Book Reviews

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Late Westerns: The Persistence of a Genre
Lee Clark Mitchell. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. 342pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $55.00.

Twenty-four years ago, Lee Clark Mitchell wrote another book about westerns and masculinity that was praised for its sensitivity to historical context as well as its provocativeness (*Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996]). By contrast, this text seems much less concerned with history and less provocative because it is more opaque. Its tortuous argument contends that the western has been "effectively 'post-' all along." Per the subtitle, it has persisted as a genre, but one that is ever-changing, and that riffs on its clichés are what keep its freshest and smartest incarnations both relevant and worthwhile staples in the cannon (pp. 5–6). Mitchell admits that he does not even like the concept of "postwesterns" and instead prefers "late," "in order to identify them chronologically without imputing anything like a generic break" (p. 6). This insistence on genre continuity accounts for at least some of his downplaying of or even hostility towards history. Yet, Mitchell appears to undercut his own preoccupation with the "persistence" of the western by acknowledging that other forms exhibit the same properties, while alternately asserting that *departures* from its tried and true conventions are what make good westerns somehow still identifiable and relevant.

In seven chapters, *Late Westerns* thoughtfully examines nine movies: John Sturges's *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955); Delmer Daves's *3:10 to Yuma* (1957) and James Mangold's 2007 version of the same; John Sayles's *Lone Star* (1996); Tommy Lee Jones's *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005); David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005); Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005); the Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007); and Ridley Scott's *The Counselor* (2013). That last selection sticks out like a sore thumb, given how it was "savaged" (in the author's own words) by several critics and failed "to engage a larger audience" (pp. 289n10, 233). Mitchell argues this is because "viewers resist a challenge to their cultural belief in self-command, especially in a film combining aspects of popular genres: the crime film, the western, the neo-noir thriller" (p. 233). Does the public really care this much about genres? The author is clearly passionate about westerns but also perhaps a bit Sisyphean in his quest to articulate the genre's elusive characteristics—or even what it is, exactly.

It should not be lost on anyone that every film he selected was directed by men and featured predominantly male protagonists. They were also written by men, with *Brokeback* as the single exception, having been adapted from an Annie Proulx short story by screenplay writers Larry McMurtry and his partner, Diana Ossana. Same-sex love in that film notwithstanding, there is more than a whiff of mustiness here when it comes to

gender presumptions. Mitchell contends that "the heart of the western has been a more or less traditional conception of masculinity," a rare spot of continuity amidst flux. His catalog of "a younger generation of actors [eager] to replay and redefine the role of the Western hero" who constitute "the power of the newly revived Western" seems to reflect just how much *has not* changed between the male protagonists and the (entirely white) list of male actors that follows (p. 26).

AMY LIPPERT
Chicago, Ill.

Frontiers of Boyhood: Imagining America, Past and Future
Martin Woodside. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020. 240 pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $34.95.

The idea of the frontier permeated American culture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, fueled by the reality of people moving west, the promise of fortune and fame, or simply the prospect of a fresh start. Print media propagated the opportunity present in the western territories, and the message found an attentive audience in American boys. In *Frontiers of Boyhood*, Martin Woodside traces the history of American Boy Books, dime novels, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West show through the lens of childhood development, dissecting the influence they had on America's boys.

Woodside organizes *Frontiers of Boyhood* in five chapters touching on different angles of frontier-themed entertainment's connection to the American boy. The first two chapters analyze the literary works of Mark Twain, William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody, and dime novels of the late nineteenth century. Woodside draws attention to the varying interpretations of the frontier. Most notably, he contrasts Frederick Jackson Turner's interpretation of western settlement being a contest of farmers against the land with Buffalo Bill Cody's description of the frontier as a battleground between whites and American Indians. The latter interpretation was, unsurprisingly, popular among the general public and especially young boys. The American Boy Book genre rose out of this interest and, as Woodside states, "provided a successful formula for developing the crude materials of Anglo-Saxon boyhood into successful American manhood" (p. 44). Woodside turns his attention towards Buffalo Bill's Wild West in the second half of the book, covering the hoards of children drawn to the pageantry and the indigenous children featured in its narrative that recounted a settler-centric perspective of the frontier. Addressed in the book's final pages is the continuation of the public's fascination with the frontier beyond Cody's death in 1917, citing twenty-first-century pop culture such as *Star Trek* and *Toy Story*.

While *Frontiers of Boyhood* features excellent exposition of the frontier myth through some of the most influential literary works and traveling shows, Woodside's argument would have benefitted from expanded explanation on how children reacted to the larger themes presented in the novels and wild west shows. The evidence presented on that topic is meager. Readers interested in the history of the childhood frontier canon will enjoy the author's preferential treatment of the subject. Those looking for an extended discussion on childhood development and how boys took to American Boy Books may be disappointed. Regardless, *Frontiers of Boyhood* tackles everything from toy guns to intellectual themes through the lens of

childhood development, which has never before been undertaken. The individualist themes that seeped into many frontier tales are brought to light in Woodside's work. Any reader interested in the history of the American West with a critical view of frontier Americana will relish Woodside's recounting and interpretation of some of the most influential entertainments of the late nineteenth century and their effect on American boyhood.

OLIVER WEST SIME
North Dakota State University
Fargo, N.Dak.

Art and Advertising in Buffalo Bill's Wild West
Michelle Delaney. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. 247pp. Illus. Notes. Apps. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $45.00.

In *Art and Advertising in Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, cultural historian Michelle Delaney analyzes printed material used to advertise William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody's Buffalo Bill's Wild West show between 1883 and 1913. Delaney calls attention to commercial print production and its influence on American and international culture by studying collections at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. A scholar of visual culture who has previously published work on photography, Delaney currently serves as the Assistant Director for History and Culture at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. In *Art and Advertising*, she extends her analytical eye towards lithographic advertising.

In brief, Delaney presents a history of print culture in entertainment as seen through the lens of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. She divides her work into two main sections. In the first, "Inventing the Wild West," Delaney explores the creation of the Cody "brand," while at the same time uncovering the juxtaposition of technical innovations in printing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with advertising art. The strongest element of the first part is Delaney's new scholarship on the previously ignored legacy of Louis E. Cooke, Cody's talented publicity agent. In the second section, "Visualizing Buffalo Bill's Wild West," the author examines how major printing companies in Cincinnati developed the Wild West's visual culture. She focuses on the artists and other individuals who contributed to the exhibition's brand as it changed to meet new audiences over its thirty-year run.

Delaney argues that the posters' imagery and sheer artistry contributed to the impact that Buffalo Bill's Wild West had on American and international culture. She compares photographs and rarely seen conceptual sketches to finished works produced by the Strobridge, Enquirer Job, A. Hoen, and Courier printing houses. Following the lead of preeminent scholar Jack Rennert, Delaney stitches together archival finds to buttress the idea that personal relationships between Cody and company owners account for the consistently high quality of the show's advertising products.

This volume began its existence as a dissertation and, as published, it still closely resembles one. The appendices are unnecessary; Appendix A, a timeline denoting when Cody used each printing company, for instance, should have appeared in the relevant part of the text. Similarly, the literature review, with its statement of methodology, outline of chapters, and discussion of sources, would be more useful integrated into the narrative, if included at all.

In *Art and Advertising*, Delaney's strongest contribution to the field is her examination of the Louis A. Cooke materials, and her analysis of the union of technological developments in printing with the advertising used over the course of the thirty years that Buffalo Bill's Wild West operated. The rich field of visual culture related to Buffalo Bill's popular exhibition has long been overdue for attention by scholars and this book is a great beginning.

JUTI A. WINCHESTER
Fort Hays State University
Hays, Kans.