turner is convinced that the religious, political, and economic destiny of the country is something that must be decided in the West, a region representing the material growth—"lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends"—and the spiritual freedom—a "restless, nervous energy" and "exuberance"—of the nation (Ibid. 8). The West is a "gate of escape from the bondage of the past" because of its "freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons" (Ibid. 9).

As it appears from the lyrical aspirations of these brief passages, Turner's idea of the Frontier contained one big challenge. Despite its many flaws, his essay dared to present history from a different point of view, questioning the tenets of the historical profession. In 1893, after ten years of existence, the American Historical Association was in its infancy but already counted 631 members, all graduates from European universities or working under mentors trained by European historians. Herbert Baxter Adams, who was Turner's mentor at John Hopkins University when he earned his doctorate, believed in an evolutionary link between American institutions and European Germanic ancestors. The dominant line of analysis among those European-trained historians was the "Germ

Theory", which explained that the origin of social and political organizations that influenced the development of England and, therefore, of the American colonies was to be found in the "forests of medieval Germany" (Nobles 1997: 6). What Turner was trying to propose to his fellow historians and colleagues was thus profoundly revolutionary since he presented the Frontier as "a new product that is American", truly American, "a movement away from the influence of Europe" (Turner quoted in Ibid. 6). Turner wanted to present this history as a line separated from Europe, forged in contact with a new environment, linked to the characters produced by a different land and its dangerous savages. Another exciting and challenging factor in his thesis was the popular register. The process of Frontier settlement and its explanation was not only an act of self-reliance and a quest for independence—or a way to overcome the inferiority complex that American culture suffered when confronted with Europe—but a promotion of freedom, opportunity, and democracy. The people that Turner identified as the agents of this westward advance were ordinary people, not members of the European upper classes, depicted in their quest for independence. These common folk progressively acquired an ideological distance from elitist influences in pushing settlement toward the Pacific. Their thrust toward new ideas was glorious.

Let us now move to consider the limitations of this approach. Turner placed great emphasis on the coincidence between this national mission and a nostalgic and, to contemporary eyes, unsustainable vision based on three points. Firstly, the agricultural nature of the initial Frontier economy that he promoted in the West was rooted in classical mythology, strengthened by the Louisiana Purchase (1803), and based on Thomas Jefferson's beliefs that the American land had to be settled by independent yeoman farmers who would have employed axe and plow to create a 'natural' democracy. In molding the shape of the Frontier, Turner reinforced the myth of the American pastoral, the taming of the wilderness, and its transformation into an ideal garden of civil rights and duty. Albeit profoundly cherished by Turner, this aspect was not easily detectable at the dawn of the Twentieth century, when agriculture had already become commercial and industrial. Secondly, the spirit that informed his thesis was based on the marriage between the philosophical

underpinnings of Manifest Destiny (which justified the fait accompli of the dominant expansion of Anglo-Saxons in the West) and the overt religiosity of the Puritans. He based his ideas on John Winthrop's "City upon a Hill—A Model of Christina Charity" which depicted community bonds and America's exceptionalist mission in a sermon written in 1630, nearly three centuries before the historian. The underpinnings of the nation's pretension to be identified with the western Frontier—the American pastoral, the Manifest Destiny, and the Puritan model of Christianity—followed a line of reasoning that was presupposed rather than discussed, taken for granted rather than questioned. This tradition was more or less invented but still genuinely American. The third and most important limitation of Turner's Frontier Thesis is a tendency to overlook and obliterate the constant and robust significance of the international/transnational influence on American culture. Anglo-Americans are the main actors in this drive west; theirs is the bleeding in violent fights against the Natives, theirs the losses, the exhaustion, and the victory. Turner's heroes are the pioneering farmers taming the wilderness with the plow, pious but ready to protect their property with guns. As Karen Jones and John Wills suggest, scant attention is paid to the Chinese immigrants who extensively worked on the railways or to the African Americans who comprised one-third of all range riders during the cattle industry's flourishing in the late nineteenth century. Native Americans appear as a declining ethnic group, a source of danger, or the savage enemy (Jones and Wills 2009: 93–94). As Matthew Carter writes, through the agency of Turner, "the West was becoming a set of symbols that constituted not history, but an explanation of history, and in that sense a myth" or "an ideologically desirable (for Anglo-Americans at least) idea of America, rather than a 'real' history of America" (Carter 2015: 13). Indeed, when seen from the perspective of Native Americans, Hispanics, Chinese, or Africans, the westward expansion was hardly a positive process based on buoyancy and exuberance. Rather than freedom, opportunity, and democracy, the expansion brought them death, displacement, destruction, assimilation, and loss. In the words used by Carlton Smith, "cultural exceptionalism and dominance could only be asserted and defined against the liminal, the historically silenced" (Smith 2000: 2).

To fill out the void that such elision produced or to correct the grand narrative of frontier settlement as the quintessential Anglo-American (hi)story, it is necessary to follow the path of those historians who, in the subsequent decades, presented the history of the West through a more complex and inclusive lens. One of them was American historian Herbert Eugene Bolton, who published *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* in 1921, where he hoped to forge a Hispanic counterpart to Turner's foundational narrative of the frontier. By the early 1930s, many other historians had followed the path initiated by Bolton, mainly John Francis Barron, one of his pupils. However, these historians tended to focus on the events linked to the people of Spanish origin. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chicano historians such as Rodolfo Acuña and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, on the other hand, began to highlight American imperialism over Mexico, emphasizing the history of the people of Mexican origin.

Patricia Limerick is one of the contemporary historians who has most extensively analyzed the present-day evolution of the frontier in relation to *la frontera*. She has often pointed to a complex series of historical and political events exposing the troublesome governance of a borderland, a process that began more or less in 1821. When Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, American colonists were allowed to settle in Texas in the hope that they could bring vitality to the border economy. Under the government of Mexico, Texas decided to give land to the Anglos in exchange for a promise to conform to Catholicism, Mexican citizenship, and Hispanic civilization—an agreement that also imposed the end of slavery, a pivotal aspect in the economy of Anglos (Limerick 1987: 227–230). Despite these impositions, the prospect of acquiring land rights was enticing, and in the 1830s, Anglo-Texans outnumbered Hispanic Tejanos three to one. In 1834, an initiative toward centralization taken by Antonio López de Santa Anna raised discontent among the Anglo-Texans. The subsequent fight ended with the creation of the Texas Republic (1836) and its annexation by the U.S. in 1845. Defined by Limerick as "a mortifying international insult" (Ibid. 232), the annexation was the triggering event that caused the Mexican-American War (April 1846-February 1848). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed on 2 February 1848, giving the U.S.

complete control of Texas and approximately establishing the same U.S.-Mexican border we know today. The Treaty shifted meanings radically when viewed from different directions. From the point of view of American citizens, it was another step along America's grand advancement in continental Manifest Destiny. From the point of view of Mexicans, it was "a shameless land grab and an aggressive attack on Mexican sovereignty" (Ibid. 232). In this phase, the U.S. superimposed its institutions on Hispanic ones, causing much trouble for those who overnight found themselves thrown into a different political and social system. Systematically mistreated, seen through stereotypes and biases, exploited and low-paid, punished for suspected crimes, or encouraged to stay in their place by the arbitrary, extralegal actions of Anglo-Americans, Hispanics responded with a complicated mixture of accommodation and resistance (Ibid. 232–242).

In one of her most cited articles, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century" ([1992] 2001), Limerick offers an interesting parallel between the concept of the western frontier and the image of *la frontera*. Today, the frontier is still a symbol of promise and progress, representing the positive and negative outcomes produced by an ideal zone of open opportunity linked to the entrepreneurial activity of bottom-up business groups or to the refractory and unfair commercial practices imposed by large corporations. Limerick states that this concept has acquired broad connections to many other contexts, from left-wing political views to lifestyles and medical science. However, it is still recognized worldwide as a synonym of opportunity and freedom, and linked to a sort of "toxic ethnocentrisms" and "nationalistic self-congratulations" (Limerick 2001: 92). Against this hodgepodge of elements bearing the mark of a confident nation talking about itself, the idea of *la frontera* represents a transnational counterpoint, at least for two reasons. Firstly, even in 1893, the frontier was considered closed since the land was entirely discovered and conquered, a factor that led Turner to activate a nostalgic stance. Conversely, the U.S.-Mexican border was already producing many troubles in 1893—the Porfiriato (1876-1910) represents the worst point in the history of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. The borderland is less a fantasy than a bare reality, an open issue without an easy solution. Secondly, while the frontier, especially in Turner's view, was a

hymn to the open land and new opportunity, a land built on promise and hope, on common folk and pristine lives, the U.S.-Mexico border is much closely linked to the European idea of a border, in which two nations confront each other and compete for control of the local resources. Indeed, one of the most evident differences between the mythic frontier and the actual U.S.-Mexican border is the opposition between openness and closeness. Whereas the former is still linked to a paean to freedom that rejects external interferences, the southwestern border represents a closed boundary implying foreign relations and geopolitical diplomacy. This point is particularly clear in Limerick's article, where the socio-political discourse of *la frontera* appears opposite to Turner's nostalgic image. Turner honors the victorious conclusion of a historical cycle, and in so doing—as often happens in American culture—he employs a nostalgic vision. By contrast, Limerick presents the contemporary borderland as an unrecovered trauma, an open wound. In Limerick, we feel the echo of Gloria Anzaldúa passage, where the U.S.-Mexico border "*es una herdida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2007: 25). While in Turner's nostalgic view, the frontier appeared as a closed historical phase that would have opened a new stage equally abounding in self-definition and mythology, in Anzaldúa's powerful and traumatic imagery, *la frontera* remains an open issue that requires from both sides a solution that should be extended across national boundaries. This open wound cries out for a straightforward refusal of autochthonous, limited perspectives.[4]

Historic borderland

When Turner wrote his paper in 1893, the current theory of the melting pot solicited an assimilation of different ethnicities into a homogeneous American society characterized by specific political, economic, and social systems. Turner's idea of the frontier participated in this process. As I have

[4] Following the same path indicated by Limerick, historian Gregg Grandin argued for a possible end of the myth of the frontier hitting a wall at the southern border and being forced to revise itself, to reconsider its violence as incorrect, and its mythology of freedom as a blind interpretation of history that has for too long justified militarism, brutality, and bloodshed (Grandin 2019). The safety valve represented by the apparent eternal availability of open land found an obstacle in the southern border. This obstacle inevitably leads to an ideological reconfiguration of past conceptions of national identity.

already argued, for Turner, the frontier was a truly American product, a "crucible" where "the immigrants were Americanized" and liberated from the influence of the British empire (Turner [1920] 1986: 8, 9). Turner considered minorities *only* as entities-soon-to-be-forged into the American character. The border cannot contain a similar aspiration (or, at least, it cannot contain *only* this plausible aspiration): it is an obstacle more than a crucible, a fence more than a cauldron, where different identities must or want to keep their proud variety. It is impossible to define the border through later metaphors emphasizing the multiculturalism of North American society, such as the salad bowl or the kaleidoscope, where the original specificity is maintained, albeit within a basic mingling of features. At the border, we have no melting pots nor salad bowls but a barricade separating two diverse countries and two different governments. However, this barricade is not inviolable, and fractures may break this separation, turning racial hatred, fears, and anxiety into dialogues and openness.

Despite this difference, the Southwest borderland represents a homogenous territory, an "ecological whole" in Limerick's words (Limerick 1987: 222), in which the northeastern Mexican desert blends into the southwestern American desert without an end in sight. The one line that nature did provide—the Rio Grande—is a river running through a cohesive land. Secondly, while the border between Hispanic America and Anglo America has shifted more than once over time, people's habit of *not* respecting the line between the two spheres of sovereignty has remained constant. It was (and still is) extremely difficult to maintain the sanctity of a line across the land when the foreigners were (and still are) convinced that opportunity lay on the other side—and this assumption goes both ways. The continuity of the terrain is mirrored in the fluid interaction of peoples—intermarriages, encounters between ethnic groups, race relations, bilingualism—that have always represented the unique confluence of cultures, identities, and ideologies in a porous and dynamic space.

The specific social condition of Mexico also sustains this perception. Octavio Paz points out that Mexico is a land of superimposed pasts and multilayered ethnicities, a connecting point between Spain—which was also a conglomeration of nations and races—and pre-Columbian Mexico—a

mosaic of nations, tribes, and languages, mainly represented by the Aztec peoples of the historical and cultural region of Mesoamerica. "Mexico is the most Spanish country in Latin America", as Paz asserts, adding that it is simultaneously "the most Indian" (Paz [1979] 2005: 362). Although language, religion, and the political institutions of the country are Western, as Paz points out,

> there is one aspect of Mexico that faces in another direction—the Indian direction. Mexico is a nation between two civilizations and two pasts. Every Mexican bears within him this continuity, which goes back two thousand years. It is not something known but something lived. […] For the Mexicans, communion represents the great universal commixture, the great bathing in the waters of the beginning, a state beyond purity and impurity (362, 365).

Paz presents the organic complexity of Mexican society as simultaneously similar and different from the multiethnic plurality of the U.S.: similar because the U.S. has a comparable colonial history; different because it lacks the natural, non-structured vitality that characterized the primordial communion of ethnicities in Mexico ("it is not something known but something lived"). First published in "The New Yorker" on 17 September 1979, Paz's article represents a tentative solution for those who struggle to find quilting points. He states that "to conquer its enemies, the United States must first conquer itself—return to its origins. Not to repeat them but to rectify them: the others—the minorities inside as well as the marginal countries and nations outside—do exist" (Ibid. 376). Only in recognizing the multiple complexity and multilayered reality outside the border is it possible to reject the rigidity that is so deleterious to American (and every other nation's) identity.

Gloria Anzaldúa suggests that a possible way toward an awareness that goes beyond national boundaries is to accept hybridity and syncretism as a constitutive condition of the border, both in the sense of a geographical border and a psychological one. As she explains at the beginning of her book,

> I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). […] It's not a comfortable territory to live in. […] However, there have been compensations for this mestiza, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. I have the sense that certain 'faculties'—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar—never comfortable. […] No, not comfortable but home" (preface, no page number).

As Anzaldúa beautifully says, “the shifting and multiple identity and integrity” experienced at the border outline a dynamic space that combines topography and intimacy, creating an inner map where a tolerance for ambiguity and hybridity is made possible. Many scholars have followed this path in the effort to define the borderland as a place requiring the activation of “dormant” cognitive and spiritual faculties.

Porous and hybrid environments require flexible identities, unbiased and open-minded thoughts. In many cities along the border (El Paso, Laredo, Matamoros), inhabitants of Mexican descent and elements of Mexican culture are ubiquitous. Restaurants, radio, television stations, newspapers, and stores are all serving their audience in Spanish or greeting their customers with bilingual options; simultaneously, the Mexican American society is also heavily socialized *through* and *into* American mainstream media (radio, tv, cinema, newspapers are widely available in English). The school and health systems, as well as many local, federal, or public institutions, are organized according to the structural characteristics of the American system (Lozano 2017: 35–48). This social and psychological environment has elicited different definitions. The notion of a hybrid culture has influenced, for instance, intellectuals such as Michael Kearney and García Canclini, who emphasized that identities and loyalties are not Mexican or American anymore but something else, something implying a third space. Kearney argues that people living in borderlands sometimes tend to partake of both nations, at other times, to partake of neither, which downplays the concept of nation and its structures (1991: 52). While Canclini utilizes the term *deterritorialization* as a synonym for the erosion of roots (1990), Gilberto Giménez opts for the term *multi-territorialization* to identify a state of permanent conflict that does not alter the hard core of constant inequality and hegemony (Giménez 2009: 24).

Even if I tend toward Kearney’s and Canclini’s theses, my impression is that the concept of third space instigates a process of ghettoization that limits the potentiality of the border as a magnifying glass for international issues such as freedom, equality, mutual exchange, and dialogue. The border is not an isle but a transnational place where social practices are offered in their intensified

version. Conversely, I suggest that we consider the border as a possible gateway connecting local peoples and global cultural aspects, or national characters and transnational exchange. This cultural and social network is detached from fixed linkage with specific origins (one or the other), producing a community based on a sensibility that goes beyond inborn characteristics. In my view, the U.S.-Mexico borderland is an in-between space that simultaneously comprises *both* nations, not belonging in full to either of them.

South-of-the-Border-Westerns

In Hollywood cinema, the coexistence of two competing factors is not rare. Richard Maltby defines it as the "controlled indeterminacy", a concept that explains and justifies a coexistence of conflicting voices that produces different interpretations (Maltby 2003: 550-553). Still, each movie contains a variety of possible combinations of this polyvalence. Whereas many westerns appear close to the Turnerian vision of the frontier and to the myth's foundation, others clearly reject a full-blown mythology and lean toward the Mexican border. When a film establishes a discourse on this borderland, the frontier's ideological purity and the myth that informs it cannot be fully preserved, since a transnational ingredient moves the focus toward a potentially anti-national perspective. Further, the transnational ingredient usually has a consistent character of its own, representing a commixture of elements coming from both sides of the border that champions the philosophical idea of *border identities*. The geographical and psychological condition of "border residents"—in Anzaldúa's definition, border residents are those who are *simultaneously* affected by both cultures and ethnicities—has a particular resonance in the westerns that I have chosen to analyze. They are set and often shot close to the border or in Mexico where *la frontera* downplays the national bombastic celebration of the American frontier, the mythology of an open land with no boundary, and resounds with notions that Gerard Delanty describes as constitutive of cultural cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2011: 633–656). Cosmopolitanism mainly concerns the emergence from the world's diverse cultures of the values of dialogue and openness, the overcoming of divisions and the appearance of

an attitude of self-problematization. The harmonious coexistence of a variety of cultures cannot exactly be equated to cosmopolitanism, but an idea of "unity-in-diversity" is the socio-cultural condition of its possibility (Ibid. 652). When *la frontera* becomes central in western films, the frontier can finally appear as it was: unilateral, unambiguous, and tied to the myth of a land that knows no confines. If the winning of the West produced a coherent singularity, the southwestern border remained a concoction of multiple elements. The border is not a singularity but a multilayered, fluid, and organic multiplicity.

In light of this premise, I want to identify a group of films that I will call South-of-the-Border-Western (SBW), westerns that emphasize crossroads instead of clashes, showing that the border is a place defined by the presence of a recurring, unfinished process more than by unquestionable events.

I have identified 29 westerns utilizing the same criteria that are usually employed to label a film as a western: time and space. In general, westerns are set in the strip of land between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River and in the time span between the 1870s and the 1890s. These westerns are otherwise set close to the border or in a real or fictive Mexico, often depicting an historical context more recent than that offered by classical westerns. They are:

In Old Arizona (Irving Cummings, Twentieth Century Fox, 1929)
The Texan (John Cromwell, Paramount Pictures, 1930)
Cimarron (Wesley Ruggles, RKO, 1931)
Three Godfathers (Richard Boleslawski, MGM, 1936)
Stagecoach (John Ford, Walter Wanger/UA, 1939)
South of the Border (George Sherman, Republic, 1939)
Mexicali Rose (George Sherman, Republic, 1939)
Romance of the Rio Grande (Herbert Leeds, Twentieth Century Fox, 1941)
The Ox-Bow Incident (William Wellman, Twentieth Century Fox, 1943)
San Antonio (David Butler, Warner Bros.,1945)
The Gay Cavalier (William Nigh, Monogram, 1946)
Beauty and the Bandit (William Nigh, Monogram, 1946)
South of Monterey (William Nigh, Monogram, 1946)
Riding the California Trail (William Nigh, Monogram, 1947)
Robin Hood of Monterey (Christy Cabanne, Monogram, 1947)
King of the Bandits (Christy Cabanne, Monogram, 1947)
Fort Apache (John Ford, Argosy/RKO, 1948)
Three Godfathers (John Ford, Argosy/MGM, 1948)
The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (John Huston, Warner Bros., 1948)
Duel in the Sun (King Vidor, Vanguard/Selznick Releasing Organization, 1948)
Border Incident (Anthony Mann, Nicholas Nayfack/MGM, 1949)

The Furies (Anthony Mann, Hal Wallis/Paramount, 1950)
Border River (George Sherman, Universal, 1954)
Vera Cruz (Robert Aldrich, James Hill/UA, 1954)
Treasure of Pancho Villa (George Sherman, Edmund Grainger/RKO, 1955)
Bandido! (Richard Fleischer, Robert L. Jacks/UA, 1956)
The Ride Back (Alain Miner, Aldrich&Associates/UA, 1957)
Man in the Shadow (Jack Arnold, Albert Zugsmith/Universal, 1957)
Buchanan Rides Alone (Budd Boetticher, Harry Joe Brown/Columbia, 1958)

Ten of these are set in a recent or contemporary border: *South of the Border*, *Mexicali Rose*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *Border Incident*, *Treasure of Pancho Villa*, *Bandido!*, *The Ride Back* and *Man in the Shadow.* Some of these films were directed by two filmmakers, George Sherman and Budd Boetticher, often chosen by the studios' production managers as directors with a deep knowledge of Mexico, its land, culture, and language; another two filmmakers are often cited within this context, John Ford and John Huston, who were also capable to offer insight into Mexico. As for the production, the group of films that I have identified as SBW goes from A-features with expensive production values (*Cimarron*, *Duel in the Sun*, *The Furies*, and *Vera Cruz*) to lower budget films: *Mexicali Rose*, *South of the Border*, the six films of the Cisco Kid cycle starring Mexican actor Gilbert Roland and produced at Monogram by Scott Dunlap between 1946 and 1947 but also *Romance of the Rio Grande* (starring Cesar Romero), *Treasure of Pancho Villa*, and *The Ride Back* are all instances of lower budget productions but highly attractive to popular audiences in smaller towns or rural areas. My intention is to use the widest possible scope of analysis without leaning toward auteur theory for the sake of more commercial products (or vice versa) to reveal Hollywood's multilayered complexity as a film industry and a cultural community interested in reaching the widest possible audience.

The first feature of SBW is their natural landscape settings. SBW are all set in a landscape that is presented as a borderland, a contact zone, an in-between territory. In Limerick's words, we could define it as an "ecological whole" encompassing the American southwest and the northern Mexican states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas. This is the first mark of a transnational commonality between the U.S. and Mexico. The fluid interaction of myth and history is the second feature of SBW films, representing the multiple levels at which a popular or less popular

commercial film can be read, not only as a way to enjoy a ritual experience of self-definition but also as a way to *creatively* consume texts that encourage potentially varied responses. The potential for identifying the transnational ingredient in these SBWs is not only determined by the cultural vitality of responses offered by the Latino part of the mainstream audience—often migrants coming from the other side of the border and consuming Hollywood products—but also by their internal complexity. The third feature of SBWs is the dynamic relationship between the frontier and la *frontera*. The idea of the frontier is no longer a single myth or voice but instead a coexistence of different voices, known as *la frontera*. This alternative notion, *la frontera*, is often linked with a direct critique of the ideological assumptions that westerns are based on. These stories often celebrate a conquest founded on racist, imperialist, and sexist premises. By contrast, in the absence of a national myth and its unsustainable celebration, the transnational mix of elements representing the border advocates for the values of cosmopolitan encounters. This openness may also be considered a legend, but at least it is a transnational legend, not a national myth.

Greater U.S.-Mexico

Apart from the term "ecological whole" used by Limerick to identify a borderland, another pivotal concept in this thesis is that of "Greater Mexico", drawn from Américo Paredes (1915–1999), author of *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958). This volume examines the figure of the folk hero Gregorio Cortez (1875–1916) and his ballads (*corridos*), songs about the various forms of oppression experienced by the inhabitants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the territory close to the border between Texas and Tamaulipas. *Corridos* are songs recounting acts of criminals and vaqueros or describing other social or cultural aspects that characterized the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the borderland. In the collection of songs *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero* (1976), Paredes coined the term "Greater Mexico" as a way to refer

> to all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense (Paredes [1976] 1995: 175).

José Limón follows the lead of Paredes and utilizes the term "Greater Mexico" to identify in his work (1998) the inhabitants of the large region comprising the American Southwest—which is the territory that was originally Mexico, made up by present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California—and those of the northern states of present-day Mexico (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas; Limón 1998: 3, 7–33). The author is fully aware of the long list of reasons that would lead to emphasize the dominant entity represented by Anglo Americans as well as the forced assimilation they have imposed on Mexicans. However, Limón is also interested in pinpointing the long history of social contacts and cultural dialogues that characterized one century of mutual exchanges happening in those states, a study that explores the Mexican American commonality in disciplines such as figurative arts (*murals*), literature, cinema, and folk songs. Through the study of the Mexican connections and exchanges with American artists and intellectuals, living on both sides, we can delineate the virtual contour of an imagined community living on the border but not knowing limits or boundaries.

To Paredes's and Limón's visions, I would add that the term Greater Mexico can be further expanded to include not only the peoples of Mexico in their process of migration and exile or their capacity to maintain a link with their ethnic and national origins. More ambitiously, Greater Mexico can identify the space of vast cultural encounters that emphasize cultural dialogues and social contacts on both sides. In my vision, therefore, the term Greater Mexico identifies a sociocultural network detached from any fixed linkage with specific origins, a network of exchanges established within a macro geographical area [Fig. 1]. As an imagined community, the Greater U.S.-Mexico is a contact zone, an in-between space across two countries where a variety of material and non-material objects, from art to lifestyles, from music and films to political and social expressions, can find points of contact, both in terms of clashes and fusions.

The geographical specificity of the borderland triggers cultural/social contacts. In the specific situation of the U.S.-Mexican borderland, according to Carlos Fuentes, author of *The Old Gringo*

(1985) and *The Crystal Border* (1996), it is likely that people across both nations, who have actually come into contact with each other, will carry both countries within. Border residents, in Anzaldúa's words, tend to sense a twin presence in their soul since the geographical distance between two countries usually "shrinks into intimacy" at the borderlands. The intimacy can be brutal, turbulent, frenzied, even destructive for those who experience it but closeness avails a different type of visibility. New faculties are being activated so that long shots—things seen from above or from the outside—are zoomed into close-ups, small life details, cases of brief duration, micro-histories. This perspective can explain, for instance, the life experiences of many actors and filmmakers analyzed in this thesis.

In looking for the micro-histories of a Greater U.S.-Mexico in SBW, this thesis aspires to question the imperialist vision with which westerns have traditionally been associated. The reversal will allow us to detach westerns from an exclusively national ideology and emphasize transnational subplots in the national history we all know. The proximity of the borderland is what allows to introduce cosmopolitan values and beliefs offering an alternative to a binary and unproblematic model of domination-and-resistance in an idea of unity-in-diversity and cross-fertilization. In SBWs the national idea of the frontier makes room for transnational approaches that uphold the willingness to yield what is familiar and embrace otherness.

The territory ahead

Following a rationale inspired by the methodology of spatial analysis and border theory, I wish to organize the study of SBW according to landscape. Apart from the first, each of the subsequent chapters find inspiration in a specific image connected with the space of the border: desert, garden, fence, river. The first two are strongly connected as they represent a mutual reversal of the well-known opposition between civilization and wilderness. The desert (Chapter Two) represents a cultural image of greed while the garden (Chapter Three) identifies the picturesque background for stories of cross ethnic romances in a few SBWs. The last two are otherwise two declinations of the image of the border. On the one hand, the border is a fence (Chapter Four) intended to outline and

discriminate between diverse citizens with different rights and who are subject to different policies. On the other hand, it is a river (Chapter Five), a metaphor for a fluid intertwining between two countries.

Chapter One starts with my response to Camilla Fojas's thesis in *Border Bandits* (2016), which is based on three basic assumptions. Firstly, she condemns the presence of despicable stereotypes of Mexicans in Hollywood border films. Secondly, she discusses the full erasure or distortion of the historical tradition of *la frontera*, as happens, for instance, in the central role of the Texas Rangers. They safeguard law, peace, and order from the despicable actions of Mexican bandits identifying a simplistic opposition. Thirdly, she argues that Hollywood border films are inclined toward a restoration of a national identity based on a strong image of white and Anglo American masculinity. The hero encompasses general doubts, phobia, and hope regarding Mexican lands and characters. My response is based on the analysis of the production and international distribution of Hollywood films, to highlight how the stereotype came to be slightly corrected thanks to the initiative of the Foreign Department of the MPPDA. Bilingual productions uphold my argument on cultural exchanges since they gave working opportunities to Mexican actors, screenwriters, and directors, who would later constitute the underpinnings of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. The brief analysis of the trade press and other magazines published in Mexico demonstrates the substantial fondness that Mexican audiences have for Hollywood movies. These aspects reverberate in many films' plot, where we find instances of Mexican heroes. Furthermore, the general tendency to romanticize the Revolution and the bigger-than-life personality of Villa can also be read in this light. By disconnecting SBW from a strictly national mythology, the territory of the borderland (Greater U.S.-Mexico) ceases to appear as a clear-cut division into ideological extremes and becomes blurred into a common ground. Drawing on Gerard Delanty and Martha Nussbaum, I explain how cosmopolitanism is an accurate way to identify transnational connections between Mexico and the U.S. within my canon of SBWs. Border theory and spatial analysis provide the methodology through which traditional theories of the western can be revised to delimit the object of this study.

In Chapter Two, the ideological counterpoint between wilderness and civilization is readjusted and adapted to a transnational context. In classical westerns the American territory appears through specific embodiments of values and visions: the lushness of the grass and the lack of obstacles are symbols of the fertility of the prairie waiting to be plowed and planted. By contrast, in SBW what should appear as an abundant garden is transformed into a barren desert and the Mexican side of the border (real or fictive) often appears through images of lavish vegetation and shimmering water basins. This image of the desert is also placed under scrutiny within the 1930s cultural context when issues related to the exploitation of lands—the drought in the Midwest and the catastrophe of the Dust Bowl—gained centrality. *The Texan* (John Cromwell 1930) and *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles 1931) question the idea of American progress as an evolution from wilderness to civilization, in connection with a historical period characterized by two main aspects: the Good Neighbour Policy, which opened the diplomatic and cultural relations between Mexico and the U.S. and, secondly, a tendency to romanticize folk people in rural areas. In this chapter, my main focus is on *Stagecoach* (John Ford 1939), but I also discuss *Fort Apache* (1948) and *3 Godfathers* (1948) as well as John Huston's 1948 *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

In Chapter Three, I offer a cultural interpretation of the border based on the representation of the notion of picturesque applied to Mexico. In many SBWs we have different declinations of a form of exoticism extended to the southern neighbor. In the Cisco Kid cycle as well as in *South of the Border* (George Sherman 1939), *Mexicali Rose* (George Sherman 1939), *San Antonio* (David Butler 1945), and *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1948), we find a depiction of the Mexican landscape as a background for interethnic romances that contest the usual representation of a hierarchy between Anglo and Mexican women or men where the former represent good sense and good morality while the latter are often relegated to secondary roles of sultry Latinas or Latin Lovers. In these films, virtues such as strength and self-reliance are attributed to traditionally marginalized people. Furthermore, these films show an evolution from the hard-bitten cowboy to a tender lover that captivated female spectators and generally modified the audience's sensibility, leading to situations

where middle-class embarrassment could not exercise massive censorship power. Roles simultaneously comprising the sentimental and the hard-boiled became largely used in westerns, especially when they were validated by a change of settings and locations from harsh western towns to a picturesque Mexico exuding sensuality.

In Chapter Four, I offer a socio-political interpretation of the border based on the presence of fences and boundaries in the films' spaces. As in noirs, the border in westerns is often the expression of Cold War worries about American citizenship and evidence of the process of enforcement of national territorial integrity. Here, SBW addresses the problem of belonging and issues related to otherness, through those who represent a different political and social affiliation. *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1943), *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949), *The Furies* (Anthony Mann 1950), and *Man in the Shadow* (Jack Arnold /Orson Welles 1957) reveal the errors committed by overzealous Anglos looking for revenge as strenuous defenders of the law (the posse in *The Ox-bow Incident*, the criminal organization in *Border Incident*, T.C. Jeffords in *The Furies*, the citizens of *Man in the Shadow*). They also show that, in contrast with money-grabbing, back-stabbing, and rude Anglo Americans, Mexican culture appears as much more gracious and wise. Juan Martínez (Anthony Quinn) in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Pablo Rodríguez (Ricardo Montálban) in *Border Incident*, Juan Herrera (Gilbert Roland) in *The Furies*, and Jesús Cisneros (Martin Garralaga) in *Man in the Shadow* are all instances of this gracious vision conveyed by the films.

In Chapter Five, I deal with the representation of a Greater U.S.-Mexico through the phenomenon of runaway productions and using the cultural image of a river. After World War II , many films were shot on location abroad, often in Mexico, as happened, for instance, in the films of John Huston, Budd Boetticher, and George Sherman. Anthony Quinn, a cosmopolitan actor of Mexican origin, was also involved in B westerns set at the border. Similarly, Gilbert Roland was involved in many SBWs set and shot in Mexico, moving his career away from the image of the Latin Lover to embrace a transnational notion of a cowboy hero, a proud Mexican vaquero. Films such as *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher, 1958), *Treasure of Pancho Villa* (George Sherman, 1955),

and *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer, 1956) show the legendary fight of the *Villistas* in a sympathetic light. In this chapter, I expand Cristopher Frayling's analysis of Zapata-Spaghetti westerns by attributing the mercenary-into-friendship plot to this last group of SBWs. Here, sympathetic Anglos are persuaded to join their Mexican friends according to a mindset that is not unilaterally identified with the political vision of Latin America that the U.S. nurtured. According to some scholars, in fact, the American saviors appeared in many of the earlier westerns where "Anglo cowboys fought 'bad Mexicans' in defense of 'good Mexicans' because the Mexicans could not help themselves" (Rodríguez 2004: 125). I argue that this is not a simple endorsement of the Cold War legend of the good Samaritans because in many occasions the Anglos are saved by their connection with Mexican friends and by their openness to a foreign culture.

CHAPTER ONE
Theory and Methodology

Hollywood cross-border encounters

Camilla Fojas argues that in Hollywood the southwestern border is a catalyst of anxiety-ridden emotions, from disdain to attraction, that have always represented the relationship between self and other in the American mind. While Fojas is surely right, what is less satisfactory is her final remark about Hollywood stories often exploiting "the trope of the southern border between the U.S. and Mexico to capture a range of 'American' ideals and values—integrity, moral clarity, industriousness, rugged survivalism, confidence, and self-sufficiency" (Fojas 2008: 2). In Fojas' opinion, classical Hollywood films reject the condition of economic and political interdependence and mutual influences to highlight an eternal national character forged on the frontier. Even in the presence of a reassessment of traumatic events of the past, Hollywood border films are bound to refuse undesirable or unassimilable people—Mexicans, Native Americans, and racially mixed characters—concluding with a restoration of the American way (Ibid. 2). She is particularly clear in arguing that the border cannot be measured in any way as a contact zone, appearing instead as a place of hyper-contrast connoting a fortified nation that rebuffs harmful and unwanted populations or ideas coming from the other side of a hypothetical wall. The final result is a ratification of the supposed economic, political, and moral superiority of the U.S. and additional evidence that a cross-border dialogue is highly improbable due to a biased American society (Ibid. 2). This chapter argues instead that the shades through which Hollywood has depicted the border in the past are more complex than suggested by Fojas, mainly because simplistic ideas that reiterate a monolithic concept of American-self have coexisted with other discourses. In classical westerns, the U.S.-Mexico border is more than just a pretext for consolidating identity. In many cases, it appears as the vital repository of mobile social identities that are only partially conformist, cohesive, and homogeneous. The southwestern border is a hybrid space that attracts mobile identities from different origins, foreigners, and new settlers,

inducing essentialist positions to change through persistent contact with other equally mobile identities.

Fojas points to three basic reasons to sustain her argument. First, the abiding stereotype of Mexicans has become the symbolic center of Hollywood borderland narratives since the late 1910s. One of the most derogatory images of Mexicans, popular at the turn of the twentieth century, was that of the greaser. The term originates from the Anglo perception that Mexicans' brownish complexion was the result of applying grease over skin while working as carriers loading heavy burdens in cargo-wagons (Fojas 2008: 6). This job increased their skins' color, also suggesting scarce hygiene and proclivity for violent or illegal behaviors. The term was in common usage among U.S. troops during the Mexican–American War (1846-1848) and was expanded to nineteenth-century dime novels and early silent films such as *Tony the Greaser* (1914), *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914), *The Greaser's Revenge* (1914), and *Guns and Greasers* (1918). The misuse of the term facilitated the extension from earliest silent era "greasers" to subsequent stereotypes of Mexicans in Hollywood cinema. Generally presented as bandits (the men) and prostitutes (the women), the Mexicans were associated with the full range of shades in the portrayal of evilness: irrational violence, dishonesty, dementia, brutal behavior, moral degeneration, and sexual urges, often associated to physical aspects (unclean hair or missing teeth). Charles Ramírez Berg identifies the geopolitical agenda behind the persistence of this stereotype in the mass media, writing that the case "involves a discursive system that might be called Latinism [a play on Edward Said's *Orientalism*]: the construction of Latin America and of Latinos in this country to justify the United States' imperialistic goals" (Berg 2002: 167). Hollywood endorsed American dominance of the hemisphere, as Berg points out, often depicting that hegemony uncritically, therefore preventing future change. Mexicans thus appeared in racially stigmatized images in order to justify and perpetuate the discourse of domination.

The second reason Fojas identifies to sustain her idea of Hollywood's unilateral portrayal and hegemonic strategy is the erasure or distortion that border cinema made of historical and cultural traditions of Mexican origin. The figure of forgetful and disrespectful cowboys plagiarizing skills and

traditions from Mexican vaqueros rose to massive popularity in dime novels, comics, Wild West shows, high literature, and figurative arts, occupying the central position on the classical Hollywood screen. The same kind of exploitation is detectable in the long list of mystifications that involved General Pancho Villa and Mexican Revolutionaries portrayed as bandits without any form of historical awareness and authenticity. Historical events such as the battle of the Alamo (February 23-March 6, 1836) was often presented as a romantic myth for every Texan of Anglo origin, demonstrating the willingness to erase its significance for Tejano-Mexicanos (Richard Flores 2002: xvii, 11).

The third reason is the neurosis and insecurity about self-identity that American culture tends to wipe off in the filmic representation of national identity. The Americans might even be beaten, but they always end up confirming everlasting visions that mask fragilities and insecurities and avoid any chance for true dynamic evolution. There is no space for self-scrutiny, no internal purpose to dismantle the bold attitudes of Anglo Americans confronting the southern neighbor.

This chapter aims to enlarge this vision and go beyond excessive particularism or blind victimization. Hollywood's representational and narrative codes mirror partial decisions and unilateral views designed to serve a dominant agenda. Even when the best intention of being true to the subject is involved, films made by white people for white audiences will inevitably see in Mexicans (or whatever other minority) what they want to see, what they need to see. As is declared in the first pages of the excellent volume written by Edward Buscombe on the representation of Natives in Hollywood, it is preferable to present the argument about the mystifying stereotype and distortion as a starting point, not as a conclusion. As the author points out, readers should be already persuaded that Hollywood films are not accurate historical records and are interested in perpetuating dominant positions (Buscombe 2006: 184). Still, we can also admit that the wants and needs of a dominant group are not just complex and miscellaneous in a specific interval of time, but they also change over time. This point allows us to understand the complicated pathways through which cinema history reaches the present sensibility. This chapter wants to pursue this pathway to see if the road

can appear dynamic and winding instead of eternally fixed. Firstly, the stereotyping process is the result of a long history of spectacles and stage shows that progressively changed when ordinances and rules started to ban the exhibition of films encouraging race hatred (Serna 2014: 3077–3622). Secondly, bilingual productions in the early phase of talkies offered many working opportunities to actors, screenwriters, and filmmakers of ethnic origins interested in promoting less stereotypical images about themselves. Further, the consumption of Hollywood bilingual products in Mexico attests to a fondness for many celebrities of ethnic or mixed origins, promoting more tolerant visions. Thirdly, from the point of view of the plots, we also find romantic portrayals of bigger-than-life Mexican Revolutionaries or American bandits, often depicted in a similar light. By moving the focus toward the southwestern border, a blurred territory reveals a transnational, cosmopolitan character.

Stereotyping processes are not necessarily equivalent to prejudice. According to Walter Lippmann, who first coined the term "stereotyping" in 1922, if prejudices and biases are expressions of hatred and disparagement, appearing as a reactionary act of ignorant and racist people, stereotypes can be neutral or hollow figures applied to the entire spectrum of ethnicities and utilized for narrative purposes (something similar to Hollywood typecasting, which also involved white Anglo actors). In printing, a stereotype, stereo-plate, or stereo is a solid plate of type metal cast from a *papier-mâché* or plaster mold made from an original plate. This procedure of arranging types from a plaster mold is not so different from the process whereby roles and parts were attributed in the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* (sixteenth century), where stock characters were taken from the *canovaccio* (the mold of a script) and treated according to a modular approach. Nobody would have taken these masks too seriously. At the same time, we can acknowledge, beyond a fictive charade of exaggerations and distortions, some capacity to reveal universal truths about vices, desires, and human weaknesses. Nonetheless, one could argue that a racist reason was behind the decision to *often* attribute derogatory stereotyping to ethnic minorities. One of the worst instances of derogatory stereotyping is in the minstrel show, a form of theater that originated in the U.S. during the early nineteenth century. It involved predominantly white actors donning blackface makeup to depict racial stereotypes of

African Americans humorously. This practice was highly derogatory and thoroughly out of sync with contemporary social norms. Still, many authors have emphasized the multilayered functions and meanings attributed to these degrading representations (Toll 1970; Bean et al. 1996; Lott [1993] 2013; Lhamon Jr. [1998] 2000). The untamed characters of Tambo and Bones were based on a racist representation that had to magnify the otherness of marginal groups as a response to social anxiety and fears of self-reflexive degradation. These representations betoken some doubleness or complementarity with the dominant group's drives and needs. In this case, stereotyping is not a neutral or innocent process since it responds to the needs of a discursive act that uses otherness to offer humorous comments or to vent to universal urges that were not admissible. Still, in the numerous instances where a black actor was wearing a black mask, the process was subtler since it was often intended a means of social defense. On top of that, this sort of derogatory practice changed following different historical moments.

Similarly, the images of Latinos changed in the course of time. If, up to a certain period (the 1910s), images offered through the American press and motion pictures industry invariably characterized Latinos as the vilest villains capable of the worst actions, the situation began to change when pressures coming from foreign public opinion led to take direct action. The modification may not reflect a fundamental change in dominant moral values. However, it mirrored the increasing importance of the global markets for Hollywood, whose requests became so high that they solicited the creation of centralized authorities in the industry to provide representational guidelines for every product.

The most conspicuous regulation came from the Production Code in 1930, a form of self-regulatory practice in industry policy furnishing instructions and recommendations that emphasized strong morality in the treatment of sex and crime. They mainly pertained religion, politics (domestic and foreign), national symbols (flags, for instance), and corporate capitalism but also involved ethnic minorities. Ruth Vasey emphasizes that films were regulated in light of the effects they had not only on American citizens but also on a global audience, in a way that fully reflected the principles of

international diplomacy. Vasey points out that the international field began to exercise an increasingly wider range of influences on the Hollywood entourage. As a response, in the 1920s, the MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America) began to focus its effort on the creation of a Foreign Department in New York, responsible for trade negotiations and diplomatic contacts, and tasked with transmitting audience pressures and claims to producers (Vasey 1997: 8–16). The country in which pressures were threatening enough to induce the MPPDA to take action was Mexico. One of the first complaints came from the fact that western films—in Vasey's words, a "staple of American film production" (Ibid. 19)—regularly presented Mexicans as villains or greasers, following a previous tendency in popular literature (see also Stanfield 1987: 97-112). The situation partly changed when the Mexican government grew tired of "complaining fruitlessly about individual instances of offence" and began to boycott Hollywood products in 1922 (Ibid. 19). Laura Isabel Serna indicates that the Mexican government banned the films of companies such as Aywon Films, Metro Pictures, Educational Films, Christie Comedies, and Warner Bros., requiring their retirement from global circulation since they could impede the development of lucrative commercial relations between other countries and Mexico due to the negative image of Mexicans circulating worldwide (Serna 2014: 3304). The ban was followed by a reaction of the foreign relations agency of the MPPDA. According to Vasey, the head of the office, Bernon T. Woodle, "spent three months negotiating with the Mexican government and eventually managed to persuade them to uplift the ban" (Vasey 1997: 20). The perspective of losing the entire Mexican market due to the boycott was an important enough reason to persuade the studios to avoid the production of films presenting similar negative figures. For Hollywood studios, the damage in the reputation and prestige of one of them would have resulted in ruining the entire American cinema industry and its interest in the foreign markets. The agreement established a change in contents[1] to prevent a terrible loss in economic and

[1] Laura Isabel Serna argues that it was more a diversion of arguments than a change in contents. The final agreement between Woodle and the Obregón government did little to alter contents for two reasons. First, the domestic audience was the primary source of revenue, and the American audience had few objections to those stereotypical representations. Also, the rationalization of the production process made the insertion of new formulas difficult, and Hollywood preferred

financial profits; the immediate result was the emergence of *caballeros* and Latin lovers who reversed the stereotype on a positive note, still presenting a basic formula that was presumably appealing to American mainstream audiences.[2]

After the introduction of sound films many occasions for the convergence between the Mexican and American film industries occurred. Mexico was the first to demand changes in the portrayal of Mexicans offered by Hollywood films; it was also the first country to open negotiations, trade agreements, and contracts with Hollywood (de las Carreras and Horak 2017: 5–31). The transition to sound led to expanding the market in the early 1930s, which marked the increasing production of bilingual products distributed to hundreds of theatres in the United States. The venues located in downtown Los Angeles, such as the Teatro Eléctrico, the California, the Roosevelt, the Mason, the Azteca, the Million Dollar, and the Mayan were particularly interested in similar screenings. Hollywood aimed to reach out to non-English speaking audiences so studios translated the scripts and filmed at night on the same sets used in the English versions, but with different actors and directors.[3] The decade also saw the expansion of movies shot in Mexico by producers of Mexican origin, who started to distribute their products in American cities to satisfy niches of Spanish-speaking audiences living in Los Angeles. Frank Fouce, the Calderón Brothers, and Juan Salas Porras (see footnote n. 4) started to invade the American market, founding or buying theaters in both countries, often establishing their head offices along the border cities of El Paso and Laredo. By focusing on the first steps in their careers,[4] we can see many connections with the evolution of the

to maintain the same codes simply being evasive on the locations, so that a direct connection between places and populations was less clear (Serna 2014: 2245–3571).

[2] Allen L. Woll explains how one of the first exceptions to the rule of despicable greasers in 1910s Hollywood was the movie *Tony the Greaser* (1911). Against the backdrop of the persistence of old stereotypes, this film presents a nobler figure. Here, Tony saves the landowner's daughter from marauding Mexican bandits, representing one of the first instances of the Good Mexican/Bad Mexican paradigm in American cinema (a paradigm that anticipates the two-fold figure of Good Indian/Bad Indian that we would find in 1950s westerns). One of the advertisements reads: "From force of habit, some might call him a Greaser; true, he is a Mexicano, but a man of noble instincts and chivalrous nature" (Woll 1980: 55).

[3] The urtext of the history of Hollywood bilingual productions was written in 1990 by Juan Heinink and Robert G. Dickson, "Cita en Hollywood", translated and re-published in de las Carreras and Horak 2017: 65-82.

[4] The Azteca Film is a perfect instance of how well Mexican businessmen had learned the lesson from the movie moguls who founded Hollywood: the Calderón brothers acquired a virtual monopoly in exporting Spanish-language movies to

business of Jewish movie moguls such as Louis B. Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, Harry Cohn, Adolph Zukor. They were all salesmen and merchants at the beginning of their careers and later expanded their income through the acquisition of chains of theaters. This was an important lesson learned by Mexican producers and distributors from Hollywood studios' strategies and vertical integration.

Bilingual productions also attracted talented Spanish-speaking writers, actors, and directors to Hollywood. Apart from illustrating the technological/industrial complexity of the transition from silents to the sound era—one of the most hellish struggles was *la guerra de los acentos*, the war of accents, due to the fact that the Spanish spoken by actors with diverse ethnic origins (Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Costa Rica, Spain) presented different inflections, resulting in boycotts and claims—, these bilingual productions offered Mexican actors the first occasion to develop technical knowledge and skills, representing a wonderful boost for careers on the rise (de las Carreras and Horak 2017: 5). An increasing number of Latin actors, mainly Mexicans, hired in the Hollywood studios, took the chance to express their talents showcasing "the idiosyncrasies, traditions, and cultures of Latin America and Spain" (Ibid. 6). As Dyer points out, there are peculiar markers of a specific performance such as voice, facial expressions, gestures, body postures and movements (Dyer 1998: 134) that studios tried to maintain, even highlight, emphasizing a touch of ethnicity in its actors' performance. Against a tendency to promote a fluent, grammatically correct, free of dialects, and well-spoken movie speech, Hollywood partly nurtured 'other voices,' as Hirsch puts it, "voices oozing with personality and vernacular verity" (Hirsch 1991: 201), as trademarks of each actor's personality. To please audience's desire for exoticism, the ethnic origin of successful Mexican actors

the U.S. to satisfy the growing market of Spanish-speaking audiences (de las Carreras and Horak 2017: 5, 24–26). The Azteca controlled the entire chain of production, distribution, and exhibition as every other vertically integrated majors in the U.S. did. As Horak writes, three persons were involved in this initial phase: producer Frank Fouce and the Calderón Brothers, José and Rafael, who were exhibitors and distributors. Fouce was born in Honolulu from Spanish parents and migrated to Los Angeles, where he began to work in Columbia's Spanish-language film production unit (Ibid.17). In Los Angeles Fouce met the Calderón brothers, who started out as exhibitors in Chihuahua and in 1920 expanded their activity across the border, to El Paso and San Antonio. Their main interest was boosting the film industry in Mexico but they were "also interested in gaining access to the Spanish-language audiences living in the U.S., owning distribution offices in San Antonio, Denver, Chicago, and New York" (Ibid. 26). For similar information about the circuit of cinema theaters owned by the Calderón brothers in association with Juan Salas Porras, former store's manager of *El Nuevo Mundo*, a store specialized in dry goods from Europe and from the U.S., see Laura Isabel Serna 2014: 4002–4006.

such as Ramón Novarro, Dolores Del Río, and Lupe Vélez was foregrounded. The Spanish-language journal "Cinelandia", published in Los Angeles by the Spanish American Publishing Company,[5] promoted bilingual Hollywood films focusing on Lupe Vélez's sweet and warm personality. On the cover of the February 1930 issue, Vélez appears in a portrait that exalts her ethnic beauty: full lips, olive skin, big and luminous dark eyes. The coal-black hair is tied in a feminine and stylish ponytail behind her neck, while a lock is curling close to the ear. She wears Art Deco earrings to reveal her association with modernity and class, and a fiery look speaks about her refusal to appear as an incarnation of outmoded womanhood. Ana López discusses Vélez's sexual appeal, revealing outrageous, aggressive, and defiant elements, something that represents a standpoint of proud and untamable ethnicity (López 1991: 412; Rodriguez 2004: 65–73). Many different aspects of these heterogeneous screen personae unified under the label of more or less visible Mexican *caballeros* and *señoritas* can be scrutinized.[6] However, it is the social and economic power embodied by emancipated and successful ethnic women that is worth noting. They may have been threatening to the eyes of the American mainstream, or stereotyped to Hispanic audiences but, as women and actresses, they also encapsulated the epitome of liberation and emancipation. The freedom they incarnated was truly revolutionary and they were able, on the screen at least, to love and make love without any restrictions or shame.

The industrial connection between Mexico and Hollywood happened under the imprint of modernity. Differently from Europe, where the concept of national cinema asserts a form of resistance against the dominant international cinema produced by Hollywood, Mexico has used exhibition and

[5] On the web-site of Media History Digital Library, created by the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research and coordinated by Eric Hoyt, we read that "Cinelandia" emerged "from the United States but engaged with other cultures through their own unique perspectives. The word "Cinelandia" refers both to tinseltown and to the Hollywood culture as seen and experienced by Mexican moviegoers. https://mediahistoryproject.org/collections/spanish/#cinelandia.

[6] The case of Carmen Miranda would lead us too far, but it is highly significant since Miranda transposes her supposed *latinidad* into a declared regime of spectacularity, conveying a subtle discourse on ethnic issues in the cinema. She is a splendid instance of a reworking of ethnic codes as a social defense. Other actors were more prone to a desire to be assimilated into the mainstream group. One of them was Rita Hayworth, whose *latinidad* was never openly expressed. As we will see in the following chapters, Gilbert Roland represents an entirely different case since, in the first part of his career, he remained generally typecast in the role of Latin lover or in ethnic roles not necessarily identified with a Mexican character to completely shifts the trajectory of his career in the post-war era and in the sub-genre of SBWs.

consumption of Hollywood films at the border within a national agenda that wished to present moviegoing not as evidence of American cultural imperialism but as a mark of Mexico's modernity (Serna 2009: 143; Serna 2014: 261–286). Mexican producers and exhibitors adopted commercial skills from movie moguls and were able to apply them with creativity, prowess, and competence; actors, screenwriters and directors cut their teeth in Hollywood bilingual productions, bringing to the Mexican film industry new energy and life; consumers found new models for a modern behavior: they all saw the opportunity to exploit the system with the intention of making the best out of it.

Bandits and heroes

Such connections devised at the level of industry had positive repercussions on the movies' plots. However, not every film was expression of similar openness. American businessman, newspaper publisher, and Republican politician William Randolph Hearst had extensive investment in Mexico—"millions of dollars' worth of oil, mining, timber, and chicle holdings" (Brownlow 1978: 2088–2099). He decided to cover the Revolution in Mexico from a jingoistic point of view, afraid that the new political situation would mine his interests. A first result was the serial *Patria* (1916-1917), that depicted a Mexican-Japanese alliance that would have subverted the United States. In *Liberty*, another serial distributed by Universal in 1916, the Punitive Expedition of General Pershing—who crossed the Mexican border in search of Pancho Villa after the latter attacked the 13th Cavalry Regiment in Columbus on March 1916—was depicted as a fair attempt to stop a purported conspiracy between Germany and Mexico. The border conflict was evidently imagined in connection to the situation of the First World War and to coeval imperialist rivalries. However, in the years before these controversial instances, which dated 1916 and 1917, we find different portrayals of General Villa and the Mexican Revolution.

In *A Prisoner of Mexico* (Kalem Company, 1911), the Revolution was portrayed as a struggle for freedom nurtured by popular malcontents. The mercenaries involved in the fights were patriots, ready to die so that Mexico can proudly take its place "among the leaders of the world" (Brownlow

1978: 2110). One of the first and most consistently favorable images of Villa was offered in *The Life of General Villa* (Christy Cabanne 1914), filmed by the Mutual Film Company. It premiered at the Lyric Theatre in New York on 9 May 1914, and starred future director Raoul Walsh in the role of young Villa, Mae Marsh and, notably, Pancho Villa, who played himself. The film was a revision of the disputed image of the General as an indomitable and ruthless man, created through a charismatic, strong, fierce, and bigger-than-life personality, that of Villa himself.[7]

In her analysis of the figure of Pancho Villa in American cinema, Deborah Mistron argues that westerns depicting Villa were forced to erase the complexity of his screen persona because the conventions of the genre required the distinction between proper and improper uses of violence. In westerns, brutality and violence should be *only* justified in the interest of democracy or when they are supported by proper values such as communal interest, social protection and other forms of welfare. As the American enemy, Villa could not be associated with a proper use of violence conducted in the interest of democracy. The western hero is either "the lawgiver or the gunfighter, the patriot or the tyrant but never both at the same time" (Mistron 1983: 1–13, quote: 1) and obviously Villa was more a tyrant and a gunfighter than a lawgiver and a patriot. Following this rationale, Carlos Cortés points out that Mexican Revolutionaries are either portrayed negatively, as bandits, or positively, but *only* when they depend on Anglo mercenaries in a subordinate relationship (Cortés 1989: 98, 109). This paragraph aims to show how SBWs on General Villa tend to reproduce instead the dichotomy and ambiguity described by Margarita de Orellana for *The Life of General Villa.* The concept of "controlled indeterminacy" (Maltby 2003: 550), which is unique to Hollywood films and particularly to westerns, allows Villa to embody both the roles of a lawgiver and a gunfighter *simultaneously*. This ambiguity adds depth to the character, extending the multifaceted character we

[7] In 2004 HBO produced a TV movie, *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*, with Antonio Banderas in the role of Villa. This film recounts the events behind the filming of *The Life of General Villa*, which is considered lost. The absence of the film does not allow us to be more precise but primal sources attest to the fact that it wanted "to illuminate the motives of a patriot". After the Columbus Raid, Villa's image changed in the American mind and "the social bandit, the just man in whom the Americans placed their hopes, would become definitely the savage thirsty for their blood" (de Orellana 2009: 58-65; quote: 64; "Bioscope", 18 February 1915, p. 627).

found in westerns set south of the border. Villa thus appears like a cowboy and an outlaw, displaying both nobility and eccentricity.

The enigmatic ambivalence of Villa is reactivated, after the interval represented by the Punitive Expedition (1916-1917), in *Viva Villa* (Jack Conway, 1934). The film is a rich reproduction of the life events of the General, produced by David O. Selznick and distributed by MGM; it was also a hit not least for its four Academy nominations. The screenplay was written by Ben Hecht from a 1933 biography by Edgecumb Pinchon and the film starred Wallace Beery in the role of the General. Beery imbued his performance with a wide range of emotions from rage to nostalgia, showing the character's ambivalence. Before the opening scene, onscreen intertitles declare that "this saga of the Mexican hero […] is a fiction woven out of truth, and inspired by a love of the half-legendary Pancho and the glamorous country he served", a declaration that may sound as preventive self-defence against criticism for stereotypical representation. In the opening scene, the description of the life event that led the young boy to become the General clearly identifies the person who is responsible for the poor condition of destitute Mexicans: Díaz, the "tyrant", and the elite of the estate owners. Pancho is surely a violent man, but his violence has understandable reasons. Villa's bad-tempered personality appears, in fact, as a reaction against a long chain of abuses and discriminations inflicted on poor farm workers by *hacendados* and *federales* administered by president Porfirio Díaz. Four close-ups of the campesinos do not just reveal the influence of Eisenstein's intense portrait of Mexicans in *Que Viva Mexico* (1931) but also identify the characters with whom the film sympathizes. When Villa's father dares to respond to Don Rodrigo (George Regas), who has previously forced them to leave the agave plantation on which they are toiling all day, the cause of the campesinos is clearly expressed: "We have been slaves, now we become dogs. But we are not dogs; we are men" [*Viva Villa*, 00:04:44-00:04:50]. Villa's father takes a handful of earth from the ground —"just give us this much"—but Don Rodrigo gives the order to give him with one hundred lashes. When the poor man dies, hung on the whipping post, a detail of his fist shows the earth hidden inside, the only reason he had to live and

die. The sequence of events justifies the murder young Villa commits in retaliation for these hideous actions and for the dissemination of terror Don Rodrigo is causing over his homeland.

The fatherly figure of Madero (Henry B. Walthall) is the one who digs out from the General the positive attitude of a peon, taming that of a violent man since he sees in him not just the vindictive murderer but the honest farmer who fights for the fate of Mexico. "I did not send for Pancho Villa, the bandit; I sent for Pancho Villa the peon, the man whose father was whipped to death" [*Viva Villa*, 00:24:00–00:24:40]: Madero's words at the beginning of their first meeting initiate a discourse that reinforces the values shown in the opening scene but relieved of the violence that accompanied it. The violent behavior cannot be endorsed by Madero but is understood and read as a comprehensible response to stop Díaz, the tyrant—which is a perfect interpretation of the justification of violence in westerns. Like the script, the filmic codes depict Madero as a representative of democracy, clearly upholding a political vision consistent with the American system of government. Still, it should be noted that also in Mexico, the memory and myth of the Revolution show Madero as "The Apostle of Democracy", a true believer in the possibility of increasing political liberty and of extending the circle of democracy (Benjamin 2000: 84–91). The movie thus chooses a standpoint not so different from that conveyed in the memory of the Revolution accepted and divulged in Mexico. The memory of the Revolution in Mexico remembers Pancho Villa, on the other hand, as "The Strong Arm of the Revolution", the man who raised a military force to fight the regimes, first of Díaz, then of Huerta, becoming one of the most important commanders in the Constitutionalist Army (Ibid. 123–134). Villa is in fact shown as irascible and rude, a compulsive womanizer and a superstitious man, naive in making decisions on economic policies but ready and pragmatic in those related to the military force. His obsession with bulls and his belief that pigeons bring misfortune is a melodramatic representation of how his wicked tendency and violent behavior often prevail over tolerance and grace. However, he is also sincere and trustworthy, mainly when dealing with Madero, the representative of the proper use of violence. Villa's devotion to Madero is absolute and incontestable, and this kind of integrity is displayed in his willingness to reject the dishonesty that comes with positions of power.

The rejection of the position of power is a crucial point in Villa's portrayal since it testifies to the connection between Villa and his peons over and above the link between him and corrupt power. During the banquet, his discourse declares the real intention that led Villa, the "Strong Arm of the Revolution", to act violently in the interest of democracy and social welfare: "I came to Mexico City to bring Mr. Madero's laws, now I go back home," Villa declares, ultimately upholding Madero's conviction that Mexico City "is no good place" for him [*Viva Villa*, 01:37:43–01:38:25]. The camera shows him in a frontal perspective at the center of the frame: his figure perfectly divides the series of guests sitting at his table, aligned on the right and the left side of the screen. The General is wholly endorsed and fortified by the image of Madero, portrayed in the extensive frame hanging on the wall behind his back. Despite its simplicity, the political speech shows the positive side of his naïveté and preserves the integrity of a character never shown separated from his people. Shortly before the sequence in which he resigns, a montage of shots recounts the increasing mobilization of campesinos who do not hesitate to help Villa in his cause, seconding his desire to revenge the killing of the "poor little fella", Madero. The intertitle "Villa wants you" used during the montage is accompanied by the famous song "La Cucaracha", aspects that do not leave doubts about a desire to extend cultural codes that belonged to the U.S. and project them into the national frame of Mexico and its culture. The operation can be arguable but Villa's charismatic power to rouse his people is undeniable. Campesinos are shown bringing guns, ammunition, resources, and energy to their leader with no hesitation. The link is reinforced by the connection between their courage and desire to fight for their rights and Villa's intrepid stance.[8]

Villa's honesty and bravery should also be considered a counterpoint to Johnny Sykes's (Stuart Erwin) penchant for deceptive behavior. Johnny is the American newspaperman who

[8] The theme of Villa's bravery is an important theme in the film. When General Pascal (Joseph Schildkraut) is beaten and, as a prisoner of Villa, is led to face the General, he claims that—differently from Villa—he is not afraid to die. Villa replies that he is not afraid to die either, since he has no affection left after Madero was killed. The sequence probably corrects the possible perception of Villa as a coward produced by a previous sequence in which he begs General Pascal to spare his life since the cause of the revolution is not over and he must help Madero in his intent. In any case, his heroism is never questioned; what is questioned in the film is Villa's violent behavior (shown in the scene of Pascal's killing, whose gruesome details could be appropriate to a horror film), not his courage. Still, as I try to show, the violence finds also its reasons and justification.

befriends Villa with the initial purpose of exploiting a privileged position to depict the events of the Revolution. His intentions are not completely honest since he does not want to depict these events faithfully. He simply wishes to maintain his exclusivity over other newspaper journalists. He is a humorous character but a rascal conman nonetheless. While Johnny is in Mexico, Villa's country, to make the scoop of his life, busy in the effort to take advantage of Mexico's turmoil, Villa is sent in exile to the U.S., Johnny's country, and precisely to Texas, where he finds only deprivation and intolerance. This parallel explains the uneven relationship between the two, showing Villa's devotion to Mexico and his fondness for the patriotic cause in a sympathetic light, clearly highlighted against the foil of Johnny's deceitful attitudes.

The relationship between Villa and Johnny grows throughout the film, representing, at the end, another instance of the homosocial bonding that is so diffuse and complex in the western. Their relationship is based on mutual exploitation—Villa obtains popularity from Johnny, and Johnny receives access to the front line of events from Villa—but it reveals further details along the process. In the last scene of Villa's death, for instance, Johnny is the only one who remains faithful to the General, not only sharing the anguish of the last minutes with him but also shaping the outline of Villa's public memory on respect and admiration. Villa appears as a "Wild Heart who had not fought in vain," as the superimposed text wishes to suggest. Villa's last words, addressed to his American friend, underscore the concept—"what have I done wrong?"—a question that echoes coeval charismatic screen characters such as Rico Bandello, Tony Montana, or Tom Powers, who appeared dangerously charming to the audience. However, Villa's reasons are more clearly exposed and preserved within the filmic structure than those upholding Rico, Tony, and Tom's actions.

Deborah Mistron asserts that the characteristics of Villa's personality that the American cinema tends to glorify are downplayed in Mexican cinema, mainly when the glorified traits are Villa's exaggerated enthusiasm and naïveté. *Viva Villa* represents, nonetheless, the first attempt that Hollywood made to offer a multilayered portrayal of one of the most famous heroes of the Mexican Revolution. The film was probably one of the first instances in which the Revolution was not viewed

as a looming threat against American lifestyles coming from the margins of the nation (sadly, a pastime for those living along the southwestern border was watching the gruesome spectacle of battles happening very close to the boundary). Instead, an effort to catch Villa's complexity is made that would have changed the perception of Mexico in the American sensibility. Despite contrasts and imbalances, the men chosen and depicted as heroes by the American screen were not different from those remembered in the official memory of the Mexican Revolution in Mexico, and this similarity functioned as an essential hook capturing the interests of the Mexican sector of mainstream audiences.

Like Villa, portrayed in 1934 as a foreign hero caught between terror and honesty, the figure of the social bandit is ambiguous and controversial. It is a transnational and highly popular image, presented with slight variations among national traditions. In Hobsbawm's words, social bandits are

> outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of the liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported (Hobsbawm 2000 [1969]: 19).

We have *bandoleros* in Spain, *banditi* in Italy, *shiftas* in the Horn of Africa, and many other declinations that cannot be now considered. Even if this figure is diffused in traditional societies more than in modern countries based on advanced agrarian system and capitalism (such as the U.S.), social banditry remains "one of the most universal social phenomena known to history, and one of the most amazingly uniform" (Ibid. 21). What makes it transnational is the ideological basis on which it is founded, being almost always a challenge against economic and political orders. Bandits all over the world are fighting "those who hold or lay claim to power, law, and the control of resources" (Ibid. 7). Ned Kelly (Australia), Maté Cocido (David Segundo Peralta, Argentina), Joaquin Murrieta (Mexico), Gregorio Cortez (Mexico), and Jesse James (U.S.) are essentially heroes who rebel against a capitalist economy based on bank credits and mortgages. Terror and cruelty are combined with nobility in men who robbed, burned, and murdered for one reason: retaliation against the insatiable rapacity of one class over the other or against any form of persecution (Ibid. 10, 68, 70–71, 186). Like modern Robin Hoods, ready to champion the poor against the rich, the seeker of justice against the

rule of the unjust, many western heroes are outlaws rebelling against established social and legal codes in the name of the poorest or the weakest.

Outlaws from both sides of the border represent the joy of a carefree life to be championed against the rules of social ideology. They uphold the values of community, equality, and justice against the impositions of the political system. In particular, there is not such a big difference between a fictional 'desperado' such as Joaquín Murrieta (1829–1853), the noble robber who sustains Mexicans against the profit-driven intentions of the Anglos in early California, and American outlaws like Jesse James (1847–1882) and his brother Frank (1843–1915). They operated in the West, but anarchic and revolutionary drives also marked their legacy.[9] The differences between General Villa and Joaquín Murrieta or the Jameses are numerous. Equally different were the governments and political systems in which they operated. However, the ideological roots and the imaginary investment behind their deeds are comparable (Ibid. 48–57, 93–119).

Michael Denning highlights a connection between rural audiences and the figure of the outlaw in many western novels since the publication of Irwin P. Beadle & Company's *Dime Books* (1860), where early colonial tales of pioneers, scouts, and Indian fighters were balanced against a wide range of fiction about working-girls or outlaws, all particularly appealing to the immigrant working classes on the rise and about to delineate the linings of mass culture (Denning 1998, [1987]: 15–16). Since the 1870s, dime novels have told stories of outlaws such as Deadwood Dick, Jesse James, or Joaquín Murrieta, all marked by the same ideological stance and belief: their social and political concerns are those of the contemporary readers of mass cultural products, i.e., the issues of capital formation, class and interest groups, how to cope with the imperatives of progress and technological development. As Denning writes, these social bandits allowed their readers to understand the nation's political structures, and their tales were "less stories of the Wild West than stories of Labor and Capital" (Ibid. 161–166, quote: 163). Even if it may sound haphazard, we can say that, at least in terms of contents,

[9] Jesse, in particular, interpreted the claims and political requests of Grangerism and of the People's Party for rural Midwest people during the last three decades of the century (Hobsbawm [1969] 2000: 185–186).

there is a direct line connecting the dime novel *Deadwood Dick* (1870) to *Viva Villa* (Jack Conway 1935). The same line can be devised between *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* (William Wellman 1936), starring Warner Baxter in the role of Joaquín Murrieta, and *Jesse James* (Henry King 1939), where the protagonist is played by Henry Fonda.

The transnational legacy Hobsbawm described in social bandits can also be scrutinized in *Jesse James*. The film was directed by Henry King, who had already given a subtle description of poverty in *One More Spring* (1935). The script was written by Nunnally Johnson, who worked for the Twentieth Century Fox's production of *Jesse James* shortly before adapting for the screen John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Steinbeck recounted in this novel the story of the Joads, the Oklahoma family of farmers forced during the Great Depression to emigrate to California. John Ford's *Grapes of Wrath* was released the year after, in 1940, starring almost all of the main protagonists of the cast of *Jesse James*: Henry Fonda, Jane Darwell, John Carradine. The political background is, in fact, the same: like the Joads, the Jameses are forced to leave their lands because of progress, in the former represented by mechanized agriculture, in the latter, by the St. Louis Midland Rail Road.

Jesse James (Tyrone Power) and Frank James (Henry Fonda) do not elicit the same emotions that Villa, a foreign hero, may conjure up in spectators. Power and Fonda are handsome young men able to play virile, dynamic, fearless, and spirited American characters for a genuinely American audience. They could tap into physical resources that are lacking in Beery's Villa. The specularity between the mainstream audience and the national qualities (youth, energy, dynamism) represented by Power and Fonda is detectable in the final epitaph recited by the newspaperman of the little Missouri town where the Jameses live. Major Rufus Cobb (Henry Hull) remembers Jesse with a colorful expression that explodes with patriotic hyperboles: "he was one of the doggonedest, gold-dingedest, dad-blamedest buckaroos that ever rode across these United States of America!". While Jesse's evilness is being bedecked with national gold, Villa's penchant for violence can only be

channeled into a commitment to a different country, Mexico. Still, the reasons that initially drove them—Villa and the Jameses—to action are the same.

In the opening scene of King's film, for instance, the despicable act of government agents forcing poor farmers out of their land moves the brothers to fight. The agent of the railroad, Barshee (Brian Donlevy), violently beats a farm boy and then attempts to kill Frank with a sickle. When their mother, Mrs. Samuels (Jane Darwell), is killed by a bomb thrown by Barshee, violence bursts out in the town, and from the atmosphere of terror derives a guerrilla warfare. The radicalism of their retaliation is not reduced or softened in the course of the film, reaching its apex in one of the most beautifully shot scenes, when the gang assaults the passengers traveling in the railroad cars. On top of the train, Jesse is framed against the silhouette of the black pine trees (a wilderness) and runs in the same direction of the train but more quickly so that it gives the impression of a powerful desire to stop the advancement of a machine, a desire that leaves behind unaware passengers seating in their comfortable chairs. On the bottom of the screen, they are peacefully immersed in a yellowish, warm light and seem to move in the opposite direction, toward the West, indicating the symbol of the progress the Jameses want to fight. The sense of a hidden danger looming above passengers is palpable: riots, violence, and revolution accompany what is, in the end, a strongly defined polarization along the class divide. On both sides of the border, the violent reaction of these working-class outlaws is produced by the same condition of cruelty or indifference to people's problems imposed by arguable decisions made by the respective governments.

The same ideology is extended to many versions of subsequent anti-heroes, who revise the law or amend their egotistical tendencies to favor the community, as happens in the cases of Ringo (John Wayne) in *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), Clay Hardin (Errol Flynn) in *San Antonio* (David Butler, 1945), Juan Martinez (Anthony Quinn) in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman, 1948), or Cisco Kid, played by Gilbert Roland in the cycle produced by Monogram between 1946 and 1947. Similar roles caught between opposite directions are also detectable in other SBWs considered in this thesis, where the heroes always make space for ideological visions that are not aligned with the

majority. From these films, the instances are repeated to reach Sam Peckinpah's cinema and, beyond him, in a transnational direction, the Spaghetti Western.

The cross-border comparison offered in this paragraph is meant to demonstrate that the presence of the U.S.-Mexico border in westerns can be more than a simple representation of an escape to Mexico for American bandits on the lam. Instead of a situation in which the border divides the good guys (cowboys) from the bad guys (bandits) we have a blurred condition in which Mexican and/or American bandits are, at times, presented through positive traits. Patriotism, honesty, devotion, integrity, collective values, and a sense of justice can be distributed along the border in (almost) equal proportion.

"In landlessness alone resides the highest truth": Looking for cosmopolitan sensibilities

This section develops the transnational dimension of SBW through a quest for cosmopolitan sensibilities. Cosmopolitanism is an attitude of the soul informing a particular behavior, a sensibility based on openness and fluidity more than a systematic doctrine. Sensibility is an individual's emotional response to external influences, a certain kind of sensitivity that affects behavioral patterns before informing theoretical ideas. By using a cosmopolitan approach to SBW, this thesis aims to explore the genre from the nation's margins and decouple it from an exclusively national perspective.

This paragraph draws from Gerard Delanty the pivotal concept of an extension of the moral and political horizons of societies through an attitude of *openness* (Delanty 2019: 873). Delanty points out that three interconnected principles define openness: first, viewing the world through a framework of interpretation that takes into account the variety of its different perspectives; second, the broadening of the moral and political horizon of a community through the value of inclusion; third, cosmopolitanism is essentially imagined as an alternative to the homogenization produced by global markets as well as to narrow nationalism (Delanty, online seminar *Cosmopolitisme*, July 6, 2021). These three aspects are closely entwined since viewing the world through a framework that considers its dynamic heterogeneity should encourage decisive engagement with others involving

political and ethical commitments. In this way, the next step is to create the political condition for the existence of a cosmopolitan citizenship based on universalistic values, which can be devised in liberal multiculturalism, the awareness of the vulnerability of others, ethical consciousness, and political responsibility (Delanty and Harris 2019: 3806–3817). These universalistic rules satisfy Delanty's idea of cosmopolitanism as a possible alternative to the risks of both, global homogeneity *and* narrow particularism (Delanty, online seminar *Cosmopolitisme*, July 6, 2021).

The concept of cosmopolitanism has hitherto produced a significant amount of discussions and revisions. They can be structured around four different frameworks of interpretation. First, we find a moral framework. Usually scholars identify the Enlightenment, mainly Kant's 1795 work *Perpetual Peace*, as a starting point to define theoretical principles connected to cosmopolitanism. Kant was the first to theorize global peace and propose a philanthropic policy that granted individuals universal rights. This idea of universalism was germane to a phase of radical transformations that launched a brand-new political imaginary consistent with the Age of Revolutions—the American Revolution (1776–1783) and the French Revolution (1789). Kant's notion of universal justice expanded across different states to extend globally, favoring peaceful and lawful relations not only within a single nation but at an international level. Despite what critics defined as major critical blind spots present in Kant's idea of cosmopolitanism—mainly his Eurocentric vision of historical developments—there was a universalistic orientation in his philosophy that advocated an ever-wider sense of inclusion for all human beings (Chernilo 2019: 1878–1945). The contemporary use of the word cosmopolitanism can also be rooted in the concept of the Hellenistic *ecumene* (Hannerz 2007: 229–312). The Stoics imagined loyalties as circles of commitment with the individual at the center. From the first circle, representing the self, to the second, the circle of family, to the subsequent circles—neighbors, local groups, city fellows, country fellows, ethnic, religious, and gender affiliation—to the final circle encompassing humanity as a whole, this concentric figure represents our duties to the world outside (Nussbaum 1996; Nussbaum 1997). The moral framework offered by the circles of commitments is pivotal in this thesis because

cosmopolitanism tends to refuse narrow forms of nationalism (jingoism, excessive particularism), not the idea of cultural differences, even national differences.

Secondly, we have a political framework concerning citizenship, democracy, and the possibility of a new legal cosmopolitan order. The political framework of cosmopolitanism always tends to uphold inclusivity, extending bonds to the broadest possible perimeter. Its final aim is to expand democracy by extending the political spaces where experiences and actions can occur, live or mediated, through technical and expressive devices.

Thirdly, we have a sociological framework interested in how cosmopolitan attitudes are manifested in a given social milieu through various practices such as travel, fashion, mobility, social performances, and human relationships. As a methodology of social analysis, cosmopolitanism proposes to replace, in Ulrich Beck's formulation, methodological nationalism with methodological cosmopolitanism, emphasizing connections between countries instead of autochthonous, supposedly pure expressions (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 1–23; Beck and Boudou 2014: 103–120).

Finally, we have the cultural framework, emphasizing popular expressions in which multiple forms of identity and belonging coexist. Within this framework, we find an inclination to transcend clearcut divisions between the self and other, and we tend to put notions of hybridity and syncretism at the center. An essential point of the cultural framework of cosmopolitanism is thus the recognition of the role represented by cultural pluralism, the awareness that the world's cultures can preserve some flexible specificity even if they are deeply interconnected. Multiculturalism is not a synonym of cosmopolitanism. However, it can be—and this is a point of prime importance in this thesis—a precondition of this kind of sensibility (Delanty 2011: 633–656; Delanty, online seminar *Cosmopolitisme*, July 6, 2021). By focusing on transnational exchanges that happen locally or in specific geographical contexts such as borders where the multiple dynamics between different cultures are at play, we can better reevaluate the division between identity and otherness. To create a

cosmopolitan sensibility, it is necessary to find a synthesis between multiculturalism and communal aspiration.[10]

The cultural framework of cosmopolitanism is particularly relevant here, given the differences and commonalities between the U.S. and Latin America. Many scholars have defined the rise of cosmopolitanism in the U.S. as a consequence of the awareness of the flaws of cultural pluralism (Schlesinger 1992; Hollinger [1995] 2005; Hartman 2019). Cosmopolitanism seems to rise from the risk of excessive fragmentation of the national group and the subsequent need to find a way toward empathy and chorality. One of the leading proponents of this view, Andrew Hartman, argues that the pluralistic vision offered by influential intellectuals such as Horace Kallen (1915), Randolph Bourne (1916), and Alain Locke (1916, 1925) was not wrong but failed in producing a choral perception of the American society, which began to appear dismembered into many different ethnic claims (Hartman 2019: 467–479; Bernstein 2014: 21–38). This argument underscores the centrality of race in the cultural debate of the U.S. since it shows how deeply the racial discourse can be interconnected with the urge for cosmopolitan aspirations, which, to a certain extent, represents an obstacle to the communication of claims and issues of an ethnic group. However, cosmopolitan aspirations should not underestimate the overall presence of the color line in the U.S. and the specificity of the condition, assertion, and demands of a specific ethnic group (Appiah 1985; P.C. Taylor 2000). To better understand the path toward the possibility of breaking the impermeability between different groups

[10] Robert Stam describes a historical evolution that led to this balance between multiculturalism and transnational exchanges implying the importance of communal aspiration. In the late 1980s, many disciplines took a strong multicultural turn in the effort to preserve national and local identities from the risk of dissolving into the imperatives of assimilation—the idea of the salad bowl was germane to this fear in the U.S. In the cultural debate of the late 1990s-early 2000, the analysis led to the importance of transnational exchanges in a way that emphasized the global flows of people, goods, and ideas. Numerous metaphors still orient our notion of the transnational exchanges between diverse cultures. Recent scholarship has been, for instance, inundated by **1.** aquatic metaphors, such as "global flows" (Appadurai) and "liquid modernity" (Bauman) or images of water and waves. These metaphors represent the effort to overcome what now appears as a negative pole identified in stasis, roots, enclosure, and boundaries—images of barbed wire, fences, hermetic isolation, all associated with essentialism, binaries, inertia, nationalism. Then, we have **2.** optical metaphors mostly dealing with visual spaces, places, margins, central points (such as prisms, grids, lenses, optics, windows, maps). Other analysts also appeal to **3.** rhetorical figures of contradiction that consent to acknowledge contradictory effects. Here, we have oxymora rather than metaphors, resulting from combining opposite tendencies (to this category belongs, for instance, the coinage of composite words such as "glocal"). Finally, we have **4.** botanical metaphors close to the Deleuzian term "rhizome", that emphasize aspects of hybridization and multiplicity in dealing with other cultures. The concept of rhizome suggests a systematic condition of plurality and relationality, and inspires the representation of a constantly transforming root (Stam 2019: 10–11).

and making other people's problems *our* problem, it is necessary to show race not as a veil that inhibits vision but as a medium that satisfies revelation and further apprehension (W.J.T. Mitchell 2012). The cosmopolitan approach in the U.S. is consistent with the effort to overcome the burden of a black-and-white polarity in coping with race issues, and to find new tools to simultaneously convey ethnic difference and universal aspiration. For instance, Roxanne Wheeler proposes to replace the concept of race with the elastic notion of complexion (in both senses of skin color and complexity). Complexity is a dynamic nexus of elements such as temperaments, dispositions, characters, practices, milieu, geographic variation, climatic conditions, and cultural habits (Wheeler 2000: 2–3, 22–31, 48) that can be used in place of the idea of race. Bonnie Honig also proposes to replace the concept of immigrant, which has always fostered a negative vision of foreignness as "a problem that needs to be solved" (Honig 2003: 1) for that of the foreigner. The latter notion functions as a tool to justify the import of specific resources that are potentially dangerous but much-needed to the whole community since they bring fundamental renewal in the socio-cultural system of the receiver (Ibid. 2). For instance, myths of foreign founding or re-founding of a community serve to generate a cosmopolitan tolerance and magnanimity toward newcomers that is all too often absent from the American political landscape (Ibid. 83, 103–105).

On the other hand, cosmopolitanism in Mexico offers a more organic perception of the harmonious coexistence of ethnicities when compared to the American situation. South of the border, it is the choral aspect that wins over the weight of multiculturalism. According to Aurea Mota (2019) and Camila Fojas (2005), cosmopolitanism in Latin American countries coincided with a proud and modernist search for national identities, not simply resulting in "imports" from the U.S. and Europe. In Fojas's words, the U.S. offered a "how-to-manual" (Fojas 2005: 103) to produce a Latin American version of progress as a form of modernization influenced by the U.S. but conducted on Latin American premises. In this light, the harmonious coexistence of ethnic diversity that Latin America represents constitutes a model for the U.S. The work of José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru (1928), José Vasconcelos in Mexico (1925), and Gilberto Freyre in Brazil (1933) attests to a historical

cosmopolitan framework that championed societal principles that placed a big emphasis on the worldly agency of human beings beyond racial claims. Mariátegui, Vasconcelos, and Freyre were all involved in the effort to show how the racial hybridization of Latin America was the most successful example of a cosmopolitan harmony among different ethnicities, especially when compared to American fragmentation. This spontaneous inclination toward hybridization recalls Tzvetan Todorov's discussion of a possible cultural and symbolic advancement produced by the Spanish presence in Latin America, which produced not only violence and brutality but also a state of constant contact (which is defined by Todorov as "communication").[11] This openness and tolerance allow us to consider the triad slavery-colonialism-communication not merely as an instrument of conceptual analysis but as a succession within time (Todorov 1984: 177, 254).

From this parallel, we can devise a possible combination between two different sensibilities, the U.S. and Mexico, within a communal history of post-colonialism. The hierarchic model of the former is intertwined with the egalitarian vision of the latter, producing a tentative balance among different drives: individual qualities, communal aspirations, and the reasons and meanings of each ethnic group can coexist within the cultural framework of cosmopolitanism.

The cultural framework of cosmopolitanism

Numerous authors have interpreted cosmopolitanism from a strictly cultural perspective in the effort to find a middle ground between national traits and transnational exchanges. For instance, Kwame Anthony Appiah calls "cosmopolitan patriot" a person simultaneously tied to other people's cultures/lands and to his own. "Recognize that nations are invented, and you will see they are always being reinvented," as he writes (Appiah 2018: 102), stressing that nation and identity can be founded on new premises, less strict and essential. To this end, we must keep options open to a constant re-creation seeing ourselves as members of social/cultural/political contexts along different scales (local,

[11] A figurative instance of this communication is in the paintings "Los tres mulatos de Esmeraldas" (1599) by Andrés Sánchez Galque and in "De Español e India, nace Mestiza" (1764) by José Joaquín Magón. They are both described as fine instances of *mestizaje* (Rafael López Guzmán 2021: 167–181).

regional, national, transnational, global) without fear of contradiction. We can consider ourselves as members of a family, local neighbor, city, country, continent, or globe without experiencing contradictions among those scales and without leaving other options out of reach or nullified. This freedom is consistent with a refusal of absolutist choices such as obtuse nationalism, chauvinism, jingoism, or ethnocentrism. As the author writes, "clannishness is a basic feature of our human psychology" along issues of creed, country, color, class, culture, and taste (Ibid. 81). However, we must pay attention to not let those attachments degenerate in blind essentialism. Negotiation with other needs, values, beliefs, and tastes must always be left open. To put it briefly, a cosmopolitan-oriented citizen tends to recognize that a commitment to other people's lives and issues is always complementary with other loyalties, to be selected according to variable pertinence and under the condition that none of those loyalties could assume an absolutist stance.

Following the same reasoning, Martha Nussbaum argues that becoming world citizens does not necessarily mean relinquishing local affinities and national identities (Nussbaum 1996; Nussbaum 1997; Naseem and Hyslop-Margison 2006: 51–60). Ulf Hannerz points out that "there can be no cosmopolitan without locals" (Hannerz 1996: 111; Hannerz 1990: 237–251). In the field of cultural anthropology, Marshall Sahlins does not avoid the possibility of using discriminatory practices and contrastive patterns when dealing with cultures. At the same time, he emphasizes that cultures are never rigidly bounded, unchanging, and systematic—even in the cases of primitive or marginal groups. As he writes, "all cultures are hybrid, [and] all have more foreign than domestically invented parts" (Sahlins 1999: 411). Mitchell Cohen's "rooted cosmopolitanism" rests on the idea of multiple patriotisms and multi-cultural exchanges, proclaiming the existence of a plurality of loyalties (Cohen 1992: 483). Homi Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" is a deconstruction and extension of the concept of in-between reality (Bhabha 1994: 19, 38–40). He further points out that cosmopolitan practices lead to accepting epistemological paradoxes such as "inhabiting multiple places at once" or "seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller" (Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty 2002: 11).

Drawing from these authors, this section states that a possible link between national identity and transnational syncretism can also be applied to Hollywood cinema. As an international rather than national industry, Hollywood has offered its products to a global audience and, since the silent era, has been able to reach a great diversity of places all over the world. Further, at the level of production, we must acknowledge that artists working in this industry traditionally had an international rather than American origin. Hollywood cinema, in general, is characterized by a cosmopolitan aspiration rooted in the country's culture and simultaneously projected to include international contributions (at the level of creativity) and foreign audiences (at the level of reception). Its most evident goal is to please everybody across and beyond national boundaries. This vision is germane to Delanty's interpretation of the cultural framework of cosmopolitanism, in which syncretism is emphasized as a notion of vital importance in popular expressions. As an industry, a community, or considered in the totality of films produced and viewed, Hollywood has triggered a process of broadening the nation's limits, allowing us to find a possible middle ground between national trait and cosmopolitan aspiration.

Mapping out the southwestern borderland

To activate cosmopolitan sensibilities within the geographical specificity of the U.S. and Mexico, we need to emphasize that a dialogue between North and South exists over and above political differences. Border theories and space analysis are particularly helpful methodologies for exploring the transnational/cosmopolitan dimension of the cultural representations of this region. In order to map out a pathway through the U.S.-Mexico border, this section starts with the landscape, imagined as the site of culture. If cultures are always spatially constituted, as Jackson points out (Jackson 1989: 3), spaces are also the locus of cultures.

To some extent, nature can operate independently of human influence and existing social, political, and cultural structures. An area with geographical similarities does not change according to the presence of a line on the sand: nature rejects fixed boundaries and tends to take its course. As

Doreen Massey states, geography in the fuller sense implies physical differentiation or homogeneity of terrain, vegetation, and climate that go beyond a human agency (Massey 1982: 52). In dealing with the vast expanse of the North and South American territory, one should be mindful of its geographical variety and self-determined nature.

According to Pierce Lewis, we can count at least four large geographical regions in the U.S.: the Coastal Plain (from the Hudson River to the Rio Grande, stretching along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico); the Appalachian Mountains (near the Atlantic coast); the Interior Lowlands (which stretches along the Rockies, from north to south); the Western Cordillera and Basins (framed by two high mountain systems, the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada). These four regions can be distinguished according to their climate, from the humid east to the arid or semi-arid west, with two isolated large areas, the Pacific Coast and the mountain climates. The natural boundaries among them are evident and precisely detectable, while the dividing line between the northern area of Mexico and the southwestern area of the U.S., namely the U.S.-Mexico border, is less visible. It is a large and homogeneous area defined as a Basin-and-Range region. It borders northeast with the Great Plains (the beginning of the mythic west) and extends south to Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and, south of the border, Mexico. Lewis defines the region as particularly barren and semi-arid. He writes that "rocks of the earth's crust have been faulted into blocks […] mostly aligned north to south and isolated from adjacent blocks by broad basins filled with sand, gravel, and dried salt. *On a map, they resemble nothing else in North America*" (Lewis 1992: 55, emphasis added). While the Colorado Plateau is "an island of tranquility" with remarkable scenery carved into mesas and buttes, typically with flat tops and clifflike margins, beautifully colored with a bright palette of reds, yellows, oranges and browns (Ibid. 56), the Basin and Range region is a hostile place, suffering constant wind erosion. Broken rocks that geologists call desert pavement characterize this border area, identifying a uniform land clearly distinguishable from every other region in the U.S. for strictly natural reasons.

Nonetheless, nature cannot be considered a universal absolute independent from every other aspect. For instance, human perception can change over time. Yi-Fu Tuan points out that when John

R. Bartlett, a delegate of the U.S. and Mexico Boundary Commission, crossed the southwestern plains of New Mexico, he concluded his survey with a comment on the universal barrenness characterizing this landscape. Bartlett described it as monotonous and "uninteresting in the extreme, with the ever-recurring sameness of plain and mountain, plant and living thing. Is this the land," he asks, "which we have purchased,[12] and are to survey and keep at such cost?" (J.R. Bartlett, May 1851, quoted in Yi-Fu Tuan 1974: 67). Bartlett's comments, however, contrast with the description of the same land given by historian and ethnographer Charles Lummis forty years later, in 1893, in the same year of Turner's description of the westward expansion. Lummis was the first to change the perception of the border zone as a colorful land of sunshine, adobe, silence, and beauty. His survey was fascinating since it was a romantic description of a land seen with caring eyes for the first time. The ethnographer was mainly impressed by the *un-American* character of this borderland, influenced by the geographical vicinity of a different country and by the miscegenation and hybridity of its peoples. Instead of downplaying these elements as not exciting and potentially inadequate or inappropriate (as Bartlett did forty years before), Lummis stressed his awe and admiration for natural aspects that were deeply atypical in the U.S. Since 1893, the early forms of tourism based on public and private investments, economic growth, and cultural interests have been attracted to this borderland for precisely the opposite reasons that enticed tourists to visit Monument Valley or the Colorado Plateau: it was the un-American character of this land that was attractive.

Mapping out a land always implies tracing its natural homogeneity and internal differences. However, to avoid the risk of taking geography back to a previous era of environmental determinism, it is vital to consider not only how human perceptions can change the land itself but also how successive rounds of cultural investments (or disinvestments) in particular regions affect them (Jackson 1989: 3, 184–185). Cultural geographers like Peter Jackson are primarily concerned with

[12] Bartlett means the Gadsden Purchase or Venta de la Mesilla that took effect on 8 June 1854. It was intended to settle a series of border issues that affected both sides (such as Indian raids) and that were left unexpressed and open during the previous Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848). Moreover, the U.S. aimed at creating a transcontinental railroad in the area of the Rio Grande, which became the network of transportations operated by the Southern Pacific Transportation Company.

identifying these influences. The natural landscape cannot be considered in isolation because human perceptions, cultural/social agency, and political authority always modify and act upon it (Ibid. 13–22). These influences are particularly evident in borderlands, where social mobility and cultural interest are powerful agents in connecting politically divided spaces and transforming them into a continuous place.

Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford emphasize that instead of a mechanism of control imposed by policy and government sovereignty, borders should be considered as social and cultural processes whose "polysemic qualities" imply constant mobility, evolution, and negotiation (Cooper and Rumford 2011: 263). The bottom-up approach to borders is interested in highlighting these processes, making the border appear as a gateway and a quilting point in its connective intention. Cooper and Rumford's article releases the border from the limit of dominant binaries—mainly inside/outside—to reveal its social vitality or cultural and imaginary potential. Their article aims to produce a cosmopolitan image of the border as a connecting point in entwining global and local, or the transnational and the national. A border ceases to be the line imposed by the organized forces and structures of power. It is given back to people who inhabit that place, turning its apparent impermeability into a fluid and organic connectivity produced by concrete practices or cultural and imaginary projects.

In this light, it does not seem arbitrary to sustain the "paradoxical character" of borderlands (Baud and van Schendel 1997: 242). Michel Baud and Willem van Schendel argue that if boundaries create political distinctions or even social and cultural divisions, they "simultaneously imply the existence of new networks and systems of interaction" (Ibid. 216). The comparative exploration of two different borderlands could lead to assessing an extensive array of differences. For instance, the Canadian border can be ascribed to the category of a "quiet borderland" (Ibid. 227), where Native American groups are recognized by both governments and allowed to cross without any state interference (Ibid. 238). By contrast, the U.S.-Mexico border has always represented, politically and structurally, a condition of constant unruliness (the "unruly borderland," Ibid. 228). Rebellions and

riots are usually the consequence of two enormously different economic and political systems forced to work and stay in close vicinity. Still, social and cultural activities often work against political systems, a process whereby the boundary ceases to be tight-fitting to appear, paradoxically, loose, liquid, fluid, constantly shifting in shape, size, position, values, and forces. For the authors, borders have life spans similar to human beings. However, contrary to the natural evolution of human beings, the joyful part is at the end, when the boundary is losing its political importance. The decline begins and opens up new opportunities for a socio-cultural exchange (Ibid. 224–225).

David Spener and Kathleen Staudt argue that if processes of *rebordering* are always performed at the U.S.-Mexico border—Operation Wetback (1954); Operation Gatekeeper (1994); Operation Streamline (2005-2019)—, contrasting activities and organizations often work toward processes of *debordering*, on both sides. Mexican *transmigrantes* constantly move back and forth, remaining active on both sides of the border; we have sedentary poblanos (those who are coming from Puebla) in New York City and zacatecanos (those who are coming from Zacatecas) in Los Angeles; others, especially young men, coahuilenses, guanajuatenses, and potosinos, tend to sojourn close to the border on a periodic basis without ever establishing permanent residence north of the border (Spener and Staudt 1998: 237, 239). Despite their different occupations, as we have seen, American citizens, mainly Angelenos or Sandiegans, are equally used to going back and forth across the border. To all of them, the border is not a dividing line but a place of cross-border cultural networks that act against political rebordering processes (it is a case of 'imagine no line' instead of a 'Maginot Line' separating two countries, a pun explaining the refusal of thinking the boundary as a fortification; Ibid. 237).

The breathtaking movement of people across the border demands creative resources to imagine a non-militarized concept of boundaries. Borders can be settled and changed by people's activities. From this perspective, two points should be singled out concerning the U.S.-Mexican borderland. First, as Paz (referring to Mexico) and Anzaldúa (referring to the U.S.-Mexico border) underscored, *la frontera* should be defined in terms of hybrid identities. This region almost defies

definitions, not only because of the most evident duality of Hispanic and Anglo-American but also due to the presence of a multiplicity of ethnic groups who gather at the border: Californios, Tejanos, Sonorenses, native peoples, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans (Truett and Young 2004: 1–32). Second, a transnational analysis of this area aims to explore large questions in a small place, emphasizing that the U.S.-Mexico border may be a divided space at the level of political sovereignty but also broadly consistent at the level of human perception, social practices, and cultural exchanges. In the 1999 edition of his *Concise History of Mexico*, Brian R. Hamnett writes that the border remains a mainly political concept. The growing Mexican impact in former territories such as Texas, Arizona, and lower California is evident to anyone who lives and travels there, across the string of twin-cities—Calexico-Mexicali, both Nogales (Arizona and Sonora), Douglas-Agua Prieta, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras, Laredo (Texas)-Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas), Brownsville-Matamoros—distributed along the border. It is also everywhere to be seen in Los Angeles. A slow, persistent growth of Mex-America has occurred since the political impositions of 1848 (Hamnett 1999: 10). This concept translates the idea of a Greater U.S.-Mexico discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

Transnational culture reaches its apex on this border, triggering a cosmopolitan sensibility that permits the identification of crossroads and meeting points more than clashes and rivalries. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo itself, for instance, reminds us of the ideas of fluidity and porosity—a liquid membrane, not a stronghold—giving liveliness back to a fixed map or a contended line. The border, when observed from both sides, is a symbol expressing not only the obstacle against the glorious expansion of the western frontier. It is not even just the opportunity for an escape. Its transnational ingredient allows observers/scholars to rectify strict interpretations of primordial concepts of national identity. The whole picture changes, and our preconception of the epic setting the western was supposed to celebrate assumes a different significance. Borders, paradoxically, bring diverse people together.

Western, South of the Border Western, New Western, Global Western

In the final section of this chapter, my aim is to provide an overview of the extensive scholarly literature on the genre. The purpose here is to locate gaps and fault lines in previous theories within the history of western scholarship to position the specific treatment of SBWs in conversation with them. This thesis argues for the need of a flexible theory of the genre that avoids earlier dichotomous temptations and expands on roads already open for more nuanced perspectives. The methodology offered by spatial analysis can offer a powerful context to identify SBWs that reassess earlier theoretical and historical mappings of the genre.

This section is divided into three different arguments. First, the importance of the impact of social changes in the genre is emphasized by many scholars. The notion of function applied to the genre serves the purpose of presenting it not as an imposition from a profit-driven industry interested in preserving social ideologies but as a response to audiences' desires and needs. These aspects keep on changing throughout history. By contrast, the overall oppositional formula between wilderness and civilization that many scholars had always emphasized in westerns tends to keep the genre circumscribed within the limit of the national boundaries. As we have explained in the introduction, the genre contains different motifs that go beyond this purportedly exhaustive explanation: the vanishing Americans; the issue of the discursive representation of history; problems related to land ownership, rights, and speculations; ideas about nature and culture or about nature and politics; geopolitical balances; drives toward a community versus individualist aspirations; male desires of freedom in a constrictive society. The issues at stake are various and never result in a conclusion that can be taken for granted. Still, the genre has often been reduced to this opposition, and associated with the task of recounting a purportedly inevitable evolution toward civilization. Usually, the western is considered as a genre that always presents the same situation of an old world on the wane, replaced by a new one where law and order are established against violence and unrest. The SBW, by contrast, tends to choose wilderness over civilization, pinpointing the flip side of that assumption: that progress often brings on decay, leading to an orderly and law-abiding but not efficient or

egalitarian community. Often, SBW presents characters who reject the civilization represented by the American economic and social system to choose a different country, Mexico, with its society, culture, and lifestyle (as happens, for instance, in *The Last of the Fast Guns* and many others here considered). The usual opposition between wilderness and civilization is thus crucial to identifying the SBW since this cycle tends to reverse the direction of the process or deflect it toward a different country's social and cultural system.

The second argument proposes a revision of the evolutionary paradigm whereby the genre evolved during the twentieth century from rudimental simplicity (the silent era) to increasingly formal, thematic, and ideological coherence (the classical era) and, finally, through revision of the most triumphal aspects, in what may be described as the post-western era. This thesis does not look for a complete overturning of this paradigm. However, it does pursue a reassessment of this scheme to understand why and according to what rules the evolution is only sometimes valuable. The SBW is a possible answer to this issue since it anticipates many arguments that revisionist westerns would later consider as extensive themes.

Finally, the third argument is related to Rick Altman's notion of a possible overlapping between the concept of the genre and that of the nation. This suggestion reinforces a transnational interpretation of the western. The SBW can be assessed in terms of the geopolitical relationships between the U.S. and Mexico and in terms of hybridization between different genres. The SBW is a sub-genre of one of the most quintessentially American among Hollywood genres, a sub-genre that contains, nonetheless, a spatial perspective offered by a different country, Mexico. Because we read space as the locus of culture, we can also argue about a possible cultural syncretism characterizing a border space. The frontier may be rethought through the spatial perspectives of the U.S.-Mexican borderland, a process that entails not just the portrayal of a hybrid culture based on mixed characters but also the potential of genre hybridity. In SBWs we recognize elements from different genres: the Mexican comedia ranchera (*South of the Border*, *Mexicali Rose*, *Stagecoach*); Civil War melodramas that involve Mexico as a place where former Confederate soldiers escape and organize their

counterattack against the Union (*Border River*, *Vera Cruz*) or melodramas that revolve around solid and complex Mexican characters or the attractions of the land itself (*Duel in the Sun*, *The Ride Back*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*), noirs where the Mexican border plays a pivotal role (*The Furies*, *Border Incident*, *Man in the Shadow*), legal dramas exposing Mexican claims (*The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Buchanan Rides Alone*), and historical dramas that place at the center the fight of the Villistas (*Bandido!*, *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*). This attests to a perception of the western as a multiple repertoire compatible with and open to other genres—as open is the limit of the boundary between these two countries in SBWs.

I) The importance of the notion of function and the limits of the national paradigm Wilderness / Civilization: Rick Altman, John Cawelti, Will Wright, Jim Kitses.

Many notable scholars have argued that the western is not all about formulae and predictable, one-dimensional schemes. For instance, while Thomas Schatz places emphasis on repetition and sameness as opposed to variation and change (Schatz 1981: 15–41), Steve Neale highlights the latter, introducing the notion of genres as never closed and continuous but always intermittent and hybrid, open to discontinuities that often follow historical transformations, societal expressions and needs. Neale underscores the concept of process within genre formation and evolution (Neale 2000: 217), a process whereby the repertoire of conventions available is always "in play", frequently producing hybrid films and cycles in which multiple relational possibilities with other genres are possible. Since a constant transformation is present, the definition of a single genre should be narrowed down to "anything other than basic terms" (Ibid. 219). Despite its formulaic character, the western appears particularly open to change. As Philip French writes, "the western is a great grab-bag, a hungry cuckoo of a genre, a voracious bastard of a form" (2005: 13).

In his classic film genre theory, Rick Altman also emphasizes the importance of a historical approach to genres interested in chronicling internal developments (2003: 27–41). To overcome the immobile identity of the genre and the homogeneity produced by synchronic approaches to its

characteristic structures, Altman proposes a theory of cinematic genres based on the paradigm of semantic and syntactic elements. While semantic elements are always unmistakably identifiable in the western—a *man*: cowboy, outlaw, soldier, trapper, rancher, farmer, mountain man; a *natural landscape and wilderness opposed to isolated country towns*; *moral restraint*; *violent forms of behavior*—, syntactic elements are much more variable being the result of the innumerable ways in which all the previous elements can be combined. Altman argues that while the semantic elements are the genre's building blocks, the syntactic parts appear as the film's structure and, as such, are responsible for the production of meanings. To a certain extent, it can be said that by using the same bricks, we can obtain different architectural forms: the general result always depends on how those blocks are combined. However, the initial choice among different materials for those blocks is also significant and has repercussions on the final result: having a desert instead of a prairie or a mountain peak for the wilderness produces different perceptions in the viewer. The same can be said if we have a Mexican setting (like the Pyramid of the Sun) instead of an American setting (like Monument Valley) as a natural landscape.

To understand the evolution of a group of films we need to detect its shifts, shifts that can even produce new genres—the process defined as genrification by Altman (1999: 40, 61). The constitution of a film cycle such as the SBW is initiated by attaching a new element to previous materials (what Altman calls "adjectives added to an existing noun-genre"), a process usually brought about by one single studio that opens a new cycle of films identified with that new element. When a "single-studio cycle" acquires enough importance to attract other studios, the cycle can turn into a wider sub-genre (Ibid. 61). This process works very well with the musical but also with the western. In our case, in fact, the cycle of SBW is introduced by a new factor—a new setting—that progressively becomes wide and consistent to appear in many different studios and across historical phases. If we cannot define this group as an actual genre, we can undoubtedly say that SBW is a subgenre or a cycle. Even if the semantic blocks are more stable, in Altman's opinion, the new element added to previous materials can also be identifiable in the location, which is what happens,

for instance, in the Pennsylvania Westerns—films such as *Hide, Wide, and Handsome* (Rouben Mamoulian 1937) or *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford 1939)—set east of the Mississippi and, as such, not fully identifiable as typical westerns. In the case of the SBW, the change of setting is not an 'accident' inscribed in the constant move westward of the frontier but a real detour, one that implies a modification of other aspects—both at the semantic and syntactic levels—that traditionally constituted the western. For instance, we can perceive a modification at the level of moral restraint—a flamboyant and excessive character appears—or at the level of violent behavior—friendship replaces brutality. Cultural atmosphere and values, patterns of actions, and even characters' beliefs can change according to modifications in the location. For instance, moving the location to the South changes the general perception of a wilderness: the southwestern narrow gorges with their deserts and rivers define the emotional condition of its settlers (or of those who cross them) in a way that is entirely different from how high mountains, snow, or mountain lakes evoke human types and attitudes. Above all, the appearance of a Mexican landscape produces semantic and syntactic variations in westerns because the sub-genre of SBW removes the setting from the mandatory contrast between wilderness and civilization and its prerequisites based on necessary westward expansion. In this cycle, we do not see the traditional evolution between wilderness and civilization because a transnational ingredient deflects the focus toward a different cultural and social system. Furthermore, the comparison or friendship between two men from different sides of the border becomes a paramount element, which implies an exploration of the psychology of both protagonists (or ethnic groups) concerning various aspects that will be analyzed in the following chapters.

The work of post-structuralist scholars such as John Cawelti, Will Wright, and Jim Kitses, who proposed throughout the 1970s a positive idea of the film genre produced by Hollywood, is also germane to this thesis. Based on audiences' complex reactions to the mythical quality of the western, Cawelti's, Wright's, and Kitses' approaches attributed ultimate authorship to the audience itself against a parallel ideological vision demonstrating how Hollywood political interests and profit-driven needs manipulated the viewers. Simplifying somewhat, we can say that the Frankfurt school

of critical analysis has heavily influenced an ideological approach to the genre, which tends to characterize the western as a lie imposed by some imperialistic agenda that informs every segment of the production and every part of the product. It is important to note that, beyond the actual impossibility of settling the issue, the scholarly literature on the western based on those post-structuralist scholars tends to highlight instead the idea of function. For them, the genre serves audiences' desires reflecting social changes in national history as well as in specific ethnic sectors of the mainstream audience (we talk about audiences—plural—indeed). This premise, therefore, facilitates the creation of a corpus of SBW.

John Cawelti emphasizes how strong the relationship between the film and the viewer can be, based on notions such as "wish fulfillment; repetition compulsion; impulse gratification; dreams; psychic conflicts; psychological tensions" (Cawelti 1970: 5, 7, 9–11). In Cawelti's opinion, westerns delineate symbols, beliefs, and patterns involved in overcoming those anxieties, tensions, needs, and desires. In his theory, this genre offers psychoanalytic sessions where aggressive impulses and the subsequent sense of guilt are solved or, at least, worked out (Ibid. 14). In the chapter dedicated to the western in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, Cawelti does not change his rationale, arguing that the genre may change according to different historical phases but it always responds to psychological and sociological functions. If the functions change with time, what is less subject to modification is what he defines as the western formula. There are four major elements in this formula: setting, which is the strip of land that stretches from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains (in a westward expansion); character, a western hero combining the town's morals with the outlaw's skill and tendency toward violence; pattern of action, which is varied: chase and pursuit; flight and capture; conflicts between pioneers and Indians; conflicts between ranchers and farmers; and themes, which is the only aspect that changes according to succeeding historical phases responding to social needs and tensions (Cawelti 1976: 194). In *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999), the author expands on his previous work in light of new important publications such as Richard Slotkin's trilogy of the myth of the frontier and instances of gender studies applied to the genre (Jane Tompkins and Lee Clark

Mitchell). However, he remains faithful to the idea of the western as a genre particularly connected to the American West, proposing the same framework in which national identity and the frontier myth are indissolubly tied together.

Will Wright's influential structural analysis of the western—which appeared in two volumes, *Six Guns and Society*, written in 1975, and *The Wild West*, written in 2001—undertakes a systematic study of the genre emphasizing its importance in contemporary American society. Again, the concept of function is singled out, but more than Cawelti, especially in the second volume (2001), Wright stresses the identification of the genre with a homogeneous idea of the nation.

In the first volume, Wright outlines an evolutionary scheme in which western plot structures undergo a series of variations related to economic shifts in American society from a market-based economy and mass industrial production and consumption to a corporate economy (Wright 1976: 14). Drawing his concepts of myth and function from Levi-Strauss and his narrative plot structures from Propp, Wright identifies four periods. The first, the classical plot (1930–1955), is based on a lone gunfighter who saves the town from the villains. The second, the vengeance variation (until about 1960), revolves around "an ill-used hero" whose idea of justice does not fit in society. He tends to seek personal revenge, and although he desires to belong, his relationship with society is unstable (Ibid. 15, 154–63). The third is the period of the transition theme, in which a hero wants to defend justice but is thoroughly rejected by a society depicted via despicable aspects. This period historically overlaps the second and basically consists of three films: *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann 1952), *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Daves 1950), and *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray 1954), where society indeed appears in an extremely negative light (Ibid. 74–85). Finally, the last period of the professional plot (1958–1970) involves a group of heroes who are professional fighters taking jobs for money (Ibid. 15, 85–123). In Wright's theory, this evolution fully reflects a paradigm related to the modifications of the market economy toward a managed and corporate technocracy (a paradigm confirmed by the emergence of the professional plot in which the hero has lost his absolute freedom). The author delineates a pattern in which the tripartite scheme he identified as central in the genre (a hero, a

society, a villain) is applied in different variations but along one essential opposition: the hero being inside the society (civilization) / the hero being outside society (wilderness; Ibid. 49). Again, we find the same opposition between civilization and wilderness but this time developed in an intriguing way: Wright identifies a difference between the notion of society, linked to culture and individual responsibilities, and that of civilization invariably associated with a concept of progress that is dictated by the American mindset ("money, tools, and products of the American culture"; Ibid. 57). For instance, the Natives in *Broken Arrow* are inside of a society (their own) but outside civilization. In this way, civilization appears to be a concept indissolubly linked with American progress and economic evolution, and living in the wilderness means rejecting American values. The author is thus drawing a line separating characters who take part in a society—as the Natives—and characters rejecting economic evolution in the name of a wilderness. Briefly, the possibility of being inside a society but positioned against American values or beyond the idea of American citizenship and national belonging is contemplated as possible. Nonetheless, he does not further expand this argument. Because he is interested in finding clues relating modifications in western plots to transitions in the American economy, he never expands on the concept of society / civilization beyond the national boundaries. In one word, his analysis has no trace of a transnational perspective.

In *The Wild West* (2001), Wright is even more focused on the western hero as a symbol of the national character identified with Anglo-Saxon roots. This hero is involved in the effort to build a society according to the principle of market individualism: freedom, equality, rationality, autonomy, opportunity, and private property (Wright 2001: 1). The main protagonist of this saga is a white man involved in a process that leads to guaranteeing an endlessly productive environment. Wright insists on the equation between the U.S. and a concept of market society based on the theories of John Locke (individualism) and Adam Smith (rationalism and the invisible hand). An analysis of Karl Marx's, Max Weber's, and Emile Durkheim's strong critique of the oppressive and corrupt aspects of the market economy is also undertaken, but only to emphasize their distance from the western (which is one of the least valid parts of Wright's view—the author does not explain precisely why Locke and

Smith should be preferable to a social critique encapsulated in the hero's commitment to social values). Images of the cowboy and the frontier justify market economy, colonial expansion and imperialism (Ibid. 134). By contrast, "non-white characters—blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Indians—have either not been portrayed at all, or they have usually been portrayed as inferior, primarily suitable for servitude, removal, or pity" (Ibid. 159). The process of civilization based on individualism and market economy is associated with the mythical figure of the white cowboy on the frontier to justify American colonial action against Natives and its extension in imperialistic impulses against "Mexico, the Philippines, Cuba, China, Vietnam, and many other countries," all equally manifesting the same kind of opposition found between the U.S. and the Natives (Ibid. 160–162, 168). The savage/civilized distinction, then, not only asserts that the "savages" were categorically unequal, forever deemed to remain unequal, because they were racially inferior, but it also justifies American violence for the sake of market expansion. In this way, in our view, Wright's position tends to exclusively link the gunfighter to the unilateral position of the U.S. in the global chessboard without paying the right amount of attention to the rebellious and contrastive drives that lead the hero to contemplate a life outside a corrupt American society. This thesis aims to emphasize instead that in westerns, civilization does not always triumph.

Although post-structuralist authors recognized the western as a sequence of formulae that allowed films to reflect societal or psychological issues instead of the false beliefs imposed from above by a profit-driven industry, they were still associated with a strict interpretation of the opposition between wilderness and civilization from an exclusively American perspective. Albeit with diverse purposes, Cawelti and Wright reiterate the same oppositional scheme of contrast, identifying the West through cohesive symbolism associated with the nation. The western is a genre always set on the frontier, where a man encounters his uncivilized double and where old and new orders clash in violent confrontation. The genre's core is found in the dividing zone between two cardinal points, the East and the West, between two eras, the past and the future, and in a hero divided between two value systems (the old and the new). The frontier always coincides with the West, which

stresses identification with the homogeneous idea of a nation valuable to all American citizens without internal divisions or interpretative polyvalence.

The theory of the western developed by Jim Kitses (1969), on the other hand, grows out of an ideological stance that embraces a wide range of variations, which contributes to making the opposition between a garden and a desert more complex. Drawing from Kitses, this last part of the section thus proposes a review of this opposition that considers the complexity of meanings attributed to the cardinal point of the West as opposed to multiple readings of the southwestern border with Mexico.

Kitses insists on shifts and modifications within a supposedly fixed pattern. As he writes, the western maintains its options open in a manner that tends "to explore rather than to order" or to negotiate instead of pontificate (Kitses 1969: 12). In its innumerable adaptations and dislocations, the genre has incorporated from the beginning "elements of *displaced* (or *corrupted*) myths" (Ibid. 14, emphasis in original), losing or loosening its adherence to a precise framework, shifting its roots or searching for hybridizations with other genres. It appears as "a complex variable," allowing a wide range of interventions, choices, and experiments (Ibid. 20). What appeared to be an eternal synchronic structural chart between wilderness (nature, land, and the others) and civilization (culture, progress, the U.S.) progressively takes on the lively form of a "cluster of possible significances" that finally modifies and energizes an immobile structure (Ibid. 21).

The protagonist of the western encompasses a wide range of variations. The westerner can be a noble, idealized, robust cowboy but also a pioneer who must look for external support to have his rights recognized (*3:10 To Yuma*, Delmer Daves 1957). He is a gunfighter acting in the name of the law but also an outlaw upholding the rights of the homesteader against the advancement of civilization (*Jesse James*). He is a soldier of the U.S. Cavalry fighting proud and strong Natives or a worn-out Confederate officer who wanders without a country (*Vera Cruz*). He is a man with a code, but he accepts pure brutality, and the moral effects of this combination are deeply ambiguous (*My Darling Clementine*, John Ford 1946). He is the symbol of freedom and individualistic drives but

sometimes his life presses him against a corner (*The Gunfighter*, Henry King 1950). Furthermore, he is also often associated with a friend who represents the opposite set of values and beliefs (especially from the post-war era onward). In terms of geography, the East is the symbol of culture but also populated by negative figures such as bankers, lawyers, and journalists, often represented as entirely ignorant of the foundations upon which life on the frontier is based, and corrupt or weak. On the other hand, their female counterparts generally carry the virtues and graces usually lacking in the West but this is not, for instance, the case of *Stagecoach* where the women of the Law and Order League are surely not the symbol of grace.

According to Kitses, the dichotomy between wilderness and civilization entails three oppositions (see the following chart). The wilderness corresponds to the individual, and as such, it holds *all* the virtues and *all* the vices of individualism, from moral integrity to egotistic self-interest. The community is related to *both* positive aspects (social responsibility) and negative characteristics (restriction). Nature is also manifested through captivating *and* repulsive aspects such as purity and savagery, while culture is associated with knowledge and corruption. Wilderness and civilization are thus simultaneously represented by negative and positive values depending on the general position of the rest of the values distributed along the chart in the specific situation offered by the film under scrutiny. The general scheme mainly reveals its complexity if we focus on the geographical aspects (the West and the East). If the West is equality and democracy, it is also associated with tradition and agrarian values whereas the East is class and industrialism but also, surprisingly, the future. An instance of this variation is in the battle between cattle owners and homesteaders in *Man Without a Star* (King Vidor 1955) or *Day of the Outlaw* (André de Toth 1959). If we follow the entry "America" in the chart, the degree of internal modifications appears even more complex since the U.S. seems to be flexible enough to occupy both boxes. It thus becomes associated with the positive values of wilderness (equality, nature) and civilization (future, homesteaders) but also with the negative ones. For the wilderness: brutality, tradition, oppression; for civilization: corruption, disillusion, restriction, and compromise.

WILDERNESS	CIVILIZATION
THE INDIVIDUAL *Freedom and integrity* *Self-interest and egotism*	**THE COMMUNITY** *Restriction and compromise* *Social responsibility and duty*
NATURE *Purity, experience, pragmatism* *Brutality, violence, savagery*	**CULTURE** *corruption, sophistication, artificiality* *knowledge, legalism, humanity (or refinement)*
THE WEST *Frontier, equality, agrarianism* *Tradition, Cattle owners* *America*	**THE EAST** *Europe, class, industrialism* *Future (change), Immigrants and Farmers* *America*

Chart on wilderness and civilization[13]

Although his theory is still ascribed to the general desire to define westward expansionism within a larger ideological project of national formation, arguing for some American property of the genre, Kitses refuses to present the issue as a coherent whole. The idea of the West is an "ambiguous mercurial concept" (Ibid. 8), a resonant complexity linked to geopolitical connections and external—whether European, Native, or Mexican—influences. The opposition between antinomies depends on

[13] Kitses's oppositional scheme has become widely applied and notable scholars such as Michael Wood and Robert B. Ray utilize it for broader purposes. Wood, for instance, emphasizes that wild nature appears in many films, not only westerns, in an unsustainable but extremely seductive light. At the same time, a comforting but extremely failing civilization is also often present (Wood 1975: 44-50). Ray describes the thematic paradigm upon which classical Hollywood in its entirety is based utilizing the same chart. The competing values implicit in his "reluctant hero story" borrow Kitses' scheme along a different list of aspects: *age* (outlaw heroes reject maturity); *society and women* (outlaw heroes distrust marriage); *politics and the law* (outlaw heroes have no faith in politics and laws). Albeit the final result is usually a postponement or negotiation, the reluctant hero tends toward a final choice: to be inside a society as an aging, belonging, and law-abiding man (Ray 1985: 55–69). The monumentality of this argument in Hollywood leads Ray to sustain that every classical film is a form of disguised western (Ibid. 74).

how they are treated in the film, and the result is never clear-cut, taken for granted, or presented as unproblematic. The individual can represent integrity or self-interest depending on whether the community appears through responsibility or restriction; nature can stand for purity or savagery depending on whether culture is corruption or refinement. Finally, "America" is the only entry that crosses the borders and changes according to external values. If we extend this mobility to the presence of an external, geopolitical element, Mexico, we can identify the mobile role the U.S. plays in SBWs. The "frontier" was associated with profound idealism (equality and democracy) and with the myth of a cowboy enjoying freedom from social and professional constraints. However, external or heterogenous forces exert a transformative power over a profoundly seductive but utopian concept of ever-lasting freedom and endless availability of land. Even if westward expansionism remains associated with the ideological project of the national formation of the U.S., the characteristics of this formation cannot be taken for granted since they are not isolated in some exceptional, absolutist stance. Another country intervenes to modify its position in the chart.

II) The evolutionary paradigm: Tag Gallagher, Matthew Carter, Andrew Patrick Nelson.

The second point that helps define the theoretical perimeter for the cycle of SBW revolves around the evolutionary paradigm. The genre's popularity permits adaptability to modifications imposed by diverse factors linked to the audiences' needs and requests. These shifts happen throughout the production, distribution, and exhibition phases. The production of westerns was very high in the 1910s; then, a progressive decline happened during the transition to sound, when technological problems linked to sound recordings in the open air made the shooting of westerns extremely difficult. The 1930s saw, nonetheless, the production of B-westerns starring singing cowboys such as Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Tex Ritter, often employed by the Poverty Row Studios and highly popular among rural audiences. With Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), the genre moved to its adult phase to reach, again, its peak in the post-war era. The most prolific and mature season was the 1950s, when cinema (both B movies and prestige pictures) competed with small-screen westerns series *The Lone*

Ranger, *Have Gun — Will Travel*, *Gunsmoke*, *Rawhide*, *Bonanza*, and others. However, it would be a mistake to say that the evolution came only in the 1950s because adaptability has been constitutive of the genre's history since the beginning.

In "Shoot-Out at the Genre Corral: Problems in the Evolution of the Western", Tag Gallagher describes the tendency of genre criticism to outline a change in the evolution that took place more or less in 1959 when audiences and filmmakers grew increasingly "self-conscious". From a "classic" treatment of conventions usually attributed to westerns, the genre moved across a phase of "parody" and "contestation" (the 1960s) that led to final "deconstruction": the late western (Gallagher 2003: 262). According to critics, the evolution occurred at three levels: first, thematic: later westerns are less optimistic about the vision of the West as a setting where the American character is forged; second, character: the hero is not an agent of law and order, but he becomes a renegade; third, style: later westerns are less simple, tidy, and naive and, thus, more ambiguous, ironic, self-critical, and usually hybridized with other genres (Ibid. 263). By contrast, Gallagher highlights that even if each film reflects its age, there is no absolute rule dictating that later westerns are always more self-conscious and complex than earlier westerns. Instead of considering the history of Hollywood as a trajectory in which a form is first established and then elaborated upon, we should think of this history in terms of a continuum in which audiences' demands for variation, complication, and formal elaboration of previous instances are always high. Many aspects that scholars find in revisionist westerns are also present in the silent era. For instance, *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter 1902) recounts an event that happened shortly before 1902 instead of a mythical past. The protagonist is not a hero but an anti-hero, an outlaw who breaks the rule of illusion in the film's ending by pointing his gun directly at the audience (style). Parody, realism, and diverse genres were already present in this early phase when audiences witnessed a rejuvenation of previous products such as dime novels, Wild West Shows, and theatrical dramas (Ibid. 267). With its internal movement and fragmentation, the big screen itself represented a novelty and a change. Between 1903 and the 1910s, "there were probably more westerns released each month than during the entire decade of the 1930s," as Gallagher

writes (Ibid. 265), and all the events, issues, and fashion trends of those days—labor actions, prohibition, and female suffrage—were embraced and considered as possible sources. In Gallagher's opinion, if there is an evolution, it is in the intensity of the expressive codes (codes generally attributed to eroticism, violence, and ugliness) rather than in the themes conveyed or in the characters depicted. Gallagher's effort to counter the evolutionary argument may be excessive, but his discussion has interesting aspects to offer to our vision.

The absolute evolution from wilderness to civilization in classical westerns appears, for instance, to dictate that early heroes tend to choose civilization while the later ones elect wilderness. Many cases contradict this assumption. The films of John Ford are eloquent in this respect: his heroes choose one or the other in a manner that contradicts every tentative detection of a pattern. In *Three Bad Men* (1926), the heroes choose wilderness, as do Ringo Kid (John Wayne) in 1939 (*Stagecoach*), Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) in 1946 (*My Darling Clementine*), and Cheyenne Harry (Harry Carey) in 1917 (*Straight Shooting*). However, Robert Hightower (John Wayne) in *Three Godfathers* (1948) and Travis Blue (Ben Johnson) in *Wagon Master* in 1950 chose civilization. *The Searchers* (1956) represents a peculiar case in this light because Ethan, initially, is not linked to the wilderness but to a rigorous and profoundly negative concept of civilized values: he champions home and family, loathes Indians, and execrates miscegenation. In the end, the character chooses some sort of hybrid between the two, rejecting the purity of a civilized community and embracing within the community what was ascribed to the wilderness: miscegenation and a mixed-race family. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* offers the same complex combination, showing a rebel loner (Tom/John Wayne) who yields to civilization and a compliant lawman (Ransom/James Stewart) who is corrupted by it. Following this rationale, it appears increasingly difficult to sustain that the West is the ideal setting to forge a perfect idea of American civilization or that the purportedly eternal qualities attributed to civilization can never be questioned. On top of that, in our SBWs, we see that heroes often choose a different country at the end, opting out of this opposition and proposing flexible in-between conditions or transnational positions.

More recently, two scholars have utilized Gallagher's essay as the basis for their arguments and expanded upon his initial idea. Matthew Carter places under scrutiny the assumption that the western evolved following quite the same path identified by Gallagher (classicism, contestation, deconstruction). What he discusses in his volume is not the validity but the absolutism of the pattern, mainly when it comes to defining classical westerns as ideologically monolithic and *always* involved in the effort to promote a myth or a history aimed at Anglo-American self-definition or inscribed in the overall justification of the "violent response to difference" (Carter 2015: 2–4). The principle of evolution can even be accurate but not always correct since westerns are also involved in the effort to explain the position of the other, primarily through the values of friendship and camaraderie. Andrew Patrick Nelson applies the same criteria to revisionist westerns. He emphasizes that the canonization of westerns through the label of revisionism is often questionable (Nelson 2015: 8). There is an unbroken continuity between 'classicism' and 'revisionism'—what he defines as "an ongoing, cyclical process of regeneration that transcends established divisions in the genre's history" (Ibid. 7). While the revisionist westerns also show a desire to connect with an older generation of filmmakers and audiences (mainly Ford), the classical canon incorporates revisionist deviations.

Writing a history of the genre according to an evolutionary template proves to be not entirely satisfying. The emergent complexity of a single period (in Nelson's case study, 1969–1980, in this thesis, 1930–1960) reveals numerous instances that could be considered traditional and conservative, while many others propose new patterns as well as new formal features. This complexity indicates that even a brief period of time—a decade, for instance—can offer internal distinctions or eccentric manifestations that go beyond the familiar canonization, leading us to identify our cycle of SBWs.

III) Nation/Genre, Transnational/Genre Hybridity: Rick Altman, Neal Campbell, Josh Garrett-Davis

The last step of this revision of the critical literature on the western is related to the possible overlapping between the concept of nation and that of the genre. Rick Altman offers a definitive

framework by calling into question both in his volume *Film/Genre*, where the spatial metaphor of the borders is frequently evoked, suggesting a useful parallel between the two. For Altman, genres and nations are flexible notions instead of given entities with fixed qualities. We do not have "a single coherent concept referring to a single coherent object" when we talk about genres or when we talk about nations (Altman 1999: 86). Nations and genres are discursive formations or practices that depend on constant negotiations and processes whereby the margins react to a centralized and land-owning authority. As happens for nations, the genre begins with a process of cycle-making creolization, combining and integrating new factors coming from the margins into the center. By contrast, centers often slow the process down, resisting and maintaining the genre within their internal coherence and permanent inviolability. In employing Altman's idea of borders, we can think about genres through the concept of nations and vice versa. Further, the author offers an image of the border that is less a clear line of demarcation than a broad zone where nations and genres continually undergo recreation and re-imagination.

By introducing a third cardinal point in the history of westward expansion—the Southwestern border or a Greater U.S.-Mexico—this thesis wants to open up the frontier to concepts of mobility and fluidity, which allow us to overcome the fixity of oppositions between wilderness and civilization. Seeing the western from its southern border produces the effect of displacing and reviewing the genre's very internal coherence. In the same way, seeing the country from its boundaries produces the effect of displacing and reviewing the nation's internal (supposed) coherence. The southwestern border introduces a transnational ingredient in the coherent homogeneity of the western as the presence of the borderland or of a Greater U.S.-Mexico inserts an anti-national perspective within the excessive particularism of the country. This approach emerges through rejecting the notion of roots and an essential identity commonly shared by all, to acquire a more fluid, mixed sense of cultures born out of exchange, movements, relations, and hybridization. The Southwest is a place of routes, a meeting point, and the location of interrelations between Mexicans, Europeans, Natives, and *mestizos*. As Neal Campbell writes, quoting de Certeau, the New

West is an "agglomerative space" where "borderline, borrowed, or rejected phenomena can be perceived and related to supposed or posited totalities, bringing forth differences relative to continuities" (Campbell 2000: 5, 13). This is highly detectable in contemporary western literature[14] and cinema, but it is not restricted to it. Displacement, interference, and interaction can be found, for instance, in Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902). In Wister's novel, the places of the western are seen as spaces of difference forged out of the East and the South, characterized by "the rainbows" of colorful characters and various ethnicities: "Chinese, Indian chiefs, Africans, General Miles, younger sons, Austrian nobility, wide females in pink" (Wister 1902: 60). This is a space comparable to a prism where "languages and meanings collide and reflect a cosmopolitan, hybrid mix" (Campbell 2008: 5), a vision of a diasporic, rhizomatic place, full of encounter, contact, fusion, and cultural mixing.

In *The Rhizomatic West*, Campbell writes that

> to examine the West in the twenty-first century is to think of it as *always already* transnational, a more routed and complex rendition, a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously (Campbell 2008: 4).

Campbell's references and rhetorical strategy are distinct from those proposed in this thesis (he extensively draws on poststructuralist theory and focuses on high literature and art). However, his notion of the West as a place/space in tension with traveling drives makes fixed boundaries explode in unpredictable directions and meanings. The "system of westness" is, in his words, "a mobile genealogy, a cultural discourse constructed through both national and transnational mediations, of roots and routes, with its territories defined and redefined (*deterritorialized*) from both inside and outside the U.S." (Ibid. 8). In this thesis, the displacement is primarily represented by a different nation, Mexico, whose highly identifiable characteristics and features not only spill north of the

[14] Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy—*All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), *Cities of the Plain* (1998)—furnishes a noteworthy model of these phenomena that bring forth differences into a world based on the static fixing of myth. In the trilogy, a more fluid, changing idea of process and motion, like migratory crossing, appears to break the homogeneity (Campbell 2000: 27).

border but also exert a profound force on the system of westness, changing it irremediably into the hybridized system described by Campbell.

In this sense, it is worth making a final reference is Josh Garrett-Davis's volume, offering one of the most useful takes on the genre as a fluid and capacious form. His idea of extending the concept of the frontier with that of *la frontera* from Anzaldúa's work is a direct source of inspiration for this study. Garrett-Davis writes that "the idea of a historical and present-day West as a borderland—or a two-or-more-sided frontier—where old-timers and newcomers coexist, collaborate, fight, and innovate holds ample ground for new stories and images" (Garrett-Davis 2015: 434). The traditional, probably never-existing coherence of the American frontier is now turned into a transnational borderland—an expanded territory across the boundary between two nations—a borderland that contains a myriad of areas of consciousness, traditions, legends, myths, and histories that clash and conflate, intermingle and disconnect. Cowboys and their adventures in the West are just the tip of the iceberg since, as Garrett-Davis writes, we can expand the concept to include many different things such as "Kansas City jazz, Haida House Posts, Mormon hymns, Chicano/a Aztlán murals, San Francisco hippie comic books, and Los Angeles noir movies—none of which one might initially use the word 'western' to describe or classify but all of which are legitimately western" (Ibid. 247). What we have previously defined under one region—the West—now seems to expand beyond precise limits and boundaries. Placed in dialogue with a region, the Southwest, traditionally identified as *un-American* (Lummis) or with a different country, Mexico, even the most classical western seems more ambiguous, transnational, and cosmopolitan than it once may have appeared.

In sum, this thesis proposes a new spatial paradigm for the western that considers the long-contested border between Mexico and the U.S. as a vantage point to analyze the classical western produced in Hollywood between 1930 and 1960. This expansion of the genre questions earlier dichotomies (wilderness/civilization) and spatialities (the journey West), as well as the traditional canon based on the evolutionary paradigm, to contribute to recent theorizations of the cultural centrality of the genre. The SBW is introduced here as a sub-genre of the western and as a vantage

point that allows us to see the genre with new eyes. Instead of being wholly opposite concepts, the frontier appears now as *always already* commingled with the Mexican border, and the country as *always already* transnationally extended into a borderzone.

CHAPTER TWO

The North-American Desert

Elegies for a national landscape

The notion of a blessed national identity flourishing directly from the western landscape has mainly informed the figurative arts. Lavish prairies and elevated mountains represented the bountiful nature with which the national identity has been identified since the Nineteenth century. German painter Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) was one of the most famous European artists to accompany official surveys in the exploration and documentation of the West. In the spring of 1859, he made his first journey to the U.S., leaving behind Düsseldorf and his favorite subject, the Alps, to discover the Rocky Mountains. During the Frederick Lander expedition in that mountainous region with deep valleys and high peaks, Bierstadt first glimpsed what would become his preeminent subject: snowy pinnacles observed from a valley of lush grassland (Kinsey 1996: 64; Goldin 2007: 518). Punctuated by details of rocks and clouds, shades of dark and light, these visions offered a secular version of the sublime.

Following European tastes, Bierstadt initially favored dramatic mountain scenery farther West, reaching the Sierra Nevada. His vast paintings reproduce the Yosemite Valley, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon, encompassing the richness and potentiality of the western landscape. The monumental Rockies we see in "A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie" (1866) or in "Night at Valley View" (1884) are the best instances exhibiting a sensibility that asks viewers to focus on minuscule details within huge canvases that had to be observed as if in motion. These are comparable to a panorama unrolling in front of viewers' eyes, a precursor of cinema. Bierstadt was also attracted to the prairies. In "Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies" (1859), he focuses on a flat landscape populated by wagon trains and animals resisting hardship and impermanence [Fig. 2]. It is extremely important to emphasize the opportunities represented by the open landscape in this painting, the measureless extent of a vast horizon opening up in front of settlers eager to discover and conquer new land. In this instance, the stature of the mountains in his paintings of elevated peaks becomes depth (Kinsey 1996:

18). Bierstadt adapted details of the grassland's presumed emptiness to preconceived notion of beauty, adding elements instead of portraying them as they appeared. The early prairies had a prospect, a sense of future inscribed in the notion of Manifest Destiny, suggesting a divine providence that sanctioned the promise of prosperity for the American enterprise.

The terrain's openness became an essential feature influencing and shaping the cultural interpretation of the West. In "California Crossing, South Platte", painted by William Henry Jackson in 1867 [Fig. 3], the foreground is framed with tepees representing a world on the wane. Numerous covered wagons and a procession of small figures of pioneers start their pathway toward the horizon, a composition that represents not only the massive scale of the movement but also the implicit "message of futurity" inscribed in the direction of this movement (Ibid. 70). The same message is made prominent in Frances Flora Bond Palmer's "Across the Continent. Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" (1868), a clear illustration of the organic encounter between the railway and the wilderness. John Gast's "American Progress" (1872) stands among the most explicit instances of the symbolic evocativeness of the epic expanse represented by prairies [Fig. 4]. Here, the powerful industrial East is relegated to the margin of the canvas, on the left corner, while the imperialistic conquest of the continent has its theatre in the Mississippi Valley, a threshold to the West. The allegorical figure of Progress, Lady Columbia, is a personification of the country, wearing a white garment and bearing a star on her forehead. She moves toward the West, leading wagons, miners, settlers, and locomotives. Columbia carries a telegraph wire and a school book, blatant archetypal expressions of this forward-looking American prospect based on technological progress and enlightenment. As Kinsey points out, the Mississippi Valley is the gateway to a new course of events: "the prairies are where the dream will be realized and from there transported to the future in the westward flow of progress" (Ibid. 26).

These illustrations of the westward migration reproduce a movement of peoples that is not only physical or geographical but cosmic: their exodus follows the westward course of the sun, which blesses their escape from the European past. It is the elegy for an American civilization sprung

directly from the landscape of the future nation. It is a natural space where the quest for innocence is still possible. The nation is still young and its memory appears as a timeless myth, a sacred place not affected by decay or deterioration.

Nineteenth-century literature also connected profoundly with the evocative beauty and redemptive role of the western landscape. For instance, in James Fenimore Cooper's novels, the landscape offered a paradigm for male behavior in a way that showed through nature the dynamics of the hero's moral constraint, ethic codes, and self-possession. In Cooper, nature contains and expresses the classical virtues of the hero. Despite his lower class status, Leatherstocking encompasses the same beauty and innate goodness contained in nature, which makes him a natural aristocrat, a genteel hero notable for prowess and courage. The mythic overtone that manufactured the West was acquired through the romantic tradition of the pathetic fallacy: the attribution of human feelings to inanimate things, mainly landscapes, in art and literature. The grandiosity of the natural setting offered the perfect theater that most adequately served as a prototypical stage for Cooper's description of the noble virtues of the hero (Nash Smith [1950] 1978: 65–70).

In the same way, Frederick Jackson Turner envisioned the national western landscape as a timeless space, the foundation of a "new order of Americanism" that emerges as an organic extension of the human contact with nature (Turner [1920] 1986: 7). Theodore Roosevelt's masculine ethos is also linked to the natural landscape. Even more than Turner, who mainly emphasized the contact between the yeoman (free farmer) and the wilderness, Roosevelt presented the history of the taming of the frontier as an ethnocentric movement that had significance only if seen from one side of the many parts involved: the point of view of a fierce white Anglo-Saxon man. The main protagonist of this epic is not the yeoman discussed by Turner but the gunfighter, a "wild rough rider of the plains," a cattleman, a cowboy, or a hunter, "brave, hardy, and adventurous" (Roosevelt [1888] 2019: 82). In his quiet and uncomplaining grit and endurance, in the prowess and bravery of his manhood, the gunfighter is forged in his proximity with the American landscape:

> He lives in the lonely lands where mighty rivers twist in long reaches between the barren bluffs; where the prairies stretch out into billowy plains of waving grass, girt only by the blue horizon—plains across whose endless breadth he can steer his course for days and weeks and see neither man to speak to nor hill to break the level (Roosevelt [1888] 2019: 82).

The life style of the gunfighter is forged by "mighty rivers", "barren bluffs", "waving grass" and "blue horizon". From nature he derives his self-endurance. His existence is not only patriarchal in character—it is the life of men who live in the open because "the frontier is hard on women" (Roosevelt [1888] 2019: 80)—but it is also substantially based on the work of Anglo-Saxon ranchers because, for instance, Mexican cowboys "generally do the actual work well enough, but are not trustworthy" (Ibid. 12). Deprived of their bonds with the British traditions and elitism, only the Anglo-Saxon man can be baptised again into the American national landscape, which, for him, stands as a promised land.

David Noble argues that the dominant paradigm for American studies used Cooper's, Turner's, and Roosevelt's readings as a blueprint for the elegies of the American landscape. Henry Nash Smith (1950) and Leo Marx (1964) wrote about a timeless, innocent pastoral dream in their volumes on literary criticism where virtues, rationality, and fraternal democracy could emerge directly from the land (Noble 2002: 108–128). They did not see history through the lens of the cultural variety brought by enslaved Africans, Native tribes, or immigrants since the Americans were settlers who descended from the Anglo-Saxons. The national cultures standing outside that perimeter—the French Catholic Canada north of the border or the Spanish Catholic Mexico south of the border—were not part of the process. Drawing from Cooper, Turner, and Roosevelt, the two most notable volumes—Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* and Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*—depicted a timeless realm outside the circumstances of history and rejected the irruption of novelty into a powerful romantic legend, forgetful of the thrust of international movements and transnational commitments.

Dust and sun-baked faces: the 1930s landscape

The Great Depression profoundly impacted American culture, mainly when it comes to identifying the frontier's ideological premises described in the previous paragraph. Farm crises and widespread drought focused attention on the land and produced a new awareness of the American identity. Significantly, images of the desert replaced classical visions of mountains and prairies as a central motif of the entire decade. Sand, stone, rocks, and desert offer the background of many representations of the 1930s landscape in cinema, photography, and the figurative arts. The images of the desert in this decade increasingly became the symbol of a critique of the values assumed by an American civilization that had gone astray, obsessively based on scientific management, technological evolution, industrial waste, and political corruption. The optimistic and celebratory visions that represented the landscape as a paradigm for a male behavior based on virtues and restraint had become seriously challenged by the late 1920s and 1930s events. Before analyzing the various instances of SBWs based on this sort of criticism, it is necessary to briefly identify the main characteristics of the 1930s cultural context.

Although the economic collapse was felt heaviest in the urban centers, American culture tends to picture the Depression as something affecting, above all, the rural landscape. The dust storms of the first five years of the decade entirely eroded the confidence of the rural citizens of the areas involved. The uncertainty instilled habits of caution and concerns about security, protection, and self-reliance. Nobody can separate the perception of this historical phase in the American mind without approaching the immense volume of photographs and reports documenting the toll of human suffering in the rural areas involved. They coincided with the Midwest, stretching from the Great Plains to the Texas Panhandle and down to the Mexican border. In these areas, the threat that droughts represented to the pioneering spirit was steady and profound, and inevitably tempered the enthusiasm that embraced the prospect of westward expansion. For instance, the expression "Dust Bowl" was introduced in a title of a dispatch sent to the "Washington Evening Star" referring to "life in the dust bowl of the continent". The expression suited the popular mood better than "dust belt" since it

contained a sardonic echo of the Nineteenth-century apostle of Manifest Destiny, William Gilpin, who depicted the plains as "a great fertile bowl rimmed by mountains, its concave interior destined one day to become the seat of the empire" (quoted in Fender 2012: 23). This expression brings to mind the concept of a natural calamity that strikes at the very core of a nation's food supply. It uses the term "bowl" figuratively to represent a daily meal and transforms the vessel holding soup into a receptacle of dust. As a majestic symbol of a mythic garden, the grassland is now contrasted with disturbing images of economic disaster. The prairies now appear as a ravaged landscape stripped of its protective age-old grassy anchor and rich topsoil, as the specter of economic and social erosion and desolation (Worster 1979: 13).

The despair, fear, and anxiety produced by the Dust Bowl era had many repercussions on the images of westward expansion. In Conrad Buff's "Westward" [Fig. 5], painted between 1933 and 1934, the fertile green sea of prairie embracing the pioneers is turned into a barren soil made of rocks and stones hampering the movement of a covered wagon confined in the left corner of the frame. Two men are depicted in their effort to pull the prairie schooner up to a bulwark using a rope, but their endeavor is inadequate to the insurmountable rock. In Jackson Pollock's "Going West", created between 1934 and 1935, the natural setting of a desert is depicted in murky colors as an ocean of dirt confused with a gloomy sky [Fig. 6]. The westward advancement appears in Pollock not in the prevailing model of an integral development but as a faltering process caught under the pressure of an historical cataclysm and a series of social conflicts. As the silhouette of the farm seems to suggest, humankind is not embraced by nature but engulfed by it, isolated in a barren space. Pollock replaces the excitement supposedly contained in the process of "going west" with stagnation, and the florid sea of green grass with a wild and barren space.

During the 1930s, the westward movement appeared under a gloomy perspective also in light of the process of depopulation of American farms, which were threatened not only by drought and grasshoppers but also by foreclosures and mortgages. Farmers had borrowed heavily to purchase land and machinery, taking on debts they could not pay and becoming suddenly caught in a vicious circle

that forced them to leave their homes. In the photograph "Abandoned Farm" (1941), Frank Morris offered a snapshot of the haunting mood that a vacant house represented, identifying a dark version of the traditional paintings that had previously advocated the moment in which options were still open. In a vacant house, the dream of prosperity appeared under an ambivalent light that made its confidence vacillate: having lost its futurity, the horizon was threatening more than beneficent (Kinsey 1996: 133). Albeit the FSA photographers did not submissively adhere to the model of victimization—to the contrary, they often emphasized dignity and determination instead of surrender—their images still recall the feeling of impermanence and vulnerability of those years.

In the famous photograph "Tractored Out", Dorothea Lange portrays the human consequences of mechanization in the picture of an abandoned farmhouse, home of a sharecropper family forced off the land. The title is an idiom of the time, implying that the mechanized plow forced owners to discharge workers from their land. In the photograph, the weather-beaten house appears as a decaying island amid a plowed field, with furrows reaching the porch's doorsteps, invoking the nostalgic specter of a lost past in which everything seemed more humane. In a caption to the image, Lange's husband, economics professor Paul S. Taylor, wrote, "Tractors replace not only mules but people. They cultivate to the very door of the houses of the men they replace" (Taylor 1939, quoted in Kinsey 1996: 132). Many American farmers firmly believed that mechanized agriculture had made people greedy. As a Kansas farmer writes in a letter to senator Arthur Capper, "they run the renter off, tear down the buildings so tax will be cheaper, and no upkeep… In other words, the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer" (December 17, 1938, quoted in Ibid. 133).

The desert landscape is thus at the center of a new awareness. Its symbolic value differs from the traditional pilgrimage conception, where the unfamiliar environment allowed the pioneers to test devotion and strength. Images of the desert are now reversed, appearing not as a passage but as a destination, marking out the first ecological disaster in American history to be memorized. The erosion of environmental resources and the depletion of social and material energy were in that specific period seen through a radical denunciation of capitalism. Capitalism became the first target

of reproach since it seemed to have produced nothing but poverty, unemployment, chaos, and riots, preventing people from leading a harmonious and sane existence. During the 1930s, it became clear to many citizens and intellectuals that capitalism's primary responsibility for structural inequality and imbalance was its acquisitive, profit-driven, individualistic nature. In other words, America's mechanized production-for-profit, anarchic and unbridled individualism, and neurotic wealth-accumulation were carried out at the expense of every human impulse (Pells 1998 [1973]: 103; Dickstein 2007: xxi).[1] The image of rural poverty shook all consciences in the U.S. since they were seen as proof of the failure of the entrepreneurial spirit and its promise of prosperity.

The study of two Americas

Because land erosion was also a social erosion and because the Depression appeared as a national trauma, we have an immense amount of documentaries, films, and works of art involved in devising a solution or offering solace to the people in the rural areas. The list of cultural works describing the farm crisis or participating in this general effort comprises James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), reports and photographs of the FSA,[2] John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* but also the musical compositions of Aaron Copland, or Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads.* Hollywood contributed to this effort with the social trilogy of Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941) and with the populist quartet of John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) and *The*

[1] Early studies in ecology, like Paul B. Sears's *Deserts on the March* (1935), captured the political atmosphere of the 1930s. Sears considered capitalism as the first responsible for this catastrophic relationship between men and nature. The technology applied to agribusiness was controlled by greedy men, who wished to clear forests and over-plow plains. In this light, the pioneer appeared as a maker of the wilderness instead of its tamer. Pare Lorentz sustained a similar thesis in the government-sponsored documentaries *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937). The image of drought, flood, and rural calamities exposed in a poetic narration suggested that the pioneering days were a myth that served the American citizens' beliefs that they could control the trajectory of economic advancement. The image of the prospect wound up in a highly geared mechanism calibrated to big corporations' rapacity and rigidity (Fender 2012: 6; Dickstein 2007: 276-77).

[2] The famous photographs of Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Carl Mydans, Marion Post Wolcott, and many others were mostly commissioned by the Farm Security Administration (FSA), a New Deal program under the leadership of social economist Roy Stryker. The agency was designed to address the needs of the poorest farmers and workers in the rural areas.

Grapes of Wrath (1940). One of the most committed figures in this effort was Will Rogers, a part-Cherokee vaudeville performer and cowboy who starred in many films (including Ford's). Rogers delivered his homespun philosophy based on gumption and humor via radio addresses and weekly columns. All these products and many others share a tendency to romanticize the folk in the rural areas, representing one of the many facets that the general fascination with folklore assumed during those days.

Before proceeding any further, it may be helpful to remember that this transformation of the American culture and its general critique of the imbalances produced by capitalism in rural communities was not a conservative attempt to restore a parochial and introverted national culture. The advocates of folk cultures expressed an honest desire to describe the heterogeneous contributions of different traditions and sub-cultures not necessarily prone to national unification. The advocates of folklore cherished ethnic diversity more than a concept of unified national culture (Kammen 1991: 408). Evidence of this widely shared objective is in the general attraction to other countries, especially Mexico, an appeal nurtured by a stable phase in the relationship between the two nations, created by the Good Neighbor Policy introduced in 1934 by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The end of a long period of warfare based on the big stick diplomacy popularized by the other Roosevelt, Theodore, led to a new phase interested in extending the tenets of the free market south of the border and building an atmosphere of solidarity.[3]

The movement toward the social and cultural diversity represented by Mexico was amplified and invigorated by the state of mind of the Depression, especially in relation to the political position of the most radical fringes of the American leftist intellectuals. As Richard Pells states,

[3] Even if we must recognize that radical visions appeared in those years, the general criticism against capitalism was generally intended to correct its excesses, not to destroy its underpinnings. Thus, the tenets of the free market were not knocked down but extended abroad albeit under a different premise. The big stick diplomacy was a bellicose corollary that Theodore Roosevelt had introduced in the Monroe Doctrine about the necessity of decisive actions to prevent "any likely crisis". Affinity and cooperation officially start in 1934 when Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the Caribbean, ending more than three decades of armed American intervention south of the border. Two years later, in 1936, Roosevelt sailed to South America and was cheered as the first American president to travel to the southern continent (Kennedy 1999: 391–392).

> just as intellectuals had been drawn to Europe in the previous decade, or to the image of the Soviet Union after 1929, so they undertook pilgrimages to Mexican villages in search of some mystical experience unavailable in the United States. In each case, they were attracted to societies that seemed outside the pale of capitalist civilization (Pells [1973] 1998: 101).

The interest in the political situation of Mexico ushered in a movement toward the geographical diversity represented by the border landscape, which represented the most advanced position within the general sensibility that the U.S. had established for the cultural and social context of its southern neighbor. For instance, Popular Front writer Waldo Frank argued that American writers attributed to Mexico an organicism missing in capitalism's fragmented, frantic void («New Republic», July 1, 1931, pp. 183–184). They idealized a foreign country, projecting over it what was profoundly missed in the U.S.: the intimate connection between self and nature, which was sadly unavailable or deficient in the urban centers north of the border. As historian Stuart Chase proposed in his *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (1931), the idealization of a cultural and natural "arcadia" south of the border directly depended on a severe critique of what was happening in the U.S. Chase traveled to Mexico intending to start a comparative study inspired by the analysis that anthropologist Robert Redfield previously made of a village community based on a handicraft system, Tepoztlán. Chase compared the Mexican handicraft system with the achievements of the machine age. The author did not wholly reject the comfort offered by machines, but also rejoiced in the essential quality of life and in the values guaranteed by a machineless society. The village's handicraft economy based on self-subsistence, full employment, and a healthy balance of work and play impressed him since it completely differed from what was happening in the U.S. The sense of partnership and commonality experienced in Tepoztlán wholly contrasted with the anarchic individualism of the U.S., just as an acquisitive and mercenary absence of values contrasts with unity, wholeness, harmony, and balance. Chase saw in Mexico the source of a peace of mind that was not guaranteed in the U.S. For him, this Mexican community also represented the contrary of a contractual society based on obligations imposed by laws, rules, and institutions. The spontaneous vitality of a rural society offered a model of human integration with nature, and a community where communal responsibility prevailed upon personal aggrandizement or harmony and balance were more important than the mere functions of

the market (Susman 1984: 61, 155–156, 191; Britton 1995: 105–127). Even if he minimized the Mexican problem of poverty and was not aware of the undercurrent of paternalism in his approach, Chase contributed to shaping a utopian vision of the land south of the border. His analysis may have lacked the desire to problematize the multilayered complexity of two extremely different economic systems, but contributed to the creation of a different perception of Mexico. The dream of happiness and fulfillment seemed to be more easily realized on the other side of the border, far from a homeland that had become increasingly hostile to projects of life based on a more holistic concept of personal achievement.

The fascination with Mexico involved many American leftist intellectuals, artists, painters, writers, and filmmakers. They showed a political and cultural interest in the Mexican Revolution and became intrigued by Mexican art and culture. The "Yankee Bohemia", as John Britton defined these intellectuals and artists, includes a long list of people (1995: 50-66). Sociologist Frank Tannenbaum was inspired by rural education in Mexico when he formulated the principles of the Farm Security Administration. American painter Stuart Hart Benton was influenced by Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. Novelist Kathrine Ann Porter was largely influenced by Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio and his work on *indigenismo*. Photographer Paul Strand and filmmaker Fred Zinnemann went to Mexico to shoot the film *Redes* (1936) about the fishing community of Alvarado, near Vera Cruz, in collaboration with Emilio Gómez Muriel. Orson Welles shot his unfinished film *It's All True* in Mexico (1943). Yet, this radical group permeated the liberal, less extreme culture and its intelligentsia. For instance, Aaron Copland was influenced by tunes and musical motifs learned south of the border in the composition of his *El Salón México* (1932-36), which was named after a popular dance hall in Mexico City where Mexican composer Carlos Chávez took him one night. This piece was one of the first instances in which Mexican folk music's easily recognizable impressions and "tremendous energy" gave the neighboring country a powerful and pristine dignity that went beyond the usual stereotypes (Dickstein 2007: 458).

The cultural and aesthetic investment in Mexico that characterized this decade was highly idealized. However, at its base, there was an honest assumption about the harmony and sense of community experienced by people south of the border, which were, in any case, positive values. Further, radical visions of individual competition or atomization of American society remained undisputed. In looking at the folk cultures of a more primitivist and traditional Mexico, the urban-industrial America wanted to learn—and it did learn—about its mistakes. The simple folkways of Tepoztlán, with their "organic, breathing entity" (Chase 1931: 170) and self-sustaining lifestyle, represented a model of ideal balance and harmonious community lacking in the American context.

Cimarron *(1931) and the emergence of 1930s SBW*

According to Peter Stanfield, the relative failure of the western in the decade was due to problems with casting, poor scripts, lack of novelty, and issues with sound technologies (Stanfield 2001: 49–55). This chapter emphasizes instead that a large part of the reason explaining the relative disappearance of western classical formulas was that the genre had to cope with a historical period characterized by a different sensibility, requiring new formulas to tackle new issues. The Depression-era Dust Bowl raised doubts about the American expansionist beliefs that nature must be consistently conquered since it placed everyone before the evidence of a fruitless land. The desert represents the American expansionist beliefs turned upside-down or reversed in the opposite direction, from civilization to wilderness, as a reminder that anarchic and profit-driven individualism had to be corrected in a different paradigm.

Three different cycles span across the 1930s production of westerns: the first part (1929-32) revolves around a group of A-feature films that take into account more serious aspects; the second (1936-38) is based on the success of B-western series of singing cowboys; the third (1939-41) sees again the appearance of A-features revolving around significant themes of democracy and ethnic tolerance. Each of the films discussed in the chapter—*Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles, RKO, 1931), *Under Western Stars* (Joseph Kane, Republic, 1938), and *Stagecoach* (John Ford, Wanger, 1939)—

represents a good case study for this evolution with *The Three Godfathers* (Richard Boleslawski, MGM, 1936) as a link between the second and the third phase.

The first cycle was inaugurated by *The Virginian* (Victor Fleming, Paramount, 1929) and by *In Old Arizona* (Irving Cummings, Fox, 1929; see next chapter) and culminated with the production of *The Big Trail* (Raoul Walsh, Fox, 1930), *Billy the Kid* (King Vidor, MGM, 1930), and *Cimarron*. This cycle emphasized dramatic and serious issues in the effort to help the genre acquire maturity, leading mainstream audiences to lose the impression that westerns produced formulaic fairytales with ideal and far-fetched heroes (Stanfield 2001: 15–55). This kind of maturity is detectable in *Cimarron*, one of the first instances of a SBW reflecting the changed sensibility about the ideological premises of westward expansion.[4]

Cimarron recounts the story of an Oklahoma couple of pioneers from the opening of the territory to white settlement (1889) to the film's production year, 1930. The film was an adaptation of Edna Ferber's best-selling novel *Cimarron* (1930), chronicling the experience of Yancey and Sabra Cravat. Ferber was interested in denouncing "the essential materialism of mainstream American capitalist society" and "the sentimental view of the female pioneer" (Smyth 2009: 39). Howard Estabrook was chosen to adapt the novel for the screen, as he had a predilection for historical subjects. The screenwriter was not interested in the triumphalist chronicle of the westward expansion and wanted to be more faithful to the novel's critical approach. He assessed the picture of a multiracial West as a space settled by different populations and avoided the usual celebration of the frontiersman as a white hero, eschewing the tendency to romanticize those distant pioneering days.

[4] Warnings about a society sick with intolerance and greed were already issued by a foreign filmmaker, Erich von Stroheim, who showed the U.S. as a place corrupted by rapacity in *Greed* (1924). The final dramatic image of the film showed the protagonist, a stranded and alone Mac (Gibson Gowland), left in the dreadful landscape of the Death Valley, a place taken as a symbol to convey a radical vision against the excess of capitalism represented by the absurd stinginess of Trina (ZaSu Pitts) and abnormal voracity of Mac. The desert in the last scene is not presented as a place where pioneers face dangers and threats to test their endurance but as a natural setting that identifies domestic emptiness and inner vacuity. Another film that questioned the American expansionist beliefs that nature must be conquered and turned into a fruitful garden is *The Wind* (1928) from another foreign director, Victor Sjostrom. Here, the virtuous heroine, Letty, played by the strictly American and beloved star Lilian Gish, is almost overwhelmed by the forces of nature.

The film's narrative begins with a two-shot foreword emphasizing Turner's and Roosevelt's elegy to the process that transformed raw land into an egalitarian nation. This country is presented in the intertitles as "a nation rising to greatness through the work of men and women… a new country opening… a raw land blossoming". However, the first shot describes exactly the opposite. Two Natives approach a group of settlers preparing for the land rush, and the white merchant attacks them, violently yelling racist remarks, "Hey, drop that, red skin, and get out!". Images of poverty, brutality, and violence appear behind the rhetoric of the triumphant view exposed in the written prologue, which stresses homogenous settlement and avoids the reality of racism. The film questions the connection between reality and myth, creating a strong contrast between the images, identifying the reality of the frontier, and the narration, which uses the rhetoric of the myth.

The ambiguity with which the film enforces the myth of a democratic nation and simultaneously describes the inadequacy of those who apply these principles is the main point of interest here. On the one hand, there is Sabra (Irene Dunne), a biased woman who cannot foresee the correct path to the social and political advancement of the nation but is a hard-working and dedicated wife, mother, and businesswoman. On the other, there is Yancey (Richard Dix), who has an innate inclination to protect the weak and defend the rights of the minorities (women, Natives, African Americans) but who cannot tame his lust for adventure. When the news of the latest run for land bursts out, he cannot resist the temptation to abandon his job, wife, and kids to join the group of men in the adventure. At first, he critiques the government for its deceitful behavior toward Natives—explaining the westward expansion as an institutional fraud—but then, he cannot resist the lure to achieve his individual ambitions by employing the same frontier rhetoric to satisfy intimate needs. The use that the film makes of the mythic language of westward expansion is often ironic and detached, appearing as a blind repetition of formulas that propel a rhetoric by which people justify themselves, their sense of freedom, and their inclination to postpone maturity. Yancey's exaggerated individualism leads him to turn the supposedly correct rhetoric of the epic journey of the country into a personal desire for glory or into a childish love of adventure.

The western often appears as a genre based on a tendency to passively mirror national myths and refuse historical occurrences. However, *Cimarron* deliberately denounces the rhetoric and artifice of those national discourses. As we have already mentioned, this point is made clear through the contrast between the level of the images and the unproblematic discourses and blank formulas repeated and mimed throughout the film through intertitles and monologues. Shibboleths of national success and industrial progress hide government corruption, anarchic individualism, the persistence of class and race prejudices (Sabra), and attachment to childish desire for adventures (Yancey). In the film's final part, which recounts the years of the film's production, 1929–1930, the contrast between Yancey and Sabra leads to their separation. The election of Sabra as the first female member of Congress for the state of Oklahoma may suggest the film's desire to omit criticism and glorify the existence of a liberal attitude in the nation. Conversely, the discourse of the film continues to denounce comforting myths about American westward expansion. The westward expansion is an uneven process based on two significantly different people: Sabra is a dogmatic person who has the intelligence to change her mindset, but remains silent and supportive of a constantly absent man; Yancey is an inborn liberal and intrepid man who fails in the project of building a nation or a family since his personal needs are more vital than a commitment to the community. The westward expansion appears in both cases limited and flawed. What was supposed to be the epic journey of a country becomes, instead, an uneven route to compromise and pragmatism in which Sabra's flawed bargains with Yancey and her profession always fall short of satisfying her personal aspiration. On the other hand, Yancey's natural inclination to idealism ends up in an endless process of pleasing personal needs. Even if Yancey, as Sabra remarks, was ahead of his time on many arguments about a liberal society that she could not understand, he has remained frozen in the repetition of the same escapist tendency reproduced under different shapes and adapted in the series of border skirmishes, repossession of territory, new conflicts, new wars, new lands, and new adventures.

The deconstruction of the frontier ideology and the interrogation of the rhetoric of history through images that challenge or reject the omniscience and absolutism of written truths are aspects

that reveal how profoundly *Cimarron* is linked to 1930s criticism. Further, in the film, the romantic couple serve the opposite function usually attributed to romance in classical Hollywood: in *Cimarron*, marriage exposes two ideological tendencies that cannot find resolution and remain unwed. The ideology of the westward expansion appears, in the end, deconstructed into an ambivalent mixture of frontier motives. They represent the bombastic, reductive, often jingoistic version surfacing in traditional texts and clashing against a historical reality that the film aims to expose. A similar deconstruction also demonstrates *Cimarron* as an undervalued precursor of the New Western Theory (Limerick), foreshadowing the same paradigm of a contrast between myth and reality used in contemporary criticism of western movies.

Political allegories and social responsibility

Between 1936 and 1937, smaller studios such as Monogram, First National, and Republic made a series of investments in screenplays, props, recyclable footage, and contemporary settings to produce the second cycle of westerns, mainly consisting of B-production of western series. Starring extremely popular singing cowboys such as Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, and Roy Rogers, these films were predominantly concerned with issues of labor and capital and with social tensions around work, gender, race, and class (Stanfield 2001: 4, 11–12). The changes in the genre that occurred during the Great Depression are reflected in three different aspects. First, the majority of these films were set *not* in the historical but in the contemporary West, mainly for money-saving reasons but also because they wanted to reflect contemporary needs instead of championing mythological celebrations of westward expansion. This tendency led to self-reflective strategies applied by famous singers aware of the dependence their success had on cross-media appearances. In these films, Autry is, in fact, a radio star almost as much as he is a cowboy, and every film promotes a new record in the hope that it will become a top hit through the heavy rotation guaranteed by local radio stations (Stanfield 2002: 77–127). These tie-in sales completely changed the plot of the films and the image of the cowboy, updating them both to a new social context set on younger people living in rural or provincial areas. The third aspect is the most interesting from our perspective because moving the genre to the

contemporary West was a strategy that allowed these small studios to face contemporary political issues such as the problem of mechanization, bank debts and mortgages, riots and strikes and, last but not least, drought, erosion, and loss of farms. The cowboy became increasingly identified with a righter of wrongs linked to contemporary problems: through him, as Stanfield writes, "land and property are restored to their rightful owners" (Stanfield 2002: 138). In his autobiography, Gene Autry writes:

> While my solutions were a little less complex than those offered by Franklyn Delano Roosevelt and my methods a bit more direct, I played a kind of New Deal Cowboy who never hesitated to tackle many of the same problems: the Dust Bowl, unemployment, or the harnessing of power. This may have contributed to my popularity with 1930s audiences (Autry 1978: 53).

Depression motifs are present, for instance, in *Red River Valley* (Republic 1936), where Autry takes the job of a "ditch rider", a watchman hired to guard a massive dam under construction against the attempts at sabotaging the structure made by the posse of a corrupt banker, Hartley Moore (Frank LaRue). The latter's goal is to buy the land from local farmers and ranchers for the lowest price possible and then resell it for a much higher price, when the land is finally irrigated under his use of water rights. Autry takes the side of the workers to protect them against such evil tactics practiced by unscrupulous businessmen (Stanfield 2002: 139–140). Roy Rogers was also involved in similar plots, as happens in *Under Western Stars* (Republic 1938). In this film, the main villain is not a bandit but a large corporation, the Great Western Water and Power Company, which owns the only water source in a drought-plagued region. The Company uses corrupt congressman Scully (Tom Chatterton) to filibuster a bill over the construction of a dam that would solve the problems of farmers and rural workers. Rogers decides to run for office against the congressman who does the bidding of the Company: he heads for Washington D.C., to get a counter-bill on public water rights and guarantee

the federal government's control of the water supply in his district (a plot that reminds us of Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, released only in 1939).[5]

At the capital city, Rogers arranges a western party at a country club where he introduces the main attraction: a newsreel about the Dust Bowl, shot in Pare Lorentz's style. Roy tells the story of his fellow farmers and ranchers and sings "Dust" after the documentary's projection [Fig. 7]. Written by Johnny Marvin, "Dust" is a plaintive cowboy classic. As Jim Bob Tinsley remarks, the dust has always been a problem for cowboys because of the storms and the moving herds (Tinsley 1991: 194–195). "Rocks in the beans and sand in the meat" was a common lament sung during the old trail-driving days; yet, the case recounted in the song is more specific and connected to a precise time and place, the Dust Bowl:

> Cattle and sheep bedded down to sleep / Seemed to realize their fate.
> Vultures in the sky know the time is nigh / Will they fly away or wait?

Both Autry and Rogers recorded the song for record release. While Autry reached the top hit of 1938 with a faster version, Roy Rogers recorded a slower, emotive rendition. The song begins with a distorted, twisted sound that imitates a strong wind's lash on the sand, the sound of particles massively hitting skin and eyes. Then, the guitar moves in to give the slow rhythm of arduous steps advancing in the storm, backed by the voice obsessively repeating "Dust, Dust, Dust." The chorus immediately makes a reference to *Home on the Range* (Daniel E. Kelley, Brewster M. Higley) by asking, "what has become of the range?", accompanied by images of previously florid prairies and activities and an instrumental quotation of that western song. The same painful situation was described by Woody Guthrie, who declared injustices and iniquities in his *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940), joining the cause of fellow friends in the southwestern rural areas. Guthrie conveyed in his songs an anger and irony that was lacking in Rogers's "Dust", but the situation and the claim were the same.

[5] In John Wayne's first series for Republic, the plots are also consistent with the same thematic concerns. In *Rainbow Valley* (Lone Star/Monogram 1935), *Winds of the Wasteland* (Republic 1936), *Three Texas Steers* (Republic 1939), and *Wyoming Outlaw* (Republic 1939), John Wayne plays the role of a cowboy clearly taking sides with working men and women when conflicts between labor and capital were raised.

Like the song, the film *Under Western Stars* and many others equally interested in tackling the issues experienced by these rural populations demonstrated the capacity of the genre to adapt to renovated needs and different sensibilities. They all accurately avoided the traditional celebration of westward expansion to declare the importance of staying in contact with the ordinary folks and with their contemporary issues (Loy 2001: 90–92; Stanfield 2002: 144–147). This process had a general repercussion on paradigms and principles through which the nation considered itself and its relationship with others.

The symbolic value of the desert in Three Godfathers *(1936)*

Three Godfathers is the first proper example of a 1930s SBW. The film was one of the most significant hits in A-feature westerns of the biennial 1936–1937, after the lowest point in the genre production, 1932–1934. The film was based on Peter B. Kyle's novel, *The Three Godfathers* (1913), which was adapted for the screen numerous times. The story recounted the redemption of four outlaws—the Mexican bandit Pedro (Joseph Marievsky), the young and virile Bob (Chester Morris), the ragged, toothless, illiterate Gus (Walter Brennan), and Doc (Lewis Stone), a steely and well-read old man. They arrive in the town of New Jerusalem to rob a bank but find redemption when they encounter a dying woman with an infant needing their care. Unlike *Cimarron* produced by RKO, *Three Godfathers* was not a high-production-value film, but it was still an A-feature movie that cost $65,000 and contributed to the attempts to introduce the genre in the Hollywood mainstream that led to the third final phase of 1930s western (Stanfield 2001: 117–147).

In this film, the desert landscape is a redemptive space that allows the men to experience a regeneration based *not* on violence and gun-play but on love and self-sacrifice. As an anonymous writer argued in 1939,

> although set in a western locale […], this is no prosaic western picture. […] The picture has an impressive quality not ordinarily associated with outdoor western entertainment. While it provides thrills and action, desperation, fear and heroism, it does so more in a manner *to play upon the sentimental rather than excitable emotions* (quoted in Ibid. 126; emphasis added).

The film falls outside the ordinary through the beauty of its natural setting and the atypical evolution toward maturity of the protagonists. The natural arena of a desert with its inhospitable flat lands, beautifully photographed by Joseph Ruttenberg, is offered as an objective correlative of the internal feelings of the protagonists and, as such, a vehicle of the film's ultimate significance. Drought and barren land are symbols of the Depression and of the haunted and haunting feelings it had induced in every man in the U.S. The poisonous water hole, hard buttes, and cracked soil are a paradigm of the shrinking dead-end in which the country was entrapped. This desert is not the wilderness offering signs of Manifest Destiny in a language laden with Old Testament imagery. In a more universal attitude, it offers the theatre for the story of the sentimental redemption of three men whose lives are regenerated by a commitment to a woman and her infant lost in the desert. As we will see, high buttes and other iconographic codes attributed to the barren land indicate the correct direction to the bad men. Thus, the landscape becomes the quintessential representation of the transformation of the cowboy persona that happened in the westerns of the decade.

Stanfield is persuaded that a sentimental aspect was overtly added to address the female sector. This paragraph wants to emphasize instead the ethnic connotation of the film. Of the four bad men, at least two, Pedro and Bob, are of Mexican origin or associated with Mexico. First of all, when the four silhouettes appear on the horizon, in a beautifully photographed dusk, we hear "La golondrina", the famous Mexican folk song. The film aims to articulate a connection between them and the migrating swallows ("golondrinas") longing for their homeland. The suit of Pedro, the guitar player, shows his origin: wide-brimmed hat (sombrero), fitted pants, short adorned jacket, wide leather belt, and bowtie. During the bank robbery, while Pedro stands outside the bank, playing the guitar and watching out for his friends inside the building, his profile appears in the foreground associated with a horse-drawn, white funeral chariot that enters on the left of the frame and arrives in the proximity of the building. It is a symbol of his imminent death since Pedro will be shot shortly after the robbery by a local man who, through a bitter comment ("I wonder who he was"), implies that he was nobody worthy of staying alive. In many African American folk songs, the iconography of a horse-drawn

chariot is used as an allegory for redemption, identifying a wish to be remembered by caregiving friends after death. The image confirms that Pedro's soul, the spirit of a renegade waiting for his chance to be remembered, lives in the others: he is the spirit that lies within them all. Among the other three, Bob is the most akin to Pedro. The dark color of his suit, the tight-fitted pants, and the decoration on his gun belt can be read as having a Mexican origin. He has probably spent two years away from New Jerusalem, the small town where the story is set, in Mexico. As in Ford's later version, the town is close to the border. The sign in the desert, close to the poisonous water-hole, reads "New Jerusalem", "Las Cruces", "Pinto Flats", the latter two probably towns on the other side of the border. To a certain extent, Bob is a character suspended between two worlds, still in love with Molly (Irene Hervey), his old sweetheart in New Jerusalem, but simultaneously haunted by hatred and a sense of loss. Pedro and Bob represent the desire to be accepted and the fear of failing, encompassed by these "bad men" with whom, eventually, part of the audience would sympathize.

This aspect is detectable in the scene of the Christmas social dinner. The dinner gathers all the townspeople in New Jerusalem, and the three men are invited to join the group. The inhabitants of this town are not precisely "sanctimonious buzzards", as Bob describes them. Still, they are plain human beings, overly quick in trusting everybody—professor Snape (Sidney Toler), the dentist, is deceiving them with discourses of dubious argumentation—or excessively slow when it comes to understanding general hypocrisy. They are ready, in fact, to accept the town's prostitute at their social dinner *only* in disguise, under the appearance of a good girl. Bob walks in the social dinner as a dark celebrity—the sheriff tells a suitably impressed Doc that he can "kill anything from a baby to an old woman". At the beginning, Bob dances with Blackie (Dorothy Tree), the town's prostitute, but Molly's crystalline voice interrupts their embrace. He turns around and sees her, wearing a warm smile, descending the stairs. "Red River Valley" is heard at this point, a musical cue that tells of a lost love revived from the past: the two were former lovers, and probably their life together changed at some point because of his desire of freedom or because Molly had to interrupt a relationship with a man who did not suit received social's standards. They look into each other eyes, dancing together,

and she almost succumbs to the temptation of kissing him. However, her engagement with the boring but reliable Frank (Robert Livingstone) stops her from resuming her relationship with Bob.

After the social dinner, Bob goes back to the saloon to meet Blackie. As they embrace, he tells her that his acquaintance with the high class (Molly) did not get him anywhere—"I danced at the social, but it didn't get me anywhere".[6] Later, the tall tale of the mother's watch is proposed to the saloon bartender. This tall tale recounts his dead mother's last desire to give him the only thing that belonged to her, the watch. Bob adapts it to different listening ears (first, Blackie, then Molly, and finally, Ed, the saloon bartender) to second his various aims (impressing the prostitute, convincing her previous fiancée to renew their relationship, having the bill with the bartender settled), showing not just his treacherous ways but also his usual tendency to transform emotions into misleading and distorted lies. Afraid of drowning in a sea of effeminacy, Bob is not in contact with his real identity. Piloted by an established preconception of strenuous masculinity—so important in the Mexican tradition, where virile hyper-masculinity has been primarily represented as a problem of national identity (Tierney 2003: 227–228)—Bob cannot rely on his authentic, intimate self.

After the discovery of the baby and the mother, the journey across the desert is punctuated by five different settings and is associated with three different authors, Arthur Schopenhauer, John Milton, and William Shakespeare, whose volumes are carried by Doc. They act as a comment upon the protagonists' evolution from imperfection to maturity. The first pause is associated with Schopenhauer. "What is the story?" asks Gus, interested in discovering the book's topic. "There isn't any story," Doc replies, "Jokes, huh?" the other returns. "Yes", responds Doc, "just jokes". Then, he continues, "man is everything, woman is nothing". The sexism attributed to the philosopher is a signal of the wrong decisions made by Doc in the past and probably implies that the same choices are also driving Bob. They gather around the fireplace, and the heat of the setting conveys comforting, youthful memories of female companionship; Bob closes the dialogue with a strictly utilitarian

[6] The Production Code demanded to eliminate the tagline "wonder how I'll do with you" because it was too explicit. Still, this sentence would have better explained Bob's haunted feelings about the doomed love story with Molly, emphasizing a moment of anguish that otherwise does not appear (Stanfield 2001: 128).

affirmation: “I’m sure gonna get me a lot of nothing as soon as I hit Gray’s Gulch,” demonstrating his obsessive hyper-masculinity again. The second moment is identified with a dry branch of sagebrush placed in the foreground of the shot, which impedes a clear view of the three men behind. The branches appear as the bars of an imagined prison. Doc, exhausted and wounded, must throw away his books. He decides to get rid of Milton’s book first, humorously saying, “You were always a little heavy”. The third stop is close to a thicket of yucca trees, one of the most iconic trees in Mexico, offering momentary shelter for Doc. It is the first time we hear their real names: a moment in which their true identity initially appears behind masks of excessive masculinity and stamina. Doc is worried about the future of the baby, and he writes down what seems to be Gus’s will (Gus is illiterate). However, the writing is addressed to Bob: “If you get this letter, it means that Gus is dead too. If you never did anything human before, give the kid an even break”. The letter is intended to rekindle Bob’s feminine emotions, which could save not only the baby but also Bob himself, from his exaggerated preconceptions of machismo. The yucca tree is a national codification for Mexico, signaling Bob’s evolution toward self-discovery.

Doc knows he will not make it through the desert. Left alone, shortly before killing himself, he comments upon the awkward pathways of life, “where you start has nothing to do with where you finish”, a phrase that probably found an echo in the poverty-stricken audience caught in the midst of Depression years. It simultaneously comments upon Bob’s evolution to maturity and progressive self-scrutiny. He reads aloud from *Macbeth:* “Life’s but a walking shadow […] It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”. The last words of the quote lead to a shot that forces Bob and Gus to turn around for a brief moment; yet, they must proceed with the journey. The fourth stop marks the death of Gus, who, after a pathetic little prayer learned as a child, leaves what he thinks is a will (Doc’s letter) between two sacks of gold and wanders off into a flat terrain beautifully shot in the dusk, with a gun in his hand. The desert of this sequence is a metaphor for a point of no return [Fig. 8]. The absence of life-signs akin to those we have seen in the preceding settings—a campfire, a sagebrush, the yucca tree—indicates a watershed in Bob’s evolution.

After reading the letter left by Gus, Bob first decides to leave the baby and begin the final leg of his journey toward Mexico alone, but the crying baby calls him back. The frame shows him drawing his gun to snap out a shot. There is a cut, and we see a dead rattlesnake; the camera pans to the right of the frame to discover the baby alive and well. The following montage sequence shows his ride-back toward New Jerusalem. Bob's tired steps fade in and out with reminders of all he once cared for, abandoned on the soil: the blankets, the gold, and finally, the gun. He is about to give up, but the natural landscape setting comments upon this moment of despair through the embracing and protective background of a mountain butte—the fifth and final stop. This fatherly image is associated to a moment in which he remembers that Doc, a fatherly figure, reckoned that the poisoned water of the waterhole would take an hour to kill a man. Knowing that the water would help him to reach the town of New Jerusalem, only 5 miles from that location, he decides to drink it and sacrifice his life for the baby. Self-discovery is central in this phase: Bob finally encounters his image reflected in the mirror of the pond, realizing his authentic self for the first time. The journey's destination is represented by Bob's heroic entrance into the church, where all the people are gathered for Christmas. He passes the infant to Molly, who finally ratifies the story of the watch, which belongs indeed to Bob's mother. The entrance into the church is the amended version of the first gathering (the social dinner) based on the townspeople's fear and prejudices and on Bob's excessive individualism.

Three Godfathers depicts the regenerating spirit behind every man's dark side through ethnic codes that identify a Mexican character in a quest for identity. The desert is not a two-dimensional projection of wilderness, a place of puritanical regeneration through violence. This wilderness offers a place to start a process of self-awareness for Bob, and the desert landscape becomes a theater for self-scrutiny. The character experiences a new identity, moral and ethnic, through self-sacrifice and universal love, kindness, and humanity. Although the presence of Milton, Shakespeare, and Schopenhauer signals Anglo-Saxon or European culture, at least in the fatherly figure of Doc, it is a Latin soul that animates the film's narration. Through a personal evolution that moves across five

different declinations of the desert (bivouac fire, sagebrush, Yucca Tree, barren soil, mountain's butte), this SBW identifies a possible vehicle for developing a new sensibility toward Mexico.

John Ford's Stagecoach *(1939), the American desert and the dream of a Mexican garden*

The third cycle of westerns coincides with the beginning of the genre's renaissance. Many articles, journals, and reports declared that Hollywood was involved in the effort to produce "progressive pictures in defense of democracy" as a response to the rise of fascism and nazism in Europe (Walter Wanger, «New York Times», March 28, 1939; quoted in Stanfield 2002: 155). Film reviewers, screenwriters, filmmakers, actors, and, in general, the cultural and social entourage of Hollywood studios gathered around this important aim: to present democracy as a way to stop the advance and expansion of dictatorial powers across the Atlantic. During this delicate historical moment, when the relationship with Europe was increasingly worsening, that with Mexico was reinforced, especially after the resolution, via Franklin D. Roosevelt's diplomacy, of the controversial issue of the oil rights of American companies in Mexico.[7] The relationship mainly consolidated around the principles of the Good Neighbor Policy during the 1939 World's Fair, held in New York, where delegates from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua were invited to gather and form the Pan American Union. Mexico declared war on the Axis powers following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. The consolidation of this relationship is mainly visible in the script of *Juarez* (William Dieterle 1939), cowritten by Wolfgang Reinhardt and John Huston. They aimed to draw a parallel between the expansionist ambitions of Napoleon in Mexico and the increasing extension of the power of Mussolini and Hitler in Europe. The film, above all, exalted the friendship between Abraham Lincoln and Benito Juárez (Paul Muni), who embodied Mexican nationalism against the French invasion in the person of Austrian archduke Maximilian I (Brian Aherne). This parallel

[7] On March 18, 1938, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas announced the nationalization of all oil resources and facilities in Mexico. The government assumed control of the property of nearly every oil company operating in Mexico. As a response, Franklin D. Roosevelt rejected demands of intervention coming from government members and from the American companies involved in this enterprise on the Mexican land and negotiated acceptable compensation (Kennedy 1999: 391–392, 420).

encouraged Mexican solidarity with the U.S. in the name of an idea of democracy consistent with a liberal phase in American government.

This historical change produced a modification in the tendency to show images of failures of American standards and mindset in the westward expansion. Still, the redefinition of the myth conveyed in 1930s westerns remained partially active until the end of the decade.[8] Simultaneously, in the general history of Hollywood, the year 1939 saw the release of essential films representing a step toward the maturity of production. Among them is *Stagecoach* (John Ford 1939). André Bazin argued that the movie is "the ideal example of the maturity of a style brought to classic perfection" since it displayed a balance between three different elements characterizing westerns: social myth, historical reconstruction, and psychological truth. According to the French author, the film is like a perfectly made wheel that remains in equilibrium on its axis in any position, attesting to its subsequent identification with the classic canon of the genre. While westerns made in the post-war era are characterized by complex and mature themes like sexual attraction (*Duel in the Sun*) or politics (*High Noon*), *Stagecoach* is a snapshot of a moment in which the genre's elements are in perfect balance: art and entertainment, society and psychology, myth and history, landscape and character (Bazin [1958] 1999: 261–271, my translation). Ford's film thus represents the Ur-text in the canon of the genre since the balance between the elements appears already spent in the period from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s. Simultaneously, the film also appears to be the culmination of the preceding phase of B-production of western series. Thus, the perfect wheel of which Bazin was talking was the outcome of a virtual anthology of motifs, conventions, characters, and landscapes we have seen in the singing cowboy westerns, primarily influenced by Depression-era images and tropes. The effect this historical moment had on the geographic, aesthetic, cultural, and ideological premises of westward expansion leads directly to Ford's film.

[8] For instance, in *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939), Destry (James Stewart)'s refusal of violence in his confrontation with the villainous Kent (Brian Donlevy) is a novelty in the genre and profoundly distant from the traditional process of becoming a man through violent action.

The film recounts a westbound journey from an eastern city, Tonto, to a western town called Lordsburg, with three stops along the way. At Dry Fork, the first stop, the cavalry that has offered its support until that moment must leave the stagecoach alone (since another outfit has not made the appointment), and the passengers vote to go on without its help. At Apache Wells, Mrs. Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt) learns that her husband is wounded, and Doc (Thomas Mitchell) sobers up to deliver her baby. Ringo (John Wayne) and Dallas (Claire Trevor) fall in love. At Lee's Ferry, they find the family of the watchman killed, and they must wade across the river. Every step represents a new stage conquered toward a progressive revelation of each character's redeemable traits. Accompanied by trumpet fanfare and triumphal music, the stagecoach is framed within towering buttes, immense mesas, and jutting rocks, embodying the democratizing process implicit in the regeneration of characters. As Mitchell points out, this process is defined by "identification with a landscape that is itself lent a heroically national cast" (Mitchell 1996: 93).

Still, the quality of the landscape cannot be defined in terms of a celebration. Apart from the initial impression offered by the image of the stagecoach at the town's edge (a fence signals it)—a shot implying the excitement of starting a journey—no other image suggests the same initial joy and prospect. Between Tonto and Dry Fork, the movement of the stagecoach is troubled by the presence of humps, and the barren land makes the passage increasingly tricky. The presence of threatening elements (bare trees and the carcasses of dead animals) is a harbinger of future dreadful events in the plot but also an expression of a historical phase that had left its marks on the land. These signs cannot be read a-historically. In the passage from Dry Fork to Apache Wells, for instance, a dust blizzard strikes the stagecoach. The strong wind is so persistent that it penetrates the cockpit and remains there as a fastidiously constant presence. The landscape does not emphasize their energy, inviting them to pass or clearing the ground for them: nature is fearsome and threatening, and its vertiginous setting and troublesome passages are withering more than inspiring. This threatening quality does not produce a mirroring between the majestic landscape and the stagecoach's mission. By contrast, the haunting nature downplays the centrality of the people inside and minimizes their importance,

dwarfing the stagecoach's proportions. Nature does not express advancement but hampers it, representing a potential threat at every passage. In this light, the landscape is consistent with Depression-era cogent representations of social eviction and homelessness.

This impression can be better explained by the commonly accepted story of how Ford came to shoot parts of *Stagecoach* in the Monument Valley. According to McBride, Ford's enlightenment about the Valley came from Harry Goulding, who for many years had run a trading posting lodge there with his wife Leone (AKA "Mike"), and befriended the Navajo. Because of the Depression, Goulding and the Navajo (with whom he traded goods) lost money; the tribe was hit especially hard by the cutbacks in government subsidies. So, Goulding was seeking a new source of revenue for both, and he went to Hollywood with a set of photographs of the Valley in which he lived (McBride 2003: 289). According to journalist Buzz Bissinger, Joseph Muench, a photographer of German origin, provided the set of photos. When Goulding arrived at the office of independent producer Walter Wanger, he met the location manager Danny Keith, who summoned Ford to look at Muench's pictures (Buzz Bissinger, "Stagecoach" DVD Edition, Criterion 2010). Ford was so excited by these photographs that he decided to shoot on location and tried to reproduce their harsh quality. The impression of a celebration of the Valley as an iconic symbol of the frontier myth mainly comes from the diegetic music written by Richard Hageman and from subsequent readings of the film. Yet, the images of a dry and remote land were initially not intended to highlight the heroic virtues of those who endure suffering, but to illustrate how the Depression had hit hard an already harsh and desolate territory. In Muench's embryonic, initial intuition, the Valley represented a gigantic natural setting acting as a foil to human shortcomings and limitations.[9]

The historical reading of the landscape in *Stagecoach* contradicts authors who suggest that Ford tended to ignore contemporary realities (e.g., Robin Wood 2001: 14). The film is fully aware of

[9] An impression of ambiguity is probably the definitive feeling that this landscape offers to contemporary readers. As Cawelti writes, the codes attributed to the Valley remain highly ambiguous since this landscape "is not redolent of evangelical mysticism or moralistic allegory […] There is no religious awe or pure romantic passion", the majestic and dark rock formations of the Valley are "richly enigmatic" (Cawelti 1976: 243) and at the same time highly realistic, almost documentary.

the difficulty of the times, in its readiness to show ideological support for those who are oppressed by economic threats and dislocated at the margins of society. Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, released one year after *Stagecoach*, describes the coeval plight of ordinary citizens under attack, experiencing economic and social inequalities that are not so different from those experienced by Doc and Dallas in the historical fiction of *Stagecoach*. The film's metaphorical/allegorical treatment of space fully reflects the mood of the period in which it was made. In Tonto, Doc and Dallas showcase the fear of social displacement and economic instability. The arrival in Lordsburg, though, is equally dark. There is no possibility of freedom and happiness for those oppressed by the social system even though the frontier myth had dictated that, with the westward expansion, a democracy produced by overcoming class boundaries would have followed. The thematic darkness of the film is germane to its visual darkness: Lordsburg is a noirish town, the place of disillusionment, filmed in an expressionistic style that implies more an urban-western nightmare than the realization of a dream. During the silent walk of Ringo and Dallas through the mean streets of bars and whorehouses, with their garish colors and the laughter and cries of the prostitutes, Lordsburg appears as the opposite of the City upon a Hill. It is not the abode of the Lord but the final destination of a westbound journey to hell. At each step, the light is darker, and the impression of threats increases not just because Ringo understands that Dallas is indeed a prostitute, but also because of a noirish atmosphere instilled in what was supposed to be the final destination of freedom and democracy.

When the passengers reach Apache Wells during their westward route, we have an interesting instance of the ethnic codification applied to the landscape. Apache Wells is a border landscape, a place in between the priggish town of Tonto and the corrupt, villainous Lordsburg. In Apache Wells, the station keeper, Chris (Chris-Pin Martin), lives with his wife, Yakima (Elvira Ríos), in an adobe house with low ceilings and a large fireplace. The house is modest but beautifully decorated with Mexican artifacts, vases, and blankets. In Ford, the representation of the other is much more complicated than it might appear from first impression. The community depicted by the film is prejudiced and racist: Buck (Andy Devine), who has a Mexican girlfriend, Julieta (who the viewer

never sees), jokes about the large number of family members she has; when Chris discovers that his wife has abandoned him riding his horse, he makes a humorous confusion between woman and horse; when the whiskey-salesman Peacock (Donald Meek) spots Yakima, he warns everybody else with a yell: "a savage!". However, *Stagecoach* cannot be considered representative of the familiar stock of xenophobic texts that Hollywood often produced. For instance, the only real evil character in the film is banker Henry Gatewood, who utters sentences such as "what is good for the banks is good for the country", words that may have well enraged American audiences of the late 1930s. His wife is a member of the hideous group of the Ladies of Law and Order, who are always depicted in Ford in a very negative way, as old prudes sick with the "foul disease called social prejudice". The subjective shot of Dallas looking toward those ladies fully endorses her point-of-view: "there's worse things than Apaches". Judging from their ugly and devilish faces, Ford seems to have the same opinion. Moreover, Mexican characters are not a negative, evil presence. Yakima betrays Chris not because she is treacherous but because she wants to return to her people. She sacrifices the relative security of Chris's house in order to get what she wants. Loyalty or disloyalty, as Ford often displays, depends on the perspective from which we look at the conflict. Even if his films sympathize with the extensive group of white settlers (could it have been otherwise?), they often manage to show the diverse dynamic inside this group as well as honesty and honor in the enemies. More than anything else, *Stagecoach* describes a community fundamentally based on an ideologically vague but fully lived cultural integrity. Cultural integrity, intermarriages, and racial promiscuity are sometimes objects of humorous comments but are never considered wrong or threatening. They are part of life on this southwestern borderland, Apache Wells.

Natives and Mexicans live together (Chris and Yakima), but Americans and Mexicans can also create a romantic couple, as Buck and Julieta demonstrate. Buck may be disrespectful in his comments about her numerous parents, but he also declares that he works hard to be considered trustworthy and propose to her. Chris might be an opportunist in his relationship with Yakima, but

he also declares he likes her very much.[10] The Anglo-Mexican relationship is not limited to romance and love but often extends to camaraderie. Ringo has a friendly relationship with Mexicans, as proven by the saddle and blanket he carries when the audience sees him for the first time in the well-known tracking shot. He is fluent in Spanish and a friend of Buck's and Julieta's relatives, as demonstrated by the fact that he asks Buck about them when he stops the stagecoach. Later on, it is Chris who warns Ringo about the presence of the Plummer boys in Lordsburg since Ringo's father "was a good friend of mine".

The complicated rendition of ethnic and racial promiscuity is germane to the rendition of settings and locations. Chris and Yakima's Mexican adobe house is where the film's most warm-hearted and compassionate events happen: Doc sobers up to deliver the baby; Yakima sings her song; Ringo and Dallas fall in love. The border landscape of Apache Wells has the same function of warming the audience's hearts when they see these protagonists make right decisions or sacrifice a part of their identities and aspirations in order to meet the other person. The image of the coyote between the yucca tree and the cactus, howling at the sky, with the background offered by darkened mesas, is iconically beautiful but also conveys the intimate aspects expressed in the scene. This moment marks a dilution of Anglo-Saxon self-constraint, watered down into the unstructured, impulsive, random vitality associated with Mexico.

Yakima expresses her desires to reach her people in the romantic song "Al pensar en ti". This song emphasizes her feminine power but also Yakima's love for her native land, and is a splendid instance of Ford's use of foreigners[11] voicing through music a desire to return to their homeland:

> Al pensar en ti / Tierra en que nací / Qué nostalgia siente mi corazón
> En mi soledad / Con este cantar / Siento alivio y consuelo en mi dolor.
> Las notas tristes de esta canción / Me traen recuerdos de aquel amor

[10] Yakima is partially used as protection by Chris, who does not want to have problems with the Apaches. Yakima is, in fact, an Apache woman fluent in Spanish, and thus, she may well be a Mescalero Apache, one of the tribes of the Southwestern Pueblo communities of New Mexico and Arizona who often spoke Spanish as their first or second language. Bilingualism predominated when the Americans acquired this region through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848.

[11] In the opening sequence of *The Informer*, the minstrel boy hides his true nationality (Ireland) behind his apparent loyalty to Great Britain using the power of a song. "Rose of Tralee" is in fact an Irish ballad for a woman of Tralee, an Irish town, but also a symbol for Ireland. The gesture of tossing away the coin given to him by the British officer clearly speaks about the other, most profound, loyalty hidden in his heart.

Al pensar en él / Vuelve a renacer / la alegría en mi triste corazón

The musical cue borrows the mariachi band's instruments and harmonics, emphasizing Yakima's bitter-sweet attraction to Mexico, a feeling saddened by distance. Albeit it offers a prelude to Ringo and Dallas' love story, "Al pensar en ti" is not associated with their romantic love but with Yakima's fondness for her homeland. Kathryn Kalinak describes how Mexican music is used in Ford as a signifier of mutual exchanges and agreement in scenes of meetings between ethnic groups set against each other—which differs from the use, for instance, of Black music (blues or jazz) in Anglo courtship rituals (Kalinak 2007: 74–75). In the specific case of *Stagecoach*, a Mexican musical code appears to unify in one embrace not two members of different ethnic groups but a woman living in a different country and her homeland. So, the general inclination toward Mexico appears to be the most evident feature characterizing the whole section of Apache's Wells [Fig. 9].

Yakima's devotion to Mexico is mirrored in an inclination toward that land in the two main protagonists, Ringo and Dallas. Their love flourishes around the birth of Lucy Mallory's baby girl, who is named after a coyote, the symbol of the southwestern borderland. The exchange of gazes between Ringo and Dallas unites them around the gentle image of a newborn called, indeed, Lil' Coyote. After this sequence, Ringo follows Dallas in the backyard, where he proposes to her. The setting is very simple: a fence built out of a mixture of earth and straw on a barren terrain punctuated by cacti. Ringo's monologue is an honest and affectionate declaration that transports the lovers' imagination and hope to a place in Mexico where Ringo owns "a cabin half built":

> "Maybe I am taking a lot for granted… Well, I still have a ranch across the border. And it is a nice place, a real nice place. Trees, grass, water. There's a cabin half-built"

During the Ringo's monologue, we are mainly given the reaction shots of Dallas—she looks astonished by his love and innocence, and by a promise of a marriage to be consummated south of the border. She listens to his voice, touched by what seems like a serious proposition. This scenario of a genuine romance between a prostitute and an outlaw is unusual in classical westerns, especially

when it adds a Mexican ethnic codification in sounds and space. Most times, in fact, when a similar connotation is utilized in Hollywood westerns, it is often to signal a brief and inconsistent fling policed by racial or ethnic boundaries. By contrast, the dialogue here clarifies that Dallas and Ringo are serious, and that their relationship has a future only if they take a southbound detour to Mexico.

The entire section of Apache Wells in the film thus confirms Mexico as the leitmotif of the most sympathetic stage of this journey West: the birth of Lil' Coyote, Yakima's fondness for her homeland, Ringo and Dallas's love story. However, Mexico does not cease to be the only place where the pursuit of happiness is feasible, even at the end of the film, in the final destination. After Ringo has accomplished his task, vindicating father and brothers against the Plummer Boys, his willingness to find a prospect in Mexico does not change. Marshall Curley Wilcox (George Bancroft), in fact, releases Ringo from the criminal charge, and the couple could even decide to remain in Lordsburg. Instead, they choose to pursue their plan of reaching Ringo's half-built cabin south of the border. Doc's final comment—"they are saved from the blessings of civilization"—is prepared for by the complexity delineated above and, seen from the perspective of a reversal of the opposition between wilderness and civilization, explains the entire film's kernel. The westward movement fades in a southwestern borderland (Apache Wells) that leads the romantic couple to Mexico, far from the American towns of Tonto and Lordsburg, places towards which the film shows a high degree of skepticism. This suspicion toward the American mythology of westward expansion appears both at the beginning and the end. Tonto represents the unlimited power to eject those wrongly defined as 'misfits' at the journey's beginning. On the other hand, Lordsburg encloses the incapacity to eradicate corruption at its end. Mexico seems to be instead the final true destination, the only place where the pursuit of happiness can be realized.

The legacy of the 1930s study of two Americas

This section of the chapter focuses on a subsequent historical phase, the 1940s, when the previous revision of the westward expansion was partially maintained in films equally imbued with 1930s criticism but from a different ideological premise. The reversal of the opposition between wilderness and civilization shown in *Cimarron*, *Under Western Stars*, *Three Godfathers*, and *Stagecoach* is repeated in the movies analyzed in the following pages, which also contain a positive image of Mexico set against the American desert in a way that resumes a discourse started in 1930s cultural context.

In a previous paragraph, we have described how many American intellectuals and historians began to idealize Mexico, projecting over it what was profoundly missed north of the border. In *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (1931), historian Stuart Chase offered the profile of a cultural and natural "arcadia" in the community village of Tepoztlán, which was based on a severe critique of the false achievements of the machine age. The village's handicraft economy offered a model of a healthy balance of work and play that was completely different from what was happening in the U.S., with its anarchic individualism and money-oriented, competitive productivity. As previously described, for Chase, the Mexican community represented the opposite of a contractual society made of obligations and laws, which aimed to illustrate the superiority of communal responsibility over constrictions or desires for personal aggrandizement. Chase tended to downplay Mexico's poverty problem, resulting in a paternalistic approach that indirectly shaped a utopian vision of this land without addressing its issues. Part of the same complex mixture of paternalism and utopian visions is detectable in the following filmic instances: John Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948) and *3 Godfathers* (1948), and John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) where again the image of a desert becomes the symbol of an American sense of failure. However, this legacy cannot be fully understood if we do not consider the historical and political changes happened in the post-war era, a period that opened a series of structural connections between Hollywood and the Mexican cinema industry. By

spreading the values of capitalism in Mexico, the structural connection between the two industries probably reversed the approach devised in Chase's comparative study, especially considering the renovated ideological scenario. However, we cannot deny that the economic collaboration was fruitful on both sides since it was not only Hollywood that profited from Mexican creativity, visions, and locations but also Mexico that prospered from American capital. John Ford and John Huston were two of the most involved filmmakers who participated in this exchange program. The following section thus places their films at its center, starting with a brief presentation of *The Fugitive* (1947) as the first product of an age of artistic collaboration that had John Ford as a principal referent.

The frontier ideology was partially restored at the turn of the decade (1939–1941) and reinforced during the war through the propaganda of B-westerns showing cowboys involved in a fight against Nazis or Japanese soldiers. To a certain extent, even Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) participates in this renovated celebration: the church dance sequence succinctly encapsulates Earp (Henry Fonda) and the eastern lady Clementine Carter (Cathy Downs) as the union between the best elements of West and East. Earp is depicted with shades of grey, suspended between righteousness and flaws, but, at the end, the victory over the Clantons coincides with a celebration of the civilizing process of the frontier. However, many scholars have emphasized the contradictory character of Ford's films. Joseph McBride writes about his body of films as "maddeningly self-contradictory, often defiantly quirky and self-indulgent to the point of perversity" (McBride 2003: 420; McBride and Wilmington 1975: 19; also Baxter 1971: 10), an argument that is entirely pertinent to his 1940s filmography. This decade includes, at times, optimistic films showing confidence in the goodness of society and in the hero's ability for self-sacrifice in order to establish the advancement of civilization. Other times, skepticism and pessimism lead Ford to describe instead a corrupt society in which the only hope for men is to try to adapt and conform. Sometimes nostalgic, other times intensely individualistic or profoundly interested in the value of community (the microcosm of the cavalry), the Fordian value system of the 1940s is elusive (Gallagher 1986: 244). This ambiguity also applies to *The Fugitive*, a film that represents an interesting case-study to demonstrate not just the author's

ambiguity toward the political situation in Revolutionary Mexico[12] but also the cultural and ideological complexity of what we have called the 1940s legacy of Chase's study of the two Americas.

Even if it was the first independent production of John Ford's Argosy and a highly personal film, *The Fugitive* (1947) should also be remembered as one of the early instances of a runaway production in Mexico. Daniel Steinhart does not include the film in his list, which starts the year later, 1948, and encompasses notable movies set and shot in Mexico as, for instance, John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (Steinhart 2019: 201–221). Still, this film is one of the most interesting instances of a runaway production since it lays the historic foundation of the economic support to develop and expand the production companies—mainly Estudios Churubusco—that gave life to the golden age of cinema in Mexico (1936-1956). In *The Fugitive*, the presence of filmmaker Emilio Fernández, of actors Pedro Armendáriz, Miguel Inclán, Dolores del Río and of cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa is evidence of this link, and proof that the intention to develop and promote the Mexican golden age of cinema north of the border was high and consistent.

The collaboration between artists from both sides of the border, involved in various runaway productions, stemmed from the creation in August 1940 of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) headed by Nelson Rockefeller, which followed the dispositions of the Good Neighbor Policy (1934–1945). During the postwar era, the office continued its activities under an ideological phase that completely changed the leftist scenario of the 1930s political culture. This period was characterized by an inter-American alliance that was intended to stop the expansion of the Soviet Union according to the principle of the Containment Theory (1947). The OCIAA strongly encouraged the use of local resources and locations to produce films set in Mexico, a project intended to shore up a political/ideological/military alliance. From the point of view of Mexico, there was a

[12] Ford seems to be simultaneously critical of the dictatorial methods of the Revolutionary past of Mexico but equally close to its profound Catholicism since, as we know, Ford was an Irish Catholic. On these aspects, see my "John Ford's Mexico: *The Fugitive* (1947)", in Julie Assouly and Esther Eboyan, *Elsewhere From An American Perspective* (manuscript under review).

specific prospect. The post-revolutionary state nationalism in Mexico tended to align with the support of the anti-communist movement in the U.S., as presidents Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–1946) and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946–1952) correlated progress with a transition towards capitalism in their political-economic policies. RKO, the company that released *The Fugitive*, was one of the most involved studios in south-of-the-border projects. The creation in 1943 of Estudios Churubusco mirrored this alliance since the studio was the outcome of a joint venture built by an American industrialist, Harry Wright, in collaboration with local entrepreneur and mass-media capitalist Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta. Initially considered an RKO external facility, the Mexican studio received substantial financial support from its parent company (Fein 2000: 84–85, 104; Giovacchini 2017: 3943). Filmed on location in Cholula, Cuernavaca, and in the Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City, *The Fugitive* thus showcases the pivotal role played by Hollywood in the consolidation of a Mexican facility and indirectly emphasizes the latter's centrality in the production and promotion of the golden age of Mexican cinema in the post-war years. Furthermore, the film can be easily read as evidence of a cross-cultural exchange engaging American and Mexican artists, filmmakers, and actors in a one-to-one dynamic that influenced both sides. Saverio Giovacchini argues that the relationship, at a cultural and expressive level, cannot be merely explained as a hierarchy in which a ruling and powerful industry, using a condescending method, takes possession and control of the other country's creativity. Opinions, visions, and know-how circulated between peers, so the exchange abounded with advancement for both, especially when considered at the level of a one-to-one relationship. "The Mexican experience", as the author points out, "changed American films and filmmakers" (Giovacchini 2017: 3939) and vice versa. Furthermore, the availability of authentic locations in Mexico changed Hollywood filmic practices and American sensibility toward the other countries.

We cannot properly consider *The Fugitive* as a western (not even a SBW) so this preamble is limited to a short presentation of the film that, nonetheless, used this first instance of a transnational production to demonstrate how much Ford's style in this period could reflect external influences

coming specifically from Mexico.[13] In particular, we are interested in Mexican actor Pedro Armendáriz. His jovial personality and spiritual intensity allowed Ford to intensify in 1940s westerns a Mexican dimension that tempered the Anglo-Saxon characters' rigor with Hispanic energy and ardor, further crafting what we defined as SBW.

John Ford, Pedro Armendáriz, and the SBW: Fort Apache (1948)

Born in Mexico to a Mexican father and an American mother, Armendáriz began working in Mexican cinema in 1935. He took part with Dolores Del Río in several films directed by Emilio Fernández, the notable filmmaker of the golden age of Mexican cinema, author of *Flor Silvestre* (1943), *Maria Candelaria* (1944), *Enamorada* (1946), and *La Perla* (1947; from Steinbeck's novella *The Pearl*), all starring Armendáriz. After *The Fugitive*, the actor became part of the well-known group of collaborators defined as the John Ford Stock Company.[14] The collaboration was established in two westerns, *Fort Apache* and *3 Godfathers*. In these SBWs, Armendáriz breaks away from the usual stereotypes applied to Latino characters, expressing instead the free-wheeling, unconventional, and rebellious ethnicity that Ford often upholds against the limited confines imposed by the Anglo-Saxon system of values (Berg 2001: 83). Armendáriz embodies Ford's fluid idea of national or ethnic cultures as not eternal and monolithic systems but as organic, free, transformative entities, resulting from inextricably entangled mutual influences.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Armendáriz's acting skills is his bilingualism. He spoke English with an American accent, but he was also fluent in Spanish, and in both languages, his mastery of voice modulations was high and consistent. This skill made his contribution to Ford's

[13] The case of *The Fugitive* is particularly evident since the film appears as *also* the outcome of Emilio Fernández's directorial ideas, Gabriel Figueroa's figurative style, and Pedro Armendáriz's acting ability. On this aspect see my "John Ford's Mexico in *The Fugitive* (1947)", in Julie Assouly and Esther Eboyan, *Elsewhere From an American Perspective* (manuscript under review).

[14] The stock company included many actors such as Francis Ford, John Wayne, Ward Bond, Mae Marsh, John Carradine, Victor McLaglen, Harry Carey Sr., Harry Carey Jr., George O'Brien, John Qualen, Jane Darwell, Henry Fonda, Chief John Big Tree, Ben Johnson, Stepin Fetchit, Woody Strode, James Stewart, Barry Fitzgerald, Maureen O'Hara, Andy Devine, Charley Grapewin, Donald Meek, Slim Summerville, Thomas Mitchell, Olive Carey, and Will Rogers.

directing method pivotal, given that Ford rarely conformed to Hollywood imperatives imposing heavily accented English to overdetermine racial or ethnic otherness. Like Huston, Ford uses instead authentic foreign languages, downplaying the need for clarity of the mainstream, English-speaking audience. Consequently, he rarely adheres to conventions such as brown-face or black-face for white stars playing ethnic characters (he uses Natives in the roles of Natives), and, as a corollary, he seldom structures the entire film around one single character and gives, instead, extreme importance to 'secondary' ethnic characters. They also acquire fundamental responsibility through Ford's clever use of essential cinematic elements that help the ethnic codification of those roles, not only language, sounds, and music but also location setting. All these elements are of paramount importance in conveying the films' meanings. This process is pervasive in his filmography and is particularly well illustrated in *Fort Apache* (1948).

In the film, Ford gives Armendáriz the role of sergeant Beauford. The name suggests a French origin but Beauford speaks fluent Spanish, which outlines the profile of a cosmopolitan character. He is in fact entirely at ease with the army way, participating in the spirit of camaraderie with the other—all Irishmen—sergeants (Mulcahy, Shattuck, and Quincannon played, respectively, by Victor McLaglen, Jack Pennick, and Dick Foran). Beauford enjoys going on a spree with them as happens, for instance, when colonel Owen Thursday (Henry Fonda) orders them to destroy the whiskey of the corrupt Indian agent Meachum (Grant Withers) or when they gulp down the entire content of the non-com's ball punch in retaliation for being forced to obey Thursday's foolish orders. Ford upholds a vision in which the Anglo-Saxons are dull hypocrites, and the ethnic minorities embody the lively merriment of dissent.

For his special mission to the Apache camp across the Mexican border to persuade Cochise (Miguel Inclán) to return to the American territory and declare peace, captain Kirby York (John Wayne) suggests Beauford as a second in command. York introduces Beauford to colonel Thursday in a way that exalts his characteristics: he was a major in the Confederacy Army, already serving as a second in command to general J.E.B. Stuart and not a soldier of the lowest military rank. York

recognizes, in fact, his valor even though Beauford had previously served in the enemy army: the film expects us to see the Confederacy as a trope for a different ethnicity. The sergeant is precious since he is the only one who can communicate with the enemy, representing an irreplaceable key figure to manifest the importance of diplomacy—which explains why Kirby wants him in that role. The Mexican sergeant whose name suggests French origin, who speaks fluent Spanish and is at ease with the Irish ethos of drinking is more valuable in peace than skilled on the battlefield. The role the sergeant can play in preventing absurd bloodshed and violence is thus underscored by his non-conformity with the mainstream group, a task paradoxically entrusted to a person born under a different flag and speaking a different language. This loyalty toward a different land is made clear in the very same mission of peace when York pauses at the Rio Grande/Río Bravo before entering Mexico to meet Cochise, and offers Beauford a sip of water from his canteen. He makes a toast to Mexico, *"Por la tierra de mi madre"*, a line accompanied by a respectful glance toward the South.[15] As we have seen in *Stagecoach* with Yakima, in Ford, loyalty can be simultaneously distributed in many different directions, all equally respectful and legitimate.

In the sequence of the meeting between Thursday and Cochise before the final battle, Ford overturns the hierarchy of the rank each officer has in the corps with moral positions signaled by different stature and composure. On the left side of the frame, we have York and Collingwood (George O'Brien), who listen to Cochise in respectful silence, standing behind Thursday and Meachum, seated in a lower position, which indicates their low moral stature. On the right side of the frame, the Indian chiefs Cochise, Alchesay, Satanta, and Geronimo are formally introduced by Beauford, who stands in the middle. The camera follows the introduction, framing the chiefs as noblemen, shown in low-angled closeups. Thursday asks to get on with the parley, apparently because he does not appreciate excessive formalism, but actually because he does not recognize the authority

[15] In Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch*, Angel (Jaime Sánchez) gazes across the Rio Grande saying "Mexico Lindo!", to which Lyle (Warren Oates) replies "I don't see nothing so *lindo* about it", and Tector (Ben Johnson) adds "Just looks like more Texas as far as I am concerned". But Angel explains they are not using the right eyes, the eyes of the soul. In this way, Peckinpah pays one of his numerous homages to John Ford, replicating the situation established in *Fort Apache* between Beauford and Kirby. On a different note, it might be interesting to pinpoint that Armendáriz's mother was American while his father was Mexican.

of the enemies. Thursday is an Anglo-Saxon colonel of the U.S. Army, "a martinet, stiff-backed, hungry for glory" (Gallagher 1986: 250), representative of the higher class, ashamed to fight "breech-clad savages" in some godforsaken military outpost. He is an absolute racist who judges Irishmen, Natives, and Mexicans with culturally biased opinions and hides a near-psychotic lust for violence underneath his position as an army officer. He is, thus, at the opposite pole of the cosmopolitan sergeant Beauford, who uses language as a diplomatic tool to bring peace. During the meeting, the Mexican translator and the Natives are presented as noble characters: Cochise does not speak broken English but grammatically correct Spanish, carefully explaining his reasons.[16] Beauford, as a translator, displays knowledge and skills superior to his commanding officer, the self-righteous prig colonel, as is demonstrated by his oratory when he changes Cochise's insults to Meachum into a well-read and ironic periphrasis[17] on which everyone seems to agree apart from the isolated colonel. Cochise tells his story in what appears to everyone an entirely reasonable truth:

> "Esperábamos protección en el Gran Padre Blanco. Nos dio una muerte lenta. No volveremos a tu reserva mientras esté ese hombre u otro como él. Despídelo y hablaremos de paz. Si no lo despide, habrá guerra. ¡Y por cada uno de nosotros que mates, morirán diez hombres blancos!"

In hearing these words, Thursday bursts out to declare his final sentence ("I find them without honor") and his ultimatum ("if they do not return to the reservation by dawn, the cavalry will attack"), scornfully rejecting what in his opinion has been a series of "preliminary nonsense" and "ceremonial phrasing". Beauford replies, emphasizing Cochise's honesty and correctness in what he has just said—"he is only speaking his truth"—but his complaints go obviously unheard.

The film endorses Cochise's standpoint through camerawork: the angle of the shots, the posture of the members of the two delegations, and the point of view lead us to sympathize with the

[16] Cochise is played by Miguel Inclán, also a Mexican actor who worked with Fernández on many occasions: *María Candelaria*, *Enamorada* (where he plays Bocanegra, the aide of general Juan José, played by Armendáriz), and *Salón Mexico*. For Ford, Inclán played the chief of the town taken as a hostage in *The Fugitive* and the proud Apache chief Cochise in *Fort Apache*. Later on, he appeared in the role of the blind man in Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950).

[17] This is the periphrasis: "Well, sir, a free translation would be that "Meacham is a yellow-bellied polecat of dubious antecedents and conjectural progeny". Cochise's words, of course, sir—not mine" (*Fort Apache* [01:44:25–01:44:38]). The moment of pause among them demonstrate that everybody agrees with Cochise/Beauford.

Natives and Beauford, isolating Meachum and Thursday in their lower moral positions. Yet, more than camerawork, language conveys the film's meaning: Cochise's discourse is given in Spanish. It is not just what he says but how he explains his reasons, using Spanish, which is important since the same complaints and claims were sustained by the Mexicans, deprived of their land and submitted to a foreign political and social sovereignty. This is an exemplary case of the Fordian multicultural dynamic where ethnic identities find ways to express their truth through musical accompaniment, language, songs, spaces, and landscape, all elements of paramount importance for their capacity to convey ethnic codifications that amplify the meanings of Ford's films. These ethnic codifications are often used to allow the audience to empathize with ethnic characters in a way that overthrows the norms that usually police the borders between Anglo-Saxon characters—as positive representations of good sense and good behavior—and ethnic minorities, usually identified with foolish or useless demeanors.

In many of Ford's films, masterly in *The Searchers* (1956), racism and transgression of boundaries intersect. The racial or ethnic other becomes an alter ego of the self in a pattern in which every entity is, for good or for bad, a shadow existence and a shadow justification of the other (Telotte 2003: 128). Ford always goes beyond the celebratory recognition of the status quo since racial identities are always in some problematic position that requires additional analysis than that offered by simplistic frames such as assimilation or domination-resistance. This conceptual mobility explains why Ford does not mechanically construct enemies in a strictly dualistic system, presenting, on the one hand, the virtues of the heroes and, on the other, the vices of the villains. By contrast, he mirrors them in one another—heroes are not always do-gooders, villains have their reasons—and thus subverts the moral order of classic westerns encouraging the audience not to stop at hasty conclusions. Further, in a genre that has always emphasized ritualized moments of violence, in which violent behaviors are justified and controlled within a system of values carefully crafted, Ford inserts elements of uncertainty. In his plots, we do not simply attend to a process in which men revise their

pride in light of humility and kindness since it is the function of the violence itself that begins to show its problematic nature (as happens in *Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, and *The Searchers*).

In this changed paradigm in which a Mexican character represents superior qualities to those championed by the Anglos we should also focus on the importance of landscape since there is another starring role in the film: dust. Gallagher emphasizes the pivotal role played by this element:

> Dust thrown by Cochise as a sign he will engage the cavalry; dust clouds warning York the Apache are near; dust clouds squaws creates to fool Thursday; dust engulfing the trapped regiment; dust into which the Apache disappear after planting the destroyed regiment's banner in front of York (Gallagher 1986: 249).

This element becomes a symbol attributed to the enemy, the Spanish-speaking Apaches, a symbol engulfing the U.S. Cavalry in a sense of failure and despair. Despite the controversial final sequence celebrating the myth of American heroism as a beneficent form of survival for the nation (we need to print the legend and validate a wrong, unilateral reconstruction in order to survive), the film remains clear in settling the dispute. *Fort Apache* prints the legend but also tells the truth about what really happened: on the one hand, those who are erroneously cherished; on the other, the righteous people who will be forgotten. In this light, the dust is not the natural shape this particular borderland assumes but a trope carrying the truth the film aims to show behind the legend: the land contains the mistakes made by one group at the expense of the other and is thus the symbol of the inequality of the civilizing process. Dust in the film is, to borrow Limerick's lyrical definition, "something in the soil" still contained and included in every layer of geological material, in every sediment of sand, in the memory of the land, able to speak for the populations that set up home or established nomadic life in the area before "us". Through dust, *Fort Apache* expresses its bitter truth about a dispute between enemies, clarifying its position on what stands behind all our wrong legends about American heroism.

John Ford, Pedro Armendáriz, and the SBW: 3 Godfathers *(1948)*

The desert is also central in *3 Godfathers* (1948). Beautifully shot by Winton C. Hoch, who moved cacti and sagebrush around to create a balanced composition, the desert in the film acquires a

substantial symbolic value. Dust blizzards, windy sand-hills, a salty lake and its dry soil, sunburned cobbles, and a broken terrain: every natural setting in the film explains how heavily the iconography of the 1930s Dust Bowl influenced the film and, simultaneously, shows its intention to beautify it [Fig. 10].

The social instability of the 1930s and the notion of an uneven civilizing process are evident in the frequent clashes among the three outlaws and in the pursuit conducted by the Americans to capture them. In the opening sequence, the three outlaws are shown as brutal bandits lurking at the edge of this isle of civilization, Welcome. One of them, Mexican outlaw Pedro Roca Fuerte (Pedro Armendáriz) says that when he visited the town last time, it was still part of Mexico. Later on, during the dust blizzard, he points out that similar storms were named "Santa Anna Clouds" to remember the glorious cavalry of general Antonio López de Santa Anna, the Mexican leader who participated in the war against the U.S. in 1846. Before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the territory was pristine—"there was nothing, no bank, no railroad" but a few adobe huts and a little cantina "where a beautiful Mexican girl named Josefina played her guitar"—a line attesting to the general tendency to romanticize Mexico as a utopian place where it was possible to live a simpler and more unstructured life. Ironically, the name of the Mexican town was Tarántula, albeit Pedro's remembrance indicates a different atmosphere. The new name, Welcome, makes a similar ironic inversion since its settlers have only the appearance of amiability. When the outlaws enter Welcome, they find a nice little town with small houses scattered along a grid of a few main roads. Mr. Buck Sweet (Ward Bond) emerges behind a brightly colored picket fence decorated with flowers. His house is even labeled with a shingle hung on the fence: B. Sweet. Everyone is indeed sweet and welcoming, but this is a mirage of hospitality that hides delusional endings. Despite the civilizing principle of virtues that its name endorses, B. Sweet fires at the three outlaws when they escape from town after the bank robbery. Later, he blocks their way to all the water tanks between Welcome and the border. He takes almost as a personal fight the hunting of these three desperadoes who, in his opinion, had the guts to ridicule his name ("B. Sweet! That is a mighty pretty name!"), family (they lied to his

wife), and town (they robbed the bank). His quest to stop them becomes a personal fight, overcoming his concern over his niece, who has gone missing with her husband in the drive from New Jerusalem to Welcome. When he discovers his niece's dress near the dried-out well, during the pursuit of the outlaws, Buck immediately assumes that the three are responsible for her death and for the destruction of the water tank. The principle of justice, in this character, borders on personal revenge, which looks ahead to the character of Ethan in *The Searchers*.

The social instability of the period is not only mirrored in the relationship between Buck and the bandits but also in the internal skirmishes that menace the harmony of the trio: Bob (John Wayne) and Pedro are constantly arguing over decisions about the future or the responsibility for past events, as happens, for instance, when the former blames the latter for having lost the horses in the blizzard. Bob is about the raise the lasso in an attempt to whip him but Pedro bursts out in anger—"that's what happened to me after I decided to come here, to this land, with these two fools". Despite having lost their horses, the trio proceeds on their journey until the outlaws find the lost wagon with the pregnant woman (Mildred Natwick), Buck's niece. After having helped the woman deliver her baby, Pedro insists on speaking Spanish to the infant. Humorously using the same language he despises, Bob gets angry: "cut out that *Mex lingo* around the kid, will you, Pete? We got to raise him with good old *American habla*, like his 'ma!" (*3 Godfathers* [00:53:05-00:53:13]). However, Pedro keeps on talking in Spanish with little Pedrito.

The film's second part turns the social instability into hope, directing the audience to the need to sublimate trouble and anger into an upward sense of commonality. After the discovery of the pregnant woman in the covered wagon, Bob describes the plight of the family to his friends. The foolish pregnant woman's husband had placed dynamite on the tank to quickly obtain water with the effect of destroying it forever; after that, the horses had licked the alkaline slop and got sick. The husband tried to bring them back when they ran away, leaving his wife alone. This chain of troubles may well evoke the plight of the farmers fighting against drought during the worst years of the Depression. The birth of the baby brings a sense of community among Pedro, Bob, and William

(Harry Carey Jr.), who carry the baby in three different portions of the journey, one after the other, each one contributing to a part of the collective task. The infant, named Robert William Pedro, is a living embodiment of their memory just as the child Michael Thursday York O'Rourke, at the end of *Fort Apache,* represents the union of the best elements of his flawed grandfathers. More than *Fort Apache,* though, it is *Stagecoach* that casts a long shadow over *3 Godfathers*. First, we find the same names, of characters (Buck and Curley) and location (Apache Wells). Then, we have the event of the delivery of a baby, contrasting with the usual violence of a western. Like *Stagecoach*, this is a SBW revolving around a Mexican border-landscape, and one that is narratively dependent on the importance of a Mexican character, Pedro Roca Fuerte. Pedro's evolution in the film reminds us of Doc's in the 1939 film, with the fundamental change imposed by ethnic representation.

Like Doc in *Stagecoach,* Pedro is selected as the most appropriate person to help the woman have her baby. Bob persuades Pedro to help her since he trusts his virtue, just as the passengers of the stagecoach trust the doctor despite his weakness for alcohol. He is the only one who can reassure an American woman in labor in the middle of a desert, having lost her husband, and accompanied by three men with whom she is not familiar. The film emphasizes this role with a close-up of Armendáriz [Fig. 11]. He advances toward the camera, visibly touched by the situation. He raises one eyebrow—a typical gesture of Armendáriz—and brings his hand to his heart looking down. The camera frames him from below, with the intention of emphasizing nobility, as in the shots of the three chiefs in *Fort Apache*. Pedro decides to support the woman in this delicate moment so he gently approaches the covered wagon, hat in hand, offering help with an extremely mellow voice: "Please, *señora*, do not be afraid of me" (*3 Godfathers* [00:39:08–00:39:13]). Ford places him at the exact center of the frame, taken from the inside of the covered wagon as in a subjective shot from the woman's perspective. He is framed by the edge of the wagon's canvas, which draws around him a white arch that seems like an aura emanating from his gentle soul.

Bob and William cherish the baby's birth with the same awe displayed by the men waiting for the birth of Lil' Coyote in Chris's adobe house in *Stagecoach*. Like the "proud, glorified dregs" Doc

and Dallas, Pedro is redeemed by his deed. When Bob expresses doubts about making it through the desert and escaping from Buck ("Why didn't somebody stop me before I promised that woman? I don't want to grow no long white beard at the Yuma penitentiary"), Pedro rescues him from wrongdoing and misconduct. As he declares, a similar abdication cannot be contemplated: "May my beard grow clear till it gets down to my foot, may it get a nest of prison rats before I break my promise to a dying woman!". They start quarrelling again, but Bob returns to Pedro's words when, after the death of both his friends, he looks for a source of comfort to alleviate the pain. He imagines William and Pedro—we see their translucent profiles behind him—giving the necessary energy to complete the task. In the last sequence, in front of the judge (Guy Kibbee), Bob persuades the jury to absolve him using Pedro's words: "I am not breaking the promise made to a dying woman". Curiously, one of the last lines delivered by Bob in the film is given in the previously rejected language and addressed to the godson he wanted to protect from dangerous ethnic influences: *Adiós compañero!*

In the post-war era, with the problems of the Dust Bowl already distant, the social and political issues connected with the Depression acquired a more intimate nature. The escape of the three outlaws through the desert progressively becomes a spiritual and psychological journey more than a form of social critique. The desert landscape of the film thus encompasses fears, anxiety, and inward-looking stasis, with dust representing internal isolation and psychological regression, wounds that must be healed to endure. Still, the role played by Pedro acquires primary importance and leads us to find analogies with the 1936 version of the same film. Through Armendáriz, Ford had the opportunity to highlight the ethnic codification of Pedro as a Mexican, extending and insisting on his pivotal role. In 1936, Pedro is killed almost at the film's beginning; in 1948, the same character is expanded, and his trajectory becomes more complex. Further, in 1948, Pedro embodies the coexistence between sinful transgression and spiritual anguish that was so central in Ford's sensibility. By delivering the baby and becoming one of his godfathers, the character diverges from the holiness of the Christian family and prompts us to reassess our preconception of it. The film upholds the prospect of a society

based on a renovated paradigm in which a Mexican bandit is chosen to be the godfather of an American newborn.

In conclusion, Ford benefits from Armendáriz's acting skills, which are foregrounded in many sequences. The peculiarities of this actor are numerous. For instance, the actor often raises one eyebrow when a pause filled with pathos suspends the progress of the action, and a specific emotion is conveyed, usually attributed to poignancy and passion. This happens in many scenes of Fernández's *Enamorada,* and Ford tries to make the best of the immense potentiality of the human material at his disposal, which explains why the American filmmaker assigns to Armendáriz that close-up after Bob's description of the plight of the family. The emphasis on a different modulation of Armendáriz's voice and its transition from loud shouts to sweet murmurs is also important: it is a correlative feature to the landscape of the actor's face, another element identifying his trademark and, notably, utilized by the actor in both languages. Consider, for instance, the noteworthy sequence of *Enamorada* in which he describes to Father Sierra (Fernando Fernández) the beauty of Beatriz (María Félix). In a few sequences of *The Fugitive,* Armendáriz's voice drops its explosive vibration to acquire a honeyed nuance associated with erotic charged moments.[18] Through him, Ford went beyond preconceived ideas of ethnicity that determined what should *be* and *not be* shown of a Mexican character in Hollywood westerns.

John Huston's study of two Americas: The Treasure of the Sierra Madre *(1948)*

The love story between Mexico and the U.S. does not involve only John Ford. Many other American filmmakers in the late 1940s became or continued to be interested in Mexico for different reasons: Dalton Trumbo, Budd Boetticher, George Sherman, John Huston, and many others. To define the complexity of the political and ideological negotiations of the post-war era, we also need to remember that some of them, most notably Trumbo, escaped to Mexico mainly for political reasons during the

[18] The erotic charge attributed to a Mexican character was kept low key in Hollywood productions but Armandáriz's acting skills made that thrill still detectable in *The Fugitive*.

hearings of the HUAC (House of Un-American Activities Committee). By contrast, Boetticher and Sherman were attracted to the South for personal and cultural more than political reasons. Even if he was not blacklisted and not forced to escape, John Huston was attracted to Mexico instead for both personal and political reasons. The Cold War was, in fact, a period in which this country was selected as a location to find a political environment more compatible with leftist ideologies that were largely diffused during the 1930s in the U.S. but increasingly suppressed in the late 1940s. Many dissidents looked for political shelter south of the border to maintain their critical resistance against forms of oppression when these ideologies faced intense criticism in the American political debate of the 1940s. Rebecca M. Schreiber defines these dissidents "American exiles" since they sometimes never left Mexico to return to the U.S. (Schreiber 2008: ix-xxv). John Huston was not one of them, but he was certainly close to the leftist side of the political debate throughout his life. He was one of the founders of the Committee for the First Amendment formed in September 1947 to support the Hollywood Ten[19] during the difficult weeks of the hearings. Besides, he first proved to be close to the cultural debate we have previously described when in 1940 he decided to adapt the *The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett, who certainly did not hide his sympathy toward a Marxist critique of the social system. Then, he confirmed his inclination when he decided to adapt *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, written in 1927 by B. Traven, a novelist of German origin and member of the anarcho-syndicalist trade union of the Industrial Workers of the World (or Wobblies).[20]

John Huston claimed once that his trademark was to film on location, "where the films happen". He relied on foreign crews and infrastructures in a way that emphasized notions of authenticity and creativity. As he declared, "story needs and not economics [i.e., detaxation] must dictate the location of a film" (in Steinhart 2019: 56). This principle is primarily detectable in the

[19] Alva Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrain Scott, and Dalton Trumbo refused to cooperate with the HUAC.

[20] Traven can be considered one of the writers of the Popular Front literature of the 1930s, together with John Dos Passos (the U.S.A. trilogy), Erskine Caldwell (*Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre*), Langston Hughes (*The Ways of White Folks*), Josephine Herbst (Trexler trilogy), Henry Roth (*Call It Sleep*), Nelson Algren (*Somebody in Boots*), Jack Conroy (*The Disinherited*), Richard Wright (*Native Son*), Edward Anderson (*Hungry Men*), John Steinbeck (*Tortilla Flat*, *The Pearl*, *The Grapes of Wrath*), and many others.

numerous cases in which Huston decided to shoot in Mexico, a country that always had great appeal to him. The director lived south of the border in his youth and later bought a house in Puerto Vallarta, where he spent a considerable part of his life. This familiarity increased a desire to capture the "true identity" of the Mexican people and landscape. Because of his knowledge of the language and culture, he was hired as a screenwriter (in collaboration with Wolfgang Reinhardt) for *Juarez* (1939). He later shot three films on location in Mexico: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), and *Under the Volcano* (1984).

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre can be considered Huston's version of Chase's comparative study of the two Americas. This film offers his interpretation of the contrast between the urban and industrial American civilization and the primitivist and traditional culture of Mexico. Through the description of the main characters' greed and rapacity, the film aims to show how the civilizing process resulted in alienation rather than security and fulfillment. The film is a peculiar SBW, in which the pioneering spirit of three Anglo-Saxon prospectors—Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart), Curtin (Tim Holt), and Howard (Walter Huston)—is questioned through personal failures and busted dreams. If in Ford, we can still count on images displaying the victorious, albeit erroneous, agency of the myth, in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a gloomier prospect takes place that wipes away any hopes for a better future.

The opening sequence of the film reveals the influence of 1930s Depression culture: a broken Dobbs drifts around the streets of Tampico, picking up cigarette butts from the ground and begging rich passersby for some spared *centavos* (among them, Walter's son, John Huston, who gives him a few *centavos* to get rid of the homeless). He is one of the 1930s forgotten men, desperately trying to make a living south of the border, fighting privations and marginality. When an American building company finally hires Dobbs and his friend Curtin for a temporary job, they do not receive their daily wage as promised. When they later retaliate by beating up the crooked employer, Huston shoots the sequence with a low-angled camera placed at ground level, showing the employer as a crawling evil creature. Shortly before the beating, Dobbs describes to Curtin the feeling of being broken and

desperate—"you can sit on a bench till you are three-quarters starved. You can beg from another gringo, or even commit burglary"—sentences that convey the nihilism and disillusionment that characterized the decade. By presenting Dobbs and Curtin as two outcasts beaten up by a corrupt and profit-driven American company, the film fully sympathizes with the starvation army that filled early 1930s social problem films or proletarian novels that focused on industrial conflict and working-class conditions. It is also important to note that the film's slang and general linguistic terms clearly derive from Depression-era literature.

The 1930s tendency to explore Mexican culture and society is also in the film's desire to compare two different national mindsets on abundance and wealth. On the one hand, the American obsession with profit represented by the three prospectors; on the other, the wiser and deeply ironic detachment felt by Mexicans toward issues of material wealth. This last part of the chapter is dedicated to the analysis of these two intertwined concepts in the film. Albeit still retaining the general paternalism that characterizes the American attitude toward the South, the film interrogates the psychological unruliness of the protagonists and shows how they learn from contact with the rich Mexican land and its inhabitants. Thus, the film is a comparative study of two approaches to material and spiritual wealth.

Through Curtin, Howard, and Dobbs, the film shows three different reactions to the corrupting power of gold. Material wealth is presented in the film as a corrupting agency that fully degrades a person's temperament (the case of Dobbs) or amplifies evil inclinations (Curtin and Howard). Curtin is the youngest of the three, embodying a naive, optimistic position. When the incident of the explosion of the mine almost kills Dobbs, Curtin is tempted by the idea of letting him die to take the part of gold that belongs to his friend. With his back toward the camera, we watch him walking on, but he suddenly pauses and turns back to the mine. From that moment onward, Curtin abides by the moral standard of this virtuous decision, stopping every devilish plan that might come to Dobbs's mind. Still, when Cody (Bruce Bennett) climbs to the mountain to reach their site and tries to persuade them to take him as a partner, Curtin agrees with the others to kill him so they can get rid of a

competitor who might take part of their wealth. Played by the filmmaker's father, Howard is the older prospector who tempts Dobbs and Curtin into the business of prospecting for gold. After having listened to Howard's speech at the inn, *El Oso Negro*, Dobbs is enticed into this adventure. "Gold doesn't carry any curse with it; it all depends on whether or not the guy who finds it is the right guy", he declares to Curtin after Howard's speech. By contrast, Howard signals from the beginning that gold corrupts every man, beyond individual temperament. He is an authoritative expert ("I've dug in Alaska, Canada, Colorado") and often gives valuable information to Dobbs and Curtin, who lack basic know-how. In the speech at *El Oso Negro*, he carefully describes how a profit-driven business like gold prospecting can become a form of obsession:

> "Gold's a devilish sort of thing. You start out by telling yourself you'll be satisfied with $25,000 worth. So help me, Lord, and cross my heart. Fine resolution. After months of sweating yourself dizzy, few provisions, and finding nothing, you come down to $15,000, then $10,000. Finally, you say, 'Lord, let me just find $5,000 worth, and I'll never ask for anything more the rest of my life" (*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* [00:12:00–00:12:24])

Curiously, Howard here reverses the vibrant enthusiasm that Crèvecoeur illustrates at the end of "History of Andrew the Hebridean" in *Letter From an American Farmer* (1782), where he provides details on the farmer's relentless work. In four years, the ideal farmer has acquired a list of properties whose monetary value is accurately reported as a fortune constantly growing in his pocket: "improvements and lease: $225; six cows at $13: $78; two breeding mares: $50; the rest of the stock: $100…" (Crèvecoeur 1904: 117–118). After the fascinating blend of naturalistic details, romantic fantasy, and nostalgic exaltation of civic virtues that the *Letter* describes, the westward expansion is in Crèvecoeur reduced to aspects of profit and income. Howard describes instead a dream gone wrong, transferred abroad, and characterized by downward instead of upward mobility. Still, probably because of his experience, Howard maintains some sort of detachment toward the task of accumulating wealth. His indifference toward this prospect is often coated in merriment and irony. For instance, in the dialogue regarding their future plan, Howard declares he wants to settle down somewhere, open a small store and spend the rest of his life reading comic strips. Conversely, Dobbs seems to have bigger plans: "a brand-new set of duds [clothing], dozen [sic.] of everything" and the

comfort of being rich. Later, during the same dialogue, Howard proposes to put a limit on their take so that when they reach it, they can leave the business and go back to their normal life again. Dobbs wants to set the highest limit, and after being accused of greed by Curtin, demands the part of the share he gently offered to his friend when the business started and he was still free from assets. As he points out, "in any civilized place, the biggest investor gets the biggest return, doesn't he?", which already shows the potential dishonesty and avidity of the character. Howard then intervenes, replying, "That's one thing in favor of the wilds". Howard's position on the principles of civilization is thus very precise: they are mostly wrong especially when they are intended to maintain inequality.

Dobbs is literally deformed by wealth, an aspect that confirms Howard's initial theory on gold and contradicts what Dobbs himself had maintained at the beginning. Like Kane in *Citizen Kane*, he is corrupted by greed. He appears like a mad guy speaking to himself, the grotesque mask of his face over a deformed body in the expressionist imagery of a horror film. For instance, after the arrival of Cody, he appears in a twisted position, his face covered by a long beard, distorted with madness, with a large head and small hands, strained by anxiety and the desire to kill—an image that was influenced by his earlier role as Duke Mantee in *The Petrified Forest* (Archie Mayo 1936). This image is replicated later, after Howard leaves them to reach the Mexican village. Left alone with Curtin, Dobbs becomes increasingly isolated in his incapacity to control other people's intentions. He attempts to betray Howard but when Curtin refuses to take part in the evil plan, he decides to murder him. Transformed into a mad dog, foam in his mouth, shivering and grinning, his face lit from the fire below, Dobbs is like an appalling monster burning in hell and at war with everybody.

Robert Warshow argues that in westerns there is no poverty and no wealth. The westerner is a "man of leisure" who owns nothing and does not need money since every form of richness appears to be less a material than a moral quality, the occasion that starts the contention, not the object of contention (Warshow [1954] 2001: 108–109). This SBW seems to perfectly explain and extend this concept: Howard, Dobbs, and Curtin are *not* men of leisure and they *do* need money. Therefore, they are less mythical versions of a westerner. Yet, the second part of Warshow's reading is here true:

their lust for money highlights moral differences among them and between the group of prospectors and the Mexican population. The three Americans develop various relationships with the Mexicans in the film. For example, Dobbs appears isolated and resentful in his remarks regarding the land and people. This is evident when he expresses his frustration about being a financially struggling American in Tampico while observing that the poor Mexicans in the same town have a better chance of survival than he does. On the other hand, Howard is always respectful of the Mexican ways. He speaks fluent Spanish and is at ease with local customs. He explains to Dobbs why they must exchange tobacco with the villagers when they arrive unexpectedly at their bivouac. Despite the paternalistic overtone of his approach, Howard fully understands that the Mexicans require his presence at the village to compensate him for having saved the kid's life. When Dobbs violently reacts in an attempt to convince the Mexicans that Howard cannot go with them, they are ready to engage in a fight. Howard knows that Dobbs's ways are not correct and lead nowhere ("You can't fight your way out of this").

John Huston once said that since he lived in Mexico during his youth, his determination to make the film there and to capture the true color required for the story had profoundly increased (Pratley 1977: 63; Brill 1997: 247). Like his father in the film, Huston knew this land and its landscape very well. In his autobiography, *An Open Book* (1980), he furnishes substantial evidence for his in-depth knowledge of Mexico as a country of yucca trees, mesquite, cacti, wilderness, and beauty. The first page, for instance, describes Puerto Vallarta with romantic and detailed images that demonstrate how accurate and, at the same time, lyrical was Huston's knowledge of Mexico:

> Life here is lived in the open. At night, wild creatures come down to inspect the changes I've made in their domain: coatimundis, possums, deer, boars, ocelots, boas, and jaguars. […] Parrots come winging in at first light, full of talk. After sunrise, the jungle quiets down, but there is always something going on at sea. Pelicans in tandem skimming the waves. […] There is a manta ray who performs regularly about fifty yards offshore. He always jumps twice. The first time is to get your attention" (Huston 1980: 4).

Huston's fondness for Mexico was thus cherished through direct and close observation. As a consequence, in his films, the Mexican natural landscape is never reduced to abstraction—an

imaginary land—or to symbols partially fabricated in a fanciful reconstruction. Huston's Mexico was the real Mexico, at least as seen through the director's lens. Consider, for instance, the first images of Tampico in the film, with its glimpse over the small park with the fountain where Dobbs and Curtin meet for the first time. While Dobbs wanders between the town's main streets, the viewers can see the graceful buildings behind his back, with their elegant balconies and the crowded porticos of the town, where shops and vendor booths are located. Yet, it is in the sequence of the healing of the boy that the relationship between land and people becomes genuinely evident and charged with a mystical significance that contrasts with the wild and desert landscape of the protagonists' souls [Fig. 12]. The sequence opens with the four villagers appearing in front of the three prospectors as if they materialized from nature. Dobbs, Curtin, and Howard are late in perceiving their presence. This identification between land and people is also evident in the following sequence. This land is entangled with its inhabitants: villagers, in a religious silence, immersed in communion with their land, appear in a beautiful chiaroscuro underscored by the magical atmosphere offered by the extra-diegetic musical accompaniment. The richness of the Mexican land is displayed through the visual motif of life-giving waters—a prominent trope in this film and one that Huston used symbolically throughout his career (Brill 1997: 19). In this sequence, water becomes a symbol of this land. The American characters waste water or take benefit from it in a way that suggests their attitudes toward the land. Dobbs throws a glass of water in the face of the lottery boy at the film's beginning, already displaying a tendency toward tyranny and avidity. Howard advises his partners, who exulted at the glimpse of pyrite mistaken for pure gold, to save water since, as he points out, it can be more precious than gold. Water mixed with tequila is used by Howard when he heals the kid who is lying on the flat rock, surrounded by lavish vegetation. Water is offered as a synonym for the reinvigorated lifeblood overflowing in the boy's veins, and the same happens to Howard. He decides to help the Mexican community without doubts or concerns regarding his share of gold left under the surveillance of two potential adversaries (mainly Dobbs, who progressively loses sanity). Lifeblood indeed overflows in his veins again.

This association between water and land, counterpointed with the material aspects of wealth and possession, is particularly interesting since it outlines the pattern of associations and contrasts between Mexican and American characters. In their primitive Arcadian communalism, the villagers do not need money: they possess everything they need in order to be happy. The sequence of Howard being pampered by girls, food, tequila, and cigarettes is obviously humorous but contains a truth that speaks about the abundance in which they live. Mexicans seem to place value on things other than gold: bandits look for guns instead of gold; villagers from the mountains or the valley choose furs and pack-animals over money; the federales are after bandits. Mexicans are not depicted in consistently favorable overtones—as is demonstrated by the violence and ignorance of the *bandidos* (played by José Torvay and Alfonso Bedoya) or the perfunctory procedures of the federales. However, they are presented as the ethnic group furthest away from the corrupting effects of gold. Only the Americans—Dobbs, Cody, Curtin, and Howard—are obsessed with the source of wealth: how to achieve it, how to maintain it. Yet, sometimes, these contrasts give way to resemblance. Contrary to Dobbs, Howard and Curtin are enlightened by the Mexicans about a valid truth: Curtin resolves to visit Cody's widow in Texas, and Howard returns to the village. In both cases, the pursuit of happiness follows the general principles taught by Mexicans: a lifestyle close to nature, love and friendship, and the satisfaction of one's basic needs. This explains why, in the film, gold is constantly confronted with the "real treasure" of life. The letter written by Cody's wife and found in the man's pocket by the three prospectors, for instance, fully expresses a point of view germane to the idea of a lifestyle close to nature and inspired by the communal values shown in the Mexican village. The letter, read aloud by Curtin and Howard, describes the love of a wife and the affection of a child who are waiting for their husband and father to return home. It ends with an exhortation to remember that life's real treasures are in love and affection. This resounds with the desire of the villagers to ask Howard to go with them so they can repay his kindness. Yet, it is also evoked on other occasions, when affection arises from suspicions and fear. When Cody proposes a fair agreement with the three prospectors, for instance, Howard is the only one willing to strike some friendship and solidarity with

him. Asked about his future plan, Curtin responds with a reminiscence of the time spent as a young picker at a peach harvest in the San Joaquin Valley. Harmony, community, and affection are all activities linked to the rhythm of nature.

Compared to the desert landscape of the protagonists' souls, the Mexican land thus becomes the symbol of moral purity. Howard's promptness in supporting the villagers pays back when he Howard and Curtin are later saved from Dobbs's madness. Significantly, this ethical principle of mutual assistance appears wholly reversed in the case of the Americans, where a poisonous rather than redemptive approach is often implied. Consider, for instance, how Dobbs and Curtin are tricked by their American employer at the film's beginning or how they are ready to kill their competitor, Cody, who comes to disturb their business. In this light, after the dust storm that scatters the precious metal away at the end of the film, Howard and Curtin's laughter is profoundly liberating. The release happens not only because the dust storm symbolically returns what was stolen to where it belonged (the Mexican land) but because Howard and Curtin finally enjoy freedom from constraint and need to succeed. Howard can return to the Mexican village and Curtin can follow his dream to have a new life with Cody's widow. The initial lust for success and prosperity, the American obsession with money, is thus compared to a dangerous addiction. Exported to Mexico and confronted with the land's natural inclination to identify the real possession of life with positive values of friendship and kindness, the American mindset produces catastrophic results. The death of Dobbs, the only character unable to learn the lesson, extends the film's interest and supports this reading, especially if we compare this role with the virtuous American Bogart played in *Casablanca* (initially reluctant but then aware of official values). By placing the plot within the geopolitical context of the relationship between Mexico and the U.S., Huston outlines an interesting opposition in which Mexico, at the end, appears immensely superior.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mexican Garden

Landscape art: the notions of picturesque and sublime

In his volume on landscape art, Malcolm Andrews describes the aesthetic criteria to organize rough materials into an artful landscape. The portion of nature is chosen by the artist as a pleasurable and fascinating place following earlier images, a choice that imposes a window-frame to elect that portion of land as a place where to direct viewers' eyes. The imposition of a frame allows the viewers to experience a vicarious feeling of presence that brings the outer world into an artificial version of reality that supplies the viewers with what they are missing. To a certain extent, a view is always exotic, being the pictorial representation of a natural scene offered to citizens who live separated from nature. Andrews insists that a landscape is *already* mediated land, "land that has been aesthetically processed" according to specific criteria furnished by earlier painted scenes or views described in pastoral poetry and used as pre-existing "molds" where the artist pours new ideas (Ibid. 3-7, 50). In a way, even the beauty of a real landscape derives from its allegedly fictive character, from what seems to be the product of art more than of nature. The process of identifying a portion of land to single it out as aesthetically superior from adjacent parts is already an act of converting raw land into an artful view:

> In judging what is a "good view" we are preferring one aspect of the countryside to another. We are selecting and editing, suppressing or subordinating some visual information in favour of promoting other features. We are constructing a hierarchical arrangement of the components within a simple view so that it becomes a complex mix of visual facts and imaginative construction (Ibid. 3).

The potentiality of a landscape in art is in this complex combination of visual facts and imaginative construction, a combination that allows to turn banal scenery into a meaningful view. This process *always* starts with a selection: something must be excluded, left outside, in order to celebrate other features that, by contrast, are emphasized so that they can elicit emotional responses or produce

cultural significance. The frame literally defines the shape of a land, as Andrews argues, since it is the limit imposed by an external subject that determines the content of a view.

The analysis of landscape art also involves a consideration of the intrinsic aspects that identify the internal elements of a view. Within the limits imposed by the frame, the organization of motifs establishes precise coordinates that allow the viewer to read the image. The reading depends on the relations between these various features: their internal distance, dimension, and collocation. The presence of water or clouds, for instance, is essential to identify the meaning of a view (we can consider not only a landscape but also a cloudscape or a skyscape). Some elements seem more important than others, as in the case of what is not specifically landscape: animals and human figures. Andrews pinpoints the extreme importance of the human figure in classical figurative art. The author identifies the traditional tendency to have the landscape occupying a lower status in comparison to the human figure, and defines this condition as "attributive". Landscape tends to be, in fact, the attribute of a figure, a quality that extends and reflects that characteristics of the subject represented. Landscape is thus dependent on the human figure in so far as it signals salient traits of the human presence (consider, for instance, the case of mythological or hagiographical representations). Natural motifs and human figures are arranged according to an internal tension that constitutes the argument of the picture, its theme, or narration. Organized in specific designs and colors, these two categories (landscape and human figure) identify a recognizable mood according to the symbolic or allegorical treatment they receive within the frame. Still, natural motifs within a view contain a potential meaning even when the human subject is removed. Buildings, ruins, different types of trees or flowers, mountain peaks, deserts, water basins, scattered bushes, stormy clouds or sunny skies, soft grassland, or austere rocks are meaningful beyond the presence of what is not specifically landscape. In order to offer an interpretation of these natural aspects, landscape art tends to mingle scientific methods and cultural investment (topography, cultural geography, spatial analysis), producing a result in which details attributed to a real place are mixed with symbolic features elaborated and projected by the artists or by the viewers.

Unlike classical landscape art, nineteenth-century popular panoramas or non-fiction travelogues emphasize the framed view of a land downplaying the role of human figures. They aim to turn the space into a commodity: a portion of land is the aesthetic asset, the value that must be sold since its principal goal is to increase touristic fervor. One of the most evident characteristics of these views was the marginalized—or even the absence—of human figures: these products focused solely on a visual display of faraway, exotic places with minuscule figurines at the bottom of the frame. The initial attributive status of a landscape in classical figurative art is thus turned on its head: here, the low status is occupied by the human subject, that acquires an accessory or peripheral position, often appearing removed or dwarfed by the magniloquence of the landscape. The setting determines the features characterizing the human figure, not the other way around, and the eventual presence of a human subject acquires a quality according to landscape specificity (Ibid. 25-35).

As a commodity of crucial importance, a land can be better sold if the function attributed to its reproduction in images is made clear. For instance, a picturesque landscape is often connected to the psychological restoration it produces, a feeling that reveals the therapeutic power implicit in that view. As Andrews writes, "beautiful landscapes can detoxify the mind and spirit" (Ibid. 53) and this restoration depends on internal factors of the image. The author identifies the historical background of the notion of picturesque in the Latin concept of *locus amoenus* (pleasant place). Used in classical and Renaissance times to designate beautiful rural retreats, the idea of picturesque gained new interest during the eighteenth century, after the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where Kant proposed a subjective treatment of aesthetic values. The Enlightenment refused universal notions of beauty, opting instead for an interiorized paradigm that depended on specific attitudes toward nature. If classical beauty consists of a symmetrical view of landscape, picturesque beauty derives from an aestheticization of a sensitive response by a subject who draws a peculiar image of a pleasant landscape out of raw nature following his/her internal inclinations. Nature is a source of diversified experiences that the artist reproduces on the canvas through irregular shapes and colors, conveying not an eternal notion of beauty but a distinctive and subjective version. The notion thus condenses an

exquisitely subjective experience more than fixed and immutable concepts of ideal beauty (Ibid. 53–77).

It is useful to draw a parallel with the idea of sublime where, contrary to the picturesque, a notion of restoration is missing. While the conventions derived from the picturesque tend to secure some kind of non-classical uniformity and harmony, the conventions that inform a sublime landscape suggest an experience of near loss of visual and intellectual control over the environment. A picturesque view offers a comfortable middle-ground between cold refinement and passionate wilderness, a place stimulating sweet repose and serenity. A picturesque view has to be safe: it can contain internal variety but must not be fully chaotic or untidy. By contrast, the notion of sublime, defined in the same period as the picturesque in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), identifies the forces overpowering human figures. If the picturesque is benign and luminous, characterized by pastel colors, and by a repertoire of lively themes, the sublime is usually visionary and unquiet, with gloomy hues, saturated colors, and strongly marked edges. The characteristics of the sublime suggest the isolation of the subject, the tempest of emotions: fearful, awful, perverse aspects of nature mirroring inner dilemmas or the unrepresentable horror of distress and loss of control. Wild and turbulent landscapes—a violent storm over a rocky area, an erupting volcano, or a thunderous waterfall—are identified with "forces stronger than us" (power) or with an indeterminate source (obscurity). A sublime image rejects reassuring boundaries (infinity) and generally represents human privation. The sublime has the power to compel and destroy the human as it contains a dramatic coexistence of evilness and indeterminacy. The delightful terror implicit in these views is measured against human proportions, dwarfed by the magnificent vastness of a sublime landscape: reduced in size or marginalized at the bottom of the canvas, human figures are often present but marked off by distance and weakness (Ibid. 133–134).[1]

[1] Thomas Cole depicted both categories in his *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, MA, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (1836) interpreting the opposition between wilderness and civilization as an opposition between sublime and picturesque in one single canvas. The storm on the left leaves a sunlit sky that blesses a placid landscape below, irrigated by the bow-shaped bend of the river and steeped into the golden beam of daylight: a picturesque view of a civilized nature.

The process of creating beauty or terror in a landscape and the critical judgment required to ascribe an image to one of the two categories depend on the viewers' sensibility, culture, ethnicity, gender, and social status. These are the extrinsic aspects of a view. The act of interpreting always derives from the adoption of a code of looking that is geographically and culturally positioned and changes accordingly. Each viewer thus appreciates diverse features within the same view, producing different ranges of mutually exclusive responses based on discriminating factors. Valuing a natural scenery as an expression of aesthetic amenity or sublime terror is a thing that depends, for instance, on age. Maturity usually brings sophistication to the aesthetic and spiritual response to a landscape that goes beyond the initial sensuous delight. Further, kinship or ethnic belonging affects our reaction. To an outsider, a foreign landscape is bound up with property and territorial control issues, with the desire to master a view. Many authors point out landscape art's inevitable ideological implication as a visual/pictorial medium that reproduces a postcolonial drive toward territorial expansion (Ibid. 162-166; Mitchell 1994: 23). In some cases, a picturesque view can be considered as a reaction to the violence implied in the conquest of a land, which is translated into mild images of delightful serenity that indirectly justify that previous phase, adulterating its brutal core (Cooper 2022: 97-132). We have discussed many examples of this pictorial version of imperialism at the beginning of chapter 2, where celebrations of the national landscape tend to defend a past and prepare a future just for one part of the ethnic groups involved.

We can thus summarize a final framework that may be useful for the analysis of filmic images. First, landscape cinema turns the hierarchy between human figures and natural backgrounds on its head: the former acquires attributive status assuming the characteristics intrinsic in the natural motifs (in Hollywood cinema, this is a tendency, not a rule). Secondly, the important coefficient represented by subjectivity: a filmmaker may pour his ideas inside a view in order to offer specific experiences

On the left corner, stormy clouds block out the sun leaving in obscurity a savage region below. With its predominance of yellows and with the presence of water, the right side of the frame contains a picturesque half-landscape that contrasts with the sublime uncertainty represented on the left. Curiously the painter figured himself as a tiny figure sitting on the wild side of the canvas yet confined on the edge, as an in-between figure, simultaneously expressing fear and desire to meet the savage land.

that will be peculiarly received. Thirdly, landscape cinema differentiates between picturesque or sublime notions according to a psychological investment: a picturesque landscape has a therapeutic power over the viewer, while the sublime expresses fear and uncertainty, but both are involved in a general commodification of land. Fourthly, landscape cinema contains a specificity in topographic records—the straightforward connection with a country and its locales—and pure fantasy consisting of cultural approaches, aesthetic, and emotional investments. There is always a real referent coexisting with a large dose of creativity, which means that landscape cinema always contains myth and history, even if under different degrees of variation. Therefore, a form of concealment, to some degree, is always involved. The frame singles out a portion of land from all the other possible choices: it is a device that simultaneously reveals and conceals and that is affected by each historical phase, with its various economic or political forces at stake. So, the distinction between picturesque or sublime landscapes changes diachronically according to what is left outside the frame, such as what is imposed by the postcolonial erasure of controversial aspects or by an emphasis on specifically exotic and seductive elements.

Picturesque Mexico

When applied to the Mexican landscape, the concept of picturesque results from mutual influences involving Mexican artists and filmmakers in promoting their land. As a European concept, the idea of picturesque beauty was imported into America in the mid-nineteenth century following dominant political ideas that wished to place Mexico in a global dialogue with the art and culture of other Western countries. After the first phase of dissemination of these principles in local art academies, which had to rectify the alleged *mal gusto* of the pre-Hispanic pictorial system through European aesthetic notions, Mexican artists began to domesticate the concept, acquiring an autonomy that increased with national pride and consumption (Ortega 2021: 129–130, 145). The idea of picturesque Mexico was heavily influenced by the image European countries had produced and projected over

this land. Still, the final result elaborates on initial concepts and appears as a compound that comprises domestically expanded or locally reformed aspects.

Ortega identifies an evolution of the formulae of picturesque landscape in Mexico from an early period heavily influenced by Europeans to a later phase focused on hybrid versions that paved the way for the filmic images of picturesque Mexico. In *Views of the Cordilleras and Monuments of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas* (1814), Alexander von Humboldt showed the country as an extraordinary place where nature appeared in the most luxuriant expression, a country seen through a profoundly romantic projection of liberty (Pratt [1992] 2008: 118-126). In the volume, the verbal descriptions were supported by sketches. One of them is "Pyramid de Cholula", where we see a vast picturesque landscape with two figures in the foreground whose clothes and posture strongly identify as Europeans. They seem to discuss the majestic and mysterious temple to make it more legible to the circle of contemporary intellectuals and artists. Moving upward to the middle ground, we find an isolated figure herding cattle, portrayed as immersed in a picturesque landscape, with maguey plants and dragon trees pleasantly burgeoning throughout. We can thus identify two different historical frameworks within the same geographical space, as seen according to European values. If the Europeans, in fact, projected themselves into space and present time, extending their desire to occupy land, the Indigenous peoples appeared encapsulated out of time or in a temporal isolation identified with a mythic past and destined to lead the way to progress and evolution. As Ortega writes, "depictions of picturesque ruins testify only to the need to control place" in order to suspend native Mexicans in temporal "bubbles" (Ortega 2021: 127, 141).

In the revisionist version of the picturesque landscape portrayed by Mexican artists Luis Garcés (1840-?) and José María Velasco (1840-1912), working in the second half of the nineteenth century, Indigenous figures gained the center of the frame reversing foreign prejudices about the backwardness of the nation or the necessity of colonial intermediation. In their paintings, the Natives appear as members of the lower class, often portrayed in encounters with pre-Hispanic monuments or Aztec ruins. While Humboldt depicted Indigenous figures as suspended in time and removed from

a present geographical context, in *México pintoresco, artístico y monumental* (*Picturesque, artistic and monumental Mexico*, 1880–83), a volume written by historian Manuel Rivera Cambas (1840–1917) and illustrated by Luis Garcés, the lithographs ascribed to the section of *México pintoresco* reverse the formula, featuring Indigenous people in a present time and involved in a contemplative relationship with the ruins of their civilization. Following the approach of *sentimentalismo*, Garcés wished to develop a totalizing idea of an encounter that could serve all the other ethnic groups (Ibid. 147). In "Calendario Mexicano" (1880), for instance, a fashionable city couple, expression of the most modern Mexico, observes a lower-class Indigenous boy who appears to be lost in contemplation of the Aztec sun stone. This image reproduces a cross-ethnic exchange of gazes as a metaphor for the coexistence of ethnicities inherent in the contemporary notion of a picturesque Mexico. Following the same rationale, "El árbol de la noche triste" [Fig. 13], painted by Velasco in 1885 for the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City, places almost at the center of the canvas the *ahuehuete*, an enormous cypress, as the principal focus of an Indigenous person looking at the monumental display of heroic resistance against the invader. The *ahuehuete* is, in fact, a tree native to Mexico and known as the only remaining witness of the battle lost by Cortés during his invasion of Tenochtitlán (1521). The relationship between the person and the tree is not the only tension depicted on the canvas. In the background, the church of San Esteban is the third corner of a triangular encounter that aims at corroborating the sentimental image of a confluence between nature, Indigenous identity, and religious colonialism (Ibid. 147). The viewer looks at the intersection of three poles, representing a fourth point in a dynamic encounter of different spaces/times. Albeit diminished in stature, the Native is portrayed as a figure occupying a precise space: not mythologized in a distant past but inserted in his native land. Velasco veils painful memories of the invasion of Mexico—the marks of suffering, humiliation, and trauma—by presenting a coexistence of different elements into a sentimentalist encounter offered to the viewer, trusting his/her ability to decode such aspects.

The national version of picturesque appears as a tool endorsing a nascent *mestizaje*, a positive view of Mexico as a country allegedly resulting from *un encuentro*. This encounter is an idealized

reading of the uneven relationship among diverse ethnic groups involved in the history of colonization. The sentimentality of these images is a powerful artistic convention corroborated by the same Mexican artists, a convention that responded to the aim of promoting progress and healing the traumas by appealing to human emotions. By emphasizing a mythological encounter between the past and the present, national art hails the existence of a mestizo culture and celebrates "the belief that Mexicans", as Ortega writes, "are the product of a mixture of Indigenous and European peoples" (Ibid. 131-132).

In the same period, the notion of a picturesque Mexico was also used by American writers traveling to Mexico. In 1888, two habitual travelers, Mary Elizabeth Blake and Margaret Frances Sullivan, began to select and construct the artistic image of Mexico for American tourists in their volume *Mexico: Picturesque, Political, Progressive*. The first part, written by Blake, was explicitly dedicated to detailed descriptions of the picturesque beauty of the country. Here, the author insists on a series of aspects using a framework similar to that adopted by Mexican artists, and interested in emphasizing a sentimental image of *mestizaje*. The amiability of Mexico is found in its unconventional 'foreign' aroma, based not just on magnificent plants such as maguey and cacti but on its exotic features: flat-roofed adobe houses, Aztec ruins, and Spanish churches and missions. Everything seems unfamiliar, therefore seductive: the stone arches of old aqueducts, the enchanting mystery of Tula and its Toltec pyramids and sculptures, the majesty of the peaks of Popocatépetl and Iztaccihuatl, the bright colors of tiles, the white fabric of women's skirts, the aromas and flavors of open-air markets. The author delineates the charming beauty of land and people, revealing her desire to penetrate a foreign culture by learning a foreign language. Many objects, merchandise and items of clothing are in fact named in Spanish: *patios*, *rebozos*, *sarapes*, *haciendas*, *portales*, *tiendas*, *cantinas*, *pulquerías*, *candelería*, *dulces*, *mozos*, etc.

The effort to foster a change of American preconceptions about Mexico is demonstrated by comments upon uncivilized conditions suffered in the U.S., immediately followed by sentences praising a progressive version of the same situation in Mexico. For instance, the smells are

agreeable—"the population was constantly bathing and washing clothes" or "we have been surprised throughout at the neatness in the country"; the education system is accurate—"the schools seem well conducted" often "remarkably good", and nearly all speak English and/or French. The military academy gathers students so skilled and enthusiastic that "Harvard would be obliged to go to the wall" (Blake and Sullivan [1888] 2021: 77–78). The work ethic of Mexicans is so remarkable that the author is led to conjecture about "where or how the fallacy concerning their laziness has gained ground" (Ibid. 117). The passionate absorption in their occupations gives them dignity, the author adds, that is lacking "at home", where workers are "listless, uninterested, careful only to fill the time of their contract" (Ibid. 118–119).

Blake's insistence on praising the foreign beauty might be debatable, even limited. However, her intention to reproduce for readers the bewildering effect she experienced in her journey is equally startling. The progressive notion of the picturesque that she promoted in 1888 was based on an idealized *tierra caliente*. The splendor of people and land is due to exotic aspects, and the sparkle is not just produced by sight. The thrill produced by hearing "the strange, soft, liquid tones of a foreign language" (Ibid. 37), for instance, is evident in many parts of the volume. The same can be said about the pages describing the minutiae of the pulque-making process. This is a "mystery" that a stranger cannot elucidate, and so is the taste of a" slimy, yeasty, sorrowful" drink (Ibid. 109-110). Yet, the process does not fail to seduce the writer. The exotic leads its way to the erotic, and, albeit not openly declared, one of the main reasons explaining the charming power of a picturesque view of Mexico is that the country is willingly perceived through the senses, hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste. What is unfamiliar becomes domesticated, probably distorted, diminished, exalted, or eroticized. Yet, the commodification of land produced by eyes attracted to its picturesque beauty contributes to stirring up a new disposition and dissipating part of the obscurity hanging over Mexico.

In 1925, a seminal volume on *Picturesque Mexico* was published in London, serving as a translation of a German edition from the same year. This volume, featuring an introduction by

Walther Staub and primarily composed of Hugo Brehme's photographs, brought to light the theme of picturesque concerning the architecture, landscape, and folk life of Mexico.

The 256 photographs in the volume represent three different categories of landscapes—natural scenes, pre-Hispanic monuments, and colonial-era architectural buildings—each occupying one-third of the volume. The first group shows the beauty of lakes and seashores, mountain peaks, majestic cacti and coconut palms, ficus trees, and agave fields ranging from the virgin forest of Tamasopo to the petroleum wells of the Panuco River valley. The second group highlights the most iconic archaeological sites: the famous Aztec sun stone, the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon with the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in Teotihuacán, the Pyramid of Cholula, the ruins of Xochicalco and Tepoztlán in Morelos, Chichén Itza in Yucatan and Mitla in Oaxaca. The final group contains photographs of architectural buildings of the colonial era, a large number of Spanish Baroque churches, rustic white chapels with bell towers, internal patios, the Castle of Chapultepec, the Cathedral of Mexico City, and the striking arches of the old aqueducts of Los Remedios, San Felipe, and Querétaro. The volume collects the most iconic locations within a large map, combining topographical specificity and documentary records. This list of locations remained almost intact in the history of the promotion of a picturesque Mexico, demonstrating the high capacity of adaptation across different historical periods and media. We will find some of them in the following pages, used as shooting locations for movies produced on both sides of the border. The picturesque corners of internal patios with arches and curved stairs decorated with majestic cacti [Fig. 14] or the old courtyards of Spanish haciendas with balconies furnished the blueprint for the sets of many SBWs produced in the 1930s. Idyllic views of small villages populated by rural folk became usual locations of 1950s SBW. The famous canal of Xochimilco, south of Mexico City, with its blossoming and colorful *chinampa* and bamboo huts, became the setting of *Maria Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández) in 1944. The Church of San Francisco Acatepec and the famous Plaza de la Concordia in Cholula (Puebla) became locations of transnational films such as *Enamorada* (Emilio Fernández) and *The Fugitive* (John Ford) in, respectively, 1946 and 1947. One of the most striking and indelible sites in

this list is the Pyramid of the Sun in *Vera Cruz* (Robert Aldrich 1954), where the viewer witnesses the sheer and incongruous spectacle of a caravan of horses and cowboys moseying along one border of the Pyramid, dwarfed by its majesty, in a momentary mash-up of gunslinging mercenaries and pre-Hispanic architecture.

The list of films may be long, but more important is to emphasize that the iconic Mexican beauty shown by these photos became a model for set designers and art directors, even in cases of films set but not shot in Mexico. Hollywood wanted to use the impression of authenticity to the best advantage, promoting the ability of cinema to offer a vicarious traveling experience, yet if the option of location shooting was not feasible (due to high cost or other issues of production), they had to resort to set construction. Nonetheless, this phase was accomplished by using the same materials contained in the old volumes on picturesque Mexico: photographs, topographical data, and spatial details offered by paintings, drawings, lithographs, records, and descriptions that praised and intensified the beauty of that land. By pinpointing touristically seductive sites, the long life of the picturesque traversed different media, progressively identifying and consolidating a Mexican-specific notion of beauty. Further, those materials used as a blueprint for film productions resulted from a concoction of different images and notions that traveled across different countries, accruing or shedding new aspects in their journey. Thus, the collective production of a picturesque Mexico requests a transnational approach in order to describe how the U.S. looks at its neighbor south of the border in a way that also considers how Mexico sees itself. The final result, if we could stop it on a frozen shot, strongly depends on the mutual influence of these crossed gazes and exchanged codes.

When the long life of the picturesque Mexico landed in Hollywood, the most evident result was tied to a different treatment of the human figure. This is particularly true in the case of the filmic genre of the western—a perfect instance of what we have defined as landscape cinema. This genre has always tended, in fact, to emphasize the ability of natural motifs to project their quality over characters showing protagonists that acquire characteristics given by a "background" of landscape

and cloudscape.[2] In SBWs considered in this chapter, the strong ethnic connotation of a Mexican-specific notion of picturesque produces a specific effect on the protagonists.

Small productions of SBW: the long life of picturesque Mexico

Even in the 1930s, when B-westerns were affected by the economic Depression and images documenting droughts (see Chapter 2), the genre's usual depiction of the American landscape was one of the first reasons for its appeal in foreign markets. "The American outdoors", Stanfield writes, "has been one of the key elements in defining what was exceptional about America. By the evidence of press reviews, this is particularly true for the British audience's regard for the western. It is rare to read a review of a western from the 1930s that does not make some reference to the landscape" (Stanfield 2001: 138). Still, we should also consider the dynamism of American audiences and the high percentage of foreign-born citizens or second-generation immigrants within it. If the American land was an important selling point abroad, the cohort of immigrants within the U.S. were also plausibly attracted to acknowledge the beauty of their land of origin on the screen.

In his review, Graham Green highlights the cosmopolitan background of *The Gay Desperado* (1936), produced for UA to promote the beauty of a border landscape. Despite a framework of parody—the film displays lunatic horse rides, car chases, and a group of grinning bandits who decide to modernize criminal activities by watching Hollywood gangster movies—this film contains an instance of the attraction toward picturesque Mexico we have described. Greene's review closes with a praise of the "lovely shots of cacti like cathedral pillars, of galloping horses before old Spanish churches, of sombreros against skyscapes" (Greene 1980: 117). The attraction represented by the Mexican landscape in the film is evidence of the long life of the notion of picturesque, which found in cinema an ideal medium. One of the most prized possessions for many westerns produced by the

[2] By contrast, what generally happens in classical Hollywood is that the protagonist is placed at the center of the frame so that the human figure continues to be exalted and magnified against a background that remains, indeed, in the background.

biggest among the Poverty Row studios—Monogram, First National, Republic—was the marquee appeal represented by the southwestern border-landscape, especially greeted by the Mexican American sector of general audiences. Initiated with *South of the Rio Grande* (Columbia, 1932), starring Buck Jones, the trend will be later reinforced by the Cisco Kid cycle and by Gene Autry's *Mexicali Rose* and *South of the Border*, released in 1939 and directed by George Sherman. All these films represent the first instance of a vogue of all things Mexican that extols the pictorial beauty of Mexico and inserts in it heroic figures that, by osmosis, assume qualities and characteristics of the landscape. They appear as smart rascals with good hearts and virtuous principles. Mainly, they show dexterity in the art of seduction, the best ever experienced on the screen.

The presence of romantic, swaggering daredevils has usually been underestimated as evidence of racialization. This chapter aims to show instead how they represented one of the many ways in which 1930s Hollywood proposed modern social attitudes. Many films in this decade strongly encouraged the creation of a new discourse of nationality and public life based on modern principles: multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and a collapse of the old barriers based on the alleged authority of a white Anglo-Saxon elite. Lary May argues that the number of characters who dealt with a world turned upside down increased from 10 to over 50 percent in the 1930s. Businessmen represented as morally evil and socially dangerous rose exponentially (mostly in Capra's films; May 2000: 65). Further, the old notion of success and economic accomplishment changed according to a different ethic in which the excesses of individualism were punished instead of consecrated, and considered as a source of decline rather than progress (Dickstein 2009: 215–311, 342–354; Pells 1984: 268–291; see also Hearn 1977; McElvaine 1984; Bergman 1991). The films of Capra, Ford, Welles, Vidor, and popular serial products such as *The Thin Man* or the Charlie Chan films created a new world where older points of view appeared shattered. As May points out, "strictures of the Victorian artistic canon" according to which a dramatic hero had to be Anglo-Saxon, while "criminals, clowns, and fallen women" showing qualities of lasciviousness and disorder had to be representative of a foreign country became untenable (May 2000: 77). In these westerns featuring a picturesque Mexico, we find a similar

desire to overcome the prejudices of American high-class members toward Mexicans. In the Cisco Kid cycle, for instance, the gentleman/bandit Cisco becomes a representative of the Mexican character: lighthearted, contemptuous of the law but not of a personal ethic, a superb lover when compared to the lukewarm, tepid, too-polite Anglo cowboy's version of romanticism. Above all, Cisco is always involved in an open fight against high-class prejudices and racial bias. Further, the films of this cycle often sympathize with poor but noble Mexicans or with the most liberal aristocracy of Mexico against evil plans of American commercial enterprises.

In *South of the Rio Grande* (Lambert Hillyer, Columbia, 1932), Buck Jones plays general Carlos Olivárez, head of the Rurales,[3] defending the interests of señor Antonio Ruiz (James Durkin) against the evil plan of an American oil corporation whose rapacious executive, Mr. Clark (Philo McCullough), aims at taking possession of the Mexican borderland. The film conveys a desire to correct criticism against earlier negative representations of Mexicans. The initial caption declares: "Even the Royal Mounted of Canada and the Texas Rangers had no finer records than the Rurales of Old Mexico". In moving focus to the past, the film avoids politically charged aspects linked to the Revolution and simultaneously supports the nationalization of the oil wells that Mexico tried to obtain in the early 1930s during one of the most tense phases of its relationship with the U.S., shortly before the Good Neighbor Policy (1934). By placing a fraudulent Yankee stock company at the center of the narrative and choosing an ideological point of view akin to Mexico and Mexicans, the film elicits empathy toward their problems and needs.

Albeit within the limits of a low-budget major film,[4] the production heavily invested in emphasizing the natural beauty of the country. Images of señor Ruiz's old Spanish hacienda are framed by romantic tree branches or associated with a graceful parakeet playing in its rope ring. The melodic sound of chirping birds offers a sonorous background for romantic sequences shot in highly decorated interiors. The setting comprises Saltillo blankets, serapes, beautifully decorated vases—all

[3] The armed government force introduced by Benito Juárez and dissolved during the Mexican Revolution.
[4] Columbia produced *South of the Rio Grande* with a budget close to $10,000; usually, the budget of a poverty row studio in the same period was close to $3,000 (Stanfield 2001: 57).

aspects that contribute to transferring the picturesque to the cinema, expanding the fixed beauty of the images discussed in previous paragraphs into the fascination of moving pictures. During the fiesta, an almost mandatory sequence in these productions, the internal patio and the covered balcony above offer a beautiful background to flamenco dancers with *castanets* and *mantillas* moving around a fountain surrounded by cacti. The curved handrail of a stair leading to the balcony or the brownish shingles of the roof are part of the general attraction offered to viewers. The setting of a typical Spanish villa supplies the whole needed repertoire for a cultural journey to Mexico offered to the American audience or for a re-discovery of aspects belonging to their culture to the Hispanics. The pictorial beauty of a Mexican garden is openly mentioned by the protagonist, general Carlos, who, in replying to the corrupt executive Mr. Clark, suggests an identification between the majestic nature and his land: "we are strange people: we prefer the white bloom of the yucca to the dark dirt of an oil well", a line that openly sympathizes with the predicaments of Mexicans fighting for the nationalization of natural resources against the American profit-driven enterprises.

The Mexican garden of purity and wisdom can also be found in a film characterized by average production values: *The Texan* (John Cromwell, Paramount, 1930). The film adapts the story "A Double-Dyed Deceiver" by O. Henry (pen name of William Sydney Porter), where Llano Kid (Gary Cooper) is forced to run from the law for killing a cheating player during a poker game. Llano is persuaded by a crooked and racist lawyer, Thacker (Oscar Apfel), to deceive a wealthy Mexican widow, Doña Margarita Ibarra (Emma Dunn), who is looking for her lost son and has promised $1,000 reward to those who can bring information. Llano impersonates the lost son Enrique Ibarra, who disappeared, as the shot of the missing person column informs, when he was ten years old. Llano and Thacker aim to receive the reward and escape. However, the exotic atmosphere of the hacienda softens the protagonist, who falls in love with Doña Marguerita's niece, Consuelo (Fay Wray). Like the viewers, seduced by the stunning beauty of the Mexican landscape, shot by cinematographer Victor Milner, Llano is warmed by the affection and trust of Doña Margarita and Consuelo; he decides to call off the deal with Thacker and look for forgiveness. His decision is final when he finally

understands that the swindler he killed in a poker game was no other than Enrique, the beloved son he is now impersonating.

Probably for diplomatic reasons imposed by the foreign department of the MPPDA, the name of the land chosen in the screenplay was a more generic and completely invented Buenas Tierras. Nonetheless, the images have Mexico written all over: the schooner that brings Thacker and Llano to Buenas Tierras seems to land in Puerto Tampico, and the kids offer sombreros to the northern tourists. The schooner drops anchor in the harbor, and Llano comes ashore, backlighted by the early morning light and surrounded by a lively crowd, in a sequence that anticipates his adventure. The elegant carriage driven by a coachman curiously named Pasquale is waiting for him, and a sharpening white umbrella protecting a beautiful señorita from the hot sun promises the upcoming romance. The hacienda is stunningly attractive: cacti on the patio, archways adorned with flowered plants, a fountain, a wrought iron gate, and decorated osier furniture [Fig. 15]. The romantic view of the Mexican landscape prepares for a change in Llano's character, further triggered by the renewed ways in which Consuelo and Doña Marguerita see him, not as a rough outlaw but as, respectively, a potential husband and a son. The misunderstanding produced by the switch of identity is pivotal since it activates an inner change in the protagonist due to his transformation into, literally, a member of a Mexican family. Arrived from Texas to incarcerate the outlaw, the American sheriff (James A. Marcus) changes his mind when he sees Llano through the eyes of the two noblewomen. Thus, exposing this evolution, the film also aims to correct the audience's prejudices against Mexicans. Yet, what triggers the evolution is the gradual absorption of characteristics that belong to the space into Llano's personality and temperament.

The change is detectable in the scene of the dialogue with Consuelo on the patio. Llano sits on the fountain's edge while a gush of water flows behind his back, emitting harmonious sounds. Consuelo is at his side, on a chair, describing the many accomplishments expected from men like him. He must remember the important things he had forgotten during the years spent as a cowboy in

Texas. Then, she enumerates the things that, up to a certain extent, represent the Mexican character in the eyes of a gringo: first of all, Llano has to remember how to sing. Asked about his singing skills, the outlaw replies that he used to "hum a little to his pony". Then, dancing. Asked about this topic, he says his feet "kind of get all tangled up". Finally, the outlaw declares that he had never been a "ladies' man" and his puzzled face is convincing enough. The question about having left his heart in Texas to a beautiful American girl is answered with, "No, I've still got it with me". The joke undoubtedly triggered much laughter since it probably explained how passionless, deadpan, and unsatisfactory a Yankee cowboy might have been in the eyes of fiery señoritas. The sequence ends with the musical accompaniment of a guitar singer that almost turns the Yankee's tightness into a relaxed Latin atmosphere.

According to some scholars, at the beginning of the sound era, the language of love and intimacy embarrassed middle-class audiences, so the early talkies turned to the Latin lover to make this kind of language more acceptable (Crafton 1998; Stanfield 2001). As a consequence of this tendency, Latin masculinity also acquired a sexual potency, representing a menace for the white men in the audience concerning overpowering passions and uncontrollable instincts of non-white characters. According to Gaylyn Studlar, the menace was tackled by involving in the process also actors who were thought to be representative of a "sturdy Anglo-Saxon stock" (Studlar 1997: 194). Still, the transitive property goes both ways. If bulky male actors made tenderness seem less synonymous with softness, it is also true that assertive actors were given the freedom to express these emotions. Cooper was not strictly representative of that sturdy stock: he was undoubtedly *the* American type but not bulky. Instead, he was sometimes characterized by a hesitant and whimsical temperament (as in his roles for Frank Capra). Furthermore, this kind of evolution from a hard-bitten cowboy to a tender lover captivated female spectators and generally modified the audience's sensibility, leading to situations where middle-class embarrassment could not exercise massive censorship power. Roles simultaneously comprising the sentimental and the hard-boiled became

largely used in westerns, especially when they were validated by a change of settings and locations from harsh western towns to a picturesque Mexico exuding sensuality. The same can be said about costumes: flamboyant dresses emphasizing legs and backside appeared as a consequence of the general modification. The cowboy figure was thus adapted to a less violent, more romantic, or 'soft' personality, inspired by Mexican bandits/vaqueros, who were used to stealing from the rich and romancing señoritas south of the border.

Beyond issues related to the perceived masculinity of these lovers, part of the problem was the recipient of affection. When flirtation and romance came from a Latin character, generally in classical Hollywood, the woman receiving the attention had to be also Hispanic. The miscegenation between a Mexican man and an Anglo-American woman was, in fact, an issue in many parts of the U.S. up until at least the 1950s. On the other hand, when the romance involved a Yankee and a Spanish woman, as Stanfield argues, the latter had to be a member of the high class and not a prostitute or a destitute girl (unless in the case of unimportant flings). The presence of characters similar to Consuelo, i.e., daughters of "Spanish grandees" whose European bloodline is "unbesmirched by the taint" of Indigenous peoples (Stanfield 2001: 25), was thus used as a way to sanction the appropriateness of miscegenation, presenting the romance as something involving an American man and an aristocratic Hispanic woman. However, the nobility of Mexican characters should also be considered in the light of the requests imposed by Mexican authorities on Hollywood products, requests respected by the counterpart to end the embargo on American films offering negative stereotypes. The presence of stylish and well-read young women from south of the border can thus be a response to a similar request. In any case, beyond hypotheses on the insertion of cautious elements making love between different ethnicities more acceptable, the interethnic romance per se contributed to defeating prejudices over promiscuity. For instance, *The Texan* does not offer the same kind of romance we see in *The Virginian* (Victor Fleming 1929), where the protagonist (Gary Cooper) flirts with a Mexican saloon girl early in the film to stop the courting when the American character, Molly (Mary Brian), appears. The border romance of *The Texan* expresses the potentially positive

effects of mingling a Yankee outlaw who speaks fluent Spanish with a high-class Hispanic girl who accepts his courtship. The love story modifies Llano's aggressive inclinations and arguably leads to an engagement: he decides to stay in Mexico and live with his newfound spouse. The emphasis on the positive qualities that a negative character assumes through contact with this land is achieved through a romantic story where the love interest is not a saloon girl, but rather a noblewoman who shows maturity and understanding by acknowledging the authentic nature of her partner.

The Cisco Kid cycle

One of the majors capitalizing on SBWs set in the historical location south of the border, Fox began the series on Cisco Kid with *In Old Arizona* (Irving Cummings 1929). Cisco is the most popular Hispanic cowboy hero. Surprisingly, it was Fox that introduced the ethnic connotation. The Kid is, in fact, the product of writer O. Henry (the same author of the story adapted for *The Texan*), who introduced the character in *The Caballero's Way* in 1914. In this story, the Kid is a violent Anglo robber and cattle rustler named Goodall who murders many Mexicans (Rainey 1996: 113-118; Nevins 1998: 9-15). Fox adapted the character to changed social conditions and across-border requests to hinder the spread of negative stereotypes in films. Between 1929, the year of *In Old Arizona*, and 1955, the year that marks the ending of the TV series *The Cisco Kid* (1950–1955), four actors played the role: Warner Baxter (five films), Cesar Romero (six films), Duncan Renaldo (eight films and the entire 1950s TV series consisting of 156 episodes), and Gilbert Roland (six films). The trend introduced by Fox in 1929 continued until 1994 when a second TV series was produced, starring Jimmy Smits and directed by Luis Valdez, author of the play *Zoot Suit* (1978) and considered one of the pioneers of the Chicano movement. The Kid remained Hispanic since 1929, when Fox decided to put emphasis on the ethnic codification. More than a Latin lover, Cisco is primarily an outlaw, a roguish and derring-do man, a Robin Hood figure, simplistic but fascinating, and a righter of wrongs (Loy 2001: 212).

In the first film of the cycle, Cisco is played by Warner Baxter and shown as a courageous and confident man, loyal to his lover, Tonia Maria (Dorothy Burgess). If we must find a flaw in Cisco, it is that he is not a good judge of character, not realizing the fact that she is not a faithful lover. Tonia Maria double-crosses the Kid, in fact, to join American sergeant Dunn (Edmund Lowe). Cisco kills her at the end not because, as Stanfield argues, her betrayal is also a betrayal of race—a Mexican girl cannot backstab a Mexican man to form a couple with a Yankee (Stanfield 2001: 25)—but because Tonia Maria is the supreme deceiver. Cisco's good qualities are often juxtaposed with the inadequacy of American characters: the frightened and silly driver Charlie (Charles Miller) is unable to stop the bandit when Cisco holds up the stagecoach, but later brags about the bravery with which he opposed the terrible Mexican outlaw. Even the candid sergeant Dunn cannot outsmart Cisco. During the scene at the barber shop, the bandit sits comfortably in a chair, with his face shaven, while a nearby group of customers discusses the evil actions of the dreadful Mexican. Cisco's face is hidden from the viewer, who cannot see that the person sitting on the barber chair is the famous bandit. The Italian barber Giuseppe (Henry Armetta, uncredited) stands with his back toward the camera, hiding the customer's identity with his body. The others simultaneously discuss with animosity what has just happened (Cisco robbed the stagecoach, taking the Wells Fargo safe box), but when the barber lifts the chair, Cisco's face finally appears, producing a hilarious effect. Empathy toward the bandit is constantly highlighted through discursive devices. For instance, with the close-up of Baxter/Cisco, we hear one of the customers says, "If I ever meet him face to face, I will kill him like a dog", which induces a look of reproach in the outlaw: "what? you'd kill a man?!?". The hilarious sequence is built around Cisco's visual centrality: he is at the center of the frame, remarkably unwavering and self-assured, surrounded by his hunters who look like heedless fools.

The situation is so humorous that it deserves to be further exploited, this time at the expense of sergeant Dunn. When Dunn enters the parlor, he first mistakes Cisco for the barber—a far-fetched intuition—and then, boastfully declares that nobody should fear Cisco's evilness while he is in town.

The film makes fun of Dunn as an American version of the "vainglorious soldier" (*miles gloriosus*) who brags about his many accomplished feats. The target of this joke is not just the propensity for overblown patriotism in gringos but also the tendency to self-assured belligerence. When it is Dunn's turn to sit on the barber's chair, he starts to argue with Giuseppe about female shapes, especially those who belong to a certain "belle of Greenpoint". The detailed shot of the photograph of a dumb-looking Dunn in a bathing suit, side-by-side with the "belle of Greenpoint", is the cherry on top of the cake. When they both get out of the parlor, Cisco leaves with his magnificent horse while Dunn slaps a mule to make it get out of his way and leaves: the shot compares his brash and cocky attitude to asinine behavior. When, immediately after, Dunn asks the blacksmith if he knows "the fella they called Cisco Kid", he goes, "Hey, that's was him you have just shaken hands with!". The mule's whinnying and the hearty sound of the blacksmith's laughter mark his foolishness. The shot of Cisco riding his horse in the valley, already far from town, is inserted between the two lines of dialogue as an explicit remark on his superior qualities.

The film opens with a beautiful shot of the bells hanging from the arched openings in the wall of a Spanish mission; a storm of pigeons flying at the sound of the ringing bells crosses the frame. Later, a band of *mariachi* players languidly take some rest from a crowded market nearby [Figg. 16, 17]. Romantic images of Yucca trees and cacti are often peppered throughout the film to comment upon Cisco's straightforward approach to life and love. All these icons of picturesque Mexico represent the south of the border version of the immense prairies that furnish melancholic horizons to American cowboys riding alone, away from civilization. They precede the disclosure of his character: smart, roguish, derring-do, righter of wrongs, and incredibly sentimental. This atmosphere would be later reiterated in many other romantic depictions of Mexico, its porticos and arched walkways populated with street vendors or *mariachi* players, used as a picturesque background for the new version of the hero this chapter is atttempting to describe. They all demonstrate the ability of landscape to bring about a transformation and adjustment in the characters and plots.

As has already been mentioned, a general re-negotiation of the quality usually attributed to masculinity took place in Hollywood, involving American actors such as Gary Cooper or Warner Baxter in a total release of the romantic aura denied in Anglo cowboys but thoroughly unleashed in their Latin version. This move aimed at increasing the potential interest of female audiences in the genre and was probably supported by the evident attraction that the women showed toward the exotic/erotic persona of Latin lovers. Miriam Hansen accurately studied the connection between Valentino's ethnic eroticism, his sexual ambiguity, and the centrality gained by women in the process that modified taste and pleasures in 1920s Hollywood (Hansen 1986: 6–32; Hansen 1994: 245–294). A similar process is detectable within the limit of the western, ten years after the incredible success of the Italian *divo*. The humorous inflections of Cisco's speech were probably due to the necessity of calibrating promotion with banishment so that the general audience, including the male part of it, could not be excessively destabilized by the heroism of a Mexican character. Still, *In Old Arizona* praises the character's honesty and integrity and attributes to Cisco the same romantic attitude it ascribes to landscape. The art of love here finds a perfect sanction: the outlaw is above all a passionate and attractive lover who dares to romance even Anglo women (at least from the 1940s onward). The tendency to emphasize themes of romance was progressively accompanied by the introduction of vague social subjects, often taken from the realm of cowboys: Cisco is a stagecoach robber but usually robs specific individuals, mainly evil corporations. On top of that, his first aim is to overcome the prejudices of some characters against the *caballero*, biases that reflect social inequalities and mirror the audiences' high-class view of the Mexicans as guilty and dirty evil men. "Probably just a dirty greaser" is what one of the men in the barbershop says referring to Cisco, but such assumptions always lead these characters to trouble. Alternatively, the filmic discourse implies that this kind of ideas can be compared to limited conjecture coming from unsympathetic and asocial characters. Albeit simplistic, these movies tackled issues related to ethnicity to abate or reduce trouble and sufferings provoked by similar biases. The vehicle used for this purpose is usually the mistaken

identity produced by a switch of roles, one of the oldest narrative devices in the history of light operas such as *operetta* or *zarzuela*.

Starring Cesar Romero in the role of Cisco and Chris-pin Martin in that of his loyal and voracious assistant Gordito, *Romance of the Rio Grande* (Herbert Leeds, Twentieth Century Fox, 1941) opens with an image of the rancho Santa Margarita that provides the primary setting for the film. The beautiful señorita Maria (Lynne Roberts) plays the guitar, singing "You'll Find Your Answer in My Eyes" to a group of young men gathered below a picturesque stone arch decorated with flowered branches. The ranch belongs to Don Fernando de Vega (Pedro de Cordoba), who fears his imminent death and hence asks his grandson, Carlos, living in Granada, to visit the ranch, hoping that he will accept the inheritance. Cisco uses his extraordinary likeness to Carlos (played by Romero himself) to help Don Fernando get rid of the supposedly loyal nephew Ricardo (Ricardo Cortez), who plots to inherit the ranch, blaming the evil bandit Cisco for the attempted murder of Carlos. The plot is entirely based on a series of misunderstandings produced by the change of identity between the humble and soft-spoken Carlos and the bold and daring Cisco. Cisco's cheerful comments on the treacherous situation ("something smells around here but it's not the flowers") are deeply ironic, as ironic is the cameo of no less than Francis Ford (uncredited): he plays the role of a stagecoach driver who carries the newly arrived Carlos to the ranch. On the way to the ranch, the driver makes cheerful remarks on the naiveté of Europeans regarding the West, and then, placing Granada in the UK and calling Carlos an "Englishman" shows his own complete ignorance of the old continent's geography.

Cisco embodies the features of the picturesque not only when he romances señoritas. The romantic evaluation of the aesthetic principles contained in a picturesque Mexico extends into a social and ideological evaluation that likewise involves Cisco. As mentioned, the usual prejudice against the bandit represents his primary target and foremost rival. During a dialogue with Maria, Cisco, under the false identity of Carlos, openly declares that Cisco does not steal, kill, or swindle, as they think, but "he is a brave, wonderful man who loves adventure and excitement". While the false Carlos defends the Kid's reputation and protects the real Carlos, the meanest characters, Ricardo and his

henchmen, attempt to inherit the rancho and, an important point, always have something to do with the U.S.. Ricardo's evil plan, in fact, is upheld by a group of American cowboy mercenaries. The geographical identification of notions of good and evil distributed along the border with clear-cut ascription (North corresponds to evil, South identifies good) is underscored by specific glimpses of land. These views emphasize a Mexican-specific notion of beauty that uses clear ethnic connotations: the rancho Santa Margarita in *Romance of the Rio Grande*, for instance, has an internal patio with an elegant gallery of bright stone arches and a curved stairway of beautifully adorned stuccos typical of a Spanish style villa. The spatial organization of this principal setting mixes open air and private spaces, nature and refinement, culture and personal touches that are fully extended in the kind of personality Cisco represents: elegant and smart, brave and outgoing, skilled in deception and able to calibrate aloofness and sociability, the self and the mask. Cisco is precisely the opposite of what the unfriendly Ricardo thinks of him. When the false Carlos asks Ricardo to describe this filthy criminal, Cisco, his reply—"he is a short man with dark, treacherous eyes, and filthy as a pig"—completely contrasts with Cesar Romero's look: tall and courteous. Like the Spanish villa that furnishes the film set, Cisco is extremely sophisticated, i.e., the reverse of the stereotype of Mexicanness as "short men with dark, treacherous eyes, and filthy as pigs". Space and character thus account for a defense of ethnic diversity and a reproof of shallow stereotyping produced by high-class prejudices. Besides, Cisco's boldness in romantic situations—his kisses are always very prompt and timely—expresses fantasies of female viewers seduced by the idea of overwhelming passions expressed with no fears by a dashing, reckless man. His liveliness and ability arguably represent what every Anglo man secretly wants to be.

The formula briefly described for *Romance of the Rio Grande* is repeated almost intact in every other film of the cycle. They generally touch on vague social themes such as robbing big corporations and giving to the poor, and often highlight the American origin of greedy and malicious villains. Cisco's ethics remained integral throughout the cycle, and so was his involvement in fighting prejudices. In time, his penchant for romance got even bolder, often assuming interethnic

connotations. This is especially true in the case of Mexican American actor Gilbert Roland, who made six Cisco Kid films between 1946 and 1947. In *King of the Bandits* (Christy Cabanne 1947), for instance, he courts a lovely Anglo girl, Alice (Angela Greene), using a fascinating mix of the athletic and healthy style he borrowed from Errol Flynn with a strictly Hispanic imprint. Roland swashbuckles at the end of *The Gay Cavalier* (William Nigh 1946), giving evidence of zest and energy as a brand-new, Mexican version of the confident optimism and bravado that was typical of Anglo characters. Roland's Cisco adds new traits to the cycle: the religiosity of the character or the ties with family and origins. At the beginning of *The Gay Cavalier*, for instance, Cisco is backlighted against a cloudy sky while praying by his father's grave in Mexico, in a sequence that seems figuratively influenced by Ford. The cycle also expands on self-reflexive irony. *King of the Bandits* opens with a dream of Pancho (Chris-pin Martin) in which the two are executed by a Cavalry platoon, a situation made completely unreal by the humorous remarks of Cisco, which the same Roland often inserted. In fact, the actor used to complement scripts with his ideas or with lines taken from his favorite poet, Juan de Dios Peza, insertions that intended to make the character appear well-read and savvy. The wisecrack addressed at the extra-diegetic level revealed the desire to boost a series that, before the arrival of Roland, showed some signs of tiredness.[5] Roland gave life to the best version of Cisco, a noble vaquero, able to ride and court each señorita or Anglo woman without ever seriously committing, an incredibly seductive figure based on Roland's cool gestures (one of his notable habits was drinking tequila in a traditional Mexican way). In Chapter 5, we will learn about how Roland created a unique star persona exactly after 1946-47, his Cisco phase. This persona was characterized as robust and sardonic and, above all, founded on direct claims about his ethnic identity. Suffice it to say for now that despite changes in actors, Mexico's picturesque qualities [Fig. 18] remained a constant element maintained for the entire cycle duration.

[5] The final phase of Cisco, before the 1994 TV series, was given to Duncan Renaldo, the Romanian-born actor who began the cycle in 1945 with *The Cisco Kid Returns* (John P. McCarthy, Monogram). In 1945, Renaldo starred in three Cisco movies, all quite vapid. Then, he continued the series in 1948, taking over the reins from Roland, with five more films before moving to the 1950s TV series.

Gene Autry goes south of the border

The richest among the poverty row studios, Republic, made fourteen movies starring Gene Autry that promoted a friendly relationship with Latin America: films such as *Comin 'Round the Mountain* (1936), *Rootin 'Tootin 'Rhythm* (1937), *Boots and Saddles* (1937) and *In Old Monterey* (1939) present a situation identified with a desire to elicit hemispheric harmony between the two countries, fully serving the idea of Pan-Americanism that was also promoted by historian Herbert Eugene Bolton. There is no room to analyze each of them; instead, the following pages focus on the most popular two of the series, *South of the Border* and *Mexicali Rose*.

Both released in 1939 and directed by George Sherman, these films endorsed Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan to create harmony and unity with Mexico. Compared to the Cisco cycle, these films presented similar contents—the criticism against prejudices—and similar formulas—the comic duo, sidekick-hero. As we have seen, the cycle was based on the presence of a fat *caballero*, Gordito (and, then, Pancho), as the protagonist's loyal assistant; in the series of B-westerns starring Autry, the singing cowboy is always accompanied by his sidekick Frog (Smiley Burnette).[6] Last but not least, we find the same imprint on the picturesque images of Mexico. However, there are two main differences from the Cisco cycle: first of all, Autry is a more moderate lover than his Latin counterpart; his kisses are usually decorous or shared behind closed doors or wide-brimmed hats. Second, the Pan-Americanism of these films heavily promoted a convergence around American values of modernity, market capitalism, and concerted public diplomacy aimed at communicating homogeneous values across the border. While the general atmosphere depicted in the Cisco cycle was primarily based on Hispanic lore and customs, the process of Americanization fostered by Autry appears more decisive and steadfast.

[6] Burnette played the role in all Autry's films. By contrast, Gordito/Pancho was played in some movies by Martin Garralaga, in others by Chris-pin Martin. Leo Carrillo played Pancho in the movies starring Renaldo.

In *South of the Border* the plot is influenced by the geopolitical tension produced by the upcoming World War II. Its message, as Duchemin writes, "puts the incoming Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho on notice that the U.S. would not tolerate German submarine bases in Mexico" (Duchemin 2016: 119-120, 144-145). This time, in fact, Gene and Smiley are not radio stars (as often happens in their movies), but two government agents sent south of the border, in the fictive state of Palermo (which is standing for Tampico), to help Don Diego Mendoza (Frank Relcher), a cattle ranch owner, against a group of revolutionaries led by his nephew, Andreo Mendoza (Duncan Renaldo). The revolutionaries conspire, in fact, with an American traitor, Saunders (Alan Edwards), to sell petroleum to "foreign powers" (which stands for Germany) in exchange for weapons that must serve their cause. They plan to refuel "foreign" submarines perched offshore in the Gulf of Palermo, an event that had evident similarities with the historical menace of German U-boats in the Gulf of Mexico. Gene discovers and contrasts the evil plan promoting beneficial outcomes produced by a Pan-American alliance. To better sustain his argument, the plot weaves an interethnic romance between Autry and Andreo's sister, Delores (Lupita Tovar). Furthermore, it pours a flood of good bilingual songs in the film:" Come to the Fiesta", sung by the cowboys crew led by Gene and Frog going south of the border in the opening sequence, or "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)", sung by Gene as he rides across a picturesque forest of Yucca trees. In the sweet ballad "Moon over Mañana", Gene serenades Delores under a picturesque flowered pergola in a balcony facing the internal patio of a Spanish hacienda. If the message was not clear enough, the cheerful musical routine "When the Cactus Blooms Again" allows Gene to convince the increasingly skeptic and tired vaqueros, who refuse to keep on working under troubled conditions and constant attacks from the revolutionaries, that a solution is possible. Cowboys and vaqueros singing together is a recurring formula in SBWs starring Autry.

The inclusion of cultural elements and architectural motifs from Mexico, together with costumes and lore from south of the border are also present in *Mexicali Rose*. The film included

numerous Mexican actors and singers in the production, thriving on the same formulas that built the popularity of the Mexican film genre of *comedia ranchera*, where rural folk music, comparable to western music, was combined with comedic action.[7] This connection made *Mexicali Rose* more appealing to the Mexican audiences who also enjoyed Fernando de Fuentes's films (see previous footnote). The plot sees Autry in the role of a righter of wrongs. This time, he protects a group of Mexican orphans living in an old mission supervised by Padre Dominic (William Farnum) and Anita Loredo (Luana Walters), which is located close to Mexicali, on a piece of land that has become the target of a crooked American oil company (Alta Vista Oil). Gene feels responsible for this trouble because the Alta Vista Oil also sponsors his radio show. With Frog and Valdez (Noah Beery), the head of a group of good Mexican bandits, Gene decides to investigate the company's real business of selling false shares to unaware people. The film expresses full sympathy for the position of the Mexican government that tried to protect the natural resources from the greedy maneuvers of American oil companies. As we have mentioned, Roosevelt openly upheld Cárdenas's decision to declare the nationalization of the oil company PEMEX, and Autry spent his entire career advocating and defending the president, the New Deal, and his foreign politics. So, in the film, the Mexican orphans of the mission together with the common American people swindled by the oil company are presented as victims to be protected against greed. The musical routines and the unifying power of music create a fruitful atmosphere for the promotion of concerted public diplomacy and communal support. The good bandit Valdez, for instance, is a fan of Gene Autry—his favorite record is precisely the song of the title, "Mexicali Rose" (which was a hit Autry had previously recorded with Armida

[7] Scholars 'opinions on this Mexican genre are divergent. While Duchemin argues that *comedia ranchera* was a genre that borrowed heavily from the musical westerns of Autry, Conway writes that *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936) was "inspired by Spanish one-act comedies called *sainetes* and operetta called *zarzuelas*" (Conway 2019: 47). Their value judgments are also partially divergent. Duchemin emphasizes the absence of modern aspects such as radio sets, telephones, and automobiles that are otherwise consistent in Autry's series of B-westerns. The depiction of the daily life of a Mexican rancho in the *comedia ranchera* contains much more "grit". It includes topics such as drunkenness, which is more appropriate for an adult audience, mainly when compared with the audience of Autry, based on young people (Duchemin 2016: 125–126). Conway, on the other hand, criticizes the ideological content of these products that "dwell on the past" partially sharing the opinion of Carlos Monsiváis: "the genre is ahistorical, unrealistic, populist, and chauvinist because it encapsulated the classist fantasies of the Mexican land-owning class", or a social situation antecedent the Revolution (Conway 2019: 47–49; quote: 48).

Vendrell, the Mexican actress who played with him in *Rootin 'Tootin 'Rhythm*). Autry reciprocates the praise by singing for Valdez the tune "Robin Hood" where he compares his actions to the deeds of the much-heralded and honored bandit of the title. To the list, two songs are also added:" Allá en el Rancho Grande" and "Las Chapanecas" which are part of the Mexican folk tradition embraced by the film and promoted through the beats of fandangos and with the merriment of a folk dance like "El Jarabe tapatío". The vibrant rhythm of Mexico, sanctioned and empowered by a star extremely popular in the rural areas of the U.S. where the prejudices against Mexicans were arguably more rooted, is the added value of the picturesque visual codes attributed to this land.

These SBWs also tackled prejudices related to ethnicity. Stanfield argues that the sidekick cannot be considered equivalent to the court jester, whose function was to emphasize the monarch's absolute power. By contrast, this clownish figure had to keep the hero (Autry) in the realm of the common men (Stanfield 2001: 104–110; Stanfield 2002: 116–120). The sidekick is a dependent figure who has less authority than the hero without paying any deference to him. As Stanfield writes, the sidekick "is no man's servant or master" (Stanfield 2001: 109–110); he is free to act as he pleases, and he can thus turn on its head the accepted hierarchy between those who control and those who are controlled. The sidekick formula was expanded through Burnette's extreme eclecticism, creativity, and complete freedom of decision when it came to impersonating female characters or ethnic minorities. Frog's switching of gender and ethnicity was an adaptation of older conventions that burgeoned in the tradition of theatrical masks. These codes were transferred to vaudeville and, by the mid-1930s, had lost part of the vulgar aspects of a caricature to maintain the basic cultural meaning of the impersonation. These impersonations acted as a safe valve for an oppressive social ideology that banned homosexuality or expressed anxiety over the transgression of racial boundaries. The lack of deference to authority figures or the liberating power represented by Burnette is fully detectable in *South of the Border* and *Mexicali Rose*. In the musical routine "Fat Caballero" from *South of the Border*, Frog teases the fictive image of handsome and assertive Anglo cowboys declaring to be just

a “fat caballero”. In “My Orchestra Is Driving Me Crazy” (from *Mexicali Rose*), he underplays the communication problems among speakers of different languages: “not one word of English and I don’t speak Mexican / oh boy, what a job for a leader / they never know what I am saying, and I never know what they are playing”. The lyrics of the song makes these communication problems appear as much more addressable by interpolating the refrain of the popular folk song “Cielito Lindo” (Quirino Mendoza y Cortés). All the orchestra members of orphans sing the song out loud, allowing Frog to emphasize the ecumenical value of music and, more generally, the extreme confidence with which those artists see music and comedy as a way to change the world.

The most important feature of both films is still the presence of a picturesque Mexico. *South of the Border* starts and ends with the same sequence: Autry approaches an isolated mission, protected by a bright stucco wall whose upper side is covered with brown shingles. He enters the courtyard and sees a señorita in mantilla and peineta praying in front of a statue of a Madonna with a baby. The woman is Delores, Andreo’s sister, and Gene falls deeply in love with her even if, at the end, the film suggests that she has decided to become a nun (to atone for her brother’s sins). Similarly, in *Mexicali Rose*, the most essential part of the film is set in the mission, a picturesque house of two floors, a balcony, and tiles on the roof, enclosed by a stucco wall. The courtyard is adorned with a fountain and colorful tiles. These are lovely romantic spots where even a tepid lover like Gene can show his soft side. Notably, these places are sometimes counterpointed by images of wooden cabins in western style, where evil plans unfold.

The long life of the picturesque we have seen throughout these films has thus attracted a different image of the cowboy, merged with aspects derivative of a Latin lover and a figure acquiring by osmosis qualities provided by the landscape. The seductive style of the landscape assumes different degrees and extents depending on the actor/role involved. Cisco is a Mexican, gaudy, passionate, sometimes even brazen and cocky, mainly in Romero’s and Roland’s cases. In *The Texan*, Gary Cooper/Llano mingles an introspective reticence that is still typical of a gringo with a seductive,

upbeat narcissism that comes from Mexico, offering an interpretation that combines opposite qualities (an indication that a general caution was needed in strictly American cases such as Cooper's). By contrast, Autry usually avoids extreme passions, suggesting mild intimacy. In the films considered here, Gene is meek, never afraid to show his soft side, and always ready to defend the weakest, himself included, from any foolish accusation and censure. Despite these differences, the emphasis on a picturesque representation of the landscape south of the border attributed its quality to all the actors/roles involved contributing to the creation of an ideal harmony based on some basic principles: promoting the beauty of a land, fighting prejudices, creating the premise for peace and commercial exchange. If the style changes according to the actor involved, the strategy remains the same: to trigger a process that ends up softening even the most sturdy and sinewy of that Anglo-Saxon stock.

The first big production of a SBW featuring a picturesque bordertown: San Antonio *(1945)*

The SBW is a cycle close to the swashbuckler, an adventure genre set in the past and characterized by a fixed narrative pattern. Usually, a young, bold, romantic hero fights against a tyrannical power, helped by a beautiful girl with whom he releases the oppressed people from a totalitarian government. This virile genre had its forebear in 1920s films starring Douglas Fairbanks, who, as Lary May writes, "merged the cowboy to the athletic urbanite", proposing an idea of modernity based on the regenerating power of sport and physical vigor (May 1980: 96–97, 112–116). Since the beginning, the swashbuckler has generated many different sub-classifications according to the geographical setting. For instance, we find an Oriental version of swashbuckler in *The Thief of Baghdad* (Raoul Walsh 1924) or a Hispanic version in *The Mark of Zorro* (Fred Niblo 1920). *San Antonio* can be considered a hybrid between a Hispanic swashbuckler and a SBW, with Errol Flynn at the beginning of his career's decline but still dashing and full of bravado, engaged in a mission to free Mexican and American cattle ranchers from a massive cattle rustling ring that has stolen thousands of dollars from them.

The plot reveals the influence of both genres. The head of the rustler ring is a Yankee crook named Roy Stuart (Paul Kelly), who partners with a Frenchman named Legare (Victor Francen). Roy also owns the main saloon in town, the Bella Union, where Jeanne Starr (Alexis Smith), a New Orleans dancer and singer, performs every night. Clay Hardin (Errol Flynn) fights against this conglomerate with the help of Jeanne. The chemistry between Flynn and Smith was not as good as that between him and Olivia de Havilland, yet the couple was reassembled in 1950 for another western, *Montana* (Ray Enright). The film's primary interest is Bert Glennon's Technicolor cinematography that transforms the Calabasas Ranch (owned by Warner Brothers) into a picturesque image of a southwestern borderland.

The film opens with a beautiful shot of a horseman silhouetted against a half-cerulean, half-gold dazzling sky. Shortly after, we see Clay cheerfully playing the guitar in a small Mexican village. From the dialogue with his friend Charlie (John Litel), the horseman seen in the opening shot, we understand that Clay is not on the run but in voluntary exile from the U.S.: the real criminals live in the north. Clay decides to leave Mexico and return to San Antonio to fight Stuart and Legare, who are getting richer on honest ranchers. The old San Antonio looks like a small border town with sandstone buildings, a plaza crowded with Mexican peddler's carts and booths, and a mock-up of the Alamo ruins. The audience sees the crowded plaza in the establishing shot taken from the perspective of a Mexican boy (Robert Blake, uncredited) standing on a balcony. The town's vitality is emphasized by that of the boy, who slides down a banister to take a joyful stroll in the direction of the Belle Union, passing through the market with its inviting attractions, flowers, corncobs, and strings. Pilfering articles here and there and causing humorous reactions from the vendors, he arrives in front of the Union Belle, offering a preview of the majestic interior decorations of the theatre (art directors Ted Smith and Jack McConaghy received an Academy Award nomination for this setting). The real San Antonio is thus transformed into a picturesque border town observed by a Mexican kid cheerfully enjoying its attractions. However, the expressionistic quality of Technicolor moves the realistic imprint we have already seen in previous movies toward a surreal, hyperbolic definition.

Suspended on a crane that fluidly retreats in a pullback shot, the camera offers a view of the interior of the Union Belle, revealing a cross-ethnic audience gathered in the room facing the stage. The characteristics of the plaza are exalted in the visual codes attributed to the theatre's interior with its rich decoration of drapes and curtains in red and green, the colors of the Mexican flag. The chorus line of buxom girls dances in scanty dresses decorated with serape and miniature sombreros. Further, the score, signed by top Hollywood composer Max Steiner, is punctuated by a stream of music cues identified with Mexico. These elements demonstrate the effort to produce a picturesque image of Mexico within a venue dedicated to hosting stage entertainment, which possibly addresses the artifice inherent in the process. Despite sounding sometimes false, every space appears in the film as a spectacular reproduction of *mestizaje*, a perception reinforced by aural aspects. In the medley heard for the dancing sequence in a cantina of Cotulla, just across the Mexican border, we distinguish, for instance, "La Golondrina". The plaza's lively crowd is associated with the lively beats of "El jarabe tapatío". Even if there is no interethnic romance in the plot, the love story between an Anglo woman and a Mexican man is recounted in the song "Somewhere in Monterey" (Charles Kisco, Jack Scholl) performed by Alexis Smith at the Union Belle. She wears a long tiered skirt with a large rebozo as a waist belt and a short-sleeved blouse with floral embroidery around the neckline and the sleeves, a dress that looks like a refined version of an Adelita dress, the vibrant work outfit named after a folkloric female fighter in the Mexican Revolution. The prevalence of greens and reds in the outfit codifies Mexican folk clues (even if Jeanne/Alexis Smith has fair skin and blue eyes and later declares to be a Texas native). The lyrics describe a cross-ethnic flirtation in which a woman loses her heart to a Mexican man: "That day across the border / he tosses a glance / I lost my heart". The romance recounted by this song compresses in a brief musical routine the plots of many SBWs featuring variants of a Latin lover as a romantic southern cowboy exuding charm and seduction.

The final gunfight between Clay, Roy, and Legare breaks out in the theatre and extends to the plaza, notably ending up at the Alamo ruins. The Alamo is used throughout the film as a backdrop for many dialogues exposing each character's possible contrastive arguments: Stuart and Legare,

Legare and Jeanne, and Jeanne and Clay. All embody different views illustrating the irreconcilable positions the Alamo also symbolizes in the history of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. In the last dialogue between Jeanne and Clay, the historical monument occupies the entire frame scope. It is associated with Clay's proposal for a possible resolution between opposite drives: a resolution that rejects the evil dictatorship of Stuart and Legare, advocating a cross-ethnic state of affairs based on the framework proposed by Pan-America harmony. The nocturnal shot of the internal ruins of the Spanish mission moonlit against a bluish sky punctuated by scattered clouds [Fig. 19] is so glowing that it is inserted four times during the gunfight between Clay and the heavies. By closing the plot with a fight in a similar location, the film suggests a resolution based on a renovated idea of the borderland emerging from the ruins of past contrasts. This harmony is problematized in *Duel in the Sun* in a complex tangle of frustrated desires and racial prejudices that find in a final space, Squaw's Head Rock, a possible resolution.

The A-Feature SBW: Selznick presents Duel in the Sun *(1947)*[8]

Backed by an outstanding financial investment, the image of a picturesque and sublime Mexico is transformed into the eye-catching quality produced by Technicolor in *Duel in the Sun* (*DITS*). As will be explained in the following pages, the magnificent landscape of Squaw's Head Rock is obtained with a composite photograph, in which paintings are superimposed over previously filmed footage: a collage that combines and rearranges, cuts out, and inserts lyrical aspects into a photograph of a real location. The realism of previous movies is wiped out in a breathtaking border-landscape that derives from a symbolic investment rather than a documentary desire to show the beauty of a land. The U.S.-Mexico border is formally reconstructed and offered as a metaphorical space that reveals an intention to describe the complex relationship of seduction and anxiety that unites these two countries.

[8] In this last section, DOS stands for David O. Selznick Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

As a journalist wrote in 1947, *DITS* was the "greatest screen gamble of all times" (Fred Stanley, "New York Times" January 27, 1947). David O. Selznick produced only one western in his career and was not a fan of the genre, but *DITS* was his first big production after *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming 1939). Nicknamed "the boss" by his numerous collaborators and secretaries, Selznick gambled on this film, becoming obsessed with one feverish aspiration: to equal the monumental success of 1939 with an outstanding production that defied the rules of the genre and the beliefs of American society. Yet, if in 1939 Selznick was still young and able to mingle his arrogance with warmth; ten years after, he was a middle-aged businessman with an ever-increasing ego and a view of himself as a man beset by general incompetence and by the changing conditions of a work that was still a number one priority in his life (Haver 1980: 353). Many interpretations of Selznick's private history have been offered. Reading memos or digging deeper into his views, one can finally understand how grim, sad, and glamorless the picture-making business could have been. The problem with Selznick was that "he couldn't keep his hands off anything", as critic Dwight Whitney wrote in 1972 (the same year as Rudy Behlmer's *Memo From David O. Selznick* was published). As the critic points out, Selznick could not stop at the limits of his role: he "wished to write for his writers, direct for his directors", interfere in every single detail of the moviemaking process and know-how (Whitney, "Los Angeles Times" September 24, 1972). Selznick was obsessed with details, as six-page-long memos on a single costume can testify. Never-ending notes on how it was necessary to dirt up clothes after a character falls from a horse or how make-up had to give realistic effects of brownish complexion on Jennifer Jones's fair skin also testify to Selznick's inability to stay within limits. Memos over memos on the minutiae of moviemaking practices mainly attest to his many excesses: of words, of amphetamines, of mental activity, of self-absorbed visions, all tempered with a high dose of irony, and mixed with a lot of screaming and yelling on his part to gain better results out of everybody's work.

With a similar tormented mind as a producer and four different filmmakers (William Dieterle, Otto Brower, and Reaves Eason directed some parts while King Vidor signed the film),[9] the process of creation of *DITS* suffered from constant procrastination resulting in one the most trouble-beset productions in the history of Hollywood. By focusing on Selznick's memos, one can figure out the complexity of levels and the multiplicity of pressures that a studio had to tackle in order to guarantee a successful movie in terms of aesthetic value and commercial performance. At Vanguard Films—the production company established in 1943 and founded by the producer—Selznick and his numerous assistants faced various issues in three years, from 1945 to 1947, looking for solutions as quickly as possible. In a letter to Vanguard's vice president of distribution, Neil Agnew, Selznick poses a myriad of questions concerning the possibility of a national distribution of *DITS*, keeping in mind that in answering each one of them, as he writes, "several million dollars are involved" (Letter from Selznick to Agnew. July 22, 1946, DOS). Vanguard spent $6,000,000 on film production plus $2,000,000 on advertising campaigns. The financial effort was well remunerated: at the time of its TV reissue in April 1956, the film had already passed the $15,000,000 gross since its initial release on December 31, 1946 (Letter from Ben Seigel, distribution office, to Selznick. April 2, 1956, DOS). Apart from a few exceptions—notably, *Heaven's Gate*—the most expensive films earn the most money, and *DITS* is a perfect case study for this proportion. Selznick frequently bragged about his ability to maintain value and money together. Still, during film production and postproduction, he had to endure one of the most prolonged and bitter strikes in the history of Hollywood, organize a massive advertising campaign, and find a solution to the troubles caused by a long quarrel with UA.[10]

[9] Uncredited filmmakers are also Joseph von Sternberg, William Cameron Menzies, and the very same Selznick who directed a few scenes after Vidor walked out of the production, exasperated by the constant rewriting made by Selznick.
[10] The quarrel was due to previous neglected agreements and wrong decisions such as selling part of the library of Vanguard to RKO as a proviso when Dore Schary, who was on loan to RKO, decided to take over the role of producer in that studio and leave Vanguard. Pickford and Chaplin (UA) accused Selznick of breaking previous agreements and override their position since those films had been released through UA. In February 1947, Selznick withdrew his share from UA selling his stock interest for $2,000,000. He also had to contribute to the other two films that UA requested according to the agreement dated October 4, 1941 which established that Vanguard would have delivered five pictures to be distributed by UA (Letter from Selznick to Agnew. July 22, 1946, DOS). This situation forced Selznick in December 1946 to organize overnight his own distribution set-up called SRO (Selznick Releasing Organization) since he wanted a massive distribution of *DITS* to guarantee rapid recuperation of the money spent. The method defined as "area saturation"

Last but not least, he tackled a long series of boycotting practices and censorship reactions from religious groups.[11] All these events go a long way toward explaining the long production process and the tepid reaction of critics. To most critics, the film appeared excessively fraught with sensationalism, gore, and sex (too much sex), while the script appeared episodic, erratic, uneven, characterized by inconsistencies, and with no genuine and plausible continuity.

The legacy of these readings is still detectable, and a conservative interpretation of *DITS* has become prevalent in contemporary film criticism. Camilla Fojas reads the film in the light of the fear of a failed assimilation, showing Pearl (Jennifer Jones) as an embodiment of the status of Latinas in westerns: a deleterious, perverse presence that intensifies the rivalry between the two white brothers and epitomizes anxiety and fears linked to nationalism and colonialism (Fojas 2008: 37-43). Likewise, Stanley Corkin insists on the cautionary aspects of *DITS*, emphasizing how the film uses

consisted in a simultaneous release in about fifty theatres in every market area of the country at a $1,25 admission, a method very close to a nation-wide release. If Selznick had had to wait for the release pattern established by the clearance system (which assured priority to the biggest first-run theatres, followed by second-runs at a lower price, wending its way down to minority theatres and grind houses), he would have never benefited from the enormous flood of the campaign. In order to do it, he had to count on the enormous number of seats available in each area, both downtowns and suburban. He finally made a deal with the Skouras brothers who owned Fox West Coast Theatres and with the Loew's Theatres chain in New York. In December 1946, roughly one year before the Paramount case decision establishing the divorcement between production and distribution, Selznick founded SRO with the intention of opening international offices for film exchanges throughout the world.

[11] In January 1947, William H. Mooring, a film critic of "The Tidings", the official Los Angeles archdiocesan newspaper, wrote an article that castigated the picture on moral and religious grounds, closing it with a peremptory remark: this is "hog-wash in a gold canteen" (Transcription of William H. Mooring "The Tidings", January 17, 1947, DOS). The publication also contained an official statement of Archbishop John J. Cantwell admonishing church members that, considering that the Legion of Decency was still uncertain about film classification, they could not see it "with a free conscience" (Transcription of John J. Cantwell "The Tidings", January 17, 1947). Most importantly,"The Tidings" accused *DITS* of violation of the Code, which prevented representations of rape and parody that ridiculed ministers of religion (the role of Jubal Crabbe played by Walter Huston). Using as intermediary Martin J. Quigley, publisher of "Exhibitors Herald" and strenuous defender of the Code, Selznick managed to avoid the fearful rating "C-condemned" from the Legion that would have resulted in a national campaign of boycott and an avalanche of protests damaging his reputation and having terrible effects on a significant investment of time and money. The production made thirty-two cuts and trims, shortening a few sequences—most notably the one at the pond where Jones/Pearl dances for his lover—and several lines of dialogue were dropped (Letter from Daniel O'Shea to Neil Agnew. February 3, 1947, DOS; Letter from Selznick to Father Masterson. February 3, 1947, DOS). Further, he had to insert an Overture explaining the nature of the character of Jubal Crabbe, the sinkiller, defined here as a role "based upon those fraudulent, unordained evangelists […] who were recognized as charlatans by the intelligent, God-fearing minority" (Transcription. March 6, 1947, DOS). All these modifications allowed the studio to obtain the rating "B-morally objectionable in part" from the Legion. Still, in the producer's opinion, this story revealed the Code's unpredictable disservice, resulting in a sense of insecurity, the awareness that even when the Code authorities' wishes were fulfilled to the letter, there was no guarantee of absolute protection against condemnations coming from religious groups behaving in a completely different manner from the PCA (Letter from Selznick to Eric Johnston. February 27, 1947; Letter from Johnston to Selznick. March 17, 1947; Letter from Selznick to Johnston. March 25, 1947, DOS). Exactly one year after the release of *DITS*, the Supreme Court declared that movies should not be regarded as business but as art, which brought them under the free speech provisions. The dissolution of the Code was near: it was rewritten in 1966 and completely replaced with the rating system in 1968.

melodramatic elements to confirm the need for rationality and order. Pearl's deranged conduct is read in the light of the Cold War rhetoric in which she is deemed an alien presence that must be eliminated. Behaviors that do not respect traditional gender roles or a domesticated image of motherhood (the mother of Pearl) produce psychic torment and social chaos, and have terrible consequences on family, community, and nation, three dimensions that appear strongly connected in the Post-War Era (Corkin 2004: 602-1109). In Fojas's and Corkin's readings, *DITS* reveals a desire to police the boundaries between what is appropriate and what is not in order to regulate domestic behavior and correct any deviance that risks derailing the American social system as Pearl threatens to trigger mishaps in the McCanles family.

The film represented a point of reference also for Feminist Film Studies. Laura Mulvey initially utilized it as a source of inspiration to build her analysis of the masculinization of the spectator in Hollywood films. The woman is the image while the man is the bearer of the look, in a schema in which the split between spectacle and narration mirrors and upholds the active power of the man as the one who moves the story forward while the woman remains confined as the object of the gaze (Mulvey [1975] 1985: 303–315). Later, Mulvey rethinks her view on the position of female spectators, focusing on the sexual crisis of Pearl as a symbol of the instability of the sexual identity in female characters. *DITS* is analyzed as Pearl's internal drama, represented by the two brothers, Jesse (Joseph Cotten) and Lewt (Gregory Peck), both poles who identify her sexual ambivalence. Mulvey uses the two cowboys as the embodiment of Pearl's unbalanced suspension between rationality and compulsion: Jesse represents the proper course of a woman toward marriage, domesticity, and passive identification; the latter, the annihilation of this rational disposition toward passion, sexual expressivity, and active power. Still, even if Lewt and Jesse embody Pearl's internal inclinations, it is in a world established by men's rules that the drama must be explained, which shows Pearl's inability to find a solution to get out of a patriarchal system (Mulvey [1981] 1989: 29–38). Within the context of FFS, Gaylyn Studlar extends Mulvey's reading utilizing the concept of hysteria

applied to the roles of female adolescents played by Jones in other films produced by Selznick (Studlar 2013). The scholar applies a "psychology of two" in the relationship Selznick-Jones defined as a "male-authored narrative of female hysteria", otherwise explained through the fictional relationship between Svengali and Trilby. Even if Mulvey and Studlar expand on the initial idea of a woman confined in the role of a pleasurable erotic fantasy for men, their readings remain limited to an in-depth psychoanalytic framework of the protagonist that does not fully explain the social implications of the character's emotional responses.[12] In a later essay that concedes more space to the political and social aspects present in *DITS*, Studlar discusses the centrality of rebellious women in post-war "family on the land" westerns.[13] This cycle of westerns intermingled the classical trope of epic conflicts between cattle barons and farmers with melodramatic elements such as dynastic wars and succession issues linked to the use of land by future generations. The family-on-the-land-western often revolves around renovated characters such as "defiant daughters, delinquent sons, sexualized matriarchs, and flawed, overreaching patriarchs involved in intergenerational conflict" (Studlar 2020: 76). In this way, Pearl's hysteria can be projected on a broader canvas, being the outcome produced by social and family issues. The mansion of the McCanles thus represents for Pearl not a home, but an uncanny, dark, and violent space that informs her psychotic behavior (Studlar 2020: 82–83).

Two essays emphasize a previously underestimated aspect, presenting the film as a precursor of things to come. Durgnat and Simmon's paragraph on *DITS* in their volume dedicated to Vidor is a very well-written piece showing an in-depth analysis of the multilayered complexity of a film considered simultaneously modern—anticipating the 1950s—and classical. The authors investigate the characters involved, the nature of their relationship, and the impact that the star personae of Jones

[12] FFS tends to focus their reading within the framework offered by psychoanalysis, which is fully justified by the fact that both Selznick and Busch, the author of the novel, showed their interest in the subject. Selznick produced *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock 1945), *Since You Went Away* (John Cromwell 1944) and *I'll Be Seeing You* (William Dieterle 1944), all showing the influence of similar themes; Busch wrote *Pursued* (Raoul Walsh 1947), *The Furies* (Anthony Mann 1950), and *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray 1954), also demonstrating how much psychoanalysis had penetrated in 1940s American culture.

[13] The formula "family on the land" western was introduced by Virginia Wright Wexman in 1993 (Wexman 1993: 81).

and Peck had on the audiences ʾperception of Pearl and Lewt (Durgnat and Simmon 1988: 235–255). Robin Wood proposes to consider *DITS*, together with *The Searchers* (John Ford 1956), as a film capable of sustaining the "most challenging and subversive statement about American civilization" (Wood 1996: 191–192). Following the path indicated by these scholars, the following pages focus on the melodramatic treatment of stage design, mise-en-scène, and location to emphasize themes linked to picturesque and sublime images of a border-landscape. However, before that, we must focus on the transition from the novel to the film, which explains how Selznick introduced elements that play a pivotal role in my thesis.

"Borderland Crossties"

Published in January 1944, the novel *Duel in the Sun* quickly became popular. Niven Busch based his story on a legendary lady bandit of Arizona "with an eye to an eventual movie sale hoping to star his wife Teresa Wright as Pearl Chavez" (Haver 1980: 352). The writer sold the story to RKO on February 15, 1944, intending to get a little, intimate film out of it. In collaboration with Oliver H. P. Garrett, he wrote the script under the supervision of Charles Koerner, vice president of RKO. An abridged version of the novel appeared in early April in the magazine "Liberty", that was intended to prepare for film penetration.[14] The first draft produced by Garrett and Busch (July 24, 1944) differed significantly from the film Selznick later produced. Pearl is only twelve years old when her father Raoul is lynched for cattle-killing. Raoul Chavez shoots, in fact, the landowner's steers trampling on his corn, an event that recalls the beginning of *The Westerner* (William Wyler 1940) that Busch had written for Samuel Goldwyn four years before. In the first draft, Pearl's mother is a destitute Indian woman who has remarried and refuses to take care of the daughter she had with her first husband. She thus begs Mrs. Laura Belle McCanles, her first husband's former lover, to take Pearl to Spanish

[14]" Duel in the Sun: A thrilling novel of the West by Niven Busch, abridged to a reading time of one evening, and illustrated by Tom Atwell" in "Liberty", April 1, 1944, pp. 31-46, DOS.

Bit. Laura Belle and Senator Jackson McCanles live in the mansion with their four sons, Lew, Jesse, Gil, and Ruck. Laura Belle opposes the idea of a relationship between her sons and Pearl, becoming increasingly worried when Lewt shows an overwhelming passion toward the *mestiza*. The novel and the first draft emphasize the traditional opposition between law and nature, clearly outlining an antagonism between the official hero, Jesse, and the outlaw hero, Lewt. Being deprived of his father's economic support, Lewt robs a stagecoach, a bank and, later, holds up the El Paso southbound train, implicating the innocent Pearl, who is arrested and charged with abetting Lewt's crimes. In the role of her lawyer, Jesse demonstrates the innocence of the girl in a lengthy trial in which she declares Lewt's toxic influence. The marriage between Pearl and Jesse can only be celebrated after Lewt's death. Pearl must kill the outlaw in the famous final duel, knowing that she will never attain security and happiness with Jesse if Lewt is alive. The first draft written by Busch and Garrett was almost identical to the novel. It was intended to produce a hybrid between a western and a courtroom drama about a Mexican Indian woman being harassed by an American outlaw and saved by the representative of the liberal and positive forces of civilization.

Selznick became interested in the project when Charles Koerner submitted the script to him, looking for suggestions and a leading lady. Koerner had thought about Jennifer Jones, Selznick's protégée, for the lead, but Selznick's refusal to lend her to RKO was probably a move revealing a personal involvement in the story. When Koerner's interest in producing the film cooled off in November 1944, Selznick bought the rights to the novel and the script dated July 1944.[15] At the end of the month, Selznick announced a series of briefings with scenario assistants Barbara Keon and Lydia Schiller to rewrite the first draft. He requested a page breakdown of the novel in four

[15] There was probably a second script prepared for RKO by Garrett alone (employment contract of Garrett at RKO dated April 1944) in addition to the one written by both (July 1944). Busch later aimed to establish credit in connection with the script. The Screen Writers' Guild finally settled that *DITS* was "suggested by a novel by Niven Busch", giving credits to Busch only as the author of the novel. Garrett received credit only concerning the adaptation of the novel, while the screenplay was entirely attributed to Selznick (Letter from Robert Dann, Vice-president and general counsel of Vanguard, to Sidney Lipsitch, RKO. February 12, 1945, DOS; Letter from Selznick to Garrett. April 10, 1945, DOS; Letter from Selznick to the Screen Writers 'Guild. February 13, 1946, DOS; Letter from Alice Penneman, secretary of Screen Writers' Guild, to Selznick. February 28, 1946, DOS).

documents: physical characterization, costumes, setting and props, and season charts. The writing was initially given to Oliver Garrett in collaboration with Stephen Longstreet, who contributed only to dialogues. The second draft was finished on February 20, 1945. Selznick supervised the process, remaining constantly unsatisfied. During the year 1945, simultaneously with the film shooting (which began on March 4), Selznick continued to alter Garrett's script, adding new scenes and the prologue ("Legend Prologue, Added Scenes and Retakes". October 9, 1945, DOS). The date of the third and final script is January 12, 1946. It contained rearrangements due to issues with the PCA and suggestions given by Joseph Breen. The picture's first test preview, in early February 1946 at the Grand Lake Theatre in Oakland, did not exactly go as expected. The film was reviewed again until Selznick finally managed to release *DITS* at the Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles on December 31, 1946, the last day in which he could qualify the film for Academy consideration.[16] The wide release was nonetheless postponed on May 7, 1947, due to the boycott of the Legion, that started in January that year (see footnote 11).

In the final analysis, Selznick added and changed some essential elements: first, he emphasized the geographical and cultural characterization of a border-landscape, inserting, for instance, the spectacular dance at the bordertown café. Then, he turned an out-and-out-western plot about the traditional opposition between outlaw hero and official hero into a melodramatic romance between Lewt and Pearl, a romance that is treated with the blatant and unprecedented sexual frankness emerging in the picturesque sequence at the pond and in the sublime duel at the end of the film. Finally, Selznick moved the plot's focus from Pearl's mother to her father: Mr. Chavez sends Pearl away to save her from loneliness and dissipation. Further, he modified the traditional, straight-laced cowboy persona with romance and lust, thus touching a territory usually confined to dashing Mexican *caballeros*. In the novel and first drafts, Lewt was an outlaw, like Jesse James, "a ne'er-do-well if ever

[16] Selznick wanted a premiere with a great fanfare in Texas, in September, premiere that had to repeat the famous opening of *GWTW* in Atlanta, but he was forced to wait for the last day of December since he was not satisfied with the Technicolor tests. Jennifer Jones and Lillian Gish were both nominated but Olivia de Havilland (for *To Each His Own*) and Anne Baxter (for *The Razor's Edge*) won instead.

there was one" (Haver 1980: 352) who entertained himself with banditry and traditional cowboy songs such as "The Streets of Laredo". In the film, Lewt is a blacked-up version of a cowboy obsessed with a girl and incapable of properly loving her for the racism the Senator keeps on implanting in his brain. As the song "Gotta Get Me Somebody To Love" (Allie Wrubel) suggests, Lewt's only interest is the physical possession of a *mestiza*, which is far from the traditional aloofness and nobility of cowboys or even Mexican versions of cowboys who, by contrast, usually express healthier forms of romanticism. To a certain extent, Lewt is a passive target of the Senator's racism and of Laura Belle's ineffective liberal views, which do not help a wholesome expression of an interethnic romance.

Mainly, Selznick changed the ending. The producer was persuaded that the happy ending showing a final marriage between Jesse and Pearl was "lacking in satisfaction, because it seems to negate what the whole picture has been about" (Letter from Selznick to Koerner. September 1, 1944, DOS). In his opinion, the first drafts lacked the preparation for the hope that Pearl could be happy with Jesse. What intrigued Selznick was the desperate and overwhelming attraction between Pearl and Lewt, an attraction that was missing in the other couple. In the case of a final happy ending, this attraction would have been entirely nullified. "Since the audience and Jesse both know", Selznick writes to Koerner, "that she has loved the man she killed entirely and unceasingly throughout the entire picture". The producer thus continues:

> If it were my picture I would eliminate inference of a sexual or even romantic attraction for Jesse to Pearl; and would have her drawn from start to finish, irresistibly and right through to her death, to Lewt. I think there is a perfectly magnificent finish screaming to be written and played if, when she shoots Lewt, […] the two play their final love. Moments in each other's arms, both dying. […] The picture should have twice the power, create twice the discussion, receive much better critical attention, in my opinion, with such a finish. It is my belief that it would find audience acceptance provided there was no duality of interest on the girl's part, no division of her affection; provided that all her actions, from the moment she first met Lewt until the conclusion of the picture, were motivated by the overwhelming attraction he has for her (Letter from Selznick to Koerner. September 1, 1944, DOS).

Selznick intended to focus the entire story on this fatal attraction, with Jesse representing a substitute father figure. Mutual lust was, in fact, emphasized throughout the film via symbolic uses of aural and

visual codes. For instance, after the preview-test in Oakland, Selznick hired Dimitri Tiomkin to write an appropriate score. Not only did the film change this Russian-born composer's future career, paving the way toward his extraordinary successes,[17] but Tiomkin also changed the film with his seventy-five-piece orchestra and a special percussion session. He was asked to produce orgasms in the form of music, adding the "unbridled, throbbing urge" to the love scenes between Pearl and Lewt. As Tiomkin writes, "plenty of throbs, with violent palpitations" gave the proper expression to their thunderous and fervid passion (Haver 1980: 359).[18] The palpitations were visually associated with the thunder and lightning attributed to their first sexual encounter, a detail regarding the weather that was already inserted in the novel ("Season chart compiled from the novel". March 6, 1945, DOS). However, the film used the shot of a lightning bolt splitting the stormy sky to emphasize the turning point represented by that event, remarking its difference from the usual clear sky of other scenes. As happens for the death of Laura Belle, where a heavy rain signals a turning point in the story of Pearl, the tremendous burst of a thunderstorm "puts an exclamation point on the scene" (Haver 1980: 353), giving epic proportion to Pearl's sexual awakening.

The film makes symbolic use of many other visual codes. For instance, the images of the horses in the mansion change according to variations in couplings. In the novel, Jesse buys a pair of boots, a dress, and a "fine looking red gelding" for Pearl (Busch [1944] 2013: 3612, 3757), while in the film, it is Lewt who gives her the pinto, Dice, a horse that is identified with the wilderness, being usually ridden by Natives. Immediately after her sexual surrender, the film shows a black stallion bursting out of the stable as a metaphor for the previous encounter. Lewt is shown taming the stallion and biting the horse's ear to cool it off while Pearl looks on with evident captivation. By contrast, in

[17] After *DITS*, Tiomkin would scored numerous classical western films such as *Red River*, *High Noon*, *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, *Rio Bravo*, *Alamo*, and many TV series such as *Rawhide.*

[18] Ronald Haver recounts the anecdote reported in Tiomkin's biography that after all those violent palpitations of the orchestra were added, Selznick was still disappointed. The producer asks "Dimi, that is not the way I make love", to which he shouted, "But it is the way *I* make love!". Selznick burst out laughing. End of story. He agreed Tiomkin could make musical love like he pleased (Ibid. 361).

a later sequence, immediately after the barbecue party, Sam Pearce's (Charles Bickford) gentle proposal of marriage is associated with colts and a mare calmly grazing in the field, an image resounding with Pearl's attachment to Sam as a substitute father figure, curiously resembling Jesse. Colts and mares grazing in the field represent a weakened vigor compared to a black stallion bursting out of a stable.

Persuaded that the title *Duel in the Sun* was not appropriate to the production, afraid that audiences could not immediately understand the general nature of the story, thinking it was about "a dogfight between two planes" (Letter from Selznick to Niven Busch. December 28, 1944, DOS; Letter from Busch to Selznick. January 4, 1945, DOS), Selznick opened a contest in June 1945, limited to employees of Vanguard, to choose another title. He finally gave up on the idea in November, realizing it would have been silly to change the title at that moment, throwing away precious months of ads and word-of-mouth, destroying the vast capital invested by the publicity department (Letter from Selznick to Albert Sindlinger and al. (Gallup). November 1, 1945, DOS). Apart from the recent "Lust in the Dust" utilized as a nickname for *DITS* among scholars, many other intriguing titles were offered during the contest. For instance, Selznick was almost persuaded to change it to "Untamed", "The Devil Saw Her First", "Walk in the Sun", and "Texas Passional". Many titles emphasized the idea of margins, "The Edge of Happiness", and the Mexican border-landscape: "The Hills of Mexico", "Border Legend", "Borderland Crossties", "Ring Around the Border", or "Pearl from the Border". These titles aim at accentuating the revolutionary case of miscegenation of a Mexican girl with an American cowboy, a love story hopelessly unsuitable for the unpreparedness of the McCanles. Curiously, one of the employees, a woman, proposed "C'est l'amour" as a title for *DITS*, suggesting that what lies behind Pearl's attempt to cross a geographical and metaphorical boundary between Anglo and Hispanic cultures was a desire to be accepted and loved. Like other border-crossers in the history of literature and cinema, Pearl lives in the space between nations, cultures, ideologies, lifestyles, and mindsets, following her desire to belong and to live a normal life.

On the other hand, Lewt, a spoiled young man, is forced to hide his attraction for a beautiful *mestiza* under layers of preconceptions imposed by the Senator. Pearl's struggle for identity and recognition within a different family, society, and culture, and Lewt's legitimate attraction toward a girl "from down along the border", as the Legend defines her, could be considered as communal aspects in experiences of border-crossing that are not merely geographical. The uncontrollable and obsessive passion they have for each other is already a crossing of borders, a daring expression of the fascination toward otherness that is experienced on both sides, and that makes the bond between them appear as intimately well-founded but socially unaccepted by a family shown as not yet ready for a similar leap.

Taking this crucial premise in mind, the following pages focus on specific formal elements that allow us to understand the way in which the film handles this argument through mise en scène and spatial representation. First, wardrobe and costume color are analyzed to reveal three aspects: Selznick's studied plan to make clear the *Mexicanidad* of Pearl and her mother; a dramatization of the ideological contrast between characters; and the common fate that unites the two lovers. Second, the interiors of Spanish Bit, designed by Emile Kuri, a set dresser and decorator of Mexican origin, illuminate the complexity of the film and mirror Kuri's insights into the culture of his homeland. Finally, the landscape, not merely arranged in the film to represent the classical opposition between civilization and wilderness, is treated in impressionistic views of a picturesque/sublime borderland. This treatment is detectable in the scene at the pond, in the prologue, and in the final duel. While the pond is a picturesque landscape encompassing Pearl's and Lewt's border idyll, Squaw's Head Rock is the sublime spatial representation of their colorful, kitsch, bitter, and hardboiled act of love and death.

Wardrobe Plot: The McCanles

Among the many Selznick collaborators, Natalie Kalmus was hired as "color director" to furnish advice on technical aspects related to filming in Technicolor. She also provided insights into the

psychological effects of colors on actors and viewers. In an article written for "Photoplay", Kalmus is almost presented as a psychotherapist, working on the positive effect of wearing a blue, yellow, or green outfit on stars' personalities. She recommended not choosing red for high-strung, emotional stars such as Joan Crawford or orange for excessively assertive personalities such as Ann Harding. Apple green is appropriate for ambitious stars like Norma Shearer since it combines the sedative blue with the color of money, green. In contrast, jade green and yellow are recommended to elicit joy. In Kalmus's view, every color resonates with higher levels of significance, being able to trigger stars' feelings and radiate them to the viewers (Lois Shirley "All Hollywood has now gone color-conscious" "Photoplay", 42:3, August 1932, pp. 48–49, 118). Despite assertions that the two-color process promoted by her husband, Herbert Kalmus, enhanced realism in the reproduction of nature and reality (a publicity campaign on the "Saturday Evening Post" declared "Technicolor is a natural color"; Haver 1980: 179), its use remained entirely confined under a symbolic framework at least until the mid-1960s. For instance, in 1936, Selznick produced *The Garden of Allah* (Richard Boleslawski), and Kalmus suggested the use of an almost monochromatic glow instead of what the production wanted, to have the desert rendered in realistic pastel hues (Ibid. 188). The tendency did not change when, in the late 1940s, the three-color process was largely introduced in A-features with expensive production values, which required specific procedures and coordination with other aspects of filmmaking: photography, camera movements, make-up, costumes, background, and settings. In the late 1940s, Kalmus was still in charge of all color matters for Vanguard, and the symbolic use of colors was still aimed at heightening the image's emotional impact.

The wardrobe department of *DITS*, formed by Walter Plunkett, designer, with superintendents Elmer Ellsworth, Frank Beetson, and Ann Peck, made many decisions that resounded with the notions of colors elaborated by Kalmus. The necessity of a color-conscious choice led Selznick to request in March 1945, when the shooting had just started, a detailed chart on each of the five principals showing what each of them wore in the various scenes (Selznick to Elmer Ellsworth. March 14, 1945, DOS). This chart helped the filmmaking process since it offered precise indications of wardrobe, hairstyles,

and make-up, all precious tools in case of modifications in the first unit that did not match the material already shot in the second unit. Further, Selznick wanted to produce a scheme of clash and harmony of the five main characters. Created by Ellsworth, head of the Wardrobe department, the "wardrobe plot" contained descriptions of garments (type and cutting) illustrated by small pieces of fabrics showing solid colors or flowered patterns. The color scheme represented a sketch of each character's personality, their mutual relationship, and their progressive evolution or stasis. Let us start with the McCanles.

One of the most evident oppositions is between Lewt and Jesse, who also appeared counterpointed in Busch's novel. With a predominance of brown, red, and navy blue, Lewt embodies the forces of wilderness, whereas Jesse, with neutral hues like gray and beige, incarnates the interests of civilization. Their difference is in manners, styles, speech, and inclinations. Intellectual activities are prevalent in Jesse, while Lewt prefers the manual sphere of riding, wild horse taming, and gunfighting. He is a traditional incarnation of a cowboy, as shown by his usual apparel: buckskin jacket, neckerchief, cowboy boots, and hats. Contrary to Jesse, Lewt does not have his room in Spanish Bit, revealing a completely different relationship with domesticity. Their life philosophy is thoroughly disjoined: for Lewt, deep individualism and family loyalty; for Jesse, progressivism and a populist sympathy for immigrants. Still, the values attributed to each one are not as clear-cut as they initially appear. Lewt, for instance, does not follow ethics and conduct that were typically associated with a cowboy: he is openly racist, a seducer who takes what he wants. His evolution toward love in the final duel is equally uncommon. Further, the character was far from Gregory Peck's persona, usually comfortable with unbending or introspective parts such as Jimmy Ringo in *The Gunfighter* (Henry King 1950). When Peck felt awkward and uncomfortable with playing a cold-blooded seducer, Vidor suggested basing his role on the character of Sportin' Life (from *Porgy and Bess*). The result is thus an interesting mash-up between a cowboy and an outlaw who borrows his style from a black character and his audacious sexuality from a Latin lover. The shuffling walk we notice in Peck comes from the former, but the perennial cigarette in the mouth and the hat slouched over

one eye come from the Mexican bandit/heartthrob persona of Cisco. In the same way, Jesse is identified with an internal contrast. During the fence-line scene, Jesse openly takes the side of the immigrants, identifying the future of Texas in homesteaders and civic principles. Still, he is also an inflexible, obstinate man, a do-gooder who cannot accept, forgive, or figure out Pearl's sexual weakness. Jesse replies to Pearl, asking him to forget what he saw, "No, I don't think I'll forget it. I don't think I'll be able to", a cold if not cruel answer that emphasizes his stuffy and self-righteous character ("DITS, Based on the novel by Niven Busch", Screenplay by David O. Selznick, final script, January 12, 1946, p. 109, DOS).[19]

Notably, Jesse, Laura Belle, and Helen Langford (Joan Tetzel) are usually connoted through solid colors that persist without modifications. Jesse is often associated with gray suits that, according to Kalmus' view, was often worn by persons who prefer to maintain a prudent and judicious position. A rich and sophisticated girl, Helen wears up-to-date black and white dresses, while Laura Belle is often associated with mauve, rose, or lavender shawls. This hue suits gentlewomen and perfectly illustrates the Victorian delicacy of her character, Laura Belle's penchant for dignity and decorum. On top of that, lavender and mauve suggest old-fashioned politeness—"there is always a formality and dignity about Laura Belle" ("Physical Descriptions and Characterizations compiled from the novel", December 14, 1944, DOS). Selznick pointed out interesting possibilities in Gish's costuming since her character "lives in the past, and in a world of her own, very removed from the actual locale of the story. She should be costumed as a southern belle of twenty or thirty years earlier, in her clothes, jewelry, hair dress, etc." (Letter from Selznick to J. Von Sternberg. March 6, 1945, DOS). Similarly, the patriarch and magnate Senator McCanles is associated with fine clothes and a fancy pocket watch, all features identifying the large amount of prosperity and power represented by Spanish Bit. The Senator has the most tremendous responsibility in this dysfunctional family. His wife points it out to

[19] From now on: "DITS, final script"

him in the brief scene in front of the fireplace: "you spoiled Lewt… Ever since he was a child, he thought rules weren't made for him. He thought you made the rules, all of them not just those for Spanish Bit" ("DITS, final script": 157, DOS). The Senator's rigidity, as shown in the fence-line scene, and the racism represented by his supercilious disdain for Pearl (encouraged by the fact that he knows she is the daughter of Scott Chavez) are signs of frailty, frustration, and incapacity to love. The consistent lack of change in the Senator's clothes' hues—black or brown velvet jackets or henna tweeds remain untouched throughout the film—can be read as a sign of the catastrophic situations that have characterized Spanish Bit in both present and past days. This detail highlights the self-absorbed tyranny of a despot. By contrast, Laura Belle participates in the same liberalism that characterizes her son Jesse. She welcomes Pearl into the family from the beginning, waving excitedly at the buggy entering the gate, warmly embracing the daughter of her former lover, and later protecting Pearl from the Senator's desire to send her away. However, aware as she is of her husband's evident racism, jealousy, patriarchy, and to Victorian ideas of womanhood, Laura Belle is unable to express her feelings. When the quarrel about the railroad encroachment erupts between her son Jesse and the Senator, she carefully diverts attention toward atmospheric conditions. The Victorian idea of womanhood Laura Belle represents, beautifully expressed in her monochromatic wardrobe, leads her to avoid too serious arguments: she deflects explanation of the "incident" when Pearl arrives at Spanish Bit or subjects like death or unhappiness when the girl bursts into tears at the thought of her dead father. Laura Belle's plan to help her is never supported by resolute actions.

The racialization of Pearl that *DITS*, according to some scholars, operates by identifying skin complexion and heirlooms as causes of unconstrained sexual behavior should be carefully scrutinized. The film does not portray Pearl as being savage because of her skin color or heritage but rather because of the reaction of the McCanles to these features. The racialization of Pearl is rooted not in the film but in the family's reaction to her ethnic diversity. Characterized by openly racist figures or by liberal attitudes that remain inoperative or not binding (both Jesse and Laura Belle are

altogether unable to embody their ideals wholeheartedly), the McCanles family is the first responsible for that process of racialization. In this light, the ethnic codes identifying Pearl as a Mexican girl mirror biased views that do not belong to the film but to the characters in the film. Pearl's black hair, dark skin, and tawny eyes are not presented as a tendentious anticipation of the catastrophic ending unless they appear as such when attributed to the opinion of some characters. Further, the relationship between her overwhelming passion for Lewt and the sins of her unreliable mother is no more evident than the connection between Lewt's racism and his father's dominant patriarchy. In any case, compared to the Chavez, the McCanles appear equally defective and flawed.

Wardrobe Plot: The Chavez

For the opening scene in the bordertown, Selznick requested explicit ethnic codification in costumes, encouraging the use of Mexican mantillas, sombreros, and skirts, a note accompanied by an equally important recommendation about the necessity—for precautionary reasons against a possible rejection coming from Addison Durland, the Latin American adviser of the MPPDA—to make clear that the café was on the American side of the border (Letter from J. L. Breen to Vanguard. January 24, 1945, DOS; Letter from Selznick to Glett and Nelson. November 17, 1945, DOS). A publicity note distributed by Ann Harris (research department) to the entourage of Paul MacNamara (head of Vanguard publicity unit) explained that "the material for Jennifer Jones's costumes was found in Mexico. The serape was used as an all-purpose garment to carry clothes in, as a blanket or a robe" (Memo from Ann Harris to MacNamara. September 6, 1945, DOS). Notably, the film inserts an essential difference from the novel. In the sequence of the sinkiller, Pearl covers her naked body with the serape instead of wearing a robe as happened in the novel, where Mrs. McCanles gives her this garment to prevent her from meeting the reverend wearing only a blanket (Busch [1944] 2013: 614). The ethnic characterization of costumes was thus highlighted as a way to reveal the racism of the social entourage of the family. The sinkiller, a satirical figure that exposes the hypocrisy, prudery,

and unconscious racism of this entourage, defines the serape as a "heathen blanket", a mark of her belonging to the race of those ancestors who "will be spinning like tops when they know you got this on", meaning the holy medal he has just given to the girl ("DITS, final script": 76–77, DOS). Selznick wished to articulate Pearl's ethnic codification as a way to emphasize specific remarks attributed to other characters. At the beginning, the Senator teases Pearl after she gets off the buggy: "girl, what are you doing in that get-up?" he asks, adding a racist remark, "is that what they are wearin 'this season in the wigwams?" ("DITS, final script": 25, DOS). Even Jesse appears similarly startled by her clothes during the buggy ride.

The ethnic code attributed to the Chavez is heavily saturated in the dance sequence of Pearl's mother (Tilly Losch).[20] Her costume is one of the very few things that completely satisfied Selznick—"Miss Losch's costume is, I think, excellent" (Letter from Selznick to Beetson. October 31, 1945, DOS)—together with the exotic dance that, in his opinion, had to be a replica of the contorted, wriggling, wide open movements choreographed by the same Losch in *The Garden of Allah*. To emphasize the ethnic code attributed to Mexico, Selznick followed the suggestion offered by folk dance expert Lloyd "Pappy" Shaw, who proposed that the choreography could be complemented with the support of an unidentified "young Mexican woman" (Letter from Ruth Burch to Selznick. October 18, 1945, DOS).[21] The mysterious and uncredited young Mexican dancer helped Losch to reproduce ethnic codes in her performance. Apart from the colors of her dress—Losch wears an emerald green, wide-ruffled gown with sparkling inserts and a red blouse that emphasize the exact colors of the

[20] For her role Henry Willson, a talent agent for Selznick, proposed a list of Latin actresses such as Lupe Tovar, Dolores del Rio, Maria Montez, Carmen Miranda, and Rosita Moreno. Also, for the role of Mr. Chavez was initially proposed a list of Latin actors: Pedro de Cordoba, Julian Rivero, Paul Lopez, Duncan Renaldo, Antonio Moreno and Gilbert Roland (Henry Willson, "Suggestions for Mrs. Chavez and Mr. Chavez". October 16, 1945, DOS). At the end, Selznick opted for Losch, a sophisticated dancer of Austrian origin who became famous on Broadway with Adele and Fred Astaire, since she had already worked for him in *The Garden of Allah*.

[21] The memo that the secretary Ruth Burch sent to Selznick also retained Shaw's letter defining details and the dancer's name. Selznick later gave this letter to Losch, which explains its absence from the archive (there is only Burch's memo). The delivery and absence of the letter is explained in Selznick's reply: Letter from Selznick to Burch. October 22, 1945, DOS.

Mexican flag—the choreography reproduces the performative style of Mexican folk dance. This style is based on the twirls of the upper body executed by female dancers dressed in wide skirts who use their arms to flutter the cloth's edge up and down in ample, swaying movements. They typically style their hair in a low bun adorned with flowers that match their dress, though Losch wears her hair down, held back with a headband that creatively blends Native and Mexican influences. The convoluted movement of the camera associates the gown's twirls with the fortune wheel's vortex, emphasizing the male audience's general craze in the café. Symbolic images of sexual charge—two iron cannons are placed at the center of the stage—underline the frenzy of her movements, vibrant and sinewy, and the power she has over men. During the promenade on the bar-counter that functions as her stage, Mrs. Chavez steals a gun from one of the bystanders and fires bullets in the air, highlighting the masculine overtones of her choreography, also helped by the throbbing, pounding drumbeat of a small band playing guitar and percussion on a platform standing above the stage. Mrs. Chavez's performance is flirtatious and provocative, ending in a supine, not vertical, position. She lies on the stage floor, warmly receiving her lover's embrace. This is an enigmatic, impressive mating dance, reproduced on a more innocent level by Pearl, dancing for the Mexican kids outside the café.

Scott Chavez (Herbert Marshall) is a cosmopolitan version of a figure often present in classical westerns, that of a dissipated southern gentleman, a gambler or a drinker, forced to deviate from his cultivated high standards by the rough ways of the West.[22] We find similar figures in Hatfield (John Carradine) from *Stagecoach* or in the cynic and defeated Doc (Victor Mature) from *My Darling Clementine*, who quotes Shakespeare by heart. Doc recites *Hamlet*, Scott Chavez recites Omar Khayyám's *The Rubaiyat* (1120), even if the excerpt changes from the second draft to the film. In Garrett's version (February 1945), Raoul cites a poignant verse on death ("A moment's halt, a

[22] Selznick was thrilled to cast Marshall for the concise yet powerful role of Scott Chavez. However, he was deeply concerned about his health due to the prosthetic leg that was causing Marshall a lot of pain and distress. Selznick always cared for him and for all his actors and ensured they were given the utmost attention. In any case, the cosmopolitan attitudes of Scott Chavez perfectly suited the sophisticated ways of Marshall.

momentary taste…") while the same character, later named Scott, recites a different line where the joys of youth are compared to a fleeting moment ("Oh threats of hell and hopes of paradise! One thing, at last, is certain: This life flies / One thing is certain, and the rest is lies / The flower that once has blown forever dies"; "DITS, final script": 11, DOS). In the brief sequence at the bordertown café, Scott Chavez appears as a counterpoint to his wife's sparkling vitality: buried under a blanket of smoke and steeped in a sea of sombreness, he wears a tweed that seems to contain the memory of emerald green with a red velvet lapel neck. "I don't mind if others besides Marshall in the sequence wear top hats", Selznick writes in the memo, "providing the others are entirely different colors than Marshall" (Letter from Selznick to Glett. November 6, 1945, DOS). The ways of a gentleman are encapsulated in his fancy clothing, whose colors appear now worn out. Red and green simultaneously identify the character as Hispanic—his last name evokes a defeated Spanish colonial aristocracy that ends up marrying outside his class—and match his character with that of the wife, as a reminiscence of a precedent passion now depleted of energy and enthusiasm, and left to wind up in poverty and torment.

Durgnat and Simmon point out that the relationship between Lewt and Pearl fails, first and foremost, because of their lack of stable roots and support from the family/community. Lewt is a spoiled son, Pearl is an orphan, and their isolation brings into their relationship an undercurrent of masochism (Durgnat and Simmon 1988: 244). Their common destiny is expressed through their constant association, also shown in the match of colors. When Pearl reveals herself as a tomboyish girl daring to ride Dice bareback to show Lewt she can be his equal, she wears a yellow blouse with a deep oval neckline and an emerald green calico skirt with a tight waistband. Lewt's usual hues, associating the character with the wilderness (he wears leather chaps and a brown shirt), are brightened up by a green neckerchief resonating harmoniously with her gown. The sequence with Dice has a high erotic charge overturning the typical chase and pursuit we have seen in many westerns into an explicit act of love. Lewt follows Pearl with his horse in a mad run for a rescue. She falls from

Dice lying on the ground with Lewt standing in front of her, calmly staring at the contours of her figure brought in evidence by the fall. He simultaneously chases away the cowhands, who had rushed to help, without even a look: "go on! mosey, will ya?". Then, he helps Pearl rise to her feet teasing the girl with provocative remarks, "you better stick to buggy riding", ironically reminding Jesse's preference for a less imaginative activity ("DITS, final script": 50, DOS). The color green suggests refreshing emotion and represents the beginning of an inappropriate, intoxicating love. At the end of the sequence, Lewt invites her to the pond for a swim using a honeyed and allusive intonation. Pearl's resistance triggers an irrational reaction in Lewt, who alternates nicety and meanness in response to her actions. In the sequence of Pearl's sexual awakening (which starts as a rape but ends with the girl's surrender and evident enjoyment of the act), the match of colors is marked—her red blouse and pale blue skirt harmonize with the red and white fantasy pattern of his navy blue neckerchief—associating two lovers in a single fate.

Pearl is the only character whose evolution surfaces in costume through an interesting contrast between white and black outfits. The so-called "degradation scene", when Lewt visits Pearl after the murder of Sam, is one of the most controversial in the film. Clung to his leg, screaming her desperate love, she begs him to be taken to Mexico, but he kicks her in the face: "now, look, will you stop your yammerin'? I gotta mosey" ("DITS, final script": 174, DOS). This scene is associated with a color that represents the symbol of purity and marriage, all aspects that Lewt refuses to associate with Pearl. She is wearing the white nightgown Mrs. McCanles has given her in an earlier sequence (cut out in the film), with the name "Laura Belle" embroidered on the bosom. White is a symbolic reminder of Pearl's desire to be accepted and to pass for white, an aspiration never fully approved within the house and, as such, limited to impersonation, a form of mimicry never sanctioned by the family. White is also the color Pearl wears at the barbecue dance when Lewt, under the Senator's influence, refuses to announce they are "bespoken". Representing marriage, the coronation of love and affection, sacrifice

and altruism, white is the symbol of their adversity, the misfortune due to a society unready for modern interracial romance. By contrast, black is the color that characterizes Pearl at the beginning, when she arrives at Spanish Bit wearing a black dress in mourning. At the end of the film, after Lewt shoots Jesse in the attempt of murder, Pearl goes back to wearing black. The novel and first drafts showed Pearl's masculinity not only in marksmanship and bareback riding but also through the use of manly clothes. She appears in "linsey shirt, buckskin riding pants and star-boots" when she chases after Lewt before the trial and, later, Jesse brings her "a slicker and a Stetson hat" in preparation for their new life together (Busch [1944] 2013: 1909, 3610). In the film, on the other hand, manly clothes are replaced with black outfits. In the final duel, she wears a black blouse with the same red skirt seen in the opening scene. This costume highlights her transformation, evoking not only her parents 'tragic end in the prologue but also the rigidity assumed by her body: the impassive face, the flat and icy gaze, a characterization that we usually attribute to western male heroes, past and present, from William Hart to John Wayne, from Randolph Scott to Clint Eastwood. Pearl's masculine approach in the final sequence encompasses her physical strength and power to endure, anticipating the attraction that post-classical cinema had for tough-girls-with-a-gun, unabashed about their feelings, ready to face whatever consequence.

Emile Kuri and the social values of objects

Born in Cuernavaca, Emile Kuri was employed as a set designer for *DITS*. In the late 1930s, he began to work for Hal Roach and was later called by Vanguard as a set dresser for *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock 1945). The production found his work remarkable, and Vanguard decided to regularize his employment with a six-month contract at $200 per week and an option to extend the term for one year at a rate of $250 (Contract between Vanguard and Kuri. August 7, 1944, DOS). Selznick wished to secure Kuri for *DITS*, and in January 1945 the contract was extended for one year (Extension of contract between Kuri and Vanguard vice-president Robert H. Dann. January 5, 1945, DOS). Kuri

was later involved in a jurisdictional fight between the more conservative IATSE (International Alliance of Theatre and Stage Employees) and the emergent CSU (Conference of Studio Unions) controlled by Herb Sorrell.[23] This fight turned into one of the most significant strikes in Hollywood history. The conflict started eight days after the beginning of the shooting of *DITS*, on March 12, 1945, and officially ended in October after an intervention of the AFL (American Federation of Labor); then, it flared again in 1946. In early 1947, the representative of the IATSE, Roy Brewer, began a series of meetings intended to destroy the CSU, considered as a base for the Communist party operations in Hollywood. The minutes of these meetings were filed as records for the congressional investigation that triggered the activity of the House Un-American Activities Committee and its purge of leftist writers and workers from Hollywood. Despite a letter of suspension dated one week after the beginning of the strike (Letter from O'Shea to Kuri. March 19, 1945, DOS) and a notification of the closing of his contract in August of the same year (Letter from Robert H. Dann to Kuri. August 13, 1945, DOS), Kuri received credit for the film, probably having worked up until March 12 to prepare the interior design of Spanish Bit at MGM. He was later employed at Liberty Films (owned by Frank Capra). However, he continued to work for Selznick's later productions, and his skills remained highly appreciated (Letter from Vanguard to Set Designers and Decorators Local 1421. January 17, 1946, DOS). It is thus important to emphasize his contribution to the film, intermittent but significant, especially considering his controversial activism and the fact that the production constantly underscored the protagonist's ethnicity also through settings and props.

The layout of Spanish Bit shows a strict separation between Pearl's bedroom and all the other spaces of the mansion. Her room was described by Busch as a dark space not much bigger than a closet, with a sour smell of having been shut up for too long and "lighted only by one of the slits that

[23] As per Vanguard payroll records, Kuri was one of the members of Screen Set Decorators affiliated with Local 1421. This union, along with Painters Local 644, was controlled by agent and rank-and-file painter Herb Sorrell. Sorrell initiated a militant campaign against the IATSE, seeking a more radical solution for film workers (List of Vanguard payroll and contracts from assistant production manager Fred Ahern. March 12, 1945, DOS; Nielsen 1990: 170–171). The jurisdictional dispute between the IATSE and the CSU arose to determine which union would represent 78 studio set decorators.

were the Senator's idea of windows" (Busch [1944] 2013: 503). In the film, Pearl's room is at the end of a flowered pergola in the open patio, as a separate building with a heavy wooden door that makes it appear as a cellar. It has no lock so that any house resident can enter, with or without permission. The room is further described with a few details: an oil lamp, a rawhide bed with a thick mattress, a pine dresser, a pine chair, a niche for a pitcher, and a wash basin scooped into the wall: no traces of ethnic codes (Busch [1944] 2013: 503). Kuri amplifies this simple scheme by adding essential features that function as a codification for Pearl. Apart from a bottle of oil, soap and scrub pads, a broken-toothed comb, and a picture of his father in a red frame, he adds a serape, a sombrero, and a cheap string of Mexican red and green beads (Daily Production Report. July 7, 1945, DOS; Fig. 20]. Pearl uses the string as a waistbelt when she arrives late at supper after Lewt interrupts her swim at the pond, and Vashti (Butterfly McQueen) later that night plays with the Mexican belt when she wakes Pearl up before the meeting with the sinkiller. Like the serape wrapped around her naked body, the belt represents the unconscious seductive power of the girl and her impressive beauty. Kuri surely did not have complete freedom of action, even in his department, but his origin presumably increased his competence in emphasizing ethnic codification of the character. Since there is no trace of strong ethnic codifications in the novel, Kuri utilized props to focus viewers 'attention on her beauty, accentuating the features that the production used to expose the brutality and hypocrisy of the McCanles and the blatant racism of Jubal Crabbe.

This hypothesis of Kuri's pivotal role can be further elucidated through the analysis of props and settings in the other rooms of Spanish Bit. In the novel, Mr. McCanles's room is briefly described through a series of features: an ink-spotted desk where the original Spanish bit was placed, a rawhide chair, a fireplace, objects representing cattle business (a bell rope) and western environments (a brass cuspidor; Busch [1944] 2013: 2207, 2211, 2230, 3475). The Senator is a rich man, ambitious and haughty. Like a Charles Foster Kane of the West, he is a ruthless despot amassing power and wealth. Kuri interpreted this authority by inserting symbols of power: a framed picture of a fighter with clenched fists in a position of defense, a western chair made by entrenched steer horns, an embalmed

eagle hanging over his writing desk, sculptures of horses, steer horns hung over the fireplace and, curiously, a big sea shell placed near the fire that probably represents his vulnerability. The defeat at the railroad encroachment and the final approval of Jesse's point of view and Laura Belle's love constitute the coronation of this vulnerability.

On the other hand, Laura Belle's living room is thoroughly described in the novel as stuffed with "knick-knacks of all sorts" and fraught with expensive furniture: a piano with "claw legs, silver-plated pedals and the name Chickering in gold scroll on its mahogany paneling" and a marble-topped table with a gilt decanter of plum brandy, a thimble-sized gilt glass, and a book, Guillaume du Tillot's *Lives of Famous Converts* (Busch [1944] 2013: 532, 619, 994, 2253). By packing the room with rich details, Kuri highlights the density of a character immobilized in the past. The room has lace curtains, damask upholstery, table drapes, and velvet chairs. All over the place, Kuri inserts antique figurines, lithographs of graceful landscapes, and a Victorian oil lamp made from a rounded ivory glass, all representing the legacy of a tradition [Fig. 21]. Among them, the bird sculpture is a detail evoking the heroines Gish played for Griffith: frail, gentle young girls rather than grown-up women, often portrayed in association with flowers, dolls, or doves (like Lucy in *Broken Blossoms* or Elsie in *Birth of a Nation*). All these characters in Griffith conveyed a sublimation that diverted the sexual impulse from its immediate goal to lead it toward more acceptable social uses. In the role of Laura Belle, Gish embodies that memory, a time in which an impossible love was diverted in a catalog of things seen, touched, and offered from lover to lover, signifying male impulses to protect and female propensity to accept. Kuri interpreted the sensibility of Victorian womanhood through these gentle figurines, framed pictures of a graceful landscape hung on the wall, elegant oil lamps, and furniture, placing the bird sculpture as a symbol of the erotic impulses that Gish represented, at least in the history of Hollywood cinema. The blatant eroticism characterizing Pearl is obviously of a different substance, contained and emerged through different objects and different qualities.

Using these objects, Kuri's insights into characters outline an additional scheme based on a series of boundaries and confines separating Pearl from the McCanles. These boundaries can be identified in terms of generations, the oldest and the youngest; in terms of class, the wealthy family and the destitute Pearl; in terms of ethnicity, the Anglo McCanles and the Mexican Chavez; and in terms of geographical/cultural aspects, between the frontier and the border (Mr. McCanles and Pearl, or also Lewt and Pearl). His contribution not only deepens our understanding of the characters but also piques our interest in further exploring the complexity of the narrative in light of the concept of border-crossing.

Border crossings and picturesque landscape: the dance at the pond

The contrasts expressed by Kuri lead us to identify a common thread and governing principle in the film: that of border-crossing. *DITS* shows four significant border-crossings in characters moving toward a different geographic context or altering their emotional/psychic approach toward a different cultural or ethnic group. In our corpus of SBWs, this is one of the first filmic instances in which the border crossing between the U.S. and Mexico is not primarily geographical but cultural. The remaining part of the chapter will thus focus on these intersections and passages.

The first passage happens when Pearl crosses the gate to enter Spanish Bit. This border-crossing echoes the one undertaken by her father, Scott Chavez, a destitute member of the Hispanic aristocracy who decided, for non-explicit reasons, to move to Mexico and marry outside his class. By contrast, Pearl follows the opposite trajectory, moving from Mexico to the U.S., aiming to correct her father's errors. Still, Pearl finds in Texas the opposite of freedom of action and availability of opportunities. During the buggy ride, Jesse explains that everything has a seal of ownership. The seal is copied from an original Spanish bit for horses, a tool resembling an H, with loops on the bottom of the uprights and a triangular wedge on the crossbar. It emphasizes the idea of possession and points to the fact that everything and everyone in Spanish Bit is the object of deprivation and constraint. The

acres of the McCanles empire, whose limits are marked by square stones planted on the ground, almost coincide with the territory of Texas. As Jesse points out, the Senator does not recognize a difference between the two, putting the Spanish Bit brand on everything: the boundary stones, the animals, the buggy dashboard, the instep of the men's boots. Even Jesse wears a pin marked by the Spanish Bit brand, and Lewt has the same seal on his belt: nothing seems to enjoy freedom from constraint. The gates of the residential section of the ranch mark the Senator's private empire, imposing a clear difference between those who inhabit that space for kinship or work services and all the others, considered as "trespassers". On the gate, we read: "Residence of Hon. Jackson T. McCanles. Sole Owner of Spanish Bit. Trespassers will be regarded as rustlers and shot without warning". Even if Jesse sweetens the passage by encouraging Pearl to think that she is fully welcomed in the family—the joyful announcement at the entering of the gate: "and on to the fortress and happiness" ("DITS, final script": 12, DOS)—, the Senator ultimately hampers the girl's pursuit of happiness. His preconceptions about trespassers and outcasts are mainly addressed to the whole Chavez family, deemed a potential threat against the purity of his kinship.

The fence-line sequence marks the second border-crossing. The Senator and his cowhands resist the railroad's expansion because they believe it will allow a myriad of immigrants to enter the country. They will vote and raise taxes, causing problems and threatening McCanles's power, which has been built over many years of hard work and the absence of personal restrictions and superior laws. Still, at the fence-line, the Senator receives confirmation of his vulnerability, reckoning that those ideas are no more tenable, not just because the feud is internecine—Jesse has already crossed the barbed wire fence, and he is on the side of progress and modernity (even if he cannot apply his liberal view to a private, intimate context)—but also because the Senator is overwhelmed by signs of things to come. Selznick aimed to make this scene appear as the most outstanding in the picture: shot against threatening clouds, the great activity of Chinese, Mexican, and Indian workers, heavily occupied with picks, shovels, and other tools, represent modern society already pushing against the

edges of the empire. An immense camp of tents in the background with wagons, horses, mules carrying materials are the unbeatable forces that the Senator cannot wipe out. The film attempts to create an equation between those forces and the troop of Cavalrymen appearing on the horizon with the American flag and the Cavalry's guidon (the guidon is a small flag or streamer carried as a guide for marking or for identification). Jubilant workers throw hats in the air and yell in relief, while the Senator looks filled by in a cold rage. After the soldiers' arrival, an impressive tracking shot of henchmen and troops facing each other, divided by the barbed wire fence, ends with a close-up of the Senator turning his look to the Spanish Bit seal, which appears slightly trembling in the wind. Immediately after, another close-up of the Senator pans to the right of the frame in a rapid movement that shows the American flag gently undulating in the wind to signal the effect of a superior seal over the land. This power reverses and minimizes Spanish Bit's mark over Texas. The sequence emphasizes the film's main point, presenting the contrast from the Senator's perspective but building the audience's empathy towards the outcasts glorified by the flag. Mr. McCanles is not simply opposing the presence of Pearl in his house but the entire course of historical events bringing new people to the territory: laborers working on the railroad, settlers, and farmers who, like Pearl, look for their place in the "fortress", thus contributing to building a different mindset.

The third border-crossing is the one performed by Lewt. Selznick wanted to insert a lapse of time to justify the character's absence from the group of men the Senator summons at the fence-line (Lewt's trip to El Paso). Initially, this detail may have increased the expectation of a "payoff" from the Senator, who had stopped supporting Lewt for his lack of assistance when it was needed (Letter from Selznick to Koerner. September 1, 1944, DOS). In the final version, there is no trace of this retaliation, and Mr. McCanles is constantly willing to help his favorite son despite repeated absences and mischief. Nonetheless, the fact that Lewt is not present at the fence-line suggests his being unfamiliar with political issues but also an ideal connection the film wants to show between this sequence—quintessential western material—and the sexual border-crossing. This way, both

crossings appear as ambiguous harbingers of future events. The audience sees Pearl on her knees, mopping the floor, with her bare feet and buttocks toward the camera as viewed from Lewt's standpoint: a shot showing her sexual vulnerability. She tries to resist, backing away from him, hitting and kicking, scratching his face, struggling desperately until the moment in which the struggle ceases. In a reverse angle, over his shoulder, we perceive Lewt's quick and excited breath but no body movements, so when they finally kiss, sinking out of the frame to the bed below, it all appears to be coming from her initiative. The script describes the assault in terms of a tribal dance: "they jockey for position like savages doing a strange, tribal dance" ("DITS, final script": 100, DOS). The novel described it in a very similar way:

> At first their movements, jerkily coordinated to each other, had a resemblance to a dance. Later the dance came to possess the quality of a murder. At no time did it seem to be what actually it was: a courtship. […] Gasping and moaning they wrestled, glaring at each other like lunatics, skidding over the wet floor like skaters off balance who clutch each other for a frenzied moment before trashing down together (Busch [1944] 2013: 826–836).

Inspired by Busch's novel, the film emphasizes the kitsch in this material, assuming the blacked-up and rocked-out style of a dirt-chip romance full of violence and shocks. It dyes the western epic with a mix of psychoanalysis and popular culture, a mix that secures audience success, the critics' disdain, and the Legion's anathema.

Another explicit scene of a sexual border-crossing was supposed to include a dance of Pearl to Lewt's guitar accompaniment in a clearing surrounded by trees near the pond. The dance was highly seductive: Breen rejected some of its parts and suggested protection shots to replace "the hip movements that might be interpreted as sex movements in connection with the tree in symbolism" (Letter from Breen to Selznick. July 13, 1945, DOS). In a radio interview, Anita Colby explained that although Jones was fully clothed, the audience would have gotten the idea that her garments were not

loose fitting (Transcription of the radio interview, MacNamara. no date, DOS).[24] The dance was toned down and shot again in October under Selznick's request that Breen (or his collaborators) could be present at rehearsal so that they could give immediate approval (Letter from Selznick to Glett. October 23, 1945, DOS; Letter from Selznick to Blaustein. April 5, 1946, DOS). In 1947, when the Legion attacked the film, the studio finally decided to cut it out. From two publicity stills and a brief excerpt kept in the film, we can see that the place represented a picturesque spot surrounded by vegetation and close to the pond [Fig. 22]. The brief excerpt begins with the camera panning over the pond, gently moving toward the right side of the frame to discover Pearl and Lewt lying on the ground. A cut and we see the lovers' embrace in a close-up: they are kissing and discussing marriage; Lewt rips off the necklace given by the sinkiller, and the sequence ends with the shot of water circles indicating where he has thrown the medal ("I don't want no milkmaid!"). In the novel, Busch defines this windmill pond as a "sump" positioned three miles from the house, dammed and dredged out at one end and used for swimming (Busch [1944] 2013: 736). There is almost nothing that can be deemed attractive in this swimming hole: a scum of seed from the wild grass lies on its surface, and the bottom is muddy; "small bugs dart and waver in the cool strip of air above the water" (Ibid. 770). The only bright note is given by low plants and shrubs growing around: cottonwood trees, tule grass, and huckleberry bushes, but the lick of green is soon sunk by the half-dead tree named "Ward's Tree" after a rustler who had once swung from it (Ibid. 859). In the first scene set at the pond, when Lewt retaliates for Pearl's evening stroll with Jesse, the locale is surrounded by flat rocks and bullrush, and the girl enjoys her swim in green, limpid water until Lewt arrives to interrupt her. Complaining about the inaccurate or unimaginative set, Selznick expressed his hope to get "more effects with shadows, foreground [sic.], bits of leaves, branches of trees, ferns, etc. to give the thing more photographic and pictorial beauty" (Letter from Selznick to Glett and al. October 31, 1945, DOS). The sump thus turns

[24] Colby was considered Selznick's righthand lady and, together with Florence Pritchett, Laura Wells, and Inga Arvad, was hired to tour the country and publicize the film in the huge advertising campaign organized by Paul MacNamara (Donald Marshman, "Life" February 10, 1947, DOS).

into a picturesque lily pond, with clear water, green ferns, and purple lilies, as an expressionist rendition of a splendid and surreal borderspace, very different from the swimming hole of the novel and very different from the naturalistic background of the pond in which Lewt played the joke on Pearl. Selznick aimed at highlighting it as a romantic and picturesque extension of their interethnic romance. The producer interpreted that setting as a magnificent border-landscape where Pearl dances for Lewt, and where the two can enjoy their torrid affair far from the social and familial context of Spanish Bit.

Border crossings and sublime horizon: Squaw's Head Rock

The last border-crossing is the final act of love/death that happens under Squaw's Head Rock. Pearl climbs up a slope punctuated by cacti and rocks. When Lewt appears on the high edge of the hill, she fires her first bullet, hitting his leg. She thinks she has killed the adversary, but another shot coming from his gun as well as Lewt's voice—"you double-crossin 'bobcat!"—leads her to continue the fight. She reaches a sharp-pointed rock and stands visible to her enemy, who shoots her in the shoulder. We see her crawling across a barren terrain, with sharp rocks cutting into her flesh, while Lewt grabs his gun and charges it, lying, "I can't shoot no more, honey" ("DITS, final script": 202, DOS). Yet, she fires a final shot that hits Lewt in the stomach. The production wished to emphasize the realistic effect of sweat, dirt, and dust on the actors' skin and the glare of heat in the blazing noon of summer: a note in the script reported that the protagonists "are soaking wet with sweat, like people who have done manual work in front of an open furnace" ("DITS, final script": 197, DOS). At this moment, both are mortally wounded and separated from each other, unable to see the other person, to understand and recognize their real intention. However, Lewt is the first to realize that he cannot lie anymore about his love for Pearl. With his back against the rock, he calls out for her, knowing that it is too late, that he is dying, "no use my lyin 'no more. I'm through" ("DITS, final script": 206, DOS). On a handwritten memo, Selznick pointed out that the sound had to be corrected according to visual

distance on screen, suggesting the effect of dying people calling to each other, "each summoning their last inner strength" to stay alive a few minutes longer and finally see the other person (Selznick, handwritten memo, "DITS Wild lines and Loops". October 17, 1945, DOS). He further requested retakes due to insufficient emotional pathos, especially concerning Pearl's reaction to Lewt's calling. He considered that moment a climax, a turning point in their story, a moment of epiphany in which they finally come to terms with their relationship and discover mutual love. Selznick's obsession with this last sequence turned it into a delirious, larger-than-life, doom-laden duel, unashamedly blatant in exposing violence and carnality. They die in each other arms while the camera retreats in a remarkable pullback shot of the two figures swallowed up in a desert landscape to enter into the legend of the Mexican border associated with Squaw's Head Rock, a symbol of a cross-ethnic encounter.

The novel describes the location of the final duel not exactly as a specific place but simply as a space of the mind where the protagonists experience a collapse of visual and intellectual control over reality. The lack of geographical coordinates in this section is emphasized by the couple's isolation and the tempest of their emotions. Busch transforms the landscape surrounding the two protagonists into a contrastive, tantalizing, and visionary space. The situation is almost psychedelic:

> They were still on a lonely and forsaken brushy slope; nothing outwardly had changed and yet the hillside and the spreading and impenetrable vastness of the thicket itself catapulted through space; it slid over like a panel till it occupied a new position in a country of the mind, a land that Lewt and Pearl had never left, in which they lived their lives and conducted all business that really mattered to them, yet a land which existed for nobody else. This was the country of that section of time which related to their love for each other, and to hatred, distrust, desperation, and lost youth, vanished hope, and agony and bliss so sharp and sweet it was impossible in memory to tell one from the other. They were together, they were in that country for an agonized instant as Pearl pulled the trigger (Busch [1944] 2013: 3872–3877).

The film takes inspiration from this passage but turns this mind-space into a specific place, the border between Mexico and the U.S., using evident geographical connotations that were missing in the novel and first drafts, where the rock is never mentioned. Before the holdup of the stagecoach, after the Senator has kicked Lewt out of the mansion, his hideout is a repaired cabin of a deserted ghost-town

close to an abandoned quicksilver mine. After the assault of the southbound train, Lewt finds shelter in a barn on a ranch "scooped out of the brush down near the Brazos" (Busch [1944] 2013: 2030, 3082). The place where Pearl and Lewt meet is not SHR but a spot called Five Oak Camp in a canyon between two wide and rough ridge slopes with manzanita bushes. The last duel happens near a "lonely and forsaken brushy slope", the one we read in the excerpt. The absence of comments on SHR in the novel leads us to identify its origin in Selznick's production, especially in the phase of location scouting.

In order to make the process less complicated, most scenes of *DITS* were shot in California, specifically in the following spots: the fence line was shot at Lasky Mesa, 45 miles from Hollywood, to assist Lionel Barrymore, who was 70 years old during the film production. MGM studios loaned its facilities to Vanguard, allowing the company to build all the interiors inside its establishment. RKO-Pathé Ranch and Corrigan's Ranch signed contracts with Vanguard to shoot part of the exteriors in their areas. They also furnished 400 horses and 400 heads of cattle. These sites were all in California. On the other hand, Selznick decided to build the exterior of Spanish Bit and the final duel on location in Arizona, on a site not far from the National Coronado Forest, a mountainous area of granite rocks and cacti a few miles on the northeast of the city of Sonoita, in Pima County, 30 miles from the Mexican border. The choice of the specific places in that area was taken during the location scouting conducted by Glenn Cook (unit manager) and George Tobin (assistant manager) with King Vidor and James Basevi (head of the art department and production designer), who toured the area before March 1945. The point chosen to build the mansion's exterior was humorously called "King's V Ranch or Basevi's Bluff" [Fig. 23]. While scouting in the Coronado Forest—named after Francisco Vazquez de Coronado, a Spanish conquistador and explorer who led an expedition in this southwestern borderland between 1540 and 1542—the idea of filming the duel in the shadow of a rock vaguely reproducing an Indian profile came out (Promotion material, Paul MacNamara. No date, DOS; Location Agreement between Vanguard and Helen M. Stein. October 15, 1945, DOS).

Because it suggested the loss of geographical coordinates of Busch's excerpt and the passion of the isolated lovers abandoned by their families, SHR appeared extremely important. Selznick felt it had to be repeated four times in the film. The left profile of SHR appears for the first time in the opening sequence, defined by the producer as "The Legend", and associated with the cactus flower and with the poem read by Orson Welles in voice-over. Then, we have two matte shots of the right profile inserted at a brief interval of time and alternated with the close-up of the girl when Pearl approaches Lewt's hideout shortly before the final duel. The last image of the left profile appears at the end, after the pullback shot of the embraced lovers, two figures swallowed up in a desert landscape. The art department, formed by designers J. McMillan "Mac" Johnson and Jack Cosgrove, painted a model of the rock representing the Indian head that could have been combined and coalesced with footage taken on location, during the scouting [Figg. 24-25]. They inserted the rock's outline to obtain four matte shots of SHR, two of them combined with the foreground of Pearl riding Dice, on her way to Lewt's hideout shot on location [Figg. 26-27] and the other two, combined with a solid setup of false rocks punctuated with cacti used for the opening and ending sequences [Figg. 28-29; respectively, where the flower stands at the beginning and where the two lovers lie down at the end].

The sublime quality of SHR as a cultural symbol of an interethnic encounter in the southwestern border was accurately constructed through a series of preliminary shots showing the ruins of an old church, a Gila monster crawling across the ground, a skull and bones of a steer, a coyote hauling in the night, all assembled in a montage sequence fading in and out to a series of shots of the broiling sun. These images build an atmosphere of expectation for the final duel, the most crucial scene in the film. Furthermore, the initial Legend anticipates and prepares for the sublime reconstruction of the border at the end. In the opening sequence, the association between the rock and the poem explains the importance of this location for the film. From the matte shot of SHR [Fig. 28], the camera descends toward the landscape of false rocks. After a cut corresponding to a black sharp-pointed rock, the camera offers a close-up of the soil that ends with the detail of the scarlet cactus

flower, "quick to blossom and early to dye" [Fig. 30]. The Technicolor steeps the footage in a saturated red atmosphere, itself an evident symbol of the sublime intention guiding the Legend. The shot is accompanied by Orson Welles's deep voice, reciting the opening poem about the lovers:

> Deep among the lonely sun-baked hills of Texas, the great and weather-beaten stone still stands. The Comanches called it Squaw's Head Rock. Time cannot change its impassive face, nor dim the legend of the wild, young lovers who found heaven and hell in the shadows of the rock. For when the sun is low and the cold wind blows across the desert there are those of Indian blood who still speak of Pearl Chavez, the half-breed girl from down along the border, and of the laughing outlaw with whom she here kept a final rendezvous, never to be seen again. And this is what the legend says. A flower, known nowhere else, grows from out of the desperate crags where Pearl vanished. Pearl, who was herself a wild flower, sprung from the hard clay, quick to blossom and early to die ("DITS. Dialogue Continuity": 1, DOS)

The piece of writing was born out of a collaboration between Selznick and Ben Hecht, who was called to improve the rhythm with his "famous adjectives" (Telegram from Selznick to Robert Ross. August 20, 1946, DOS). The result combines a first part edited by Selznick and Welles with a second part that Hecht wired to Selznick's assistant, Robert Ross, in late August 1946. Like the red atmosphere and the cactus flower, the poem is an attribute of the "great and weather-beaten stone", SHR, the location that glorifies a passion between a *mestiza* and an American cowboy, in a celebration of love that overcomes self-preservation and sublimates struggles and trauma to find an emphatic and melodramatic union.

The symbolic meaning of SHR represented by the rock, the poem, the flower, and the red sky allows us to devise an association between this imaginative, nonexistent place and other mythical figures carved in the rocks and scattered throughout the American landscape. The massive sculpture of Crazy Horse in the Black Hills of South Dakota is, for instance, a response to the four heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt sculpted on Mount Rushmore. Crazy Horse and Mount Rushmore respond to a desire to inscribe history on the natural landscape as a tribute to both, history and nature, and as an awareness of their profound connection in American culture. Still, Crazy Horse is often seen as a response to the celebratory values inscribed in the four heads of the Anglo presidents since it commemorates and honors those

who have lost the Indian Wars and have been forgotten in the history written by the winners. During the phase of location scouting, Cook, Tobin, Vidor, and Basevi probably made the same association, thinking that an imaginative landscape intermingling reality (the Coronado Forest) and fiction (a false rock reproducing the head of an Indian) could furnish the best location for an act of love and death, similarly to what the massive sculpture of Crazy Horse represented with respect to the celebratory values of Mount Rushmore. In their intentions, SHR might have functioned as a southwestern version of Crazy Horse. These two rocks represent, in fact, the powerful revenge of the imagination against the lost memory of history. Through the filmic SHR and the real Crazy Horse, those who have been erased from the pages of history can still leave an indelible mark on the landscape. The filmic landscape of the Mexican border (SHR) and the real landscape of the American frontier (Crazy Horse) inscribe a claim deeply rooted in the soil and detectable in the shape of the land, as a promise of future—albeit never guaranteed—transformations.

The picturesque and sublime images the film uses to expose the transgressive love between Lewt and Pearl would be later reiterated in many different instances, boasting the beauty of the Mexican landscape. In *Garden of Evil* (Henry Hathaway 1954), for instance, the luxuriant and fertile nature of Mexico is detectable in the vertiginous mountain passage, in the picturesque bay of the opening sequence, or in the sublime ruins of a pre-Hispanic village, all sites suspended between real place and pictorial beauty. The same can be said about the images of Mexico conveyed by other SBWs considered in this thesis, which intermingle a real place with an imaginary reflection. By applying notions of the picturesque (as a gentle reconstruction of natural beauty) and the sublime (as a loss of control in a passionate view of the land) to a southwestern crossroad, *DITS* contributed to outlining the evolution of these two notions within the postcolonial phase of their history. Like the scarlet flower growing out of clay that the poem celebrates, the majestic view of the rock encompasses the cultural idea of the U.S.-Mexican borderland as a point of contact. If the pond offers the picturesque background for Lewt's and Pearl's love story, SHR suggests that their tumultuous

interethnic relationship can be celebrated only through the trace of its loss. They pay tribute to an interethnic romance and simultaneously recognize its impossibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fence: South-of-the-Border *Noirish* Western

Intimate frontiers

After World War II, when the urgency of defeating Nazism disappeared, a few westerns showed situations in which lonely men were haunted by despair and defeat. The general disorientation that characterized cowboy-heroes in 1940s westerns increased with a progressive disillusionment in the values attributed to the community: a small town is not settled by virtuous pioneers and is not the embodiment of America's ideal community. It is simply a place where the cowboy can "get some relaxation", as Lewt declares to his father in *Duel in the Sun*, or where he must face a violent confrontation with an enemy. The family does not offer protection but misery or treachery, anxiety and threats. The small group of pioneers on the frontier is cowardly and prejudiced, and not engaged in confident, honest, and law-abiding activities. The capacity of a single-handed hero to rid a small town of a few evil men is increasingly questioned, and so are the mythic values associated with a pure-hearted gunman. In traditional westerns, the hero was usually linked to the wilderness—representing detachment from obligations, extraordinary skills, physical strength, or even ferocity—and presented as an "instrument" for civilization: progress, growth, the formation of a community based on new immigrants were created thanks to his extraordinary stamina and psychological integrity. As Simmon writes, late 1940s westerns made this formula more complex, exposing the dark side of the genre's natural and political philosophies (2003: 196). The most evident outcome was a progressive darkening of the screen, painted in black or veered toward a strong chiaroscuro lighting technique heavily influenced by the noir aesthetic.

This chapter focuses on a few westerns that, in terms of narration, figurative style, and psychological approach, are hybridized with noir films. They often involve protagonists who have ambiguous origins or are associated with ethnic characters. They often occur on a borderland treated as an unstable frontier between inclusion and exclusion. The U.S.-Mexico borderland in these films

is the locus of stories revolving around social justice and punishment (*The Ox-Bow Incident*), cooperation and boundary policies (*Border Incident*), dispossession and revenge (*The Furies*), or the role of an eccentric, corrupt power in maintaining a condition of inequality and intolerance (*Man in the Shadow*). All these westerns share with noir films an intensely skeptical representation of society where there is no place for rationality and progress. They also draw from noir a narrative centered on the presence of other ethnicities—in our cases, Mexicans—who claim both their belonging to a place of origin different from the U.S. and their aspiration to possess the same rights as a native-born. As we will see, all these South-of-the-Border *noirish* westerns (SBNW) develop a visual pattern associated with barbed wire fences, boundaries, thresholds, vertical figurations, and linear divides that cut the frame in different sections, conveying an internal dynamic, at times identified with imprisoning structures, at others with a border-crossing experience. Since the influence of noir is consistent in these films, this chapter starts by describing this genre's thematic and formal aspects.

Black mood, existential cool, figurative motifs: the noir

Noir's long tradition of investigation has become increasingly intertwined with its subject of study. This "unusually baggy concept", as Naremore defines it, has a precise point of origin, France, and a precise time, the 1940s (Naremore [1998] 2008: 5). It was first defined by a French-Italian critic, Nino Frank, in an essay appeared on the number 61 of "L'ecran Français" and edited in August 1946 with the title "Un nouveau genre 'policier': l'aventure criminelle", where he offered a reading of four films—*Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944), *Laura* (Otto Preminger 1944), *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston 1941) and *Murder My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk 1944)—characterized by communal aspects: a psychological approach to crime, violent death, the fragmentation produced by first-person narrations or flashbacks (all except Huston's film), and harsh realism. Following this analysis, three months later, Jean-Pierre Chartier's "Les Américains aussi font des films noirs" appeared in a more conservative journal, "Revue du cinéma", where he maintained a cautious approach to the genre emphasizing its "ignoble characters" and their "disgust for humanity" (Chartier 1946: 70). In 1955,

Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton's *Panorama du film noir américain (1941-1953)* was published with an introduction signed by the editor in chief of Gallimard's "Série Noir" Marcel Duhamel, a post-surrealist who began to publish the translations of American hardboiled novels particularly attuned to the Parisian cultural atmosphere, its craze for jazz and the spread of existentialism. Borde and Chaumeton placed great emphasis on the themes of noir—death, pathology, sadism, masochism—analyzed from a point of view that was influenced by French culture and that slightly downplayed the visual style. The authors insisted on the genre's ability to systematically reverse Hollywood's foundational myths with social realism, an obsession for criminals, and a new definition of morality influenced by a desire to shock. These films centered not on incorruptible law agents but on shady private eyes, crooked policemen, and lying district attorneys. The corrupt world recounted in noirs had its primary source in the high class, and the general disorientation was designed to attack ideas and beliefs on which that class was based. The two French critics defined the noir in negative sentences: in these films, there was no trace of a logical action, an evident distinction between good and evil, well-defined characters, or clear motives. The scenes were more brutal than spectacular, and the female protagonists embodied the opposite of what was exquisitely feminine. The hero was never entirely honest (Borde and Chaumeton 1955: 14). The genre appeared to them as the flip side of films based on conventional norms: it was illogic, oneiric, brutal, and immoral. In sum, the French authors saw noir as an anti-American genre, the essence of "an anarcho-leftist critique of bourgeois ideology" and the "inversion of capitalist and puritan values" at the base of American culture (Naremore [1998] 2008: 20).

Borde and Chaumeton mainly focus their volume on two essential aspects that allow us to define a connection with the western as a genre. First of all, the paranoid situation produced by the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) and the rise of the crime rate in the U.S. explain the emergence of noir in American culture. Both events demonstrated the genre's penchant for recounting murky crime stories with protagonists in psychological distress. Then, noir appeared to them as a transnational object produced by a massive contribution coming from the European

culture.[1] Their approach was resumed in the UK by Raymond Durgnat, who reiterated the French perspective, emphasizing psychological aspects over any specific historical period. In his article "Paint It Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir", the author indulges in a compulsive classificatory desire, identifying a series of tiny sub-genres with blurred boundaries: "crime as social criticism"; "gangsters"; "on the run"; "private eyes and adventurers"; "middle-class murderers"; "portraits and doubles"; "psychopaths"; "hostages to fortune"; "blacks and reds"; "Guignol, horror, and fantasy" ("Film Comment", November 6, 1974, reprinted in Silver and Ursini 1980: 37–51). The impulse toward classifications was accompanied by a tendency to expand the genre's historical margins, adding a series of films produced and released beyond the years 1941 and 1953 chosen by Borde and Chaumeton. Noir increasingly became identified with a mood, a spiritual category, or a specific sensibility potentially expandable to different genres, an ell-encompassing state of mind that has lost the initial chronological boundaries imposed by the two French critics in 1955.

It is thus correct to say that the discourse on the genre originated in Europe, with French intellectuals' perspective.[2] Later, in the three decades that followed the analysis of the Europeans (Borde, Chaumeton, and Durgnat), American critics Paul Schrader (1972) and James Naremore (1998) veered their focus toward the specificity of American culture, after a long phase in which the U.S. had released noirs without developing a critical conscience of the genre. These authors pointed out that the European filmmakers used scripts heavily influenced by the communication style adopted in Depression-era hardboiled novels written by Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett, who began to publish their stories in pulp magazines—mainly "Black Mask". The dialogue used in noirs had a source in the blunt sentences and tough-guy overtone of Horace McCoy and James M. Cain or in the

[1] Specifically, the cultural products from which they thought the noir derived were a few Hollywood genres (the horror films produced by Universal, the gangster movies released by WB, and the classical detective films produced by Fox and MGM based on a final deductive reasoning showing the culprit). Yet, it was European cinema, mainly French cinema, that Borde and Chaumeton emphasize as a source of the genre: the films of Julien Duvivier (*Pépé le Moko*, 1937), Jean Renoir (*La grande illusion*, 1937; *La Bête humaine*, 1938), and Marcel Carné (*Le quai des brumes*, 1938; *Le jour se lève*, 1939), all starring Jean Gabin.

[2] Furthermore, noir is also profoundly linked to Europe for the numerous German filmmakers who moved to Hollywood expanding their careers and the genre's cultural interest. These directors include Michael Curtiz (who arrived in the U.S. in 1928), Edgar Ulmer (who first crossed the Atlantic in 1926 but only settled in the country in the 1930s), William Dieterle (1930), Karl Freund (1933), Fritz Lang (1934), Billy Wilder (1934), Otto Preminger (1935), Robert Siodmak (1940) and many others.

sophisticated and grim romanticism of the first-person narration of Raymond Chandler. Hollywood spread a patina of glamour over the dark mood of the hardboiled style, and late 1940s filmmakers indulged in the production values offered by a prosperous industry. They mixed the modernism typical of Hammett, Cain, and Chandler—subjective narration, multiple viewpoints, non-linear plots, and depth psychology—with visual experimentation, adding an appearance of acceptable morality. This recipe also added a massive quantity of sex (albeit within the limits of the Code), producing what Naremore defines as "commercial blood melodrama" (Naremore [1998] 2008: 48).

In the next section, I combine the perspectives of French intellectuals and American critics to present a view of noir as a super-genre of the period. As pointed out by Durgnat, noir was comparable to a sensibility that extended into other genres, contributing to the transformation of the western. The following section includes an analysis of the ideological and visual motifs behind each of these two genres. The last part of this section is dedicated to identifying elements of noir that contribute to what we may call a sub-genre of a cycle: the South-of-the-border *Noirish* Western (SBNW).[3]

South-of-the-Border Noirish Westerns

In its idealized form, the western is the flip side of noir. Nino Frank argued that the new generation of filmmakers who made noirs aimed to escape from the old one represented by Ford, coincidentally the father of the western (Frank 1946: 14). Similarly, Wayne's star persona appears as the opposite of the troubled, flawed, neurotic roles played by Humphrey Bogart or Robert Mitchum. Wayne is "a muscular Christian saint regressed back to the frontier where Americans could imagine themselves innocent even as the apocalypse hung overhead like a cartoon anvil of doom" (Dinerstein 2017: 18). In one of the rare moments of optimism in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), George Bailey (James Stewart) visualizes a bright future for himself in a childlike image of a cowboy lassoing the moon. This image becomes a western cartoon drawn by Mary (Donna Reed), which later represents

[3] In this Chapter, I use the term *noirish* as an adjective of the genre western: *noirish* westerns are westerns influenced by the mood and sensibility of noir.

the limitations of George's pioneering spirit and the harsh reality of a dream turned into a suicidal nightmare. In Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), the charismatic role of the racketeer Harry Lime (Orson Welles) steals the stage from Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten), the virtuous, rational, naive, and sunny writer of western novels to whom another character reminds that "this is not Santa Fe and you're not a cowboy". The western has always been associated with youthful dreams, childish idealizations, a realm of optimism for people with strong faith and beliefs. Because it is dark, cynical, claustrophobic, and urban, and it tends to reject the belief in the power of regeneration represented by open spaces, noir appears as the opposite of the western. Yet, as we have explained so far, the western may seem simplistic *only* at first glance. Moreover, in the 1940s, the opposition loses its absolutism. Uncertainty, tragedy, detachment between hero and society, cynicism, moral ambiguity, and a mood of destructiveness entered also the screens of the western.

The late 1940s westerns primarily assume *noirish* elements at the levels of nonlinear plots, often acquiring single components such as the presence of a femme fatale or a subjective narration, especially when Niven Busch is involved as a screenwriter or author of the novel.[4] Let us quickly look at the plots of the most popular *noirish* westerns. In *Blood on the Moon* (Robert Wise 1948), Jim Garry (Robert Mitchum) is caught amid a bloody feud between a cattle owner and the malicious leader of the farmers. This feud produces suspicion and betrayal, often at the expense of the protagonist, who is almost trampled over by a herd of runaway steers, shot at numerous times, almost gunned down in cold blood, beaten up by his former friend, ambushed and knifed by a sold Indian. *Pursued* (Raoul Walsh 1947) begins with Jeb Rand (Robert Mitchum) as a boy of four, hidden under a floorboard in his family house, witnessing the brutal murder of his mother and father. This episode haunts him throughout the entire film. He later has to face a venomous relationship with his stepbrother, a revenge-seeking newly-wed wife, an ambiguous step-mother and another vengeful character, Uncle Grant (Dean Jagger), who, for the entire movie duration, attempts to assassinate him for a sin he did not commit—the love affair between his step-mother and his father. In a remake of

[4] *Duel in the Sun* has been deemed a noir in fact by many scholars.

the gangster film *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh 1941), *Colorado Territory* (Raoul Walsh 1949), the outlaw Wes McQueen (Joel McCrea) breaks out of jail and tries to connect with his old friend, but finds himself caught in a net of crime. Although he aspires, like Roy Earle (Humphrey Bogart) in *High Sierra*, to the love of an apparently honest girl, McQueen is forced to ride off with his faithful half-breed girl to end his journey on the high ledge of a deserted town. In *Ramrod* (André De Toth 1947), a plot close to a typical cattle war story revolves around Connie Dickason (Veronica Lake), who maliciously forces out of business all her potential competitors and double crosses the hired man David Nash (Joel McCrea) using feminine power to beguile, manipulate, and destroy. In *The Gunfighter* (Henry King 1950), Jimmy Ringo (Gregory Peck) is an outlaw who attempts to reunite with his estranged wife and young son. Because of his wife's doubts over him, Ringo remains confined in a corner of his hometown's saloon, back toward the wall, in the company of a watch, slowly counting the long-drawn-out hours he has to live. The notoriety of his deed costs Ringo his life in a tragic epilogue that draws from 1930s gangster movies—also precursor of noir anti-heroes. In *Yellow Sky* (William Wellman 1949), James 'Stretch' Dawson (Gregory Peck) leads a band of outlaws across the desert to escape from a posse after a bank robbery. He arrives in a ghost town, abandoned by its entire population except for a young woman and her grandfather. When the men learn that the two hide gold in a mine, a rivalry between Dude (Richard Widmark), the cruelest in the gang, and Stretch bursts out over newfound prosperity and the woman. The list can be extended, but we will stop here as the subjects tend to overlap. An out-of-control situation features in at least four of them (*Blood on the Moon*, *Pursued*, *Colorado Territory*, *The Gunfighter*), a femme fatale is at the center of *Ramrod* and greed and lust are in *Yellow Sky*. Low-key or shadowed lighting and deep-focus photography also convey the hallucinatory atmosphere that characterizes all of them. The omnipresence of interior shooting and of clocks measuring the amount of time left to accomplish what is needed—for instance, in *The Gunfighter* or, also, in *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann 1952)—increases the effect of boxed-in spaces and a time-compressed narration that is ominous and threatening.

The most evident case among the series of westerns influenced by noirs is *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford 1946). To a certain extent, Ford's film encompasses the traditional dominant concept of the western as it tells of a hero, Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda), who cleans up a town from its undesirable characters: the violent Clantons (Walter Brennan, John Ireland, Grant Withers) and the crazy Indian Charlie (Charles Stevens). If we consider also the desperate Doc (Victor Mature) and the sexually avid Chihuahua (Linda Darnell) who are not target of Wyatt's concerns but who are nonetheless destined to disappear we have the entire spectrum of noir characters. They embody what is usually associated with noirs—violence, despair, eroticism, and pathology—and what is generally stigmatized at the level of class, gender, and race. The violent Clantons live isolated from the Anglo core of the community; the depressed, drunk, and broken Doc is also extremely isolated; the sultry Chihuahua is a Mexican prostitute; the crazy Charlie is a Native. The sequence of Wyatt and Clementine (Cathy Downs)'s morning stroll toward the site where the church is erected identifies the western's home-and-family-building traditional motif and delineates the contour of a hero who watches over a town, protecting it from external threats. The church is a space that celebrates a newly unified Anglo community, evidently Protestant, and one that contains no trace of ethnic inclusiveness.[5] The Clantons and Doc are clearly absent from this ideal place; much less misplaced would be the Mexican prostitute Chihuahua and the crazy Native Charlie. *My Darling Clementine* partially mirrors a historical moment when some sectors of American society were eager to divide the elect from the damned, creating an atmosphere of pathological fear and loathing toward 'others'. When Wyatt arrives in town to get a shave, he complains not just about the fact that he cannot have his face shaven without risking his life—"what kind of a town is this?"—but also that in Tombstone, alcohol is served to Natives. When the barber attempts to guess his profession, the answer epitomizes a priggish inclination in Wyatt, indirectly implying that the myth of an individualist hero cleaning up

[5] Consider, for instance, this scene with that of the church in *Cimarron*, an improvised shelter where Yancey (Richard Dix) conducts a religious service. The tent is significantly called "The Osage First Methodist Episcopalian Lutheran Presbyterian Congregational Baptist Catholic Unitarian Hebrew Church" (Coyne 1997: 34; Simmon 2003: 249). As we have described in Chapter 2, Yancey is an extremely tolerant man who welcomes in his sermons all the congregations even if he is incapable to transform his idealism into actual commitment with Sabra and his family.

a town from evil characters presumably displayed a self-righteous, dignified (and racist) man (Simmon 2003: 263).

Still, Ford's film also identifies a desire to question a few thematic elements that the western has usually taken for granted mainly in relation to the hero. Wyatt, in fact, cleans up the town, but a personal, not ethical, reasoning inspires his actions. In the beginning, he is entirely detached from any cause. Before discovering the death of his brother, Wyatt's first reason for going to town is to get a "relaxing little shave", which identifies the film as a noir recalling the typical spiral of uncontrollable events triggered by an initial fortuitous situation. Then, he refuses the help offered by Tombstone's mayor and by the church deacon, saying that the fight with the Clantons "is strictly a family affair" (*My Darling Clementine*, pre-released version, "Ford at Fox Collection", 2007 [01:28:50–01:28:55]).[6] So, Wyatt is not acting as a professional fighter hired by someone and accepting a job for pay, as in the "professional plot" that Wright places in the 1960s. However, he does not even have the desire to protect the community, as happens in more traditional plots. By contrast, *My Darling Clementine* seems closer to what Wright calls the vengeance variation (Chapter 1). In any case, a vague weariness in his desire for revenge risks getting lost in a series of postponements at the poker card table. The protagonist nurtures some sort of passivity and a tendency to procrastinate that makes him appear as "lackadaisical" or "seemingly lazy" (Simmon 2003: 216). Further, the film builds a profound empathy toward Doc. Doc is the darkest figure in the film, affected by tuberculosis, haunted by a sense of failure, and obsessed with the ineluctability of death. The soliloquy of Hamlet that he takes over from Thorndyke (Alan Mowbray) stops at a precise line—"And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought…"—that explains not only the existentialist soul of Doc but also the film itself, in which dreams once full of determination become lost in melancholic emptiness, entrapment, and resignation. This mood explains Doc's enigmatic repudiation of Clementine or his frantic escape to Mexico for never-

[6] I here insert references since not all versions of *My Darling Clementine* maintained the line. This is a pre-released version.

explained reasons. The existential mood is also detectable in Tombstone's curious spatial organization, initially presented as a maze of gloomy corners, dead-ends, and alleys that perfectly reflect and induce bewilderment. Doc's anguish appearing halfway through the film is in the visual style from its opening scenes: a harshly lamplit hotel doorway, random gunshots in the night, the crowded and deeply shadowed gambling hall, a body, young brother James, down in the mud and hit by hard rain: this is a noir set in the West.

If we reduce the film to a simple formula (a hero cleans up a town from evil characters), we can say that *My Darling Clementine* describes a movement from darkness to light. The arrival of Clementine half an hour into the film makes the space appear more wide, the sky more transparent, and the light brighter, giving the western a victory over the *noirish* part of the film (which can be explained by Ford's strong commitment to frontier values and the making of a nation). Still, the intense anguish of its characters remains undisputed, and so does the film's sense of despair, its being imbued with hardboiled sensibility, psychoanalytic aspects, moral ambiguity, and misogynistic eroticism. Doc's bad reputation and Wyatt's procrastination encapsulate the existential motifs we see in the opening sequence with the random burst of violence and Tombstone's geographic isolation, lack of order or regulations with loafers filling the streets. The film's blank and harsh mood of despair, disillusionment, and torment is there despite the bright side brought in by Clementine.

Even if Ford's film helps us in identifying the *noirish* elements that make a western also partially a noir, the presence of dark aspects alone does not make a *noirish* western also a SBNW. We need to pinpoint specific elements coming from that genre that are essential for identifying the sub-genre we refer to as South-of-the-border *Noirish* Western. I have identified five of them.

First, realism. The noir is a genre heavily influenced by a greater realism, a convention that is evident in its preference for urban settings, often shot at night and featuring rain-slicked streets and foggy diners, dingy interiors, and characters in their dull routines, dressed in everyday clothing. These elements tend to give an idea of a more honest and less counterfeit, Hollywood-style image of the

U.S. (albeit they later became stylish or arty). This aspect is also present in SBNWs considered in this chapter, which are definitely less mythological than realistic.

Second, the emphasis on existentialist themes. The disillusionment of the protagonists of noir, their moral darkness and torment about the constitutive evilness of society develop into the SBNWs' skeptical view of the process of civilization. The psychological deconstruction of the hero described at the beginning of the Chapter is an outcome of this influence. Forced to face violence and repression characterizing the historical phase of the late 1940s, audiences demanded a more serious approach to essential subjects on the screen. They requested protagonists to be knowledgeable that rationality, equality, freedom, and positive values of civilization were often hypocritical mythologies. The lack of certainty in the responses coming from these ideologies (or any ideology) surfaces in these films, especially in their suspicious visions of all the aspects that, up until that moment, had furnished support to the advancement of progress. Confidence and trust in these virtues and beliefs were deconstructed to leave only a personal ethic based on stoicism and self-creation.

Third, the notion of coolness. Explored by Joel Dinerstein, the post-war idea of coolness requests a posture that corresponds to the repression of suffering and the assumption of a superior self-mastery in front of the awareness of limited rational control over life events. The detectives introduced by Hammett, the Continental Op and Sam Spade (from, respectively, *Red Harvest* and *The Maltese Falcon*), or Chandler's Philip Marlowe, were representative of internal resistance against corruption, capitalist greed, and bourgeois complacency. All these men use the "mask of coolness" to maintain a self-possessed, extremely stoic front to cope with horror and disgust, refusing emotional outpourings and complaints. They mix dignity, detachment, and resistance. In them, there is no space for sentimentality or nostalgia. This aspect that Dinerstein describes as having origin in the African American attitude of coolness toward racism and hypocrisy of American society is extended to the ethnic characters analyzed in this chapter: Juan Martínez (Anthony Quinn) in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Juan Herrera (Gilbert Roland) in *The Furies*, and Pablo Rodriguez (Ricardo Montalbán) in *Border Incident* reject sentimentality and are highly conscious not just of corruption but mainly of social

prejudices and inequalities. On top of that, American cowboys emerging from the following pages are also men significantly wounded and fragile, who often humanly show their shortcomings: think about Donald Martin (Dana Andrews) in *The Ox-Bow Incident* or Ben Sadler (Jeff Chandler), the beaten sheriff of *Man in the Shadow* (Jack Arnold 1957). These SBNWs welcomed vulnerable cowboys moving to ethnic characters the stoicism that is typical of the Anglo tough guy in noir.

Fourth, psychological depression. If the 1930s economic depression requested positive people eager to spend money, the dark sensibility appeared toward the end of the war refused simple solutions and rejected optimistic views. In Schrader's opinion, the disillusionment of veterans returning to peaceful but sad routines and the anxiety-ridden confusion produced by the Cold War were mirrored in the attraction toward pessimism and "sordidness". Society turned into a body of hypocritical, back-stabbing, shattered individuals with a penchant for sadness and repressed violence (Schrader 1972: 9). This atmosphere was also due to a complex political situation: shortly after World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union ceased their friendly relationship, vying for a worldwide ideological influence. While Soviet totalitarianism expanded, right-wing zealots in the U.S. reacted with a wave of uncontrolled fear about the purported spread of domestic communism and of fifth columns. If the war had caused audience members to see their existence endangered and to review their motivations against or in favor of others (including their ideas on the Soviet Union), the Cold War demanded a new revision of personal and geopolitical beliefs and new concepts of national belonging and citizenship. This condition of depression, confusion, and paranoia is detectable in a different image and notion of violence in SBNWs. The meaning of the killing became increasingly absent: death is now gratuitous, pointless or, at least, ambivalent. Above all, violence is always presented as a sadistic and perverse ritual instead of as the high-principled outcome to which the protagonist is forced in order to prevent worse evils and protect the community. The perverse ceremony of killing takes the place of a repressed and chaste version of death inflicted by virtuous men on the wicked.

Last but not least, the fifth aspect is the visual style of noir. In noir films, we often see vertical and oblique separations of the screen that take precedence over horizontal lines—a tendency borrowed from German expressionism. The fragmentary nature of the frame highlights the impression of characters being separated or alienated since the fragment stresses a dissonant relationship between the environment and the protagonists or between them and the other characters. Low-key or dark-shaded photography accentuates elements of mistrust and paranoia, despair and imprisonment, creating the sense of a lack of control, as happens in the well-known noir trope represented by venetian blinds symbolizing entrapment or that of neon lights conveying ominous and squalid locales. In the westerns here considered, fences and barriers encapsulate a similar symbolism in contrast with the image of the horizon as an open prospect or a virgin land, and clearly applied this trope to the U.S.-Mexico border.

The margins acquire center stage

All the five aspects identified as constitutive of this *noirish* sub-genre of the cycle SBW take on a specific meaning related to a metaphorical and geographical border-crossing experience. The symbolic and real act of moving from one side to the other of two nations or two states of mind or conditions is another element that SBNW shares with noirs, especially those set in the proximity of national perimeters, specifically in the southwestern frontier with Mexico (so, we can have also a South-of-the-Border Noir sub-genre akin to our SBW).

James Naremore points out the presence of symbolic meanings attributed to Mexico and Mexicans in many noirs revolving around an American character crossing the border southbound. The country usually appears as the place of the unconscious where the protagonist can reach psychological catharsis from rules and constraints experienced at home. Released from the negative elements attributed to "home", the anti-hero of these noirs set on the border becomes a foreigner in an exotic land, a situation usually aimed at destabilizing the audience's perception of a clear separation between what is inside and identified with a collective "us" and what is outside a national

boundary ("them"). In *Ride the Pink Horse* (Robert Montgomery 1947), the parade of el Día de los Muertos is the vernacular and pastoral background necessary to show the evolution of Gagin (Robert Montgomery) from the disoriented and tormented veteran he was when he moved to Mexico to the renovated man he is at the end of the movie. *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur 1947) utilizes Acapulco for its blend of primitivism and elegance, almost pushing Jeff (Robert Mitchum) and Kathie (Jane Greer) into each other's arms. She materializes out of the bright light outside the café "La Mar Azul" in a feline walk under a dark archway beautifully shot by Nicholas Musuraca: the beauty of the woman blends with the romanticism of the place and fully engulfs Jeff's plan to carry out the wishes of his client. With its cantinas, night-clubs, and romantic seashores, Mexico is not just where the couple is brought together but the geographical context where two non-natives from north of the border, immersed in an extremely suggestive town, could find their similarities in a foreign land. In *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang 1947), Mexico is more than a simple exotic backdrop to stage the sexual desire between Celia (Joan Bennett) and Mark (Michael Redgrave): announced by a scream, the sequence of the knife fight between two Mexican men vying for the love of a woman ends with the knife landing very close to Celia's gloved hand; immediately after, an exchange of looks sparks the current flowing between the two lovers: from this moment onward, the film associates Mexico to a complex mix of danger and hypnotism in a way that allows the lovers to break free from repression and vicariously realize their passion. In this film, the foreign land is not just a place where a couple falls in love far from the rules imposed at home. It is also a metaphor that conveys the long process required in a romantic relationship—all the efforts needed to overcome initial fears and reveal the potential of a happy space based on mutual identification and projection. Yet, this is just one side of a more complex scenario where also the Mexicans are involved.

The development of a feeling of dispossession in many noirs set close to the Mexican border should be analyzed in the light of a series of historical events that increased the feeling of being deprived from their rights to live in the U.S. and be considered as part of a larger community. The year 1947 marks a series of events that forced American citizens to grow suspicious of "others" and

anxious about distinguishing friends from foes or discriminating between domestic agencies and foreign instigation. In March, the Truman Doctrine proclaimed the intention to defend the U.S. from ideological, political, and military incursion of the Soviet Union. In June, the Marshall Plan rehabilitated Western Europe from past events, forging an economic tie with the U.S., while the Taft-Hartley Act aimed at excluding radical visions from labor unions (for instance, the Conference of Studio Unions guided by Herbert Sorrell; see Chapter 3). In July, George Kennan wrote the famous article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" or "X Article" since he signed with a pseudonym, "X". Published in the magazine "Foreign Affairs", the article described the Soviet Union according to a theoretical background that furnished the bases for the strategy of containment. In the same month, the National Security Act aimed to create a system of surveillance and military intelligence. Finally, between October and November, Hollywood was involved in the process, and the HUAC began its investigations on filmmakers and screenwriters. In November, producers and tycoons gathered at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan. They signed the Walford Statement, a document that attested their commitment to avoid the employment of communists or members of any party advocating the overthrow of the American government (MPAA, Waldorf Statement, November 25, 1947). Even if Eric Johnston, head of the Motion Picture Association of America, appeared in front of the HUAC to read a reasonable declaration suggesting discrimination between a subversive action and a radical opinion, the latter protected by the First Amendment, this period undoubtedly created an atmosphere of high tension between friends and colleagues: threats, misjudgments, sense of guilt. The specific situation of Mexicans living or working in the U.S. in the late 1940s was heavily influenced by this situation especially if we consider a recrudescence of the rules linked to the Bracero Program. Established in 1942 and extended until 1962, the Mexican Farm Labor Program (or Bracero Program) was a temporary emergency labor disposition intended to replace American workers with Mexican seasonal laborers. This disposition was highly lucrative for agribusiness in the U.S. The short-term labor permit allowed workers to spend north of the border the amount of time necessary to carry out fruit-and-vegetables-picking jobs, receive payment, and return to their country to avoid political

instability. Conversely, immigrant directors and writers who left Europe to escape from Nazism in the 1930s were no longer welcomed in the country at end of the 1940s. Many blacklisted screenwriters and filmmakers, who were not allowed to work in the cinema industry anymore, found in Mexico a new home (Chapter 2). So, while the U.S. needed strong labor power and invited underpaid workers for the time needed to send them back home at the end of their service, Mexico welcomed many blacklisted screenwriters and filmmakers who had lost their job in Hollywood. From the perspective of Mexican laborers forced to repatriate, the imbalance between Mexican hospitality and rejection by the U.S. could create immense suffering and bitter disillusionment.

The historical imbalance in hospitality and rejection is a pivotal premise in our analysis of the SBNW since it clarifies the obsessive presence of fences, separation, barriers, and thresholds in this corpus of films. The marginality that barriers and fences suggest is one of the constitutive aspects of these movies questioning themes of national belonging and citizenship. The protagonists are in-between characters experiencing social detachment, a feeling of being inside yet not belonging. The thematic aspects of south-of-the-border noirs or *noirish* westerns where an experience of trespassing, real or symbolic (geographic or metaphoric), is recounted, allow viewers to question preconceived truths and break out from strong polarizations between "us" and "them". In summary, we can say that the late 1940s south-of-the-border noirs or *noirish* westerns tended to reverse qualities and characteristics usually attributed to right and wrong, bright and dark, positive and negative, or inside and outside, making these concepts appear through blurred lenses.[7] The border thus loses its absolute value, a process that generates psychic anxiety, fury, and a sense of insecurity due to a lack of

[7] There is no homogeneity in noirs produced in the period here considered. Some films correspond to the frame described in the text, others intended to adhere to Cold War propaganda suggesting the importance of imposing a firm boundary between friends and foes. The academic literature has produced a mixed set of responses to the representation of others in these noirs. On the one hand, some scholars have described misogyny, homophobia, and general intolerance toward the "difference" in certain movies. On the other hand, a critique of the intolerance toward outsiders is evident and so is a tentative redefinition of the foreigners' rights and responsibilities of citizenship. A clear instance of this second case is in *Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk 1947), the famous noir recounting the story of a veteran victimized by anti-Semitism. This noir is an early version of the cycle of social problem films produced by many different studios after World War II. Numerous liberal (or vaguely left-wing) filmmakers who managed to maintain their jobs within the major studios in the post-war era attempted to denounce this atmosphere of intolerance, racism, and lynching in movies such as *Pinky* (Elia Kazan 1949), *Lost Boundaries* (Alfred Werker 1949), *Gentleman's Agreement* (Elia Kazan 1947), *Body and Soul* (Robert Rossen 1947), *Home of the Brave* (Mark Robson 949), and *Intruder in the Dust* (Clarence Brown 1949), all comparable to what Dmytryk attempted to do with *Crossfire*.

protection but also a mechanism of reciprocity that brings on correspondences between outsiders and insiders. If the light is usually identified with a "non-located and disembodied position of knowledge", often associated with transparency, purity, and transcendency (Dyer [1997] 2007: 4, 82–144), the shadow of noir epitomizes the ideological centrality of the others. Characters who suffer from displacement, who have lost their connection to their country of origin or are rejected at their destination, their rights refused or revoked, are the margins that acquire a central stage in the films considered in this chapter.

Two incidents

This section analyzes two South-of-the-Border *noirish* westerns that are consistent with the aspects considered. They were released at different times, one during World War II, in 1942, and the other during the Cold War, in 1949, yet both deal with similar issues of justice and citizenship in relation to the notion of belonging and rejection: *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1942) and *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949).

The Ox-Bow Incident *(1942)*

The western has always tried to capture the events of the founding and institution of the law (Pippin 2008: 226). In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford 1962), for instance, we have an attempt to come to terms with the fact that the establishment of a legal order is usually performed by extraordinary individuals whose illegal, violent, and brutal actions guarantee the foundation of a civilized society. For its part, society must find a way to turn that fact into a myth or a national memory: partial and uneven but valuable to the continuity of a system. By contrast, *The Ox-Bow Incident* rejects illegal and brutal violence as fully unjustifiable. The theme of violence purportedly intended as the basis for a community of law and order is not only wrong but foolish, and in this western, specifically attributed to an episode of mob lynching. Instead of presenting the majority as

a positive, illuminated, rational force that welcomes social and ethnic progress against a small group of evil and reactionary impulses, the film shows a majority unable to think and form a conscience. While the minority assumes the mask of coolness, the majority appears as driven by excessive and distorted energy and a desire to kill those who seem "different". As happens in noir, the protagonists of *The Ox-Bow Incident* are vulnerable prey to a riotous crowd and its anarchy. In this light, the film is one of the westerns that went farthest in turning the bond between individualism (the hero) and collective identity (the community) on its head in a way that emphasized the flaws and ineffectuality of justice.

Based on a 1940 novel by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox-Bow Incident* became one of the period's most politically conscious westerns, probably due to the presence of three left-wing artists: Henry Fonda, William Wellman, and Lamar Trotti. Critically acclaimed for its anti-fascist subtext, the novel was not only a pessimistic study of mob psychology that left the reader "in despair for mankind" (Mary Beth Crain 1976: 241) but also a sophisticated reading of existentialist aspects. The film was less pessimistic than the novel but equally *noirish* in its redefinition of the concept of individualism and in promoting a mature notion of justice.

The film opens with two horsemen, Gil Carter (Henry Fonda) and Art Croft (Harry Morgan), arriving in a completely deserted town in Nevada called Bridger's Wells.[8] The year is very precise: 1885. A dog crosses their path. They enter the Darby Saloon passing close to the town drifter, Monty Smith (Paul Hurst). Inside the saloon, they look at the portrait of a sensuous woman, half draped and reclined on a chaise longue. From behind, a man seems to be sneaking up on her. Later, Gil complains that the man is "awful slow getting there" while Darby (Victor Kilian), the bartender, replies defending the man who is always "in reach and never able to make it". Darby's comment reminds us of Walter Brennan's Judge Roy Bean from *The Westerner* (William Wyler 1940), obsessed with portraits of the actress Lillie Langtry and condemned to never reach her. The atmosphere of the saloon

[8] Nevada is not a state bordering with Mexico so this film is not considered here for its recounting a geographical border-crossing experience. My main interest is showing how the existential atmosphere described by the film and the role of Juan are inscribed into the definition of a SBNW where a metaphorical border-crossing is placed at the center of thematic and figurative aspects.

conjures up a sense of authenticity (the first aspect of SBNW), with its dusty and extremely masculine setting: this is a saloon where there is no music, no women, no entertainment, apart from liquor, and where men can only enjoy each other's company. The vague feeling of distrust and hostility among them can only be beaten through fighting, sleeping, gambling: there is a table of bored men playing cards and soon violence will erupt. The undercurrent of anger immediately surfaces in the dialogue: the bartender reveals that Rose Mapen (Mary Beth Hughes), Gil's girlfriend, has left town to go to San Francisco. Gil accuses the bartender of being a liar and starts to gulp down glassfuls of whiskey. They are told that ranchers living near Bridger's Wells are suspicious for numerous episodes of cattle rustling that are happening around their town. The antagonism increases with the arrival of Jeff Farley (Mark Lawrence), who accuses Gil and Art of being the rustlers they are looking for only because they are just arrived in town after a long period spent in cattle drives and roundups. The atmosphere is so tense that a violent fight bursts out with Gil brutally kicking Jeff in the chest; shortly after, the bartender knocks Gil out smashing a bottle on his head. The violence is clearly vicious and wild, and Gil's physical fury ends in a similarly uncontrollable retching which forced him to leave the saloon to throw up, therefore comically exclaiming that he "must start all over again". This kind of wholly masculine context based on tension, mutual accusation, aggression is shown with great realism in the initial scene and in the entire film, also made evident by the lack of women in the group. The only woman is Ma Grier (Jane Darwell), a grotesque monster-version of the mother figure she usually performed, for instance, in *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford 1940) and *Jesse James* (Henry King 1939). The first shift in the film happens when Greene (Billy Benedict) suddenly appears running like a mad boy to give the news of the death of Kinkaid, a local rancher whose cattle has been rustled by unknown thieves. Despite the efforts of Arthur Davies (Harry Davenport), the general storekeeper, an introspective and sympathetic old man whose concept of justice is too ineffectual, and Judge Tyler (Matt Briggs), who is otherwise confined in his abstract pontifications, a posse is formed. The bad intention is clear since the beginning and the mob quickly gathers steam, furiously seeking vengeance like a brutish animal without even a sheriff to lead but a deputy, Butch Mapes (Dick Rich), one the

most bloodthirsty among them. As Bosley Crowther wrote in 1943, the film catches the moment when rancour and violence fan a reckless fire that gathers momentum ("New York Times", May 10, 1943, p. 15). Nobody can take life in their hands anymore since all are prey to a devilish crowd.

Peter Stanfield argues that the Confederate officer Major Tetley (Frank Conroy) should be read in relation to another character from the Old South, preacher Sparks (Leigh Whipper) and points out that the lynching of the three men can be considered in the light of the historical subjugation of African Americans in a segregated South (Stanfield, "Introduction to the DVD edition of *The Ox-Bow Incident*: The American Narrative" 2016). Especially when it revolves around former Confederate officers, in fact, the western tends to give space to a narration based on re-uniting what was once separated or resolving what was problematic, binding again two parts of the nation that seemed irreparably divided. That explains why, in the western, Old Southern characters—mainly former Confederate officers fallen in disgrace—are shown as capable of starting a new life in the West. They are re-westernized, or made 'Americans' again through a restored confidence in themselves, a confidence mirrored in the open spaces of the West. Yet, in this film the restoration does not happen and the Major remains incapable of evolution, caught forever in his tyranny and intolerance. Still, the film avoids the novel's strong pessimism and concedes something to that renovated idea of unity through the sensitive son of the Major, Gerald (William Eythe). The heavenly choir of African American voices in the soundtrack also helps to underscore a feeling of restoration. Most importantly, the unity is emphasized at the end in Gil's reading of the letter written by Donald Martin (Dana Andrews), the intelligent man unjustly lynched by the mob. In the novel, the content of the letter is not revealed apart from a brief mention toward the end ("'He talked about me in the letter,' Davies mooned. 'He told his wife how kind I was to him…'"; Clark [1940] 2020: 198) while the film cites the full letter in the final scene at Darby's Saloon. The framing of the shot is extraordinary: Gil's eyes are blocked by the brim of Art's hat, and as Gil reads, we only see his mouth and Art's eyes, pensively focusing on the letter's meaning. They are two people united in one single soul. Then, a cut to the listeners in a gallery of faces demonstrates their guilty conscience. The letter

is a touching piece of writing that expresses hope in justice and faith in democratic union, which, in 1942, must be read with Nazism as a backdrop. The letter is partially inspired by Davies's monologue in the novel, in which the character focuses on a transcendentalist argument: "what is the conscience of any man save his little fragment of the conscience of all men in all time?" (Ibid. 45). Henry Fonda's calm voice adds poignancy to that excerpt, and reminds the spectator of Tom Joad's famous monologue in *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford 1941) or that of professor Turner reading Bartolomeo Vanzetti's letter in *The Male Animal* (Elliott Nugent 1942), both played by Fonda. Donald's notion of justice in the letter applies the transcendentalist concept of the universal mind that animates and motivates all living things, a concept that combines the idea of human dignity expressed in Vanzetti's letter and the Emersonian oversoul exalted in Tom Joad's speech.[9] All these monologues had to spread a sense of unity and rekindle courage in preparation for the incipient war.

The reference to the subjugation of African Americans in the South is not the only ethnic issue touched on by the film. Mexico and Mexicans are mentioned both in the novel and the film, especially concerning mob racism. In the novel, one of the mob members points out that if they must wait for a fair trial, they will surely "have every thieving Mex and Indian and runaway Reb in the whole territory eating off our own plates" (Ibid. 32). In the film, apart from the racist remarks coming from the Confederate officer, Jeff yells "the Mexican is mine" shortly before the lynching. He refers to Juan Martínez (Anthony Quinn), one of the victims of the mob. As we will see, Juan is a crucial character in the film, not least because he foreshadows the attitude that Dinerstein defines as a "mask of coolness" (the third element in our list of features of SBNW). Juan, in fact, maintains a self-possessed, extremely stoic front to manage the ignorance and racism of the mob, refusing emotional outpourings and complaints [Fig. 31]. He is completely detached from the situation and later tries to deceive the crowd, making them believe he is the guilty, ignorant Mexican that those men assumed. He aims to

[9] Martin, through Gil: "And what is anybody's conscience except a little piece of the conscience of all men that ever lived?" (1942); Tom Joad: "maybe it's like Casey says, a fellow ain't got a soul of his own, just a little piece of a big soul, that one big soul that belongs to everybody…" (the speech mixes Marxism with Transcendentalism, 1941); professor Turner reading Vanzetti's letter: "Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man, as now we do by accident" (1942).

escape, but when he fails, Juan stoically accepts his destiny with inner strength and self-dominance. The contrast between this character and the absurd behavior of the mob is fully evident in the interesting spatial construction of the film.

In terms of space, the film has an interesting construction. The first part is set in the saloon; then, a brief intermission shows the posse riding along a high gorge to reach Bridger's Pass. Shot on location in Lone Pine (California), the brief montage sequence introduces the third part of the film, emphasizing aspects linked to space. The sequence shows menacing cliffs surrounding the riders, and an ominous soundtrack intensifies the gloomy atmosphere. The last part opens with the mob lined up under a big tree looking toward a large area below, where the suspected murderers are camped. The tree beautifully frames the image, but its branches are shadowy and menacing, anticipating the claustrophobic stasis of the third part. The movie now intensifies its noir style. Shot in a soundstage of the 20th Century Fox backlot, the setting perfectly encompasses the psychological turmoil that leads to the hanging, an event that in the novel happens amid a nighttime snowstorm. The storm was eliminated in the film, but the circumstances of ignorance, chaos, and inhumanity are equally maintained and rendered through references in the dialogue (the "rotten liquor" they are drinking refers to the deteriorating state of a group of men trapped in a dreadful night). The location is a hollowed and sunken glade bordered by a wreckage of a mountain cabin, a destroyed fence, and a bare oak tree used for the hanging. A small river crosses the glade obliquely augmenting the sense of confinement. Three men are sleeping near the bivouac fire: as we will discover, they are an old man, Alva Hardwick (Francis Ford), a cattle owner, Donald Martin (Dana Andrews), and the Mexican gambler Juan. The film does not add more about their characterization: a preacher is simply a preacher, a judge is simply a judge, a sheriff is no more than a sheriff, and these three men are identified with sparse traits. The mob wakes the men up, disarms them, and confines the victims at the center of a circle. So, now we have the three men gathered around the fire and surrounded by the mob.

A singular stasis characterizes this phase of the film, and the narration is reduced to a few elements. The film's significance is mainly attributed to the characters' position in relation to the fence, the cabin, the tree, and the river. The lighting is also crucial. During the questioning, intended to prove the guilt of the three men instead of their innocence, the hanging tree seems to move closer to the convicts: at the beginning, it is never framed; then, after the decision to postpone the execution at sun up, the tree moves closer, appearing like a dark shadow that remains prominent throughout the rest of the movie. The convicts gain three hours, from 3:05 to 6:00, the estimated time of the sheriff's arrival. The mob is shown in its animal impulses: they decide to eat the food of the convicts since, as Smith comments, "can't call it stealin' because, at the time of death, there won't be any owners". Later on, Smith, hidden behind the ruined remains of the abandoned cabin infested by sagebrush, has sexual intercourse with Ma. By contrast, the victims' humanity is emphasized by their closeness to the bivouac fire: Martin is bent on his letter, Alva is sadly munching a piece of bread, and Juan is consuming his last meal. Each man's ethical and moral position is attributed to the place the character occupies in the setting—in relation to the cabin, the fence, the oak tree, and the small river—and in the frame. While the mob surrounds the three men violently accusing them of murder, Gerald, the weak and sensitive son of the Confederate officer, is standing alone, on the other side of the small river with his back to what is happening, indirectly declaring a different moral stand. Gil and Art will do the same later, during the last calm moments before the hanging (the three hours they have to wait for the sheriff's arrival), when they sit near the fence, again suggesting the difference in their moral judgment [Fig. 32]. They begin to see the entire situation with uncertainty, with an awareness of its absurdity. Apart from Sparks, whose skin color is already a sign of distinction and evidence that his presence can only be confined to that of a preacher, only Gil (who shows an extreme likeness to Martin), Art, Gerald, and Davies occupy positions that make them stand out from the rest. In this carefully constructed space, the film creates an interesting code of lighting. Shortly before dawn, the Confederate officer decides that they must act as a unit and abide by the decision of the majority; he asks those who want to put off the hanging to "step over there", pointing at a space on the other side

of the bivouac fire. Again, the spatial position is moral and ethical, and camera editing and lighting underscore the division. The seven men—Gil, Art, Davies, Gerald, Sparks, and another two anonymous posse members—are framed in a low-angle shot that projects their silhouette against the blazing shimmer of dawn. The soft light illuminates their open and bright faces. By contrast, the majority is shown by an inclement tracking shot that moves from left to right, revealing their grotesque looks and foolish expressions encompassing awful pusillanimity and ignorant ruffianism, a shot accompanied by an increase in the volume of the soundtrack that underscores the impressive amount of people standing on the wrong side—all against seven good men.

The presence of Juan among the group of victims is extremely important since he is the only representative of ethnic diversity. At first, as the movie suggests, Juan seems to be the principal suspect in what happened. When the mob approaches the group, he quickly wakes up to put his hand on his gun, suggesting to the mob and the viewer that he is probably a violent Mexican. Then, when spoken to, he only replies with inarticulate sequences of "no sabe", also hinting at the purported ignorance of Mexicans who speak grammatically incorrect Spanish and no English.[10] Later, Bartlett (Stanley Andrews) accuses him of being an impostor and a gambler, indicating that a Mexican character cannot but play the usual immoral role. Then, Juan attempts an escape and, caught again by the posse, reveals the illegitimate possession of Kinkaid's gun. This detail undoubtedly pinpoints him as a guilty Mexican. If this was not enough, Juan is shown as extremely good at handling knives. It seems that the movie wants to test our capacity for judgment and ability to use discernment in dealing with presumptions; to a certain extent, the film suggests the importance of getting our facts right. Even if all the events in the film give a different impression, and the viewer, with the mob, is led to believe that the Mexican is guilty, Juan is not the culprit.[11] Further, he is not ignorant and is not even immoral. Stopped by a bullet during the escape and forced to extract it from his leg—Juan wants to

[10] The scriptwriters used 'no sabe' instead of 'no sé' to emphasize the mob's general preconceptions about Mexicans' ignorance. Quinn, who is of Mexican origin, was perfectly aware of the error and the ethnic connotations of his character, but he wanted to second the representations of mob's prejudices. I reserve part of the criticism of Quinn's biography and career for Chapter 5.

[11] One of the main interests of the film is in the fact that the viewer tends to be placed on the side of the mob, not on that of the seven good men.

stand upright, as he says, "when you come to your pleasure"—he reveals a new identity that completely disregards the expectation and changes the audience's perception. The Mexican is not a despicable greaser but an articulate and wise man, compassionate (to Gerald) and courageous (humming a jolly tune while fixing his leg may slightly overdo the reverse tendency!). The film reveals that his ignorance was a rhetorical strategy to test the viewers' prejudices. Now, his true self belies what happened before. The calm stoicism that characterizes his attitude rejects sentimentality and refuses any complaint. He starts to talk, revealing that he speaks ten different languages but uses them only when needed, an act of self-determination that can be compared to Martin's writing. Both react against a superior, apparently legitimate, order that cannot be changed. Both fight through the unbeatable weapon of personal expression, the only tool to face horror and disgust for the bestial mob psychology.

In the film, the border mainly appears in terms of metaphors that allow the viewer to test prejudices over notions of right and wrong, inside and outside. The borders are represented by four simple props: a cabin wreckage, a fence, a stream of water, and a bivouac fire that identify the separation between a despicable majority and three convicts supported by seven good men. The cabin wreckage is where Ma and Smith have sex, the fence represents the moral separation of Gil, Art, and Davies, the river identifies the fragile, slightly homosexual personality of Gerarld, the fire the fierce humanity of the convicts. The minority is left outside the leading group, in its eccentric position: close to the fence, near the fire, across the small river. In synthesis, they are in the margins of the frame. Despite the validity of Stanfield's argument on western narrations hailing a re-unification of two halves of the nation in the vastness of the West, this South-of-the-Border *noirish* western describes and preserves an internal divide. In the stasis that characterizes the last *noirish* part, a stasis quite atypical in a western, editing, lighting, camera movements, and props trace a boundary opposing an evil majority and a good minority that stands for the victims of racism and intolerance. This separation not only undermines one of the most sacred truths of American democracy, the importance

of unity, but also upholds the position of those who stand on the other side of a metaphorical and, in Juan's case, geographical fence.

Border Incident *(1949)*

Janine Basinger describes Anthony Mann's late 1940s films—*Desperate* (1947), *Railroaded* (1947), *T-Men* (1947), *Raw Deal* (1948), *He Walked by Night* (1948), and *Border Incident* (1949)—as typical noirs. Paranoia, violence, greed, or situations produced by a corrupt world trap a character in a situation that cannot be controlled or that is barely understood (Basinger 2007: 29-36). *Border Incident* is not an exception, with the only difference being that it reveals germs of the following involvement of Mann in the western. The film is, in fact, a mixture of noir and western, and one of the most explicative of both genres' connection with the notion and image of borders. Mainly, *Border Incident* explores a contemporary concern that is holding up surprisingly well in the current debate over immigration and border cultures.

In terms of plot and structure, the film bears some similarities with *T-Men*, produced the year before by the Pathé subsidiary Eagle-Lion Films, a B-movie that recounted the story of two undercover treasury agents who nail down a gang of counterfeiters. In *Border Incident*, we have two agents and a gang again, but this time, the agents belong to the immigration service, and the gang does not smuggle bogus bills but human cargo. Further, the agents of *Border Incident* come from different sides of the U.S.-Mexican border: Pablo Rodríguez (Ricardo Montalbán) is the Mexican agent of the Policía Judicial Federal, while Jack Barnes (George Murphy) is the inspector of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. They are involved in the same case, fighting the brutal murderers of defenseless braceros on the borderland between Mexico and the U.S. The similarity with *T-Men* is also due to the fact that Mann was helped by the same team of screenwriters (John Higgins and Charles Zuckerman) and by one of the greatest among American cinematographers, John Alton, who teamed up with him at Eagle-Lion Films and followed the filmmaker in the production of *Border Incident*. Further, the film benefited from a shift of studio, moving to the rich production

values guaranteed by MGM. The arrival of Dore Schary in the summer of 1948 as head of production (from RKO, where he had produced *Crossfire* the year before) changed MGM's profile from the glossy musicals of the 1940s to hard-hitting social dramas. As Auerbach writes, the film "presumably appealed to the liberal Schary less for its police plot than for its representation of a disadvantaged group's oppression" (Auerbach 2011: 125-126).

The potential interest in the underprivileged group of Mexican braceros was also kindled by two historical events of the year 1948. The first, known as "El Paso Incident", was the consequence of a suspension in February 1948 of the Bracero Program for abuses and improper application. Only seven months later, pressed by the agribusiness fearing the loss of the harvest, American government officials unilaterally violated the moratorium and allowed braceros to cross the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juarez to El Paso (basically sanctioning a form of illegal crossing). For economic expediency, as Auerbach points out, the U.S. "made a mockery of its mutual cooperation with Mexico and compromised the formal distinction between legal and illegal at the heart of the guest-worker program" (Ibid. 129). The other event was the broadcasting of *Poverty in the Valley of Plenty*, a twenty-minute documentary describing the farm workers' strike in Kern County (CA). The film was aired in May 1948 by a Los Angeles television station, KTLA, and outlined a situation similar to that shown in Mann's film, with the difference that braceros and illegal 'wetbacks' were smuggled not for an anonymous agribusiness industry but following the interest of a specific farm corporation, the DiGiorgio Fruit, guilty of having left its laborers in deplorable sanitary and working conditions. The DiGiorgio sued the union filmmakers for defamation and later triggered congressional hearings against the Farm Labor Union that organized the strike (Ibid. 129; Fox 1999: 100-101). These events focused attention on the Mexican workers' condition and their systematic mistreatment as, for instance, the fact that they received much lower wages than their counterparts, American unionized workers.

The film belongs to the noir tradition of presenting characters who cross the border between legal and illegal situations, eventually falling into a state of paranoia and fear; yet, this time the

crossing from a land of "normalcy" to that of crime is due to a crossing of national borders. Specifically, the psychological condition of paranoia and fear is attributable to a form of statelessness. The sense of vulnerability experienced by braceros in *Border Incident* is entirely different from that induced by a foreign country used for a temporary sexual transgression as happens, for instance, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett 1946) or even in *Out of the Past*, where the border-crossing to Mexico is mainly erotic and eventually leads to personal trouble. In other films—for instance in *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944), *Where Danger Lives* (John Farrow 1950), or *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis 1950)—Mexico is the safe haven that American fugitives look for, despite their failure to reach it. In *Border Incident*, a reversed direction of the traffic, from south to north, turns the focus on Mexicans, attributing paranoia and fear to their condition of statelessness in a way that is intended to simultaneously elicit compassion and trigger a serious debate about their rights to be protected despite the absence of citizenship. The vulnerability and psychic disorientation usually suffered by noir protagonists are here declined in a lack of protection produced by geopolitical dislocation and estrangement: braceros illegally crossing the borders are reduced to counterfeit 'objects' and deprived of any protection from the governments or from the law. By relating noir emotions like fear, trauma, and paranoia to workers illegally crossing the border, the film tests and questions the border itself, its absolute impenetrability and the policies that regulate its existence.

The omnipresence of boundaries in the film emphasizes the dramatic experience and lack of freedom encountered by braceros. At the beginning, the two sides of the border appear significantly different. The Mexican side is a hallucinatory and ominous world of eerie bars and gambling halls populated by mysterious and terrifying characters. The woman who makes tortillas looks like a grotesque witch, the German broker named Hugo Wolfgang Ulrich (Sig Ruman) is a terrifying dictator, and the henchmen at his service—Zopilote (Arnold Moss), Pocoloco (José Torvay), the stoned marijuana smoker, and Cuchillo (Alfonso Bedoya)—seem more foolish than wicked.[12] By

[12] Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) seems to have taken great inspiration from this human cross-section, adding some baroque excess and a touch of radical views to a similar border microcosm.

contrast, on the American side, order and rational organization are evident in the presence of a post office and industrial activities. The elegant house of Owen Parson (Howard Da Silva) shows modern high-tech curios such as a cigar lighter shaped in the form of a gun, a clay pigeon shooting game, and a dictaphone that Zapilote and Cuchillo avidly explore. However, nothing is what it looks like, and we progressively discover that in crossing the border northbound, the only difference is in the means of locomotion: on the American side, braceros do not hide in an old truck but in a state-of-the-art camper van. Yet, on both sides, they are treated like objects.

In the opening credits, the film emphasizes linear perspectives, highlighting a sense of order and protection represented by the border. In a semi-documentary style that mixes omniscient voice-over and didactic explanation, the opening sequence shows the "vast empire of the Imperial Valley of Southern California" that corresponds to the real territory that surrounds the U.S.-Mexico border. Presented as "All-American", the web of canals of the Imperial Valley is associated with an extremely rational land organization, and emphasized by a musical accompaniment that inspires harmony and safety. The impression is that of a paean to man's industry: images of canals or ordered lines of trees celebrate the order encompassed in a pattern made of water streams, strips of land, and plowed fields, shot in high-key photography and seen from above, in an aerial view. The images are illustrated by a disembodied narrator who links the geometric perfection to Mexican laborers preparing the land and harvesting the food for "our tables". Albeit obviously observed from the point of view of the U.S., the impression is that of an organic society where everyone relies on everybody else. Still, after these images of abundance, the film switches the focus on braceros crammed behind the fence and looking toward the U.S. By showing desperate braceros forced to eternally wait on one side of the fence and then finally cross at the expense of their life, facing terrors and paranoia, the film clearly aims to offer an explicit critique of a situation that favored only one side of the border at the expense of the other—the opposite of an organic society. The luminous Valley's counterpoint is the dark Cañón de la Muerte, shown in the *noirish* sequence of the workers on their way back to Mexico, after having completed their jobs in the North. In the no-man's-land between two countries, they are violently

robbed, stabbed, and left to die in the quicksand. In this horrific scene, Alton transposes to a western terrain the claustrophobic impression typically attributed to dark interiors or meandering city streets in noirs, without losing their sense of confinement and suffocation. As Auerbach writes, this "graphic devouring of braceros by the maw of earth enacts a kind of birth in reverse", sending back Mexicans to their motherland (Auerbach 2011: 131) in a sequence of extreme violence that belies the opening semi-documentary part and its comforting images. The inked-black soil of the quicksand tarnishes the intensely bright images of the Valley. It adds a menacing pattern of obstacles and fences that hinder the open land, as shown in the initial sequence.

The contrast between rationality and hallucination [Figg. 33-34] is a recurring motif in many noirs set in Los Angeles or California, where pastoral serenity and ominous shadows coexist in an inextricable blend. More than any other city in the U.S., Los Angeles was chosen as the epitome of the genre. Transposed into a rural context, the shadows and lights of this city assume the aspect of a contrast between the formless muck of the Cañón de la Muerte and the Valley's straight canals. Still, the clear-cut opposition is only apparent since the general sense is that of a whole, an undivided space, a borderland where rationality and hallucination are two sides of the same coin. Arrived in the Imperial Valley, braceros find constant obstacles that, in terms of figurative elements, tend to make appear the space increasingly fragmentary. Basinger, for instance, points out the presence of a basic pattern in showing the experience of the border-crossers: "off-angle close-ups", "pieces of things", "parts of people", such as a disembodied hand that often "intrude into frame, throwing meaning and security off balance" (Basinger 2007: 53). "The space one occupies", she continues, "can be taken over, or lost, at any minute" and there's no security anywhere. The lack of freedom is, above all, a lack of movement. For instance, when the illegal braceros are transported to the U.S., they are packed in the truck, lying down in a claustrophobic entrapment that makes them appear as animals or objects (Parkson refers to them as "Mexican straw dolls"). The claustrophobic situation is also in the tendency to show rapid movements of border patrol vehicles along the fence line, a wall denying access to the other side. The braceros are reduced to animals in a cage, unable to move, immobilized behind the

chain-link fence at the border control checkpoint looking toward a horizon that cannot be reached or packed in confined and dark interiors of vehicles. The border conjures up the idea of a prison locking people behind a barrier.

The contrastive pattern of *Border Incident* thus leaves room to a willingness to create an ordered symmetry, which is not simply confined to the image of the crossing flags closing the movie. The next few pages investigate the nature of this symmetry built over characters mirrored into each other or opposed according to specific characteristics.

The symmetry is mainly in the presence of the bad guys, paired and split like the good guys, Pablo and Jack. The perverse Hugo Ulrich, the dictatorial boss who is in charge of recruiting and supplying braceros on the Mexican side of the border, is counterpointed on the northern side by an arch-villain, the American character Parkson, who receives the exploited workers in the U.S. Compared to Ulrich, he appears more vicious and nasty: with his tough foremen, Jeff Amboy (Charles McGraw) and Clay Nordell (Arthur Hunnicutt), Parkson provides the bogus immigration permits allowing braceros to work for other farm corporations. As Amboy points out toward the end, he is the "mastermind nobody could touch", the top of an evil organization. The fact that he is Anglo upholds and simultaneously contradicts the theory of the supremacy of Anglo-American characters who must be the center of the action. This character is undoubtedly above others but in wickedness, depravity, and corruption. The social and ethnic codification of Parkson and Amboy is more than evident in their wearing cowboy hats, boots, neckerchiefs, in their use of guns or in their parlance.[13] Significantly, the principal pastime of the arch villain—shooting clay pigeons with an air pistol—reduces a national craze to a useless hobby and shows the idleness that characterizes this role. Further, his final act of cowardice debases his purported centrality and reveals the flip side of a character presented as occupying the pinnacle of a ferocious business that reduces people to worthless objects.

[13] One of the few female characters in the film, Amboy's wife, Bella (Lynn Whitney), says: "I was brought up in the Panhandle, and I can sure use this thing", referring to the rifle with which she tries to stop Pablo.

The symmetry is also in the victims. The episode in which a sinister posse of cowboys attacks and stabs poor braceros in the heart, throwing them in the loathsome muck, is counterpointed in Jack's ritualized murder, which spares nothing for the audience in terms of graphic details. As Basinger writes, the murder of George Murphy is shocking and unexpected since

> He not only is mercilessly tortured, but also wiped out with a brutality that is almost unmatched in American film. […] The machine moves forward slowly, relentlessly, getting bigger and bigger in the frame, its lights cutting through the black night with an eerie omniscience. Murphy, shot and beaten, has fallen into the dirt. He lies helpless in front of the onslaught. His face is filthy, covered with the fresh soil, his eyes and mouth filled with it. He appears totally helpless, and the fresh soil almost looks like baby pablum on his face. As he sees the machine's advance, he tries desperately to crawl, his hands digging uselessly in the soft earth (Basinger 2007: 55, 56).

With its heavy rotating discs churning up and cutting out Jack's body, the tractor is a metaphor for the American religion of mechanization and industrial science. Jack's death is not precisely comparable to that of Jack Burns (Kirk Douglas), who is run over by a moving truck on the highway at the end of *Lonely Are the Brave* (David Miller 1962). The death shown in *Border Incident* has nothing of that romantic vision. It is not only merciless but humiliating since a typical "all-American hero" is being muted, made helpless, maimed by the monstrous machine, and reduced to a defenseless infant by a device representing the technological supremacy of the U.S [Fig. 35]. Up until that moment, everything in the character had contributed to showing his "Americanness": from attire to speech, his bravery, endurance, and grit. Still, Jack does not survive, and his death is not limited to a periphrasis: it is literal and heavily detailed. The pivotal element of the symmetry between the death of the braceros and that of Jack serves the film's intention to build up reciprocity between two apparently different countries. The U.S. may establish the law and be supported by high technology, but without Mexico, the help coming from its legal workers, or concerted police procedures involving Mexican government officials, it is equally destined to disgrace. This mirroring assimilates the fate of the poor braceros buried in the Cañón de la Muerte on the Mexican side to that of Jack north of the border, a man made impotent, crawling without success to find a way out from his demise.

Pablo's character acquires similar centrality and importance, mainly because his trajectory is successful and goes literally upward instead of downward. The suspenseful sequence in the water tower at Parkson's ranch house, where Jack is held prisoner, is a masterwork in its use of space, a use entirely attributed to the superior ability of a Mexican character. Here, Mann defines the location by moving figures within the frame or moving the camera to explore a complicated, vertical area. Pablo climbs the stairs to contact his friend Jack, incarcerated in a room on the tower's second level. Clay follows him so that Pablo is forced to gain the third level to hide behind a corner. Clay reaches Jack's room and asks the prisoner about the noise he has heard. Jack tries to distract him from that suspicion, but Clay is not persuaded and proceeds to check further, so Pablo must reach the rooftop to step on a nearby tree branch and hide in the foliage [Fig. 36]. Pablo's ability to sneak out, smartly fleeing from the enemy's pursuit is the counterpoint of the desperate struggles of the braceros, as it represents their desire to reach and expand on the other side of the fence. In this sequence, his exploration and conquest of space is the *noirish*, vertical version of the western trope of horizontal prospect. Further, his mastery of a labyrinthine space reproduces the coolness and smartness of noir anti-heroes. Consider, for instance, the tricks used by detectives to get rid of a persecutor and their cunning way of hiding or making the adversary lose their track: this is typical in Bogart's Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade. Pablo utilizes the same detached and cool style but adds the stamina of a western hero—like a John Wayne from south of the border, Pablo offers a Mexican version of a cowboy ready to fight for the weakest. This aspect contributes to re-centering the marginality usually suffered by Mexican characters, placing at the center their astuteness, physical force, and intelligence.

Border Incident powerfully tests borders at many levels. With Jack's horrific death, the film overturns the axiom whereby a minor, ethnic figure must die in order to allow the Anglo-Saxon hero to celebrate a victory and praise a friend's virtue. In *Border Incident*, it is not the Anglo-Saxon hero who hails the friend's sacrifice as a heroic gesture for a superior cause but precisely the opposite: Jack is killed so that Pablo can applaud the friend's earnest gesture, the good intentions of a character who helped him despite adverse events happening in his last effort to fight the enemy. This way,

Pablo extends the principle of symmetry discussed above, decisively tearing down another portion of the cultural boundary between the representation of Anglos and the representation of Mexicans in Hollywood. Even if the transnational sharing of a concerted goal appears, at times, as a foolish illusion, something limited to the final image of crossed flags, the overcoming of traditional narrative and stylistic mechanisms reveals a desire to create an atmosphere based on balance and cooperation. On top of that, this symmetry reveals a different reality behind the hypothetical separation between a sunny valley and a dark quicksand.

Noiring a South of the Border Western: The Furies *(1950)*

Largely underrated in comparison to the cycle of westerns that followed and usually confined within the interrogation of the oedipal conflict that attracts Vance (Barbara Stanwyck) to his father, T.C. Jeffords (Walter Huston), *The Furies* deserves more attention especially for its largely unexplored focus on aspects related to Mexico.

It might be helpful to briefly offer a synopsis so that we can better orient ourselves to the analysis of the film's cultural context. Attracted to her father, the tyrannical cattle baron T.C., the owner of the immense property called "The Furies", Vance Jeffords is led to defy parental authority, secretly entertaining a romantic relationship with Juan Herrera (Gilbert Roland), Vance's soulmate and confidant since childhood. Made up of his younger brothers, Feliz (Pepe Hern) and Aguirre (Lou Steele), and by the mother, Mamacita Herrera, splendidly played by Blanche Yurka, Juan's family is of Mexican origin and occupies an abandoned area on the property's border despite T.C.'s strong aversion. Vance is not less reckless than T.C. in her desire to replace her father's powerful position and fight for the inheritance of the mansion against the meek brother Clay (John Bromfield). T.C. does not hide a preference for his daughter but their relationship has a toxic undertone since Vance is not free to choose her husband, her father having interposed veto power over a future spouse. Her plan to marry the son of one of T.C.'s enemies, Rip Darrow (Wendell Corey), is mainly due to Vance's desire to defy her father. Still, the plan crashes against awareness of Rip' duplicitous

intentions. The latter also wants to regain possession of a part of the land from which his family was previously evicted (the "Darrow's Strip"). The situation precipitates when T.C. brings home Flo Burnett (Judith Anderson), a long-time lover who has become a widow and can join him in matrimony. Flo also reveals a duplicity: after marrying the patriarch, she intends to inherit the mansion and send Vance to Europe for a grand tour. Vance responds to Flo's warmhearted but calculating offer with a violent burst: she tosses a pair of scissors that belonged to her dead mother at Flo's face, horribly disfiguring her rival forever. After riding away from the mansion, she looks for refuge in Juan's fortress at the border of "The Furies", but T.C. wants his revenge now. With his henchmen, the *patrón* starts an expedition to the fortress to kill his daughter and get rid of the Herreras once and for all. Vance fights against the venomous father, helped by the Herreras, who are also driven by a violent revenge wish against T.C.'s attempts to oust them from a territory that belonged to the family before the arrival of the Anglo pioneers. However, T.C. dupes Juan into accepting a truce, a submission due to Juan's awareness of Vance's concerns for her father more than to his lack of grit. The scene ends with Juan's sacrifice: he is hanged by a furious T.C. who retaliates against Vance's violent attack on Flo. In the second part of the film, after Juan's death, the Mexican interest disappears. The film centers on the renovated alliance with Rip. Nevertheless, the Mexican claim over land returns at the end. After Rip and Vance have accomplished their payback, Mamacita Herrera waits for T.C. outside the bank. While he burns the worthless box of illegal bills with which he had always paid destitute Mexicans working for him, Juan's rancorous mother shoots T.C. in the back.

Despite general unpopularity and scarcity of extensive critical evaluations, the film contains many interesting aspects. Jeanine Basinger largely emphasizes the film's debt to noir, identifying the prominence of women as one of the primary reasons for this connection, which still makes this movie linger over the previous phase of Mann's noir.[14] The author reads the film, along with *Devil's*

[14] The author divides Mann's 1950s filmography linked to the western in five phases: 1. Transition from noir to western where the two genres mingle into *noirish* westerns: 1949-50 (*Devil's Doorway*, *The Furies*); 2. Exploration of the genre of the western: *Winchester '73* (1950); 3. Definition: the four films representing the core of the years 1952–55 (*Bend of the River*, *The Naked Spur*, *The Far Country*, *The Man from Laramie*); 4. Inversion and abstraction: 1955–57 (*The Last Frontier*, *The Tin Star*); 5. Culmination: 1960 (*Man of the West*).

Doorway, as a "translation of Mann's film noir style to the western genre" (Basinger 2007: 71). In *The Furies*, the presence of Stanwyck in the leading role and that of other essential female characters played by remarkable actresses (Judith Anderson, Blanche Yurka, Beulah Bondi) make Basinger's point highly consistent. By contrast, *Devil's Doorway* is less the story of a woman than of a Native, Lance Poole (Robert Taylor), a dark film not only for John Alton's night photography but also for the despair of a doomed love story between the protagonist and Orrie Masters (Paula Raymond), the female lawyer who attempts to sustain his position. The description of the plight of Lance, initially honored by the highest institutions of the country and then formally evicted from his land, is highly pessimistic. His despair resounds in that of Orrie, forced to hide behind the initial of her full name to avoid discrimination against a woman doing a man's job. *The Furies* is not less *noirish*. Hal B. Wallis, the legendary producer of *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz 1942), posed a veto against the use of Technicolor, identifying the film with a psychological drama more than with a conventionally heroic western. The chiaroscuro and the perennial dusk of photography attest to this tendency; the musical accompaniment by Franz Waxman works in the same direction, creating an atmosphere connected with paranoia and drama more than with the celebratory vitality of an adventure. Basinger mainly aligned the film with the noir tradition for the presence of a psychological theme: the secret sin that unites father and daughter. Vance's overwhelming and exaggerated affection toward T.C. describes the overpowering mental instability that leads to dramatic consequences. As is typical in noirs, a sexual secret racked by internal rivalries leads to emotional upheaval and hunger for money and power. Still, we should not overlook the western theme in both films, which was already part of the author's concerns in 1949–50. Mann's future narrative elements linked to the genre—the importance of revenge, the complex relationship between hero and villain, the ambiguous values attributed to family and community, and the disturbing violence—are already contained in these two *noirish* westerns. Even if the filmmaker arrives at the summit of his personal and professional experience with other films, *The Furies* is an interesting case study that confirms and contradicts Mann's narrative features linked to westerns mainly because it associates them with other themes that

still remain today largely unidentified. Firstly, the centrality of the interethnic romantic couple formed by Vance and Juan offers an interesting standpoint to consider the specific treatment that revenge and violence receive in this film.

As happens for Lance and Orrie in *Devil's Doorway*, the couple formed by Vance and Juan is depicted in a dim overtone instead of being projected toward idealism, as in Daves's *Broken Arrow*, also released in 1950. Above all, in both films, the impulse toward revenge keeps firmly united a woman and an ethnic character, a tendency at odds with Mann's subsequent interest in Anglo American figures of male heroes. Furthermore, these two films present an interesting parallel: *Devil's Doorway* attributes the triad represented by dispossession, violence, and revenge to an ethnic character (Lance), which extends into a woman (Orrie), while *The Furies* explores the same triad through a female protagonist (Vance), reflecting on an ethnic character (Juan). This section thus aims to investigate the interethnic romance shown in *The Furies*, emphasizing its largely unexplored focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. The film's interest in delineating a historical focus on the border is thus investigated in the following pages and centered on two aspects that mainly contain and express this topic: character and space. The role played by Juan Herrera in Vance's decision to destroy the power of T.C. is the result of a contribution coming from different sources—novelist Niven Busch, screenwriter Charles Schnee, and actor Gilbert Roland—who are partly responsible for the film's emphasis on this topic. By focusing on the spatial patterns created by the film and on the cultural motif of fences and thresholds, we can also see how Mann's usual analysis of the limits of patriarchy here assumes a specific declination toward Mexico.

The Furies, Mexico, Charles Schnee and Niven Busch

The usual collaboration between Mann and his screenwriters is explained as part of his mastery of the genre. Borden Chase produced three of his masterpieces: *Winchester '73* (1950), *Bend of the River* (1952), and *The Far Country* (1954). Mann also worked with Philip Yordan for *The Man from Laramie* (1955) and *The Last Frontier* (1955). Dudley Nichols is the screenwriter of *The Tin Star*

(1957). For *The Furies*, Mann utilized instead a script co-written by Chase and Charles Schnee. The collaboration between Chase and Schnee began with *Red River* (Howard Hawks 1948), one of the first Hollywood films emphasizing Mexicans' claim over the land. In one of the opening scenes, the protagonists, Tom Dunson (John Wayne) and his partners Nadine Groot (Walter Brennan) and Matt Garth (Mickey Kuhn), are shown branding their first steer on a Texas plain while two vaqueros ride up toward them to inform the trio that they are trespassing on land that belongs to Don Diego. He lives across the Rio Grande, and that land, as the two vaqueros explain, is the northern part of an immense territory stretching out south of the river. Predictably, Dunson does not care about Don Diego's claim of ownership and scornfully replies: "you mean Diego took it away from whoever was here before". Tom validates the western 'law' based on a superior antagonist: he is now to Don Diego what Don Diego was before to the indigenous people he robbed. In Dunson's view, possession is established on power and force, not on titles, and when one of the vaqueros draws on him, he is ready to shoot the Mexican down. As Conway correctly explains, this killing is a "symbolic shorthand" for the annexation of a large Mexican territory established by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which ended the U.S.-Mexican war of 1846. The war broke out not only over the annexation of Texas to the U.S. (1845) but also over the U.S. claim that the border with Mexico had to be located at the Rio Grande and not, as Mexico sustained, at the Nueces River, over one hundred miles north. The defeat of Mexico in 1848 resulted in the American acquisition of the southwestern territories. The killing of the vaqueros on Tom's part thus echoes a foundational myth over which the Anglo-American pioneering ambition is upheld and explained. The two vaqueros are quickly conquered—one killed, the other mercifully let go—while Don Diego will never be seen in the film. Still, the coarse practicality and harsh individualism that Dunson shows in that sequence are ultimately interrogated through the intergenerational fight between Tom and Matt. Growing up with a different conscience and philosophy of history, Matt embodies qualities that are fully at odds with Tom's archetype of a western hero as a commanding character embodying ethnocentrism and nationalism. This change of focus contradicts the traditional point of view, transforming the American cowboy

through different stories and themes, especially when these new tropes are embodied by a young and extremely charismatic actor such as Montgomery Clift (Clift plays the older Matt). Together with Chase, Schnee directed this trajectory in the film, taking into account the key role Mexicans played in colonizing the southwest, an enterprise borne out of a real encounter between land-hungry Anglo-American settlers and Spanish-speaking peoples who inhabited the frontier before. The latter are ousted by Anglo American entrepreneurialism, but their presence is, at least, acknowledged and made visible in the narrative, rather than erased, avoided, or forgotten, as many historical reconstructions of the frontier did before and would continue to do since. Schnee goes back to a similar topic in adapting for the screen Niven Busch's novel, *The Furies*.

Niven Busch never showed excessive deference to traditional frontier conventions, often challenging genre norms by inserting external features. His choice of new themes was less dictated by whims of updating his subjects to current trends than by an authentic interest in different topics. With *Pursued* (script), he imbued the western with *noirish* tropes derived from psychological melodrama, turning the genre into a frontier of flashbacks, voice-over narration, and nighttime scenes. Busch's use of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico is less acknowledged and scrutinized as a cultural and historical context for his novels, stories, and scripts. With *Duel in the Sun* (novel) and *The Furies* (novel), or with more modest productions such as *The Man from the Alamo* (he wrote the story of the 1953 film directed by Budd Boetticher) and *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* (he wrote the script of the 1955 film directed by George Sherman, starring Robert Mitchum and Gilbert Roland; see Chapter 5), Busch remodeled the focus of the genre. More specifically, he expanded the frontier into a new southwestern border region where more complex figures of Mexicans could emerge. *Duel in the Sun* is an excellent case study that helps us to measure the author's sensibility toward the Mexican cause. Busch depicted Pearl as a revolutionary mestiza, an energetic and vigorous protagonist instead of a passive victim of the hypocrisy and power of the McCanles (Chapter 3). Similarly, in *The Furies*, he presents the Herreras through a spatial pattern linked to the experience of border crossing imposed by the dispossession of a land they once controlled. The central theme

that runs through *The Furies* and organizes the novel's internal core is, in fact, a SBNW's trope: the dispossession of land and the opportunity to regain, if not the rights to that land, at least the rights of being recognized and protected under rules and policies applied within that territory.

The Herreras, as Busch depicts them, are placed in a precise historical context, which allows them to develop a rich and complex identity that highlights, if not their honesty, at least their ancestry. For instance, the author recounts how Juan's great-grandfather, Castellano Herrera, continued the family business of horse-stealing. Yet, as he also adds, the same great-grandfather had built their fort-like house on a high hill before the arrival of the Jeffords, during the colonial era of the Spanish Empire, in the late 18th century (Busch [1948] 2008: 99, 105). As the author writes in the novel's first pages, the Herreras are:

> a wide clan who had taken to the mountains after losing a suit over a land claim in the days of Spanish rule. Like many of the families living on the Birdfoot range, they were squatters—but with a difference; they were not of peon descent, like the inhabitants of the pueblecitos on the south division; the Herreras were landed people, savage and proud. They had never entirely given up their claim to a vast heritage and they counted themselves the equals of any man and the superiors of the American settlers who had dribbled into the Territory on the heels of General Kearney's busy little army[15] and the rawhiders who smoked in later, after the Civil War (Ibid. 6).

In the excerpt, Busch explicitly distinguishes the Herreras' origin from that of the Puebloans. Yet, in other points of the novel and in the film, their conditions are assimilated under the sign of mistreatment. Descendants of the Spaniards and the Natives are coupled in a desire to fight a larger-than-life Anglo American giant, T.C., who, in the 1890s recounted by the novel/film, is still defending the protracted expropriation of the "squatters". In the film, during the first encounter between Juan and T.C., when the latter accuses the Herreras of stashing the calf in the mud to come back later and get it, Juan replies that the act derives from "our right on the land, the right of we, the Herreras and those of the pueblecitos" and a right that goes back to "as many years as you have hairs on your head". In the novel, Busch clarifies that incidents like this one give T.C. the excuse he wants "for

[15] General Stephen Watts Kearny (or Kearney) was largely remembered for the conquest of California during the Mexican-American War (1846–1848).

making a few coffee-colored Mexicans look for a new place to live" or for actually worst sort of retaliations such as "rape, arson, lynching, tar-and-feathering" (Ibid. 34). In the last round-up, T.C. is likened to a bull, the symbol of the frontier and Anglo American entrepreneurialism, the undefeated defender of individualism, self-reliance, and self-sovereignty, the descendant of those ambitious and energetic pioneers that poured into the territory after the Civil War, many years after the settlement of the Hispanics into the southwestern area. In this way, Busch openly creates a fictive opposition between the Herreras and the Jeffords that replicates the historical events of the U.S.-Mexican war and its outcome. Counterpointed by the great power of T.C., the Herreras, as proud heirs of a settlement that goes back to an earlier time, are thus victims of a dispossession.[16]

Notably, the year Busch published the novel, 1948, marked the centennial of the end of the Mexican-American war officially concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo signed on February 2, 1848. The author thus probably wished to remember the historical events linked to that Treaty. Even if the mansion's name in the novel is a more anonymous "Birdfoot", the notion of revenge remains central in the film and encapsulated in the territory itself—"The Furies"—and generally extended to all the other characters and entities involved: Flo, Vance, the Anaheim Bank and Rip. Called "The Furies", the land itself identifies not only a material value but a savage drive, the symbol of a tragic impulse toward a personal goal that is always related to the ownership of a piece of soil that attract many other interests, not only the Mexicans' claim. In this way, the position of the Hispanics in the territory is equally remembered and reduced as one of the many interests involved—exactly as it happens in *Red River*. Each character vies for the possession or repossession of a strip of land. Nonetheless, in our discourse on the SBNW, it is essential to emphasize that Juan's dispossession from the southwestern land extends to Vance, and her revenge also belongs to him.

[16] I do not think the supreme revenge of the Herreras can assume the irredentist characteristics and specificities of a military campaign to reclaim their strip of land, as something related to *La Reconquista* (the reconquering of the land lost in 1848) even if—symbolically—their fight may sound like it. The fight of the Herreras in the film is more aimed to have their rights recognized in that land.

Douglas Pye writes that Mann's films deviate from a certain tendency of the western to depict the evolution from the wilderness to a positive image of civilization. In Mann, civilization never fully triumphs since a notion of marginality is always acknowledged in his films. His heroes are often confined in marginal corners of the U.S.: *Bend of the River* (1952) places its hero in a northwest corner close to Canada; *The Far Country* (1954) is circumscribed to Alaska; *Naked Spur* (1953) is set in Northern Oregon; a ghost town is the main set of *Man of the West* (1958); a southwestern bordertown constitutes the setting of *The Man from Laramie* (1955) and, partially, of *Winchester '73* (1950). This geographic liminality also suggests that the lonesome cowboy is not a mythical figure, an untrammeled adventurer, free of movement and noble in action, but a savage and neurotic man. As Pye writes, "the fantasy of preserving male independence by moving on is not only no longer available, it has become almost psychotic" (Pye 1996: 170). Contrary to John Ford's films, where a nostalgic and crepuscular sensibility is detectable under the hard skin and the sense of duty of the hero, a sensibility that is reflected in Ford's use of space, which tends to be transcendental and emblematic, in Mann, the hero is transformed into a hunter of revenge. This psychological eccentricity is mirrored in the use of space that is always marginal, de-centered, and displaced. Still, apart from *The Man from Laramie* and *Man of the West* and partially *Winchester '73*, none of the films mentioned above is set in the southwest or close to Mexico since Mann usually privileged the north and its mountain tops. Moreover, in terms of ethnic characters, we can see that none of those three films leave room for Mexicans, even if they are all set close to Mexico. In *The Man from Laramie*, the role of Padre (Frank DeKova) is meager, while *Man of the West* ends with two Mexicans murdered by the violent gang of Dock Tobin (Lee J. Cobb): Juanita (Tina Menard) and her husband (Joe Dominguez, both uncredited), the last settlers of the bordertown of Lassoo. In *Winchester '73* there are no Mexicans. Thus, *The Furies* constitutes a notable exception: it is set on the border and the role played by Mexican characters is pivotal. Further, the same logic involving the hero as a psychotic man is reversed in a woman, Vance. In *The Furies*, the marginality of the space is attributed

to the Herreras' refuge, placed at the margin of the empire, T.C.'s mansion. The boundary between these two spaces is thus a metaphor for a border between the two countries. In this sense, Juan becomes the epitome of the Hispanics while T.C. represents an older model of Anglo-Saxon identity, one that must be overcome in a renovated notion of the relationship between Anglos and Mexicans as represented by Vance.

In the novel, Juan Herrera is a proud character described as "a tall lean fellow with a bony, sorrowful, good-natured face and a walk like a fighting chicken's" (Busch [1948] 2008: 5–6). After Vance's attack on Flo and her eviction from the mansion, the relationship between Juan and Vance gains centrality in the novel, with the former softened by the presence of a lover and Vance kindled by his proximity. Vance's troubled condition is the main reason for their mutual understanding, support, and marriage. In the novel, Juan marries her, a decision not only dictated by love but by their sharing of the same feeling of rejection. As Busch writes, "people in trouble turn naturally for help to those who are suffering or have suffered the same kind of trouble. Juan, himself rejected, would accept her; himself homeless, he would know where to hide her" (Ibid. 141). Although it cuts out the part of the marriage, the film expands the intensity and affection encapsulated in their union. The Mexican ritual of breaking bread together is a daring metaphor for a consummation of love: "till our eyes next meet" Juan says, to which she always replies: "till then". Further, the kisses on the lips,[17] their secret rendezvous, and the intensity of their gazes foster the hypothesis of a passion based on a transgressive relationship, made even more audacious by the fact that she is violating T.C.'s vetos against the Herreras, disobeying his order to oust them from the land. Kitses emphasizes Juan's quasi-maternal and protective role affirming that a similar character, completely "selfless, virtually suicidal", limits Juan's credibility, projecting him into a romantic aura that does not fit into Mann's world of selfish overreachers (Kitses, "Criterion Edition of *The Furies*", 2008). Still, there is no doubt that his sacrifice inflames and extends Vance's yearning to destroy T.C. and what the father represents

[17] Joseph Breen requested the elimination of open mouth kisses. Further, the presence of an interethnic romance in which the man was an Hispanic and the woman an Anglo was considered immoral (Chapter 3) so that probably the production, under the head of Hal Wallis, tried to suggest that the kisses between Vance and Juan had lost erstwhile passion (January 25, 1950, MPPDA file, Margaret Herrick Library).

in terms of strong authority over immense land. His sacrifice, in this light, appears not as a plot device or a quick way to get rid of a useless character in the plot, one confined to the role of lover/confidant of the protagonist, but the motivation that informs the protagonist's desire to stop T.C.'s individualistic control of the land. Although less selfish than others in the film—especially in his relationship with Vance—Juan is responsible for triggering a violent revenge. Resumed by Vance and concluded by Juan's mother, the revenge remains encapsulated in a series of meanings that are specifically associated with the dispossession, subjugation, and re-conquering of the territory from which the Herreras, as the epitome of Mexicans in the U.S., had been previously evicted. The family does not conquer back its strip of land and the Southwest inherited by Vance inevitably crosses white patriarchy—she marries Rip instead of Juan, and their son will be presumably named after the grandfather. There is no assurance that the downfall of the *patrón* T.C. would usher in the rise of a different mindset. Surely, there is no hint of a future in which Mexicans will play a primary role.

What is particularly interesting, in any case, is that the interethnic romance, albeit doomed to end (as always happens in noirs), has a strong connection with the ideological interpretation of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. During the sequence in the high hideout, when Juan courteously makes Vance win the race on top of the hill, he explains the dispossession of the Herreras from "The Furies" using a fatherly attitude that betrays his older age. He explains that despite the vast array of land with cattle and horses running free, no space is allowed for the family. The camera helps his commentary with a slow pan toward the right side of the frame that discovers a massive portion of land, stretching far away toward the horizon. She suddenly turns on him, abruptly shifting from passionate lover to master, adopting her father's feudal logic. Yet the impulse soon returns to devotion, ending with a kiss. With his calm, secure, and manly attitude, Juan holds a strong power over Vance's decisions and feelings, an attitude that is maintained throughout the film. For her part, Vance defends Juan and his family when the Anaheim Bank demands to clear up the land from the "squatters", fearing encumbrance that might invalidate or impair a title to the property. Before the attack on Flo, she shows up unexpectedly at the fortress to handle the Herreras in her way. She does

not want to burn them out, but she equally asks them to leave; upset and hurt, full of resentment toward her treatment, Juan scornfully teases her boastful order, “you look like T.C.”. Embittered by jealousy, he recoils with a strong criticism: “I have no stomach for the way you live”. Vance knows Juan’s power over her and that no other man can lead her to make the right decision. This time, Vance brings the piece of bread, an act showing that the impulse toward understanding and coexistence with the family is equally alive in her than the desire to be a leader. This premise adequately prepares us for the final fight with the father. The sequence of the fight will be later analyzed in relation to the landscape. For the moment, suffice it to say that Juan and Vance’s mutual understanding, consolidated by their romance, projects Juan’s reasons on Vance’s action leading the viewer to expand the meanings behind her revenge.

Juan is shown in the film as a proud representative of the Mexican American cause, involved in the effort to explain to Vance—and to the audience—the specific conditions suffered by Mexicans in the southwestern regions of the U.S. This theme is repeated multiple times in the film: at the beginning, when he explains to T.C. his rights and those of the Pueblecitos to take what is needed to live, then to Vance in the two scenes just described, and later during the fight at the fortress. His pivotal role in the film coincides with and concludes his research, which led Gilbert Roland toward a different phase of his career based on assertions of his ethnicity as a Mexican American actor. He began to associate himself with a fight for better roles and better representations of Mexican Americans, taking part in western movies where Mexican characters were allowed to express their culture and historical identity or proudly combat for their causes, equality, and justice. As we will see more extensively in Chapter 5, after a first phase almost exclusively identified with the image of a Latin Lover, the actor moved to roles increasingly aligned with his ethnic origin, roles that reflected his fight off the screen. The first shift in his career happened during the B-movie production of The Cisco Kid series (Monogram Pictures, 1946–1947). From that phase onward, he remained increasingly identified with the heartthrob persona of Cisco but within a social and political context

that was more aware of what was happening in Hollywood regarding the representation of Mexican Americans.

Character in space: a dark version of the U.S.-Mexican borderland

During an interview with Paul Mayersberg conducted for the BBC series "The Movies" in 1967, Mann argues that the potentiality of a western is in the physical relationship the genre allows to create between a real space and a human being. The director of westerns can take a group of actors out of their comfort zone confined in the studios' backlots to "throw them into the elements". Shooting on location means that the actors have to "shout above the winds, they have to suffer, they have to climb mountains", and there is a physicality involved that better displays their drives and offers a catharsis (Mann, "Action Speaks Louder than Words", BBC Series "The Movies"). The geography of the West is, for Mann, an immense theatre of passions where men can find resolutions to their conflicts. The filmmaker exploits the most dramatic natural forms—rivers, peaks, forests—so that nature can convey the inner drives of characters. According to Kitses, Mann's use of landscape is less concerned with picturesque beauty or with sublime aspects than with a "geological, ground-level, brutal point of view that has a strong connection with a physical intensity" (Kitses, "Criterion Edition of *The Furies*", 2008; also Kitses [1969] 2004: 167). Mann's landscape has no agrarian idealism but dark and brutal rocks, rushing rivers, arid prairies, and a natural space where a man can find the proper projection of his aspirations or obstacles. On top of that, the landscape in Mann is always an inner landscape representing a personal dilemma, physical intensity, a moral struggle, or aspiration toward justice.

In this light, we may now analyze the figure of Juan as a man of pure action framed within a natural background: Juan never appears confined to the rooms of banks and big mansions. He is always "thrown against the elements", his world made of rocks, trees, a high refuge with stone walls, and a figure always associated with a vividly concrete treatment of nature. By contrast, Rip, a gambler turned into a banker, is representative of the capitalist structure, and, as such, Mann identifies him

with interiors—the bank, the saloon, and the mansion frame the character within closed spaces. Mann bequeaths upon Rip the western tradition of negative meanings attributed to business and commerce.[18] Compared to Darrow, Juan is an idealist: his world is the wilderness, not the plowed earth but the brutal rocks, not the vault of a bank or the rich rooms of a big mansion but wild nature. Juan is often associated with the materiality of natural elements: the film frames him with trees or rocks in the background or links him to images of majestic cacti and great height. The only sequence in which the viewer sees Juan in an interior space is the fight with T.C., when he brandishes a rifle to shoot the approaching posse climbing up to the mountain to hunt Vance and the Herreras out of their fortress. He appears framed within the narrow window of the fortress, an image that anticipates the impending misfortune. Juan is an ethnic version of a traditional cowboy who loves to roam free on the prairie or fight like an animal hidden in some dark cover-up, far from civilization, up in the mountains. Juan is a cowboy but one representative of a different ethnicity. He is a Mexican vaquero, proud and ready to fight for his land. More than a sentimental figure, he represents the opposite of a vision based on rugged individualism and greedy capitalism [Fig. 37].

About the use of landscape in Mann's filmography, Basinger points out that the position of a character in terms of narration and psychology can be read from the position he occupies in space (Basinger 2007: 71). In *The Furies*, Juan is framed by trees and rocks in the background in a way that suggests not just his strong adherence to nature but also a change in his relationship with Vance: trees usually express harmony between lovers while rocks or fires show moments of tension, as in the sequence in which Vance goes to the fortress to evict them—a decision that, as we have already said, changes in the course of action. The fire of the burning Pueblo villages in the background epitomizes Juan's and Vance's differing standpoints, even if their ritual at the end dissolves the tension. The position a character occupies can even change over the course of the film, demonstrating the existence

[18] In westerns, railroad tycoons or bankers embody the capitalist values and are often associated to negative aspects, not differently from the big ranchers squeezing homesteaders into limited parts of land. As a gambler turned into a banker, Rip outlines an interesting inversion of the usual trajectory of fallen characters such as Doc in *My Darling Clementine* who loses his status and profession becoming a drunk, destitute gambler. By contrast, here, the gambler upgrades his status to become a financier, simultaneously endorsing and turning on its head the usual western critique of the capital.

of a constant tension between his ever-changing inner state and the outward condition. If we cannot say that in Mann there is a strong codification establishing a specific parallel between personality and space as, for instance, a direct link between an evil man and a rock or between a good man and a tree, it can be said that usually, in his filmography, great heights are always a clue to identify the transcendent forces of justice. Juan is in fact not only usually associated with nature but mainly with positions high up on the terrain, which partially mirrors his being above all the others or his representing, at least in Kitses' opinion, an exception in a world ruled by self-aggrandizing impulses.

Juan's standing on the highest points can also be read in relation to the issue of dispossession and to Juan's role in explaining the reasons of the Herreras and their assertion over themes of justice. While Ford usually places Natives in these positions to express their knowledge of the territory and the dangerous threat they represent to the Cavalry (in a fight, those who occupy the highest positions are usually advantaged), Mann places Juan in the highest points to give him a better post from which to speak. Juan always occupies positions high up in the terrain when he explains his reasons and makes assertions over issues related to justice: twice with Vance (the first on the rock, the second on his fortress), the last fight when he dies, and the first time we see him. The first time, Juan appears on the edge of a high hill, standing above the mud pond where T.C. saves the calf. He is framed in a low-angle shot, emphasizing his high spirit and yearning for justice. The scene opens with Vance, T.C., El Tigre (Thomas Gomez), and Mr. Reynolds (Albert Dekker) riding along the fence that separates T.C.'s land from the abandoned Darrow's Strip close to the Herreras confinement. They hear a calf bawling, and they go to see what happened. T.C. says that Juan's family is responsible for stashing the calf in the mud so he can come for it later and rob him of his steer. When T.C. jumps into the pond to take the calf out, Juan and his brothers Feliz and Aguirre appear high on the horizon. After a quick pan from T.C.'s point of view to the Herreras framed under the sky, they appear as an ominous presence, exposing T.C.'s vulnerability: they can quickly shoot from that position and get rid of their enemy. He is saved by Juan, who orders not to shoot since Vance is present. The dramatic tension between the two groups is thus defined in a brief sequence that displays the importance of

their spatial and moral positions: T.C.'s individualism, stubbornness, and, ultimately, greed lead him into a dangerous pitfall. By contrast, Juan is capable of mercy. To the latter, so positioned against the sky, goes our sympathy. First, Juan stops the brothers from shooting, an act that might hurt Vance, and then, he explains his reason to T.C. Catching a few calves from T.C.'s cattle is a trick done to procure food for their families, a trick that explains the problematic condition of destitute Puebloans, later shown as forced to accept worthless money and survive on limited supplies. T.C.'s reply immediately re-opens their hostility—"stop stealing cattle from "The Furies"! I told you once, I tell you now. I won't tell you again"—but the shot only includes T.C. in the foreground with El Tigre and Reynolds on the left, behind the tycoon. Vance is left offscreen in this particular framing, an absence that suggests her ideological separation from T.C.'s rebuke. The image is followed by a close-up of Juan, who slightly leans towards his left to meet Vance's gaze. He waves to his secret lover, framed against a luminous sky, and Vance replies with a gentle sign and a smile. Stuck in the mud, like a "brainless calf", as Vance defines him, T.C. shows a lack of mental flexibility while Juan, associated with the light of the day and with the heroic postures of a cowboy, attracts our interests and empathy.

Mann's use of space is finally exemplified in the sequence of the fight between the Herreras and T.C.'s henchmen led by El Tigre. The scene identifies a particular moment in the plot that represents the pinnacle of the first part and a turning point that leads to the finale, again proposing the theme of justice in response to dispossession. This is a scene of high contrasts, first at the level of photography, then in terms of spatial organization. The same pattern we have just explained between high and low characterizes the scene: the fight takes place on the steep slope of a hill punctuated by cacti and rocks. On top of the hill is the Herreras fortress, where Vance hides after the attack on Flo. The high refuge is framed from below, like a black diamond set in stone, with one of the corners of its rectangular base pointing up in the sky toward the top of the frame. The Herreras toss large rocks at the henchmen, impeding T.C. and El Tigre from climbing the hill. The dynamism of the fight is emphasized by the two charismatic figures of T.C. and Mamacita, both fearless, both full of desire to

destroy the other. The old bull, below, and the witch, above, finally engaged in the battle they always wanted. With her hysterical giggle, Mamacita looks like a grotesque creature of the night, uttering brief guttural sentences half in English, half in Spanish: "come, my toro". However, when Mamacita is about to kill T.C., firing a bullet from one of the narrow windows of their fortress, Juan interrupts the fight. He wants to yield to Vance's desire to save her father and looks for a truce. This event opens a phase that lessens the tension: a gentle camera movement shows the Herreras and Vance descending the slope to reach T.C. and El Tigre below. The gentle accompaniment of a Flamenco guitar follows the group silhouetted against the sky with a musical cue associated with Mexico. T.C. has just promised that they can all go free and safe, but he is about to betray his oath. T.C.'s dishonesty is exposed in this sequence, where the eviction of Vance and Juan from "The Furies" turns into the assassination of Juan for a pretense: horse and cattle stealing. T.C. betrays his promise by killing the only person who could support Vance after her expulsion from the house to retaliate against Vance's attack on his wife. Vance, Juan, Mamacita, and the two brothers are now on the top of the hill, outside their fortress, separated from T.C. and El Tigre by a fence. A thicket of cacti surrounds them. The space is thus occupied by a series of lines that, like a grid on the frame, create narrow sections on the image, blocking the vision: the vertical lines of tall saguaro cacti cross the horizontal lines of the fence that separates the fortress from the mule track below where T.C. is standing [Fig. 38]. These lines are a clear alert of future events.

Noir style is encapsulated in this sequence, and Kitses compares it to "a somber ceremony": the characters are silhouetted against the sky, with dark shadows turning Vance and Mamacita's faces into noir masks (Kitses, "Criterion Edition of *The Furies*", 2008). The deep focus composition of the cinematography signed by Victor Milner and the gentle camera movements combined with the moving figures against the horizon enhance the scene's high dynamism. The two groups are now separated by the majestic cactus that encapsulates their division. The horizontal lines of the fence seem to erase any possible resolution between them. Stiff with hate, T.C.'s haughty profile is counterpoised to a low-angle shot of the Herreras magnifying their nobility: Mamacita in the

foreground and Juan behind, with Vance by his side. While T.C. wants to settle the score with Vance, Juan proudly decides to face death instead of begging for a salvation that will never come, forcing on her the prosecution of his fight. Mann associates the brief dialogue between Juan and Vance with a tall cactus behind him, condensing the symbolism of a phallic signifier into Juan, who proudly decides to face his destiny. “You will not humble yourself; this I ask”, says Juan, looking into her eyes. His sacrifice is a token in exchange for Vance’s promise that she will not humble to her father’s imperial decrees. Juan extends a yearning to kill his adversary over Vance, now enraged not just by her eviction from “The Furies” but by Juan’s death.

After this brief dialogue, Juan approaches the mother and puts a hand on her shoulder. Then, the Herreras disappear on the right angle of the frame to sink below toward the site of the gallows. Vance and T.C. are left alone, staring into each other’s eyes, separated by another tall cactus that almost cuts the frame in two equal parts, Vance on the right and T.C. on the left. A cut shows Juan taking off his hat to kneel down for a final prayer. Then, a kiss on the cross he wears on his chest and a sign of the cross with his right hand. He rises on his feet, puts on the hat again, and approaches the gallows with an extremely relaxed attitude. The vertical lines of cacti, rifles, men, and vegetation look like stakes of a fence enclosing the Herreras in their fate [Fig. 39]. She runs down towards him to perform their departing ritual one last time: she starts the line, “Till our eyes next meet”, to which he replies sombrely, “Till then”. Like in the fight against T.C., they now switch positions: she takes on Juan’s fight against dispossession. Then, Vance runs back to the top of the hill to finally meet T.C., father and daughter opposed by mutual hatred. In an outburst of fury, she addresses T.C. to deliver her passionate speech—“Now I hate you in a way I didn’t know a human could hate. Take a good, long look at me, T.C.; You won’t see me again until the day I take your world away from you!”—a moment that owes a lot to Stanwyck’s skill in expressing impromptu bursts of anger. When she departs from the site of the fight, riding back to the mule track behind the gallows, the camera follows her movement from a position very close to Juan. The camera quickly pans to reveal his face for a moment, briefly capturing his cool mask as it gives way to a hint of a satisfied and proud smile.

In many other occasions, Mann evokes the spirit of an implacable justice working through the protagonists, forcing us to identify the landscape with a psychological terrain full of symbolism. The landscape is where a struggle toward self-definition happens through a ritual confrontation between the bad man and the good man. For instance, there is a universal sense of justice in the final fight between the protagonist and his brother on a rocky landscape on top of the mountain in *Winchester '73*, or in the fight between Glyn (James Stewart) and his friend Emerson Cole (Arthur Kennedy) in *Bend of the River*, where the protagonist emerges out of the river purified of his other, evil self. In *Naked Spur,* a final confrontation happens close to a river, which symbolizes again the protagonist's ability to come to terms with himself. In *Man from Laramie,* a battle between a good man and a bad man happens close to the salt basin where Will (James Stewart) is tortured and where his struggle for justice begins. The final shootout in *Man of the West* sees Link (Gary Cooper) killing his evil past represented by the fatherly figure of Dock (Lee J. Cobb) in the ghostly bordertown of Lassoo, a ritual act that signals the birth of a new self. In *The Furies*, the high hill is where Vance, through Juan, comes to terms with her feelings toward her father. As we have seen, the fragmented frame (the grid of lines) mirrors and evokes the obstacles that divide two groups that cannot find any prospect of unity. Moreover, the site of the hanging where vengeance is triggered is not an anonymous slope but a specific space. In a local newspaper column dated November 11, 1949, it was, in fact, reported that the fight between T.C. and Juan/Vance was shot at Squaw's Head Rock, the exact location used by Vidor and his crew for *Duel in the Sun* (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 33). Vance breaks away from what her father represents to ideally join Juan's cause in a location that is a replica of the one identifying the mythic union of Pearl and Lewt, the outcasts of the McCanles mansion. Like the couple represented by Lewt and Pearl counterpoised to the patriarch McCanles, Juan and Vance are positioned as a foil to T.C.'s frontier type. Vance gets her revenge, maintaining the promise made to Juan. However, Juan's death also triggers a final act: Mamacita's retaliation. Dispossessed of her son's love, Mamacita finally kills T.C., settling a score that ends the dreadful chain of revenge by getting rid of the last powerful force of the southwest.

Man in the Shadow *(1957), Orson Welles, and the visual motif of the fence*

Almost at the end of Busch's novel, one of the bystanders of the Legal Tender, the saloon owned by Rip, says that when Asians were killed, back in the railroad-building days, nobody paid much attention to the murder since Asians, like Mexicans, were not even counted when alive. In 1942, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned in detention camps, an event that was at that time commonly linked to the anti-Mexican response in the Sleepy Lagoon case. These two events were probably still fresh in Busch's mind when he wrote that sentence five years later. The Sleepy Lagoon case began when José Díaz, a seventeen-year-old Chicano, was found dead near a reservoir called Sleepy Lagoon on the morning of August 2, 1942. The Los Angeles Police Department was quick to arrest seventeen Mexican Americans considered responsible for his death despite the lack of evidence. They were held in jail, severely beaten, and later convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to serve in San Quintin. In public life, this episode was associated with a "lynch-mob atmosphere whipped up by Hearst headlines about a Mexican American 'crime wave'" (Denning 1997: 399). The quick sentence of the young Chicanos, in fact, triggered the Zoot Suit Riots (1943), a period of race riots also linked to issues related to the repatriation of Mexicans after the Great Depression and to the fallout of the Bracero Program on the life of American citizens. This tension led many community members and artists to mobilize in support of the defendants. The Sleepy Lagoon Defence Committee was organized by a Chicana activist, Josephine Fierro de Bright, and upheld by several spokespersons, including Anthony Quinn, Rita Hayworth, and Joseph Cotten. One of the most involved artists was Orson Welles, whose *Touch of Evil* (1958) recounts a situation similar to that of the seventeen young Chicanos. The framing of young Manolo Sanchez (Victor Millan) by the corrupt policeman Quinlan (Welles) in the film recalls what happened in 1942. The filmmaker later complained about the fact that instead of the long take of Vargas (Charlton Heston) and his wife Susan (Janet Leigh) crossing the Mexican border, a shot interrupted four minutes later by the killing of the American building contractor—one of the most discussed shots in the history of Hollywood—

critics should have focused on a more subtle sequence. Specifically, the one that shows Quinlan planting evidence (dynamite in a shoe box) in the Mexican boy's apartment. Welles wanted to call attention to a shot that linked politics and entertainment. Another noir starring Welles in a similarly despicable role, *Man in the Shadow*, was released in 1957, the year before the renowned *Touch of Evil*. This SBNW is another good instance of a perfect balance between politics and entertainment.

This modest SBNW presents an early version of Welles's radical vision of the U.S.-Mexico border. The corruption of the American police we see in *Touch of Evil* expands to comprise the entire, imaginary southwestern bordertown of Spurline. The economic survival of this town entirely depends on Virgil Ranchler (Orson Welles), the sole owner of the Golden Empire Ranch. The name evokes the real Imperial Valley shown at the beginning of Mann's *Border Incident*. The Golden Empire hinges on cheap Mexican labor, but Ranchler is worried about the purportedly negative influence that one of the braceros, Juan Martín (Joe Schneider), has on his daughter Skippy (Colleen Miller). He requests his two ruthless henchmen to "teach him a lesson". Yet, instead of roughing him up, they beat him to death under the eyes of one of his friends, an old bracero named Jesús Cisneros (Martin Garralaga), hidden outside the shack where the beating happens. Jesús reports the murder to the local sheriff and is later killed for his defiance of a dictatorial power. When sheriff Ben Sadler (Jeff Chandler) starts an investigation, the townspeople, afraid that such a scandal could ruin their businesses, try to beg him not to pursue the case. He stands alone against Ranchler's tyranny even if he knows how dreadfully the entire case might end for him. As happened before to Jesús, he and his family become the target of Ranchler's evil intentions. Ben has a car accident (the tycoon's yes-men loosen the lug nuts of his car's wheels), and then he is violently beaten, grabbed, and dragged by the wrist from a pick-up truck through the streets of Spurline and dumped in the town's central square. After recovering from the wounds, the sheriff becomes aware that the legal ways are not walkable anymore. He says to the townspeople: "Now you're shocked? All you decent people are shocked? For god's sake, why? Because my name's Ben Sadler instead of Juan Martín because I'm a taxpayer instead of a drifter?". Ben's linkage with immigrants is evident in the film from the beginning: the

only two people supporting him are Mexican bracero Jesús and Italian barber Tony (Mario Siletti), who knows that situations such as this must be immediately tackled or the U.S. will end up under the same Fascist despotism of 1920s Italy. Conversely, all the Anglo citizens declare their opposition to Ben's investigation, claiming that their county is "crawling with drifters" coming from south of the border, drifters that are allowed into the U.S. illegally while "innocent, decent people" have to take care of the situation alone. Ben has a tough time convincing them that there is nothing "innocent and decent" in their submission to Ranchler. When Ben finally confronts the enemy breaking through the gate of the Golden Empire to arrest him, the town's leading citizens, with changed hearts and minds, arrive to help their sheriff, finally making a stand against Ranchler's dictatorial practices.[19]

The film's main interest lies in its visual treatment of the borders. This treatment seems to have had a strong influence on Welles's subsequent hallucinatory view of the U.S.-Mexican border in *Touch of Evil*. The opening crane shot of *Man in the Shadow* starts from the still image of Ranchler's mansion, reproducing the southern style of a plantation house. It is nighttime, and two men meet in the courtyard. They move toward the camera, which slightly retrocedes and rises to discover the upper part of a chain-link fence. Then, it plunges on the fence, showing the two men approaching the barrier across the wire net. The board hung on the wall reads "Obreros no son permitidos a traves de esta cerca" ("braceros are not allowed to cross the fence"). By contrast, the two men easily walk through the fence gate and approach the bunkhouse. The camera follows their movement from a point of view that coincides with the bracero quarters to identify the ideological space occupied by the film. The music (composed by Hans J. Salter and Herman Stein) underscores the two men's ominous intention with strong percussions and acute strings counterpoised by the

[19] We find a similar plot in *The Lawless* (Joseph Losey 1950), where the persecution of young Chicano Pablo Rodríguez (Lalo Rios) is contested by only one person from the sleepy town of Santa Marta, an imaginary town very similar to Spurline, on the U.S.-Mexican border. After the initial hesitation, newspaperman Larry Wilder (Macdonald Carey) defends Pablo, immediately falling victim to the same ostracism. The film's most important message is the change of Larry from a lazy chronicler of Santa Marta's simple affairs into a political militant. Losey and the screenwriter Daniel Mainwaring wished to awaken audiences' political conscience, showing how lackadaisical citizens in the film could finally face their fears and react against general dishonesty. The most notable instance of this plot is *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann 1952), in which the general agreement of frightened citizens who refuse to help Marshal Will Kane (Gary Cooper) can be explained by the atmosphere of conformism and paranoia produced by the HUAC (Dibbern in Krutnik 2007: 97-112; Salvi 2020: 125–145; on the ambiguity of *High Noon*: Fisher 2022).

cheerful folk song played by the braceros. In this opening sequence, the fence between the mansion and the bunkhouse is pivotal in explaining the economic and social difference between the privileged life of those who settle on the bright side of the Golden Empire and the rest. Three other scenes are set at the Golden Empire's external gate, which appears throughout the film to describe the evolution in the relationship between ordinary people, frightened by Ranchler's tyrannic power, and the ranch itself, isolated in its privilege.

Ranchler's property is in the middle of the countryside, and no images or sequences show precisely how far from the town the mansion is. In any case, it seems that, in terms of space, the mansion where the ranch owner lives is in proximity to Spurline but far enough to give an impression of complete seclusion. The sheriff has three different interactions with the social and political space of the mansion. During the first approach to the Golden Empire, we see Ben's car moving along the border. A closer shot of a board hung on the boundary shows that Ranchler is not friendly with trespassers: "No hunting, no trespassing, violators will be shot". Two cowboys and dogs with vicious instincts, barking against Ben's car, are shown near the sign. The sheriff stops in front of the checkpoint and politely asks the man in charge to let him enter the gate, for he has a few questions for the owner. Behind the parallel lines of a barbed wire and a fence, the cowboy declares that they are not seeing many sheriffs "this way". Ben insists on seeing Ranchler, and the cowboy lets him in, not before having informed the owner and warned Ben against leaving the main road since the cattle might get edgy, a sinister comment on how badly the foremen of the Golden Empire can react against strangers. The visual style of the sequence emphasizes the linear composition of the fence's wooden planks and the barbed wire. The horizontal lines of the booth's window and door magnify the effect of separation and division. All these lines evoke the intricate negotiation needed to handle such an unconventional authority [Fig. 40]. The following dialogue is entrusted to Welles almost whispered lines, uttered in a suave and velvety voice, from which transpires the character's ambiguity. The final threat is nonetheless clear: "if you give me any more trouble, this county's gonna have another sheriff". Ben's sense of duty is unstoppable, and armed with a search warrant, he appears a second

time at the gate. The sheriff drives his car at high speed along the boundary, repetitively honking the horn when he stops in front of the gate. He gets out of the car and yells at the man inside the booth who exists from his den and scornfully comments upon his "making a lot of noise". The camera tracks in a closer two-shot of Ben and the cowboy. Only the search warrant allows him to enter this time, a warrant showing his willingness to violently tear down the wall behind which wrongdoing and crime are perpetrated. However, the legal paper and the discovery of a bloody splinter of wood do not solve anything but trigger a series of violent reactions (the killing of Jesús). This is the moment when Ben decides to turn toward the illegal path. To fight against the tycoon and overcome his fellow citizens, defined as "trained dogs", Ben must relinquish his sheriff badge and deal with Ranchler in his way. During nighttime, Ben's car again approaches the gate, but this time, it breaks through without even bothering to ask. The sign above the gate ruinously falls from the vehicle's rapid movement, and the cowboy rushes to the middle of the road, a shadow silhouetted against the car's taillights, in a worthless effort to stop him. The illegal trespassing performed by Ben Sadler looks ahead to Quinlan's unorthodox procedure in *Touch of Evil*. However, the former is justified by a completely different premise intended to restore confidence in a positive conclusion of similar events. Quinlan embodies the quick method of the Los Angeles Police Department against the wrong man in a crime that must be covered up. By contrast, Ben deviates from a legal procedure with the opposite aim in mind: to defend the victims against the perpetrators and accomplish an essential task for the survival of democracy.

The events recounted in *Man in the Shadow* reflect the hero's evolution in the late 1950s westerns and anticipate the argument of the next Chapter. The community of weak but good men helped by a noble cowboy in early westerns appears now extremely poisonous or paralyzed with fear and unable to support the courageous acts of the hero. Further, the hero's actions tend to double in that of an ethnic friend whose cause is sustained by the hero against eccentric Anglo-Saxon powerful men (this is the case of all the films here considered apart from *The Ox-Bow Incident* where, in any case, seven good men sustain three victims). Often, the hero is associated with a friend (*Border*

Incident, *Man in the Shadow*) or a lover (*The Furies*) of ethnic origin who extends the good intentions of the protagonist to achieve important causes from the point of view of a minority. Then, the critical role is played by the figurative and spatial image of boundaries in SBNW. In *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the fence separates a good minority from a weak, ignorant majority. In *Border Incident*, the U.S.-Mexico border outlines the exclusion of one group from protection and support, applying the typical fear and anxiety of noir films to the specific condition of statelessness of the braceros. In *The Furies*, the boundary between the Herreras's fortress and T.C.'s mansion acquires a vertical outline that recalls the sense of justice linked to the dispossession of the Hispanic family and its drive toward a re-conquest of rights over land. In the opening scene of *Man in the Shadow*, fences are simply exposing the inequality between braceros and the tycoon while, in the second part, the perimeter separating community and privilege is violently torn down, following a sensibility that was in the early 1950s primarily spread in American culture. Our analysis of *Man of Shadow* is much shorter than the others, but by focusing exclusively on the three excerpts of the scenes at the Golden Empire gate, we can explain the symbolic importance of the impulse toward destruction in the late 1950s political debate in the U.S.

Going back to the five aspects SBWs acquire from noir, we can see that they are distributed differently among the four films considered in this Chapter. If a lack of certainty in the responses coming from ideologies and values linked to the process of civilization (second aspect) is especially evident in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the attitude of coolness (third aspect) is detectable in all the ethnic characters described: Juan (Quinn) in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Pablo (Montalbán) in *Border Incident*, Juan (Roland) in *The Furies*. Violence, pessimism, and the perverse ceremony of killing (fourth aspect) are in all of them, especially in *Border Incident* (the killing of Jack). Finally, the first (realism) and fifth aspects (metaphorical and geographic boundaries) are particularly evident everywhere to demonstrate how the development of an ethics of the border linked to rights and claims of foreigners should be tied to the historical and political events of the late 1940s and 1950s. In the light offered

by these events, *noirish* emotions such as pessimism, depression, paranoia, sense of entrapment, and lack of certainty acquire a clear significance.

CHAPTER FIVE

The River: Runaway Hollywood, Mexico.

In her analysis of the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border in post-war Hollywood cinema, Stephanie Fuller argues that often the border is represented through its absence or signaled by flags or elementary markers, giving a vague perception of a shift between two countries. Diverse visual and oral aspects such as architectural motifs, language, music, and graphic codes also alert the viewer of the change while the border itself remains rarely represented. In Fuller's reading, this absence seems connected to the impossibility of defining a precise boundary between the two countries, a difficulty experienced since its inception with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Taking a period of three months—from February to May 1848—the Treaty is the result of clarifying statements, sub-clauses, ratifications, and reveals a redundant language that, instead of removing complexity, shows a tendency to overwrite the border. Fuller's reading of the genealogy of the Treaty shows that a map often precedes or even creates a territory, as the textual mapping of the border actually did in 1848. Following this rationale, the author points out that many Cold War movies recall the problem of representation experienced in the Treaty and belies an attempt by the U.S. to sanction a robust control over that area (Fuller 2015: 33–39). The urge to make the boundary appear as a clear and solid infrastructure, as a defense barricade well founded on the ground and upheld by strong regulations, policies, and facilities, led the same movies to elude the actual image of checkpoints, fences, gates, chainlink, obligatory walkways featuring instead authoritative figures whose offices often display maps of the area. This is an act of recoiling from absence and confusion we described above, a sign of an effort to fix and control an unruly and indefinite borderzone, a hint of a cartographic anxiety, in Giuliana Bruno's definition (2002; Ibid. 39–50).

I want to revise the absoluteness of this reading, emphasizing the importance of symbolic or imaginary uses of space in Hollywood. As Fuller points out, a map creates a territory, and certainly, the U.S.-Mexico border was created during the Treaty. Yet, films are not always a response to the

urge of holding control over the border; they are not always a response to cartographic anxiety. In the previous Chapter, we saw how classical Hollywood tackled the problem of presenting actual checkpoints with more or less metaphorical fences. The fence can be considered as a dark symptom of a desire to maintain the exclusion of ethnic characters from citizenship, or as a claim for their fight to possess the same rights as a native-born. Attributed to the U.S.-Mexican borderland, the cinematic image of the fence evokes a precise cultural discourse that has a strong repercussion on the public perception of the possible friendship between Mexico and the U.S. since it tends to emphasize all the plausible reasons that both sides have to confirm the shortcoming of a collaboration. This Chapter reverses the perspective, proposing Hollywood's symbolic treatment of the opposite image: the river. Compared to the solid boundary, the river suggests connection and openness. The fluidity that characterizes it upholds precise spatial and cultural discourse based on transnational/cosmopolitan aspirations. The fence, as a form of civil engineering and landscaping, can evoke a sense of fear, pessimism, and discouragement. On the other hand, the river, often used as a natural border between two lands, can also serve as a means of connection. Peoples use the river to connect and combine diverse points in a landscape. While the fence is the response of a human agency, the river appears as a natural agency, expression of the land itself.

In the films considered in this last Chapter, the river is *only sometimes* surfacing in the images. Still, friendship, hope, faith are *always shown* as the imaginary outlook encompassed by the river's inspiring principle and cultural motif. By emphasizing the importance of the symbolic presence of a fluid interspace between Mexico and the U.S., we can correct the concept of absolute non-representability of the boundary or the tendency to reduce it to a cartographic anxiety. This Chapter also aims to offer a counterpoint to the *noirish* motif of the fence discussed in Chapter 4. In his analysis of the culturally constructed spaces of the bordertown of Los Angeles, Celestino Deleyto focuses on the processes whereby a real place is transformed into a cinematic space, producing a detailed and accurate spatial discourse. "Real places", as Deleyto puts it, "are transformed in the film narrative through editing, camera position, and frame composition in order to produce meaning"

(2016: 168). In this way, a film can be compared to other ways of constructing space, being the cinema "one more cultural mechanism", like many others constantly re-creating social space. This study does not discuss urban spaces and probably emphasizes less the real than the imaginary space represented in the films. However, the spatial discourses conveyed by these films cannot be understood beyond a consideration of the real space between the U.S. and Mexico. The transformation Deleyto describes in the opening pages of his volume is equally valid for analyzing the spatial discourse on the rural region of the border these films produce. So, the real Rio Grande/Río Bravo is used in the movies here considered as a symbol to deliver their precise spatial and cultural discourse over a borderzone as a fluid territory where peoples can freely move. In the imaginary outlook conjured up by these films, the river running through a territory is less a dividing line than a channel connecting people living in the area.

This last Chapter focuses more on the human material that animates the space here considered. Anthony Quinn, Gilbert Roland, and Budd Boetticher, two Mexican actors and an American filmmaker, represent specific cases of personal involvement in a cross-cultural dialogue along the U.S.-Mexico border. In their filmography, the real space of Mexico and the cultural discourse of the border are entwined since all these authors share a deep knowledge of the Mexican land and culture, albeit having lived or worked for most of their lives on the northern side of the border. They often visited or returned to Mexico in their career, spending years in this country. The experience and knowledge they gained during their lifetime enabled them to enhance the perception of these two countries as neighboring places in the public's opinion. They are the border-crossers that this thesis hails and celebrates, helped by a different practice inaugurated by runaway productions.

Runaway Hollywood

Scholars' opinions on runaway productions keep changing over time. This section suggests that these productions tended to promote cross-cultural transnational exchanges. To some degree, this different

practices[1] in the postwar era were responsible for making cinema less of a national cultural product than it originally seemed. They encourage an attitude of openness across boundaries, achieved not just by using an ethnically diverse cast and crew, but also by choosing Mexico as a location and as a setting for the plot.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood primarily shot films indoors or in studio backlots. If the plot demanded it, the cast and crew would move outdoors to take advantage of the diverse landscapes available in California, such as mountains, forests, flatlands, water basins, and more. According to Daniel Steinhart, this trend was embodied in the industry maxim: "a rock's a rock, a tree's a tree—shoot it at Griffith Park" (Steinhart 2019: 5). Paramount Studios famously created a map that indicated the best locations for each setting [Fig. 41]. For instance, the Tahoe Forest could stand in for the French Alps or Siberia, while the Sacramento River could become the Mississippi. The Pacific Coast could offer the seashores of Africa or Spain, and the towns near Tahoe Lake were comparable to New England. The Salton Sea could be transformed into the Red Sea, and the arid Southwest or Wyoming cattle ranches could be found near Death Valley or the Mojave. Space in cinema is often false, artificial, feigned, illusory. It is creative play over the landscape, an imagined geography, an atlas of emotions. Hollywood excelled at offering vicarious traveling experiences to its eager audiences: we have an artificial London in *Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich 1935), a false Paris as a background for the ménage-à-trois of *Design for Living* (Ernst Lubitsch 1933). Vienna was replicated in *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls 1948), and Venice in *Trouble in Paradise* (Ernst Lubitsch 1932). The Paramount Studio Location Map brilliantly encapsulates this trend, which included not just foreign locations but also American urban centers and rural areas that were just as difficult to reach for film crews. It was only after World War II that, as Steinhart notes, "location filming both in the U.S. and abroad continued to increase due to some critical disruptions

[1] We cannot compare runways to mode of production since the studios were still central and the methods remained largely unchanged. So, we tend to talk about different practices (going abroad and hiring local crews) more than of methods. The method of shooting remained the same. Still, the contact between different practices produced a general modification since the systematic and standardized American practice of production mingled with the creative and improvised Mexican practice.

within the industry". Numerous financial and economic conditions such as cheaper labor costs outside California led Hollywood Studios to consider as appealing the option of using foreign locations. According to Steinhart, the trend reveals an increase of these practices from the late 1940s through the 1950s with a peak in 1958 (Ibid. 9).

International productions and location shooting affected the product in many ways. De-taxations led to a decrease in production expenses, while opportunities to promote films abroad increased. This, in turn, made censorship reactions usually[2] less critical. Runaway productions also had a significant impact on the style and content of films, resulting in an increased perception of a Hollywood-style cosmopolitanism (Ibid. 9–15). The films shot abroad were often produced by independents under release contracts with Hollywood studios. Since their contents often emphasized values of friendship and tolerance over financial profit, these films appeared less a reflection of the global expansion of the power of a single nation than an indication of the film industry's desire to promote its openness toward other cultures and beliefs. Hollywood wanted to use the impression of authenticity to the best advantage, often creating picturesque compositions and underscoring the visual appeal of real locales. The films attained a sense of authenticity especially when the filmmakers were led to choose the location not following economic advantages (detaxation, cheap labor expenses) but specific creative intentions to make evident the overlapping between where the film was shot and where it was set. Compositional conventions were traditionally standardized and remained unaltered—depth of field, perspectives, and proper lighting were always the same; they did not change according to whether the crew was abroad or not—but by shooting abroad, the filmmaker could apply them with an added bonus. By shooting the scenes where the film was set, the filmmaker could experience an immense difference with respect to a limited reconstruction in the studio backlot. On location, the place could pop up out of the screen as surprisingly vivid and "real". On top of that, authentic places requested authentic faces and genuine languages (pronunciation and speech),

[2] This is not always true since, for instance, in Mexico the censorship had different targets and was measured differently when compared to the PCA. See Fein 2000; Tierney 2011.

increasing job opportunities for local actors, technicians, and crews. Protagonists of many SBWs set and shot in Mexico were veterans such as Pedro Armendáriz, who worked for Ford in *The Fugitive* (1947; Chapter 2) and Anthony Quinn, one of the most cosmopolitan actors of Mexican origin (*The Ox-Bow Incident* 1942; Chapter 4). Quinn's presence is pivotal in many movies related to Mexico such as *Ride Vaquero!* (John Farrow 1953), *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner 1956), and *The Ride Back* (Allen H. Miner 1957). He also starred in runaway productions in Mexico: *The Magnificent Matador* (Budd Boetticher 1955), *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan 1952) and *The River's Edge* (Allan Dwan 1957). For his part, Gilbert Roland made in this period an important shift toward a different phase of his career, focusing on roles of Mexican Revolutionaries as happens in *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* (George Sherman 1955) and *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer 1956), an opportunity also created by the fact that both are runaways. All these actors offered a variety of characters who pleased audiences from both sides of the border, contributing with creative details and a personal touch to filling the visual appeal and depth of the reality conveyed through the screen.

Browsing through the list of films that Steinhart ascribes to the category of runaway productions, we discern a range of different options in terms of the relationship between story settings and shooting locations. The first case of overlapping is in *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann, 1949), shot on location in Baja California and Sonora (Mexico). The top-down shot of the central canal of the Imperial Valley that opens the film adheres to documentary conventions and offers a precise spatial discourse of the border between Mexico and the U.S. (Chapter 4). Mann's film is one of the few referential images of the actual border in 1949, and one that deliberately aims to evoke a precise idea over it. Still, as mentioned above, the image of the border is often reconstructed, symbolic, or adherent to the cultural discourse the film aims to convey. Consequently, many films that are shot in Mexico cannot be accredited as part of our corpus *only because* they are shot there. Even though Henry Hathaway shot *Garden of Evil* (1954) in Mexico (where it is also set), the film seems more preoccupied with offering the melodrama of a love triangle unrelated to any spatial

discourse over Mexico.[3] This probably happens because of the absence of a direct encounter between Anglo and Mexican characters in the plot. Our corpus is thus based on those films that use a real location showing a willingness to transform that place into a creative and imaginative geography of the mind that mirrors the anxiety, fear, or desires of American citizens toward Mexico, or the perception that a Mexican character has of their homeland. These films more easily serve an idea of a cultural and spatial borderzone since they are also often intended to target south of the border audiences—in the sense of Mexicans living in the U.S. as well as those who still lived in Mexico. Suffice it to consider the cases of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston 1948; Chapter 2), *Bullfighter and the Lady* (Budd Boetticher 1951), *The Magnificent Matador*, *Border River* (George Sherman 1954), *Vera Cruz* (Robert Aldrich 1954), *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Bandido!* to understand that for these films, the use of a real location is an occasion to extensively and thoroughly capture the symbolic/expressive, cultural, and political frame of this specific country. In a word, in these cases, the choice of land as a shooting location was not accidental or simply dictated by tax reasons. John Huston, Budd Boetticher, and George Sherman personally knew and loved Mexico. For them, the Mexican landscape was not simply there to be framed into a postcard showing high realism according to usual conventions. The choice of an authentic landscape helped them to convey complex and rich symbolic meanings pertinent to a precise cultural discourse about the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. Through the ways in which it is shot and framed in these films, the authentic Mexican landscape absorbs and articulates cross-border human interactions, cultural positions, personal stories, and emotions, a micro-history that redefines cultural boundaries, at times reinforcing them, and other times dissolving or questioning them.

This chapter thus combines movies shot and set in Mexico—*Border River*, *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, *Bandido!* and *Vera Cruz*—with films that, despite being shot in the U.S.—*The Ride Back* and *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher 1958) still convey a precise spatial and cultural

[3] Similarly, even if they are shot south of the border, *The Last Frontier* (Anthony Mann 1956) or *Hondo* (John Farrow 1954) reproduce traditional categories related to the myth of the western frontier.

discourse over the U.S.-Mexico border that is highly self-conscious and interested in conjuring up values of friendship and openness.

Border River *(1954)*

Stanley Corkin and Christopher Frayling believe that westerns of the 1950s made use of Mexican locations and scenery principally in order to foreground the greatness of the U.S. and reinforce its identity. For these scholars, Mexico is used either as another territory for the expansion of the U.S., as the West was during the Indian Wars, or as an inconsequential backdrop to the adventures of characters going southbound. Corkin posits that westerns made during the Cold War reflect the "inevitability" of American expansion and are imbued with the theory of Manifest Destiny that justified the control of the entire continent (Corkin 2004: 157–172). Frayling leans toward a more nuanced position. He points out that sophisticated Anglo mercenaries often intervene with a superior fire-power, expertise, and a generous dose of paternalism, to help poor Mexican Revolutionaries to accomplish their goals. These films equalled Mexico to Revolution, and Revolution to confusion. As he points out, this country "simply provided colorful exteriors, cheap extras and a fashionably 'Third World' atmosphere" (Frayling [1981] 2006: 217–225). Both authors emphasize the role of Mexico as one that serves to pinpoint and foreground American identity and nationality in classical westerns. As we will see, this is not the case of *Border River* (George Sherman 1954).

An interesting case of SBWs is the one showing a Confederate officer moving to Mexico in order to pursue his rebellion against the Union or to find a way to cope with failure. This plot can be found in *Border River* and *Vera Cruz*, and in other films that exceed the period considered in this thesis such as *The Undefeated* (Andrew McLaglen 1969) or *Rio Conchos* (Gordon Douglas 1964). All these films tend to make Mexico appear on a more complex ground than that shown by Frayling and Corkin. Peter Stanfield points out that the representation of southern Confederate officers in many westerns from the late 1930s onward usually identifies a problematic status concerning the Union that finds in the West an occasion to be resolved. For instance, in *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles 1931;

Chapter 2), *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Henry Hathaway 1936), or *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1942; Chapter 4) a southerner can "cleanse and renew" himself in the West and be transformed again into an American citizen (Stanfield 2001: 207). The author points out that, usually, this former Confederate officer embodies the retrograde values of the Old South in a plot that invariably maintains an echo of the social and economic contrasts of the Civil War, namely those between tradition and modernity. These contrasts are worked out in the movie, often with the intention to re-establish a new state of the Union via a process of westernization of the conservative mindset of a southerner. In transforming a southerner into a cowboy, these films resolve a set of complex negotiations between opposite views, usually stressing American values such as white egalitarianism, democracy, freedom, and individualism that were absent from the social and cultural substratum of the Old South (Ibid. 193–212). As Stanfield suggests, censorship also contributed to the prevalence of this formula. Hollywood could not be excessively frank in the representation of controversial aspects linked to the Old South and its retrograde mindset since the PCA strongly recommended avoiding plots that could deliberately offend citizens of the Southern states. Pro-southern sentiments thus appeared in many westerns, albeit accurately purged of aspects related to slavery and racism, and reduced to a generic concept of "tradition" that had to be purged in the West. In westerns from the 1930s onward we find many sympathetic southern characters: Wallace Beery's Reb in *Wyoming* (Richard Thorpe 1940) or James Cagney's Jim Kincaid in *The Oklahoma Kid* (Lloyd Bacon 1939) are possible instances of sympathetic southerners. In the majority of these films, the southerner is a depositary of a nostalgic vision of a long-gone 'America', a symbol of the fissures of the Union, an ambivalent character who should transform himself so that a new, different idea of the nation could emerge. Sam Fuller's *Run of the Arrow* (1957) offers an interesting case study to explain Stanfield's reading. Here, veteran officer O'Meara (Rod Steiger) develops a strong antagonism against the U.S. He goes West, joins the Sioux, and takes a wife. O'Meara refuses to be recognized as an American citizen until the outbreak of the Indian Wars. Captain Clark (Brian Keith) then leads the officer to understand that his hate toward homeland would simply exacerbate the anger

that haunts the character to an unbearable level. He thus persuades O'Meara to modify his vision and join again the army in its war against the Natives.

In *Border River* (George Sherman 1954), we have a similar chivalric view of the South in the character of Confederate Major Clete Mattson (Joel McCrea). An essential deviation from the pattern described by Stanfield is nonetheless in the trajectory of the journey. At the end of the Civil War, the character does not turn to the West, where he would undergo the process of erasure of his questionable heritage, but goes farther south, to Mexico, where he can continue to fight against the Union thanks to the support given by a foreign country. Far removed from concepts of slavery and close to those of radicalism and revolution, Mexico offers simultaneously a ratification and a veto against the lost cause of the rebellious Old South. Still, what is more interesting than the change in the character is the change in the spatial and cultural discourse on Mexico.

The film recounts the story of Clete Mattson, who arrives in a small territory across the river from the U.S. called Zona Libre to buy supplies for the Confederacy using gold stolen from the Union. The territory is ruled by the ambiguous Calleja (Pedro Armendáriz), a relentless and intolerant Mexican dictator, who offers protection to outlaws on the lam and takes advantage of the total absence of rules to make profitable deals. The Zona Libre is a dangerous territory mainly because it attracts any sort of corrupt characters from both sides of the border and from abroad. They are all interested in the opportunity to get rich in the free zone: two cattle rustlers from Texas look for dishonest methods to thrive; German businessman Baron Von Holden (Ivan Triesault) aims to replace the dictator Calleja; Captain Vargas (Alfonso Bedoya), Calleja's assistant, attempts to keep gold for himself. Above all, Calleja aims to obtain the maximum profit through his personal deduction from the exchange. The Major openly distrusts each and every one of them, but he is also in desperate need of supplies that only Mexico can procure. With the help of Carmelita Carias (Yvonne de Carlo), Calleja's girlfriend, Mattson thus refuses to make a deal with the despicable dictator and looks for an agreement with the revolutionary forces of Benito Juárez, historically remembered as the first Mexican president to begin a new phase of friendship with the U.S., a position that he 'attained' after

Juarez (William Dieterle 1939; Chapter 2).[4] The legitimate bargain between Mattson and the Juaristas suggests that regulated trade and commercial exchange are the best tools for nurturing vicinity between the U.S. and Mexico. However, this condition of concerted regulations across the border is made *not* by a representative but by an internal enemy of the Union, a Confederate officer. Furthermore, the multiple interests shown in the Zona Libre, especially the foreign presence of Baron Von Holden, recall the historical fight between Juárez and the foreign power represented by French Emperor Napoleon III and his support of the Second Mexican Empire ruled by Austrian archduke Maximilian I (1864-1867), a fight certainly supported by the U.S. but that nonetheless represents a fundamental moment of evolution in the country's history. To a certain extent, thus *Border River* is a version of Stanfield's cases in which it is not the southerner officer who undergoes a change but the country itself, another country. It is an actual birth of a nation based on values compliant with the U.S. but sanctioned by one of its enemy.

The mutual and legitimate obligation between the Major and the Juaristas is reinforced in the relationship with Carmelita. As often happens in Hollywood cinema, romance triggers the necessary transformation in characters. On the one hand, the Major understands that his excessive idealism must be curtailed in order to prevent a degeneration into fanaticism—which leads him to make the bargain with the Juaristas instead of Calleja. On the other, Carmelita undergoes a political awakening that leads her to reject the corrupt influence of Calleja. They refuse a dictatorial government that is undoubtedly beneficial to both characters but not driven by correct beliefs and values. The first change in Carmelita happens during the encounter with the Major when she takes care of him after the fistfight with the Texans. She explains that ideals are "a luxury" and that she only cares about getting rich through Calleja's corrupt business. Ideals lead people to death, she exclaims, while showing a portrait of her father and brother, dressed in the uniform of the Mexican army as soldiers of General Santa Anna. They died during the battle of Buena Vista (1847), fighting against the U.S.

[4] I am writing the name of Benito Juárez with an accent apart when appears as the title of the film of Dieterle and in quotations from English-language sources.

army, like the Major in the historical present of the film. She also mentions the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, adding that her family also had to face the tribulation of losing the home they were fighting for, "bargained away across the treaty Table". This is another aspect recalling the fate of the Confederacy: like many families in the Old South, Carmelita's family members have lost "first their lives, then everything else".

The vital role each represents for the other revolves around the centrality of the river, a motif related to rescue and deliverance. The film opens with a reversal of the western classical trope where a damsel in distress is traditionally saved in a last-minute rescue by an indomitable cowboy. In *Border River*, a defeated Confederate officer is saved by an indomitable Mexican woman who owns a cantina south of the border. The film opens in fact with a rider—later we learn he is the Confederate officer Mattson—scrambling down from a rocky cliff and heading toward the Rio Grande/Río Bravo to plunge into the river. The Union troupe follows him, shooting at the rider on the lam. The viewer sees this pursuit in a long focal-length shot from a point of view that entirely coincides with a group of bystanders on the Mexican bank. Calleja sits on an elegant carriage with Carmelita and proposes a bet to Vargas: "One hundred dollars gold that he does not make it to this side". Their detachment from the human condition is evident. During the problematic ride to reach the other bank—a ride that, in those days, probably recalled myriads of border-crossings by braceros—the river appears almost like a vast, solid matter, equated to the rocky formation enclosing the horizon on the American side. Despite its fluid quality, the water hinders the rider from going to the other side, making his movement extremely lengthy. He falls from his horse under the firing gunshots of pursuers—Union soldiers as border patrol agents—and feigns death to find salvation on a lower point, down the river. Carmelita runs toward that point to help the man reach the ground. The river appears now different: silvery crests and gentle curls animate its surface, erasing the previous perception of the river as solid matter [Figg. 42-43].

Toward the end of the picture, she saves his life again in the proximity of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, an event that repeats Carmelita's initial kindness. The river is thus associated with a symbol

of relief and assistance, since it coincides with a moment of salvation in every scene in which it appears. In this sequence, she loses the precious jewel that Calleja gave her as a present, which reduces the woman to being a possession of the dictator. This object represents her entrapment within a purported Free Zone. At the same time, Mattson receives a vital warning from Carmelita's part that saves the Confederacy's last hope to fight. The bullion appears on the horizon, sliding over the silvery surface of the river as the raft moves toward the Mexican bank, confirming the image of the river as a saving trope. The musical accompaniment emphasizes this moment as a revelation that seals the pact between the two characters under mutual trust and affection. Her choice is further confirmed in the final scene when she pulls the Major out of the quicksand while he is fighting against Calleja over a different view of the U.S.-Mexico border. The Major' and the Juaristas' regulated and controlled concept of boundary ought to win over the other, which is inhumane and dictatorial.

The situation of need attributed to an American character in war against the Union and who must look for a bargain with Mexico is thus an interesting modification of what Stanfield described as the usual plot of westerns featuring Confederate officers. Through this change of trajectory, the film avoids the spatial discourse of the West as a synonym for the American national identity, a space nurturing values of egalitarianism, democracy, freedom, and individualism—as happens, for instance, in Fuller's *Run of the Arrow*. Conversely, *Border River* offers a spatial discourse of Mexico that keeps the country's identity separate and distinguished. Mexico does not serve to pinpoint and foreground American identity—at the end of the film, the Major continues to fight the Union instead of adhering to different values. Moreover, Mexico is not another territory for the expansion of the U.S., as Corkin argues, since the Major does not intend to politically or economically overrun the territory of Zone Libre. The film preserves the Mexican identity by recounting one of the pivotal events of its history: the fall of the empire and the restoration of the republic under Benito Juárez. It also avoids Frayling's argument about westerns that equal Mexico to Revolution and Revolution to confusion since here the revolutionary government of Juárez brings profound liberal changes. On top of that, the saving symbol of the river represents the imaginary prospect that unites two countries in mutual help and

support as the romance between Carmelita and the Major represents the promise of the liquifying process happening at the river banks.

The following section focuses on Anthony Quinn and Gilbert Roland, whose lives and careers demonstrate a continuity between different cultural contexts along the border. Their presence in runaway productions is a declination of the image of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo we have discussed in *Border River*. In the films discussed in the next section, the river is often reduced to a creek (*The Ride Back*) or to a bridge over invisible stream of water (*Buchanan Rides Alone*). Yet, its symbolism is otherwise present in terms of friendship, openness, mutual understanding, specularity and communality. In all these films, *The Ride Back*, *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, *Bandido!*, *Buchanan Rides Alone* and *Vera Cruz*, a friendship between a Mexican and an Anglo becomes central. In some cases, a Mexican character saves an Anglo friend (*The Ride Back* and *Bandido!*), in others, the Anglo character is transformed by his contact with a Mexican friend (*The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, *Buchanan Rides Alone*, and *Vera Cruz*). Friendship between Mexicans and Anglos is showcased in all of them, identifying a precise position over geopolitical concerns regarding the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Since an important role in runaway production in Mexico is given to Mexican actors, the next paragraph will focus on the progressive change in the representation of Mexicans in the 1950s.

Sympathetic portrayals of Mexicans

The 1950s was a decade of many contradictions. The paranoid atmosphere of the Cold War produced a tendency of inward-looking conservatism based on homogeneity and assimilation. It was not a good time to show alternative positions even if Hollywood, as we have seen in the previous chapter, attempted to offer a tentative redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, questioning themes of national belonging. Contrary to the socially conscious popular culture that characterized the 1930s, a decade of connection between high art and ordinary people or between vernacular expressions and popular products, the 1950s appeared as a placid period. Clara Rodríguez describes

it through a series of significant icons of middle-class tranquillity, which were also projected in TV programs such as *Father Knows Best* (CBS 1954-60), *I Love Lucy* (CBS 1951-57), and *The Red Skelton Show* (NBC 1951-53; CBS 1953-70). The romantic visions of the common man emphasized in the 1930s became in the 1950s a fantasy realized based on consumerism, the abundance of goods, technological advancement, suburban dreams, and the baby boom (Rodríguez 2004: 103–105). In comparison to the 1930s social responsibility over collective action, art and cultural products of the 1950s seemed to always evade the reality of domestic and international conflict and instability. Still, these events were already happening: in 1954, the Supreme Court declared that separate was not equal during the famous trial Brown v. Board of Education so that African American students were allowed to attend the same schools of white students in Arkansas. In 1955, Emmett Till was brutally killed and Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to move to the colored side. In 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. began his campaign of passive resistance against segregation, racism, violence. The civil rights movement was born and the process also involved Mexicans.

At the level of representation, Hollywood continued to offer a limited range of alternatives to Mexican actors, with a majority of erotic and exotic roles of dark, forbidden, dream lovers. As Rodríguez points out, "they were the women that audiences yearned to touch, lusted after, the ones their mothers had warned them about; they made their viewers' hearts skip a beat and promised rapture and full surrender" (Ibid. 111). Usually, the escapist fantasy with a Mexican dream lover subsided to leave space for a more acceptable and untroubled relationship with a non-Latino, who represented the image of good morality and good sense. In any case, when compared to clumsy and not particularly attractive, often sexually restrained partners, either male or female, a sultry Mexican man or woman was a strong temptation for the audience, the alternative they would choose even if at the end of the movie the plot did not seem to approve of it. In general, ethnic characters were usually more narrowly developed than the others or described as belonging to a lower socio-economic status.

One of the first reasons that explain a progressive modification of this premise was the presence of an expert on Latin America within the PCA, Addison Durland.[5] John Hay 'Jock' Whitney, the head of the special Motion Picture Division within the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (an office created to follow the dispositions of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy; Chapter 2) strongly upheld the candidacy of Durland in this role. Under Durland's control, pictures had to fit the requests of the southern neighbor if they wanted a wide distribution in Mexico. Characters became increasingly positive: they could sing, dance, and flirt but they also had to reflect the image of a modern Mexican elite that wanted to promote a prosperous image of their country, one largely assimilated to European values and mindset. The Anglo tourists in Mexico represented in films were destined to have the "most memorable moments" of their life south of the border. With the increasing number of location shootings in Mexico, the use of local human resources helped to achieve the needed goals. The PCA, in the person of Durland, guarded and secured authenticity: for instance, if a film was set in Brazil, local characters could not speak Spanish, much less American English, but Portuguese. Moreover, when prominent Mexican stars were involved, Durland did not censure the film assuming that the presence of a star from south of the border was in itself assurance against offensive representations (Rodríguez 2004: 82–83; O'Neil 2001).

Many examples of this changed situation are detectable. The first that comes to mind is Helen Ramirez, played by Kathy Jurado, in *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann 1951). She is not just the leading man's former mistress but the proprietor of a saloon in town, like Carmelita Carias in *Border River*, a woman who not only overcomes her rival in terms of sexual charge but also lectures the blonde, prim and pacifist Amy Flower (Grace Kelly) on true love and appearance. In *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner 1956), Jurado gives an astounding performance as Estella, the vigorous assistant to the town doctor and mother of an estranged child. She manages to challenge the closed-minded views of the town folk by subtly resisting them. At the same time, she helps Dave Robles, played by Anthony Quinn, who is an outcast pistolero, to change his perception of self. As a consequence, he

[5] He was born in 1903 to a New York banker and a Cuban journalist and raised in Cuba.

comes to realize that violence and rebellion are not the only solutions to his psychological issues. One of the most popular and well-known evidence of this change is nonetheless in George Stevens's big production of *Giant* (1956).

The movie is more a melodrama than a western since it is not set in the historical phase usually considered in the genre (1870-1890), and describes the life events of a family, usual argument of the melodrama. Still, it is one of the most significant among the 1950s liberal movies that showcase a better representation for Mexican actors. Even if it is not a western, a brief reference to this film is needed in a chapter focusing on the centrality of Mexican actors. Through the character of Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor), member of a liberal family of the East coast, *Giant* openly makes a statement on the historical evidence that Texas was once a territory that belonged to Mexico. "We really stole Texas, didn't we? I mean, away from Mexico", she smartly asks her future husband, Jordan 'Bick' Benedict (Rock Hudson), during their first encounter in Maryland. In this light, the film openly bemoans the discrimination of Mexicans in Texas, a situation that is clearly perceived by Leslie when the couple is established in the huge territory that belongs to the Benedicts, "La Reata". Many scenes describe the terrible hygienic and economic conditions of those living in Vientecito, close to the mansion. When, for instance, Àngel Obregon (Sal Mineo) approaches the Christmas gathering dressed in military uniform, he is surely welcomed with grace by Leslie but forced to wait outside the room when Bick reunites all the possible male heirs of the empire. When his corpse comes back from the war in a draped casket, the image of the funeral that follows is moving and equally dense with criticism. The sequence shows the mourning of a death gallantly given for the homeland with flowers, flags, and soldiers in uniform proudly standing in a misty brownish area covered with tombstones. While it emphasizes Àngel's honour and courage, the film simultaneously disapproves of a government that cannot protect the life of citizens/ranchers left in disastrous hygienic conditions in a ghost town where the dead outnumber the living.

On the other hand, *Giant* openly upholds the possibility of change. The film exactly describes, in fact, a process of re-scaling of the immensity represented by the territory of "La Reata" toward a

more reasonable dimension where Mexicans can find a new place—albeit this is happening not because Mexicans gain positions of power but because a different competitor, oil tycoon Jett Rink (James Dean), changes the scenario. In any case, the movie starts with Mexicans as trespassers and ends with a fully legitimate romance between Jordan Benedict III (Dennis Hopper) and Juana Villalobos (Elsa Cárdenas).[6] Juana is a very interesting instance of a change in representation. Played by Cárdenas, a Mexican actress who worked on both sides of the border during her entire career, Juana is not the usual stereotypical bombshell nor a representative of the lower classes: she is an aspiring doctor who has an internship at the hospital. In this and many other ways, the film fully addresses Leslie's opening remark, upholding the recognition and inclusion of Mexicans within the initially exclusive group of the Benedicts, who many years before had stolen land from them. However, the change is never taken for granted: the hairdressing salon and the restaurant refuse to serve Juana, despite her being the wife of the heir of one of the most famous families in Texas. In this sense, the brawl with the restaurant owner during the journey back to "La Reata" toward the film ending is remarkable. Bick gets into a fight with the owner shortly after the latter refuses to serve his daughter-in-law. However, he is not successful in persuading the racist man to change his behavior. The outcome of the brawl is that *all* the Benedict members, Mexicans and not Mexicans, are *not* allowed to eat. While Bick personally undergoes a substantial change, there is no sign that the same modification toward openness and tolerance will ever happen in the world around him—not certainly in Sarge's hamburger joint. Simply, Bick gets knocked flat on his back amidst dirty dishes and tables turned upside-down. The owner puts a sign on his stomach, "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone", to make clear that he does not want to serve him, either.

Like the change showcased by the Benedicts, the inclusion of new actors in the range of more complex and interesting roles is never taken for granted nor universal. Openness is a partial and uneven, unstable change, private more than social, an individual effort more than a universal outcome.

[6] The closing image of the two grandchildren, one with dark eyes and skin, the other blond, with fair skin and blue eyes, is the symbol of a unity-in-diversity that does not necessarily assimilate the other into a coherent group but aspires to maintain his social and psychological characteristics intact. This image clearly underscores Stevens' liberal position over social concerns and civil rights.

The Mexican savior in The Ride Back *(1957)*

One of the recurrent motifs in westerns of the postwar era was, in Rodríguez's opinion, that of the "Anglo good samaritans". According to the author, the "good Samaritans appeared in many of the earlier westerns" where "Anglo cowboys fought 'bad Mexicans' in defense of 'good Mexicans'—because the Mexicans could not help themselves" (Ibid. 125). The author reads this motifs in the light of the willingness of the U.S. to preserve its interest in Latin American countries, especially against any other influence coming from the Soviet Union. In Rodríguez's opinion, the motif is also present in *Giant*, where Leslie works very hard to welcome and accept, defend and support, rule and guard the "poor Mexicans" of Vientecito. In any case, as we have seen, in *Giant*, the purported "saviors" end up losing their privileged position. *The Ride Back* (Allen H. Miner 1957), a movie starring Anthony Quinn, turns the motif of the good Samaritan on its head since it presents a plot based on a Mexican savior.

Anthony Quinn was one of the most eclectic and cosmopolitan actors working in Hollywood during this era. Born Manuel Antonio Rodolfo Quinn Oaxaca in Chihuahua, the actor famously played a wide range of different ethnicities on the screen, to which his many highly acclaimed Mexican roles must be added. *Blood and Sand* (Rouben Mamoulian 1941), *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellmann 1942, Chapter 4), *The Brave Bulls* (Robert Rossen 1951), *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan 1952), *Blowing Wild* (Hugo Fregonese 1953), *Ride, Vaquero!* (John Farrow 1953), *The Magnificent Matador* (Budd Boetticher 1955), *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner 1956), *The River's Edge* (Allan Dwan 1957), and *The Ride Back* all star Quinn in the role of a Mexican. His other parts ranged from that of an Italian strongman in *La Strada* (Federico Fellini 1954) to French painter Paul Gauguin in *Lust for Life* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956). He also played the Mongol warrior Attila in *Attila the Hun* (Pietro Francisci 1954) and an Eskimo in *The Savage Innocents* (Nicholas Ray 1960). His best-remembered roles are from the 1960s, when he played Zorba

in *Zorba, the Greek* (Michael Cacoyannis 1964) and Auda Abu Tayi, the Arab sheik, in *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean 1962).

This variety of roles testifies to the increasing number of runaway productions that impacted both the style and the content of Hollywood films and, thus, of the actors who could offer the most authentic performances according to the choice of location. Quinn was a peculiar actor whose life and career are difficult to pinpoint since his heirs never donated to archives documents over which a scholar interested in Quinn can work (apart from the two significant autobiographies, *One Man Tango* and *The Original Sin,* or books on his other interest, figurative art). Still, we know that Quinn was never interested in the strategy of invisibility that was sometimes used by Latino actors looking for better roles to avoid typecasting. He never accepted marketing pressures to play down or suppress his ethnic identity. Conversely, he transformed a purported limitation into a strength. Quinn always brought out of his roles, whether playing a Mexican or another ethnicity, a chance to ponder human or psychological conditions beyond ethnic specificity. This ability to break out from expected codes and principles gave him an extremely modern sensibility shaped by cosmopolitan values of openness to all humankind. Ideally, Quinn is the perfect representative of a thesis interested in explaining the cosmopolitan aspirations of the classical western.

The Ride Back recounts the story of a man of mixed origin, Mexican on his father's side, Roberto Kallen (Anthony Quinn), who kills two cowboys in self-defense and escapes to Mexico. Sheriff Chris Hamish (William Conrad) is on his tail and follows the outlaw to a Mexican village, Cerralvo, where the sheriff finds him living with a woman, Elena (Lita Milan), who is devoted to Roberto. Through the help of a priest, Father Ignatius (Victor Millan), who wants to protect his village from violence, Hamish succeeds in capturing the man to lead him to Scottsville, a border town in the U.S., where he must undergo a murder trial. The trip is nonetheless hampered by many unexpected events: Elena joins them but is stopped at the border for she cannot produce her documents to leave Mexico; the Apaches kill a family of Anglo settlers, and they have to take with them the only survivor, a kid; later, the Natives surround them and slow down their journey. Finally, Hamish is wounded by

an arrow during an attack of the Apaches, and Roberto sees the opportunity to escape from imprisonment only to come back to the friend and the kid and help them to go back safe and sound to the U.S. As the story develops, the viewer understands that the film's main interest is to show the process that brings both men to maturity. The journey is personal and intimate, and the specularity between Roberto and Chris is developed through the presence of the little orphan, played by Ellen Hope Monroe, who serves as the missing link in their lives.

In *The Ride Back*, Quinn does not create one of his usual histrionic, exaggerated, over-the-top characters. His acting is minimalist and intimate, cohesive, almost restrained. Throughout the film, Quinn's character, Roberto, shows extreme kindness, especially in his relationship with the orphan, which allows him to reveal the sensitive and calm side of his personality. This sensibility is detectable in many different details: the first time the viewer sees him, the character appears from behind the door frame of his adobe house, with a little pig in his arms instead of a gun, and a woman at his side. Later, when they stop at the pioneers' cabin in the American side of the border and discover that the Apache have killed all the family members—father, mother, and daughter—he embraces the dead kid with tender affection. The discovery of a survivor, the dead girl's twin sister, is attributed to Roberto, an event underscored by a musical clue that anticipates the importance of the orphan for the development of both men and their relationship. While Hamish speaks to the traumatized kid in a loud voice, trying to feed her impatiently—"You have nice ways with kids" is Roberto's remark—the Mexican is incredibly protective. He brings a jacket and a doll to make her comfortable. During the following night spent under an outdoor bivouac, he gives her the poncho so she can protect herself from the cold. The mise-en-scène highlights his fatherly attitude from the beginning, when Roberto and the orphan are included in a dual shot, associated with a picture of a mother and child hung on the cabin's wall.

As the ballad "The Ride Back" (Joseph Devol)[7] synthesises, the film is recounted from the point of view of the sheriff: "I'm no man of violence, but I'm facing a test / There someone in Cerralvo I've got to arrest / There's something I must tell you before I am dead / I didn't bring the prisoner in, he brought me instead". Despite their difference and opposing roles as pursued and pursuer, Roberto and Hamish must come to terms with their past and start anew. At first, the former is the notorious outlaw who must be apprehended and brought back, but as the story progresses, he becomes the guide for Hamish's journey back home, ultimately becoming *the* savior or responsible for the sheriff's redemption—as the lyrics point out, Hamish, not Roberto, is the one who has been brought back. The sheriff sees the mission as a way to regain his lost confidence, but in the process, he learns a much more valuable lesson in friendship and respect for the other. Unafraid to feel and love, Roberto teaches him a new approach to life. In a word, the movie is trying to humanize Hamish again by using Roberto as the active agent. The dissimilarity between the two men begins to fade away in the second part of the movie, where both show some softness. The first opportunity to open up to each other is inside the pioneers' cabin, the night before the discovery of the other twin. Hamish mentions that his wife cannot have children, having lost their first one. No further comment is made, and Quinn's character replies by associating the sound of the falling rain with Elena. Later, during the bivouac under the trees, Hamish declares that he would immediately switch his position with the enemy's: while the former is alone, frustrated, and despised by the wife and friends, Roberto is deeply loved in the village and cherished by a woman, Elena. By contrast, the Mexican knows that his brown skin will hamper any chance of having a fair trial. Hamish thus promises his support if Roberto agrees to go back to the U.S. with him avoiding attempts to hamper the process.

[7] Even if it was directed by Allen H. Miner, a TV filmmaker, the majority of cast and crew belonged to what we can define as a Robert Aldrich stock company: director of photography Joseph Biroc, with whom the filmmaker made *Attack* (1956), *Hush… Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *Ulzana's Raid* (1972), and musician Frank Devol (*Kiss Me, Deadly* 1955; *The Dirty Dozen* 1967; *Emperor of the North Pole* 1973). Most notably, Aldrich asked Eddie Albert, who would later became one of his stock actors, to sing the film's ballad whose music and lyrics were written by Devol.

Associating and combining two different men is one of the innovations of the 1950s western. The most notable instance is in Delmer Daves's *3:10 To Yuma*.[8] A similar story of friendship and rivalry also appears in *Ride the High Country* (Sam Peckinpah 1962), which shows the same dynamic of promise and betrayal of *The Ride Back*. Like Roberto, Randolph Scott's character, Gil, is tempted to betray his friend Steve, played by Joel McCrea. When the occasion is offered, he steals the horse and gun that belonged to one of the dead brothers of the evil gang of the Hammond to threaten the friend, steal the gold, and escape. However, he changes his mind and finally faces the gang by Steve's side. Before dying, the latter admits that Gil has simply forgotten his commitment for a moment. Gil's ride back to save Steve thus replicates, five years later, Roberto's ride back to save Hamish in Aldrich's film, where the act of salvation is attributed to a Mexican character and performed by a Mexican actor. Rather than pursuing his desire to escape, leaving the kid and the wounded Hamish alone, Roberto rides back to save them. The audience sees him through Chris's eyes in a blurred, subjective shot that progressively clears up. Roberto looks down on him, calmly assuming the function of a protector, or a hero. Their relationship is thus the joint combination of two fears that fade away, a mirroring of each man in the other, yet, one that certainly turns on its head the usual myth of the Anglo good Samaritan.

As in other SBWs considered in this last chapter, the specific setting of the U.S.-Mexico border helps this dynamic between the two men take form. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo is reduced to pristine elements: a creek close to the guard's (Jorge Treviño) adobe house crosses a barren area surrounded by animals and an infant, the guard's son, playing in the sand [Fig. 44]. The boundary gradually fades away in a sequence of low-angle frames of gentle hills and peaceful villages set against an expansive sky. The locations are scarce but impressive in their beauty: the cemetery where Hamish meets the priest; the thicket of bent and low trees where they hide from Natives; the hill close

[8] According to Bertrand Tavernier, Robert Aldrich produced the film because the plot reminded him of *3:10 to Yuma*. In 1956, Aldrich and Associates had put hands on the rights to Elmore Leonard's script but the project ended up on the desk of Columbia. *The Ride Back* in fact reproduces the same psychological substratum emerging out of the relationship between two very different men in Daves' film ("Présentation par Bertrand Tavernier", *The Ride Back*, DVD Edition, Sidonis Calysta, 2011).

to the pioneers' house where they bury one of the twins. All these open vistas appear as a part of the same territory. The landscape is placid, even romantic. As the palpably sensual relationship between Roberto and Elena demonstrates in the initial phase of their journey, this land has the power to calm the soul. In 1893, Charles Lummis highlighted the relationship between a renovated concept of the self and the southwestern borderland, which he defined in a book under the curious title *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (curiously published in the same year of Turner's *Significance of the Frontier in American History*). The book opens with a statement that compares the southwestern border to

> The United States which is not United States. Here is the land of *poco tiempo*—the home of "Pretty Soon". Why hurry with the hurrying world? The "Pretty Soon" of New Spain is better than the "Now! Now!" of the haggard States. The opiate sun soothes the rest, the adobe is made to lean against, the hush of day-long noon would not be broken. Let us not hasten—*mañana* will do. Better still, *pasado mañana* (Lummis [1893] 1906: 3).

Like Lummis's journey in the southwestern borderland, the sheriff's journey has changed perceptions and attitudes. Hamish learns to live a different life. The placid landscape starkly contrasts the abstract map on his office wall, shown during the opening credits montage where the character is first introduced.[9] In this sequence, Hamish's hand draws wide circles on the map, progressively moving from the North of Texas toward Mexico. The nervous gestures of his hand make him appear tired and angry. The outlaw is somewhere south of the border, close to the town of Cerralvo, and Hamish is unsuccessful in his goal to catch him. He is a haunted man, frustrated and oppressed by an unsuccessful mission to catch a purportedly violent and brutal Mexican outlaw. However, the journey leads him to discover a different truth about the bandit, which will also change him with the pursued: two men united in a single story. Whereas the map is associated with Hamish's apprehensive and jittery gestures and movements, the images of a smooth landscape represent a progressive relaxation of tensions. Sky and land form a fluid and connecting stream, pointing to their journey toward an awareness of the specularity of their condition and a yearning to understand each other.

[9] The viewer will later identify the man as Chris Hamish since the sequence shows him from the waist down in an extremely minimalist set made of one chair and one desk, aimed at expressing anger and frustration in the quest.

Gilbert Roland

An interesting article published on the "Herald Examiner" in 1969 defines Gilbert Roland as a man "fully realized, thorough, total", an appropriate definition for such an actor whose career spans from the 1920s, when he started as an extra at $3 a day with Clark Gable and Gary Cooper, to 1982, the year of his last appearance on-screen. In 1969, when the article was written, Roland was a transnational star well known to the group of actors and directors who had worked with him and to a global audience that learned to love and admire him along all those years (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9). The last phase of his career was mainly occupied by Spaghetti westerns such as *Any Gun Can Play* (Enzo Castellari 1967), *The Ruthless Four* (Giorgio Capitani 1968) *Between God, the Devil, and a Winchester* (Marino Girolami 1968), and *Johnny Hamlet* (Enzo Castellari 1968). His final role, Don Braulio, the antagonist of the titular Mexican outlaw in Fred Schepisi's *Barbarosa* (1982), starring the legendary country singer Willie Nelson, was heavily influenced by the Italian style of the western. The endurance and ability to adapt of Roland was his best quality. The sense of fulfillment in his career derives from his adaptation to changing condition in Hollywood, to new styles and different production mindsets, in the effort to meet the demands of the audience and endure under constant changes.

Roland was born Luis Antonio Dámaso de Alonso on December 11, 1905, in Ciudad Juárez. His father was Francisco Alonso, a Spanish bullfighter nicknamed Paquiro who settled in Juárez as an assistant to a French impresario, Félix Robert, with his wife, Consuelo, also born in Spain. Roland dreamed of becoming a matador like his father but in 1911 when the Mexican Revolution, led by Madero, broke out and Pancho Villa began to fight, his family moved across the border to El Paso. They were very poor at that moment and the elder Alonso, who was a victim of 20 *cornadas* in the arena, suffered a paralysis. He thus asked his children to help the family. The young Luis Antonio had to sell newspapers in front of the hotel El Paso del Norte and work in a color factory. Roland did not know English at that time but was greatly helped by his teacher Alma Bartlett at Franklin School in El Paso. When he was 14 years old, he caught a freight train and moved to Hollywood looking for

a job as an extra. The first phase of his career was almost exclusively identified with the image of a Latin Lover. He was asked to change his name to a "nice middle-class sounding American name such as George Adams" but he could not look at himself in the mirror looking credible under that name (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9). So, he chose to at least maintain a part of his identity intact, combining names of his favorite male and female movie stars, John Gilbert and Ruth Roland. Swarthy complexion and black, curly hair were nonetheless unequivocal signs of ethnicity. He played opposite Clara Bow in *The Plastic Age* (Wesley Ruggles 1925) and Norma Talmadge in *Camille* (Fred Niblo 1926), and starred with Constance Bennett in *After Tonight* (George Archainbaud 1933). Roland is the exotic beau with whom all the protagonists fall in love on screen and in real life. He was, in fact, romantically involved with the first two and married the third. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, his career stalled in smaller films with only one big production, *Juarez* (William Dieterle 1939), where he played a secondary role. The marriage with Bennett was in crisis—in 1943 it ended in a divorce—and parts in Hollywood were not easy to find. During World War II he served in the Air Force, an experience remembered in one of his numerous home movies (AMPAS, GR Collection, "Home Movie" n. 7). After the war, Roland moved to roles increasingly associated with his ethnic origin. He started a new phase of his career in the B-moviedom, specifically at Monogram, under the supervision of Scott R. Dunlap, playing the starring role of Cisco in the cycle of six movies released between 1946 and 1947 (Chapter 3). Roland was the only Mexican to play the role of the extremely seducing Mexican caballero Cisco, a role that mixes the heartthrob persona of Don Diego de la Vega/Zorro with the vague social background of Robin Hood, stealing from the rich to give to the poor. At Monogram, Roland gave life to the best version of Cisco, a noble vaquero, able to ride and court each señorita without never seriously committing, an extremely seductive figure based on Roland's cool, signature gestures: his way of drinking tequila or of walking, hands on his belt, the hat low on one eye, cigarette hanging from mouth, the irony. His intriguing ways also captivated Anglo women, shown as victims of his power. At Monogram, he was allowed to contribute to dialogue, which testifies to the relative freedom permitted in B-moviedom, but also to his willingness

to create a different star persona, robust, rough, sardonic, one that remained intact during the rest of his career. In contrast to the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Roland tended to erase his ethnic identity to avoid excessive typecasting, ethnic identity played a significant role in this second phase (from 1946 onward). Roland portrayed many Mexicans on the screen to help improve and contribute to creating a more inspirational, confident, and assertive image of Mexicans in Hollywood. Notable filmmakers began to take notice of Roland's acting skills, especially John Huston who gave him an important part in *We Were Strangers* (1949). Vincente Minnelli wanted him for the role of Gaucho, the suave actor who keeps the screenwriter's wife, the southern belle Rosemary (Gloria Grahame), occupied in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). In Minnelli's film he offers a bright caricature of his previous roles as a Latin Lover. Later on, he worked with Anthony Mann in *The Furies* (1950; Chapter 4) and *Thunder Bay* (1953), and with John Ford in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Most notably, he was involved in a series of westerns, among which two SBWs—*The Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Bandido!*—where he played the role of a Mexican Revolutionary fighting alongside an American friend, a proud and tough idealist fighting for his cause. He later played in five productions of Spaghetti westerns, a move that perfectly delineates not just the evolution of the history of global Hollywood but also of an actor who looked for different ways to engage with new audiences' demands.

Roland was a Hollywood veteran who took great pride in his career. He saw himself as a symbol of the Horatio Alger success story. Having served in the Second World War and the U.S. Air Force, he never lost touch with the American culture and lifestyle. However, particularly interesting, in our perspective, is the second phase of Roland's career, when he decided to use his bond with Mexico as a way to promote the TV/cinema projects in which he was involved. Part of these projects remained unrealized but what is astounding is the degree of interest toward his homeland that Roland shows in the period that goes from 1947 to 1960. Rather than downplaying his Mexican origin as a blemish to be erased in assimilatory practices, he literally used it as a signature. Many articles in newspapers, for instance, promoted him as a transnational star with a big audience that extended

along the border. The word “border” or “fronterizo” are often mentioned both in English or Spanish newspapers especially in relation to his bilingualism: “he spoke in true border tradition”, an anonymous journalist of “El Paso Times” wrote in 1959. “Su español tiene un suave tono Mexicano y, a veces, se desliza en su parla alguno de estos inefables vocablos de los estados fronterizos” wrote another journalist of “Primer Plano” in 1954. Spanish-speaking newspapers often emphasized the success of a Mexican American actor who became a star in Hollywood, spoke both languages, and did not disdain the chance to work in Mexico, since this cinema “me parece el más interesante del mundo” (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 195). His admiration for Mexican cinema, especially that of the golden age is often described, especially in relation to colleagues such as Pedro Armendáriz, Miguel Inclán, Pedro Infante, Jorge Mistral, Mario Moreno (Cantinflas), Dolores del Río, and Maria Félix (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 84, f. 195; Scrapbook n. 9). Newspapers published in the U.S., on the other hand, emphasized his beginnings in Hollywood silent era and his endurance. Yet, they did not avoid the relationship with Mexico. First of all, his marriage with Guillermina Cantu, an artist and former top aspiring tennis player from Mexico City, the passion for bullfighting, and, in general, a bond with a country that probably even in his mind had acquired a mystical, even mythical significance.

Many articles written in English on Roland demonstrates that this sensibility was openly declared without fear of being typecast or considered as an “outsider”. In an interview with “Los Angeles Times-West Magazine” in 1971, the actor remembers nostalgically his childhood in Ciudad Juárez, described as

> warm and friendly in the pale sunlight. The adobe color of the earth; the earth in the heart. Poor adobe houses with joy inside. Pictures of saints on the wall, naked children crawling, birds in wicker cages, dogs barking in the bare yard swept clean, and flowers, all kinds of flowers, because a Mexican house without flowers is nothing. *Nada* (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 205)

Mexico is a land of contrast, made of poverty and genuine sentiments: Mexico is “the earth in the heart”, a place associated to a geography of the soul that mingles a real Mexico with a heart full of memories. In a clipping with no date and no title we read, for instance, that among the ten things that

make the actor's heart beat faster is "The Rio Grande River with the mud and the kids swimming in shallow water—and the memory, wherever I'm called a movie star, that I was one of them" (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9). The memory he cherished of his old town, Juárez, linked to family and old friends, all lost in the decades that followed, becomes the epitome of the country in its entirety and of all that Mexico represents in the mythical projection of its people: the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa, and his wife, María Luz Corral. In 1981, when the widow of Pancho Villa died, Roland wrote a tribute for the general. His admiration for Villa downplayed evidence that the actor's family had to escape to the U.S.—his father was of Spanish origin—when the general entered Ciudad Juárez. "As a small boy", the actor writes in the tribute, "I remember him on the steps of the Aduana [Customs in Spanish] after he captured the town from the federales. I looked at him in silent admiration. He was the *gran guerrillero*. The fearless liberator. Pancho Villa was the savior of Mexico". After that "hot August afternoon on the way from Canutillo to Parral" when Villa was ambushed, the widow, Señora Luz, became "the last of the great women of that time and that place". She is "the heart of Mexico" (Ibid.). Roland's desire to bring to his home in Beverly Hills a park bench on which family and friends used to sit when they were spending afternoons in the central plaza of Juárez testifies to his willingness to keep intact a private past locked in the actor's heart. This wistful remembrance mixed personal and historical evidence, his heart with the earth, a private Mexico with that of the popular mythology of the Mexican Revolution. The legacy is two-folded: "You return to the land of yesterday… You search for a grave. No grave. But you remember. Your heart was buried there" (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 300; Scrapbook n. 4)

Mexico was thus a place to be seen with eternal homesickness, as part of his lost youth, a nostalgic place where the actor could transform all that was lost in his personal life into an artistic creation. First, Mexico is in the initial aspiration to a career as a bullfighter. Other notable American authors and filmmakers, from Hemingway to Budd Boetticher, had fallen in love with bullfighting in the same period. Hollywood produced numerous films capitalizing on the adventures of matadors. *Blood and Sand* (Rouben Mamoulian 1941), *Bullfighter and the Lady* (Budd Boetticher

1951), and *The Sun Also Rises* (Henry King 1957) are among the most noteworthy. Roland was incredibly passionate about this spectacle and befriended the greatest, Manolete and Arruza. He made many trips to Mexico often initially intended to visit or watch his toreador friends performing in Mexico City. These journeys also included visits to his beloved teacher when he was a student of English in El Paso Elementary School, Alma Bartlett, visits to Villa's aging widow in Mexico City, and to his hometown Ciudad Juárez. The actor filmed numerous home movies during these travels, including behind-the-scenes footage of his productions in Mexico (AMPAS, GR Collection, "Home Movie" n. 8, n. 11). Here, we see El Paso, Ciudad Juárez with the state of Benito Juárez, the rural area close to Tepoztlan and Cuernavaca, Mexico City with Arruza performing in the bullring. Budd Boetticher and George Sherman were among the bystanders. Then, footage of countryside, agave plants, adobe huts, kids playing on the streets, roads paved with cobblestones, bulls in their arenas, and romantic sunsets: all these images did not contain graphic or written signs that allow us to identify the towns and villages visited. Still, they have Mexico written all over. The interest in Mexican people is evident in the myriad of close-ups of kids playing around the shooting area of the runaway productions in which Roland was involved,[10] kids brought by fathers and mothers who appeared as extras. Roland cheerfully plays with them, distributing toys, balloons, and candies or exchanging smiles with shy kids who stay behind, entertaining them for a while with a magic trick or a joke. These fascinating and moving documentary images are to be framed within a mindset that again discloses an almost mystical approach to the land, which mingles with a genuine interest in the Mexican population and a sincere admiration of its cultural heritage.

In an article dated 1965 and published on "El Paso Herald Post" he clearly states that "Mexico is California's home country with its innumerable historical connections—a fact forgotten by many new residents" and that Roland attempted to recall. "If a gringo goes to Mexico and spends his time in American type of bars and restaurants and does his visiting just with fellow Americans", as the

[10] They are: *Bullfighter and the Lady* (Budd Boetticher 1951), *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* (George Sherman 1955), *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer 1956), and *The Last of the Fast Guns* (George Sherman 1958).

actor wisely writes, “he might as well have stayed home”. He pointed to the rich history of this land and of its people and “the amazing civilization that existed there centuries ago”. If an American tourist goes to Mexico with a desire to discover its treasures, he should demonstrate respect, courtesy and consideration: “even if he does not know the language, it is not hard to interpret a smile” and he will be “richly rewarded” (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 205). Roland’s romantic and private relationship with Mexico is intertwined with a public praise of its rich heritage. Most importantly, it ends up with a promotion of a cosmopolitan view of the country that intends to broaden the moral and political horizon of a border community using the value of inclusion and openness.

Four SBW projects

The association between the Mexican land and the star-persona of Roland in the 1950s was also used to promote personal projects. Four projects should be mentioned as central in this decade.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Roland wrote an original treatment inspired by his father’s life as a torero titled *Blood on the Horns* that was adapted in a script cowritten by Roland and Niven Busch. The actor wished to produce it through his company, Hidalgo Productions, but the script never found a way to the screen (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 91).

The second project is an episode of *Wagon Train* (NBC, 1957-1962), the TV series inspired by John Ford’s *Wagon Master* (1950), starring Ward Bond. One episode, “The Bernal Sierra Story”, was aired during the first season on March 12, 1958. The episode had Roland as a special guest star. “The Bernal Sierra Story” recounts the story of the title character, Bernal Sierra, a man who escapes from a sentence to death for armed resistance against the troops of Maximilian I during the Revolution of Benito Juárez. He escapes to Texas and joins the wagon train led by Major Seth Adams (Ward Bond), who clearly shows a sympathetic position toward the cause of Juaristas deprived of their elected president and oppressed by “a foreigner who sets himself up as an Emperor” (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 164, p. 15). The pioneer train led by the Major also includes a traitor, Casey Reardon (Louis Jean Heydt), who has previously killed one of Sierra’s friends and fellow combatants, Miguel

Córdoba—event that is never shown but only discovered toward the end. The killing happened during a special mission across the Rio Grande/Río Bravo to buy from Reardon guns and ammunition for the Revolution. Reardon had betrayed and killed Córdoba with the help of Córdoba's unfaithful partner, Perdida (Charlita Regis). The killer had also stolen the valuable gold intended to buy guns to fight the foreign invader Maximilian I, using it to purchase brandy that would have been sold upon the wagon train's arrival in California. Sierra is the hero who vindicates Córdoba, betrayed by an unfaithful woman. On top of that, he also vindicates the cause of the Revolutionaries, the Juaristas, betrayed by an insensitive and business-oriented gringo, Reardon. The most interesting aspect of this episode is the ending, which looks forward to the use that Sergio Leone and other Italian western filmmakers would make of gold hidden inside caskets or tombstones in abandoned cemeteries amid a desert. In the TV episode, the gringo sets up his funeral, feigning his death to escape Sierra's vengeful fury, bringing the remaining gold stolen from Córdoba with him, in the casket. In the last sequence, the coffin's lid is pushed open, and a final gunfight ends with Sierra as the winning hero. Reardon falls to the ground with the gold spilling out of the casket on the church floor (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 164). Most importantly, the episode was the adaptation of a story by Gilbert Roland titled "La Dulcera". This story was a chapter in an unpublished book of tales and anecdotes preserved at the Margaret Herrick Library (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 300).[11]

The unpublished book titled "Stories"—the third important point in our list—contains eleven short stories: "Glass of Wine", "La Dulcera", "No Shade in the Sun", "Mexican Tragedy", "The Merry-Go-Round", "Messenger Boy", "The Spaniard", "The Baseball", "Uncle Damaso", "Mexican Heiress", and "Bits of Life". "The Merry-Go-Round" is the only story not related to Mexico; it is a nostalgic look at the golden days of Hollywood attributed to a dying American soldier who, during the harsh days of the battle, during World War II, dreams about the movie stars he loved in his youth.

[11] An article written by Cecil Smith and published on "Times Entertainment" (titled "Roland pens own star role for TV") points out that Roland sold his story to the production of the TV series. According to that article, the story was collected in a "book of remembrances" that Roland wrote to prevent loss. The book was titled "The Wine of Yesterday". The collection of stories simply titles "Stories" is preserved at the AMPAS in a separate file (f. 300) while the 500 pages of Roland's memoirs are contained in two different file boxes (f. 306 and f. 307).

The other stories are all linked to his homeland and distributed in diverse topics: bullfighting ("The Spaniard", "No Shade in the Sun"); an adventure at the U.S.-Mexican border ("Mexican Heiress"); a vaguely biographical description of the friendship between a Mexican orphan who crossed the Rio Grande/Río Bravo to El Paso, where he sold newspapers, and an African American cook ("The Baseball"); and tall tales of old Mexico ("Glass of Wine", "Messenger Boy", "Uncle Damaso", and "Bits of Life"). "La Dulcera" recounts in first person the story of a soldadera of Pancho Villa who follows the leader through all his battles (Torreón, Ojinaga, Casas Grandes, Ciudad Juárez) and prepares bisnaga, the cactus candy Villa adored. She is also the mother of Tiburcio, who betrays the leader. In order to escape the wrath of Villa, he hides inside a casket, as Casey did in "The Bernal Sierra Story". In an interview published on "Times Entertainment", Roland explains that "to fit the *Wagon Train* format the story was set back from the days of Villa to those of Juarez". It was further changed to incorporate the top cast of the series, Ward Bond, Robert Horton, and the others. In a different interview for "The Herald Post", the actor adds that the background for the "Bernal Sierra Story" (and for "La Dulcera") was taken from things Roland heard before he came to El Paso, when he was "driven out of Mexico during the time of Pancho Villa" (AMPAS GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9).

The last story of the collection, "The Mexican Tragedy", revolves around Captain Juan Durango, a Mexican American policeman at the U.S.-Mexico border. Vaguely inspired by this story is the pilot of a TV series that Roland began to produce, *Amigo.* This is an expression that the actor often used on-screen and in real life, in interviews and promotional papers. Here, the protagonist is John Domingo, a Mexican American lieutenant of detectives who lives in El Paso and solves the mysteries with the cooperation of Juárez officials. The pilot was intended to elicit the same kind of concerted harmony between governments and police forces at the border that Mann's *Border Incident* wished to promote. It was financed by Roland's own Hidalgo Productions, under a contract with a syndicated company of the television studio arm of MGM (MGM-TV). Roland considered investing heavily in this medium as a new source of opportunities. The pilot was titled "The Bracero Story"

and was shot on location in El Paso and Juárez with Don Siegel as a director and Roland in the starring role of John Domingo (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9). The series was strongly promoted in English and Spanish newspapers where the show was presented as a noteworthy case of "co-operation" between governments and institutions across the border, and as an important tribute to both cities, El Paso and Juárez. Yet, the show ended up with just the pilot filmed and nothing more. At the start of each episode, the protagonist would introduce a new adventure in a voice-over technique, noir style:

> This is El Paso, Texas. A rugged romantic border city at the foot of Mt. Franklin. It's a good city. I went to school there. This is the historical Rio Grande River, I swam here when I was a boy. You cross the International Bridge and you are in Juarez, Mexico. I like this town. I was born here. And this is me… John Domingo, I'm a detective. I work on both sides of the border. Some people say I'm a tough hombre. Maybe I am. Other people say I'm amigo, a friend. Well, we see about that (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 126).

The pilot revolves around a bracero named Salvador Luna who is tricked by a girl and robbed of his wages on the Mexican side of the border by an Anglo hoodlum. The script, written by Herb Meadow and based on Roland's story, begins with an opening title, *Amigo*, superimposed on a long aerial shot of El Paso that slowly crosses the Rio Grande/Río Bravo and shows the Santa Fe street bridge with the American and Mexico immigration offices at either end; a caption appears at the end that reads, "John Domingo, Lieutenant Detective, Police Department". The script contains several dialogues in Spanish, including the final sequence between Domingo and Mama Luna, Salvador's mother. After catching the culprits and returning the stolen money to the family, the lieutenant shows to whom exactly the friendly side of his tough character, as the voice-over mentions in the opening, is addressed: "Ay muchas gracias, Señor. Dios se lo pague. Usted es un buen *amigo*" (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 126).

The fourth important 1950s project associated with Mexico is an original script, titled *The Eagle and the Cactus*, that Roland wrote with Ernst Pascal. The film remained on page but the script gives an idea of what it could have been: a western revolving around two romantic figures of Mexican Revolutionaries, Lorenzo Mota and José Gonzales, two peasants from San Isidro, Chihuahua—

Roland's state of birth. The script combines the fictional story of Lorenzo and José with historical evidence of two military leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Tiribio Ortega (1870-1914) and Juan Medina (1883-1922), Villistas from Chihuahua. Lorenzo and José leave their family to join Ortega's troops, and later seek vengeance on Medina for betraying Ortega shortly before the last battle. With the emphasis on his loyalty, Lorenzo appears as a version of Pinchon's Zapata, a radical revolutionary willing to sacrifice familial quietness in the name of a principle.[12] He "is a simple man, handsome, with black hair and green eyes". In the opening scene, he wears fair cotton pants and shirt, a straw hat, and huaraches while "his strong black hands guide the wooden plow yoked to two skinny oxen along the furrow" (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 100: 1). The script contains many folk songs—Roland was an expert on this topic—and details of social aspects of the Mexican culture alternated with accurate descriptions of the women and men involved in the fight. Firstly, the soldaderas: "the women with rebozos over their heads, bandoliers across their breasts, and baskets under their arms, who follow their men over the mountains, across the rivers, cactus fields, and deserts, they follow their men to victory, to defeat, to love and death. They are not necessarily married to them, they are simply their women: they sleep with them, prepare their food, pulque, and give the warmth of their body" (AMPAS, GR, Collection, f. 100: 6). The desire to create an authentic portrayal of Mexican society during the revolutionary days emerged in a plot that recounted friendship and commitment. The poverty and apathy of the population justify Lorenzo and José's fight for a better world. The actor wished to reiterate the brash characterization of a bad guy with a heart of gold that his audience loved since the days of the Cisco Kid cycle and mingle it with the values of a revolutionary ready to fight for poor peons in a setting that also emphasized authentic locales and faces. The script contained a production treatment that comprised shooting locations in Mexico: a cantina, a church, a ruined monastery, a train, a high bridge, and a corral.

[12] Kazan and Steinbeck wrote the script of *Viva Zapata!* (1952) from Edgcumb Pinchon's fictionalized *Zapata the Unconquerable* (1941). Rather than stressing the radical aspects of this historical figure, they emphasized Zapata as a man of conscience, a mythical leader who refuses to be institutionalized as a representative of the people, teaching the peasants that they are *all* leaders of themselves. This reading was the backlash of a decade of HUAC hearings and the rising values of family, homes, and peaceful oblivion. Kazan's reading also reflected his disillusion with the Communist Party and his debatable decision to collaborate with the Committee.

Roland never complained about the failed projects or about his small roles in big productions. On the latter, he once pointed out: "you must be very careful in selecting movie roles. Even a small role in a good picture can be more rewarding than a big part in a bad picture" (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9). At the same time, he often spoke in support of the Mexican Americans. He recounted, for instance, an episode of discrimination he experienced when he was still an extra: he was barred from a very "famous ballroom" because he was a dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking man. He often recalled that his desire to change the Cisco Kid's scripts at Monogram was intended to highlight that Cisco was a civilized, well-read man who quoted Shakespeare and his favourite poet, Juan de Dios Peza. In a 1951 interview published in a Spanish cinema magazine, "Primer Plano", he complained about the stereotyped image of the Mexican with sombrero, no shoes, and a guitar. Six years later, he also criticized *The Death of Manolete* (John Frankenheimer 1957) calling it a "murder of Manolete" since it dramatically transformed a courageous and full of dignity toreador into a weeping man in agony. The Mexicans he wished to portray were men of honor, courage, fortitude, and idealism. This mindset simultaneously represents his time (he was born in 1905) and looks way beyond it, to embrace modern views of ethnicity.

Mercenary-into-friendship plot: two films starring Gilbert Roland

Treasure of Pancho Villa (George Sherman 1955) and *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer 1956) are both part of the list of Hollywood runaway productions in Mexico, the former released by RKO, the latter by United Artists with the support of infrastructures and crews furnished by Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City. Both featured a high number of Mexican actors—Rodolfo Acosta, José Torvay, Miguel Inclán, Pascual García Peña, Carlos Múzquiz—and used lush Mexican settings and production values. Moreover, they both apply the same formula: the mercenary-into-friendship plot (which is also present in *Buchanan Rides Alone* and *Vera Cruz*). The remaining part of this chapter will focus on these movies as a reflection of a runaway production that uses the symbolism of a friendship

between a Mexican and an American character as a means to create reciprocal understanding and promoting cross-cultural unity along the iconic image of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo.

To a certain extent, the mercenary-into-friendship plot anticipates what Frayling defines as the Zapata-Spaghetti variant of Italian westerns (from now on: ZSW) in the 1960s. This is Frayling's schema:

a. There are two heroes—one is a European or American arms dealer/mercenary, the other, a Mexican peasant/bandit.

b. The laconic cool style of the gringo is contrasted with the flamboyant, talkative style of the Mexican.

c. The gringo—a specialist in some form of gunplay—offers to join the Mexican bandit, in the hope of finding some gold, or of arranging a 'hit' for which he has been paid in advance.

d. The Mexican society is polarized into corrupt government officials/brutal army officers and oppressed, illiterate peons.

e. The Mexican bandit becomes a revolutionary while the gringo tries to operate in partnership with the Revolutionaries.

There are a few optional variants as a possible ending: 1. The gringo remains a cynical man and the two heroes go separate ways. 2. The gringo remains a cynical man and he is killed by the Mexican. 3. The gringo is converted to the revolutionary cause, joins the Mexican bandit and prepares to face the counter-revolutionary forces in a final settling of accounts. Most of the 1950s runaway production of SBWs usually typified variant 3 of the ZSW. *Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Bandido!*, both starring Roland in the role of the Mexican revolutionary, are prototypes of what Frayling calls the Zapata Spaghetti's third variant. Yet, Frayling downplays this source in favor of other possible antecedents. He takes into account Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, Dashiell Hammett's *Continental Op*, Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*, Robert Aldrich's *The*

Last Sunset, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar*, offering just a final remark on Aldrich's *Vera Cruz* and on Boetticher (Frayling [1981] 2006: 41–59).

The author's main interest is to deconstruct the erroneous argument of the cultural roots according to which the Italians were inevitably producing a "cheap and opportunistic imitation" of a western as they were far removed from the milieu and mores typical of the genre. Frayling correctly explains that those who were purportedly considered as strictly Anglo-American filmmakers, close to those milieu and mores, were actually coming from the same continent that represented the origin of Leone, Europe: Ford, for instance, was Irish. He further specifies that the SW (and the ZSW) inevitably reflected a different sensibility, based on Italian culture, society, and mode of production. To be more precise, for Italian cultural forms, the author means opera and *commedia dell'arte*; for Italian society, he means the social substratum of the southern regions, with their emphasis on familial backgrounds and on a patronage system; for Italian mode of production, he means co-production deals that involved Cinecittà extras or technicians and American companies' frozen dollars (these frozen dollars, for tax reasons, had to be spent in Europe; Ibid. 37-103). Still, when it comes to the problem of finding connections between the SW (or ZSW) and the classical Hollywood western, Frayling is excessively hasty. He simply states that Hollywood had "rarely shown interest" in topics such as the southwestern frontier, the confrontation between Anglos and Mexicans, and the relationship between Mexican revolutionaries and peasant communities unless to hail the coolness of sophisticated American mercenaries/observers who remain detached from the awful episodes of a "chili con carnage", i.e. the Mexican Revolution. At best, classical Hollywood westerns assure the redemptive power of Anglo defenders of justice and law through a rosy and mindless story in which the detached observer turns into a self-interested supporter who helps the rebellious force for mainly personal reasons. The author reckons that sometimes the reluctant hero turns his detachment into a loyalty to the rebel, but a loyalty that imposes a redefinition of the struggle in term of an American mindset. The intervention of the Anglo savior is just a process that deadens any form of genuine revolutionary impulse.

This last part of the chapter aims instead at emphasizing that—albeit with a different dose of cynicism and with less craze for violence—Leone's *Dollars Trilogy* (1964, 1965, 1966) or *Duck, You Sucker* (1971) and Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) found some of their characteristics in SBWs. This relationship is reflection and evidence that the same transnational perspective we find in Leone, an Italian who looks at the U.S., or in Peckinpah, an American who looks at Mexico, was already present in runaway productions of SBWs where different content and forms had to cater to the demands of a south of the border audience that never saw the Revolution as a quick formula for profit.

The transnational perspective that takes into account the audiences south of the border is particularly evident in *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Bandido!*. In promoting these films, the marketing strategy for Mexican audiences emphasized aspects of the Mexican Revolution, while the press distributed in the U.S. focused on locations and actions.

Treasure of Pancho Villa was strongly promoted by "Cine Mundial", a Spanish-language version of "Moving Picture World", the leading publication for film exhibitors in the U.S. since 1916. "Cine Mundial" declared itself "dedicated to the promotion of cinematographic interests in the United States and in Latin American countries". Specifically, Laura Isabel Serna describes its function at two levels. First, the publication was thought as a support for the studio production management and aimed at film exhibitors, distributors, and other entertainment and commercial entrepreneurs in the Spanish-speaking world. It was, for them, a primary resource with accurate descriptions of the latest releases or how-to articles on projection and marketing, contact information on companies that provided cinema furnishing, equipment, and translation services. It also published general information about the business of cinema, and reports on exhibition and distribution in various countries. By 1920, the magazine changed its focus to more national aspects and began to publish articles that appealed to film fans, adding fashion spreads, advice columns, and profiles of stars. The articles were written specifically for Latin American readers. The emphasis on national aspects was clear: for instance, a monthly "Crónica de México" section mingled cinematic happenings—new releases, national production, and theater openings with society events, sports news, and accounts of

different activities. In the 1950s the magazine was still intended as an instrument for the diffusion of a national culture in combination with the project of hemispheric unity through modern capitalism and promotion of a consumer culture (Serna 2014: 562–931). While on the northern side of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, film reviewers put emphasis on the Mexican locations present in *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, "Cine Mundial" published an article (May 18, 1955) that exactly belies that projects of hemispheric unity based on modern capitalism and national pride. The article highlighted authentic Mexican locations: Taxco de Alarcón, Yautepec (Oaxaca), Tepoztlán, and Cuernavaca, simultaneously stressing production values such as Technicolor and a cast of international stars that comprised big actors from Hollywood. The first position was given to Roland and then, "una constelación de luminarias del cine nacional" that comprises Fanny Schiller (who was Mexican despite the English-sounding name), Carlos Múzquiz, Tony Carbajal, and Pascual García Peña. Notably, the article declared that the film "se basa sobre un hecho de nuestro Centauro del norte" (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 84). The article extensively discussed the Mexican Revolution and Pancho Villa's central role, especially when compared to other Mexican leaders who were traitors of the Revolution, like Victoriano Huerta (the film slightly suggests this opposition). Villa continues to be, in fact, a significant figure representing the national identity of all Mexicans. Conversely, in the U.S., the myth of Pancho Villa was diminished with respect to other features. The main marketing strategy was, for instance, linked to a news episode covered in many of the nation's leading newspapers. In the 1950s, during the film production, a woman from Brawley (CA) told authorities that she knew precisely where the bullion of Pancho Villa of $1,500,000 was buried. The news triggered a treasure hunt craze in American citizens looking for the gold in the mountains of the Mexican border of Texas, an event that was largely exploited in the promotion of the film on the northern side. The premiere in San Antonio, on the other hand, was an occasion for Roland to describe his childhood in Juárez/El Paso, and promote his identity as an in-between man, a star from Hollywood cinema but also a popular actor in Mexico. An article published the day after the premiere described him as "the most interesting conversationalist" and "skittish about the date" but not about

the place of his birth. The journalist ended with a praise of Roland's willingness to be identified as a Mexican born in Juárez rather than as a El Pasoan, a detail that the Spanish-speaking audience of that premiere surely appreciated (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 9).

During the two years he spent at Monogram starring in the role of Cisco, Roland took the liberty to change the scripts according to his sensibility. Many changes are detectable in his personal scripts, heavily annotated by a re-writing of dialogues. The second draft of the script of *Treasure of Pancho Villa*, signed by Niven Busch and dated March 29, 1955 contains several annotations that prove Roland's careful preparation for the role he had to play. In the film, he is colonel Juan Castro, the head of the Villistas who had to deliver gold to Pancho after the betrayal of another Revolutionary leader turned into a dictator (the script does not give indications of his identity, but the event seems to refer to Victoriano Huerta). In a handwritten note of Roland's personal script, we read that he did not want his character to be shown as a brutal man, one with a whip. "He is a Revolutionary", Roland writes, "not a Simon Legree" (the slave owner in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). "This is Mexico, not Virginia", he further points out (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 83, p. 48). Differently from the extremely flamboyant buddies or enemies played by Gian Maria Volonté, Eli Wallach, Jason Robards, or Rod Steiger in Leone, Roland's Castro is less raucous and definitely more idealized. The colonel is not a baroque, exaggerated caricature of a Revolutionary but a rational man compared to his younger companion, Tom Bryan (Rory Calhoun), the black-clad mercenary armed with a huge machine-gun that was christened La Cucaracha, like the famous song recalling Villa's extreme stamina. Castro and Tom, the gringo, meet during the assault of the train transporting gold of the federales, where the latter—secretly paid to help the colonel—assists the *guerrilleros* in their plan to steal the bullion. Bryan recounts his story and that of Castro in voice-over, opening the film with the final sequence, then going back to where it all started. He begins with a praise for Castro: "he was quite a guy. We had gone through enough together to know each other pretty well. But it wasn't until that moment right there at the end, that I understood what had made Juan Castro do the things he did and what made me go along with him" (AMPAS, GR Collection f. 83, pp. 3-4). Together with Ruth

(Shelley Winters), an Anglo schoolteacher in sympathy with the Revolution, Castro is responsible for Bryan's change from a profit-driven mercenary to an idealist. Heavily cut during the shooting, a long nighttime scene showing a pause from battles against the federales happens on a river's edge. Calmly sitting on a rock separated from the other *guerrilleros,* who are sitting close to the river singing "El Tecolote"—a revolutionary song of Chihuahua that was chosen by Roland himself—Castro gives romantic advices to his younger buddy, clearly emphasizing the needed idealism that only love and commitment to the Revolution could produce in him (AMPAS, GR Collection, f. 83, p. 71). This sequence largely demonstrates Castro's importance in the transformation of Bryan from a cynic hired-gun into an idealist. It is the moment in which the gringo starts to admire the other man's cause, a cause built on pure loyalty and commitment. To emphasize the influence of the mature man on the younger, Roland wrote on the script: "smoking, no singing for Castro" (Ibid.). The absence of the scene from the final version of the film limits our understanding and reduces the interest of the movie to a troubled romance between the young character and Ruth. By the end of the movie, the Anglo mercenary's motivations are aligned with Castro's, not because he sees the revolution from the perspective of a gringo, but because the character genuinely believes in it.

Bandido! *(1956)*

Released through United Artists and directed by Richard Fleischer, *Bandido!* was a runaway with bigger production values than *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*. The credits of the art and sound department, as well as production management, were given to Mexican technicians and supervisors. The producer, Robert L. Jacks, used several extras and actors from Mexico to give a sense of authenticity to the action. "Variety" highlighted its "lush settings via its on-the-spot lensing below the border" as a "wise move" that gives the picture a large number of "strikingly beautiful scenes lensed by Laszlo" (AMPAS, GR Collection, Scrapbook n. 10). Unlike *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, where Roland played a more mature man than his counterpart, *Bandido!* relies on the presence of Robert Mitchum in the role of the gringo. In 1955, during the film production, Mitchum was an actor

with a consolidated career whose presence demanded different dynamics with respect to his co-star. The off-hand, restrained portrayal of Mitchum as the Anglo mercenary Wilson contrasts with the brash and flamboyant Colonel Escobar, played by Roland, in a much more balanced team of two complemental actors. In the bordertown of the opening sequence, Wilson appears in the same posture and attitude as one of his best-known creations, the detective Jeff Bailey, from Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947). The romantic atmosphere is here repeated with an equally unhappy but much less dark lady, Mrs. Lisa Kennedy (Ursula Thiess). Unlike Bryan in *Treasure of Pancho Villa*, Wilson strives to be ethical on his terms, which already appears as a symptom of the future sacrifice of his financial profit. Further, in Fleischer's film, there is another arms dealer from the U.S. who attempts to sell ammunition to the other side involved in the battle. While Mr. Kennedy (Zachary Scott) sells sophisticated arms to the federales, Wilson offers more humble grenades to Escobar, a Villista. The gringo also aims to rescue Lisa, Kennedy's wife, from being used as a pawn by the husband, ready to exchange her for his safety. On top of that, Wilson sticks to the man with whom he sided from the start, Escobar.

Mitchum's proverbial coolness is shown in the first fight between the federales and the Villistas in Hidalgo (the scene was shot in the capital city of the state of Durango, in Mexico). Wilson walks through gunfire and galloping horses, takes a bottle of wine fallen from a crashed window, asks for a "room with a view", threatens the manager, pours himself a glass of wine, and steps out on the balcony to toss two grenades at the federales, all done with the same calm demeanor. He only appears disappointed when the bottle is gunned down and its contents partly spilled. Later, we see him hiding behind a small column on his hotel's balcony, sipping wine and tossing grenades around. Even the glass of wine takes on an overwhelmingly cool attitude, staying in perfect balance on the narrow railing where he gently puts it for a while as the Revolution continues. After this battle, the Villistas start to call him Alacrán, the archetype of cool, a deadly stinging scorpion who kills in a single move without being seen. His action inspires the rebels to rise from hiding places to fight the Revolution more decisively.

Roland's character appears for the first time in the film as a reaction to Wilson's help. Yet the colonel does not have less charisma. The camaraderie between Escobar and Alacrán is palpable and highly intriguing, built as it is over the complemental relationship between the two men. Escobar is the leader of the rebellious forces and a tremendous fighter. Roland's vitality is emphasized in every detail of his actions, from minimalist gestures to wide steps and jumps. He leaps onto a horse with one single agile movement, a gesture befitting a character known for his wide open arms and ironic smiles. When he enters the hotel, looking for the gringo, he kicks the door to enter the room, where Wilson is calmly taking a nap, hat covering his face. Roland alternates grand gestures of agility or wide, open movements of arms and legs with intimate forms of dynamism usually attributed to his hands: rolling a cigarette and placing it under the ear, caressing a whip, finding comfortable places to lean the weight of his body. This small dynamism also gives space to suspensions dense with ironic intensity, all built over moments of pause where the actor is doing nothing to give the other speaker time to reply—as happens, for instance, in the highly calibrated dialogue with Alacrán in his hotel room. The latter is lying on the bed in the usual cool aplomb of Mitchum. Escobar is no less sardonic and provoking character—and the dual shot that unites the two remarks their combination.

The vitality of Roland's Escobar is also evident in the instinctive reactions and colorful, almost improvised gestures—the quick sign of the cross—or fancy expressions such as "ay, chihuahua!" or "you bet your life…" aimed at eliciting a sympathetic reaction in the audience. The large number of lines spoken in Spanish and rarely translated[13] is another way to bring out positive reactions in the viewer not only toward Escobar but also to other Villistas, Sebastián (Rodolfo Acosta) and González (José Torvay). The complex rivalry/friendship dynamic between Alacrán and Escobar reaches a turning point in the sequence of their reunion in the Villistas' headquarters. This is a moment of revelation. On the left side of the image, we see Escobar in the foreground, framed in a medium shot. He is looking at a procession of peasants who accompany a casket toward the cemetery adjacent to a picturesque Hispanic church that occupies the entire right side of the frame. The funeral

[13] Usually, other characters in the film offer a synthesis in English of what has been said in Spanish.

intersects the focal length passing from right to left of the frame while a visibly sad Escobar makes a slow and somber sign of the cross. Meanwhile Alacrán, from a distant point on the horizon, approaches the colonel walking the road that borders the church. They are separated by the funeral, which is an evident figurative sign of the problems they experience in terms of personal involvement in the cause of the Revolution. The commandant informs Alacrán that the funeral is just one of the many they have had to celebrate for the rebels who died during the attack on the train. He then accuses the gringo of being too focused on money and amusement, or of confusing the Revolution with an adventure while the Villistas are fighting for a solid commitment to their cause. Alacrán tries to convince him they still have a chance to win, but the rage and despair on Escobar's side is evident. The fracture between them is not mended, but a change happens in both men. Wilson understands the rebels' cause beyond his financial needs. As he declares to Kennedy during the following scene in the swamp, "I'm not in this for profit". He implies the woman, Lisa, Kennedy's wife, but also the word given to a friend as well as his support for the Villistas, who, he understands, are on the side of the people against the oppressor. Alacrán's lack of commitment is then reversed with an act that rejects money as the cause of the Revolution grows within him. In turn, Escobar's excessive zeal gives way to a reasonable and trustful friendship.

Apart from the beauty of the visual style, the sequence is an interesting showcase for Roland's acting style. Like Mitchum, Roland' style of acting was based on the simple philosophy condensed in the maxim: "learn your lines and don't bump into the furniture" (Server 2001: 72). Mitchum was 12 years younger than Roland but both surely based their style on producing powerful effects through economical, pragmatic methods, acting on the base of their truthful, natural, and instinctive ability. Roland, for instance, was more at ease with cool wit and mischievousness or ironic suavity than with dramatic burst of anger and despair (Stanwyck was otherwise extremely skilled in these manifestations). The sequence in which Escobar accuses Alacrán to be excessively focused on profit-driven business is extremely important in the plot and carefully constructed, as it is associated with the funeral of those who died for the cause of the Revolution. This exploit is the hyperbolic version

of similar scenes of *The Furies*, where Roland/Juan Herrera explains with a fatherly attitudes to Vance Jeffords the condition of the Mexicans living in the southwestern border of the empire (Chapter 4). Still, in terms of acting style, Juan in Mann's film maintains a coolness that the colonel loses in that sequence. The dramatic moment helps nonetheless to trigger a more decisive commitment in Wilson. Other scenes in the film are better showing the complementary status of these two actors, and one of them is the final.

The final sacrifice of part of the loot shows that Escobar's dramatic statements have had their outcome on Alacrán. Despite knowing it would exclude him from any final profit, Alacrán proposes to explode one of the two barges that contains dynamite and gasoline to mark the end of the federales. The renewed harmony between them is accurately portrayed as they dismount from their horses together, jump into the water, swim toward the barge, and climb onto it in a synchronized movement. The landscape also outlines a final fellowship. The lagoon is dotted with palm trees, and the water is calm and serene. The landscape waits to be animated by the actions of the couple of heroes who fight together not a single enemy but an evil association. The setting is a lagoon, not the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, but it equally suggests the fluidity of a border, an inland sea where the heroism of one is mirrored into the other, even under a different style. As we have mentioned before, the fluid presence of water is used for its symbolism and for the values that it represents: friendship and unity. In terms of acting, the low-level and ordinary style of Mitchum perfectly combines the more animated and broadly expressive, intensive behavior of Escobar/Roland. Most importantly, the last departing scene, in which Alacrán returns to the woman he loves after having renounced his part of the loot, is framed from Escobar's standpoint. At first, the colonel is distracted by his men and gives them orders in Spanish on where to place rifles and ammunition, but then he turns around and sees Alacrán relaxing on a trunk. He adjusts his hat high on his forehead—a typical gesture of Roland—and reaches the friend, calling his attention with a clap of the hands. In one second, he joins him on the trunk, one leg on each side, as if they were riding the same horse [Fig. 45]. He tries to persuade Alacrán to continue the fight, but the latter gently declines, saying, "With you, tomorrow is never payday". The other

laughs, and they say goodbye. The last image gives Roland/Escobar a final, important reaction shot to the departure of the friend. The close-up expresses an intense moment but one that is fully underplayed. Like in *The Furies*, Roland quickly raises his arm in response to Alacrán's greeting gesture. Then, he slows down, almost unprepared to separation, finally gently waving his hand and nodding slightly as a sign of gratitude. The separation thus appears as a poignant moment, showcasing Roland's ability to convey nostalgic sentiments through unique grace and minimalistic acting.

Budd Boetticher's Mexico

Another filmmaker linked to 1950s runaway productions in Mexico was Budd Boetticher. He arrived in Hollywood literally passing through Mexico so we can say that without this country we would never have had Budd Boetticher, the director of westerns.

Born in Chicago in 1916, as Oscar Jr. Boetticher, the future "Budd" never knew his birth parents. He was adopted by Oscar Boetticher, a prosperous self-made man living in Evanston (Illinois), with whom he never felt at ease. The adoptive family immensely spoiled the child, which had terrible consequences on his social life. "I grew up a real sissy. Being one of the richest kids in town, they called me Oscaretta. People used to beat me up and chase me home and 'pants' me" (quoted in Ellis 2023: 17). Sports were his salvation: he was a fast runner and quickly became a baseball player and a boxer. He later enrolled at Ohio State University but a knee injury sidelined him. He was prescribed a year of rest and in late 1939, Boetticher "embarked on a south-of-the-border convalescent odyssey in a shiny yellow La Salle convertible, bound for Mexico City" (Ibid. 18). The plan was to spend four days in the capital of Mexico and then head to Vera Cruz where he wanted to take a ship for South America. Yet, bullfighting got in the way. "The Sunday after arriving in Mexico City", as Ellis recounts, "he attended his first bullfight and was immediately seduced by the sport's dangerous combination of balletic grace, austere rigor, and medieval ritual" (Ibid. 18). Boetticher was introduced to Lorenzo Garza, known as El Magnífico, to Fermín Espinoza, known as Armillita, and to Arruza. Determined to find his way in the art, he took daily training sessions in Plaza de Toros, the

world's largest bullring. After an almost fatal wound from a gore during the ritual known as *la tienta*, Boetticher's mother called him home since "it just wasn't culturally acceptable for a Boetticher to be a bullfighter" (Ibid. 20). The path toward Hollywood starts almost accidentally at this point. One of his college friends was Hal Roach Jr., the son of movie producer Hal Roach, an acquaintance that allowed him to find employment as a consultant for Rouben Mamoulian's *Blood and Sand* (1941). Ten months after his initial departure for Mexico, Boetticher walked into a false arena built by Twentieth Century Fox demonstrating standard cape passes to producer, director, and actors. He literally came to Hollywood from Mexico, where he learned everything he had to know to proceed his new career: "what I learned from bullfighting is to have absolutely no fear in dealing with anyone from Hollywood. It gave me tremendous concentration and a lot of control" (quoted in Ibid. 21). Boetticher started to direct films in the Columbia B-movies outfit—which led him to face one of the most feared producers in Hollywood, Harry Cohn.[14] Then, a new phase followed at Eagle Lion (where Anthony Mann was also working in his noir-period) and at Monogram (where Gilbert Roland made his Cisco films). The shift toward the next part of his career happened with his first prestige film, *Bullfighter and the Lady* (1950), produced for Republic Pictures by John Wayne and starring Robert Stack and Gilbert Roland. It was a quasi-autobiographical movie describing the adventure in Mexico of an American aspiring matador. The movie was shot on location with Jack Draper, a Mexico-based American cinematographer who helped Boetticher to create the iconic look of the golden age of Mexican cinema having apprenticed with Gabriel Figueroa. Literally, his journey to Mexico at the beginning of his career thoroughly changed his life, character, and vision.

Jim Kitses values the importance of Mexico in his chapter on Boetticher, pointing out that western and bullfighting are the "polarities" of his world. Boetticher's world is particularly ambiguous, suspended between a commitment to a highly romantic individualism that refuses any compromise over personal integrity and the corporate and glossy industrial art, Hollywood (Kitses

[14] During an altercation between George Stevens and Cohn, Boetticher got in the way, replying in a very dry way to the big producer. "Do you know who I am?", Cohn asked the cocky assistant. "Yes, sir, I do, Mr. Cohn. But compared to those black bulls coming out of those black holes, you look like the Virgin Mary" (quoted in Ellis 2023: 23).

[1969] 2004: 174). In Kitses's schema, Mexico is on the side of personal commitment and integrity, while Hollywood represents falsity and commercial reasons. Still, this industry also allowed Boetticher to go back and spend time in Mexico during the many occasions for runway productions: *Bullfighter and the Lady*, *The Magnificent Matador* and *Arruza* are all shot on location south of the border. The next two sections focus on Boetticher's films revolving around experiences of border-crossing to Mexico. They show how this country was not just a metaphorical abstraction or stylistic inspiration for the filmmaker but also the precise location where the internal evolutions that led to his sensibility took place.

Budd Boetticher's South of the Border Westerns

At least one third of Boetticher's films, including the most personal ones, used Mexico as a geographic location for shooting, as a set of the story. This paragraph mainly focuses on his SBWs, omitting the movies on bullfighting. However, something must be said about *Bullfighter and the Lady* (1951), one of Boetticher's most personal films and the movie that opened his career in Hollywood. *Bullfighter and the Lady* is a personal commentary on the cultural journey of John Regan (Robert Stack), who aspires to be included in the cultural milieu of Mexican toreros. The latter are clearly shown in the film as nobler and more sophisticated than the group of Anglos. Regan gains the attention of matador Manolo Estrada (Gilbert Roland) by showing honest interest and desire to learn the art of bullfighting rather than with complimentary goods to impress the purportedly poor southern cousins. For instance, the bottle of champagne sent by Regan's friends to the matador's table in one of the first scenes is politely refused by Manolo, who believes that respect cannot be bought with commercial values. Most importantly, the relationship between John and Manolo changes the stereotypical plot of Mexicans looking for acceptance in Anglo society since it shows the opposite: and Anglo who fights for acceptance in a Mexican society. In all his bullfighter films, Mexico

represents authenticity and nobility, challenging the U.S. to learn from them instead of the other way around.[15]

The critical and financial success of *Bullfighter and the Lady* allowed Boetticher to direct nine films at Universal in the early 1950s. The majority of them were westerns. "I became a western director because they thought I looked like one, and they thought I rode better than anybody else", the director wrote in his autobiography (quoted in Ellis 2023: 28). Three of these films were strongly related to Mexico: *Cimarron Kid* (1952), *The Man from the Alamo* (1953), and *Wings of the Hawk* (1953). Let us take a brief look at their plots. Recounted from the outlaws' point of view, *Cimarron Kid* describes the life events of a Mexican outlaw, Bill (Audie Murphy), who is released after a period in jail. Despite his innocence, during a robbery, he is arrested a second time. To rebel against the unbalanced justice system and harshness of cruel lawmen, Bill becomes the leader of an interracial gang. In contrast to the limitations of the law in the U.S., Mexico represents safety and spiritual rejuvenation. In *The Man from the Alamo*, an American soldier (Glenn Ford) deserts his post at the Alamo during the siege of General Santa Anna to learn that his wife and children are killed by a group of Texans disguised as Mexicans. He has to demonstrate that his actions are not dictated by cowardice, a situation that de-mythicizes the legendary bravery and virtues of American soldiers resisting during the siege—the historical events of the Alamo have always represented a point of contention between Texas and Mexico. In *Wings of the Hawk*, the main character Gallagher (Van Heflin) is an American miner and entrepreneur who is searching for gold in Mexico. He decides to support the Mexican Revolution and joins the fight against the corrupt federales. During his journey,

[15] Giovacchini, for instance, highlights this aspect in an interesting comparison between *The Magnificent Matador* (1955) and Rossen's *The Brave Bulls* (1951). While Rossen's film tends to offer a view of the shortcomings of a system that leaves the matadors unprotected, Boetticher's exalts their power and extreme nobility, especially when compared to American society (Giovacchini 2017: 4104–4151). *The Magnificent Matador* was independently produced by Edward Alperson with funding from Mexican banks and under a release contract from Twentieth Century Fox. The film was shot entirely in Mexico at Estudios Churubusco and in the streets of Mexico City. *Arruza* (1971) was a much more personal film. It captured the dramatic events of the life of Boetticher's friend, matador Carlos Arruza. The filmmaker spent most of the 1960s in Mexico working on this project and rejecting offers from Hollywood. It is "a deeply personal film, a valuable record, a moving experience" (Kitses [1969] 2004: 191), the outcome of fifteen years of planning that cost him sickness, a period in jail, and extreme pain. *Arruza* was first released in Mexico in 1971 before obtaining, the year after, a release in the U.S.

he falls in love with Rachel (Julia Adams), a beautiful soldadera. At the end of the film, he sacrifices his gold mine to save the *guerrilleros* and allow the rebels to capture Ciudad Juárez. The five movies written by Burt Kennedy that constitute the critically acclaimed Ranown Cycle[16]—*The Tall T* (1957), *Decision at Sundown* (1957), *Buchanan Rides Alone* (1958), *Ride Lonesome* (1959), and *Comanche Station* (1960), to which *Seven Men from Now* (1956) must be added despite being a Batjac Production (John Wayne)—also took place on the southwestern region of the U.S. Still, *Buchanan Rides Alone* is the only one, among them, where we have a specific description of a border crossing experience and a transnational concept of culture. We will return on it later.

Among Boetticher's SBWs also the script of *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (Don Siegel 1970) should be included. The script was very different from the film, heavily influenced by the ZSW. Don Siegel tried to capitalize on the big success of the Italian western especially in the light of the presence of Clint Eastwood in the role of a laconic gringo, a mercenary named Hogan. By contrast, the script centered on the chivalric, high-principled, man of honor that Scott played in Boetticher's films and less on Eastwood's iconic style in Leone's westerns: cigars, hat and poncho, deadpan expression. Like the Man with No Name, Hogan is a superhuman drifter wondering along the southwestern frontier. Part of the pre-Spaghetti sensibility was thus lost. Still, in Boetticher's script, the film sanctioned an ideal connection between a high-principled gringo and the Mexican Revolution. As Ellis points out, "the protagonist is another version of Ben Brigade in *Ride Lonesome*, dressed in the colors of the desert and the rocks… riding on the Sierra Madre of Mexico" (Ellis 2023: 154). Boetticher had penned the principal role for Robert Mitchum—who had a similar part in *Bandido!*—and for Mexican actress Silvia Pinal, from Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961). In his script, the American dynamiter was incongruously called Lucy, a man with a tragedy in his past as he had lost his wife and son in childbirth. The man rides on his trail toward Mexico to meet the Juaristas in their fight against Maximilian's French group and finds this young Mexican girl, Sara, who is being abused by

[16] Randolph Scott's production company Ranown was named after the star's first name (the first three letters of Randolph, "Ran") to which the last three letters of co-producer Harry Joe Brown's last name ("Own") were added.

three gringos. He rescues her from rape and they develop a strong relationship progressively falling in love. In the script's intention, the film had to recount the story of an Anglo man obsessed with his past and progressively humanized again through the contact with a Mexican woman.

All these films give us an idea of the importance of Mexico in Boetticher's work. He chose the country in his life and career for the difference it represented when compared to Hollywood's obsession with commercial aspects, but also for the symmetry he found between the two countries. For him Mexico was at the same time a mirror and a release, a place where he could lose and renew himself. This sensibility is particularly evident in *Buchanan Rides Alone*.

Buchanan rides back from Mexico

The hero in the Ranown Cycle has specific characteristics. On the one hand, there is his countenance in the face of every danger, his chivalric codes and the high formality of his acts, the precise ideas of virtue and justice. On the other, especially because of Randolph Scott's personality, the protagonist is never reduced to high principles and often characterized by a profound melancholy. Pat Brennan in *Tall T*, Bart Allison in *Decision at Sundown*, Ben Brigade in *Ride Lonesome* and Jefferson Cody in *Comanche Station* are all profoundly human: in Kitses words, Scott's characters are sometimes "the very butt of the world, tossed about like a leaf, tragicomically at the mercy of life" (Kitses [1969] 2004: 181). They are not the fastest guns, not the perfect shots, not the toughest riders: Brennan loses his horse because he cannot ride a bull, Allison is cheated by his wife and completely wrong about her. Most of the time, the heavy overcomes them in charm and charisma. Ben Brigade, for instance, has almost the same reasons as his adversary Boone (Pernell Roberts) has to ride the country—both need redemption from feelings of guilt (Brigade blames himself for the death of his wife, Boone wants to purge his past criminal record).

Compared to Scott's other characters in Ranown, Buchanan is an exception. Firstly, he is a cheerful and undemanding man whose acts are led by a particular empathy toward Mexico. He is an Anglo mercenary who arrives in the U.S. from Mexico, where he had joined the rebels in the

Revolution. The crossed bandoliers identify him as an in-between figure, a south-of-the-border rebel with light hair and fair skin. In the opening scene, as the titles fade, the camera remains fixed on the landscape. Buchanan appears out of a corner in long distance, among a group of adobe houses. He approaches the camera, passing near two men, who slightly change their position to make him ride undisturbed. A closer shot shows him with a cheerful smile. He looks at the sign of the U.S.-Mexican border, stopping momentarily in the middle of the bridge. He is on his way toward the saloon where he is looking for some refreshment and a room for the night, but is rudely stopped by Lew Agry (Barry Kelley), the sheriff, who warns him against drifting around Agrytown: "We get enough drifters coming across the border with nothing in their pockets". Later, the situation gets worse. Nobody is friendly; everything costs $10, and the citizens, especially those who bear the name of Agry, seem to show great interest in his money. The town is entirely governed by the Agrys, a family who owns every business: Lew is the sheriff, his brother Simon is the corrupt, suave Judge Agry (Top Avery), and the other brother, the foolish Amos (Peter Whitney) is the owner of the only hotel in town. While the unfriendly sheriff is interrogating Buchanan, another family member, Roy (William Leslie), crosses the border, riding his horse at high speed. Nobody seems to care about him since Roy is one of the clan. The sheriff comments with "somebody's chasing you, Roy?". From the beginning, it is thus clear that the family leads the town with arguable methods and that its members are taking advantage of the proximity to Mexico to do and take what they want. Furthermore, they cannot judge characters since they question the wrong person. Buchanan seems to abide by the situation without any complaints. The typical wound attributed to the other Scott roles in Boetticher's films has moved, in fact, to a Mexican character: Juan de la Vega (Manuel Rojas), led to revenge for the rape of his sister, abused by Roy. The entire film is thus based on Buchanan's involvement in the troubles that haunt Juan. He aims to rescue the Mexican from lynching for having killed Roy in a fair fight, sharing with Juan the same destiny until they finally release the town from the corrupt family.

The Ranown cycle is a symphonic variation on the same theme of a hero alone who finds his meaning in life: all the films are intertwined, connected, each representing an extension or a variant

of the others. Like in *Decision at Sundown* (1957), corruption lies at the core of an American town. Buchanan is robbed, unjustly accused, imprisoned, almost lynched, mistreated during the trial, absolved and released but finally cheated as he becomes the object of an attempted murder. The citizens are represented as men thirsty for bloodshed and violence against the protagonist and Juan, associated as victims of a blind desire of revenge beyond true justice. Like *Decision at Sundown*, *Buchanan Rides Alone* is an inner-town western since both are almost entirely set in a town: only a limited number of scenes show characters out of that context. Unlike *Decision at Sundown*, though, *Buchanan* is set in a bordertown close to Mexico. The other three Ranown are otherwise on-the-trail western movies, where protagonists and characters are almost always shown in open air, far from settlements and built-up areas. Consider, for instance, the barren rocks of Lone Pine (California) used as a stand-in for the southwestern desert in *Ride Lonesome* and *Seven Men from Now*. In Boetticher, the relationship between natural settings and characters' inner psychology assumes the form of a pathetic fallacy that determines how human feelings can be attributed to landscape. In all his films, the landscape transcends the conventional denotative function as backdrop in order to become connotative of the inner experience of characters. The texture of rocks is profoundly fascinating to the filmmaker. Upon offering obstacles to a glorious, unfettered vision or because of their solid resistance, the rocks show the protagonist's struggle to become human overcoming pain or loneliness through self-scrutiny. The resistance represented by the rocks in Lone Pine contrasts with the wonderful sublimity of perpendicular cliffs, powerful vertical aspiration and moral elevation of the Rocky Mountains or the moral prospect of the Great Plains with their endless, infinite horizons. By contrast, *Buchanan Rides Alone* and *Decision at Sundown* replace that desert with a claustrophobic settlement where frames, bars, windows and prison cell doors are displayed as a recurrent visual motif that conveys the absence of freedom attributed to a community of weak citizens ruled and dominated by corrupt leaders.

In the Ranown, Scott's characters are usually the ones who bring values, honor, and ethical principles in a lonely and hostile landscape characterized by the absence of meaning. In this light

Buchanan Rides Alone is a unique film since it attributes those moral values to Mexico. The movie highlights how good principles are specifically projected and extended to friends from the other side of the border. In a barren and morally empty American town at the border with Mexico, the only thing that matters is for Buchanan to save a Mexican.

The protagonist seems to have been related to Juan's family since his past job as a mercenary fighting for the Mexican Revolution. During the trial, Buchanan explains that he took part in the Revolution because he needed $2,000 to build his ranch on the American side of the border. Meanwhile, he developed empathy toward the country. When he is held in prison with Juan the second time, Buchanan tells his Mexican friend that he knows his father:

> Buchanan: The whole of Mexico thinks a lot of your dad.
> Juan: You've heard of him?
> Buchanan: Lots, all good.
> Juan: He's a fine man.
> Buchanan: And he has a fine son.

The mise-en-scène of this dialogue is particularly intriguing as it shows both characters together, with the camera positioned near Juan's left shoulder. We see Juan's profile and a close-up of Buchanan, lit from one side, a composition that adds to the intimate nature of the moment.[17] This is where Juan begins to trust Buchanan, and the latter discloses part of his past adventure in Mexico. The movie emphasizes the relationship between the two characters from the beginning. Buchanan risks his life to help Juan against an angry crowd. When Buchanan is forced to leave town under the supervision of Pecos (L.Q. Jones) and Lafe (Don C. Harvey), he manages to free himself and return to the bordertown. He aims to use the $2,000 he earned from his participation in the Revolution to free Juan instead of pursuing the plan to build a ranch. Finally, he helps him to obtain the saddlebag that Esteban (Joe De Santis) brought to buy Juan's release. Their friendship is also projected over the community on a social scale. For instance, after the killing of Roy, the image of Buchanan and Juan carried over to the prison in a procession of enraged citizens is seen from the point of view of the Mexicans. The

[17] There are many moments of suspension and intimacy in Boetticher. Violence often leaves space to tenderness, love, and affection. Another example is in the almost erotic bond that unites Pecos (L.Q. Jones) to Juan in a two-shot toward the end of the film. Men in Boetticher are often extremely humane, fragile, and tender.

camera stands above a group of men with their backs to the camera, looking at the procession of people moving toward the jail. Their moral and visual position thus coincides entirely with that of the camera, a shot that increases the audience's empathy for those who live on the southern side of the border.

The final scene also upholds a south-of-the-border standpoint. It is set on the bridge over the Rio Grande/Río Bravo. The sequence is choreographed according to a pattern of shot and reverse shot in which the two factions are presented at the two ends of the bridge. On the Mexican side, we have Buchanan, Juan, and Esteban, while on the American side, the treacherous family of the Agrys attempts to take possession of the money. During the exchange of hostages, Esteban is allowed to cross to the Mexican side. The greedy Judge Agry is otherwise killed by the sheriff, who is more interested in putting his hands on the saddlebag than saving his brother. The fact that the saddlebag of money—a stand-in for the natural resources and national richness of Mexico—has fallen in the middle of the bridge at the scene's beginning is an interesting way to think about the relationship between the two countries from the point of view of moral values over commercial interests. Boetticher shows the events from a Mexican standpoint: only 15 brief shots of the poor village of adobe houses are alternated with more than double shots of the American side (about 40) observed by Buchanan's small group [Fig. 46]. The tension finds catharsis in the showdown between the two Agry brothers in the middle of the bridge. They face each other in front of the U.S.-Mexico border sign, a composition that suggests that rapacity and greed over Mexican money is a strictly American business, an attitude that may lead the country toward self-destruction. The position of the audience thus coincides with that of Juan and Esteban, supported by Buchanan. Although the river is not physically present, the reference to a symbolic Rio Grande/Río Bravo flowing under the bridge is evidence of the moral, sociological, and political position upheld by the film.

Buchanan Rides Alone seems to be a perfect allegory of the importance of cultivating unity in diversity. "When you have a Mexican as a friend", says Juan to Buchanan, "you must allow him to repay you for all you have done", a comment that foregrounds not only the geographical shift south

of the border that Boetticher made in his life and career but also the reversal of the usual plot of Anglo saviors giving money and ammunition to their poor cousins. As he declares during the trial, Buchanan became a mercenary because drought and bank foreclosure forced him to leave his land. By contrast, Juan is the wealthy, educated son of a Mexican family of landowners and horse breeders. Furthermore, Buchanan's experience in Mexico did not simply give the character what he needed to start again—"I got myself a stake", as he says during the trial, and that explains the smile on his face in the opening scene—but also procure him the acquaintance with Juan's father, Pedro de la Vega. This experience leads to a moral transformation in the character that evokes Boetticher's life-changing experience in Mexico. Even if it started in response to a personal need, the Mexican experience of Buchanan sheds a new light on the decision to help Juan. This detail represents a specific exception in the Ranown cycle, where Scott's characters are usually led by egotistical reasons to act. By contrast, in this film, the plot, the composition of the frame, and the space aim to elicit the expansion of the community's horizons, creating a bridge over principles of inclusivity and cross-fertilization. This time, Buchanan acts for unselfish reasons and as a response to a life-changing experience that happened south of the border.

Vera Cruz ***(1954) and the Mexican landscape***

Daniel Steinhart points out that the emphasis on foreign settings in runaway production practices offered charming postcard views of the main attractions of the world. This practice always aligned with Hollywood conventions in term of style and narration so that the assortment of shooting sites the world offered was usually bent to meet the storytelling requirements and standard visual patterns within a limited range of variation and novelty. The scenic allure of famed iconic landmarks was thus tamed under the principles of figurative composition, which provided depth of field, photographic fidelity, and proper lighting. Dialogue and actions were infinitely more important than the insertion of a prolonged shot over a specific location, which had to be motivated by story and character action and thus narrativized. However, with the introduction of new technological developments such as

CinemaScope and Cinerama, experimental innovations in style and compositions were partially introduced, combining astonishing locations with the potentiality of wide-screen (Steinhart 2019: 143–184). Aldrich's *Vera Cruz* (1954) perfectly showcases this association between screen technology and majestic location.

Steinhart recalls the reaction of some critics who voiced a lack of appreciation for the "absolute orgy of formalism" demonstrated by Aldrich in *Vera Cruz*. According to those critics, the filmmaker pushed against Hollywood standards to flaunt the location through the use of the wide-screen. Aldrich's unique approach to filming in Mexico demonstrates the filmmaker's understanding of the potential of an authentic location and his intention to effectively utilize new technology to enhance that location. In the film, iconic landmarks such as the Castle of Chapultepec, the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacán, or the ruins of Tepoztlán in Morelos (Chapter 3) achieve pictorial strength through the extra breadth of the screen, which added depth to Mexico's colonial and pre-colonial architecture. The singularity of locations is thus wed to the spectacle of CinemaScope in a way that goes beyond usual aesthetic conventions. These locations become the main protagonists, in an inverted approach that foregrounds the spectacular space *almost* at the expense of the stars, Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster, who appear belittled by this comparison. Most notably, the film associates the mythic heritage of the majestic landscape of Mexico with the peculiar motivation of the Revolutionaries rather than with the two protagonists. The technological innovation of CinemaScope thus serves a specific discourse on Mexico that hails its beauty and celebrates its ancient history and population. The link between people and land is absolute and, in this film, acquires a symbolic, cultural, and political significance.

The movie recounts the story of an American mercenary, Ben Trane (Gary Cooper), who travels to Mexico to offer his services to the highest bidder between the Juaristas, in the person of General Ramírez (Morris Ankrum), and the army of French emperor Maximilian I, represented by Marquis Henry De Labordere (Cesar Romero). Ben also meets Joe Erin (Burt Lancaster), another gringo, leader of a gang of desperados, with whom he joins forces to make profitable business. While

Ben is a mature and beaten former Confederate officer, Joe is a thief and a swindler. They are employed to escort a French countess (Denise Darcel) and a substantial amount of hidden gold from Mexico City to Veracruz. Both men aim to take possession of the gold. Still, Ben is won over by the cause of the Revolution whereas Joe remains stuck in his obsession with individual financial gain. Their differences find a resolution at the end when Ben kills Joe to stop him from stealing the bullion for himself. He helps secure the gold for the Juaristas and joins Nina (Sara Montiel) in her fight to free Mexico from the French oppressor.

The high number of beautiful images of Mexican settings lensed by Ernest Laszlo (he will later work also in *Bandido!*) is remarkable in the film. As Stephanie Fuller sums up, each of the small towns that the traveling party enters "is full of beautiful but dilapidated buildings and architecture" and, as the author continues, "the decaying plaster and paintwork does not look dirty or scruffy but becomes a beautiful palette of color set off against the blue sky and brown track" (Fuller 2015: 70). The aqueduct, the stone bridge and the village with its arched windows and doors opened on old churches, its walls dotted with plants and flowers are all framed with the honest intention to evoke their ancient and picturesque beauty (Chapter 3).

Fully adhering to this epic landscape is the mysterious and magical appearance of the Revolutionaries led by Ramírez, who secretly observes the movement of the convoy. Their first appearance in the sequence of the young girl tormented by a gang of gringos has a remarkable pictorial strength, following an iconography inspired by Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. The magic overtones of this appearance are triggered by the hieratic gesture of Ramírez and accompanied by the gentle sound of Pedro (Juan García)'s guitar. The huge number of Revolutionaries lined up on the battlements is emphasized by the spectacular panning shot circling at 360 degrees in one single smooth movement. The width of the CinemaScope and the gentle movement of the camera intensify the power of this image: the Revolutionaries rise up from their hideouts on the battlements with a magic quality. This appearance is repeated two other times in the film. In both cases, the Juaristas, like animals camouflaging in nature, appear from nowhere as if they

materialized out of the architectural sites and the natural landscape. In both cases the CinemaScope does not serve to emphasize the coolness of Anglo heroes/stars but the magical power of a population strongly connected to its land. In the Pyramid sequence, for instance, the army of the Marquis moves very slowly along one side. The shot is particularly long as the camera explores the monument's width following the same direction of the convoy. Suddenly, a single figure of a Juarista with his back to the camera appears in a vertiginous angle high up on the monument looking down. The man observes the army passing below. The shot maximizes the expanse of the CinemaScope and puts the viewer on a higher point on the Pyramid, close to the rebel. From atop, the convoy appears dwarfed by the long distance and immensely belittled by the majesty of both, the man and the monument.[18] A similar association is in the sequence of the ancient bridge, the third magical appearance, where the carriage with the bullion is being carried by a squad of the Marquis's army. The gringos are arguing below, making a lot of noise; suddenly, a gunshot, and silence descends on a quiet image of Juaristas aligned side-by-side against the sky on top of a crest. They draw an uneven line descending toward the opposite side of the frame, a composition that mirrors the bridge's edge below. The image is beautiful and confirms the strong association between people and landscape that the film constantly creates.

The prevalence of top-down shots attributed to invisible Juaristas observing the unaware convoy gives a powerful position to their presence. Many critics have emphasized the uneven dynamic between the two protagonists as a representation of individualism against the anonymous, collective mass of the Mexicans (French 2005: 69). According to Philip French, for instance, this uniform collective cannot challenge the position of Cooper and Lancaster as stars of the movie, remaining confined into the periphery of the plot. In French's opinion, the positions high up in the sky do not eliminate the perception of their marginality. Still, the prevalence of extreme high-angle shots giving the Juaristas enormous power coincides with a reversal of the hierarchy. Their marginality allows them to observe the convoy without ever being seen. It provides them with

[18] And the crew, who managed to reach the point to shoot the sequence.

extreme knowledge as if they were external instances dominating the plot. Moreover, the audience observes the events through their eyes, which increases empathy toward them.

The difference between Ben and Joe is also highly relevant to political aspects connected to notions of individualism and collectivism. Stressing the left-wing political background of Aldrich and part of the crew, Fuller points out that *Vera Cruz* questions the individualism the U.S. represents, assuming a precise position in the Cold War political debate. This happens mainly through Ben, Cooper's character. Through him, the film interrogates the values of capitalism and creates a connection with the specific political form of collectivism upheld by the Revolutionaries. Shortly before the final battle at the French headquarters, a remarkable tracking shot shows Ben walking on the edge of a river surrounded by trees [Fig. 47]. He moves across Juaristas playing songs and friendly conversing, with soldaderas making tortillas and kids offering pulque and food. The walk begins with Joe on his side. Joe's racist comments on peasants anticipate his future betrayal of the agreement. Then, Ramírez takes over Joe's position on Ben's side. The general points out that men must have more than money, "something to believe in". Finally, Nina enters the frame, offering Ben tequila while the general leaves him with the woman. She states that the gold belongs to Mexico, but she is interrupted by Joe, who catches up with the friend after his detour for a bottle of tequila. They proceed offscreen, with the camera fixed on Nina's worried expression, leaving the audience doubtful about future developments. The walk along the river shows the vitality of the Revolutionaries and the atmosphere of preparation for the next day's battle. It specifically shows the engagement with the cause of the Revolution, as seen by an Anglo character. As he walks through the parade of Revolutionaries calmly preparing for the fight, accompanied by the gentle melody of "La Golondrina", with the river in the background, Ben reaches a different stage in his personal development. The walk epitomizes a border-crossing experience, representing through different characters (Joe, Ramírez, Nina) Ben's intimate process. He moves through different stages—first rugged individualism (Joe), then collectivism (Ramírez), and finally commitment (Nina)—to end at

a precise destination. Like Alacrán in *Bandido!*, Ben puts aside his financial gain to meet the Revolutionaries—if not their ideals, at least the people.

This chapter has drawn inspiration from the image of the river. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo was once a place where people exchanged goods and culture with friends and relatives. However, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the communal space legally became a divided land and was subject to customs restrictions. Over time, Chicano/a scholars and activists have imagined such communities brought up by an all-comprising place erasing the border—such as Aztlán or Pan-America—explicitly choosing the Rio Grande/Río Bravo as the primary icon of any narrative that goes beyond that boundary. This area metonymically marks, in all its narrow longitude, an emblematic place for border-crossers, nomads, and travellers (Fox 1999: 46–56). Américo Paredes points out that in the 1920s, at the age of the *tequileros* crossing the border to bring their goods to the other side, the riverbank was a place to establish contact. "Friends and relatives living within shouting distance of each other", as Paredes writes, "did not travel forty or sixty miles just to reach the bridge" but crossed the river where they were (Paredes 1976: 54). Attributed to the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, this imaginary of communication is not limited to the analysis of Chicano/a activists but extends to the films discussed in this chapter. Here, the Mexican Revolution is an occasion for an Anglo character to work through his personal troubles and leave the initial baggage of financial gain or personal vengeance behind. This chapter contends that instead of being circumscribed to occasions for reinforcing the identity and mindset of the U.S., these SBWs revolving around the symbolism of a river aimed to offer transnational perspectives that showed precise positions regarding the U.S.-Mexico relationship. They create a new perception of the cultural complexity of the southwestern border.

CONCLUSION

In his volume on the Spaghetti western, Christopher Frayling writes that Italian filmmakers are "concerned with aspects of American interest in which Hollywood had rarely shown interest—aspects which could only achieve prominence once the genre had been divorced from its traditional historical base" (Frayling [1981] 2006: 127). In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that those aspects that Frayling describes as constitutive of the SW—the southwestern border, the confrontations between Anglos and Mexicans, the relationship between bandits and peasant communities, the status of minority groups in growing towns or the dictatorial ways in which these towns are run—are all aspects that have been touched upon by Hollywood, albeit with a different sensibility. It's worth noting that the more radical phase of SW, the one that comprised films by Sergio Sollima and Damiano Damiani, *almost always* used Mexico as a metaphor of the Third World struggling against the capitalist countries, the latter usually represented by a "gringo". In my thesis I explained how SBWs usually feature Mexico to represent the country itself or its symbolic values instead of using it as a stand-in for the poor global South. Especially when considered in the post-war era, the SBW appeared inevitably influenced by the containment theory, which requested careful consideration of the Mexican neighbor. Still, we cannot assume that Hollywood films are always expression of what a government decides for the country. As cultural products, films are influenced by multiple aspects and factors especially when the industrial connection between two countries allows people to meet and exchange different visions and practices along the border. This is one of the most evident results of my analysis.

This thesis needed limits in terms of the historical period, so I was forced to take a photograph of a limited situation. Yet, one of the points of departure for future observations could be the long series of connections and influences that this sub-genre, the SBW, has not just with post-classical Hollywood cinema—primarily, Sam Peckinpah—but also with the global western. In Sergio Leone and other Italian filmmakers who worked in this genre, Mexico is the epitome of the workforce in the economic struggle against the capital, which fully expands the premises of the SBWs, probably also

turning them upside down. Apart from Italy, many other countries, from Germany to Spain, from Australia to Eastern Europe, Mexico included, have produced films that re-work the values, characters, themes, and legends of the western in very different ways. Born just four years apart, Peckinpah and Leone are characterized by a similar sensibility, mainly in terms of *cinephilia*. The idealism of the SBW is present in both these authors, even if buried under layers of anarchic individualism or nihilism (Peckinpah) and parodic views of the mechanism that unites victims and executioners (Leone). In *The Wild Bunch* (1969), what leads Bishop (William Holden) to act is the death of his friend Ángel (Jaime Sánchez), murdered by General Mapache (Emilio Fernández). Mapache subjugates a poor Mexican village, betraying the most profound values of the Revolution, which brings about awful consequences for its inhabitants, Ángel included. Bishop leads the wild bunch to change egotistical plans and do what they must do, despite all odds, because, as Bishop says, "when you side with a man, you stay with him! And if you can't do that, you're like some animal, you're finished!". The journey of the bunch to Mexico, a land deeply cherished by Peckinpah for its absence of ideological paradigms and anarchic inclination, is a modern elegy to utopian values and moral principles that seem to be on the wane (La Polla 2006: 33). Leone's Man with No Name, played by Clint Eastwood, was reduced to subtler aspects, almost to an iconic style—cigars, hat and poncho, deadpan expression. Yet, he is still close to a mythic, undefeated hero who re-establishes order in San Miguel, especially within the family of Marisol, Jesús, and Julio. In his way and without saying it, the Man with No Name interprets the same principles supported by Joel McCrea's character, Steve, in *Ride the High Country* (1962). They all want to "enter home justified", as he says in the film. They still believe in something.

Speaking about limits, another significant limitation of this thesis is the unilateral perspective. My topic is not how Mexican filmmakers have proposed a personal version of the genre but how Hollywood has offered a perception of Mexico and Mexicans in the genre. Yet, it is essential to note that Hollywood does not only feature American filmmakers. Many Mexican actors were involved: Pedro Armendáriz, Miguel Inclán, Anthony Quinn, Gilbert Roland. Further, many American

filmmakers such as George Sherman and Budd Boetticher were often chosen by the studios' production managers because they were directors with a deep knowledge of Mexican land, culture, and language. John Ford and John Huston were also capable of offering insights into this country. To a certain extent, the context of American Studies has offered me an interesting perspective to measure the cosmopolitanism of an industry, Hollywood, that has always cherished global audiences and always requested transnational authors.

The thesis started as a response to a certain tendency to read classical westerns as a negative instance of an industry only interested in offering distorted perceptions of the others. As is declared in the first pages of the excellent volume written by Edward Buscombe on the representation of Natives in Hollywood (2006), it is preferable to present the argument about the mystifying stereotype as a starting point, not as a conclusion. As the author points out, readers should already know that Hollywood films are not accurate historical records and that they are most of the time interested in perpetuating dominant positions. More intriguing, to me, is to place under scrutiny the complexity of needs, desires, and fears of a dominant group as well as the responses that the "others" propose in their fight for a different perception of themselves. This point helps us to understand the complicated pathways through which the cinema of the past connects with present sensibilities. The cosmopolitan approach offered by Gerald Delanty is crucial for this task, especially for its emphasis on the cultural framework of cosmopolitanism, which spotlights popular expressions where multiple forms of identity and belonging coexist. As discussed in Chapter One, an inclination to transcend clearcut divisions between the self and others is detectable in many cultural products—films included—that tend to put notions of hybridity and syncretism at the center. An essential point of the cultural framework of cosmopolitanism is the recognition of the role represented by cultural pluralism, the awareness that the world's cultures can preserve some flexible specificity even if they are deeply interconnected. To create a cosmopolitan sensibility, we must find a synthesis between cultural diversity and communal aspiration. In this sense, the concept of circles of commitment is extremely helpful. The Stoics imagined loyalties through the image of concentric rings, with the individual at

the center. From the first circle, representing the self, to the second, the circle of family, to the subsequent circles—neighbors, local groups, city fellows, country fellows, ethnic, religious, and gender affiliation—to the final circle encompassing humanity as a whole, this figure represents our duties to the world outside (Nussbaum 1996; Nussbaum 1997). The moral framework offered by the circles of commitment is pivotal in this thesis because cosmopolitanism tends to refuse narrow and inflexible forms of nationalism—jingoism, excessive particularism—not the idea of cultural differences or national differences. The circle of commitment allows us to simultaneously maintain both perspectives without fear of disloyalty and contradiction. The national cannot refuse the transnational since the definition of self cannot be identified beyond considering others and how they see us. We can be interested in ourselves as a nation only if we consider the position of others, at the level of neighbors—those on the other side of a fence—and those who live among "us" but are not born in "our" territory.

Following the premise offered by cosmopolitanism, this thesis expands the theory of the western by questioning three aspects that are usually taken for granted. Firstly, the idea of classical western as a simplistic phase, an idea implicit in the evolutionary paradigm contested by Tag Gallagher, Matthew Carter, and Andrew Nelson. This vision deems the genre incapable of expressing perspectives on "difference" or of making serious statements on serious topics. One of my first targets was the theory of the classical western as a genre considered either historically vacant (unable to take into account the reality behind the myth) or ideologically monolithic (unable to think of the Anglo-Saxon self-definition in terms other than a violent response against others or unable to perceive others except as threats to be overcome). Secondly, the assumption that this phase of the genre history is strictly national and jingoistic has been corrected through a changed geopolitical awareness and a desire for transnational openness. As Rick Altman points out, we do not have "a single coherent concept referring to a single coherent object" when we talk about genres or when we talk about nations (Altman 1999: 86). Nations and genres are discursive formations or practices that depend on constant negotiations whereby the margins react to a centralized and land-owning authority.

Therefore, this thesis fully agrees with Josh Garett-Davis's vision that cowboys and their adventures in the West are just the tips of the iceberg since, as the author argues, the concept includes many different things that initially were not identified as "westerns" but that are now legitimate instances of the genre. What we have previously defined under one region—the West—now seems unable to remain confined within those precise limits and boundaries. Placed in dialogue with a region, the Southwest, traditionally identified as un-American (Lummis) or with a different country, Mexico, the western appears as a multi-layered rhizome producing cycles and sub-genres. In this light, we can also agree that origins and centers (America, the West) are no longer necessary. On this point, I must confess to having had some difficulty thinking about this genre as something not generated by American culture, at least at the beginning—in one way or another, things must have an origin somewhere. Yet, scholars should be more interested in exchanges rather than hierarchy in time or space. Finally, the linear evolution from wilderness to civilization appeared to many theorists as the explaining principle of the entire genre. This thesis has carefully interrogated this principle since, in all these SBWs, the concept of civilization contains many flaws and shortages.

To activate cosmopolitan sensibilities within the geographical specificity of the U.S. and Mexico, this thesis has attempted to emphasize that a dialogue between North and South could and did exist over and above political differences. In order to map out a pathway through the U.S.-Mexico border, I conceptualized landscape as the site of culture. As Peter Jackson points out, if cultures are always spatially constituted, spaces are also the locus of cultures (Jackson 1989: 3). In this sense, this thesis aims to offer culture and geography as two sides of the same coin, which explains why I have focused less on the real space of the border between Mexico and the U.S. than on its creative and fictional representation. Applying Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford's interpretation of borders as connecting points that entwine the global and the local, or the transnational and the national, the thesis unveils the great imaginary potential of connections where many other aspects only speak about divisions, walls, separations. Connections and exchanges are pivotal here since they work against the constant process of *re*-bordering that happens at the U.S.-Mexico border. The processes of *de*-

bordering produced by people's mobility are more important to me than explaining the reasons for a firm policy at the Mexican border. I have attempted to explain how the Hollywood industry actually worked as a de-bordering process activator, especially considering the massive investment in runaway productions in Mexico. The hypotheses of a de-bordering process inevitably happen when a dialogue is sought, as these productions shot on location in Mexico attempt to do. This perspective has also allowed me to bypass the unilateral vision that tends to give more importance to Mexicans moving across the border northbound. A more balanced vision can appear by interrogating why Americans had to move southbound across the border. The photograph of the relationship between these two countries offered in this thesis may be partial, even deceptive, but it remains heavily invested in highlighting the dialogue among people working on the same area of expertise, looking for connections based on know-how, production cultures, and national cultures.

Despite being inspired by spatial and geographic analysis, all the chapters propose to combine the real Mexican border with an imaginary space that also incorporates influences from the forms and contents of figurative art. I use the cultural image of the desert that identifies the American southwest and the northern states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas to explain the position of the U.S. in the historical period of the Great Depression. In this phase, the desert appeared not as the place where everything started, the point of departure of the Pioneers' journey from Europe to the U.S., but as the end point of a trip that contained many errors. It represented a way for Americans to think about themselves differently, an approach deprived of the jingoistic prospect inherent in the idea of westward expansion. Moreover, this period of self-scrutiny led American intellectuals and artists to look for a garden outside the perimeter of national boundaries. Richard Pells states that just as intellectuals had been drawn to Europe in the previous decade, so "they undertook pilgrimages to Mexican villages in search of some mystical experience unavailable in the U.S." in the 1930s. They were attracted to societies that seemed outside the pale of capitalist civilization (Pells [1973] 1998: 101). As historian Stuart Chase proposed in *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (1931), the idealization of a cultural and natural "arcadia" south of the border was linked to a severe critique of what was

happening in the U.S. The interest in the political situation in Mexico sparked a movement toward appreciating the geographical and cultural diversity represented by the country. This approach represents the most advanced stance the U.S. has ever taken regarding its southern neighbor's cultural and social specificities.

The SBWs considered in Chapter Two are mainly analyzed as expressions of the 1930s Depression but part of this sensibility is extended to the following period in what I define as "the legacy of the 1930s study of the two Americas" (p. 122). In *Fort Apache* (1948) and *3 Godfathers* (1948), John Ford defies the typical stereotypes of Latino characters by portraying Mexicans as free-spirited, unconventional, and rebellious. They always challenge the limited constraints imposed by the Anglo-Saxon system of values, an aspect that the Irish-American filmmaker had previously addressed in other films. Pedro Armendáriz embodies Ford's fluid idea of national and ethnic cultures as not eternal and monolithic systems but as organic, free, transformative entities, resulting from inextricably entangled mutual influences. Ford experienced Mexico for cultural reasons. His adventure in this country started with one of the first runaway productions in Mexico, *The Fugitive* (1947), where his Irish Catholicism could meet the religiosity of the land. Then, it expanded through his collaboration with Mexican actors such as Elvira Ríos (*Stagecoach*), Miguel Inclán, and Pedro Armendáriz (*Fort Apache* and *3 Godfathers*). By contrast, John Huston had decisive political reasons to visit the country. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) is one of the most impressive instances of runaway productions in Mexico and, with *The Fugitive* (1947), it lays the historic foundation of the economic support to help boost the production companies—above all, Estudios Churubusco—that gave life to the golden age of cinema in Mexico (1936-1956). Huston's fondness for Mexico was reinforced through numerous travels the filmmaker made to that land—he also bought a house in Puerto Vallarta. As a consequence, in his films set and shot in Mexico, and especially in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the natural Mexican landscape is never reduced to an imaginary land or to symbols partially fabricated in a fanciful reconstruction. Huston's Mexico was the real Mexico, at least as seen through the director's lens. This realism is especially detectable in the first images of

Tampico in the film, with its glimpse at the small park where the two prospectors played by Humphrey Bogart and Tim Holt meet for the first time. Yet, it is in the sequence of the healing of the boy that the relationship between land and people becomes genuinely evident and charged with a mystical significance that contrasts with the wild and desert landscape of the protagonists' souls. The sequence begins with the four villagers suddenly appearing before the three prospectors as if they materialized from nature. The identification between land and people is evident throughout Huston's film and is proposed again in Robert Aldrich's *Vera Cruz*, which is analyzed in Chapter Five. These two films are positioned in different chapters because *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is mainly linked to the 1930s political situation, while Aldrich's film is more linked to the cultural interpretation of the river as a symbol of friendship between gringos and Mexicans. Still, the images of the land proposed in these two movies are equally entwined with its inhabitants.

The richness of the Mexican land shown by Huston is a good connection to Chapter Three, where an imaginative Mexico appears as a metaphorical garden of courteous love and interethnic romance. The first two chapters are paired. While the desert reveals the perception that Americans moving to Mexico had of the U.S., the garden reverses the angle. It shows the nostalgic perception that Mexicans living in the U.S. had of their homeland. While Chapter Two is focused on political and social aspects—the tendency of American intellectuals and artists to move south-of-the-border to study a different economic system, one that seemed to produce better fruits—Chapter Three describes purely creative and expressive concepts of picturesque and sublime. These concepts provide the background to evoke the attraction and the risk (respectively) of an interethnic romance.

The attributive condition that the landscape had in landscape art (p. 150) is in the films discussed in Chapter Three turned on its head: here, the human figure acquires characteristics given by the shape of the land. The Mexican picturesque brings on changes in characters, that begin to "experience" a remarkable freedom in their expression of love and romance. The changes in characters and landscape also trigger a tendency to promote a new perception of this country and its inhabitants. As Lary May points out, in many other films produced in the 1930s, the "strictures of the

Victorian artistic canon" according to which a dramatic hero had to be Anglo-Saxon, while "criminals, clowns, and fallen women" showing qualities of lasciviousness and disorder had to be representative of a foreign country became untenable (May 2000: 77). In these SBWs featuring a picturesque Mexico, we find a similar desire to overcome the prejudices of American high-class members toward Mexicans. This change of perception also involved new ideas about the language of love and intimacy. The Latin lover had already made this language more acceptable in the silent era. In the 1930s, images of a picturesque Mexico contributed to extending similar characteristics related to the language of love and intimacy to a concept of different masculinity represented by noble vaqueros, fascinating Mexican outlaws, and romantic Robin Hoods robbing evil characters and defending the weak in picturesque locations south-of-the-border. This different idea of masculinity also involved Anglo actors who started to play characters capable of freely expressing these emotions, helped by a different landscape. There is no significant difference between how Gary Cooper appears in *The Texan* (1931) and how Gregory Peck appears in *Duel in the Sun* (1947): they are both instances of the American type, but they both borrow their audacious sexuality from the Latin lover. The perennial cigarette in the mouth and Lewt's (Peck) hat slouched over one eye in Vidor's film come from the heartthrob persona of Cisco, incapable of committing but always ready to seduce. This kind of evolution from a hard-bitten cowboy to a tender or harsh lover captivated female spectators and generally modified the audience's sensibility, leading to situations where middle-class embarrassment could not exercise massive censorship power. Roles simultaneously comprising the sentimental and the hard-boiled became a staple in westerns, especially when they were validated by a change of settings and locations from harsh western towns to a picturesque Mexico exuding sensuality.

From picturesque photographs or footage of Mexico—to which Mexican artists themselves contributed—the Chapter moves to the imaginary vision of Squaw's Head Rock and the picturesque pond in *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1947) to discuss the importance of Selznick's investment in the revolutionary power of an interethnic romance. The symbolic meaning of Squaw's Head Rock in this

film helps us to trace an association between an imaginative, nonexistent place and other mythical figures carved in the rocks and scattered throughout the American landscape. In the intentions of the filmmaker and of the art department, the rock should function as a southwestern version of the massive sculpture of Crazy Horse in the Black Hills of South Dakota. These two rocks, the filmic and the real, represent the powerful revenge of the imagination against the lost memory of history. Through the filmic Squaw's Head Rock and the real Crazy Horse, those who have been erased from the pages of history could leave an indelible mark on the landscape. While the pond in the film offered the picturesque background for Lewt and Pearl's torrid expression of love, the rock suggested that the tumultuous relationship between an American outlaw and a mestiza from along the border could only be celebrated through the trace of a loss. By applying notions of the picturesque (as a gentle reconstruction of natural beauty) and the sublime (as loss of control in a passionate view of the land) to a southwestern crossroad, *Duel in the Sun* contributes to the evolution of these two notions within the postcolonial phase of their history.

Chapters Four and Five are also paired to present different visions of the U.S.-Mexico border: the dark vision describes separation, while the sunny vision portrays friendship. Noirs and more typical westerns occupy these two chapters. Anthony Mann is the protagonist of Chapter Four, even if the filmmaker was not particularly remembered for his sensibility toward Mexico and Mexicans. In John Ford's films, a nostalgic and crepuscular sensibility is still detectable under the hard skin and the sense of duty of the hero, a sensibility that is reflected in Ford's use of space, which tends to be transcendental and emblematic. In Mann, on the other hand, space and hero represent psychotic liminality and dramatic drives. The hero is transformed into a revenge hunter. This psychological eccentricity is mirrored in a use of space that is always marginal, de-centered, and displaced. Except for *The Man from Laramie* (1955), *Man of the West* (1958), and partially *Winchester '73* (1950), none of his other westerns is set in the southwest or close to Mexico. Mann usually favored hidden corners in the North or on the mountain tops. Additionally, in terms of ethnic characters, none of these three films include Mexicans, even though they are set close to Mexico. Thus, *The Furies* constitutes a

notable exception: it is set on the border, and the role played by Mexican characters is pivotal. The same can be said about *Border Incident*. The five aspects I have identified as constitutive of the South-of-the-Border *Noirish* Westerns—realism, the emphasis on existential themes, the notion of coolness, the psychological depression, and the visual motif of the fences and boundaries—are neatly represented by the four films considered in Chapter Four and specifically related to a metaphorical and geographical experience of border-crossing. The symbolic and real act of moving from one side to the other of two nations or two states of mind or conditions was heavily influenced by people's mobility, especially braceros moving to the U.S. and filmmakers and leftist intellectuals moving to Mexico. Established in 1942 and extended until 1962, the Mexican Farm Labor Program (or Bracero Program) was a temporary emergency labor disposition intended to replace American workers with Mexican seasonal laborers. This disposition was highly lucrative for agribusiness in the U.S. The short-term labor permit allowed workers to spend north of the border the amount of time necessary to carry out fruit-and-vegetables-picking jobs, receive payment, and return to their country to avoid troubles that might have caused political instability in the country. Conversely, many immigrant directors and writers who had fled Europe to escape from Nazism in the 1930s were no longer embraced by the country at the end of the 1940s. Blacklisted screenwriters and filmmakers were no longer permitted to work in the cinema industry and consequently sought and found a new home in Mexico. So, while the U.S. needed strong labor power and invited underpaid workers for the time needed to send them back home at the end of their service, Mexico welcomed many blacklisted screenwriters and filmmakers who had lost their job in Hollywood. From the perspective of Mexican laborers forced to repatriate, the imbalance between Mexican hospitality and rejection by the U.S. could create immense suffering and bitter disillusionment.

The historical imbalance in hospitality and rejection is a pivotal premise in my analysis of the South-of-the-Border *Noirish* Western since it clarifies the obsessive presence of fences, separation, barriers, and thresholds. The marginality that this figure evokes is one of the constitutive aspects of these movies, questioning issues of national belonging and citizenship. The protagonists are in-

between characters experiencing social detachment, a feeling of being inside yet not belonging. The experience of geographic and metaphoric trespassing recounted in these films allows viewers to question preconceived truths and break out from strong polarization between "us" and "them." The border thus loses its absolute value, a process that generates psychic anxiety, rage, and a sense of insecurity due to a lack of protection. Yet, it is also a mechanism that brings on reciprocity and correspondence between outsiders (those who are outside and aspire to be included) and insiders (those who are inside but feel they do not belong).

In Chapter Four, the border between Mexico and the U.S. appears through the symbolic image of a fence, a *noirish* cultural motif that reveals paranoia and fear linked to the border-crossing experience. By contrast, in *Run for the Border*, Steven Bender demonstrates how the U.S. and Mexico are inextricably intertwined into a "cultural blending" based on "economic interdependence" and "cross-border travels" (Bender 2012: 184). This process makes the border appear less like the open wound that Gloria Anzaldúa wrote of, where "the Third World grates against the first and bleeds". Rather than a horizontal gnashing, it becomes a cultural waterway, navigable with ease as local economies, cultures, and priorities dictate (pp. 5-6). In Chapter Five, I have given form to this transformation of the border into a fluid symbol of friendship and specularity. All the films considered in this chapter revolve around two friends, a gringo and a Mexican, a specific variation of the obsession that the genre had in the 1950s for the duality, i.e. the comparison between two (anti-)heroes—in Mann, in Boetticher, and in many other instances, such as Delmer Daves' *3:10 to Yuma*. In the cases of SBWs discussed in this chapter, the American is depicted as gaining knowledge about matters concerning his Mexican friend.

As a form of civil engineering and landscaping, the fence evokes pessimism and discouragement. Albeit often used as a natural boundary between two lands, the river otherwise serves as a means of connection. Peoples use the river to connect and combine diverse points in a landscape. While the fence is an act of human agency, the river appears as a form of natural agency, an expression of the land itself. Anthony Quinn, Gilbert Roland, and Budd Boetticher, two Mexican actors and an

American filmmaker, represent specific cases of personal involvement in cross-cultural communications along the U.S.-Mexico border. In their filmography, the real space of Mexico and the cultural discourse of the border are entwined since all these authors wear the border as a second skin. Beyond their place of origin, they all share a deep knowledge of the Mexican land and culture, albeit having lived or worked for most of their lives on the northern side of the border. They often visited or returned to Mexico in their career, spending years in this country. The experience and knowledge they gained during their lifetime enabled them to enhance the perception of these two countries as neighboring places in the spectators' minds. They are the border-crossers that this thesis hails and celebrates.

Anthony Quinn was never interested in the strategy of invisibility that was sometimes used by Latino actors looking for better roles to avoid typecasting. Rather, he transformed a purported limitation into a strength, always bringing out of his roles, whether playing a Mexican or another nationality or ethnicity, a chance to ponder human conditions beyond ethnic specificity. This ability to break out from expected codes gave him an extremely modern sensibility shaped by the cosmopolitan value of openness to all humankind. Quinn is the perfect representative of a thesis interested in explaining the cosmopolitan aspirations of the classical western. In Wellman's *Ox-Bow Incident*, Juan/Quinn is a crucial character, not least because he foreshadows the attitude that Joel Dinerstein defines as a "mask of coolness" (2017). Juan, in fact, maintains a self-possessed, extremely stoic front to manage the ignorance and racism of the mob, refusing emotional outpourings and complaints. He is completely detached from the situation and later tries to deceive the posse, making them believe he is the guilty, ignorant Mexican that those men assumed. He aims to escape, but when he fails, Juan stoically accepts his destiny with inner strength and self-dominance. The contrast between this character and the absurd behavior of the mob is fully evident in the spatial use the film makes of fences. In Allen Miner's *The Ride Back*, Juan's coolness is tempered in a softer attitude that transforms Roberto/Quinn into *the* savior of a gringo who has lost his self-confidence. The latter

learns a valuable lesson in friendship from a Mexican character, Roberto, who is unafraid to feel and love. In sum, the movie humanizes a gringo again by using a Mexican as the active agent.

The presence of Gilbert Roland in several parts of the thesis (Chapters Three, Four, and Five) allows us to identify him as the most evident embodiment of a transnational border-crosser. Roland is the noble vaquero Cisco in six SBWs set in the picturesque Mexico. Here, the beautiful Mexican scenery becomes a primary attraction for the Mexican audience still residing south of the border or for those who lived in the U.S. and longingly sought images of their homeland. The feature of this land leads Roland to create a different star-persona, full of bravado and proud of his heritage. From this successful cycle, he moved to films that increasingly emphasize his ethnic origin. He is Juan Herrera, a proud Mexican who fights for the recognition of his rights in *The Furies.* Through Juan, the film describes the aspiration of Mexicans to be recognized within a land they owned before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Finally, in *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Bandido!* (1955, 1956), the actor outlines a new phase of Hollywood in which Mexico was increasingly identified with incendiary revolutionaries who had to teach cynical gringos how to become idealists again. Roland envisions progress for Mexican American actors in Hollywood, constantly promoting his vision through his on-screen roles and through an off-screen crusade for better parts. This explains his life and career, as well as his multiple unrealized projects, which are not a good argument for this thesis's aim to adhere to the audience's taste. They are evidence that the cause for a better representation of Mexican Americans in Hollywood remained, at times, relegated to unsuccessful products. Still, they give an idea of the complexity of a topic that encompasses all the contexts and levels of production (authoriality of actors comprised).

Each chapter overlaps with the others as the arguments cannot be neatly isolated. For instance, the concept of picturesque Mexico is also present in Huston's *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. Similarly, many scholars have often considered *Duel in the Sun* as a noir movie even if the chapter emphasizes its locations as a background for an interethnic revolutionary romance. The interethnic love story between Juan and Vance is also in Mann's *The Furies*. Yet, the couple is united in

vengeance, which allows us to consider the political aspects of that romance. The actual Rio Grande/Río Bravo in *Border Incident* is the symbolic element around which the film builds its complex pattern of symmetry between Mexico and the U.S. In this sense, the film could also fit into Chapter Five. Finally, in terms of figurative patterns, fences are present in many films that, in the approach taken by this thesis, define friendship and communication. In *The Ride Back*, the map in Hamish's office illustrates what Giuliana Bruno has defined as cartographic anxiety, a desire to translate an amalgamated territory into a well-identified map of separated lands. In *Buchanan Rides Alone* and *Vera Cruz*, friendship is constantly threatened by fences and separations. However, I have attempted to emphasize the intention behind each of them, keeping together films that represent certain cultural spaces in similar ways. The desert is a metaphor for political confrontation between the U.S. and Mexico (Chapter Two); the picturesque and sublime garden of Mexico is a location for interethnic romance (Chapter Three); the fence is a symbol for claims over injustice and different policies at the Mexican border (Chapter Four); the river is a symbol of the liquifying process of a waterway connecting friends (Chapter Five).

My final remark addresses the opposition between frontier and border. While in Turner's nostalgic view, the frontier appeared as a closed historical phase that would have opened a new stage equally abounding in self-definition, in Anzaldúa's powerful and traumatic imagery, almost one century after Turner, *la frontera* is an open issue that requires a transnational solution. Still, adapted for the screen and inevitably involved in storytelling practices, even the reality of the border tends to mingle with legends and imaginations. My attempt was to understand the functions of this imaginary activity. The function of these SBWs is to connect popular pleasures, social reality, and political change. Scholars sometimes tend to ignore the relationship among these three elements using the argument that a popular film should be criticized for its incapacity to tackle serious issues and drive political change. They make the mistake of underestimating the internal complexity of popular products. Audiences do not just escape *to* something. In fact, they escape *from* something, creating hope, aspirations, alternative horizons, and possible evolutions that, in the films discussed in this

thesis, may uphold revolutionary visions of a new, imagined, cosmopolitan borderland. If we do not sufficiently believe in the possibility that popular cinema may also present positive approaches, the battle would already be lost.

APPENDIX

Fig. 1: Greater U.S.-Mexico

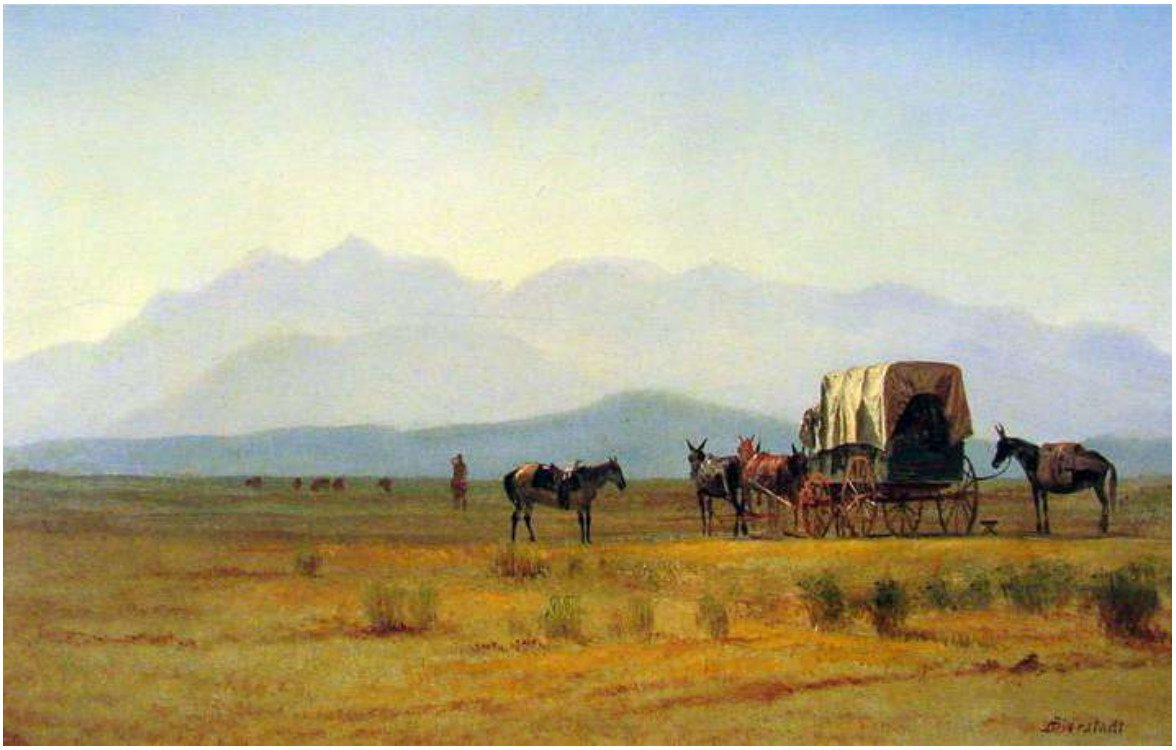

Fig. 2. Albert Bierstadt “Surveyors’s Wagon in the Rocky Mountains (1859)

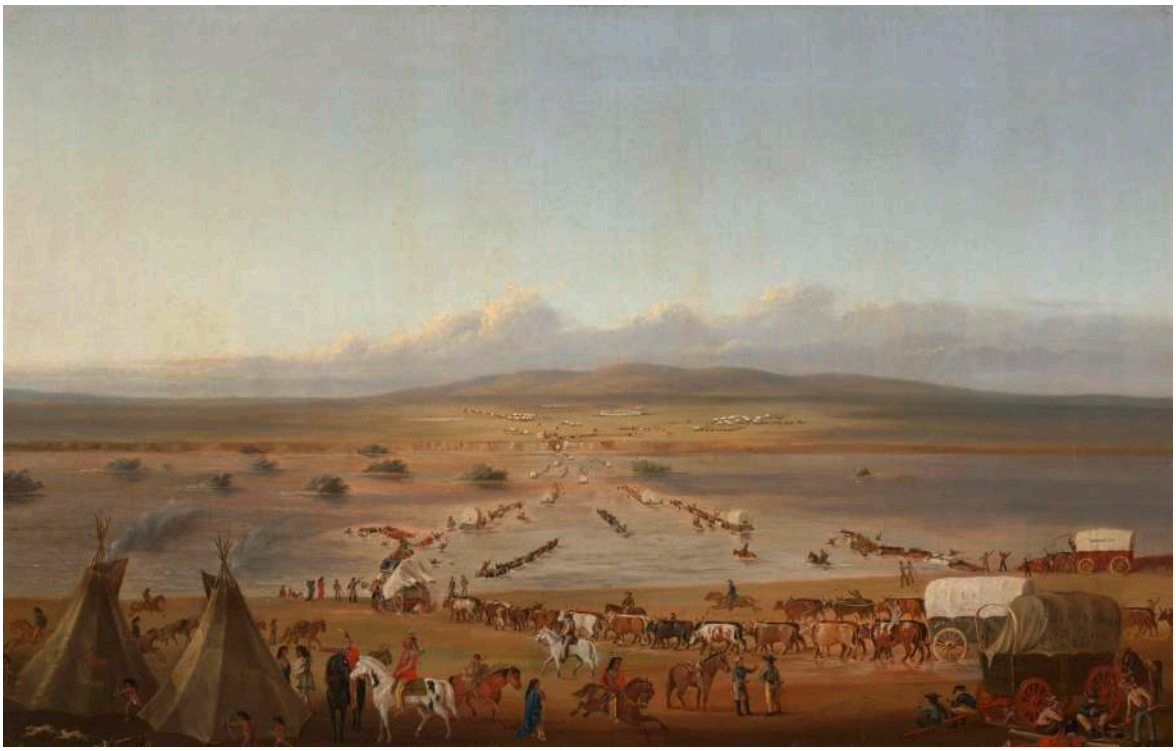

Fig. 3. William Henry Jackson “California Crossing, South Platte” (1867)

Fig. 4. John Gast “American Progress” (1872)

Fig. 5. Conrad Buff “Westward” 1934

Fig. 6. Jackson Pollock “Going West” (1934)

Fig. 7. Roy Rogers shows the plight of farmers in the Dust Bowl before singing “Dust” in *Under Western Stars* (Joseph Kane, Republic, 1938)

Fig. 8. Sam “Gus” Barton walks aways toward the desert at the end of *Three Godfathers* (Richard Boleslawski, MGM, 1936).

Fig. 9. The border space of Apache Wells in *Stagecoach* (John Ford 1939) where Yakima (Elvira Ríos) sings *Al pensar en ti*

Fig. 10. The desert in *3 Godfathers* (John Ford 1948)
where the three bad men start their journey

Fig. 11. Pedro Armendáriz as Pedro Roca Fuerte in *3 Godfathers*

Fig. 12. Howard healing the kid in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston 1948)

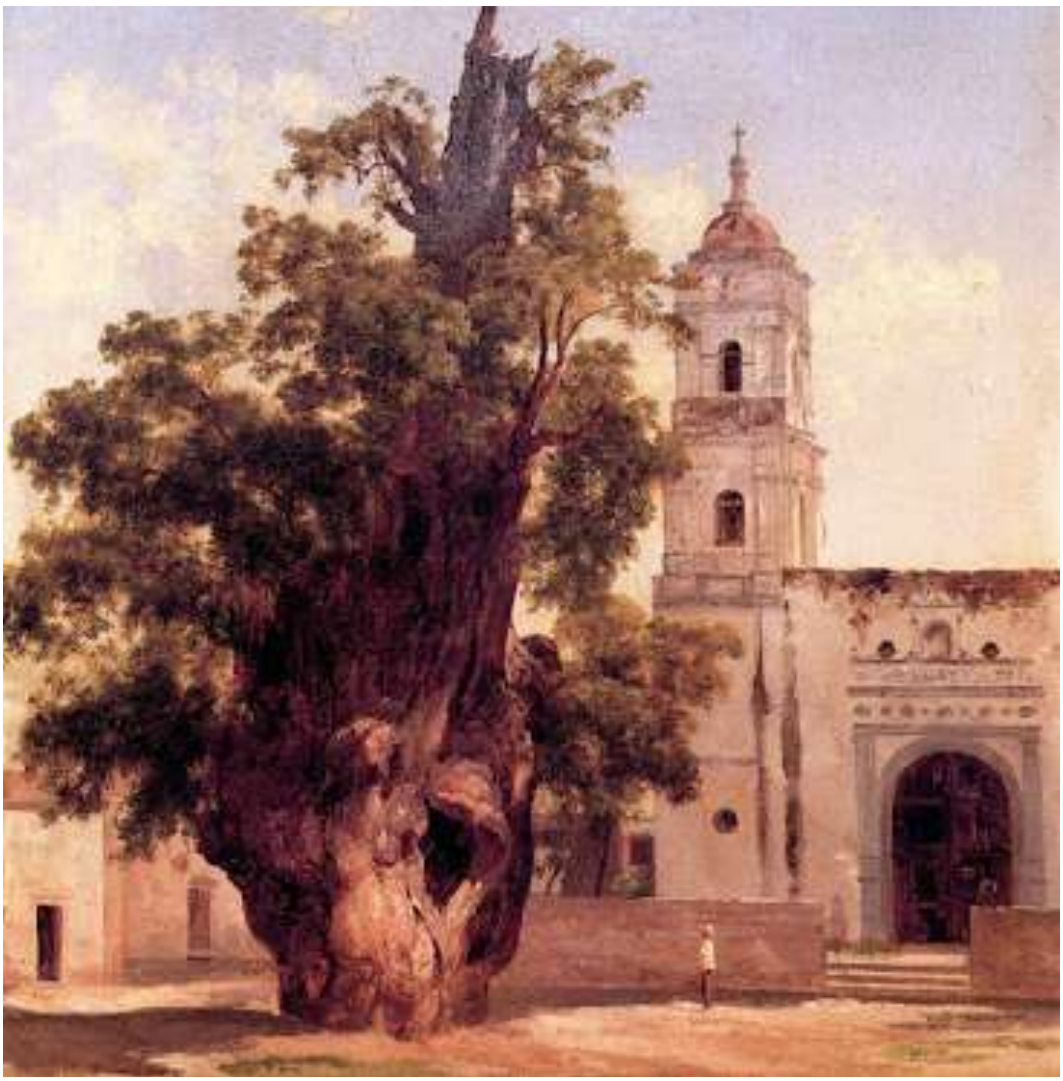

Fig. 13. “El árbol de la noche triste” José María Velasco, 1885

Fig. 14. Cuernavaca, picturesque corner. From *Picturesque Mexico: The Country, the People and the Architecture*, London, 1925
(photograph by Hugo Brehme)

Fig. 15. The long life of picturesque Mexico: *The Texan* (John Cromwell 1930)

Fig. 16. The long life of picturesque Mexico: *In Old Arizona*
(Irving Cummings 1929)

Fig. 17. The long life of picturesque Mexico: *In Old Arizona*
(Irving Cummings 1929)

Fig. 18. The long life of picturesque Mexico: *King of the Bandits*
(Christy Cabanne 1947)

Fig. 19. The long life of picturesque Mexico: *San Antonio* (David Butler 1945)

Fig. 20. Pearl's room in *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1947)
Interiors Pearl's Bedroom; Vanguard Set Stills, 1946
"Interiors, Buildings & Train Sets" (Production, Slifer). Box/Folder: 4085/7, 9.
Courtesy of Harry Ransom Center.

Fig. 21. Laura Belle McCanles's sitting room in *Duel in the Sun (*King Vidor 1947)
Interiors Mrs. McCanles Sitting Room; Vanguard Set Stills, 1946
"Interiors, Buildings & Train Sets" (Production, Slifer). Box/Folder: 4085/7, 9.
Courtesy of Harry Ransom Center.

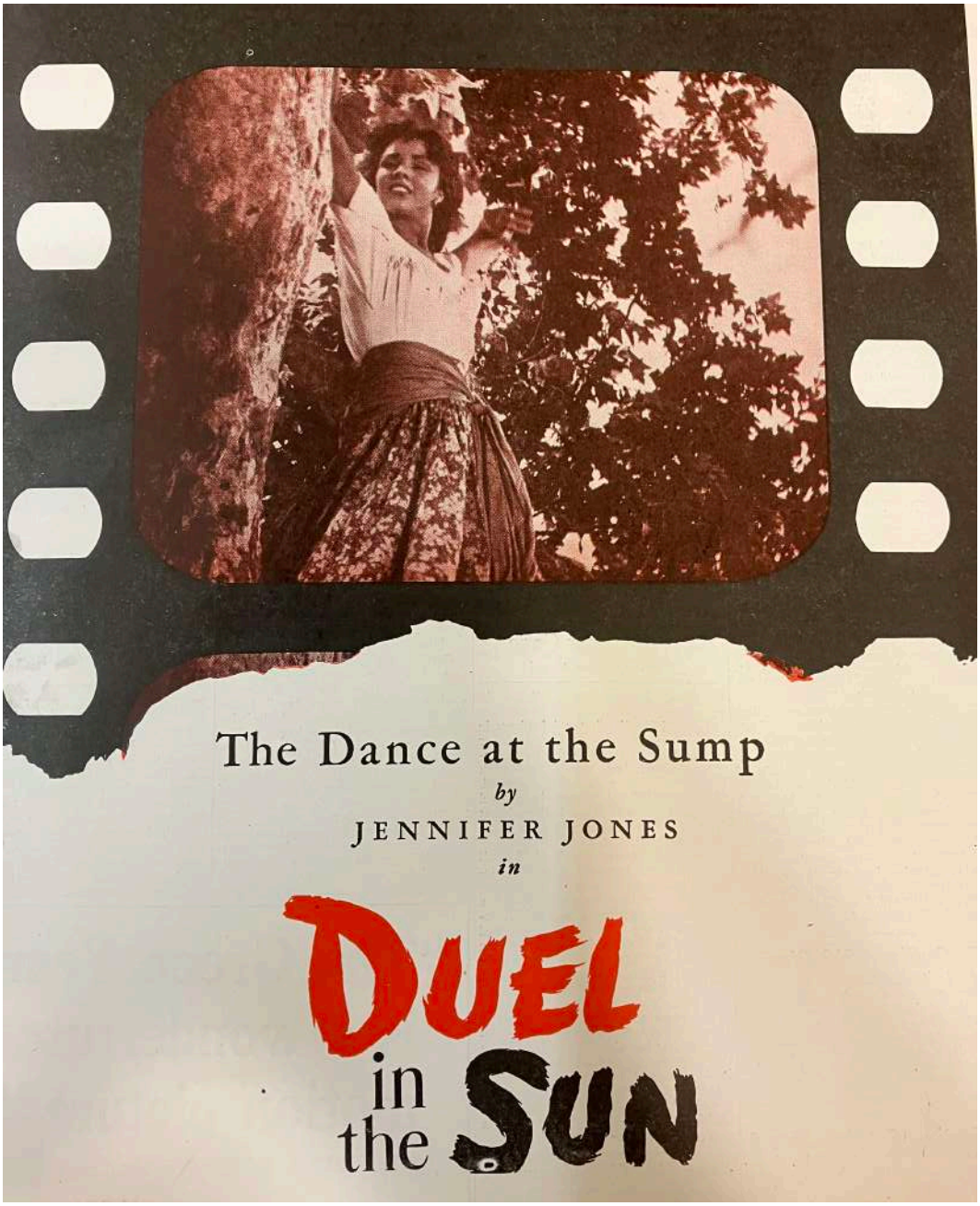

Fig. 22. Pearl dances in the cut out scene
at the picturesque pond (the sump)
in *Duel in the Sun*

Fig. 23. James Basevi (?) shows the spot chosen for the construction of the exteriors of Spanish Bit in *Duel in the Sun.*

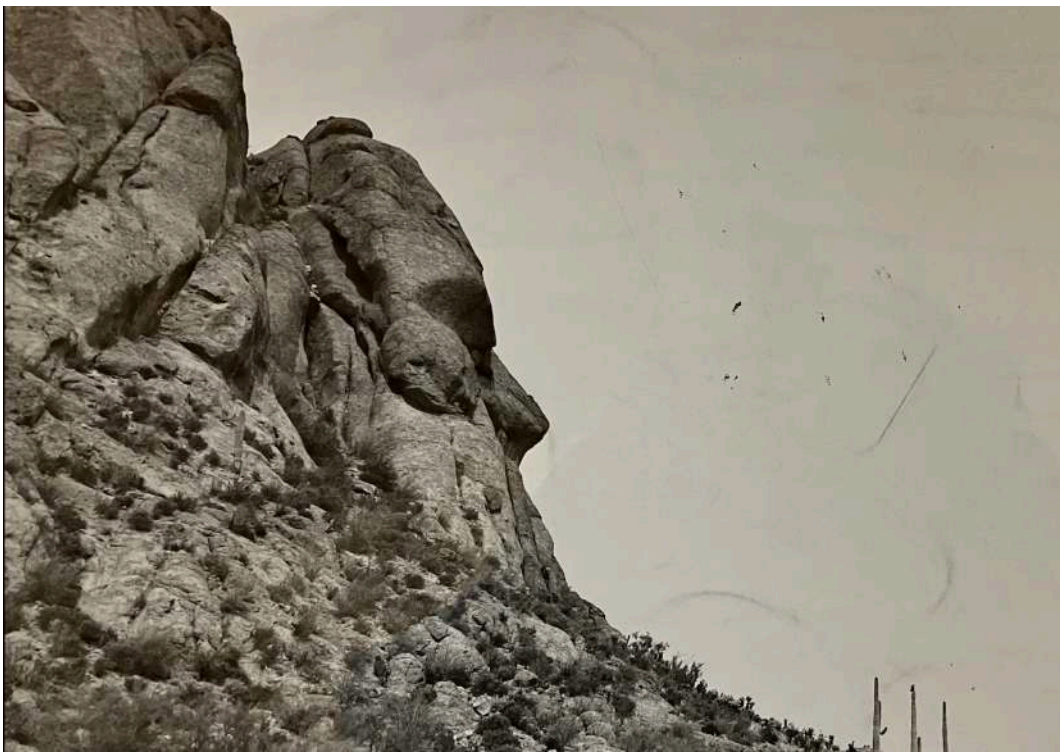

Fig. 24. Abstract composition of Squaw's Head Rock
combining footage and drawing for the Technicolor test.

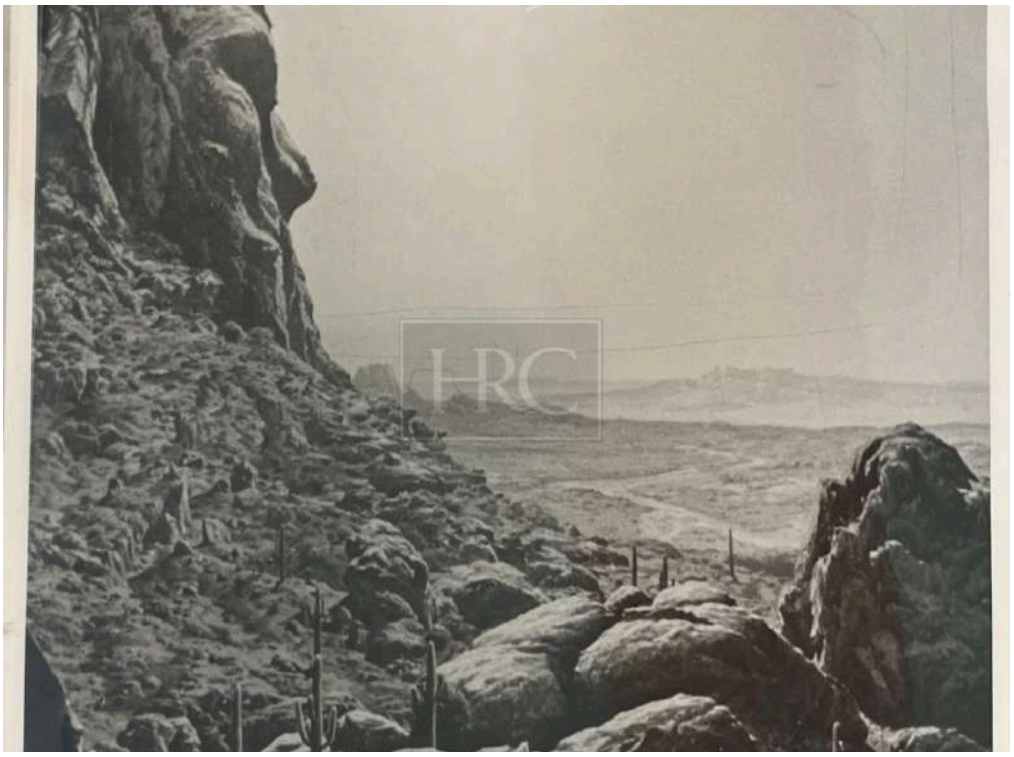

Fig. 25. Drawing of SHR as a model for the matte shots.
SHR (b&w, right profile) "Stills, 1946 Miscellaneous Shots, Wardrobe, Scenes,
Landscape, 80 Items" (Production, Slifer). Box/Folder: 4085/5-6.
Courtesy of Harry Ransom Center.

Fig. 26. Matte shot of SHR with the foreground of Pearl riding Dice
taken on location in Arizona.

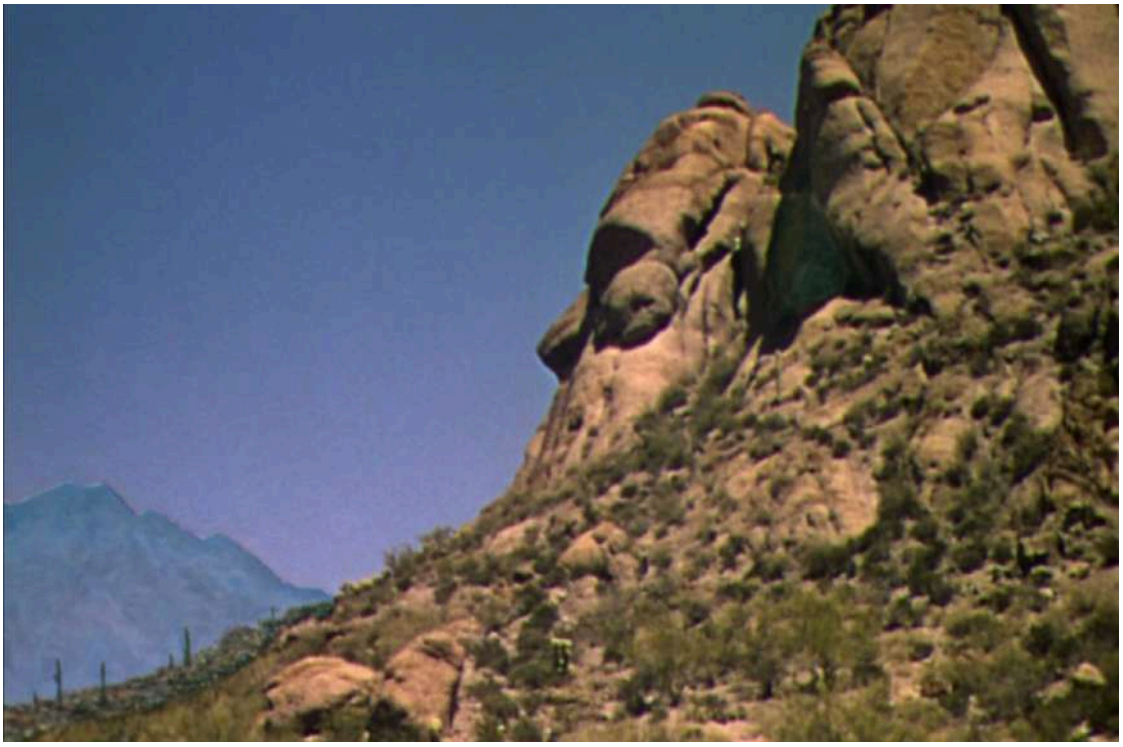

Fig. 27. Matte shot of SHR with a foreground of the slope
taken on location in Arizona.

Fig. 28. Matte shot of SHR for the opening Legend.

Fig. 29. Matte shot of SHR for the ending sequence.

Fig. 30. Matte painting #5 from DUEL IN THE SUN, FF Folder 2, NO.3396
Courtesy of Harry Ransom Center

Fig. 31. Anthony Quinn (Juan Martínez). The mask of coolness as a way to cope with an angry mob in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1942)

Fig. 32. Moral positions in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1942)

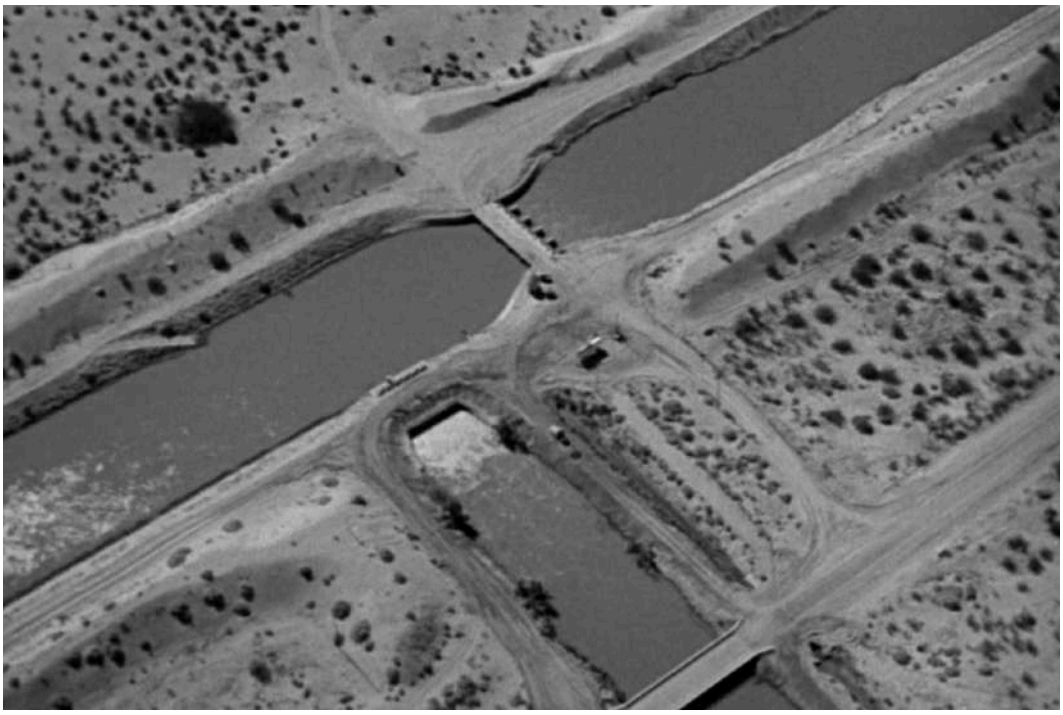

Fig. 33. The U.S.-Mexico border in *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949)

Fig. 34. The U.S.-Mexico border in *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949)

Fig. 35. The death of Jack (George Murphy) in *Border Incident*
(Anthony Mann 1949)

Fig. 36. The cool detective/cowboy Pablo (Ricardo Montalbán)
in *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949)

Fig. 37. A noble vaquero. Gilbert Roland in
The Furies (Anthony Mann 1950)

Fig. 38. The fence as a clear alert of future events in
The Furies (Anthony Mann 1950)

Fig. 39. The stakes of a fence enclosing the Herreras in their fate
The Furies (Anthony Mann 1950)

Fig. 40. The horizontal lines of the booth's windows magnify the effect of separation and division. *Man in the Shadow* (Jack Arnold 1957)

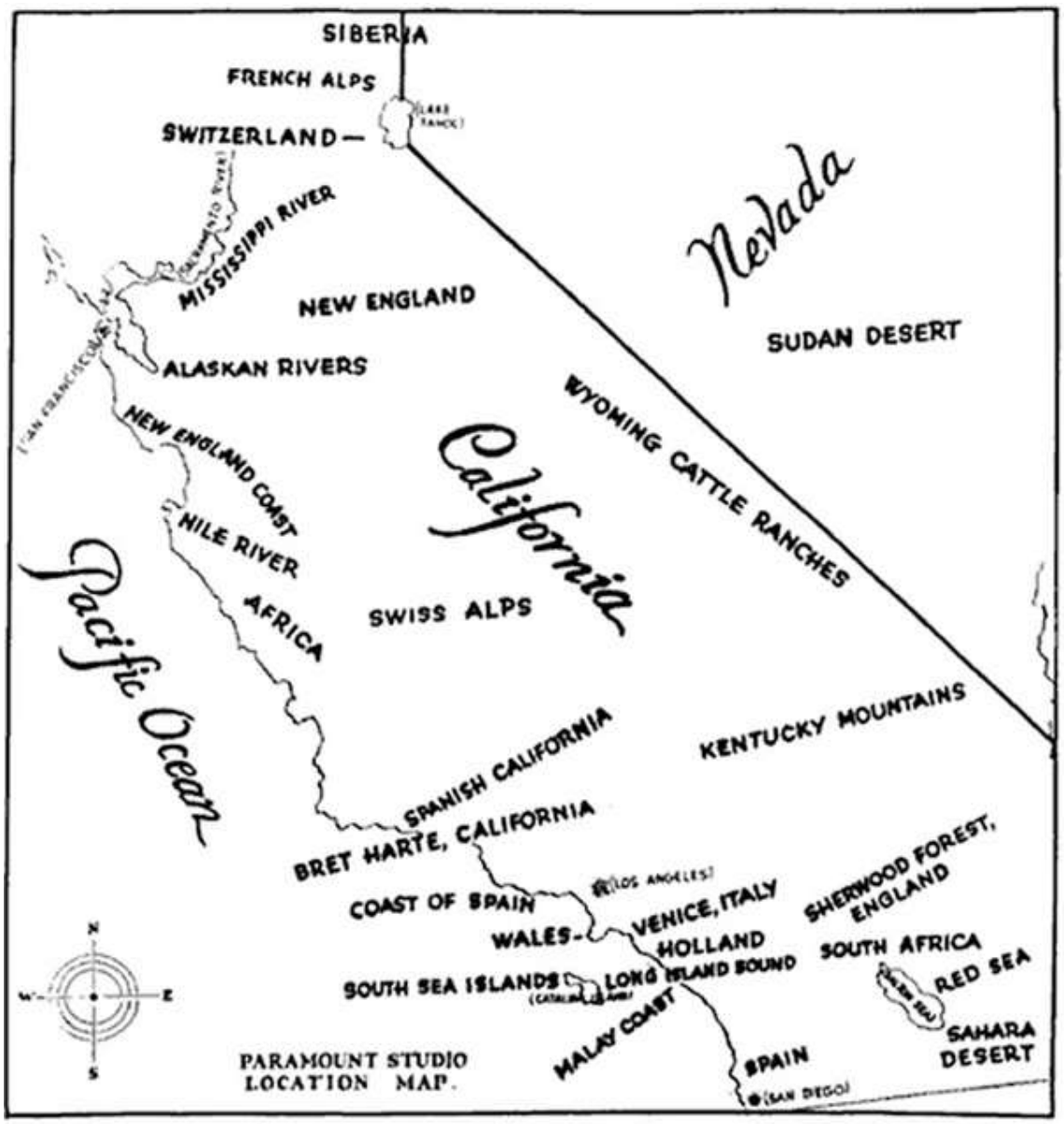

Fig. 41. Paramount Studio Location Map

Fig. 42. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo like solid matter
in *Border River* (George Sherman 1954)

Fig. 43. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo as a silvery surface with gentle waves
in *Border River* (George Sherman 1954)

Fig. 44. The Rio Grande/Río Bravo like a rivulet in the borderland shown in *The Ride Back* (Allen H. Miner 1957)

Fig. 45. Gilbert Roland and Robert Mitchum in *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer 1956)

Fig. 46. Buchanan (Randolph Scott) going back to the U.S. from Mexico
in *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher 1958)

Fig. 47. The bridge separating the U.S. from Mexico
in *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher 1958)

Fig. 48. The idea of the river as a mean of communication
in *Vera Cruz* (Robert Aldrich 1954)

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The Gay Cavalier (William Nigh, Monogram, 1946)
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South of Monterey (William Nigh, Monogram, 1946)
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The Ride Back (Alain Miner, Aldrich&Associates/UA, 1957)
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RESUMEN

Siguiendo una lógica inspirada en la metodología del análisis espacial y la teoría de las fronteras, deseo organizar el estudio de (South-of-the-Border Western) SBW según el paisaje. Aparte del primero, cada uno de los capítulos siguientes se inspira en una imagen concreta conectada con el espacio de la frontera: desierto, jardín, valla, río. Los dos primeros están fuertemente conectados ya que representan una inversión mutua de la bien conocida oposición entre civilización y naturaleza. El desierto (capítulo dos) representa una imagen cultural de la codicia, mientras que el jardín (capítulo tres) identifica el fondo pintoresco de las historias de romances interétnicos en unos pocos SBW. Los dos últimos son por lo demás dos declinaciones de la imagen de la frontera. Por un lado, la frontera es una valla (Capítulo Cuatro) destinada a delinear y discriminar entre ciudadanos diversos con diferentes derechos y que están sujetos a diferentes políticas. Por otro lado, es un río (Capítulo Cinco), una metáfora de un fluido que se entrelaza entre dos países.

El capítulo uno comienza con mi respuesta a la tesis de Camilla Fojas en *Border Bandits* (2016), que se basa en tres supuestos básicos. En primer lugar, condena la presencia de estereotipos despreciables sobre los mexicanos en las películas fronterizas de Hollywood. En segundo lugar, analiza la total eliminación o distorsión de la tradición histórica de la frontera, como ocurre, por ejemplo, en el papel central de los Texas Rangers. Salvaguardan la ley, la paz y el orden de las acciones despreciables de bandidos mexicanos que identifican una oposición simplista. En tercer lugar, sostiene que las películas fronterizas de Hollywood se inclinan hacia una restauración de una identidad nacional basada en una fuerte imagen de masculinidad blanca y angloamericana. El héroe abarca dudas, fobias y esperanzas generales respecto de las tierras y los personajes mexicanos. Mi respuesta se basa en el análisis de la producción y distribución internacional de películas de Hollywood, para resaltar cómo el estereotipo llegó a corregirse levemente gracias a la iniciativa del Departamento de Asuntos Exteriores del MPPDA. Las producciones bilingües sostienen mi argumento sobre los intercambios culturales ya que brindaron oportunidades laborales a actores, guionistas y directores mexicanos, quienes luego constituirían los pilares de la Época de Oro del cine

mexicano. El breve análisis de la prensa especializada y otras revistas publicadas en México demuestra la sustancial afición que el público mexicano tiene por las películas de Hollywood. Estos aspectos resuenan en la trama de muchas películas, donde encontramos instancias de héroes mexicanos. Además, la tendencia general a romantizar la Revolución y la personalidad descomunal de Villa también puede leerse desde esta perspectiva. Al desconectar a SBW de una mitología estrictamente nacional, el territorio de la zona fronteriza (Gran Estados Unidos-México) deja de aparecer como una división clara en extremos ideológicos y se vuelve confuso en un terreno común. Basándome en Gerard Delanty y Martha Nussbaum, explico cómo el cosmopolitismo es una forma precisa de identificar conexiones transnacionales entre México y Estados Unidos dentro de mi canon de SBW. La teoría de las fronteras y el análisis espacial proporcionan la metodología a través de la cual se pueden revisar las teorías tradicionales de Occidente para delimitar el objeto de este estudio.

En el capítulo dos, el contrapunto ideológico entre naturaleza y civilización se reajusta y adapta a un contexto transnacional. En los westerns clásicos, el territorio americano aparece a través de encarnaciones específicas de valores y visiones: la exuberancia de la hierba y la falta de obstáculos son símbolos de la fertilidad de la pradera que espera ser arada y plantada. Por el contrario, en SBW lo que debería parecer un jardín abundante se transforma en un desierto árido y el lado mexicano de la frontera (real o ficticio) a menudo aparece a través de imágenes de exuberante vegetación y relucientes cuencas de agua. Esta imagen del desierto también se pone bajo escrutinio dentro del contexto cultural de la década de 1930, cuando las cuestiones relacionadas con la explotación de tierras (la sequía en el Medio Oeste y la catástrofe del Dust Bowl) ganaron centralidad. *The Texan* (John Cromwell 1930) y *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles 1931) cuestionan la idea del progreso americano como una evolución de la naturaleza salvaje a la civilización, en relación con un período histórico caracterizado por dos aspectos principales: la Política del Buen Vecino, que abrió el espacio diplomático y las relaciones culturales entre México y Estados Unidos y, en segundo lugar, una tendencia a romantizar a la gente popular de las zonas rurales. En este capítulo, me centraré

principalmente en *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), pero también analizo *Fort Apache* (1948) y *3 Godfathers* (1948), así como *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* de 1948 de John Huston.

En el capítulo tres, ofrezco una interpretación cultural de la frontera basada en la representación de la noción de pintoresco aplicada a México. En muchos SBW tenemos diferentes declinaciones de una forma de exotismo extendida al vecino del sur. Tanto en el ciclo Cisco Kid como en *South of the Border* (George Sherman 1939), *Mexicali Rose* (George Sherman 1939), *San Antonio* (David Butler 1945) y *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1948), encontramos una representación del paisaje mexicano como telón de fondo para romances interétnicos que cuestionan la representación habitual de una jerarquía entre mujeres u hombres anglos y mexicanos donde los primeros representan el buen sentido y la buena moralidad, mientras que los segundos a menudo son relegados a roles secundarios de latinas sensuales o Latin Lovers. En estas películas se atribuyen virtudes como la fuerza y la autosuficiencia a personas tradicionalmente marginadas. Además, estas películas muestran una evolución del vaquero duro a un amante tierno que cautivó a las espectadoras y, en general, modificó la sensibilidad de la audiencia, llevando a situaciones en las que la vergüenza de la clase media no podía ejercer un poder de censura masivo. Los roles que comprendían simultáneamente lo sentimental y lo duro se volvieron ampliamente utilizados en los westerns, especialmente cuando fueron validados por un cambio de escenarios y ubicaciones de las duras ciudades del oeste a un México pintoresco que exudaba sensualidad.

En el capítulo cuatro, ofrezco una interpretación sociopolítica de la frontera basada en la presencia de vallas y límites en los espacios de las películas. Como en películas negras, la frontera en los westerns es a menudo la expresión de las preocupaciones de la Guerra Fría sobre la ciudadanía estadounidense y la evidencia del proceso de cumplimiento de la integridad territorial nacional. Aquí, SBW aborda el problema de la pertenencia y las cuestiones relacionadas con la alteridad, a través de quienes representan una afiliación política y social diferente. *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William Wellman 1943), *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann 1949), *The Furies* (Anthony Mann 1950) y *Man in the Shadow* (Jack Arnold /Orson Welles 1957) revelan los errores cometidos por anglos demasiado

celosos en busca de venganza. como enérgicos defensores de la ley (la pandilla en *The Ox-bow Incident*, la organización criminal en *Border Incident*, T.C. Jeffords en *The Furies*, los ciudadanos de *Man in the Shadow*). También muestran que, en contraste con los angloamericanos acaparadores de dinero, traicioneros y groseros, la cultura mexicana parece mucho más amable y sabia. Juan Martínez (Anthony Quinn) en *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Pablo Rodríguez (Ricardo Montálban) en *Border Incident*, Juan Herrera (Gilbert Roland) en *The Furies* y Jesús Cisneros (Martin Garralaga) en *Man in the Shadow* son todos ejemplos de esto visión amable que transmiten las películas.

En el capítulo cinco, abordo la representación de un Gran México-Estados Unidos a través del fenómeno de las producciones desbocadas y utilizando la imagen cultural de un río. Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, muchas películas se rodaron en exteriores, a menudo en México, como ocurrió, por ejemplo, en las películas de John Huston, Budd Boetticher y George Sherman. Anthony Quinn, actor cosmopolita de origen mexicano, también participó en westerns B ambientados en la frontera. De manera similar, Gilbert Roland participó en muchos SBW ambientados y filmados en México, alejando su carrera de la imagen del Latin Lover para abrazar una noción transnacional de un héroe, orgulloso vaquero mexicano. Películas como *Buchanan Rides Alone* (Budd Boetticher, 1958), *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* (George Sherman, 1955) y *Bandido!* (Richard Fleischer, 1956) muestran la legendaria lucha de los villistas desde una perspectiva comprensiva. En este capítulo, amplié el análisis de Cristopher Frayling sobre los spaghetti westerns de Zapata atribuyendo el complot de amistad entre mercenarios a este último grupo de SBW. Aquí, se persuade a anglos comprensivos para que se unan a sus amigos mexicanos según una mentalidad que no se identifica unilateralmente con la visión política de América Latina que nutrió Estados Unidos. De hecho, según algunos estudiosos, los salvadores estadounidenses aparecieron en muchos de los primeros westerns donde "los vaqueros anglosajones lucharon contra los 'mexicanos malos' en defensa de los 'mexicanos buenos' porque los mexicanos no podían ayudarse a sí mismos" (Rodríguez 2004: 125). Sostengo que esto no es un simple respaldo a la leyenda de los buenos samaritanos de la Guerra Fría

porque en muchas ocasiones los anglos se salvan por su conexión con amigos mexicanos y por su apertura a una cultura extranjera.

CONCLUSIÓN

En su volumen sobre el Spaghetti Western, Christopher Frayling escribe que los cineastas italianos están "preocupados por aspectos del interés estadounidense en los que Hollywood rara vez había mostrado interés, aspectos que sólo pudieron alcanzar prominencia una vez que el género se hubo divorciado de su base histórica tradicional" (Frayling [1981] 2006: 127). En esta tesis, he intentado demostrar que aquellos aspectos que Frayling describe como constitutivos del SW — la frontera suroeste, los enfrentamientos entre anglos y mexicanos, la relación entre bandidos y comunidades campesinas, el estatus de los grupos minoritarios en las ciudades en crecimiento o las formas dictatoriales en que se administran estas ciudades — son todos aspectos que Hollywood ha abordado, aunque con una sensibilidad diferente. Vale la pena señalar que la fase más radical de SW, la que comprendió películas de Sergio Sollima y Damiano Damiani, casi siempre utilizó a México como metáfora del Tercer Mundo que lucha contra los países capitalistas, estos últimos generalmente representados por un "gringo". En mi tesis expliqué cómo los SBW suelen presentar a México para representar al país mismo o sus valores simbólicos en lugar de utilizarlo como un sustituto del Sur global pobre. Especialmente cuando se considera en la era de la posguerra, el SBW parecía inevitablemente influenciado por la teoría de la contención, que exigía una cuidadosa consideración del vecino mexicano. Aún así, no podemos asumir que las películas de Hollywood sean siempre expresión de lo que un gobierno decide para el país. Como productos culturales, las películas están influenciadas por múltiples aspectos y factores, especialmente cuando la conexión industrial entre dos países permite que las personas se encuentren e intercambien diferentes visiones y prácticas a lo largo de la frontera. Éste es uno de los resultados más evidentes de mi análisis.

Esta tesis necesitaba límites en cuanto al período histórico, por lo que me vi obligado a tomar una fotografía de una situación limitada. Sin embargo, uno de los puntos de partida para futuras observaciones podría ser la larga serie de conexiones e influencias que este subgénero, el SBW, tiene no sólo con el cine posclásico de Hollywood –principalmente, Sam Peckinpah– sino también con el cine occidental global. Para Sergio Leone y otros cineastas italianos que trabajaron en este género,

México es el epítome de la fuerza laboral en la lucha económica contra el capital, lo que amplía plenamente las premisas de los SBW, probablemente también poniéndolas patas arriba. Además de Italia, muchos otros países, desde Alemania hasta España, desde Australia hasta Europa del Este, incluido México, han producido películas que reelaboran los valores, personajes, temas y leyendas del western de maneras muy diferentes. Nacidos con sólo cuatro años de diferencia, Peckinpah y Leone se caracterizan por una sensibilidad similar, principalmente en términos de cinefilia. El idealismo del SBW está presente en ambos autores, incluso si está enterrado bajo capas de individualismo anárquico o nihilismo (Peckinpah) y visiones paródicas del mecanismo que une a víctimas y verdugos (Leone). En *The Wild Bunch* (1969), lo que lleva a Bishop (William Holden) a actuar es la muerte de su amigo Ángel (Jaime Sánchez), asesinado por el general Mapache (Emilio Fernández). Mapache somete a un pobre pueblo mexicano, traicionando los valores más profundos de la Revolución, lo que trae terribles consecuencias para sus habitantes, incluido Ángel. Bishop lidera al grupo salvaje para cambiar sus planes egoístas y hacer lo que deben hacer, a pesar de todas las probabilidades, porque, como dice Bishop, "¡cuando estás del lado de un hombre, te quedas con él! Y si no puedes hacer eso, eres como un animal, ¡estás acabado!". El viaje del grupo a México, una tierra profundamente apreciada por Peckinpah por su ausencia de paradigmas ideológicos y su inclinación anárquica, es una elegía moderna a los valores utópicos y principios morales que parecen estar en decadencia (La Polla 2006: 33). El hombre sin nombre de Leone, interpretado por Clint Eastwood, se redujo a aspectos más sutiles, casi a un estilo icónico: cigarros, sombrero y poncho, expresión inexpresiva. Sin embargo, todavía está cerca de un héroe mítico e invicto que restablece el orden en San Miguel, especialmente dentro de la familia de Marisol, Jesús y Julio. A su manera y sin decirlo, El hombre sin nombre interpreta los mismos principios sostenidos por el personaje de Joel McCrea, Steve, en *Ride the High Country* (1962). Todos quieren "entrar a casa justificados", como dice en la película. Todavía creen en algo.

Hablando de límites, otra limitación importante de esta tesis es la perspectiva unilateral. Mi tema no es cómo los cineastas mexicanos han propuesto una versión personal del género sino cómo

Hollywood ha ofrecido una percepción de México y de los mexicanos en el género. Sin embargo, es esencial señalar que Hollywood no sólo cuenta con cineastas estadounidenses. Participaron muchos actores mexicanos: Pedro Armendáriz, Miguel Inclán, Anthony Quinn, Gilbert Roland. Además, muchos cineastas estadounidenses como George Sherman y Budd Boetticher fueron elegidos a menudo por los directores de producción de los estudios porque eran directores con un profundo conocimiento de la tierra, la cultura y el idioma mexicanos. John Ford y John Huston también fueron capaces de ofrecer información sobre este país. Hasta cierto punto, el contexto de los estudios americanos me ha ofrecido una perspectiva interesante para medir el cosmopolitismo de una industria, Hollywood, que siempre ha apreciado audiencias globales y siempre ha solicitado autores transnacionales.

La tesis nació como respuesta a una cierta tendencia a leer los westerns clásicos como una instancia negativa de una industria interesada únicamente en ofrecer percepciones distorsionadas de los demás. Como se declara en las primeras páginas del excelente volumen escrito por Edward Buscombe sobre la representación de los nativos en Hollywood (2006), es preferible presentar el argumento sobre el estereotipo desconcertante como un punto de partida, no como una conclusión. Como señala el autor, los lectores ya deberían saber que las películas de Hollywood no son registros históricos precisos y que la mayoría de las veces están interesadas en perpetuar posiciones dominantes. Más intrigante, para mí, es poner bajo escrutinio la complejidad de las necesidades, deseos y miedos de un grupo dominante, así como las respuestas que los "otros" proponen en su lucha por una percepción diferente de sí mismos. Este punto nos ayuda a comprender los complicados caminos a través de los cuales el cine del pasado conecta con las sensibilidades del presente. El enfoque cosmopolita ofrecido por Gerald Delanty es crucial para esta tarea, especialmente por su énfasis en el marco cultural del cosmopolitismo, que destaca expresiones populares donde coexisten múltiples formas de identidad y pertenencia. Como se analizó en el capítulo uno, una inclinación a trascender las divisiones claras entre uno mismo y los demás es detectable en muchos productos culturales (incluidas las películas) que tienden a poner las nociones de hibridación y sincretismo en

el centro. Un punto esencial del marco cultural del cosmopolitismo es el reconocimiento del papel que representa el pluralismo cultural, la conciencia de que las culturas del mundo pueden preservar alguna especificidad flexible incluso si están profundamente interconectadas. Para crear una sensibilidad cosmopolita, debemos encontrar una síntesis entre la diversidad cultural y la aspiración comunitaria. En este sentido, el concepto de círculos de compromiso es de gran ayuda. Los estoicos imaginaban las lealtades a través de la imagen de anillos concéntricos, con el individuo en el centro. Desde el primer círculo, que representa al yo, al segundo, el círculo de la familia, a los círculos siguientes (vecinos, grupos locales, compañeros de ciudad, compañeros de campo, afiliación étnica, religiosa y de género) hasta el círculo final que abarca a la humanidad como un todo. En conjunto, esta cifra representa nuestros deberes para con el mundo exterior (Nussbaum 1996; Nussbaum 1997). El marco moral que ofrecen los círculos de compromiso es fundamental en esta tesis porque el cosmopolitismo tiende a rechazar formas estrechas e inflexibles de nacionalismo (patrioterismo, particularismo excesivo), no la idea de diferencias culturales o diferencias nacionales. El círculo de compromiso nos permite mantener simultáneamente ambas perspectivas sin temor a la deslealtad y la contradicción. Lo nacional no puede rechazar lo transnacional ya que la definición de uno mismo no puede identificarse más allá de considerar a los demás y cómo nos ven. Podemos interesarnos en nosotros mismos como nación sólo si consideramos la posición de los demás, al nivel de los vecinos –los que están al otro lado de una valla– y de aquellos que viven entre "nosotros" pero no nacen en "nuestro" territorio.

Siguiendo la premisa ofrecida por el cosmopolitismo, esta tesis amplía la teoría de lo occidental cuestionando tres aspectos que habitualmente se dan por sentados. En primer lugar, la idea del western clásico como una fase simplista, una idea implícita en el paradigma evolutivo cuestionado por Tag Gallagher, Matthew Carter y Andrew Nelson. Esta visión considera que el género es incapaz de expresar perspectivas sobre la "diferencia" o de hacer declaraciones serias sobre temas serios. Uno de mis primeros objetivos fue la teoría del western clásico como género considerado históricamente vacío (incapaz de tomar en cuenta la realidad detrás del mito) o ideológicamente monolítico (incapaz

de pensar en la autodefinición anglosajona en otros términos que no sean una respuesta violenta contra los demás o incapaz de percibir a los demás excepto como amenazas a superar). En segundo lugar, la suposición de que esta fase de la historia del género es estrictamente nacional y patriotera se ha corregido mediante un cambio de conciencia geopolítica y un deseo de apertura transnacional. Como señala Rick Altman, no tenemos "un único concepto coherente que se refiera a un único objeto coherente" cuando hablamos de géneros o cuando hablamos de naciones (Altman 1999: 86). Las naciones y los géneros son formaciones discursivas o prácticas que dependen de negociaciones constantes mediante las cuales los márgenes reaccionan ante una autoridad centralizada y terrateniente. Por tanto, esta tesis concuerda plenamente con la visión de Josh Garett-Davis de que los vaqueros y sus aventuras en el Oeste son sólo la punta del iceberg ya que, como sostiene el autor, el concepto incluye muchas cosas diferentes que inicialmente no fueron identificadas como "westerns" sino que ahora son ejemplos legítimos del género. Lo que antes definimos bajo una región – West – ahora parece incapaz de permanecer confinado dentro de esos límites y fronteras precisos. Puesto en diálogo con una región, el suroeste, tradicionalmente identificada como antiamericana (Lummis) o con un país diferente, México, el western aparece como un rizoma de múltiples capas que produce ciclos y subgéneros. En este sentido, también podemos estar de acuerdo en que los orígenes y los centros (Estados Unidos, Occidente) ya no son necesarios. En este punto, debo confesar que tuve algunas dificultades para pensar en este género como algo no generado por la cultura estadounidense, al menos al principio; de una forma u otra, las cosas deben tener un origen en alguna parte. Sin embargo, los académicos deberían estar más interesados en los intercambios que en la jerarquía en el tiempo o el espacio. Finalmente, la evolución lineal de la naturaleza salvaje a la civilización apareció para muchos teóricos como el principio explicativo de todo el género. Esta tesis ha interrogado cuidadosamente este principio ya que, en todos estos SBW, el concepto de civilización contiene muchos defectos y carencias.

Para activar sensibilidades cosmopolitas dentro de la especificidad geográfica de Estados Unidos y México, esta tesis ha intentado enfatizar que un diálogo entre el Norte y el Sur podría existir,

y existió, más allá de las diferencias políticas. Para trazar un camino a través de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, conceptualicé el paisaje como el sitio de la cultura. Como señala Peter Jackson, si las culturas siempre están constituidas espacialmente, los espacios también son el lugar de las culturas (Jackson 1989: 3). En este sentido, esta tesis pretende ofrecer cultura y geografía como dos caras de una misma moneda, lo que explica por qué me he centrado menos en el espacio real de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos que en su representación creativa y ficticia. Aplicando la interpretación de Anthony Cooper y Chris Rumford de las fronteras como puntos de conexión que entrelazan lo global y lo local, o lo transnacional y lo nacional, la tesis devela el gran potencial imaginario de las conexiones donde muchos otros aspectos sólo hablan de divisiones, muros, separaciones. Las conexiones y los intercambios son fundamentales aquí, ya que van en contra del constante proceso de nueva frontera que ocurre en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. Los procesos de desfronterización producidos por la movilidad de las personas son para mí más importantes que explicar las razones de una política firme en la frontera con México. He intentado explicar cómo la industria de Hollywood funcionó realmente como activador de procesos de desfronterización, especialmente considerando la inversión masiva en *runaways productions* en México. Las hipótesis de un proceso de desfronterización inevitablemente suceden cuando se busca un diálogo, como lo intentan estas producciones rodadas en locaciones mexicanas. Esta perspectiva también me ha permitido sortear la visión unilateral que tiende a darle más importancia a los mexicanos que cruzan la frontera hacia el norte. Puede surgir una visión más equilibrada al cuestionar por qué los estadounidenses tuvieron que cruzar la frontera hacia el sur. La fotografía de la relación entre estos dos países ofrecida en esta tesis puede ser parcial, incluso engañosa, pero sigue apostando fuertemente por resaltar el diálogo entre personas que trabajan en la misma área de especialización, buscando conexiones basadas en conocimientos, culturas de producción y culturas nacionales.

A pesar de inspirarse en el análisis espacial y geográfico, todos los capítulos proponen combinar la frontera real mexicana con un espacio imaginario que también incorpora influencias de las formas y contenidos del arte figurativo. Utilizo la imagen cultural del desierto que identifica el

suroeste americano y los estados norteños de Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila y Tamaulipas para explicar la posición de Estados Unidos en el período histórico de la Gran Depresión. En esta fase, el desierto apareció no como el lugar de inicio de todo, el punto de partida del viaje de los Pioneros de Europa a Estados Unidos, sino como el punto final de un viaje que contenía muchos errores. Representaba una manera para que los estadounidenses pensaran sobre sí mismos de manera diferente, un enfoque privado de la perspectiva patriotera inherente a la idea de expansión hacia el Oeste. Además, este período de autoexamen llevó a los intelectuales y artistas estadounidenses a buscar un jardín fuera del perímetro de las fronteras nacionales. Richard Pells afirma que así como los intelectuales se habían sentido atraídos por Europa en la década anterior, "emprendieron peregrinaciones a pueblos mexicanos en busca de alguna experiencia mística que no estaba disponible en los Estados Unidos" en la década de 1930. Se sentían atraídos por sociedades que parecían fuera del ámbito de la civilización capitalista (Pells [1973] 1998: 101). Como propuso el historiador Stuart Chase en México: un estudio de dos Américas (1931), la idealización de una "arcadia" cultural y natural al sur de la frontera estaba ligada a una severa crítica de lo que estaba sucediendo en Estados Unidos. en México desató un movimiento hacia la apreciación de la diversidad geográfica y cultural representada por el país. Este enfoque representa la postura más avanzada que Estados Unidos haya adoptado jamás respecto de las especificidades culturales y sociales de su vecino del sur.

Los SBW considerados en el Capítulo Dos se analizan principalmente como expresiones de la Depresión de los años treinta, pero parte de esta sensibilidad se extiende al período siguiente en lo que defino como "The Legacy of the Study of Two Americas" (p. 122). En *Fort Apache* (1948) y *3 Godfathers* (1948), John Ford desafía los estereotipos típicos de los personajes latinos al retratar a los mexicanos como personas de espíritu libre, poco convencionales y rebeldes. Siempre desafían las limitadas limitaciones impuestas por el sistema de valores anglosajón, un aspecto que el cineasta irlandés-estadounidense ya había abordado anteriormente en otras películas. Pedro Armendáriz encarna la idea fluida de Ford de que las culturas nacionales y étnicas no son sistemas eternos y monolíticos, sino entidades orgánicas, libres y transformadoras, resultantes de influencias mutuas

inextricablemente entrelazadas. Ford experimentó México por razones culturales. Su aventura en este país comenzó con una de las primeras producciones fugitivas en México, *The Fugitive* (1947), donde su catolicismo irlandés pudo encontrarse con la religiosidad del país. Luego, se expandió a través de su colaboración con actores mexicanos como Elvira Ríos (Stagecoach), Miguel Inclán y Pedro Armendáriz (*Fort Apache* y *3 Godfathers*). Por el contrario, John Huston tenía razones políticas decisivas para visitar el país. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) es una de las instancias más impresionantes de producciones desbocadas en México y, con *The Fugitive* (1947), sienta las bases históricas del apoyo económico para ayudar a impulsar a las productoras –sobre todo Estudios Churubusco—que dio vida a la época dorada del cine en México (1936-1956). El cariño de Huston por México se vio reforzado a través de numerosos viajes que el cineasta realizó a esa tierra; también compró una casa en Puerto Vallarta. Como consecuencia, en sus películas ambientadas y filmadas en México, y especialmente en *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, el paisaje natural mexicano nunca se reduce a una tierra imaginaria o a símbolos parcialmente fabricados en una reconstrucción fantasiosa. El México de Huston era el México real, al menos visto a través del lente del director. Este realismo es especialmente detectable en las primeras imágenes de Tampico en la película, con su vistazo al pequeño parque donde se encuentran por primera vez los dos buscadores interpretados por Humphrey Bogart y Tim Holt. Sin embargo, es en la secuencia de la curación del niño que la relación entre la tierra y la gente se vuelve genuinamente evidente y cargada de un significado místico que contrasta con el paisaje salvaje y desértico de las almas de los protagonistas. La secuencia comienza con los cuatro aldeanos que aparecen repentinamente ante los tres buscadores como si se hubieran materializado de la naturaleza. La identificación entre tierra y gente es evidente a lo largo de la película de Huston y se propone nuevamente en *Vera Cruz* de Robert Aldrich, que se analiza en el capítulo cinco. Estas dos películas se ubican en capítulos diferentes porque *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* está principalmente vinculado a la situación política de la década de 1930, mientras que la película de Aldrich está más vinculada a la interpretación cultural del río como símbolo de amistad

entre gringos y mexicanos. Aún así, las imágenes de la tierra propuestas en estas dos películas están igualmente entrelazadas con sus habitantes.

La riqueza de la tierra mexicana mostrada por Huston es una buena conexión con el Capítulo Tres, donde un México imaginativo aparece como un jardín metafórico de amor cortés y romance interétnico. Los dos primeros capítulos están emparejados. Mientras que el desierto revela la percepción que los estadounidenses que se mudaron a México tenían de Estados Unidos, el jardín invierte el ángulo. Muestra la percepción nostálgica que los mexicanos que vivían en Estados Unidos tenían de su tierra natal. Mientras que el Capítulo Dos se centra en los aspectos políticos y sociales (la tendencia de los intelectuales y artistas estadounidenses a trasladarse al sur de la frontera para estudiar un sistema económico diferente, uno que parecía producir mejores frutos), el Capítulo Tres describe conceptos puramente creativos y expresivos. de pintoresco y sublime. Estos conceptos proporcionan el trasfondo para evocar la atracción y el riesgo (respectivamente) de un romance interétnico.

La condición atributiva que tenía el paisaje en el arte paisajístico (p. 150) se da vuelta en las películas analizadas en el capítulo tres: aquí, la figura humana adquiere características dadas por la forma del terreno. El pintoresco mexicano provoca cambios en los personajes, que comienzan a "experimentar" una notable libertad en su expresión de amor y romance. Los cambios de personajes y de paisaje también desencadenan una tendencia a promover una nueva percepción de este país y sus habitantes. Como señala Lary May, en muchas otras películas producidas en la década de 1930, las "restricciones del canon artístico victoriano" según el cual un héroe dramático tenía que ser anglosajón, mientras que "criminales, payasos y mujeres caídas" debían mostrar cualidades de la lascivia y el desorden tenían que ser representativos de un país extranjero se volvieron insostenibles (May 2000: 77). En estos SBW que presentan un México pintoresco, encontramos un deseo similar de superar los prejuicios de los miembros estadounidenses de clase alta hacia los mexicanos. Este cambio de percepción también implicó nuevas ideas sobre el lenguaje del amor y la intimidad. El latin lover ya había hecho que esta lengua fuera más aceptable en la época del cine mudo. En la década

de 1930, las imágenes de un México pintoresco contribuyeron a extender características similares relacionadas con el lenguaje del amor y la intimidad a un concepto de masculinidad diferente representada por vaqueros nobles, fascinantes forajidos mexicanos y románticos Robin Hood que robaban a personajes malvados y defendían a los débiles en pintorescas localidades al sur de la frontera. Esta idea diferente de masculinidad también involucró a actores anglosajones que comenzaron a interpretar personajes capaces de expresar libremente estas emociones, ayudados por un paisaje diferente. No hay una diferencia significativa entre cómo aparece Gary Cooper en *The Texan* (1931) y cómo aparece Gregory Peck en *Duel in the Sun* (1947): ambos son ejemplos del tipo americano, pero ambos toman prestada su sexualidad audaz del amante latino. El cigarrillo perenne en la boca y el sombrero de Lewt (Peck) inclinado sobre un ojo en la película de Vidor provienen del personaje rompecorazones de Cisco, incapaz de comprometerse pero siempre dispuesto a seducir. Este tipo de evolución de un vaquero duro a un amante tierno o duro cautivó a las espectadoras y, en general, modificó la sensibilidad de la audiencia, lo que llevó a situaciones en las que la vergüenza de la clase media no podía ejercer un poder de censura masivo. Los roles que comprendían simultáneamente lo sentimental y lo duro se convirtieron en un elemento básico de los westerns, especialmente cuando fueron validados por un cambio de escenarios y ubicaciones de las duras ciudades del oeste a un México pintoresco que exudaba sensualidad.

A partir de fotografías o imágenes pintorescas de México, a las que contribuyeron los propios artistas mexicanos, el capítulo pasa a la visión imaginaria de Squaw's Head Rock y el pintoresco estanque en *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1947) para discutir la importancia de la inversión de Selznick en la revolución. El poder de un romance interétnico. El significado simbólico de Squaw's Head Rock en esta película nos ayuda a rastrear una asociación entre un lugar imaginativo e inexistente y otras figuras míticas talladas en las rocas y esparcidas por el paisaje americano. En las intenciones del cineasta y del departamento de arte, la roca debería funcionar como una versión suroeste de la enorme escultura de Crazy Horse en Black Hills, Dakota del Sur. Estas dos rocas, la fílmica y la real, representan la poderosa venganza de la imaginación contra la memoria perdida de

la historia. A través de la película Squaw's Head Rock y el verdadero Crazy Horse, aquellos que han sido borrados de las páginas de la historia podrían dejar una marca indeleble en el paisaje. Si bien el estanque de la película ofrecía el pintoresco fondo para la tórrida expresión de amor de Lewt y Pearl, la roca sugería que la tumultuosa relación entre un forajido estadounidense y una mestiza de la frontera sólo podía celebrarse a través del rastro de una pérdida. Al aplicar nociones de lo pintoresco (como una suave reconstrucción de la belleza natural) y lo sublime (como una pérdida de control en una visión apasionada de la tierra) a una encrucijada del suroeste, *Duel in the Sun* contribuye a la evolución de estas dos nociones dentro del fase poscolonial de su historia.

Los capítulos cuatro y cinco también están emparejados para presentar diferentes visiones de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México: la visión oscura describe la separación, mientras que la visión soleada retrata la amistad. Noirs y westerns más típicos ocupan estos dos capítulos. Anthony Mann es el protagonista del Capítulo Cuatro, aunque el cineasta no fue particularmente recordado por su sensibilidad hacia México y los mexicanos. En las películas de John Ford todavía se puede detectar una sensibilidad nostálgica y crepuscular bajo la dureza de la piel y el sentido del deber del héroe, sensibilidad que se refleja en el uso que hace Ford del espacio, que tiende a ser trascendental y emblemático. En Mann, por otra parte, el espacio y el héroe representan una liminalidad psicótica y pulsiones dramáticas. El héroe se transforma en un cazador de venganza. Esta excentricidad psicológica se refleja en un uso del espacio siempre marginal, descentrado y desplazado. A excepción de *The Man from Laramie* (1955), *Man of the West* (1958) y parcialmente *Winchester '73* (1950), ninguno de sus otros westerns está ambientado en el suroeste o cerca de México. Mann solía preferir los rincones escondidos en el norte o en las cimas de las montañas. Además, en términos de personajes étnicos, ninguna de estas tres películas incluye a mexicanos, aunque están ambientadas cerca de México. Así, *The Furies* constituye una notable excepción: está ambientada en la frontera y el papel que desempeñan los personajes mexicanos es fundamental. Lo mismo puede decirse del *Border Incident*. Los cinco aspectos que he identificado como constitutivos de los *South-of-the-Western Noirish Western* (el realismo, el énfasis en temas existenciales, la noción de frialdad, la depresión

psicológica y el motivo visual de las vallas y fronteras) están claramente representados por las cuatro películas consideradas en el Capítulo Cuatro y específicamente relacionadas con una experiencia metafórica y geográfica de cruce de fronteras. El acto simbólico y real de pasar de un lado al otro de dos naciones o dos estados mentales o condiciones estuvo fuertemente influenciado por la movilidad de las personas, especialmente de los braceros que se mudaron a Estados Unidos y de los cineastas e intelectuales de izquierda que se mudaron a México. Establecido en 1942 y extendido hasta 1962, el Programa de Trabajo Agrícola Mexicano (o Programa Bracero) fue una disposición laboral de emergencia temporal destinada a reemplazar a los trabajadores estadounidenses con trabajadores estacionales mexicanos. Esta disposición fue muy lucrativa para la agroindustria en Estados Unidos. El permiso de trabajo a corto plazo permitía a los trabajadores pasar al norte de la frontera el tiempo necesario para realizar trabajos de recolección de frutas y verduras, recibir pagos y regresar a su país para evitar problemas que podrían haber causado inestabilidad política en el país. Por el contrario, muchos directores y escritores inmigrantes que habían huido de Europa para escapar del nazismo en los años treinta ya no fueron acogidos por el país a finales de los años cuarenta. A los guionistas y cineastas incluidos en la lista negra ya no se les permitía trabajar en la industria cinematográfica y, en consecuencia, buscaron y encontraron un nuevo hogar en México. Entonces, mientras Estados Unidos necesitaba una fuerza laboral fuerte e invitó a trabajadores mal pagados por el tiempo necesario para enviarlos de regreso a casa al final de su servicio, México dio la bienvenida a muchos guionistas y cineastas incluidos en la lista negra que habían perdido su trabajo en Hollywood. Desde la perspectiva de los trabajadores mexicanos obligados a repatriarse, el desequilibrio entre la hospitalidad mexicana y el rechazo de Estados Unidos podría crear un sufrimiento inmenso y una amarga desilusión.

El desequilibrio histórico entre la hospitalidad y el rechazo es una premisa fundamental en mi análisis del *South-of-the-Western Noirish Western*, ya que aclara la presencia obsesiva de vallas, separaciones, barreras y umbrales. La marginalidad que evoca esta figura es uno de los aspectos constitutivos de estas películas, que cuestionan cuestiones de pertenencia nacional y ciudadanía. Los

protagonistas son personajes intermedios que experimentan un desapego social, un sentimiento de estar dentro pero sin pertenecer. La experiencia de invasión geográfica y metafórica narrada en estas películas permite a los espectadores cuestionar verdades preconcebidas y romper con la fuerte polarización entre "nosotros" y "ellos". La frontera pierde así su valor absoluto, proceso que genera ansiedad psíquica, rabia y sensación de inseguridad por falta de protección. Pero también es un mecanismo que genera reciprocidad y correspondencia entre los de afuera (los que están afuera y aspiran a ser incluidos) y los de adentro (los que están adentro pero sienten que no pertenecen).

En el capítulo cuatro, la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos aparece a través de la imagen simbólica de una valla, un motivo cultural noirish que revela paranoia y miedo vinculados a la experiencia de cruzar la frontera. Por el contrario, en *Run for the Border*, Steven Bender demuestra cómo Estados Unidos y México están inextricablemente entrelazados en una "mezcla cultural" basada en la "interdependencia económica" y los "viajes transfronterizos" (Bender 2012: 184). Este proceso hace que la frontera se parezca menos a la herida abierta de la que escribió Gloria Anzaldúa, donde "el Tercer Mundo se roza con el primero y sangra". En lugar de un crujido horizontal, se convierte en una vía fluvial cultural, navegable con facilidad según lo dictan las economías, culturas y prioridades locales (págs. 5-6). En el capítulo cinco he dado forma a esta transformación de la frontera en un símbolo fluido de amistad y especularidad. Todas las películas consideradas en este capítulo giran en torno a dos amigos, un gringo y un mexicano, una variación específica de la obsesión que el género tenía en los años cincuenta por la dualidad, es decir, la comparación entre dos (anti)héroes – en Mann, en Boetticher, y en muchos otros casos, como *3:10 to Yuma* de Delmer Daves. En los casos de SBW analizados en este capítulo, se representa al estadounidense adquiriendo conocimientos sobre asuntos relacionados con su amigo mexicano.

Como forma de ingeniería civil y paisajismo, la valla evoca pesimismo y desaliento. Aunque a menudo se utiliza como límite natural entre dos tierras, el río sirve como medio de conexión. Los pueblos utilizan el río para conectar y combinar diversos puntos de un paisaje. Mientras que la valla es un acto de acción humana, el río aparece como una forma de acción natural, una expresión de la

tierra misma. Anthony Quinn, Gilbert Roland y Budd Boetticher, dos actores mexicanos y un cineasta estadounidense, representan casos específicos de participación personal en comunicaciones interculturales a lo largo de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. En su filmografía el espacio real de México y el discurso cultural de la frontera se entrelazan ya que todos estos autores visten la frontera como una segunda piel. Más allá de su lugar de origen, todos comparten un profundo conocimiento de la tierra y la cultura mexicanas, aunque hayan vivido o trabajado la mayor parte de sus vidas en el lado norte de la frontera. A menudo visitaron o regresaron a México en su carrera, pasando años en este país. La experiencia y el conocimiento que adquirieron durante su vida les permitieron mejorar la percepción de estos dos países como lugares vecinos en la mente de los espectadores. Son los transfronterizos que esta tesis saluda y celebra.

A Anthony Quinn nunca le interesó la estrategia de invisibilidad que a veces utilizaban los actores latinos que buscaban mejores papeles para evitar el encasillamiento. Más bien, transformó una supuesta limitación en una fortaleza, siempre sacando de sus papeles, ya sea interpretando a un mexicano o a otra nacionalidad o etnia, una oportunidad de reflexionar sobre las condiciones humanas más allá de la especificidad étnica. Esta capacidad de romper con los códigos esperados le dio una sensibilidad extremadamente moderna moldeada por el valor cosmopolita de la apertura a toda la humanidad. Quinn es el perfecto representante de una tesis interesada en explicar las aspiraciones cosmopolitas del western clásico. En *Ox-Bow Incident* de Wellman, Juan/Quinn es un personaje crucial, sobre todo porque presagia la actitud que Joel Dinerstein define como una *"mask of coolness"* (2017). Juan, de hecho, mantiene una fachada dueña de sí misma y extremadamente estoica para gestionar la ignorancia y el racismo de la mafia, rechazando efusiones emocionales y quejas. Él está completamente desconectado de la situación y luego intenta engañar a la pandilla, haciéndoles creer que él es el mexicano ignorante y culpable que esos hombres asumieron. Su objetivo es escapar, pero cuando fracasa, Juan acepta estoicamente su destino con fuerza interior y autodominio. El contraste entre este personaje y el comportamiento absurdo de la multitud queda plenamente evidente en el uso espacial que la película hace de las vallas. En *The Ride Back*, de Allen Miner, la frialdad de Juan se

ve atenuada por una actitud más suave que transforma a Roberto/Quinn en el salvador de un gringo que ha perdido la confianza en sí mismo. Este último aprende una valiosa lección de amistad de un personaje mexicano, Roberto, que no tiene miedo de sentir y amar. En resumen, la película vuelve a humanizar a un gringo utilizando a un mexicano como agente activo.

La presencia de Gilbert Roland en varias partes de la tesis (capítulos tres, cuatro y cinco) nos permite identificarlo como la encarnación más evidente de un transnacional que cruza fronteras. Roland es el noble vaquero Cisco en seis SBW ambientados en el pintoresco México. Aquí, el hermoso paisaje mexicano se convierte en una atracción principal para el público mexicano que aún reside al sur de la frontera o para aquellos que vivieron en los Estados Unidos y buscaron con nostalgia imágenes de su tierra natal. La característica de esta tierra lleva a Roland a crear una estrella diferente, llena de valentía y orgullosa de su herencia. De este exitoso ciclo pasó a películas que enfatizan cada vez más su origen étnico. Él es Juan Herrera, un mexicano orgulloso que lucha por el reconocimiento de sus derechos en *The Furies*. A través de Juan, la película describe la aspiración de los mexicanos a ser reconocidos dentro de una tierra que poseían antes del Tratado de Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Por fin, en *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* y *Bandido!* (1955, 1956), el actor describe una nueva fase de Hollywood en la que México se identificaba cada vez más con revolucionarios incendiarios que tenían que enseñar a los gringos cínicos cómo volver a ser idealistas. Roland visualiza el progreso de los actores mexicano-estadounidenses en Hollywood, promoviendo constantemente su visión a través de sus papeles en pantalla y a través de una cruzada fuera de la pantalla para obtener mejores papeles. Esto explica su vida y carrera, así como sus múltiples proyectos no realizados, que no son un buen argumento para que esta tesis pretenda apegarse al gusto del público. Son evidencia de que la causa por una mejor representación de los mexicano-estadounidenses en Hollywood quedó, en ocasiones, relegada a productos fallidos. Aún así, dan una idea de la complejidad de un tema que abarca todos los contextos y niveles de producción (incluido la posibilidad de ampliar la autoridad de los actores).

Cada capítulo se superpone con los demás ya que los argumentos no pueden aislarse claramente. Por ejemplo, el concepto de México pintoresco también está presente en *The Treasure of*

the Sierra Madre de Huston. De manera similar, muchos estudiosos han considerado *Duel in the Sun* como una película noir, incluso si el capítulo enfatiza sus ubicaciones como telón de fondo de un romance revolucionario interétnico. La historia de amor interétnica entre Juan y Vance también está en *The Furies* de Mann. Sin embargo, la pareja está unida en venganza, lo que nos permite considerar los aspectos políticos de ese romance. El actual Río Grande/Río Bravo en el *Border Incident* es el elemento simbólico en torno al cual la película construye su complejo patrón de simetría entre México y Estados Unidos. En este sentido, la película también podría encajar en el Capítulo Cinco. Finalmente, en términos de patrones figurativos, las vallas están presentes en muchas películas que, en el enfoque adoptado por esta tesis, definen la amistad y la comunicación. En *The Ride Back*, el mapa en la oficina de Hamish ilustra lo que Giuliana Bruno ha definido como ansiedad cartográfica, un deseo de traducir un territorio amalgamado en un mapa bien identificado de tierras separadas. En *Buchanan Rides Alone* y *Vera Cruz*, la amistad se ve constantemente amenazada por cercas y separaciones. Sin embargo, he intentado enfatizar la intención detrás de cada uno de ellos, manteniendo juntas películas que representan ciertos espacios culturales de manera similar. El desierto es una metáfora de la confrontación política entre Estados Unidos y México (Capítulo Dos); el pintoresco y sublime jardín de México es un lugar para el romance interétnico (Capítulo Tres); la valla es un símbolo de reclamos por la injusticia y las diferentes políticas en la frontera con México (Capítulo Cuatro); el río es un símbolo del proceso de licuación de una vía fluvial que conecta a amigos (Capítulo Cinco).

Mi observación final aborda la oposición entre *frontier* y *border*. Mientras que en la visión nostálgica de Turner *the western frontier* aparecía como una fase histórica cerrada que habría abierto una nueva etapa igualmente rica en autodefinición, en el imaginario poderoso y traumático de Anzaldúa, casi un siglo después de Turner, la frontera entre estados unidos y méxico es un tema abierto que requiere una solución transnacional. Aun así, adaptada a la pantalla e inevitablemente involucrada en prácticas narrativas, incluso la realidad de la frontera tiende a mezclarse con leyendas e imaginaciones. Mi intento fue comprender las funciones de esta actividad imaginaria. La función

de estos SBW es conectar los placeres populares, la realidad social y el cambio político. A veces los académicos tienden a ignorar la relación entre estos tres elementos utilizando el argumento de que una película popular debería ser criticada por su incapacidad para abordar cuestiones serias e impulsar el cambio político. Cometen el error de subestimar la complejidad interna de los productos populares. El público no escapa simplemente hacia algo. De hecho, escapan de algo, creando esperanza, aspiraciones, horizontes alternativos y posibles evoluciones que, en las películas discutidas en esta tesis, pueden defender visiones revolucionarias de una nueva, imaginada y cosmopolita tierra fronteriza. Si no creemos lo suficiente en la posibilidad de que el cine popular pueda presentar también planteamientos positivos, la batalla ya estaría perdida.