

- 14 And while we're on the subject of popular song (so many of them about the road, some even transformed into films and television shows, *Convoy* (1978) being my personal favorite), it is interesting to note how Bob Dylan's "Highway 61" attempted to restore the Biblical rhetoric of the road so pervasive in prewar films. Highway 61, of course, was the route the Blues took from the Delta to Chicago. Dylan would be a central figure in an extended examination of the culture of the road, as would be his antetype, Woody Guthrie. Hal Ashby's *Bound for Glory* (1976) is therefore both biography (of Guthrie) and road film. In general, however, the road film's insistence upon east-west routes has been complicitous (along with the Western) in the complete failure to come to grips with race as an (perhaps the) American condition. Even the 'minor' films presently under discussion suffer from this oversight (which amounts to nearly complete suppression). The major exception to this rule would be *The Bingo Long Traveling All Stars and Motor Kings* (1976), a story based loosely on the lives of Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and Jackie Robinson and the days of barnstorming, razzle-dazzle baseball. But the film can never delve too deeply into the bitter pill of success within the confines of racism: entrance into white baseball.
- 15 Brooks would, more successfully I think, return to an exploration of the consumption/renunciation dialectic in *Defending Your Life* (1991). Like Wenders, he turns from the road to the afterlife. Unlike Wenders, Brooks imagines mortality as a form of failure.

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WESTERN MEETS EASTWOOD

Genre and gender on the road

Shari Roberts

They tell me everything isn't black and white. . . . Well I say, why the hell not?

John Wayne ("John Wayne as the Last Hero": 55)

I like simple things, yet I'm obviously more complex than I appear on the surface.

Clint Eastwood (Thompson: 121)

Introduction

As portrayed in the Western and alluded to in the road movie, frontier symbolism is propelled by masculinity and a particular conception of American national identity that revolves around individualism and aggression. During the height of the studio system, this symbolic core codified into the Western film as an iconography evoking already nostalgic ideas about the frontier. As the Western condensed further into what we now refer to as the genre of the road film, these characteristics become concentrated and codified, in part through the insistence on the extremely linear narrative structure of the road film. What ultimately links the road movie to the Western is this ideal of masculinity inherent in certain underlying conceptualizations of American national identity that have persisted, if only through continual ideological struggle.

Eastwood provides the touchstone for my analysis of the road film, its relationship to the Western, and the gendered assumptions that inform both genres.¹ This essay contextualizes Eastwood within the genres, and then uses his star text as an example through which to explore them.² A consideration of recent "feminine" road films, that is, road films featuring female protagonists and feminine issues, further highlights the inherent masculinity of the road movie.

Westerns, Road Narratives, and Masculinity

The films of director and actor Clint Eastwood include Westerns, road films, and some films that fit both categories, thereby straddling these two genres. Eastwood reached international fame as the Man with No Name in the Sergio Leone Western trilogy, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), produced after the genre of the film Western has been established for fifty years. Subsequently, Eastwood starred in many Hollywood films, including Westerns, some of which he also directed (*Hang 'Em High*, 1967, *High Plains Drifter*, 1973, *Pale Rider*, 1985, and *Unforgiven*, 1992), and road movies, some of which he also directed (*Two Mules for Sister Sara*, 1970, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, 1976, *Every Which Way But Loose*, 1978, *Bronco Billy*, 1980, *Honkytonk Man*, 1982, and *A Perfect World*, 1993), and all of which either fall within or allude to the Western genre.³ Even his television series, *Rawhide* (1959–66), organized around an extended cattle drive, constitutes a road narrative.

The generic logic that helps to produce Eastwood, who crosses back and forth between Western and road film, results in a star who enunciates a macho, jingoistic brutality at one with the earlier John Wayne Western cowboy, and takes advantage of the underlying masculinist tendencies of both genres. That Eastwood straddles the Western and road film makes generic sense, and, although this study focuses on one star in particular, it has implications for the genre as a whole.

The Western has been popular with the American public across changing media as well as shifting historical context, starting with literary frontier narratives, such as James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales (e.g., *The Pioneers*, 1823), and including Western novels by authors such as Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour. Westerns have been part of Hollywood since its inception, with serials in the 1920s and 1930s, and hundreds of nationally distributed feature films produced from the 1920s through today, starring the likes of Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, John Wayne, and Eastwood. Western radio shows of the 1930s and 1940s gave way to television Western programs in the 1950s and 1960s (Tompkins: 5; Cawelti: 3, 89–119; Buscombe: 48). Such consistent popularity demonstrates how this "quintessential American genre" (Smith: 3) persistently speaks to the American public. As Virginia Wright Wexman notes, "the venerable Hollywood formula articulates a view of America that has dominated the popular imagination throughout the greater part of the twentieth century. The classic Western – defined in part by its association with the images of John Wayne and stars like him – participates in a . . . discourse on American history and American identity that uses the myth of the frontier to contain . . . inconsistency in American nationalist ideology" (71).⁴ The Western continues to resonate as symbolic of a particular version of US national identity.

Many have noted the masculinist character of the Western.⁵ Jane Tompkins argues that, in the twentieth century, secular, masculine, male-authored novels and films replaced nineteenth-century Christian, domestic, female-authored sentimental novels. According to Tompkins, "the Western *answers* the domestic novel" as "the antithesis of the cult of domesticity that dominated American Victorian culture" in a "gender war" over both "literary landscape" and the "national scene" (39, 42). She argues that the Western is "about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents" (45). The Western film continues this masculinist tradition, and during the studio era ranked among women's least favorite film genres (Handel: 124). Not only did the Western become popular because of male readers, who, in Tompkins's argument, may have fantasized a refurbished, masterly gender identity, but it also has continued to be popular in part because of Americans who desire to re-create a revitalized, and particularly masculinist, national identity through popular culture. The road genre further emphasizes this cultural function.

A brief consideration of John Wayne's star text demonstrates the masculinist, nationalist ideology enunciated by both the Western, precursor to the road film and Eastwood's own road films. In 1963, "God and Man in Hollywood" appeared in *Esquire*. In this article, the author calls Wayne a "superpatriot" and relates how when Wayne was once asked in a nightclub if he would like to have his favorite tune played, Wayne replied, "No, if you played my favorite tune, everybody would have to stand up" (Morgan: 74). Wayne's extra-filmic life coalesces with his filmic Western persona, consistently presenting a masculinist, chauvinistic ideal. He started adult life with a college football scholarship; he was a staunch and public supporter of the US government even for controversial domestic and foreign policies, such as the 1950s "red scare" and the 1960s involvement in the Vietnam War,⁶ and he heroically battled his last enemy, cancer, which he called "the big C" in the pages of the popular press. Sample articles among many include "John Wayne Rides Again," or "Big John," which begins, "John Wayne, the big boy, the Duke, . . . had licked 'the big C.' . . . He threw a couple of ascorbic-acid pills into his mouth and washed them down with a slug out of a half-gallon jug of mezcal – which is 120 proof and called *la gasolina* by the locals. 'Goddam!' bellowed Duke, 'I'm the stuff that men are made of!'" Another typical Wayne statement is this self-conscious articulation of his "macho" perspective on the film industry: "There's a lot of yella bastards in the country who would like to call patriotism old-fashioned. . . . My main object in making a motion picture is entertainment. . . . If at the same time I can strike a blow for liberty, then I'll stick one in" ("John Wayne": 55). Wayne's metaphor for the nationalistic function of the mass media – "strike a blow" and "stick one in" – may be mixed, but they are also singularly coded as masculine.

Stagecoach (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956), directed by John Ford and starring Wayne, are Westerns structured by road narratives. As such, an analysis of these films provides a contrast to Eastwood road films with Western allusions. *Stagecoach*, a relatively early, traditional Western, uses a road journey to redefine community. The stagecoach, whose path structures the film, is peopled by a miniature community, including both representatives and misfits of society, from the doctor and the banker to the prostitute and the outlaw. The hero, Ringo (Wayne), is on a quest for vengeance against those who have murdered his family. He also serves as a catalyst to articulate a particular definition of the Western and, metonymically, the American community, based on communal values and against the exclusionary practices of the East and South. The final shoot-out, in which the hero avenges his family through vigilante killings, demonstrates how might sides with right in the black-and-white world of the Western. The marshal's acquittal supports Ringo's stand for a "natural" justice that supersedes society's unfair laws.

The film concludes with Ringo and Dallas (Claire Trevor) riding together into the sunset, with the promise of their own nuclear family, home, and land on the horizon. This resolution demonstrates that even Ringo and Dallas, a fugitive and a prostitute, may create new identities, a new community, and a new start in the open spaces, "safe from the blessings of civilization." The East – represented by the town and the "Ladies of the Law and Order League" – signifies the feminine – domestication, corruption, class stratification. By contrast, the film privileges the West and equates it with the masculine – nature, open spaces, heroism, vitality, and justice. The images of Monument Valley symbolize Westward expansion and the opportunity promised by America's wide open spaces. Ford/Wayne films conflate the East and the old, defeated South, which together connote regressive values, decay, decadence, effeminacy, and foppishness. Ford/Wayne films create a new Western world that stands in for an ideal version of America in which the masculine acts as the standard for all that is valuable.

The Road Rises to Meet the Decline of the Western

Genres maintain their vitality by combining difference and familiarity. For instance, although Wayne and Eastwood both play macho Hollywood cowboys, their star texts are quite different, emerging as they do from different historical contexts. As Wayne himself points out in a 1960 interview, "I like to play *men* – be they good guys or bad,' . . . lighting a cigarette. 'I don't mind being brutal, or tough, or cruel. . . . The day film companies think that a Western is a place for weaklings, I'll go'" ("John Wayne's Ordeal": 107). Wayne adds that the Western film should not "get the audience involved in thinking," and, still speculating on his new-media rivals, he continues, "On TV, the cowboy is introverted and

oversensitive. The cowboy loved, hated, had fun, was lusty. He didn't have mental problems. . . ." Wayne distinguishes himself from the "TV cowboys" – including Eastwood, who had begun his seven-year *Rawhide* stint – who threaten to replace him.

The Searchers, a later, revisionist Western, simultaneously works within the genre and throws all it stands for open to question. Many critics, popular and academic, have discussed *The Searchers*, released almost twenty years after *Stagecoach*, as a problematic Western: as a detestable excuse for violence, racism, and misogyny, as an indictment of such, and as a work of art that exceeds the boundaries of the genre.⁷ Superficially, *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers* resemble each other. In both, the bugle signals the arrival of the cavalry, cowboys and Indians fight, the men with white hats draw faster than those with black, the women either need to be rescued or remain at home, and in the end some sort of justice is served. However, in *The Searchers*, the cavalry is not heroic, but comic; the women are raped, murdered, and kidnapped. Moreover, as Ethan (Wayne) rejects the goal of rescuing the kidnapped woman and instead rushes to kill her, the viewer must grapple with the difficulty of accepting a pathologically racist and murderous protagonist, and realizing that the basis for the film title entails issues that were never "black and white." The conflict between civilization and savagery becomes muddy and confused, as Ethan and Scar (Henry Brandon), the Comanche chief, mirror each other, hero and enemy sharing the same space. No simple rescue or vengeance ensues, and, although the film closes with the promise of a wedding and a reuniting of some semblance of family, this homecoming does not resolve the search that structures the film. As Brian Henderson notes, the theme song overlaps with the closing images of the settlers entering the house as Ethan turns away: "A man will search in heart and soul. . . . His peace of mind he knows he'll find, but where, O Lord, O where? Ride away, ride away, ride away" (11). The film ends without answering these questions or fulfilling the title search, leaving the "hero" on the road, wandering. The relentless linear thrust of the search takes on its own life and power, and overwhelms all other values.

While some contemporary viewers might have been unimpressed with *The Searchers* – *Variety*, for instance, calls it "disappointing" and "overlong and repetitious" – Stuart Byron notes the wide-reaching influence of *The Searchers* on American film-makers, suggesting "that . . . it can be said that all recent American cinema derives from . . . *The Searchers*," and lists among those influenced Paul Schrader, John Milius, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Michael Cimino (45). Byron argues that, in particular, films showing the mark of *The Searchers* have a structure identical to the 1956 film, including *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Close Encounters* (1977), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Hardcore* (1979). It may seem impossible to explain – beyond the statement of its qualities as an

“artistic masterpiece,” as Godard has called it – that one studio film could affect so many different directors in the “new Hollywood” and result in such different films, none of which would be classified as Westerns. However, if viewed as part of the establishment of the road film, *The Searchers*’ uniqueness as a Western may be owed to its straddling of cultural and generic shifts.

It is no coincidence that *The Searchers* was created toward the end of the film Western’s heyday. Feature Westerns were popular until the 1960s, when production gradually declined. For instance, 27 percent of all films produced in 1953 were Westerns, but only 9 percent produced in 1963 were, and production continues to drop through the present. By the 1970s, Westerns were seen by the industry as a liability, and in 1979 the genre lost its greatest and most consistent advocate, Wayne (Smith: 45–6).⁸ Beginning with *The Searchers*, the focus changed from a hero traveling across the frontier to the searcher hitting the road.

Robert Ray discusses how fundamental structures and tropes of a genre can be “disguised,” a Western structure being used, for instance, in a Second World War film or a space odyssey.⁹ However, it’s not simply the case that the Western disguises itself in road clothing; instead, a distillation takes place in which certain elements from the Western help to form a new genre of the road genre. What was at first a theme becomes a recognized genre in its own right. Of course, the road has existed as a theme or structuring device since the beginning of film and before. At some level, all narratives incorporate the theme of the road. One might call Homer’s *Odyssey* a proto-road-narrative, and point out the similarities between it and Hollywood road movies. However, the road does not constitute a genre until a body of films become recognizable as separate and distinct for audiences.

We think of Francis Parkman Jr’s *The Oregon Trail* and L’Amour novels as part of the Western tradition, even though *The Oregon Trail* would not have been understood as a Western at the time it was published in 1849. In the same way, while contemporary viewers would have recognized films, from *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) to *Stagecoach*, as versions of the Western, neither of these films nor non-Western road narratives such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) or *They Live By Night* (1949) would have been understood as part of a road genre at the time of their release. While critics and viewers may have discussed travel or a quest in relationship to *Stagecoach*, it would have been recognized and described as a Western, and still would be labeled as such today. Retrospectively, elements of *Stagecoach* structure it as a road movie as well as a Western; however, this is an understanding obtained only by reading American film history backwards. To call *Stagecoach* a road movie would be meaningless without the publication of books such as *On the Road* (1957) and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), and the release of films such as *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Stranger than Paradise* (1984).

Road Films, Western Allusions, and Masculinity

The road film did not exist as a recognizable genre until, roughly, the release of *Easy Rider* in 1969.¹⁰ Social upheavals helped to define this period in America, including the women’s liberation, civil rights, and youth movements, but of particular note is the gradual increase in American involvement in the Vietnam War. US involvement began in 1955, the year that the French left and Vietnam was partitioned into North and South. Between 1955 and 1964, American troops in Vietnam increased from the hundreds to a hundred thousand. By the end of 1965, 188,000 American troops were stationed in Vietnam, and protests, mostly among youth groups, began.¹¹ To put the two genres in context, by 1956, the year *The Searchers* was released, Americans had already experienced the stalemate of the Korean conflict, and feelings of certainty about foreign involvement seemed as distant as “the last good war”¹² over a decade earlier. Domestic racial unrest and civil rights activism had been building since the time of the Second World War, and desegregation began to come to an end with *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, only two years previously.¹³ By 1968, the year that Lyndon Baines Johnson chose not to run for re-election, partly owing to the Vietnam issue, the tide had turned and the public generally demanded withdrawal from the war. And in 1969 the independent film *Easy Rider*, Cannes Film Festival award-winner, was embraced by a generation as a statement of youth, rebellion, and counter-culture.

A linear, yet almost non-narrative film, *Easy Rider* set the standard for the road genre. The advertising describes it with an economy of words: “A man went looking for America and couldn’t find it anywhere.” The film features protagonists Wyatt (Peter Fonda), who wears a helmet emblazoned with the American flag, and Billy (Dennis Hopper), who wears a pioneer-styled, leather fringe outfit, who are named after legendary Wild West figures Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid. Their names and costumes emphasize the link between a genre that would enunciate an American dream, and one that represents the absence of clear-cut ideals. Although the characters travel to New Orleans, this literal road only gives structure to a parallel, spiritual quest for freedom for life and art, and freedom from restrictive traditions, mores, and social norms. Wyatt literally reads the writing on the wall: “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” The main characters search for a new spiritual place for themselves appropriate to their counter-culture and the modern world. The film experiments with editing, camera movement, angles, and film stock, while the characters simultaneously experiment with sex and drugs in an attempt to break through old boundaries and create a revitalized set of values. The physical journey to Mardi Gras structures the process of self-discovery, the search for new personal and national identities. *Variety* states: “Film does not force parallels but they resemble

men looking for some sort of new frontier, giving an ironic cast in a land now populated from sea to shining sea. The bikes, while part of them, are also a means of giving them movement and freedom. No dwelling on reasons, didactics or explanation of why they are what they are but filling it in on their long hejira." This contemporary review recognizes the aspects of the Western inherent in what can only be called a road film. The link between the Western and this constitutive road film proves informative throughout the genre.

In my undergraduate Road Movie course, one of the small group projects performed is a discussion of images and words that connote America, an exercise through which the concept of national identity is investigated as an "imagined community" (Anderson). Students regularly create provocative lists, merging such concrete items as cars, McDonald's, guns, and "The Brady Bunch" with abstract concepts such as democracy, individualism, and freedom.¹⁴ Sergio Leone himself remembers feeling that "America was like a religion. . . . I dreamed of the wide open spaces . . . the great expanses of desert, the extraordinary melting pot. . . . The long, straight roads . . . which begin nowhere, and end nowhere" (Frayling: 65). In a recent editorial concerning terrorism, the author sums up what he thinks "America" means to those included in and excluded by "American culture . . . : our blend of individualism, 'Baywatch,' hamburgers, capitalism and Beach Boys. It has the power to supplant any culture on the planet. To us, it's Route 66; to the mediievally inclined, it's the road to hell, paved with 'Good Vibrations'" (Lileks: 20). This casual description of America indicates how "the road" is of a piece with some of the goals, such as individualism, of the American Dream. These examples demonstrate how the mere mention or image of the road has commonly come to symbolize a conceptualization of America.

In the Eastwood films, and, by extension, the road film in general, the frontier, the wide open spaces of the Ford/Wayne films, transforms into the road, a more current icon. American geography and history play much the same role here as in the Western, so that the image of the white dotted line becomes a visual shorthand indicating a new start, endless possibility, and equal opportunity – the American Dream. Western imagery was already nostalgic when the genre was established, and now the Western itself seems dated. The road stands in for the frontier, but, instead of symbolizing a romanticized America in which the American Dream will come true, it simply asks over and over, as each mile marker is passed, what does America mean today? Are dreams even possible? While the traditional Western often works to resolve and contain disturbances, as in *Stagecoach*, the road tends to reveal the illusory nature of these terms.

Rather than setting these films in the iconic Western frontier, road films are characterized by an absence of civilization, law, and domesticity, marked instead by primitivism or post-apocalyptic space. With a more global understanding of

the frontier *qua* road, the journey may move along a highway (*Bronco Billy*), a river (*Apocalypse Now*, 1979), or through space and time (*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, 1991). While other elements of the Western remain important to the road film, the transformation of the frontier into an often metaphorical road introduces the crucial, structuring device of the road – the dual journey, the interdependent physical and spiritual journeys. The road as theme may appear in any film, regardless of historical context, whereas, in the road film genre, the metaphor of the road becomes the main structuring device through this interdependence of the physical and spiritual journeys.

The protagonist – sometimes with a "buddy," as in *A Perfect World*, or a hodge-podge, *ad hoc* family, as in *The Outlaw Josey Wales* or *Bronco Billy* – moves through the film on a physical journey that parallels a spiritual quest. Often escaping a threat, the law, and/or an unwanted lifestyle (*Bonnie and Clyde*, 1967, *A Perfect World*, or *Thelma and Louise*, 1991), the hero also usually begins a quest, often unbeknownst to her/himself, for a better life, a new social order, or fulfillment. For instance, in *The Searchers*, as opposed to the earlier, more traditional *Stagecoach*, the goal of the search remains as ambiguous as in many road films. The road protagonist searches for a concrete goal: Ethan follows Debbie (Natalie Wood) for years in *The Searchers*; Wyatt and Billy travel to Mardi Gras in *Easy Rider*; Red (Eastwood) tries to make it to Nashville for an audition in *Honkytonk Man*; and Butch (Kevin Costner) in *A Perfect World* escapes prison and so is on the run towards Alaska. However, in these road movies, as opposed to Westerns, internal journeys fuel the physical wanderings. Moreover, while one might suggest that in *Stagecoach* Ringo Kid takes the road to Lordsburg to avenge his family, the film's simple journey, traditional goal, and closure seldom occur for the protagonists of road films. Ethan perhaps searches for an elusive peace, Billy and Wyatt search for something like enlightenment, Red and Butch search for immortality – in each of these the spiritual journey parallels but always overshadows the physical journey.

In part because Eastwood's road films conform to this extremely linear structure, actions may seem to speak louder than words. This masculinist hierarchy is common to both the Western and the road genre, although it functions differently within each. Regarding the Western, Tompkins notes that the "interdiction masculinity imposes on speech arises from the desire for complete objectivization. And this means being conscious of nothing, not knowing that one has a self. . . . Not fissured by self-consciousness, nature is what the hero aspires to emulate: perfect being-in-itself" (55–7). Smith corroborates this observation in his analysis of Eastwood's performance in the Leone films, noting "close-ups of faces, costumes, and gestures . . . do not so much signify the internal qualities of the classic cowboy, . . . as construct instead a mere exterior, a purely physical demeanor that stands in for masculinity itself" (11). Leone says of Eastwood,

"I looked at him and I didn't see any character . . . just a physical figure" (Cumbow: 154). Tompkins suggests that the silence of the male Western informs the Western genre in all its permutations, suppressing "inner life" in men (66). Smith further reads Eastwood's silence as particular to the Man with No Name, suggesting that it implies the "emptying out of the moral codes of the western hero . . . openly insulting to the American tradition," whereby this subaltern production resists American domination and hegemony (13–14). The laconic hero works as an element in transit from Western to Eastwood, notable in the Leone Westerns in which Eastwood's character, instead of history, has a richness of surface, all actions and attitude, using an economy of performance that points toward an anticipated generic unfolding in a manner consistent with a revisionist product. That is, Eastwood's Western persona appears when the over-saturated genre anticipates its audience, for whom the merest gestures towards the conventions suffice, and the resulting film may even be read as camp by some viewers. In contrast to the traditional Western, in which the silent male hero is privileged through an assumed association with nature, in the road movie action *becomes* the inner life. For the crossover Eastwood hero, in late Westerns and in road films, silence signifies neither the death of the inner life, as in Tompkins, nor the emptying out of morality, as in Smith, but instead the *literalization* of the inner journey. The road movie involves a dual journey, physical and spiritual. It is not the case that the external journey replaces the internal quest, but rather that the two are instead interdependent.

Violence and death, also associated with the masculine, permeate both the Western and the road film. Tompkins takes the title of her book, *West of Everything*, from a L'Amour passage in *Hondo*: "hero of a Washington romance, dead now in the long grass on a lonely hill, west of everything" (56). She argues that "To go west, . . . west of everything, is to die. Death is everywhere in this genre" (24). Tompkins argues that death and violence help to define the masculinist genre (24–5). Violence and stoicism, in other words, are the means by which the men of the Western demonstrate their heroism, and death is the means by which they gain glory. At a recent tribute to Eastwood, the master of ceremonies, Jim Carrey, attributed Eastwood's popularity to male fantasies of control and natural justice fulfilled by the image of Eastwood, who always beats into submission the specter of the viewer's "school yard bully."¹⁵

In the traditional Western, violence and death are the means by which to test the unquestioned ideal of masculinity; in the Eastwood road film violence becomes hyper-real, ritualistic, a spectacle that alludes to the old codes of the Western in the pastiche of this postmodern genre. Neale has noted that, in Eastwood's Leone trilogy, the violence becomes spectacle in that its denouement comes without suspense. This is not to suggest that the violence becomes meaningless, or that, by implication, audiences do not register violence and its consequences, but rather

that, owing to genre over-saturation and audience expectations, the moments of violence unfold without suspense, so that audiences wonder not if or when violence will occur, but how. Death similarly becomes an underlying assumption as the films begin and end with death. Films that begin with death – often the motivation for the hero to go on the road in vengeance – include *The Searchers*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, and *Mad Max*; films that end with death (not the death of the "bad guys" of *Stagecoach*, but the death of the hero) – include *Easy Rider*, *Honkytonk Man*, and *A Perfect World*. Ethan's actions typify those of the road hero, whose journey is often motivated by death, and who never reaches any goal or satisfaction, and instead remains on a road that never ends. If something like "love" is denied Ethan at the start of *The Searchers*, urging him on, these dreams forever elude him, and the last shot frames the door closing on what might have been a home. *Easy Rider* ends with both Wyatt and the flag lying bloodied and burning, the American Dream a corpse along with the hero, left on the side of the road as the credits roll over them.

It's not so much death *per se*, but life that characters both escape and seek in the road movie. Death seems self-evident, not something necessarily either avoided or pursued in this genre. Road narratives are constituted by a search for life, the characters running from death which always threatens at either end of the road. A romantic notion, death here may work to give meaning to life, much as form gives shape to art, and darkness gives definition to light.

The characters' desires to get on the road indicates a longing for a self-transformation, as well as a revitalized belief in the nation, or at least in the American Dream. Although the search often aborts or remains unfulfilled at the end of the movie, the characters search for a secular moral code and a renewed belief in self, and by extension, in the nation. The frontier is the Western leveler that allows equal opportunity to misfits like Ringo. The old values are superseded by the vitality of the West. The road, the new symbol for opportunity and freedom, offers the same possibilities, but in the postmodern world of the road film, no order *per se* exists to be replaced; instead, the only straw man available is nostalgia for past beliefs, represented by the Western itself.

Honkytonk Man links itself to the Western partly through the presence of Eastwood himself, who plays an aspiring country singer, Red, wearing a cowboy hat. Red's motivation to go on the road is an invitation to audition at the Grand Ol' Opry. Because he is dying of tuberculosis, Red sees the audition as his last chance for fame. Although he is unable to make it through a song without convulsing in coughing, he receives a recording contract in time to sing painfully, yet manfully, giving up his life to effect a vinyl immortality. Red's road trip to Nashville parallels his desire for, and posthumous achievement of, a new identity. A community forms around Red, reminiscent of Ringo and his group in *Stagecoach*, that includes Red's nephew, Whit (Kyle, Eastwood's son), Grandpa

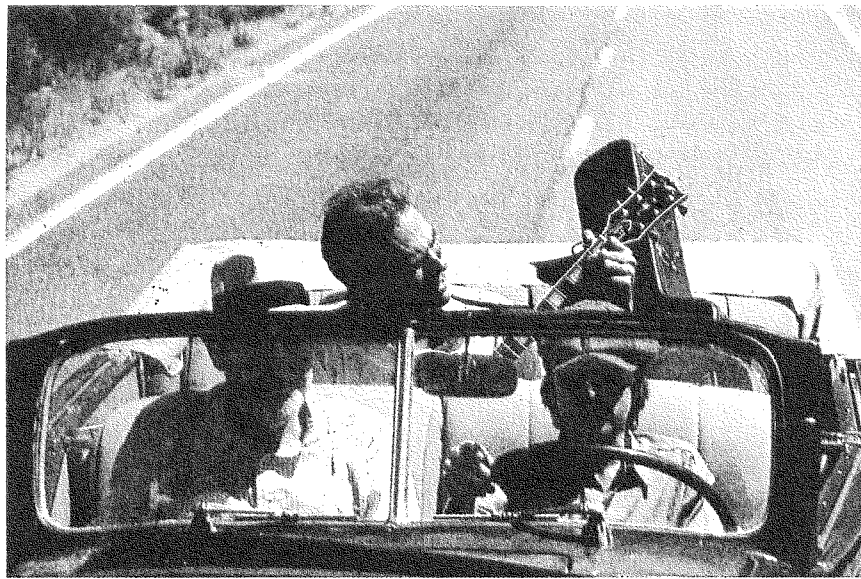


Plate 2.1 *Honkytonk Man*. Red (Clint Eastwood) links the pioneer and Depression generations.

(John McIntire), and Emmy (Verna Bloom). Grandpa's recollection of his youthful road trip from Tennessee on a mule makes the Western connection at the heart of this road movie explicit. Grandpa describes "the run" of 1893, when "they opened the Cherokee strip to white settlers. . . . It was the greatest horse race for the greatest prize." He explains the meaning of the trip and "the prize": "It wasn't just the dirt, just land. It was the promised land. . . . it wasn't just the land – it was the *dream*. We wasn't just land chasers, we was dream chasers." Simply by participating in the run, by going on the road, Grandpa transforms himself into a "dream chaser," at once an individual pursuing a dream, and a part of a vital community of settlers. Even though Grandpa loses the literal goal of the journey, the "dirt" means much less than the alchemic properties of the road. Whit's dream to do better than his sharecropper parents aligns him with Grandpa and Red. Red, raises his surrogate son in a masculinist tradition, by teaching him to become a miniature version of himself. He encourages him to write songs, such as the title track, "Honkytonk Man," drink whisky, have sex with prostitutes, and to follow his dreams. In the film's final scene, Emmy, the stand-in mother, complaining of morning sickness, and Red's spiritual son, Whit, wearing Red's cowboy hat and guitar, walk together away from his funeral; his song symbolically plays over a car radio. These two "dream chasers" continue on their now joint quest to keep traveling and "be somebody" in the spirit of Red and Grandpa. *Honkytonk Man* is set during the Depression, thus bridging the era of the Western and of the

contemporary road movie. It neatly exhibits how the Western articulation of the American Dream continues to beckon in this new genre, and how the over-determined referent of the frontier has been translated into the road.

Bronco Billy, another example of a Western-cum-road-film, also uses Eastwood both to locate the Western in a contemporary setting and incorporate a road structure. *Bronco Billy* (Eastwood), the self-proclaimed "head ramrod" of a traveling Western show, leads a hodgepodge group of misfits across the country. Dressed as a parody of his Western persona, wearing cowboy hat, rodeo shirt, and pearl-handled six-shooters, he is toasted by his cohort as "the fastest gun in the West." Hackneyed Western references abound, from the spectacle of the bucking broncs, smoking guns, hooting Indians, and squealing, starry-eyed women of the road show to verbal clichés such as "Just tell 'em I died with my boots on" and "Looks like it's the end of the trail." More interesting than these superficial gestures toward the Western is the mutation of crucial elements from one to the other genre. The film presents Billy initially through the eyes of Miss Lily (Sondra Locke). From her point of view, this Western champion appears as an anachronistic cliché, a buffoonish sham of the cowboy hero. When a redneck sheriff forces him to grovel and admit, with downcast eyes, that his is not the fastest draw it seems to confirm her initial impressions of this shadow of the masculine ideal. The viewer also sees the show from a backstage point-of-view, watching the backs of the performers as they do their routines, which emphasizes the illusory, performative nature of the Western and thereby deflates it.

However, when Lily calls Bronco Billy "nothing but an illiterate cowboy," he responds, "No one talks like that about a cowboy." The viewer learns that Billy promulgates the standards of the macho Western hero by playing surrogate father to his followers and performing charity acts, so that even the doubting Lily finally agrees with the words, "Anything you say, Bronco Billy." Moreover, he teaches his values not only to his "family," but to an endlessly growing group of "little pardners" through the medium of the show. As did Ringo in *Stagecoach*, Bronco Billy creates a community out of the misfits of society. Yet, located within a contemporary and deflated setting, Eastwood's character can achieve only a mock-heroic stance.

In fact, the film explicitly points to the need for a cowboy hero in modern times, even if the need is filled only through illusion. For instance, when he discovers that his war-deserter colleague has been jailed, his concern extends to the children who come to the Western show, and who need their positive masculine images: "What about those little pardners that look up to you?" The film nondiegetically supports and mimics Billy's sentiment, that we need to fabricate a hero, by ending the film with the following words of the theme song, addressed ostensibly to the children watching Billy's Western show, but also to the watching film audience: "I've got a message for you li'l pardners out there, finish your



Plate 2.2 *Bronco Billy*.

Eastwood reconstructs the American cowboy as heroic ideal.

oatmeal, listen to your parents, don't tell a lie, say your prayers before you go to bed. . . ." The theme song, sung by a paternal voice, infantilizes the viewer and offers reassuringly direct, old-fashioned advice. The film further connects the father figure to the American ideal of the Western hero. As the "Bronco Billy" theme song speaks to all the "li'l pardners" in the audience, the final crane-out reveals the show's new tent, rising like a nylon phoenix from the ashes, sewn from hundreds of American flags. This reconstruction symbolizes the re-creation of the American Dream out of the ideological materials of the Western.

In *A Perfect World*, another Eastwood-directed film that addresses the role of the hero in the modern period, the protagonist, Butch (Costner), again plays surrogate father to a boy, Phillip (T. J. Lowther), whose father is absent. The film equates the fatherless boy with an orphan. Even though his mother is present, she is inadequate on her own, unable to protect herself or her child, as demonstrated through her molestation and Phil's kidnapping in the first scene. As opposed to *Honkytonk Man* and *Bronco Billy*, films which emphasize the successful discovery of the heroic father figure in the protagonist, *A Perfect World* explores the repercussions of missing and inadequate biological fathers. Butch tries to teach Phil, who he calls "son," all the lessons a father might share with a son in a lifetime. For

instance, upon discovering that Phil's Jehovah's Witness mother does not let him celebrate Halloween, Butch lets him wear a stolen Casper trick-or-treat outfit for much of their journey together, asking in dismay, "No Christmas? Birthdays? You ain't never been to the carnival? Cotton candy? Roller coasters?" Having received a negative answer to all these questions, Butch exclaims, "You know, Phillip, you have a god-damned red-white-and-blue right to eat cotton candy and ride roller coasters." The scene cuts from the two characters in the interior of the car to a long shot of Phil, joyfully sitting with his legs hooked through the luggage rack and his arms above his head, yelling "Faster, Butch, faster!" Butch also tries to teach others the importance of fatherhood. Wielding his gun, he tries to teach child-rearing techniques to a terrified grandfather, ordering him to "hold that boy . . . tell him you love him. . . say it like you mean it." Butch ties them up while, in the meantime, the horrified Phil shoots Butch in the stomach.

That Phil must shoot Butch, who in this scene proves that he, too, is an inadequate father, demonstrates how wide-reaching is the problem of deficient fathering for this film. The viewer learns that the violence is attributable to a cycle of fatherless children, including Butch, on the road to Alaska to find his missing father. Butch carries with him a raggedy picture postcard from his father that reads, "Someday you can come and visit and we can maybe get to know each other." This tattered reminder is the only thing his father has ever given him, a signifier of his broken promise — "we can maybe get to know each other" — and of his absence. The film suggests that being without a father is at the bottom of all Butch's problems, and that the consequences of being fatherless, for Butch, are either to be on the road, or to be dead.

During his terrorization of the family, Butch says, in a moment of self-assessment, "No, I ain't a good man; I ain't the worst, neither." Similarly, after Butch's death the Texas ranger (Eastwood) is reassured, "You know, you did everything you could." He replies, "I don't know nothin', not one damn thing." Butch's corpse fills the first and last shots in this film, emphasizing the failure of the father. In the final shot, the camera cranes out to reveal that the point of view belongs to Phil, who now holds the symbolic postcard, signifier of the absent father, the only thing that Butch can give him. The road trip in *A Perfect World* is a quest for the missing hero that Phil and Butch take together — for Phil to gain a father, and for Butch and the Texas Ranger to become fathers. All of these journeys result in failure, except, perhaps, for the viewer, who learns the value of fatherhood and of heroes in this clearly imperfect world.

Butch describes Alaska, the home of his father, to Phil as "The last of the wild frontiers" and "wild and woolly," indicating that the missing father remains in the romantic American Dream of the frontier. Red performs here in the other father figure role, attempting to guide Butch to a better life. Eastwood's character, too, is linked with the Western, with his tough-guy, Texas ranger persona, his

Western garb, and his Western motif office. He watches helplessly as Butch runs and, finally, dies. The father, the masculine hero who seems self-evident in the romantic Western, is missing from this world, and all that remains is the search for this hero.

The Ford/Wayne Westerns already express the need for heroes. For instance, in *Fort Apache* (1948), the viewer suffers along with the regiment through the unbearable treatment of York (Wayne) by Thursday (Henry Fonda), the belligerent superior officer, only to watch Thursday killed, along with most of the soldiers, through his own foolish command. The film's coda adds insult to injury when Thursday, not York, goes down in history as a legendary warrior. York tells newspaper reporters that Thursday was a great hero, and that his example was such as to "make them [the regiment] better men." Ford echoes these sentiments in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich. Bogdanovich asks, "The end of *Fort Apache* anticipates the newspaper editor's line in [*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 'When the legend becomes a fact, print the legend.' Do you agree with that?" Ford answers, "Yes. . . . We've had a lot of people who were supposed to be great heroes, and you know damn well they weren't. But it's good for the country to have heroes to look up to" (86). The Western creates for us the authentic, if unacknowledged, hero, Wayne, whose heroic qualities permeate his star text so fully that he became equated with his Western hero performances. In contrast, the road film offers us only the illusion of and the unfulfilled desire for heroes.

While Wayne's heroic characters all ride horses, Eastwood's would-be heroes all drive cars, as in *Honkytonk Man*, *Bronco Billy*, and *A Perfect World*. Tompkins suggests that, in the Western, horses "fulfill a longing for a different kind of existence. Anti-modern, anti-urban, and anti-technological, they stand for an existence without cars and telephones and electricity." (93). The hero and the horse are one with nature in the Western. In the road film, the hero still needs a means of transportation s/he can control, because the ability to control one's own destiny is at the base of the road film. Americans' love affair with the car is fueled by ideology that upholds our individualism, and the car has become a symbol for our rights to freedom, and our belief in technological progress.¹⁶ In *A Perfect World*, at one point Butch asks Phil, "You ever been in a time machine before? . . . Ahead is the future. Behind us is the past. If life's going too slowly, press the gas. If you want it to slow down, press the brake." Butch's description convinces Phil of the car's fantastic ability to take him anywhere, unlimited by space, time, or imagination. Later, Butch again teaches Phil lessons on the importance of free choice, saying, "There's lots and lots of stuff you can do. . . . Make up a list of everything you ever wanted to do . . . like cotton candy." A moment passes before Phil asks, "Butch, how do you spell rocket ship?" The bird's-eye view of the car in the middle of a corn field, with Butch's paternal laughter echoing through the night, seems surreal, and the car might be a rocket ship blasting off.

In the Western, the horse and frontier symbolize the struggle between man and nature, a nostalgic signifier of the nineteenth century. In the road film, the car and road, contrivances of man, connote technological progress as a sign of the twentieth century. However, they also indicate restrictions because, while the horse can go anywhere, the car needs a road. Therefore, while the horse connotes freedom, the car indicates limitations and the end of the wild West, which has been paved.

In the concluding scene of *A Perfect World*, Phil encourages Butch to run to escape the police, but Butch replies, "No, I need me a time machine with a live radio to take me where I'm going. Walking's for squares." Without his car – his roller coaster, his rocket ship, his time machine, his means to control his own destiny – his future is gone. Not surprisingly, in moments, the police kill Butch. The physical journey – the car moving down the highway – is of a piece with the spiritual journey, so that when Butch's freedom – his American privilege – is taken from him, symbolized by his loss of a car, he simply ceases to live. His last words are, "Bye, Phillip, it's been one hell of a ride," and the road, the journey, and his life end simultaneously.

The road movie's linear structure and the metaphorical road's connotations of individualism, aggression, independence, and control, combine the Western's ideal conceptions of the American and the masculine. Masculine superiority links itself with racial hierarchies, manifest destiny, and closure through heterosexual romance and marriage. This is not to suggest that either the Western or the road movie are simply masculinist, nor is it a reduction of these genres to a monolithic formula. Instead, this analysis points to an underlying residual, American, masculinist ideal which informs both genres despite their seeming differences both in content and historical context. This masculinism causes tension in the postmodern road film. The Western, born from an earlier period and out of a nostalgia for a mythic American past, more clearly privileges male protagonists and masculine settings. Even late, revisionist Westerns, such as *The Searchers* or *Unforgiven*, are informed by the concept of the male cowboy hero and the masculine frontier, if only as structuring absences. In contrast, the road film is less prescribed and more open, fueled by quests for missing values, often simply indicated by a blank marker. The road movie transforms the frontier into a metaphorical road, the horse into a car, and the cowboy into an illusory and elusive metaphor. All of these generic elements are man-made products, perhaps suggesting the genre's recognition that the masculine, American ideal, enunciated by the Western, is a social construction.

Starting with *Easy Rider*, the road film concerns not just journeys and searches, but notably alternative paths and choices. The more fluid genre of the road film has ample room for protagonists of any nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or race. For instance, popular road films have included *Mad Max* (1979), *The*

Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994), and *Boys on the Side* (1995). This small sampling includes films produced in Australia and the US, centering on not only heterosexual, white male protagonists, but also homosexual, transsexual, black, and female protagonists. These films serve to indicate how road films may veer from a male-centered, homophobic, racist, pro-US Western. Therefore, although the road genre is informed by residual conceptions of the American and the masculine, the uneasy and self-reflexive genre of the road film simultaneously calls their hegemonic equation into question.

Femininity on the Road

Another way to understand the gendered construction of road films is to examine how women figure in them. In the traditional Western, women often figure as helpless, parasitic embellishments to a masculine genre. In addition, in Westerns with road narratives such as *Stagecoach*, the hero flees decay, corruption, and cloying domesticity to forge a new, revitalized world. In the Eastwood road vehicles, the recurring figure of the talkative, modern, independent, urban woman is positioned as a foil to the laconic, macho, male actor. For instance, with Lily and Billy, in *Bronco Billy*, and with the novice detective (Laura Dern) and Red, the experienced ranger, in *A Perfect World*, the woman relies on superficial facts whereas the man is imbued with spiritual knowledge. This dichotomy persists throughout the Eastwood films. These films teach the viewer that an illusion, performed by the Eastwood hero and by the movie, stands in for the transcendental truth. In road films, male heroes are still the norm, and masculine privileging prevails. Women continue to be nonexistent or peripheral in buddy-road movies, from the Bing Crosby/Bob Hope *Road to* series to *Midnight Run* (1988). Even in films featuring female stars, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Badlands* (1973), the actresses play integral halves of the heterosexual, anti-heroic couple, yet they remain bound up in the limitations of a male-oriented and -dominated fantasy. Fleeing the law-abiding sphere of family, child-raising, and community to escape onto a road that ends violently, these women are crucial to the films, yet still act as appendages to masculinist fantasies.

The inherent masculinity of the road movie is demonstrated by recent "feminine" road films. While male protagonists use the road to flee femininity, women cannot similarly flee the masculine because of the gendered assumptions of the genre. In the last few years, beginning with Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise*, and including such films as *Leaving Normal* (1992) and *Boys on the Side*, a few road films have featured female main characters and feminist issues, targeting a primarily female audience. *Thelma and Louise* caused a great deal of public debate in the popular and academic press over issues including feminism, patriarchy, male-bashing, and female bonding. In *Thelma and Louise*, women take on roles

coded as masculine in a masculinist genre, and therein lies part of the controversy that still surrounds this film. Not only do these films upset audience expectations concerning content and protagonist, they also disrupt formal genre norms.

At the peak of the 1991 high public discourse on the film, some argued that *Thelma and Louise* was a simple case of role reversal. In this argument, a savvy male director used the buddy movie genre to please the males in the audience by having attractive actresses accentuate their sexiness with their gun-wielding, fast-driving shenanigans, and simultaneously pacify female viewers as the characters shoot male chauvinist characters. However, the *Thelma and Louise* trend cannot be so easily explained. The trend serves to open up the issue of a new type of women's film, a subgenre which targets a female audience. The most substantive generic alternation is not that actresses are substituted for male stars, but that the protagonists take to the road not to escape socially coded notions of the feminine, but rather to flee patriarchy and its effects on their lives. The trend, therefore, works to bring concerns associated with women and feminism into the public discourse. For instance, *Thelma and Louise* helped encourage people to discuss wife-abuse, rape, self-defense by women, violence against women in films and in our society, suicide, and the patriarchal character of our society. *Boys on the Side* raises the issues of lesbianism, AIDS, single motherhood, mixed-race relationships, and mother-daughter relationships, and

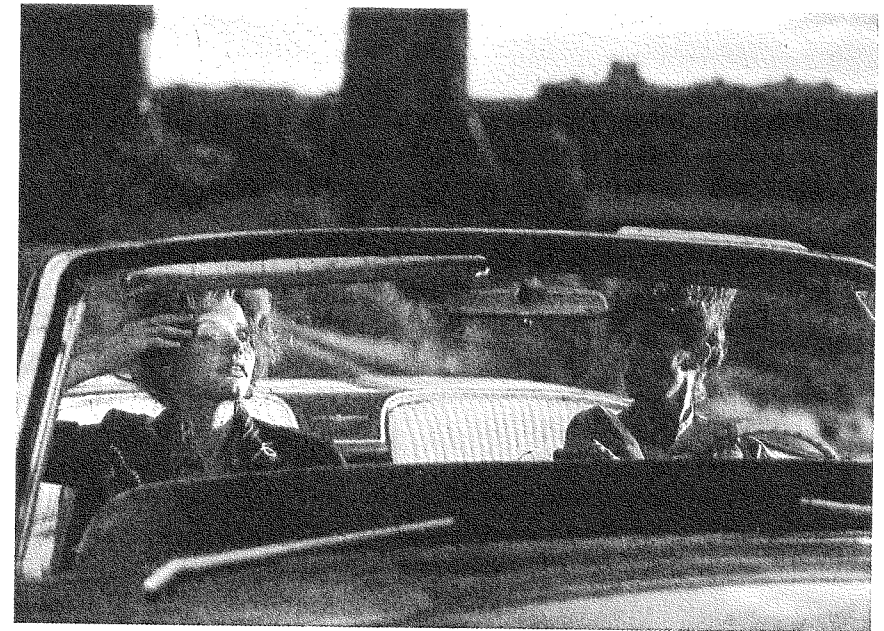


Plate 2.3 Thelma and Louise take femininity on the road.

Leaving Normal focuses on domestic abuse, child abandonment, and female heads of households. That conversations on such topics could be sparked by Hollywood films in the 1990s is noteworthy in itself.

Questions raised by the conjunction of a male-centric genre and female-focused topics include the following: Do women "need" the kind of heterosexual pairing symptomatic of most established Hollywood films, including road movies? If the female characters in these films are escaping from society, why do they cling to society's structures, such as the family and the romantic couple? If they don't need these structures "on the road," do they ever need them? Where do same-sex bonding rituals adopted from men's stories break down with women? For instance, in *Leaving Normal*, the two women begin playing a "one up" game to prove who is more badly behaved, and Darly (Christine Lahti) stops the game playing cold when she suddenly admits to abandoning her child eighteen years before. How do women's friendships work out under the pressure, not only of the road, away from society, but also of their former immersion in patriarchal society, and that society's omnipresence? The women's pasts set events into motion and determine the actual physical course of their journey, as well as its emotional momentum. For instance, the aversion Louise (Susan Sarandon) has to Texas, where she purportedly was raped, determines the women's route. Because Marianne (Meg Tilly) dislikes decision-making, the women in *Leaving Normal* choose their route through tossing coins, picking cigarettes, and waiting for birds to excrete on their map. If men go on the road to escape feminine civilization, can women ever in their turn effectively escape patriarchal society?

Inserting female protagonists into this male-oriented genre neither simply subverts nor subsumes its masculinist tendencies. In traditional Westerns, and in road films that clearly derive from this genre's Western origin, such as the Eastwood films, men often flee the feminine figure which stands for that which is limiting, cloying, and degrading. In the female-protagonist road films, the women more clearly flee real men and the abuses of patriarchy. Men physically beat Thelma (Geena Davis), Holly (Drew Barrymore), and Marianne, prompting them to go on the road. From the truckers making lewd comments to the women in *Thelma and Louise* and *Leaving Normal* to the unsympathetic prosecutor in *Boys on the Side* who cross-examines the women on the stand on every aspect of love between women, these female protagonists go on the road to avoid what is pictured as a male-dominated, anti-woman society. They gain temporary escape into single-sex freedom that can end only in death, compromise, or fantasy.

As with the Westerns and the road films discussed here, the women end up creating new communities on the road. All three of the films offer the escapist image of a euphoric car ride, although it is figured as a still-domestic flight in which these women take a last chance at building alternative families. However, the traditional, nuclear family that they have been raised to expect for themselves

and which society still anticipates for them remains in stark contrast throughout the films. For instance, the wedding bands and married names of the women who have fled their married identities are repeatedly stressed in the films through lingering close-ups. In addition, Robin (Mary-Louise Parker), in *Boys on the Side*, explains that what she really wants is an employed husband, two kids, a boy and a girl, in that order, and a house with white banisters and a convertible den — a banal description of herself integrated into a family structure centering on a woman's traditional wife and mother roles. Robin's flashbacks to black-and-white memories of her childhood, which flesh out this description, serve only to demonstrate to the viewer how impossible, and often unwanted, are these retrograde dreams for the female film characters who — arrested for murder, single and pregnant, HIV-positive, black, and gay — cannot fit themselves into this all-American, exclusive prescription for feminine social roles.

For instance, Robin, Jane (Whoopi Goldberg), and Robin's mother (Anita Gillette) watch *The Way We Were* (1973) and *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982). The viewer is allowed to watch along with them the Hollywood romantic leads in the concluding moments of these love stories, which enforces the fantasy status of their traditional male-female role-playing in contrast to the very different paths being taken by the characters in *Boys on the Side*. Jane compares Robin's gender-identity fantasies to Donna Reed, and Robin's mother even offers Katharine Hepburn, as quoted in the woman's magazine *Redbook*, to Robin as a female model: "Never complain, never explain." *Leaving Normal* similarly contrasts Marianne and Darly, who hitch-hike, steal, and semi-prostitute themselves, with Marianne's sister and her more traditional lifestyle. Marianne also shares her desire, similar to Robin's, for "a home . . . big noisy holidays, coats on the bed, happy faces — a family." The film begins with a prologue of Marianne's childhood; she imagines her family van leaving the highway and taking off for the stars. Later, as Marianne and Darly begin their spontaneous trip together, the camera draws back to show that a rainbow touches down where their road meets the horizon.

Only in their fantasies, only over the rainbow, somewhere beyond the material world, are these women able to achieve their dreams of negotiation with, or escape from, media depictions of women, outdated prescriptions for social roles, changing expectations for gender identities, and their personal goals, hopes, and fears for themselves, born out of a male-dominated society. The escape to the road indicates avoidance of the material conditions which these characters, and presumably audience members, must face every day. These feminine films add up to a criticism of our society and of a genre that maintains dominant, patriarchal ideology, in that the only solution for these women seems to be to escape patriarchy by leaving behind their relationships with men for fantastical journeys that would move "outside" society on the road. However, because they attempt to escape patriarchy within a masculinist genre, these female protagonists are unable

to avoid cultural constructions of femininity. For instance, on the road of their choosing, stars of their show, Thelma and Louise are nonetheless interpellated within the film by sexist labels, including beaver, peach, Kewpie doll, baby, girl, and bitch; the equivalent of such continual undermining of the male hero and his quest would be unthinkable in an Eastwood film. At one point, while already on the road, driving through the desert, Thelma and Louise watch the sun rise, and are framed against a classic Western landscape (Putnam: 300). However, the soundtrack disables this attempted cooption of a masculinist generic moment by the women, as Marianne Faithfull sings of a woman's unaccomplished, and unachievable dreams: "At the age of 37 she realized she'd never ride through Paris in a sports car with the warm wind in her hair."¹⁷ Faithfull's words contradict the promise the "open" road is supposed to hold. In the end, Thelma and Louise refuse the Western trope of the final shoot-out, choosing instead a bittersweet freedom from patriarchy through their suicidal acceleration into the Grand Canyon. In sum, although the feminine road films critique dominant ideology, because of their attempted escape specifically into a masculinist genre, these films tend metaphorically to raise their hands in "feminine" despair.

The masculinist genre of the road film works to limit the solutions for the female protagonists. Attempting to flee men and patriarchy, the female protagonists go on the supposedly open road only to discover that escape from the effects of patriarchy is impossible. These "feminine" road films demonstrate that the road does not provide, or even allow for, a female space for escape or revitalization because of the cultural codes that make up the masculinist road film, which reinscribe women into regressive social prescriptions of femininity. The women bring masculinist concepts of gender identities for women, and their roles in society, with them on the road, even as they recognize the artificiality of these prescriptions. While Eastwood's characters successfully flee the limitations of "feminine" civilization by creating a revitalized, masculine world on the road, these female characters attempt to flee not just men, but patriarchy, which is omnipresent and which in part defines the road and the genre, and so are ultimately unsuccessful.

Conclusions

In the transference from the Western to the road film, the frontier becomes the road, the horse becomes the car, and the hero becomes a desire, perhaps Quixotic, for heroism. The road itself at once incorporates the two most striking aspects of the Western, its American and masculine qualities. In standing in for the frontier, it captures the essence of the American Dream by incorporating all that which the frontier has symbolized for the history of the United States' development, and the masculine brand of heroism that the Western has equated

with the frontier. In addition, the linear structure that the road movie offers — such as directness, aggression, independence, control, all linked to American ideals and privileges of choice — all remain masculinely codified traits. Given the proliferation of new media, such as the World Wide Web, and new media formatting, such as the multiplication of cable channels and the rapid editing of media products, such as MTV or Nickelodeon commercials, the linear structure of the road film may prove to be a genre as nostalgic as the Western. The Western expresses a romantic desire for an ideal America, a fantasy version of the frontier which never existed. The road film exhibits a similar nostalgia for a time when the world seemed, if not marked by black-and-white hats, at least informed by a straightforward motion, like time, going in just one direction. In other words, the road film, with its linear structure, may seem appealing in part owing to the increasing non-linearity of today's world, with all its seemingly new possibilities and diversity, such as expanding forms of communication and travel. The simplicity of getting in a Ford and pushing a pedal to accelerate in one direction down one road may seem reassuringly inviting.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 My analysis of Eastwood's character indicates that he, like Wayne before him, provides a consistently patriotic and masculine figure throughout his films and related publicity. A different perspective comes from Bingham, who asserts that Eastwood's image gets less violent and less masculine with each film, and that in fact "his career . . . has illustrated a twelve-step withdrawal program from masculinism" (243). Also note Knee's article on Eastwood in his directorial debut, a "passing moment of progressive questioning of traditional constructions of male identity prior to the conservative reaction which launched him to greater macho stardom" (101).
- 2 See Dyer's work on star texts for a delineation of this methodology.
- 3 Louis L'Amour offers a literary counterpart to Eastwood's straddling of the Western and the road genre. His last novel (*The Last of the Breed* (1986)), structured arguably as a road narrative, is his only non-Western book which, as Tompkins notes, contains most of the elements of the Western, only removed in space and time (206).
- 4 See Wexman for a discussion of Wayne's star text and the Western, nationalism, and race.
- 5 See, for instance, Mulvey; Neale ("Masculinity"); and Wexman.
- 6 Wayne notoriously directed and starred in 1968's *The Green Berets*, a glorification of