
Prospecting for Cultural Gold: The Western Mining Film, 1935-1960

By William Graebner
SUNY-Fredonia

Of the thousands of westerns that Hollywood has brought to the screen, perhaps a score take western gold or silver mining as their subject in some significant way, and probably fewer than one hundred evoke gold or silver mining or the mined metals in even marginal or minimal ways. How to account for this dearth? Hollywood has seldom been attracted to the workplace, and the mining workplace is either dark—the mine shaft—or curiously amorphous—the stream bed. While the cry of “Eureka!” is likely to be good for the box office, mining itself, whether by pick, sluice, or pan, is a prosaic, repetitive, and—for the film viewer—rather boring activity.

Indeed, about half of the “mining” films do not show any mining taking place. Nor is mining as an occupation likely to produce the romantic leading man. A miner prodding a burro does not cut quite the same figure as a cowboy on horseback or a sheriff squaring off against an outlaw in the center of town. Although the mining engineer was understood in the late nineteenth century to be a risk-taking, manly, even romantic figure, Hollywood thought differently in the twentieth century, presenting the engineer in *Silver River* (1948) as an amiable but weak appendage to a powerful woman, and in *Garden of Evil* (1954) as the whining object of a rescue effort mounted by real men and a real woman. In addition, frontier mining areas were male enclaves, complicating Hollywood’s ability to create the romantic, heterosexual couple. Others have emphasized that the frontier mining experience—the transient camp, the town in upheaval, the bachelor experience—is incompat-

ible with the Western’s attention to the construction of an ideal, stable, family-based community.¹

Although hardly Hollywood favorites, films about western mining are sufficiently numerous to make possible some preliminary ideas about the history of the genre and its social and cultural interpretive functions. It may even be possible to suggest a historical trajectory locating the apogee of the western mining film in the late 1940s, when the genre’s focus on a world traditionally associated with men briefly coincided with more general social and cultural imperatives.

My conclusions are based on a sample of twelve films that were both relevant to the query—some, admittedly, more than others—and available for viewing. This list includes a film from the 1930s, *The Call of the Wild* (1935), and two from the early 1940s, *In Old California* and *The Spoilers* (both 1942). It draws five films from the late 1940s, *Station West*, *Yellow Sky*, and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (all from 1948), and *Silver River* and *Lust for Gold* (1949). The list also contains three films from the 1950s, *Apache Drums* (1950), *Wings of the Hawk* (1953), and *Garden of Evil* (1954); and one from the 1960s, *North to Alaska* (1960).²

Mining, According to Hollywood

Of the films that show us something of the process of mining gold, most represent that process as it was practiced in its early stages. Set in Alaska nine years after the discovery of gold in 1891, *The Spoilers* shows employees of the Midas Mining Company, a small partnership, standing

in a river bed, shoveling gravel into a Y-shaped sluice. The California rush depicted in *In Old California* consists of a brief but vivid and reasonably realistic montage of a variety of techniques, from the very basic to the more sophisticated. In these scenes individual miners work a section of the Sacramento River with pans and picks. Up in Bear Claw Camp and Brandy Gulch, more miners use pans, a rocker, and—in the final scene of the montage—an elaborate sluice system with three wooden channels, each perhaps a hundred feet long, fed gravel by dozens of miners with shovels. *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* contains a basic but vivid shot of panning, and its three prospectors also use a simple, short sluice box, presumably built to wash gravel extracted from an improbable timbered tunnel dug into the side of the mountain.³

By the late 1940s, mining was increasingly represented on film as a business requiring capital, labor, and machinery. The mining operation shown in *Silver River* consists of several large buildings, a railroad spur, and a smelter with a smokestack, all managed by a mining engineer. Irish Gallagher's (Van Heflin) Mexican operation in *Wings of the Hawk* incorporates placer mining on a large scale, with a sluice system hundreds of feet long, but dependent on an elaborate network of tunnels beneath the surface of the hillside. Although none of the films in the sample shows any machinery other than a cradle or sluice box, *Silver River* and *North to Alaska* feature subplots involving the purchase and delivery of machinery, suggesting that mining had moved beyond the stage of exploration and discovery. Still, the actual mining we see in *North to Alaska* is all done with sluice boxes—whether simple or complex—and all, conveniently, within a short wagon ride of Nome. What the Alaska-Yukon films do not show are the labor-intensive and sometimes complex methods used to thaw the ground in order to recover the gold-bearing gravel for sluicing.⁴

The only other issue specific to mining that

receives important coverage in these films is claiming-jumping. Scholarly literature on gold rushes emphasizes how limited this practice was, and how miners in the camps came together to establish *ad hoc* legal systems that effectively discouraged it. Still, claim-jumping is a threat in several films, including *The Call of the Wild*, *North to Alaska*, and *The Spoilers*. Set in Nome and vicinity in 1900, *The Spoilers* opens with these words on the screen: "During the Alaskan gold rush, claim-jumping and mine stealing became an every day occurrence—lawlessness was rampant." A valid statement, perhaps, but only for the early stages of the rush, before the mid-1899 discovery of alluvial gold deposits on the Nome beach.⁵

Sometimes, the problem is a failure to respect the legal rights of those who have filed a claim. Events in *Lust for Gold* validate the anxieties of Jacob Walz, who is reluctant to file a claim to the Lost Dutchman Mine because to do so would make public the mine's location and threaten his newfound wealth. Similarly, Howard advises against filing a claim in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* because that would invite a visit from a representative of a big mining company "with a paper in his hand showing we had no right to be here."

More often, the problem resides with the law itself, or with those charged with its enforcement. In *Wings of the Hawk*, Irish Gallagher's livelihood is threatened by General Ruiz (George Dolenz) and his Mexican federal troops, who operate like the Mafia, demanding half of Gallagher's gold production in return for protection from the Insurrectos. Claim-jumpers abound in *North to Alaska*, but the more serious obstacle to the admirable entrepreneurship of Sam McCord (John Wayne) and George Pratt (Stewart Granger) is a bumbling, insensitive Alaskan territorial government bureaucracy indifferent to truth and justice. In *The Spoilers*, claim-jumping is facilitated by a slick, corrupt U. S. Gold Commissioner (Randolph Scott), who allows the filing of

fraudulent claims based on specious earlier filing dates, and a dishonest circuit court judge who enforces them—what one character labels a “law and order front.”

“Wet” and “Dry” Films

We may profitably classify mining films as “wet” or “dry,” depending on the area in which the action takes place. “Wet” films are those set in regions notable for rain and snow, particularly the Alaska–Yukon region, which is featured in three of the twelve films. “Dry” films are generally set in the arid regions of the American Southwest or northern Mexico. Wet films, which usually open on a street deep in mud in downtown Nome or San Francisco, dominated the 1930s and early 1940s and returned to favor in 1960 with *North to Alaska*, a John Wayne vehicle in which Nome’s residents find themselves ankle-deep in mud despite ubiquitous sunshine.⁶

Except for this urban mud, wet films do not take full advantage of their locale; they do not represent geography as the significant obstacle it often was. Notwithstanding what one scholar has described as the “animal-like malevolence of nature at her most cruel, the diabolical harshness of the Yukon in the grip of winter,” neither the film set in that locale—nor the two set in Alaska, where the weather was not much different—present the local climate as anything more than moderately challenging. Even *The Call of the Wild* is set in 1900, when steamboat and rail transport existed over some of the more difficult portions of the route into the Klondike.⁷

Hollywood may have preferred the Alaskan gold rush of 1898, as portrayed in *The Spoilers* and *North to Alaska*, over the Klondike–Yukon experience as a setting for its films because Alaska’s camps were located closer to town (viz., Nome). Hence verisimilitude did not require featuring the long trek into the camps.⁸ Even so, the geography of *North to Alaska* appears to have been compromised for the sake of simplic-

ity and the picturesque. The film’s theme song by Johnny Horton has its prospectors crossing the Yukon River to their “bonanza gold.” This journey would have put the mine some two hundred miles from Nome and justified Sam McCord’s claim that he managed to get into town only once every six months, but the film actually locates the mine in a non-existent nearby mountain range, within a day’s ride by buckboard. *In Old California* deals with somewhat more accessible mining regions and a milder climate, but it, too, avoids portraying the extraordinary physical effort required of a gold-rush prospector. Most of the film takes place in San Francisco or Sacramento; only a steamboat ride separates the two cities. Wet films transport us to another time and place, but do not present the natural environment as a formidable opponent of human activity and desire.

The films of the late 1940s and 1950s are mostly dry. Except for *Silver River*—apparently set in Silver City, Nevada,⁹ in the vicinity of snow-capped mountains—these postwar efforts offer us forbidding, bone-dry climates or set the action in the drier areas of regions with diverse climates. *Yellow Sky*, filmed in Death Valley National Monument, opens with six men on horseback. The camera presents a variety of geographies and weather conditions in short order, including mountains, thunder and lightning, clear skies, and sunshine. The discovery of a skull pierced by an arrow initiates a discussion that refines and limits the geographical space.

When Stretch (Gregory Peck) asks, “All this country around here like this?”—as if the camera had revealed a sameness—Dude (Richard Widmark) responds with remarks that set the stage for a harrowing desert crossing to come, and for the “dry” setting of the remainder of the film: “Pretty much. Up north there are lots of canyons and draws, if you know which ones are open. Those hills over there back up right into the mountains. Those are salt flats down south. Even a rattlesnake couldn’t get across. . . .”



Yellow Sky (1948), a “dry” western starring Richard Widmark and Gregory Peck (third and fourth from left, respectively), uses its arid setting to frame commentary on economic development and sexuality. (Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.)

Garden of Evil traverses a variety of Mexican topographies before setting the action in a rocky, parched, forbidding Mexico that makes ironic the lush image of the movie’s title. It opens with Fiske (Richard Widmark) contrasting his “dry” location with the “wet” environs of the 1849 California gold rush. “Every mother’s son’s pickin’ up gold by the fistful in California,” he laments, “and I’m marooned in a Mexican village called—what do you call it?” Concerned that summer wild flowers would give his *Yellow Sky* desert the wrong look, director William Wellman had workmen use spray-paint to produce the “dead gray” he wanted.¹⁰

The Social and Economic Landscape

The “wet” and “dry” settings of western mining films reflect very different attitudes toward life’s social and economic possibilities. The wet films all take place during a gold rush, which these films present as a moment of exuberant adventure, economic opportunity, physical struggle and pleasure, violence, noble self-sac-

rifice, community building, and, in the end, a satisfying domesticity. Director William Wellman opens his depression-era film *The Call of the Wild* with a map of the Yukon, followed by the words “Skagway—mushroom metropolis—the first stop on the long trail to the goldfields.” The urban milieu of Skagway tracks the nation’s uneasy fascination with city life, reflected in the gangster pictures of the 1930s, and the film’s commitment to adventure resonates with Americans’ desire for the journey of escape in an era of diminished opportunity.¹¹

Twenty-five years later, in the relatively affluent economic environment of 1960, Nome’s waterfront is similarly depicted in *North To Alaska* as a space of energy—bustling, thriving, building. In these wet films, the saloon is an extension of the dynamic street scape: the densely packed Great Northern of *The Call of the Wild*, with its chorus line and live band, its frenetic pace made ironic by its displaced population—“seems that all the homesick guys in the world come up here;” the nameless saloon in *The Spoilers*, where miners wearing caps confront Gold

Commissioner McNamara and brawl over serious issues of class and elitism; the Palace of *North to Alaska*, where fighting has been divorced from mining history and become just so much comic fun.¹²

The dry films of the postwar decade shun the milieu of the gold rush for less promising moments in less hospitable geographies. *Lust for Gold*—based on the “true” story of the Lost Dutchman Mine—takes place in Arizona’s Superstition Mountains, thirty-six miles east of Phoenix, in the 1840s, 1887 and 1948. *Apache Drums* presents the “waterless mountains of the South West” in 1880. *Wings of the Hawk* is set in the revolutionary Mexico of 1911, and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* in the post-revolutionary Mexico of 1925. Reflecting the concerns of post-World War II America, two films are conveniently set in the post-Civil War era: *Yellow Sky* identifies its setting as 1867; *Silver River* opens with a scene from the battle of Gettysburg that shapes the character of Mike McComb (Errol Flynn) for the remainder of the film.

Except for the community of Silver City in *Silver River*—which has some of the dynamic qualities of the gold rush towns of the wet films—dry mining films are for the most part set in or around under-populated small towns and villages in which there is little or no entrepreneurial life. *Garden of Evil* (1954) has two semi-urban settings: Puerto Miguel, the sleepy coastal village where the film opens; and an interior location, “a boom town once,” but now—except for a church steeple and a mine shaft—covered with volcanic lava. The town of Spanish Boot, the setting for *Apache Drums*, appears to be a harmonious community, but it is also a place of boring and unproductive moralism. The prospectors in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* get their start in Tampico, depicted here as a city of sorts. But there is so little work to be had and so little economic activity going on that Fred C. Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart) is reduced to buying lottery tickets, begging for meal money from fellow

Americans, and lamenting the community’s unwillingness to let a “gringo” set up a shoeshine business and make a few pesos.

The fullest exegesis on the barrenness and decline of economic life takes place in *Yellow Sky* around a ghost town of the same name, where Stretch, Dude, and some other bad boys have gathered to take the gold mined over the years by Mike (Anne Baxter) and her grandfather (James Barton). *Yellow Sky* was once a silver boomtown, Grandpa explains—the “Fastest Growing Town in the Territory” according to its own, now crumbling sign—before the “veins pinched out.” A late arrival, he found gold. Now, according to his granddaughter, he still lives out the dream of growth and prosperity. “It ain’t just the money,” she contends. “Look at him. He’s an old man. All he’s dreamed about is seeing this town come to life again, with people livin’ here and working, and stores open, the stage comin’ through from Alkali, and all because of him and what he’d done.”¹³

Money and Materialism

Curiously, the depression of the 1930s and the prosperity of 1960 seem to have resulted in films in which the protagonists, though willingly involved in the pursuit of gold, are also somewhat disengaged and rather blasé about money. In *The Call of the Wild*, this disengagement is portrayed through the metaphor of gambling; when Jack Thornton (Clark Gable) loses his gold fortune at the gaming tables, he is unfazed, announcing there’s “a lot more where that came from.” He later teams up with Shorty Hoolihan (Jack Oakie) and Shorty’s map because he appreciates Shorty’s attitude: “it’s only a gamble.” *North to Alaska* opens with McCord and Pratt having already struck it rich; they trade their nuggets for cash and buy drinks for the saloon patrons. Although they intend to make more money by mechanizing their operations, Sam and George are more interested in women. George

wants to use his share of the profits to bring his girlfriend north from Seattle for marriage. "You don't know what Jenny means to me," he tells Sam. "All the gold in Alaska—not worth the little finger." Sam, more reluctant to risk the male bond for heterosexual domesticity, concludes the film with a declaration of his love for Michelle (Capucine) with the words, "I got myself a real gold mine."

In contrast, the dry films of the postwar decade, although made in a time of growth and prosperity, are as a group sharply critical of materialism. Indeed, some of them reflect the 1946 wave of labor militance.¹⁴ *Apache Drums* validates the hard work of its Welsh miners and emphasizes the need to contain and redirect the misguided selfishness of gambler Sam Leeds (Stephen McNally) and those like him. *Silver River's* McComb builds an empire—the slogan of his Silver City Bank is "Assets: All the West"—and lives in a mansion filled with European imports. But his economic success and material wealth come at the expense of his friendships, his humanity, and the men who work in his mines. Several films, including *Garden of Evil* and *Station West*, suggest that people can literally be bought—that is, made to do things they would not otherwise do—and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* uses a marketplace model to explain and predict human behavior, viz.: to point out humanity's vulnerability to material desires.

Like *Silver River*, *Yellow Sky* applauds growth and commercial development while remaining critical of grasping materialism. Its most conflicted villain, Dude, is never able to transcend the memory of having lost his wealth. "I used to have a big Pharaoh layout [house] in San Juan," he reveals. "Best looking woman in camp waiting on me hand and foot. Then bang! Along comes this tinhorn, puts a bullet in me." Dude has vowed to return with a stake, and he cannot resist the gold that will provide it. In Dude and other *Yellow Sky* characters, materialism and sexuality are conflated. At one end of the scale, those

who care little about money are able to sublimate their sexual desire; at the other end, those who lust for gold are also potential rapists.

The Heroic

In wet films, the heroes are seldom conflicted, and more grasping attitudes toward wealth are reserved for the evil "other." These characters include Ernie Kovacs's cheat and con man Frankie Canon in *North to Alaska*. In *Old California's* wealthy Britt Dawson (Albert Dekker), plans to trade typhoid fever medicine for gold in the mining camps and with his dying words, inappropriately offers Lacey Miller (Binnie Barnes) "the house with the gold door-knobs, if you want 'em." Claim jumpers and corrupt judges and regulatory authorities frustrate the legitimate goals of decent, ordinary citizens in *The Spoilers*. In *The Call of the Wild* the genuinely heartless and sometimes effete villains' lust for gold and lack of concern for human life bring about their violent deaths—drowned by the weight of sacks of gold.

To be sure, Gable's Thornton is tempted to mix his philosophy of the "game" and the "gamble" with some version of might-makes-right. When Shorty wonders how gold and the things it will buy will change their lives, Claire Blake (Loretta Young) responds that it won't be "nearly as much fun." Thornton tries to set her straight. "You're wrong, Claire," he says as the three sit around the campfire. "Wishing never got anybody any place. It's owning something that counts. Taking it, when you can't get it any other way. That's all right, too. The law up here—the law of the Klondike—if there's something you need, grab it, take it away from the other guy—it's a good law—it works." Yet Claire—whose verbal response is not intelligible—disagrees, and in the film's last scenes, Thornton shrugs off his own "need" for Claire, allowing her to leave with her husband in an act that puts his own life at risk.

Saloons

The saloons of the “dry” towns tell a similar story. As opposed to the large, thriving center of social activity in the wet mining films, the saloon of the dry film is usually a small, dark, confining, and hostile space—a space with some of the unsettling qualities of the *film noir* style. *Yellow Sky* offers two worthy examples. Its first saloon, appearing only minutes into the film, is a nearly empty space, defined by a folk painting hanging above the bar which features a woman astride a wild, rearing horse, against a desolate background of a leafless tree. The second saloon, in the ghost town of Yellow Sky, is the long-abandoned El Dorado Bar. Marked by a fallen sign, it functions in the film as a space of reduced consciousness—of sleep and death. It

is where the men sleep, and where Dude dies, gold dust—his blood—pouring from a bag near his body.

The festive connotation of the word “saloon” hardly describes the subdued, languid atmosphere of the bar in *Garden of Evil*, which Leah Fuller (Susan Hayward) enters, gun on hip, to offer a thousand dollars to any man willing to ride into the hills to rescue her husband, trapped in a mine cave-in. The modest Tampico bar in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is the setting for only one event: a bloody, brutal, and realistic beating administered to another character by Dobbs and Curtin (Tim Holt), very different from the formulaic, boys-will-be-boys skirmishes featured in most wet films. The saloon in *Station West* is large and rather elegant, but it is memorable as the scene of an early, tense, hostile con-



Lust for Gold (1949) features Glenn Ford (foreground) as Jacob Walz, claimant to what became known as the Lost Dutchman gold mine in Arizona's Superstition Mountains, and Ida Lupino as the femme fatale. This scene reveals the film's interest in the crowd.

(Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.)

versation. Shaped by camera work that turns the large room claustrophobic, the scene features the stranger Haven (Dick Powell) and saloon owner Charlie (Jane Greer), who is behind a series of gold shipment stage robberies that Haven, of the Military Intelligence Department, seeks to solve. Charlie will be shot and killed in her office above the saloon.

Perhaps the strangest saloon scene of all takes place in *Lust for Gold*. Walz, a German immigrant, has found gold in the hills near Phoenix, and the town's citizens, eager to have him reveal the site of the find, push him into the saloon and gather around the piano for a few choruses of "Du Du, Liegst Mir Im Herzen," guaranteed to please the wealthy stranger. When he sensibly refuses to divulge the location of the mine, the saloon mob labels him a "foreigner." Thrown out, Walz vows that if they won't let him stay in, "I won't let you come out," and for a time enforces his edict by shooting from the street at the saloon doors.

The People, the Mob

Walz's experience in that Phoenix saloon is one of several that mark "the people" as untrustworthy—as a crowd, a mob in the making, an irrational congregation requiring control—the standard approach of those dry films that have an interest in the subject, and reflective of middle-class anxieties through much of the twentieth century. A mindless bunch with that most elemental of motivations—the lust for gold—the Phoenix populace follows Walz wherever he goes, hoping he will lead them to the source of his new wealth. "Every time you leave Phoenix," complains the saloon keeper to Walz, "you take half the town with you."¹⁵ Another scene suggests that strong and thoughtless women, abetted by weak men, may be at the core of the mob's irrationality. In *Lust for Gold* it takes place with Walz in the assay office, converting gold nuggets into dollars. He is asked to

sign a paper—"It's the law," says the clerk—and he does so. A huge crowd has gathered behind him to monitor the transaction. A group in the crowd has this exchange, with the conversation moving backward through the line:

Man: Is he signing his name?

Woman #1: Is he signing his name?

Man: I don't know.

Woman #1: He isn't even signing his name.

Woman #2: He can't even write his own name.

Woman #3: He can't read nor write.

Woman #4: How do you like that, Julia?

A stupid foreigner that can't even read or write finds a million dollar gold mine And you [she glances disparagingly at her short, obviously henpecked husband] get \$11 a week clerkin' in a hardware store. You and your high school diploma—huh!

The wet mining films of World War II vintage are especially steeped in concerns about crowds, the people, workers, and community responsiveness. Set during the Alaskan gold rush, *The Spoilers* pits the "law"—meaning the government and the courts—against entrepreneurial capitalism and its militant, working-class miners. In an effort to elicit the viewer's sympathies for Glennister (John Wayne), owner of the Midas Mining Company, the film offers some of cinema's most idyllic mining scenes, a machine-in-the-garden perspective that combines a charming river valley with a train, a dam, placer equipment, and hard-working, presumably well-paid miners housed in tents. When corrupt public officials shut down the mine and threaten to remove it from Glennister's control, angry miners revolt. Led by their boss, they use a locomotive to break into the gated, heavily-guarded property, precipitating a lengthy nighttime gun battle in which many miners and deputies are

killed. Although the script appears to tolerate and even encourage working-class militance, it also shifts the object of that militance from business to government.

In *In Old California*, another wartime film, Sacramento pharmacist Tom Craig (John Wayne) is about to be lynched by citizens who believe he is responsible for the death of a local man, when the discovery of gold distracts the crazed mob and shifts the scene to Shinbone Creek, Brandy Gulch, and other mining camps up river. An epidemic of typhoid fever in the camps creates panic in Sacramento, where fearful residents prepare to flee the town and abandon the fever victims in the camps above.¹⁶ Stepping into a leadership role, Craig convinces the people to stay and fight the epidemic. In a later scene, he even manages to secure the cooperation of a group of “bad guys” by making them understand their own vulnerability to the fever. Hence the film employs disease—a rather extreme device, it would seem—to promote the intense, shared, cross-class, cross-cultural community required to fight the real war against the Axis. And *In Old California* suggests how difficult it is to get people to do the right thing. Only a Wayne-style charismatic leader, and a dose of self-interest, can persuade the masses—emotional, fickle, often irresponsible, and inherently selfish—to act ethically, altruistically, and cooperatively.

The Psychotherapeutic

Except for *Lust for Gold*, most of the dry films in the sample do not conceptualize “the people” as an entity. Rather than crowds, mobs, or other large aggregations, they feature individuals in conflict with the self, or small groups characterized by disparate perspectives and conflicts—in short, a potentially therapeutic universe. These new concerns reflect a declining interest in the sociological origins of Nazism, fascism, militant labor unions, and other socially threatening mass movements of the 1930s and early 1940s. They

manifest a growing postwar interest in analyzing and treating anti-social behavior through psychology, psychotherapy, and small-group dynamics and therapeutics, with returning veterans and aggressive women as patients. Even *Lust for Gold*, for all its fascination with an irresponsible populace, suggests that Walz—depicted in several scenes as a vicious, hardened killer—has been the victim of personal tragedy and might be reachable through a sort of informal psychotherapy orchestrated by a nurturing and loving woman.

Consistent with this modern, individualized perspective, the four men gathered by Leah Fuller to save her husband in *Garden of Evil* reflect different types and values: Daily (Cameron Mitchell) is the unredeemable, oversexed, gold-crazed ex-bounty hunter, lacking entirely in moral character. He is accompanied by his partner in the quest for gold, the Mexican (Victor Mendoza). “They don’t know anything,” says Hooker (Gary Cooper) of the pair. “They’re just trying to get rich before they die.” Hooker, an ex-sheriff, is observant, thoughtful, judicious, courageous, and a leader, while Fiske (Richard Widmark), is a complex man whose actions are not entirely predictable.

A hardened, professional gambler whose fondness for the material is apparent in the gold chain and medallion hanging from his vest, Fiske is also a self-proclaimed poet of “people,” who avers: “I like to see what I can get outta them—either their money or their characters or both.” Yet stranded on the Mexican coast, his complaint that “every mother’s son” was at that very moment getting rich in California at least evokes his mother’s essence, and in the end, with the Apaches in hot pursuit, it is Fiske who chooses to stay behind and face certain death to allow Leah and Hooker to escape—and make the couple. Looking back and reflecting on Fiske’s sacrifice, Hooker says: “Somebody always stays. All over the world, somebody gets it done.”

Yellow Sky offers much the same gang of mis-

creants and the same set of obsessions—gold (again, somebody else's), and sex, though with a different emphasis. Having gaped at the woman in the painting above the bar, robbed a bank, escaped from the cavalry, and crossed the arid salt flats, the six bad boys come upon Mike and her grandfather, living in a cabin near Yellow Sky and—as the newcomers will soon discover—sitting on fifty thousand dollars worth of gold dust that they have cradled and sluiced over the years. Raised by Apaches and adept with a pistol and a rifle, Mike is a strong, assertive young woman. Aware that most if not all of the men find her attractive, Stretch, the group's leader, orders them to stay away from the house.

Although each of the men has a different relationship to the twin temptations of gold and sex, two of these relationships are noteworthy. Several of the men display a degree of sexual desire for Mike that borders on a rape fantasy. This desire persists even after Grandpa has agreed to split the gold with the intruders, subject to their digging it up from a cache at the mouth of the old silver mine. As several men go about that task, Mike is accosted by Lengthy (John Russell) and Walrus (Charles Kemper) while carrying the proverbial pail down to the stream. Lengthy grabs her and wrestles with her, while Walrus, in a line that references and recasts the painting over the bar in the earlier scene, yells: "Ride her cowboy, ride her, but watch yourself!" When Stretch arrives to intervene, the men assert that "she was just askin' for trouble," and Stretch, ostensibly troubled by Mike's impact on his companions, tells her to "stop swingin' your hips all over the place."

In the meantime, we have been monitoring Stretch's desires, which are more for Mike's body than her gold. Ignoring his own advice, Stretch has gone up to the house, rolled on the ground with Mike and kissed her, only to have been rejected. "You smell bad," Mike says, implying that Stretch's affections might be welcomed if only he were to make use of that agent of civili-

zation, the bar of soap. As the days go by, Stretch cleans up for Mike (he shaves), and listens thoughtfully as Grandpa and Mike narrate and interpret the old man's story of hard work in mining the gold, and his quest for security (the right reason to acquire gold) and social progress (through the revitalization of Yellow Sky). This story serves as a way station for Stretch's sublimation of his sexual desire, a sublimation that lies at the heart of *Yellow Sky*. The night after the struggle between Mike and the men down at the spring, Stretch has a second sexual encounter with Mike, this one brought on and fueled as much by Mike's passion as his own. Yet this erotic moment goes no further than a deep kiss. Just as Mike, as a woman, must learn to give expression to appropriate sexual feelings—to grow up, to cease being a child, to drop the tom-boy routine for full womanhood, Stretch, as a man—and, one might add, as a veteran—must learn to temper his lust, to repress some of his sexual energy.¹⁷

Indeed, the next scene reveals how thoroughly Stretch has learned that lesson. From the exterior location of their kiss, Mike and Stretch move inside, into the space of domesticity. There, James "Stretch" Dawson—the revealing of full names in this scene marks the maturity of the characters—tells Mike and Grandpa his own story. He comes from "good people," parents who were farmers, from "sound stock." Although the family's involvement in the Kansas border wars has bent the youth toward guns, and the Civil War, as Grandpa put it, "set [the young men] off on the wrong foot," his mother's deep religiosity and his own habit of reading the Bible, developed in childhood, have provided a proper moral grounding. These details confirm that Stretch possesses the moral values and character necessary to sublimate his sexual desire and become a productive citizen. The parallel story—Mike's emergence as a sexual being—is, of course, not narrated. But Stretch is well aware that his story mandates hers, that

the reward for male repression is female sexual availability. When he leaves he suggests this bargain, asking Mike, "haven't you got any better name than Mike?" She replies, "Constance Mae."¹⁸

Concepts of Leadership

After 1945, mining films, wet and dry, appear to lose interest in *In Old California's* project, the forging of a national community committed to a single goal, and, more particularly, in the concept of leadership used to forge it. *Yellow Sky's* Stretch talks the leadership talk in his effort to control the unattractive characters he has mistakenly chosen for companions. When an anxious Grandpa asks: "What'll they do next?" Stretch responds didactically: "It's hard to say with me not there to tell 'em." But Gregory Peck is no John Wayne, and his intentions, as we have seen, have more to do with women than with the leading of men.

Something similar seems to occur in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. That film offers only Howard (Walter Huston) as a leader, and his non-directive, chatty, informational style seems to be no match for Dobbs's obsessions, his paranoia, or the strength of his on-screen persona. To the extent that Howard is expected to keep Dobbs in line, he fails. In the end his leadership role is limited to that of a medicine man in an Indian village, where, as he explains, "I'll be worshipped and fed and treated like a high priest for telling people things they want to hear. Good medicine men are born, not made."

But to emphasize Howard's weakness as a leader is to misunderstand his role. Howard is a very powerful leader—indeed, a controlling force—but his leadership is of a new and different kind. Howard's leadership is the leadership of the expert, much revered in wartime and post-war America, a leadership grounded in experience and knowledge rather than the force of personality, though he has some of that, too. In

the 1940s, experts in fields such as child-rearing, public works, psychiatry, and the military were valued according to their ability to order things, to reduce the role of the contingent, to generate a science that would make the behavior of human beings understandable and predictable. Howard's role in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* was to move that agenda forward, and he did.¹⁹

The case for charismatic leadership is taken up in *Silver River*, a film whose confused ideas about leadership suggest that it may have been conceived during the war as a wet mining film and completed in the postwar era as a dry one. Thrown out of the Union Army for (unavoidably) disobeying orders, the arrogant Mike McComb (Flynn) goes out West and builds an empire in silver mines, banks, and gambling houses, while abandoning friends, alienating the miners, and angering the community. Coveting Georgia Moore (Ann Sheridan), the wife of mine owner and mining engineer Stanley Moore (Bruce Bennett), McComb intentionally fails to warn Stanley of Indian trouble in the Black Rock Range where Stanley is headed, and Stanley is killed. This is an ethical failure of the first magnitude, one to which McComb never confesses and for which he is never properly contrite.

Remarkably, the film employs the ideology of leadership, outdated by 1948, to redeem this nasty, selfish, thoroughly immoral man. In the midst of an enormous campaign rally attended by hundreds of unemployed miners, McComb's lifelong friend, John Plato Beck (Thomas Mitchell), a populist-style candidate for the U.S. Senate, is murdered while giving a speech. Over Beck's dead body, Georgia, now McComb's wife, encourages him to take up the burden of leadership.

I'll tell you what he [Plato] told me. In every age, every country, a few leaders are born. Not many. Just enough to keep things going. You were that kind

of man, Mike. He'd always hoped you'd find out. But you've built an empire, just for yourself. Then you destroyed it. Plato was trying to pick up the pieces, put them together again. There's no one left to do that now, but you.

Inspired by Georgia's remarks, McComb reprises his Civil War leadership role, leading an enormous cavalcade of miners into Silver City, where, in the film's final scenes, they take up arms against concentrated wealth and privilege.

Women of the Mining West

The model of wet and dry films also has considerable relevance to the ways in which women are presented. Despite Wayne's presence as a possible romantic interest in *In Old California*, women aren't much more than an afterthought in that film. *The Spoilers*, also made in 1942, has women of moderate strength: Cherry Malotte (Marlene Dietrich), who runs a saloon and deals cards, and Helen Chester (Margaret Lindsay), who recognizes and resists the corruption of her uncle, a judge. But again, neither character drives the plot. Determined Claire Blake is a strong presence in *The Call of the Wild*, but her central functions in the film are rather traditional ones: to monitor Thornton's male ethics while remaining loyal to her husband. In the wet film revival *North To Alaska*, where the mining camp—with its suburban-like “honeymoon” cabin—is a site for the almost desperate mating rituals associated with the height of the baby boom, women have been reduced to romantic objects.

The women featured in dry films are tougher, more masculine, have more economic power, and are more dangerous to men. They sometimes wear pants, have names like Charlie and Mike, and carry six-guns on their hips. In some of the films, including *Station West*, *Silver River*, *Garden of Evil*, and *Yellow Sky*, they own or share ownership of a gold or silver mine—a step up from

the saloon. The men in these films are both attracted to and repulsed by the strength of these women. Like Stretch in *Yellow Sky*, *Station West*'s Haven insists on knowing Charlie's “real” name, Charlene, only to confirm its superiority—“I like that better.” While negotiating with mine-owner Georgia Moore for the use of some wagons in *Silver River*, McComb can't help but notice her wardrobe. “Pretty smart in those pants,” he says. Her reply: “I'd look pretty silly without ‘em.” Leah Fuller's cold demeanor and single-minded determination to save her husband in *Garden of Evil* are for Fiske less admirable qualities than signs of something lacking. “She's like something hammered outta silver,” he comments. Heflin's Irish Gallagher has a similar reaction to Raquel (Julia Adams), the swarthy revolutionary in *Wings of the Hawk*. “You look like a female,” he tells her, “but that's about all.”²⁰

In *Yellow Sky*, Hollywood's effort to subdue the over-aggressive woman resulted in harsh treatment for leading lady Anne Baxter. “I'm insisting on the boys getting really rough with her,” said director Wellman, “because you can't pretend in these matters and get by. But I don't want her to suffer anything worse than maybe some bruises.” Baxter found it all quite curious. Referring to one scene in which the script called for co-star Peck to “[make] a flying tackle” and “[throw] her violently to the ground” before kissing her, she said, “If my husband [John Hodiak] had tried that technique on me when we were going together—well, I'd still be single.”²¹

Many of these films implicate women in the weaknesses and failures of men. Mike's swinging hips drive men to attempted rape; Georgia Moore's swaggering self-confidence tempts McComb to commit murder by default; Leah Fuller's money, determination, and allure compel three men to join her on a deadly journey. Even *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, an essentially woman-less film, suggests that Dobbs's destructive paranoia has something to do with

sexual maladjustment. When Howard asks Curtin and Dobbs what they intend to do with their share of the profits, Curtin mentions peach farming, but Dobbs focuses on the physical pleasures, including a Turkish bath and, awkwardly, women.

Two films—*Station West* and *Lust for Gold*—go further, marking their women protagonists as criminals or as evil people capable of heinous acts. Like almost everyone in the hostile town of *Station West*, Charlie is hardened, callous, and cynical; she believes that “every man has his price,” and that “every woman knows it.” When Haven arrives in town to investigate a series of gold robberies that have already killed at least two soldiers, he discovers that Charlie is behind the scheme. Despite their deep attraction to each other, Charlie’s activities confound their love and end in her death. As Haven mounts his horse and rides out of town, the soundtrack carries the final stanza of the film’s theme song, with its suggestion that Charlie is a product of the town, and that the town is a product of its geography:

It’s heartless and cold
In the dust of the prairie
And a man can’t grow old
Where there’s women and gold.

Mining Noir

As a genre, the western is ill-suited to the style known as *film noir*, which characterized more than 150 films made between 1942 and 1958, and whose peak in the late 1940s coincided with that of the dry western. While most *noir* offerings were notable for their urban locations, shadowy interiors, and nighttime sequences, the *mis en scene* of the standard western was characterized by open, even panoramic exteriors shot in daylight. These characteristics were, if anything, accentuated in the mining film, which often featured a journey to or from min-

ing country or to the mine proper, and often a mountainous location. Nonetheless, several “dry” mining films have one or more *film noir* qualities. *Station West* is the best example. While its song elicits concern for men, Charlie is the film’s tragic, flawed figure—not unlike Joan Crawford’s Mildred in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) or other *noir* female protagonists who find romance and a fondness for money incompatible. Its town of Rock Pass is very much a *noir* space: dark, insular, claustrophobic, and mean. Using words that evoke the *noir* idea, a reviewer for *New Yorker* magazine noted William Wellman’s curious treatment of space in *Yellow Sky*: “With all the outdoors in front of him . . . Wellman has managed to make the whole thing seem rather confined.”²²

Lust for Gold uses the *noir* flashback and explores the subjective narrative associated with documentary *noir*; a theme developed below.²³ In Julia Thomas (Ida Lupino), it features the only truly evil woman in western mining film—a match for *Double Indemnity*’s Phyllis Dedrickson (Barbara Stanwyck) or any of the other really nasty *film noir* ladies who kill or try to kill their husbands or lovers. In *Lust for Gold*, Julia is married and owns a bakery in what she describes as a “filthy” western town, 1887 vintage. She has a genial, public face for customers, but privately hates her work and treats her meek husband Pete (Gig Young) with disdain, denying him affection and sex, and at one point threatening to reveal a murder he committed in Milwaukee—that *noir* sense that everyone has a dark past—should he not go along with her scheme. When Jacob Walz ends up drugged on her doorstep, she takes him in, feigning ignorance of his discovery of gold and lying about her marriage, while playing on Walz’s German heritage and pretending to be a nurturing, bread-baking nice girl.

Although just as capable of nastiness as Julia, Jacob falls in love. He cleans himself up—endemic to the mining film—and commits himself to Julia, demonstrating his commitment by giving her a map to his mine. Although somewhat

attracted to Walz and even a bit tempted by real romance, Julia is incapable of sharing his feelings. Driven by the lust for gold, she stabs her husband in the back in a last-ditch but hopeless attempt to convince Jacob of her fondness for him. A Columbia Pictures publicity poster for the film, depicting this sorting-out that takes place at the mine, reveals an earnest Julia on her knees, pleading with an unyielding Walz—a pose that suggests that one purpose of *Lust for Gold*, and of similar films, was to show a strong woman reduced to abject helplessness.²⁴

Geography and Civilization

Only in the dry films, and only in two of them, do we encounter a geography that is more than a setting for events, a geography with impact. One of them is *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a dry film of considerable geographical complexity and depth, the script for which was adapted by John Huston from a 1935 B. Traven novel with Marxist overtones.²⁵ Filmed for the most part on location in Mexico, the action opens in steamy Tampico, on Mexico's eastern shore. Here the three central characters come together in a prospecting venture: Howard (Walter Huston), the experienced old-timer; Curtin (Tim Holt), the earnest, agreeable tenderfoot; and Fred C. Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart), neurotic and needy, his prosaic name a sign of his status as everyman.

The story briefly traverses the lush valleys of the Sierra Madre Oriental, where machetes are required in the dense, jungle-like underbrush; moves on to the dusty upper reaches of the Oriental range, where gold is abundant and water scarce, and where the film's most important events either take place or are initiated; and concludes to the west in a mythic Durango, where drought and wind-blown dust seem to be a way of life.²⁶ Despite this movement through space, with its scenic potential, the film's refusal to offer the viewer that scenery, and its frequent use

of the close-up, yields what film scholar James Naremore has described as "an oddly claustrophobic effect."²⁷

The story of Dobbs's migration to greed and paranoia is justifiably famous, but what is perhaps less understood is the role that geography plays in that transformation. Dobbs is uncomfortable in every part of the Mexican climate; he is always hot, dirty, and sweaty. He longs to be clean. In Tampico, with a few panhandled pesos, his first stop is the barbershop, for a shave and a haircut. Up on the mountain, he imagines returning to a Turkish bath. He becomes enraged when Curtin uses the word "hog" to describe his inclination to accumulate more gold than he needs, claiming that Curtin had implied that he was not "civilized." Although the valley-jungle portion of the journey is brief, it nearly defeats Dobbs, who expresses his desire to "go back to civilization."²⁸

Later, when the group ascends the mountains and the jungle and its creatures have presumably been left far behind, references to jungle animals, including lions, tigers, and even a leopard skin with which Curtin covers his burro, dot the screenplay—although the only animal the group physically encounters is a foot-long Gila monster.²⁹ For all the men, but especially for Dobbs, the jungle and its inhabitants signify the great anxiety of the postwar world: of humanity's animal-ness, of its primordial origins, and of its partial, incomplete, and problematic transformation into a "civilized," domesticated state.³⁰ After Dobbs, at his most paranoid, shoots Curtin and leaves his body behind a tree, his morning anxiety begins when he hears a growl. "What's getting into me," he asks himself. "A tiger." Returning in panic to the where he has left the body and finding it gone, he imagines what has transpired. "I got it," he says. "The tiger. Yeah, yeah, that's it, the tiger. Must have dragged him off to his lair, that's what." In a sense, he was right; the tiger is Dobbs.

Dobbs has another, very different, problem



This publicity photo for 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre' (1948) resonates with the psychological conflicts for which the film is well known. The three prospectors could share their food, but dividing their gold proved more difficult. The film stars Tim Holt, Humphrey Bogart, and director John Huston's father, Walter Huston. (Courtesy of the UCLA Theater Arts Library.)

with the natural environment: he does not understand it. That, at least, appears to be message of the following exchange, which takes place when our trio of prospectors decides to break camp:

Howard: Take another week to break down the mine, put the mountain back in shape.

Dobbs: Do what to the mountain?

Howard: Make her appear like she was before we came.

Dobbs: I don't get it.

Howard: We wounded this mountain. It's our duty to close her wounds. The least we can do to show our gratitude for all the wealth she's given us. . . .

Curtin: You talk about that mountain like it was a real woman.

Dobbs: Been a lot better to me than any woman I ever knew. Keep your shirt on, old timer; sure, I'll help you.

Howard's view of the mountain is mystical, and it is one for which we have not been prepared. To this point in the film, Howard's voice has been that of reason, pragmatism, math, science, and the marketplace, a voice devoid of the qualities that one might today label New Age feminist spirituality—or perhaps as superstition, incipient environmentalism, or just an odd sort of chivalry.³¹ But while Dobbs is willing to help, his perspective differs markedly from Howard's, and even from Curtin's, who appears to entertain the mountain-as-woman idea. In contrast, Dobbs pitches in not because he believes the mountain is a damaged woman whose wounds he is obliged to treat and heal, but because he is sure that the mountain is not a woman and could

not, having been so generous, be one.

Put another way, Howard and Curtin can understand how the act of mining could be conceptualized as an act of exploitation because they have some sense of themselves as flawed men who might be tempted to exploit women—that is, because they are civilized. Conversely, Dobbs has no sense of mining as exploitation because he has no sense of himself as a man who exploits women—that is, because he is too much an animal. Although fretful about animalness in some intuitive or unconscious way, Dobbs has not yet come to terms with it consciously.

The standard argument for Dobbs's paranoia is that he has succumbed to the lust for gold, that proverbial temptation. A somewhat more sophisticated version of that argument, and one made in the film's trailer, is that the three prospectors manage to overcome the "forces of nature, only to find their greatest enemy is: human nature." Howard, the film's voice of authority, confirms that perspective at several points, warning the boys in an El Oso Negro dormitory, for example, that "when the piles of gold begin to grow, that's when the trouble starts." Later, on the mountain, when Dobbs first expresses interest in dividing the gold dust, Howard says, "I know what kind of ideas even supposedly decent people get when gold's at stake." The letter from Helen, found among Cody's possessions after his death, with its comment that "we've already found life's real treasures," also implies that the search for gold is somehow inappropriate.³²

Yet the film offers another explanation for Dobbs's behavior that has more to do with geography—specifically, with the curious wilderness in which these men find themselves. On the train early in the journey, Howard points to his map and announces they are headed for a place so remote that the terrain is undefined, "that shows the makers of the map themselves don't know for sure." At every turn, Dobbs's

mental problems are identified with that wilderness environment. After one especially difficult night, when his paranoia is only beginning to emerge, Dobbs's neurotic morning mumbling takes place against a mountain backdrop. When Dobbs and Curtin come into conflict on the trail down, with Dobbs coming apart at the seams, he meets Curtin's ethical objections to stealing Howard's goods by suggesting that Curtin's "Sunday school talk" sounds "foolish out here in the wilderness." That evening, Dobbs's rapid descent into madness is framed by a surreal, almost haunted setting of barren trees.

The next day, after Curtin has barely survived Dobbs's attack and Curtin and Howard have a moment to consider what has happened, Howard's explanation is the confluence of money and Mexico's remote back country. "He's not a real killer as killers go," Howard says. "I think he's as honest as the next feller, or almost. The big mistake was leaving you two fellas out there in the depths of the wilderness with more than a hundred thousand between you." Significantly, in the film's final scene, when Howard rehearses the possible explanations for the tragedy that has befallen them, the trilogy he offers—"the lord, or fate, or nature"—includes neither "human nature" nor greed. And Howard's claim that "the gold has gone back to where we found it"—although obviously not true in the literal sense—reinforces the importance of nature in Howard's summation of what has occurred.

Howard's Experiment

Even so, there is something unsatisfying about the view that Dobbs's paranoia is the product of the natural environment; the nature depicted here is not all that rugged or frightening or mysterious. The term "wilderness," which dots the screenplay and suggests remoteness, is closer to the film's truth. But something is missing. What is it about the wilderness, about the remote, that would have fascinated director John

Huston in 1948? The answer lies in Howard, who orchestrates and supervises the expedition. No ordinary old timer or sourdough, Walter Huston's Howard has some of the qualities of an academic, of a social scientist whose specialty is economics and society.³³ When we first meet him at El Oso Negro, he is presenting a version of the ideas of nineteenth-century British economist David Ricardo, holding forth on theories of the labor value of gold, which he cleverly and adroitly models mathematically for his eager class of wide-eyed pupils, including Dobbs. A scholar of human nature with world-wide experience on the subject, he calmly explains how gold affects human beings and predicts future events up on the mountain with calm precision.³⁴

Yet despite his knowledge, Howard cannot resist mounting the expedition, an enterprise that could be understood as a study or experiment on the effects of economic stimuli on human beings in an environment of isolation—i.e., the wilderness—an experiment, it should be said, whose outcome Howard already knows. Of course, Howard cannot avoid being part of the experiment; after all, he is one of the prospectors. Hence his role is a complex one. One part of his “narrative” reflects his role as prospector. Implied rather than presented, this narrative is the story of men working together in a spirit of cooperation and tolerance, finding and sharing gold, and eventually going on to achieve a state of domestic bliss. The other part of his narrative—more forcefully articulated and even predicted, and reflecting Howard's status as a social scientist—has the group coming apart because of conflicts over gold.

To manage these disparate narratives and conduct his experiment, Howard puts himself at some remove from the emerging conflicts. When Dobbs first raises the issue of dividing the gold dust, Howard tellingly rejects the obvious leadership role—he refuses, in effect, to remind Dobbs that he had predicted Dobbs's desire, and to persuade him to rethink it. Instead

Howard moves the experiment along by acceding to Dobbs's request. Nor does Howard use the revelation of the Gila monster under the rock that covers Dobbs's goods to convince Dobbs that his anxieties are delusional. Indeed, Howard's position as investigator obviates a therapeutic, interventionist perspective, no matter how appropriate it seems to the viewer. He stubbornly refuses to identify Dobbs as an especially neurotic man who needs help sorting things out.

Instead, Howard prefers to see Dobbs as “not a real killer as killers go,” and “as honest as the next feller, or almost,” thus preserving Dobbs's status as an ordinary, even normal man, and as an appropriate subject for the experimental demonstration to which Howard is committed. Howard's rational, removed, non-therapeutic perspective resembles that of biologist Alfred C. Kinsey, whose *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*—the first of two volumes of what became known as the Kinsey Report—appeared in the same year as John Huston's film.³⁵

When Cody arrives in camp, he for a time takes over this academic role, perhaps to keep Howard's character from becoming irritatingly rational or perhaps to suggest the limits of the rational mind. Cody combines science and logic. On the one hand, he claims to have the ability to locate gold by examining geological formations; on the other hand, he purports to know something about how human beings will resolve ethical dilemmas. Supremely confident in his own reason, Cody outlines for the prospectors the three possible ways in which they could deal with him. One would result is his being expelled from the group, the second in his becoming a partner, the third in his death. At each step he imagines how the option would play itself out and explains why it would or would not be the most advantageous course for the prospectors to take.

This social-scientific perspective on *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* helps clarify one other-

wise odd scene, early in the film. It takes place in Tampico and features director Huston in a cameo role as a well-to-do American, dressed in a white suit and white hat, who has twice been hit up for money by the pan-handling Dobbs. On the occasion of a third request, an exasperated Huston—another advocate of nineteenth-century market economics—calls attention to the situation and offers Dobbs a peso in return for his promise not to ask him again. Then, as if Dobbs were an object in an experiment, perhaps a welfare recipient whose behavior he seeks to modify, Huston puts a second peso in his hand. “Just to make sure you don’t forget your promise,” he adds, “here’s another peso . . . but from now on, you have to make your way through life without my assistance.”³⁶

Huston’s demand for self-sufficiency raises the issue of Dobbs’s dependence on Howard, which is apparent throughout most of the film. How, indeed, does Dobbs respond to Howard’s experiment, and to his own status as experimental subject? He rebels. This rebellion takes the form of paranoia, a state of “madness” characterized by “systematized delusions and the projection of personal conflicts, that are ascribed to the supposed hostility of others.” This dictionary definition applies to Dobbs, but only if Howard can be trusted—only, that is, if he is not experimenting with Dobbs’s life or otherwise seeking to exercise control over him. Film scholar Dana Polan offers us another way to understand paranoia, one perhaps more applicable to the situation that Dobbs faces. Polan describes paranoia as a response to power, and especially to “the power of a narrative system.” “Paranoia,” he argues, “will here first be the fear of narrative, and the particular social representations it works to uphold, against all that threatens the unity of its logical framework.”³⁷

Using Polan’s concept of paranoia, it is possible to appreciate Dobbs as a figure of resistance, struggling for personal freedom, working to position himself outside of Howard’s dual

narrative and experimental consciousness. But how might Dobbs do this? In what might rebellion consist? By being cooperative, Dobbs could challenge Howard’s predictive abilities, his authority as a social scientist, and his economic model of human behavior. But to do so would consign him to a group life and a domestic future that he finds unappealing. By being uncooperative, he writes himself into Howard’s experiment as the predictable paranoid. More sophisticated responses to Howard’s narrative power—some sort of unpredictable randomness, perhaps—are beyond him. Like the classic *film noir* victim, Dobbs has no way out.

Made a year later, *Lust for Gold* (1949) is also about epistemology, and it also explores that subject through a story about mountains. But unlike *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the mountainous setting of *Lust for Gold* is deeply, rather than superficially, anthropomorphic. “You’re looking at Superstition Mountain,” announces the opening voice-over, “a barbaric pile of rock. . . . Eight hundred square miles of sudden and violent death. . . . She looks easy, from the outside. Inside, it’s like Satan’s private art gallery; sculptured pagan granites, unmellowed by time, hidden and terrifying canyons and gorges.” “You see,” concludes the initial voice-over, “this is the true story of Superstition Mountain, the biography of a death trap.”

Posed against this mythic and intimidating geographic mass we have Barry Storm (William Prince), the latest in a parade of men who have sought to penetrate Superstition and find its buried treasure, and the grandson of Jacob “Dutch” Walz, the German immigrant who in the 1880s rediscovered what became known as the “Lost Dutchman” mine. Storm has the enthusiasm and methodology of a cub reporter or graduate student. In his 1948 search for the mine, he examines the files of the local newspaper, visits the coroner’s office, listens as the local sheriff recounts an Apache legend and shows him arcane markings on a rock, and does some oral history

among the community's oldest citizens at the Pioneer Rest Home. The film itself participates in and appears to validate this process of inquiry, and to assume that it leads to some sort of truth. Following the title and credits, we are shown a piece of paper, signed by the governor of Arizona. It reads: "The picture which you are about to see represents, to the best of our knowledge, the true facts concerning this unusual situation, as substantiated by historical records and legends of the State of Arizona."³⁸

Storm is our bellwether for evaluating the validity of the process of inquiry and for knowing whether truth is accessible, and the messages the character provides are mixed. On the one hand, his detection of a key geographical starting point, Weaver's Needle, by what he admits is "sheer blind luck," would suggest that even the most determined researcher or scholar needs a bit of good fortune to prevail. On the other hand, ensuing discoveries of a stone-carved "master map of the region" and, across the canyon, a needle-like peak with a windowed opening, produce in Storm euphoric, conceited claims that belie his earlier state of humility. "As I clawed and climbed my way toward the window above," Storm breathlessly narrates, "one thought kept repeating itself: nobody—not Ray Covin, not the sheriff, [not] Bill Bates—nobody had ever mentioned the weird map cut in the rocks or this peak that had been pointed out by the stick in the hole. I'd discovered these things all by myself—what I knew was top secret, private knowledge for Barry Storm."³⁹ What Storm has found is not unimportant, but neither is it "private knowledge;" indeed, Deputy Covin (Will Geer) stands behind him with a rifle, ready to march Storm off a cliff to protect his own knowledge of the map and the windowed peak.

After Covin's plan has been foiled, Barry and Sheriff Lynn Early (Paul Ford) take a turn at moonlight prospecting, emboldened by the thought that the moon, shining through the needle's window, will illuminate the site of the

Lost Dutchman. That idea, while sensible enough and the culmination of the film's investigatory premise, is dashed on the rocks of Superstition Mountain. Storm's thorough and relentless inquiry has missed something basic: time and nature in motion, the natural world understood historically. "You forgot [that] the moon and earth keep movin'," the sheriff suggests. "At this rate, you're gonna have to dig up the whole mountain—need a bulldozer. That [1887] earthquake changed things, too. That's why Ray Covin never found the mine. That's why you'll never find it." Chastened but unbroken, and clinging to his grandfather's German rationalism, Barry acknowledges the problem, but only to imagine solving it. "That's right," he tells the sheriff. "If it is the moon that'll point out that gold, it'll only do it once a year. On the anniversary of the night [a century ago] when the Peraldas [the Mexican brothers who opened the mine on Indian land] made that sign. That's the catch. When was that sign made? What hour? What moment? If I could figure that out, I'd hit the jackpot."

Storm's response reflects the deep belief in the postwar era of the power of science and scientific method to penetrate and solve life's mysteries. His enthusiasm had an official voice in Vannevar Bush, Franklin Roosevelt's foremost science policy adviser, who in 1945 pronounced science an "endless frontier," the development of which was as essential to national greatness in the twentieth century as the free land of the West had been in the nineteenth.⁴⁰ The film as a whole is more ambivalent. To be sure, Storm has framed the remaining mysteries in a way that opens them to rational inquiry. Mysteries of a different sort—the Apache legends that present Superstition Mountain as a "sacred" place, or the suggestion that the mountain's perverse geography makes for "unfriendly ground"—have apparently been forgotten. Still, *Last for Gold* denies knowledge and science their just deserts; it ends without the mine having been found. *The*

Treasure of the Sierra Madre does something similar for the experimental ethos of the social sciences. The film at times identifies its mountain terrain as primordial and haunted, and Howard's film-ending litany of "the lord, or fate, or nature" doesn't include science. But *Treasure* is at its core a chilling experiment in economics and human behavior, with Howard as head investigator and Dobbs his unwitting victim.

Director John Huston's fascination with these themes was not unusual. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) dealt even more directly with the hubris of the rational and the experimental, depicting two young men who commit murder for "the experiment of committing it." Psychologist B. F. Skinner's best-selling novel, *Walden Two*, published the same year, featured a utopian community operating under behaviorist principles. In short, *Lust for Gold* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* use the geography of western mining as a space in which to explore and celebrate the roles of rational, scientific inquiry and social-scientific experimentation in mid-twentieth-century American life.⁴¹

Conclusion

The western mining film accomplishes what most genres or types accomplish; it sheds light on some of the more important issues of the era, including community, "the people," the role of leadership, the impact of war, the growth of big business, the perils of materialism, the corruption of government, and the role of women. The wet mining films of the Great Depression, World War II, and 1960 are, on the whole, positive and accepting about entrepreneurial and commercial activity, adventure, money-making, women with strength, aggressive men, domesticity, and the role of ordinary people in community life. The dry mining films of the post-war decade are more likely to probe the dark side of the American experience, including an irresponsible populace, failed leadership, greed, fate,

male sexuality, powerful and ambitious women, and an overbearing science. The West of the wet mining film is essentially a space of sanctioned commercial and economic exploitation, where good and evil lock horns. The West of the dry mining film is often a space of psychological and sociological conflict and torment, where the human condition and human nature are at issue, and where basically good people—Barry Storm, Stretch, Dobbs, even Howard—lust for gold, sex, or power.

Films also differ in how they present western topography. The West of the wet film is knee-deep in the man-made mud of plentiful water, community, and enterprise; it is accessible by helpful maps that can be read or figured out; it abuts oceans and rivers that carry machinery to Nome or Silver City. The geography is often sublime—as in *North to Alaska*—or picturesque—as in *The Call of the Wild*. The terrain can be difficult or dangerous, but it is seldom impassable or deadly. In contrast, the West of the dry film is a West of salt flats and gila monsters, dusty rocks, and water to be hauled—if it exists at all. Its maps are incomplete, wrong, unclear or indecipherable, or if readable—as in *Garden of Evil*—somehow cursed, the source of the problem rather than its solution. Neither sublime nor picturesque, the West's geography is desolate, its terrain a dangerous and deadly one of narrow ledges, steep ascents, craggy peaks, volcanic eruptions, and avalanches.

Perhaps most importantly, in the best of these films, this "dry" West is a space of legend and mystery. In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, it is space inhabited by lions and tigers and leopards—that is, by the animal within us that threatens to engulf the self or, understood more positively, to frustrate those who would claim to be able to predict the behavior of human beings. In *Lust for Gold*, it is inhabited across time by Apaches and Mexicans and by their legends and stories, frustrating efforts to locate the Lost Dutchman and to know the "truth." And in both

films this West is inhabited by something even more intangible. Whatever one calls it—nature, God, fate, spirit—it is what compels Howard to repair the damage to the mountain, and it is

what produces that delicious feeling of doubt when the incorrigible positivist Barry Storm brazenly concludes that the answers to just a few questions will make him rich. ■

Notes:

- 1 For many years the mining engineer was as ignored by scholars as he was by Hollywood. See Clark C. Spence, *Mining Engineers and the American West: The Lace-Boot Brigade, 1849-1933* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 2, 15, 318. Spence treats the mining engineer as an aspect of the “transition from unsystematic to scientific mining under way since the mid-nineteenth century.” (p. 4). On the ratio of women to men during the California gold rush, see William S. Greever, *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 62. On the mining town’s incompatibility with the Western’s ideal community, see “Mining” entry, Edward Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), 188-91.
- 2 I am grateful to Paul Ryan, who graciously made his substantial collection of western films available to me and steered me toward films about mining, and to Lee Albert, Bennett Graebner, and David Manch for locating several hard-to-find films.
This list is partial. Other relevant films include *The Walking Hills* (1949); *Black Hills* (1947); *Silver Queen* (1942); *The Silver Lode* (1954); *Romance of the West* (1946); *Fury at Furnace Creek* (1948); *Comanche Territory* (1950); *Daughter of the West* (1949); *Indian Uprising* (1952); *River of No Return* (1954); and *The Far Country* (1955).
None of the films screened deal with the Black Hills gold rush of 1874-79, which took place in the Dakota and Wyoming territories. *Black Hills*, listed above, a “B” picture at best, uses the region’s name and has a gold-mining subplot, but it otherwise ignores the setting. On the Black Hills gold rush, see Watson Parker, *Gold in the Black Hills* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), and Rodman Wilson Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 176-96.
- 3 The rocker, the sluice, and other mining methods are described in Greever, *Bonanza West*, 47-51, and Otis E. Young, Jr., *Western Mining: An Informal Account of Precious-Metals Prospecting, Placering, Lode Mining, and Milling on the American Frontier from Spanish Times to 1893* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 108-23.
Quartz mining—the mining of veins of gold embedded in rock—was so difficult that it was usually reserved for corporations with money and expertise. It is unlikely that the trio of prospectors in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* would have had the equipment for such an enterprise or the time to make it profitable. Greever, *Bonanza West*, 52-3. Indeed, B. Traven, on whose novel the screenplay was based, explained in an eight-page memo on the techniques of gold mining that a vein mine was (i.e., should be) “out for this picture.” Memo, “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,” in folder “Treasure of Sierra Madre, Traven B. and H. C. corres, 2/47, n.d. notes,” John Huston Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.
- 4 The mining scenes for *Silver River* were filmed on a set constructed in Bronson Canyon, only minutes from Hollywood. Production Notes for *Silver River*, in Production Files, Herrick Library. Greever, *Bonanza West*, 361-64.
- 5 On claim law in the early mining camps, see John Walton Caughey, *Gold is the Cornerstone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), 227-32. Based on a 1898 Rex Beach novel about a Nome gang of “spoilers” who swindled miners out of their claims, *The Spoilers* was filmed in 1913, 1930, and 1942. See folder, “The Spoilers,” “Exploitation Suggestions & Feature Articles,” Production Files, Herrick Library. On Nome’s early history, see W.P. Morrell, *The Gold Rushes* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1940), 402-03.
- 6 San Francisco’s mud problem was especially severe during the wet winter of 1849-50. Greever, *Bonanza West*, 38.
- 7 Garry Hogg, *Lust for Gold* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1962), 43. *Trail of ’98* (1928, silent), set in the “Klondike” region of Alaska, offers the most realistic film treatment of the harsh conditions along the Alaska-Yukon border. The film appears to replicate the passage over the Chilkoot Pass in the Klondike region, between Skagway and Dawson. It also conflates the Klondike—an iconic word in the film—and Alaska.
- 8 The White Pass and Yukon Railroad was completed in 1900, replacing the very difficult White Pass trail out of Skagway. Greever, *Bonanza West*, 354-56.
- 9 The film could also be set in the mining town of Silver City, New Mexico or in Silver City, Utah. Its featured Indians are Shoshone, a widely disbursed linguistic

group with a presence in Utah, but not in New Mexico or Arizona. "[Studio] Synopsis," *Silver River*, Production Files, Herrick Library.

- 10 Shot on location in Teptzlan, along the Concheros River near Acapulco, around Paricutin Mountain, and near Guanajuato, *Garden of Evil's* scenery produced considerable comment in the popular press. "Vital Statistics," *Garden of Evil*; "Garden of Evil," *Variety* (D), 30 June 1954; and "Garden of Evil," *Time*, 19 July 1954, all in Production Files, Herrick Library. "Vital Statistics Concerning *Yellow Sky*" (20th Century Fox mimeographed handout), Production Files, Herrick Library.
- 11 Morrell's *Gold Rushes* describes Skagway in similar terms, even using the word "mushroom" (p. 384). A member of the Northwest Mounted Police, visiting Skagway in the late 1890s, described the town as "about the roughest place in the world." Greever, *Bonanza West*, 344.

The best example of escapism in film is *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). On the city in film, see Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* (1971; New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 18-29. On the importance of adventure in the decade after 1935, see William Graebner, "The Apple Boy: Individual and Community in the Era of the Second World War," *New York Folklore*, 10 (Summer-Fall 1984): 77-87.

- 12 On Dawson's saloons, see Morrell, *Gold Rushes*, 389. Drinking, alcoholism, and saloons were features of the mining scene, in the camps and nearby towns and cities. See Greever, *Bonanza West*, 60-61; Rodman Paul, *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1947), 83; Paul, *Mining Frontiers*, 164-66.

The mindless brawling in *North to Alaska* was socially purposeful. Reviewers applauded the film's non-realistic, non-adult, non-political approach. "No message here," wrote Constance Littlefield for the *Los Angeles Examiner*. "No social significance, no juvenile delinquents, no beatniks. Just screams of laughter from the first barroom brawl to the closing donnybrook in the muddy main street of Nome." *Los Angeles Examiner*, 24 Nov. 1960, Production Files, Herrick Library.

- 13 According to Philip French, the ghost town is "the objective correlative of the impermanence of American life, a pessimistic feeling about the fragility of American civilization and its problems in putting down roots." Quoted in "Ghost Town" entry, *BFI Companion to the Western*, 129.
- 14 George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight"* (South Hadley, Mass.: J.F. Bergin Publishers, 1982).

- 15 On the people and the mob, see, for example, Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922. Reprint. New York: The Free Press, 1965); Gregory W. Bush, *Lord of Attention: Gerald Stanley Lee and the Crowd Metaphor in Industrializing America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991); and William Graebner, *The Engineering of Consent: Democracy and Authority in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

To be sure, it was not uncommon for cities to empty out in the early stages of a gold fever, and for business to come to a near standstill as a result. It happened in San Francisco in 1848. See Caughey, *Gold is the Cornerstone*, 20.

- 16 Disease, including typhoid fever, was a serious problem in the California camps and other areas of the state before 1856. Greever, *Bonanza West*, 58.
- 17 The sexual content of *Yellow Sky* echoes the sex crime panic that reached a peak of intensity in the winter of 1949-50. George Chauncey, Jr., "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," in William Graebner (ed.), *True Stories from the American Past* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 160-178. The Motion Picture Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs found the film "very offensive," and the Production Code Administration and local censorship boards of the Motion Picture Association of America took exception to some of the more salacious aspects of the script and film, including "violent kissing" and the "ride her, cowboy" line. Letter, Stephen S. Jackson, Production Code Administration, to Colonel Jason S. Joy, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 21 Apr. 1948; letter, Mrs. P.E. Willis, General Federation of Women's Clubs, Motion Picture Committee, to Lamar Trotti, Twentieth Century-Fox Studio, 21 Dec. 1948; and reports of local censorship boards for the Motion Picture Association of America, all in Production Code Administration Files, *Yellow Sky*, Herrick Library, Department of Special Collections.
- 18 On *Silver River* and *Yellow Sky* as stories about "war-alienated individuals," see John H. Lenihan, *Sideshow: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 102-05 (quotation on 105). Rita Parks puts Stretch in the "good badman tradition" of films such as *Jesse James* (1939) and *Billy the Kid* (1941). Parks, *The Western Hero in Film and Television: Mass Media Mythology* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 95.
- 19 On expertism, see William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 32-33.
- 20 "We got the realism we were after," said William Wellman of *Yellow Sky*, including "rough, wild men

- fighting over a desert-hardened girl." The *Los Angeles Times* referred to *Station West*'s anti-heroine as the "Outlaw Queen." "Vital Statistics Concerning *Yellow Sky*," and Edwin Schallert, "Powell Duels with Sultry Jane Greer, Outlaw Queen," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Oct. 1948, both in Production Files, Herrick Library.
- 21 "NEWS From 20th Century-Fox," 16 June 1948 (Wellman) and "Vital Statistics Concerning *Yellow Sky*" (Baxter), in Production Files, Herrick Library.
 - 22 See June Sochen, "Mildred Pierce and Women in Film," *American Quarterly* 30 (Spring, 1978): 3-20. *New Yorker*, 12 Feb. 1949, in Production Files, Herrick Library.
 - 23 J.P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 134-78.
 - 24 *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* also has *noir* qualities. Bogart is the quintessential *noir* film star, and his Dobbs is a perfect example of what film scholar Winfried Fluck has called "drifter-*noir*," a form of the genre that locates the source of crime in mood and impulse and hence problematizes the idea of guilt. See Fluck's superb essay, "Crime, Guilt and Subjectivity in *Film Noir*," in *Amerikastudien* 46, no. 3 (2001), 379-408.
 - 25 James Naremore, "Introduction: *A Likely Project*," in James Naremore, (ed.) *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 13-14.
 - 26 The real Durango—at least two hundred miles from where the three prospectors find gold—seems too far away to have been a realistic destination. See Ferol Egan, *The El Dorado Trail: the Story of the Gold Rush Routes Across Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), map in front matter. A reviewer for *Variety* (7 Jan. 1948) suggested that the "rugged beauty" of the location "contrasted [with] the human condition."
- On Traven, see B. Traven, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1935. Reprint. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Ernst Schürer and Philip Jenkins (eds.), *B. Traven: Life and Work* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987).
- 27 Naremore, "Introduction," 21-22. In *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992; New York: HarperPerennial, 1993, 417-18), Richard Slotkin argues that each of the film's locations represents a social and political system or option: "the city of Tampico, divided between unscrupulous wealthy capitalists (many of them American) and the utterly immiserated poor; the primitive pueblo, where a rough but simple justice rules under the eye of a patriarchal mayor; the wilderness mining camp, where no law exists but self-interest and the gun; and the Indian village, which offers a vision of pastoral paradise." By emphasizing Howard's future in the Indian village, and Curtin's as a peach farmer back in the States, Slotkin argues that Mexico functions in the film as a site of American moral regeneration. That Howard was in need of regeneration is clear, but his behavior in the film, especially his role in the tragedy that befalls Dobbs, would seem to require something more than his narcissistic withdrawal into a life of semi-retirement in a remote village.
- There is a large literature on *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and director John Huston. See especially Stuart Kaminsky, *John Huston: Maker of Magic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978); Scott Hammen, *John Huston* (Boston: Twayne, 1985); Lawrence Grobel, *The Hustons* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989); Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser (eds.), *Reflections in a Male Eye: John Huston and the American Experience* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Lesley Brill, *John Huston's Filmmaking* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Stephen Cooper (ed.), *Perspectives on John Huston* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1994).
- 28 The film's *Sierra Madre* is the *Sierra Madre Oriental*, one of Mexico's north-south ranges and an extension of the Rocky Mountains. Its peaks are from fifty to one hundred miles west of the Gulf Coastal Plain upon which Tampico is located at the mouth of Rio Panuco. The city had been a starting point for gold seekers since the 1840s. Historian Ferol Egan describes Tampico as "a good place to hurry through, an unusual place to write home about, but it wasn't healthy to stay there for long unless a man had already built up some natural immunity to fevers and developed a tolerance for the swarms of insects." Egan, *The El Dorado Trail*, 207; James D. Rudolph (ed.), *Mexico: A Country Study*, Foreign Area Studies, The American University, 1985 (n.p., n.d.), map of Mexico's geography opposite pp. 84 and 87.
 - 29 The film's treatment of the animal population of the *Sierra Madre Oriental* resembles one miner's account of the fauna he encountered—grizzlies, panthers, pumas, and lions among them—while in the headwaters of the Platte River on the way to the Colorado gold rush. The account is in Hogg, *Lust for Gold*, 41.
 - 30 Graebner, *Age of Doubt*, 23 and *passim*.
 - 31 On New Age feminist spirituality, with its emphasis on interconnectedness rather than power and dominance, and on the cosmos as a "living body," see Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "The New Age Movement and Feminist Spirituality: Overlapping Conversations at the End of the Century," in James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton

- (eds.), *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), especially 172 and 175.
- 32 The "greed and gold" interpretation is found in *Variety* (7 Jan. 1948), and in Bosley Crowther's review in the *New York Times* (24 Jan. 1948, 11:2). For the history of humanity's lust for gold, see Hogg, *Lust for Gold*. The theatrical trailer is available in the "Humphrey Bogart Collection" edition of the video version of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (Warner Brothers, 1948 [Turner Entertainment Company]).
 - The film's reflections on the desire for gold might be understood as a version of the mythic Spanish quest described by historian David J. Weber in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest* (the Calvin P. Horn lectures in Western History and Culture, University of New Mexico, 8-11 Nov. 1987; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988). According to Weber (p. 4), even the treasure sought by Cortes and Pizarro had only mythic content. "This treasure," he writes, "existed only because of their imagining. Gold, the principal commodity that the Spaniards valued, had no intrinsic value in and of itself. Unlike essential commodities, such as food or shelter, whatever value gold held for the Spaniards was the value they invested in it through their own beliefs, or myths." When Howard argued in *El Oso Negro* that gold's value was based on the labor required to find and mine it, he was presenting a very different perspective. On one level, then, the film might be understood as a conflict between different ideas or systems of value.
 - 33 Reviewer Bosley Crowther (*New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1948, 11:2) describes the old timer as "the symbol of substance, of philosophy and fatalism, in the film, as well as an unrelenting image of personality and strength." While accurate, the description fails to capture Howard's complex agenda.
 - 34 Naremore emphasizes Howard's "theatrical sense" in this and a later scene, set in a Mexican village, in which Howard ministers to an ill child. Naremore, "Introduction," 27.
 - 35 Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948).
 - 36 The scene resonates with John Huston's recollection of his only "recurrent dream . . . one in which I'm ashamed of being broke and having to go to my father for money." John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 5.
 - 37 Laurence Urdang (ed.), *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1968). Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 12.
 - 38 Six of the films under discussion treat native Indian populations in some way. The Indians are usually hostile and usually Apaches in the American Southwest. See the sketch map "Apache Country," which defines Apache territory as roughly equivalent to Arizona, New Mexico, Sonora, and Chihuahua. Paul I. Wellman, *Death in the Desert: The Fifty Years' War for the Great Southwest* (1935; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), viii. While most films present a generic "Apache" group, *Apache Drums* (1950) features the Mescalero Apaches, led by Chief Victorio, who menaced whites in the Southwest in the late 1870s, and the Apaches in *Lust for Gold* are led by Cochise. The Shoshone appear off screen in *Silver River* (1948). On Chief Victorio, see Wellman, *Death in the Desert*, 162-63.
 - A reviewer for the *New York Times* found the narrator's closing assertion that the basic facts were true "somewhat optimistic," but he characterized the film as a "tense, intelligent, and often thrilling adventure." *Variety's* reviewer commented on the film's twenty million dollar giveaway "dwarfing even radio's fabulous handouts." A.W., *New York Times*, 4 July 1949, 9:2. *Variety*, 25 May 1949.
 - 39 The reference to "top secret" is a nice touch from the Cold War.
 - 40 Graebner, *Age of Doubt*, 125; Vannevar Bush, *Science: The Endless Frontier. A Report to the President* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, July, 1945), 1, 5-6.
 - 41 *Rope* (1948); B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (1948. Reprint. New York: Macmillan, 1962).