

REFLECTION STATEMENT

My generation is the first to have lived in a world after 9/11. So many customs, regulations and conversations that were forged after this cataclysmic event, seem simply an integral part of life. In this new cultural turn of Trumpism, a slowly fading American hegemony and a virus that has quite literally transformed every part of our lives, my generation is getting its own taste of changing customs that will grow to define and alter the way collective humanity functions. Thus, the purpose of my Major Work entitled, *Unfastening the Dying Animal: Reimagining the Western Genre in a Post 9/11 Landscape*, is to understand the way, the most intrinsically American cinematic genre, the Western, transformed in the aftermath of 9/11, to reflect the voice of a nation who for the first time, had to reconcile with the possibility that not all thought it was "the land of the free, the home of the brave".

My intended audience is my generation, thus to have it published from a University Press, ideally in America, would make the most sense. The Duke University Press magazine *Camera Obscura* "encourages contributions in areas such as the conjunctions of gender, race, class, and sexuality...politically engaged approaches to a range of media practices"³³.

The Western genre has been one of the most successful film genres; however, recently the media has become ever more increasingly convinced of the "death" of this steadfast genre. Articles such as "How the Western Was Lost (and Why It Matters)" from *The Atlantic* and "How the western got lost: why the genre needs to innovate to survive" from *The Guardian* piqued my initial interest in the malleable role of genre to reflect shifting values and concerns of a contemporary audience. I was intrigued by the desire among academia and critics for the Western genre to reclaim its relevance and evolve with the changing times. It is films such as *There Will Be Blood* and *No Country for Old Men*, my core texts, that are the exemplar for such a movement.

³³Read.dukeupress.edu. 2020. Camera Obscura | Duke University Press. [online] Available at: <https://read.dukeupress.edu/camera-obscura>

In *The Contemporary Western: An American Genre Post-9/11* (2019), John White explores how films such as *Open Range* (2003), *True Grit* (2010) and *Jane Got a Gun* (2016) reinforce a conservative myth of American exceptionalism, endorsing the use of extreme force in dealing with enemies and highlighting the importance of defending the homeland. Moreover, White's text assisted greatly in informing my understanding of the post-9/11 neo-western genre and also cemented my inquiry question and concept in the company of other literary criticism. White's text also reinforced the originality of my piece as he argued that post-9/11 Westerns harped back to the American Cultural myths³⁴, whereas, the texts in my essay belong to a niche artistry that aimed to question and destroy these myths.

French Postmodernist Jean Francois Lyotard's concern with "incredulity towards metanarratives"³⁵ enabled me to recognise the significance of the Western as the "cultural crutch" of the United States, providing deeper insight into the very purpose of the films and in turn, the purpose of my Major Work. Whilst others such as the grand narrative of European Enlightenment and even Christianity had taken beating after beating, this national narrative still remained, manifested in the supremely American Western genre. Thus, it became apparent that after the horrific event that was 9/11, it was painfully naive to continue to uphold this failing narrative. Hence, the significance of my texts is clear as they both represent a new movement, born out of the ashes and rubble of 9/11 that has dared to wrestle with the history of their nation in an attempt to make sense of their chaotic present.

Furthermore, Jung's philosophy surrounding the archetypes was instrumental in forming my understanding of the humanity, or lack thereof, behind these revolutionary Westerns. My investigation into Jung's psychology was sparked and thus framed by the essay *Carrying the Fire: Individuation Toward the Mature Masculine and Telos of Cultural Myth in Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men and The Road* by critic Maggie Bortz. Bortz argues that, "Jung viewed great art as an aperture to the collective unconscious, through which the role of the

³⁴ White, J. (2019) *The Contemporary Western: An American Genre Post-9/11*. Edinburgh University Press. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvnjbh16.

³⁵ Lyotard, J. and Bennington, G., 2010. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis, Minn: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

archetypes in shaping the psychological development of individuals and societies might be discerned". My essay aims to expose how both *There Will Be Blood* and *No Country for Old Men* are examples of art that uses Jungian archetypes to tap into the collective unconscious, beckoning us to understand the flaws of American society and the values it holds, exports and praises.

In identifying the traditional archetypes these characters of the post-9/11 Western neo-genre represented, such as the "senex male", "magician" and "everyman", I was able to properly understand the intricacies of the new "cowboy" of the post-9/11 Western and the cynicism and dark ambition, American capitalist culture erroneously praises.

Research into my chosen form of the critical essay enabled me to formulate a coherent argument and sustained voice that is engaging and academic. Susan Sontag's *Directions: Write, Read, Rewrite* (2000) raised my awareness of the interconnected art of reading and writing and the need to assess and revise cadence and structure, for the sake of my readership: "to write is to practice with particular intensity and attentiveness, the art of reading."

Mark Vail's literary criticism *The "Integrative" Rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" Speech* (2006) inspired my voice, structure and concept throughout the evolution of my Major Work. Just as Margaret Atwood's *Nobody to Nobody* (2003) demonstrates how essays can be an interplay between fiction and non-fiction, Vail's work performs this argument as he immerses his reader in the March on Washington, "As he watched the great wave of humanity swell around the Mall's reflecting pool". This inspired me to open with the emotive image of "America and the world watch(ing) the Twin Towers burning on 11th September 2001" describing how "it was not just metal and concrete which burned and crumbled" but rather "American insouciance". I use metaphor to further set the scene, "the image of an America on fire was plastered on every corner of the earth". Moreover, Vail also employs a hybrid voice that is both accessible and compelling for his audience. Vail writes "while it is not my intention to dismantle the inestimable cultural impact...I do suggest that two pivotal rhetorical events in the

months preceding the march primed the public...” He speaks with authority and generates eagerness in the reader to learn more. I attempt to mimic this hybrid voice “Therefore my premise is that it makes cultural sense for American directors to return to the narrative that shaped Americans in the 20th century in order to understand where they ended up in a post-9/11 world”.

My Major work has been influenced by my Stage 6 studies in both the genesis of my concept and the skills required to complete a critical response. It was my study of our English Extension 1 elective; *Worlds of Upheaval*, that sparked my interest in the relationship between genre and history. As we studied Beckett’s groundbreaking absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*, I was intrigued by the paradigm shift that had occurred in our understanding of theatre and the political role it had in capturing the human response to the tragedy of the Second World War. Just as Beckett refuses Aristotelian traditions of the “tragedy” to better reflect the woes of his context, so too do my core texts present a similar refusal of the historic conventions of the steadfast Western film tradition. Our Preliminary study of the poetry of W.B. Yeats and the Module A course, allowed me to better understand the conversations between texts that reframe values and perspectives, with my own title, akin to the Coen brothers’, drawn from Yeats’ *Sailing to Byzantium*.

In conclusion, the purpose of my major work is to consider the role of art in times of great upheaval, through the American lens of the changing Western genre. As we live through a time of unprecedented change and chaos, it is essential that we, as a new generation in search of change, recognise the necessity of turning towards the humanities to find answers and direction out of a darkening landscape. The writing process of my major work was grueling, difficult and emotional, and taught me so much about myself as a writer, but more importantly made me more aware of our world and the significant role art has and will always play in it.

When I began my major work in 2019, the old American exceptionalism and status of unparalleled power was gradually dwindling thanks to another “old man” sitting in the

whitehouse. Now, as we are in the midst of another cultural turn, this gradual dwindling of American global hegemony has transformed into a speedy plummet. Thus, the value of my major work has only increased as it contributes to not only an international scholarship concerned with the breakdown of American cultural myths and hyper-power status, but it also speaks volumes to the collective international changing sentiment towards the dark history of Western governance that has brought us to such pandemonium.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adams, J (2015) *No Country for Old Men: Darkness in the New West*. Book Chapter pp 164-178 of *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments*. Published by: Columbia University Press (2015)
2. Altman, R (1998) *A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre*. Film/Genre. BFI Publishing 1998
3. Avens, R (1977) *The Image of the Devil in C.G. Jung's Psychology*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Jul, 1977) pp 196-222. Published by: Springer
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505406>
4. Biggs, C (2017) *Why There Will Be Blood feels more relevant than ever*. *Little White Lies*, 25 January 2017
5. Black, B (2008) *Reviewed Work: There Will be Blood by Paul Thomas Anderson*. *Environmental History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Apr, 2008) pp 367-368
6. Black, B & Lifset, R (2012) *Imaging the "Devil's Excrement": Big Oil in Petroleum Cinema, 1940-2007*. *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 99, No. 1, *Oil in American History* (June 2012) pp 135-144
7. Bortz, M (2011) *Carrying the Fire: Individuation Toward the Mature Masculine and Telos of Cultural Myth in Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men and The Road*. *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, Vol5, No. 4 (Fall 2011) pp 28-42. Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd on behalf of C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jung.2011.5.4.28>
8. Bradshaw, P (2019) *Why the best film of the 21st Century is There Will be Blood*. *The Guardian*, 13 September 2019
9. Bradshaw, P., 2011. *9/11 Films: How Did Hollywood Handle The Tragedy?*. [online] the Guardian. Available at:
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/sep/08/9-11-films-hollywood-handle>.

10. Bramesco, C., 2020. How The Western Got Lost: Why The Genre Needs To Innovate To Survive. [online] the Guardian. Available at:
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/26/how-the-western-got-lost-why-the-genre-needs-to-innovate-to-survive>
11. Bush G.W., 9/11 Address to the Nation, 11 September 2001, Oval Office, Washington, D.C.
12. Cawelti, J (1975) *The gunfighter and the hard-boiled dick: Some ruminations on american fantasies of heroism*. American Studies, Vol. 16, No 2, An Issue for Alex (Fall, 1975), pp 49-64
13. Ceaser, J. (2012). The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism. American Political Thought, 1(1), 3-28.
14. Chomsky, N., 2016. Noam Chomsky: The Cost Of Violence In The War On Terror. BillMoyers.com. Available at: <https://billmoyers.com/story/chomsky-the-cost-of-violence/>.
15. Coles, R. (2002). Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined. Sociology of Religion, 63(4), 403-426. www.jstor.org/stable/3712300
16. Conley, T (1994) *Rhetoric in the European tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994
URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30151593>
17. Devlin, W (2010) *No Country for Old Men: The Decline of Ethics and the Western* . Book Chapter pp 221-240 of *The Philosophy of the Western*. Published by University Press of Kentucky (2010)
18. Dollars Trilogy. (1964-1966). [film trilogy]. Produzioni Europee Associati
19. Fidler, J (2015) *There Will be Blood*. Senses of Cinema, 1 February 2015
20. Frye, N (1951) *The Archetypes of Literature*. The Kenyon Review, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter 1951), pp 92-110. Published by: Kenyon College. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4333216>

21. Frye, S (2005) *Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" and McCarthy's "No Country for Old Men": Art and Artifice in the New Novel*. *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, Vol 5, No 1 (Spring 2005), pp 14-20
22. Gilmore, R (2009) *No Country for Old Men: The Coens' Tragic Western*. Book Chapter pp 55-78 of *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*. Published by: University Press of Kentucky (2009)
23. Grindon, L (2000) *Reviewed Work: Film/Genre by Rick Altman*. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Summer 2000), pp 53-55. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1213754>
24. Hayden, B.S (1980) *Reviewed Work: Six-Gun Mystique by John Cawelti*. *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter, 1980), p. 70
25. Hobsbawm, E (2013) *The Myth of the Cowboy*. *The Guardian*, 21 March 2013
26. Hoffman, M., 2020. *The Western Genre: Dead Or Evolved?*. [online] *Cinemablography*. Available at: <http://www.cinemablography.org/blog/the-western-genre-dead-or-evolved>
27. Hussain, M. and Hussain, M., 2018. *It'S Time For America To Reckon With The Staggering Death Toll Of The Post-9/11 Wars*. [online] *The Intercept*. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2018/11/19/civilian-casualties-us-war-on-terror/>
28. Jung, Carl G. (1968) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Second Edition. Hull RFC (Trans) Read Sir H, Fordham M, Adler G and McGuire W (eds) Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
29. Lyotard, J. and Bennington, G., 2010. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis, Minn: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
30. Machiavelli, N. (1532). *The Prince*.

31. Mangrum, B (2011) *Democracy, Justice and Tragedy in Cormac McCarthy's "No Country for Old Men"*. Religion & Literature, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Autumn 2011), pp 107-133
32. McClain, W (2010) *Western, Go Home! Sergio Leone and the "Death of the Western" in American Film Criticism*. Journal of Film and Video, Vol. 62, No. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2010) pp 52-66. Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the University Film & Video Association. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jfilmvideo.62.1-2.0052>
33. McMahon, J., 2010. *The Philosophy Of The Western*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
34. Nayak, M., & Malone, C. (2009). *American Orientalism and American Exceptionalism: A Critical Rethinking of US Hegemony*. International Studies Review, 11(2), 253-276.
www.jstor.org/stable/40389061
35. *No Country for Old Men*. 2007. [film] Directed by J. Coen and E. Coen. Scott Rudin Productions and Mike Zoss Productions.
36. Placido, D., 2020. *The Western Is Finally Returning From The Dead*. [online] Forbes. Available at:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2017/07/05/the-western-is-finally-returning-from-the-dead/#4427d0e19ff9>.
37. Petlewski P. *Complication of the Narrative in the Genre film*. Film criticism. Fall 1979, 4:1, pg 18-19.
38. Rapp, C., "Aristotle's Rhetoric", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>.
39. *Stagecoach*. 1939. [film] Directed by J. Ford. Walter Wanger Productions.
40. Steadman, J (1976) *The Idea of Satan as the Hero of "Paradise Lost"*. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 120, No. 4, Symposium on John Milton (Aug 13, 1976) pp 253-294

41. Sayre R. F. (2000). The Landscape of Capitalism. The Iowa Review.
42. The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. 2020. [film] Directed by A. Dominik. Virtual Studios. Scott Free Productions. Plan B Entertainment.
43. There Will Be Blood. 2007. [film] Directed by P. Anderson. Ghouardi Film Company.
44. Turner F. J. (1893). The Significance of the Frontier in American History. American Historical Association. Chicago World's Fair.
45. WADDINGTON, R. (1962). Appearance and Reality in Satan's Disguises. Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4(3), 390-398. from www.jstor.org/stable/40753522
46. White, J. (2019) The Contemporary Western: An American Genre Post-9/11. Edinburgh University Press. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvnjbh16.
47. Wolfe, C. (1997). Historicising the 'Voice of God': The Place of Vocal Narration in Classical Documentary. Film History, 9(2), 149-167. www.jstor.org/stable/3815172.