RICHARD HUTSON

John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946)

Americans in the 1940s lived in a great deal of uncertainty. There was the trauma of World War II, ending with the horror of atomic bombs and the full revelations of the Holocaust. The long era of the Great Depression that had been alleviated by the wartime economy threatened to return after the peace treaties in 1945. “America in the 1940s was no longer the determined social-reformist nation of the 1930s, but not yet the self-assured, even complacent, world power of the 1950s. Fears and anxieties—about the end of progress and the decline of civilization, about economic stagnation and social stasis, about a historical past that was at best irrelevant to the present and at worst the source of present predicaments—dominated intellectual and cultural expression. Yet against this backdrop of gloom and doom there were those who imagined, even proclaimed, a revitalized culture.”

For many thinkers and artists of the postwar years, the American ideological traditions could not be taken for granted but had to be rethought. The traditions, the ideologies, that had been central to American thinking before the war seemed no longer even relevant. In some of the most influential books of the era, a serious revision of American history was undertaken. In Richard Hofstadter’s *The American Political Tradition* (1948), the presidents and heroes of the American past were persistently debunked as he demonstrated that the political conflicts of the past were merely superficial aspects of a deep consensus civilization. In Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis on the centrality of the frontier as the key to a number of institutions in American democracy was relegated to mythology, linking the thesis to a long political and literary tradition. Louis Hartz, in *The American Liberal Tradition* (1952), as well as Arthur Schlesinger and other political intellectuals of the late ’40s struggled to redefine the terms of liberal culture.

A number of artists and intellectuals engaged in that effort in their own terms. John Ford, returning from his experience in the war, saw his task as a filmmaker
as reassuring Americans that their history was relevant, that the war had been fought for certain values central to the United States as a liberal society, just as the West had been won for “the abiding values of domesticity and small-town life,” for the everyday simple things in an American environment of peace and individual freedom. Ford wanted to contribute to the rebuilding of American confidence in itself and its history after the devastation and death, and he returned to Hollywood from his stint as a naval officer to make a film about a Western hero based on his memories of conversations he had had with Wyatt Earp, a “living legend” whom he had met in the early years of filmmaking. To Ford, Earp was a frontier figure who believed in building civilization despite the many factors that could subvert the progress of a civil community and culture. The film he ultimately made in 1946 was an explicit attempt to present these issues for a liberal society.

In *My Darling Clementine*, Ford tends to film the figure of Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) on thresholds—in doorways, under arches, on covered boardwalks, on a church floor framed by the uncompleted and open structure of a bell tower, a structural frame. Wyatt Earp gained his reputation and fame, according to Ford, dealing with groups of Americans trying to move from a frontier and primitive culture to a higher level of civilization. A sense of liminality, of cultural anticipation that is marked in gesture, image, and narrative, pervades *My Darling Clementine*. Obviously, what the culture needs in order to move along the path toward civilization is a lawman, a figure who understands his role to be the care and protection of the people and values of a community. Wyatt Earp’s job, when he becomes marshal of Tombstone, is to execute the law as the expression of the general will of the “good people” of the community, and to do so entails removing the obstacles to such an authority representing the general will. There are two competing authorities that apparently serve to hold on to a primitive but skewed order of sorts: the violent patriarchal authority of Pa Clanton, who controls the major economic order of the cattle business, and the equally violent authority of Doc Holliday, who holds sway over the gambling and saloon culture in Tombstone. (As a cowboy, herding cattle from Mexico to California, who also loves to gamble, Wyatt participates in both spheres of activity.) Both the Clantons and Doc Holliday are threats to the newly forming society because they represent undomesticated self-interest rather than communal good.

The issue of law and order is raised in the opening moments of the film when Earp and his brothers arrive in Tombstone to get shaves after spending days trailing their herd of cattle. The town barber, always desiring to bring the latest devices and signs of civilization to the frontier and whose shop bears the pretentious name of the Bon Ton Tonsorial Parlor, does not quite know how to handle the new barber chairs just arrived from Chicago. But shots ring out and bullets start flying even into the barber shop. The barber runs for cover, leaving Wyatt with lather on his face asking, “What kind of town is this?” This is a question he will repeat to the mayor as he walks into the street where people have gathered for their protection.
from the shooter in the tavern, Indian Charlie. When Wyatt challenges the town marshal, Luke, to go into the tavern and arrest the drunken Indian, Luke returns the challenge: “Why don’t you go and get him out yourself?” (34). Wyatt answers that the town is not paying him to perform such a job. But when Indian Charlie begins his indiscriminate shooting again, Wyatt moves stealthily into the saloon, knocks Indian Charlie over the head, drags him into the street, and boots him out of town. In taking care of a personal disturbance to his “relaxin’ little shave” (36), he has also taken care of a public disturbance. The highly impressed mayor offers Wyatt the job of marshal on the spot; Earp’s response is “Not interested” (36).

But when he and two of his brothers ride back to their herd, the herd is gone and brother James lies dead in the rain. Wyatt returns to the mayor and takes the job of marshaling, insisting on his remaining two brothers as his deputies. After the event of a double crime against him and his brothers, Wyatt is now “interested.” With the knowledge gained from his previous experience as a law and order man in cattle towns of the West, he asks the mayor two questions: Who runs the gambling in the town? and Who runs the cattle? For such a primitive community, institutional roles are elementary and minimal. It is not as if the citizens of the community have elected anyone to serve as the authorities for these roles. The ruthless Pa Clanton and his socially retarded sons run the cattle business on their own terms. Any objections to their terms are met with violence. The same goes for Doc Holliday and his self-appointed role as the law of the saloons. These men rule their precincts by threat of violence. Where are the representatives of the “good people”? Actually, where are the “good people” of this community? They do have a representative in the mayor, but he is no threat to the other powers without a lawman to execute the laws. Even in such a reduced community, there is a niche for a marshal, but Luke was no threat to the other powers either. It will be Wyatt Earp who understands his authority to be superior to that of the Clanton patriarchal tribe and Doc, the consumptive ruler of the saloons; his entrance on the scene will establish a contest of authority for the community at large as he tries to find the perpetrator of the crimes against him while, at the same time, he watches over the community.

According to the credits for the film, the screenplay is based on an early historical study of Wyatt Earp, Stuart N. Lake’s *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal* (1931). Actually, Lake’s book is a better study of early cattle towns on the Great Plains than of Earp—towns like Dodge, Ellsworth, and Wichita that are associated with Earp’s work as a lawman and the development of him as a legend in the West, a legend presupposed and invoked in the film. In the film, characters like the mayor of Tombstone as well as Pa Clanton do double-takes when Earp identifies himself as “Wyatt Earp.” Everyone in the West who is in the know knows the legend of the lawman. But, as Robert Lyons notes, Ford and his screenwriters had little respect for the actual facts of Earp’s life, and very little of John Ford’s story has any historical accuracy. Since Ford has been on record as more interested in the hero “legends” of the West than in the historical facts, viewers and critics have been obliged to ask,
What’s the point of the legends? In such a view, legends seem to originate within a community and have the purpose of identifying and preserving the community. They have a profoundly political role. For John Ford, as for Ralph Waldo Emerson, legends are the product of a cultural-historical alchemy that produces a politically usable example or lesson from the facts of history, a source of spiritual guidance for an ongoing culture. Legends and myths eliminate unusable facts of history and transform historical details into usable meaning as a result of the desires and interests of a community in general. In his interview with Peter Bogdanovich, Ford claimed that legend “is good for the country. We’ve had a lot of people who were supposed to be great heroes, and you know damn well they weren’t. But it’s good for the country to have heroes to look up to. . . . of course, the legend always had some foundation.” Besides, from another perspective, “history, as its clear-sighted practitioners are obliged to admit, can never completely divest itself of myth,” and, therefore, the “criterion of validity [of meaning] is not to be found among the elements of history.”

For John Ford, Wyatt Earp is the legend of a certain style of law and order. Stuart Lake quotes Earp himself as saying that he had heard his father “say many times that, while the law might not be entirely just, it generally expressed the will of the decent folks who were trying to build up the country, and that until someone could offer a better safeguard for a man’s rights, enforcement of the law was the duty of every man who asked for its protection in any way” (Wyatt Earp, 7). In this quote is almost everything that Ford and his screenwriters needed for the legend: the son quoting the wisdom of the father, which is a wisdom about “the will of the decent folks,” and the notion that one cannot expect the law to protect one unless one is willing to protect the law. In My Darling Clementine, it is precisely when Wyatt would call upon the protection of the law, when the law fails, that he takes on the job of marshal, “Providin’ my brothers are my deputies” (38).

When Wyatt arrives in Tombstone, it is clear that the role of the marshal has not yet been established as the primary authority. In fact, the job of marshaling is something of a joke. There is Pa Clanton’s remark upon Earp informing him that he has taken the job: “Marshalin’? In Tombstone? Well, good luck to you, Mr. . . . ?” (40). Or Chihuahua’s threats as Wyatt drags her outside the saloon where she has been signaling to a gambler what cards Wyatt has in his hand: “Listen, Mr. Tin Star Marshal, this is Doc Holliday’s town, and when he comes back . . . ” (44). Wyatt’s task will be to establish the role of the marshal and the rule of law as the primary authority, neutralizing or appropriating the other two authorities, who do not represent the interests of the will of the “good people” and are, in fact, usurpations of a primordial communal authority. Clanton and Holliday are improvisatory authorities and are maintained without the community’s consent.

Only after their own personal losses do the Earp brothers step into the role of keepers of the law; only then are they “interested.” The film narrative, as with so many of the repetitions of the Earp-Holliday films, will emphasize the development
of a personal relationship between Wyatt and Doc Holliday. Wyatt appears to know how to handle the nihilist threat of the suicidal Doc and respects his private anguish as if Doc expressed the depths of Wyatt’s own melancholy, which Wyatt is able to control and turn into the defense of the community. Commentators on the film have noted its dark mood, suggesting even a noir background, as if Doc represented the most intense expression of despair of the postwar period. But the real conflict is between Pa Clanton backed up by his four sons, whom Pa rules with a whip, and Wyatt backed up by his two brothers. The conflict takes on the aura of a family feud, which, apparently, is the way Pa Clanton understands the confrontation and, eventually, the way the Earps understand it also. In the finale, when the surviving two Earps are to face the Clantons at the O.K. Corral and the town mayor and the church deacon come to join in the confrontation, Wyatt tells them that “this is strictly a family affair” (102). Earp removes his marshal’s badge and, after taking the bullets out of their guns, allows the two representatives of the community of the good people to serve as military decoys in the walk toward the final shoot-out.

In the history of the Earp legend, various writers and film and television producers have wavered on the question of whether the Earp story is about bringing law and order, a framework for the possibilities of justice, to the primitive towns of Western development or whether it is a story of Earp’s willingness to take on the task of a town marshal as a cover for wreaking vengeance on various figures who have stood in the way of his own personal interests. As Tag Gallagher notes, when Wyatt talks to his dead brother James and buries him by piling up rocks to serve as a memorial, “Wyatt consecrates himself at James’s graveside to the loftiest goals of civilized utopia (‘When we leave this country, kids like you will be able to grow up and live free’), but he equally consecrates his personal vengeance, his honor of family, as lawful authority. . . . what is worrisome is his alliance of implacable vengeance with legal and moral justification” (John Ford, 226).

After all, in the frontier West, presumably he could have been tempted to solve the crimes against him without becoming a law officer. He could have simply gone off on a quest for vengeance. As in other Westerns, notably the 1939 Stagecoach, Ford always had a complicated sense of the proximity of vengeance to justice. Moreover, in the ambiguous nature of a frontier community, with Earp as a figure who most appropriately belongs to such a liminal cultural threshold, there is no clear certainty in distinguishing between the private and the public, between “interest” and “the will of decent folks.” For Ford, justice is at once private and public. The myth of Wyatt Earp, in this view, is of a figure for whom private interests and care of the public at large exist in an unbroken harmony. Before Wyatt draws his gun to start shooting at the O.K. Corral, he presents an arrest warrant to Pa Clanton for the murders of James and Virgil Earp. In response, the Clantons begin shooting.

There is, in Wyatt, an expression of a kind of categorical imperative so that the personal interest in vengeance gives way to the legitimacy of executing the law. Vengeance has been sublimated in the concept and execution of the law wherein
it serves as the force of the law. Justice has comprehended vengeance, preserved it by overcoming it, just as the close-knit family of Earp brothers, an echo of the tightly controlled Clanton family, comprehends and transforms the Clanton family. In committing their crimes, the Clantons seem to have summoned their melodramatic echo in the Earps (whose father is absent, in California). But from Wyatt’s perspective at James’s grave, the loss of a brother generates the sense of a general loss and a general prospect and motivates him to take on the task of watching over the community in a gesture of care as an expression of a deep piety for culture and its progress. Ford’s Wyatt Earp represents the lawman as a culture hero.

Unless personal “interest” is touched and set in motion, there can be no thought of the general interest. In egregious acts of injustice, such as murder and theft of property, in theory, all human beings have an interest in restitution. Once Earp’s interest is tapped by the crimes against him and his brothers, Wyatt takes an attitude toward the community that has little to do with interest as mere self-interest. He is, thus, a version of what Alexis de Tocqueville saw as a typical United States citizen: “The inhabitants of the United States almost always know how to combine their own advantage with that of their fellow citizens.” Wyatt exemplifies what Tocqueville saw as the doctrine of self-interest properly understood, a doctrine that has a long history in European intellectual traditions but has become, in America, “universally accepted.” When he becomes the marshal, he simply takes care of the community, even in its seemingly unimportant details. He keeps an eye out to protect the itinerant actor-entertainer, Granville Thorndike, so that Thorndike will not get too drunk to give his evening performance at the community theater. (“Shakespeare in Tombstone?”) Later, he rescues Thorndike from the Clanton brothers who have kidnapped him for their own barroom entertainment. When Clementine arrives on the stagecoach, Old Dad, the usual greeter and caretaker of visitors, is not present to wait upon her, and Wyatt improvises in the role, escorting Clementine into the hotel, carrying her bags, ordering warm water for her, and showing her to her room. He watches over the development of Doc and Clementine’s troubled relationship, even risking Doc’s accusation that he is meddling in their affairs. He escorts Clementine to the church dedication ceremony and dances with her. (“Church bells in Tombstone?”) He carves the Sunday roast at the head of his table in the hotel. He interferes on Clementine’s behalf when she is being harassed by Doc’s jealous mistress, Chihuahua. He takes charge when Chihuahua is shot and orders Doc to operate and so on. Wyatt seems always to be interested in the activities of the community in general, in the ordinary details of everyday life. He is a pure democratic hero—modest, unself-conscious, acting as if by pure and benign instincts rather than with concepts about right and righteousness. His actions of care are more a behavioral expression than a concept. The doctrines of a political liberalism have become in him naturalized.

And yet, the Earps never act literally in the name of the decent folks. They seem to live, for the most part, outside of the community. They do not even know
that the citizens are building a church. When the church deacon invites the Earps to the church dedication, Wyatt says, “I was wonderin’ what that fresh-cut lumber was for” (76). Virgil Earp speculates that the gathering of the people this Sunday morning is a “camp meeting,” but the deacon, in his cultural pride, is quick to correct him that this is a “Regular church” being dedicated today (76). Both the Earps and the Clantons seem to belong to saloon society rather than to the people celebrating the founding of a church. When the Earps refuse the invitation by the deacon to join the good people and Wyatt excuses them because they have “sort of a job of work to do” (76), the deacon excuses them also with the remark that “keepin’ the peace is no whit less important” (77). But, when Wyatt shows up at the church’s ceremonial dancing with Clementine on his arm, the deacon stops the music and invites Wyatt officially by commanding the other dancers to “Sashay back, and make room for our new Marshal and his lady fair” (84). Wyatt and Clementine dance alone in front of the community, set apart even as they are included with this special gesture as the community’s center. And brothers Morg and Virgil, after performing their Sabbath duties to their dead brother by visiting James’s grave, join the communal celebration. John Ford always holds on to his own dance of private and public.

The setting for this extraordinary synthesis is John Ford’s mythic Monument Valley landscape, signifying the American West. We see Wyatt placing rocks over James’s grave, mimicking with his monument the shape of the natural buttes in the background, as if the haunting formations of the valley were memorials to an irretrievable loss that has now been lost to consciousness. It is as if the unexpected and terrible loss of the youngest brother is a distant echo of a more sublime and cosmic trauma. In film after film, for Ford, these great juttings from a valley always seem to express some elemental, mysterious significance. They are at once alien to human purpose, it seems, and also models for cultural building. Wyatt has imitated their formations in his monument to James, but the buildings of Tombstone too echo the shapes of Monument Valley, as if the town and the buttes had established an impassive, inarticulate correspondence with each other. Even Wyatt’s (Fonda’s) stiff and rather awkward bodily uprightness keeps echoing the pillars of buildings and an occasional desert cactus, as well as the chimney rock formations in Monument Valley. Culture and nature achieve their synthesis in this mythology, in the world of the narrative as well as in the person of Wyatt, most obviously in the humorous confusion when the scent of Wyatt’s cologne (from the barber) is mistaken for the scent of the wild honeysuckle or the desert flower. For John Ford, America is, as Perry Miller suggested about the ideological history of the nation, “nature’s nation.” The sublimity of culture and the good people’s piety toward culture derive from the sublimity of such a natural setting. Culture appears to gain its legitimacy by being reintegrated in nature.

What Ford seems to have had in mind with the production of this film may look like a contradiction in terms, the idea of a certain kind of hero for liberal
society. Whereas some people during the war years were clamoring for heroes, others after the end of the war had come to consider the idea of the hero itself as dangerous, as belonging to the ideologies of the countries the allies had just defeated in World War II. Somehow, the idea of the hero tends to get associated with the suspicion of a political savior: “Whoever saves us is a hero.” But journalists promoted the authentic American “heroes,” GIs, citizens whose ordinary lives had been interrupted and who had gone to war to protect the way of life they had left, “exemplars of national life, heroic symbols that satisfied the normal social preferences and the wartime psychological needs of American civilians.”

Ford’s Wyatt Earp does not literally rescue anyone or the community at large. Basically, outside of watching over Tombstone, he is not especially active except in solving his own problem. If Wyatt had not come on to the scene, perhaps nothing would have been different for Tombstone. But because of the terrible crimes against him, he once again enrolled in the cause of law and order. But the Earp brothers keep the community in a peaceful state. Without the presence of Wyatt Earp, Clementine Carter of Boston, the figure of advanced civilization, would probably not have remained in Tombstone to establish a school for the local children after the death of Doc Holliday, the former fiancé she had been looking for. Wyatt has served as a framework for the progress toward a peaceful and lawful society. He is a hero who is not really a hero, but he thinks and acts according to reduced, basic principles of political liberal theory. He inaugurates a new “reign of personality, victorious over nature, narrow selfishness, and passive tradition.” Beyond solving his own personal issues, he has really nothing to do but to be, like a motto or an inscription on a building or a coin, exuding the implications of a simple axiom that seems to radiate endless connections, all of them beneficial. Ford’s Wyatt Earp is the ultimate representative of America’s confidence in the liberal principles of its foundation, principles that Ford and Twentieth-Century Fox’s Darryl Zanuck felt were appropriate and timely to be reiterated with the war’s completion.

Ford and Twentieth-Century Fox used the legend of Wyatt Earp to offer a film that strongly suggests an allegory of the recent war. The fictional loss in the film of the two Earp brothers appears to echo the multiple family losses in World War II as depicted, for instance, in the film _The Sullivans_, based on the actual deaths of five brothers. According to Ford, Wyatt Earp visited film studios in the days when Ford began working on films. “I knew Wyatt Earp. In the very early silent days, a couple of times a year, he would come up to visit pals, cowboys he knew in Tombstone; a lot of them were in my company... he told me about the fight at the O.K. Corral. So in _My Darling Clementine_, we did it exactly the way it had been. They didn’t just walk up the street and start banging away at each other; it was a clever military manoeuvre” (John Ford, 84–85). Why not simply make another film about the war itself? Ford had recently done so with his dark vision in _They Were Expendable_ (1945). But with _Clementine_, he clearly wanted to present a narrative that would connect the recent event of the war to a context of what he took to be a quintessential Ameri-
can history, as if the drama of the frontier West could always clarify the genuine issues of American values and purpose. The winning of the West for the values of what were thought to be “civilization” serves as the model for the later armed struggle.

Such a sense of the aura of World War II to the narrative may account for the mystifying absence, for the most part, of the good people who are to be protected, who seem to emerge literally onto the scene as an identifiable community only in their gathering for the Sunday church celebration. Otherwise, they are absent from the story, doing what good people in a liberal culture do—looking out for their self-interests without paying much attention to other issues. Perhaps a frontier culture presents an extreme form of this social disappearance into self-interest. The citizens in and around Tombstone seem not to be cognizant of the crimes against the Earps. With the Earps’ herd rustled and a brother murdered, why does the community not set up a posse? It would seem that the people of this frontier setting are really a precommunity, living their own version of liminality, too fragmented even to care about a concerted effort to rid the area of such criminal activity as long as it does not affect them. There is some danger in such a view of the relationship between an officer of the law and the indifference or helplessness of the community. But the people, as a community, are weak even as their collective goodwill can be presumed to support the efforts of the marshal. There is a need for a citizen volunteer, who is also a quasi-professional lawman, like Wyatt Earp, to take on the task of executing their implicit will to order. Their hero is, however, so modest that he always thinks of his role as merely a job—“what I’m gettin’ paid for” (49). He is not a samurai defending a community of peasants too weak to defend themselves.

In the end, the struggle takes the form of a contest between a regime of brothers against the repressive regime of a patriarch. This conflict has been a common theme in many of the greatest examples of Westerns, from the late 1930s into the ’40s and for the next two decades. My Darling Clementine, while it looked backward to the recent experience of World War II, anticipated the later versions of the conflict when the political meanings of the fraternal-patriarchal contests could invert or move around according to an immediate political context at the time, always referring to the dominant ideologies of the prewar or the postwar periods. Besides, the idea of a former marshal, like Wyatt Earp or Will Kane (High Noon, 1952), having left his lawman’s job to become an ordinary citizen, but then having to pick up his gun and badge again to maintain law and order, is rampant as a feature of the Cold War popular entertainment in Westerns. For reasons that may be obvious, wars and their aftermath generated two periods in the history of popular Hollywood filmmaking in which the genre of the Western, in its many varieties and mutations, figured most prominently and most seriously as entertainment: the post–World War I era and the post–World War II era, not to mention the prewar World War II era, mainly 1939 (throughout the ’30s, Westerns were mainly boys’ stories).
But instances of the genre intended to serve as entertainment for mature audiences tackled slightly displaced but serious political themes, stories of the American West as having “a special relation to American history.”

Take, for instance, the differences between the prewar version of the Earp story and the postwar version. *Frontier Marshal* (the 1939 film) is not about two sets of families, one fraternal and the other patriarchal, in conflict with each other. Rather, the contest in the earlier version echoes the problems politicians were struggling with in the period of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal. The major contest in this film is between two saloons always competing with each other, the one unfairly and illegally with various questionable tactics such as stage hold-ups, getting Indian Charlie drunk so that he will shoot up the competing bar, and kidnapping the entertainer (Eddie Foy, not the Shakespearian actor). When Wyatt Earp (Randolph Scott) enters the scene to subdue Indian Charlie and then becomes the marshal of Tombstone, he begins to interfere in a number of matters that had never before been considered within the legitimate sphere of action for a lawman. As he becomes evermore the actual authority who now represents fairness or justice, the local businesses are forced to overcome the dog-eat-dog competition of raw capitalistic enterprises and become evermore regulated. In such a version, the post–Wyatt Earp era is analogous to the Rooseveltian federal programs of, in effect, regulatory legislation. The former kind of activity of freewheeling and free moral activity is represented by people moving out of town after the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral, whereas Sarah (the earlier version of the Eastern woman, Clementine) and Wyatt stay on in Tombstone. The shoot-out represents the reactionary last-gasp attempt to hold on to the old ways of unregulated enterprise. In *Frontier Marshal*, Doc Holliday is an ineffective keeper of order even though he is feared by everyone as a killer. He gains his idiosyncratic control of the saloon chaos by joining it, an aleatory order of sorts that is ineffective and chaotic in itself. He objects to Wyatt Earp’s interference, and Wyatt seems always to be lecturing him on his behavior. Also, in 1939, a film narrative about Destry (James Stewart) is a version of the Wyatt Earp story, and Destry uses no violence at all to bring about the cessation of criminal business activities (*Destry Rides Again*: director, George Marshall). Instead, as a charismatic political hero, he inspires the whole community of good and decent people with his moral uprightness, and they eventually take up general arms against the perpetrators of crooked business dealings. The final equivalent of a shoot-out consists of masses of men and women simply overpowering the bad guys as they parade through the center of town, a show of populist force, taken completely out of Destry’s hands, that cannot be defeated.

As Aristotle noted, the best tragic narratives were “founded upon the stories of only a few houses,” and dramatists and poets kept returning to them because they were consistently entertaining even if the audience knew nothing of the original stories. In the same way composers of Westerns found that they could return again.
and again to certain characters and the events of their lives, like the Wyatt Earp story or the events of the Powder River War.\textsuperscript{20} Narratives of Wyatt Earp extend back to Walter Noble Burns’s novel \textit{Tombstone} (1927) and the first film version, \textit{Law and Order} (director: Edward L. Cahn, 1932), and up to more recent films such as \textit{Tombstone} (director: George P. Cosmatos, 1993) and \textit{Wyatt Earp} (director: Lawrence Kasdan, 1994). (I am omitting a number of films and television productions between these dates.) Each producer or writer could find different meanings in the selection of events from the various stories and legends that emerged from Earp’s life. But the best versions of the Earp story, and \textit{My Darling Clementine} is the greatest version of them all, have taken on some of the richest themes of American culture, providing ample support for the view, as Bernard Williams has noted in passing, that “Westerns at their best constitute a powerful anthology of political philosophy.”\textsuperscript{21} At least, in the heyday of the production of the genre, Westerns undertook to work out some of the most abstract and fundamental issues of American political beliefs and principles. But, for historical reasons that are always somewhat mysterious, genres also die or become transformed into other genres. After the Vietnam War, the genre of the Western tended to move into outer space, in \textit{Star Wars} (1977) or \textit{Outland} (1981), for example, but that is another story.

\section*{Notes}

3. I use the name of John Ford as a shorthand for a group of writers and producers responsible for the making of a film, of \textit{My Darling Clementine} in particular. By 1946, Ford had established himself as an auteur, but working within the Hollywood studio and with Darryl F. Zanuck at Twentieth-Century Fox, he was only one member—perhaps the most important—of a cooperative group. However, he was always a cowriter of his films. See the remarks by the main screenwriter for \textit{Clementine} in Robert Lyons, “Interview with Winston Miller,” in \textit{My Darling Clementine, John Ford, Director}, edited by Robert Lyons (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984), 141–50. All citations of the screenplay are from this edition.
4. Lyons, \textit{My Darling Clementine}, 25. The reference to Sam Hellman’s story as the source of the screenplay is a reference to the 1939 film version of the Wyatt Earp story, \textit{Frontier Marshal} (director: Alan Dwan), \textit{My Darling Clementine} is literally a remake of \textit{Frontier Marshal}, with a number of important differences that suggest the different political meanings of the two films.
5. Ford’s interest in legend over fact is most explicit in the 1962 film \textit{The Man Who Shot Liberty Va lance}; Lyons, \textit{My Darling Clementine}, 2–6. For a truer account of the Earp brothers, see Stuart N. Lake, \textit{Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshal} (Boston, 1931). James Earp, for example, was not the youngest brother, as in Ford’s film, but the oldest brother, incapaci-
tated by Civil War wounds (6). Virgil Earp was not shot in the back by Pa Clanton but lived a long life, dying in 1906 in California (372). Wyatt’s brothers are not mentioned and do not appear in Frontier Marshal. Ford and his screenwriters added them. Allen Barra refers to Lake’s Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshal as “a terrific novel, putting most of the story in Wyatt’s voice”; Inventing Wyatt Earp (New York, 1998), 10. On Stuart Lake’s influence on a number of screenplays and film productions in Hollywood, see Barra, Inventing Wyatt Earp, 347–49.

6. Peter Bogdanovich, John Ford (Berkeley, 1978), 86. Ford is referring to his own mythologizing of Custer in Fort Apache (1948).


8. According to one nineteenth-century trail-driver who was a typical Texas rowdy in northern cowtowns, a marshal tended to be “a saloon man’s marshal,” hired by saloon owners to keep the peace, not a representative of the populace in general; E. C. (“Teddy Blue”) Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher (1939) (Norman, Okla., 1954), 26.


10. Albert O. Hirschman’s The Passions and the Interests (Princeton, 1977) presents a history of the concept of “interest” in a number of thinkers of the Enlightenment and its aftermath as a key idea for the promotion of capitalism, modernity, and liberal culture. For a definition of the complexities of the idea, see 32–33.


15. Guido de Ruggiero, The History of European Liberalism, trans. R. G. Collingwood (1927) (Boston, 1959), 218. De Ruggiero is describing a Kantian hero of liberalism. I owe this reference to Michael Rogin, who, at a luncheon in which he offered a number of comments on an early rambling draft of this essay, suggested ways to clarify my argument. I took extensive notes from our conversation but have been able to take advantage of only a few of Michael’s generous comments. The quotation from de Ruggiero fits another 1939 film version of the Earp story, Destry Rides Again.

16. I take the idea of the “regime of the brother” from Juliet Flower MacCannell, The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy (London, 1991). I have previously noted the transformations in Westerns from 1939 through the classic Cold War era of the regime of the brothers versus the regime of the patriarchy. In Shane (1952), for instance, the regime of the brothers is the criminal, imperialistic gang of Riker brothers against the benign group of fathers with whom Shane identifies; Richard Hutson, “Guthrie’s Shane and American Culture of the Cold War,” in Fifty Years After “The Big Sky,” ed. William E. Farr and William W. Bevis (Helena, Mont., 2001), 109. The most complex and ambivalent rendition of the Earp brothers story as a regime of the brothers is Lawrence Kasdan’s 1994 film Wyatt Earp.

17. For the post–World War I era, see Jean-Louis Leutrat, L’Alliance brisée: Le Western des années 1920 (Lyon, 1985). For the post–World War II era, see John H. Lenihan, Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film (Urbana, Ill., 1980).

19. I am indebted to Kathleen Moran for discussions about *Frontier Marshal*. For a number of years, she and Michael Rogin taught a course, “America in 1939,” and became authorities on the political and popular culture of the time.
