

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

File 19 Modern western

A commercial genre? p. 219

A Spaghetti Western becomes a cute cartoon in AT&T's¹ latest cinema mashup

AT&T has turned the dial up on its genre-mixing cinema campaign promoting its “More for Your Thing” platform: it spliced² together a Spaghetti Western and a whimsical children’s animation. [...]

The new ad will begin airing on May 24, ahead of big summer movies like Aladdin. It starts off in a classic Western scenario, as a gang of grizzled³ bandits blow up a steam train running through Arizona’s Monument Valley. But after the train derails and the smoke clears, we switch to the animated footage, featuring cute railroad cars singing a jaunty⁴ melody about how they “gotta get back on the track” as the bandits look on in astonishment, bewildered by their own physical transformation into cartoon figures.

Director Dougal Wilson says the storyline appealed to him as a fan of both Westerns and animation. “I grew up watching a lot of John Ford films and Sergio Leone movies, like Once Upon a Time in the West,” he says. [...]

Western scenes were shot in the northern Nevada Northern Railway, a railroad museum. Just before filming began, a heavy blizzard threatened the production. Wilson, who’s used to having to create fake snow for his Christmas ad shoots, says it’s the first job he’s worked on where snow actually had to be painted out (by VFX house Method). The butte peaks from Monument Valley were also added in later (in case you were wondering, there’s no railroad in Monument Valley).

Alexandra Jardine, excerpted from *adage.com*, May 24, 2019

1. a mobile-phone company 2. join 3. having grey hair 4. cheerful

Western literature p. 220

Virgil Cole and the narrator, Everett Hitch, are lawmen who have arrested Randall Bragg, a murderer.

Vince came back with twenty riders on a hot, still day with no clouds and a hard sun. I was sitting out front with Whitfield when they turned the corner at Second Street and started down toward us at a slow walk, nobody saying anything.

“God, Jesus,” Whitfield said and stood up.

“There’s a loaded gun in the table drawer,” I said to him. “If they rush us, shoot Bragg.”

Whitfield went inside the office. I took out my Colt¹ and fired two shots in the air and reloaded and holstered². A couple of the horses in Vince’s party shied³ at the gunfire. No one else reacted. I picked up the eight-gauge⁴ and stood. There were people on the sidewalks on Main Street. As the riders approached, the people disappeared into the nearest doors. The riders fanned out⁵ across the street behind Vince three rows deep, halted in front of the office, and turned their horses toward me. The riders in the second and third rows moved slowly sideways to form a big single-file circle in front of me. Some of them had Winchesters⁶.

“Morning, Hitch,” Vince said to me.

“Vince,” I said.

“We come for Mr. Bragg,” Vince said.

“Can’t have him,” I said.

“We’ll take him if we have to.”

The rider on the far right end of the circle had a riderless saddle horse on a lead⁷. To my right, Virgil Cole came walking on the boardwalk toward us. He didn’t seem to raise his voice, but everyone heard him clear.

“If you do, he’ll be dead.”

No one said anything.

“Everett,” Cole said, “you step on into the office with that eight-gauge and first thing, anything happens, you blow Mr. Bragg’s head off.”

I wanted to say that Whitfield had that assignment and I could do him more good out here. But I didn’t. I did what he told me. I always did what he told me, because in a lot of towns over a lot of years, I’d learned that in a tight crease, you’d best do what Virgil Cole told you. No questions. Virgil always knew the situation better than you did, and he always knew what he was doing better than anyone did. I reached behind me and pushed open the office door and went inside.

Behind me, I heard Cole say, “You boys best wheel them animals around and shoo⁸.”

I glanced over my shoulder at Bragg.

Bragg was standing in his cell, close to the bars, looking at me.

Robert B. Parker, *Appaloosa*, Chapter 22, 2005

1. type of revolver 2. put a gun into its holder 3. *faire un écart* 4. firearm 5. spread out
6. type of rifle 7. *en laisse* 8. go away

An overview of the genre p. 221

'The American epic': Hollywood's enduring love for the western

The western has been a movie staple¹ since the pioneering 1903 film, *The Great Train Robbery*. It became the dominant genre, especially after the Second World War, creating an image – John Wayne – of rugged American self-reliance² and manliness. From 1910 through 1960, approximately a quarter of all films featured hats and horses and the television landscape was similarly populated with cowboys. [...]

The classic westerns “celebrated American exceptionalism”, Richard Aquila, professor of history, says. [...]

Radical change arrived in the 1960s with a young generation opposing the Vietnam war and supporting the civilrights and women's movements. “Old westerns were like a checklist of what their revolution was against,” Robert Thompson, media scholar, says: macho heroes, “might makes right”³ and manifest destiny against “savages”.

In a nation divided, John Wayne westerns remained popular but antiheroes such as Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leone's legendary spaghetti western trilogy and Paul Newman and Robert Redford as doomed robbers in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* became the cultural touchstones⁴, alongside Sam Peckinpah's bloody *The Wild Bunch*, which he said was an allegory for Vietnam, *Butch Cassidy* was the most successful western ever ... until *Blazing Saddles*, which completely subverted the entire genre. Revisionist westerns took over, led by movies like *McCabe & Mrs Miller* and *Little Big Man*.

“The western is flexible, that's why it's alive still,” says Aquila. “It's like an inkblot test and every generation uses it for its own purposes.”

Stuart Miller, *theguardian.com*, October 21, 2016

1. foundational element **2.** independence **3.** *la loi du plus fort* **4.** points of reference

Afterword

Like most children of the fifties, my first impressions of Native American people were not very positive. Indians were widely portrayed as devils, whose destruction was purely a matter of necessity in the process of taming¹ the West. Every publication or film I saw as a child was slanted² in this way.

But from the first, I sensed somehow that the story was incomplete. Late in elementary school I read a book by Quentin Reynolds that was written for young readers. I can't remember the title, but the book was about Custer and the Seventh Cavalry and the Little Big Horn. I enjoyed it immensely and, as most boys would, I identified strongly with the white soldiers.

There was something else, however, that sparked my interest for years to come. One particular Indian was portrayed in Reynold's book as a great warrior and leader—Crazy Horse. From the moment I read about him I wanted to know more. Perhaps it was the ring of his name or the description of his fighting spirit, but I recall distinctly that I laid the book down with the thought, I'd like to know more about that Crazy Horse.

In succeeding years, I never fully lost the desire to know more, but it wasn't until my mid-twenties that I encountered the Indian people again, the time reading Dee Brown's classic *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. I was stunned, heartbroken, and enlightened. [...]

Another ten years have passed and I am still reading Native American history. It is often a sad study of genocide, of cultural annihilation perpetrated by our forefathers³ in the name of growth and of the "future generations" that we now comprise.

When I think of what was lost in the trampling⁴ of the great horse culture and its people, I am made immeasurably sad. Here were a people living in rough perfection; at home with sky, earth and plain; strong families living in societies that valued and cared for their members. Not only was most of this destroyed but what

little remained was locked up on reservations in desolate territory, far from public sight.

So the novel *Dances with Wolves* was written in part because I wanted to present some of the record of history as I see it. It was my hope that in showing what was lost, something might be regained—not the least of which could be new respect for the proud descendants of the people I wrote about, who are living yet on reserves where our ancestors confined them.

Michael Blake, *Dances with Wolves*, 1988 (afterword written in 1991)

1. controlling, conquering 2. prejudiced 3. ancestors 4. destruction

The untold story of the Wild West p. 223

Posse, a big, brawny¹ western starring and directed by Mario Van Peebles, displays a stormy love-hate relationship with westerns gone by. On the one hand, this obviously talented film maker celebrates all the aggrandizing features of the genre: the laconic tough talk, the manly camaraderie, the proud posturing, the power of walking tall past the awestruck² citizenry of a prairie town. On the other hand, *Posse* does its best to reject and avenge what it regards as the flagrant distortions of the past.

So the turbulent, high-voltage *Posse* is part entertainment and part history lesson. In the course of describing the adventures of a band of black heroes (with one token³ white boy in their midst), it also seeks redress⁴ for the racial attitudes of Hollywood's most thoughtless cowboys-and-Indians pictures. Mr. Van Peebles and his screenwriters, Sy Richardson and Dario Scardapane, care most about making their points emphatically, even if that sometimes leaves "Posse" riding heavy in the saddle. Luckily, most of their film is fast-paced and star-studded enough to avoid an overly preachy⁵ tone.

Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*, May 14, 1993

1. strong 2. amazed 3. used as a symbol 4. reparation 5. moralistic

20th-century cowboys p. 224

“Brokeback Mountain” is a short story about a friendship between two cowboys that turns into love.

They were raised on small, poor ranches in opposite corners of the state, Jack Twist in Lightning Flat, up on the Montana border, Ennis del Mar from around Sage, near the Utah line, both high-school dropout¹ country boys with no prospects, brought up to hard work and privation, both rough-mannered, rough-spoken, inured to² the stoic life. Ennis, reared by his older brother and sister after their parents drove off the only curve on Dead Horse Road, leaving them twenty-four dollars in cash and a two-mortgage³ ranch, applied at age fourteen for a hardship license⁴ that let him make the hour-long trip from the ranch to the high school. The pickup was old, no heater, one windshield wiper, and bad tires; when the transmission went, there was no money to fix it. He had wanted to be a sophomore⁵, felt the word carried a kind of distinction, but the truck broke down short of it, pitching him directly into ranch work.

In 1963 when he met Jack Twist, Ennis was engaged to Alma Beers. Both Jack and Ennis claimed to be saving money for a small spread; in Ennis’s case that meant a tobacco can with two five-dollar bills inside. That spring, hungry for any job, each had signed up with Farm and Ranch Employment— they came together on paper as herder⁶ and camp tender for the same sheep operation north of Signal. The summer range lay above the tree line on Forest Service land on Brokeback Mountain. It would be Jack Twist’s second summer on the mountain, Ennis’s first. Neither of them was twenty.

Annie Proulx, “Brokeback Mountain”, 1997

1. someone who has left high school without finishing 2. accustomed to
3. *hypothéqué* 4. driver’s license given under exceptional circumstances 5. student in his second year of school 6. cowboy

The Mandalorian is definitely a western. And not just one specific kind.

Almost every episode of *The Mandalorian* has leaned¹ heavily on the show's influences, but "The Gunslinger," was especially full of callbacks² to the Western genre. Those include an arid and inhospitable landscape, a frontier bar in the form of the famous *Star Wars* Cantina — the same one from *Star Wars* where Greedo famously exclaimed "Maclunkey!" before he tried and failed to kill Han Solo — speeder bikes in place of cowboys' horses, and even indigenous people (the Tusken Raiders) who our heroes must negotiate with in order to arrange for safe passage through their territory. "The western" is not a singular concept, though, and one of the cool things about *The Mandalorian* is how many different kinds of westerns it touches upon. "The Gunslinger" 's story of an experienced vigilante³ taking a young man under his wing recalls John Wayne's final film, *The Shootist*. Previous episodes included visual or narrative references to *The Searchers*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Shane*, and *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* just to name a few of the most obvious inspirations. [...]

The Mandalorian's general concept about a kind-hearted bounty hunter⁴ roaming⁵ the untamed wilderness recalls western series like *Wanted Dead or Alive*, which was recently spoofed⁶ as *Bounty Law* in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* — whose title is inspired by a spaghetti western directed by Sergio Leone, a man whose international breakthrough was a western called *A Fistful of Dollars*, which was based on a samurai film by Akira Kurosawa called *Yojimbo*. And around and around we go. *The Mandalorian* is taking all of these influences and synthesizing them into something new.

Matt Singer, *screenrush.com*, December 6, 2019

1. depend
2. references
3. person who enforces the law without the authority to do so
4. *chasseur de primes*
5. wander
6. parody