

Generic Subversion and Political Critique in Lucan, Vergil, and American Westerns

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Abstract

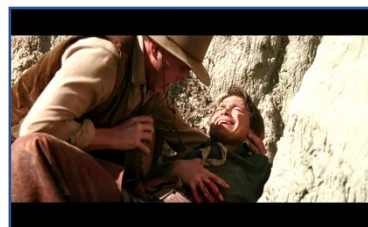
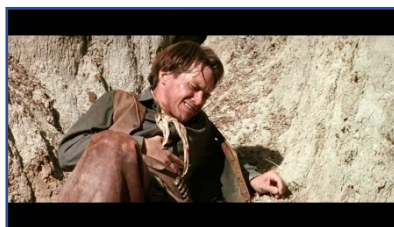
(Lucan translations from Duff's Loeb edition, 1928)

1. Subversion Strategies

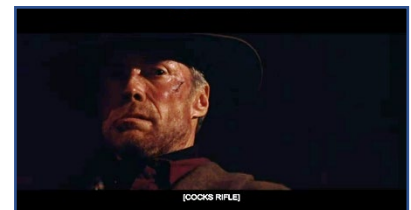
a. Unheroic Heroes



b. Intensified and Devalored Violence



c. Non-Teleological Narrative (cf. Quint 1993)



2. The Schofield Kid, Disappointed and Disillusioned

a.



KID: You don't look like no rootin'-tootin', son-of-a-bitchin', cold-blooded assassin.

MUNNY: Say what?

KID: My guess is you're calling yourself Mister William Munny.

MUNNY: You have me confused with someone else, mister.

...

MUNNY: So you're Pete Sothow's nephew, huh? I thought maybe you was someone come to kill me for something I done in the old days.

KID: I could have. Easy.

MUNNY: I guess maybe so.

KID: Like I was saying, you don't look no meaner-than-hell, cold-blooded damn killer.

MUNNY: Maybe I ain't.

KID: Well, uncle Pete says you was the meanest god-damned son of a bitch alive, and if I ever wanted a partner for a killing you were the worst one...meaning the best on account of you're as cold as the snow and you don't have no weak nerve, nor fear.

MUNNY: Pete said that, huh?

KID: Yeah. Yeah he did. I'm a killer myself, except I ain't killed as many as you because of my youth. The "Schofield Kid" is what they call me.

MUNNY: Why? Are you from Schofield?

KID: No, it's on account of my Schofield model Smith and Wesson pistol.

b.



KID: Was that what it was like in the old days, Will? Everybody riding out shooting, smoke all over the place, folks yelling, bullets whizzing by?

MUNNY: I guess so.

KID: Shit. I thought they was going to get us. I was even scared a little. Just for a minute. Was you ever scared in them days?

MUNNY: I can't remember. I was drunk most of the time.

KID: I shot that fucker three times. He was taking a shit and he went for his pistol and I blazed away. First shot...I got him right in the chest. Say, Will...

MUNNY: Yeah?

KID: That was the first one.

MUNNY: First one what?

KID: First one I ever killed.

...

KID: Jesus Christ. It don't seem real. How he ain't gonna never breathe again, ever. And the other one, too. All on account of pulling a trigger.

MUNNY: It's a hell of a thing, killing a man. You take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have.

KID: Yeah. Well, I guess they had it coming.

MUNNY: We all have it coming, kid.

...

KID (handing his pistol to Munny): You go on, keep it. I'm never going to use it again. I don't kill nobody no more. I ain't like you, Will.

3. W.W. Beauchamp: The Mythmaker

a.



LITTLE BILL (looking at the cover of Beauchamp's "Duke of Death" book about English Bob): Boy, they look like real hard cases, Bob. Did you kill all seven of them dead or did you just wing some of them? Now that is you there, isn't it, Bob, on the cover? "The Duck of Death?"

BEAUCHAMP: Uh, The *Duke*. *Duke* of Death.

LITTLE BILL: You always were hell and Jesus with a pistol, Bob. And seven of them, and you protecting that woman. How in the hell do you do that?

BEAUCHAMP: Uh, you see, it's generally considered desirable in the publishing business to take a certain liberty when you are depicting the cover scene. It's for reasons involving the marketplace, et cetera.

LITTLE BILL: Well, Mr. Beauchamp, from what I've read in this here book, the

writing's not that much different than the picture.

...

LITTLE BILL (reading from the book): "You have insulted the honor of this beautiful woman, Corchran!" said The Duck. 'You must apologize!' But Two-Gun Corchran would have none of it, and, cursing, he reached for his pistols and would have killed him, but The Duck was faster, and hot lead blazed from his smoking six-guns!"

BEAUCHAMP: See, I consider that to be an accurate description of the events...albeit... Alright, there is a certain poetry to the language which I couldn't resist.

LITTLE BILL: Uh, Mr. Beauchamp, I was in the Blue Bottle Saloon in Wichita on the night that English Bob killed Corky Corchran, and I didn't see you there, nor no woman. No two-gun shooters. None of this.

b.



LITTLE BILL (in the middle of a story):
 “No, no, you’re wrong, Little Bill,” he
 said, “that’s not a Curly J. That’s a
 Bobbed J!” (laughs)
 He had changed it over and I said to
 him, “Jim, you’re a liar and a horse
 thief. Oh, now, when he saw that the
 rest of them weren’t going to help him
 none, he, of course, started crying and
 sobbing and just carrying on saying “Oh,
 Bill! Oh God, please don’t kill me,
 Bill! Please don’t kill me, Bill!” I
 said, “Jim, it just makes me sick!...to
 see a man carrying two pistols and a
 henry rifle and crying like a damned
 baby.”

BEAUCHAMP: So you killed him?

LITTLE BILL: No. But I should have. I
 can’t abide them kind. You see them in
 the taverns, you know, tramps and drunk
 teamsters and crazed miners...

BEAUCHAMP: Yeah.

LITTLE BILL: ...sporting their pistols
 and acting like they was bad men but
 without any sand or character. Not even
 any bad character. I do not like
 assassins--

BEAUCHAMP: ...assassins?

LITTLE BILL: ...or men of low character.

BEAUCHAMP: Yeah.

LITTLE BILL: Like your friend English
 Bob.

BEAUCHAMP: Uh-huh.

LITTLE BILL: Now Bob, he was no coward,
 you know. Now he wouldn’t come up to
 your face and cry and carry on like
 that...

4. Lucan's Curio: a would-be Hercules (*BC* 4.583-665, excerpted)

For bold Curio weighed anchor on the shore of Sicily, and a gentle North wind filled the sails, till he gained the shore of famous anchorage between Clipea and the half-ruined citadels of great Carthage. ... From there he marched to the rocky eminence, hollowed out on all sides, which tradition with good reason calls the realm of Antaeus. When he sought to learn the origin of that ancient name, he was told by an unlettered countryman a tale handed down through many generations...

“...Hence the land has got its name from long tradition which treasures the past and thinks highly of itself. But a greater name was given these heights by Scipio, when he brought the Carthaginian invader back from the citadels of Latium. Here he encamped when he reached the soil of Libya; yonder you see the remains of his ancient rampart; these are the fields which the Roman conqueror first occupied.”

Curio heard this with joy, believing that the lucky spot would fight for him, and repeat for him the success of former leaders. Pitching his ill-starred tents on that lucky ground, he trusted too much to his encampment and robbed the heights of their good fortune. He challenged a fierce enemy who was too strong for him to fight.

Namque rates audax Lilybaeo litore solvit
Curio: nec forti velis Aquilone recepto
Inter semirutas magnae Carthaginis arces
Et Clupeam tenuit stationis litora notae: ...
Inde petit tumulos exesasque undique rupes,
Antaei quae regna vocat non vana vetustas.
Nominis antiqui cupientem noscere causas
Cognita per multos docuit rudis incola patres:

...

Hinc, aevi veteris custos, famosa vetustas
Miratrixque sui signavit nomine terras.
Sed maiora dedit cognomina collibus istis,
Poenum qui Latiis revocavit ab arcibus hostem,
Scipio. Iam sedes Libyca tellure potito
Haec fuit. En, veteris cernis vestigia valli.
Romana hos primum tenuit victoria campos.

Curio laetatus, tamquam fortuna locorum
Bella gerat, servetque ducum sibi fata priorum,
Felici non fausta loco tentoria ponens,
Indulsit castris, et collibus abstulit omen,
Sollicitatque feros non aequis viribus hostes.

5. Lucan's Caesar at Troy (*BC* 9.961-999, excerpted)

Emulous of ancient glory, Caesar visited the sands of Sigeum and the stream of Simois, Rhoeteum famous for the Grecian's grave, and the dead who owe so much to the poet's verse. He walked round the burnt city of Troy, now only a famous name, and searched for the mighty remains of the wall that Apollo raised. ... The stream trickling through the dry dust, which he crossed without knowing it, was the Xanthus. When he stepped carelessly over the rank grass, the native bade him not to walk over the body of Hector. When scattered stones, preserving no appearance of sanctity, lay before them, the guide asked: "Do you mean to pass over the altar of Zeus Herceos?"

How mighty, how sacred is the poet's task! He snatches all things from destruction and gives to mortal men immortality. Be not jealous, Caesar, of those whom fame has consecrated...posterity shall read my verse and your deeds; our Pharsalia shall live on, and no age will ever doom us to oblivion.

When Caesar had satisfied his eyes with venerable antiquity, he reared in haste an altar of piled up sods, and uttered prayers and vows over the incense-burning flame: "All ye spirits of the dead, who inhabit the ruins of Troy; and ye household gods of my ancestor Aeneas... I, most renowned descendant of the race of Iulus, here place incense due upon your altars, and solemnly invoke you in your ancient abode. Grant me prosperity to the end, and I will restore your people: with grateful return the Italians shall rebuild the walls of the Phrygians, and a Roman Troy shall rise."

Sigeasque petit famae mirator arenas,
Et Simoentis aquas, et Graio nobile busto
Rhoetion, et multum debentes vatibus umbras.
Circuit exustae nomen memorabile Troiae,
Magnaue Phoebai quaerit vestigia muri.

...

Insicus in sicco serpentem pulvere rivum
Transierat, qui Xanthus erat. Securus in alto
Gramine ponebat gressus; Phryx incola manes
Hectoreos calcare vetat. Discussa iacebant
Saxa, nec ullius faciem servantia sacri;
Herceas, monstrator ait, non respicis aras?

O sacer et magnus vatum labor, omnia fato
Eripis, et populis donas mortalibus aevum.
Invidia sacrae, Caesar, ne tangere famae: ...
Venturi me teque legent: Pharsalia nostra
Vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo.

Ut ducis implevit visus veneranda vetustas,
Erexit subitas congestu cespitis aras,
Votaque thuricremos non irrita fudit in ignes:
Di cinerum, Phrygias colitis quicumque ruinas,
Aeneaeque mei...

Gentis Iuleae vestris clarissimus aris
Dat pia tura nepos, et vos in sede priori
Rite vocat: date felices in cetera cursus.
Restituam populos: grata vice moenia reddent
Ausonidae Phrygibus, Romanaque Pergama surgent.

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