

“I Didn’t Expect to Find Any Fences Around Here”: Cultural Ambiguity and Containment in *Shane*

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The opening shot looks down into the valley. We see snow-capped mountains in the distance and verdant fields before us. A horse and rider come into the scene from off camera, moving into the valley. We see first the horse as it rides away, bringing into view the rider whom we see only from the back. The shot then changes as the credits are imposed on a wide view of the valley stretched before us, with all the glory of the Grand Tetons gracing the screen. We are drawn to the mountains in the back, behind the listing for costumer and cinematographer. We then notice a small figure, dwarfed by the natural world surrounding him, riding his horse across midscreen, an antlike presence engulfed by nature.

The opening of *Shane* (1953) evokes the natural man that is one of the key features of the epic western. In this case, it is done quickly, almost preemptively, to embed the film in the genre. It may be the quintessential naturalist opening, or it may be an unsubtle evocation of the imagery. Whichever, it succeeds in getting us to accept this as a conventional western very quickly, a necessary act because it will turn unconventional almost immediately.

The third shot is of the settler household of Joe Starrett, a log cabin in the valley with the mountains again in the background, and a pond in the

foreground in which a large stag is wading. We are brought into a close-up of Joey Starrett, a young boy with his gun stalking the stag. He is clumsy. He rustles branches and bumps into rocks. The stag turns to the sound, notices the boy, and returns to drinking as if nothing is out of place. A distant rider is visible, framed in the stag’s antlers. The rider approaches quietly, but the stag is alerted to his presence, stops drinking, stares, and then bolts. As *Shane* rides into the foreground, we notice his buckskin shirt and pants; he is clad in nature, enveloping him more deeply in the vision of the natural man evoked in the credits. Yet, if *Shane* is one with nature—clad in it, surrounded by it, almost indistinguishable from it—why does the stag run? Is there something unnatural about *Shane*?

This is only the first of a number of unconventional elements in *Shane*, and it forces us to re-examine the film. Embedded more deeply in the conventions of the genre than the 1950s films of John Ford or Anthony Mann and released a year after *High Noon* (1952), George Stevens’s *Shane* has a simplicity and comprehensibility that belies its more subtle treatment of sociocultural issues.¹ *Shane* has often been seen as a traditional western celebrating an American cultural consensus, and is generally ignored in studies of Cold War films or

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of ideologically significant westerns of the 1950s.² The western genre is evoked in a series of ham-fisted ploys, often derived from B-westerns of the 1930s, while the characters and action in the film undermine the ideology the western genre is supposed to celebrate.

Shane is, in fact, infused with the ambiguities of Cold War American culture. Still adhering to a dominant cultural language that celebrated self-reliant individualism associated with free soil ideology, Americans found themselves ill equipped to understand the new international and postindustrial society that was their reality. Increasingly embedded in bureaucratic organizations and international commitments fostered by the newly expanding national security state, Americans experienced increasing anxiety arising from the ambiguity produced by the disjunction between cultural expression and lived experience. While firmly evoking the images that audiences had come to expect from the western—the romantic, competent individual gunfighter, the struggle of the settler community against the rapacious cattle baron, the panoramic, open American frontier—*Shane* creates ambiguity around those images as it resonates with the growing awareness of the social transformations that people were undergoing in the 1950s: changing gender roles, the rise of suburban planned communities, and the growth of a bureaucratized economy.³ Instead of endorsing only hardworking settlers building a prosperous economy, the film offers two visions of economic activity and a far-from-clear message about the value of commerce. Rather than portraying men as powerful, competent, and independent, the film offers competing images of masculinity. Rather than good unambiguously triumphing over evil, individuals of various moral shades are forced to cancel each other out for the preservation of the planned community. Far from celebrating the American individual, *Shane* kills him. There is more containment than frontier, more of Leavitt than the Virginian in this film.

As John Cawelti notes in *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, westerns have always been possessed of a cultural ambiguity, celebrating both the individual cowboy and outlaw, and the community

of settlers. *Shane* raises this ambiguity to new levels. George Stevens saw the western in terms of mythic traditions of heraldic bravery and chivalry, yet offered a more starkly realistic portrayal of western life than had previously been achieved (Richie 60–64; Petri 166–72). The disjunction of myth and reality in the film dislodges members of the audience, forcing them to see *Shane* as a mythic and chivalrous figure through the eyes of young Joey Starrett. This contrasts with the realism of the muddy streets, the meager constructions in the town, and the drab work clothes of the settlers. While Stevens did not see himself playing with the genre in an ideological sense, the ambiguities of myth and reality would serve to direct his audience's attention to other, subtler ambiguities that crept into the film, of which Stevens was perhaps unaware.⁴ The great success of the film both commercially and critically suggests that audiences and critics found in it much with which they could identify. The conscious construction of the film is of less interest than the message conveyed within this very traditional structure. It is here that we will find that *Shane* renders ambiguous more than the relation of myth and reality in the Old West.

Several readings of the film have suggested that *Shane* be seen as more than a traditional western film. In *Sixguns and Society*, Will Wright offers *Shane* as a paradigm of the western, whose function is to resolve the dissonance created by the transition from entrepreneurial to corporate capitalism and to legitimate the latter. What Wright sees as a clearly defined ideological legitimization of the corporate community, however, others have found to be more problematic.⁵ Nonetheless, Wright's approach highlights the ideological functions of the western, but only within narrow parameters.

In *The Crowded Prairie*, Michael Coyne notes that *Shane* follows a traditional formula of the gunfighter riding into town, saving the town, then riding out, but emphasizes the discord within the family that is present in the unspoken attraction between *Shane* and the sodbuster mother, Marian Starrett. He argues that the individual creates a dysfunction within the nuclear family and is thus

portrayed as a threat to the community. In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin focuses not on the dysfunction to the family but on the different economic roles of Starrett, Ryker, and Shane. He sees the conflict between Starrett and Ryker as that of a progressive democratic community versus a rapacious cattle baron. Shane is a professional who comes to the aid of Starrett to defend this community. Both Coyne and Slotkin see the film as offering a clear moral vision, one in which the progressive democratic community is validated over the threat from the "charismatic authoritarian" capitalist (Coyne 76; Slotkin 399). This seems an odd conclusion to draw given the ambiguous images of family and professionalism that these authors identify, and suggests a need to examine how deeply these cultural ambiguities infuse the film. A broader reading reveals that rather than providing a clear moral vision for 1950s America, the film problematizes a series of cultural images, including commerce, masculinity, and role of the individual in society. A central image of the film that weaves through each of these areas is that of fences.

Fences dominate *Shane*. The homes of the sodbusters are surrounded by fences. The community is symbolically fenced in by the Grand Tetons, which surround the valley on all sides. The battle between the homesteaders and the Ryker brothers revolves around the fencing of the range. Shane rides into the Starrett claim without opening a fence, but he must open one to leave.

The function of fences, both to keep things in and to keep things out, is a central question of the film. While the fences represent, on the one hand, the closing of the frontier and the spread of civilization, they also contain and exclude those elements of human nature that had settled the frontier in the first place—the pioneering spirit, the entrepreneurial individual, and the dark side of that individual, his violent and anomic pathology. The fences, built by the settlers, represent the spread of a new kind of production based on the application of scientific principles, knowledge, and group effort rather than individual initiative and entrepreneurial activity. They separate the indoors from the outdoors, and the placement of

men within and without those fences signals a changing vision of masculinity.

In retrospect, one can see *Shane* as a Cold War allegory. A bipolar conflict between progressive democratic capitalists and a land-hungry, expansionist totalitarian power is waged across the wooden curtain of the rail fences. In this allegory, Shane represents a weapon of mass destruction; when he joins the settlers, Ryker is forced to get a weapon of his own, gunfighter Jack Wilson. The final outcome of the ensuing arms race is massive retaliation against the totalitarian. While this allegory was not likely intended by George Stevens,⁶ and is far too limiting an avenue to explore in such a complex film, it is interesting to see that Stevens sets his tale in a context that can evoke this allegorical imagery. Here, the external situation of the Cold War and the social transformations experienced by Americans in their daily lives are linked, drawing connections between the emergent postindustrial society and containment.

The major lines of conflict are drawn in the first meeting between Shane, Joe Starrett, and Rufus Ryker. Shane is traveling "nowhere in particular, just some place I've never been" when he cuts across the Starrett claim. Cautiously welcomed by Starrett, Shane is asked to leave at gunpoint when Starrett mistakenly assumes that he is one of Ryker's men who appear in the distance. Ryker tells Starrett that he has obtained a contract from the government to supply beef to the reservation and wants the homesteaders off the range. Starrett, still holding the gun, refuses. As tensions rise, Shane, who had appeared to leave, emerges behind Starrett, offering his support. After Ryker and his men depart, Starrett apologizes and invites Shane to supper.

At this point, the conflict seems obvious. The cattle baron versus the settler was a common theme of westerns of the 1930s. Within this obvious plot, however, already ambiguities are emerging. Ryker, for instance, while menacing and powerful, is not evil. He is less the authoritarian cattle baron than was John Wayne in *Red River* (1948). Instead, he is portrayed as a desperate man who sees all that he has worked for being taken away. While Starrett sees him as

rapacious ("He thinks the whole world belongs to him"), Ryker sees himself as defending what he has built. The settlers have "fenced off my range; fenced me off from my water," and thus threatened his economic existence. He has resorted to violence, but at a low level; he has kept far short of killing anyone. He protests throughout the film that he is a reasonable man who does not want any trouble. Ryker and Starrett meet twice more in the film. The second is a barroom fight in which Shane and Starrett defeat Ryker's men, after which Ryker hires Jack Wilson, the gunfighter out of Cheyenne, and claims, "the next time we tangle the air will be filled with gun smoke." This is not the case, as the final meeting between the two takes place after the Independence Day celebration. With his hired gun in tow, Ryker offers to take Starrett on as a partner, paying him for his claim. He pleads with Starrett, even with Starrett's son to take his offer, arguing, "I'm a reasonable man." The failure to offer Ryker as truly evil is one of the great sources of ambiguity in the film.

Over supper, Starrett explains his approach to farming to Shane, offering a contrast between two competing modes of production. Ryker runs his cattle on the free range as had been done for decades. He can no longer do this because the homesteaders have fenced off the range. The settlers offer a different form of production. By raising cattle within fences on small farms and providing a regularized feeding schedule, the settlers can raise better beef than Ryker. While no settler can raise as much beef as the rancher, together they can provide healthier steer that provide more meat. If Ryker's mode of production is to survive, the settlers must go. If the settlers' mode of production is to survive, Ryker will cease to exist as an economic force. The two modes are mutually exclusive.

The film presents both claims to the land and, thus, both modes of production as valid. Ryker's claim is legitimated by the federal government, which has given him a contract to supply beef to the reservation. He refers to the settlers as squatters, to which Starrett replies, "you mean homesteaders, don't you?" This acknowledges that the government has also recognized their claim to the

land through the Homestead Act. This creates an ambiguous vision of government. What kind of policy is the government following if it is endorsing competing claims to the land, and thus competing modes of production? This is also seen in the role that the government plays in providing policing authority in the valley. The settlers frequently refer to the lack of law. Starrett says that a penitentiary is only now being built; Ernie Wright, one of the settlers, notes that a marshal is three days' ride away. This suggests that the government engages in contradictory actions (legitimizing both Ryker's and the settlers' mode of production) but is unwilling to enforce one set of rules over another.

Starrett further legitimates his claim to the land through his better use of it. Ryker counters with a claim of first occupancy. He settled there, tamed the land, and brought in the cattle herds. While Starrett challenges this claim, noting that there were scouts and trappers before Ryker, they did not settle. "They weren't ranchers," Ryker protests. Because both claims are legally legitimate, they cancel one another. The right of first occupancy is countered by a claim to better scientific management of cattle herds. The only argument that remains is the motive for the land. This is offered by Starrett, who claims that "Ryker only wants to raise beef; we want to raise up families." This is echoed by Ryker, who early on declares to Starrett, "I mean business." Ryker does mean business: economic action for its own sake. Because the settlers seek economic gain not for itself but to build and sustain a community, they have one more argument in their favor. While this is offered as the progressive answer in the film, it is not offered as such unconditionally. Ryker's claims to the land are never refuted, merely countered. Ryker is presented as neither evil nor illegitimate, and remains a viable alternative to the settler society.

The new mode of production represented by the settlers does not merely affect commercial relations; it also gives rise to new kinds of communities. As William Whyte argues in 1956, the rising corporate economy offers reward not to the entrepreneurial individual but to the organization

man. Rather than emphasizing individual initiative, competence, and achievement, the organizational man stresses the application of scientific knowledge, group effort, and togetherness. Individual economic activity for its own sake, the film seems to suggest, is no longer valid. The entrepreneur who tamed the land through force and will, through hard work and diligence, is now to be replaced by a community builder who will repress his own individual drives for those of the community.

The settlement that Joe Starrett is building is similar to the planned suburban communities that were sprouting up in the 1950s. Starrett's identity is wrapped up in the community. He expends much energy to keep all on their claims, and in the end, he is willing to sacrifice himself for the community. At the Independence Day celebration—ironically, also Starrett and Marian's anniversary—Starrett accepts the characterization of the settler Shipstead that he has given up his independence in marrying Marian, adding, "But no man ever gave it up more gladly." He has also given it up to the community; there is no independent individual here, only the voice of the group. His goal is to build a real town, with churches and a school. But this is not, as yet, a real town. The real town, such as it is, is located some miles distant, centered on Grafton's Mercantile and Saloon. Starrett's activity as community builder is symbolized by the only economic activity we see him and Shane undertake—building fences—which symbolizes the new bounded community. The fences are a threat to Ryker, and one of the major acts of harassment he uses is to tear down those built by the settlers. The fences, which have separated him from the resources he needs to survive, represent the lines of conflict between individual entrepreneurship and bureaucratic production. The community of settlers, suburban, bureaucratized producers, and the organizational men is contained within the fences, while the individual entrepreneur is fenced out. Shane, who like Ryker, does not expect to find any fences on the open range, has voluntarily joined the corporate community and will himself become a builder of fences with Joe Starrett. Sig-

nificantly, Starrett's apology to Shane and invitation to supper are shot with a fence in the foreground, partially obscuring Shane from view. When Shane agrees to stay and shakes Starrett's hand, the angle is reversed, placing Shane in the foreground and the fence in the background, signifying that Shane has now moved inside the fence with Starrett.

This transformation in economic production and the rise of the organizational man also became part of the "crisis of masculinity" that was perceived in 1950s American society (Cuordileone 523). Embedded in a community rather than independent, locked indoors in an office rather than outside, using science and a group ethos rather than physical might and individual principle, the organizational man was often perceived as too effeminate to face the challenges posed by the Cold War. This tension between more traditional visions of masculinity—individuality, power, and patriarchy—and the organizational man permeate *Shane*. The more traditional notions of masculinity are the characteristics we see in Rufus Ryker. A powerful man leading an exclusively male group, Ryker represents an archetype of masculinity common to many westerns. He is aloof from the indoors, from the new enclosed community that the sodbusters are building, and cannot exist within their fences. While he is concerned solely with money and power, they are concerned with building families and community. The masculine power of Ryker cannot be contained within the fences, and he thus presents a threat to the community they are building. Similarly, the fences, which separate him from the economic resources he needs to survive, also separate him from the openness and freedom of the frontier that is necessary for the expression of his masculine independence; Ryker's masculinity is equally threatened by the sodbusters.⁷

Grafton's Mercantile and Saloon becomes a locus for much of the imagery concerning masculinity. The store and saloon are separated by a swinging gate similar to a fence. The external entrance to the store is a full door, while the saloon has only a gate, rendering it a more open space. Ryker's men occupy the saloon while the settlers

occupy the store.⁸ Confrontations with Ryker's men during Shane's two trips to town highlight the gender distinction. The first trip is to retrieve fence wire for Starrett and to buy some "sure enough work clothes." While Shane is paying for his outfit and complaining about price inflation ("it's been a long time since I've had store boughten clothes"), the settler, Lewis, is in the store. The bartender sneaks a bottle of whiskey to Lewis so that his wife will not know. Within the store (and the settler community), women have an authority unknown in the exclusively male domain of the saloon that requires men to hide their actions. When Shane enters the saloon to buy Joey a soda pop, Chris Calloway, one of Ryker's men, taunts him, throws whiskey on him, and says, "Now you smell like a man." When Shane returns in the second trip to town with the settlers, looking for a fight, Calloway takes the bait and tells him, "Go back into the store with the women folk." The bar is a place for men: "You think you can come in here and drink with men, sodbuster?" Calloway asks Shane.⁹

The tension between these competing visions of masculinity is most stark in Joe Starrett. He is a physically powerful man, more so even than Shane, as we see during their fistfight. Starrett continually refers to the violence that underlies his confrontation with Ryker, and sees a major fight as inevitable. He tells Joey, "the only way they'll get me off my spread is in a pine box." He is the first to brandish a gun in the confrontation with the Rykers and speaks frequently about force. Yet Starrett's power is suppressed, contained. He has subordinated his masculine power for the sake of the community he is building. Rather than meet the Ryker brothers in straight combat, he holds meetings and organizes the men into a civic committee to discuss what they will do. Rather than welcome confrontation, Starrett hides within the community, finding strength in their togetherness.

The containment of Starrett's masculine power is symbolized by his physical containment. He is rarely seen without some form of wall bounding him. He is either inside the house or the store, within a set of fences. Even at the funeral of Tor-

rey, the cemetery is enclosed by buckboards and the settlers have brought chairs, domesticating this open space. Starrett rarely rides a horse, but is generally on a buckboard. He is on a horse when he returns to the farm after hearing Shane's gun as Shane teaches Joey how to shoot, but here Starrett is still within the bounds of the fence. He seeks to ride a horse into town to confront Ryker and kill him, a meeting that will never occur as Shane fights with him to take his place.

Shane also displays the necessity of the suppression of masculinity within the community. At both the beginning and end of the film, Shane is a confident, competent individual. During his sodbuster sojourn, however, as he trades in his buckskins for work clothes, he loses that confidence and now needs validation from the community. He seeks confrontation with Calloway during his second trip to town because the settlers believe he is a coward. When he has defeated Calloway and is setting to fight the rest of Ryker's men, Joey tries to get him to leave, pleading, "There's too many of them." Shane asks him, "You wouldn't want me to run away now, would you?" Instead of the competent, self-directed man of the American tradition, he has become the weakened, other-directed man of Riesman's *Lonely Crowd*. It is only at the end of the film, when he has regained his autonomous state, garbed in his buckskins and leaving town, that he rejects the need for validation. He hits Starrett with a gun, which Joey perceives as unchivalrous, and tells Marian that he is going to the battle in Starrett's stead to save the community rather than for her. He could have used the incident to win her affections further from Starrett, but instead offers it as a moral crusade, independent of what she and Joey believe.

The second trip to town is the turning point in the film, which revolves around these visions of masculinity. When Shane and Calloway fight a second time, the settler men and women are huddled in the store or in its doorway, fearful that this expression of male power might spill over to them. "This is bad, this is bad," mutters Lewis. The settlers cower together indoors while the men fight in the relative outdoors of the saloon. It is only when Joey emerges from the bar, announcing

that "they're trying to kill Shane," that Starrett grabs an axe handle, driving the wooden pole before him to open the gate, and penetrates the male domain of the bar. Entering the battle, he raises the stick erect over his head and begins to fight. In a moment of male arousal, he joyfully expresses his masculine power that has been suppressed to build the community, and engages in a barroom brawl.

Coyne's discussion of the dysfunction within the Starrett family centers on Marian's attraction to Shane. That attraction is largely based on a romantic vision of masculine independence. Here the ambiguity is striking. While Starrett is more powerful than Shane, he is also less independent. Rather than settling his own score with Ryker, he resorts to committee meetings and group solidarity. Shane, however, will fight, and becomes a catalyst for a transformation in Starrett. Shane's willingness to fight brings out Starrett's own bellicosity. While the other men huddle in the store during the barroom brawl, Starrett joins in with glee. After the battle, both Joey and Marian, who had watched the fight with excitement, laud the men for their brutality; as Marian notes, they were "ugly and wonderful." If Shane's presence in the valley can make Starrett fight, the existence of a masculine individual can undermine the organizational control necessary to maintain the community. Shane's final departure from the valley will thus signal not merely the victory of the new mode of production but also the expulsion of the violence inherent in masculine independence. As he tells Joey, "Tell your mother there are no more guns in the valley." The independent male is gone, replaced by the organizational man—applying scientific methods to his work, building the community and the family, but never demonstrating the brutal and wonderful elements that paved the way for the bureaucratized suburban community of today.

Behind images of masculinity and commerce lies the individual. While Starrett is bound up in the community, Ryker and Shane are independent individuals. Ryker is the entrepreneurial individual, the pioneering spirit of American culture. He settled the land and fought the Indians, taking a

Cheyenne arrow in his shoulder. He made the valley safe for the Starretts and the other homesteaders. There is righteousness to him, a nobility that one accords a founding father. His opposition to the homesteaders is understandable, his actions equally understandable if not condoned. He is driven to deadly force only after Shane has changed the balance of power in the valley.

The individualism represented by Shane is of a different sort. Shane is the natural man, riding out of the mountains clad in buckskins. He is the competent man, good in a fight with fist or gun, good with a horse, easily capable of adapting to the hard work of a farm if he chooses. He is a loner by choice, although he wonders if that is the best choice. The free-ranging individual spirit of Shane that draws the affection of Joey and Marian, however, has a dark side. There is a vanity to Shane that is apparent in neither Starrett nor Ryker. While his buckskins may seem a naturalistic symbol, they are cut with fringes, an adornment that contradicts the innocence they might otherwise convey. More significantly, Shane embodies violence and menace. Animals fear Shane. The stag runs from him in the opening sequence, the cattle and horses are often disturbed by his presence. When he first rides onto the Starrett claim, he is startled by Joey cocking his unloaded rifle and a calf with a cowbell. In both instances, he reaches for his gun, offering evidence of his violent nature. While we see Shane through the eyes of young Joey as bathed in the glow of a hero, we also hear the canonlike explosions of his gunshots and see the potential violence of his actions.

While Joey continually compares his father with Shane, forcing the audience to compare them as masculine role models, it is Ryker to whom Shane bears the most resemblance. Like Ryker, Shane expects to find no fences on the open range. Ryker understands Shane better than Starrett does, demonstrating their similarity as individuals. Ryker recognizes long before Starrett that Shane must be attracted to Marian. After Shane has bested Calloway, Ryker offers him a job, unable to understand why a man like Shane would work for Starrett. "You don't belong on the end of

a shovel," he tells him. After Shane refuses the job at double his wages, Ryker leeringly suggests, "Pretty wife Starrett's got." Shane's violent outburst of, "Why you dirty, slinkin' old man, I oughta . . ." is belied by the attraction that has already been made apparent. Starrett does not see Shane as clearly as Ryker, early assumes him to be one of Ryker's men, and only slowly comes to realize the attraction between Shane and Marian. The settlers, similarly, are slow to recognize Shane for what he is. Misinterpreting his reluctance to fight Calloway, Lewis and Torrey assume him to be a coward. It is only when he demonstrates his specialized knowledge of gunfighting at the Independence Day celebration that they start to see the truth. "You seem to know an awful lot about this business," one of them says.

Ryker's men (except Calloway) also see the menace of Shane. When Shane returns to the bar looking for a fight, the man playing cards with Calloway says, "Deal me out." When Calloway protests, he replies, "Just say I'm superstitious." Calloway's failure to recognize Shane is significant; it is Calloway who becomes disgusted with the new level of violence that Ryker employs, quits, and informs Shane of the ambush awaiting Joe Starrett in town. As the one of Ryker's men most sympathetic to the settlers, he is least likely to identify Shane for what he is.

In many ways, Shane's anomie is the central element of his character. He has no past, no destination; even his name is incomplete. He is easily identified as an alien other walking among them for a time. Initially his clothes set him apart, but his donning of the sodbuster costume does not mask his difference for long. He is always on the fringes of the community at meetings of the men, during trips to Grafton's store, at community rituals such as funerals or the Fourth of July celebration. The only time he is amid the community as an equal is when dancing with Marian at the Independence Day celebration. Yet this is made possible only by the alienation of Joe Starrett. After the Starrett's anniversary celebration, Starrett goes off with the men to drink. When Marian, along with the other women, comes to break up the group to dance, Starrett encloses himself from

the rest with the fence gate, saying, "They've fenced me out." From across the gate he watches, increasingly disturbed as Shane dances lithely with his wife. This inclusion will be fleeting, however, as Torrey arrives with the news that Ryker has a new man whom Shane identifies as the gunfighter Jack Wilson. Shane's professionalism as a gunfighter again sets him apart. Shane may be inside the fence, but he is still a dark force, alien to the community and ultimately threatening to it.

Shane's crossing of the fences of the Tetons and the Starrett ranch is the force that propels the settlers and the rancher toward a violent confrontation. Prior to Shane's arrival, Ryker has maintained his willingness to be fair, as he does throughout the film. He eschews gunfighting and has resorted to low-intensity intimidation: selective killing of livestock, tearing down fences, harassing the farmers when they come to town. Only after Starrett hires Shane, who demonstrates in the barroom fight his willingness to use violence and the potential to unleash the power in Starrett, does Ryker go to the extreme measure of hiring Jack Wilson, the gunfighter out of Cheyenne. It is Shane's entry into the valley that leads to Stonewall Torrey's death, the burning of Lewis's homestead, and ultimately the fight that takes the lives of Wilson and both Ryker brothers. It is Shane who upsets the balance in the Starrett family, drawing away from Starrett the admiration and love of both Joey and Marian.

When Shane comes to town in place of Starrett to face Ryker and Wilson, we have reached the final confrontation of the film, not between the community and the individual, but between two sides of the individual: the entrepreneurial spirit and the menace of anomic violence. The dialogue leading up to the gunfight makes clear the identity of Shane and Ryker and their lack of place within the fences of the new community. "You've lived too long. Your kind of days are over, old man," Shane tells Ryker, who asks, "My days? What about you, gunfighter?" "The difference is, I know it." In the battle, Shane kills Wilson and both Ryker brothers, while being wounded himself. He tells Joey to go back to the farm, to grow

up to be strong and true, and then rides off through a ragged cemetery¹⁰ and into the hills, slumping in the saddle, possibly mortally wounded. Whether dead or merely gone, Shane has been expelled, forced outside the fence, and has taken Ryker with him. From the suburb of the organization man, all aspects of individualism are gone. In the memorable ending, Joey calls after him, "Mother wants you. I know she does." Joey also calls, "Pa has things for you to do." In fact, Starrett has no more jobs for Shane; he needed the death of Ryker, and once Shane fulfills that function, there is no other job for him to do. He must be expelled; in killing Ryker, Shane has killed himself within the community. He notes this when he tells Joey, "There's no going back from a killing." He is too dangerous, too threatening to the community, and he cannot be permitted to stay.

The elegiac ending in which we mourn the passing of Shane is also a mourning for the passing of the pioneer, the entrepreneur, and the individual. Joe Starrett is a good man, but he is a company man, an organizational man. He follows the best in scientific advice on the raising of cattle. He suppresses his own urge for independence and expression of his strength. He seeks to build and maintain his suburban community, free of violence and free of menace. But it is a bureaucratized community, with meetings and cooperation. There is no room in the valley for individuals, only for those who accept the company line, who are willing to be contained by the fences that spring up. But our gaze, at the film's end, like Joey's, looks across the fences that contain us onto the departing figure of Shane. The romance of the American individual on the frontier lives, although we have killed that individual for the sake of suburban comfort and the promises of the Sears catalog. While we know that Joey will grow up straight and true, like his father, and although we are comforted by that validation of our own increasingly suburban and bureaucratized lives, we also miss that which we have expelled, the romance and hope of the extraordinary. We are left, in fact, straddling the fence, wondering if the cost was worthwhile.

Notes

I would like to thank Professor Nelson Hathcock, Professor John Gutowski, students from my Politics and Film class of 2002, and an anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of American Culture* for insights that have helped this to be a better article. Its continued flaws, however, are my fault.

1. Joseph Flora's article "*Shane* (Novel and Film) at Century's End" is an insightful discussion of the relevance of *Shane* today and suggests that novel and film be taken together as an exemplar of the traditional western. He notes some of the ways in which the film diverges from the novel, but stresses the high level of concordance between film and book. While this concordance between the film and novel is high, the film alters the tale in three ways that are of particular significance in examining the cultural significance of the film for its period. The first is the dress of the title character. In the book, Shane is an urbanite, dressed in fancy clothes and clearly well versed in contemporary fashions. In the film, he is dressed in buckskins and rides out of the mountains. This gives him a primordial identity; he is a natural individual who is now facing the organizational society. Further enhancing the cultural conflict between the settlers and Shane is the portrayal in the film of Joe Starrett as a settler in the valley. In the book, he is a former employee of Ryker; as such, his aspiration to own his own farm would be straight out of free soil ideology. Without his previous connection to Ryker, the film embeds him ever deeper in the settler community and breaks a connection between him and the individualism of Ryker and Shane. Finally, changing the name of the boy from Bob in the novel to Joey in the film creates a sense of time and generational change, giving greater cultural meaning to the actions of those whom young Joey admires. By identifying Starrett with Joey, we see the actions of the film in a broader context of cultural time, and thus they take on greater cultural significance. While still a "pure western" in the genre sense, these alterations enhance the role of actions in the film as cultural commentary, and thus render it even more interesting as a cultural artifact.

2. The film is generally held by critics as an exemplar of traditionalism from a variety of perspectives. Jane Tompkins's *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* sees *Shane* as participating in the genre's tradition of gender stereotyping. In *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film*, John Lenihan characterizes it as exemplifying the "classic optimism" (7) of the genre. In his structuralist study of westerns, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*, Will Wright uses *Shane* as the paradigm of his "classic" western plot. The film has been seen as exalting the cowboy as heroic individual in classical, heraldic, and religious forms (see, for instance, Pauline Kael, *Review of Shane*; Michael Marsden, "Savior in the Saddle: the Sagebrush Testament"; and Harry Schein, "The Olympian Cowboy"). In *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*, Peter Biskind sees *Shane* as a traditional American individual, necessary to save the settler community from the villainy of the open-range ranchers, the Ryker brothers. In his seminal study of the ideology of Hollywood cinema, *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Robert Ray offers *Shane* as a paradigm of the masking of choices both thematically and formally, placing it in a category that would confirm a notion of consensus in American culture.

3. On social transformations of the 1950s and cultural anxiety produced by the Cold War, see, among others, K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis of American Masculinity, 1949-1960"; Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*; Ann Markuson, "Cold War Workers, Cold War Communities"; Elaine May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women and the Bomb"; Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives,*

Postmodernism and the Atomic Age; and Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*. This anxiety is apparent in several major works of cultural criticism during the period. From Arthur Schlesinger's emasculating vision of post-WWII politics in *The Vital Center: Our Purposes and Perils on the Tightrope of American Liberalism*; to David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, a lament that the self-directed man was being replaced by the other-directed man; to William Whyte's conformist in *The Organizational Man*, critics saw the vitality of the American individual waning before the onslaught of bureaucratic society at home, and the threat of controlling communism abroad.

4. The ambiguities were clear to contemporary reviewers of the film. Bosley Crowther, in *Review of Shane*, notes the contrast of the real and the mythic in the film, suggesting that *Shane's* ambiguities were apparent to audiences at the time.

5. Analyzing the economic arguments of Ryker and Starrett, and the role of commerce in the sodbuster community of *Shane*, Edward Countryman and Evonne von Heussen-Countryman conclude that "... the film remains fundamentally uncertain about its [commerce] significance" (41).

6. While not intending a Cold War allegory, Stevens did intend to exaggerate the violence of the western, hence the explosive sound of the gunshots. Given his desire to reveal a more realistic level of violence and destruction, it seems plausible that this allegorical reading might have entered the consciousness of many in the audience.

7. I do not want to push this analogy too far. Starrett is an individual producer in true free soil fashion. Still, he is inextricably nested within the community and subordinates his individual desire to that community. Hence, while not the white-collar office worker of Whyte's vision, in the context of the film, he is much closer to that representation than the unrestrained individualism of *Shane* or Ryker.

8. This is a key point in Tompkins's interpretation of the film, which notes that Ryker apparently lives in the hotel over the saloon. See Joseph Flora, "*Shane* (Novel and Film) at Century's End," for a response to Tompkins's interpretation.

9. Calloway is the only member of Ryker's gang who enters the store, once to find the bartender and once when *Shane* throws him through the gate. The only settlers who enter the bar are *Shane* and Stonewall Torrey, described as a hothead and fated to die in the muddy street outside of Grafton's, the victim of Ryker's hired gun. Starrett enters once, but only to help *Shane* in the fight with Ryker's men.

10. This is not the same cemetery in which the settlers buried Torrey; that cemetery is located directly across from Grafton's. This one is less well kempt and is located in the hills behind Grafton's. Ryker mentions that he is the only surviving member of his generation of wilderness tamers, suggesting that this is their burial site. If so, *Shane's* ride through the graveyard in the penultimate shot of the film further suggests his identity with Ryker and his inability to dwell within the fences of the settlers.

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