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The Collision Of Romanticism And Modernism In Post-World War II American Cinema: A Theoretical Defense Of Intellectual History In The Undergraduate Classroom

Daniel Hunter Ferris

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THE COLLISION OF ROMANTICISM AND MODERNISM IN
POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICAN CINEMA: A THEORETICAL DEFENSE OF
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOM

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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Doctor of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

2013

This dissertation, submitted by Daniel H. Ferris in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Signature Daniel Hunter Ferris

Date 30 April 2013

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To Elizabeth, Dad and Hitch

ABSTRACT

The post-World War II era in the United States, which ran from 1945 to 1970, has long been divided into two distinct periods; the late 1940s and 1950s and the 1960s. Out of this separation has come a view of the late 1940s and 1950s as a time dominated by a conservative conformist culture that did little to rival pre-war norms. On the other hand, the 1960s have come to be seen as a decade that witnessed true social revolution and thus should be considered responsible for shaping the social and cultural landscape of late twentieth-century America. While these views represented the dominant scholarly position on post-war era culture, a recent shift has brought this view into serious question. Through the work of historians such as Alan Petigny, the post-war era is no longer divided into two separate periods, but rather considered as a single swath of time in which the forces of Modernism began to influence society and affect change.

In a period that boasted numerous well-known philosophers and public intellectuals, Ayn Rand became one of the most widely-read and controversial thinkers of the post-war era. Despite being most well-known for her philosophical novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand wrote numerous works of non-fiction including the 1971 publication, *The Romantic Manifesto*. In this collection of essays, which Rand wrote throughout the 1960s, she identified, like Petigny decades later, the aggressive march of Modernism in post-war America, which, in her estimation, had already ravaged Europe decades earlier, but was temporarily halted from fully taking over the United States because of the Second World War. In addition to identifying the war waged by

Modernism against the established tradition of Romanticism in American culture, Rand also discussed the primary elements of literature, which could also be applied to film, and explained how one could determine whether or not a work of art represented Modernism or Romanticism.

This study has two main objectives. In terms of historical inquiry, the study will apply the conclusions of Rand and Petigny as to the influence of Modernism across the entire scope of the post-war period to American cinema in order to determine whether or not the art produced by this popular and influential medium reflected an early presence of Modernism or if, in keeping with the traditional view of the period, Modernism was in fact a product of the 1960s. In order to put the ideas of Rand and Petigny to the test, a series of films from a range of genres that were made across the entire post-war period will be analyzed using Rand's method in order to determine whether or not they represent modernist ideas and influence. However, because this study will be used to create a History 399 course, elements of pedagogy will also be considered. Thus, prior to the film analysis, the importance of intellectual history will be stressed specifically in terms of its applicability to sources, such as films, that were previously excluded from serious consideration in the field. After concluding the film analysis, the study will then examine the literature on using film in the undergraduate classroom in order to demonstrate its value as the centerpiece of an undergraduate course. Finally, this study will conclude with a description of the specific course construction including readings, assignments, grading and assessment.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every intellectual product must be judged from the point of view of the age and the people in which it was produced.
—Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 1873

Culture doesn't save anything or anyone, it doesn't justify. But it's a product of man: he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it; that critical mirror alone offers him his image.
—Jean Paul Sartre, *The Words*, 1964

In the over five decades that have passed since the end of the 1950s, the prevailing stereotype associated with American culture of that era is one of a shallow, bland, conformist domestic landscape driven greatly by fear and hysteria associated with international events pertaining to the Cold War. When compared alongside the radical cultural trends of the 1960s—the anti-Vietnam War movement, free love, the proliferation of drug use and the open rejection of traditional forms of authority—the years of the late 1940s and 1950s, typified by bobby soxers, poodle skirts and Pat Boone, hardly seem comparable in terms of their revolutionary nature. In the revolutionary milieu of the 1960s, even the image of Elvis Presley, who many segments of American society considered taboo during the 1950s, came to be viewed as a cultural cliché during the Age of Aquarius. Just as quickly as the post-war era (1945-1970) came to a close, the historical scholarship on the period overwhelmingly promoted the stereotype of a conformist 1950s followed by a revolutionary 1960s.

Historian James T. Patterson's volume on the post-war era, *Grand Expectations*, written as part of the Oxford History of the United States, marked the pinnacle of the historical tendency to view the 1950s and 1960s as separate and distinct periods in American history. In this volume, Patterson first set out to describe the anti-establishment aspects of 1950s America, which included Rock 'n' Roll, the rise of James Dean as the first anti-hero, the proliferation of sexually explicit culture as epitomized by Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and the Beat movement, the writings of which were littered with non-conformist messages and the promotion of unbridled sexuality. When it came time for Patterson to cast judgment on these issues in early post-war culture, he rejected the idea that these anti-establishment elements influenced American society in any meaningful way.

Following his critique of anti-establishment behavior during the 1950s, Patterson extended his conclusions to other areas of early post-war American culture such as the new progressive methods of child rearing and parenting advocated by Dr. Benjamin Spock and new religious teachings linked to modern psychology promoted by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. In terms of Spock, Patterson dismissed his new vision of child rearing and parenting as simply a continuation of older modes of thinking on the subject, while he found more power in the established mainline religious denominations, especially fundamentalist ones, than the new message of faith coupled with *The Power of Positive Thinking* preached by Norman Vincent Peale. Conclusions such as these led Patterson to confirm, and thus bolster, the prevailing image of the 1960s as the true period of change and cultural revolution in the second half of the twentieth century. However, as the twenty-first century brought forward a new generation of scholars, the

binary view of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to a new, more inclusive interpretation of the post-war period as a whole.

In 2009, historian Alan J. Levine (*“Bad Old Days”: The Myth of the 1950s*) explored the vast array of 1950s anti-establishment groups examined by Patterson as part of a larger re-consideration of American society during the decade, and when coupled with the immense level of influential social criticism produced during the decade by figures such as C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse and William Appleman Williams, concluded that the 1960s should be viewed not as an isolated time of revolution and social change, but as a continuation/fuller realization of the social trends and patterns of thought developed in the late 1940s and 1950s. While Levine’s criticism of the established approach to the cultural history of the 1950s represented only a single piece of his analysis, historian Alan Petigny published an extensive study the same year (*The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965*) that spanned all but the last five years of the post-war period, the purpose of which was to develop a more complete understanding of post-war American culture by considering the period as a whole instead of isolating individual decades.

Employing an abundance of primary sources including literature, material/popular culture, television advertising, music, movies and a wide range of available statistical data, Petigny concluded that every aspect of early post-war culture Patterson found negligible in fact provided the extended foundation for the overt upheavals that occurred during the 1960s. From religion and Rock ‘n’ Roll to sexual behavior, psychology and youth culture, Petigny argued that modernist impulses, many of which began even before the end of the Second World War, launched a cultural firestorm that produced its most

visible effects during the 1960s. Although less sensational, Petigny concluded that trends such as the relaxing of moral standards linked to religious practice, a new psychology of parenting that promoted a more complaisant attitude in terms of parental authority and a youth culture typified by aggressive assaults on conventional social behavior and sexual norms, made possible the social and moral upheavals of the 1960s, such as the rise of more extreme youth counter-culture (free love and the hippy movement) and the Anti-Vietnam War movement, by permanently destroying the pre-war cultural and moral edifice that would have prevented such occurrences from happening.

In the end, the importance of the scholarly re-assessment of post-World War II cultural history described above is that the overarching thesis that emerged from the writings of Levine and Petigny can be applied to more specific aspects of post-war culture and tested in order to determine its legitimacy. With this point in mind, the present study seeks to analyze post-war American cinema and trace its development over the entire period in order to discover whether or not evidence exists in the artistic output of Hollywood that confirms the contentions of Levine and Petigny that modernist elements influenced American culture from the beginning of the post-war period and simply grew stronger during the latter part of the era, or whether Patterson's view that the 1960s should be viewed as a cultural entity is sound.

While Petigny's work provided the overall inspiration for launching a re-examination of some specific aspect of post-war American culture, the decision to focus on American cinema came with the discovery of a little-discussed treatise penned by one of the most well-known and controversial American philosophers/public intellectuals of the post-war period, Ayn Rand. In 1971, Rand brought together a group of essays she

had written over the course of the 1960s and published them as *The Romantic Manifesto*. In this volume, Rand heavily attacked post-war American art, primarily literature, as being completely overrun by the same forces of Modernism generally identified by Petigny. Rand believed that the art produced in post-war America reflected the changing moral and social landscape chronicled by Petigny because it promoted moral relativism, anti-valuing, the acceptance of illicit/degenerate sexual and social behavior and the superiority of a lackluster collective over the potential power of the individual. While working in Hollywood as a screenwriter in the early 1950s, Rand attempted to warn the public of the encroaching forces of Modernism in the pamphlet *Screen Guide for Americans*, which highlighted the ways in which modernist (and communist) ideas could be covertly inserted into mainstream films. However, what Rand saw as a growing threat in the early 1950s had, in her estimation, become a full-scale crisis by the early 1960s, which prompted her, in the wake of releasing her magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged*, to begin writing the essays that later became *The Romantic Manifesto*.

Throughout the essays contained in *The Romantic Manifesto*, Rand argued that the influence of Romanticism, a philosophical/artistic movement based on the volition of the individual, which had been in constant retreat in Europe since the initial growth of Modernism in the mid-nineteenth century but had been influential in American popular culture up to the start of the Second World War, was under threat of complete annihilation by the 1960s. Considering all levels and forms of artistic expression and evaluating them based on the elements of theme, plot and characterization, Rand concluded that a philosophical and moral war between Romanticism and Modernism raged across the twenty-five years that comprised the post-war period. When considering

Screen Guide for Americans and *The Romantic Manifesto* together, it is clear that Rand, like Levine and Petigny decades later, understood the importance of the cultural and moral changes that accompanied the rise of Modernism in post-war America and placed its appearance in the late 1940s and early 1950s instead of viewing it as an isolated incident of the 1960s.

Although literature was the art form that Rand spent a majority of her time critiquing in *The Romantic Manifesto*, her practical experience in Hollywood that began in the 1920s, as well as her love of film and understanding of it as an important medium for the transmission of philosophical and cultural knowledge, pushed her to acknowledge that films could and should be interpreted for their philosophical messages according to the same standard she established for literature. As briefly highlighted above, Rand believed that the elements of theme, plot and characterization had to be heavily scrutinized in order to determine whether a film possessed the traits associated with Modernism or Romanticism. Rand held a very strong opinion as to which school of thought represented the correct message. Her method of determining the philosophical stance of a work of literature or film was simple, yet effective, and her conclusions as to the weakening moral structure of the United States in the post-war era, whether or not one agrees that such a trend was positive or detrimental, mirror those rendered by Petigny forty years later.

In the end, a combination of Petigny's analysis and general conclusions as to the early and steady march of Modernism into nearly every major aspect of post-war American life and Rand's more specific cultural critique of modernist infiltration of high and low art during the same period form the analytical model that drives the case study

that follows this introduction. Basically stated, Rand's model and critique will be applied to a series of films, separated by genre, made across the entire post-war period, in order to determine the legitimacy of the larger claims made by Petigny. As film historian Peter Biskind concluded the introduction to his examination of post-war film, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*, "I take film criticism to be a species of cultural criticism; I am interested in what film tells us about society and what society tells us about film. This book describes what we see when ideology becomes visible."¹ While the current study identifies what Biskind referred to as "cultural criticism" as intellectual history, this small issue of nomenclature does not change the connection between the general goals of the present work and that of Biskind. The major task undertaken in the pages that follow is to discover, in light of new scholarship, what one of the most important and popular art forms of the post-World War II period has to say about an era whose cultural and moral identity is contested ground.

Before moving into the study itself, a brief outline of its contents is necessary in order to provide the reader with a basic understanding of its construction. The first chapter has three primary functions. First, because this study is directly connected to the creation of an upper-division undergraduate course (History 399), the legitimacy of intellectual history as a valid tool of instruction at the undergraduate level is addressed primarily by examining the ideas of intellectual historian Daniel Wickberg, who has argued extensively about the importance of intellectual history in the twenty-first century despite its overshadowing by younger fields such as social history. After establishing the importance of intellectual history in the undergraduate classroom, the second focus of

¹ Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 6.

chapter one centers on the individual whose intellectual work underpins the entire analysis, Ayn Rand.

Beyond the importance of intellectual history as a field, the question of whose voice is given legitimacy and whose voice is disregarded is important because it exposes potential bias that can, if allowed to proliferate, skew the larger intellectual direction of the field. While the author initially brushed off the dismissals of Rand's work he encountered in the academic setting as anecdotal, it became clear, after reviewing numerous sources dealing with post-war American intellectual life, that such dismissals were in fact a reflection of a larger bias against her work. This becomes apparent when one delves into the secondary sources in which Rand should be mentioned. Thus, the second section of the chapter will first prove that Rand, despite being one of the best-selling American public intellectuals/philosophers of any period, is virtually ignored in academic works in favor of thinkers and writers who were less prolific and influential, but whose political persuasions tended to be the opposite of Rand's. Next, in order to demonstrate Rand's legitimacy as an intellectual whose ideas deserve to be considered within the context of a historical study, the few academic works on Rand will be examined in order to highlight her general philosophical positions. This exploration will then lead into a specific analysis of her writings on art and culture that serve as the model for the film analysis presented in chapters two and three.

With Rand established as legitimate figure for academic inquiry, the final section of chapter one confronts the historiography of the post-war period. The importance of this component is that it brings into focus the clear contrast between the traditional view of the 1950s and 1960s as being separate and distinctly different historical periods and

the more recent tendency to view the entire post-war era as a whole. Building on the traditional analysis offered by Patterson, the changing landscape of post-war historiography, culminating with the work of Petigny, will be considered. To reinforce the diverse ways in which the post-war period can be viewed from a historical standpoint, the chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the 1960s from the perspective of historians who have uncovered a radical conservative movement among young people during the decade that receives little attention in favor of the radical left-wing youth activities such as the anti-Vietnam War movement that have become part of modern American folklore. In the end, the fact that a conservative youth movement thrived in the 1960s alongside its more famous left-wing counterpart provides yet another indication that the individual decades of the post-war period should not be considered as separate entities, but rather as a continuous period in which more than one ideological/philosophical vision jockeyed for control of the American cultural landscape.

After establishing the importance of intellectual history, profiling the ideas of Rand and exploring the recent shift in the historiography of the post-war period, the study will move into its primary area of focus; examining a selection of films made during the post-war era in order to determine whether they reflect the steady infiltration of Modernism as argued by Rand and Petigny or whether the films of the 1950s have little connection to their counterparts produced during the 1960s. In order to complete this task, a dual approach will be utilized. Using the Western genre as a case study, chapter two will consider the three films from the genre chosen for History 399 and apply an in-depth intellectual analysis using related films and extensive secondary sources. Primary source material related to the production of the films, such as director interviews will not

be included in the discussion of the films as the purpose behind this study, and the goal for students enrolled in History 399, is to consider the finished films as abstract philosophical statements that reflect post-war American culture. Muddying the waters of discussion with extensive focus on intended meanings could likely lead to severe negative effects because pre-conceived meaning and intent during the artistic process is not necessarily evident in the finished product. The goal for the organized discussions that are so vital to the success of History 399 is for the students to reflect on what they have watched having been presented with as little background knowledge/interpretations as possible in order to ensure a lack of specific pre-conceived notions about the films.

Having devoted an entire chapter to an in-depth case study of one of the major genres considered in History 399, chapter three will profile the remaining genres and films in a more concise format. Building on the extensive case study of the Western genre, each film in each genre will be introduced with a plot synopsis followed by an original analysis by the author that considers the film in light of the ideas of Rand and Petigny and the trends uncovered in the more academically authoritative analysis of the Western genre. The purpose of these streamlined considerations is to replicate the manner in which the author plans to discuss these films with students in the classroom. The level of inquiry reached in chapter two is beyond that which could be realistically expected from undergraduates, many of whom may have little to no experience with film analysis, philosophical theory or even the general history of the post-war era. Thus, the film analyses presented in chapter three identify and explain the ways in which the films reflect the post-war conflict between Romanticism and Modernism in more general terms that students, having been presented with the ideas of Rand and Petigny, will be able to

identify and articulate. The importance of establishing talking points likely to generate student discussion cannot be understated as the post-viewing discussion periods are intended to be student centered and student led, with the author assuming the role of facilitator.

While chapter three provides practical topics to guide student discussion of the films considered in History 399 in order to ensure their understanding of the key ideas at the center of the course, the final chapter of the study focuses on the technical aspects of teaching History 399, the most important of which is ensuring that students are presented with assignments that provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the course. After a brief opening in which the literature pertaining to the use of film in the undergraduate classroom is profiled in order to confirm its legitimacy as a valid teaching tool, the bulk of chapter four is devoted to explaining the ways in which the students will be instructed and assessed.

The combination of an early review of Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto*, a cumulative final essay examination that requires a discussion of the general course ideas and their application to post-war American cinema and a major research/film analysis paper in which students will create their own study modeled on the course, provides a solid core of information from which the author can assess student performance. The review of Rand's work will confirm, early enough in the semester, whether or not the students have an understanding of her interpretation of literature and the parameters of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. The final examination, which will require students to meld their understanding of Rand and Petigny with the knowledge

they acquired while viewing, discussing and researching films, will determine the level at which they are able to articulate a critical vision of the course.

Although the development of a critical understanding of the course is important, satisfactory completion of the research/film analysis paper, the most heavily weighted of the assignments, mandates that students apply their overall understanding of the course by selecting a group of films and rendering their own analysis based on the course framework. From this perspective, the weekly course viewings and discussions, although important for the content and ideas they convey and produce, represent a series of object lessons intended on modeling a method of intellectual historical analysis that the students will have the opportunity to emulate in order to further their understanding not only of post-war American culture and cinema, but perhaps more importantly, the manner in which intellectual historical inquiry is conducted.

CHAPTER II

A NEW VISION FOR INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, AYN RAND'S *ROMANTIC MANIFESTO* AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE AMERICAN MIND IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II ERA

Whatever happened to Randolph Scott
Ridin' the trail alone

Whatever happened to Gene and Tex
And Roy and Rex, The Durango Kid

.....

Everybody's tryin' to make a comment
About our doubts and fears
True Grit's the only movie
I've really understood in years

.....

Oh, whatever happened to Randolph Scott
His horse plain as could be

Whatever happened to Randolph Scott
Has happened to the best of me

—The Statler Brothers, *Whatever Happened to Randolph Scott*, 1973

They're messing with our heroes and we've gotta stop 'em now!

—Hank Williams, Jr., *The Coalition to Ban Coalitions*, 1981

Daniel Wickberg and a New Vision for Intellectual History

In 1989, historian John Higham updated his classic work on his profession, *History: Professional Scholarship in America*. Originally published in 1965, Higham now had the opportunity to comment on the dramatic changes that occurred in the discipline of history during the late 1960s and 1970s. In Higham's estimation,

intellectual history received an inordinate amount of damage due to the social and political turmoil of the period, which brought into question the very premises on which the power of post-war intellectual history was founded. According to Higham, American intellectual historians developed a strong affinity for Alexis de Toqueville's *Democracy in America*, which "treated American culture as an organic whole; and . . . rested heavily on the concept of national character."² While Progressive historians of the pre-World War II period viewed de Toqueville's ideas as "somewhat suspect," many of America's foremost historians of the post-war era—Daniel Boorstin, C. Vann Woodward, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Richard Hofstadter, Edmund Morgan, and Louis Hartz to name only a few—seized on the spirit of de Toqueville's message and in their own ways offered insights into the "distinctive character" of the United States.³

The period that ran from the late 1940s to the early 1960s also witnessed the power of what Higham identified as "the cultural explosion."⁴ Higham described this trend and its impact on professional historians when he noted, "Though academic historians rarely produced the popular histories that were prominent on the best-seller lists, they could feel a vital connection with an expanding body of contemporary opinion that drew its historical consciousness from such leading intellectuals as Reinhold Niebuhr, William Faulkner . . . and Lionel Trilling."⁵ In sum, the intellectual historians of the post-war period placed great faith in achieving "a vision of the historian as an intellectual, nourished by and serving an increasingly responsive national culture."⁶

² John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 221.

³ Higham, *History*, 221.

⁴ Higham, *History*, 239.

⁵ Higham, *History*, 239.

⁶ Higham, *History*, 239.

However, the strong connection intellectual historians of the Consensus school established with the “comprehensive themes and overarching generalizations” inspired by the renewed interest in de Toqueville proved devastating for their efforts as the 1960s progressed and “dissent and alienation cut more and more deeply into the promises of the past.”⁷ Now, a generation of American youth came of age “who felt little relation to the past or to the future.”⁸

In assessing the impact of this cultural milieu on the discipline of history Higham observed, “Yesterday’s solutions seemed irrelevant to today’s problems. . . . A radicalized American historian [typically] advised his readers that they could best formulate and pursue present goals if they avoided intense involvement with the past.”⁹ In the end, the increased focus on “social diversity” led to the “disaggregation of American history” as contemporary groups of Americans began to find empowerment in the histories of their predecessors, which led many historians to take-up the task of studying previously marginalized groups and ordinary people once thought irrelevant to the grand narrative.¹⁰ To this day, “the liberation of social history from its post-war subordination to intellectual history” has dominated the landscape of professional history in the United States, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, it has placed a stranglehold on the field of intellectual history preventing it from assuming the status it once held as a viable, stand-alone field of historical inquiry.¹¹

In an effort to break social history’s control of intellectual history, historian Daniel Wickberg critiqued the results of that dominance and offered a viable solution for

⁷ Higham, *History*, 240, 235.

⁸ Higham, *History*, 235.

⁹ Higham, *History*, 235.

¹⁰ Higham, *History*, 242.

¹¹ Higham, *History*, 242.

the emancipation of intellectual history in his 2001 article, “Intellectual History vs. the Social History of Intellectuals.” Wickberg first assessed the climate in which intellectual history operated after the onset of social history during the late 1960s and 1970s, of which he concluded, “The Lack of distinct boundaries between intellectual, cultural and social histories has led to a serious erosion of the distinctive approach to the past that intellectual history offers.”¹² The author went on to establish the existence of “two broad schools of historical practice” that have divided the field of intellectual history.¹³ On one side of the divide is what Wickberg referred to as “the history of thought,” which stood diametrically opposed to the other movement in intellectual history, “the social history of intellectuals.”¹⁴

Wickberg believed that the output of individuals on each side of the divide represented the most direct means of identifying their position. He stressed the fact that historians working in the realm of “the history of thought” produce “works that focus on the history of ideas, language, texts, ideology, meaning and cultural representation.”¹⁵ On the other hand, those historians interested in “the social history of intellectuals” tend to generate “intellectual biography [and] histories of institutions . . . [or] what is summed up as the history of intellectual life.”¹⁶ In short, “the historian of thought” is centered on the exploration of “ideas” derived from methods such as tracing “patterns of meaning” from a variety of “texts,” while “the social historian of intellectuals” is most concerned with establishing “cultural representations [from texts]” in order to determine their

¹² Daniel Wickberg, “Intellectual History vs. the Social History of Intellectuals,” *Rethinking History* 5, no. 3 (2001): 383.

¹³ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 383.

¹⁴ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 383.

¹⁵ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 384.

¹⁶ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 384.

“relationship to social institutions,” or what Wickberg labeled simply as “persons.”¹⁷ As the author developed his argument further, the conflict between these two opposing groups of intellectual historians became more distinct and easily relatable to the negative impact of social history.

In re-visiting the general history of the onset of social history in the late 1960s, Wickberg pointed to the fact that historians such as Jesse Lemisch carried not only the overt “agenda” of constructing a vision of the past from “the bottom up,” but also “from the neck down.”¹⁸ The author elaborated on this criticism by pointing to the fact that “the notion that guided much of the early new social history of the 1960s and 1970s was that social reality was fundamentally material and behavioral in nature, that ideas don’t really count for anything—other than concealing or revealing some underlying real interest.”¹⁹ Wickberg identified the point at which social history relegated the study of ideas to a reduced status as the point at which intellectual historians “turn[ed] intellectual history into a form of social history” simply to ensure their survival.²⁰ However, that decision proved nearly fatal to the future of the study of ideas as important causal factors in the actions of human beings.

While those historians who made the corrupt bargain with social history for the sake of their own survival proved willing to work within the accepted context of “the social history of intellectuals” with its disregard for the importance of ideas, intellectual historians such as Wickberg exposed a major defect in the social history approach to

¹⁷ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 384.

¹⁸ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 385.

¹⁹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 386.

²⁰ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 386.

intellectual history.²¹ As Wickberg declared, “Ideas [have] come to be seen as tools, weapons, instruments to achieve goals that are defined by interests or social position that exist in some pre-conceptual or pre-intellectual way.”²² Phrased differently, “Thought and meaning cannot structure and precede motives, but must be subordinate to them.”²³ Wickberg took this key premise of social history and considered it in light of the concept of “agency,” which is one of the hallmarks of social history.²⁴

Although the goal of providing “agency” involved the seemingly noble task of “rescuing past peoples from” historical oblivion and “restoring their moral status as authors of their own actions,” Wickberg pointed to the “skeptical” framework around which social historians pursued their desires as being illogical and completely opposite of the goals of true intellectual history.²⁵ Thus, if social historians work from the premise “that interests and goals can be defined prior to thought, and that thought is a means to achieve those goals or express those interests,” how can they maintain such a stance in light of the simple fact that “agency, after all, is an idea as well, with its own history, as are the conceptions of personhood that underlie it?”²⁶ Wickberg concluded that in no way could such a stance be upheld. In the words of the author, “To assume that agency and personhood are non-intellectual qualities that help us to understand intellectual ones is to deliberately put a whole sector of phenomena in a category of non-historical, as well as to embrace a traditional material/intellectual dualism.”²⁷ While the author called into serious question the reasoning by which social historians pursue the establishment of

²¹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 385.

²² Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 387.

²³ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 388.

²⁴ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 387.

²⁵ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 387.

²⁶ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 388.

²⁷ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

“agency” for the people they study, he reinforced that attack by questioning the ability of social historians to use “experience” in order to recreate the past.²⁸

In addition to “agency,” Wickberg profiled the process by which “the social historian seeks to recover the experience of past actors through the use of primary texts” as an equally important goal of the field.²⁹ As with “agency,” Wickberg identified an important flaw in this goal that brings its vaunted legitimacy into question.³⁰ The process of “strip[ing] off bias or unreliability in order to get at the truth about the objects represented,” which social historians believe aids in the process of recreating “experience” more clearly, is something that Wickberg felt needed to be questioned for its ability to be used in an effort to chronicle the “experience of past actors.”³¹

The problem with the type of analysis employed by social historians is that it is highly selective and inevitably leads to a reconstruction of the past, based on fragmentary evidence, that ends with conclusions rooted as much in supposition as in fact. Nevertheless, social historians continue to pursue such work, creating their own visions of past events beyond what the record allows. However, Wickberg pointed to the fact that true intellectual historians accept and are comfortable with the limitations of the historical record in terms of the ability to recreate an accurate picture of past events. In the words of the author, “Experience of past actors is inaccessible.”³² But, despite this grim reality, Wickberg went on to demonstrate how a meaningful level of understanding of the past can be achieved through the use of the same sources utilized by social historians.

²⁸ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

²⁹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

³⁰ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

³¹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

³² Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

While Wickberg's analysis suggested that social history's negative view of the importance of ideas failed to account for the human necessity to think before acting, and as its attempt to provide "agency" through "experience" required the use of historical license and contemporary imagination of past events based often on scant resources, the author did believe that a renewed success of intellectual history could be attained by expanding the scope of inquiry in a manner inspired by social history.³³ For Wickberg, the scope and variety of sources utilized by social historians did not present a problem. However, he viewed the social historian's purposeful removal of "bias, point of view, conceptual categories [and] mode of organization of a text" as the destruction of what can be understood from historical records of all kinds.³⁴ Instead of trying to recreate "the experience of past actors," which is an impossibility because it requires a contemporary mind to fill in the gaps left by the fragmented record, Wickberg believed that a more realistic goal for historical inquiry could be found in considering "the patterns of mind that shaped documents."³⁵ In this sense, Wickberg concluded, "All history must ultimately be the history of ideas because all historical documents are meaningful only in relation to human minds."³⁶ Wickberg believed this view to be key in the ability of intellectual historians to return their field to a position of relevance within the larger discipline.

In examining Wickberg's study, it becomes clear that social history did not triumph over intellectual history because it had a better, more objective method of historical inquiry. At a minimum, the author's handling of the two major tenets of social

³³ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

³⁴ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

³⁵ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

³⁶ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 391.

history—“agency” and “experience”—cast doubt on the supremacy of methods that reached beyond the knowable past.³⁷ However, Wickberg understood the value of the great diversity of sources used by social historians that the “history of intellectuals” group, once co-opted by social history, refused to recognize.³⁸ The author felt that the inclusion of a larger body of sources into true intellectual history would allow the discipline to rival social history by providing a more reasonable landscape of the past via the constructions of “patterns” as opposed to recreating “experiences.”³⁹

Furthering the idea quoted above, that “all history must be the history of ideas because all historical documents are meaningful only in relation to human minds,” Wickberg believed that intellectual historians could grant true “agency” to the people they study by using their “methods and insights” to analyze a wider range of sources.⁴⁰ As the author declared, “If the history of thought is to be successful, it must abandon . . . the notion that a fixed body of texts and thinkers—a canon—is its proper subject matter, and must seek thought wherever it can find it—which is everywhere.”⁴¹ In preparing to conclude this section it must be noted that the inspiration for this study emerged as an answer to Wickberg’s call to arms for a new, more diverse approach to intellectual history.

The closing paragraphs of Wickberg’s article summed up the general message he wanted to convey to readers. In the words of the author, “Every document is a source for intellectual history. . . . The focus should not be on intellectuals, nor on important texts,

³⁷ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390.

³⁸ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 389.

³⁹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 391.

⁴⁰ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 390, 393.

⁴¹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 392.

but on ideas.”⁴² In preparing to present the theoretical model that underlies the current study, the detailed discussion of Wickberg’s ideas above proved necessary because the basis of this study hinges on the consideration of non-canonical sources in a work of intellectual history in addition to the use of a conceptual framework envisioned by a popular public philosopher almost entirely shunned by the academic world. Taking the contention of a respected intellectual historian such as Wickberg to heart, that “thought is to be found everywhere” and should be explored regardless of who created it, it is now time to examine the theoretical background of the current study, which seeks to view post-World War II American cinema as a battlefield on which the larger struggle between Romanticism and Modernism, as explored by Ayn Rand, was contested.⁴³

Ayn Rand’s *Romantic Manifesto*, Modernist Opposition, and the Application of Rand’s Intellectual Framework to American Cinema

In considering Wickberg’s identification of the inability of intellectual historians to look beyond a small canon of accepted works in their efforts to create historical analyses, hardly a better victim of this academic tunnel vision could be found than Ayn Rand. A Russian émigré who came to the United States in the mid-1920s, Rand worked her way up from the performance of menial jobs to become a Hollywood screenwriter, a best-selling novelist, a cultural critic, a public intellectual, and the founder of a new philosophy. The fact that Rand’s activities occurred in the recent past has allowed for the collection of data that provides a glimpse as to the level of cultural saturation her worked achieved as well as the extent of its impact on American society. Rand published her breakout work, a novel titled *The Fountainhead*, in 1943. By the time of her death in

⁴² Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 393.

⁴³ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 393.

1982, Rand had added to her dossier three more novels and several works of non-fiction. In 1995, the total sales of Rand's published works approached thirty million copies.⁴⁴ More recent data has confirmed that the number of Rand's novels sold each year, apart from the numerous non-fiction volumes still in-print, hovers around the five hundred thousand mark.⁴⁵

While the sales of Rand's books indicate a high degree of cultural saturation, a scientific survey published by the Library of Congress in 1991, which sought information about "lifetime reading habits," provided insight as to the level of influence Rand's writing enjoyed among the American reading public.⁴⁶ Of all the popular, ground-breaking works published in the reading lifetimes of those who participated in the survey, as well as the entire canon of great literary, historical and philosophical works of the world, Rand's 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, proved "second only to the Bible in its significant impact on their lives."⁴⁷ Taking into account the available data as to the high level of cultural saturation and impact of Rand's writing in the United States, it would be logical to assume that historians and other professionals working in the humanities and social sciences on projects related to the social, cultural and intellectual landscape of post-World War II America would be forced to confront the ideas and writings of such an

⁴⁴ Chris Matthew Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2. It must be noted that disagreements over the sales of Rand's books often arise because the Ayn Rand Institute regularly purchases large numbers of her books for free distribution. The Ayn Rand institute freely admits to the number of Rand's books it purchases each year. The figure of five hundred thousand represents the number of Rand's novels sold in 2008 after having been adjusted to account for the number of books purchased by the Ayn Rand Institute. In order to cross-reference the figure provided by Burns, the author consulted an updated version of the same source, *Impact*, which is the official publication of the Ayn Rand Institute. Following up on the 2009 article cited by Burns, the April 2010 issue provided documented third-party data that indicated a 260% increase in the already high sales of Rand's novels since 2005 as well as a 50% increase in the sales of her non-fiction publications. Yaron Brook, "Ayn Rand's Nonfiction Book Sales," *Impact* 16, no. 4 (April 2010): 1, 4.

⁴⁶ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 1.

⁴⁷ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 1.

influential figure. However, with minimal exceptions, Rand's ideas and writings have received little serious attention from both academic and popular historians.

Published in 1993, David Halberstam's popular history of the immediate post-war period, *The Fifties*, chronicled the social, political and cultural aspects of the era across a 732-page narrative and remains one of the most regularly cited non-academic histories of the 1950s. Ayn Rand, whose 1943 novel *The Fountainhead* began a steady rate of "astounding" sales following the end of the war that continued into the 1950s, and whose 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*, became a "blockbuster" complete with a high-end New York publicity campaign launched by Random House,⁴⁸ failed to receive a single reference in Halberstam's history. While Rand's name is missing from Halberstam's extensive index, he gave lavish attention to popular novelist Grace Metalious, who he described as possessing "innate talent and shrewdness," popular novelist Sloan Wilson, whose 1955 novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Halberstam believed to be "one of the most influential novels of the fifties," and beat writer Jack Kerouac, whose "new vision for American life" Halberstam spent several pages sentimentally chronicling.⁴⁹ In the area of intellectuals and philosophers, the author devoted several pages to the sociologist C. Wright Mills, who Halberstam held up as a "mythic figure" with a lasting "posthumous influence."⁵⁰ While Rand failed to pass muster with one of the most widely read popular historians writing on the early post-war period, she suffered the same fate at the hands of Halberstam's opposite number in the world of academic history.

Three years after Halberstam published *The Fifties*, historian James T. Patterson's massive narrative, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, appeared as the

⁴⁸ Burns, *Goddess*, 165.

⁴⁹ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard, 1993), 583, 522, 306.

⁵⁰ Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 536.

volume on post-war America in the famed Oxford History of the United States series. Unlike Halberstam's work, which stopped in the early 1960s, Patterson's 790-page narrative extended the analysis of post-war America across fourteen additional years, but still failed to mention Rand despite the fact that her public notoriety grew even larger during the 1960s. However, the same writers from Halberstam's study cited above all made appearances in *Grand Expectations*. While Patterson did not offer the same level of uncritical treatment of these writers presented by Halberstam, the author did admit that these individuals "tapped into a reservoir of discontent" in post-war America.⁵¹ Also, the fact that Patterson devoted precious space to these individuals and not to Rand reflected an intentioned value judgment as to their perceived importance. Even in academic works in which Rand's name does appear, her ideas and writings usually receive attention that is disproportionate to her impact on the American cultural landscape.

Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale's 2011 book, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America*, chronicled "the romance of the outsider [that] began to appear among self-conscious white bohemians and in books, music, and movies" during the post-war era.⁵² The first chapter of Hale's study, which she devoted to exploring many of the popular writers of the 1950s who rebelled against the status quo, devoted page upon page to a glowing, sentimental description of J. D. Salinger's 1951 novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, while her description of Rand's *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* received a single paragraph that stated Rand belonged to the right-wing, promoted "selfishness" above all else, and suggested

⁵¹ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*. The Oxford History of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 410.

⁵² Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

that her work contained overt sexism.⁵³ In no way could Rand's novels approach the level of importance engendered by Salinger's main protagonist, Holden Caulfield, who Hale described as "a seductive character, an artifact of mass culture, a fictional person that in turn shaped how real people think and feel and love."⁵⁴ In a book whose title prominently features the word *Outsiders*, Ayn Rand still resides on the periphery of relevance. The question that needs to be asked at this point is simple; Why?

Only a cursory examination of the cavalcade of writers and intellectuals repeatedly cited, and in turn legitimized, by both popular and professional historians of the post-war period reveals the answer as to why Rand is either completely excluded from their studies or marginalized to the point of un-importance. The defining characteristic that held together the works of Wilson, Metalious, Kerouac, Mills, and Salinger was their outright rejection or negative critique of contemporary American society. Moreover, their discontent for post-war society has been examined and accepted as emanating from the political Left.

Both Patterson and Halberstam promoted Metalious' novel *Peyton Place* as a work that reflected the feminist movement and thus "was a book before its time."⁵⁵ Patterson noted Mills' pioneering "of a New Left."⁵⁶ Halberstam highlighted Wilson's contempt for corporate America's "conservative politics," while also connecting the counterculture of the 1960s to the listless lifestyle and insane escapades of Kerouac and the Beats who, to Halberstam's apparent approval, signaled the beginning of the end of

⁵³ Hale, *Outsiders*, 39-40.

⁵⁴ Hale, *Outsiders*, 33.

⁵⁵ Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 581.

⁵⁶ Patterson, *Expectations*, 623.

“the old order.”⁵⁷ Of Holden Caulfield and *Catcher in the Rye*, Hale believed Salinger unleashed “the democratization of the modern idea of what it means to be an artist.”⁵⁸ As will be demonstrated below, Rand’s ideas and writings stood opposite the leftist tilt that has been identified in the current cadre of writers and intellectuals under consideration. However, while it is not the goal of this examination to suggest that historians should be forced to include the ideas of certain writers and thinkers in their analyses, it will be demonstrated that the exclusion of a prolific and popular thinker such as Rand leaves a void in the quest for a better understanding of “the patterns of [historical] meaning” identified by Wickberg as the hallmark of true intellectual history.⁵⁹

In the three decades since Rand’s death, only two professional academics have completed book-length examinations of her life and ideas. Political theorist and scholar Chris Matthew Sciabarra’s 1995 book, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, examined “Rand’s thought in . . . [a] historical and intellectual context” in an effort “to assert that Rand’s philosophy should be taken seriously and treated with respect.”⁶⁰ Sciabarra cited the almost complete disregard of Rand by academic and high-brow popular writers detailed above as the primary motivation for completing his analysis. In the words of the author, “The mere mention of Ayn Rand’s name in academic circles can evoke smirks and a rolling of the eyes. Most often she is dismissed, without discussion, as a reactionary, a propagandist, or a pop fiction writer with a cult following.”⁶¹

Historian Jennifer Burns also noted the near full-scale rejection of Rand and her ideas by the academic and public intellectual establishment in her 2009 biography of

⁵⁷ Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 524-525, 307.

⁵⁸ Hale, *Outsiders*, 33.

⁵⁹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 384.

⁶⁰ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 8.

⁶¹ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 8.

Rand, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*. In Burns' estimation, "Because of her extreme political views and the nearly universal consensus among literary critics that she is a bad writer, few . . . have taken Rand seriously."⁶² However, like Sciabarra over a decade earlier, Burns saw the importance of Rand and her ideas as part of "the tumultuous century that her life spanned."⁶³ As the author concluded, "Though Americans turned to their government for aid, succor, and redress of grievances ever more frequently during the twentieth century, they did so with doubts, fears, and misgivings, all of which Rand cast into stark relief in her fiction."⁶⁴ While the existence of only two academic studies of Rand's ideas greatly limits the ability to establish identifiable trends in scholarship, the works of Sciabarra and Burns, when taken together, provide a clear picture of Rand's philosophical system, Objectivism, as well as its place in the Western philosophical tradition and the historical context that led to its development.

While the specific focus of this study seeks to apply Rand's views on esthetics to post-war cinema, a general understanding of her philosophy is necessary to contextualize how Rand formed those views in relation to the larger Objectivist system. In characterizing Objectivism to coincide with the publication of her magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand declared, "My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute."⁶⁵ With the exception of an undergraduate degree in history and philosophy from the University of

⁶² Burns, *Goddess*, 2.

⁶³ Burns, *Goddess*, 2.

⁶⁴ Burns, *Goddess*, 3.

⁶⁵ *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z*, ed. Harry Binswanger (New York: Meridian, 1988), 343.

Leningrad, Rand's education, which contributed to the creation of these ideas, came as the result of years of self-study. This method of learning fueled Rand's "aggressively anti-intellectual" attitude and did little to help her cause among established intellectual and academic outlets.⁶⁶ As Burns noted, "[Rand] was uninterested in placing herself with the broader community of thinkers and cared little about the intersections between different schools of thought."⁶⁷ Despite Rand's desire to be considered apart from the Western philosophical tradition, her own writings, as well as those of Sciabarra and Burns, point to Rand as a reflection of specific philosophical traditions that she shaped into her own vision.

Although Rand and her followers have filled entire volumes with detailed explanations of the various aspects of Objectivism, the basic themes of this system as it applied directly to the individual are reflected in three brief points Rand identified in 1962. First, Rand declared that "reality exists as an objective absolute," which followed the logic that "facts are facts, independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears."⁶⁸ Next, Rand believed that "reason . . . is man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival."⁶⁹ Lastly, Rand argued that "man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others."⁷⁰ Rand's continual reinforcement of these concepts—reason, reality, consciousness and individualism—point to a definite connection to the core of Aristotle's philosophy.

⁶⁶ Burns, *Goddess*, 127.

⁶⁷ Burns, *Goddess*, 127.

⁶⁸ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 344.

⁶⁹ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 344.

⁷⁰ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 344.

Citing Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Sciabarra pointed to the philosopher's view that "there is an ultimate principle at the base of reason which is both ontological and epistemological."⁷¹ Having read Aristotle as an undergraduate, Rand came to agree strongly and adopt this view, which she characterized as "an objective absolute."⁷² As Sciabarra further noted, Rand's conception of an "absolute" world of existence stood firmly in line with the larger Greek tradition that "the identity of existence and consciousness implies that entities which exist are limited, finite, and knowable."⁷³ Rand herself rarely missed an opportunity to celebrate her connection to Aristotle, whose ideas she labeled "the intellect's Declaration of Independence."⁷⁴ In Rand's estimation, "[Aristotle's] incomparable achievement lay in the fact that he defined the basic principles of a rational view of existence and of man's consciousness."⁷⁵ Rand's decision to embrace the "rationality" of Aristotle placed her in direct opposition to the powerful legacy of the ancient philosopher's teacher, Plato.⁷⁶

As Rand applauded the solidity of Aristotle's belief in the supremacy of a world that man can understand and navigate successfully with the use of "reason," she had little use for the contributions of Plato, which she linked to "mysticism."⁷⁷ Sciabarra elaborated on Rand's dislike of Plato when he cited her objection to his stance on "cosmology," which "contributed to the belief that the universe could be defined in terms of two separate spheres of reality."⁷⁸ The author went on to describe the process by which Platonic cosmology became part of "the Christian metaphysic," which "moved

⁷¹ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 139.

⁷² Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 344.

⁷³ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 141.

⁷⁴ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 34.

⁷⁵ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 34.

⁷⁶ Burns, *Goddess*, 112.

⁷⁷ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 34.

⁷⁸ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 131.

away from the realism of the Aristotelian tradition and elevated the infinite above the finite.”⁷⁹ Rand believed that man’s failure to come to terms with the confines of reality led to repeated trips back to Plato’s mythic cave and the promise of societal disasters.⁸⁰

In tracking the impact of Platonic cosmology to the dawn of the modern period, Rand identified Immanuel Kant as the source of the philosophical deluge that plagued Western society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the space required to outline the intricacies of Kant’s philosophy is beyond that of the current study, Rand’s primary objections to it can be relayed in simple terms. Kant argued that “man’s basic concepts (such as time, space, existence) are not derived from experience or reality, but come from an automatic system of filters in his consciousness.”⁸¹ Known as “categories” and “forms of expression,” Kant believed these entities “impose their own design on his [man’s] perception of the external world and make him incapable of perceiving it in any other manner other than the one in which he does perceive it.”⁸² Rand believed Kant’s conclusions devastating to the survival of reason as the guiding force of society. Linking Kant’s “attack on man’s consciousness” to the “primordial mysticism” of Plato, Rand declared, “Make no mistake . . . it is a revolt, not only against being conscious, but against being alive—since in fact, in reality, on earth, every aspect of being alive involves a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action.”⁸³ Because of Kant’s belief in the lack of an individual reality, Rand argued that his ideas naturally led to the acceptance of “altruist-collectivist ethics,” which in her view explained the source of

⁷⁹ Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand*, 141.

⁸⁰ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 34.

⁸¹ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 235-236.

⁸² Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 235-236.

⁸³ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 236-237.

much of the suffering that occurred as a result of political ideologies in the twentieth century.⁸⁴

Kant's contention as to the lack of a true individual consciousness drove Rand to associate the rise of altruism with his influence on Western society. Viewed as a "moral code," Rand defined altruism as a state of being in which "man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value."⁸⁵ Kant's role in the development of altruism stemmed from "the collective" experience of non-reality created by the human mind.⁸⁶ Logically, Rand believed, a view that denied the individual human ability to experience reality would lead to a group mindset in which the interests of the whole come to be valued above those of the individual. As Rand's protégé Leonard Peikoff described her view of the individual within the context of altruism, "Every man . . . is morally the property of others."⁸⁷ For Rand, the proof of such a claim could be found in the guiding principle common in all of the infamous ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Rand's words, "The social system based on and consonant with the altruist morality—with the code of self-sacrifice—is socialism, in all or any of its variants: fascism, Nazism, communism. All of them treat man as a sacrificial animal to be immolated for the benefit of the group, the tribe, the society, the state."⁸⁸ The connection of Plato's "mysticism" to Kant's "negation of consciousness," culminating in the spread of altruistic political ideologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, brought Rand

⁸⁴ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 9-10.

⁸⁵ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 4.

⁸⁶ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 235.

⁸⁷ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 8.

⁸⁸ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 9.

into what was for her a contemporary nightmare for which she sought a meaningful solution.

Having come to the United States from Russia in 1926 in order to escape the encroaching hand of Soviet altruism, Rand spent the next fifty-six years producing ideas that challenged what Burns referred to as “a basic human dilemma: the failure of good intentions.”⁸⁹ Objectivism, the philosophic system that emerged from Rand’s personal war against altruism, as defined above in her own words, sought “to eliminate all virtues that could possibly be used in the service of totalitarianism.”⁹⁰ While such a goal implies the use of the same forceful methods that guided the totalitarian outgrowths of altruism, Rand came to believe that “the absence of physical coercion” and “the [free] choice to exercise his rational faculty” had to be provided for all of mankind in order to stop the forces of altruism.⁹¹ However, the right of all men to be completely free in forming their own ideas and views did not mean that Rand thought artists, philosophers and intellectuals should simply stand by and not pass judgment on altruist practices. Instead, Rand felt, and exemplified in her own work, that thinkers and artists should present man with works that reflected moral substance, which would then allow the individual to develop their own moral compass. Rand’s two great novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, presented the core of Objectivism through an artistic vision that she contemplated at every level. The importance of purpose in the creation of art proved so important to Rand that she published a collected volume on the subject, the examination of which will serve as the foundation of the current study.

⁸⁹ Burns, *Goddess*, 3.

⁹⁰ Burns, *Goddess*, 3.

⁹¹ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 180-181.

During the 1960s, with both *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* under her belt, Rand turned much of her attention to the purpose and production of art. First published in 1971, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* represented Rand's statement about the creation of art and the purposes to which it should be directed. While Rand's views of specific types of art and artistic movements will be discussed below, it is first necessary to consider why she believed art to be important and to outline the basic components she felt every work of art (in this case literature) needed in order to achieve its purpose. Establishing the basic foundations of why and how Rand believed true art should be created will reinforce the later discussion of the critical perspective she adopted when assessing the art of the post-war period.

From the perspective of culture, Rand viewed art (literature, film, music, visual expression) as the most important factor driving the continuation of any society. In her words, "Art is inextricably tied to man's survival—not to his physical survival, but to that on which his physical survival depends: to the preservation and survival of his consciousness."⁹² Rand believed that the continual nature of human "consciousness" should be classified as "a non-socializable aspect of reality, which is universal . . . but not collective."⁹³ From the standpoint of metaphysics, which "includes every concrete he [man] has ever perceived," Rand identified art as the means by which the core of man's metaphysical "consciousness" continues to endure.⁹⁴ Because metaphysics "involves such a vast sum of knowledge and such a long chain of concepts that no man could hold .

⁹² Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 1975), 5.

⁹³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 4.

⁹⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 7-8.

. . . in the focus of his immediate conscious awareness,” Rand believed “that [this] power is given to him by art.”⁹⁵

Defining art as “a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical judgments,” Rand argued that “an artist isolates the things which he regards as metaphysically essential and integrates them into a single new concrete that represents an embodied abstraction.”⁹⁶ For the individual, interacting with any number of these “conceptual. . . . abstractions” leads to the development of “a sense of life,” which simply represents “the integrated sum of his [man’s] metaphysical abstractions.”⁹⁷ Although Rand applied the term “universal” to her definition of man’s “consciousness,” she understood the individual nature of “consciousness” based on the fact that “the place of ethics in any given work of art depends on the metaphysical views of the artist,” which in turn are absorbed by an individual who possesses a unique set of ideas arrived at through a specific set of encounters containing certain “metaphysical value judgments.”⁹⁸ In the end, the responsibility for developing and maintaining a worldview fell squarely on the individual. As Rand concluded, “The reason why art has such a profoundly personal significance for men is that art confirms or denies the efficacy of man’s consciousness, according to whether an art work supports or negates his own fundamental view of reality.”⁹⁹

While Rand believed that each individual developed their own worldview out of unique conscious experiences, she also argued that in order to be of use to the individual, art must possess certain “essential attributes” that allow for the derivation of meaning;

⁹⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 7-8.

⁹⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 8.

⁹⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 5, 25-26.

⁹⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 4, 11, 8.

⁹⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 13.

“theme—plot—characterization.”¹⁰⁰ Taking these aspects of art in order, Rand argued that “a theme is the summation of a novel’s abstract meaning.”¹⁰¹ The absence of this element would, in Rand’s view, result in a complete failure of the novel to be understood by the individual. In the words of the author, “If a novel has no discernible theme—if its events add up to nothing—it is a bad novel; its flaw is its lack of integration.”¹⁰² Moving to “plot,” Rand understood this literary element as “a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax.”¹⁰³ As with “theme,” Rand believed that a lack of “plot” undermined the artistic function of the novel by forcing the “theme,” if one is present, to remain an isolated idea even within the artistic abstraction because the individual is never presented with an image of the “theme” in use.¹⁰⁴ In Rand’s view, “If the characters of a novel engage in lengthy abstract discussions of their ideas, but their ideas do not affect their actions or the events of the story, it is a bad novel.”¹⁰⁵

Of the construction of the individual characters that populate the novel, Rand surmised, “Characterization is the portrayal of those essential traits which form the unique, distinctive personality of an individual human being.”¹⁰⁶ In the author’s estimation, continuity of characters should be of the utmost importance to their creator as “the action of a novel has to proceed from and be consistent with the nature of its characters.”¹⁰⁷ As Rand concluded, “At the end of the novel the reader must know why

¹⁰⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 71.

¹⁰¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 72.

¹⁰² Rand, *Manifesto*, 72.

¹⁰³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 73.

¹⁰⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 72-73.

¹⁰⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 76.

¹⁰⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 78.

¹⁰⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 78.

the characters did the things they did.”¹⁰⁸ While Rand’s definitions and justifications for the basic elements of fiction appear to be pulled out of a high school English textbook, they are important because she believed these principles to be mandatory in any work of art and based her critical assessments of contemporary literature (and art in general) on the presence of these components.

Although Rand came to the United States in her early twenties, her childhood and teenage years in Russia, which bridged both sides of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, remained present in her mind for the rest of her life. Admiring the world of nineteenth-century culture Rand wrote, “As a child, I saw a glimpse of the pre-World War I world, the last afterglow of the most radiant cultural atmosphere in human history.”¹⁰⁹ Rand believed that Romanticism represented the driving force that produced the cultural zenith of the nineteenth century. In Rand’s estimation, the culture created by Romanticism “projected an overwhelming sense of intellectual freedom, of depth . . . [of] concern with fundamental problems, of demanding standards, of inexhaustible originality, of unlimited possibilities and, above all, of profound respect for man.”¹¹⁰ However, Rand identified World War I as the event that forever changed the cultural landscape of Western society.

When reflecting on the generations that lived through and fought the First World War, Rand observed, “They had given up on everything that makes life worth living: conviction, purpose, values, future. They were drained, embittered hulks whimpering occasionally about the hopelessness of life.”¹¹¹ Rand’s view of the conflict’s impact on

¹⁰⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, vi.

¹¹⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, vii.

¹¹¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, vii.

the generation that spanned the pre-war and post-war years appears harsh because most discussions of the First World War in terms of its impact on those who experienced it are sympathetic in that the war is viewed as a valid reason for what modernist scholar Christopher Butler referred to as the “very general 20th-century skepticism about the group claims of philosophy, religion, and ideology in general.”¹¹² However, Rand believed that the war became a convenient excuse that opened the door for many in the West to “renounce valuing” of any kind, which resulted in the growth of Modernism and the death of Romanticism.¹¹³

In assessing the war between Romanticism and Modernism in the middle of the twentieth century, Rand returned to the importance of art in terms of understanding the metaphysical foundation of a society. In the words of the author, “Art (including literature) is the barometer of a culture. It reflects the sum of a society’s deepest philosophical values: not its professed notions and slogans, but its actual view, of man and of existence.”¹¹⁴ Within this cultural context, Rand defined Romanticism as “a category of art based on the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition.”¹¹⁵ The meaning Rand ascribed to the term “volition” stemmed from her belief “that man is a being of volitional consciousness,” which she rooted in the concept of “reason.”¹¹⁶ According to Rand, “You [the individual] are not free to escape from your nature, from the fact that reason is your means of survival.”¹¹⁷ Rand further declared that “a being of volitional consciousness has no automatic course of behavior. He needs a

¹¹² Christopher Butler, *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.

¹¹³ Rand, *Manifesto*, vii.

¹¹⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 122.

¹¹⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 91.

¹¹⁶ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 177.

¹¹⁷ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 177.

code of values to guide his actions.”¹¹⁸ Here Rand presented the justification for her belief in the strict adherence to the elements of literature described above. Rand believed that Romanticism in its purest form provided individuals with the most frank presentation of “metaphysical abstractions”¹¹⁹ to which they could apply their “volitional consciousness.”¹²⁰ In Rand’s words, “What the Romanticists brought to art was the primacy of values.”¹²¹ However, Rand also understood the process by which artistic movements often fail to achieve their goals and stray from their original intentions.

While Rand chronicled the importance of Romanticism in that it exposed “the reality of man’s higher potential and what scale of achievement it had reached in a rational (or semi-rational) culture,” she also detailed how the forces of “mysticism” retarded the ability of Romanticism to achieve its fullest potential.¹²² In the words of Rand, “The Romanticists saw their cause primarily as a battle for their right to individuality and—unable to grasp the deepest metaphysical justification of their cause, unable to identify their values in terms of reason—they fought for individuality in terms of feelings, surrendering the banner of reason to their enemies.”¹²³ Despite the fact that virtually no scholars of Romanticism cite or even take seriously Rand’s writings on the subject, her contentions as to the wrong turn the movement took are reflected in the current body of scholarship on Romanticism.

Michael Ferber, an expert on romantic literature, noted, like Rand, that the romantics “parted company from the rationalist critics who preceded them in wishing to

¹¹⁸ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 177.

¹¹⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 26.

¹²⁰ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 177.

¹²¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 97.

¹²² Rand, *Manifesto*, viii, 97.

¹²³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 98.

preserve the religious experiences of the believer, the feeling of mystery, of ecstasy, of yielding to the infinite, as well as the aesthetic delights of churches and their art and music.”¹²⁴ Morse Peckham, also a scholar of romantic literature, emphasized the importance of “the imagination” in attaining “the cultural transcendence which was the task of the Romantics.”¹²⁵ Rand identified this embrace of “mysticism” with a return to a Platonic worldview, which she believed inaugurated the downfall of Romanticism long before the cataclysmic events of World War I.¹²⁶

In terms of “pure, consistent” romantic literature, Rand believed that only a select group of individuals, led by Victor Hugo and Fyodor Dostoevsky, ever achieved such a distinction.¹²⁷ Rand believed that the work of these two individuals reflected “their full commitment to the premise of volition in both of its fundamental areas: in regard to consciousness and to existence, in regard to man’s character and to his actions in the physical world.”¹²⁸ However, as Hugo and Dostoevsky published great works of “pure” Romanticism in the 1860s, a dangerous trend was already underway led by writers such as Leo Tolstoy and Emile Zola; Naturalism, which Rand viewed as the beginning of “modern literature.”¹²⁹

While Rand argued that Romanticism “trains and equips man for the battles he has to face in reality,” she contended that Naturalism “represents an escape—an escape from choice, from values, from moral responsibility.”¹³⁰ In Rand’s estimation, Zola typified Naturalism because he “rejected metaphysics. . . . [and] values” and simply

¹²⁴ Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66.

¹²⁵ Morse Peckham, *Romanticism and Ideology* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 20-21.

¹²⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 97.

¹²⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 99.

¹²⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 99.

¹²⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 99, 118.

¹³⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 133.

relied on “the method of journalism: the recording of observed concretes.”¹³¹ Rand equated Tolstoy’s literary efforts to the blatant promotion of the collective over the autonomy of the individual. In the words of the author, “In *Anna Karenina*, the most evil book in serious literature, he [Tolstoy] attacked man’s desire for happiness and advocated its sacrifice to conformity.”¹³² Taken together, Rand described the larger movement of Naturalism [Modernism] as “choosing society as the factor that determines man’s fate . . . claiming that man has no volition, but society, somehow, has.”¹³³ The Naturalists achieved this ideological shift by using a literary formula Rand labeled “statistical Naturalism.”¹³⁴ Epitomized by the realist novels of Zola, writers who employed this technique “substitute[d] statistics for values as a criterion of selectivity: that which is statistically prevalent among men . . . is metaphysically significant and representative of man’s nature, that which is rare or exceptional, is not.”¹³⁵ From this point, Rand traced the development of Naturalism into Modernism and the twentieth century.

Following the trend established by writers such as Zola, Rand identified the process by which the realistic aspects of Naturalism came to dominate the subject matter of literary pursuits to the point at which the ideal vision of man had been lowered completely to the ground. As Rand declared, “Naturalists [modernists] consigned the exceptional man to unreality and presented only the men who could be taken as typical of some group or another. . . . Then, since they saw more mediocrity than greatness around them, they began to regard greatness as unreal, and to present only the mediocre, the

¹³¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 109.

¹³² Rand, *Manifesto*, 109.

¹³³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 109.

¹³⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 119.

¹³⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 109.

average, the common, the undistinguished.”¹³⁶ The firm grounding of the Naturalist trend of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be seen in novels such as Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* and Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, both of which chronicled the lower reaches of society and failed to present the reader with anything more than “trite stories” from which questionable ethical principles can be drawn.¹³⁷

Moving into the post-World War I period, the works of Lost Generation writers such Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* furthered the cause of Modernism by glorifying a group of people who simply checked-out of society after the war and had little care beyond immediate gratification. The promotion of this type of carefree attitude reinforced the Naturalist claim “that values have no power and no place, neither in human life nor in literature.”¹³⁸ The avant-garde modernist literature of post-World War II society, typified by Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac, simply took art further down the path of self-destruction. In the wake of the Second World War, Rand described the continued lowering of literary standards to the point at which “the nature of man, the metaphysically significant, important, essential in man—is now represented by dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, sexual perverts, homicidal maniacs and psychotics.”¹³⁹ Now the “statistical Naturalism” of writers such as Zola turned into “the sewer school of art,” whose purpose was “to portray man as impotent and innately loathsome.”¹⁴⁰ While the “frantic search for misery” that characterized modernist literature steadily infiltrated

¹³⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

¹³⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 76.

¹³⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 117.

¹³⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

¹⁴⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 119, 124-25.

American society, a diluted but still potent form of Romanticism continued to captivate large numbers of Americans seeking the uplifting metaphysical potential of art.¹⁴¹

While high-brow literature completely deserted any connection to its romantic past by the beginning of the post-World War II period, Rand pointed to the proliferation of “popular fiction,” which included “detective, adventure, science-fiction novels and Westerns,” as being the heirs to the romantic tradition.¹⁴² While people in the mid-nineteenth century looked to Hugo for “metaphysical abstractions” to aid in the development of their moral compass, American readers in the twentieth century, desperately hungry “for a ray of Romanticism’s light,” had to turn to popular novelists such as Mickey Spillane.¹⁴³ Although largely overlooked today with the exception of their anti-communist bent, popular writers such as Spillane provided “the generalized abstraction” of romantic values that Rand deemed necessary to the durability of individual “consciousness.”¹⁴⁴ Of Spillane and his contemporaries Rand wrote, “Their heroes and villains are abstract projections, and a loosely generalized view of moral values, of a struggle between good and evil, motivates the action.”¹⁴⁵ As exemplified by Spillane, the popular writers of the romantic tradition, who demonstrated in basic terms the higher levels of morality and “values” that can be achieved through the application of individual “volition,” provided man with “what [Rand believed] Naturalistic art can never give him;” a goal, a model to strive for.¹⁴⁶ Although most of Rand’s writing on Romanticism dealt with literature, she hinted that Romanticism still existed in other

¹⁴¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 124.

¹⁴² Rand, *Manifesto*, 103.

¹⁴³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 26, 127.

¹⁴⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 133, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 103.

¹⁴⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 97, 103.

popular mediums where it fought valiantly to resist the onslaught of Modernism in the post-World War II era.

During her discussion of the popular writing that carried the romantic tradition into the post-World War II period, Rand pointed to the medium of film as a perfectly designed outlet for the proliferation of romantic ideals to a mass audience. In the words of the author, “As far as their fiction aspects are concerned, movies . . . by their nature, are media suited exclusively to Romanticism (to abstractions, essentials and drama).”¹⁴⁷ However, because Rand focused her attention almost solely on literature in *The Romantic Manifesto*, it is important to probe other aspects of her life and writings in order to connect her ideas about romantic literature to the medium of film. What can be discerned from such a search is that American cinema “played a major role in Ayn Rand’s professional, as well as personal, life.”¹⁴⁸ In addition to studying at the State Institute for Cinematography prior to leaving Russia in the mid-1920s, Rand worked as a Hollywood screenwriter from the late-1920s to the early-1950s under the tutelage of legendary producers Cecil B. DeMille and Hal Wallis.¹⁴⁹

While Rand worked in Hollywood, she, along with many other writers, directors and actors, became wary of the influence of Communism in the movie industry and in American society as a whole and came together to form The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. Unfortunately, the academic climate of recent

¹⁴⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ Ayn Rand, *Russian Writings on Hollywood* (Irvine, CA: Ayn Rand Institute Press, 1999), 10.

¹⁴⁹ Rand, *Hollywood*, 10-11, 43, 173-218. While a student in Russia, Rand wrote an essay on American cinema, “Hollywood: American City of Movies,” which was illegally published without her knowledge after she left Russia for the United States. Unfortunately, the value of the text for analysis is questionable due to the fact that it was altered by the publisher, which makes it difficult to discern Rand’s voice because the original copy of the essay has never been found. Also of note in terms of the importance of film in Rand’s life is the journal she kept between 1922 and 1929 in which she recorded the names and production information of every film she watched. During this seven year period Rand made 433 trips to theatres from Russia to California.

decades has only been able to cast ridicule upon the Alliance because of its connection to McCarthyism and the Red Scare without giving proper legitimacy to the reasons that motivated individuals such as Rand to adopt severe anti-communist viewpoints, which originated in the 1930s at a time when “Communism was a whole climate of opinion [in the United States].”¹⁵⁰ In a chapter of his larger study, *The Culture of the Cold War*, which addressed “the politics of film,” historian Stephen J. Whitfield broke ranks and acknowledged the influence of Rand’s ideas and writings shortly before he dismissed them as “eccentric and pretentious.”¹⁵¹ However, Whitfield’s analysis highlighted a popular pamphlet Rand authored for the Alliance in 1950; *Screen Guide for Americans*. While historians such as Whitfield have branded this short piece of writing as anti-communist propaganda, its value as an intellectual statement has been overlooked.¹⁵² When analyzed from the perspective of Rand’s later writings in *The Romantic Manifesto* as to the cultural war being waged between Romanticism and Modernism, *Screen Guide for Americans* reflected the way in which Rand applied her views on literature to the post-World War II American film industry.

¹⁵⁰ Burns, *Goddess*, 34-35. Burns did an excellent job of characterizing the trend “in educated, reform-minded circles . . . that the United States would simply have to move toward Communism or, at the very least, socialism.” While the Red Scare that occurred during the post-World War II has pushed many historians to conclude that fears of Communism within the United States were completely exaggerated, less emphasis is placed on the “Popular Front period of 1935-1939, when the Communist Party encouraged an alliance with the American left,” which led many Americans to become affiliated with organizations directly or indirectly associated with the Communist Party. This association even reached the White House. As Burns noted, “One of the [Communist] Party’s most powerful front groups was the American Writers’ Congress, which called for a ‘new literature’ to support a new society, and even convinced President Roosevelt to accept an honorary membership.” While Cold War historians such as Stephen J. Whitfield may be correct when they point to the fact that the Communist element in post-war society never reached a level commensurate to the hysteria created, one must never lose sight of the fact that individuals such as Rand carried with them the first-hand knowledge of the true extent to which Communism had infiltrated the American landscape during the 1930s and had little desire to see it furthered.

¹⁵¹ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 131.

¹⁵² Whitfield, *Culture*, 130-31.

At twelve pages in length, *Screen Guide for Americans* is divided into thirteen points that represented behavior and actions Rand believed should not be allowed into American films if the goal of stopping Communism was to be successful. While the first six points pertain to matters associated with capitalism and economics, the remaining seven dealt with issues related to the “altruist morality” Rand associated with all brands of collectivism and which she saw reflected in the downturn of art she associated with the onset of Modernism.¹⁵³ The ability to detect the influence of Modernism became problematic because its influence on mainstream films did not contain the overt messages associated with avant-garde works of art and literature. In the words of Rand, “[Altruism’s] purpose is to corrupt our moral premises by corrupting non-political movies—by introducing small, casual bits of propaganda into innocent stories—thus making the people absorb the basic premises of Collectivism by indirection and implication.”¹⁵⁴

Delving into more specific aspects of the document, Rand’s indictment of Modernism’s intense focus on “misery,” “mediocrity,” and general degeneracy that appeared in *The Romantic Manifesto*¹⁵⁵ appeared in *Screen Guide for Americans* as warnings against the promotion of “failure” and “depravity.”¹⁵⁶ As Rand wrote of “failure,” “By presenting every kind of failure as sympathetic, as a sign of goodness and virtue. . . . [it] implies that only the evil can succeed under our American system—while the good are to be found in the gutter.”¹⁵⁷ This statement reflected Rand’s criticism of

¹⁵³ Binswanger, *Lexicon*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Ayn Rand, *Screen Guide for Americans* (Beverly Hills, CA: The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, 1950), 1.

¹⁵⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

¹⁵⁶ Rand, *Guide*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Rand, *Guide*, 6.

the trend in Naturalism cum Modernism that focused artistic endeavors on people who had lost-out in society. While Rand never denied that such people existed, she understood that altruist ideology took advantage of the ease with which the problems of one person could be lumped into those of a group, at which point the priority of the individual could be easily sacrificed to the will of the group.

In terms of “depravity,” Rand contended, “If you preach that a depraved person ‘couldn’t help it,’ you are destroying the basis of all morality. You are implying that men cannot be held responsible for their evil acts, because man has no power to choose between good and evil.”¹⁵⁸ In this statement, Rand could have replaced the words “power to choose between good and evil” with “volition,” a concept that underpinned her entire argument in *The Romantic Manifesto* and that viewed “man, not as a helpless pawn of fate, but as a being . . . whose life is directed by his own value-choices.”¹⁵⁹ Rand’s views on the depiction of “depravity” in films dovetailed with her request that filmmakers not “smear an independent man.”¹⁶⁰ In her view, “[Altruism’s] chief purpose is to destroy every form of independence—independent work, independent action, independent property, independent thought, an independent mind, or an independent man.”¹⁶¹ Unlike those altruists who wanted to promote “conformity, likeness, servility, submission and obedience,” Rand viewed the “independent man . . . [as] one who stands alone and respects the same right of others, who does not rule nor serve, who neither sacrifices himself nor others.”¹⁶² These attributes formed the foundation of “the

¹⁵⁸ Rand, *Guide*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 125.

¹⁶⁰ Rand, *Guide*, 6, 9.

¹⁶¹ Rand, *Guide*, 9.

¹⁶² Rand, *Guide*, 9.

generalized abstraction of a hero” Rand profiled in *The Romantic Manifesto* and which she viewed as vital “in shaping human character.”¹⁶³

While bringing together Rand’s *The Romantic Manifesto* and *Screen Guide for Americans* reinforces her arguments as to the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism in the post-World War II American cultural landscape and provides ample justification for extending that analysis into the world of American cinema, the final consideration that must be addressed before moving on to the general historical critiques of the post-war period is the perspective from the modernist position. Viewing post-war culture through the lens of Modernism not only balances the study in terms of perspectives considered, but also allows for the understanding of the adversary Rand viewed as a severe threat to American society. However, the problem with any attempt to synthesize Modernism in a few paragraphs is the fact that the movement had no spokesperson such as Rand, who penned a general manifesto outlining the specific attributes and goals of the movement.

The most logical explanation for the lack of a single defining statement of the main points of Modernism is related to the fact that the movement most closely resembled a diverse “plurality.”¹⁶⁴ As modernist scholar Christopher Butler declared, “[Modernism] was all sorts of things.”¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, modernist scholars such John Orr have confirmed Rand’s declaration that “from 1910 onwards modernist revolt . . . targeted the romantic world-view of the artwork as a form of creative human struggle towards cosmic harmony.”¹⁶⁶ Despite the vast, often unconnected nature of Modernism,

¹⁶³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 133, 99.

¹⁶⁴ Butler, *Modernism*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Butler, *Modernism*, 9.

¹⁶⁶ John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 3.

and the fact that no Rand-like text exists extolling the virtues of Modernism, the modernist mindset and value system Orr identified has been transmitted via the writings of historians such as Peter Gay and Richard Pells, both of whom experienced the modernist impact on American culture, embraced it, and went on to chronicle the movement from a historical perspective that carried their pro-modernist bias. A brief critical examination of their works will not only help to situate Rand's position in relationship to her opposition, but will also provide insight as to the moral and philosophical justifications used to promote the modernist ethos.

Having come to the United States in 1941 as a Jewish refugee fleeing Nazi persecution, Peter Gay possessed a unique modernist make-up in that he had been exposed to the movement in Europe by the Jewish intellectual community as a teenager, and later absorbed its impact on American culture in the post-war period during his undergraduate and graduate studies. Gay displayed his lengthy relationship with and enthusiastic support of Modernism in his 2008 history/appraisal of the movement, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*. In the early pages of the study, Gay characterized the general nature of Modernism when he observed, "It [Modernism] produced a fresh way of seeing society and the artist's role in it, a fresh way of valuing works of culture and their makers."¹⁶⁷ At this point, Gay also highlighted the anti-establishment (anti-nineteenth century) focus of Modernism. In the words of the author, "The one thing that all modernists had indisputably in common was the conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the experimental to the

¹⁶⁷ Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy, From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Norton, 2008), 3.

routine.”¹⁶⁸ While these statements do not go beyond the bounds of how other modernist scholars have characterized the movement, and in some ways echo Rand’s own belief in the exceptional nature of the heroic subject, the manner in which Gay applied them to specific modernist creations of the post-war period revealed his desire to elevate certain moral standards that placed him in diametric opposition to Rand’s vision.

In terms of literature, Gay located the works of Gunter Grass under the classification of “writing worthy of being called civilized.”¹⁶⁹ After briefly explaining the plot of Grass’ first novel, *The Tin Drum*, the “hero” of which, Oskar Matzerath, took the form of “a dwarf and a hunchback . . . [who] had not chosen to grow in stature beyond three years,” Gay hailed the book as a “historic masterpiece.”¹⁷⁰ The author’s admiration of Grass’ creation of socially and physically malformed characters, as well as his development of “magical realism,” stood opposite of everything Rand thought literature should epitomize.¹⁷¹ In discussing another novel in Grass’ Danzig Trilogy, Rand likened his work to writing fit for the “gutter.”¹⁷² In her words, “Sewers are not very rich nor very deep, and today’s dramatists [Grass] seem to be scratching bottom.”¹⁷³ While Gay praised characters such as Matzerath, a cruel individual “responsible for several deaths but [who] always succeeds in escaping blame,”¹⁷⁴ Rand lambasted the utter disregard for “human virtue” that pervaded the novels of modernist writers such as Grass and came to be admired by scholars who interpreted those works.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Gay, *Modernism*, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Gay, *Modernism*, 445.

¹⁷⁰ Gay, *Modernism*, 445.

¹⁷¹ Gay, *Modernism*, 445.

¹⁷² Rand, *Guide*, 6.

¹⁷³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 124.

¹⁷⁴ Gay, *Modernism*, 445-46.

¹⁷⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 124.

Moving into an examination of the artistic medium most important in terms of the current study, film, Gay utilized Orson Welles' 1941 film *Citizen Kane* to promote modernist efforts in American cinema. In Gay's estimation, *Citizen Kane*, which profiled the life of a fictional publisher whose life crumbled commensurate to the financial and commercial success he achieved, epitomized American modernist cinema. While the author lauded the "unanimous enthusiasm" showered upon *Citizen Kane* by contemporary critics, he demonstrated a thinly veiled contempt for the larger audiences "of moviegoers presumed to know best" for not making the film a financial as well as critical success.¹⁷⁶ After referring to Welles as a "brilliant genius," Gay concluded his analysis by blaming the business end of the Hollywood studio system for the lackluster box-office performance of *Citizen Kane* and the remainder of Welles' jaded career, while he also suggested that Welles was too good for American audiences.¹⁷⁷ In the words of the author, "It [Welles' career] was part of an all too familiar story, a modernist's failure at the hands of the philistine. American culture may not have deserved him, but serious moviegoers with a taste for Modernism will always have *Citizen Kane* as a lasting pleasure."¹⁷⁸

Gay's positive critique of Welles and *Citizen Kane*, which proved highly dismissive of mainstream American movie audiences, reflected his opposition to Rand's insistence as to "the people's need for a ray of Romanticism's light."¹⁷⁹ The fact that far more people flocked to theatres in 1941 to watch movies such as *Sergeant York*, a film that told the story of America's most decorated soldier of World War I, as opposed to

¹⁷⁶ Gay, *Modernism*, 387.

¹⁷⁷ Gay, *Modernism*, 387-89.

¹⁷⁸ Gay, *Modernism*, 389.

¹⁷⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 127.

Citizen Kane, indicated the almost “universal need” for Romanticism among American film audiences that Rand highlighted.¹⁸⁰ However, academic elitists such as Gay continue to ignore the positive power and message contained within a film such as *Sergeant York* because it failed to live up to the morally blurred landscapes found in the majority of works produced in the modernist tradition such as *Citizen Kane*. While Rand admired the romantic characters of real-life stories such as *Sergeant York*, or those created by artists such as the detective writer Mickey Spillane, whose “potboiling plots and gun-toting heroes were dedicated to separating good from evil,”¹⁸¹ the critics who applauded the morally ambivalent *Citizen Kane* viewed the works of such writers and filmmakers as dangerous and “paranoid,” while modern historians have marginalized their artistic output, most typically by labeling it anti-communist drivel devoid of any merit.¹⁸²

In 2011, historian Richard Pells, who began his friendly relationship with American Modernism as a teenager in the 1950s, built upon Gay’s work by surveying the

¹⁸⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 127-28. *Sergeant York* was the top box-office film in 1941. Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 92.

¹⁸¹ Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 310-11.

¹⁸² Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 59-61. Halberstam established his position on Spillane by placing his analysis in line with fellow popular historian Kenneth C. Davis, who believed the author’s signature character, Mike Hammer, stood as “a reflection of the McCarthyite soul of the country.” When crossing the line into academic historical analysis the Spillane’s writing has fared little better in terms of its positive cultural value. Stephen J. Whitfield dismissed the possibility of any “literary significance” in terms of Spillane’s work, which he characterized as “appalling crudeness.” Considered as works of Cold War propaganda, Whitfield lambasted what he viewed as the “vigilante ruthlessness” promoted by Spillane. Whitfield did not attempt to hide the fact that he believed “[Mike] Hammer personifies the rejection of liberalism.” While there is no dispute as to the dark, violent and anti-collective nature of Spillane’s novels, Whitfield failed to acknowledge what Rand understood very clearly, that “art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value judgments.” Just because Spillane’s character Mike Hammer engaged in violent, and often deadly confrontations with Communist infiltrators that did not always fall within the rule of law did not mean that he advocated the wholesale killing of anyone thought to be a Communist. The grim situations that filled the pages of Spillane’s novels, which Whitfield cited extensively, stand as outstanding examples of the “metaphysical abstractions” Rand believed vital in the ability of the individual to make moral determinations from the art they view. Although Whitfield’s analysis included the fact that Spillane’s novels sold millions of copies, he failed to make the connection between the numbers of people who read Spillane’s work and the need for art with a clear, understandable message. Whitfield, *Culture*, 34-37. Rand, *Manifesto*, 8, 26.

way in which the movement in post-war America grew to the point that it impacted the culture of the entire world.¹⁸³ While the exportation of American culture is not under consideration in the current study, Pells' detailed account of the creation of American Modernism is of great importance in gaining additional understanding of the cultural and intellectual forces targeted by Rand. In much the same manner as Gay conducted his study, Pells constructed his examination, *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture*, by first pointing out the overriding themes of American Modernism and then proceeding to provide evidence as to their legitimacy.

In terms of American cinema, Pells discussed a wide array of post-war films from Westerns such as *High Noon* to social dramas such as *Rebel without a Cause* to satirical works such as *Dr. Strangelove*. Within the course of his analysis, Pells glowingly described “the obsession in these films with selling out, with the dangers that come from living by the ethic of success, with the spiritual poverty that accompanies the acquisition of wealth.”¹⁸⁴ The author then took dead aim at “the failure of parents . . . and authority figures of all types to comprehend the young,” a trend to which he positively attributed the rise of “cultural hero[es]” such as James Dean, who took on an American society dominated by “law-abiding conformists.”¹⁸⁵ Taking the momentum started by individuals such as Dean in the 1950s, Pells documented what he referred to as “a renaissance in American filmmaking [that] coincided with the political and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s.”¹⁸⁶ The films and “heroes” Pells chose to elevate reflected

¹⁸³ Richard Pells, *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), ix. Pells established his connection to American modernism in the Preface when he reminisced about his interactions with the artistic creations of the filmmaker John Ford and architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

¹⁸⁴ Pells, *Modernist*, 272.

¹⁸⁵ Pells, *Modernist*, 272, 276.

¹⁸⁶ Pells, *Modernist*, 294.

the stark contrast between the values of Romanticism as outlined by Rand and its modernist opposition.¹⁸⁷

Building on his analysis of 1950s American cinema that “addressed the problems and defined the mood of America,” Pells argued that films such as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider*, *The Last Picture Show* and *The Godfather* represented the cultural rebirth of American cinema.¹⁸⁸ Like Gay, Pells wasted no time in pointing out that these films “were more sophisticated, verbally and visually” than American films of previous generations.¹⁸⁹ In terms of the Americans who viewed these films, Pells argued that this group of “American filmmakers appeared to have a higher regard for the intelligence of their audience,” who “were encouraged to connect with the characters however mystifying they might occasionally be.”¹⁹⁰ While the author’s contention as to the quality, intellectual rigor and desired level of audience relationship to characters completely dismissed the content and substance contained in the works produced by filmmakers over the preceding fifty years, the more problematic aspect of his comments centered on the lack of seriousness he applied to issues of characterization.

Based on the quote cited above as to the “sophisticated” nature of the new style of American modernist films of the late 1960s and 1970s, Pells’ infatuation with stylization is apparent to the extent that he glossed over the “mystifying” characters in the films he heralded as landmarks.¹⁹¹ As Rand observed when considering the role of style in literature, “To a real writer the re-creation of a mood [by means of artist style] is only one of the means he has to master for the achievement of such complex elements as theme,

¹⁸⁷ Pells, *Modernist*, 302.

¹⁸⁸ Pells, *Modernist*, 270.

¹⁸⁹ Pells, *Modernist*, 303.

¹⁹⁰ Pells, *Modernist*, 303-04.

¹⁹¹ Pells, *Modernist*, 303-04.

plot, [and] characterization.”¹⁹² Thus, “Style . . . is only a means to an end—the means of telling a story. The writer who develops a beautiful style, but has nothing to say, represents a kind of arrested esthetic development.”¹⁹³ Although he did not acknowledge the point, Pells’ own writing about the films cited above demonstrated their hollow nature despite the author’s attempts to raise these cinematic creations above their predecessors.

The first question that must be raised is a clarification of the “mystifying” characters that populated the films cited by Pells.¹⁹⁴ In terms of *The Godfather*, the viewer is presented with the Corleone family, who led an organized crime syndicate and systematically moved to dominate criminal enterprises that impacted American society in addition to killing the members of other syndicates that attempted to assert similar control. With *Bonnie and Clyde*, which Pells labeled “an American countercultural romance,” audiences encountered a glorification of a pair of degenerate outlaws, who often held less respect among their own criminal element as they did law enforcement and the public.¹⁹⁵ In *Easy Rider*, a film with “no script,” Pells happily pointed out that “the characters have no rationale except to flee the world of conformists and rednecks.”¹⁹⁶ Of *The Last Picture Show*, Pells wrote, “None of the characters has a mission. . . . All they can do is roam, without purpose or point, through the empty streets.”¹⁹⁷ Out of all these observations, Pells could only conclude, “The audience is left to decide, as it often was in the foreign and American films of the 1960s and 1970s, what to make of the story or the characters or the morally ambiguous conclusion.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Rand, *Manifesto*, 89.

¹⁹³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 88.

¹⁹⁴ Pells, *Modernist*, 304.

¹⁹⁵ Pells, *Modernist*, 305.

¹⁹⁶ Pells, *Modernist*, 309.

¹⁹⁷ Pells, *Modernist*, 309-10.

¹⁹⁸ Pells, *Modernist*, 310.

The problem with Pells' conclusion from a Randian perspective comes when one considers what the audience is left with to make their moral determinations. Of the four films cited above, only one, *Bonnie and Clyde*, despite its glorification of criminals, demonstrated a somewhat clear confrontation between good and evil. If one attempted to draw a moral picture from *The Godfather* the choice would be between which set of criminals presented the better moral compass. In terms *Easy Rider* and *The Last Picture Show*, their random nature and lack of plot and true character development left the viewer with no substance on which to base a philosophical or moral judgment other than misguided youths who wanted to mimic such nihilistic behavior because they did not know any better. At best, the films cited by Pells contained "heroes" so tainted that the term should not even be applied, and at worst the heroic character gave way to individuals who lacked the gumption, wherewithal and concern to make moral judgments of any kind.¹⁹⁹ While new techniques and experimentation may have made these films more "sophisticated" by modernist standards,²⁰⁰ it is clear that their contribution "to the preservation and survival of man's consciousness," the aspect of art that Rand believed trumped all others, left audiences with their feet planted firmly in mid-air.²⁰¹

Of more direct consequence to this introduction, Pells' examination of Modernism, along with that of Gay, highlighted the more complex aspects of American society during the post-war period. Within the context of their work, traditional notions of a united, content America of the late 1940s and 1950s that gave way to a radical cultural revolution in the mid-1960s appear to be inaccurate and misleading. Re-evaluating the cultural dynamics of the post-war period prior to moving on to the film

¹⁹⁹ Pells, *Modernist*, 302.

²⁰⁰ Pells, *Modernist*, 303.

²⁰¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 5.

analyses contained in chapter two will provide a more detailed contextual framework from which to better understand how, when and under what circumstances the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism erupted in American cinema.

The Permissive Society: A Critical Re-Evaluation of the Post World War II American Cultural Landscape

James T. Patterson's 1996 work *Grand Expectations*, cited above for the author's observations on the cultural and intellectual climate of 1950s America, attempted to bring together the entire post-war period, nearly three decades, in a single narrative. While Patterson's prolific volume synthesized the major threads of ideas and events that occurred between 1945 and 1974, the author's characterization of the two major decades that comprised the post-war era, the 1950s and 1960s, followed the traditional path of treating each decade as a separate entity and reflected the author's own connection to the cultural milieu of the time in question.²⁰² While Patterson opened his chapter on the general cultural aspects of the 1950s by alluding to the fact that changing cultural standards "exposed undercurrents of dissatisfaction and rebellion that were to break loose

²⁰² In the sense that the word traditional is used to identify Patterson's characterization of the 1950s and 1960s, one could substitute the word original because Patterson's ideas about the connections and differences between the two decades developed before the 1960s ended. While a search by this writer did not yield specific biographical information in terms of a date of birth, Patterson completed his doctorate and published his first book, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, by 1967, which meant that he experienced the transition between the 1950s and 1960s as an adult culturally rooted in the time. Based on the known timeline, Patterson spent his childhood and teenage years in the late 1940s and 1950s. During the early 1960s he finished college, entered graduate school and by the end of the decade had published a book and began his career as a professional academic. Having entered the world of college teaching in the late 1960s it is not difficult to understand why Patterson would come to view the 1960s as a wholesale change from his own experiences as a teenager and beginning college student in the 1950s. While such firsthand knowledge is valuable in that it provides the perspective of having been on the ground during both decades in question, one cannot ignore the fact that other perspectives are blurred by not being able to more objectively view a period of time removed of personal experiences and memories.

more powerfully in the 1960s,” the author’s analysis led him to conclude that “many of the ‘threats’ to older ways of life in the 1950s were exaggerated.”²⁰³

Three chapters later, when Patterson assessed the 1960s from the same perspective, he determined, “Many Americans at the time indeed sensed that the times were changing, that a new if undefined *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times, was in the process of remaking society and culture.”²⁰⁴ Despite Patterson’s stated intention to connect the cultural trends of the 1950s to the 1960s, statements such as this one left readers with the distinct impression that, while some overlap existed, the two decades stand separate in terms of their cultural make-up. Moving beyond Patterson’s grand work of synthesis to works by historians of a younger generation, one finds similar conclusions as to the separate nature of the two decades.

Published in 1994 and still considered one of the standard general works on the 1960s, historian David R. Farber’s *The Age of Great Dreams* cemented for a new generation of scholars and students the same distinctions between the 1950s and 1960s that Patterson and others in his generation formed as far back as the 1960s. While Farber paid similar scant attention to the relationship between the social changes that occurred during the 1960s and the culture of the late 1940s and 1950s, he never referred specifically to the 1950s in the introduction to his book, but rather penned grandiose statements that characterized the 1960s as a singularly special decade. In the words of the author, “In the 1960s Americans dared to chance great dreams and they paid for it.”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Patterson, *Expectations*, 344, 374.

²⁰⁴ Patterson, *Expectations*, 447.

²⁰⁵ David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 3.

The sentence that preceded this quote reminded the reader of “the possibilities, the grandeur and . . . the tragedy” associated with the decade.²⁰⁶

When Farber finally addressed the 1950s in the first chapter of the book, he did so only to draw severe contrasts between that decade and the 1960s. In the course of attempting to recreate the general atmosphere in the United States on January 1, 1960, Farber noted, “Tens of millions of Americans, on New Year’s Day 1960, did not expect or desire anything fundamental to change in the decade to come.”²⁰⁷ Statements such as this one did little to stimulate thought as to the complexities of the cultural framework of the post-war period as a whole and instead cultivated the perception that the culture of the late 1940s and 1950s stopped at a certain point and that the culture of the 1960s took over. It was not until the last years of the twentieth century that historians began to truly connect the 1960s to the preceding fifteen years of post-war society in a meaningful way that identified strong cultural continuities which spanned the entire era.

As the twentieth century came to a close, intellectual historian Gertrude Himmelfarb chronicled the impact on American society of the “cultural revolution” that occurred during the 1960s in her 1999 book, *One Nation, Two Cultures*.²⁰⁸ At first glance, phrases such as “cultural revolution” appeared to reinforce the traditional scholarly interpretation of the post-war period, which emphasized clear distinctions between the 1950s and 1960s.²⁰⁹ However, Himmelfarb’s analysis went beyond the token connections made between the two decades by Patterson and Farber in that she acknowledged the true impact and force behind changing cultural norms that dated to the

²⁰⁶ Farber, *Dreams*, 3.

²⁰⁷ Farber, *Dreams*, 8.

²⁰⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1999), 11.

²⁰⁹ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 11.

1940s in terms of their contribution to the more well-known upheavals of the 1960s. Himmelfarb turned the traditional interpretation of the “open society and . . . thriving economy” of the late 1940s and 1950s, typically viewed as a time of cultural conservatism, upside down.²¹⁰ In opposition to those who “described [the 1950s] as a period of sexual repression and patriarchal oppression, [of] bleak conformism and quiet desperation,” Himmelfarb highlighted a very different set of facts about the late 1940s and early 1950s.²¹¹

In terms of the individuals who later became “the revolutionaries of the sixties,” Himmelfarb observed that “so far from being repressed or oppressed, they had been brought up by doting parents following the permissive prescriptions of Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose books on child care were the bible of the generation.”²¹² When it came time for the children of that generation to seek higher education, many of them did so in largely expanded state university systems where “they enjoyed the privilege of attending colleges that flourished . . . thanks in part to the G.I. Bill of Rights and the massive infusion of government funds” that occurred because of the Second World War.²¹³ While Patterson concluded that groups such as the Beats, headlined by writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg, had little real effect on the cultural dynamics of the 1950s, Himmelfarb pointed out that the academic environment that fostered the birth of the Beat Generation in the late 1940s provided the students of the 1950s and early 1960s with “the intellectual stimulus to challenge the dominant culture.”²¹⁴ Outside of the academy, other modernist influences such as Abstract Expressionism, which “made a hero of [the anti-

²¹⁰ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 13.

²¹¹ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 13.

²¹² Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 13.

²¹³ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 13.

²¹⁴ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 13-14.

establishment artist] Jackson Pollock,” undermined more traditional forms of artistic expression.²¹⁵

As far as the political climate of the 1950s, Himmelfarb chose to go beyond the historical view of the McCarthy period that only focused on the negative aspects of the anti-Communist efforts of the American government, and instead focused on the large-scale “anti-McCarthy movement,” which educated many in the “tactics of dissent” that are typically associated the protest movements of the 1960s.²¹⁶ Lastly, Himmelfarb questioned the conservatism of the first fifteen years of the post-war period in terms of human sexuality by chronicling “the Freudianism that was so pervasive and influential in the postwar generation.”²¹⁷ From the proliferation of sex manuals to Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, Himmelfarb argued that “the techniques of sexual liberation and fulfillment” attained prominence and popularity during the 1950s, well before the free love atmosphere of the late 1960s took shape.²¹⁸ In the end, while Himmelfarb’s purpose in writing *One Nation, Two Cultures* centered on the goal of better understanding the late twentieth-century implications of the events that occurred in the 1960s, she understood that those events could not be separated from the preceding fifteen years of post-war culture. As the author, referencing the classic late-1950s traditional sitcom *Leave it to Beaver*, concluded, “When enthusiasts for the sixties pride themselves on doing away with the bad old days of the fifties . . . it is well to remember that there was much going on outside of the Cleaver household.”²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 14.

²¹⁶ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 14.

²¹⁷ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 14.

²¹⁸ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 14.

²¹⁹ Himmelfarb, *Cultures*, 14-15.

In 2008, historian Alan J. Levine explored the American landscape of the 1950s beyond the world of television sitcoms in his study, *Bad Old Days: The Myth of the 1950s*. Following the line of thinking established by Himmelfarb, Levine sought to combat the historical “distortion” of the 1950s, which he blamed on historians such as Farber, who forwarded “a sentimentalized version of the 1960s.”²²⁰ While the author acknowledged the efforts of popular historians such as David Halberstam, who argued that “it was the glory of the 1950s that . . . paved the way for a later era [the 1960s],” Levine also pointed out that such efforts suffered because of a political battle in which both sides wanted to marginalize the 1950s for different reasons.²²¹ On one side of this battle stood the conservatives who waged a hard campaign for traditional values during the Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s. As Levine observed, this group came to believe that the proximity of the 1950s to the upheavals of the 1960s served as a good reason to promote a bland version of the decade. In the words of the author, “Conservatives . . . wonder if any decade next to the 1960s might have something wrong with it.”²²²

With conservative elements fighting to maintain the promotion of a docile cultural memory of the 1950s, Levine contended that “liberals and leftists” wanted to maintain the same view of the decade because such a vision bolstered their promotion of the extreme importance and unique cultural dynamics of the 1960s.²²³ As the author concluded, “[The more dynamic view of the 1950s forwarded by Halberstam] has not proven too popular among liberals and leftists. Perhaps it is just too far from their favored

²²⁰ Alan J. Levine, *“Bad Old Days:” The Myth of the 1950s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2008), 1.

²²¹ Levine, *Myth*, 4.

²²² Levine, *Myth*, 4.

²²³ Levine, *Myth*, 4.

clichés.”²²⁴ In order to fortify his arguments, Levine focused on examples from two areas related to the current study; “social criticism” found in popular intellectual writing and “popular culture” conveyed through the medium of film.²²⁵

Despite the efforts of those who wanted to portray the 1950s as a time of “supposed complacency,” Levine looked to the literary and intellectual world to prove that “the 1950s produced far more social criticism than is generally realized.”²²⁶ After identifying a cavalcade of writers headlined by individuals such as the sociologist C. Wright Mills, philosopher and political theorist Herbert Marcuse and historian William Appleman Williams, Levine contended that the anti-establishment writings of these authors produced no documented “harassment by the supposed hordes of McCarthyism.”²²⁷ Instead, this disparate group of intellectuals led the way for what happened in the following decade and beyond, which prompted Levine to conclude that “the 1960s, despite what is usually assumed, did not produce much that was really new, even in the way of . . . ideas.”²²⁸

Moving away from the intellectual realm of 1950s culture, Levine applied the same critical light to the more popular world of American cinema. Instead of characterizing the development of post-war cinema in terms of a slow process of changing values that led to a complete revolution against traditional standards by the mid-1960s, Levine documented “a quiet loosening of censorship [that] seems to have taken place soon after World War II.”²²⁹ Levine linked this change in standards to a new

²²⁴ Levine, *Myth*, 4.

²²⁵ Levine, *Myth*, 83, 90.

²²⁶ Levine, *Myth*, 83.

²²⁷ Levine, *Myth*, 84.

²²⁸ Levine, *Myth*, 84.

²²⁹ Levine, *Myth*, 92.

mindset that seemed to take over Hollywood after World War II. In the words of the author, “After 1945 the mood and tone of American movies deviated sharply from that dominant before and during the war. They were noticeably more mature, even bleak, sometimes, even, repulsively cynical or perverse.”²³⁰ Levine argued that the darker atmosphere in which Hollywood operated because of relaxed moral standards allowed for a ten year period between 1945 and 1955 in which “Hollywood made movies about matters it would previously not have touched with a ten-foot pole.”²³¹ Most of the revered films to emerge from this period—Westerns such as *High Noon*, dramas such as *Sunset Boulevard* and science fiction films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—stood in opposition, not in support of the constraining, conservative culture that is typically associated with the early post-war period. While Levine positively acknowledged the contribution of the socially conscious films of the early post-war period, he also connected the changing circumstances that heralded their creation to the beginning of the more morally reprehensible aspects of post-war culture that culminated in the late 1960s.²³²

Although the films cited in the preceding paragraph sounded the call for overt social commentary long before the 1960s, and proliferated due to relaxed moral standards, Levine also observed how the increased lack of constraint during the early post-war period led to a trend in the late 1950s in which “truly unpleasant and perverse movies had begun to appear.”²³³ More and more, films such as the “race-conscious” *Bad Day at Black Rock*, in which a white man avenges the murder of a Japanese family, came

²³⁰ Levine, *Myth*, 92.

²³¹ Levine, *Myth*, 95.

²³² Levine, *Myth*, 95.

²³³ Levine, *Myth*, 95.

to be replaced by films such as *Suddenly Last Summer*, a story about a young woman whose family attempts to force her to undergo a lobotomy to cover-up her knowledge of her cousin's homosexual activity that led to his murder.²³⁴ In Levine's view, what had started out as a forwarding of social commentary brought about by "the loosened standards governing the portrayal of sex and violence" led to "a loss of imagination" that served as a direct link to drug and sex laden films such as *Easy Rider* that would not appear for another decade.²³⁵ While Levine, like Himmelfarb before him, brought to light numerous aspects of post-war culture that pointed to the strong threads that connected the moral and social battles of the 1960s to the late-1940s and 1950s, it took the work of another historian, Alan Petigny, to bring their ideas under the umbrella of a new, all-encompassing theoretical interpretation of the post-World War II era from a cultural perspective.

In 2009, Petigny published a cultural examination of post-World War II America, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965*, which brought the fact-based evidence as to the continuities of post-war culture, identified by Himmelfarb and Levine, into a theoretical model that profiled the cultural dynamics of the period within groupings such as "religion," "psychology," "sex" and "youth culture."²³⁶ In his profile of American religion during the late 1940s and 1950s, Petigny argued that "the secularization of Sunday and the dulling of sectarian differences [in addition to] the growth of interfaith marriages and the reduced emphasis placed on proselytizing" indicated that one of the major centers of moral guidance in American society conformed to societal changes,

²³⁴ Levine, *Myth*, 94-95.

²³⁵ Levine, *Myth*, 95.

²³⁶ Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15, 53, 100, 179.

which signaled “that the early postwar years were not a time when the religious faith of most Americans was deepening.”²³⁷ In most cases, as Petigny concluded, “The level of commitment required of believers was becoming less burdensome.”²³⁸ Leading religious figures such as Norman Vincent Peale participated in this “accelerated rise of permissive ideas” by walking the line between religion and psychology.²³⁹ Despite “Peale’s conservative politics,” he marched in lock-step with figures such as Dr. Benjamin Spock in “warning his readers [in 1950] about the dangers of sexual repression.”²⁴⁰ Such statements appeared concurrent to documented “cultural change[s]” that included “a sharp upswing in the level of premarital sex,” “the more aggressive marketing of birth control,” and rising “rates of single motherhood,” disturbing cultural trends that, in Petigny’s view, the American religious establishment had to accept at some level in order to maintain its following.²⁴¹

While most of the behavior described above originated in the adult world of the early post-war period, Petigny went on to document the process by which the impact of the younger generation on the adult population proved just as important in the instigation of the “permissive turn” that occurred in the early post-war period.²⁴² Fully developed by the 1950s, the “cult of youth,” centered on the sexually charged nature of rock ‘n’ roll, also impacted how post-war society viewed issues of sex and religion.²⁴³ While “establishment” entertainer Pat Boone “introduce[d] thousands of fans to other [more morally questionable] rock ‘n’ roll acts” such as Elvis Presley, in addition to presenting

²³⁷ Petigny, *Permissive*, 53.

²³⁸ Petigny, *Permissive*, 54.

²³⁹ Petigny, *Permissive*, 50.

²⁴⁰ Petigny, *Permissive*, 51, 133.

²⁴¹ Petigny, *Permissive*, 130, 112, 132.

²⁴² Petigny, *Permissive*, 13.

²⁴³ Petigny, *Permissive*, 222.

the youth of America with his own lighter interpretations of overtly sexual songs such as “Blueberry Hill,” large numbers of adults past the point of youth culture filled their “desire . . . to remain young at heart” by consistently watching programs such as *American Bandstand* and reading *MAD* magazine.²⁴⁴ Considered alongside the changing psychological, sexual, and religious mores described above, the extension of youth culture beyond the bounds of adolescence added to the list of cultural features associated with the early post-war period and begs the question; why, if all these trends existed, has the late 1960s received all of the attention in terms of emphasis on moral and social change?

In Petigny’s estimation, prevalence of certain behaviors did not necessarily equate to open cultural acceptance. As the author concluded, “During the 1960s, Americans were simply more willing to acknowledge the extracurricular activities of their youth [and society in general] than they had been during the previous decade.”²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, historical detection and intellectual inquiry has demonstrated the existence and importance of a large and steady cultural change that followed the end of World War II. In the end, Petigny’s wholesale consideration of the connection between trends in psychology, changing attitudes toward religion and sex, as well as the broad appeal of youth culture, pointed to the realization that “an unprecedented challenge to traditional moral constraints” saturated post-war American culture prior to the famed events of the late 1960s.²⁴⁶ In fact, it is highly improbable that the late 1960s as we know them today would be recognizable without “the dramatic liberalization of values [that occurred]

²⁴⁴ Petigny, *Permissive*, 185-88, 220-21. Petigny noted how up and coming, and often controversial, rock ‘n’ roll entertainers such as Elvis Presley often opened for Boone early in their careers, which provided quite a bit of exposure to the more strait-laced audiences that came to see Boone.

²⁴⁵ Petigny, *Permissive*, 117.

²⁴⁶ Petigny, *Permissive*, 2-3.

during the Truman and Eisenhower years.”²⁴⁷ However, before ending this introductory chapter, the 1960s must be briefly considered in terms of establishing that decade’s place at the end of the larger trends identified by Himmelfarb, Levine and Petigny.

In addressing the 1960s in response to the restructuring of the post-World War II cultural landscape documented above, it is of vital importance that the 1960s are not allowed to fall victim to the same problems that the historians cited above exposed when examining the traditional scholarship on the 1950s. While evidence to support the characterization of the United States from the mid-1940s onward as a *Permissive Society* has been clearly established, one cannot treat such information as though unanimity of opinion in support of the changing cultural landscape existed even after the onset of the more openly anti-traditional 1960s. To believe that even a majority of American youths in the late 1960s supported the mythical leftist hippie counter-culture, which has become one of the standard images of the period, would be no more responsible than believing that a majority of teenage males in the 1950s looked and acted like Wally Cleaver. The fact that “generations [and cultures] are not monolithic” led sociologist Rebecca E. Klatch and historian John A. Andrew to document the libertarian and conservative response by American youth to their counterparts on the political Left during the 1960s.²⁴⁸

Organized in 1960, the Young Americans for Freedom attracted conservative and libertarian minded American college students and represented what Andrew referred to as

²⁴⁷ Petigny, *Permissive*, 2.

²⁴⁸ Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

“another side . . . [of] the sixties.”²⁴⁹ The organization’s founding document, *The Sharon Statement*, read as though it could have been written by a young Ayn Rand. From the opening line of the document, which announced that the United States was experiencing a “time of moral and political crisis,” *The Sharon Statement* attacked collectivism and altruism and promoted the individual.²⁵⁰ While the connection between the founding of the Young Americans for Freedom and the philosophy of Rand are evident, the more interesting aspect of *The Sharon Statement* is the fact that a group of young American college students in 1960, years removed from the cultural explosion and social turmoil of the late-1960s, organized around the idea that a “moral and political crisis” existed in the country.²⁵¹

On one level the recognition of a cultural crisis by the founders of the Young Americans for Freedom seems to confirm the arguments made by Himmelfarb, Levine, and Petigny as to the true impact of the changing cultural and moral standards that occurred during the early post-war period, as the students who founded the Young Americans for Freedom emerged from high school and began college during the supposedly docile, conservative 1950s. Clearly, their behavior must have been motivated by some type of a reaction to the realities of the changing culture they observed in their own surroundings. On a deeper level, and of vital importance to this study, the existence of libertarian and conservative opposition to the leftist youth and intellectual culture of the 1960s highlighted the continuation, and one could argue the culmination, of the struggle between Romanticism and Modernism as outlined by Rand in *The Romantic*

²⁴⁹ John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 4.

²⁵⁰ Andrew, *Sixties*, 221-222.

²⁵¹ Andrew, *Sixties*, 221-222.

Manifesto. While the leftists stood on the side of collectivism, altruism and the modernist diminishment of the heroic individual in favor of the group, the libertarian and conservative opposition heralded the individual and vehemently opposed the collective.

In fighting for their political, social and cultural ideals, these generational elements represented the opposing sides of the artistic struggle for “man’s consciousness” that Rand chronicled throughout the post-war period.²⁵² In the end, the students on the Left and Right acted based on their own “metaphysical abstractions” of what they believed represented right and wrong.²⁵³ Those ideas, as Daniel Wickberg noted, had to come from somewhere. The only task that remains is to examine the art of the time, in this case Hollywood films, to discover how the struggle, which began in the mid-1940s and culminated in the late 1960s, impacted and was reflected in popular culture and to understand the process by which the conflict developed over time.

²⁵² Rand, *Manifesto*, 4.

²⁵³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 26.

CHAPTER III

THE WESTERN FILM IN POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICA

Why are you stopping?
They're making me run. I've never run from anybody before.
Then don't go back.
I've got to. That's the whole thing.
—Amy and Will Kane, *High Noon*, 1952

An Injun will chase a thing till he thinks he's chased it enough.
Then he quits. Same way when he runs. Seems like
he never learns there's such a thing as a critter that'll keep
comin' on. So we'll find 'em in the end. I promise you.
We'll find 'em. Just as sure as the turnin' of the earth.
—Ethan Edwards, *The Searchers*, 1956

When you side with a man you stay with him. And if you can't
do that you're like some animal, you're finished!
—Pike Bishop, *The Wild Bunch*, 1969

***High Noon* and Modernism's Opening Assault on the Romanticism of the Western Genre**

Director Fred Zinnemann's 1952 Western, *High Noon* tells the story of Marshal Will Kane, who, at the beginning of the film, is seen retiring his badge in order to marry Amy, a young Quaker. Just as Kane hands in his badge he is informed that former town menace and convicted killer Frank Miller has been paroled from prison and is on his way to Hadleyville to rendezvous with his two brothers and another former gang member to excise revenge on Kane for having brought him to justice five years earlier. Upon

reception of this news Kane's friends push the newlyweds for a quick departure so that they will be as far away as possible prior to the arrival of Frank Miller on the noon train. Although reluctant to leave because the town's new marshal is not due to arrive until the following day, Kane climbs atop his packed carriage and departs with Amy. However, after going only a short distance Kane cannot bring himself to keep going and against Amy's request turns the carriage back toward Hadleyville.

Instead of receiving the help and support of his friends upon his return to town, Kane is systematically refused help in fighting the Miller Gang by everyone except the town drunk and a young teenage boy, which he refuses. Kane's wife, because of her Quaker pacifism, also deserts his side and purchases a ticket to Saint Louis in which she will depart alone on the same train that brings Frank Miller to town. With all of the town, his wife and even his own deputy refusing to assist him, Kane scrawls out his last will and testament in his office and sets out into the street to face the Miller Gang alone. After vanquishing two members of the gang on his own, Kane's wife returns to town from the train depot after coming to the realization that she cannot leave her husband to die and shoots a third member of the gang in the back from an office window killing him instantly. After the killing the third gang member, Frank Miller takes Amy hostage and drags her into the middle of the street in order to lure Kane out of the building in which he has taken cover. Kane agrees to come out and as Miller turns Amy loose a struggle ensues at which point Miller and Kane draw their weapons and Kane kills Miller. After the death of Miller the entire town emerges from hiding and surrounds Will and Amy. Surveying the faces of his former friends who refused to lift a finger to stop the Miller

Gang, Kane slowly takes off his badge for the last time and tosses it in the dirt before boarding the carriage and riding off with Amy.²⁵⁴

Released in 1952 at the height of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, *High Noon*, with its basic story of a man standing alone against a dangerous enemy has become, in terms of historical analysis, a cultural reflection of the social, political and cultural climate of early 1950s America based on an interpretation of comments made by *High Noon* screenwriter Carl Foreman, a former Communist, who faced a subpoena from the House Un-American Activities Committee during the production of the film. Historian John H. Lenihan forwarded the common historical view of the film when he noted, “Screenwriter Carl Foreman admittedly attacked community cowardice and conformity during the McCarthy period in which became *High Noon*.”²⁵⁵ Cultural and film historian Nora Sayre also promoted this view of the film in her notable study *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*. In the words of the author, “When Carl Foreman was writing *High Noon* in 1952, he deliberately used Gary Cooper’s lone marshal combatting some dangerous outlaws in a small town—where no one wants to support him—as a parable for the Committee’s onslaught on Hollywood, and the timidity of the community there.”²⁵⁶ While the Cold War interpretation of *High Noon* is typical and fits well with the modern leftist political narrative, it ignores deeper studies and considerations of the film in terms of how it reflected larger cultural trends in American society.

Sociologist and film historian Will Wright identified *High Noon* as being a major contribution to a trend in the Western genre that started in 1950 “in which the relation

²⁵⁴ *High Noon*, DVD, directed by Fred Zinnemann (1952; Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2008).

²⁵⁵ John H. Lenihan, *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 21.

²⁵⁶ Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War* (New York: Dial Press, 1982), 176.

between the hero and society was significantly changed.”²⁵⁷ Film historian John Cawelti viewed *High Noon* as part of a larger cultural upheaval during “the [late] 1940s and 1950s [that] reflected the increasing gap between an inherited moral universe and the ambiguities of social and cultural change.”²⁵⁸ While the ideas of Wright and Cawelti are valid and will be addressed in a more detailed discussion below, it is first important to understand *High Noon* within the context of the films in the Western genre that preceded it in order to be able to more accurately conclude whether it was a unique piece of Cold War propaganda tied directly to the early 1950s, or part of a larger post-World War II trend in Western filmmaking. This process will also allow for a more accurate application of a Randian analysis to the basic elements of the film as it can then be compared to what came before it and as the second and third sections of this chapter will demonstrate, what came after.

In the decade of the 1930s, the Western stood as a popular established genre in American cinema. In hundreds of films made throughout the decade, eager audiences of young and old alike witnessed the thrilling exploits of screen heroes such as Randolph Scott and Johnny Mack Brown, who stood tall in the face of danger, always fighting on the side of right as opposed to a clearly defined wrong. In writing about this period of Western filmmaking Lenihan noted, “The Western translated a relatively brief segment of American history into an idealization of socially responsible individualism, of a transitional social order both needing and permitting personal freedom and the exercise of

²⁵⁷ Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

²⁵⁸ John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 91.

individual power.”²⁵⁹ As the author concluded, “Within the framework of the Western, a man could do what he had to do with an instinctive natural awareness of right and wrong.”²⁶⁰ Cawelti reinforced Lenihan’s view when he wrote that the Westerns of the 1930s “strongly depended on the moralistic and sentimental version of the genre articulated by Zane Grey,” a prolific author of Western stories, many of which became Western films during the decade.²⁶¹ While Hollywood carried this standard recipe for the Western into World War II, the films that began to appear after the conflict ended readily moved away from the previous standard of the flawless hero fighting on the side of right, who could always rely on help from local society.

While cultural and film historians such as Sayre characterized *High Noon* as unique to the early 1950s because of their desire to view the film strictly as a piece of anti-McCarthy propaganda, they failed to realize that the trend in Western films of the individual hero having to fight society as much if not more than outlaws dated back to mid-1940s and the end of the war. Even Lenihan, who identified *High Noon* as “the most significant turning point in the Western’s treatment of the individual societal relationship,”²⁶² overlooked Western films made within the year after the end of the war that started what Wright referred to as “the transition theme,” a formula in which “the hero is forced to fight against society,” and of which *High Noon* stood as a prominent example.²⁶³

Produced in 1945 and released early in 1946, director Edwin L. Marin’s *Abilene Town* starred Western hero Randolph Scott as Marshall Dan Mitchell, who is forced to

²⁵⁹ Lenihan, *Showdown*, 15.

²⁶⁰ Lenihan, *Showdown*, 15.

²⁶¹ Cawelti, *Mystique*, 90.

²⁶² Lenihan, *Showdown*, 117.

²⁶³ Wright, *Sixguns*, 74.

keep order in a town that is divided between a permanent local citizenry and transient cowboys and cattlemen who frequently cause numerous disturbances but are a key source of revenue for the town. The situation is exacerbated when a group of homesteaders move into the area to settle it for farming. When the cattlemen see their interests threatened by the fence building farmers they resort to an array of violent tactics that Scott must confront even though much of the action occurs in the county and not the town because the county sheriff is completely corrupt. As Scott attempts to reign-in the wild and dangerous behavior of the cattlemen and cowboys he falls under severe criticism from many of the people living in Abilene who are hedging their bets as to which group, the cattlemen or the homesteaders, will provide the best economic benefit to them in the long run. After the cattlemen launch an all-out assault with the intention of destroying Abilene, it is the homesteaders who give their full support to Scott, who remains unaided by those in the town until they have an eleventh hour inspiration to act on the side of right. In the end, the cattlemen are defeated and the viewer is left with an image of homesteaders and citizens sharing happiness and fellowship within their new social situation.²⁶⁴

By Rand's standards as outlined in *The Romantic Manifesto*, *Abilene Town* can be judged a positive artistic creation. The character of the marshal as portrayed by Scott is a prime example of a character demonstrating "their full commitment to the premise of

²⁶⁴ *Abilene Town*, DVD, directed by Edward L. Marin (1946; Portland, OR: Allegro, 2010). In order to remove confusion for the reader it is necessary at this point to provide explanation as to the author's decision to refer to Randolph Scott by his real name and Gary Cooper by the name of his film character. Randolph Scott developed a screen identity that came to be almost exclusive associated with the Western genre. Thus, from film to film, audiences came to identify with Scott's persona as opposed to that of the individual characters he portrayed. While Cooper starred in several Westerns over the course of his career, he made his mark in many genres and his performance in *High Noon* did not represent a point of evolution in a series of Western performances. Also, because other performances of Scott will be cited as the chapter progresses, the author feels that the use of Scott's real name will ease the confusion that could be caused by using individual character names. The same method will be used when referring to John Wayne.

volition . . . in regard to consciousness and to existence.”²⁶⁵ Never does Scott waver from performing his duty in a fair and just manner, despite the elements in the town that want him to allow lawlessness and criminal activity to go unpunished or overlooked. Scott’s character is the epitome of the individual, “motivated by a conscious purpose,” demonstrating “the power of moral values in shaping human character.”²⁶⁶ As Scott’s character moves through the plot of the film, never backing away from his commitment to provide equal justice to everyone living in Abilene, the viewer comes to understand through his actions why he acted in the manner he did, an element Rand felt had to be present in art in order for the viewer or reader to form “an embodied abstraction,” which they could add to their collective “consciousness” in order to form “metaphysical value judgments” in their own lives.²⁶⁷

While the portrayal of the heroic individual in *Abilene Town* stood in line with Rand’s vision of how the potential power of the individual should be characterized in works of art, the manner in which the film portrayed the citizens of Abilene conflicted with some of the core concepts Rand outlined in *Screen Guide for Americans*. Rand’s pronouncements that filmmakers should not “smear wealth,” “smear the profit motive,” “smear success” or “glorify depravity” are drawn into question in terms of how the film depicted the majority of citizens, merchants and government officials in Abilene and the surrounding area.²⁶⁸ These individuals, with their ambivalent attitude toward standing up for the basic natural rights of their fellow citizens and attempting to impede the ability of the one man willing to do so, represented the modernist trends toward the “debasement of

²⁶⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, 99.

²⁶⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 70, 99.

²⁶⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 8, 5, 8.

²⁶⁸ Rand, *Guide*, 4-6.

values” and promotion of cultural “mediocrity” that pushed Rand to characterize post-war America as a period of “cultural bankruptcy.”²⁶⁹ However, the group of homesteaders who banded together and helped Scott fight off the cattlemen saved *Abilene Town* from being completely tainted by the influence of Modernism in terms of how it depicted the civic body.

Rand never suggested that every character or group depicted in a piece of literature or a film should be depicted as good or without problems. Such a contention would have represented a denial of reality. Nevertheless, Rand viewed in Modernism an imbalance in the way that artists depicted the forces of good and bad. In the words of the author, “They [modernist writers and filmmakers] saw more mediocrity than greatness around them, they began to regard greatness as unreal, and to present only the mediocre, the average, the common, the undistinguished.”²⁷⁰ While the combination of Scott’s heroic character, the morally driven homesteaders and the ultimate conversion of the civic body to the side of right kept the modernist influence at bay, *Abilene Town* still differed from its pre-war counterparts in that it opened the door for the normalcy of portraying large civic bodies in a negative light, thus forcing stalwart individuals such as the one portrayed by Scott to fight the forces of darkness with the realization that help could not be counted on. The road to Hadleyville ran directly through Abilene.

By the time the post-war Western reached 1952 and the production of *High Noon*, the redeemable element of society found in *Abilene Town* gave way to a situation in which no one in the civic body capable of doing so proved willing to help the marshal stand against the destructive forces of the Miller Gang. Whereas Scott had willing allies

²⁶⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 104, 118, 121.

²⁷⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

in the homesteaders, Cooper's character Will Kane becomes the isolated individual who must stand alone on the side of right. At no point in the film is this fact more fully realized than in the legendary sequence in which the camera continues to retreat into a panoramic overhead shot as Kane stands alone in the middle of Hadleyville, while everyone else in town has retreated to the sanctuary of their homes. The fact that *High Noon* offered an artistic vision containing such diametrically opposed visions of the ultimate heroic individual and the completely corrupted civic body creates a conundrum for anyone attempting to read the film from a Randian perspective.

While there is little doubt that Kane came to represent the absolute embodiment of the power of the "exceptional man" that Rand believed essential to any work of art, the behavior of the citizens of Hadleyville proved problematic.²⁷¹ Although Scott had to contend with the possibility of a citizenry that would likely walk out on him in a time of severe trouble, he was saved in the end by their last minute moral awakening. *High Noon*, on the other hand, completed the process Wright described as "the transition theme."²⁷² In the words of the author, "The conceptual weight of 'bad' [in *High Noon* and other Westerns] is now carried by the townspeople, or society, rather than by the villains."²⁷³ The lack of an alternative source of redemption in the film left no way out for the heroic individual other than to leave as he could not stay among those who refused to exercise a similar level of moral acumen. Thus, a great deal of analysis has been focused on the closing frames of *High Noon* in which Kane throws his badge in the dirt and rides out of Hadleyville and away from his former friends and neighbors who proved unwilling to stand by his side to protect their own interests. However, just as scholars

²⁷¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

²⁷² Wright, *Sixguns*, 74.

²⁷³ Wright, *Sixguns*, 75.

such as Wright and Lenihan failed to properly document the full process by which post-war Westerns came to portray the heroic individual as being isolated from society, the manner in which these same scholars interpreted the ending of *High Noon* led to a one-dimensional reading of the film that proved damaging to the high stature it accorded to individual ability.

In assessing the culminating scene of *High Noon*, film historian Douglas Brode contended that the film “offered us our first complete vision of the hero as dropout from society.”²⁷⁴ Cawelti reinforced Brode’s conclusion when he described Kane’s exit at the end of the film as a “voluntary exile.”²⁷⁵ Film historian Peter Biskind took a more socio-political approach to Kane’s departure from Hadleyville. In the words of the author, “Kane can’t transform consensus. . . . he just gives up and walks away from it.”²⁷⁶ Taken together, these critiques implied that Kane somehow found himself permanently removed from the world and forced to live the rest of his life as an outcast individual. However, Brode, Cawelti and Biskind failed to consider the fact that Kane left Hadleyville at the end of the film presumably (the viewer is not informed otherwise) to start the new life of a store owner with his new wife just as he attempted to do at the beginning of the film prior to the arrival of the Miller Gang.

There is no reason to suspect that Kane will not function, be accepted and quite possibly find a better, more morally stalwart group of individuals in the new town in which he plans to settle with Amy. Therefore, while the film does portray the civic body of Hadleyville as being completely devoid of any true moral strength, one can still hold a glimmer of hope that Kane will not have to face the same situation further down the road.

²⁷⁴ Douglas Brode, *The Films of the Fifties* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1976), 68.

²⁷⁵ Cawelti, *Mystique*, 30.

²⁷⁶ Biskind, *Believing*, 46-47.

While this scenario is far from ideal in terms of how Rand believed works of art should be conceived, the film promoted above all else the image of a solid heroic individual who never wavered from what he knew he had to do and who also rose above the moral cowardice of his own community. As will be demonstrated in the next two sections, the prevalence of the untainted heroic individual in the Western film, as portrayed by Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, began to decline steadily as the 1950s progressed.

***The Searchers* and the Blemished Individual in the Post-World War II Western**

John Ford's 1956 film *The Searchers*, generally regarded as his magnum opus, tells the story of Ethan Edwards, a former confederate soldier from South Texas who returns to his brother's farm there three years after the conclusion of the war with a large quantity of freshly minted gold and little explanation as to his activities since the Confederate surrender. While it appears that there is some tension between Ethan and his brother as well as a strange, possibly former romantic relationship between Ethan and his brother's wife, these issues never have a chance to manifest themselves as shortly after Ethan arrives the local Texas Rangers along with most of the able bodied men, including Ethan, are lured away from the settled area to investigate possible cattle rustling. When they come upon the mutilated carcass of one of the stolen cows Ethan realizes that instead of rustlers they are faced with Comanche Indians bent upon a death raid. By the time Ethan and a portion of the party reach his brother's farm, the Indians have already departed after killing Ethan's brother and nephew, raping mutilating and killing his brother's wife and kidnapping his brother's two daughters (Lucy, a teenager and Debbie who is nine years of age).

After a brief stay to bury his family and put his affairs in order, Ethan sets out with his adopted nephew Martin and the local contingent of Texas Rangers to track down the group of Comanche Indians who perpetrated the crime and to hopefully rescue Lucy and Debbie. After fighting a brief skirmish with the Indians, the commander of the Texas rangers concludes that they do not have enough men to successfully pursue the group. At this point Ethan sets out alone, accompanied by Martin and Lucy's boyfriend Brad, who refuses to be left behind.

Early in their search, Ethan, when away from the other two, discovers Lucy's raped and mutilated body, which he keeps to himself until they happen upon the Indian camp and Brad reports from a scouting mission that he has seen Lucy, at which point Ethan tells him what he actually saw was an Indian woman wearing Lucy's dress. After being told the truth about Lucy, Brad becomes so overwrought with emotion that he pulls out his pistol and runs into the Indian camp and is shot down. Ethan and Martin then proceed on alone, spending the next several years in dogged pursuit of the group of Indians who still have Debbie. Along the way they discover that the Comanche Indians they are looking for are led by a warrior chief known as Scar. Eventually, Ethan and Martin locate Scar's group and see with their own eyes a now teenage Debbie, who Scar has taken as a wife. The fact that Debbie has now reached sexual maturity and has apparently had sexual intercourse with Scar cements Ethan's resolve that he must kill Debbie because he believes that miscegenation with Indians, whether consensual or not, has turned Debbie into an irredeemable savage.

After a close encounter with Debbie in which Martin refuses to allow Ethan to shoot her, Debbie runs back to Scar's camp while Ethan and Martin return home to

regroup at which point they reunite with the Texas Rangers and a company of United States cavalry who are preparing an assault on Scar's camp. Before the main assault, Martin convinces the commander to allow him to sneak into the camp in order to remove Debbie in order to ensure that she is not killed by Scar when the attack is commenced because he knows Ethan and Martin want her back. In the process of rescuing Debbie, who subsequently gets away, Martin is forced to kill Scar who discovers him trying to remove Debbie from the camp.

After the death of Scar, the attack on the camp begins and Ethan, after entering the camp, makes his way to Scar's teepee and scalps his corpse in retribution for the death, mutilation and rape of his family. Ethan then chases after Debbie on horseback after having to fight off Martin, who still believes that he intends to kill her rather than take her home. However, upon reaching Debbie, who has taken refuge in a small cave, Ethan picks her up and declares that he is taking her home. The viewer is left with a final shot of life being returned to as normal an order as possible based on what has happened. Debbie is home, Martin walks hand in hand with his fiancée Laurie and the door of the house shuts on an image of Ethan, walking alone, away from the restored order in which he has no place.²⁷⁷

The traditional interpretation of *The Searchers* by scholars has consistently focused on the issue of race. With the production of the film coming on the heels of the first rumblings of the post-war Civil Rights Movement in Montgomery, Alabama, many writers who examined the film argued that it represented a reflection of American society coming to terms with a major social issue that had plagued the nation since its founding. Brode echoed this sentiment when he wrote, "The story is a morality play in which the

²⁷⁷ *The Searchers*, DVD, directed by John Ford (1956; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).

rugged American individualist Ethan—and subsequently, America itself—works himself free of racism, which ultimately centers around a fear of miscegenation.”²⁷⁸ Lenihan took a more pessimistic view of Edwards, whom he referred to as “John Wayne’s obsessive Indian hater.”²⁷⁹ Just as he did with *High Noon*, Biskind addressed the issue of race in *The Searchers* and added to it a heavy political interpretation. In his estimation, “Ethan is a vigilante, a hard-liner. . . . He’s a right-wing extremist, a radical individualist . . . a fanatic motivated solely by revenge.”²⁸⁰ While the assessments of these scholars are difficult to deny based on the events depicted in the film, the premier action hero of the post-war period did not simply arrive on screen in 1956 flashing his “violent dementedness.”²⁸¹ Just as the corrupted civic body in *High Noon* had its roots in the direct aftermath of the Second World War, so too did the corruption of Wayne’s image as the un-tainted heroic individual.

In 1939, less than three years prior to the United States’ entry into World War II, Wayne won the starring role in John Ford’s landmark Western, *Stagecoach*, a film often credited with revitalizing the Western genre by starting a trend toward more serious films that continued after the conclusion of the war. In the film, Wayne portrayed The Ringo Kid, who has escaped from prison after being accused of robbing a bank (it is never determined if he robbed the bank or not, but one is led to believe he is innocent of the charge) and comes into contact with a stagecoach after his horse gives out on the trail. Because there is a marshal on the stagecoach, Wayne is taken into custody as he is a wanted criminal and also because it is known that he is in pursuit of the Plummer

²⁷⁸ Brode, *Fifties*, 181.

²⁷⁹ Lenihan, *Showdown*, 115.

²⁸⁰ Biskind, *Believing*, 241.

²⁸¹ Lenihan, *Showdown*, 150.

Brothers, who killed Wayne's father and brother. After befriending Dallas, a prostitute who is on the stagecoach because she has been run out town, Wayne is able to escape the custody of the marshal but returns to lend a hand when he realizes that an Indian attack on the passengers is likely.

Following the Indian attack, the marshal allowed Wayne to leave his custody and returned his guns in order for him to settle his feud with the Plummer Brothers. After confronting and killing the Plummer Brothers, Wayne rides to Lordsburg, the stagecoach's final destination and surrenders himself to the marshal. Knowing that Wayne's character is not a criminal, the marshal allows him to escape town and return to his ranch with Dallas, who he plans to marry.²⁸²

Just as in the pre-war films of Randolph Scott and Johnny Mack Brown, Wayne played the role of the heroic individual to its fullest extent. Although accused of a crime, from the first time he appeared in the story, valiantly twirling a Winchester rifle, there is no doubt that he is the hero standing on the side of right. When given the chance to escape to freedom, he returns to offer his help to save the passengers. After being allowed to finish his business with the Plummer Brothers, he voluntarily returns to Lordsburg, which undoubtedly means a return to jail and the ordeal of proving his innocence in the robbery. In terms of Dallas, he makes no judgments about her previous life. Instead, he gives his love unconditionally based on the way he personally feels. Cawelti acknowledged the purity of Wayne's image in *Stagecoach* when he argued that "instead of being a mysterious figure in black, he [Wayne] is a nice young cowboy who has just escaped from prison and is a bit shy and awkward."²⁸³

²⁸² *Stagecoach*, DVD, directed by John Ford (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1997).

²⁸³ Cawelti, *Mystique*, 91.

From a Randian perspective, Wayne's image in *Stagecoach*, when considered alongside the points made above, accentuates the concept of "the exceptional man," who remains firmly in control of his own actions and through his own reason stands on the side of right.²⁸⁴ Although there are characters in the film who represent cultural degeneracy (the banker who becomes a passenger after having gone on the run as a result of embezzling a large sum of money), Wayne and several secondary characters (Dallas and the alcoholic doctor who pulls himself together in order to oversee the birth of a child on the trail) overpower the worst the worst traits of humanity by illustrating "the reality of man's higher potential."²⁸⁵ While Wayne parlayed his portrayal of the heroic individual in *Stagecoach* to Hollywood stardom, that image underwent a severe negative transformation early in the post-war period.

In 1945, as the Second World War drew to a close, Wayne maintained his heroic image as a heroic Western star with the film *Dakota*, in which he played a former gambler who assists a group of wheat farmers near Fargo, North Dakota, in their fight against corrupt business interests in the city.²⁸⁶ Wayne's next appearance in a major Western came three years later when he headlined Howard Hawks' 1948 film, *Red River*. In this film, Wayne portrayed Thomas Dunson, a cattle baron who comes to own a major ranch in Texas by killing the legal owner in a gunfight. The crux of the film takes place directly after the Civil War when Dunson is forced to make a long cattle drive to Kansas in order to recoup his losses as a result of the war. Wayne's leadership on the drive, which borders on the sadistic, leads to a mutiny among the cowboys led by Wayne's adopted son, Matt, who leaves him with a horse and supplies and proceeds on with the

²⁸⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

²⁸⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, viii.

²⁸⁶ *Dakota*, DVD, directed by Joseph Kane (1945; Santa Monica, CA: Republic Pictures, 2002).

herd to Kansas. Wayne then makes his own way there with the intention of killing his adopted son. After a brief physical confrontation in Kansas, Dunson and his adopted son make peace with each other and vow to return to Texas and make their ranch even stronger.²⁸⁷

Although father and son happily reconcile in the end, the image of Wayne that emerges from *Red River* is one of a crazed, irrational individual, who Biskind characterized as “unbalanced” and “a primitive . . . asocial savage.”²⁸⁸ Lenihan added to Biskind’s assessment when he likened Wayne’s character in *Red River* to “an obsessed tyrant who is oblivious of the welfare and rights of other men.”²⁸⁹ Clearly, this image of Wayne stood far apart from that of the heroic individual he portrayed in *Stagecoach*. Made almost halfway between *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers*, *Red River* provides the important explanation as to how Wayne’s image evolved from the untainted heroic individual in films such as *Stagecoach* to the racist, “hard-bitten . . . neurotic” in *The Searchers* who is hell-bent on retrieving his kidnapped niece or killing her if necessary.²⁹⁰ Playing the character of Thomas Dunson in 1948 paved the way for his portrayal of Ethan Edwards in 1956.

Despite the eccentric nature of Wayne’s character in *Red River*, his extreme behavior is guided toward the reasonable goal of successfully completing a major cattle drive in order to restore prosperity to his region of Texas in the aftermath of a devastating conflict. While the viewer is aware that Wayne’s character initially obtained his land via morally questionable means, he does center his efforts during the main sequences of the

²⁸⁷ *Red River*, DVD, directed by Howard Hawks (1948; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 1997).

²⁸⁸ Biskind, *Believing*, 280.

²⁸⁹ Lenihan, *Showdown*, 110.

²⁹⁰ Biskind, *Believing*, 280.

film on an honest task. The fact that he pushes his men to the point of mutiny is offset by the positive goal he is attempting to achieve. This fact is conveyed to the viewer in the way that Wayne is left behind by Matt and the cowhands. They do not abandon Wayne and the cattle drive as well. Rather, they simply realize that Wayne's determination to succeed has pushed him beyond the limits of sanity.

With Matt at the helm, who proves a less harsh and far more understanding boss, the men continue the drive successfully. Although Wayne pushes on alone with the intent of settling the matter with Matt by means of physical violence, a moment of clarity (provided by Matt's girlfriend who holds a gun on the two men to get them to stop fighting) returns him to his senses and everyone heads back to Texas happier and wealthier. In the end, Wayne's character is forgiven his temporary lapse because he sought a legitimate goal that others achieved with only slight deviation. No one faulted Wayne's desire to get the cattle to Kansas, only some of the methods he employed. Thus, while *Red River* tainted the image of Wayne as a heroic individual by portraying his leadership as erratic and dangerous, the basic Randian concept of individual "volition" remained intact in that Wayne's character set out a well-reasoned goal, put the men and material in place to get the job done and in the end witnessed its successful achievement albeit as a spectator.²⁹¹ Moving into *The Searchers* eight years later, "the violent dementedness of Wayne's character"²⁹² remained, but was now accompanied by questions surrounding the legitimacy of individual "volition."²⁹³

Unlike Thomas Dunson, whose goal of a successful cattle drive developed from his own reasoning as a way of restoring his lost prosperity, Ethan Edwards represents the

²⁹¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 91.

²⁹² Lenihan, *Showdown*, 150.

²⁹³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 91.

individual who never has a permanent function within the civic body of the film. The early scenes in the film make it perfectly clear that Ethan is an oddity when he returns to his brother's farm and attempts to take his place in the family unit, especially with the apparent romantic interest that still exists between Ethan and his brother's wife. As discussed above, the conclusion of the film, with order having been restored, sees Wayne again without a place in the existing social structure. Only the kidnapping of his two nieces gives Wayne a temporary function in the film. While his dogged commitment to finding Debbie is admirable and certainly stands as a prime exhibition of the type of extreme individual "volition" Rand prized, even this attribute is tainted by the fact that Wayne is determined to kill the girl on sight if he locates her after she reaches sexual maturity based on his own racial beliefs.²⁹⁴ Although Wayne is eventually persuaded by Martin and his own conscience not to kill Debbie, his triumph in bringing her home and vanquishing the Indians who murdered his family is short-lived as he is once again removed from the civic body in a negative sense.

While *High Noon* presents the viewer with a clear "abstraction" of the individual's capacity to stand alone and victoriously on the side of right, *The Searchers* profiles an individual on a mission that requires similar solitary determination, but unlike Will Kane, Ethan Edwards is clearly off kilter. While the film does not disparage individual action entirely, the manner in which it is portrayed through Wayne's character leaves one to question the level at which they should allow vengeance to dominate their thought. Biskind believed that Wayne's character went too far in attempting to avenge the death of his family and to attempt to rescue Debbie. In the words of the author,

²⁹⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 91.

“Instead of forgiving and forgetting, he [Wayne] vows revenge, and most of the film is devoted to showing us how he gets it.”²⁹⁵

Observations such as Biskind’s are only possible because of the crazed, racist behavior associated with Wayne’s character in the film. How else could one nonchalantly write negatively about a character going to extremes by searching high and low for the individuals responsible for the murder, rape and mutilation of their family? The answer to this question can be found in an observation Cawelti made when considering Wayne’s character in *The Searchers* alongside his previous role in *Stagecoach*. As the author declared, “John Wayne’s Ring Kid helps fight off the Indians and save his fellow passengers, but Ethan Edwards . . . becomes increasingly indistinguishable from his Indian adversary Scar.”²⁹⁶ Perhaps the most visual example of Cawelti’s point comes at the end of the film when Wayne enters Scar’s teepee and scalps his dead corpse. Taken alone this act is not as barbaric as it seems as the viewer knows what Scar did to Wayne’s family in the beginning of the film and is reminded again later when Ethan and Martin enter Scar’s camp posing as traders and are proudly shown an entire string of white scalps that includes those of Ethan’s family and Martin’s mother. However, when tinted with Wayne’s overt racism and his commitment until the very end of the film to kill Debbie if she has not been recovered by the time she reaches sexual maturity, the heroic Ethan is reduced to a flawed anachronism, who, although unwavering, does not uphold moral standards one would want to emulate.

Films such as *The Searchers* forever brought into question whether or not the individual could be counted on stand squarely on the side of right. Wayne’s portrayal of

²⁹⁵ Biskind, *Believing*, 241.

²⁹⁶ Cawelti, *Mystique*, 94.

Ethan Edwards in 1956, tainted by racism and crazed hatred, proved a far cry from the unflawed figure of a prewar Randolph Scott in *Buffalo Stampede*, who sets out alone, with the full support of the civic body, to rescue his fiancé from the clutches of her degenerate, sexually perverted stepfather, who plans to keep her as his personal concubine.²⁹⁷ While in 1933 the clarity between right and wrong appeared distinct, it became somewhat blurred by the mid-1950s. When viewed through the lens of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism in the post-war period, it becomes apparent that *The Searchers* reflects the impact of the latter movement in that the image of Wayne as a heroic individual has been brought closer to the viewer's reality. Now, the sheer grit and determination of the individual have been joined with racial overtones that did little to differentiate Wayne from a stereotypical white bigot. This point reflected Rand's major contention as to the impact of Modernism on post-war American culture, which began "to portray man as . . . innately loathsome."²⁹⁸ Also reflected in the film is the evidence of "the permissive turn" described by Petigny and outlined in the first chapter of this study.²⁹⁹

The complex and flawed moral landscape of Wayne's character in *The Searchers* offers little surprise when one considers the liberal moral revolution that occurred at the time. Unlike the morally solid characters Wayne portrayed through the war years, his image as the heroic individual, epitomized by his portrayal of Ethan Edwards, changed commensurate with the moral quagmire many Americans found themselves negotiating during the 1950s. When common individuals found themselves forced to confront the changing moral structure brought on by the influence of Modernism, which Petigny

²⁹⁷ *Buffalo Stampede*, DVD, directed by Henry Hathaway (1933; Portland, OR: Allegro, 2010).

²⁹⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 124.

²⁹⁹ Petigny, *Permissive*, 13.

believed had saturated all aspects of American culture from religion and music to psychology and youth culture, it is natural that the popular art they consumed would also have shifted to reflect the new moral instability. Thus, Wayne's character in *The Searchers* is now tough, determined but bigoted as opposed to the "exceptional man" of *Stagecoach*, who could always be counted on to set a high standard for individual conduct and morality. Although Wayne went on to star in other films such as Howard Hawks' 1958 Western *Rio Bravo* in which the heroic individual fares somewhat better than in *The Searchers*, the impact of Wayne's image shift in 1956 foreshadowed the growing dominance of Modernism in the Western genre and with it the complete destruction of the romantic hero.

Sam Peckinpah, *The Wild Bunch*, and the Death of Romanticism in the Post-World War II Western

Sam Peckinpah's 1969 film, *The Wild Bunch*, tells the story of a group of aging Western outlaws struggling to maintain their criminal endeavors in the modern world of 1913. Led by Pike Bishop, who is portrayed by legendary Hollywood actor William Holden, the Bunch have taken to operating along the Texas/Mexico border as this area remains in disorder because of the constant political flux in Mexico. The opening sequence of the film shows the Bunch successfully robbing a railroad payroll office in an American border town. However, after a bloody, ultra-realistic shootout, complete with the slow-motion photography and blood splatters that became Peckinpah's trademark, the Bunch set down to divide their haul only to learn that they stole several bags of bolts and washers that had been planted in the office safe as part of a set-up by the railroad company to lure them into a trap.

During the shootout, Pike noticed that his former partner, Deke Thornton, played by the venerable Robert Ryan, was part of the group of bounty hunters waiting to attack the Bunch outside of the railroad office. In a series of flashbacks that occur throughout the film, the viewer learns that Thornton was captured by railroad detectives years before, while Bishop managed to escape through a hotel room window. Having suffered several years of brutal captivity in Yuma Prison, Thornton agreed to lead a group of degenerate bounty hunters, paid by the railroad, to capture the Bunch in exchange for his freedom.

In an attempt to regroup from the failed railroad office robbery, the Bunch crosses the border into Mexico to rest and plot a new crime. It is at this point that Pike learns of a tyrannical Federal general named Mapache, who wants to expand his control but does not have the firepower to stop the revolutionary forces of Pancho Villa. Mapache's need for more modern weapons and the Bunch's need for a successful heist leads Bishop and Mapache to agree on a deal in which the Bunch will cross the border, steal a supply of United States Army rifles from a troop train and carry them back across the border and deliver them to Mapache in exchange for \$10,000 in gold. Although Thornton guesses correctly what Bishop's plans are, he is unable to stop the Bunch from successfully hijacking the train and stealing the guns because of the inept men hired by the railroad and a young group of fresh Army recruits who prove useless in stopping the seasoned outlaws. Nevertheless, Thornton trails the Bunch back into Mexico and awaits their next move.

Having successfully completed their mission the Bunch arranges a special method of delivering the stolen weapons to Mapache while protecting themselves from a likely double cross. In the end, they receive full payment for the weapons and have a clear path

to escape with their reward with one exception. The newest member of the Bunch, a Mexican named Angel, is taken prisoner by Mapache because he killed his former fiancé who had become one of Mapache's concubines. Also, in a side deal with Bishop, Angel agreed to relinquish his share of gold if the Bunch agreed to give one case of rifles to the revolutionaries in his village who were out-gunned in their efforts to stand-up to Mapache. When Dutch, another member of the Bunch, and Angel ride into Mapache's stronghold to report the location of the last stash of weapons and retrieve the final installment of gold, Mapache dismisses Dutch's cover story that one case of rifles had been lost in transit because the mother of Angel's former fiancé told him that Angel stole the rifles. Upset but unable to take-on Mapache's entire force singlehandedly, Dutch is forced to ride away and leave Angel to a certain slow and painful death.

With the knowledge that Thornton and the bounty hunters are blocking a key escape route back into Texas, Bishop decides that the Bunch should bury the majority of their gold and take temporary refuge in Mapache's stronghold at Agua Verde, where he reasons that the general will be so happy with his new weapons that he would help the Bunch elude Thornton by providing another way out of Mexico. While Bishop's prediction about Mapache's willingness to help the Bunch proved correct, the Bunch display a visceral reaction when they ride into the villa and see a bloodied, but still living Angel being dragged around the courtyard behind Mapache's car. When Bishop fails to convince Mapache to sell Angel to him in exchange for his share of the gold, the Bunch is persuaded by Mapache's executive officer to adjourn to a brothel in another section of the villa in an effort to preserve Mapache's good spirits and to ensure the continuation of the fiesta celebrating the arrival of the new weapons, which also included a heavy

machine-gun not originally thought to be part of the shipment, but which the Bunch presented to Mapache as a gift.

While the other members of the Bunch partake in a session with some of Mapache's prostitutes, Dutch remains seated on the ground outside of the brothel, unable to come to terms with the fact that the Bunch has done little to help Angel, who proved a loyal member and never divulged his bargain with Pike to Mapache. After the conclusion of his sexual encounter, Bishop, without discussion, collects the other gang members (Lyle and Tector Gorch) from their room in the brothel, walks outside to where Dutch is sitting and a simple smile is all that is required to communicate his decision that the Bunch is going to get Angel back one way or another. After retrieving their weapons, Bishop, Dutch and the Gorch Brothers walk into Mapache's courtyard and demand that he return Angel.

Although Mapache initially appears willing to return Angel, he cuts his throat before releasing him, which prompts Bishop to shoot him. After a brief pause in which Mapache's men and the Bunch stare each other down in an attempt to anticipate what to do next, Bishop shoots a German military advisor who had been assisting Mapache and then begins targeting Mapache's staff officers. This act triggers a large-scale gun battle in which the Bunch is able to secure the elevated position where the machine gun had been set-up. Although they are able to vanquish several dozen of Mapache's men, the overwhelming strength of the force proves too much and Bunch are eventually cut down in one of the most bloody sequences in film history.

Having watched the entire confrontation from an elevated spot outside of town, Thornton and the bounty hunters ride into the villa at which point the bounty hunters

begin looting the bodies of any valuables and securing those of the Bunch, who have to be returned to the railroad in order to receive the promised bounty. Thornton chooses to stay behind as the bounty hunters ride out of the villa with the bodies of the Bunch draped over horses because he knows that the revolutionaries from Angel's village, who rescued the last member of the gang, an old man named Sykes who was wounded earlier in the film, are waiting to ambush the group. While Thornton sits against a wall contemplating everything that has happened, heavy gunfire is heard in the distance. Later, Sykes and the villagers ride into the villa after having killed the bounty hunters. Sykes, who knew Thornton from their old days riding with Bishop, recruits his old friend to help in the villagers' struggle against the repressive Mexican government. As Thornton prepares to ride off with the group, the film cuts to brief scenes from the beginning of the film in which the members of the Bunch share a laugh together. As the credits begin to come onto the screen, an earlier scene in which the Bunch rides slowly out of Angel's village is replayed and then paused.³⁰⁰

With its ultra-realistic violence, coarse language and mature themes, *The Wild Bunch* represented an important early step into uncharted waters for a major Hollywood production, a point made clear by the fact that the film carried an X rating. Often coupled with other pioneering films produced in the late 1960s such as *The Graduate*, *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider*, most scholarly interpretations of *The Wild Bunch* have acknowledged the film's importance in terms of how it paved the way for the proliferation and dominance of modernist films that began in the early 1970s and continues to this day. In considering the story of aging outlaws facing a twentieth-century modernity in which they have no place alongside the changes that occurred in

³⁰⁰ *The Wild Bunch*, DVD, directed by Sam Peckinpah (1969; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).

post-World War II America, which were clearly visible by the late 1960s, Cawelti believed that the most powerful theme of *The Wild Bunch* was that it demonstrated “the inevitability of . . . modern society.”³⁰¹ On a basic level this message is communicated visually throughout the film as the viewer is presented with many scenes in which the Bunch, outlaws of the late nineteenth century variety who carried lever-action Winchester rifles and Colt revolvers, are confronted with automobiles, semi-automatic pistols and heavy machine-guns. However, the more complex aspects of the modernist influence on *The Wild Bunch* are located in the story, the perspective from which it is told and most importantly and the characterization of the heroic individual.

Cawelti reflected on the more intricate modernist elements in *The Wild Bunch* when he wrote of the film, “[*The Wild Bunch*] presented the unregenerate, lawless outlaw as a sympathetic figure. . . . We have come to a point when it is increasingly difficult to imagine synthesis between the honor and independence of the Western hero and the imperatives of progress and success, law and order.”³⁰² Peckinpah scholar Paul Seydor added to Cawelti’s assessment of the moral disintegration reflected in *The Wild Bunch* when he observed that the film presented “discomfiture with all certainties and [moral] absolutes.”³⁰³ Such flagrant, unrestrained Modernism also spelled major trouble for the Western genre as the post-war period drew to a close. As film historian Wheeler Winston Dixon argued, “[*The Wild Bunch*] constitutes a complete re-visioning and reconfiguration

³⁰¹ Cawelti, *Mystique*, 54.

³⁰² Cawelti, *Mystique*, 54.

³⁰³ Paul Seydor, *Peckinpah: The Western Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 103.

of classical Western genre values in a way that surprisingly calls all previous examples of the genre into question.”³⁰⁴

Sam Peckinpah, the man whose artistic vision created *The Wild Bunch*, stood at the forefront of the modernist push that occurred during the late 1960s that resulted in the final decimation of the romantic core of the Western genre, which, as the two previous sections in this chapter demonstrated, had oscillated on the edge of destruction since the late 1940s. Just as the films profiled in those two sections had to be contextualized and placed within a clear evolution that occurred in the Western genre, so too must the artistic output of Peckinpah, for the “cruelty,” “sadism” and overall iconoclasm of *The Wild Bunch* did not simply materialize out of thin air.³⁰⁵ Instead, the modernist elements that Peckinpah unleashed in *The Wild Bunch* represented the culmination of an artistic education that bridged both sides of the post-war philosophical/ideological struggle between Romanticism and Modernism.

As an aspiring director in the mid-1950s, Peckinpah worked extensively in the world of the television Western. While films such as *The Searchers* cast shadows on the heroic individual, the medium of television became a refuge in which basic versions of romantic Western heroism flourished. In addition to authoring numerous Western teleplays for several anthology series, Peckinpah penned several scripts for the iconic television Western *Gunsmoke*, which profiled the quiet, unassuming yet heroic exploits of Marshal Matt Dillon, who provided law and order in a fictional dramatization of the

³⁰⁴ Wheeler Winston Dixon, “Re-Visioning the Western: Code, Myth, and Genre in Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch*,” in *Sam Peckinpah’s The Wild Bunch*, ed. Stephen Prince (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155-56.

³⁰⁵ Dixon, “Re-Visioning,” 156.

real Western town of Dodge City, Kansas.³⁰⁶ With a cache of writing credits to his name, Peckinpah focused his creative energies on the creation of a new Western show.

Peckinpah's first television show, *The Rifleman*, debuted in 1958 and told the story of former gunfighter and Union soldier now homesteader Lucas McCain, who lived outside a small town named North Fork with his son. While McCain had given up violence as a way of life, he was often forced to confront outlaws and other bad elements that travelled through North Fork. Played by the tall, commanding former professional baseball and basketball player turned actor Chuck Connors, Lucas McCain was every inch the romantic Western hero that ruled the silver screen before World War II. With every new episode the viewer watched the same grand opening sequence in which the imposing McCain strode down the main street of North Fork while rapidly firing his specially modified Winchester lever action rifle with triumphant theme music playing in the background.³⁰⁷

While Peckinpah left *The Rifleman* during the first season because of creative differences with production officials, he parlayed his experience in creating and writing episodes of the show into another influential, yet short-lived series, *The Westerner*, which chronicled the adventures of a fictional cowboy named Dave Blasingame, who travelled throughout the West and became involved in an array of situations in the localities he visited. Although *The Westerner* did not include the grandiose promotion of the heroic individual in the style of *The Rifleman*, the show promoted a positive image of the individual who directs his energies in the direction of good instead of the morally

³⁰⁶ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 3-4.

³⁰⁷ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 5-6.

reprehensible.³⁰⁸ By the early 1960s, with both *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner* under his belt, Peckinpah sought to apply his artistic vision to feature films. While he carried with him the influence of romantic television Westerns, his first major film project continued further along the rocky moral path taken by earlier modernist influenced films such as *The Searchers*.

Released in 1962, Sam Peckinpah's first major Western, *Ride the High Country*, tells the story of two aging lawmen, Steve Judd and Gil Westrum, who are reunited in the early years of the twentieth century when Judd takes on the job of protecting a major gold shipment into the town of Hornitos, California, from a mining camp high in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. While Judd, played by Hollywood veteran Joel McCrea, has maintained the clean image of his prime years working as a lawman, Gil, played by Western film icon Randolph Scott, has taken to touring around towns in the West posing as a fictional gunfighter/lawmen named the Oregon Kid. The centerpiece of Gil's gimmick is a rigged shooting contest in which spectators attempt to outshoot him.

While Gil's life and moral character seem to have taken a downward turn in the years since they have been apart, Judd is relieved to find his old friend at a time when he is in desperate need of an experienced gunman. After taking on Gil and his partner Heck Longtree, Judd heads into the Sierra Nevada Mountains to retrieve the gold. Along the way they are joined by a young girl, Elsa, who is determined to escape her overly zealous father and marry a young man named Billy Hammond with whom she has been having a secret romance. More importantly, it is during the trip to the mining camp that Gil's plan to betray Judd and steal the gold is fully revealed.

³⁰⁸ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 5-16.

After reaching the mining camp and securing the gold, trouble arises when Elsa's wedding night turns into a drunken debacle after her husband, along with his father and brothers, attempt to gang rape her in the back room of the camp saloon. Although Judd and Gil are able to get Elsa out of town, her new husband and his family are hot on their trail. It is at this point that Judd catches Gil attempting to ride out of their camp at night with the gold. Instead of fighting with his friend, Gil surrenders to Judd who vows that he will bring formal charges against him and Heck. However, with a group of armed men in pursuit of them, Judd is forced to give Gil his guns back in order to fight off the Hammond family.

The culminating scene of the film occurs at Elsa's home where the Hammonds have killed her father and are waiting to ambush Judd and Heck, who stayed with his captor after Gil escaped. While the Hammonds are able to pin down Heck and Judd, Gil hears the shots and in the end cannot leave his old friend in trouble. After gallantly riding toward the house with guns drawn, Gil and Judd take on the remaining Hammond brothers in a classic Western gunfight with both groups walking straight toward each other in the open. When the smoke clears the Hammonds have been vanquished but Judd lies on the ground with a fatal wound. Gil promises his old friend to complete the job of delivering the gold. As the film ends, it is apparent that Gil has been redeemed and that Heck and Elsa are on the fast-track toward marriage.³⁰⁹

While *Ride the High Country* is deep in complexity and can be analyzed in many different ways, the current analysis is concerned with the way in which the film impacted the heroic image of Randolph Scott, who retired from acting after its completion. Unlike

³⁰⁹ *Ride the High Country*. DVD, directed by Sam Peckinpah (1962; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2011).

John Wayne, Scott managed to escape the modernist assault on the romantic Western hero that occurred during the post-war period. While Wayne's image, by the mid-1950s, had become associated with highly flawed individuals such as Ethan Edwards, Scott still portrayed more morally acceptable men of steel such as Ben Stride in Budd Boetticher's Western masterpiece, *Seven Men from Now*, released the same year as *The Searchers*. In this film, Scott's character is a former lawman, whose wife died during an armed robbery and he has vowed to find and kill the seven men responsible. Without the racist bravado of Ethan Edwards or the lack of civic support for his efforts, Scott successfully completes his mission in a controlled manner that never leaves the viewer questioning the moral legitimacy of his actions or thinking that he is taking the matter too far.³¹⁰ While Scott carried this image through the tumultuous 1950s, his final role in *Ride the High Country* in 1962 exposed a major crack in the edifice of a romantic hero no one had ever questioned.

Far from the morally determined persona that characterized Scott's previous body of work, his portrayal of Gil Westrum in *Ride the High Country* permanently tainted the image he worked so many years to cultivate. While three generations of movie goers had come to expect integrity, honesty, perseverance and a strong moral compass from Scott's characters, they suddenly found their hero with a "tacky new identity."³¹¹ As Peckinpah scholar Paul Seydor observed of Scott's character in the film, "Gil is attired in the latest fashion, a tailor-made glen-plaid suit, and has outfitted himself with a new reputation, equally well tailored."³¹² Seydor's description of Scott's characters skirts the fact that

³¹⁰ *7 Men From Now*, DVD, directed by Budd Boetticher (1956; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2006).

³¹¹ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 33.

³¹² Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 33.

one of Hollywood's most beloved Western heroes, who always rode tall in the saddle on the side of right, is now presented as a washed up joke, reduced to selling a fake image which even included faux facial hair in the style of Buffalo Bill Cody. More important than the embellished image and hideous attire is the way in which Scott so calmly seizes on an opportunity to take advantage of his old friend Steve by agreeing to help him with the gold shipment with the full intention of stealing it from him in the end. While Scott ultimately redeems himself when he returns to help Steve vanquish the Hammond brothers, he has demonstrated that he is not above committing morally reprehensible behavior for personal benefit. Courtesy of Peckinpah's modernist brush, yet another Western hero was brought down to a common level and shown to be capable of common misdeeds. As Scott rode into the sunset a tainted hero, Peckinpah's efforts to recast the Western genre along a strict modernist model had only just begun.

In assessing *Ride the High Country* as part of the evolution of Peckinpah's career as a director, Seydor noted, "For all practical purposes, *Ride the High Country* is the real artistic beginning of his [Peckinpah's] career, as it heralds his emancipation from the [traditional] Western even as it demonstrates how thoroughly he had absorbed and mastered it."³¹³ While Peckinpah proved that he had "mastered" the epic nature of the Westerns made by directors such as Ford, who Peckinpah idolized,³¹⁴ the release of *The Wild Bunch* in 1969 "completely re-created the genre of the Western for the late 1960s."³¹⁵ As film historian William Wheeler Dixon observed, "It [*The Wild Bunch*] constitutes a complete re-visioning and reconfiguration of classical Western genre values

³¹³ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 32.

³¹⁴ Seydor, *Peckinpah*, 32.

³¹⁵ Dixon, "Re-Visioning," 155.

in a way that sweepingly calls all previous examples of the genre into question.”³¹⁶ In seven short years Peckinpah moved from the depiction of an aging hero who temporarily allows his demons to get the better of him to an all-out modernist work that destroyed the already blurred lines of morality in the Western genre.

When considering *The Wild Bunch* in light of the ideas Rand espoused about the dangers of Modernism in the post-war period, it is surprising that she did not use the film as a case study because it represents at every level what Rand believed to be the most dangerous aspects of Modernism. As previously quoted in chapter one, Rand wrote about post-war Modernism, “Man—the nature of man, the metaphysically significant, important, essential in man—is now represented by dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, sexual perverts, homicidal maniacs and psychotics.”³¹⁷ Unlike *High Noon*, in which the civic body is corrupted but the hero stands higher than ever, or *The Searchers*, in which the hero, although flawed, restores positive order through individual action, *The Wild Bunch*, in keeping with Rand’s assessment of the growing power of Modernism in the late 1960s, presented viewers with a story in which all facets of society are completely and utterly corrupt.

The so-called heroes of the film are simply vicious killers that Peckinpah attempted to humanize by presenting an equally tainted society on the right side of the law. This latter group is headlined by corrupt railroad authorities, who, driven by what Peckinpah scholar Christopher Sharrett referred to as “the savagery of unfettered capitalism,” are willing to stop at nothing to kill the Bunch even if it means the death of innocent civilians as depicted in the film’s opening sequence in which a number of

³¹⁶ Dixon, “Re-Visioning,” 155-56.

³¹⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

civilians are gunned down in the crossfire that ensues during a gun battle between the Bunch and the railroad's hired guns.³¹⁸ These degenerate bounty hunters hired by the railroad to track the gang serve as an extension of the evil hand of that organization as they frequently demonstrate their simple desire to kill for profit, a trait that Peckinpah scholar Michael Bliss believed reflected "capitalist expansion," which in this case typically meant taking everything of value from the bodies of their bounties including cutting out gold teeth.³¹⁹ Deke Thornton, the former member of the Bunch who rides with the bounty hunters is not working to stop the gang because he thinks it is the right thing to do, but rather because it was the only way he could leave prison. In Mexico, General Mapache and his Federal troops are portrayed as greedy, bloodthirsty opportunists, who place no value on any aspect of humanity. Although not directly presented as corrupt, the United States Army troops stationed along the Mexican border are simply inept and fail to stop the Bunch from stealing a load of military weapons and delivering them to Mapache.

While the Bunch commits horrific acts throughout the film and eventually collude with the bloodthirsty Mapache in his quest for weaponry suitable to fight off the insurgency led by Pancho Villa, they become, by film's end, heroes worthy of sympathy rather than un-merciless killers. Stephen Prince, a noted Peckinpah scholar whose name stands atop two volumes on the director's work, worked to promote this idea by suggesting that the Bunch are simply victims of the fact that they have survived so long. Faced with the encroaching modernity that paralleled the development of the twentieth

³¹⁸ Christopher Sharrett, "Peckinpah the Radical: The Politics of *The Wild Bunch*," in *Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch*, ed. Stephen Prince (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94.

³¹⁹ Michael Bliss, "'Back Off to What?' Enclosure, Violence, and Capitalism in Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*," in *Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch*, ed. Stephen Prince (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124.

century, Prince provided legitimacy to the view that the Bunch should be understood as “flawed heroes caught in a period of historical transition.”³²⁰ For Prince, the climactic gun battle between the Bunch and Mapache’s minions at the end of the film ensured that “Pike and his gang . . . are reborn into legend.”³²¹ In returning to Rand’s quote about the dramatic lowering of standards for fictional heroes during the post-war period, the contrast between the romantic Realism of Rand and the romantic fantasy of Prince becomes quite clear.

Although Rand never specifically reviewed *The Wild Bunch*, her general observations about the Modernism’s impact on American film would have resulted in a harsh critique of the film from the perspective that the Bunch, who have come to be identified as the heroes of the film, possess no redeeming qualities. What they do in the film they do for themselves. Even their last stand, which is precipitated by their desire to save Angel from Mapache, has no real meaning in that it provided a convenient cover for a group of aged thieves and killers who knew they had no real chance of surviving the increasing onset of time. Although the Bunch prove to be anything but heroes when considered within the larger context of romantic heroism and more specifically the pre-World War II American Western hero, it is not surprising that scholars such as Prince have recast the Bunch into heroes. In the end, the evolving cultural climate of the post-war period, which brought nearly every established philosophical and cultural ideal into question, provided, by the late 1960s, an artistic milieu in which those who searched for

³²⁰ Stephen Prince, ed., *Sam Peckinpah’s The Wild Bunch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23. In addition to compiling and introducing this volume in 1999, Prince also authored the 1998 monograph *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies*.

³²¹ Prince, *The Wild Bunch*, 23.

heroes found them by separating the best of humanity's worst abstractions from the absolute worst.

Conclusion

In concluding this case study of the impact of Modernism on the post-World War II American Western, it is important to return once again to the pre-war years. Prior to the Second World War, audiences regularly viewed Western films headlined by stars such as Randolph Scott, Johnny Mack Brown and John Wayne. The collected body of pre-war work by these actors contained a solid consistency in terms of morality, heroism and the individual. One never left the theater after watching one of these films not knowing the clear difference between right and wrong. In addition to the clear differences that separated the good from the bad, these films also placed the individual hero in high regard. Individual action to correct wrongs or stop the forces of bad typically received support from the civic body, which generally bestowed its gratitude on the individual or individuals who proved willing to help. It was not until the conclusion of the war that the character of the Western began to change. The artistic trend that emerged in the wake of that conflict moved toward the creation of a cultural landscape in which the distinctions between good and bad became blurred.

Beginning with films such as *Abilene Town*, the portrayal of a solid civic body was circumvented by a trend in favor of highlighting the darker tendencies of human institutions. Thus, by the early 1950s, films such as *High Noon* presented viewers with a heroic individual who is isolated from society. While characters such as Will Kane provided excellent examples of individual romantic heroism, the moral degeneracy of the civic body in the film reflected the growing dominance of Modernism identified by Rand

in *Screen Guide for Americans* and *The Romantic Manifesto* and documented from an academic perspective by historians such as Alan Petigny, Richard Pells, and Alan Levine. While the fictional representation of civic bodies and institutions fell victim to moral uncertainty in the early post-war period, the heroic individual became the next victim of the modernist juggernaut. The Western persona of John Wayne, which stood solidly heroic prior to the war, was quickly brought into question in the years after the conclusion of the conflict in films such as *Red River* and *The Searchers*. Although Wayne's characters in these films ultimately stood on the side of right, those results came not without a high level of moral uncertainty along the way.

As documented in the final section of this case study, the modernist groundwork laid in the late 1940s and 1950s provided an excellent foundation for a new generation of Western directors, led by Sam Peckinpah, to extinguish the last vestiges of Romanticism from the genre. After tarnishing the heroic image of Randolph Scott in *Ride the High Country* by portraying him as an aged former lawman who is willing to turn against his best friend and commit armed robbery, Peckinpah presided over the final destruction of the romantic Western with the release of his film *The Wild Bunch* in 1969. With its central theme of complete societal depravity and the resulting glorification of bloodthirsty outlaws, *The Wild Bunch* marked the successful culmination of over two decades of modernist assaults on the Western genre. Although the low-budget, anti-romantic Italian Westerns of Sergio Leone had, by 1969, penetrated the American market with great success, the emergence of a large-scale, big-budget American Western that completely destroyed the genre's previously established ideals of the romantic and the heroic confirmed Rand's worst fears regarding the future ability of Americans to craft a

balanced moral conscience through art.³²² While the nature of Modernism's impact on the American Western, and American culture in general, is highly subjective and continues to be debated, there remains little doubt that the post-war period witnessed a persistent, highly visible surge of Modernism that changed forever the artistic and cultural landscape in the United States.

³²² Any discussion of the impact of Modernism on the American Western must, at the very least, mention Leone's name. For artistic reasons that the following discussion will make clear, and because, as a Spanish director, he worked outside of the American film industry, which is the focus of this study, the author chose not to include an extensive discussion of Leone's work in the main body of the current case study. Nevertheless Leone did have an impact on American cinema and thus his work deserves some degree of contextualization, which the following lines attempt to construct. Between 1964 and 1966, Leone made three films that are now known as *The Man With No Name* trilogy; *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For A Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966). With former Western television actor Clint Eastwood starring in the leading role, these three films provided a different, more fully modernist version of the Western film than the typical fare still being produced in Hollywood, even when one takes into consideration American Westerns from the early 1960s such as *Ride the High Country*. The main character in these films, The Man With No Name, was a hard bitten criminal who possessed no redeeming qualities. The major portion of the plot structures in these films involves Eastwood's character engaging in some type of criminal activity. In assessing these films, Peckinpah scholar Wheeler Winston Dixon wrote, "Leone . . . stripped Eastwood's character of both a name and any motivation other than greed, lust, or a desire to kill, dubbing him 'the man with no name.'" While on the surface it may seem as though Leone's modernist, "bloodthirsty films" provided a major source of inspiration for Peckinpah as they appeared in the United States just as he began the quest that culminated in *The Wild Bunch*. However, Dixon quelled that notion when he engaged in a simple comparison/contrast between the work of Leone and Peckinpah. In his view, "These [Leone's] films raised the bar on the graphic specificity of violence, thus erasing the legacy of the sentimental West, but they were empty at the center. The films were nothing more or less than killing machines, unreeling with mind-numbing, grisly assurance to reveal a core absolute of nonexistence." In opposition to Leone's artistic output, Dixon argued that "Peckinpah's films were violent, but they never sacrificed character or thematic development in their pursuit of the director's nihilist vision." Dixon's assessment of Peckinpah's work parallels a similar series of comments Rand made in *The Romantic Manifesto* when she evaluated the work of writers whom she disagreed with on a philosophical level, but who demonstrated, in her estimation, superior skills in terms of creating high quality writing. For example, when considering the work of Feodor Dostoevsky, Rand declared, "I like Dostoevsky, for his superb mastery of plot structure and for his merciless dissection of the psychology of evil, even though his philosophy and his sense of life are almost diametrically opposed to mine." Of Leo Tolstoy, Rand stated, "I cannot stand Tolstoy, and reading him was the most boring literary duty I ever had to perform, his philosophy and sense of life are not merely mistaken, but evil, and yet, from a purely literary viewpoint, on his own terms, I have to evaluate him as a good writer." Thus, even with her strong views as to the moral degeneracy of Modernism, Rand would have been capable of acknowledging the technical merits of *The Wild Bunch*, which possessed good plot structure, characterization, theme and style, elements which Rand valued in art. Nevertheless, as argued in the final section of this chapter, it is almost certain that beyond the film's technical merits Rand would have found Peckinpah's work morally reprehensible. Dixon, "Re-Visioning," 168-70; Rand, *Manifesto*, 33-34.

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE WESTERN FILM: A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF THE OTHER GENRES CONSIDERED IN HISTORY 399

“It don’t matter where a man dies, as long as he dies for freedom.”
—Sgt. Bill Dane, *Bataan*, 1943

“Dad, what can you do when you have to be a man?”
—Jim Stark, *Rebel Without A Cause*, 1955

“Through cowardice we shall all be safe.”
—Lt. Cmdr. Charlie Madison, *The Americanization of Emily*, 1964

“Well boys, I reckon this it—nuclear combat toe to toe with the Russkies. . . . I want you to remember one thing, the folks back home is a-countin’ on you and by golly, we ain’t about to let ‘em down. I tell you something else, if this thing turns out to be half as important as I figure it might be, I’d say that you’re all in line for some important promotions and personal citations when this thing’s over with. That goes for ever’ last one of you regardless of your race, color or your creed.”

—Maj. T. J. “King” Kong, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, 1964

“I’m walking out that door and all I want to know is if there is one of you who is man enough to come with me?”
—Billy Jack, *Born Losers*, 1967

The World War II Genre

Although the Western film pre-dated the start of World War II by more than two decades, the World War II genre has been placed at the head of the class because of the importance of the conflict as a point at which American culture began to change and the

conflict between Romanticism and Modernism began in earnest. While the aftermath of America's participation in the Second World War ushered in the great cultural and moral changes that permanently altered the nation's social fabric, the war itself became a popular subject for Hollywood films. Beginning during the war and continuing throughout the post-war period, the American film industry churned out a massive body of films about various aspects of the nation's involvement in the conflict. Like the Western films profiled in the previous chapter, the World War II genre evolved over the twenty-five years of the post-war period as Romanticism slowly but surely lost ground to its modernist opposition. The three World War II films selected for viewing in History 399 reflect the profound impact caused by the rising power of Modernism in the post-war era.

Although made during the war, Tay Garnett's 1943 film, *Bataan*, set the standard for romantic Realism in the genre. Set on the Bataan peninsula during the last weeks of the American/Filipino struggle to stop the Japanese takeover of the Philippine Islands in early 1942, *Bataan* tells the fictional story of a group of American and Filipino volunteers who take on the task of demolishing a key bridge and then defending the pass against the Japanese in order to delay their march down the Bataan peninsula. After the captain in charge of the detachment is killed suddenly by a sniper, the leadership of the men falls to the hardened Sgt. Bill Dane. Over the course of the ensuing days, Dane valiantly holds the men together as they are slowly killed-off one by one as the Japanese exert more pressure on the patrol's position. After a climactic battle in which the Japanese finally launch a direct assault to wipe out the remaining members of the patrol, Dane is left alone when two other survivors are killed by a Japanese soldier who pretends

to be dead. Although alone, Dane spends the hours after the attack burying and marking the graves of the most recent fatalities. Having not slept in days, Dane then stumbles to the camp water hole to wash his face. When he returns to the main machine-gun emplacement, the angle of the shot shows that the line of graves goes right to the edge of the pit. As Dane steps down, a marker driven into the ground above reads, Bill Dane, Sgt., 31st Infantry, Killed in Action. Having dug his own grave, Dane, determined to die fighting, waits for the final Japanese assault, which comes almost directly after he takes his position behind the machine gun. With a steady fog rolling in, Dane opens fire on the approaching Japanese soldiers, first with his Thompson sub-machine gun, and then with the Browning .50 caliber heavy machine-gun. As Dane fires the Browning, loudly taunting the Japanese, he is swallowed by the fog with his gun still blazing as the post-script rolls across the screen.³²³

With its solid message of individual responsibility and classic representation of romantic heroism, *Bataan* will be offered as an example of pure Romanticism in the World War II genre. While various members of the patrol grapple with their own problems and the reality of their situation, they all come to realize, in their own ways, the importance of what they are fighting for and what their sacrifice means. In terms of the romantic hero, Robert Taylor's portrayal of Sgt. Bill Dane stands as one of the best in film history. Throughout the dark, death-ridden landscape of the film, Dane stayed strong, never wavered and provided a positive example for the men under his command. When left alone, with escape and evasion a dangerous but possible choice, Dane dug and acted in the same manner he would have had he been under the watchful eye of his men or his commanding officer. Thus, when considered as a metaphysical abstraction, Dane

³²³ *Bataan*, DVD, directed by Tay Garnett (1943; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2000).

must be placed alongside other abstractions such as Will Kane in *High Noon*, and be heralded as an absolute personification of romantic heroism.

Having established the roots of the World War II genre, the post-film discussion of *Bataan* will be tempered with some key examples of how the film's legacy shaped the genre in the early post-war period. For example, the 1955 film, *To Hell and Back*, which recounts the real-life exploits of Audie Murphy, America's most decorated foot-soldier of the war, will be used to show how the romantic model established by *Bataan* during the war could still be found in the mid-1950s. With a diverse unit of men surrounding him, Murphy, who played himself in the film, demonstrated the potential power of the individual to overcome adversity and display individual heroism while fighting on the side of right.³²⁴ This brand of metaphysical abstraction fits perfectly into the model outlined by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

While the Western genre fell under heavy attack by Modernism at the very start of the post-war period, the World War II genre, although not completely unaffected, was able to maintain a more pure romantic core for a longer period of time. However, by the early 1960s, direct modernist challenges to the established norms of the World War II genre began to appear. Arthur Hiller's 1964 film, *The Americanization of Emily*, has been selected for class viewing as one of the early examples of modernist refashioning of the World War II genre. As will be demonstrated in the brief synopsis below, *The Americanization of Emily* was selected because its plot, characterization and theme overtly counter the romantic ideals outlined by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

³²⁴ *To Hell and Back*, DVD, directed by Jesse Hibbs (1955; Universal City, CA: Universal Home Entertainment, 2011).

The Americanization of Emily depicts the weeks leading up to D-Day as seen through the eyes of Lt. Cmdr. Charlie Madison, who serves as a dog robber to Adm. William Jessup. The main function of a dog robber was to act as a personal liaison for high-ranking officers, which typically meant planning and gathering supplies (including female attendees) for lavish dinner parties and receptions. Madison, a former night manager at a luxurious diplomatic hotel in Washington, D.C., initially enlisted in the Marine Corps and fought in the battle of Guadalcanal before becoming cynical about the war and contacting Jessup to accept a standing offer to serve as his dog robber in the European Theater of Operations.

Surrounded by the other officers on Jessup's staff, most of whom are career officers and graduates of the United States Naval Academy, Madison is a self-acknowledged coward whose only goal is to get through the war by looking out for himself. Strangely enough, Madison's cowardly attitude attracts the attention and affection of Emily Barham, a British Army driver, who suffers daily from the loss of her father, brother and husband during the early years of the war. The collective trauma of these losses drives Emily to give her affection to someone who is unlikely to die in the war. Because of his job and his views on the war, heroism and duty, Madison fits perfectly into Emily's vision of the ideal partner.

While Emily and Madison enjoy a budding romance, Jessup, who is suffering from an untreated nervous breakdown brought on by the death of his wife, becomes convinced that the Army's role in the upcoming Normandy invasion will overshadow that of the Navy, with the possible result of a severe post-war reduction in funding and size. In order to prevent this scenario from occurring, Jessup devises a scheme to ensure that

the first U.S. service member killed during the invasion will be from the Navy. Jessup then wishes to have the remains of the individual memorialized in a national monument similar to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Under the administration of staff officer Lt. Cmdr. "Bus" Cummings, Jessup's irrational plan is put into action and Madison is secretly chosen to be the first man, and in turn the first casualty, on Omaha Beach.

With Madison frequently declaring his intention not to participate in a plan (he does not know he has been selected as the intended victim) he views as bordering on the insane, he is nevertheless dispatched, with Cummings, as part of a camera crew whose official mission is to document the Navy's role in the Normandy invasion. Before leaving on the mission, Emily experiences a change of heart and wishes that Madison would show courage and demonstrate romantic idealism. When he refuses to comply with her wishes, Emily leaves Madison in a driving rain on the runway declaring that she never wants to see him again. While Madison proceeds to go along with the mission, it is not until the film crew lands on the beach that Cummings, with his sidearm drawn, divulges his plans for Madison by forcing him to run forward into German artillery under threat of death. At this point Madison disappears in the smoke of an exploding shell.

After returning to duty on Jessup's staff, Cummings finds that the admiral's illness has been treated and has been returned to duty. When told by Cummings that the plan involving Madison has been acted out, Jessup reacts angrily as he cannot believe that his orders were carried out when he was in such a clearly disturbed state of mind. Nevertheless, the public relations campaign reporting Madison as the first United States military member killed on Omaha Beach has already been started and must be carried

forward to avoid a devastating public scandal that would bring about the ruin for the Navy feared by Jessup initially.

With the media campaign going forward, and Emily having been informed of Madison's death, which brings on extreme guilt and remorse because of the way she acted during their last meeting, a phone call is received from a temporary hospital on the English coast stating that Madison is alive. After picking-up Emily, Cummings goes directly to the hospital where he is angrily received by Madison, who states boldly that he is going to tell the press the truth about Jessup's plan. Desperate to stop Madison's disastrous intentions, Cummings relies on Emily to convince him to play along with the charade in order for them to be able to share a free and happy future together. The film ends with Madison, flanked by Emily and Cummings, walking in the direction of a group of reporters, happily prepared to lie about his heroic act for the sake of his happiness and the Navy's future.³²⁵

When viewed in tandem with *Bataan*, the profound shift toward Modernism in *The Americanization of Emily* becomes easy to identify. While both films confront the subject of heroism, their interpretations differ greatly. In *Bataan*, the viewer is confronted with a metaphysical abstraction of real heroism, determination and moral duty. Although each member of the patrol demonstrates these characteristics in some manner, the message is headlined by Sgt. Bill Dane, whose character can be placed in the highest echelons of abstracted romantic heroism. Opposing the romantic hero epitomized by Dane is Madison, who is portrayed as heroic primarily because he disavows, and then makes a mockery of the true heroism of the stripe demonstrated by Dane.

³²⁵ *The Americanization of Emily*, DVD, directed by Arthur Hiller (1964; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005).

While *Bataan* explored what a diverse group of men thrown together in a dire situation could achieve, *The Americanization of Emily* exemplified what staff officers and ivory-tower admirals could conjure-up well behind the safety of their own lines. Although Madison nearly becomes a victim of the delusional ideas of these men, for the majority of the film he is one of them in the sense that he is proud to have escaped his role as a combat marine to perform their brand of duty. One could not imagine Dane phoning General Douglas MacArthur to have himself extracted from the Bataan peninsula, or telling his men to head for the hills and simply let the Japanese take control of the mountain pass. Such a scenario is unimaginable because when *Bataan* was made, the outcome of the actual conflict was yet to be determined and the reality of the heroic struggles facing our fighting forces was real and palpable to audiences who viewed this type of film. However, two decades later, as the dire circumstances associated with the conflict faded, and with the United States approaching what would become a socially divisive conflict in Vietnam, the World War II film, as exemplified by *The Americanization of Emily*, provided an easy target for the forces of Modernism.

Instead of directly confronting their growing discontent with existing political and social power structures, the modernists in Hollywood did what artists typically do when attempting to comment on contemporary events in a society that still overwhelmingly views such actions in a negative light; they pick another event from the past in order to create a parable. The problem with such an approach, as demonstrated in *The Americanization of Emily*, is that along with establishing the parable the artist also alters the image of the historical event used to create the parable. Thus, while *The Americanization of Emily* certainly has as much or more to say about the mid-1960s as it

does about the Second World War, the fact that the film takes place during the latter time means that the artistic message will also impact the way in which people think about the historical event, most especially those who did not experience it firsthand. In the end, contemporary questions and criticisms of military actions pertaining to the Cold War led to those concerns appearing in the guise of metaphysical abstractions set during the Second World War, which meant that modernist sentiments freely jaded and distorted an outstanding instance of collected heroism in the American past.

The final installment in the World War II sequence, Brian G. Hutton's 1970 film, *Kelly's Heroes*, builds on the parable theme identified in *The Americanization of Emily*, taking it to a more extreme level. Set in France during the Summer of 1944, *Kelly's Heroes* tells the story of an embittered former lieutenant who has been reduced to the rank of private when he became the scapegoat for a miscommunication that occurred during a battle that resulted in the deaths of a large number of American soldiers. While operating behind the German lines, Kelly, who has been assigned to capture a German soldier for intelligence purposes, apprehends a colonel, who later divulges, just prior to his death, the location of a shipment of gold bars valued at sixteen million dollars. Kelly then becomes determined to find a way to break-through the German lines and steal the gold from the bank where it is being held in the town of Clermont.

In putting together his plan to steal the gold, Kelly decides to use an upcoming rest period for the platoon to sneak through the German lines and head toward Clermont. Knowing that the company captain, whose uncle, General Colt, is the division commander, has done little in overseeing the daily activities of his men, Kelly proceeds to bribe the artillery sergeant with a bar of gold taken from the colonel's briefcase so that

a mortar barrage can be arranged to cover the platoon's breach of the German lines. Kelly then brings the company supply sergeant, Crapgame, in on his plan so that he can acquire the necessary food, weapons and equipment to carry out the operation. It is while talking with Crapgame that Kelly stumbles upon a hippie tank sergeant, Oddball, who is the defacto leader of three rogue Sherman tank crews whose commanding officer has not been reported as killed-in-action because Crapgame has been collecting his cache of whiskey. With an offer of an equal share of gold, Oddball agrees to sneak his tanks through the German lines, link-up with Kelly at a pre-selected point and attack the Germans in Clermont. With all of the logistical aspects of the mission taken care of, Kelly then has to convince the members of the platoon, and most importantly its imposing sergeant, Big Joe, to agree to leave their post and attempt to steal the German gold.

In his quest to pull Big Joe into the operation, Kelly takes advantage of the sergeant's brief absence from the platoon and tells the men about the gold. Because of their extended time at the front with low pay and no leave, the entire platoon eagerly and unanimously agrees to go along with Kelly. While Big Joe, who enters the room right after Kelly has told the men about his plan, remains unconvinced about Kelly's scheme, he agrees to go along with the operation once he realizes that the entire platoon wants to go for the gold.

According to Kelly's plan, the platoon will break through the German lines under the cover of a pre-arranged mortar barrage and make their way to the link-up point where they are to meet Oddball's tanks. Although the platoon loses two men and their vehicles along the way, they successfully join the tanks and begin pushing towards Clermont.

Unknown to the platoon, their radio transmissions with Oddball during a battle with the Germans at a bridgehead were intercepted by the communications officer on General Colt's staff, who wrongly determines that Kelly's unit is spearheading an independent offensive to break key German positions along their lines.

As Colt heads for Clermont and what he believes is the redemption of his division, Kelly's group lies in wait outside Clermont devising a plan by which they can attack the town and steal the gold. A dramatic twist occurs when Oddball learns that his one Sherman tank (the other two were destroyed by the Germans at the bridgehead) will have to face-off against three German Tiger Tanks. Despite Oddball's fear of the large, heavily armored German tanks, Kelly constructs a plan that, with the aid of church bells and a twenty-minute window of time in which the Tigers run their engines, allows the platoon to sneak into the town, plant explosives in the building housing the German soldiers (most of them are still sleeping because the attack occurs in the morning) and launch a surprise attack.

While the platoon is able to neutralize all of the German infantrymen in the town, and Oddball, with Kelly's help, is able to destroy two of the Tiger tanks, the efforts to secure the bank are halted when the Sherman breaks-down and the remaining Tiger positions itself in the town square. With no way to stop the tank, Crapgame suggests that Kelly try to contact the Germans on the radio to arrange a cease-fire in order to make a deal. This suggestion leads to a dramatic scene in which Oddball, Kelly and Big Joe gather in the street leading to the square, draw their weapons and walk in sync toward the German tank accompanied by background music reminiscent of that in the Spaghetti Westerns Eastwood made with Sergio Leone in the mid-1960s.

After reaching the tank and talking with the German sergeant in command, the trio is able to convince him of the futility of his position in that an entire division of American infantry soldiers, led by Colt, will likely enter the town at any moment based on the breakthrough they made, which had undoubtedly been discovered. Also of importance is the fact that the German sergeant has no idea what is inside the bank, but is simply guarding it as ordered. All of these factors, including an equal share of the gold, result in the Germans agreeing to join forces with Kelly and using the high velocity gun on the Tiger to blow open the well-secured door to the bank.

Once inside the bank, the Germans and Americans gather together as Kelly busts open a box to confirm the existence of the gold. After rejoicing for a brief moment at the sight of the shiny bars that tumble out of the box in Kelly's hands, the men move quickly to split the gold with Oddball and the Germans and then load their shares, which add up to just under one million dollars per person, into a German truck and head out of town. Just as the platoon moves out toward an unknown destination (perhaps Switzerland), Colt and his staff enter Clermont from the opposite side and are greeted as liberators by a mob of townspeople. Colt's nephew, Capt. Maitland, who has secretly pieced together that the men under his command were responsible for the breakthrough, walks through the destroyed bank door and is greeted by the famous American G.I. graffiti, "Kilroy was Here." The camera then cuts to the platoon driving into the sunset as the credits roll.³²⁶

Filmed and released during the height of the anti-Vietnam War movement in the United States, there is little doubt that *Kelly's Heroes* represented an effort to make a political statement about the conflict in Southeast Asia. From Oddball's hippie commune, to the crazed Gen. Colt, and the overall incompetence and corruption depicted

³²⁶ *Kelly's Heroes*, DVD, directed by Brian G. Hutton (1970; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007).

in the film, the fictional connection to contemporary events of the late post-war period such as Gen. William Westmoreland's leadership in Vietnam, false body counts, the five o'clock follies and the growing American counter-culture of the second half of the 1960s remains too coincidental to be an accident. However, in a more extreme example than that of *The Americanization of Emily, Kelly's Heroes*, in an attempt to make a political statement about Vietnam, tarnished the image of America's involvement in the Second World War.

Watching a depiction of American servicemen deciding to desert in order to steal gold applied the modernist brush of the late 1960s to the World War II generation. By muddying the waters for younger viewers, films such as *Kelly's Heroes* brought the soldiers of the Second World War down to the same level as the disaffected youth of the late 1960s. When removed from the romantic pedestal, the soldiers of the Second World War were no different, no more morally sound, and certainly not more heroic than their counterparts in the Vietnam generation. This process of generational leveling also came with the distasteful practice of blackening the general reputation of World War II combat soldiers by suggesting that behavior such as that depicted in *Kelly's Heroes* was not uncommon. Thus, instead of depicting an episode from a desperate struggle in which a group of nations successfully worked to defeat two truly sinister regimes, it had become acceptable, by the latter years of the post-war period, to positively depict American forces conspiring with the enemy for their own personal gain.³²⁷ As the title of the film

³²⁷ While from the Romantic perspective any collusion with the forces of fascism would be viewed in a negative light, what made the actions of Kelly and the platoon more reprehensible was the fact that the Germans they join forces with are members of the Waffen SS, the military wing of Hitler's infamous state security that menaced civilians and Jews alike. These men were not typical German soldiers in the regular army, but rather dedicated Nazis trained to fight for the ideals of National Socialism. The fact that Brian Hutton exerted great energy to ensure that the uniforms and equipment used in the film were as accurate as possible made the Germans that the platoon negotiated with all the more distinguishable. As opposed to

expresses, these men—Kelly, Big Joe, Oddball, Crapgame and the rest of the platoon—are metaphysical abstractions of modernist heroes. For these men, there is no loyalty beyond profit and their own self-interest. Higher motivations such as ridding the world of fascism meant nothing. As the post-war period drew to a close, this depiction of America’s involvement in World War II stood far away from the romantic abstraction of Sgt. Bill Dane uttering with grit and determination, “It don’t matter where a man dies, as long as he dies for freedom.”

In the end, the three films selected to represent the World War II genre uniquely demonstrate the sudden shift of the genre from its romantic roots to modernist domination by 1970. The dedicated heroism of Sgt. Bill Dane and his embattled patrol, which symbolized the pure romantic interpretation of World War II, established the precedent of presenting positive abstractions of America’s involvement in the conflict that endured through the 1950s and into the early 1960s. With the appearance of films such as *The Americanization of Emily* in the first half of the 1960s, Romanticism’s foothold in the genre was placed in serious jeopardy because these films were devoid of any characters or entities representing the moral compass of Romanticism as outlined by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*. By the end of the post-war period, films such as *Kelly’s Heroes* cemented Modernism’s triumph in the World War II genre by pushing beyond the lack of any legitimate romantic elements and instead turning the heroes of the film into serious criminals as opposed to mere frauds and liars. Just as the more in-depth case study of the Western genre in the previous chapter demonstrated, whether one sides

the standard gray uniforms worn by the German army, which the infantrymen the platoon fought in Clermont wore, the tank crews were attired in the black wool jackets worn by Waffen SS tank crews and the infamous SS lightning bolts and death’s head symbol are prominently profiled in several shots. Thus, the platoon was not bargaining with German soldiers forced to into service, but rather dedicated fanatics whose organization was linked to some of the most horrific war crimes ever documented.

with Romanticism or Modernism, there is no doubt that modernist forces sought to unseat their romantic adversaries as the core influence of the World War II genre during the second half of the post-war period.

Films of the Cold War

Just as the American experience in World War II influenced the era that followed its conclusion, the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which began directly after the end of the Second World War, also greatly impacted the art being produced in Hollywood. However, unlike the World War II genre, there is no easily identifiable Cold War counterpart as some films addressed aspects of the struggle directly while others utilized the parable method discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, so heavy was the saturation of the Cold War in American film of the post-war period that it provides nearly limitless choices in terms of film selection for History 399. For the initial course cycle, the unit on the Cold War will be book-ended by two films, one romantic and the other modernist, that serve as examples of the direct Cold War model, albeit from different points-of-view. In the middle of the sequence is a film that stands as a Cold War parable that reflects the romantic persuasion, but also opens a door to other aspects of post-war American film, in this case the Science-Fiction genre, not covered in-depth because of the limitations of time.

The initial selection in the Cold War sequence, Edward Ludwig's 1952 film, *Big Jim McLain*, tells the story of World War II veteran turned investigator for the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) Jim McLain (played by John Wayne) and his partner Mal Baxter, a decorated veteran of the Korean War, who travel to Hawaii in order

to investigate a communist ring that has eluded prosecution due to a lack of evidence. From beginning to end, the film offers a heroic/romantic depiction of the attempt to stop the criminal activities of Soviet supporters in the United States. In a script that Rand could have easily written, and which reflected her anti-collectivist message in *Screen Guide for Americans*, *Big Jim McLain* developed around the tightly focused message of the cost of individual freedom and liberty. Mal Baxter comes to understand that point very well in the opening scene of the film, which shows the Hawaiian conspirators walking free after hiding behind their Fifth Amendment rights.

After arriving in Hawaii in their quest to obtain hard evidence against the elusive communist underground, a trip by Jim and Mal to the capsized *USS Arizona*, which held the remains of Baxter's brother, reminds the two investigators, and the audience, of the price that often has to be paid in order to maintain freedom. With such dramatic images resonating in the minds of viewers, it becomes clear that the communists who have been operating in Hawaii, who have committed insurance fraud, unlawful labor manipulation and even murder, represent the immoral forces of collectivism that, if left unchecked, stand as a serious threat to the American way of life. With the same romantic bravado he brought to the heroic characters he portrayed in the World War II and Western genres, John Wayne presented an abstraction of what a vigilant individual could do to stop what he, and Rand, viewed as the greatest threat to the continuation of American freedom. However, after the murder of Baxter, as well as the evidence indicating insurance fraud, only three members of the Hawaiian communist ring are charged with crimes.

Just as he and Baxter experienced at the beginning of the film, McLain watches a parade of guilty conspirators walk free after refusing to talk based on their Fifth

Amendment rights. Thus, the film has far less than an ideal ending for McLain, who did his job the right way only to see a majority of the guilty party go free because of rights guaranteed by the system he has sworn to protect. Nevertheless, for the purposes of teaching the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism, the film's lackluster ending acknowledges, from the romantic perspective, the reality of the struggle it faced against the growing tide of modernist ideas in the post-war period. As Wayne, whose onscreen persona epitomized American Romanticism in the Randian sense, observes a detachment of United States service personnel marching by after just watching the guilty communists walk free, the viewer comes to fully realize, if they have not up to this point, that the film is a call to action, not just in the cause of anti-communism, but more generally against the forces of Modernism that, in the view of Rand and others, sought to destroy the previously entrenched ideals of romantic individualism in America.³²⁸

While *Big Jim McLain* served as an overt call to action for anti-communists and romantics, the second installment in the Cold War sequence, Don Siegel's 1955 film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, typified the indirect approach to Cold War commentary mentioned above. Set in the fictional town of Santa Mira, California, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* tells the story of town doctor Miles Bennell, who has just returned from a medical conference to find some strange behavior among his patients. After noticing on his drive into town that all of the local produce stands have been closed, Bennell finds several patients in his office who complain that spouses and other family members are not who they claim to be. The claims are made based on the fact that the individuals in question seem to function without typical human emotion. Although Bennell initially brushes off these incidents, he slowly begins to realize what is happening when he and

³²⁸ *Big Jim McLain*, DVD, directed by Edward Ludwig (1952; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007).

his former girlfriend Becky discover a partially formed body at a friend's house and one in Becky's basement. Bennell finds only skepticism and disbelief when reporting these incidents to local authorities.

The next day, while he and Becky are staying at the same couple's house, Bennell finds four bodies in the greenhouse growing from what appear to be seed pods. Now Bennell realizes that these bodies are intended to replace him and his three friends. After failing to get an open phone line to place a long distance call, Bennell's friend Teddy and his wife attempt to leave town by car to get help. Having spent the night locked in his office, Bennell and Becky watch from the window as hundreds of townspeople gather to receive giant seed pods from the local authorities with instructions to distribute them to near-by towns. It is at this point that Bennell and Becky are discovered by a local psychiatrist, Dr. Kauffman, and Teddy, who was intercepted on his way out of town and has undergone the change.

With Bennell and Becky cornered in the office, Kauffman and Teddy inform the two that the pods are of an extraterrestrial nature, having come down from space and landed in a farmer's field. They also tell the pair how good it is to have the weight of human emotion gone from their lives. While Kauffman and Teddy leave Bennell and Becky locked in the office with two seed pods intending for them to go to sleep (they have been awake for nearly two days) and allow the transformation to take place, the two manage to escape town and take refuge in an abandoned mine. However, while Bennell goes to investigate the farm outside the mine, which he discovers is a production center for the seed pods, Becky falls asleep and is taken over.

After failing to convince Bennell to join her in a life free of human emotion, Becky alerts the nearby farmers as to their location and they immediately start pursuing the fleeing Bennell, who manages to make it to the highway, where he stumbles dangerously through oncoming traffic. The scene then cuts to an emergency room where Bennell has been telling his story to a psychiatrist brought in to treat him because it is suspected that that he has gone insane. However, while the psychiatrist and attending physician retain this belief after Bennell completes his story, they realize that he is telling the truth when a man who was severely injured in a truck accident on the highway is wheeled through the emergency room and it is mentioned that that he was hauling a load of strange seed pods. Upon hearing this information, the doctors immediately call the F.B.I., while the camera cuts to Bennell, who has a horrified look of relief on his face as the film ends.³²⁹

Typically considered a veiled parable as to the dangers of complacency in confronting the threat of communism, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has been accorded a distinguished place in post-war film history as a reflection of the social and political culture of 1950s America. However, when considered in light of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism during the post-war period, the film can also be appreciated as an overt call to action by the forces of Romanticism. As with many of the other films cited in this study, the image of the heroic individual is at the center of this alternate interpretation of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Unlike Jim McLain, Miles Bennell does not exude the qualities typically associated with the heroic individual. Before the chaos in Santa Mira goes into full

³²⁹ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, DVD, directed by Don Siegel (1955; Santa Monica, CA: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2002).

swing, Bennell is introduced to the viewer as somewhat of a beaten individual as well as an underachiever. Although he participates in the higher intellectual circles of the medical world, Bennell is content to spin his wheels as a small-town general practitioner despite the clear fact that he is capable of achieving far more. Also contributing to Bennell's non-heroic image is the extent to which the loss of his relationship with Becky, who left him to marry another man, has negatively impacted his life and work. Although his prospects for another chance with Becky grow when he discovers that she has returned to Santa Mira after the failure of her marriage, Bennell, who is still suffering from a recent divorce of his own, is clearly broken from an emotional standpoint.

As the situation with the seed pods quickly develops into a struggle over the survival of humanity, Bennell is forced to put aside his personal problems and rise to a level of responsibility so immense that it would be incomprehensible to anyone not faced with its burden. Thus, the metaphysical abstraction presented to the viewer is that of a normal individual, not prone to or experienced in heroic behavior, having the fate of humanity thrown on his shoulders. While Bennell could have determined that his situation was futile and given-in to the emotionless beings or simply tried to flee in a vain attempt to save himself, he digs deep into his own reserve of metaphysical abstractions, determined to use his knowledge and wits to evade capture and does everything in his power to stop the menacing invaders. In the end, Bennell, in a heroic fashion similar to that demonstrated by Will Kane in *High Noon*, reaches beyond the limits of the possible as he understands them, and took a stand based on the moral landscape created by his collected metaphysical abstractions. With the onslaught of Modernism beginning to gain steady ground in the United States by the mid-1950s, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

stood as a reminder of the potential power of the individual and the ongoing conflict with Modernism in which such instances of romantic heroism were desperately needed.

While *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* demonstrated the power of the individual to act heroically in the romantic tradition, the final film in the Cold War sequence, Stanley Kubrick's 1964 Cold War satire, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, presented an extreme example in the opposite direction. The film, the setting of which is contemporary to the time in which it was made, chronicles an international crisis that arises when Air Force General Jack D. Ripper, who commands a strategic bomb wing armed with nuclear weapons, goes insane and takes advantage of an emergency plan that allows him to directly order his planes to attack pre-assigned targets inside the Soviet Union.

Once the White House and Pentagon become aware of what has happened, a meeting called by the President Merkin Muffley convenes in the war room in order to figure out how to stop the looming catastrophe. Early in the meeting it becomes apparent that Muffley is little more than a weak politician who has allowed himself to be manipulated into establishing insane nuclear contingency plans, including the one that caused the current situation, because of exaggerated hysteria created by the military and members of the civilian media. Opposing Muffley in the meeting is the ranking general in the United States Air Force, Buck Turgidson, who is characterized as an overgrown adolescent that has bullied the president into initiating excessive nuclear contingency plans with the promise that no mishaps could occur. It is this clash of timidity and adolescent bullying that typify the sequences in the film that take place in the war room.

When the film shuffles back to Burpelson Air Force Base, where Ripper has sealed off the base after ordering the wing to attack the Soviet Union, one of the two examples of individual heroism in the film is presented in the character of Grp. Cpt. Lionel Mandrake, a British officer who is serving as Ripper's executive as part of a NATO officer exchange program. Early on, Mandrake realizes that Ripper is insane and attempts to stop his plan but is unable to get the general to divulge the three letter code that, if transmitted, will recall the bombers. With the base under attack by an army unit ordered to capture him at the order of Muffley, Ripper commits suicide rather than face potential torture. Despite the persistent incompetence of Col. Bat Guano, the commander of the unit that eventually captures the base, who is convinced that Mandrake is a foreign "pervert" and responsible for the sabotage, Mandrake persists and is ultimately successful in deciphering the three letter recall code, which he then has to transmit to Muffley via a public payphone. While the code is used to recall the bombers, one plane, which was originally thought to have been shot down, cannot receive the message because of damage inflicted by Soviet surface-to-air missiles.

The crew of the B-52 bomber commanded by Maj. T. J. "King" Kong represents the second exposition of romantic heroism in *Dr. Strangelove*. While Kong and his men have no way of knowing of Ripper's insanity or the ridiculous discussions transpiring at the Pentagon, they receive the go-code to attack their targets and act in a professional manner to ensure that they complete their mission as they have been trained to do. Throughout the film, Kong leads his plane past every possible Soviet attempt to destroy it. Even when it is determined that the plane, because of a loss of fuel due to a missile explosion, cannot reach either its primary or secondary target, Kong insists on bombing

the nearest target of opportunity, a decision which leads to the destruction of all human society.

As Kong and his men move toward the nearest target of opportunity, Muffley learns from the Soviet ambassador that his government has recently put into operation a doomsday device that, if triggered by an attack on Soviet soil, will set off enough high grade nuclear weapons to wipe out human life on the entire planet. While Muffley has given the Soviet premier the primary and secondary targets of Kong's plane, he has no way of knowing that Kong has diverted to an alternate target of opportunity. Thus, when Kong's plane successfully drops its payload the doomsday device is triggered. At the same moment, the group of officials in the war room listen to Dr. Strangelove, an ex-Nazi scientist and Muffley's lead developer, talk of the possibilities of carrying on human culture from deep mineshafts as the camera cuts to a series of real nuclear explosions and the credits roll.³³⁰

Before launching into a romantic critique of *Dr. Strangelove*, the quality of the film, based on the standards identified by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*, must be noted. With developed characters, an intriguing plot and a clear modernist theme, *Dr. Strangelove* is one of the most complete works of Modernism that will be considered in History 399. While the numerous modernist elements in the film are too many to detail within the constraints of the current study, the manner in which *Dr. Strangelove* overtly attacked and in-turn made a mockery of individual romantic heroism stands as the work's most prominent display of Modernism, which makes it an ideal fit as the final selection for the Cold War sequence.

³³⁰ *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, DVD, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1964; Culver City, CA: Columbia Home Entertainment, 2001).

The two examples of individual romantic heroism that emerge from *Dr. Strangelove*, that of Mandrake and Kong, are used to demonstrate, in the case of the former, futility, and simple-minded obedience in the latter. In terms of Mandrake, the film drives home the message that despite using one's intelligence and wherewithal to solve a problem, one has no control over the outcome as demonstrated by Mandrake's persistence in obtaining and communicating the recall code only to have a nuclear holocaust occur despite his efforts. With Kong, the modernist treatment stooped to a unique level of crudeness. While hardworking crews of Air Force personnel found themselves flying to the precipice of the Soviet Union in defense of the nation, audiences sat in theatres watching a film that degraded such dedication by characterizing Kong as a redneck simpleton, whose perseverance in successfully completing the task for which he has been trained appears to be little more than ignorant obedience.

The modernist characterizations of both Mandrake and Kong stand in stark opposition to the way in which Jim McLain and Miles Bennell were portrayed in the first two films in the Cold War sequence. On one hand, Mandrake can be viewed comparatively to Bennell in that he does not typically exude the heroic nature of an abstraction created by John Wayne over the course of many performances. However, while Bennell's perseverance and heroism pays dividends for the human race, Mandrake's efforts appear almost meaningless. Along similar lines, Kong can be viewed as a foil to McLain, whose sheer commitment to duty helps to preserve the strength of freedom in the United States as opposed to Kong's determination, which unknowingly results in the likely destruction of all human life. In the end, *Dr. Strangelove*, driven by a modernist mantra that overtly emphasized the futility of individual action and heroism, as

demonstrated in the characterization of Mandrake and Kong, illustrates how, by the mid-1960s, Modernism assumed a commanding presence in artistic interpretations of America's ongoing conflict with the Soviet Union, a fact that makes the film a logical choice to end the Cold War sequence.

Youth Issues, Morality and Society

Following the Cold War cycle, History 399 will next consider a disparate collection of films that deal generally with youth issues, morality and society. While these films do not form a specific genre, they all confront the changing social and moral landscape of American society during the post-World War II period. As documented in the first chapter of this study, historians such as Alan Petigny have re-examined the cultural and moral aspects of the post-war era and concluded that many of the notable shifts typically identified as products of the 1960s were in fact products of the 1950s. The first chapter of this study also highlighted the fact that Rand, in *Screen Guide for Americans* and *The Romantic Manifesto*, argued that the rapidly changing social and moral climate identified by Petigny was the result of a modernist assault on society that could be understood through the examination of certain forms of artistic expression. With the ideas of Petigny and Rand in mind, the Youth Issues, Morality and Society cycle will begin with two films, both of which hit theatres in 1955.

The first film chronicles the problem of post-war juvenile delinquency in inner city public high schools. Although the ideas of Modernism as applied to education are clearly presented in this film, a romantic counter-force is offered as a viable alternative to the problem. The second film under consideration, while filled with modernist

abstractions of post-war youth culture, provides no romantic alternative to the problem of alienated youth. As will be demonstrated by the second two films in this cycle, both of which appeared much later in the post-war period, the path overwhelmingly followed in terms of the metaphysical abstractions concerning youth issues, morality and culture created by Hollywood as the post-war era progressed stemmed from the second, more fully modernist film made in 1955. Establishing this connection also strengthens the contention espoused by Rand, and this study, that a war between Romanticism and Modernism, spearheaded by the latter, raged throughout the post-war era with Modernism triumphing and in full control by 1970.

Leading off the Youth Issues, Morality and Society sequence is Richard Brooks' 1955 film about inner-city education, *Blackboard Jungle*. The film tells the story of World War II combat veteran now college graduate Richard Dadier, who is in New York City seeking his first job as a high school English teacher. To his joy, Dadier is asked to join the faculty at North Manual High School, whose mission is to provide inner-city students with trade skills so that they can attain gainful employment upon graduation. Dadier's joy soon turns to frustration and anger shortly after the start of the school year when he finds himself in charge of a group of poorly educated, undisciplined students, most of whom present behavior problems with the worst being gang members and full-scale juvenile delinquents. Having failed to take the advice of a veteran teacher who told him to never turn his back on the students, Dadier, on the first day of school, nearly has the back of his skull crushed by a baseball thrown by an unknown student at point-blank range.

Within the English class Dadier is assigned, he quickly identifies two students, Artie West and Gregory Miller, as being two of the leaders who the rest of the students follow. While West, who is of Irish descent, locks horns with Dadier early on, the new teacher looks to Miller, who is of African American descent, for help in attempting to steer the rest of the students in the right direction. However, when Miller fails to assist Dadier with class leadership, Dadier assumes him to be a partner of West in the latter's mission to disrupt the class and make his life miserable. As the term progresses, Dadier becomes more convinced of Miller's guilt when he is called to the principal's office and is presumed guilty of racial prejudice because an unnamed student lodged a complaint. Angered after having to defend himself under the presumption of guilt, Dadier escalates a verbal confrontation with the principal, Mr. Warneke, and then confronts Miller, who will not deny that he made the complaint, which angers Dadier to the point at which he nearly directs a racial slur at Miller.

While Dadier faces numerous problems in the classroom, trouble exists for him on other fronts as he has to fight a sexually crazed student who attempts to rape a female teacher, Lois Hammond. Because the student fell through a plate glass window after being hit by Dadier, the gang led by West targets him when he leaves a local bar with fellow first-year teacher Joshua Edwards, who is also a World War II combat veteran. As the two men take a short-cut through an alley, they are accosted by West and his gang, who beat them severely and escape before the police arrive. When Dadier returns home to his wife Anne, who is expecting their first child, she is so horrified by his bruised and swollen face that she refuses to allow him to return to work at North Manual. With a few days off to recover from his injuries, Dadier spends time at the high school in which one

of his former professors is now the principal. Away from the problems of the inner-city, Dadier is amazed as he strolls through classrooms in which students recite Latin and eagerly conduct chemistry experiments. Although offered the choice to teach at this school, Dadier decides instead to return to his job at North Manual, announcing to Anne, "I've been beaten up, but I'm not beaten."

As Dadier is able to claw his way through the fall semester, his friend Joshua Edwards is not so lucky. In an effort to increase student interest in mathematics, Edwards brings his irreplaceable collection of vintage jazz records to school in order to demonstrate how patterns in music can be understood by applying mathematical concepts. During a class break, the delinquents in Dadier's class, led by West, enter Edwards' classroom and systematically destroy his record collection. This event prompts Edwards to leave his job at North Manual a sad and defeated man.

With Dadier making some progress with a core group of students, including Miller, West pushes harder to get rid of him. Unknown to Dadier, Anne regularly receives anonymous phone calls and letters from West claiming that her husband is having an affair with Lois Hammond, the teacher he rescued from being raped earlier in the year. While Dadier is busy working extra hours on the North Manual Christmas pageant, Anne keeps the anxiety caused by these messages hidden, which eventually causes her to go into labor prematurely and nearly lose the baby. When Dadier discovers what caused the situation, he determines to quit North Manual for good. However, Anne talks him out of this decision by pointing out that she overreacted to messages that were obviously untrue and that he is doing good things for many young men.

When Dadier returns to school, the tension with West and his gang of hoodlums increases greatly, leading to a final showdown in which West refuses to go to the principal's office after making light of the fact that he is cheating on a test. The situation comes to a head when West pulls a knife on Dadier and attempts to get the entire class to attack him. While West is only supported by his chief lieutenant Belazi, Dadier is still forced to fight him. Although West is able to cut Dadier's hand, he is quickly disarmed and slammed into the blackboard. When Belzai attempts to pick-up the knife and attack Dadier while he has his back turned, another student takes the American flag out of its stand and uses it as a spear, stabbing Belzai in the shoulder thus making him drop the knife. With the crisis defused, Dadier tells the rest of the students, "There is no place for these two in your classroom." With Miller acting as their spokesman, the students support Dadier in removing West and Belazi from the classroom. In the final scene of the film, Miller walks out of the school with Dadier and the two disclose to each other their intentions not to quit North Manual. The film closes with teacher and student parting ways as Bill Haley's smash hit, "Rock Around the Clock," plays in the background.³³¹

Despite the fact that it is easy to get distracted by the sensational portrayal of juvenile delinquency in *Blackboard Jungle*, the reality of the film is that it represented a romantic response to the growing influence of Modernism in post-war America. On bold display throughout the film is the modernist approach to education, which centered on an egalitarian philosophy of "understanding and flexi[bility]" associated with the ideas of Dr. Benjamin Spock that, as Alan Petigny noted, became entrenched in American society

³³¹ *Blackboard Jungle*, DVD, directed by Richard Brooks (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005).

by the early 1950s. The principal of North Manual, Mr. Warnecke, serves as the metaphysical abstraction of Spock's ideas in action.

At the beginning of the film, as Dadier is navigating through his job interview, Warnecke responds to a question about the discipline problem at the school by declaring, "There is no discipline problem." Warnecke's claim is quickly proven untrue after Dadier's first day in the classroom. Later, as Dadier struggles to make ground in light of the problems caused by West and his gang, Warnecke angrily confronts him and assumes his guilt in committing racial prejudice, having taken all of his information from a confidential report made by West, a known delinquent and gang leader. In both of these instances, Warnecke represents the problems created by the progressive brand of education advocated by those under the influence of Modernism.

Despite the fact that an enormous problem existed in terms of discipline at North Manual, the executive leader of the school refused to acknowledge the problem, which prevented the development of a real solution and instead left teachers such as Dadier with no choice but to fight for their own safety against a mob of hoodlums. In terms of the racial complaint launched by West, Warnecke, who refuses to acknowledge the discipline problem at North Manual, proves more than willing to serve as judge and jury against Dadier, waiting until the end of his accusatory rant to ask for his side of the story. While Warnecke sounds noble in his speech to Dadier announcing that all students at North Manual would get a fair chance and an equal education, he remains silent on the violent tension Dadier faces every day at the hands of gang leaders such as West.

With no chance of any real support from the administration, Dadier is forced to rely on his own individual strength to survive at North Manual. In this sense, Dadier

becomes a romantic hero because of his ability to triumph as a teacher. While Joshua Edwards represents the ability of Modernism to chew up and spit out the individual, Dadier stands up to West on his own, neutralizes him and demonstrates to the rest of the class why West did not belong with them. Although Dadier's actions seem reasonable as he negotiates the abstractions that make up the plot, his behavior stands against modernist ideas such as those espoused by Spock, who would have advocated that students such as West should be dealt with in a manner that did not hurt their psychological well-being. In the end, Dadier demonstrates that, through individual courage and resilience, students can be taught in a dignified, disciplined classroom and that, despite the pronouncements of modernists such as Spock, students could demonstrate through their own behavior that they do not deserve to be in a classroom with students who want to learn.

While *Blackboard Jungle* demonstrates the potential impact of individual heroism in terms of how it could serve as a positive abstraction for potentially wayward youth, a film of equal popularity that appeared the same year, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without A Cause*, provided a counter message in that it showcases what can easily happen to youth who are denied positive metaphysical abstractions and are left to their own devices in terms of fashioning a moral compass. The film tells the story of Jim Stark, who has recently moved to a suburb of Los Angeles with his parents and grandmother after experiencing trouble in school in the unnamed town from which the family moved. In the film's opening sequence, Jim is taken into custody for public intoxication after he is found lying in a gutter in a drunken stupor. The scene then moves into the police station where Jim briefly encounters a girl named Judy and a young man named Plato, both of whom become important characters as the film progresses. Jim is then greeted by a

police detective and his parents. During this interaction, it becomes clear that Jim's parents, although part of the upper middle class, are more concerned with themselves than with Jim's well-being and are more perturbed by the embarrassment of having to come to the police station than the problem that keeps pushing Jim to act out. After detective Fremick talks Jim down in private, the family returns home in preparation for Jim's first day at his new high school.

When leaving for his first day at the new high school, Jim runs into Judy, who lives on the same street. In attempting to make conversation with Judy, Jim offhandedly asks if she lives on the street to which she answers, "Who lives?" At this point, a car full of teenagers, led by local hoodlum Buzz Gunderson, who is also Judy's boyfriend, drives up and Judy gets in, leaving Jim, who she describes to Buzz as "a new disease." Jim then gets into his own car and drives to school. Later that afternoon, Jim joins his class on a field trip to the local planetarium where they watch a presentation on how the earth will eventually be destroyed. After viewing a simulation of what that destruction would look like, the lecturer leading the presentation notes, "Man, existing alone, seems himself an episode of little consequence."

At the conclusion of the lecture, Buzz, who has taken a disliking to Jim, orders his henchmen to block all of the exits to force Jim into a confrontation. With the help of Plato, Jim makes to his car only to find Buzz, Judy and the entire gang sitting on the vehicle. After slashing one of Jim's tires and calling him a chicken, Buzz and Jim confront each other in a knife fight in which Jim is able to get the upper hand. Instead of hurting Buzz, Jim suggests that an alternative method of settling the dispute should be chosen. This suggestion leads Buzz to challenge Jim to a "chickie run" that night.

Although he does not know what a “chickie run” is, Jim agrees to meet Buzz and the gang at a nearby bluff later that night. Worried about whether or not he is doing the right thing by agreeing to face Buzz in the “chickie run,” Jim attempts to solicit advice from his father, who he finds in the hallway picking up a spilled dinner tray and wearing a woman’s apron. After asking his father about how a man should confront “a matter of honor,” Jim is greeted with the suggestions that he must “consider the pros and cons,” and that he cannot “just make a snap decision.” Feeling more confused and frustrated than he did before talking with his father, Jim sets out to find his own answer to the question, “What can you do when you have to be a man?”

Upon arriving at the bluff, Jim discovers what a “chickie run” is when Buzz instructs him that they will drive two stolen cars side by side toward the bluff and that the first person to bail-out of their car is the chicken. With Judy appointed the official starter of the event, Jim and Buzz motor toward the bluff. At the last possible moment Jim jumps from his car before it plummets to the bottom of the cliff. However, when Buzz attempts to exit his car at the same time, he realizes that his jacket is caught on the door handle and he is unable to free it before he goes over the cliff with the car. While everyone disperses from the scene before the police arrive, the incident sets off a series of violent confrontations later that night when some members of Buzz’s gang see Jim going into the police station and mistakenly believe that he is going to turn them all in for what happened earlier. After forcibly stealing Plato’s address book, the gang begins stalking Jim, who has taken refuge with Judy in an abandoned mansion that Plato had pointed out at the planetarium that afternoon. When Plato realizes that Jim is not home, he knows that he has gone to the mansion and drives his scooter there to be with his friend.

With the arrival of Plato, Jim and Judy go through a strange sequence in which they pretend to be a young married couple with Plato as a real estate agent who is showing them the house as prospective buyers. When Plato falls asleep after the tour, Jim and Judy take a walk through the house and eventually settle in another room where they discuss their feelings for each other, at which point Judy asks Jim, "Is this what it is like to love somebody?" After Jim answers the question in the affirmative, Judy declares her love for Jim. This romantic interlude spoils when the gang breaks into the house, chases Plato and then comes after Jim and Judy. What the gang does not know is that Plato is carrying a pistol that he stole from his mother. As the gang chases him he shoots one person before the police, who have been alerted to the disturbance, chase him into the nearby planetarium. Jim and Judy, who feel guilty for leaving Plato alone and do not want to see him killed, run past the police blockade to enter the planetarium in an effort to get him to come out.

Jim's parents, who are at the scene because they have been riding with detective Fremick searching for Jim, recognize him as he runs into the planetarium with Judy. Once inside the building, Jim is able to convince Plato to leave with him and Judy. Jim is able to secretly unload the pistol when he convinces Plato to let him look at it. When the trio starts to move through the door, Plato becomes apprehensive when he sees the police cars and people he does not recognize. In a fit of anxiety, Plato breaks away from Jim and Judy and brandishes the gun, which draws the fire of the police officers who fatally shoot Plato as Jim unsuccessfully attempts to communicate that he unloaded the gun. After Plato's body is removed, Jim stands alongside his father, who gives an indication

that he will work to be a better guide for Jim. As the group departs the scene of the shooting, Jim formally introduces Judy to his parents.³³²

While the conclusion of *Rebel Without A Cause* suggests that a somewhat brighter future may be on the horizon for Jim and Judy, the overall tone of the film is far more negative than that of its counterpart in this cycle, *Blackboard Jungle*. In that metaphysical abstraction, Richard Dadier reaches within himself and in the end proves successful in providing a positive example for a group of teenage boys, many of whom are on the borderline of becoming juvenile delinquents. While characters such as West and Belzai symbolize that not everyone can be saved from going down the wrong path, a classroom of students now have a positive influence from which they can recalibrate their moral compass. With *Rebel Without A Cause*, the viewer is presented with an abstraction, via the character of Jim's father, of what happens when there is no strong moral presence such as Dadier to provide guidance.

Jim Stark stands as the epitome of the listless youth, in this case set adrift by the influence of Modernism in the post-war era. Instead of having someone with the strength of Dadier to lean on, Jim has only his father, who is little more than an emasculated buffoon. While one cannot make the argument that Jim's parents patterned their parenting style based on the writings of Dr. Spock, their policy of hands-off parenting and Jim's father's inability to answer questions about being a man reflect the movement toward liberalized parenting described by Petigny in *The Permissive Society*. When in the mansion with Jim and Judy, Plato's memories of a "head shrinker," who "made me remember," point to the pervasive presence of modernist psychology in the post-war era

³³² *Rebel Without A Cause*, DVD, directed by Nicholas Ray (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005).

identified in Petigny's study.³³³ Judy, who makes statements such as "Who lives?," and has no understanding of human love, reflects the emptiness and negativity of post-war Modernism as described by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*.³³⁴ In a general sense, Rand's indictments that Modernism ushered in an end of "valuing" and the promotion of the individual human spirit³³⁵ are reflected in the planetarium sequence in which all of the juniors and seniors are calmly told that humankind is, in the end, "an episode of little consequence."³³⁶

When considered as part of the larger thematic abstraction promoted by *Rebel Without A Cause*, it is of little surprise that post-war teenagers such as Jim and Judy, who are not representative of the typical juvenile delinquents of the time (as are West and Belazi) receive a push toward that type of behavior due to the lack of positive individual influence as demonstrated by Jim's experience and more generally by the modernist influence on the inconsequential nature of man's existence. It is certainly not a stretch to suggest that when confused teenagers are reminded with regularity as to the relative unimportance of humanity that many will turn away from any type of activity or social behavior that promotes the importance of any human institution or moral concept. This point is brought forth in *Rebel Without A Cause* when Jim is scolded on his first day of school for walking on the school seal by a clean-cut upperclassman wearing a letterman's sweater, while Buzz and his group of non-conformists laughingly wait to harass the "new disease."³³⁷ In the end, the character of Jim Stark, who must navigate the world of conformity, non-conformity and human institutions, all the while attempting to

³³³ *Rebel Without A Cause*.

³³⁴ *Rebel Without A Cause*.

³³⁵ Rand, *Manifesto*, vii.

³³⁶ *Rebel Without A Cause*.

³³⁷ *Rebel Without A Cause*.

understand his position as a man without any guidance or positive metaphysical abstractions, marks a disturbing trend toward even greater social alienation that is reflected in the second pairing of films selected for this sequence, both of which appeared during the last years of the post-war era.

Directed by Dennis Hopper, who also starred as one of the main characters, Billy, *Easy Rider* (1969) tells the story of two outcast bikers who successfully make a major score by transporting a large amount of cocaine into the United States from Mexico and then selling it for a major profit in Los Angeles. Free from the need of money to sustain their daily lives, Billy and his partner Wyatt embark on a cross-country motorcycle trip with the goal of reaching New Orleans in time for Mardi Gras. From this point, the trip becomes a series of drug influenced episodes in which the pair stop at a ranch to fix Wyatt's bike, at a hippie commune to rest and drop off a hitchhiker they picked-up on a road and at a jail where they are confined overnight after being arrested for parading without a license. While in jail the pair meets George Hanson, a drunk who is also a successful attorney affiliated with the American Civil Liberties Union. After the three men are released from jail, George tags along as Wyatt and Billy travel further into the deep South. In a small town in Louisiana, the trio stops for lunch at a roadside café, where they are ridiculed by three rednecks sitting in a nearby booth and are ultimately refused service. Later, after stopping to camp for the night, the trio is attacked by a gang led by the men who heckled them in the restaurant. While Wyatt and Billy escape after being badly beaten, George dies as a result of his injuries.

Having no choice but to leave George's body behind, Wyatt and Billy travel on to New Orleans where they splurge on a fancy dinner and then pay a visit to an exclusive

brothel for which George had given them a calling card. After selecting two female companions, Wyatt and Billy take the girls out into the street where Mardi Gras is in full swing. It is at this point that the pair decides to drop LSD tablets given to them by the hitchhiker they took to the commune. Giving their female companions equal doses, the two couples go on an extended LSD trip that culminates with an orgy in a cemetery. Once the LSD wears off and the girls are returned to the brothel, Wyatt and Billy leave New Orleans for an unknown destination in Florida. That night, Wyatt, in a marijuana induced state, mysteriously announces to Billy, “We blew it.” The next morning, as the two ride down a rural road they are confronted by two rednecks in a pick-up truck, who, attempting to scare Wyatt and Billy, accidentally shoot Billy off his motorcycle with a shotgun. Worried that Wyatt will escape and reveal what happened, the two rednecks turn around and drive straight toward Wyatt who is speeding down the road to get help. When Wyatt is in range, he is shot at point-blank range with the shotgun. The camera pulls away and the credits role as Wyatt’s motorcycle shoots off the road in flames.³³⁸

Released in 1969 at the pinnacle of the anti-Vietnam War counter-culture movement, *Easy Rider* represented the perfect storm of Modernism that Rand devoted a great deal of her time during the post-war era attempting to combat. Before exploring some specific examples of *Easy Rider* as a reflection of the full-scale Modernism of the late post-war period, a brief restatement of Rand’s key ideas about art in general is necessary in order to ensure the accuracy of the analysis that follows. In addressing the medium of films as an art form, Rand noted, “It is the story that provides an abstract meaning which the film concretizes.”³³⁹ In moving to the key elements of literature,

³³⁸ *Easy Rider*, DVD, directed by Dennis Hopper (1969; Culver City, CA: Columbia Home Video, 1999).

³³⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 65.

which Rand acknowledged could be applied to film, she wrote of their importance, “If a novel [or film] has no discernible theme—it is a bad novel [or film].”³⁴⁰ Rand felt that theme went hand in hand with plot, which she referred to as “the pursuit of some purpose.”³⁴¹ As Rand concluded, “Only men striving to achieve a purpose can move through a meaningful series of events. . . . purposelessness is contrary to man’s nature.”³⁴²

At the practical level of artistic creation, in Rand’s estimation, stood the abstractions or characters who reflect the theme as they make their way through the plot structure. However, in order to communicate the abstract meaning of a work of literature or a film, the individual engaging with the work “must know why the characters did the things they did.”³⁴³ While all of Rand’s ideas cited above received attention in the first chapter of this study, the unique nature of *Easy Rider* as a product of late post-war Modernism stands so far outside the realm of typical post-war Hollywood films of any philosophical stripe that this restatement of Rand’s ideas about film and the elements of literature will assist in illustrating the true nature of that gap as the analysis of the film moves forward.

In considering *Easy Rider* as a form of art in the Randian sense, the first red flag that appears is the episodic nature of the film, which quickly leads to the realization that there is no real plot structure. Furthermore, while George Hanson, a minor character, offers drug induced comments about “individual freedom” and how “it’s real hard to be free when you are bought and sold in the marketplace,” there is no identifiable attempt at

³⁴⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 72.

³⁴¹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 73.

³⁴² Rand, *Manifesto*, 74.

³⁴³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 80.

“integration” of this theme into the story.³⁴⁴ The same can be said of Wyatt’s statement on the night before his death, “We blew it.”³⁴⁵ There never is any explanation or elaboration on what any of these statements mean. Although Wyatt goes to sleep decrying how he and Billy failed in something, the two bound along the road the next day just as they did throughout, only to meet their demise as the victims of the whims of two bigoted hillbillies. Even the one general goal voiced by Wyatt and Billy at the beginning of the film, to get to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, cannot be associated with the elements of plot or theme as upon their arrival they have dinner, become intoxicated, solicit two prostitutes, participate in an LSD driven orgy in a cemetery and leave the city the next day to meet their appointment with death, their detour in New Orleans having been just another drug laden adventure in the film’s disjointed nature. For all of these actions, Wyatt and Billy became folk heroes to a large bloc of American youth who, in Rand’s view, had been completely skewed by the influence of Modernism as the post-war period reached its end.

When placing *Easy Rider* alongside the basic elements of literature and film articulated by Rand, the film’s lack of substance and true artistic merit becomes apparent. In addition to the lack of larger components such as plot and theme, the more functional element of characterization is also missing. The viewer does not know who Wyatt and Billy are, where they come from, how they got to where they are when the film starts or why they do what they do. Unlike a modernist film such as *Dr. Strangelove*, which contains a much higher level of characterization as well as a theme that is reflected in the actions of the characters, *Easy Rider* possesses only the element of style, which is

³⁴⁴ *Easy Rider*.

³⁴⁵ *Easy Rider*.

showcased by the film's exceptional cinematography and choice of soundtrack.

However, as Rand observed, "Style . . . is only a means to an end—the means of telling a story. The writer who develops a beautiful style, but has nothing to say, represents a kind of arrested esthetic development."³⁴⁶ With its disjointed, episodic nature and emphasis on visual and musical elements, *Easy Rider* fits into the category of what Rand termed "mood studies."³⁴⁷ Declaring that works of this nature were not in fact "art-forms," Rand argued that modernist experiments like *Easy Rider* "reduce man's consciousness to the level of sensations, with no capacity to integrate them."³⁴⁸ When coupled with the central role drugs play in the film, the sensory driven sequences that come together to form *Easy Rider* reflect what Rand believed was a "war against reason," which promoted "the disintegration of man's conceptual faculty."³⁴⁹ As for the presence of any type of individual hero in the romantic tradition, what emerges from the inchoate morass of *Easy Rider* is "an abstraction of man's worst and lowest potentiality."³⁵⁰ While modernist films such as *Dr. Strangelove* present images of heroism that are then ridiculed and satirized, *Easy Rider* dispenses with heroism entirely.

While *Easy Rider* represents an experiment in Modernism that lacked the key elements of artistic literature and film described by Rand, Peter Bogdanovich's 1971 film, *The Last Picture Show*, represents the pinnacle of modernist artistry in the post-war era. Although Bogdanovich had no major films to his credit when he brought *The Last Picture Show* to the screen, he was a sometime film journalist and historian who treasured the earlier cinematic achievements of directors Orson Welles, John Ford and

³⁴⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 88.

³⁴⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 88.

³⁴⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 89.

³⁴⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 68.

³⁵⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 119.

Howard Hawks. While the theme of *The Last Picture Show* is thoroughly modernist, Bogdanovich channeled the elements of plot, characterization and style that he admired in earlier romantic and modernist films into an artistic statement/metaphysical abstraction that Rand, although she would have likely disapproved of the film's philosophical bent, could only have labeled it a complete work of art based on her own standards.

Set over the course of a year from November 1951 to November 1952 in the fictional small-town of Anarene, Texas, and shot in black and white, *The Last Picture Show* chronicles a year in the lives of high school seniors Duane Jackson and Sonny Crawford, best friends who share a room in a boarding house because of issues they face in single-parent homes and who also play together on the varsity football and basketball teams. When the film opens, Duane is in a serious, yet tumultuous relationship with Jacy Farrow, whose parents are the wealthiest citizens in Anarene, while Sonny is in a dead-end relationship with Charlene Duggs, who views Sonny as a safe bet for marriage. Tired of being in a relationship with someone he does not love, Sonny leaves Charlene and has no prospects for a new relationship until his physical education teacher, who is also the football and basketball coach, asks Sonny to do him a favor by driving his wife Ruth to a doctor's appointment in the middle of the day. After returning from the appointment, Ruth is very emotional, does not want to be left alone and clearly takes a liking to Sonny. This situation quickly develops into a sexual affair during which it is inferred that Ruth's husband is a closet homosexual.

While Sonny and Ruth enjoy a taboo but extremely satisfying affair, Duane's relationship with Jacy begins to crumble as she is pushed by her mother to look beyond the small confines of Anarene instead of squandering her future. Jacy's mother also

encourages her to have a full sexual encounter with Duane so that she will understand that there are more important things in life. Having come to the realization, with the help of her mother, that she has no real future with Duane, Jacy begins a prolonged process of ending the relationship, which begins at the town Christmas party in which she enrages Duane by sexually exciting him and then falsely telling him that her mother has insisted that she go with Lester Marlow to an indoor pool-party in Wichita Falls hosted by Bobby Sheen, who is also from a wealthy family. When Jacy arrives at the party, everyone is swimming nude and she must remove her clothes while standing on the diving board as part of an initiation ritual.

Although Jacy becomes enamored with Bobby, he makes it clear to her that he would only be interested in a liason if she had more sexual experience. Bobby's suggestion prompts Jacy to take her mother's advice and make a spectacle of sleeping with Duane so that Bobby will take a real interest in her. After two encounters in a local motel with a group of friends waiting in the parking lot, Jacy loses her virginity to Duane. Having gotten what she wants, Jacy then casually ends her relationship with Duane via a phone call, but is distraught when she learns that Bobby has married his current girlfriend Annie-Annie Martin. After Duane decides to leave town in the wake of Jacy's decision to end their relationship, she sets her sights on Sonny when she learns that he is having an affair with the much older Ruth.

Lured by the promise of a sexual liaison with the ravenous Jacy, Sonny abruptly stops his visits to Ruth to devote all of his time and attention to Jacy. While Sonny believes that Jacy really cares about him, it becomes clear that she is simply playing another psychological game on her latest beau. So powerful is Jacy's grip on Sonny that

he aggressively asserts his commitment to her in a conversation with Duane, who is visiting town for a few days and is still angry over the way Jacy treated him. When Sonny confesses that he and Jacy are on the verge of becoming sexually active, Duane's anger turns to rage and he smashes a beer bottle on the side of Sonny's face, destroying his left eye, and then beats him severely. After recovering from his injuries, Jacy manipulates Sonny into eloping, but she leaves behind a note knowing that her parents will be in hot pursuit and that the marriage will be annulled. Jacy's plan works perfectly as Sonny's car is intercepted by an Oklahoma Highway Patrol car, which escorts the couple back to the state line where the Texas Highway Patrol and Jacy's parents are waiting.

As Sonny finds himself alone after becoming the latest victim of Jacy's heartbreaking sting, he is alone and drifting without the guidance of his mentor and father-figure, Sam the Lion. A throwback to an earlier era, Sam owns the café, pool hall, and movie theatre in Anarene. Widowed and with no family, Sam is the guardian of a mentally handicapped teenager named Billy and stands as the only positive influence in Sonny's life. However, for a good portion of the film Sonny is estranged from Sam because of an incident involving Billy that is precipitated by Duane.

After being jilted by Jacy at the town Christmas party, Duane convinces a group of local teens that it would be entertaining to hire the town prostitute, an unsavory waitress at the local drive-in named Jimmie Sue, to have sex with Billy. Although Sonny attempts to intervene, he is overruled by Duane's more charismatic influence and is forced to watch as Billy is forced into a sexual encounter with Jimmie Sue in the back seat of a car. After loudly ridiculing Billy for not knowing what to do, Jimmie Sue slaps

Billy across the face and bloodies his nose when he prematurely ejaculates on her. When the group drives Billy back to the pool hall they are stopped by Sam and questioned about Billy's bloody nose. While Duane hides in the car, other unapologetic members of the group tell Sam about the incident to which he responds by banning them from all of his establishments. Although Sonny is able to reconcile with Sam, his mentor suffers a massive stroke shortly thereafter leaving Sonny without the one positive influence in his life. On their last outing together, a day of fishing at a reservoir outside of town, Sam waxes nostalgic about "old times" when telling Sonny about how much the area around Anarene has changed in the four decades since he came there as a younger man.

With Sam's death and the marriage debacle fresh on his mind, Sonny attends a high school football game and realizes that, although he and Duane were two of the major players on the team the year before (though the team had not been successful), all of the locals have nearly forgotten them in favor of the current team, which has a winning record. When Sonny learns from someone at the game that Duane, who has joined the army since his fight with Sonny, is home on leave before shipping out to Korea, he goes to see his best friend at his mother's house in hopes that they can reconcile. Sonny invites Duane to go to the movie theatre as the woman who has been running it since Sam's death is having to close it down because of a lack of business, thus that evening's feature will be "the last picture show."

After watching Howard Hawk's 1949 Western *Red River*, Sonny and Duane drive to nearby Wichita Falls to drink beer before Duane's bus leaves in the morning. Having seen Duane off, Sonny returns to the pool hall, which Sam willed to him and is now his major occupation. While lighting the gas heater inside the pool hall, Sonny hears a

commotion outside and runs into the street to find that Billy, who he now cares for, has been hit by a truck, whose driver did not see him standing in the road because of a dust storm. As the by-standers, including the local sheriff, speak disparagingly of Billy, calling him simple-minded and stupid, Sonny, who is overcome by an enormous wave of emotion, picks up Billy's body and moves it out of the road, covering it with his letter jacket, and then speeds off in his truck.

Travelling at a high rate of speed and well out of town, Sonny suddenly turns around and heads to Ruth's house. Having not seen her in months, Sonny discovers that Ruth has become fully immersed in the depressed pre-menopausal state that his presence in her life had previously kept at bay. Still in her bath robe in the middle of the day, Ruth makes Sonny a cup of coffee, but the anger that has grown inside her over the past months boils to the surface and she hurls the coffee pot into the kitchen wall and tells Sonny that she is sure that he had left Billy alone on many occasions when he was out with Jacy. However, when Ruth looks at a destitute Sonny, who she realizes is lost in life, she sits down at the table and tells him not to worry about anything as she takes his hand. The scene then cuts to the deserted, wind-blown main street of Anarene. Panning down the thoroughfare, the camera stops at Sam's Royal Theatre and then fades into a picture cast with Hank Williams' "Why Don't You Love Me" playing in the background.³⁵¹

When examining *The Last Picture Show* within the context of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism it is important that the film's role as a parable be considered. The film is unique in that Bogdanovich used the time of transition into the

³⁵¹ *The Last Picture Show*, DVD, directed by Peter Bogdanovich (1971; Culver City, CA: Columbia Home Video, 1999).

post-war period to make a statement about the era's end nearly twenty years later. While it is easy to only focus on the actual time in which the film takes place, its philosophical message is not specific to any one part of the post-war era. Rather, the social and cultural trends reflected in *The Last Picture Show* are more general to the larger post-war period as described by Alan Petigny in *The Permissive Society*.

In terms of psychology and the “permissive” nature of post-war sexuality outlined by Petigny, the character of Ruth presents the best example when examining *The Last Picture Show* because she interacts within both of these areas. While no scenes involving a psychological/psychiatric session appear in the film, it is known that Ruth goes regularly to Wichita Falls to receive some type of mental health treatment for the depression brought about by her quickly expiring biological clock and her confinement in a relationship with a closet homosexual who does not care about her. While the post-war world of psychology/psychiatry does not seem to help Ruth, which is demonstrated by the fact that she returns from the appointments in a more depressed state than when she left, a sexual dalliance with a seventeen year old boy proves effective in temporarily solving her problems until he is drawn away by the lure of a younger, more attractive potential sexual partner. Thus, by the end of the film, Ruth's decision to partake in the freewheeling nature of the relaxed sexual standards that have overtaken Anarene leaves her emotional constitution in the hands of a listless teenager whose actions are driven solely by whim, which leads her an emotional state that is more devastating because someone has shown interest in her sexually, but then readily casts her aside for the favors of another.

While Ruth willingly ventured into the world of sexuality in an attempt to solve her problems, Jacy, who is devious but not sexually promiscuous at the beginning of the film, is pushed by her mother into using sexual intercourse as a means of getting what she wants. In pursuing her mother's advice, Jacy first lures Duane into a sexual encounter, but when she realizes that he is just as inexperienced as she is, Jacy turns to her mother's lover, Abilene, for a real sexual experience. Thus, Jacy, an eighteen year old girl, is introduced to sex on a billiard table by her mother's illicit beau. Up to this point, Jacy's experiences in the sexual realm can be attributed to the general trend of "liberalized sexual behavior" that, in Petigny's view, trended upward throughout the entire course of the post-war period.³⁵² However, the nude pool party she attends at Bobby Sheen's house, which closely resembles the iconic nude bathing scenes associated with the hippy movement of the later post-war years and ended in open sexual encounters for many of the participants, reflected the "less inhibited public attitudes toward sex" that typified the end of the post-war era.³⁵³

As Petigny contrasted the proliferation of increased sexual behavior with the growth of popular, but less socially stringent trends in American religion, *The Last Picture Show* reflected this modernist impact on faith by completely dismissing religion as a meaningful factor in the lives of the main characters. During the conversation in which Jacy's mother encourages her daughter to have sex, Jacy is scared by the idea and questions her mother as to whether pre-marital sex is a sin, a notion that her mother dismisses as nonsense. While Jacy's religious concerns about sex are dismissed, the face of religion in Anarene is characterized by Joe Bob Blanton, the son of the local minister

³⁵² Petigny, *Permissive*, 123.

³⁵³ Petigny, *Permissive*, 123.

and a classmate of Duane and Sonny. Throughout the film Joe Bob is depicted as a religious freak, whose in-class declarations about “leading a good Christian life” appear strange and out of place. Near the end of the film, Joe Bob attempts to kidnap and molest a young girl but is apprehended on the road leading out of town having not been able to go through with the act. As Joe Bob is taken away in the sheriff’s car, with his father loudly pronouncing that he is in the lord’s hands, it is clear that the state of faith in Anarene has been completely discredited and marginalized as a cultural force.

Moving away from the issues associated with Petigny’s analysis of the impact of Modernism on post-war society and back into the examination of the conflict between Modernism and Romanticism as documented by Rand, the issue of individual romantic heroism must be considered in terms of its presence in *The Last Picture Show*. Through the character of Sam the Lion, the film reflects the gradual decay of romantic heroism in the post-war period. Just as Romanticism found itself engaged in a war of attrition with the forces of Modernism as the post-war era progressed, Sam found himself fighting against the ever-increasing social and cultural degradation of the town he helped to build over the past four decades.

Although aged and approaching the end of his life, Sam represents, in the midst of a community that has lost its sense of right and wrong, an abstraction of the better side of humanity. While Sam is not a dynamic hero who is forced to rise above his own pre-conceived ability in order to achieve something extraordinary, he demonstrates his heroism quietly through his actions. His care of Billy when no one else would look after him and his aggressive confrontation of the depraved group of boys responsible for

Billy's sexual encounter with Jimmie Sue points to Sam's inner strength and moral character. However, by the early 1950s, time and age have caught up to Sam.

Although still formidable, Sam's presence and moral example is not enough to stop the changes occurring in Anarene. Even with Sonny, who respects and admires Sam, there is little if anything he can do to help the unguided youth. Despite the fact that Sam leaves his pool hall to Sonny with the idea that he will carry on what Sam started, it is clear that Sonny does not have the emotional strength or presence to fill Sam's shoes. Sonny himself is aware of this fact, which is prominently displayed in the film when the caravan of cars traveling out of town to the Anarene High School senior picnic passes the reservoir where Sam loved to fish and had taken Sonny and Billy just before he died. As Duane and some other students in one of the cars are engaged in trivial conversation, Sonny looks out the window with tears streaming down his face. While part of this emotion is certainly driven by the fact that Sonny misses Sam, one must also consider that at this point in the film Sonny's life is beginning to fall apart and he knows enough to know that he does not have the moral and emotional tools or the commanding presence that made Sam successful.

As the film ends with Sonny sitting at Ruth's kitchen table, emotional to the point at which he cannot speak, it becomes clear that Anarene is unlikely to ever see the likes of Sam the Lion again. Unlike a film such as *Blackboard Jungle*, in which the forces of Modernism are present but it is clear that the romantic hero, Richard Dadier, will be there to fight the negative by-products of those forces, there is no Dadier in Anarene to carry on the fight in Sam's absence. It is this lack of hope for the future and the complete

triumph of cultural depravity that places *The Last Picture Show* firmly in the modernist camp based on Rand's observations in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

In the end, *The Last Picture Show*, unlike *Easy Rider*, stands as a complete work of Modernism in terms of the elements of plot, theme and characterization outlined by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*. By the end of the film, the viewer is aware of the film's theme, which centers on the negative social and cultural changes that occur as Anarene goes deeper into the post-war period. The theme is reinforced by a plot that not only provides background as to why the characters do what they do, but also reflects the typical types of behavior associated with the changing social, moral and cultural landscape of post-World War II America. More importantly in terms of the Youth Issues, Morality and Society section as a whole, the complete nature of *The Last Picture Show* as a work of art makes it an ideal film with which to end the last major section of History 399 because it represents a rare example of a work of Modernism in the post-war era critiquing the history of the movement's conflict with Romanticism. This point is crucial because it bookends the examples of Romanticism from the early post-war period by demonstrating a triumphant Modernism producing epic manifestations of its philosophical message. The fact that sophisticated modernist films such as *The Last Picture Show* appeared at the end of the post-war period re-enforced Rand's contention that, by 1970, Romanticism was reduced to shambles after being thoroughly defeated in the war of philosophical culture waged over the twenty-five year period that followed the conclusion of the Second World War.

The Drive-In Film

In concluding History 399, the focus of the course will shift away from predominantly mainstream, A-level Hollywood films and move into the world of the low-budget drive-in films that gained extreme popularity in the 1960s. While Hollywood took advantage of the drive-in theatre during the 1950s as a means of showcasing new technologies such as Cinemascope and VistaVision with their big-budget productions in an effort to compete with the growing dominance of television, the drive-in, by the mid-1960s, had become a venue for second-run mainstream films as well as a unique genre of seedy, low-budget films that pushed the envelope in terms of questionable subject matter and graphic content and because of their controversial nature became extremely popular among the younger generation. This unique low-culture genre often centered on the lifestyle and exploits of outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Hell's Angels, that became prominent features of late post-war counterculture. More importantly, the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism that raged among the higher levels of Hollywood output found its way into this genre as well. The final cycle of History 399 will consider a pair of outlaw biker films from the drive-in genre, released in 1966 and 1967 respectively, in order to demonstrate that the clash of Romanticism and Modernism impacted not only the highest levels of American filmmaking, but also the lowest.

The first of the two films to be considered in this cycle is Roger Corman's *The Wild Angels* (1966). The film chronicles the exploits of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club in San Pedro, California, primarily from the perspective of the chapter president, Heavenly Blues, played by Peter Fonda, who used his experiences in this role as motivation for his 1969 collaboration with Dennis Hopper that resulted in *Easy Rider*.

The film opens with Blues riding his motorcycle across the freeways of the greater Los Angeles area to an oil rig where his friend Loser works in order to inform him that the club has located his stolen motorcycle in the town of Mecca at a garage owned by Mexican immigrants. While talking with Loser, the rig supervisor angrily confronts Blues about the Nazi-era Iron Cross that he is wearing around his neck. When Blues disregards the supervisor's comments the man gets in his face and declares, "If you had been at Anzio you would know what that junk means." This comment angers Blues, who subdues the supervisor while Loser threatens to pull his teeth out with a wrench. Soon, the site foreman becomes aware of the confrontations and fires Loser for his actions.

After leaving the oil rig, Blues takes Loser home to his wife Gaysh, who scolds him for losing "four jobs in five months." Loser simply responds by saying that his boss "hassled my mind." Despite her anger at Loser for failing to maintain employment, Gaysh is uplifted when she learns that his stolen motorcycle has been located. Later, the key members of the chapter, led by Blues, leave the larger group to engage in an animalistic orgy while they ride to Mecca to recover the motorcycle. However, when they enter the shop owned by the Mexican gang responsible for stealing Loser's motorcycle they discover that it has been chopped for parts, which leads to a brawl between the two gangs. When the police raid the garage, Blues leads the group out of the back of the garage while Loser steals one of the police motorcycles in order to divert them from chasing Blues and the rest of the Angels. While Blues is able to escape, Loser becomes involved in a high-speed chase with a California Highway Patrol officer on a motorcycle. Although the officer is able to shoot Loser in the back, he loses control of his motorcycle and is killed after he skids off the side of a steep cliff. Loser fares little

better as he runs into a police blockade and falls off his motorcycle while bleeding profusely.

Later that night, Blues learns that Loser is alive and has undergone surgery in a local hospital. Rather than allowing his friend to recover in the hospital and then be transferred to jail and put on trial, Blues concocts a plan to kidnap Loser from the hospital. Using his girlfriend Mike as a front to gain entrance to Loser's room after declaring that she is his sister, Blues is able to locate the room and remove Loser while the nurse and police officer are talking with Mike. The plan works until the nurse hears Loser scream in pain as he is moved. Upon entering the room she is immediately accosted by members of the gang. While Blues is trying to get Loser outside, one of the sex-crazed Angels attempts to rape the nurse. Although Blues stops the assault, his face is the only one the nurse sees and is later able to identify.

As the police are able to get a positive identification on Blues, Loser is taken to an apartment rented by members of the gang and is unconscious. Another member, who possesses some type of unidentified medical training is called-in to assess Loser's situation and he informs Blues that his friend is not going to live. Lying on a Nazi flag, Loser regains consciousness and acknowledges his appreciation for the efforts of his friends to break him out of the hospital. After being given a marijuana cigarette to fulfill his last request to "get high," Loser dies suddenly.

While Blues hides on a house boat to avoid capture by the police who are looking for him, a death certificate for Loser is forged so that the gang can have his body prepared by a mortician and transported to his hometown, Sequoia Grove, for burial. With the arrangements made, the Angels meet with Blues at the house boat at which

point he directs the rest of the group travel to the funeral, which is over one hundred miles away, in a low-key manner. Driving on back roads in groups of two and not wearing their easily identifiable Hell's Angels colors, the gang assembles in the Sequoia Grove Community Church for Loser's funeral service.

As the minister attempts to offer, under duress, a message in memory of Loser, he is loudly mocked by the gang members sitting in the pews. This situation culminates when Blues angrily confronts the minister, whom he tells that "the Lord never did nothing for the Loser," to which he responds, "He [Loser] could have made of his life any number of things." The exchange then leads to Blues' declaration, "We don't want nobody telling us what to do." When the minister asks him "just what is it you want to do," Blues replies by stating, "We want to be free to do what we want to do. We want to be free to ride our machines without being hassled by the man. And we want to get loaded."

On the heels of Blues' verbal manifesto, he leads the Angels in a destructive orgy in which Loser is removed from the swastika-draped coffin and is replaced by the minister who is knocked unconscious to stop any attempt to contact the authorities. With the minister subdued, the Angels proceed to destroy the interior of the church while Blues enjoys the sexual favors of one of the club's "mamas," as two other members rape Loser's widow on the altar. When the orgy is concluded, they place Loser back in the coffin, drape a Nazi flag over it and carry their friend to the cemetery across the street for burial. As the gang lowers Loser into his grave, a teenager in the growing crowd of onlookers throws a brick, which incites a brawl between the Angels and the local townspeople. With police sirens roaring in the background, the Angels depart in order to

avoid arrest. However, despite the urging of Mike, who ultimately leaves with another member of the gang, Blues stays behind and continues to shovel dirt into Loser's grave as the film abruptly fades to black.

In examining *The Wild Angels* as a drive-in film, one cannot expect the film to possess the same level of artistic sophistication as a better funded work of high-level Modernism such as *Dr. Strangelove*, but it nonetheless achieves a higher level of plot/theme integration when compared alongside a critically vaunted work of Modernism such as *Easy Rider*. While simplistic almost to the point of ridiculousness, the plot of *The Wild Angels* portrays the members of the gang living out the philosophy Blues articulates in the culminating scene of the film when he states, "We want to be free to do what we want to do . . . without being hassled by the man." From the opening sequence in which Loser is fired from his job for assaulting his supervisor, to the drunken orgy in the church that highlights Loser's funeral, the Angels do what they want to do when they want to do it. Although, unlike Blues' wishful pronouncement, the Angels actions constantly result in their being "hassled by the man," which means anyone in a position of authority. While the overt conflicts between the Angels and the law that result from their desire "to be free" certainly highlight the film's extreme modernist bent, the sensational depiction of these events, in addition to the incessant presence of alcohol, drugs and wild sexual activity, allow many of the other modernist trappings in the film to be undervalued in terms of the importance of their meaning.³⁵⁴

Perhaps the best example of a recurrent yet undervalued theme in *The Wild Angels* is the gang's prolific use of Nazi regalia in their dress and décor. Although the

³⁵⁴ *The Wild Angels*, DVD, directed by Roger Corman (1966; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001).

issue of the Nazi regalia is highlighted in the beginning of the film when Blues is confronted by the supervisor for wearing the Iron Cross when he comes to visit Loser, the issue is never verbalized again in the film although Nazi imagery remains prevalent, especially in the scenes involving Loser's death and funeral. While one could simply agree that the choice of the Angels to use Nazi regalia is simply a matter of finding something highly offensive in order to separate them from the mainstream, such a view neglects the larger implications of such a decision. The depiction of a group of nihilistic twenty-somethings parading around Southern California in a travelling orgy that is heralded by symbols of the Third Reich is the ultimate insult to the romantic tradition and the American contribution to the Second World War, as well as being indicative of the post-war trend of value renouncement identified by Rand in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

Instead of being the dreaded scourge responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent people, the symbolism cast upon the world by the Nazis is now promoted as a means of expression for those who feel alienated from society. Despite the fact that the premise of National Socialism is entirely antithetical to the conception of individual freedom Blues espouses at Loser's funeral, the Angels use its most notorious icons as a means of visual empowerment to conduct themselves according to their own nihilistic ethos that is underpinned by no values or principles whatsoever. However, while on the surface the Angels live by this free-wheeling, do what you want to do philosophy, a seemingly unimportant statement Blues utters early in the film sheds a great deal of light on the reality of the gang's true philosophy.

After taking Loser home from the oil rig after he is fired, Blues discusses the plan to confront the Mexicans in Mecca who have stolen his friend's motorcycle. During the

conversation Blues declares, “We’ve got the power . . . [and] it never pays to hassle the man who has the power.”³⁵⁵ This statement underscores the fact that the Angels are in reality a fascistic organization in that while they live outside mainstream society, they have their own hierarchical/militaristic organization with leaders who yield arbitrary power, a system of rank, a uniform of colors and assorted regalia to identify members, specifically assigned roles and an aggressive policy of attacking potential threats to their sphere of influence. Thus, while the Angels want to do as they please within their group, they are no different than any other human group found in the historical record that seeks freedom for itself while denying it to others. One needs only to watch *The Wild Angels* in its entirety to obtain a glimpse into what a world guided by the ethos of the Angels would look like.

In the end, Roger Corman’s *The Wild Angels* falls squarely into the category of what Rand referred to as “the sewer school of art.”³⁵⁶ Through the glorification and humanization of both criminal and illicit behavior, *The Wild Angels* forwards one of the main goals of Modernism as noted by Rand, that being “to portray man as . . . innately loathsome.”³⁵⁷ Indeed it would be difficult to find a better example of “an abstraction of man’s worst and lowest potentiality” than that of *The Wild Angels*, a point that also highlights the film as a prime example of “the cultural bankruptcy” of Modernism Rand wrote so strongly about.³⁵⁸ The obvious proof of such a claim can be established by simply re-stating Rand’s fundamental description of the cultural impact of Modernism. As she noted, “Man—the nature of man, the metaphysically significant, important,

³⁵⁵ *The Wild Angels*.

³⁵⁶ Rand, *Manifesto*, 125.

³⁵⁷ Rand, *Manifesto*, 124.

³⁵⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 119, 121.

essential in man—is now represented by dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, sexual perverts, homicidal maniacs and psychotics.”³⁵⁹ While this statement accurately reflects the characters that make-up *The Wild Angels*, the more substantive reflection of “the cultural bankruptcy” of Modernism³⁶⁰ is found in the antithetical promotion of Nazi symbolism outlined in the previous paragraph.

Under the guise of an artistic movement that heralded the value of inclusivity and promoted the practice of anti-valuing, modernist films such as *The Wild Angels*, instead of advancing the collective equality that served as the foundation of the modernist ethos, glorify one of many degenerate, power hungry elements on the fringe of human society whose historical heroes are among the worst in human history. More importantly, the artistic ardor shown for the Angels is never counter-balanced by a viable force on the side of right that is promoted for its positive nature. Thus, the cultural depravity of Modernism, as described by Rand, flourishes unabated, while anything resembling Romanticism is completely shut out.

When coupled with the films from all of the genres profiled in this study made during the middle to late 1960s, it becomes clear that the type of Modernism on display in *The Wild Angels* became the dominate force in American cinema by the mid-1960s. However, while Romanticism found itself on the verge of total cultural defeat, there were moments in which those still inspired by the downtrodden school of thought demonstrated its ability to challenge Modernism within the parameters set by its powerful foe. The second film that will be considered as part of the Drive-In sequence, which will also be the final film the students will view for the semester, illustrates one of the best

³⁵⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 118.

³⁶⁰ Rand, *Manifesto*, 121.

examples of Romanticism's efforts to contest the firm grasp on the world of American cinema enjoyed by Modernism during the second half of the 1960s.

Tom Laughlin's 1967 film, *Born Losers*, chronicles the exploits of Billy Jack, a former Green Beret and Vietnam War veteran, who is also partly of Native American descent. The film centers on a series of encounters between Billy and the Born Losers motorcycle club. When the film opens, Billy comes out of the central California mountains where he lives in order to procure his monthly supplies. After finishing with the supplies in the fictional town of Big Rock, Billy stops at a local diner for lunch, which proves to be a decision that puts him on a collision with the Born Losers.

While Billy relaxes in the diner, the Losers, headed by their colorful leader Daniel Carmody, ride through the main street and are stopped at a traffic light when a teenage motorist accidentally bumps into the back of Daniel's motorcycle. After getting off the motorcycle and determining that no damage has been done, Daniel is going to let the accident go without incident. However, when he tells the teenager that he is "lucky," the young man responds by telling Daniel, "You're the one who's lucky man." After Daniel removes the teenager's sunglasses and smashes them on the ground, the young motorist grows even more petulant, calling Daniel "a rotten, lousy bastard." At this point, Daniel uses the Nazi helmet of the gang's vice-president, Child, to smash the window of the teenager's car in order to pull him out of the vehicle. Once the teenager is removed from the car, Daniel feigns as though he is going to walk away, but instead lands a huge blow on the young man's solar plexus. When the teenager remains defiant, Daniel grows tired of dealing with the situation and drives away, leaving the rest of the gang to terrorize the teenager.

After chasing and beating the young man up the main street, where no one would intervene on his behalf, he is able to escape the Losers long enough to stumble into the diner where Billy is eating lunch to try and get help. Initially, the owner of the diner refuses to help the young man and will not even give him a dime to use the phone. Billy intervenes when the owner throws the beaten teenager through the door by helping him back into the diner, calling the police and placing the phone in his hand. While he is on the phone with the police, the Losers walk into the diner and drag the young man into the parking lot where they resume the vicious beating.

Realizing that the Losers are going to inflict permanent damage on the young man, and that no one else is going to stop the violence, Billy goes to his jeep where he pulls out his 1903 Springfield rifle and confronts the Losers. The police arrive just after Billy shoots a broken bottle out of a Losers' hand who is attempting to attack him. Instead of being treated as a hero, Billy is arrested and charged with discharging a firearm in public. At his trial, Billy is sentenced to serve either 100 days in jail or pay a \$1,000 fine after being told by the judge that "if citizens are allowed to take the law into their own hands our streets would become . . . armed jungles." After opting to pay the fine, which forces him to sell his vehicle and leaves him with no money, Billy learns that the Losers he stopped were only charged with simple assault and had the choice of ten days in jail or the payment of a \$150 fine.

While Billy is in the process of accumulating the capital to settle his legal affairs, the Losers are running rampant in Big Rock and attracting the attention of several local teenage girls on summer vacation. Three of these girls latch on to the gang and go willingly with them to a beach house the Losers have rented driven primarily by curiosity

about the gang's hedonistic lifestyle, while a college girl from out of town, Vicky, is spotted riding her motorcycle wearing only a white bikini and then strong-armed into going to the house. When she arrives there, the three girls from town are already there and appear to be intoxicated, while one of them runs out of one of the bedrooms screaming and is pulled back in. After this distraction is quelled, Vicky stands in the middle of the living room, surrounded by the Losers, and is informed by Daniel, who sits in the chair of authority, how a woman is initiated into the club as a "mama," which means that she must be gang raped by every male member of the club. Painted on the wall behind Daniel is a version of an old Roman epitaph, "As I was you are, as I am you will be," which the Losers have attributed to Hitler's chief of state security, Heinrich Himmler.

Realizing that she is in over her head, Vicky suggests that everyone take LSD before the orgy begins, but is told that the club's supply of drugs has been "tapped out." Vicky claims that she has some drugs hidden on her motorcycle and is sent outside with Daniel's wife and a Loser named Crabs to retrieve them. Once outside, Vicky knocks Crabs unconscious with a jack and Daniel's wife allows her to leave without resistance because she knows that Daniel has become sexually obsessed with her. Although Vicky manages to escape, her motorcycle dies a short distance down the road because she had instructed Crabs to loosen a spring on the engine in order to divert his attention. Now on foot, Vicky runs off the road and believes that she has lost the Losers who are pursuing her. However, she walks right into a Loser named Speechless, who rapes her in the middle of a field while Daniel's younger brother, who is not a member of the gang but

has taken refuge with Daniel because of his abusive father, watches just a few yards away.

As a result of the sexual assaults of Vicky and the three other girls at the house, charges are filed against several members of the Losers, but are contingent upon the testimonies of the girls. This fact causes Daniel, who was not charged because he did not directly participate in any of the assaults, to launch a campaign of terror against the girls in order to prevent them from testifying. Ultimately, the plan works on two of the girls from town, one of whom suffers a mental collapse because of the assault. The third girl later confesses that she willingly participated in sexual acts with the Losers and has secretly returned to the house on several occasions. Despite the intimidation, the district attorney pleads with the families to stay the course, but it is apparent that Big Rock's weak and indecisive sheriff is not capable of employing his deputies in a manner that would protect the girls. When the father of the girl who suffered the breakdown suggests that if one of the Losers is seen on any of their properties they should be confronted with weapons and shot if necessary, he is lectured by the district attorney that such behavior is the exact opposite of what is needed.

While the district attorney is attempting to hold his case together with the three local girls, Daniel puts into action a plan to kidnap Vicky and coerce her into not testifying. In order to divert the attention of the deputy stationed outside the small clinic where Vicky is convalescing, Daniel and another Loser named Gangrene hotwire the deputy's patrol car while he is eating lunch across the street. After driving off in the stolen car, which causes the deputy to take chase in another vehicle, several other Losers

enter Vicky's room and are in the process of dragging her through the hospital parking lot when Billy, who was also in the diner across the street, confronts them.

When the Losers, led by a member named Cue Ball, refuse to let Vicky go, Billy employs the martial arts he learned as a Green Beret and incapacitates the kidnapers. Billy then takes Vicky to his trailer in the mountains to escape the grasp of the Losers. Although Billy is able to keep Vicky safe for a brief time, the Losers extend their terror over the two first by ransacking Billy's trailer when he and Vicky are in Big Rock and again when he and Vicky are at the lake and a group of Losers, sent by Daniel, force Billy and Vicky to come with them to the beach house for what will be the culminating sequence of the film.

Upon arriving at the house the pair find Daniel holding court in the main room where the girl from town who suffered a nervous breakdown is being held hostage in order to stop her from testifying. Billy realizes that the current situation is highly dangerous and convinces Vicky to flee when he creates a diversion. While Vicky complies with Billy's instructions, she is apprehended outside by Gangrene, who forcibly returns her to the main room where she discovers that Billy has been knocked unconscious. Also, the father of the girl from town is also being held after an ill-fated attempt to rescue his daughter. At this point, Vicky decides to redeem herself for her previous decision not to testify against the Losers by agreeing to be gang-raped in exchange for the release of Billy, the girl and her father.

After allowing Billy and the others to leave the house, the Losers, led by Gangrene, attempt to collect on Vicky's part of the bargain. However, she takes a stand and refuses to comply with the Losers' sexual desires, which results in a terrible beating

that leaves her lying unconscious on the floor. At the same time, Billy is brought back to consciousness at the sheriff's office where he learns that Vicky is still at the house and the sheriff and his men are "hiding out" while waiting for the California Highway Patrol to arrive. Enraged, Billy pushes away the sheriff and declares, "I'm walking out that door and all I want to know is if there is one of you who is man enough to come with me?" While the sheriff eventually decides to gather his force and surround the beach house, Billy walks out of the door alone and into the lion's den in a one man effort to save Vicky.

In order to lure Daniel and the rest of the Losers outside, Billy douses Daniel's motorcycle with gasoline and sets it ablaze. When the Losers run outside to put out the fire, Billy is able to enter the house, make sure that Vicky is still alive and then lays a trap for the gang. When the Losers return to the main room, Billy steps out from behind a corner with his rifle drawn on the entire group. He then instructs Daniel to send Vicky to the hospital accompanied by the "mamas" and that once the doctor calls from the hospital he will leave. Billy further declares that if Daniel does not comply with his request he will kill him on the spot. Foolishly, Daniel decides to call Billy's bluff, and after counting to three, Billy puts a bullet right between Daniel's eyes, and as blood runs down the large poster of James "Jim Stark" Dean that hangs on the wall behind him, Daniel's lifeless body falls to the ground.

With Daniel's death, Billy places authority in the Losers' vice-president Child, who, still in shock from Daniel's death, quickly orders the rest of the gang to comply with Billy's instructions. When Billy receives the phone call that Vicky is safe at the hospital, he orders the gang to exit the building through the front so that he can make his

own escape through the back. What Billy does not know is that the sheriff has finally taken action and has his men stationed in front of the house. While this action allows for the easy arrest of the Losers, Billy is mistaken for one of the gang as he rides away from the rear of the building on one of their motorcycles. Thinking he is a Loser, one of the deputies shoots Billy in the back as he rides away. The scene then cuts to the following morning, as a limousine and a patrol car drive through a heavy rain to the lake area near Billy's trailer in the mountains. When the limousine stops, Vicky gets out and runs through the rain to a hilltop overlooking the lake where she finds Billy barely conscious and bleeding profusely. After declaring her love for Billy, the wounded hero is carried by the sheriff and his deputies to a small rescue helicopter and the group stands at attention as the helicopter rises above their heads and the credits begin to roll.³⁶¹

When comparing *Born Losers* with its counterpart, *The Wild Angels*, one must not deny the fact that although a romantic counter to the Modernism typified by Corman's work, in many ways Laughlin's film presents to the viewer a more clear articulation of late post-war Modernism than that found in *The Wild Angels*. Like Corman's film, *Born Losers* showcases the affinity of outlaw motorcycle gangs for the regalia of the Third Reich. All of the major characters in the Losers display some type of Nazi symbolism from the Iron Cross Daniel wears around his neck, to Child's S.S. helmet, and the large swastika prominently tattooed on Gangrene's arm. More importantly, the fascistic aspect of outlaw motorcycle gang culture, which is present in *The Wild Angels* but not highly overt, is cultivated on a far more sophisticated level by Laughlin. The Roman epitaph attributed to Heinrich Himmler that adorns the Losers' lair—"What I was you are, what I am you shall be"—reinforces the Losers' militaristic tendencies by giving voice to their

³⁶¹ *Born Losers*, DVD, directed by Tom Laughlin (1967; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2009).

desire to recruit people into their ranks and challenge mainstream power structures. Unlike the inarticulate, fumbling leadership of Blues in *The Wild Angels*, Daniel Carmody's more organized leadership, centered on the successful campaign to prevent the girls from testifying, involved coordination and cunning and the hard hand of military-style leadership.³⁶² Overriding all of these points is the full depiction of the sexually charged nature of the late post-war period, which reached far beyond marginal groups such as the Losers as was showcased by the curiosity of the girls, at least one of whom found pleasure in the Losers' hedonistic lifestyle, but all of whom, with the exception of Vicky, arrived there because of their own interest in experiencing a taste of the fringe lifestyle.

While all of the seedier elements of modernist culture are on display in *Born Losers*, these elements represent an acknowledgment of the reality of late post-war America in terms of the increasingly overt nature of sexual behavior as described by Alan Petigny and the weakening moral fiber of American culture that angered Ayn Rand. In looking back to one of the key films profiled in this chapter that signaled the early march of Modernism in terms of the changing youth and moral culture in the United States, *Rebel Without A Cause*, it is not at all surprising that an oversize poster of James "Jim Stark" Dean oversees all of the physical and sexual violence that takes place in the Losers' beach house including being spattered with Daniel's brain matter after he is shot by Billy.

³⁶² It must be noted that Daniel's plan was in fact successful up to the point that he had Billy and Vicky brought to the house. His plan of intimidation worked against two girls from the town, the third admitted to willingly participating and Vicky stated her intention of not testifying to Billy before the Losers appeared to escort them to the beach house. In the end, Daniel extended his efforts beyond the point necessary not knowing that he had already achieved his goal.

In the twelve years that passed since *Rebel Without A Cause* profiled the plight and consequences of teenagers set adrift by parents who refused to provide them with good moral guidance, *Born Losers* highlighted the more extreme end results of the failure, complaisance or simply the unavoidable wave of changing times that took hold of American society during the early years of the post-war period. However, unlike the modernist films that became dominant in the late post-war period, *Born Losers* presents a counter-balancing romantic force, Billy Jack, who reaffirms the power of the individual to stand against “man’s worst and lowest potentiality” and in turn to inspire those previously unwilling to do so to take action.³⁶³ It is for this reason that *Born Losers* is a fitting film with which to end History 399. In a sea of cinema filled with works that projected no discernible moral statements or value judgments, Laughlin’s film helped to deliver what Rand labeled as “the people’s need for a ray of Romanticism’s light” by standing as a work of individual resistance.³⁶⁴ In this sense, *Born Losers* comes to resemble Rand’s own effort to combat the triumphant power of Modernism, *The Romantic Manifesto*, which she wrote as a piece of individual resistance, the thesis of which has inspired and informed the current examination and the creation of History 399.

³⁶³ Rand, *Manifesto*, 119.

³⁶⁴ Rand, *Manifesto*, 127.

CHAPTER V

THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICAN CINEMA AND THE CLASH BETWEEN ROMANTICISM AND MODERNISM IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOM

They hire fools like us with college degrees to sit on
the garbage can and keep them in school so women, for
a few hours a day, can walk around the city without getting attacked.
—Jim Murdock, *Blackboard Jungle*, 1955

What we've got here is failure to communicate.
Some men you just can't reach.
—Captain, *Cool Hand Luke*, 1967

Can Students Learn from Film in the Classroom?

Before delving into the specific aspects of the course under consideration in this analysis, the logical starting point for any discussion of the practical side of teaching a history course with film as the main component is to ascertain whether or not the use of film can sustain student learning over the course of an entire semester. A brief exploration of the secondary literature on the subject of using film in the teaching of history revealed that serious efforts to codify the inclusion of film into the discipline came at the dawn of the 1970s when a trend of undergraduate disinterest in history began. Lawrence Murray, a professor of history who started his teaching career at this critical time, stumbled upon film as a means of bolstering his career prospects. In Murray's

words, “As a young professor of history in the early seventies, I was rudely confronted by shrinking enrollments in my chosen discipline. Casting about for something that would solve my problems and ensure tenure, I hit upon the idea of bringing movies into the classroom.”³⁶⁵ While Murray’s ideas about film in history, which he turned into a book-length study in 1979, will be discussed below, his decision to incorporate film into his history courses as a young academic in the early 1970s coincided with a steady wave of academic writing on the subject, which has carried through into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

In 1970, historian Martin A. Jackson published a forward-looking article, “The Future Role of Films in History,” which described the efforts of the American Historical Association to promote the “belief that film is a valuable tool for the teacher and the historian.”³⁶⁶ Written in the era prior to the ready availability of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR), the centerpiece of Jackson’s article focused on a device marketed as “The History Machine,” which was essentially an early prototype of the television/VCR combinations that became widespread by the 1990s.³⁶⁷ This early electronic gadget, which played “carefully edited” chunks of feature films with significant historical elements, marked a concerted effort by the history establishment to keep pace with new pedagogical trends.³⁶⁸ More importantly, the large-scale acceptance of mainstreaming the use of film in the teaching of history, as evidenced by Jackson’s article, prompted other historians and education scholars to think about how film would specifically impact

³⁶⁵ Lawrence Murray, *The Celluloid Persuasion: Movies and the Liberal Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), ix.

³⁶⁶ Martin A. Jackson, “The Future Role of Films in History,” *The History Teacher* 3, no. 3 (1970): 11.

³⁶⁷ Jackson, “Future,” 12.

³⁶⁸ Jackson, “Future,” 13.

students in addition to ways that the use of the medium could be expanded outside its traditional role as a supplementary tool in the traditional history classroom.

Three years after Jackson published his article, historian John E. O'Connor offered a deeper analysis of the inclusion of film in the teaching of history in an article entitled "Historians and Film: Some Problems and Prospects." After echoing Murray's concerns about "decreasing student interest in history courses," O'Connor moved beyond the standard method of suggesting that teachers and professors simply add film to existing curriculum and instead offered a stand-alone "alternative" model.³⁶⁹ O'Connor applauded what, by 1973, had become a fairly common practice at many colleges and universities of offering history courses with film as their central component. In the words of the author, "A new species of 'history through film' courses, where film becomes a major part of the course material rather than simply [a] teaching aid or motivational device, has begun to catch on around the country."³⁷⁰

Although O'Connor believed that such courses presented valuable opportunities for attracting new students and expanding the ways in which history had traditionally been taught, he warned of the ease and detrimental impact that can occur when "a teaching historian becomes primarily an audiovisual enthusiast or a 'film buff.'"³⁷¹ In cases in which such a trend developed, O'Connor argued that "the classroom becomes [simply] an entertainment center."³⁷² The fear of this problem becoming widespread drove O'Connor to stress the importance of maintaining the professor/student relationship, through pre-planned discussion sessions before, during and after viewing

³⁶⁹ John E. O'Connor, "Historians and Film: Some Problems and Prospects," *The History Teacher* 6, no. 4 (1973): 546.

³⁷⁰ O'Connor, "Historians," 546.

³⁷¹ O'Connor, "Historians," 548.

³⁷² O'Connor, "Historians," 548.

films, when teaching a film-based history course. As O'Connor concluded, "The film in the classroom [when properly used] brings the student and teacher closer together in a mutual learning experience rather than placing a projecting machine or a television screen impersonally between them."³⁷³

While O'Connor explored the importance of maintaining a high level of engagement between the instructor and student in history film courses, historian Michael T. Isenberg, whose article, "A Relationship of Constrained Anxiety: Historians and Film," appeared the same year as O'Connor's, considered the intellectual conflict within the discipline of history caused by the new trend of history film courses. Dating back to the work of nineteenth-century historians such as Henry Adams, Isenberg noted "that intellectuals, considered as a class of aesthetic critics, always have been highly suspicious if not intolerant of machine-inspired culture, for it is a culture beyond their ability to define or control."³⁷⁴ Isenberg contended that such a view contributed to the elitist nature of American intellectual history that continued into the 1970s. In the words of the author, "To date, the historian of ideas has been concerned primarily with the thought of social and intellectual elites."³⁷⁵ In order to counteract the impact of such long-standing cultural snobbery, Isenberg adopted a position similar to that of Daniel Wickberg, whose ideas about intellectual history were examined in chapter one. Just as Wickberg argued in favor of including a wide array of sources into the realm of intellectual history, Isenberg believed that film, when considered for its historical and intellectual merits as opposed to

³⁷³ O'Connor, "Historians," 548.

³⁷⁴ Michael T. Isenberg, "A Relationship of Constrained Anxiety: Historians and Film," *The History Teacher* 6, no. 4 (1973): 555.

³⁷⁵ Isenberg, "Relationship," 555.

“aesthetic criteria,” could be just as valuable as any written source.³⁷⁶ As the author concluded, “The profession’s strong suit lies in rigorously applying its concepts of analytical research to that vast body of visual and written evidence which comprises the area of film.”³⁷⁷

By the end of the 1970s, those interested in the history film concept followed Isenberg’s work by moving farther away from the more simplistic justifications for using film in the history classroom to more complex examinations of how to use films and supporting sources. In his second contribution to the body of literature pertaining to the use of film in the discipline of history, O’Connor’s 1979 article, “Teaching Film and American Culture: A Survey of Texts,” addressed not only how to support history film courses with secondary sources, but also provided key advice to future instructors as to the realistic expectations they should have of the students who file into their classes. In considering potential students, O’Connor identified a common situation in which the instructor, when thinking about what films to include in a given class, “may shy away from classics such as *The Birth of a Nation* or *Citizen Kane* because they may seem overworked.”³⁷⁸ Based on his own extensive experience with history film courses, O’Connor argued that such fears should be retired because “often only a few students have actually seen these films . . . [and] even they have not viewed them critically.”³⁷⁹ The fact that most students possess little to no critical knowledge of the typical cinematic fare used in history film courses drove O’Connor to stress the importance of supporting texts in ensuring a successful learning experience. In the author’s estimation, “Most

³⁷⁶ Isenberg, “Relationship,” 568.

³⁷⁷ Isenberg, “Relationship,” 568.

³⁷⁸ John E. O’Connor, “Teaching Film and American Culture: A Survey of Texts,” *American Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (1979): 718.

³⁷⁹ O’Connor, “Teaching,” 718.

students require at least two types of reading assignments, one to introduce them to the language and idiom of the visual medium and another to put the history and development of into a cultural perspective.”³⁸⁰ As will be demonstrated in the fourth section of this chapter, the selected texts for the course detailed in this project follow similar lines to those established by O’Connor.

Historian Lawrence Murray brought to a close the decade of scholarly inquiry pertaining to the inclusion of film into the discipline with the publication of his 1979 monograph *The Celluloid Persuasion: Movies and the Liberal Arts*. In looking back over the decade in which he created his own niche with history film courses, Murray began his analysis by complimenting the inroads historians made with the inclusion of film since the enrollment crisis of the early 1970s. Murray argued that during that decade “historians have been the most aggressive professionals in the liberal arts for bringing the movies into the classroom,” and cited as evidence the fact that, at the time he published his work, “over thirty departments, with several thousand students annually, offer movie-oriented courses.”³⁸¹ While Murray applauded this accomplishment, he also felt as though more work needed to be done in terms of the discipline as a whole moving toward a specific goal for the use of film, especially in history film courses.

In his contribution to this task, Murray outlined what he referred to as “the documentarian function,” which he believed would outfit students with the best set of analytical/critical tools to both appreciate films as artistic statements and examine them for their historical value.³⁸² Murray argued that the application of this philosophy would provide students with the ability “to examine, analyze, and evaluate movies just as any

³⁸⁰ O’Connor, “Teaching,” 718.

³⁸¹ Murray, “Celluloid,” 22.

³⁸² Murray, “Celluloid,” 28.

document would do.”³⁸³ One of the most interesting facets of Murray’s vision grew out of his insistence that students take seriously “the social milieu in which . . . [the films under consideration] appeared.”³⁸⁴ In the words of the author, “Good movies, like good literature, lend themselves to multifaceted and multilevel approaches.”³⁸⁵ The importance of this statement cannot be underestimated in light of the course being proposed in this study. Instead of simply making the well-worn argument in favor of using films to bolster an existing curriculum, or even to draw the same type of conclusions one would absorb from a textbook or primary source reader, Murray opened the door for the proliferation of new and unique ways that films can be read from historical, philosophical and intellectual perspectives.

As the second decade of the twenty-first century dawned, Murray’s ideas influenced the work of a new generation of education scholars headed by Alan S. Marcus, who co-authored the 2010 book *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies*. Although, as indicated in the title, the authors chose to focus on the high school classroom, the ideas offered are just as applicable in the undergraduate classroom, which is typically filled with students who have just emerged from the high school environment. Culturally, the authors emphasized the connection between the two settings by pointing to the fact that the current generation “encounter[s] history through movies [to a far greater extent] than through any other form, including textbooks.”³⁸⁶ Thus, it can be expected that students will, at the very least, be accustomed to acquiring knowledge via the medium of film. However, in an ode to the work of Murray, the

³⁸³ Murray, “Celluloid,” 28.

³⁸⁴ Murray, “Celluloid,” 31.

³⁸⁵ Murray, “Celluloid,” 57.

³⁸⁶ Alan S. Marcus et al., *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7.

authors stressed the fact that students must be taught that “films function as texts that can be analyzed, questioned, and discussed just like any other kind of historical document.”³⁸⁷

The authors’ prescription for communicating to students the importance of thinking of “movies as primary documents” included, most importantly, the view that “movies . . . often have as much or more to say about the times in which they were filmed as the periods they purport to document.”³⁸⁸ In the end, this point is central to the History 399 course outlined in this study. Taking to heart the ideas of Murray and the current group of scholars led by Marcus, the course that emerges from this project will, at its core, represent an effort to open a door of examination and inquiry into the world of history and film that most students never before considered. Beyond the more specific goal of exploring the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism in post-World War II American cinema, it is hoped that the general course methodology, which will be explained in the next section, will forever change the way the students approach and reflect on the art they encounter throughout their lives.

The Weekly Course Structure

As is always the case at the beginning of a new semester, the first course of a new term is typically reserved for a brief course introduction, discussion of the syllabus and other administrative aspects of the course and student questions. While those elements will certainly be a part of the first session of History 399, the dynamics of the first class meeting will be somewhat different. Due to the film element, which will require an

³⁸⁷ Marcus et al., “Teaching,” 7.

³⁸⁸ Marcus et al., “Teaching,” 73-74.

extensive block of viewing time, History 399 will be offered as an evening course that will meet one night per week for two hours and thirty minutes. While the routine course structure beyond week one will be discussed below, the first course session, because it represents an entire week of class time, must first be considered in detail.

The first meeting of History 399 will begin with the typical introductions and discussion of the syllabus and course expectations. Once these matters have been addressed, the main course presentation, which is comprised of three sections, will begin. The first section will take the form of a background presentation on the post-World War II period. This discussion will cover the social, political and cultural aspects of the era with specific emphasis being placed on the changing moral landscape as reflected in the recent scholarship of historians such as Alan Petigny, whose book, *The Permissive Society*, was covered extensively in chapter one and will also be one of the required books for the course.

Whether this section serves as a refresher for students who may already have a basic knowledge of the time period or stands as the first introduction to students who have never studied modern American history, its importance lies in the fact that it establishes the cultural/moral climate in which the films under consideration were created. While the main focus of History 399, as established in the introduction, is to bring into sharp focus the intellectual struggle between Romanticism and Modernism in American cinema, and not to deconstruct individual films for their possible connection to specific events, there will certainly be occasions in which such comparisons will surface during course discussions, which is why a portion of the first meeting should be devoted

to a brief examination of the general history of the era to prepare students for such encounters.

After establishing the general history of the post-World War II era, the second phase of the presentation will outline the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism that serves as the basis for the course. First, a brief description of nineteenth-century Romanticism, followed by an outline of Rand's unique brand of Romanticism as outlined in *The Romantic Manifesto*, will introduce students to the intellectual argument that will be carried into the film analyses during the ensuing weeks. In order to balance the discussion of Romanticism and Rand, the second section of the presentation will also include a profile of Modernism based on the ideas and writings of Peter Gay and Richard Pells. The inclusion of this discussion of Modernism will establish the main tenants of the countervailing, and ultimately victorious, philosophical enemy of Romanticism.

Building on the foundation of the Romanticism versus Modernism section, the third and final component of the week-one presentation will focus on the cultural applicability of the philosophical conflict. At this time, the students will be presented with the main intellectual goal of the course; to examine an array of films made throughout the post-World War II era in order to determine how, and to what extent, the battle between Romanticism and Modernism was waged on the important front of popular culture. Using Rand's *Screen Guide for Americans* as a starting point, the goal of this discussion is not to delve into specific genres or films, but rather to engender an understanding among the students that the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism did not simply explode overnight. Instead, the students will come to understand how the struggle between these two outlooks took place incrementally over a twenty-five year

period, during which time Romantic concepts (as defined by Rand) such as the civic body and the heroic individual were repeatedly attacked and ultimately vanquished. As an addition to this discussion, the various genres covered in the class (detailed in the section below) will be highlighted so that the students will develop a firm idea of what lies ahead in terms of how the course will attempt to shed light on the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. Also of great importance, the method by which students will be expected to read the films in terms of their required journal assignments (discussed below) will be woven into this discussion.

Before leaving the analysis of the week-one class session, it must be noted that within the third section of the lecture the point will be stressed that the films viewed in class represent only a small sampling of the films (primary sources) that are related to the discussion of the confrontation between Romanticism and Modernism during the post-World War II period. In an effort to demonstrate that a complete survey of the post-war world of American cinema cannot be achieved, the example of film noir will be used. It will be noted that there is no section or individual example of a pure noir film on the syllabus, yet film noir, a movement that spanned the first fifteen years of the post-war period, is one of the most famed genres in film history. However, because of its extensive, unique nature, and the fact that it did not span the entire post-war era, the decision was made, for the first cycle of History 399, to exclude noir from the film list. Nevertheless, the lack of noir films will be supplemented through lecture, discussion and course readings. Also, future versions of the course may very well include noir films or even a film noir section. In the end, the goal in exposing students to what did not make the course is to clarify the malleability of the course, not just with genres such as film

noir, but also in terms of film choices within the existing course structure. Many of the films chosen for the course can, and will likely, be changed in future versions. Also, as will be demonstrated in the course assignments section, the abundance of film choices will provide students with a wide spectrum of primary documents to which they can apply the theoretical model learned in the classroom.³⁸⁹

Beyond the first class meeting, the structure for the remainder of the semester will be consistent. Each week, the first half of class will be spent viewing a film that is part of one of the genre groupings that will be identified in the next section. In preparation, a brief amount of time will be devoted to providing background information to the students, which will typically include the year the film was made, a basic plot description and any pertinent anecdotal information. While this minimal level of pre-film preparation may strike some observers as inadequate, it is designed to produce a student driven process of learning. From this perspective, it is the goal of History 399 not to fill the students with preconceived notions about possible meanings contained in the individual films, but rather to allow them, with their knowledge of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism, to develop their own ideas and conclusions about these cinematic works of art.

³⁸⁹ One additional point of note in terms of the flexible nature of the course construction for future cycles is the fact that a different set of film selections would offer new and different perspectives on the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism in the post-war era. Using the World War II genre as an example, a film such as *Bataan*, which is an early (made during the war) example of the Romantic interpretation of the war experience, could be substituted with a film such as John Ford's *They Were Expendable* because both films are of the same philosophical stripe, were made around the same time and would thus fill the same need. In addition to simply switching out similar films, future course cycles could alter the timeline within the existing genre choices in order to allow students to view Romanticism's struggle against Modernism from a different perspective. In returning to the World War II genre as an example, one of the two modernist choices in the current cycle—*The Americanization of Emily* or *Kelly's Heroes*—could be switched out with *The Green Berets*, a film made in the late post-war period, but one that attempted to conjure-up the romantic ideals of the World War II genre and apply them to the Vietnam War. In the end, the availability of numerous, easily acquirable primary documents will ensure that History 399 can be taught for a long span of time without the danger of becoming static.

As has been mentioned above, and will be discussed further in the section on assignments below, the students will be keeping a weekly journal that will contain entries on each film viewed in class. Prior to the viewing of the first film, the students will receive additional instruction on how to read films, not for their esthetic qualities, but as historical, philosophical, cultural and intellectual documents in the manner described in the previous section of this chapter. In addition, the students' efforts to read the weekly films will be enriched by post-film, student-led discussions (discussed below in the section on assignments and grading) that will allow for the sharing of thoughts and ideas to be added to existing film notes. Thus, the students' film journals will provide a personal forum that will not only contain their film notes, but will record the process by which they apply their own knowledge of the struggle between Romanticism and Modernism to the films selected for the course. In the end, it is the goal of the instructor, in both the written and discussion based portions of the class, not to dominate, but to facilitate a process of self-learning and self-discovery. The first week will provide the student with the tools they will need. From that point forward, they will be expected to commence construction on their own houses of learning.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ It must be noted here that the message of this paragraph should not be interpreted as a desire to avoid the responsibility of teaching/leading the course on a weekly basis. The instructor has viewed each film selected for the course numerous times, has intensely read all of the associated materials and possesses an intimate knowledge of post-World War II American cinema in general. Thus, preparations will be made for the not un-common situation in which student learners fall silent. While the instructor would not be personally objectionable to leading the discussion in every class, it is hoped that the cultivation of a classroom environment can be achieved in which his presence can fade into the background during meaningful student discussions.

Course Readings

Because of the centrality of Ayn Rand's assessment of post-World War II American culture in forming the basis of the preceding study, two of her works, *The Romantic Manifesto* and *Screen Guide for Americans*, will be the core written works students will consider in History 399. The students will read the book-length *Romantic Manifesto* in its entirety in order to be fully introduced to Rand's view of Romanticism, Modernism, the main components that comprise good art and her contemporary reactions to the growing influence of Modernism during the post-war era. While the students will be presented with a detailed outline of Rand's ideas during the first class meeting, reading *The Romantic Manifesto* in its entirety will place them closer to Rand's thoughts as she expressed them with the primary goal being to help students interpret the films they will watch during the semester from the critical perspective Rand applied to literature and then expanded to include the medium of film. This understanding of Rand does not mean that the students will be encouraged to share her conclusions about the impact of Modernism, but rather that they will possess a fundamental understanding of her line of argument, which in turn will help them in identifying aspects of both Romanticism and Modernism in the films shown as part of the course and the ones they choose to explore as part of their major paper. Coupling Rand's pamphlet, *Screen Guide for Americans*, with the reading of *The Romantic Manifesto*, will allow students to better establish the connection between the ideas of the latter work and American cinema as the pamphlet outlines her views as to how modernist ideas can saturate cinematic works in a way that closely resembles the same process found in literature.

The difficulty in providing a primary text to counterbalance Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto* is simply the lack of a similar text written from the modernist position is non-existent due to the dominance of the movement and the fact that although triumphant, Modernism possessed no set ethos that could be codified and made representative of the entire movement. Historian Peter Gay highlighted this point in the opening chapter of his history of Modernism, "A Climate for Modernism," which also provides an outstanding, yet concise introduction to Modernism from a European perspective.³⁹¹ For both of these reasons, the students will read the opening chapter of Gay's *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*.

In order to help students understand how European Modernism found its way into American culture in the twentieth century, the students will read the opening chapter of Richard Pells' *Modernist America*, "Modernism in Europe and America."³⁹² During the ensuing weeks, the students will also read the chapters ten and eleven in Pells' book, "The New Wave Abroad" and "The New Wave at Home," because they provide astute cultural and philosophical assessments of American cinema in both the 1950s and 1960s.³⁹³ Thus, Pells' writing on film will serve as the supplement to the initial lecture on the general nature of post-war film and will assist students in identifying and better understanding the philosophical and cultural shifts that occur in the films they will view during the semester.

The final addition to the course readings is a secondary text that will serve as an academic compliment to the ideas of Rand. Alan Petigny's *The Permissive Society* chronicled the vast social, political and cultural changes that took place in the United

³⁹¹ Gay, *Modernism*, 1-30.

³⁹² Pells, *Modernist*, 1-27.

³⁹³ Pells, *Modernist*, 265-342.

States as a result of the Second World War. As detailed in the first chapter of this analysis, Petigny explored a variety of topics ranging from sexual activity to religion and discovered that many of the controversial cultural changes associated with the 1960s were in fact products of modernist forces that began to pervade American society in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Reading Petigny's chapters alongside the weekly films will provide the cultural context for the specific elements of Modernism (i.e. youth culture, sex, parenting/psychology) that appear in the films and which drove Rand to highlight the severe threat to Romanticism posed by the post-war surge in Modernism.

Assignments, Grading and Assessment

The first assignment the students will complete will be a technical/explanatory review of Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto* the length of which will be between five and six typed pages. In reviewing the book, students will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of Rand's ideas about art, its philosophical/cultural function and the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism as she understood it. While this assignment is rather basic, its necessity lies in the fact that *The Romantic Manifesto* serves as the theoretical foundation upon which History 399 is built. Thus, as stated in the section above, it is vital that students gain a thorough understanding of Rand's arguments and conception of art in order to understand how to properly approach the films viewed in class and those they choose for their final paper.

As a tool of assessment, the written review, which will count for twenty percent of the students' final grade, will demonstrate the level at which they understand the core

ideas that are driving the class. The fact that the reviews will be due during the third week of class, at which point only two films will have been viewed, will allow for the instructor to address any serious deficiencies in student understanding by devoting class time and if necessary creating online discussion forums to provide students with additional opportunities to grasp the material.

The second major assignment for History 399, which also counts for twenty percent of the students' final grade, will be a semester-long journaling project that reflects not only their understanding of the course material, but also their participation. The core of the journal assignment will be the weekly notes and observations that students record while watching the films and participating in class discussions. As will be outlined in the first class session, the students will take notes on the films with one purpose in mind; to identify how the film is reflective of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. The post-film discussions will allow for students to add to their own observations from the ideas presented by their peers. In order to ensure that students complete the assigned readings after *The Romantic Manifesto*, they will be asked to include in their journals one to two page reflections on the selected readings from the books by Alan Petigny, Peter Gay and Richard Pells. As noted at the beginning of this paragraph, the journal assignment is two-fold. From the perspective of class participation, the journal requirement ensures regular attendance from students as it is very difficult to complete such an assignment when not attending class on a regular basis and the students will be informed from the beginning that the simple completion of this assignment does not guarantee an A grade. The instructor will assign a grade based on the quality, time and thought that is reflected in the journal entries.

In terms of assessment, the fact that the journal will be submitted on the day of the final examination is of little help to the instructor for the current class. However, examining these journals at the end of the semester will provide insight as to extent to which the students engaged the course material and the level at which they came to understand the foundational theoretical model. But of greater importance is the value of the journal assignment to the students in the completion of their final two assignments.

The assignment that constitutes the largest percentage (40%) of the students' final course grade is the research/film analysis paper. To complete this assignment, the students will choose either a particular genre or a specific director and select three to four films within their choice that span the post-World War II era (1945-1970) and analyze them in terms of their connection to the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. The students will not be allowed to use any of the films viewed in class in their papers and a minimum of two secondary sources per film will be required to supplement their critiques. The design of this assignment purposely parodies the weekly course model of film analysis, which makes meaningful dedication to the journal assignment integral to student success on the research/film analysis paper.

If students attend class regularly, actively view the films, meaningfully participate in the post-film discussions and reflect that dedication in their journal entries, they will master the course methodology, which is identical to what they will be expected to demonstrate in their research/film analysis papers. All they will need to do is simply find three to four additional films and apply the same analytical method. In the end, the students, via engagement and successful completion of the journal assignment will teach themselves how to write their research/film analysis papers, which makes this assignment

a superior end of semester assessment tool to determine the extent to which the students developed the understanding and skills necessary for the practical application of the course model.

While the final exam period will be reserved for a course conclusion and a special viewing to sum-up the semester, the written portion of the final examination will be a take-home essay, worth twenty percent of the final grade, in which the students will have the opportunity to bring together all of the films and ideas discussed during the semester, along with their own research, in an essay of ten to twelve pages in length in which they will chronicle their vision of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism. In doing so, the students will have to rely heavily on the films viewed during class, the supplemental readings, and the films and sources used to construct the research/film analysis papers to reinforce the points they make in their essays. Thus, if the students engage in the journal assignment on a serious level and carry what they learned into their research/film analysis papers, the final examination essay should all but write itself.

In the end, the joint consideration of the journal assignment, the research/film analysis paper and the final examination essay will provide the instructor with three major data points from which to assess the level at which the students proved successful in absorbing fundamental knowledge about the cultural, social, philosophical and moral struggle between Romanticism and Modernism that raged throughout the twenty-five years of the post-World War II era. The consideration of this trio of assignments will also inform the instructor as to the effectiveness of the chosen style of presentation so that future cycles of History 399 can be better constructed in order to meet student needs.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail.

.....
It is his [the writer's] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of the past. The poet's [writer's] voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

—William Faulkner, Speech of Acceptance upon the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1950

Humankind is not a collective agent that can decide its destiny. If humans are different from other animals it is chiefly in being governed by myths, which are not creations of the will but creatures of the imagination.

.....
The point of showing the flimsiness of all that is seemingly solid is not to come up with an immovable truth, and persuade the reader to accept it. Persuasion is a missionary enterprise, the goal of which is conversion. Instead the aim is to present a record of what one observer has seen, which readers can use as they will.

—John Gray, Introduction to *Gray's Anatomy: Selected Writings*, 2009

In summarizing the preceding study, the most straightforward manner of communicating its potential importance is to list its accomplishments. From a historiographical perspective, the study identified a recent break in the traditional scholarship on the post-war era, which for decades characterized the 1950s as a time of conservative, conformist culture that produced some fringe elements that, in the end, had little impact on American culture. This view, as epitomized by historian David Patterson, also viewed the 1960s as a distinct entity that, unlike the 1950s, was indeed responsible

for the major social revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century. Now, because of historians such as Alan Petigny, the 1950s is being reassessed and dynamic social and cultural forces have been identified, revealing that the entire post-war period reflected the growing influence of Modernism, from religion and psychology to sexual behavior and Rock 'n' Roll.

Along with the shift in the secondary interpretation of the post-war era, the study connected the changing scholarship to the cultural and philosophical observations recorded by Ayn Rand, a philosopher and public intellectual who spent the entire post-war period commenting on the moral and cultural landscape in the United States. After establishing Rand as an important thinker of the post-war period, whose ideas and writings have been largely ignored by academic historians despite an enduring influence that continues into the twenty-first century, the study then moved into an examination of Rand's body of non-fiction cultural criticism.

While Rand's prolific novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are her most widely read works, a collection of essays that she wrote throughout the 1960s and published in 1971 as *The Romantic Manifesto* chronicled the same growth of Modernism documented by Petigny decades later. Rand characterized the rise of Modernism in post-war America, not as natural, but as the product of an aggressive war waged across the 1950s and 1960s in which the established school of Romanticism came under threat and was eventually defeated by the rampaging forces of Modernism. Much to Rand's dismay, she watched as artistic abstractions depicting the power of the individual to achieve heroism and moral good became steadily replaced in American culture with the

image of the depraved and morally bankrupt becoming a more normal point of focus in literature and cinema.

The joint consideration of the larger conclusions reached by Petigny and Rand, both of which pointed to the idea that the post-war era should be considered as a whole rather than divided into decades, opened the door for the application of their ideas to various aspects of post-war culture in order to test their legitimacy. Using the medium of film as a case study, the preceding analysis considered a number of films across several genres that were made over the course of the entire post-war period to determine whether or not Petigny and Rand were correct. After profiling the Western genre in a chapter length case study and the remaining genres in more concise intellectual critiques, there is little doubt as to the validity of the argument that the ideas associated with Modernism began to infiltrate American culture in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

Early examples of civic indifference, moral relativism and a growing lack of positive metaphysical abstractions showcased the increasing isolation, and at times degeneration, of the heroic individual in films such as *High Noon* and *Rebel Without A Cause*, and thus provided a springboard from which more overt works of Modernism, ranging from low-budget nihilistic drive-in films such as *The Wild Angels* to the masterful yet morally indifferent *The Last Picture Show*, could be launched into a cultural landscape in which Americans were already growing increasingly cynical and fearful as a result of the ever-present threat of nuclear destruction, divisive conflicts such as the Vietnam War and a changing moral framework that modernist films only helped to reinforce and legitimize. Thus, the emergence of a complete work of Modernism such as

Dr. Strangelove in the mid-1960s cannot be explained away as a new artistic mode of expression, but rather as the end product and ultimate triumph of Modernism over Romanticism in the war contested over the course of the entire post-war period. Considered together, these factors all support Rand's identification of the war between Romanticism and Modernism and Petigny's argument that the traditional historiography of post-war American culture erred in its insistence that the 1950s and 1960s should be considered as separate cultural periods.

While it is important that the conclusions of this study confirmed the strength of the recent shift in the scholarship on the post-war period, its pedagogical implications represent the logical place to end this conclusion because the intellectual determinations reached are only of value if they can be presented to undergraduates in a manner that ensures student understanding. The profile of Daniel Wickberg's ideas about intellectual history in chapter one provided convincing evidence as to the importance of viewing ideas as antecedents to all other actions. Of equal importance was Wickberg's adamancy that intellectual history should not be contained among the ideas of high profile individuals, but rather should include any source connected to a discernible idea. Thus, in Wickberg's view, low culture documents such as films are of equal importance to intellectual treatises penned by renowned thinkers. This point provided academic justification for pursuing the case study using post-war film to identify the existence of a major philosophical conflict, assessing how the recent emphasis on the conflict has impacted the current historiography of the period and then using the dynamics of the conflict to construct a course on post-war intellectual/cultural history.

With film established as a legitimate source for a work of intellectual history, chapter four demonstrated that the artistic medium was also relevant as a classroom tool. Beginning with the work of John E. O'Connor and Michael T. Isenberg in the 1970s, and culminating with the more recent publications of Alan S. Marcus, the academic literature pertaining to the use of film in the undergraduate classroom overwhelmingly points to the fact that, if implemented properly, film can broaden the relationship between the professor and students by allowing for a co-ownership of structured discussions while also working toward the liberation of intellectual history from its previous emphasis on written sources generated by elite minds, a point that echoed the ideas of Wickberg.

Moving into the elements that comprise the course structure of History 399, the remaining sections of chapter four outlined the process by which, over the course of a sixteen week semester, students will be presented with the ideas of Rand and Petigny as to their interpretation of the rise of Modernism and its conflict with Romanticism during the post-war era, then introduced to Rand's method of analyzing literature and film to determine its philosophical bent. Students will then view a series of films across several genres that spanned the entire post-war period in order to apply Rand's methodology and in the end determine whether or not Rand and Petigny were on track in terms of their conclusion about the aggressive presence of Modernism in post-war American culture from beginning to end. Successful completion of assignments along the way requires that students demonstrate an understanding of course material by first affirming their understanding of Rand's ideas and methodological model via a written review of *The Romantic Manifesto*. Shifting from specific to broad, the written portion of the final examination will confirm the level at which students are able to articulate the general

intellectual ideas that drive the course by discussing them in the context of the films viewed during class and in relation to the course readings as well as their outside research.

The major research/film analysis paper that students will complete outside of class will provide the ultimate evidence as to their understanding of the ideas and material presented during the course as this assignment requires that they create their own studies based on the model they experienced over the course of the semester. The pre-fabricated model is important because the creation of a research model is typically one of the toughest steps in the process of developing any historical study, especially for students who at best will have only minimal experience with the research tools used by historians. Providing students with a model they already understand removes an important obstacle that will allow them to focus solely on generating their own original analyses. As alluded to in the introduction, the process of writing the research/film analysis paper serves the ultimate practical goal of History 399; to get students to think and write like intellectual historians. On a personal, and perhaps more meaningful level, the research/film analysis paper allows students to form their ideas with only minimal disturbance from methodological constraint, and thus frees them to make their own foray into the ever-abiding conversation about the human condition.

AFTERWORD

No historian ever began with a blank consciousness, an isolated idea or a genuinely universal doubt, for none of these is a possible state of mind. He begins always with a system of postulates (largely unexamined) which define the limits of his thought, and with a specific view of the course of events, a view consonant with his postulates.
—Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 1933

Upon completion of the preceding project it came to my attention that because this study, which is being presented as a work of history, emphasizes the heavy use of film as well as the ideas of a controversial thinker, some historians may be skeptical as to its legitimacy both from the perspective of content and pedagogy. It is the express purpose of this afterword to consider several potential points of contention that could be leveled at the study from the perspective of a traditional historian and to answer them fully. Thus, each heading represents a general area of possible criticism under which specific details and instances will be addressed.

Who's Afraid of Ayn Rand?

As has been apparent since I initially undertook this study, the serious consideration of Rand as a thinker from someone working within the academy is a decision that draws far more criticism than support. However, accolades and support were not the reasons why I completed the study. Although I had been long been acquainted with Rand's work, it was only recently that I became aware of *The Romantic*

Manifesto. Having studied post-World War II film for many years, including the writing of a master's thesis on the subject, Rand's critique of that era proved inviting because it rendered an idea that accounted for the major cultural shifts that occurred during the time period as well as for the changes in art that had been of interest to me for quite some time. I invited Rand's ideas about post-war art and culture into my realm of thought with the words of the political philosopher/historian Michael Oakeshott ringing in the back of my mind; "History is experience, the historian's world of experience; it is the world of ideas, the historian's world of ideas."³⁹⁴ Obviously Rand's ideas about art, Modernism and anything, for that matter, are subjective and open to debate by others who hold different viewpoints. Furthermore, this study did not seek to promote the litany of individuals who stand against Rand. Such an endeavor would have been outside the scope of the project. My goal in chapter one in terms of Rand was simply to articulate the main currents of her philosophical outlook, to highlight the fact that she wrote seriously and influentially about the American cultural landscape of the post-war period and that she has been largely marginalized if not completely left out of the mainstream historiography dealing with that era of American history. In terms of the latter point, if stating what is an easily discernible fact renders me guilty of being partisan, then I cannot escape such a charge.

As far as Rand's ideas driving the study, I cannot escape that charge either. I, as a historian, chose to put Rand's ideas about art and the larger conflict between Romanticism and Modernism to the test by engaging in a case study in order to determine if there was any correlation. By default, the fact that Rand's ideas were being tested meant that they were at the forefront of the study. In this case, I was not concerned about

³⁹⁴ Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 93.

what other people had to say about Rand's ideas. Rather, I wanted to know how accurate Rand's ideas were when considered alongside actual art created during the post-war era. In the end, I have no doubt that *The Romantic Manifesto*, *Screen Guide for Americans* and everything else that Rand wrote are all partisan documents. However, my project was not an examination of partisan philosophical/political treatises during the post-war era. It was, in fact, a test of a particular idea as to what forces shaped the post-World War II cultural landscape.

The Historical Value of a Narrowly Defined Project and Course

It has always been my understanding that a doctoral project/dissertation is by nature supposed to be highly focused. Thus, examining the post-war period, which ran for twenty-five years, represented a manageable period of time, but one in which quite a number of major cultural events and changes occurred. One need only to glance at the regular history offerings at the University of North Dakota to find courses that examine the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the United States: 1920-1945, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Era, 1789-1815, all of which cover time periods nearly equal to the one considered by my project and the course it inspired.

In terms of the specificity of the content, the project adhered to the mandate of a focused academic study, not a general survey. If it seems as though my examination is too narrow because of its strong reliance on the work of Rand and historian Alan Petigny. Such a focus was purposely built into the study. As stated in the previous section, Rand's ideas, as well as those of Petigny, were being put to the test. Writing a more general survey of broader cultural shifts in the post-war period did not need to occur as Petigny

had just completed that task in 2009. Once I identified that Petigny confirmed many of the cultural impacts of Modernism that Rand identified from a polemical perspective during the period, I felt I could contribute to this historical discourse by putting those ideas to a test in a case study. Such case studies are fairly common within the discipline of history; consider for example Lee Benson's 1961 work, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case*. Although focusing on the political records of a single state, New York, Benson brought into serious question Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s popularly held concept of the Age of Jackson by dispelling the notion that the leadership of both the Democratic and Whig parties broke along strict socioeconomic lines. While that particular historiographical debate continues to rage, Benson's narrowly focused case study remains an integral part of the historiography of the Jacksonian Era.³⁹⁵ In the tradition of a historian such as Lee Benson, I too looked at a larger study, Petigny's *The Permissive Society*, which seemed to represent a distinct shift in the historiography of the post-war period (I also chronicled other works leading up to Petigny's that seemed to represent the beginnings of a paradigm shift), and decided to launch my own case study to test both his ideas and those of Rand.

Contextualizing the Cold War

As American Cold War culture played a significant role in much of the work that resulted in my master's thesis, "The Duke and the Dripper: John Wayne, Jackson Pollock and Created Images of Masculinity in Cold War America," I am aware that even today the mentality still exists to paint every aspect of American culture from 1945 to 1991 in

³⁹⁵ Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 331.

light of the Cold War. It would almost appear that the hysteria of the time has bled deeply into contemporary historical discourse. While acknowledging the importance of the Cold War and its impact on American culture, I must declare that this project is not focused on the Cold War. The Cold War is certainly one important aspect that is considered, but the project's true goal, as stated above, is to test the ideas of Rand and Petigny as to the collision of Romanticism and Modernism during the post-World War II era, which overlapped with part of the Cold War era. I am well aware that historians have and will continue to examine Hollywood during the post-war era and the films it created from the perspective of the Cold War. I myself have done that very same type of analysis. However, as will be discussed in the next section, this project is about a different set of ideas, of which the Cold War is not the major consideration. I know that John Wayne was a rabid anti-communist and member of the John Birch Society, just as I am aware that Rand appeared as a friendly witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. While these facts are valuable and have been examined by those interested in Cold War culture, the next section will highlight in depth why this study is less interested in the activities of artists such as Rand and Wayne as opposed to the specific works of art they produced.

Films as Primary Documents

This topic is one in which I expected some degree of blowback because it remains outside the realm of typical history courses to use film as the central primary source. Before justifying that decision, it is first necessary to address those who may argue that films should not even be considered as primary sources. I have always operated under

the view that films, like any other sources, can be both primary and secondary sources. For example, a film from the World War II genre could be considered a secondary source if one is interested in the accuracy of the events it depicts. However, the same film could be considered a primary source if one intends to examine it from the perspective of how it reflects not World War II, but the time in which it was made. This dual function is no different than the way in which certain books are examined. A classic example of this point would be Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which can be considered as part of the secondary historiography of the Roman Empire, but also as a primary source that reflects the ideas and sentiments of the British Enlightenment.

Beyond the basic criticism of using films as primary sources, it is likely that the decision to analyze the films as finished products rather than detailing the process by which they were made could be a source of critical discontent. In order to answer such a criticism, I would first point to the fact that I am not pretending as though any film is made in a vacuum and not impacted by contemporary events. If anything, the premise that films were impacted by contemporary events is the key point that underlies the study. Going back to the issue of the Cold War discussed above, I am aware that post-war films will always be considered for their relationship to Cold War culture. I acknowledge this point in the study by highlighting classic interpretations of films, which often relate to the Cold War. Also, there is an entire series devoted specifically to films directly related to the Cold War. In terms of the course inspired by the study, chapter four details the process by which the students are made aware of the Cold War as well as other cultural events that impacted the art of the period. However, it is not the stated intention of this

study to critique the films of the post-war era in terms of the behind-the-scenes politics or intentions of those who made them. While I understand the value of such an approach and have engaged in that type of analysis in the past, it is my view that the films as finished pieces of art offer a great deal of historical meaning in their own right, and not only from the perspective of the Cold War, but also in light of the conflict between Romanticism and Modernism identified by Rand and later by Petigny.

Returning to Wickberg's thoughts on intellectual history profiled in chapter one, my method of analysis in this study sought to consider post-war films as "expression[s] of thought."³⁹⁶ In attempting such a task, my goal was that of identifying the "conceptual sensibility" that emerged from individual films, which in turn helped to identify "patterns" of Romanticism and Modernism, which, in the end, served to confirm the notions of Rand and Petigny as to the conflict between these two schools of thought during the post-war period.³⁹⁷ While I realize that my method of analysis represents one of many possible avenues of exploration, one cannot escape the fact that films can speak for themselves and represent what Rand called "metaphysical abstractions" of the artist's "sense of life."³⁹⁸ Transferred to a historical perspective, these "metaphysical abstractions"³⁹⁹ can be considered alongside each other in order to understand "the patterns of mind that shaped" them.⁴⁰⁰ In the end, adhering to the premise "that the way to understand ideas is to see them in the context of other ideas," I was able to confirm, using film as a case study, that there was in fact a struggle between Romanticism and

³⁹⁶ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

³⁹⁷ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

³⁹⁸ Rand, *Manifesto*, 26.

³⁹⁹ Rand, *Manifesto*, 26.

⁴⁰⁰ Wickberg, "Intellectual History," 390.

Modernism during the post-war era as noted by Rand, as well as the fact that, as asserted by Petigny, Modernism achieved cultural dominance by the end of the period.⁴⁰¹

Pedagogy

In thinking about possible criticisms of the study and course from a pedagogical perspective, a return to the potential issue of narrow focus represents a good starting point in terms of whether or not a course with such a focus is of value to students. At the beginning of the process by which I settled on a topic for my project and decided to make my required History 399 course an outcropping of that work, I did not consult nor was it suggested that I consult pedagogical studies in order to determine what type of course I should offer. Instead, I turned to what I believed would be the best general guide for that endeavor, the University of North Dakota Undergraduate catalog. As described above, I found courses whose subjects and time periods were commensurate to the time period I wished to cover in my course. Also, I found support for my decision in the description of courses taught under the History 399 designation, which states that these courses are focused on “specialized subject[s].”⁴⁰² Having come to an understanding of the nature of History 399 courses at the University of North Dakota, I submitted a course proposal and syllabus that were subsequently approved by the history department.

In testing the accuracy of Rand’s notion of a conflict between Romanticism and Modernism and Petigny’s conclusions as to the ultimate victory of Modernism in post-war America, the students are in no way being limited to a restricted field of historical vision. Petigny’s work, which is assigned reading that students not only discuss in class

⁴⁰¹ Wickberg, “Intellectual History,” 394.

⁴⁰² University of North Dakota, University of North Dakota Undergraduate Catalog 101, no. 3 [July 2011]: 136.

but also consider in formal writing, is a broad social and cultural history of the United States in the post-war period. Thus, it is not as though the students are only being encouraged to think only about Rand and Petigny. The ideas of these individuals happen to represent the general framework through which I am asking them to consider the post-war era.

If pressed to defend the value of the course's goals/intentions from a pedagogical perspective, I would point to the ideas of Michael Oakeshott, who, as a historian of political thought, wrote widely about issues pertaining to university education and the role played by history and the other humanities within that larger context. In an address delivered to recently arrived undergraduates at the London School of Economics, Oakeshott spoke generally of what "academic" thought means.⁴⁰³ To Oakeshott, "being 'academic' is being concerned, not with prescriptions and injunctions, not with learning what to do and how to do it, not with discovering merely how things work and what they can be used for, but with *explanations*."⁴⁰⁴ He went on to note that "the world. . . is something to be understood, not used; something to be discerned and made intelligible, not exploited."⁴⁰⁵

In a related lecture, Oakeshott described the process of learning, which he defined as "the comprehensive activity in which we come to know ourselves and the world around us."⁴⁰⁶ What Oakeshott believed the process of learning made possible for every human was the chance to claim knowledge and understanding of the "inheritance of

⁴⁰³ Michael Oakeshott, "On Arriving at a University," in *What is History? and Other Essays* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2004), 337.

⁴⁰⁴ Oakeshott, "University," 337.

⁴⁰⁵ Oakeshott, "University," 338.

⁴⁰⁶ Michael Oakeshott, "The Character of a University Education," in *What is History? and Other Essays* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2004), 374.

human achievements,” which included “feelings, emotions, images, visions, thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, relationships, organizations, religions, canons and maxims of conduct, procedures, rituals, skills, works of art, books, musical compositions, tools, artifacts, and utensils.”⁴⁰⁷ For one to enter this world via learning, Oakeshott believed that “there is no other way for a human being to make the most of himself than by learning to recognize himself in the mirror of this inheritance of human achievement.”⁴⁰⁸ To aid in this process, the teacher oversees “the deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement, or into some part of it.”⁴⁰⁹ For Oakeshott, the teacher was not simply present to be a cheerleader for what happened to be en vogue at the time. Rather, “the part of the teacher . . . is to hold up the mirror of human achievement before a pupil; and to hold it in such a manner that it reflects not merely what has caught the fancy of a current generation, but so that it reflects something which approximates more closely to the whole of that inheritance. . . . to bring to their notice what the current world may have neglected or forgotten.”⁴¹⁰

Perhaps the most useful tool that can be imparted to a student as a result of being exposed to knowledge in the aforementioned manner is the ability “to recognize and enjoy the intellectual virtues.”⁴¹¹ As further defined by Oakeshott, possession of this skill gives one “the ability to detect the individual intelligence which is at work in every

⁴⁰⁷ Oakeshott, “Character,” 375.

⁴⁰⁸ Oakeshott, “Character,” 376.

⁴⁰⁹ Oakeshott, “Character,” 378.

⁴¹⁰ Oakeshott, “Character,” 378.

⁴¹¹ Michael Oakeshott, “Learning and Teaching,” in *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (Indianapolis, IN: 2001), 59.

utterance, even in those which convey impersonal information.”⁴¹² Furthermore, “Every significant act or utterance has a style of its own, a personal idiom, an individual manner of thinking of which it is a reflection.”⁴¹³ After pointing out that this skill “cannot be *learned* separately” nor “*taught* separately,” Oakeshott concluded that “learning, then, is acquiring the ability to feel and to think, and the pupil will never acquire these abilities unless he has learned to listen for them and to recognize them in the conduct and utterances of others.”⁴¹⁴

In relating Oakeshott’s ideas to my own study, I must first say that having taught for several years, it is always my highest goal to bring students into a discourse about the human condition, which they have inherited and are also experiencing in their own right. This point is directly correlated to Oakeshott’s discussion of “explanations”⁴¹⁵ and “the inheritance of human achievements.”⁴¹⁶ The thoughts that led to the current study and subsequent course centered on my belief that I had found what was for me a new and intriguing set of ideas (Rand and Petigny), or what Oakeshott called a “personal idiom,” about the American cultural landscape during the post-World War II era.⁴¹⁷ Upon further exploration, I discovered that Rand’s ideas have received little serious consideration within the academic world despite the fact that Petigny’s work seemed to confirm at the very least the growth of Modernist culture in post-war America. Taking to heart Oakeshott’s point about the need to expose students to all of the human inheritance and not just the portions that have been deemed popular or politically correct, I chose to

⁴¹² Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

⁴¹³ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

⁴¹⁴ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59-60.

⁴¹⁵ Oakeshott, “University,” 337.

⁴¹⁶ Oakeshott, “Character,” 375.

⁴¹⁷ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

engage in a study to examine a particular form of post-war art, film, through the “personal idiom” of Rand.⁴¹⁸ Engaging in such a study forced me to consider pieces of art and American culture that I was very familiar with in a way in which I had never considered before. Carrying this new approach to the post-war period into my course, I introduced students to Rand’s “personal idiom” and together, we set about trying to understand the post-war era.⁴¹⁹ Early and often, other idioms intersected our path, many purposely inserted by me, and were welcomed into the mix and added great depth to our attempt at making sense of the post-war cultural landscape through the films it produced.

As far as the specific course assignments are concerned, they were all created with the express purpose (the details of which can be found in chapter four) of allowing students to interact with the ideas of Rand, Petigny and twenty-five years of films, and to demonstrate their ability to function within this particular idiom. Far from simply directing the students to replicate my own work, the primary objective in terms of the course and its assignments goes back to Oakeshott’s promotion of “learning to recognize and enjoy the intellectual virtues.”⁴²⁰ An assignment such as the film analysis paper, which was in fact modeled after my own exploration of post-war culture via Rand’s “personal idiom,” is a positive instance of “teaching by example” in that students are presented with “a concrete situation.”⁴²¹ Thus, “in imitating the example [students] acquire not merely a model for the particular occasion, but the disposition to recognize everything as an occasion. It is a habit of listening for an individual intelligence at work

⁴¹⁸ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

⁴¹⁹ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

⁴²⁰ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59.

⁴²¹ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 59-60.

in every utterance that may be acquired by imitating a teacher who has this habit.”⁴²² In the end, when most of the students in my class have long forgotten the individual films we watched together and even many of the ideas they cultivated during class discussions and in their own writing, it is my pedagogical hope that when they encounter a work of art, be it a work of literature, a poem, a painting or a film, they will be able to recognize and make sense of “the reflection of a mind at work in a language” expressing insight about the human condition.⁴²³

⁴²² Oakeshott, “Learning,” 60.

⁴²³ Oakeshott, “Learning,” 61.

APPENDIX

Appendix
What Went Right and What Went Wrong: Initial Observations of History 399
Nearing the End of the First Course Cycle

As the first cycle of History 399 entered its final weeks, it seemed wise to consider how the class progressed to that point in order to determine if any major components of the course needed to be reconsidered going forward. While the two major culminating assignments, the film analysis paper and the final examination essay, remain unknown entities as to student performance, more than enough time had passed in order to make an initial determination concerning the fundamental issues of the course structure, presentation of primary and secondary materials and class discussion. Within this context a great deal of positive signs became apparent. However, areas that could be bolstered proved noticeable as well.

The decision of the instructor not to reveal the specific selection of films proved to be a success. Without knowing what film they were going to screen, the students approached each viewing with a mind free of preconceived notions. This point stood in direct support of the course method presented to students during the first class session, which simply identified the perception by certain intellectuals and historians of a conflict between Romanticism and Modernism during the post-World War II era. The instructor purposefully remained neutral in terms of commenting on the validity of such claims beyond presenting the evidence cited by those whose ideas were under consideration. From the beginning it was known by the students that History 399 represented a historical/intellectual experiment that sought not to inculcate them with a particular mindset but rather to bring them into the middle of a conversation about the human condition from a historical perspective.

The absence of excessive pre-viewing contextualization allowed students to more freely make their own determinations about the content and meaning of the films they encountered. This fact proved enormously beneficial to the post-film discussions. As the weeks passed a growing chorus of student voices was heard during the discussion periods. What made the student participation most meaningful proved to be the insightful commentary they offered and which typically developed spontaneously after an opening salvo of initial reactions. The students' demonstrated their familiarity with the ideas surrounding the belief that a conflict between Romanticism and Modernism existed during the post-World War II period in the United States by commenting on what they viewed in relation to the ideas and thinkers under consideration. As the facilitator of these discussions, the instructor had ample opportunity to weave the cultural/historical contextualization of the films into the conversation in a manner devoid of constraining ideology or method.

While some readers of this analysis will argue that the time devoted to screening films in class bordered on the excessive in History 399, the in-class viewings had a positive effect in that students had no other choice but to engage with the source under consideration.⁴²⁴ Had the students been charged with watching the films outside of class it is likely that the same trend would have developed as so often occurs in courses that require a heavy load of outside reading; many students would fail to complete all or part of the assignment and the attempt to engage in an in-class discussion would result in a frustrating and counter-productive experience for both the instructor and the students. As

⁴²⁴ Although one may further argue that a student could in fact “check-out” of the class altogether, there is nothing an instructor can do for the students who have made the personal choice not to engage. It is the view of the author that until a student makes the individual decision to become a part of the discussion there is no valid consideration that should be applied to them.

it is, class time provides a captive audience of students, many of whom are at their highest peak of interest in the subject matter because they have few if any distractions.

In addition to the positive aspects that came to light as a result of completing a majority of the primary source analysis during class, the success of the practice also forced the instructor to consider the main points of dissatisfaction with History 399. The first major assignment students completed during the early weeks of the semester, the critical review of Rand's *The Romantic Manifesto*, demonstrated the danger of charging students with completing a reading assignment and expecting an acceptable level of critical analysis. In a class whose roster consisted exclusively of upperclassmen, the majority of whom were history majors, the submissions for the Rand review assignment proved so unsubstantive, despite clearly communicated expectations, that the instructor had no choice but to return the papers, none of which met the minimum criteria for length, ungraded and allow two weeks for the students to revamp their subpar efforts.

Although the criticism of the Rand paper submissions outline above may appear harsh to some readers, one could not argue that the instructor expected the students to complete the assignment without meaningful guidance as the first two and one-half hour class session was devoted to an extensive outline of *The Romantic Manifesto* and how it would be used in the course. The instructor also posted additional streaming commentary on the History 399 Blackboard page. While a small group of ambitious students reworked their papers in order to at least meet the minimum requirements for the assignment, many students submitted revisions that still lacked the depth necessary to complete the assignment successfully because they failed to stretch their papers to the minimum page requirement (five to six pages), which the instructor established

commensurate to the breadth of the assigned reading. In order to glean something positive from this lackluster performance, the instructor graded the papers critically, but admittedly eased back on the recorded grades for those students who met the minimum length criteria with the understanding that the recorded grades for the final examination essay and the film analysis paper assignment would reflect the instructor's critical eye toward active analytical engagement, development of substantive arguments and overall familiarity with the discussed during class and in assigned readings.

Going into future cycles of History 399, the issue of ensuring student understanding and accountability for the outside readings could be enhanced by devoting an additional class session to outlining and discussing the general framework of the selections. Utilizing this approach would allow for further development of Rand's ideas during the first class meeting to be followed by a targeted writing assignment that would be submitted and discussed in class the following week. While this alteration to the course schedule would force the removal of one film from the course list, it would provide additional time and increase student understanding of the main ideas the course seeks to explore.

In the end, while the two major writing assignments for History 399 have yet to be submitted, the instructor is for the most part pleased with the general flow of the course as the last few weeks of instruction approach. Despite the issue with the first major writing assignment detailed above, the overall student performance is commensurate with that encountered by the instructor in the two other courses he has taught in the history department at the University of North Dakota. The culminating experience of teaching History 399 as the final step in the process of earning the doctor of

arts degree has provided the foundation for a course structure that is malleable and will provide years of teaching possibilities in the future.

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