

WHERE HAVE ALL THE COWBOYS GONE? CREATING
THE POST 9/11 WESTERNER

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The intention of this thesis is to analyze the figure of the post 9/11 Westerner as a modern character created from the preexisting archetype of the classic Westerner. *3:10 to Yuma* (dir. James Mangold), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (dir. Andrew Dominik), and *There Will Be Blood* (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson) were released in 2007 and featured post 9/11 Westerners dealing with issues of fatherhood, demonstrating the prevalence of this figure within the modern western genre. Fatherhood becomes the prism through which these characters are depicted, which becomes the main source of their anxiety. The events of 9/11 contributed to a fracture of the western myth established by the classic postwar western that results in the post 9/11 Westerner attempting to reclaim a similar mythic status. The post 9/11 Westerner becomes an inversion of the classic Westerner seen through his insecure masculinity and ultimate failure to live up to his own imagined ideals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While this thesis directly relates to the western genre, the primary focus is about the figure of the Westerner: the hero of the western genre who acts as an agent of order between civilization and the wilderness. This thesis will discuss genre development and the concept of the post 9/11 hero. Importantly, this thesis deals with the progression of time and how that impacts the characterizations of generic figures. As time progresses, ideologies shift and transform, impacting the lens through which characters are viewed. Due to shifts in American politics, some of the western genre has dramatically shifted away from the ultra-conservative ideology intrinsic to the genre. The major shift that impacts this thesis are the events of 9/11. Instead of assured masculinity, the post 9/11 hero's masculinity is under constant threat of being lost or destroyed. This thesis positions the post 9/11 Westerner as a symbol of real-world issues where due to 9/11, the post 9/11 Westerner becomes a nostalgic figure longing for a return to the conservatism he perceives as intrinsic to the past.

No Country for Old Men (2007, dir. Joel and Ethan Coen) begins with a voice-over. Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) laments on the sheriffs of the past. "I always liked to hear about the old timers, never missed a chance to do so." He continues, "You can't help but compare yourself against the old-timers. Can't help but wonder how they'd have operated these times." This sets the stage for the battle between two other men, the outmatched everyman in Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) and the unstoppable force, Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem). However, as the initial voice-over suggests, the film is not about them. The film is about Bell and a comparison between western heroes of the past and present.

Post 9/11 Westerners are symbols/iconography of the western genre, so any introspection

they have is only symbolic. In *Late Westerns*, Lee Clark Mitchell discusses Bell and his relationship to the genre, writing, “[Bell’s] incomprehension matches the genre’s larger reconfiguration of a Western hero... Now powerless to grasp motive, means, or opportunity” (21). Bell cannot understand the type of crime he is dealing with, or the world that produces it. Bell is a symbol of post 9/11 masculinity that has reached the limits of his abilities. The post 9/11 Westerner directly confronts the idea that the myth of the Westerner may no longer be strong enough to fight the evil of today. Addressing the limits of his masculinity within a post 9/11 world, Bell says, “A man would have to put his soul at hazard.” Bell has no choice but to exist as part of the world wherein the concept of the western hero has changed. Yet, Bell cannot separate his own identity from that of the classic Westerner. The post 9/11 Westerner must live his life under the constant threat of losing his fabricated identity.

The western since the 1970’s has continuously gone through periods of decline where the genre seemed all but dead. However, in the year 2007, not one, but four westerns were released in the United States to almost universal acclaim. These four were *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007, dir. Andrew Dominik), referred to as *Assassination* for the purposes of this paper; *3:10 to Yuma* (2007, dir. James Mangold) the remake of the 1957 film of the same name; *There Will Be Blood* (2007, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson), referred to as *Blood*; and *No Country for Old Men*, which ultimately won the Academy Award for Best Picture. All four films are westerns to varying degrees with *No Country for Old Men* and *Blood* being the most non-conventional. This thesis will prioritize its analysis on *Assassination*, *3:10 to Yuma*, and *Blood’s* depiction of masculinity through the image of fatherhood. Through these three films, this thesis will construct the image of the post 9/11 Westerner as a figure attempting to achieve the status of the classic Westerner, though he almost always fails.

Western and the Westerner

In “Post-Modernism and The Western,” Jim Kitses explains how the difference of the western myth differentiates the genre from others. Kitses says, “The Western’s [generic] myth has provided a national myth and global icon, a cornerstone of American identity” (16). The issue of myth is a common theme found within the western genre, no better seen than in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962, dir. John Ford). The film follows Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart), an aspiring lawyer who confronts the harshness of the West, and must learn how to survive so he can make a difference in society. Very different from Stoddard, Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) is a classic Westerner who helps Stoddard learn to survive. The film presents two versions of heroes: Doniphon as the classic Westerner who uses violence, and Stoddard as the modern hero who fights with words and thoughts. Though Stoddard is the man who makes a real impact on the community through his political career, Doniphon is the man the characters of the film love and desire. This is reminiscent of Robert Warshow’s writing on the figure of the classic Westerner and why audiences are drawn to his image. Warshow writes, “Watch a child with his toy guns and you will see: what most interests him is not (as we so much fear) the fantasy of hurting others, but to work out how a man might look when he shoots or is shot. A hero is one who looks like a hero” (47).

Forged in a historical period of widespread immigration, the western genre continually attempts to provide a singular identity to represent American ideals. This has led writers such as J. Hoberman to declare, “It’s the Western that was our true Fourth of July celebration” (85). Joseph Deloria, in his book *Playing Indian*, references D.H. Lawrence who claims that American identity and consciousness “was essentially ‘unfinished’ and incomplete” (3). Deloria continues, claiming the “indeterminacy of American identities” is from Americans not being able

to deal with Native Americans, “Yet, in order to control the landscape they had to destroy the original inhabitants” (5). So much of the western’s history involves conflict between the “civilized” cowboy and the “savage” Indian. Though an important theme of the genre for its first 50 years, the western was not just about cowboys versus Indians, but it was important because it allowed white men to feel like conquerors. Westerns afford audiences an arena in which to project imagined masculine identities. The western genre, the origin myth of white American identity, presents a mythic depiction of the Old West which is essential to the genre.

Jane Tompkins, a leading literary scholar, writes, “The Western doesn’t have anything to do with the West as such. It isn’t about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men’s fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity” (45). The western genre from its inception in literature with Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (McGee 20), and later in cinema and television, has been linked with white Protestant masculine ideals. Common sayings, such as “the measure of a man,” or “the man with no name” have constantly positioned the concepts of manhood at the forefront of the western world. Lee Clark Mitchell, in his book *Westerns*, writes, “Yet the contradiction of the Western is that masculinity is always more than physical, and that in favoring an ideal of restraint well beyond bodily considerations it reveals how manhood is as much learned as found” (183). The western allows for masculinity to be reaffirmed or discovered, but the genre also provides an escape for angst within men. Michael Kimmel writes in his seminal book *Manhood in America*, “As individuals struggling to find meaning in the world, we create those symbols to help us return to those earlier experiences so that we can again feel secure and without anxiety” (81).

The western film genre began like most genres during the silent era with early films such as *The Great Train Robbery* (1903, dir. Edwin S. Porter) and *The Virginian* (1914, dir. Cecil B.

DeMille). The genre continued in its experimental stage until the late 30's with *Stagecoach* (1939, dir. John Ford) beginning the classical period of the genre. This thesis situates the classic period during the height of its popularity, which Thomas Schatz defines as the late 1930's through the end of the 1950's (46). This period defined the generic conventions and archetypes of the genre, as well as the base themes. Though this thesis agrees with Schatz in terms of situating the time period of the classic western, Schatz's model on genre evolution does not readily apply to the western genre. Schatz's model of genre evolution passing through the stages of experimental, classical, refined, and baroque are more suited for the studio system era in which it is easier to trace linear change. The western genre does not follow this trajectory because the genre continues to look backwards. Whenever the genre should be in its refined era, there are still classical westerns released. This is not to say there are no refined or baroque westerns, but that the genre is always present with the times in which it is released. This in turn influences the content more than adhering to genre evolution. This thesis will use Schatz to define the western, and its generic icons, more so than examining how the genre has developed.

When thinking of essential themes of the classic western, Schatz writes, "The Western depicts a world of precarious balance in which forces of civilization and savagery are locked in a struggle for supremacy" (47). This essentially becomes a battle between East versus West, or even simpler: community versus the wilderness. Films like *Stagecoach* (a prewar western notable for establishing the image of John Wayne), *My Darling Clementine* (1946, dir. John Ford), *Red River* (1948, dir. Howard Hawks), and *Shane* (1953, dir. George Stevens) entertained audiences while also establishing the iconography of the genre. Schatz's work on the western is important in terms of establishing generic conventions within the genre. As Schatz writes, "A generic icon, in contrast, assumes significance not only through its usage within individual genre

films but also as that usage relates to the generic system itself...The Westerner's white horse and hat identify a character before he speaks or acts because of our previous experiences with men who wear white hats and ride white horses" (22). This coincides with the popular belief that villains in westerns wear black hats, while heroes wear white hats. However, the issue with Schatz's sentiment is that to actually see a white horse and hat in a western is rare. That being said, Schatz's work has colored the perception of the postwar westerns as being able to fit into this simplistic categorization. Schatz's work on the western is an example of the way the western has been perceived to be simple as a genre, when in reality it is far more complicated. The western has never been simple, and still is not.

Besides costuming tropes, another prominent feature of the western established in this classical era is violence. The phallic pistol in the genre contains the masculine prowess within the classic Westerner. Jane Marie Gaines and Charlotte Cornelia, in their essay "The Fantasy of Authenticity in Western Costume," write, "Even the Colt revolver in his holster, the most cultural of his natural gear, is camouflaged as part of his hip, contributing to the ideology that a great gunfighter is 'born' a good shot" (172). Dominance is inherent within the classic Westerner, for he is born with the biggest stick, where the post 9/11 Westerner is born lacking and thus unable to maintain a position of dominance. In the western genre, it is not enough to just look like a man. One must act like the type of man the genre has deemed heroic. Ultimately, the struggle for men in the western is against themselves in needing to project the qualities of the classic Westerner, while suppressing their internal fears and insecurities. Tompkins writes, "The Western plot therefore turns not on struggles to conquer sin but on external conflicts in which men prove their courage to themselves and to the world by facing their own annihilation" (31).

This highlights an important characteristic of the classic Westerner: his fear of losing his masculinity.

In a genre so consumed with power and professionalism with a firearm, why does the western have so many fistfights? *Shane* sees an elongated brawl with Shane and Joe (Van Heflin) fighting the oppressive Rykers in the saloon. The climactic battle in *Red River* between Tom Dunson (John Wayne) and Matt Garth (Montgomery Clift) hinges on Matt not using a gun, but instead suffering a ritualistic beating from his adoptive father. Even Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name suffers a torturous beating in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964, dir. Sergio Leone). Tompkins writes, "For Westerns believe that reality is material; not spiritual; they are obsessed with pain and celebrate the suppression of feeling" (6). The classic Westerner endures pain to demonstrate his inherent strength by rising up and destroying his enemies. While the three Westerners in *Shane*, *Red River*, and *A Fistful of Dollars* undergo immense pain, they never show it, because to feel pain is to be weak, and to be weak is to be unsure.

In the three films explored in this thesis, each of the lead characters endure pain they must overcome in hopes of achieving the coveted status of the classic Westerner. In *Blood*, Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) starts by breaking his leg and pulling himself out of a mine. In *3:10 to Yuma*, Dan Evans (Christian Bale) attempts to stop the men burning down his barn only for his wooden leg to halt him from accomplishing this task. And in *Assassination*, Robert Ford's (Casey Affleck) pain is not physical, but emotional whenever he is denied status as a "real" man.

Robert Warshow defines the classic Westerner as a figure of repose and that his melancholic nature comes from the fact that his life is "unavoidably serious" (36). The classic Westerner is destined to be alone as an agent of order in a savage land that is slowly becoming

civilized, leaving no need for him anymore. His masculine prowess, usually depicted through his use of a gun for violence that he seeks to avoid, but is forced into, is mythicized and cannot be killed literally or metaphorically. Warshow's foundational work on the classic Westerner figure ends with him remarking on how violence is not the point of the western, but is the "image of a man, a style, which expresses itself most clearly in violence" (47). The classic Westerner is no more embodied than in Alan Ladd's *Shane*. Though the preeminent classic Westerner, his characterization reveals that even the classic postwar westerns of the genre are never as simple as they might appear. The classic Westerner is complicated and conflicted, constantly weighing the value of human life and the necessity of violence in the world he inhabits. *Shane* resists using his gun the entire film, but as soon as *Shane* draws his gun, the classic Westerner demonstrates his mastery over his domain. The excitement the audience feels is projected onto the character of Joey (Brandon De Wilde), the son of Joe, who is drawn to the classic Westerner that *Shane* represents.

Most of *Shane* depicts the struggle within Joey in his decision to emulate either the classic Westerner or his blue collar father. Many films of the postwar western contained a father figure character rather than relationships between biological fathers and sons. While this could certainly be attributed to the 1950's baby boom and the move to suburbia; the western's focus on father figures indicates the desire for mythic figures rather than realistic heroes. *Shane* represents this mythic figure as the classic Westerner, seemingly appearing as if he manifested from the wilderness. This idea is reinforced through Joey's first image of *Shane* being framed through the antlers of a deer. The film ends not with Joey returning home to his father, but chasing after *Shane*. Though Joey desires the figure of *Shane*, he is never able to reach the mythic classic Westerner yet continues to think he can. Much like little Joey, the post 9/11 Westerner must

contend with the realization that after 9/11 the image of the classic Westerner is no longer achievable. This realization, or lack of realization, results in the pessimistic attitude of the post 9/11 Westerner. *Shane* begins to problematize the classic Westerner, questioning the values associated with the figure leading to the future eras of the genre.

The Changing Western

After a brief stint in the early 60s, the classic postwar western faded and the spaghetti western took its place. Hoberman writes, “The sixties brought unprecedented domestic and foreign upheaval and, given its privileged place in American popular culture, the Western could hardly remain immune” (86). Steve Neale, in *Genre and Hollywood*, references Will Wright who says the classic western plot is a version of the western formula “in which the hero uses his savage skills to combat savagery, hence to protect and defend the interests of a civilized community which eventually accepts him and which he eventually decides to join” (131). Though ironically, *Stagecoach*, one of the premier westerns of the classical era, actually sees the hero choose to leave the community, and the country, altogether. The spaghetti western hero, of which Clint Eastwood’s the Man With No Name is the most popular example, is also contrary to all of Wright’s formulations. Eastwood’s heroes do not care about the community, in fact they prioritize their individualism, and are more violent than the classic Westerner. This era is the beginning of an added focus on the issue of identity, and more importantly who gets control over it. This focus on identity is seen in the rewriting of what constitutes a western hero, which sees men pushing forth their version of heroism. This is exhibited by the spaghetti western hero through the use of violence. In these films the body counts are higher and the guns are tools for killing and nothing else.

Sergio Leone, notable for such masterpieces as *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966)

and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), is the director most tied to this spaghetti era and the one, according to Hoberman, who “made the genre more immediately relevant by raising the body count” (86). These films are operatic and performative, much less focused on dialogue and more on visual communication. Audiences rarely know anything about protagonists of these films, since most of them barely speak. A notable example of this is *The Great Silence* (1968, dir. Sergio Corbucci) which features a mute hero, but is also a rare western that takes place in the snow. These heroes are motivated by personal desires such as greed and revenge, and are therefore much more positioned as antiheroes. The spaghetti western hero cares nothing for community since community is already dead upon his arrival.

This era came to a close marked by the release of two films in 1969: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969, dir. George Roy Hill) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969, dir. Sam Peckinpah) which helped to transition into the first revisionist era of the 70’s. The genre was pushing back against the figure of a John Wayne hero, and resulted in films like *Little Big Man* (1970, dir. Arthur Penn) and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971, dir. Robert Altman). These films attempted to demystify aspects of the western by focusing on the treatment of Native Americans and the role of gender within the genre. Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Stoehr write, “The revisionist Westerns of the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s tended to follow the trajectory established by Peckinpah in demythologizing the story of the old West and the figure of the westerner, whether hero or outlaw or both” (234). This led to the western splitting into what Hoberman describes as “radical right – and left-wing camps” with those starring Wayne and Eastwood as the right, and films directed by Altman and Penn on the left (89).

The social upheaval caused by Vietnam and the revelation of the atrocities which occurred there contributed to Hoberman claiming that the added focus on the Indian wars

“reinforced the argument that the slaughter of Native Americans was less the distortion than the essence of the white man’s wars” (90). Though Eastwood and Wayne attempted to reclaim the image of the classic Westerner in varying degrees, most of the revisionist westerns attempted to critique the white Protestant image of the classic Westerner. This period also witnessed the reemergence of the gangster film, which slowly overtook the western. Hoberman sees 1972 as the high point of the revisionist era writing:

Westerns still represented twelve percent of Hollywood’s output. But the year that brought Nixon’s triumphant reelection was the last in which Western releases would reach double figures. The subsequent falloff was dramatic: four Westerns were released in 1973, two in 1974, five in 1975, seven for the Bicentennial, two in 1977, three in 1978, and a total of three between 1979 and 1984 (91).

In the 1980’s westerns were few and far between with *Heaven’s Gate* (1980, dir. Michael Cimino) being more notable for how much a financial disaster it was. The genre was then pushed aside during this period for the hard-bodied action films starring the likes of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger who had come to represent the ultimate masculine hero. The genre’s appeal was fading greater than it ever had until it found new life in the 1990’s.

The 90s saw a second wave of revisionist westerns which were more concerned with experimenting with the genre rather than making traditional westerns. *Dances With Wolves* (1990, dir. Kevin Costner) and *Unforgiven* (1992, dir. Clint Eastwood) each won the Academy Award for best picture and were some of the few westerns of this era to receive both critical and commercial success. *Posse* (1993, dir. Mario Van Peebles) focused on five Buffalo Soldiers, while *Bad Girls* (1994, dir. Jonathan Kaplan) saw four prostitutes taking on the Old West. *Ballad of Little Jo* (1993, dir. Maggie Greenwald) and *Dead Man* (1995, dir. Jim Jarmusch) each took a quieter approach to examine the role of gender construction and the mythic depiction of who is allowed to tell stories within the genre.

This era also contains a prototype of the post 9/11 Westerner seen in the character of Bill Munny (Clint Eastwood) from *Unforgiven*. Munny's characterization is based on his infamy established during his time as an outlaw. Yet, the first image of Eastwood is him wallowing in the mud attempting to wrangle a pig. The audience's first interaction with the character is one of failure. He is attempting to be something he is not, but his wife is dead, he is alone with his kids, and his life is slowly passing him by. One difference between Munny and the post 9/11 Westerner is the configuration of his role as a father. He willingly leaves his kids at the start of the film, shedding his role as father. The rest of the film features virtually no mention of his children; the film chooses to focus on his place as myth rather than parent.

As the film progresses, Munny attempts to reclaim his mythic status, an obvious self-reflective project for Eastwood reexamining his Man With No Name character in a revisionist slant. Eastwood uses this film to come to terms with the violence that made him famous within the world of the film, as Munny, as well in popular culture. Mitchell comments on Munny by writing, "Yet against conviction, Munny is transformed into the haunting figure of his own youth, becoming a killing machine in scenes that register the Western ethos as an appalling last chance, neither redemptive nor worth remembering" (20). This configuration is the starting point of the post 9/11 Westerner, only it lacks the anxiety, fear, and role of fatherhood found within the figure.

The Post 9/11 Western

An important post 9/11 western is *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, dir. Ang Lee) which utilized the western genre to tell a story of two men falling in love. *Brokeback Mountain* uses western genre conventions to portray a story of two men trapped in a time, and genre, in which they are unable to express their sexuality under the strict formulations of the masculinity the

genre has prioritized. The search for identity is a main theme in the film, and the post 9/11 western genre as a whole. The post 9/11 western features little to none Native American characters, instead focusing on masculinity, identity, and homosocial relationships.

The post 9/11 western is ultimately about the failure of individuals to live up to the imagined ideals of the classic Westerner's version of masculinity and physical conquest. The post 9/11 western is also particularly narcissistic, in that the Westerner is only interested in himself and his ability to live up to an ideal. The main configuration of the post 9/11 western is the reworking of the image of the classic Westerner. As Bandy and Stoehr write in their book *Ride, Boldly Ride*, "The classic or traditional Western film typically portrays heroic protagonists who conquer enemies, vanquish evil, and help to blaze a path through the wilderness so that a law-centered civilization can flourish... These films almost always arrive at happy endings, with little regard for the dead and defeated" (269). In contrast, the post 9/11 western rarely arrives at a happy ending, and/or to do so requires a great sacrifice, with much regard for the dead and defeated.

Ahu Tannrisever writes, "While 9/11 did not 'change everything' or initiate a 'crisis of masculinity,' it has functioned as a catalyst, intensifying negotiations of U.S. heroic masculinities not only in public discourse but, noticeably, in culture" (5). Tannrisever is writing about all genres concerning post-heroes, however this thesis is using Tannrisever's formulations specifically for the western. Elisabeth Krimmer and Susanne Kord discuss contemporary Hollywood's depiction of male heroes by writing, "In light of these emasculating trends, the most potent hero in today's cinema is not the steady fighter, but the man who has undergone castration and still emerges as the guy with the biggest stick" (2). While this is true of many contemporary genres, the post 9/11 Westerner does undergo symbolic castration, only he rarely

recovers from this.

Tanrisever introduces the concept of the 'post-hero' as a figure encompassing classic traits of heroes "such as perseverance, some binding moral code/ethos," with shortcomings like "enduring isolation that pervades the antiheroic imaginary" (11-12). When describing the post-hero, Tanrisever writes, "The notion of failure becomes an integral part of the post-hero's journey, denying him a completely successful accomplishment of his 'mission,' as in dying while saving his family, by ending but not winning a war, or by metamorphosing into a nostalgic cultural artifact" (12). The post 9/11 Westerner is a post-hero whose journey is focused on fatalism. The fatalist nature of the post 9/11 western is literal in their western figures not achieving their desired outcomes, as well as metaphorical in not living up to the image of the classic Westerner.

Much of the focus of the post 9/11 western is on the inability to achieve the generic myth of the postwar western that offered an imagined place where men could reclaim their manhood.

Michael Kimmel writes about the power of the western's generic myth:

Like Owen Wister and every generation of American men since, we come to the Western to experience the initiation of manhood and the mythopoetic quest reinscribed into buckskin and revolvers. The search for authentic experience, for deep meaning, always led men back to the frontier, back to nature, even if it was inevitably the frontier of their imaginations (212)

While the revisionist westerns of the 90's such as *Unforgiven* and *Dances With Wolves*, which Kimmel is referring to here, offered a more critical depiction of the West, the films still reinforced the idea of men receiving affirmation from their quest within the western genre. The post 9/11 westerns this thesis focuses upon offer no affirmation of the classic Westerner's ability to overcome, for the post 9/11 Westerner is defined by his failures. These figures ultimately

champion the conservative ideology of the classic Westerner with nostalgia for the figure's lost superiority.

This thesis argues that despite the western myth's connections to the past, the post 9/11 western uses these myths to create the post 9/11 Westerner from the preexisting archetype of the classic Westerner. While the classic Westerner exudes confidence, the post 9/11 Westerner is consumed with angst that is internal and specific to himself. Whereas the classic Westerner views fear as a weakness and rarely shows it, the post 9/11 Westerner recognizes fear as a self-limitation in achieving the masculine success he desires.

The post 9/11 Westerner is ultimately more fully aware of his insecurities than the classic Westerner: rather than the antagonist being a black hat wearing foe, the post 9/11 Westerner's opposition is himself and his own futile desire to live up to the mythic creation of what he views as a desired masculinity. Not only is he fighting the physical forces opposing him in the film, the post 9/11 Westerner is also confronting the history of what masculinity the western hero must possess. In these films, the classic Westerner becomes an ideal the post 9/11 Westerner can never achieve.

Most of the filmmakers of these post 9/11 westerns are familiar with the classic postwar western, and are born and raised in a world where the image of the classic Westerner is known and idolized. What this means is they write into their characters the insecurities and anxieties of the modern world which comes from the realization their characters lack, or can never achieve, the masculine traits reinforced by the classic Westerner's masculine prowess. The post 9/11 Westerner is not the fastest gun, nor the strongest or most assured; he is nothing special and is no agent to anything except his own desires and insecurities. The post 9/11 Westerner does not hate violence, but recognizes the severity of it and the western frontier itself. While the classic

Westerner is more concerned about the collective, the post 9/11 Westerner is much more individualist. His mission, no matter how important or great, will not be remembered and he will not be made into a myth. Instead, he usually must die to demonstrate the random violence of the West, marking his fatalist journey in the genre.

Fatherhood

Before this thesis focuses on the role of fatherhood in deconstructing the masculinity of the classic Westerner, hence giving birth to the post 9/11 Westerner, this thesis must situate how fatherhood is being defined. Fatherhood has multifarious qualities which can be biological, spiritual, metaphorical, and a matter of choice that possesses multiple meanings to different people who interact with the title or concept. Kevin Killback, in the book *A Nation of Families*, writes, “In Native America, the concept of the ‘great white father’ was historically used by the U.S. Government officials when making treaties with Indian nations, but it became the standard image and idea of superiority to further reinforce paternalism” (34). Killback points to how Native Americans were presented with a myth of paternity in the form of white Protestant superiority. This is similar to how the western genre perpetrated a mythic image of an ideal masculinity in the form of a white Protestant male. When discussing the Anishinaabeg and Dakota tribes, Michael Witgen writes, “For both peoples kinship represented an interrelated spiritual and moral bond” (231). The reasoning for mentioning how Native tribes view kinship is because the term fatherhood is thought to be universal, only it is not. The chosen films for this thesis are not about Native paternity, but are about 21st century WASP fatherhood.

Masculinity has commonly been tied to the role of the father and husband, both of which have suffered in the post 9/11 era. Tim Edwards, in *Cultures of Masculinity*, writes, “The family is perhaps the most complex arena within which the greatest sense of concern relating to a

perceived crisis of masculinity resides” (12). Edwards is referring to the era in which the filmmakers of the post 9/11 westerns are influenced by. In each of the three chosen films, the filmmakers depict their characters as feeling their masculinity is under attack or trying to be diminished.

Each of the films chosen for this thesis explore the role of the father in different ways. Hannah Hamad, in *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. Film*, writes, “Homosocial relations remain important in westerns in postfeminist culture. However, the central dramatic emphasis is more commonly on relations between fathers and children, whether the paternal role is literal or figurative” (41). *Blood* focuses on the role of an adoptive father, *Assassination* positions Jesse James (Brad Pitt) as an actual father to his children and desired father to Ford, and *3:10 to Yuma* shows the struggles of the biological father seeking admiration from his son.

Whenever masculine prowess was in doubt, the western became a place men returned to for affirmation, but the post 9/11 western offers none. Hamad expands that “the ideal masculinity therefore proffered in prerevisionist westerns is at odds with the paternal imperative of postfeminist culture” (40). In the post 9/11 western, the father is no longer a source of knowledge, information, confirmation, love, understanding, security, etc.; instead, fatherhood becomes a source of anxiety and insecurity for the post 9/11 Westerner.

Introduction to the Films

The following thesis explores how the dynamics of fatherhood play out for the character of the post 9/11 Westerner. *3:10* is a remake of *3:10 to Yuma* (1957, dir. Delmer Daves), following the plot closely with a few changes and more emphasis on the journey to the train. Mangold’s 2007 film has the feel of a traditional western with a melodramatic finale filled with gunshots and many deaths. What makes it modern, and a focus of this thesis, are the changes to

the Dan Evans and William storyline which brings fatherhood to the forefront. William, in the original, does not accompany his father on the trip, but instead sees him as a brave hero volunteering to take the dangerous Ben Wade (Russell Crowe) to prison. The remake has William join the journey, where he is all but disgusted by his father's lack of heroism, while infatuated with Wade's charisma and outlaw fame. This thesis positions Dan as the post 9/11 Westerner struggling to earn his son's respect, while also trying to achieve the coveted status of hero.

Assassination is about Robert Ford joining the James gang, becoming close to the outlaw, and ultimately assassinating him in his own home. The film explores the myths of fatherhood through Ford's idolization of James. Soon this idolization turns to fear and jealousy, leading to the assassination. This thesis will examine the relationship between the two men through the lens of a child (Ford) building up the persona of their father figure (James) into something larger than life. The film also comments on how the reality of both men has been overshadowed by their place in history. Ford attempts to become the classic Westerner by assuming James's status, but is ultimately rejected and remains a post 9/11 Westerner.

There Will Be Blood is similar to *Red River* in that both films deal with the destructive aspects of capitalism, as well as the role of a father in the construction of masculinity. This is depicted specifically in the relationship between Plainview and his adopted son HW in *Blood* compared to Tom Dunson and his adopted son Matt in *Red River*. This thesis examines the film by situating Plainview as representative of capitalism and Eli Sunday (Paul Dano) as representative of Christianity. The two men vie to be the symbolic communal father of the town, meaning they possess the ultimate influence over the community. This will be a focus of the

analysis of *Blood*, along with Plainview's relationship with HW which helps Plainview acquire power and wealth, but also results in the deterioration of his morality.

These three films each present a post 9/11 Westerner trying to achieve some level of heroism, fame, or wealth. Their struggles and insecurities are all tied to an image of fatherhood in some way. Unlike the classic Westerner who overcomes every obstacle and is celebrated, these post 9/11 Westerners are never celebrated and ultimately fail. The post 9/11 Westerner is on a journey to achieve the status of the classic Westerner, a destination he can never reach. Like Bell from *No Country for Old Men*, the post 9/11 Westerner has no choice but to go forward and meet his certain doom.

CHAPTER 2

3:10 TO YUMA

3:10 to Yuma (2007, dir. James Mangold) depicts the struggle of a poor rancher, Dan Evans (Christian Bale) who is desperate for money. After the infamous outlaw Ben Wade (Russell Crowe) has been captured, very much due to Dan stalling him long enough for the marshals to arrive, Dan volunteers to join the group escorting Wade to the train that will send him to prison. One of Dan's two sons, William (Logan Lerman), an avid admirer of Wade, joins the trip which causes friction between Dan and Wade. The film ends with Dan being killed by Wade's gang, Wade killing his own gang, and Wade boarding the train himself. William finally confesses his love for his father Dan, who dies in his arms.

The film is a remake of *3:10 to Yuma* (1957, dir. Delmer Daves) updated for a modern audience. The 1957 version is a quiet, thoughtful western focused on the theme of faith in the family, as well as hope in economic retribution for serving one's government. James Mangold's 2007 film is much more action oriented, with the majority of the story focused on the journey to the train which is absent from the 1957 version. The biggest change between the two versions is that Dan's son William is along for the journey in the 2007 film whereas Dan's wife is the family member of focus in the 1957 film. Mangold's film is a western for modern audiences in its focus on father-son relationships rather than the nuclear family, hence the added focus on action, but also in its focus on homosocial relationships, allowing for a more thoughtful analysis of masculinity. The postfeminist era suggests men no longer owe anything to women, just to their male offspring.

As noted, much of *3:10 to Yuma* (2007) focuses on the character of William and his struggle choosing which of the men he desires as a father/father figure. Dan represents the

broken father who William views as a source of shame and disgust since he believes him to be weak and a coward. In William's eyes, Wade represents his ideal father. To William, Wade is a source of excitement and myth signified by the outlaw's prowess with a gun and unfaltering confidence. This chapter examines William as a surrogate for modern audiences. Like William, the audience for *3:10 to Yuma* is presented with two versions of the Westerner and their respective masculinities. The film represents Dan as a man who fails to embody the classic Westerner's traits, as well as being a failure in his son's eyes. This chapter argues that *3:10 to Yuma* depicts the post 9/11 Westerner's attempt to transcend his status and become a classic Westerner only to be denied access by the forces around him.

Dan Evans: Failing to Live Up to the Classic Westerner

Dan and Wade are presented to William as two different versions of the Westerner, each vying for his attention. This struggle is reminiscent of the characters of Shane (Alan Ladd) and Joe (Van Heflin) whom Joey must choose between in the movie *Shane* (1953, dir. George Stevens). Both *Shane* and *3:10 to Yuma* position a child as the one who must choose between two versions of masculinity the child will emulate.

The costuming of the Westerner contributes a great deal of meaning to the masculinity of his character. Edward Buscombe, in the essay "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema" writes, "The men in Westerns wear clothes that are aggressively masculine, sexy in a virile sort of way. This in turn determines the character of the hero – taciturn, tough, uncomplicated, self-sufficient" (17). This refers to the classic Westerner, embodied through Wade's costuming in *3:10 to Yuma*. His black hat fits perfectly to his head, which is uniform in color and style to his overcoat and pants. His vest and undershirt are rigid, nothing seemingly out of place or worn down. On the other hand, Dan's hat is uneven and beaten down from the sun so much so the

brim has lost its shape. His overcoat is too big, as are all of his clothes most likely due to lack of food. If Wade's clothes, as Buscombe notes, determine him to be professional, clean, and strong; then Dan's clothes clearly position him as dirty, weak, and outmatched.

Dan's failure as a classic Westerner reflects the socioeconomic status of a post 9/11 America. The first scene of the film is Dan's barn being set on fire by thugs of a local businessman attempting to force Dan off of the land. As Dan tries to stop the thugs, he is knocked to the ground revealing his wooden foot. William attempts to save the barn, but Dan stops him. Dan says he will handle the situation, only for William to respond with a defiant and disgusted "no you won't." Ahu Tanrisever notes the cultural function of heroism in these post 9/11 films must be understood through the context of the US housing bubble of 2007 (94). By opening the film with property being burned, this reinforces Dan's feeling of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming forces, clearly situating Dan on the verge of crisis related to his home, his livelihood, his family, and his masculinity.

As noted, much of the film depicts Dan struggling to earn his family's respect, a respect that might seem especially precarious in post 9/11 America. Lee Clark Mitchell, in *Late Westerns*, writes, "Mangold adapts [Delmer] Daves's [film] for parents of Generation Z, troubled by children who simply dismiss their assumptions, spouses who talk past each other, and economic structures that seem more unyielding and forbidding than in the past" (69). The importance of this quote is that while it shows the forces Dan is dealing with may have not been so prevalent in the 1950's, it also shows the pressure Dan puts upon himself. Dan is the one creating most of the barriers he must overcome due to his inability to accept his status and see outside his social conditioning. Dan does not realize he does not always need to be the strong/competent one, and that he is a victim of generic expectations of western heroes. Instead,

Dan strives to achieve the status of someone like Wade who is economically secure and is an active agent in his own life. In one of the quieter moments of the film, Dan comes to terms with his lack of opportunity, somberly joking to his wife he wishes the doctor had not saved so much of his leg because the pension act pays by the pound. In the scene, Bale lets out a tragic chuckle encompassing the pain, but more importantly the guilt Dan carries with him at all times. Later on, when Dan decides he will join the men in escorting Wade, Dan's wife Alice (Gretchen Mol) begs him not to go for she believes he will not survive. This leads Dan to reveal his true motives for taking on such a dangerous task. Dan says:

Have a little faith in me. I am tired of watching my boys go hungry. I'm tired of the way that they look at me. I'm tired of the way that you don't. I've been standing on one leg for three damn years, waiting for God to do me a favor. And He ain't listening.

There is no confidence in the speech, but only Dan being honest about his reality. He knows he will probably die, but a chance to change his family's perception of him is not one he will let slip away.

In the essay, "Civilization and Its Discontents," Douglas J. Den Uyl examines the role of self-sufficiency in the construction of the western hero. Uyl claims reason is at the center of the Westerner's actions, and one of the ways it demonstrates itself is through self-knowledge. Uyl writes, "The self-sufficient man would know himself, his plans, his purposes, his goals, and why what he's doing needs to be done" (39). It is this self-knowledge that provides comfort to the western hero as he ventures out on his quest, but Dan is uncomfortable with that status.

Throughout his life, Dan has been trying to make an honest living but has failed at it because of forces beyond his control. For Dan, self-sufficiency means an honest living, but then Wade shatters that illusion. "It might be honest," Wade snidely remarks during a campfire scene, "But I don't think it's much of a living." Wade suggests that Dan needs money and that is why he took

this job, challenging Dan's self-sufficiency. The insecurity of the post 9/11 Westerner is on clear display in Bale's face, and in his body language, as he subtly attempts to cling onto his carefully constructed façade. All the while, Wade is slowly chipping away at Dan's self-knowledge about his own masculinity.

During a campfire scene where Wade and Dan struggle for dominance over who is truly William's idol, the issue of sacrifice is broached. Wade's first taunt is interrupting a conversation between Dan and Mr. Butterfield, the businessman funding the trip, about how Dan came to fight for the Union army. Wade does not ask, but tells Dan that is where he lost his foot. Whereas a sacrifice such as the one Dan made would be something celebrated and displayed as an act of courage, it is only a sign of symbolic castration for the post 9/11 Westerner. Though Dan attempts to convey a righteous sense of morality in the face of the immoral Wade, it only serves as another aspect of his character that Wade can pick apart. Wade's second taunt asks Dan what he is doing out here when he has a family to protect. Wade continuously positions Dan as the head of a household, because he has seen how Dan's family lives and knows the desperation inside of him. In attempting to respond to Wade's taunt, Dan says, "Maybe I don't like the idea of men like you on the loose," carefully shifting the perspective of himself to that of a good Samaritan taking up arms against the reckless outlaw. Wade then responds it is man's nature to take what he wants, a direct insult to Dan who cannot. By the logic of Wade, and the classic Westerner, this marks Dan as not a man.

Sensing Dan's anger, Wade then questions Dan's marriage. Wade wonders aloud about the weight debt can put on marriages, finally provoking Dan just as Wade intended. Dan insults Wade claiming he does not know anything about marriage since he is a cutthroat and a thief. Wade responds:

I know if I was lucky enough to have a wife like Alice, I'd treat her a whole lot better than you do, Dan. I'd feed her better, buy her pretty dresses, wouldn't make her work so hard. Yeah, I'll bet Alice was a real pretty girl before she married you.

No longer able to control himself, Dan lunges at Wade and threatens that if he says one more word about his wife "I'll cut you down right here." "I like this side of you, Dan," Wade responds as if this was his goal all along. Dan is stuck trying to be someone he is not, whereas Wade does not have to hide who he is. The classic Westerner lacks self-doubt about his masculinity which is accepted without question by those who witness it. The post 9/11 Westerner's masculinity is never accepted and is constantly on the verge of being undone. It is also largely reactionary because Dan is clinging to outmoded ideals, but it is his own inability to adapt to more fluid concepts of masculinity that is part of the issue.

Whether it be symbolic or economic, the post 9/11 Westerner is obsessed with how valuable his life is and covets the rewards of heroism. As they await the arrival of the train, Butterfield offers Dan the agreed upon \$200 to walk away. At this moment, Dan is left alone since the men who were supposed to help have abandoned him. Dan, realizing what his perceived self-worth is to other people, says to Butterfield:

You know, this whole ride, that's been nagging on me. That's what the government gave me for my leg. \$198.36. And the funny thing is that... when you think about it, which I have been lately, was they weren't paying me to walk away. They were paying me so they could walk away.

While it is about the money, it is also about the post 9/11 Westerner's desire to be accepted by the classic Westerner. This scene shows Dan confronting his own futility because the war took from him what he can never have back, his foot. It also demonstrates to Dan how little value his life holds. For the second time, someone is offering Dan \$200 to walk away so they can feel better about themselves. In the 1957 version of *3:10 to Yuma*, Dan not only puts Wade onto the train, but is then rewarded by the universe with rain which will solve his financial struggles.

While the classic Westerner is allowed to be a hero and is rewarded as such, the post 9/11 Westerner is not. The post 9/11 Westerner's offer of heroism is a false promise because though he may succeed in his mission, as Dan does in getting Wade to the train, his reward is to die in the dirt.

While Dan may learn to accept his compromised masculinity, he is still unable to achieve any real victory. Dan is not an agent of order in a savage land, but instead lives in a world where the agent of order is a myth purported as reality. His mission will be remembered by his family and Wade, yet no one will recount Dan Evans's courage in taking Ben Wade to the train when no one else would. He will not be mythicized, nor romanticized, because his victory is a false one. Dan may perceive his final act as a victory, but fails to see that Wade will be the one remembered. Dan's final destination becomes the irony of the post 9/11 Westerner seen in his ability to get to the train, but never on it.

Even when Dan does demonstrate some level of heroism, it remains undercut through Wade's role in assisting Dan on his journey. As they start for the train, Wade's men surround the town and begin firing at Dan. At first, Wade is seemingly willing to help Dan, even alerting Dan to the presence of one of the shooters. Dan believes he is in charge, but overlooks he has only made it so far because of Wade's cooperation. As soon as Wade has had enough, he easily throws Dan to the ground and mocks his attempted heroism. Wade recognizes Dan's attempt at being heroic and understands that Dan views this as his chance to achieve his desired masculinity. The issue is Wade will not entertain the farce any further. Dan tries to rebel against what he knows to be true, pulling down Wade only to get beaten and choked. Sensing this could be the end for himself, Dan finally reveals the history of his "bravery" during the war. "I ain't never been no hero, Wade," Dan says through choked breath, "The only battle I seen, we was in

retreat. My foot got shot off by one of my own men. You try telling that story to your boy. See how he looks at you then.” Dan is ashamed of how William views him and his inability to live up to the classic Westerner’s masculinity. A main ideal of the classic Westerner is always being victorious, which the post 9/11 Westerner never is. It also underscores that most heroism is built on myths/half-truths, a constant feature of the western since the beginning.

Throughout the entire film, Dan has compared himself to Wade which only increases the insecurity he feels from being unable to be like the classic Westerner. Though the film follows the classic western structure, Dan remains a modern hero insecure about his masculinity. The post 9/11 Westerner’s masculinity is inherently linked to failure because he does not represent civilization, or savagery. He is just a man who lives in the shadow of the classic Westerner and can never escape. This contributes to the anxiety he feels from living in a world that does not perceive him as heroic, and yet his attempt to be heroic only results in his doom.

William Evans: Desire for the Classic Westerner

The opening scene of the film, involving the burning of the barn, quickly addresses the low economic status of Dan and his family. Dan’s economic desperation leads him to agree to escort Wade to the train. This decision is not for a sense of duty to the community, but as an attempt to reclaim his masculinity. In order to accomplish this, Dan must gain affirmation from his son, as well as secure economic retribution through his status as breadwinner. Yet, as Tanrisever astutely acknowledges, Dan’s journey to achieve this economic success is intertwined with his desire to be William’s selected father figure (97). Dan’s insecurity stems from his failure of not being the father/husband he desires to be, as well as failing to emulate the classic Westerner’s masculinity.

During Dan and William’s first encounter with Wade, William witnesses his ideal

version of masculinity embodied within Wade. William and Wade share no dialogue; instead, William watches Wade execute one of his own gang members and a guard of the stagecoach he has just robbed. The scene showcases Wade's brutal coldness, and highlights his efficiency in the ways of violence. Instead of commenting on the violence (as well as the betrayal Wade has just perpetrated), in hushed excitement William says, "He's fast." The first image of William in the film is of him in bed reading a pulp novel about western outlaws. Wade is the embodiment of what William fantasizes about when reading these books, because he looks how William wants to look, he shoots how William wants to shoot, and he is brave and attractive. Wade is everything William's biological father is not.

Both William and Charlie Prince (Ben Foster), a psychopathic devotee of Wade, assume the roles of "sons" attempting to emulate their "fathers." Similar to William, Charlie is also an admirer of Wade, only what he admires is different than William. Charlie has no issue with killing, in fact he seems to derive great pleasure from the act. Charlie is almost fanatic in wanting to be like Wade. Whereas William seems to overlook Wade's murderous ways in favor of focusing on being the fastest on the draw (and looking good while at it), Charlie seems to have taken greater interest in the violence of the classic Westerner.

Just as the film is about what sons desire in a father figure, it is equally about the acceptance sons seek. The character of Charlie is positioned as the counterpart of William, because though both prioritize their gaze towards Wade, William's decision is still ongoing while Charlie's is already determined. In the scene where Dan first meets Wade, Dan demands his cattle back. Charlie laughs at the comment, but as he laughs he looks towards Wade as if searching for a sign of approval. Charlie then tells Dan to be careful since he is talking to Ben Wade, almost as if he proving his loyalty to him. Later on in the film, Dan's gang tries to trick

Charlie by having someone pretend to be Wade in another carriage going the opposite direction. Charlie discovers the trick and is quick to snatch away Wade's hat from the imposter. There is even a moment where Charlie appears to fondle the hat right before turning back to the imposter he is about to burn alive. The film does not go so far as to present the hat as a fetish for Charlie, but it is clearly an object Charlie reveres. The hat represents Wade's masculinity of which Charlie is now the protector. Charlie charges himself with the responsibility of returning his father figure's hat, which will surely grant him the approval he desperately covets.

In the second campfire scene, the fight to be the dominant parent of William takes central ground between Dan and Wade. William reveals he has been following the group and Wade quickly notices William's knack for shuffling cards. Wade asks William if he has ever been to Dodge City. Dan immediately demands Wade stop talking to him and Wade's face is one of annoyance since he has repeatedly shown Dan just how small and insignificant he is. Wade commends William's skill, which leads William to ask if Wade has ever been to Dodge. Wade tells of all the people that find their way to that city, making it sound more like one of the dime novels William reads rather than reality. Wade is only reinforcing the myth and romance of the classic western genre William has read about, which intensifies William's desire even more. "Women who'll do things to you you'll never forget," Wade says to the young man with sexual undertones marking the scene clearly for what it is, seduction.

William is seduced by Wade's story of what the mythic West offers a young man like himself, a clear attempt at pulling the boy away from his father. The film frames William's face in a close-up for his reaction to Wade's comment on women, making sure to highlight the involuntary gulp William releases from the arousal Wade is provoking. The camera cuts back and forth between the boy and man, their eyes linking together like a predator ensnaring prey

with its gaze. Sensing William's arousal, Dan intervenes by calling attention to Wade's murderous ways. After a quick back and forth, Dan takes Wade away from the fire so Wade can relieve himself. Though brief, the scene depicts a literal and figurative "pissing contest" where Wade literally has his penis out and is talking about William. Wade pridefully comments on how he really thought William was going to shoot him, and claims the boy reminds him of himself. Dan is quick to dispel the notion, yet he does not say or insinuate William will be like him either. While Dan longs to be respected like the classic Westerner, he does not view William's similar desire as positive. In this moment, Dan is reacting to the myth of the classic Westerner; the belief where white men could do whatever they liked, treat everyone as inferior, and could not only survive, but be applauded for it. Dan does not represent this myth, but instead is a reaction to it. Though he may want to be like the classic Westerner, Dan wants William to desire to be like him. Though Dan may say William will not be like Wade, it is clear that William prefers the ideal father encapsulated in the persona of Ben Wade.

Dan is desperate for money, but is more desperate to be admired by his son. Once the group arrives at the town of Contention, they await the arrival of the train in the hotel where the only room available is the bridal suite, which serves to accentuate the homosocial/homoerotic themes of the film. As they wait for time to pass, Wade and Dan continue to trade barbs with Wade dangling a bribe in front of Dan that would pay him \$1,000 instead of the \$200 offered by Mr. Butterfield. It is interesting to note Dan ultimately refuses with the reasoning being everyone would know how he got the money. This refusal reinforces the idea that it is public image that is most important to Dan. More importantly, Dan is concerned with what William would think of him, leading him to refuse the offer. William's heroes do not take bribes, so Dan must adhere to his son's view of heroism. To make matters worse, Charlie arrives with the rest of Wade's gang

and calls out to the townspeople demanding to know where Wade is located. Wade is allowed to peek his head out of the window, and the first thing Charlie asks is if Wade is okay. He asks the question with such sincerity, as if regressing to a child who is genuinely worried about their father. Charlie then returns Wade's hat, a momentous occasion for Charlie since he is the one returning the hat; the ultimate sign of masculinity within the genre.

Near the end of the film, Wade and Dan are about to head for the train, but then Charlie offers the townspeople money for shooting down anyone protecting Wade. This results in the other men who were supposed to help Dan decide to leave. As soon as the men surrender to Charlie, he kills them all, leaving Dan the only one left willing to escort Wade to the train. Faced with the prospect of his father's murder, William asks Wade to call off the men, believing Wade is "not all bad," to which Wade responds, "Yes, I am."

William, not wanting to see his ideal father as the murderous outlaw he is, recounts moments that prove he is not all bad. "You saved us from the Indians," William says, only for Wade to correct him saying he saved himself. "You got us through the tunnels," William counters, to which Wade responds, "If I'd had a gun in them tunnels, I would have used it on you." The film uses this scene to demonstrate the confrontation between the myth embodied in the dime novels William loves so much, and the reality of the men the dime novels mythicized. One of the central facets of the post 9/11 western is the recognition of the myths of the genre, specifically the heroes the genre props up as symbolic representations of good. Ben Wade assumes the place of the myth of the western genre Dan must contend with, while the belief in this image is represented through William. As much as the film is about William choosing between two opposing father figures, it is equally concerned with myths of masculinity within the western genre.

Dan may achieve some form of victory in gaining acceptance from his son, but in dying, he fails to live up to the classic Westerner's status. When Butterfield returns to assure Dan he will not hold anything against him for giving up, Dan must decide whether to continue on his suicide mission or not. Then, William turns to his father and says, "Maybe he's right, Pa. Maybe we should go home." This is the first time he refers to Dan as "Pa" in the film, the first recognition of who his father is and the father he has chosen. Tanrisever takes note of this revelation writing, "Witnessed by the outlaw, father and son seal their homosocial bond of generational transition as William articulates his loyalty to Dan, stressed by his usage of the affectionate address 'Pa'" (98). While this may at first seem like a win for Dan, since he has craved his son's validation for the entire film, it is still not enough. Yes, William has chosen Dan as his father, but Dan knows it is only because William is afraid that if Dan continues he will die. While his son has finally shown affection towards him, Dan is more focused on shedding his post 9/11 Westerner image and achieving status as hero in the eyes of William.

At the hotel, Dan understands he will most likely die, but he also knows that in taking Wade to the train he can attempt to create his own myth. Before they head for the train, Dan makes Butterfield agree to his demands: make sure William gets home safe, guarantee that the thugs from earlier will stay off his land and not block off his water, and give his wife \$1,000 in cash when he sees her. Dan then gives his medal of valor from the army to William to give to Alice, securing the transition of William to head of the household. In one of Bale's more heartbreaking line deliveries, Dan tells William he has become a fine man and "you got all the best parts of me. What few there are." As he says the line, he lets out an exacerbated laugh that is an acknowledgement of his insecurities regarding his own manhood. Before William leaves, Dan

instructs William to remember “that your old man walked Ben Wade to that station when nobody else would.”

Whether it be the economic struggles, or the inability to transcend his status as a post 9/11 Westerner, Dan’s journey is a fatalist one that can only end with his death. After dodging numerous gunshots, and somewhat proving himself in battle, Dan finally arrives at the train with Wade in tow. Right as Dan puts Wade on the train, and Wade congratulates Dan on accomplishing his mission, Dan is then immediately shot in the back. The shooter, Charlie Prince, shoots Dan three more times in the chest and stomach. Tarrisever claims, “Dan has to fail in defeating ‘evil,’ as the forces he fights against are not individuals but abstract, faceless, and all-encompassing power structures and systems” (102). Only the power structures in play affect the post 9/11 Westerner. Dan is not only fighting against Wade and Charlie Prince, but he is also fighting against the bank who will take his land, the government who told him how much his life was worth, and a society that imparts greater status to an outlaw than a farmer.

Though Wade has demonstrated to William an image of the classic Westerner, both men continue to perform for the boy since this is their last chance to secure a son’s approval. As William rushes to a dying Dan, Wade kills his entire gang with the pistol Charlie returned to him. Importantly, from the moment Dan is shot, until the film’s end, Wade does not speak. Everything he does in these final moments are purely gestures. Wade kills his own men out of respect for Dan’s sacrifice, but also as a gesture for William to see the classic Westerner’s sense of honor.

Though the sequence appears to be a moment of sacrificial heroism for Dan, it is underlined with irony concerning the post 9/11 Westerner’s fate. When William reaches his father, William reassures Dan by saying he has done it; Dan has accomplished the mission of

getting Wade on the train when no one else would. The irony of the scene is that Wade is not on the train at this moment, and also Wade puts himself aboard the train. This act is another gesture for William, which may be something of a false gesture (since Wade revealed to Dan earlier that he has already escaped from Yuma prison twice). Regardless, the act reinforces William's belief in the classic Westerner. While Dan's act may have secured financial success for his family, and earned the respect of his son, the film does not depict his death as some great sacrifice. Instead, the film chooses to focus on the post 9/11 Westerner dying, unable to say any last words to his son who now belatedly respects his father. Keeping in line with the character trajectory of the post 9/11 Westerner, Dan cannot be alive to witness his son professing his admiration for him. This pessimistic tendency is found within the post 9/11 western because death is what awaits the post 9/11 Westerner.

Rüdiger Heinze and Lucia Krämer note that Mangold believes contemporary audiences would not have bought into the original film's ending where Dan succeeds in putting Wade on the train, claiming "the changed ending does not only cater to 21st-century cynicism, but changes the entire meaning of Dan's act" (73). Heinze and Krämer write, "Dan has to die because he could not have upheld his performance of mythic male heroism after returning to his pedestrian life on the farm (his lived experience)" (73). While Dan was able to play the hero for a short period of time, as a post 9/11 Westerner he could never maintain the status of hero. Heinze and Krämer cite Pete Falconer who argues that it is Wade himself who "at the end [of the film] ironically resembles the classic Western hero who saves the community by killing the outlaws and riding off" (74). This thought is only reinforced by the final image of William and his father, only William's gaze is not directed towards his father, but rather at the train transporting Wade. Also, the film ends with William destined to repeat Dan's errors and trajectory. For example,

William will continue to live in the same unfair world where he will inherit the farm, have to be the man of the house, and still desire the myth of the classic Westerner. Though William may learn to love his father by the end of the film, he does not learn that the myth of the classic Westerner is not worth chasing. The post 9/11 Westerner is defined by his failure, and although Dan brings Wade to the train, it is ultimately Wade who puts himself on it. Even though it may appear that the post 9/11 Westerner succeeds in his mission, he is never allowed passage on the metaphoric train which continues to transport the image of the classic Westerner to the masses and to future generations.

Conclusion

3:10 to Yuma is a story that presents a young man positioned between two potential father figures; he must choose who he wants to emulate. The film takes the struggle of Joey from *Shane* (who must decide between the mythic gunslinger or his hard-working father) and transports it to a film from 2007, where William must decide between two versions of the Westerner. The post 9/11 Westerner must always be understood in comparison to the classic Westerner. Wade presents Dan with a figure to which he can aspire, while at the same time the figure of Wade is what marks Dan as inferior. William assumes the role of the audience and the two men perform for his attention. They each want to be the one who makes it to the train, because the train goes forward bringing along the image and myth of the chosen Westerner. The post 9/11 Westerner must die at the end of his journey because he cannot achieve the heroism of the classic Westerner. William may choose the post 9/11 Westerner as his father within this film, but that choice is overshadowed by Dan's death. While his son may remember him, the rest of the world will never know Dan's name, but they will never forget Ben Wade.

CHAPTER 3

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD

Directed by Andrew Dominik, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) begins with the meeting of Robert Ford (Casey Affleck) and Jesse James (Brad Pitt). Ford, alongside his brother Charley (Sam Rockwell), hopes to join the James gang that already includes the likes of James's brother Frank (Sam Shepard), James's cousin Wood Hite (Jeremy Renner), and notorious womanizer Dick Liddil (Paul Schneider). The majority of the film finds Ford getting close to his hero, but after becoming disillusioned with the image of James, as well Ford killing Wood Hite, Ford makes the fateful decision to assassinate the infamous outlaw. After killing James, Ford himself becomes a celebrity where he even reenacts the assassination as a stage play. Eventually, Ford is also assassinated by a stranger seeking retribution for the James family.

The film, based on Ron Hansen's 1983 novel of the same name, details Ford's idolization of James. Whereas *3:10 to Yuma* (2007, dir. James Mangold) focuses on a biological relationship between father and son, *Assassination's* depiction of fatherhood is more metaphorical and is more focused on how men look up to and want to be like older men. James is Ford's role model; he takes on a figurative paternal role for the young man. Once Ford discovers James cannot live up to his imagined ideals, however, Ford's love and excitement transforms into fear and disgust. Also, unlike *3:10 to Yuma* which is more of an action film appealing to mainstream audiences, *Assassination* is a more intellectually ambitious film with greater pretensions. The pace is more methodical with a 160 minute runtime that features mostly elongated scenes involving men talking and gazing at each other. The western is the preeminent male melodrama of film with its epic plots, but it is the homosocial bonds found in the genre which have become intrinsically

linked to the western name. Butch Cassidy needs the Sundance Kid. Doc Holliday needs Wyatt Earp. Shane (Alan Ladd) needs little Joey calling after him in hopes he may return to prove the western myth is not gone. Jesse James needs Robert Ford.

In a way, the film is similar to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962, dir. John Ford). The two films deal with the issue of myth versus truth concerning representations of men. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is about Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart), a lawyer who moves out West only to come face to face with the reality of the lawlessness of the territory. Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), the classic Westerner if there ever was one, attempts to teach Stoddard how to survive in the West and what kind of man one has to become to do so. The crux of the film is based around everyone believing Stoddard is the one who shoots and kills the outlaw Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin), when in reality it was Doniphon. The film ultimately ends with the parties involved acknowledging the better story is Stoddard killing Valance instead of Doniphon.

Much of the western genre is predicated upon the idea of myth, and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is John Ford interrogating the very western myth he helped to establish. This is similar to the way the western genre has positioned Jesse James as an outlaw hero, when in reality he was a man consumed by his personal flaws and his penchant for violence. Whereas *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is working with the myth of the classic western genre, *Assassination* is more focused on the way myth influences men's view over other men. In many ways, Ford is similar to William (Logan Lerman) from *3:10 to Yuma* who has read all the western pulp novels like Ford has been raised on the exploits of the James gang, but fails to recognize the embellishments authors added to their stories. This misunderstanding, or failure to recognize the myth behind the stories he has read, allows Ford to project onto James the qualities

of a man he himself desires. Ford believes the version of James he has read about is the actual man. Based on these readings, Ford chooses to position James in the role of a paternal role model for himself. However, as Ford interacts with the actual James, he realizes James is not how he imagined. This results in a fracture to Ford's understanding of the man, precipitating Ford's desire to destroy James so that he himself can achieve the mythic representation of what he imagined James to represent.

Ford idolizes James as a paternal role model since he is the mythic gunslinger Ford desires to emulate. Although the film explores the idea of celebrity and fandom throughout, this chapter focuses on Ford's idolization of James's masculinity. This desire eventually leads to Ford assuming the classic Westerner's masculinity by killing James. This chapter examines Ford's crafting of his own version of the myth of the classic Westerner, his eventual denial from the classic Westerner, and his attempt to transition into the role of the classic Westerner after destroying his chosen father figure.

Desiring the Classic Westerner

Myth is important within the film because it helps to shape Ford's worldview. More importantly, Ford does not recognize his view as one tinged with myth. Instead, Ford views his fantastical understanding of James as reality. After the train robbery near the start of the film, Ford is allowed to have a one on one conversation with James away from the other men. With Frank, James's older brother, departing from the gang, Ford eagerly attempts to fill that familial void for James as the two men share cigars. While the two smoke on the porch, Ford reads to James a newspaper clipping he keeps in his pocket describing the exploits of the James boys. The moment signals Ford's role as a fan of James, but also his naivety in believing everything he has read about the outlaw. In *Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities*, Susanne Kord and

Elisabeth Krimmer write about the film, “[Ford’s] greatest fear is that the myth of the James gang could end” (70). As a post 9/11 Westerner, Ford’s world is predicated on the world of the classic Westerner. Like a son told stories from his father, it is much easier to believe in them as fact than fiction. The act of sharing a cigar positions James in the paternal role of guiding Ford into manhood. Ford longs for validation from James because it gives him a purpose and reaffirms his own masculinity.

Many of James and Ford’s scenes together involve Ford gazing at James, but the gaze is also self-reflective for Ford since he believes he sees himself within the outlaw. As the two share a cigar, Ford reveals he keeps *The Train Robbers, or, A Story of the James Boys* by R.W. Stevens under his bed. Like a child, Ford recalls in glee the nights he would spend reading the stories about the James gang’s escapades. This is a momentous occasion for Ford since he is finally granted the opportunity to sit next to his hero and share a cigar with him. Ford is allowed to taste what it feels like to be accepted by the man he idolizes. When James tells the eager Ford “they’re all lies, you know,” referring to all the writings about James, Ford’s smile painfully disappears. Eager to hide this disappointment from James, Ford puffs on his cigar claiming he knows they are lies, but is clearly hurt by the revelation. James notices the hurt on Ford’s face, as well as his struggle with coughing due to the cigar, and lets him know he does not have to continue smoking if it is making him sick. Ford is disgusted with himself in this moment, throwing the cigar with excessive force. Ford’s desire to be on the same level as James makes him react angrily and perceive any accommodation as a slight on his manhood.

James is the epitome of what Ford thinks a man should be, and Ford has become convinced that he too represents that ideal. The poster for the film has the two leads standing in an open field. James stands straight and exudes power and confidence, almost as if he is posing

for his own portrait. Behind him stands Ford with arms crossed, his shoulders slightly hunched over with a top hat covering the upper part of his face. The poster depicts James as bigger because he is what Ford has looked up to all of his life. Michael Kimmel, in *Manhood in America*, writes, “In large part, it’s other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other” (5). This idea becomes the basis for the two men’s relationship as Ford is constantly positing himself as on similar footing to James. Ford’s mistake is in failing to recognize that James is a figure already shrouded in myth. Much like in history, James commands the center of attention in the poster, while Ford’s image is more obscured. Throughout the film, Ford longs to be considered as an equal alongside James, but this hope is soon revealed to be tragic. Ford becomes jealous of James because he knows in his heart if given the chance he and James could be on equal footing and they could be remembered together. This is why when the opportunity arises for Ford to join the gang, he quickly accepts.

Ford’s hopeful journey to become a classic Westerner is mirrored by his other journey: recognizing the ways that myth has influenced his view of other men. In Ford’s first scene with Frank James, he attempts to portray himself as someone who is already a classic Westerner only needing recognition in order to be accepted. Ford’s goal in the conversation is to make his case on why he would be an asset to the James gang. Frank asks Ford who he is, not remembering his name, which leads to him ask if he is Charley’s brother. While a small detail, it is important to note Ford has no individualism or agency. Ford is only known for who or what he is associated with. Ford wants to show Frank how special he is and how he believes he is destined for great things. “I got qualities that don’t come shining through right at the outset,” Ford says, “You give me a chance, I’ll get the job done.” It is obvious the speech has been rehearsed, so much so Ford

even knows exactly how Frank will respond, only it is not the response he intended. Frank tells Ford in the colorful lingo of the Old West, “You’re not so special, Mr. Ford. You’re just like any other tyro who’s prinked himself up for an escapade. Hoping to be a gunslinger like them nickel books are about.” In other words, Frank is telling Ford that he has met many men like him before and that he is nothing new. Frank is pushing back against the mythic interpretations Ford has of him and his brother, making clear that he and his world is not the one Ford has read and fawned over.

As much as Ford may want to be James, he can never be because he lacks the qualities of the classic Westerner. In the same scene, Frank is dismissive of Ford, even saying how his presence makes him uncomfortable. While Ford does his best not to listen to Frank, he cannot ignore his next words. “You may as well quench your mind of it,” Frank says referring to Ford’s hopes of being a gunslinger like James, “Because you don’t have the ingredients, Son.” Ford is not like these men he is among. Ford is not brash nor confident. Ford is not funny, but thinks he is. More importantly, Ford does not simply believe, but *knows* he is destined for greatness. No matter what Frank may say, Ford believes he will eventually succeed in gaining the masculinity he so desires similar to an obsessed fan like Charlie Prince (Ben Foster) from *3:10 to Yuma*. Ford even offers to be Frank’s sidekick for the night, which demonstrates his youth but also how his view of the West and western figures is intertwined with the mythic depictions of both Frank and Jesse James. Ford does not view the men as men, but as ideals.

The Rebuke of Ford by the Classic Westerner

Ford will never be anything but foreign to the men of the James gang. Acceptance is what Ford searches for throughout the film, but it becomes a meaningless journey since he will never be allowed entrance into the ranks of the classic Westerner. The first image of Ford in the film is

the camera following him from behind as he makes his way through the camp where the gang is awaiting the arrival of the train they will rob. Whenever he passes, the men lower their voices so he cannot hear them. They shoot disgusted looks immediately marking Ford as Other. One of the more noticeable aspects of the costuming for the Ford character resides in his facial hair, or lack thereof. Almost every man in the film sports facial hair at one point, but Ford never does. His bare face keeps him looking young, since he claims to be 19 at the start of the film, but it is one more factor that acts as a barrier Ford continually fails to overcome.

Ford's face is revealed when he stops at a distance to gaze at James. The face is one of a boy eager to join the ranks of men. As soon as he attempts to take a seat and join in on the jokes, it is time for food and the men quickly leave Ford alone. The camera remains close on Ford's face as he watches James get food. Whereas Ford is clean and smooth, James is dirty and rugged. Daniel Eisenberg, in his essay, "Shooting Cinematic Outlaws: Ned Kelly and Jesse James as Viewed Through Film," says, "Perhaps Jesse James looks so world-weary in this film because it has taken him 100 years of riding across the screen to get to this point" (150). Eisenberg is alluding to the countless depictions of James through the history of media, but notes this depiction may very well be the most accurate. James is one of the most popular western figures ever, his infamy celebrated like a western Robin Hood. From the first moment Ford sees James in the film it is clear he is obsessed with him. Ford observes James's mannerisms and speech pattern as if he is preparing to assume his identity, which he is. Ford is by far the most neurotic of the post 9/11 Westerners, his anxiety barely contained under his face which struggles to exude the assured masculinity he hopes to project.

Much of the film is concerned with Ford's homosocial desire for James. In one instance, Ford is creeping in the doorway looking on as James lies in a bath. James, without turning,

notices the presence of Ford. The scene is tinged with homoeroticism, as is the entire film, since Ford is continuously gazing at James. Interestingly, Ford does not react like he has been caught spying, but instead the scene turns almost into a flirtatious encounter with Ford trying to joke about James never being without his gun. Then, James wipes his face with a towel, revealing the gun that was hidden on the chair beside the tub. Ford is impressed by this, even delighted to know his view of James coincided with his imagined construction of his chosen father figure. The scene changes once James ominously ponders, “Can’t figure it out: do you want to be like me or do you want to be me?” Ford is embarrassed and fears his homosocial desire has been discovered by his father figure, as well as his wish to assume James’s identity. Ford desires to become James by assuming his image creating his own line of succession.

The film is very careful in how it frames Ford, making sure to reinforce the idea that Ford’s character is unformed through the use of blurred images. Frank’s departure from the gang sees James not even leave the backyard to say goodbye to his older brother. Sensing his chance to get closer to James, Ford peers through the back door at the figure of James alone in his chair. The film frames Ford in a medium close shot first on the other side of the door, viewing him through the textured glass. The shot creates a blurred image of Ford making his appearance seem hidden and incomplete. By positioning Ford on the other side of the glass, the film furthers the idea of Ford’s lack of agency. Ford’s identity is unformed resulting in his blurred image, and by attaching himself to James he attempts to solidify that image. Similar to history, Ford is known only so far as to his connection to James. Ford needs to be attached to another masculinity in order to possess his own.

During a dinner scene with Ford, James, and Charley, Ford believes that this will be his moment of acceptance into joining the masculinity he has idolized for his entire life. In it, Ford

professes his admiration for James by counting off the ways the two are so similar. However, this only exemplifies the divide between the temperaments of the two different Westerners. The scene is tense from the start since Ford, Charley, and Dick Liddil (who the Fords are hiding) have just killed Wood Hite, James's cousin, unbeknownst to the outlaw. While everyone is on edge, Ford stays surprisingly confident even though he himself killed Wood Hite. Ford has tasted what it feels like to be James, and he begins to believe in the masculinity he thinks he has achieved. He is combative and bold, much different than the starry-eyed kid the film had shown him to be. Ford maintains this aura of confidence and self-assuredness until Charley begins teasing him about how much of a fan he is of James. As Charley begins to tell a story about his brother, James abruptly stops him because he would rather hear it from Ford with his newfound confidence. Ford quickly reverts back to his nervous ways because he does not want to be found out as a fraud in front of his mythical father figure. He then begins to note the similarities between himself and the mythic figure of James:

It is interesting the many ways you and I overlap and whatnot. I mean, you begin with our daddies. Your daddy was a pastor at the New Hope Baptist Church, and my daddy was a pastor at the church in Excelsior Springs. You're the youngest of three James boys, and I'm the youngest of five Ford boys. Between Charley and me, there's another brother, Wilbur with six letters in his name. And between Frank and you is another brother Robert, also with six letters. And my Christian name is Robert, of course. You have blue eyes, I have blue eyes. You're five feet eight inches tall, and I'm five feet eight inches tall. Me, I must have had a list as long as your nightshirt when I was 12.

Affleck delivers the lines with the sincerity of a child searching for approval, and hoping in his heart that his admiration will be reciprocated.

Throughout Ford's speech, the camera slowly dollies in towards both Ford and James as they sit opposite each other, signaling the connection Ford imagines between the two. The connection is soon disrupted when Ford fails to receive the reaction he anticipated. The camera ceases to move, remaining fixed in a medium close-up of Ford for the rest of the scene. Ford may

wish for he and James to grow closer, but the camera, and reality, will not let him. In the essay, “Death of the Strong Silent Type,” Christopher Sharrett writes about what makes a traditional male hero saying, “The male hero isn’t neurotic, because neurosis tends to indicate a contemplative personality” (166). James is confident and self-assured, while Ford is never able to live up to his own imagined ideals. The camera movement in the scene reflects Ford’s hope, that it will no longer be Jesse and Frank James, but Jesse James and Robert Ford. Only James does not reciprocate Ford’s admiration, but instead is dismissive saying, “Ain’t he something?” The whole table erupts into laughter and Ford’s smile fades. James treats Ford in this moment like a child who is left out of the joke that everyone else is in on.

This scene directly confronts Ford’s magical thinking about his own relationship with James which almost verges on delusion. Ford has taken the time to draw out these connections between the two men with even something as innocuous as the same amount of letters in both of their brothers’ names. This divergence in thinking makes Ford seem pathetic, when he believes he is being genuine and vulnerable. While Ford is hopeful James will reciprocate his feelings, the scene ultimately depicts Ford’s disillusionment with James.

Ford comes to believe that James is not the idol he thought he was. Eisenberg discusses Ford’s discovery that James is not who he thought he was, saying, “...But as [Ford] draws closer (and we with him) to James, the legend dissipates, and all that is left is a man, and he is a dangerous, dark man” (150). Ford thought he and James were connected, but James is just another man who has cruelly taunted Ford’s sense of masculinity. It soon becomes clear to Ford that James is not worthy of the praise he has received for so long. This is ominous, because Ford’s entire existence depends upon his relation to James. Ford must compare himself to James because he has a history and an identity Ford is in search of. This moment is the turning point for

Ford because he realizes he will never be accepted by the masculine role model he desires; so his smile fades and his anger grows.

Assuming the Classic Westerner's Identity

After Ford decides to kill James, the film dramatizes Ford's preparations to assume James's identity. The day before James's death, Ford stays at James's house alone and envisions himself as James. Not the James he has come to know, but the James he had looked up to his whole life. Ford walks from room to room, as if preparing for the life of being the man James should have been. He wears James's hat, the ultimate sign of masculinity in the western genre. Ford lays in James's bed and imagines his body as James's own. He rubs his fingers over his ribs, imagining the bullet wounds belonging to James; Ford imagines his body as myth. This sequence shows Ford acting out his fantasy of being his idolized version of James, a fantasy that will soon become reality for the young man. By killing James and assuming his identity, Ford attempts to be the classic Westerner he believes James has failed to be. This action would demonstrate the falsity of the masculinity propagated by men like James throughout the history of the West. James was not a Robin Hood figure who was a symbol for the downtrodden, but just a man that robbed and killed innocent people to benefit himself.

The morning of the assassination finds Ford and Charley visibly nervous and uneasy, whereas James is surprisingly at ease. Ford is nervous about his murderous intentions being discovered, while Charley is more upset that he is involved with the killing of someone he considers a friend. The first image of this sequence begins with a title card marking the date of April 3rd, 1882, followed by a time lapse shot of clouds in the sky. The speed is jarring to the viewer, for the rest of the film has moved at a slow and methodical pace, except for a reoccurring motif of sped-up shots of the clouds. When Ford goes to the water well, the film increases the

frame rate giving everything a sense of urgency. It also marks the difference of speed in which Ford and James move. James, the classic Westerner, is stuck in 24 frames per second, while Ford, the post 9/11 Westerner, can exist in a faster frame rate. This reflects Ford's heightened excitement and anticipation, plus singles him out as 'out of step' with those who surround him. This notes Ford's belief in himself as being destined for greater things, but solidifies his place as different from the classic Westerner. It also suggests the onrush of history, since events have already been set in motion. There is no way to stop history. The men's fates have been decided, and all that is left is for the men to play their parts.

Once events occur that necessitate the assassination, Ford is confronted with the reality of killing his father figure. Wendy Chapman Peek, in "The Romance of Competence," writes, "The only men in Westerns who do express explicit concern about masculinity are all failures" (209). The post 9/11 Westerner constantly struggles with his insecurity regarding his masculinity. He fails because he knows he cannot win, whereas the classic Westerner is always victorious. Sitting at the table, James reads a paper about the capture of Dick Liddil, who supposedly the Ford boys were with around the time of his capture. The importance of this fact is that James would wonder why only Dick was captured and not the Fords. This would then lead James to wonder if the Fords made a deal with some government officials, which Ford did. Ford, consumed with fear, leaves the table and sits in the parlor room nervous that James has found them out and will kill them swiftly. Ford sits on a chair, barely able to control the tears forming in his eyes from the genuine fear he feels at the moment.

It is important to note that in James's final moments in the film his dual paternal roles as father to his own children, and as father figure to Ford, are greatly emphasized. The first image of James on that day is him walking his son back home, never taking his hand off of the boy's

shoulder. He then enters through the gate where he picks up his daughter in a playful manner, which causes the girl's shoe to fly off without either the daughter or James noticing. This is obviously supposed to cause an internal struggle for Ford: he is killing not only a man, but an actual father and (to him) a father figure. To further this point, moments before he is shot and killed, James is watching out the window at his daughter playing in the field. His daughter is far from the window, yet Charley, Ford, and James remain in the parlor room inside the house. The film raises the volume of the daughter's dialogue as if all the men can hear it, which literally they cannot, but the film's decision to emphasize the daughter's voice forces the men and the audience to acknowledge James's dual paternal roles. The camera looks at him from the outside of the window, causing the image of James to become distorted (much like Ford's when he watched James through the glass door). Eisenberg describes this shot of James as one that "represents something more elusive, a figure that has become cloaked in stories, with truth and fiction blurring his image" (152). This image is the film preparing James for his placement in history where the real man is lost, and his image and myth is all that survives.

The film, through Ford's eyes, has attempted to demystify James and portray him as the person he most likely was, but acknowledges that this blurred image is the image known to the masses. The camera then reveals what James was looking at so intently; the shoe his daughter had lost earlier in the day. By having James focus on finding the shoe, the film contrasts his role as father to his children with being a father figure to Ford. It becomes only fitting that as Ford prepares to shoot the man he has idolized most of his life, James's dual paternal roles intertwine. There is no drawn out gunfight with one person making a tough shot, or being faster on the draw. The climax of this film is Ford behind James, shooting him in the back of the head. Eisenberg writes about the way the assassination is framed noting:

In this film it happens from Ford's point of view and the spectator is implicated in the assassination of Jesse James. Robert Ford is a believer and perpetuator of the outlaw legend. The audience and movie camera shooting James have been perpetuating the legend for many years. In this simple shot, the camera and the spectator are accused of assassination (151).

The simple shot Eisenberg is referring to is a point of view shot from Ford's perspective that shows him holding the gun, which is out of focus, aimed at James who is in focus. As Eisenberg suggests, the audience becomes just as involved in the assassination as Ford, forcing the audience to recognize their place in the way each of these men are remembered.

After the killing, Ford believes he is finally ready to accept the role he had envisioned for himself his entire life, the hero who shot Jesse James. Ford begins making a living by becoming an actor where he would reenact his killing of James every night alongside Charley, who played the role of James. This speaks to the concept of performance within the film, Ford literally performs the masculinity he desired and constructed within his head based upon the myths he had read about James. By reenacting the assassination every night, Ford attempts to create and maintain his own myth, only the audience begins to sympathize with the wrong legend in Ford's eyes. They recognized the falsity of Ford attempting to portray a masculinity he did not possess, and began to long for the return of James and turned on Ford. They began to heckle him with insults like "murderer" and "coward" which only served to increase Ford's anxiety and anger. Charley's struggle is also apparent in the overwhelming guilt he feels for the act, and the film notes he wrote numerous letters intended for James's wife confessing his regret; the letters were never sent. Ultimately, Charley ends up taking his own life because of this guilt, and as the film's narrator notes, "Charley Ford became all that his countrymen wanted an assassin of Jesse James to be."

Conclusion

Though many people today recognize the James name, Robert Ford has long been forgotten or vilified throughout history, a point the film seeks to critique. The title of the film is misleading because it may seem the film is judging Ford as a coward, but in reality the film is confronting how history and those who perpetrate this story have deemed Ford to be a villainous coward. The film is unique in that it creates sympathy for Ford who rarely receives any throughout history. The film makes you adopt his position and feel what he felt, better understanding why Ford did what he did. It does not matter what Ford's true intentions were in terms of history or retellings of his story. It is easier to remember him as a coward instead of acknowledging how James, a cold blooded murderer, is the one mythologized as hero. The final image of the film is a freeze frame of Ford's face where his image is slightly blurred, the film pointing to how the reality of the man is unformed and has been lost to history.

Despite attempting to assume the role of the classic Westerner, Ford cannot achieve it reinforcing his status as a post 9/11 Westerner. When asked why he killed James, Ford confesses to Dorothy Evans (Zooey Deschanel), his girlfriend, he expected applause for killing the outlaw, but the applause never came. Ford's tragedy was that he thought James's masculinity was ultimately a sham, and that his (Ford's) masculinity would be worthy of the praise James had received. Ford's ideal masculinity was just as much of a myth as James, only audiences chose to believe in James's myth. The voiceover that ends the film details how Ford's murderer would go on to be pardoned by the governor after receiving 7,000 signatures asking for his release. The narrator sums up the myth of masculinity Ford was striving for, but could never attain. The narrator states there would be no eulogies for Ford; no photographs would be taken of him; no people would crowd the street to witness his funeral; no biographies would be written about him;

no children would be named after him; no one would pay 25 cents to stand in the rooms he grew up in. These are attributes afforded to Jesse James the renowned outlaw, not the coward Robert Ford.

CHAPTER 4

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

A classic western always contains a moment when the hero must stand tall and confront the forces opposing him. In death or in life, here is where the western hero discovers his true self. For Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *There Will Be Blood* (2007, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson), the main force opposing him is himself. The film follows the capitalist pursuits of Plainview, a man whose only motivation is defeating all of his competitors. It begins with Plainview mining for silver but eventually depicts him evolving into an oil tycoon. This leads to Plainview being cut off from the world because of his overwhelming wealth, destroying the last relationship he has, and finally committing a senseless act of murder which completes his moral decay.

While initially appearing to be a classic Westerner, Plainview eventually reveals himself to be a post 9/11 Westerner through his internal struggle with his own feelings concerning fatherhood. Plainview cannot be comfortable with himself and lacks the ability to understand and maintain relationships with other men, unlike classic Westerners. This chapter examines Plainview as a post 9/11 Westerner failing to be the classic Westerner. Plainview is in a position of power for most of the film, yet he abuses it to inflict pain and embarrassment upon others. Whenever Plainview is offered a chance to atone for his past sins, he rejects the offer completely. He is unable to overcome his inherent narcissism, as well as control the violence within him. Unlike the classic Westerner who commits violence in the name of justice, Plainview is a murderous psychopath who does not uphold the values of the classic Westerner.

The film shares many similarities with *Citizen Kane* (1941, dir. Orson Welles), especially with how fatherhood is viewed under the lens of capitalism. Both films focus on masculinity and

the American dream, and both Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) and Plainview achieve great status and wealth at the expense of their morality. They each end up living in a mansion of their own creation, suffocated by the amount of materialistic items they fill their homes with in order to counteract their loneliness. One of Plainview's struggles throughout *Blood*—brought on by his extreme capitalist desires—is his self-inflicted isolation from humanity. Emphasizing this theme of isolation, the opening fourteen minutes of the film features minimal dialogue, as Plainview mines for silver by himself. During this sequence, the audience witnesses Plainview break his leg and painstakingly crawl his way back to the surface, completely isolated from the outside world. The sequence demonstrates Plainview's intensity and perseverance, as well as his individualism.

Much of Hannah Hamad's work on postfeminist masculinity in the western film genre focuses on homosocial relations, and specifically the "relations between fathers and children, whether the paternal role is literal or figurative" (41). In *Blood*, Plainview occupies both a literal paternal role as father to his adopted son, but also a figurative paternal role as the symbolic communal father who controls the politics of the town. The irony of Plainview's attempt to be a father to these two parties is highlighted by his self-induced loner status, and his obvious disgust for other people. When discussing the westerns released in the mid-2000s, according to Hamad, "That the loner hero can be reconceived to account for postfeminism underscores the near totalizing extent of the paradigm shift in conceptualizing ideal masculinity in paternal terms" (40). Hamad points to the increased focus of fatherhood in modern depictions of masculinity within film. This is seen in *Blood* where Plainview's masculinity is always attached to fatherhood, as he strives to occupy simultaneously both his roles as paternal father and symbolic communal father.

As the film progresses, Plainview attempts to be a father to his adopted son HW, as well

as defeat Eli Sunday (Paul Dano), the local preacher also vying to be the symbolic communal father. Eventually, it becomes clear he cannot occupy both roles and is forced to choose one over the other. Plainview is unable to overcome his violent nature, his self-inflicted isolation, and negotiate his dual paternal roles which leads to his failures as a father and post 9/11 Westerner. Though he may appear like a classic Westerner, Plainview reveals himself to be a post 9/11 Westerner especially in regard to fatherhood, capitalism, and the perception of masculinity.

Fathers versus Sons

Like *Citizen Kane*, *Blood* is also similar to *Red River* (1948, dir. Howard Hawks), and by comparing Plainview to *Red River's* Tom Dunson (John Wayne), this chapter will demonstrate the ways the two Westerners differ in regards to violence, redemption, and fatherhood. Whereas Dunson accepts an offer of redemption from his son, Plainview rejects a similar offer: his capitalist desires overrule any feelings of fatherhood. In *Red River*, Tom Dunson and his adopted son Matt Garth (Montgomery Clift) struggle with each other's version of masculinity. The two men attempt an ambitious cattle drive but soon become rivals due to their differences in leadership, but eventually the two men reconcile and create their own company together. Though Dunson is corrupted by his capitalist greed, he is offered redemption that he gladly accepts. In *Blood* however, Plainview rejects his two offers of redemption: by caring for HW instead of tending to his oil business, and later refusing to bless HW's plan to start his own business.

When Plainview must care for HW as a baby for the first time, after HW's biological father dies in a derrick accident, Plainview is covered in oil demonstrating his fatherhood is always contaminated. Plainview immediately uses his newfound paternity to reinvent himself as a family-first business man, and transforms a now 7 year old HW into a prop shielding his true desires. Mary Bandy and Kevin Stoehr in *Ride, Boldly Ride* view Plainview as "an almost

demonic exaggeration of the other Western empire-builders we have seen,” specifically noting Dunson as a prior incarnation (277). Dunson’s capitalist strategies are similar to Plainview where both believe in an authoritarian style of leadership. The main difference in the capitalism of the classic Westerner is that he allows for others to share in his success such as forming a joint company with his son where both are equals. The post 9/11 Westerner does not allow anyone but himself to be in charge, because his version of capitalism allows for only an individual winner.

Later, HW’s deafness, caused by an explosion in a derrick accident, forces Plainview into the role of father where he must actually care for his son but is unable to do so. Unlike Dunson who takes in the newly orphaned Matt and teaches him everything he can, Plainview cannot handle the responsibilities of a father. Hamad notes Plainview’s characterization of a single father adheres “to postfeminism’s paternal imperative, and given the ubiquity of the figure of the single father as popular cinema’s masculine identity paradigm par excellence” (44). The paternal imperative within these films refers to a lack of a mother figure. This results in an increased focus on the father who must now be the sole parent (4).

At one point in the film, Plainview is asked about HW’s mother, to which Plainview responds, “I don’t want to talk about those things.” On one hand to talk about the mother would reveal HW is not Plainview’s biological son, but more importantly it would position Plainview as someone dependent on others. Plainview does not want to acknowledge the possibility of a mother for HW since he wishes to be viewed as the sole provider. The first mention of HW’s mother is towards the beginning of the film during a business meeting where Plainview says she died in childbirth leaving only him and his son. The film never says who the mother is, nor if Plainview ever searched for her, highlighting how Plainview has assumed the sole parental role. The father-son relationship in *Red River* focuses on Dunson strictly within the father role.

Dunson is the rough father who is never loving or comforting, because acting in the maternal role would weaken Dunson's image as a strong classic Westerner. Instead, the focus of the relationship is about respect and more so about an older man guiding a younger man through his journey to discover his own masculinity.

Plainview attempts to present an image of fatherhood whenever HW is with him in public by using the boy as a prop. In an early scene in which Plainview is at a town hall meeting attempting to gain drilling rights, HW stands silently beside his father as Plainview delivers a speech about why he is trustworthy. Plainview refers to himself as a "family man" and specifically mentions HW as his son and business partner. The importance of this strategy is Plainview proclaiming he understands the bond of family in a way few oil men can. This demonstrates Plainview's interconnected view of fatherhood and capitalism since he believes being a father automatically makes him seem more trustworthy. The irony of the situation is that Plainview is correct because none of the townspeople see HW as a prop, which only furthers Plainview's corrupted view of fatherhood.

Fatherhood is nothing more than a title to Plainview who uses it to pursue his economic goals which allows him to assert dominance over other men. After the completion of his new pipeline, as well as his deal with the oil company Union, Plainview transforms into a preeminent oil tycoon. Celebrating their success, and HW's return from a school for deaf children, they attend a restaurant. As they wait for their drink order, Plainview's rival H.M. Tilford from Standard Oil, the company who offered to buyout Plainview earlier in the film, arrives. The waiter quickly forgets about Plainview to attend to the men from Standard, resulting in Plainview boasting to the room about his economic accomplishments and his refusal of Standard's previous offer. Not receiving the reaction he desired from Tilford, Plainview walks over to him

demanding he look at his son. The performance is forced and obviously more about Plainview demonstrating his economic status. Plainview's roles as father and tycoon are so embedded within the other that they are indistinct in Plainview's mind. Being a father is not a honor or duty to Plainview, more so it is a title he uses so he appears connected to humanity. While not as neurotic as Robert Ford (Casey Affleck) from *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007, dir. Andrew Dominik), Plainview is jealous and greedy which marks his status as a post 9/11 Westerner. Plainview is unsure of his own masculinity and continuously projects an assured image of masculinity so he is not found out as a fraud.

An explosion at a derrick (the cause of HW's deafness) sees Plainview confronted with his dual roles as father. Plainview must decide whether his role as the symbolic communal father or paternal father is his main priority. On one hand, his son is hurt and scared, but on the other hand his role as the symbolic communal father is put into jeopardy unless he can save his derrick. Johnny Greenwood's score in the scene is pounding, almost to the point of becoming uncomfortable. The mixture of sounds that come together to form an unharmonious beat mimics Plainview's struggle within the scene. The situation, and score, are hectic and seem out of control. The scene reinforces the decision in front of Plainview: stay with his suffering child or abandon him to save his capitalist desires. Plainview chooses saving his oil instead of staying with his terrified son. As night comes and the fire burns, Plainview watches with a sense of opportunity and aggressive desire. Plainview asks Fletcher, his right hand man, "What are you looking so miserable about? There's a whole ocean of oil under our feet! No one can get at it except for me." Fletcher is not worried about the oil, but instead asks if HW is okay. Without taking his eyes off of the oil, and with little emotion, Plainview says, "No, he isn't." Fletcher then leaves to check on the boy, while Plainview continues to watch the spurting oil which will

secure his place as the symbolic communal father.

Plainview, though appearing to present an image of a classic Westerner, is undercut by having to address his role as a father. Plainview briefly attempts to be a loving father seen in a shot where he is lying beside the boy and holding him in an image similar to a child in the womb. Plainview tries to comfort HW by kissing his head and rubbing his arm after the explosion, but it does not result in the quick fix Plainview had hoped. Also, it must be stated that in this scene both father and son are still covered in oil pointing to Plainview's inability to separate his business from his role as father. Because of this inability to separate his roles, Plainview sends the boy away so others can care for him. Plainview feels the need to be a role model to HW, but lacks the skills or temperament to achieve it.

When HW becomes a man, he decides to make his own fortune rather than accept his father's wealth, which leads to Plainview's ruin. Plainview conflates fatherhood and capitalism so much so he cannot view HW attempting to forge his own path as anything other than new competition. By the year 1927, Plainview has more wealth than he knows what to do with. His days consist of signing checks and shooting at the numerous artifacts he has filled his mansion with, which only exemplifies his loneliness. A now adult HW comes to see his father in hopes that he will support his desire to seek his own fortune. The scene is tense from the start with HW signing while his translator speaks. Plainview is quick to denigrate HW by reminding him he cannot speak. HW is seemingly used to the barbs, continuing to say how much he loves his father and that he is going to Mexico so he can do his own drilling. HW is asking not so much for permission, but for his father's approval in following in his footsteps. He wants to prove to Plainview he is his son and that he can make his father proud through his own success. Plainview cannot accept this. To Plainview, his son finding his own success would only serve to lessen

Plainview's own sense of accomplishment.

Feeling slighted, Plainview further humiliates his son by forcing him to speak aloud. The humiliation comes from the fact that HW's oral speaking is underdeveloped, a fact Plainview knows and uses as a tool to make HW feel inferior. After Plainview is satisfied with making his son feel uncomfortable, he reveals to HW that he is not his son. This reveal serves as Plainview fully rejecting his role as father to HW. It also serves as Plainview rejecting his offer of redemption by making up for past sins and supporting his son. Instead, Plainview diminishes his new competitor. "I should have seen this coming," Plainview says, "I should have known that, under this all, these past years you've been building new hate for me, piece by piece. I don't even know who you are because you have none of me in you. You're someone else's." Unsatisfied, Plainview further breaks his bond of fatherhood by telling HW, "You're an orphan from a basket in the middle of the desert. And I took you for no other reason than I needed a sweet face to buy land." Plainview makes HW look at him. "You're lower than a bastard," Plainview tells him, "You have none of me in you. You're just a bastard from a basket."

The scene emphasizes Plainview's moral decay with him continuously calling out HW as a bastard from a basket. The scene then cuts to a flashback featuring a briefly playful Plainview with a young HW. The flashback might signify Plainview's inner thoughts, but more likely it is the film showing the viewer Plainview did have multiple chances at being a father and it was his own decision to choose his role as symbolic communal father over being HW's father. In the flashback, Plainview stops playing with his son to walk back to the derrick which looms large in the background. While consciously Plainview does not think of himself as a failure, subconsciously he does. This moment is an example of Plainview actually desiring to be a father to HW, but also showcases him as a post 9/11 Westerner unable to overcome his character flaws.

Even in his memory, Plainview cannot separate his roles as paternal and symbolic communal father. This final meeting with HW is Plainview's offer of redemption when Plainview could finally accept his role as paternal father and grant his support to his son cementing the bond between them. Like Dunson is offered redemption in forgiving his son and creating a joint company together, Plainview is afforded an opportunity to be the father HW always hoped he would be. The difference is the classic Westerner, such as *Red River's* Dunson, accepts his offer of salvation and redemption by the film's end, whereas the post 9/11 Westerner rejects the offer. Instead, Plainview is left alone in isolation from the outside world with his bond of fatherhood completely shattered.

Fathers versus Fathers

Plainview's character may appear to possess traits of the classic Westerner (strong, confident, ultra-masculine), but these traits are only a façade hiding his post 9/11 Westerner image. Bandy and Stoehr discuss the classic Westerner's motives writing, "They align the values and achievements of their heroes with those of the growing social order and with the dominant national ideology—usually identified with the ideal of Manifest Destiny, a conviction in the inevitable progress of democracy and capitalism" (269-270). Plainview is the corruption of this view because Manifest Destiny envisions a collective journey, but Plainview is purely motivated by individual desires. Plainview is ultimately too self-serving and too capitalist for his own good. Plainview represents a fully corrupted image of *Red River's* Tom Dunson, retroactively influenced by 21st century politics and economics: he does suffer from insecurity of not fitting into the world of the classic western like many other post 9/11 Westerners and is in the end defined by his failure at being a father.

While Dan Evans (Christian Bale) from *3:10 to Yuma* (2007, dir. James Mangold) and

Robert Ford from *Assassination* both wanted to achieve the status of classic Westerner but ultimately fail, Plainview appears to be a classic Westerner but is unable to live up to said image. The post 9/11 Westerner is never comfortable with his position because to be comfortable means to be at ease with one's self, which the post 9/11 Westerner never is. Plainview says in the film "I have a competition in me," referring to this constant unease inside of him. He must have something to destroy, but it soon becomes a never ending cycle Plainview can never fulfill. The post 9/11 Westerner fears being dominated, whereas the classic Westerner is never concerned with this idea. Plainview must have an adversary, and Eli, the local preacher, firmly secures that role. Like Ford and Dan, Plainview feels constantly under attack, only he is more active and seeks out conflict so he may destroy it. This allows Plainview to reaffirm his own masculinity, but subconsciously creates an almost never ending struggle so he does not have to be a paternal father.

Blood contains two different father figures: Plainview and Eli, as both vie to be the symbolic communal father. Plainview uses capitalism, and Eli uses Christianity, two of the most prominent institutions throughout American history. The rivalry between Plainview and Eli begins over who is allowed to welcome prosperity to the town. The film in fact positions both men as providers; Plainview with oil and Eli with his spiritual healing. Plainview prepares to unveil the new oil derrick that will bring wealth to the town of Little Boston, when Eli Sunday arrives with a few requests. Eli begins by asking if Plainview needs anything from the church, but really the question is more of a statement. Eli does not ask, but informs Plainview he will bless the well. Plainview sees this as a chance to assert his dominance by demonstrating how his capitalist desires are what is truly helping the town. Conversely, Eli views the moment as his chance to impose his religious authority while also presiding over the economy. Eli from birth

has been fated to struggle for dominance by being born with a twin brother, while Plainview manufactures competition because he needs to triumph over others. This is another instance of men fighting over dominance, reinforced by a plethora of phallic imagery. For Plainview, the fully erect derricks (one later in the film even erupts with oil spurting everywhere) represents his phallic power, while Eli's power is seen in the construction of a new church.

Each man believes they are the ones the town should prioritize, and that they should be the face of the community. At the day of the derrick blessing, Plainview does not call for Eli's speech, but instead takes the hand of Eli's sister Mary. Standing with HW and Mary on both sides, Plainview reinforces his image as family man, prioritizing one of Eli's siblings over him. Plainview precedes to bless the well himself, demonstrating to the community he is the one in charge. Plainview speaks of sharing the wealth together, but wealth that will spring from his derrick. This proclamation positions Plainview as the symbolic communal father because he can offer tangible rewards Eli cannot. When discussing Plainview, Gregory Phipps, in "Making the Milk Into a Milkshake," writes, "[Plainview's] goal is not to transform Little Boston or to advance the industrial development of the nation; his goal is to construct a linear path toward a terminus of his own design" (40-41). The terminus Phipps speaks of is Plainview wanting the town to know that all the town's wealth and innovation is strictly because of him. This is seen in a previous scene where Eli requests the road from the derrick should lead to his church.

According to Phipps:

By invoking the question of where the "road leads," Eli marks himself as [Plainview's] chief rival. This moment frames the rivalry not as a battle for the minds of the citizens, but rather as a competition to determine where the interlinked chain of production and transformation will lead and how it will pay off (41).

Phipps is correct in his determination of the two fighting for control over production and transformation, but overlooks how those two factors do in fact aim to control the minds of the

citizens.

Since Plainview has shown the benefit of oil, Eli must demonstrate the power of faith. After one of his men dies in a derrick accident, Plainview attends Eli's church so he can bless the man's funeral. As he waits, Plainview watches Eli "cast out" arthritis from an elderly church member in a moment where Plainview, and the audience, see that Eli is nothing more than a grifter. Plainview even confirms as such by saying to Eli, "One goddamn helluva show." Once Eli finishes, the film quickly cuts to a close up of Plainview recognizing the power his rival possesses as members of the church greet Eli with love and admiration. Eli asserts his power by telling Plainview the man's death could have been avoided if he would have let him bless the derrick. The next scene shows Plainview spying on Eli's construction of a new church. The shot is wide and centered so as to see Eli's full body, and the church being built around his literal image. Eli paces back and forth, practicing his preaching's in silence as other men build his church and influence. Importantly, the *mise-en-scène* of the scene is sparse with only the supporting beams in place so there remains a multitude of open space within the building. The film depicts Eli's superficiality with building an image that looks the part, but is really empty and lacks the pious truth he attempts to emulate. Therefore, Eli is also contaminated by capitalism, which conjures thoughts of a Joel Osteen figure rather than John the Baptist.

Later, Henry, a man claiming to be Plainview's half-brother, arrives in town. At the moment, Plainview is at a loss with HW's disability and desires to maintain his familial image, since HW has been sent away. Eventually, Plainview discovers that Henry is a fraud. As the film progresses, Plainview is more disconnected from others and becomes increasingly violent. Overcome with anger from letting himself be vulnerable with another person, Plainview kills Henry. Plainview then gets drunk and passes out, but is awakened by Bandy. Bandy, the lone

holdout of the town in selling their land to Plainview, discovers Henry's body, as well as the gun Plainview used. In order to keep Bandy's silence, Plainview reluctantly agrees to be baptized (which Eli will perform) in Eli's Church of the Third Revelation. In this moment, Bandy reveals himself to be a devout believer in Eli's spiritual powers and that Eli can save Plainview's soul. By Plainview agreeing to the baptism, Bandy will allow Plainview to put a pipeline through his land. This, as well as his deal with the Union oil company, will make Plainview extremely wealthy.

On the day of the baptism, Eli asserts his dominance via Bandy in an attempt to be the symbolic communal father of Little Boston. The occasion also serves as a chance for Eli to criticize Plainview in public. Eli humiliates Plainview by making him get on his knees and confess to his sins. "You've lusted after women," Eli claims though the entire film Plainview barely speaks to any female characters. Eli also makes Plainview confess to abandoning his child. Plainview repeatedly exclaims in anguish of this abandonment which, through Day-Lewis's performance, marks the guilt and self-loathing within Plainview. In this moment, Plainview demonstrates he does care about HW, but the scene becomes contaminated once Eli slaps Plainview. Plainview's brief moment of regret is suddenly replaced with excitement, after Eli has resorted to physical violence. Plainview views the moment as bringing Eli down to his level, far more appealing than recognizing his faults as a father. Once the baptism is completed, Plainview whispers "there's a pipeline," revealing that subjecting himself to this humiliation is once again about his economic pursuits.

Both *Red River* and *Blood* are about men attempting to assert their authority over other men through violence. In *Blood*, Eli attempts to confront Plainview about the money Plainview owes his church. This confrontation is a result of the deal Plainview and Eli made whenever

Plainview purchased land from Eli's family. Plainview promised Eli a sum of \$5,000 in agreeing to sell their land so Plainview could drill for oil. After Eli asks for the money, Plainview slaps him repeatedly, mocking his spiritual healing powers since he cannot heal HW's deafness. Plainview continues to humiliate Eli by dragging him by his hair and rubbing his face in oil and mud like a petulant child. This is similar to a scene in *Red River* when Dunson attempts to punish Bunk with a public flogging for causing a stampede because he could not stay away from the sugar. Similarly, Plainview asserts his dominance over Eli through physical force, but unlike Dunson, Plainview is committing violence against someone because he cannot handle his added responsibilities of fatherhood. Dunson wants to commit a violent act in the name of maintaining order, whereas Plainview's violence is influenced by his frustration with not being able to fix his son who he perceives as broken. Plainview sees himself weakened because he views HW's deafness as a failure, hurting Plainview's image as a family first business man since he views his number one asset as damaged goods. Plainview has witnessed Eli "cure" arthritis, yet he cannot cure his son's deafness. Unlike Ford and Dan, Plainview's violence is because of his incessant need to conquer other men.

The final meeting between Eli and Plainview is one of violence and power. The last scene of the film finds Eli returning to have a meeting with Plainview, only to find Plainview passed out in his indoor bowling alley. Plainview slowly wakes up as if in hibernation, awakened by the presence of his one true competitor. Eli's intention with the meeting is to ask Plainview if he wants Eli's help in purchasing the Bandy land, the one piece of land Plainview was unable to acquire. Eli is really asking if Plainview wants to make a deal with Eli's Church of the Third Revelation. Plainview agrees under one condition; Eli must say he is a false prophet and that God is a superstition. Similar to Plainview forcing HW to speak, Plainview makes Eli confess to

being a false prophet as a way of toying with him. At first, Eli says he cannot say this since that is a lie, but he soon acquiesces to Plainview's demand whenever he and Plainview speak of the amount of money to be made. Plainview seizes the opportunity to humiliate Eli by making Eli shout it at the top of his lungs. Once Eli shouts his denouncement of God, Plainview reveals to Eli he has already taken the oil from the Bandy land, leaving Eli faced with his own humiliation and failure.

Eli says of the Lord, "He's completely failed to alert me to the recent panic in our economy," and that he must have this investment. The film positions Eli (Christianity) in need of help from capitalism, Eli's ultimate capitulation to Plainview. Plainview tells Eli that his twin brother Paul (also played by Paul Dano) was the chosen brother because he came to Plainview with capitalist pursuits and was paid \$10,000 in cash when in reality, Plainview only paid Paul \$500 for information about Little Boston. Plainview continues the lie by saying Paul has his own company with three wells producing \$5,000 a week while Eli is pleading for money. Paul was the chosen one because he believed in capitalism. Plainview then begins to literally attack Eli, proclaiming that he himself is the Third Revelation (Eli's church). Plainview overtakes Eli, secures his place as the symbolic communal father, and proclaims capitalism as the one true God. In *Late Westerns*, Lee Clark Mitchell further elaborates on Plainview writing, "Single-mindedness emerges time and again as a gesture of violence, leading at last to a brutal and senseless murder that defies any resolution to a history that was rarely what it seemed" (23). Yet the murder is not senseless to Plainview, for it is clear in his mind why he must destroy Eli: he is his one true competitor. By destroying Eli, Plainview becomes the true father of capitalism, as well as the church, making him the ultimate father of men. Plainview kills Eli and secures his place as a post 9/11 Westerner who actually seems to win, only this is a false victory. The killing

of Eli destroys any sense of morality Plainview had left. Whenever his butler comes down and asks if everything is okay, Plainview gleefully says, "I'm finished." Plainview has destroyed his one true competitor and now is left without any lands or people to conquer. By winning, Plainview has destroyed himself.

Conclusion

Plainview's defining trait is his inability to be a father to HW. Consumed by his hunger for success and triumphing over competition, Plainview only sees victory in defeating Eli which signals his corrupted view of heroism. In an earlier scene with Henry, Plainview spoke about a house from his childhood that he always wanted to buy. He tells of admiring the house, even wanting his own children to run around in it. Henry asked him if he would buy it now that he had the means, but Plainview responded that if he saw the house now it would make him sick. That house in many ways represents Plainview's morality and how consumed he has become by his capitalist desires. He now has the money to buy the house he always dreamed of, and even has a child he can live there with, but that dream has devolved into a memory reminding Plainview of the man he used to be or never was. Plainview can no longer live in that house because to do so would be giving up his status as the symbolic communal father in order to be a father to HW.

Though more confident and self-reliant than Dan Evans and Robert Ford, Plainview remains a post 9/11 Westerner because he is unable to be the man he wants to be. Plainview longs to be a man similar to Dunson where he can be successful as both father and businessman. Whenever Plainview is offered a chance at redemption, he rejects it by destroying his relationship with his son. Plainview is actually more conflicted than the post 9/11 Westerners in *3:10 to Yuma* and *Assassination*. In those films, Dan and Ford knew what they desired and strove to achieve it, whereas Plainview knows what he desires but is unsure of how to achieve it. By

rejecting his son, Plainview chooses to be the symbolic communal father over being a paternal father completing his moral decay. Plainview's tragedy is he now possesses all the wealth he has ever wanted, yet he is left in complete isolation only to think about his bastard from a basket.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The classical western film genre established a myth that Jim Kitses suggests provided a national myth for America (16). This national myth was based on white Protestant males being superior and promoting their conservative ideology over their land and people residing within it. The events of 9/11 contributed to a fracture of that national myth, as Americans realized they were not always going to be safe just because they were Americans. This idea permeates the post 9/11 western genre, which focuses on post 9/11 Westerners who are desperate to believe in the classical western myth, even though it has become unobtainable. The main desire of the post 9/11 Westerner is to be a hero like the classic Westerner. Classic Westerners always were positioned as heroes that other men in the films looked up to and admired. Robert Warshow writes, "A hero is one who looks like a hero" (47). The post 9/11 Westerner essentially desires to emulate the classic Westerner, but is unable to do so. The tragic quest of these Westerners in trying to achieve an ideal they do not recognize as myth is essential to the post 9/11 western.

The post 9/11 Westerner longs for a return to a conservative ideology where Protestant white males were the dominant presence. Most of the post 9/11 westerns do not feature any Native American or female characters, or if they do their roles are minimized. This results in white men battling each other where both sides fear losing their own masculinity. The post 9/11 Westerner developed from the preexisting archetype of the classic Westerner for post 9/11 audiences. Instead of an adversary, the post 9/11 Westerner's main opposition is himself. Because the classic postwar and post 9/11 westerns are so easily comparable, it suggests the filmmakers behind these post 9/11 westerns are very familiar with the tropes and themes of the classic postwar westerns. They recognize how the image of the classic Westerner has been

idolized by men for decades, and use their 19th century characters to reflect 21st century concerns about masculinity.

3:10 to Yuma (2007, dir. James Mangold), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007, dir. Andrew Dominik), and *There Will Be Blood* (2007, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson) each contain post 9/11 Westerners coming to terms with their masculine status. The post 9/11 Westerner is a reflection of 21st century masculinity: traditionally gendered ideals have shifted and being white no longer guarantees victory. While the world may change, and aspects of the western may evolve, the western continues to be a western. The post 9/11 Westerner becomes an updated version of the classic Westerner, while the comfortability the genre offers to its audience has changed. After 9/11, the western is no longer a safe space for men since a main reoccurring theme is the constant threat over men and their masculinity. Post 9/11 westerns rarely conclude with happy endings, instead they emphasize sacrifice and death.

Many of these films also focus on relationships between WASP fathers and sons, whether biological or not. The westerns of this era are influenced by postfeminist masculinity, which as Hannah Hamad notes, places an emphasis on paternal roles both “literal and figurative” (41). While differing in how they envision fatherhood, each of the three films examined in this thesis focuses on the impact of fatherhood on the post 9/11 Westerner’s interpretation of his own masculinity. Masculinity has always been inherent to the role of the father, which has become a source of anxiety in the post 9/11 era. The father is no longer a source of comfort and stability; instead, fatherhood is a source of anxiety and insecurity.

Dan Evans (Christian Bale) in *3:10 to Yuma*, is the only post 9/11 Westerner from the chosen films who is a biological father. Most of his decisions within the film are based on his status as father. Dan desires to be the breadwinner, but is unable to protect his own ranch. Most

importantly, Dan strives to be his son's hero, but William (Logan Lerman) sees his father as a coward. The character of William is almost non-existent in the original *3:10 to Yuma* (1957, dir. Delmer Daves), reinforcing the post 9/11 western's added focus on fatherhood. In the remake, the classic Westerner is embodied in Ben Wade (Russell Crowe), who is William's ideal father. As the two Westerners vie for control of William's gaze, they signal the differences in how each Westerner is viewed by those around them. While Dan does get Wade to the train, he is then killed by forces he cannot overcome. Dan's tragedy results in him fulfilling his desire to earn his son's respect, but only because Wade helps him. Wade is allowed to be the classical western hero by killing his gang, and is the focus of William's gaze at the end of the film.

In *Assassination*, Robert Ford (Casey Affleck) is a post 9/11 Westerner projecting the qualities of his ideal father onto another man, Jesse James (Brad Pitt). The fatherhood in this film is metaphorical and is intertwined with Ford's obsession with myth. Ford imagines his own version of James based on the myths that have proliferated around his exploits. Ford then positions James in the role of a father who may shepherd him into the status of a classic Westerner. When Ford realizes James is not the man he imagines, he attempts to transition into the role of the classic Westerner himself by destroying his father figure. After achieving what he believes to be a similar status to James, Ford realizes he will never be accepted as such, specifically when the audiences he performs before reject him. The film also contends with Ford's place within history where Ford is known as the coward who shot Jesse James, which the title of the film highlights. No matter how convincingly the film may portray Ford as a young man desperate for fame, while also fearful of the psychopathic James, Ford will only ever be remembered as a coward. Ford is a fatalist hero destined for failure and death because the world of the classic Westerner is a fantasy, but he is unaware of this fact.

Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *Blood* appears to be in the position of the classic Westerner, yet as a post 9/11 Westerner, he cannot overcome his inherent flaws. Plainview is a father to his adopted son HW, but values his role as the symbolic communal father over being a paternal father. Unlike Dan and Ford, Plainview achieves status and wealth, but his inability to differentiate his dual father roles results in him losing what little morality he possessed. Plainview becomes the post 9/11 inversion of *Red River's* (1948, dir. Howard Hawks) Tom Dunson (John Wayne). Their journeys mirror each other, but their relationships to capitalism and fatherhood differ. Dunson's version of capitalism is based on the American Dream where white men can become successful through perseverance. Plainview's version of capitalism is based on a corrupted view of the American Dream where he must succeed at all costs, as well as destroy any and all competitors. While both men struggle with being adoptive fathers, Dunson accepts an offer of redemption. Dunson forms a ranching company with his adopted son, marrying capitalism and fatherhood. However, when Plainview is offered redemption in terms of acknowledging his failures as a father to HW, he rejects the offer and instead chooses to destroy the relationship altogether. Plainview cannot marry his dueling father roles, and instead ends up more like Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) from *Citizen Kane* (1941, dir. Orson Welles). Plainview and Kane both lose what little familial connections they had in favor of enormous wealth.

In post 9/11 westerns, the characters are dealing with the fact they do not resemble the classic Westerner. While the classic western was a place where B actors could establish a persona for themselves, post 9/11 westerns feature more "A-list" actors, including numerous Oscar-winners. This mirrors a change in masculinity between the two eras. The classic western was more concerned with actors who looked like heroes, or possessed traditionally desirable

masculine traits. The post 9/11 western is about male insecurity, so it requires a greater range of emotional response from actors. Post 9/11 Westerners are more deeply psychologized characters with multiple personality facets not seen in most classic Westerners. This is possibly a reason why more “big name” and Oscar-winning actors like Russell Crowe and Brad Pitt have come to the genre. For better or worse, John Wayne and Clint Eastwood were/and still are the faces of the classic western genre. Wayne’s lone Oscar win for *True Grit* (1969, dir. Henry Hathaway) was more of an honorary Oscar for his immense body of work within the genre, and marked the end of an era. Eastwood never won an acting Oscar. It is their accentuated machismo that has colored the perception of the character of the classic Westerner. Intriguingly, the post 9/11 Westerner’s lack of machismo has now allowed for a greater variety of actors to play Westerners.

Post 9/11 westerns are essentially meta-westerns: they are literally about the nature of the classic western hero. The western genre has always been a place for male viewers to fantasize imagined masculine ideals, arguably creating a sense of comfort for white Protestant males. The post 9/11 western is not comforting, but instead creates an environment in which Westerners are consumed with angst and fail to be traditional heroes. Failure, death, and sacrifice become the hallmarks of the post 9/11 Westerner, because traditional heroes have become mythic in a post 9/11 environment.

The post 9/11 Westerner has become the main archetype in the modern western genre. *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005, dir. Tommy Lee Jones) finds Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones) forcing Mike Norton (Barry Pepper) to bury Pete’s friend Melquiades (Julio Cesar Cedillo) in his hometown in Mexico. The film also features a father and son relationship, although not biological, between Pete and Melquiades adhering to the post 9/11 western’s focus on fatherhood. While dealing with border issues and racism, the film is primarily about two

white male characters coming to terms with their own insecurities and purpose in life. At the climax of the film, the two men rebuild a mythical town that most likely never existed in an attempt to reclaim a setting and feeling lost to time. This speaks to the post 9/11 Westerner's desire for a mythic version of the West that no longer exists. The final shots of the film are of the two white males departing from each other, both emotionally unstable and unsure of their place in the world.

Hell or High Water (2016, dir. David Mackenzie) finds brothers Toby Howard (Chris Pine) and Tanner Howard (Ben Foster) robbing banks in order to buy back their land (that the bank has foreclosed on), while being pursued by Texas Rangers Marcus (Jeff Bridges) and Alberto (Gil Birmingham). What sets the events in motion is a father's desire to provide for his children by robbing banks which has become his only viable solution since other avenues have been taken from him. The film reinforces the theme of the post 9/11 Westerner attempting to overcome opposing forces that are greater than himself (the bank), while also combatting the insecurities and flaws that make up his character. In a typically defeatist ending for a post 9/11 western, one Ranger and one brother die. Unlike the classic western that would end with a grand shootout, this post 9/11 western features the two remaining adversaries talking to each other about the guilt that will haunt them forever. Ultimately, the film is about faulty men attempting to hang onto a way of life that has passed them by. The two men recognize the hollowness of their lives, yet neither wants to be the one that remedies it. The men depart knowing that any moment could be their last, and spend their days waiting for that moment to come.

Logan (2017, dir. James Mangold) features one of the most famous Marvel comic book characters in Wolverine/Logan (Hugh Jackman). Although a "superhero" X-man, Wolverine can be thought of as a post 9/11 Westerner who assumes a paternal role for his daughter who was

created by scientists. The film sees Logan confronting his own mythic status as an invincible killing machine, only to lose multiple fights and eventually die. The film also contains a running joke/actual plot point where Logan's claws do not always rise all the way up. This joke concerning his ability to "get it up" demonstrates his vulnerability and compromised masculinity. *Logan* was Jackman's final turn as the character he had played for almost 20 years, and fittingly it is in a post 9/11 western that the character finally meets his demise.

In the final scenes of *No Country for Old Men* (2007, dir. Joel and Ethan Coen), Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) comes to terms with his post 9/11 Westerner status. Bell visits Ellis who asks him why he is quitting his job as sheriff. Bell responds that he feels outmatched since he believes the world has changed so rapidly and that he is being left behind. Bell laments that he thought God would come into his life, but he never did. Bell claims it is because God has the same opinion of him that he has of himself. Bell is self-loathing and overcome with disdain because he cannot live up to the mythic ideals of the men before him. Ellis then tells a story about an early 20th-century family member who was a Texas Ranger killed by a group of Native Americans. For Ellis, the story is as an example to Bell that the world is the same, and that Bell is dealing with nothing new. This brief vignette in the film speaks to the violence inherent within the western genre since its inception. The only difference is the post 9/11 Westerner recognizes the violence, but is unequipped to deal with it. The world of the western film genre has not changed, but the men who inhabit it have. Bell would like to imagine himself as a man who would stand up to opposing forces even though he is outnumbered, but he lacks the courage to even try. The post 9/11 Westerner is never more realized than within the character of Bell because he does not understand the world he inhabits, cannot stop opposing forces, and continues

to reminisce about the classic Westerner which only serves to heighten his compromised masculinity.

In the film's final scene, Bell sits at a table with his wife pondering what to do with his life, and recalls a dream with his father. In the dream, Bell and his father were riding horseback through a mountain in the night in what Bell refers to as "older times." At some point, Bell's father rides past him and Bell knows that he is going ahead to make a fire in "all that dark and all that cold." Bell ends the story saying he knew that whenever he reached that fire that his father would be there. Then Bell woke up. The dream is one shared by all post 9/11 Westerners desiring to reach that symbolic fire where they may achieve the status of the classic Westerner. Bell, unlike Ford, Dan, and Plainview, ultimately recognizes his status as a post 9/11 Westerner and knows this desire is purely a dream. Whenever he says, "Then I woke up," he is recognizing he will never reach that fire and will never attain the status of the classic Westerner.

The ultimate unobtainable goal for the post 9/11 Westerner is to become a classic Westerner. Post 9/11 westerns utilize the theme/symbol of fatherhood to show a linear progression in terms of sons inheriting their father's traits. The post 9/11 Westerner is also inheriting the genre that developed the image of the classic Westerner. The post 9/11 Westerner must contend with the myth of the classic Westerner in a world where that myth is no longer celebrated nor even relevant. Post 9/11 reality is scary and unrelenting. As Ellis says to Bell, "Can't stop what's coming," and neither can the post 9/11 Westerner.

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