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the Western

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The Orion Press
New York

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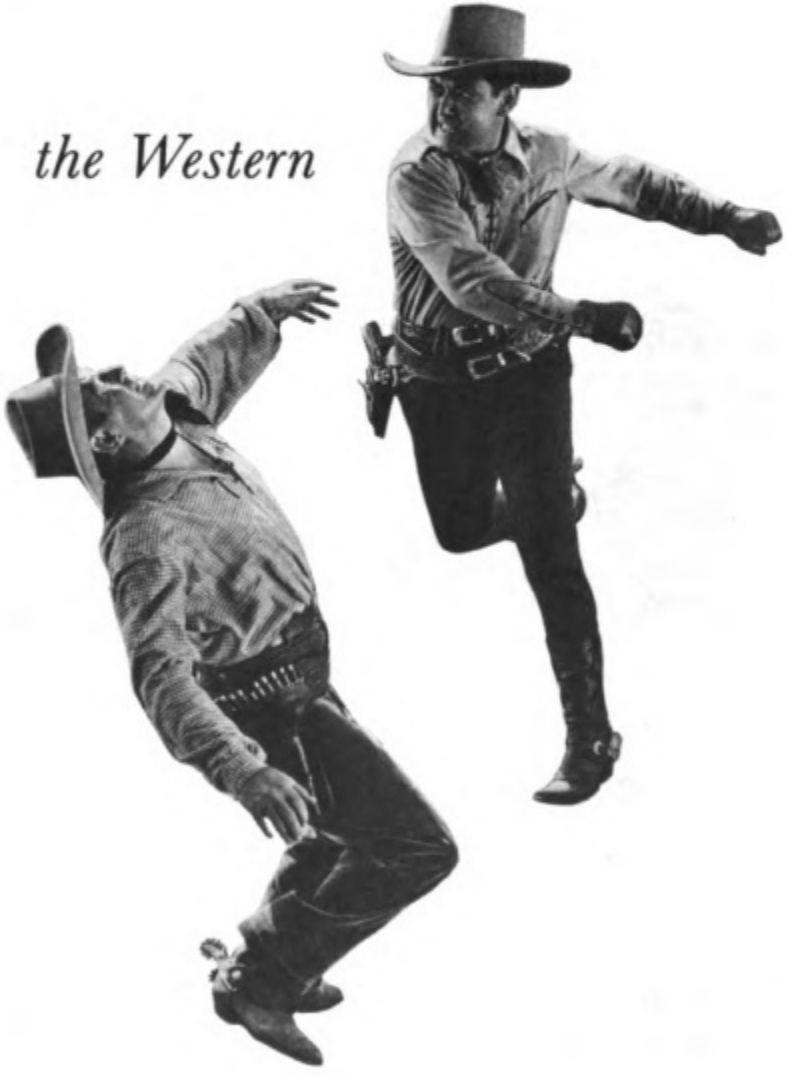
the Western



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"I've labored long and hard for bread
For honor and for riches
But on my corns too long you've tred
You fine-haired sons of bitches . . ."

BLACK BART, THE PO-8
(alias for Charles E. Bolton, poet and outlaw, who may have died in Nevada with his boots on.)

Western history and

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The glory of virgin forests. A scene from Hiawatha *(1952).*

and of districts, still more extensive, formerly in the possession of Indian tribes which have disappeared from the face of the earth; proceeding in these transactions not with the noisy pomp of conquest, but with such silence, such constancy, and such uniformity, that they have always succeeded in accomplishing their goals. Instead of armies, battles, and invasions, which raise such an uproar, and generally prove abortive, they use means which, considered separately, seem slow, ineffectual, and sometimes palpably absurd, but which unite, and in the course of time, are certain and irresistible.

They commence by introducing themselves into the territory which they covet, upon the pretense of commercial negotiations, or of the establishment of foreign colonies with or without the assent of the government to which the territory belongs. These colonies grow, multiply, become the predominant party in the population and, as soon as a support is found in this manner, they begin to set up rights which are impossible to sustain in a serious discussion, and to bring forward ridiculous pretensions founded upon historical facts which are admitted by no one.

Their machinations in the country they wish to acquire are then brought to light by the appearance of pioneers, some of whom settle on the soil, alleging that their presence does not effect the question of the right of sovereignty or possession of the land. These men excite, by degrees, movements which disturb the political state of the country in dispute. When things have come to this pass, diplomatic management commences; the inquietude excited in the territory in dispute, the interests of the colonists therein established, the insurrection of adventurers and savages instigated by them, and the pertinacity with which the opinion is set up as to the colonists' right of possession, become the subjects of notes, full of expressions of justice and moderation, until, with the aid of other incidents—never wanting in the course of diplomatic relations—the desired end is attained by concluding an arrangement as onerous for one party as it is advantageous to the other."

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of the West is proof of this evolution. In these more than fifty years we have seen one of the most amazing cases of a deliberate manipulation of a nation's history in the hands of a powerful group of film-makers. The drab and grim frontier, with its people struggling for existence as ranchers, farmers and merchants was depicted to movie audiences in an often entirely different fashion. All of the West's mushrooming communities—many of them peaceful and monotonous, heroic only in their dedication to the building of a new empire—became compressed into a stock formula town, the prototypes of Tombstone and Dodge City, with rustlers, desperadoes, and outlaws roaming the streets, or engaged in bloody saloon fights.

The great cattle empire, the gold and silver rushes, and the covered wagon treks were some of the phases of the West's history which the movies implied were a "permanent" part of the Western scene; actually, these phases were all of fairly short duration. Life in the old West was certainly a lawless one in many communities, but the generalized concept of the shooting down of endless villains and ranchers without so much as a second glance at the corpses is very much at odds with fact. A killing was as serious a matter in the West as it was in the East, although admittedly the justice meted out was a less standardized one. The laws of mob and vigilante groups were not inclined to temper justice with mercy and understanding, and in territories where the forces of crime and corruption outweighed those of law and order, an open and acknowledged felony might go unpunished. But regardless of the varying degrees of justice, even taking into account a "kill-or-be-killed" attitude among men who made their living outside the law, the taking of a human life was still not regarded lightly. The Westerns of William S. Hart recognized this principle; there was no casual extermination of badmen in the Hart-Ince pictures and among recent Westerns, Lesley Selander's *Stampede* (1949) was one of very few films which treated killing seriously.

In the glamorization of the outlaw, Hollywood has contradicted itself on many occasions, in addition to contradicting history. In *Badmen's Territory* (1946) the outlaw Sam Bass is played as a villain, in completely evil fashion by fat, swarthy Nestor Paiva. When Universal-International later made *Calamity Jane and Sam Bass* (1949)—inventing a quite fictional romance between the two—Bass was portrayed as the misunderstood hero played by clean-cut Howard Duff.

Reconstruction of historical events was and still is changed to suit the script; sympathetic or unsympathetic portrayals of events are often dependent on the importance of an historical character in a specific script.

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In *They Died With Their Boots On* (1941), Errol Flynn plays General Custer, depicted as a brilliant soldier, sympathetic to the Indians, whose command was ruthlessly massacred in a battle brought on by political chicanery. In *Sitting Bull* (1954) the story was told primarily from the Indian viewpoint: Sitting Bull was literally forced into battle by the stupidity and double-dealing of Custer, played in bullheaded fashion by Douglas Kennedy. Custer was an Indian-hater opposed to the efforts of hero Dale Robertson to effect a peace treaty. Another Indian-oriented work, *Chief Crazy Horse* (1955), gave that sachem, instead, the credit for the Little Big Horn battle, putting Sitting Bull in the position of a casual supervisor. The Warner film, *Santa Fe Trail* (1940) showed Custer, a lesser character in the film, graduating from West Point in the accustomed manner. Yet in *They Died With Their Boots On,* in which Custer was the main figure, a film made by the same studio only a year later, the audience saw General Sheridan commissioning Custer before his graduation and dispatching him forthwith to Washington where Union forces, expecting a Confederate attack momentarily, were desperately short of manpower. Here we have a clear-cut example of historical incident being manipulated to suit script requirements.

Historical events apart, neither film presented a very realistic picture of Custer the man. In *Santa Fe Trail,* played by Ronald Reagan, he was a quiet, sincere, and dedicated soldier; as written for Errol Flynn, he became the embodiment of the daredevil soldier, contemptuous of orders,

Douglas Kennedy as one of the later, unsympathetically treated General Custers. From Sitting Bull *(1954).*

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more concerned with a fight for its own sake than for its underlying causes. Later, of course, according to this particular script, he became something of an idealist. In actuality, brilliant soldier or not, Custer had a mass of neurotic complexes—an aspect of him that no motion picture has yet presented, although there were good hints of it in the distinctly and deliberately critical and unpleasant Custer portrait presented in *Sitting Bull.*

One wonders now whether or not movie traditions sometimes have a more lasting effect than the authentic traditions they copy. For example, Custer's famed Seventh Cavalry, wiped out at the Little Big Horn, was subsequently reformed as a cavalry unit and retained as a permanent force in the United States Army. The Seventh Cavalry is still in action today and, like Custer himself, it utilizes flamboyant accessories to glamorize a regulation uniform—including cavalry boots, a western-style neckerchief and, among the officers, cavalry sabres. From several first-hand accounts, it seems that these "descendants" of Custer adopt a swaggering behavior more than casually related to, although somewhat enlarged upon, the behavior of the cavalry officers in a John Ford super-Western.

Hollywood's portrayal of Geronimo created the false impression that the Apaches were the most warlike Indians of all. Actually, although savage fighters, they were comparatively few in number, and far less troublesome than many lesser-known tribes. The capture of Geronimo, too, has been fictionalized in diverse ways, especially in the film *Geronimo* (1939), in which he is captured attempting to kill a white

In the modern Western, airplanes, helicopters, and even atomic missiles became standard props. From Roy Rogers' Bells of Coronado *(1950).*

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business permeating every aspect of the modern rodeo. But when rider and wild horse are alone in the arena for an unrehearsed contest, in which the animal is often the winner, the commercial gimmicks must take a back seat and the spectator may share the rodeo rider's agony as John Huston's direction of *The Misfits* (1961) demonstrated. This is one unchanging and elementary part of the West that was. It is an aspect that is relatively unknown outside the United States, since the cost of transporting the vast amount of livestock around the world would be prohibitive. In many countries—notably England—permits may not be issued for such exhibitions, on the ground that rodeos violate regulations concerning cruelty shown to animals. This is unfair, for the animals undergo no

Montgomery Clift and Clark Gable roping wild horses in a scene from The Misfits *(1961).*

harsher treatment than they do, or did, in the course of a spring roundup.

It is not surprising to note, therefore, that the alleged "Wild West" shows put on in England by such Western stars as Gene Autry and Tex Ritter have been extremely tame, and with their emphasis on musical and low comedy elements they have represented a grave disappointment

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James Stewart proposes marriage to Debra Paget in a scene from Broken Arrow (*1950*).

Town marshal Gary Cooper has to shoot it out alone in a scene from High Noon (*1952*).

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"Sur-Western" of today that is the basis for a truly remarkable series of experiments made by Mann, Ray, Dmytryk, Aldrich, Brando, and other directors in order to achieve in due time, and with sensitivity, cultural research, and a genuine enthusiasm a new approach in the *"Discours sur la Méthode du Western."* The difficulties in rehabilitating the frontier spirit in the cinema are many and relevant. Let us not forget the pulp and

trash magazines, the comic strips, the easy merry-go-round routine of sheriffs and rustlers, still impressing the minds of both the young and adult. Let us remember Gene Autry's "Ten Commandments of the Cowboy," which gained the approval of the motion picture industry, distributors, church groups, and grateful parents. Under this code, the cowboy becomes a sort of adult Boy Scout. He must not take unfair advantage, even when facing an enemy. He must never go back on his word, or on the trust confided in him. He must always tell the truth, be gentle with children, elderly people, and animals. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas. Moreover, he must

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help people in distress, be a good worker, keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits. He must respect women, parents, and his nation's laws. He must neither drink nor smoke. And finally, the cowboy is a patriot.

Let us keep in mind the hostility of many producers toward social themes. It is easier to let French sociologists write about the Western hero as a frustrated man, who finds needed satisfaction, the "safety valve," in releasing the charges of his gun, a typical phallic symbol. Yes, the Westerner was puritanically inhibited, but he did not sublimate his desires with his pistol. And yet Hollywood, horrified, has not explained this particularly vital situation to the audiences. However, a few years ago, a marvelous sequence in Robert Wise's *Tribute to a Bad Man* (1956) gave us a clue. In this Western film depicting the adventures of a rancher who lays down his own law of necessity in a wild country, the camera focuses on a group of cowboys resting in their bunks; overhead, on the next floor, the rancher's woman plays the piano. Finally the music stops. In the silence the men look at each other and so express their thoughts. Upstairs, a man and a woman have begun to make love, while they, the cowboys, are left to their physical and psychical loneliness. This is an example of cinematic and sound treatment which is still worth the hope of those—and there are many—who want a true description of the frontier.

Shooting the buffalo hunt for The Last Hunt *(1956) in South Dakota.*

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The stereotype villain of the Thirties: a Mexican, oily, ugly, gross, overdressed. This is Richard Cramer who was so villainous that he was actually much better as a burlesqued heavy in Laurel and Hardy comedies.

Contents and

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in the contents and morals of the Western. From now on, the cowboy was not necessarily the successor to the pioneer; he was no longer just the man who toiled hard raising cattle or defending the land barons' privileges, the man whom the Great Cattle Depression of 1886–87 forced to roam the West looking for ways and means of supporting himself. An idealized, whitewashed hero emerged, his character influenced by the various codes of associations, clubs, and groups. This new "hero" reached his zenith the closer he followed Gene Autry's "Ten Commandments of the Cowboy," listed in the previous chapter. All promulgated codes of morality are inevitably influenced by current moral trends; and the perfectly acceptable behavior of the Western hero in the Twenties might be considered by some today as the ultimate in un-Americanism. We have a perfect example of this in a mild and quite unimportant Western of 1925 entitled *Shooting Square*. In it, the hero and heroine are to be married, and while they celebrate with a party at the ranch, a cowhand is sent to bring the preacher. The preacher, it turns out, is a Negro. Although he is presented likably, certain aspects of the traditional image of the comic Negro persist. His clothes are ill-fitting and he speaks—subtitles, of course—in traditionally stereotyped fashion. "I'se de preacher," is his first line upon greeting the distinctly shocked gathering. The result is astounding. The heroine almost faints and, indignantly returning the hero's ring, asks him: "How can you treat me like this?" The heroine's outraged father appears to be in a lynching mood, and

Saloon girl Louise Glaum, villain Robert McKim, and reformed outlaw William S. Hart in The Return of Draw Egan *(1916).*

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he orders the Negro from the ranch. The little preacher is bustled out as quickly as possible.

Later, however, the hero (Jack Perrin) restores himself to the heroine's favor, by assuring her that he meant no harm. The line that clinches the reconciliation is: "I didn't know he was *black.*" All this is treated casually; the incident is not used to incite racial hatred. Jack Perrin's hero is otherwise absurdly virtuous, possessed in abundance of the nine other commandments.

Today, of course, if such a sequence were included in a film, wholesale picketing would automatically result, and possibly even violence. Later in the film, hero and heroine seek out a white minister, and are then "married" by an apparent preacher, actually an outlaw in disguise; the heroine's discovery that her marriage is illegal provokes a much less concerned reaction from her than did her encounter with the authentic, but colored, minister!

The cowboy-hero, this bulwark of physical and moral strength, was the backbone in the boom of the "B" Westerns in the Thirties. But his influence was felt in the epics that were then being made (*Jesse James, The Oklahoma Kid, Union Pacific, Stagecoach*—all in 1939), and this influence generally continued to be felt in the philosophy and policies of movie producers right through World War II.

It is no surprise, therefore, to notice that right after the end of the War, the ferment of new times began to exert its influence toward a revision of the cowboy cliché. There was a marked move to make the hero a less idealized character; his aims might continue to be those of the chivalrous knight, but he was too much of a realist to achieve those aims chivalrously. The war had destroyed too many illusions.

Bill Elliott was perhaps the foremost exponent of this new "realism" in a series of Westerns made for Monogram and Allied Artists. The Elliott Western saw a number of remarkable changes in the makeup and behavior of the Western hero. In *Bitter Creek,* the hero needs information from a villain and, wasting no time playing the gentleman, Elliott proceeds to beat the information out of him, all the time keeping him covered with a gun. The villain protests: "You wouldn't get away with this if you'd put that gun down!" In the old films, of course, such a taunt would have led to the hero's dropping both gun and belt and proving that right must always win by beating the tar out of his opponent in a fair fist fight. Elliott is not taken in, however; he replies: "But I'm *not* going to put it down," and proceeds to slug away until the "heavy" gives in and makes his confession.

In *Kansas Territory* (1952) Elliott also resorts to brutal methods to run

Bill Elliott, who emulated William S. Hart in his Westerns of the Forties and Fifties. A scene from Waco *(1952).*

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Mark Stevens and Barton MacLane in a scene from **Jack Slade** *(1953).*

historical character of the post-Civil War West, a trouble-shooter for the stagecoach lines, and his very ruthlessness with outlaws brought with it a measure of law and order. Finally, however, killing became an obsession, an obsession fanned by alcohol, to the point that he became a menace to the law he was paid to uphold, and he was finally lynched by vigilantes. In the film version, this bitter end was averted, and he died, almost seeking death in a form of self-atonement, in a fairly fought gun battle. Mark Stevens acted in and co-directed this interesting and powerful film, but in such an overwrought fashion that it was reminiscent of the German film dramas of the Twenties, such as *Warning Shadows* (1922) and that it failed to become the honest portrait of a man and an era that it might have been. It always seemed somewhat confusing in its demand for sympathy for a man whose very actions, including the crippling of a child, made such sympathy impossible.

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of censorship restrictions and had less fear of controversial material, they did naturally reflect current moral trends. Divorce and remarriage were far less acceptable socially, and less prevalent, than they are today, and for the hero to be a widower raised the problem of the acceptability of a new love story and his ultimate marriage to the heroine. This is not to suggest that such themes were never utilized in silent Westerns, but they were certainly not used as widely, or as casually, as they were in such post-World War II films as *Tomahawk* and *Distant Drums,* both made in 1951.

Another variation was the hero's masquerade as an outlaw. He would join the gang in order to bring the outlaws to justice, thus adding the tension of potential discovery to the standard action. This theme was adopted by the non-Westerns in subsequent years; in the Thirties, gangsters, in the Forties, Nazis, and in the Fifties, Communists, were all rounded up and brought to book by this enterprising method.

Perhaps the last of many small changes in the general outline saw the hero framed on a murder or robbery charge. He would break out of jail and remain thereafter only one jump ahead of the sheriff and one jump behind the villains. Finally, he would manage to prove his innocence by subduing the leading villain. This plot itself had an alternate version in that, apart from being pursued by both sheriff and outlaws, the hero was also plagued by the knowledge that the heroine believed him to be guilty. This motif reached heights of absurdity, becoming virtually unwitting satire in a group of "B" Westerns manufactured like sausages by Columbia in the Forties. Each one had an almost identical plot and cast, and with monotonous regularity Iris Meredith would turn on fiancé Charles Starrett for the murder of her father, Edward Le Saint, while the real miscreant—Dick Curtis—surveyed the scene with a sardonic smile from a safe distance.

A classic cliché-scene from almost any Columbia "B" of the late Thirties or Forties, in this case The Stranger from Texas *(1939). Left to right, in the roles they always played: Edward Le Saint, the heroine's murdered father; Charles Starrett, the hero, unjustly accused; villain Dick Curtis, the real killer; weak brother Richard Fiske, who redeems himself at the end; sheriff Jack Rockwell, honest but stupid; Alan Bridge, the murdered man's competitor and an innocent suspect; and Lorna Gray, the orphaned daughter.*

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The killer (Jack Palance) prepares to gun down the farmer (Elisha Cook, Jr.) in a scene from Shane *(1953).*

The villain

The crimes of the badman were always prompted by a recognizable human emotion—greed, either for wealth or power. That greed was expressed by robbery and murder in the more elementary Westerns, and in the legal manipulations which brought about the " theft" or control of towns and even territories, in the more elaborately plotted Westerns. Such immoral practices were still products of understandable minds. In many cases, the hero was depicted as a patient and understanding man who hoped, by reason, to bring about a change in the behavior of the villain, before swinging into physical action to affirm and enforce the fundamental values.

The badman, although a brute in most cases, still represented something that the audience could understand and possibly justify, although never condone, in view of the rigidly upheld code of ethics the hero represented. "Crime does not pay," was the ubiquitous moral these Westerns taught, but the audience was still able to indulge vicariously in the various manifestations of lust and crime the screen badmen presented.

There was subtlety in subplots which presented conflicts in the outlaws' methodology. Many of the villains' get-rich-quick schemes were essentially legal: the crimes were moral rather than legal in that the vil-

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Douglas Fowley, a stock villain in gangster films, occasionally made a convincing Western heavy too. A scene from Santa Fe Trail *(1940).*

lains usually tried to cheat homesteaders out of potential wealth of which the latter themselves were not aware. One of the most reliable plots was for the villain to know in advance that "the railroad is coming through." Such an event meant, of course, that the land which the railroad would have to buy would become extremely valuable to its owners, and one can readily understand the villain's sharp business sense in trying to acquire all the available land in advance of the event.

Since such practices are, of course, quite legal, it was necessary to put the "heavy" in an unsympathetic light—in other words, he must achieve legal ends by illegal means. The ranchers must be subjected to a reign of terror. Their cattle must be stolen to prevent their paying off notes on their lands held by the banks. (One of the movies' oldest clichés was for the town banker, outwardly the territory's most respected citizen, to be the brains behind the outlaw activities.) This basic idea was applied in other ways, too; the need for land by the cattle barons, or hidden gold located on the property, unknown to the owners. Manipulation of land away from Mexicans living in California, by voiding their old Spanish land grants, brought a minor racial issue into the chicanery at times, but this was never fully developed.

A formidable trio of villains from Dawn on the Great Divide *(1942): Harry Woods, Roy Barcroft, and Robert Frazer.*

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Villains of the Thirties and Forties: Edmund Cobb (a Western hero in the Twenties), Roy Barcroft, and Bud Osborne.

The building of a town in Cimarron *(1931).*

scene from The Iron Horse *(1924).*

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Cochise (Jeff Chandler) comforts his white man friend (James Stewart) when renegades kill his Indian bride (Debra Paget). From Broken Arrow *(1950).*

to the Indian. There were always to be individual motives attributed to the white villain which made him atypical of his race, e.g. the villainous trader who knows that peace with the Indians will mean an end to his illicit traffic (Grant Withers in Ford's *Rio Grande*), and most common of all, the martinet military commander who hates Indians with a blind passion (Jeff Chandler in *Two Flags West,* Henry Fonda in *Fort Apache*) and is opposed to any means which will bring about a cessation of hostilities short of total defeat of the Indians. Since such men are almost always presented as complete or near-complete neurotics, they stand midway between guilt and innocence, and they are made to appear very much the exception rather than the rule. The Indian is presented in this case in a more realistic fashion; he is the victim rather than the aggressor, but the question of blame, which should rightly be placed on the governmental policies of that time, is neatly side-stepped.

The authentic motives for Indian hostility were seldom, if ever, explained; the main function of these Americans consisted in providing a convenient mass enemy, and a series of spectacular moving targets. Once the cliché was accepted, explanations of motivation were in any case no longer necessary. The very word *Indian* became synonymous with savagery and villainy, just as the words *German, Japanese, Nazi,* or

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Ruth Roland,
Queen of the Western serials.

Communist in themselves later became not merely descriptive nouns, but adjectives of automatic infamy in many areas of world and cinematic affairs.

The woman

The cult of the super-hero fighting the good fight in a confused and largely hostile world populated by white outlaws and Indian savages, was further developed by the role of the woman.

Originally she was shown as the full-fledged companion of the pioneer, certainly his equal, and occasionally possessed of an inner strength that made her his superior. Later, her image deteriorated into that of a frail creature, forever at the mercy of the lawless element, forever dependent for protection and her livelihood upon the hero. In other words, she ceased to become a plot participant and became a plot motivator; defense of her honor and rights became as important in themselves as the battle between law and lawlessness. Later still, towards the end of the Thirties, she became more self-reliant, increasingly athletic, and conscious of her sex appeal. In the post-war period, this sex appeal became an exasperating and exasperated *leitmotif,* which found its justification in two fundamental exigencies of the motion picture industry: the reaction to the puritanism of the Production Code, exerting an archaic censorship over a depiction of true passion and other legitimate emotions, and the need to stimulate sagging box office returns. Thus the cycle is complete even in this important aspect of the Western: the image of the western women, as rendered by Hollywood, stands con-

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between the sentimental and mythological conception of the pure eak and defenseless female, without any personality of her own, ially dependent on the hero, and the titillatingly sexual and ag- e heroine.

re and the law

e revision of the cowboy image, the demands of the public re- he revision of the concepts of adventure and law, two other coef- n the Western formula. Such a process continues today with different, mixed results, but the first cycle of the Western is complete. In fifty years, the realistic approach has been greatly adulterated and only recently are the real moral issues of the old West again being discussed.

In the meantime, world audiences have had a chance to appraise the Western era as a totally lawless one, and the isolated examples of films in which a true evaluation of this historical period was possible, left only slight marks on audiences. Prolific grade "B" Western production (made probably for U. S. and British consumption and exported elsewhere only in a limited way) has offered an appalling series of clichés which has dominated American thinking concerning the West for decades.

Adventure and the law are linked with the hero as complementing essentials in the visual presentation of the story. Adventure in Westerns has of the three most retained its classic presentation. It has always focused on the Great Plains as the *outdoors* (epitomized by grandiose perspectives, such as those obtained by Ford with his location shooting in Monument Valley for *Stagecoach* and other films) and on the saloon *indoors*. The stories played out against these natural or man-made back-

A typical program Western from Triangle: William Desmond and Luella Maxim in Deuce Duncan *(1918).*

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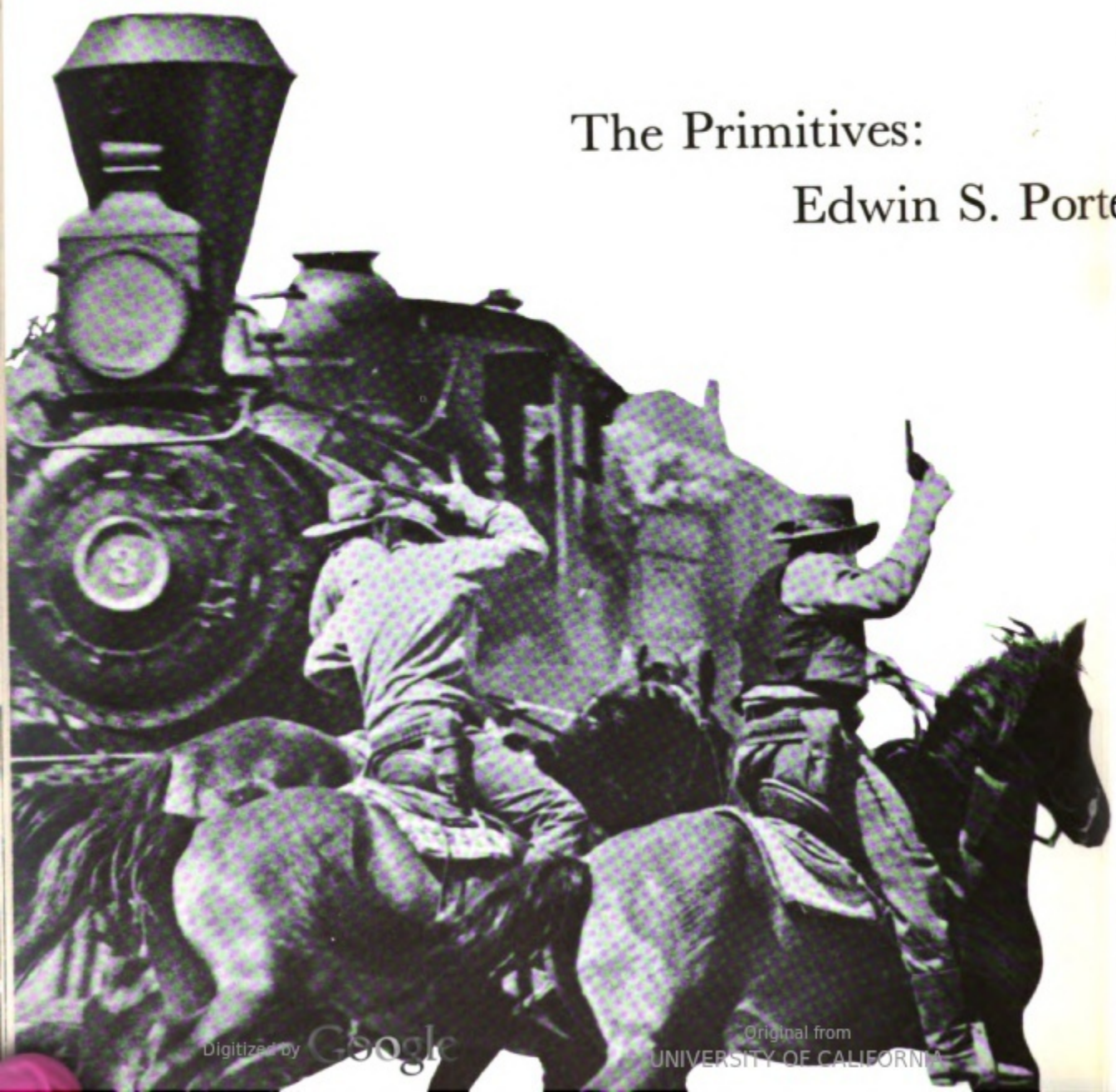
The Primitives:

Edwin S. Porter



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quence in the interior of a railroad telegraph office; a typical early movie set, photographed in typically static long-shot fashion. However, there is an unusual effect: the arrival of the train shown through a window. Certain historians have claimed that this was achieved by constructing the set immediately adjacent to the railway track, but in actual fact a good, if occasionally unsteady, superimposition was the *modus operandi.*

The bandits bind the telegraph operator; then, a cut to an exterior. As the train pauses by the railroad's water tower outside, the bandits board it. From the New Jersey exterior locale, Porter then cuts to a studio interior set of the express car. This, of course, is elementary movie-making, but was not so in 1903, when films (other than the fantasies of Méliès) were usually limited to single sets and single time-spans, in order to avoid confusing the audience. Porter then switches to another exterior, his camera placed on the rear of the tender, photographing the train in motion. The villains approach, and overpower the drivers. There is a well-staged scrap, and in a particularly deft piece of stop-motion work, dummies are substitued for the actors before they are thrown from the moving train. The callous treatment of the drivers seems to have been a deliberate attempt by Porter to emphasize that he

A scene from The Great Train Robbery *(1903).*

Very possibly the first Western of any kind, W. K. L. Dickson's Cripple Creek Barroom *was made by the Edison Company in 1898.*

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With all his limitations, Porter was nevertheless the most creative single force in motion pictures between 1901 (when he was among the foremost of the "industry's" reputed total of six motion picture cameramen) and 1908, when D. W. Griffith joined Biograph. It was Porter who, in one of his last notable films, *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest,* introduced Griffith to the screen. Using the name Lawrence Griffith, D. W. had tried to sell the Edison studios a script he had written. The studios weren't interested, but they did offer him the lead in *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* and, in need of money, he accepted. *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* is inferior to *The Great Train Robbery,* although admittedly it was a difficult subject to do well in those early days.

The kidnaping of a baby by the eagle, and the pursuit by the father (Griffith) to the eagle's nest, high on a mountain ledge, was a thrilling enough plot premise and, in fact, it did thrill audiences in 1907. However, the cutting between studio scenes, with their painted backdrops, to actual exteriors, filmed in New Jersey, merely emphasized the lack of authenticity of the studio exteriors.

None of the exteriors in *The Great Train Robbery* had been anything but the real thing, only the interiors of telegraph office, saloon, and baggage car being studio reconstructions. The obvious painted flats of rocky mountains and high ledges did not match up too well with New Jersey's wooded slopes. The cutting was somewhat slipshod, and often overlapped badly. At one point Griffith is lowered over a ledge and climbs laboriously downwards; after a few feet of film, Porter cuts to a different angle, with Griffith again only just beginning the descent.

The final fight between Griffith and the stuffed eagle was particularly ineptly photographed; the struggle took place at the extreme left of the camera set-up, yet no attempt was made to move the camera even slightly to catch all of the action, with the result that at least half of the fight is out of the frame, and the rest is overshadowed by the big expanse of black painted backdrop that dominated nine-tenths of the frame. The result was a fight hard to follow and devoid of dramatic realism. Apparently Porter and Edison never made retakes, although it is curious that such a patently bad—yet important—sequence should be accepted in such a state.

Like *The Great Train Robbery* though, *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* provided some interesting commentaries on life in the early West. Pioneers are shown working in an organized communal fashion in the clearing of land and the felling of trees, and when danger threatens, all recognize their individual responsibility to the group and aid the father in rescuing his child from the eagle.

Perhaps, had Porter like Griffith joined Biograph following *Rescued*

Looking nothing like one of the first directors of Westerns, nor even like a pioneer cameraman (both of which he was), Edwin S. Porter looks more like a highly successful businessman (which he certainly wasn't).

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Broncho Billy Anderson, dressed in the Easterner's conception of the Western costume, derived largely from dime novels.

from an Eagle's Nest, he might have realized his full potential as a motion picture director. Instead he chose to stay with Edison, stagnated, and slowly passed into obscurity. When he died on April 30, 1941, in his seventies, he had been so much forgotten that the general reaction was one of surprise that this pioneer had been living until such a late date.

The first Western star

Another Edwin Porter graduate was G. M. Anderson, later better known as "Broncho Billy" and the first real Western star. Anderson stumbled into a role in *The Great Train Robbery* almost by accident. Assuring Porter that he could ride like a Texas Ranger, he was cast in the minor role of one of the bandits and he soon showed that he couldn't even get on a horse, let alone *stay* on it. He was in short order made an "extra" for the rest of the picture, but excited by the possibilities of the films—possibilities which he certainly doubted until he saw the tumultuous reception afforded *The Great Train Robbery* at its initial showing—Anderson told himself that this was the business for him, and went to work for Vitagraph as an actor and general production assistant. He directed a version of *Raffles, The Amateur Cracksman,* in 1905 for that company, moving to Chicago two years later. Chicago was then a

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A scene from Broncho Billy's Oath *(1913).*

story individually, so that it would not matter how often Billy married, reformed, or was killed off.

Over the next few years, Billy made close to five hundred short Westerns, one-reelers at first, and then two-reelers. They were the first real "series" Westerns, the first with an established star, and the films that really established Westerns as a genre. They were simple in plot (Billy, not being of the West himself, had to fall back on pulp magazines and dime novels for inspiration) and had none of the starkness or the documentary quality that William S. Hart was later to introduce. But they were often surprisingly strong and vigorous in their action content, with elaborately constructed and absolutely convincing Western town sets. The camera work was good, and Anderson, being a husky and well-built individual, was more than up to the action. A trifle dour in the later Hart tradition, he presented a reasonably realistic and not too glamorized portrait of the frontier's manhood.

After a seven-year period, Anderson moved into features, but by this time William S. Hart had taken over the field, together with Tom Mix, and the veteran realized that he had missed out. He returned to comedies, and in the early Twenties produced a good series of Stan Laurel comedies for Metro release. However, like many another since, Billy felt that he was being treated unfairly by Louis B. Mayer. Unable to improve the situation, he said goodbye to films and retired. Thirty-five years later, in 1958, he told television audiences of his part in the moulding of Hollywood's cowboy formula, in the course of a ninety-minute show on NBC. He appeared with John Ford, John Wayne, Gene Autry, Gary Cooper, and others. Today, close to eighty, still alert and vital, he has been slowed down by a slightly lame leg, but he is eager as ever to talk about what must have been for him the good old days.

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mar and construction had not yet been devised; indeed, film grammar itself was still in the formulative stage. Since trade papers tried to help both exhibitors and distributors, they were probably prone to be lenient with really bad films, and possibly excessively generous to the good ones. But, the reviews as such seem to be honest. There are definite signs of the awareness of dramatic and photographic merit, and appropriate if mild criticism for the lack of those qualities. "Bought" reviews were unlikely; if they existed, they did so far more subtly than their counterparts today.

Hollywood makes more Westerns

As a result of the great success of Anderson's Westerns, there was immediately an increase in the number of Westerns made from 1909 on, and the big vogue of one-reeler classics such as *The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet* declined. 1909, incidentally, was distinguished not only by the upswing in the production of Westerns in the U. S., but also by the increased importing of European films, which also included a fair proportion of Westerns.

Denmark's Great Northern Film Company was particularly adept at imitating American melodramas and Westerns. Their *Texas Tex* was about as thoroughly Western a title as it is possible to conceive.

Selig was among the most prolific of Westerns manufacturers in the United States at this time. His *In Old Arizona* was rated one of his most ambitious subjects to date, and was recommended as being of sufficient merit for repeat bookings in first-class halls, although it was criticized to some extent for its inaccurate military detail. But it was certainly full of action, with a big Indian battle in the desert; the cavalry arrived in the nick of time in response to a call for help, sent via carrier pigeon by the enterprising villain! This was the era of the swarthy Mexican villain, and so it was here—although he had a treacherous Indian as his henchman. However, the Indian was by no means a stock villain in Selig Westerns. In *An Indian's Gratitude,* the hero was an Indian who had been taught the Fifth Commandment. When the villain is captured by the Indian tribe, and is about to be hanged, not without some justification, the Indian hero intercedes, persuading his brothers to follow the white man's moral law. The film prompted a critic of the time to remark: "The Selig trademark has come to mean a film of unusual quality."

Other interesting Selig Westerns of 1909 included *Boots and Saddles,* with the young heroine saving the cavalryman-hero from death at the

A scene from Broncho Billy and the Redskin. *In costuming, plot, and characterization, the Anderson Westerns matured rapidly.*

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D. W. Griffith (left) with his cameraman, G. W. Bitzer.

David W
Thomas H. Inc

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(1913). *The Last Drop of Water* (1911), was the precursor of *The Covered Wagon* (1923). Both had much the same sense of poetry. *The Covered Wagon*—which we shall discuss in much greater detail in a later chapter—disposed of its action as soon as that action had served its purpose, without integrating it into the whole. Griffith's film appeared in many ways more exciting, because the action was part of a total effect, and that effect was accentuated by cross-cutting, providing far more energy and excitement than anything in James Cruze's later film.

The Last Drop of Water is interesting also for the fact that it was one of the few Griffith Westerns in which plot and action assumed equal importance. It was colorful stuff, with heroine Blanche Sweet in love with weak-willed Joseph Graybill, whose fondness for liquor had escaped her notice. Blanche marries Graybill, while another suitor (Charles West) wishes her well, standing gallantly aside. A year later, struggling along in a marriage made increasingly difficult, Blanche and Graybill trek westward with a wagon train, joined by West who is on hand to protect the girl he loves. Water is low when the Indians attack. West, who has volunteered to reach the closest waterhole, does not return. Graybill slips through the Indian lines into the desert, where he finds West dying. At first, he jeers at the sight of his old rival, and then, overcome by compassion, offers him the last swallow of precious water from his canteen. Exhausted, Graybill dies, but West, revived by the water, is able to struggle on, to find water, and to return with a supply to the beleaguered wagon train. A detachment of cavalry finally routs the Indians in a pitched battle and, leaving the grave of Graybill behind as a tribute to the courage of the early pioneers, the wagon train, with Sweet and West now united, rolls on towards distant California. A slow, effective fadeout with the grave starkly in the foreground, shows the wagon train slowly disappearing over the distant horizon.

Richard Barthelmess (in a role originally intended for Rudolph Valentino) and Carol Dempster in a scene from Scarlet Days, *a Griffith Western of 1919.*

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Indians on the rampage in the Cherry Valley. Panoramic action from Griffith's America *(1924).*

children, cowering in a cabin under attack, are threatened with death. The film had more character development than *Fighting Blood,* greater and even more creative use of the panoramic shot, and far more savagery in the battle scenes, although Griffith was never sadistic, but rather always managed to *suggest* extreme brutality with astounding conviction.

Perhaps the only finesse really lacking from *Fighting Blood* and *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* was the running insert, or riding close-up, a device he was to develop to perfection with the ride of the Klansmen in *The Birth of a Nation.*

It has always been a source of some regret that, apart from two good program films made between 1916 and 1919 (*Scarlet Days,* a Griffith personal production and *The Martyrs of the Alamo,* a Griffith supervised production), Griffith never made a full-length Western epic. But if he turned his back on the Western as such, he never forgot the lessons he learned from his early horse operas, and the development he pioneered and perfected he used with striking success in other genres.

In his last big historical epic of the silent era, *America* (1924), one saw familiar scenes: the American colonists besieged in their little fort by hordes of redskins, Neil Hamilton racing to the rescue with a band of

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tragic endings, nor were all his tragedies contrived. Some of his short Westerns were exciting in the best sense, although they, too, relied more on dramatic situations than on physical action.

One of the best of his "tragedies" was a very moving and beautifully photographed two-reeler, *The Heart of an Indian,* a rather strange film which presented both white man and Indian in a basically sympathetic light. It opened with scenes of everyday life in an Indian village, presided over by J. Barney Sherry, playing the chief, with the Indian actor, William Eagleshirt, as his second in command. The chief's daughter is mourning the death of her child. The film cuts then to the life of the pioneers, tilling the soil, hunting buffalo. Both races are established as equals in the wresting of a livelihood from the land, and in their rights to such livelihood.

Then, an Indian raid is precipitated when a white shoots "Indian" buffalo; from one blazing cabin, the Indian chief rescues a baby girl to give to his daughter for adoption. The real mother, distraught, staggers into the Indian camp, and tries to claim her baby. The Indian girl taunts her, but then, allowing mother and child a temporary embrace, she relents, and in a touching little scene, realizes the universality of motherhood, and, indirectly, of all men. She restores the child to its real mother, escorting them both to safety. But the white men of the settlement, bent on revenge, have taken to the trail and even the sight of the mother and child, both quite safe, does not lessen their hatred. They creep up on the Indian camp and cold-bloodedly massacre its inhabitants. The final scene of the film is an exquisite silhouette, at dusk on the crest of a hill, of the now doubly bereaved Indian girl "commun-

Thomas H. Ince with his first Indian star, William Eagleshirt.

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ing with the spirit of her dead child," as she prays for the tiny body wrapped in blankets and placed atop a flimsy wooden framework.

A recurring theme in Ince's frontier dramas is the symbolic struggle between good and evil made simple by having the heroes allied with the church, and the villains with the saloon. In some cases the entire motivation was based on the church's determination to stamp out drinking, and the villains' equally strong determination that it should continue. The implication is inevitably that good can survive only when the temptation to evil (namely, the saloon) is obliterated—not indicative of very pronounced moral stamina on the part of Ince's Christian pioneers.

However, another recurring theme in Ince's pictures made it difficult

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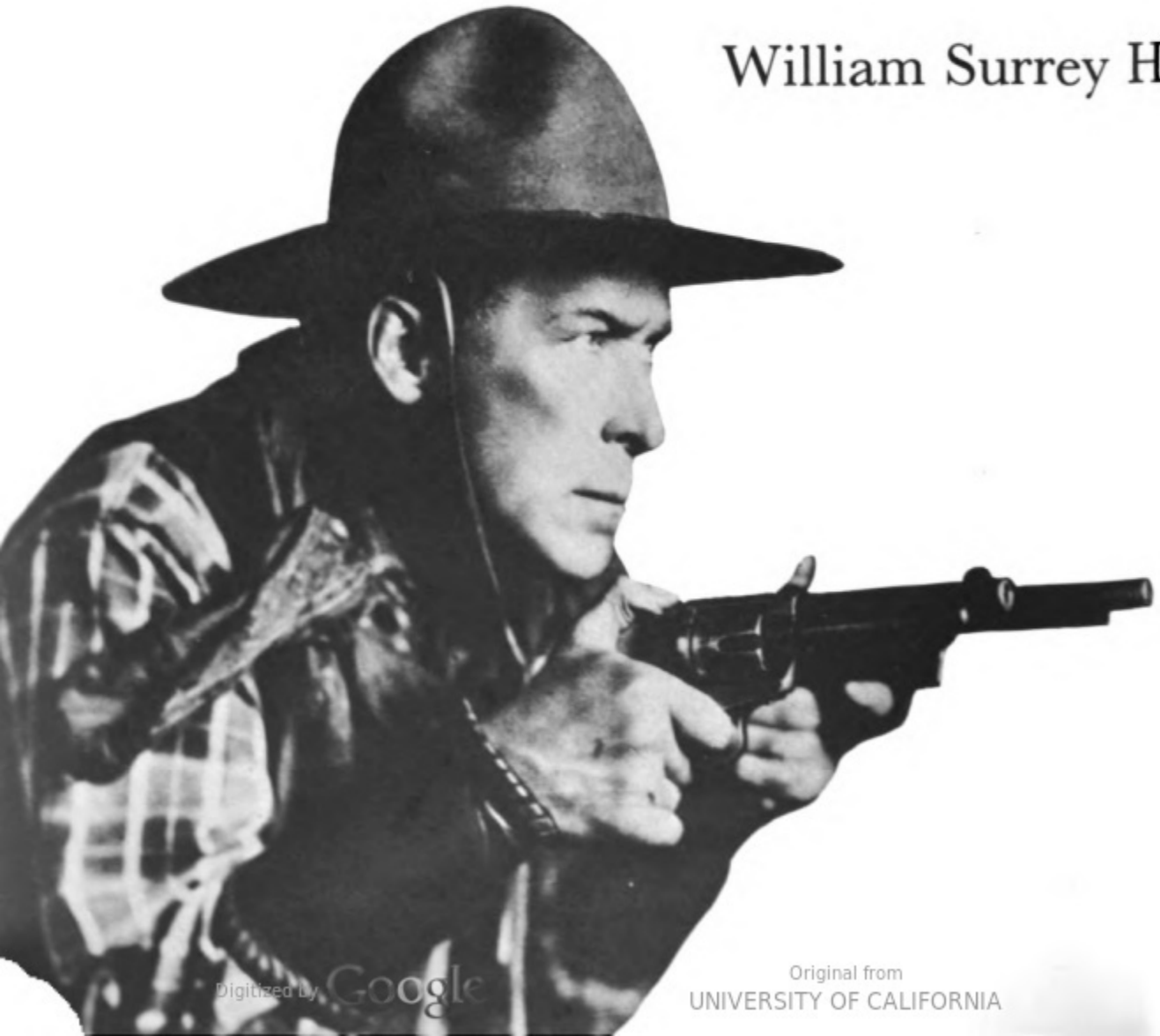
"The truth of the West meant
more to me than a job,
and always will."

W. S. HART, *My Life East and West*

William Surrey Har



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William S. Hart in The Primal Lure *(1916).*

studying and committing them to memory. Later, upon reaching California, on tour with *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,* he learned that his old friend, Tom Ince, was in charge of the New York Motion Picture Company studios. When he told Ince he wanted Western parts, Ince was apathetic, pointing out that every film company was making them, and that even the best films were having a difficult time. He agreed, however, to give Hart a chance, and as soon as he finished his theater tour, Hart returned to California. It was now the summer of 1914.

Ince's studios were located at the mouth of the Santa Ynez canyon, and consisted of several open-air stages, sets of Western towns, a ranch, a fishing village, and similar buildings. The films were released through Mutual, headed by Roy and Harry Aitken, and John Freuler. The Aitkens were the first financiers to interest New York bankers in motion picture investments; using Reliance as their key production company, they sold stock to influential buyers, and helped finance the New York Motion Picture Company, with studios in Hollywood. Ince had been in charge since September, 1912, of the eighteen-thousand-acre location called "Inceville," while Mack Sennett was located in studios at 1700 Alessandro Street. In late 1913, David W. Griffith joined the outfit.

Profits were considerable for the expanding New York Motion Picture Company; two films were turned out every day, and Griffith, Ince and Sennett—representing the three top film makers and money makers—were installed, if not in the same studio, at least under the collective roof of one busy concern.

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rose. Forced to shoot a man in self-defense in a card-game brawl, Hart flees, pursued by the sheriff. They shoot it out in the desert, and Hart wounds the sheriff. Genuinely remorseful of his life of crime, he cares for the sheriff in his cabin. Then, knowing that it means the end of his own freedom, he decides to take the sheriff back to town for medical care. But on the ride back across the desert, the two men are attacked by Indians. A fierce battle ensues. The next morning, the sheriff's posse finds both men dead—Hart smiling, with the dancer's rose in his hand.

The sentimental streak in Hart's films was manifested in many different ways: the reformation of the badman by the love of the heroine, or the admiration of a child (used in the mid-Forties by Wallace Beery in *Bad Bascomb*); the cowboy's love for his horse; and, in many cases, a cowboy's devoted affection for his sister. (This last bit of sentimentality was pure Hart. He was deeply attached to his sister, Mary, and quite obviously, in giving his movie character a sister to be cherished and protected, he was reflecting his own feelings on the screen.)

On May 31, 1915, Hart's first feature as a director was released: *The Darkening Trail.* In *The Ruse,* his next, he played "Bat" Peters, with much of the action taking place in the city. Hart has been lured there by the villians; suspecting that the heroine was unfaithful to him, he settles things in a mighty hand-to-hand battle with the villain. Then, assured of the heroine's affections, he takes her back west. Hart was very fond of the plot of the Westerner coming east, overcoming the smooth chicanery of city crooks by using common sense and Western brawn, and then returning home. The subtitle, "I'm goin' back to the country where I belong" was repeated verbatim, or with little variation, in all the Hart films with plots on this order.

Next came two more two-reelers, *Cash Parrish's Pal* and *The Conversion of Frosty Blake.* When Triangle took over the New York Motion Picture Company, *The Conversion of Frosty Blake* was re-edited and made into a five-reeler. Hart did not appear until the third reel in the new version, and Gilbert Hamilton, incredibly, received credit as the director. To further add to the confusion, the new five-reeler was re-edited once more to two reels, with a fresh title, *The Gentleman from Blue Gulch.* Thus this one film circulated in several different versions, with several different titles! Almost all of Hart's films were later reissued in this fashion.

With these strong, little Westerns, Hart reached tremendous heights of popularity. Having made twenty Westerns, he had only a few more two-reelers to make before he switched to features permanently.

The last of Hart's two-reelers were *Grit* and *Keno Bates, Liar.* The

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latter, written by Ince and J. G. Hawks, and photographed by Joseph August, was another fine Western, although a further demonstration of Hart's growing tendency to sentimentalize. Its story was very similar to that of *The Taking of Luke McVane,* complete even to the flower motif. However, the climax of *Keno Bates, Liar* sees the heroine emptying a gun into the reformed gambler, unaware that he is the man who saved her. Logic would dictate that the hero will now die—and there are indications that possibly such an ending was originally planned. But the closing scenes find the gambler miraculously recovered, reunited with the girl who now realizes his true worth.

A new phase in Hart's career soon began, for there had been dissension

William S. Hart in The Tiger Man *(1918).*

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Hell's Hinges

Just plain Hell's Hinges, and a good place to "ride wide of."

Silk Miller: mingling the oily craftiness of a Mexican with the deadly treachery of a rattler, no man's open enemy, and no man's friend.

The pitifully uneven struggle, when the face of God seemed turned away.

Not until the place is an inferno of flames does he relax and allows his captives to make their escape.

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Systematically she breaks him down, and ultimately seduces him on the evening of the opening of the new church.

Besides himself with rage, Tracey manhandles Dolly and throws her to the floor.

Hell's Crown.

Blaze Tracey finds Faith, and the body of her brother.

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running inserts of Hart—a technique he seemed not to favor, for they were rarely used in his pictures, and then usually only for shots of stagecoaches (as in *Wild Bill Hickok*) and not individual riders.

Although *The Narrow Trail* was the first film Hart made for Artcraft, it was actually the second to be released, coming out in January of 1918;

William S. Hart in Wild Bill Hickok *(1923).*

prior to it, *The Silent Man* had been released in late 1917. Original excerpts of *The Silent Man* appeared in Warner's 1943 film, *One Foot in Heaven.* Fredric March, playing a Methodist minister, goes to a movie theatre for the first time, determined to know the "evil" at first-hand so that he can denounce it. Instead, he is quite converted to films by the moral and Christian lesson in *The Silent Man.* It was a charming sequence in a touching, usually under-rated film.

Despite his higher budgets and the prestige of an Artcraft release, Hart

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William S. Hart and Anna Q. Nilsson with Richard Headrick in The Toll Gate *(1920).*

far too early to say that a definite decline was in progress. *The Toll Gate* ranks as one of his four or five best pictures, and was also his biggest money maker. In this film there can be no doubt that Hart gave the best that he had, for he was now free of Ince entirely, having formed his own company.

The Toll Gate, then, was the first film made under the new arrangement. It reverted to the basic essentials of the Hart formula, and yet there was a surprising restraint in the sentimental passages which added poignancy, absent from many of his other films. Hart was again the outlaw, "Black" Deering, and again he was reformed by a good woman, Mary Brown (Anna Q. Nilsson), and her son, "The Little Fellow" (Richard Headrick). The film had more suspense and dramatic values than usual, and the outcome was genuinely in doubt until the last moment. Sincerely in love with the heroine, and she with him, Hart was pitted against her worthless husband, who had deserted her. The two men finally confront each other, and following a vicious fight on the edge of a cliff, Hart literally throws the man to his death. Having earned the respect and admiration of the sheriff's men by deliberately casting away

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studio supervision or any other external factors, but by Hart himself.

Singer Jim McKee was the last straw for Zukor, who told Hart bluntly that from now on he would have to submit to supervision. He would continue to star, but in studio-picked stories and with studio-picked directors.

If this ultimatum seems rather harsh on the basis of only one really bad picture, it should be remembered that there had been increasing signs of this decline in Hart's recent pictures, and obviously the studio had to check him before he ruined himself as a property.

Hart, needless to say, refused the ultimatum. He probably honestly felt that *Singer Jim McKee* was a fine film, and since his principles were far more important to him than a regular salary check, he left the Lasky studio, and to all intents retired from films.

It seemed for a while that his old tradition might be revived when he returned to the screen in 1925 with *Tumbleweeds* for United Artists. Not only was it his comeback picture, but it was his first real epic, and, with a buget of $312,000, by far his biggest venture to date. Those who expected Hart to have given in, to have made the sort of Western that audiences apparently wanted (and that Zukor had earlier demanded that Hart make) were sadly mistaken. In *Tumbleweeds,* Hart reverted to type without compromise. It was austere, factual. Although showing his age more than ever, he still played an ostensibly young man, he still won the heroine at the end, and he even engaged in some skittish comedy scenes. The sentimental scenes had their usual high intensity,

William S. Hart fights his own gang, one at a time, to prevent their kidnapping the beautiful girl member of a traveling show troupe. From The Testing Block *(1919).*

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The simple, glass-roofed stage at Inceville. William S. Hart in The Devil's Double *(1916).*

and the climactic reunion scene was typical Hart emotion at its peak.

In many ways, *Tumbleweeds* was one of the best of the Western epics: it was staged on a truly lavish scale, but again, Hart's refusal to introduce action for its own sake, and his refusal to "streamline" development made it seem more than a little slow and dated. The giant land rush sequence notwithstanding, its epic qualities were appreciated and noted far less than were those of *The Covered Wagon,* a film in many ways inferior to *Tumbleweeds.*

Nevertheless, *Tumbleweeds* was a much greater success than *Singer Jim McKee* had been. Only in his use of Lucien Littlefield as a comic partner—an odd touch for Hart—was there a sign that, probably unconsciously, Hart had noted the existence of this cliché in the newer Westerns. A stickler for authenticity, Hart hated fakery of any kind, and thus there is fairly little stuntwork in the land rush sequence, possibly to its minor detriment. The crashing of a wagon is rather crudely arranged at one point, and this is typical of Hart, and a flaw that is noticeable in *O'Malley of the Mounted* and other films. If Hart had to resort to tricky stunt work to get an action effect, he usually chose to avoid it, or to get around it as well as possible by editing.

The land rush itself, as the Cherokee strip is opened to settlers, was a mighty sequence, generally superior to the similar, and imitative, rush

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he retired from films, while still remaining on the fringe of the industry. He made a guest appearance in King Vidor's Marion Davies film, *Show People*, and was the subject of one or two *Screen Snapshots* shorts at Columbia. He coached both Johnny Mack Brown and Robert Taylor in their respective versions of *Billy the Kid*, and sold his old story, *O'Malley of the Mounted,* to Fox for a remake with George O'Brien. While it was a competent enough Western, it bore little resemblance to the original except in the bare outlines, and Hart was so disgusted that he refused to sell any more of his properties for remakes. Instead, he settled on his Newhall ranch and wrote. Hart's books are heavy going, deliberately couched in rough Western vernacular, full of a rugged but far from rhythmic poetry. Nevertheless, they are well worth the effort it takes to read them, and his autobiography, *My Life East and West,* is particularly readable, even though Hart's tendency to romanticize produced some inaccuracies. *Tumbleweeds,* then, marked William S. Hart's farewell to the screen.

In 1939, the film was reissued in the United States by Astor Pictures, with music and effects added, and an eight-minute prologue. This prologue was photographed at Hart's Horseshoe Ranch in Newhall, and it is unquestionably one of the most moving reels of film ever made. It is virtually the film of a man delivering his own obituary.

Hart, dressed in his beloved Western costume, walks slowly over the hill and up to the camera to address the audience. He is old, but still a fine figure of a man. He stands there before us more as a representative of the old West itself than as a silent picture star. In a firm, beautifully modulated voice, Hart tells the audience of the picture's background; he explains what the opening of the Cherokee Strip meant to

William S. Hart served as technical adviser when King Vidor (center) made Billy the Kid *in 1930 and donated one of Billy's guns to star Johnny Mack Brown.*

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death in 1957, once remarked: "Hart was a Christian—and it showed in every one of his films."

He planned to return to the screen on at least one occasion in the early Thirties. Hal Roach was planning a large-scale Western along the lines of *Wagon Tracks*, and just at that time Hart was preparing to do a Peter B. Kyne story at RKO. Hillyer was to have been associated with both ventures. Both failed to materialize—mainly because the passing of years had not lessened Hart's determination to make Westerns his way or not at all. Among his requirements remained the stipulation that he *still* play the ostensibly young hero who wins the girl in the fadeout.

Hart's regard for the truth of the old West on the screen could, in fact, be affected by only one thing—a sincere wish not to hurt anyone's feelings. A case in point was his film, *Wild Bill Hickok*. Although he had not known Hickok personally, he knew a great deal about him from his father, and from others who had been contemporaries of the famed frontiersman. Thus Hart was able to construct a historically accurate, although artistically sentimentalized version of Hickok's life, this accuracy even extending to the little known fact that in his later life, Hickok began to go blind. (Hart achieved some interesting effects at this point in the film by having his camera go out of focus.) One of the legendary stories concerning Hickok is his gun battle with the McCanless boys, who jumped him at a relay station. What really started the fracas was

Robert Taylor, a later "Billy the Kid," visits Hart in his retirement on his Newhall Ranch. Behind them is the grave of Hart's pinto pony, Fritz.

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The half-life-size bronze statue of William S. Hart, awarded to the best bronc-buster at the 1926 Wyoming Frontier Days celebration in Cheyenne.

never recorded, but it is an established fact that Hickok killed at least four men in the battle. When it was known that Hart was going to incorporate this incident into his picture, relatives of the McCanless clan wrote him, asking that their family name not be dishonored. Hart, realizing that there were undoubtedly two sides to the story of that battle, and not wanting to cause distress to any McCanless descendants, willingly changed the names in his film.

In 1943, Hart's sister Mary, whom he loved dearly, and who had written several books with him, died. She had been ill for years, as a result of injuries received in an automobile wreck. Hart lost much of his zest for living, and his eyesight began to fail. He wrote G. W. Dunston: "At times I can hardly see at all," and added: "There is nothing I can attribute my illness to, except that I believe it is caused by the deep grief I feel over the loss and absence of my darling sister. At times it seems to be too great a burden to carry. She was in all reality the better part of my existence."

He died in Los Angeles on June 23, 1946, and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, alongside his mother, father, two sisters, and the baby brother who had first been buried in Dakota.

He left an estate of well over a million dollars. Relatively little was bequeathed to his son: Hart was rather disappointed in the way the boy turned out. To him, he just didn't measure up, but knowing Hart, and the rigorous yardsticks he applied, this may not have been due to any real shortcomings on the part of his son. There had been no actual ill will between them, and Hart did leave his son some money, although not enough to permit the younger Hart to fall back on it without earning his own way. This, too, was typical of the man. The bulk of the estate, after bequests to several charities, including fifty thousand dollars to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was left to Los Angeles County. In his lifetime, Hart had also given fifty thousand dollars to the City Park Commission, to effect improvements on his old West Hollywood estate, which he had also given to the Commission as a park. He added: "I'm trying to do an act of justice. I'm trying to give back to the American people what the American people so generously gave me."

The bequest of his estate to Los Angeles County carried with it the stipulation that his Horseshoe Ranch be turned into a public park, and his home a museum for the Western material he had assembled. For years, the ranch, with the WS brand on the front gate, was sealed, with barbed-wire fences to keep out trespassers. Valuable deposits of oil on the land were said to be the reason for the indecision concerning the future of the property. But finally Hart's wishes were respected, and the

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The African sojourn over, the wanderer migrated West and assumed a rather nomadic existence in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, working at first as an ordinary cowpuncher, and later joining the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch, one of the finest, and certainly the most famous, of all the Wild West shows. Officially acting as livestock foreman, Mix talked himself into a position as a rodeo performer, and became a champion prize winner in the 1909 rodeos at Prescott, Arizona, and Canon City, Colorado. During those barnstorming days he formed a close friendship with Will Rogers, and saw action as a law enforcement officer—with the Texas Rangers, as a sheriff in Kansas and Oklahoma, and as a deputy U. S. marshal for the eastern division of Oklahoma. Studio publicity has undoubtedly colored some of this phase of Mix's career, but documentary evidence does exist confirming that Mix's law enforcing activities were quite as rugged as his later movie adventures. The story of Mix's capture of the notorious New Mexico cattle rustlers, the Shonts Brothers, could have been taken from any one of his later Western thrillers for Fox.

But he was beginning to show tentative signs of settling down. Having bought a ranch in the Cherokee territory of Oklahoma, he married Olive Stokes, the third of his five wives. But far from retiring to a sedate ranching life, Mix's career was just beginning, and it was the acquistion of the ranch that directly led to his entry into motion pictures. The Selig Company in Chicago was looking for a good ranch location, and for someone who knew the surrounding country. Informed of this,

Tom Mix in a typical action scene from one of his last Fox vehicles, Hello, Cheyenne *(1928).*

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Mix immediately offered both his services and his ranch to Selig, who accepted, dispatching a unit to shoot a documentary film entitled, *Ranch Life in the Great South West,* a simple and straightforward little work depicting the processes involved in rounding up cattle and shipping them to the eastern markets. The director was Francis Boggs, whose career came to a tragic end shortly afterwards. While directing on Selig's open-air stage in Los Angeles, he was shot down and killed by a crazed man.

On this, his first association with Selig, Mix acted in the capacity of general adviser, taking charge of the cowboys, always available, just out of camera range, to shoot or rope any animal that got out of control. When the film was finished, Mix assumed that his work for Selig was at an end. Thus, struck by *wanderlust* again, he drifted into Mexico joining Madero's forces, and at one point was even set up before a firing squad.

Upon his return home, Mix learned that the Selig Company had been trying to find him, and promptly left for Chicago to investigate. Possibly, the mere thought of doing something new prompted his decision to join Selig again, for his earlier association with

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