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## Peering Across the Filmic Cultural Boundary: An Analysis of Societal and Gender Representation in Once Upon a Time in the West (1968) and Sholay (1975)

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Peering Across the Filmic Cultural Boundary: An Analysis of Societal and Gender  
Representation in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and *Sholay* (1975)

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Bellarmino University, 2022

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## Introduction

Film as an artistic medium is more open to translation and re-interpretation within its genre than most others; that is to say, more adaptations are observed between films than are observed in novel-to-novel or play-to-play remakes. This can be attributed to a variety of features that make the film medium distinct, not the least of which is the incredible versatility it offers in terms of visual style, which allows for the masking of an original source by a myriad of filmic elements. Though not all adapted or remade films attempt to conceal their true nature, for those that do, it can be incredibly difficult for the average viewer to discern whether the film has been largely adapted from another; as long as, say, direct dialogue has not been lifted, changes are made in terms of color palette, costumes, and pacing, and perhaps the casting is distinct enough to not be reminiscent of the source material, the adaptive backbone of the film can remain implicit. Of course, such considerations beg a question similar to the paradox of the Ship of Theseus, which asks whether a ship which gradually has all its parts replaced still remains the same ship, and if not, at what point it changes its identity.

It can behoove the discussion, though, to address existing discourse on the nature of the film remake and adaptation first. Constantine Verevis, a professor of Film & Screen Studies who has written extensively on media seriality, comments that a remake “is both an industrial and a critical genre...the remake is determined in relation to a general discursive field that is mediated by the structure of the filmic system and by the authority of the film and literary canon.”<sup>1</sup> This is to say that a remake, more specifically one that forgoes explicit crediting of its source, is then open to definition by the discourse of audience and critics, and by the films that are created around it. It is a remarkable observation, essentially implying that the unacknowledged remake is a tool to engage in discussion with film history and film future itself.

This definition also offers insight to what distinguishes a remake from an adaptation. Often, a remake is a credited re-interpretation of an existing film, though the extent of its re-interpretation is typically limited. A remade film often relies on the successes of its source, going so far as retaining elements of the source's title, its general story arc, and even lines of dialogue or actors. The remake, especially in the last two decades, is increasingly a vehicle for nostalgia and not artistic commentary, though certain artistic considerations are indeed necessary when remaking any film. Often, the goals of a remake are limited to ensuring financial success for the production based on the similar success of its source, and perhaps the reintroduction of an older film to a newer audience for whom the original is not as accessible anymore due to, perhaps, dated elements of story or even technology. An adaptation, though, encompasses any translation of film beyond the limited definition of a remake, and is therefore a decidedly broader sphere. Often, adaptations include certain intertextual links with its source material to warrant discussion on the degree of its influence or originality, and this practice of intertextuality can be as implicit or explicit as the filmmaker desires. As an example, adapted films will make changes to their protagonists in terms of personality, costuming, arc, or even gender. Plot considerations are also to be made in order to avoid narrative cliches and retain the engagement of an audience. The themes the film tackles might also undergo some change, though this realm is usually preserved, as it is often the messaging of the film that resonates with a filmmaker and beckons the adaptive process in the first place. The focus of the film *adaptation* is less on the source material serving as a tried-and-true method of success, and more about the artistic and thematic wealth that might remain unexplored to certain extents in the original. Still, it is important to understand that the terms 'remake' and 'adaptation' can indeed be used interchangeably, and often are, since the line between the two is blurred by a variety of existing films.

Nowhere is this intersection of the two terms clearer than in cross-cultural remakes. Many films that are remade into countries or regions with different cultures and histories often give homage to and acknowledge their sources, but they are inescapably unique in their handling of the material. With a completely different cultural setting within which to work, film remakes no longer retain the luxury of straightforward translation, and the obstacles in the process far exceed the base considerations of a language switch. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge foremost that Hollywood films that are remade from other Hollywood films, while being the most visible, are not the only cases worthy of consideration in scholarly discussion. In their book *Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, Stuart McDougal and Andrew Horton explore the phenomenon of the transnational remake, commenting on the popularity that Hollywood films enjoy as source material. This is of course a product of Hollywood being the world's largest film industry across many metrics, including filmic output, global audience, and total revenue<sup>2</sup>. This global visibility that Hollywood enjoys allows for more of its films to serve as the basis for remakes than other film industries – though the financial success that these films enjoy is also a contributing factor. McDougal and Horton additionally suggest that the frequency with which Hollywood films are remade into other countries is connected to foreign filmmakers attempting to generate belonging with a global film community, to augment the visibility of their own country's filmic output, and to broaden the critical considerations of their culture's artistic potential<sup>2</sup>. Naturally, the process is dynamic. As a foreign film industry establishes its originality through its own voice and style, American filmmakers are also prompted to re-interpret these works for an American audience. Consider the 2006 film *The Departed* by Martin Scorsese, one of the most celebrated American filmmakers. *The Departed*, in terms of plot, is a direct remake of the Hong Kong film *Infernal Affairs* (2002). The differences in the two films beyond the plot,

though, are vast, such that many audience members were taken aback when they discovered that *The Departed* was a remake. This is because on its own, it is in every way an American film – from its Bostonian setting to its exploration of organized crime in the American northeast, from its depiction of the jaded American police force to its commentary on the American dream through its protagonists, who seek to ascend beyond their origins in the underbelly of the city. Doubtlessly, it requires great precision on the part of the screenwriter and director to create a translation so simultaneously authentic to its foreign source and the sensibilities of its domestic audience. Moreover, it implies the existence of various commonalities between different cultures (in the case of these two films, one could say organized crime and government corruption are a few) that can be used to bridge the gap between what are otherwise mutually exclusive settings.

In her work *Once Upon a Time in India: From Hollywood to Bollywood*, Kine Engen Hoglid states that “the cross-cultural makeover has received little academic attention, only Hollywood, often seen as the acknowledged dominant cinema of the world, has been looked into in the past.”<sup>3</sup> The work of filmmakers who translate and adapt transnationally can be incredibly valuable in assessing the value of film as a medium that can transcend cultural boundaries, as well as offer insight into the language of film and its malleability in the face of its audience and creators, as well as insight into the complexities of both cultures involved. The scope of this thesis will focus specifically on translation between Hollywood and Bollywood, due to the relative lack of existing discourse on the adaptive process between these two industries, and also their standing as the two largest film industries in the world.

## Remaking in Bollywood

At first glance, it can be difficult to assess whether a Bollywood remake is at all similar to its western influence. After all, from its visual style alone - which is readily vibrant - and the general tone - which often blends genres - and the pacing - which includes steady interruptions by musical sequences - a Bollywood film differs greatly from most other movies. It should also be noted that remaking a film into Bollywood is rarely a direct process, and it is often a requirement that many fundamental aspects of the source material be altered so that the final product is palatable to the Indian audience. As Chandrima Chakraborty, a professor at McMaster University who has published many works on Indian nationalism, gender, and memory, points out in her article *Subaltern Studies, Bollywood and Lagaan*, in India, “films are largely the only available form of entertainment in which the subordinate and marginalized peoples can be both active consumers and engaged audiences,”<sup>4</sup> which makes it so that a large part of the marketed audience in Bollywood are people whose lives are defined by the oppressive socioeconomic and post-colonial systems of India, and whose sensibilities, therefore, are decidedly Indian. Moreover, Chakraborty reasons that “the majority of the population [of India] is non-literate, and therefore unable to partake in elite discussions of culture and modernity, usually articulated in academia.”<sup>4</sup> This makes it so that the adaptive process from Hollywood to Bollywood cannot be too high-brow or sophisticated, and neither can it attempt to retain too much of its western features as it is translated. The product that is delivered to this unique demographic has to seem authentically Indian as perceivable by the lowest common denominator, which becomes an important contributor to why many Bollywood cross-cultural remakes can seem wildly different from their sources – the filmmakers are bound more tightly to their audiences. For this reason, too, Bollywood filmmakers have to be incredibly judicious when selecting source material from

the western world, since a more authentically American work would be that much more difficult to completely transform. Additionally, the Bollywood remake style hinges on the ever-popular *masala* genre. *Masala*, which is a Hindi word referring to a mixture of spices used in cooking, is also used to define the Bollywood filmic style, which often blends a healthy variety of genres into each film. This style has been popular since it saw success in the 1970s with films such as *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* (1973) and *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977). One reasoning for the *masala* style's enduring popularity is that it essentially offers a package deal – with sequences of levity, romance, action, slapstick, music, etc. stitched together into one, it is essentially marketable to a larger audience that might have diverse tastes, which is helpful when considering India's population of over one billion people.

Indian anthropological and film scholar Tejaswini Ganti, as referenced in Hoglid's paper, argues that although the specific mechanisms that Indian filmmakers employ in translating foreign works are numerous, there are certain points that are shared in most processes. These specific considerations that Indian filmmakers have to be careful of are labelled "ingredients" by Ganti, and they include "adding emotion", "expanding the narrative", and incorporating "song and dance"<sup>5</sup>. Firstly, most Bollywood films work in the realm of melodrama, which makes sense considering the previous discussions about the nature of the Indian audience. More so than in other countries, films are viewed as a method of escape in India, and thus employ sequences and themes involving hyper-realistic or exaggerated emotion to best engage the audience. While Hollywood films do indeed also dabble in melodrama – *Titanic* (1997) is a great example – the average moviegoing individual in American is generally treated to a more realistic depiction of romance or action. This is not to say that Hollywood romantic comedies or action blockbusters do not engage in fantasy or hyperrealism; it is more to suggest that the general treatment of their

subject matter is more in-line with respecting the intellect of the audience. Bollywood remakes often inject extra emphasis on themes of “love, hate, revenge, and morals”<sup>5</sup> which make everything that develops on screen abundantly clear to anybody watching, and also supplements the entertainment value. Secondly, as Ganti argues, Bollywood remakes also expand the narrative of their sources. This is done by adding a “pre-story, subplots, parallel stories, flashbacks, and adding twists, thereby developing complexity in the narrative.”<sup>5</sup> Hollywood films are generally more formal when it comes to plot progression, while Bollywood – due in part to the *masala* genre – is more concerned with impression rather than rigid coherence. Lastly, of course, is the Bollywood musical style, which makes it so that almost every Bollywood film features a few song breaks over the course of its runtime. This is often the most difficult feature to reconcile when adapting a non-musical work into Bollywood. Since original musicals are constructed so that their narrative and dialogical elements flow seamlessly in terms of pacing and plot into and out of their musical elements, it requires much manipulation of a non-musical for it to suddenly feature several musical breaks. Often, Hollywood musicals will have an atmosphere of fantasy or theatrics that would make it more natural for characters to start into songs throughout the film, but with the Bollywood *masala* style, such considerations become less important, because the Indian audience is already accustomed to switches between genre and form within a film. Still, if an Indian filmmaker were to translate *The Departed*, for example, the process would be starkly different from when Scorsese translated *Infernal Affairs* due to the presence of the musical numbers alone, which would dissipate much of the sustained tension and pace from which both films draw their effectiveness. In fact, a great example is *Kaante (2002)*, which is a remake of Quentin Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs (1992)*. While Tarantino’s film is a tightly constructed, 1.5 hour display of mistrust, violence, and greed that relies on maintaining

the masculine and threatening authenticity of its characters, *Kaante* is more than three hours long, far more operatic, and unapologetically supplements the plot with musical numbers, which ends up humanizing the characters more, and even casts a sense of levity over the otherwise violent progression of the film. This is once again a result of Bollywood seeking to market to the broadest audience possible – the inclusion of songs in *Kaante* not only satiates the appetite of an audience seeking music in film, but also counterweights the excessive violence and tension of *Reservoir Dogs* for an Indian audience that might find it too extreme.

### **Distinguishing Bollywood**

As mentioned before, Bollywood is one of the largest industries globally, and it averages an output of just under a thousand films a year. Since film remains one of the primary media consumptions in Indian society, such a large-scale output is naturally warranted, and it is sustained by the ready participation of the Indian population in providing patronage to its many theatres. The population of India too is incredibly diverse in many respects. There is a large economic divide in India, and much of the country lives at or below the poverty line. Major differences exist between North and South India too – the North is more industrial, modernized, and the site of most film productions, whereas the South is more rural, separated into villages and expanses of wilderness, and is more steeped in religious tradition. Concerning religion, there are 7 major ones that are practiced in India, with many other sects and minor religions that are regionally recognized. Moreover, India is home to 22 main languages and over 270 mother tongues or derivatives. The industry itself is quite diverse, with ‘Bollywood’ serving as an umbrella term for separate film districts in major regions of India, and technically only the North Indian sector being the actual Bollywood. A notable mention includes the Tamil film industry,

which is relegated to South India. Interestingly, there is a significant transfer of film ideas from this sector into the Northern Bollywood, with these transfers being strict remakes of their sources – often the only major change that Tamil films undergo when remade into Bollywood is the translation to Hindi. Moreover, the entire Bollywood film industry services the Indian diaspora as well, which is composed of the many Indian people who have established residence in primarily Canada, United States, and London, and who use Bollywood media to maintain ties to their culture and heritage.

There is also an incredible phenomenon of celebrity in India. Though much of the rest of the world deals in its own right with celebrities, the level of veneration and regard the biggest stars in India enjoy is unparalleled. Consider the fact that many celebrities in India, after having retired from film, go on to carve significant careers in politics. Most of the highest-grossing film personalities of all time in India, of which include Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan, Hema Malini, Dharmendra, Sunny Deol, and Kirron Kher, among others, have all held positions for multiple terms in the Parliament of India. Moreover, their campaigns historically require significantly less funding for broadcasting and messaging as others do, for their name alone carries immense weight on the ballot. There is also a phenomenon of celebrity worship in India, which applies to both the psychological and literal sense. For example, Shah Rukh Khan, perhaps the biggest global star from Bollywood, consistently appears on the balcony of his house to greet thousands of people who amass on the streets below to catch a glimpse of him. Many news articles in India have commented on this phenomenon and the wild resemblance it bears to how people assemble at the Vatican to catch sight of the Pope. Other stars, for example Amitabh Bachchan, will have sculptures or effigies made for them on their birthdays or on certain religious holidays, to which large congregations pay respects. A large part of this phenomenon is

due to the fact that a majority of the Indian population is simultaneously uneducated and religious, which makes the conflation of movie stars with divinities that much easier. As a film industry, Bollywood has leaned into this phenomenon for decades, with most movies demonstrating a strong focus on building a mythology around its main characters, whether it be through channeling their romantic prowess through the wooing of females, or physical strength in hyper-realistic combat sequences. The film histories of Bollywood's biggest stars usually are of epic scale, often have many romantic leads, and systematically build upon the star's legacy.

As has been established, Hollywood to Bollywood translations are rarely a simple matter, and the variety of cultural considerations just discussed have to be factored into the process. Both film industries find great success both domestically and globally, and in their interplay they offer a view into how exclusive a film's resonance with an audience is to the cultural setting under consideration. With these factors in mind, this thesis will compare two films - *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) by the Italian director Sergio Leone for American/European audiences, and *Sholay* (1975) by the Indian director Ramesh Sippy for an Indian audience - both of which find inspiration from classic Hollywood films, that too in the distinctly American genre of the western. Though *Once Upon a Time* is not itself a Hollywood production, it takes exclusive inspiration from Hollywood western history, and as will be discussed later, it is indeed a faithful, though revisionist, example of the American western. Analysis of the pair of films will concern the ways in which they are both adaptations, with *Once Upon a Time* re-interpreting the classic American western and *Sholay* remaking *Once Upon a Time* for an eastern audience, and the ways in which adaptation within and outside cultural boundaries differs in the context of gender roles and representation.

## Chapter One: Once Upon a Time in the West

In comparing the nature of a western pastiche to its then Bollywood remake, let us first analyze *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the liberties it enjoyed as it entered discussion with its inspirations, and its relatively progressive handling of femininity. Sergio Leone's epic western *Once Upon a Time in the West* is a film important to the history of both the medium and the genre. In BFI's 2012 Sight and Sound poll - which is conducted once every decade and whose sampling includes the most visible film professionals, critics, and directors of the time - Leone's film was ranked 78<sup>th</sup>, one of the 100 best films of all time<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, Leone's name itself carries weight in the realm of westerns; in 1964, with *A Fistful of Dollars*, Leone brought a fresh take to the American western and arguably created an entire subgenre (the spaghetti western) from this film alone. With his next two features - *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966) - he completed his acclaimed *Dollars* trilogy and cemented what would become an iconic footprint in the western genre and film history as a whole.

Interestingly though, Leone's career began in the realm of the remake. Though *Fistful of Dollars* has attained enough status within popular culture as to be regarded a stand-alone original work by the average, unaware viewer, it is in fact an unofficial remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961). The plots are almost identical: a lone wanderer travels into a town that is embroiled in a feud between two powerful families, and he uses his wit, weaponry skill, and physical prowess to exploit both families for personal gain. These plot points, the nature of the supporting characters, and even certain shot compositions were considered similar enough to *Yojimbo* that Leone was even sued by the film's production company<sup>7</sup>. Though he would go on to develop his own signature operatic style and produce original works with the next two entries of the trilogy, *Fistful* stands as an example of, perhaps, the value Leone saw in engaging with the

current, existing works within a genre he sought to eventually mold to his own liking. This is to say that true complication, evolution, or transcendence within a genre should be preceded by true understanding of and interaction with its existing lineage. Of course, what is lost in the discussions of infringement and plagiarism between *Fistful* and *Yojimbo* is that Kurosawa's film was also in many ways an ode to the American western, and indeed in many parts of the film, the replacing of the samurai protagonist with a gun-wielding cowboy would have resulted in a film as close to Leone's future remake as perhaps an earlier John Ford classic.

In proceeding to make *Once Upon a Time*, then, Leone was in a wholly new position from his imitative beginnings. His previous films had found tremendous success and acclaim, even making a bona fide global icon out of Clint Eastwood, the main actor for the entire *Dollars* trilogy. The trilogy had been, in many ways, naught more than an exercise in style, flair, and storytelling. More than anything else, they were lauded for filmic elements alone, such as the stark contrasting between long shots of the western landscape and closeup shots of the character's dirt and sweat-ridden faces, extended sequences involving tense standoffs between gun-wielding opponents, and the immersive scoring by longtime collaborator Ennio Morricone. At their core, however, Leone's earlier films were largely absent of much thematic complexity, much in line with the western genre of the time. There were indeed efforts to complicate the mix on certain levels, such as developing Clint Eastwood's character to be an anti-hero as opposed to a more rigorous moral defender in a classic western, or the inclusion of tangential commentary such as in the *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, in which the main characters stumble across a battalion of the union army being led by a general who has become disillusioned by war and conflict. Still, these elements remain peripheral, and are often overwhelmed by contradictory prioritizations. The civil war general's anti-war speech is indeed touching as he lays dying in the

medical tent, but the significance of his message is lost just scenes later when thematic anchoring is sacrificed for spectacle, and the main characters return to their violent, exploitative ways, and their actions are consistently aggrandized by the epic nature of their framing and the score.

With *Once Upon a Time in the West*, Leone took his first step towards revolutionizing both the western and his spaghetti western genre not only in ways to bolster appeal as an entertainment vehicle, but instead to substantially alter the extent to which the thematic possibilities of the western genre had been considered at the time. Before considering the strides Leone made using the film, it is important to consider the impulse that is understood to have driven the popularity of classic American westerns in the first place. More than anything, the classic western returns again and again to themes of good vs. bad, of the merits of both judicial and frontier justice, and the affirmation of the heroic individual over the group. Moreover, it is less concerned with the accuracy of specific historical details, and more oriented towards representing the lost milieu and values of an America that used to be. As James K. Folsom of Yale University, who has written at length about the history of the western genre in prose and film, writes in *Western American Literature*, “the world of the Western film is true to a certain historic feeling, if not to particular historic facts...[it] mirrors a persistent nagging doubt in American life about whether the choice which America made to become a great, capitalist, industrial power was indeed a wise one.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the genre is founded simultaneously in both nostalgia and in reimagining, which allows filmmakers to be selective about what they glorify. For example, there is glorified nostalgia when these films meditate on the values of rural, homestead life or the community of a small western town, or even when the mythic likes of John Wayne or Gary Cooper are pitted against all the evils working against the innocence of the American people and the nobility of its manifest destiny. But when it comes to the elements of

the past that are conserved for historical accuracy, it is usually the domestication of women and antagonization of minorities that are reinforced. Furthermore, “western movies, far more than any other film genre, ask us to see their world rather than to talk about it...conventions of the Western film are all aimed at asking us to understand the Western world visually,”<sup>8</sup> and these visuals could not be more telling. The main focus is the heroes, and they are all male and inescapably so, while the supporting and antagonistic periphery is occupied by women and minorities. The male protagonists are rugged, well-dressed, tall, and authoritative – their characteristics could command enough visual respect even in silent film format. The women are often dressed conservatively, looking up at their male saviors, and have anachronistically cosmetic beauty. The Native Americans are prone to animated gesticulations and presence in large homogenous gangs, which likens them to unbridled forces of nature and thus dehumanizes them. There is an unwritten playbook by which the most notable western directors worked in America during the genre’s golden age of 1930s-1960s, and the visual language of its characters strayed very rarely from this manual. Thus, the objective from one film to the next was almost never about reworking these elements and was more about changing the actors who could fit these stereotypes. There was indeed great merit in these films when it comes to developments in celebrity culture and crafting elements of film language, but the legacy of the American western when it comes to making a progressive point remains woefully underdeveloped, which almost certainly has to do with the pre-civil rights era in which it was made, and the ultra-conservative and antebellum era which it created nostalgia for.

*Once Upon a Time in the West* then, in the extent to which it is influenced by the classic American western, is a *commentary* on these unexplored elements of the genre. It retains Leone’s visual flair and furthers much of the violence and lawlessness that defines both the classic and

spaghetti subgenres, but it introduces many nuances when it comes to its casting and thematic considerations. More than most westerns before it, and certainly more than the director's previous films, *Once Upon a Time* purposefully considers the western's ability to hearken back to a lost time and simultaneously critique the things that have remained unchanged in the decades since.

The plot of the movie follows as such: Jill McBain, a former prostitute, after marrying a man in New Orleans, travels out west to a town called Flagstone to live with him, only to find him and his family massacred on their land by Frank, a notorious outlaw who had been hired by a railroad tycoon named Mr. Morton to intimidate the McBain family to transfer the rights to their land. Jill soon discovers the reason that the land is wanted: her husband had purchased the land long ago knowing that it had underneath it a large freshwater reserve, and that the railroad would eventually cross through it, allowing him to make a fortune from developing a station there. Soon, Frank learns of just how valuable the land is, and betrays Mr. Morton as begins trying to intimidate Jill into relinquishing the rights to him alone. Parallely, a mysterious drifter dubbed Harmonica arrives in town with an unexplained vengeance against Frank and enlists the help of another outlaw, Cheyenne, to help Jill in retaining her rights to the land. After a series of violent encounters as the narrative unfolds, Mr. Morton is killed by Cheyenne, who is also mortally wounded in the fight. Harmonica, meanwhile, confronts Frank in a standoff, at which point he reveals that he is the younger brother of a man that Frank had many years ago killed, and wins in the shootout. Harmonica then departs the town, and Jill is left the owner of the land and station as the railroad slowly arrives to its borders.

The most distinct aspect of *Once Upon a Time* is the character of Jill McBain herself, who, by only the virtue of existing as the arguable protagonist, is a considerably revisionist

choice in a western. Throughout the movie, she remains the focal point of the plot – it is through her that most of the characters interact or develop relationships, and it is her ownership of the land that puts the plot into action in the first place. She is a far leap from the female characters of the most popular classic westerns, such as Grace Kelly’s Amy Kane in *High Noon*, whose motivation was solely defined by her marriage and dedication to Gary Cooper’s Will Kane<sup>9</sup>, or Claire Trevor’s Dallas in *Stagecoach*, who over the course of the film becomes increasingly defined by her romantic link with John Wayne’s Ringo Kid<sup>10</sup>. In *Jill*, here is a main character, who navigates her male-dominated society without a husband, holds pieces of financial leverage that gain her the interest of men beyond her offerings as a female, and retain her autonomy and independence to the very end of the film.

First, consider how *Jill McBain* differs when it comes to women of westerns in comparison to her predecessors in the genre. As discussed, the American western genre lacks a collection of popular female-lead selections. Notable exceptions exist, such as *The Furies* (1950) by Anthony Mann, which stars Barbara Stanwyck as Vance Jeffords, but it often flirts with the realm of drama more than the traditional western<sup>11</sup>. Even *Encyclopedia Britannica* classifies *The Furies* as a “Freudian western”<sup>12</sup>, which is best defined as a character-driven drama that engages in dark, psychological themes. So, most women in American westerns are of a supporting nature, and the female roles in these films are defined in relation to the more iconic male roles. *Jill McBain* is a meaningful departure from this pattern. Let us examine her interactions and relationships with the other significant characters of the film, all of whom are male.

The two male heroes of the film are Harmonica and Cheyenne, played by Charles Bronson and Jason Robards, respectively. Harmonica keeps mostly to himself for much of the film, for he is motivated solely by – as is eventually revealed – the desire for revenge against

Frank. When he finds out that Frank has murdered the McBain family, Harmonica travels to their estate where he meets the grieving Jill. Their first scene puts on display a startling aggression by Harmonica, who surprises her in the barn and, without saying much, grabs her arms and begins to pin her against stacks of hay. He remains silent as Jill asks him what he wants and proceeds to tear fabric off the collar and sleeves of her dress. With no setup to the scene and no background to Harmonica's character, all signs point to an impending instance of sexual assault or rape, if what he has done so far cannot already be qualified as the former. However, it is eventually revealed that he had been putting on an act for a pair of Frank's men watching Jill from the outside, and Harmonica wanted it to appear as if he had already gotten to her to dissuade them from entering the house. No doubt, this stands as an incredibly exploitative and roundabout way to ensure Jill's safety, so it is worth considering why exactly Leone would make this an early interaction for his female lead if he intends to take a progressive approach in his film. I think this can be understood as a moment in which Leone is entering into conversation with norms of the western genre, specifically the liberality with which they portray male overpowering of women. Analyzing the filmic elements of the scene supports the reading that Leone is in fact criticizing the history to which these scenes belong. Firstly, Morricone's score abandons any hint of Harmonica or Jill's theme here and instead inserts an unsettling piece of music that relies on high-pitched, protracted notes played on strings that establish a sense of uneasiness and danger. With lighting, while Jill's face is fully lit to display her discomfort and fear in this scene, Harmonica is cast with slightly shadowed and jagged planes, making him appear villainous. Then, as Harmonica moves threateningly towards Jill and she backs away, the camera follows them around the barn, until it passes a point where Jill stands screen-left, and Harmonica is behind one of the horses in the barn, obscured by the horse's head in the foreground. The

framing of the shot has the horse's head overlaid in a strikingly similar direction to Harmonica's own, so that it almost looks like it is the horse and Jill looking at each other, possibly suggesting how animalistic Harmonica is being here. These elements all combine to relay to the audience that this scene carries predatory undertones and, moreover, seems completely unfounded and unnecessary for the story of a character like Harmonica, who we know to be the hero. So, Leone could be commenting here, through Jill and Harmonica's first interaction, on the baseless nature many of these scenes have in western film, and how more than anything else, they should be viewed as a tarnish on the protagonist's reputation and certainly not celebrated in any capacity.

Cheyenne, on the other hand, is markedly more caring and respectful of Jill. An outlaw himself, he first meets her when he hears that Frank has framed him for the murder of the McBains, so he travels to their place to clear his name. Upon meeting her there, he is initially hostile, ostensibly due to him being unsure of her own hostility, but he eventually mellows. There is a point where Cheyenne orders Jill to make coffee at gunpoint, but when she is unable to even start the fire, he tells her to move aside and begins making the coffee himself. It is a notable switch to have Cheyenne prepare the drink for them and to characterize Jill as unfamiliar with the process, considering the stereotype of women in the west being domesticated and skilled in all aspects of homemaking. Leone is portraying her here as a more modern woman, because after all she has moved here from New Orleans, which could be supposed as a more enlightened area of the country, though not by much of course. As getting married usually involves a big change in the part of the rural woman's daily responsibilities, Leone makes it clear here that Jill is not so quick to renounce the independence of her past life. So, through this scene, Cheyenne's male character is used to define the uniqueness of Jill's female character. As their narrative

progresses and Cheyenne becomes committed to helping Jill ward off Frank and Mr. Morton's advances on her land, it is refreshing to see a relationship develop in which the male works for the female's benefit, all while maintaining a platonic rapport. There are multiple instances of dialogue where it is reinforced that while Cheyenne acknowledges Jill's attractiveness, it is not the reason he is helping her – they share a genuine partnership and friendship. For instance, when he leaves her house after their first interaction, he offers her a warm smile and tells her that she reminds him of his mother, and that he feels that Jill deserves better. Later on, when he is talking to Harmonica about building a station on the McBain land to help Jill keep her rights to it, he stares off-camera and comments on how he hopes it is the first thing she sees when she gets back. In a movie with little dialogue – it is estimated to amount to a total of 15 pages<sup>13</sup> – and that too filled with mostly cool or climactic one-liners or remarks, it is significant that much of what Cheyenne says to or about Jill is laudatory and respecting of her as an individual and a woman traversing the West alone. It is not exactly specified why Cheyenne takes such a liking to her so as to dedicate his time to saving her land, though it ultimately mirrors the baseless, selfless support that hundreds of female characters have lent male protagonists in the past, so perhaps Leone wrote Cheyenne's character with a wink in that direction.

Next, consider the antagonists of the film – Frank and Mr. Morton – and how they relate to Jill. Ordinarily, the antagonists in a western are given relatively free reign to manhandle women for the sake of sexual conquest or in some way affect the male protagonist, but the situation is different in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Jill is, for all intents and purposes, a protagonist herself, and the land that Frank and Mr. Morton are after is under her ownership. This is a novel change to the western tradition – at least in non-psychological ones – that the female lead is in possession of a desired something of value that is something uniquely her own

and is not defined by a more significant male protagonist. That is to say, Jill's primary leverage here does not originate from her sexuality, or some information/access she might be able to grant the antagonists for them to then gain an advantage against a male protagonist. Instead, she is in rightful possession of the land that is eyed by both Frank and Mr. Morton, which provides her foremost the socioeconomic status within the movie's landscape akin to that of any male, but also de-emphasizes the extent to which she needs to utilize her sexuality as leverage. Indeed, Jill is an ex-prostitute, and one would expect it to be a bigger factor in the definition of her character, seeing as there is precedence in American westerns (and many classical Hollywood films in general) of letting such a past define the character for much of the movie, that too in a restrictive manner. Consider again the prostitute character Dallas from 1939's *Stagecoach*, whose past is something she has to work to overcome as the film's narrative unfolds. She is shunned by the other members of the stagecoach, since they are aware of her being driven out of town due to the nature of her work, and it is not until John Wayne's Ringo Kid shows her affection that she becomes more accepted within the group. There is even the iconic dialogue exchange between the pair, in which Ringo tells Dallas of a ranch across the border where he would like them to go and live, to which she says, "But you don't know me...you don't know who I am," and Ringo replies, "I know all I want to know."<sup>10</sup> The response is doubtlessly liberating for Dallas, and it is a comfort seeing her be considered as more than a prostitute. However, closer reading creates the understanding that it was the approval of the authoritative male protagonist that was needed to help Dallas shift her self-image, which reinforces the concept of women lacking the autonomy to define their identity and future for themselves in the classic western. Moreover, it can be argued that their exchange does more to further John Wayne's characterization as the magnanimous lead than it does to release Dallas from her past.

Jill, though, is in total control throughout her film of when to let her past define her or not. Take for example the scene in which she is abducted by Frank and has to endure his sexual aggression as he has her pinned and attempts to seduce her. Interestingly, for much of the scene, Jill seems to act as if the proceedings are consensual, and she reciprocates many of Frank's moves and gestures. However, Frank pauses and asks her at one point, "Is there anything in the world you wouldn't do to save your skin?" to which she replies, "Nothing, Frank." In this exchange, there is a marked shift in her body language – her previous sexually suggestive movements grow still, her face turns cold, and she stares sternly and confidently at Frank when she responds. It becomes abundantly clear that in this moment that she is using her history of prostitution as an act to make it out of Frank's control alive, and it is an understandable impulse. After all, the world around her is defined by gun-toting men who by hook and crook kill, steal, trick, and massacre for their own gain and survival. She knows Frank is dangerous enough to kill her if she does not play along, so she is but opting to instrumentalize the sexuality she has developed from her past and put it to use like with any other weapon. More significantly, the lone instance where she needs to save her life, is also the lone instance she puts up this act. Her tool of sexuality is not something that is a motif in this film the same way guns are for the men. She is essentially defined to be more resourceful and adaptive than the male characters in the film – while every intermale conflict in the film is resolved ultimately through bloodshed, Jill is more judicious.

There is further evidence to support that Jill's weaponization of her sexuality against Frank is something she does as a last resort and is not something she worries will define her in perpetuity. In the scene where she first meets Cheyenne and they are yet to warm up to one another, Cheyenne repeatedly threatens her for information about the land and Frank. After a

point Jill grows frustrated by his aggression and, indignant, remarks, “If you want to, you can lay me over the table and amuse yourself...even call in your men...all I’ll need is a tub and warm water and it’ll be what it was again before...just another filthy memory.” It is a stunning statement to make, especially for the defenseless Jill against a man like Cheyenne whom the audience know to be a violent outlaw. This defines her fearlessness in the face of authoritative masculine pressure, and sheds light on how she views her status as possible sexual conquest for the men of the west. For her to say that a bath will allow her to once again return to what she was before a hypothetical sexual encounter, is to say that she views sexual interactions as inherently superficial, something that coats a woman’s image only for the moment in which the act occurs, and it can hardly be expected to go as deep as to define her character or her future from that point forward. To further characterize it as a “filthy memory” is almost a way to spit in Cheyenne’s face - make him consider the indecency of holding such a noose over a woman’s head – and to rebuke the entire nature of her previous line of work, emphasizing how it works to create an indecent self-image within a woman’s mind to prostitute herself. It is also telling that this line of dialogue marks the turning point in the scene, for after her outburst Cheyenne begins to speak with a higher degree of respect to Jill, and it is from this point forward that their relationship matures to the friendship that was discussed earlier. In comparing Jill’s actions in this scene with Cheyenne to her later scene with Frank – Leone characterizes her as an astute individual. With Frank, she was able to assess the higher degree of danger she was in and so used her sexuality to deescalate the situation as a last-ditch effort; with Cheyenne, though, she was shrewd enough to assess his character enough somehow to know that if she were to retort confidently and hold her ground, that she would be able to reason with him. Jill is therefore understood to not only have

various rhetorical tools at her disposal to navigate the patriarchal west, but also a great degree of judgement with which to analyze the people she interacts with.

Lastly, Jill's arc over the course of the film in comparison to that of the male protagonists is more clearly defined by victory and success. Cheyenne, in his shootout with Mr. Morton and his men, is wounded and eventually dies near the end of the film. Harmonica, who gets his revenge by winning the shootout against Frank, does not die like Cheyenne, but it is nevertheless interesting to note the way the film leaves his character. As Cheyenne and Jill wait in her house for Frank and Harmonica's duel to yield a winner, Cheyenne senses that Jill has feelings for Harmonica, and that she is hoping he will win and come back alive, so he says to her, "I am not the right man, and neither is he...men like [Harmonica] have something inside, something to do with death." Cheyenne's tone is resigned here, and his statement is almost fatalistic, for he is describing the very nature of the western gunslinger – he comes, he fights, he kills, he goes, and he is forgotten. Throughout the film, despite all of Harmonica's heroics, iconic remarks, or goodwill, he is the film's most one-dimensional character, propelled forward and away only by his black-and-white desire for revenge against Frank. Cheyenne is correct; if Harmonica wins the duel, there is nothing to suggest that he will stay in the town, not for the sake of his friendship to Cheyenne nor any romantic involvement with Jill. Sure enough when Harmonica returns victorious, Jill looks upon him expectantly, but he only returns his trademark stoic expression, unreadable. The music in the silent exchange is tender, as if to perhaps suggest that Harmonica recognizes feelings that Jill has for him or those that he might have for her, but he keeps them buried deep inside in order to retain...what? His authority perhaps, or maybe the dispassion that has allowed him to survive as long as he has. Either way, after holding the silence for a few

moments longer, he states simply, “Now I got to go,” and when Jill asks if he shall return to Sweetwater one day, he pauses, stares out the door, and before leaving, says “Someday.”

Here is a male protagonist who exemplifies exactly what made the western hero so wildly popular in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America. The modern, urban man sees Charles Bronson’s Harmonica as everything he himself cannot be – ultra-macho, independent, stoic, and driven by some greater, hidden purpose as opposed to living an existence in some industrial or corporate machine. When Harmonica abandons Jill and resigns himself once again to a life of drifting, despite perhaps wanting to be with her, he is celebrated by male audiences for being able to exercise that choice of freedom. However, I would argue there is an alternate reading of his story arc that sees Harmonica as a tragic character, written by Leone to demonstrate the downfalls and shortcoming of the western masculine protagonist. Driven ostensibly by revenge alone, once he has achieved it, Harmonica should by all accounts be “free” – free from the hunting of Frank, free from the grief of his murdered brother, and free to lead a different life. However, in that moment that he chooses to reject Jill, it is almost as if he is imprisoned by a drive that is left unexplained and thus can only be understood as the workings of his character’s archetype. He is, by the governing of the genre, meant to stay alone, for to succumb to relationships would mean the loss of his mystery, his cool, and perhaps the status he enjoys. This base, one-dimensional existence is in fact hinted at throughout the film, as Harmonica’s body language is consistently robotic and his face expressionless. It is almost as if Leone wants to portray him as a vessel that was once occupied by revenge, but once that condition was satisfied, there is a complete lack of aim. If probed further, there is deeper commentary within Harmonica’s character. In the flashback sequence that reveals how Frank murdered Harmonica’s brother and left him to die, the younger Harmonica can be seen to have a darker complexion and facial features that indicate

a non-Caucasian ethnicity, and since it is never specified in the film, it can be assumed using the demographics of the 1800s West that Harmonica was either of Native American or Hispanic descent. This suggests that Frank's killing of Harmonica's brother could have been racially motivated, which might offer an additional explanation for the way Harmonica's story is resolved. Leone could be hinting not only at the one-dimensional nature of the western gunslinger, but also at the regressive effect that can manifest within a victim of racial prejudice or hate crime. Though it might seem like a tangential inclusion, there is another instance within the film that Leone brings racial revisionism into the mix. Heather Hendershot, in her review for *Cineaste* magazine, which is America's leading magazine on the art and politics of cinema, points out the opening scene of the film, in which three unidentified gunslingers wait at a train station to ambush Harmonica, and of which one of them is an African-American man. She writes, "What is interesting about the [Woody Strode]'s presence, for example, is not simply that he was in several Ford films but that here, for the first time, he is a bad guy, and on a par with the other bad guys. He is important, a bit player being filmed like a star. Had a black man ever been represented like this in a Western, even if he is ultimately shot down?"<sup>13</sup> Though neither Strode's appearance nor Harmonica's background are in any way pushed to the forefront of the film's messaging, it is still notable that Leone included these elements to expand his commentary on western even beyond their treatment of female characters. For the most part with Harmonica, Leone is questioning the elements of a male protagonist the audience traditionally admires, asking if it is indeed worthwhile to retain some stereotypical masculine mystique in exchange for one's multi-dimensionality and humanity.

So, with Cheyenne's death and Harmonica's departure, they are both resigned to equally empty fates, while Jill chooses to live on in her land, complete the station, and take ownership of

her life. There is a line near the end of the film where she says to Harmonica, “You don’t look like the defender of poor, defenseless widows...but then again, I don’t look like a poor, defenseless widow.” It reads as a stamp on the evolution of her character arc; she was introduced as a woman in unfamiliar territory who is marred by the death of her husband, but she grows to stake her claim as an elevated individual within her region’s society and definitively sheds her initial image of a “poor, defenseless widow,” thus not letting herself be defined by the lack of a husband, but instead by the possession of her many skills and intellect. The film closes on Jill walking outside to provide water for the workers building her station, and there is an established sense that she will be safe and secure in her future. As Hendershot summarizes, “More than a beautiful symbol of propriety and ethics (Grace Kelly in *High Noon*), or of the carnal lust of the untamed West (Louise Glaum in the William S. Hart vehicle *Hell’s Hinges* [1916]), Cardinale's Jill McBain is a compelling, true character, and every bit as important as Cheyenne, Harmonica, and Frank,”<sup>13</sup> which is ultimately the defining achievement of Sergio Leone’s masterpiece.

## Chapter Two: Sholay

Ironically – considering Leone’s career started with a remake - it would be Leone’s most revisionist and unique western, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, that would ultimately become adaptive source material itself. *Sholay*, the Indian remake of Leone’s film, is considered to be, adjusted for inflation, the highest grossing Bollywood movie of all time, and it went on to popularize its own subgenre – the dacoit western. This is a genre defined by the clashing of law-enforcement or law-abiding heroes against dacoits, which were bandits that terrorized various region of India in the decades surrounding Independence. It is viewed by many critics to be both a reinterpretation of the American western – in that it allows for the good vs bad violent interplay – and also promotes a distaste for the outlaw lifestyle through the demonic portrayal of the dacoits, which was beneficial in a newly freed India where respect for the law was in desperate need of cultivation. Ramesh Sippy, just like Leone, had great respect for the western genre, but unlike Leone, did not have the advantage of western, English-speaking audiences for which to cater his adaptation. Leone’s experimentations with the genre could keep much of its foundation intact because even as an Italian filmmaker, his target markets heavily included the American people. Therefore, culturally, there was a basis which Leone did not have to touch, such as the very idea of a cowboy itself, or people pioneering towards the west coast, the workings of a western town, and the laws and social mores of the landscape. Sippy, though, could not reasonably remake Leone’s work in the same way Leone had done Kurosawa’s. A western cowboy could understandably be a counterpart to the Japanese samurai, but there would exist no further Indian counterpart to either the samurai nor the cowboy. There are various reasons for this, not the least of which being that during the same era that America enjoyed western expansion, India suffered under the imperial rule of Great Britain. Any individual acts of heroism

that can be likened to those of a cowboy during this era in India are to people who fought for freedom against British tyranny, which does not fully align with the core tenets of a western protagonist. Though they operate in and outside of the law, a hallmark of their existence in the West is a wide and free terrain, in which they consistently have the tools, skills, and disposition to ultimately win out over the antagonizing individual or group. To theoretically make the Indian freedom fighter the cowboy counterpart would inherently be at odds with the authority a cowboy enjoys; by the virtue alone of the protagonist being Indian, he becomes the underdog in most places he would travel in colonial India. Moreover - and this is speculation - to create a cowboy counterpart that indeed operated during the colonial times with full freedom through artistic license could have risked undermining through its revisionism the genuine struggle that the Indian people endured.

Considering the implications of British rule further, America did not develop the western film genre until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), and this was more than a century after they had already broken free from British rule and had a vast number of years to cultivate a national history rich enough to mythologize. India gained its independence in 1947, and *Sholay* released in 1975. Given this difference of only three decades, India lacked enough experience with freedom at the time to fully enter discussion with a genre defined by it. Moreover, given the relative newness of its independence, India not only lacked a long enough history, but its identity too was fractured. Upon the departure of Britain, the process of developing a standalone nation was obstacle-ridden, largely because of the country's religious heterogeneity. During colonial times, Hindu-Muslim-Sikh differences were largely cast aside in favor of unity against the colonizing forces, but after independence in 1947, flaring of tensions led to the Partition of India, which divided the subcontinent into Muslim-occupied Pakistan and

majority-Hindu India<sup>14</sup>. Sikhs and those of other minority religions saw their ancestral lands either split between the India and Pakistan border, or get integrated within the area of either country<sup>14</sup>. As said by Jawaharlal Nehru, who would go on to become the first Prime Minister of India, "Inevitably, the new nationalism in India...was a religious nationalism."<sup>15</sup> Considering that the Anti-Sikh Riots took place in 1984 and that anti-Muslim sentiments remain high to this day due to sour India-Pakistan relations, these religious tensions were hardly quick to dissipate, and it required great care on the part of a film to navigate these treacherous times. It can be safely assumed that a filmmaker like Sippy in 1975, when seeking to rework foreign material, would have to consider the fact that to have the most cultural impact and be as financially successful as possible with his film would mean to represent as close to the entirety of India on screen as he could, or at the very least make a product that balanced his artistic vision with the potential to entertain the tremendous diversity of the population.

Furthermore, considering that Sippy was adapting a gritty spaghetti western into a Bollywood film in a decade that had already cemented the popularity of genre hybridization, he opted to make his remake a *masala* film. '*Masala*' is the Hindi word for a mix of spices, and *masala* films are those that mix a wide range of genres into one work, often without particular concern about tonal shifts. This type of film gained significant popularity in India starting in the late 60s-early 70s with releases such as *Enga Veettu Pillai* (1965), a Tamil film that would have great influence on North Indian genre experimentation, and *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* (1973), which is considered to be the first true *masala* film and "the first quintessentially Bollywood film"<sup>16</sup>. A big reason for their implementation in India is the country's large population, and to intersperse comedic, musical, action, and dramatic scenes within one product ensures appeal to a broad variety of viewers.

So, when Sippy set out to create *Sholay* as a remake of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, it would have been abundantly clear that on certain levels there would need to be massive overhauls. There could be no cowboys, the gritty tonal consistency of the spaghetti western would have to be set aside in favor of a blending of genres, and the entire historical backdrop (westward expansion, the transcontinental railroad, bounty hunters, etc.) would have to either be abandoned or altered in ways that could be understood by an Indian audience. For this reason, it can be difficult to even see *Sholay* as a remake of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, but the adapted plot and characters are all there, and the degree of difference between the two, if nothing else, speaks to the tremendous care that needs to be taken when transporting art across cultural boundaries.

*Sholay*'s story goes as such: Thakur, a retired police chief and esteemed member of a rural village in India, inquires to a police friend about locating and releasing two prisoners from jail to assist him on a personal task. The two prisoners are found out to be Jai and Veeru, best friends who drift from town to town and subsists off petty robberies. Thakur enlists their help because he recalls a time when, while escorting the pair to jail on a train, the group had been ambushed by bandits, and Jai and Veeru had not only helped secure the train, but also took Thakur to the hospital when he had been severely injured in the altercation. Re-establishing contact with them, Thakur tells Jai and Veeru about Gabbar Singh, a notorious dacoit with a large dead-or-alive warrant on his head who has been terrorizing Thakur's village, and asks them to bring him to Thakur alive. He offers the pair a large sum of money in exchange for the job, and the two move to Thakur's village, begin to fight against the attacks by Gabbar's men, and acquaint themselves with the villagers, who include the gregarious Basanti, who Veeru falls in love with, and the widowed Radha, Thakur's daughter-in-law. Eventually, Thakur reveals the

reason for his hatred of Gabbar: many years ago, Thakur had put Gabbar behind bars, but he had managed to escape and travel to Thakur's estate, where he senselessly murdered every person there, leaving only Thakur and widowed Radha as the surviving members. Thakur had ridden to Gabbar's lair to seek revenge for the massacre, where he had been captured by Gabbar's men and had his arms cut off. Upon hearing this, Jai and Veeru's resolve to fight Gabbar is renewed and, after multiple skirmishes between the opposing groups, the climactic fight occurs. Jai, in trying to hold off too many of Gabbar's men, ultimately dies. Veeru, consumed with grief, attempts to kill Gabbar, but is stopped by Thakur, who wants Gabbar to himself. Upon defeating him, Thakur is about to administer the killing blow when police arrive at the scene and convince Thakur to hand Gabbar over to the law. Veeru leaves with Basanti, having restored the village to its once peaceful state.

Let us analyze the characters of the two films, specifically which ones in *Sholay* can be considered as revisions of which ones from *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and the changes that have been observed in the process of their translation. Thakur, as a first example, can be read as a translation of Mr. Morton. His connection to Mr. Morton is founded on the basis of two similarities – one in that they both hire people to carry out their tasks, and two that they both are notably handicapped through either the dysfunction or absence of limbs. Whereas Mr. Morton is a wealthy capitalist who has amassed a fortune from his life as a railroad tycoon, Thakur is a retired police officer whose fame and influence extends only to the borders of his village. In postcolonial India, it would take time before the capitalist machine would begin to churn out titans of industry that had grown organically within the system, and in 1975 there was hardly an Indian capitalist alternative to Mr. Morton. What did exist, however, was a push for lawfulness and law enforcement by different sectors of society, whether it be the film industry or

government messaging. Moiz Tundawala, an associate professor of law, writes in his article entitled “On India’s Postcolonial Engagement with the Rule of Law” that “the British rule of law tradition [received] enthusiastic embrace by the first generation of law persons in independent India. Right from the very early days of the working of the Constitution, respect for the rule of law had come to be seen as the most important and beneficial heritage of the British period.”<sup>17</sup> Given that 1970s still saw the Indian government in its relatively nascent stages, it was important that respect for the law was cultivated in society to minimize the general chaos from inter-religious or land disputes. A prioritization on law enforcement was akin to a prioritization of unity in the new nation. Naturally, this sentiment translated to the big screen, in which police officers and servants of the law began to be mythologized in much the same way powerful businessmen like Mr. Morton or cowboys like Harmonica were in the typical western. An example of this can be seen in the film *Deewar* (1975), which is considered to be a key contribution to world cinema by Bollywood<sup>18</sup>. The film tackles the conflict between two brothers, one of whom is a criminal and the other a police officer, and how they attempt to navigate their relationship despite being diametrically opposed in philosophy<sup>19</sup>. Ultimately, it is the police officer brother that wins in the end, which ties into the sentiment that would be expected from a film at the time.

This explains why a character like Mr. Morton, whose elevated socioeconomic status is a result of capitalist exploitation, and who hires an outlaw – Frank – to seize valuable land from the McBains, is rewritten as the more honorable Thakur, who has amassed his wealth by a lifetime of service in law enforcement and who hires two well-intentioned crooks to help save his fellow villagers from the threat of Gabbar. While one is driven by greed, the other is driven by service and selflessness, since those are qualities that were considered important to

promulgate in postcolonial society. Another similarity between Mr. Morton and Thakur, of course, is that Mr. Morton suffers from a bone tuberculosis that has caused him to lose control of his legs, and Thakur has lost both his arms to Gabbar. Mr. Morton's affliction is highly symbolic – for him to have a disease of the legs, that too of the bones, suggests a corrupted foundation. Moreover, if legs are to symbolize mobility, perhaps mobility in the economic sense, Mr. Morton's disease highlights how he is handicapped in accordance with his primary nature. Since his life has been defined by upward socioeconomic mobility, this disease robs him of that ability and thus underscores his greatest resource. Thakur, on the other hand, is made to lose his arms to the ruthless Gabbar. Prior to that moment, there are scenes in *Sholay* that show Thakur chasing criminals on horseback and grabbing them with his powerful arms, and even proclaiming in one instance to Gabbar that “these arms are like a noose!” If Thakur's arms are then understood to be a symbol of his strength and tools of justice, then their loss suggests that what is most central to Thakur's character is justice and lawfulness itself.

While the Mr. Morton-Thakur connection might come easier because of their both being men, it is interesting to note that there is also an aspect of Jill McBain that is rewritten into Thakur's character. In *Once Upon a Time in the West*, Jill's family is murdered, and she discovers their dead bodies lined outside the house when she arrives from the station. Parallely, in *Sholay*, it is Thakur whose family is murdered, and it is he who discovers their bodies lying beside the only person who survived the attack, his daughter-in-law Radha. Exploring further the consequences of both Jill and Thakur losing their families, notice how Jill can only grieve in the moment, and eventually has to rely on the kindness of Cheyenne and Harmonica to get her revenge against the killer Frank. Thakur, though, is visibly incensed upon discovering the bodies, and rides off to Gabbar's lair to seek revenge. Of course, there he is captured and has his arms

cut off, after which he bides his time for years and then relies on the services of Jai and Veeru for his revenge. This translation of Jill to Thakur points out an interesting choice by Sippy – why confer the tragedy suffered by a lead female in the source material to that suffered by a male supporting actor in the remake? A key to understanding this could lie in considering the fact that Jill draws much of her power and leverage in *Once Upon a Time in the West* from the clause that transfers ownership of land from her husband to herself when he dies. It is the land that Mr. Morton and Frank want, and her unwillingness to part with it and the many shrewd steps she takes in preserving her autonomy and property are for the most part what distinguish her as an iconic female lead in western film history. However, the history of land ownership in India, that too in rural towns, is slightly more complex. Social scientist and historian Prem Chowdry writes in an article discussing property rights of women in postcolonial India about the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, which reversed antiquated colonial laws that prevented women from owning property, and how it is still considered one of the most “gender equitable laws in India.”<sup>20</sup> However, she goes on to detail the immediate repercussions of this law, and how rural areas in particular were slow to let it take effect. Chowdry writes, “The Act aroused tremendous anxieties in rural society... the patrilineal and patriarchal hold stood to weaken and even be demolished in time... this Act has [tightened] the noose of control over females, unmarried or married, because giving them inheritance rights made the need to control them even more crucial.”<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, despite the legislation and various court cases to support it, “there was nothing to indicate that a sizeable number of females had indeed been able to exercise their rights,”<sup>20</sup> which is to say that female property ownership, regardless of legality under the Hindu Succession Act, was not at all a popular phenomenon, and far from a fixture, in the average rural town in India. Therefore, it made more sense for Sippy to confer the land ownership arc of Jill

over to the male hands of Thakur for the simple reason that it better reflected the India that the audiences of 1975 knew to be true. What is less easily explained though are the reasons both films give for why Jill and Thakur each rely on other people to get their revenge for them; Jill relies on the generosity of Cheyenne and Harmonica because she as a female is inexperienced with gunslinging, while Thakur relies on Veeru and Jai because...his arms have been cut off. Sippy is equating the existence of Jill to that of a limbless Thakur, which could in fact be subtle commentary about how symbolically handicapped a woman finds herself in a male-dominated society.

Of course, Jill is only partially translated to Thakur. For the most part, she is used to define the two main supporting female roles in *Sholay* – that of the vibrant Basanti and the widowed Radha. It is an interesting choice for Sippy to take Jill, the lone female character from the source film, and distribute aspects of her arc and character between two female characters in his film remake; possibly, it allows him to explore the dual and conflicting aspects and consequences of her femininity in greater detail. Basanti represents the independent, fierce, and resourceful side of Jill – her name itself means ‘spring’, which connotes lightness, beauty, and a sense of the carefree. In contrast to the entire village, Basanti is always wearing garments of vibrant pinks or greens or yellows, and it reflects both her vibrant personality and the way Jill herself stands out as lone source of beauty and vitality in her otherwise muted desert surroundings. Moreover, just like Jill rejects her past as prostitute and carves her own path as a landowner, Basanti is contrasted from the typical rural woman and especially the women in her village through working as the driver of a horse-cart. Whereas the typical rural woman, regardless of marital status, is expected to handle domestic chores, Basanti conducts her own small-scale transport business, in a way. When Veeru and Jai first arrive near the village, they

even question her about why a girl like her would be driving a cart, to which she replies “If Dhanno [the horse] can pull the carriage while being a mare, why can’t Basanti drive the carriage while being a girl?” She is characterized immediately from this introductory scene as a woman who has a clear mind about what she is capable of, and that she does not feel as if she has to restrict herself to what tradition dictates.

Jill and Basanti’s characters also intersect in one of the most compelling juxtapositions of the two characters’ scenes. As discussed earlier in the analysis of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, there is a scene where the outlaw Frank has his way with Jill, and she lets him, for she knows that to express her sexuality in that situation would be the only thing that gets her out alive. Similarly, there is a scene in *Sholay* where Veeru has been captured by Gabbar, and Basanti is made to dance for the pleasure of Gabbar and his men in order to negotiate the freedom of Veeru. This results in a musical number in which Basanti tirelessly dances under the hot sun and the animal stares of Gabbar and his men, all while singing a song which has the refrain “*jab tak hai jaan...main nachungi*” which translates to “as long as I have strength, I shall dance”. Consider the difference between the exploitation of Jill by Frank and of Basanti by Gabbar. With Jill, she is sacrificing a piece of her autonomy for her own benefit, safety, and survival. Basanti, though, sacrifices her dignity not for herself, but for Veeru. On initial observation, it can seem as if Sippy is regressing Basanti’s character by redefining her motivation through a more central male character, which would indeed fit into a Bollywood history of female characters who are defined by their support of, or subservience to, male protagonists. However, I would argue that there are certain elements to be considered in Basanti’s dance scene that reveal it to be an attempt by Sippy to display Basanti in as progressive a light as the standards of Bollywood allowed at the time.

Firstly, note the narrative context of the scene. Veeru has rushed without foresight into Gabbar's lair, and it is this foolishness that gets him captured and leaves both him and Basanti at the mercy of the bandits. Basanti is blameless here in landing them in this situation, and it in fact speaks volumes that she is the only one of the two with the resources – her ability to dance – to perhaps allow them to escape. Moreover, there are specific filmic elements in her dance scene that support the reading that Basanti is in fact being empowered in this scenario. First of all, there are numerous instances of her being framed by low-angle shots as she twirls around the rocky terrain, and it makes her seem larger-than-life, and even draws attention to how honorable her selflessness here is. In the middle of the song, Gabbar's men toss glass bottles at her feet, which immediately shatter and layer the rocks around her with shards. After only a moment's pause, Basanti continues her dance, and the camera tracks her feet stepping on and around the shards without worry, and soon portions of her feet are shown to be bleeding. Just like Jai and Veeru earlier in the film endured gunshot wounds by Gabbar's men, here is Basanti enduring her own types of wounds, in a sense equating her with the bravado we have so far associated only with the two male protagonists.

Lastly, I want to compare her dance sequence to another that takes place earlier in the film. In that scene, Gabbar and his men are visited upon by an ammunitions dealer, who brings with him a nautch girl to entertain the men. In this scene, another musical number occurs, and this time it is an item song. The term 'item song' is nicely defined by Rita Brara in her article about cinesexuality in Bollywood, in which she says, "[it] is a cine-segment comprising an item-girl...a racy song, a vivacious dance and a surround of erotic and immanent exuberance."<sup>21</sup> Essentially, these are tangential sequences of sexual dance entertainment. As superfluous as they might seem, item numbers have in fact been fixtures of Bollywood movies since the 40's, when

Cuckoo Moray began doing cabaret dances in drama-heavy movies to break tensions. Over time, as mainstream Bollywood remained focused on entertainment over art film, the popularity of item numbers grew and so did the rate at which they appeared in films. So, in the *Sholay* scene, an item girl – played by Helen, the definitive item girl of the 70s<sup>21</sup> – does her suggestive performance for the gang of bandits. Item numbers are irredeemably exploitative of women, especially with the way they cater to the male gaze, so it is worthwhile to delineate the ways in which Helen’s item number differs from Basanti’s effort to save Veeru. For one, in the item number, there is a man who sings the song as Helen dances, while Basanti is in control of both the song and dance in her sequence. Moreover, Helen is more scantily clad (at least by 70’s standards) and the camera lingers often on bare portions of her midriff or her legs. Basanti, meanwhile, is framed in consistent medium to full shots that establish her as a person and not some sum of her bodily parts. There are lighting differences too between the scenes, such as the item number being surrounded by warm, sensual, red and orange lights that amplify the sexuality of the moment, while in Basanti’s sequences there is a harsh natural light that serves as a reminder of the stakes with which Basanti is so bravely working. It is almost as if Sippy purposefully included these two dance sequences to be compared, and through their comparison the character of Basanti to be redeemed. Understandably, Indian audiences would not have responded successfully to a Basanti that was an exact copy of Jill, since that western level of independence being put on display would have been too much a departure from the domesticated woman that audiences were accustomed to seeing both on screen and in their daily lives. So, in an attempt to strike middle ground, Sippy found ways in which to express Basanti in progressive measures without making it the focal point of the film.

The other female character in *Sholay* is Radha, and she is translated from the parts of Jill that remain oppressed by a patriarchal society. Though Jill is eventually able to overcome the perception that people had of her as some unfortunate, grieving widow, it was still telling how much pushback she had to give to achieve that change. There are multiple lines of dialogue early in *Once Upon a Time in the West* that demonstrate the myopic view the townspeople have of Jill. For instance, when Jill has arrived at the McBain house to find her husband and his family killed, the driver who brought her there encourages her to go back to the station town, but she refuses. He asks, “You don’t want to stay out here alone?” to which she replies, “Why not? This is my home.” As a default, others see Jill as defined by the loss of her husband, but from the beginning Jill is at work taking ownership of her future from that point forward. This is in depressingly sharp contrast to the tragic character of Radha, who along with Thakur is the only survivor of Gabbar’s massacring of their family. While Thakur is able to move on, realize his desire for revenge, hire Jai and Veeru, and make meaningful progress in his journey away from grief, Radha remains defined by the loss of her husband in the massacre. Throughout the film, she wears only white to symbolize her grief and mourning, and there is a point when she runs down the stairs upon hearing an explosion and her veil falls from her head, for which she receives a stern look from Thakur. It is almost as if the societal structures around her will not allow her to move past the loss of her husband – that is how tightly her existence is defined by her marriage. This is true in Indian culture to some extent even today; while many cultures have the tradition of the woman’s parents ‘giving the bride away’ during a wedding, in India marriage is often seen as a complete relinquishing of the bride by her family to that of the groom’s. Though this practice has grown less conservative over time, it certainly was practiced as such in the 1970s, and has doubtfully changed much in the rural regions of India. It is remarkable to compare the

deftness with which Jill was able to blaze her own trail to the way Radha is kept sequestered within her role as a widow.

Again, just as with Basanti, it might seem that Sippy is being counter-progressive by propagating Radha's image of the repressed widow, but it is in fact commentary too. This is evinced when considering the one flashback scene that offers insight into Radha's background. The scene is set during Holi - the festival of colors – when Thakur is first traveling to meet Radha's father and propose a marriage between his son and her. As he sits in the back of the cart nearing his way to the house, Radha suddenly appears and tosses Holi colors at him and laughs joyfully. She is completely unrecognizable; up until that point, the audience has only known her post-marriage/tragedy, where she has never smiled, never emoted, never worn anything but her white dress, and never so much as gesticulated excitedly. In the flashback, though, she is wearing a bright green and yellow dress, laughing cheerily, and having the merriest of exchanges with the people around her. There is an immediate understanding that the Radha we see in the flashback is the true and real Radha, the woman yet to be shackled by the expectations and customs of marriage and widowhood. The flashback ends with Radha saying to Thakur, “wouldn't the world be a dull place without colors?” at which point the scene hard cuts to present-day Radha, drained of color and happiness. This flashback is instrumental in understanding that Radha is not a character adapted by Sippy to celebrate the entrapment of women within archaic institutions, but instead shed light on how dehumanizing they can be. Furthermore, Jill and Radha also share the fact that their desires for a love interest go unfulfilled. As discussed previously, Jill is shown to have feelings for Harmonica near the end of the film, which he fails to reciprocate and leaves Jill alone. Similarly, through the course of the film, a tender romance develops between Jai and Radha, but with Jai's death at the end of the movie, Radha's love is also left unreciprocated. The

difference is that *Once Upon a Time in the West* does not end Jill's story on that sad note; instead, it ends on the hopeful note of the successful life she is yet to live on the land she has sole ownership to and the station that is soon to be built on it. When Radha loses Jai, though, it is irreversibly heartbreaking. Keeping in mind the years she had spent being made to remain in grief over her lost marriage, her linkage with Jai – which Thakur had even grown to approve – could have been her once chance at renewal. However, with Jai's death, she is cast once again, and perhaps this time definitively, into the sadness of her past life.

Finally, in *Sholay*, there are certain details to be noted in the adaptations of the male characters too, for example Cheyenne and Harmonica being adapted into Jai and Veeru, interchangeably. These two are the loosest adaptations out of all the characters, in that the similarities extend only so far as the friendship both Cheyenne/Harmonica and Jai/Veeru share, and the fact that they both are gunslinging, town-saving men. The fact that no narrative or characteristic tendencies were carried over from Cheyenne and Harmonica when creating Jai and Veeru could very well be the result of *Sholay* existing as a *masala* film. Given how little dialogue both of Leone's male protagonists had, there was not a developed enough personality to adapt, and a multi-dimensional personality is necessary to exist in the world of *masala*, which requires characters to seamlessly transition from comedic beats to dramatic monologues to heart-pounding action sequences. This is perhaps why Sippy felt the need to craft these characters from the ground up. One thing to note though is the greater degree of male bonding that Jai and Veeru enjoy as best friends as opposed to Cheyenne and Harmonica, who are only friends by virtue of mutual respect and interests. In *Sholay*, there is a cheerful musical number in the beginning that shows Jai and Veeru riding around the countryside in a bike with a sidecar singing “*yeh dosti, hum nahin toreng...toreng dum magar, tera saat na choreng,*” which translates as “this

friendship, we will never break...though our strength might one day leave, we will never leave each other's side." Then, when Jai dies near the end of the film, Veeru is completely distraught and cries while holding Jai. At the end of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, when Cheyenne is dying of his bullet wound, he tells Harmonica to "look away, I don't want you to see me die." So, here is a situation that shows Sippy not only taking inspiration from Jill as a liberated character to express his own opinions about the state of female representation in Bollywood, but going so far as to extend that progressive lens to the subject of masculinity too. Many critics have also remarked on the relatively androgynous look that Jai has in the film, with his long hair, lanky frame, and colorful attire he wears. Sippy observes the shortcomings of the toxic masculine mindset in *Once Upon a Time* – the same mindset that it takes to shun away a friend and die alone, or to always be clad in the roughest clothes dirt-streaked faces - and amends this when creating his own male protagonists, engaging them in a meaningful bond of friendship that borders on brotherhood. Perhaps this is a result of Sippy recognizing that the problem with misogynistic portrayals in Indian cinema is not due to the inclusion of oppressed, powerless, and stereotyped female characters alone; instead, the relative hyper-masculinization of the male protagonists also contributes adversely to the image of the female. After all, for female characters in film to be drawn as powerless and oppressed, there must be characters who are then powerful and the oppressors. By coloring Jai and Veeru more deeply than Leone does Harmonica and Cheyenne, Sippy is demonstrating the balance that must be struck between male and female characters in film – that sorrow, emotion, loss, and colorful self-expression are not attributes that should be exclusively feminine, for they tend to perpetuate existing stereotypes. Just as Radha mourns the death of Jai, so does Veeru. They are both shown undergoing intense

grief, visibly showing it through tears and outbursts, and in such moments there is a level plane that is created for the male and female characters to exist upon on screen.

### Chapter Three: Evaluation and Reflection

In comparing *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Sholay*, it becomes abundantly clear that the complexity of the process of film remaking varies exponentially with the audience and culture to which the remake seeks to connect, or that which it seeks to inform. Leone's film operates across mostly steady ground; his stylistic impulses have clear inspirations, translations, and reimaginations. They work within parameters, and those parameters are the understandings of a western audience. The nostalgia for a mythologized male hero of the past – as is characteristic of the western - can connect only with an audience that is knowledgeable of that past, and furthermore lives a life that inspires reminiscence. Moreover, western films operate in spheres where there is not only a separation of church and state, but for the most part the separation of church and film art too. Indeed, Hollywood has for years been criticized for being majority atheist and moving further and further away from the conservative religious groundings of the rest of America. However, the profitability of Hollywood movies has only increased over the years, which signals that the lion share of the American public is unaffected by Hollywood's not operating within some religiously determined moral parameters.

Of course, that is just Hollywood, and there is a world of cinema to consider. Moreover, as the decades have advanced from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cinema has only become more and more globalized, not only when it comes to the distribution of films themselves across borders, but also ideas. Naturally, this dynamic flow of ideas leads to inspiration, and inspiration leads to art, which ultimately leads to film adaptations and remakes. What if, though, an idea from the morally ambivalent western cinema were to influence the creation of a remake within a culture defined more strictly by tradition? Such was the origin of *Sholay*, which on the surface, in every major way, plays like a Bollywood original, even though it is not.

The goal of this thesis was to determine the considerations that are made when transforming a film across cultural boundaries, whether those considerations be stylistic or symbolic or narrative. In utilizing two landmark films from both hemispheres of the world as case studies, this thesis foremost offers insight into the elements that define films within each culture. Then, in considering the changes made during the remake process, with specific focus on which elements were changed and which were left the same, we gain an understanding on the filmic priorities of the cultures in question. Considering *Sholay*'s analysis alongside *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the most notable changes occurred along the lines of gender roles and representations of the main characters. The degree to which the progressivism of Leone's vision in *Once Upon a Time in the West* remained faithful in *Sholay*, and the extent to which it was regressed, creates a better picture of the filter through which films pass when they are reinterpreted in the Indian film industry.

As the thesis determined, it was the progressive stances that Leone took with the lead female character in his movie that allowed for Sippy to create responsive commentary on the nature of female characters in Bollywood cinema. The logic is the same as on a mathematical problem, where, provided with a set of inputs and outputs, and upon analyzing both, one is asked to determine the mathematical function that transformed the input to the output. Similarly, by analyzing what Sippy felt comfortable enough to sustain from Leone, and especially focusing on what he felt that he had to change, we gain a better understanding of how western films undergo transformation. Bollywood was discovered to be more restricted by its social mores when it comes to representing certain aspects of feminine independence on screen. These mores were analyzed to originate from India's existence as a largely non-secular nation. The scattering of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other minor religions across a country that was defined

by religious partition from its genesis, necessitates the reality that people belonging to each religious group will hold their values close to their identity, which leads to, generally, a more conservative society, since its people conduct themselves more rigorously on the basis of their separate traditions. This is invariably going to represent itself in the filmic output of a nation, as well as what the audience within that nation is willing to tolerate collectively.

Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* had the luxury of taking liberal strides with its subject matter, for it knew that it was intended for display to a largely secular, western audience that, despite seeking the western genre for nostalgia of tradition, could still stomach the genre's inching towards progressivism, since the society around the audience was inching towards progressivism anyhow (the 1960s saw the rise of Second Wave Feminism), while *Sholay*'s attempts to do so are more restricted, since it is being made for a society that is still going through the throes of interreligious conflict and deeply-held regressive views on the role of women in society. In the same few decades that America saw calls for improvements in race relations and an end to war, India saw the rise of separatist movements such as the Khalistan effort, which was a Sikh separatist movement seeking the creation of a sovereign state in the Punjab region much like the Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. At the same time, these separatists movements had to reckon with the rise of Hindu nationalism, and with such intense interreligious division, it led to deeper entrenchment of people into their own belief systems and resulted in a more conservative society.

Nevertheless, as the thesis has analyzed, *Sholay* was still plenty progressive for its time, the credit for which is greatly owed to its source material. That is to say, perhaps if Leone had not set out to make a western as revisionist as *Once Upon a Time*, *Sholay* might not even have been as progressive as it ended up being. The fierce vitality and independence of Jill McBain in

Leone's film is unavoidable; any filmmaker seeking to remake *Once Upon a Time* has to reckon with her as a character. Therefore, if the western world seeks to spread its principles of freedom and liberality to the corners of the world where it is not enjoyed to the degree it is in the west, then it is important to consider the role art plays in that process, and the extent to which the transfer of artistic filmic ideas can impress upon the artistic minds in foreign cultures. I would like to refer to such a process as 'trickle-down progressivism', in that the extent to which progressive stances are taken in western film are replicated in smaller, more cautious steps by foreign industries. Over time though, as has happened in India, the industry learns and grows and matures, eventually mirroring its western source.

It is equally important to recognize that although Bollywood has since become more liberal and dedicated towards progressive gender portrayals, it is not the only major foreign film industry in the world. More significantly, it is not the only film industry working in a country that still operates within relatively oppressive parameters. For example, Iran is a nation that has both a booming arthouse film industry and a startlingly restrictive lifestyle for its female population. As indicated by findings of the Human Rights Watch organization, "women's rights are severely restricted in Iran...women are forbidden from watching men's sports in stadiums...confront serious discrimination on issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody...have been sent to jail for publicly speaking out in favor of equal rights for women."<sup>22</sup> This does not imply in any way that the filmic output of such a society should be a number one priority, but it should be noted that art produced in such a society will have trouble making much progressive strides if the ideas are originating from only within the culture. Consider, then, the result of foreign influence on the landmark Iranian horror film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014). As Katie Lee Lynch assesses in her article for the Trinity Middle East & North

Africa Review, this film is considered the “first Iranian vampire spaghetti western,” which lays bare its western influences. More notably, it features a female vampire protagonist who “enacts vigilant justice...[on] those whose behaviors she deems worthy of punishment, such as men who exploit and subjugate women.”<sup>23</sup> The director, Ana Lily Amirpour, has entered into conversation with the western-popularized concept of the vampire and vigilante, and imposed her own feminist views onto them, resulting in a unique blend of genre, ideas, and revisionism. The film is notable for its resistance to being defined by any particular genre, and through its course it flirts with horror, feminism, western, and vampiric elements, though never restricting itself completely to one. There is an air of freedom in the movie, the same freedom that the female protagonist enjoys with her powers, and perhaps which Amirpour hopes the female population of Iran will one day too be empowered enough to indulge in.

This is all to demonstrate that the boundaries between filmic cultures are as open as ever. Filmmakers from every country are listening, watching, and studying the works of the most visible global industries, atop which Hollywood sits paramount. It is inherent, then, on activist filmmakers in the western sphere to become increasingly conscious of the responsibility they bear in influencing positive change in other cultures through the film remake and adaptation process, and it is inherent on the audiences of the liberalized nations of the world to lend increasing patronage and support to films, filmmakers, and studios who take major strides and risks in order to further this cause.

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