An exploration of the western genre through the two versions of True Grit

Research Question: By what methods do the two versions of True Grit adhere to and subvert the western genre?

Group 6 Extended Essay in Film

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Introduction

Released in 1903, Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery signalled the birth of the western, a "cinematic genre as old as filmmaking itself" (Vittoria). Portraying the 19th-century American West, western films "...explore thorny issues of American history and character…" (Agresta). The evolution of the genre and its conventions can be traced to the evolution of "...America's…self-image" (Agresta). This is evident in how John Ford's Stagecoach (1939), which debuted John Wayne as a lower-class hero, empowered "...the working people of America" ("The Western (Part 1): The Birth of a Genre") during the Great Depression. Stagecoach inspired the image of the classic western hero, which is typically a "...clean-living…[and]...sharp-shooting…[man who]...always wins…" (French 30). However, as the Cold War progressed, "...the figure of the cowboy grew darker and more complicated" (Agresta), mirroring the United States's (US) involvement in "...coups, assassinations and…dubious wars…" (Agresta). As a result, revisionist westerns that subverted the conventions of the classic western became more "popular" (Naidoo). Clint Eastwood's revisionist western Unforgiven (1992) even revived the genre after its "lull" (Yogerst and Dowell) in the 1980s. Unforgiven influenced the rise of modern westerns, which "combine…the conventions…[of classic westerns]...with those of contemporary cinema" (Broughton 127).

The two film adaptations of Charles Portis' novel True Grit (1968) are renowned for their subversions of the western genre. Despite their differences cinematically, both films have a similar plot. They follow Mattie Ross as she embarks on a quest to find her father's murderer Tom Chaney. She travels alongside Rooster Cogburn, a marshall with a morally grey past, and LaBoeuf, a Texas Ranger also pursuing Chaney. After losing her first confrontation with Chaney, Mattie is captured by his gang. Rooster and LaBoeuf eventually come to her rescue and succeed in a shootout against the gang. However, Mattie falls into a

snakepit after shooting Chaney in their final confrontation and suffers a venomous snakebite. After a strenuous journey on horseback and foot, Rooster and Mattie find medical aid. The two versions differ in tone and when compared, the 2010 version directed by Joel and Ethan Coen is "...grittier and darker…" (Wilson). Henry Hathaway's 1969 version adheres more to the conventions of the classic western by being "...more upbeat [and having] a traditional outcome…" (Hamilton). Although this version is "...old-fashioned" (Tobias) compared to other 1969 westerns, it "...made an impact on the film industry" (Desha) by featuring a teenage girl as the lead character. The 2010 adaptation "...carries…[Mattie's]...traits into the modern day" (Desha) and takes even more of an "anti-western" (Looper) approach by ending her arc in "...a darker way" ("True Grit - How to Remake a Great Movie"). This version also provides more "humanised" ("True Grit - How to Remake a Great Movie") depictions of Rooster and LaBoeuf. Thus, using various cinematic techniques, the two films adhere to and subvert the western genre through their characterisations of Mattie, Rooster and LaBoeuf.

The Conventions Explored

The two films adhere to and subvert the classic western hero archetype through their portrayals of Mattie, Rooster and LaBoeuf. Like Rooster and LaBoeuf, western heroes work as lawmen or cowboys who "bring law and order to the untamed west" ("Logan and the Neowestern"). While western heroes are "...confident in [them]sel[ves]" (French, "Cowboy" 75), they are "...far less convinced of…[their]...invincibility" (French, "Cowboy" 75). Thus, they are less prone to downfalls, unlike Greek heroes who experience them due to fatal flaws, such as "hubris" (French, "Cowboy" 75). This is evident in the classic western revenge plot, where despite grave consequences, a hero's obsession with revenge scarcely "...drive[s]...[them]...to doom…" (French, "Cowboy" 86). Both versions of True Grit involve a revenge plot and explore this convention through Mattie. Furthermore, expectations

regarding young female characters are explored through Mattie in both films. A clear subversion is already present in how the films feature a female protagonist. Alongside being "the motive for male activity" (Tompkins 41), female characters often "...stand for love and forgiveness" (French, "Westerns" 23). Westerns also depict negotiation and "...language…[as]…ineffective" (Tompkins 52). As a result, male heroes rely on violence, which prompts female supporting characters to act as their "...voice of reason…" (French, "Westerns" 23). Additionally, "the main character is…[generally]… a full-grown adult…" (Tompkins 38) and youths are portrayed as constantly needing "...to learn from elders" (French, "Westerns" 43).

Mattie Ross

Firstly, the 1969 version of True Grit subverts its genre immensely through its depiction of Mattie. Overall, Kim Darby's Mattie rejects the genre's expectations for female characters and western protagonists.

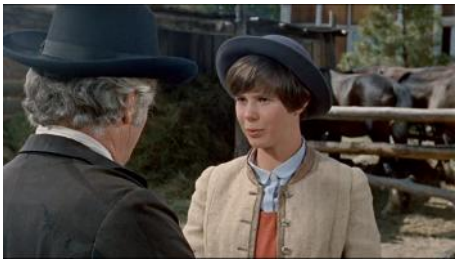

Figure 1 (35:03)

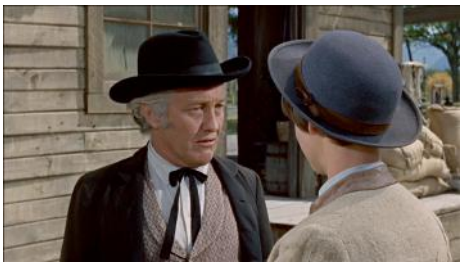

Figure 2 (35:19)

This is first evident during Mattie's negotiation with Colonel Stonehill. The scene cuts between over-the-shoulder shots of each character (Figures 1 and 2) as they speak. This editorial choice allows visibility for both characters as they deliver their arguments, establishing a sense of balance.

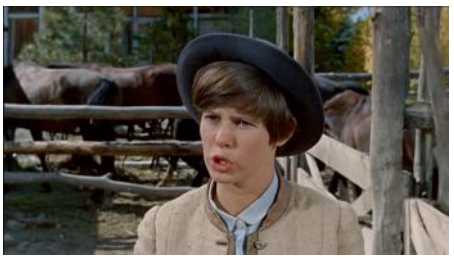

Figure 3 (35:42)

This balance is disrupted in the medium close-up shot (Figure 3), which centres Mattie as she reminds Stonehill that "...a widow and three small children can get fair treatment in the courts…" (Hathaway). Editing and framing reinforce Mattie's strategic use of her father's death to dominate Stonehill, subverting the convention that language is ineffective. Mattie's dominance in the negotiation is furthered by the irony that Stonehill's horses are only visible in the backgrounds of Figures 1 and 3. Despite being owned by Stonehill, the horses are always behind Mattie, suggesting that even they are on her side. This mise-en-scène choice supports Mattie's dominance in the interaction. Therefore, a subversion is present in how Mattie embodies qualities emblematic of the typical western hero despite being a young female.

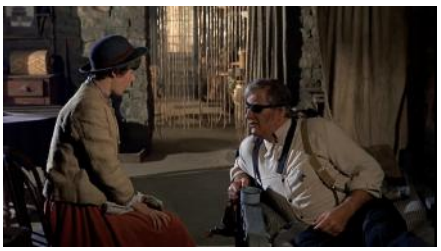

Figure 4 (40:11)

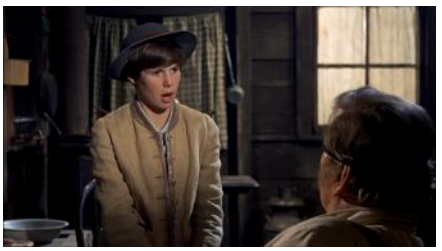

Figure 5 (40:37)

Mattie is also depicted as dominating Rooster from 39:50 to 40:37. The camera stays on a face-to-face shot (Figure 4) for 47 seconds to focus equally on both characters as they banter and argue. Additionally, physicality places Mattie above Rooster. The long take is then interrupted by an over-the-shoulder shot (Figure 5) framing Mattie at a lower angle as she threatens to "...find somebody [else for the job]..." (Hathaway). Mattie is the only person

speaking and front lighting is used to illustrate her as the main focus of the exchange. Through framing, physicality, editing and lighting, Mattie is again portrayed as having authority through language. While her discussions with Stonehill and Rooster adhere to the convention that "women rely on negotiation" (Tompkins 52), they subvert the standard that only silence and action can propel the plot.

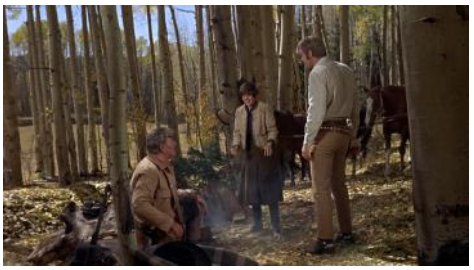

Figure 6 (59:24)

Additionally, Mattie is shown as having authority over Rooster and LaBoeuf when she breaks up their arguments. The first argument occurs when Rooster insults LaBoeuf's occupation. In the wide full shot in Figure 6, Mattie gets between Rooster and LaBoeuf and forms a pyramid, which connotes "stability" (Volpe). By making up the last edge of the pyramid, Mattie disrupts the tension.

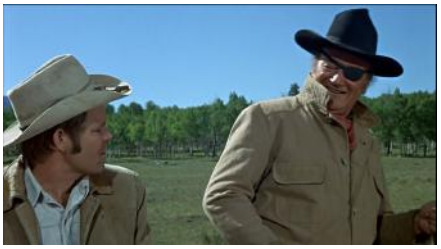

Figure 7 (1:24:28)

Figure 8 (1:25:21)

Rooster and LaBoeuf's second dispute occurs when LaBoeuf challenges Rooster's integrity. The two-shot in Figure 7 neglects Mattie and focuses solely on the petty conflict. Mattie's intervention is marked by a cut to a three-shot (Figure 8) as she shares her plan to capture Ned. The three-shot accommodates all three characters and reinforces Mattie's reminder to her partners of the larger issue at stake. Despite adhering to the convention that women are

"...the voice of reason…" (French, "Westerns" 42), Mattie's ability to suppress Rooster and LaBoeuf's conflict demonstrates her authority over them. Through editing and composition, the impact of Mattie's presence is highlighted, subverting the idea that young female characters are insignificant.

Furthermore, a notable subversion is present when Mattie experiences a downfall towards the film's end. Her obsession with revenge is established as the reason for this ordeal when she recovers one of her father's gold pieces.

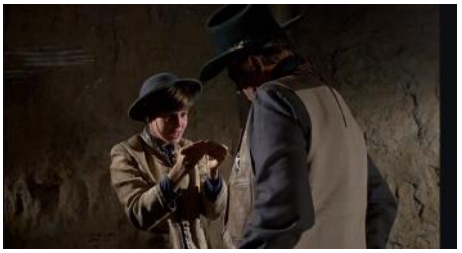


Figure 9 (1:11:00) **Figure 10 (1:52:41)**

As shown in Figure 9, Rooster casts a shadow on half of Mattie's face. Through side lighting, cinematographer Lucien Ballard illustrates darkness surfacing as Mattie's eagerness to find Chaney grows. This cinematic choice foreshadows Mattie's downfall. It also subverts the common western revenge plot by establishing Mattie's obsession with revenge as the root of her downfall.


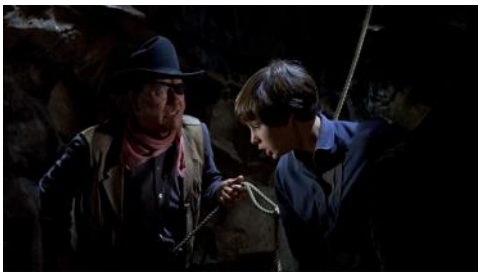

Figure 11 (1:53:38) **Figure 12 (1:55:27)**

This downfall occurs figuratively when Mattie falls into the snakepit. High-angle shots present their "subject…[as] frightened or weak…" (Biggs). Therefore, the high-angle shot in Figure 10 depicts Mattie's vulnerability as she struggles to fend off the rattlesnake. Through

low-key lighting, Mattie is portrayed as having descended into moral darkness as a result of her attempted murder, subverting the idea that revenge "propels…[heroes]...to transcend ordinary humans" (French, "Cowboy" 86). However, she has not completely succumbed to this darkness as seen in Figure 11. In this overhead shot, Chaney is engulfed by darkness while Mattie is surrounded by light. The diegetic sound of the rattlesnake reinforces the looming threat of Chaney's darkness closing in on Mattie. Ultimately, Rooster carries her out of the darkness and the film adheres to the convention that "...it's [always] a woman the men are trying to rescue" (Tompkins 41). As shown in Figure 12, Mattie's face is brightly lit as Rooster stops her from trying to retrieve her father's second gold piece. By contrasting the lighting in Figure 9, the film portrays Rooster as rescuing Mattie from her obsession and its damaging consequences.

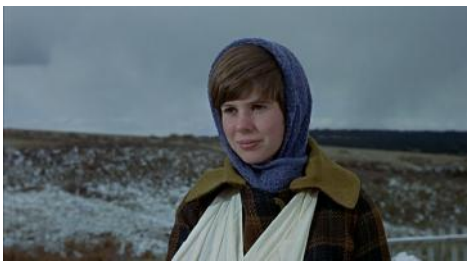

Figure 13 (2:07:00)

The film ends with a medium close-up shot (Figure 13) capturing a warm facial expression from Mattie as a triumphant score accompanies Rooster riding off towards the mountains. Through physicality and score, an atmosphere of success and fulfilment is created. The film subverts the idea that western heroes rarely experience downfalls. However, through Mattie's recovery and success, the film adheres to the convention that "the hero must prevail" (French, "Cowboy" 76).

Through its portrayal of Mattie, the 2010 version of True Grit also greatly subverts the western genre. Hailee Steinfeld's Mattie defies many expectations surrounding young female protagonists. This is first evident in the film's opening scene when an older Mattie reflects on

the journey she took when she "...was just fourteen…" (Coen and Coen). Through the use of a voiceover, the Coen brothers "...establish…[Mattie's perspective as] the lens through which the story is conveyed" ("A Deeper Look at True Grit"). This emphasises Mattie as the focus of the plot, subverting the convention that women are "...push[ed] out of the picture…" (Tompkins 39).

Figure 14 (7:02)

Figure 15 (7:07)

Figure 16 (7:25)

Additionally, the film subverts the convention that women are the voice of reason when Mattie asks a sheriff to recommend "the best marshal" (Coen and Coen). The scene cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot (Figure 14) as the sheriff describes "the best tracker" (Coen and Coen). When the sheriff describes Rooster as "the meanest" (Coen and Coen), the scene cuts to a medium closeup of Mattie (Figure 15), implying that Rooster stands out to her. The scene then cuts back to an over-the-shoulder shot of the sheriff as he describes that LT Quinn is "the best" (Coen and Coen). As he explains why Quinn "...brings his prisoners in alive" (Coen and Coen), the scene cuts to a closeup (Figure 16) that captures Mattie grinning. Here, one is led to expect that she wants an honourable marshal. However, this expectation is subverted when she asks "where [she] can…find…Rooster" (Coen and Coen). Editing and camera shots are used to portray Mattie as interested in ruthlessness, subverting the convention that women

advocate peace. Like Darby's Mattie, Steinfeld's Mattie is also depicted as having power through negotiation. This is demonstrated when Mattie approaches Rooster at the courthouse.

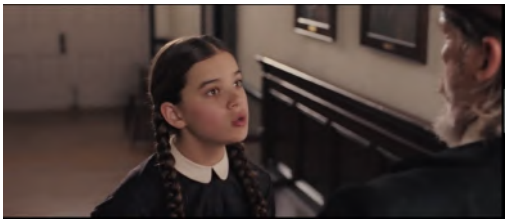

Figure 17 (21:41)

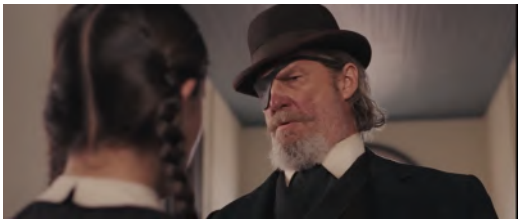

Figure 18 (21:49)

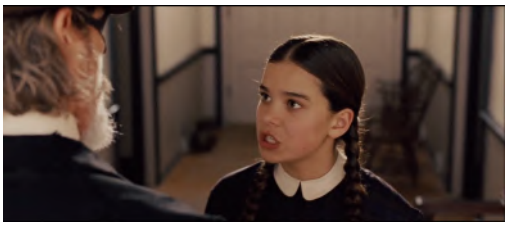

Figure 19 (22:14)

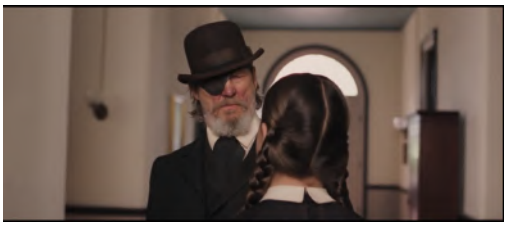

Figure 20 (22:17)

As Mattie struggles to persuade Rooster, the scene cuts between over-the-shoulder shots (Figures 17 and 18). Here, a 180-degree line is established and the camera cuts between shots where Mattie looks camera-right and Rooster looks camera-left. When Mattie expresses that "...nothing is gonna be done about Chaney…" (Coen and Coen) unless she does something, the 180-degree rule is broken. As shown in Figures 19 and 20, Mattie looks camera-left and Rooster looks camera-right. Reverse cuts are "jarring" (MasterClass) and so, they are used to illustrate how Mattie shocks Rooster into realising that she is serious about avenging her father. As a result, Mattie is able to push Rooster to temporarily consider her "...50 dollars" (Coen and Coen). Hence, the change in the 180-degree line represents the change in Rooster's impression of Mattie. Alongside adhering to the convention that youths have to "...prove [themselves]..." (French, "Westerns" 43), the film subverts the convention that language is ineffective.

Moreover, in this film, Mattie experiences a downfall similar to the one in the 1969 film. Alongside her obsession with revenge, the 2010 version depicts Mattie's naivety as a reason for her downfall.

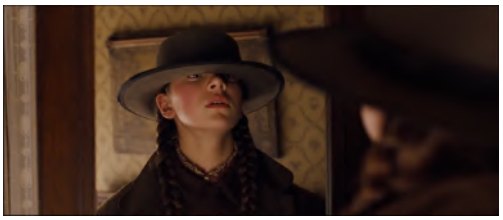

Figure 21 (33:07)

Figure 22 (33:11)

This is evident in the montage from 32:52 to 33:56 of Mattie preparing for her journey. As seen in the mirror shot in Figure 21, Mattie is wearing a hat that is too big for her. Since mirrors connote "reflection" (Horton), this shot portrays Mattie having a moment of reflection as she realises that her father's clothes do not fit her. The size of the props and costumes symbolise the vastness of the mission Mattie is about to embark on. However, Mattie is portrayed as unable to understand that this mission is bigger than she is. In the medium shot in Figure 22, there is a lot of talk space, making it unclear whether or not Mattie is looking at a mirror. The lack of reflection in this shot compared to the one in Figure 21 illustrates Mattie's blindness to the mission's challenges. Thus, the film adheres to the idea that youths have less wisdom than adults and subverts the convention that heroes are aware of their mortality.

Figure 23 (1:32:51)

Like the 1969 film, Mattie's downfall occurs after she shoots Chaney and falls into a pit. As Mattie aims a rifle at Chaney, a triumphant score swells, "reflect[ing] her feeling of glory"

("A Deeper Look at True Grit"). The non-diegetic score is abruptly interrupted by the diegetic rifle shot, which echoes as the rifle recoil sends Mattie falling backwards into the pit. Through sound, the Coens subvert the expectation that Mattie is going to emerge victorious from this confrontation. Chiaroscuro lighting is also used to depict Mattie's descent as a "moral fall" ("A Deeper Look at True Grit"). As seen in Figure 23, a stark contrast is created between the harsh brightness outside the pit and the figurative moral darkness that Mattie has fallen into.

Figure 24 (2:39)

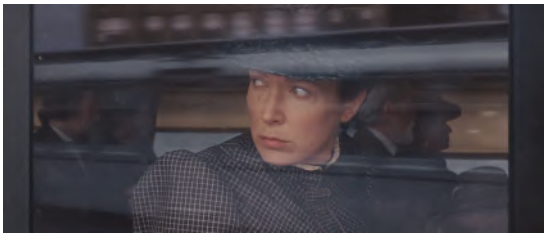

Figure 25 (1:41:10)

Unlike the 1969 film, Mattie loses her arm due to the rattlesnake bite and does not emotionally recover from her downfall. This is demonstrated through the use of visual parallelism. A medium closeup (Figure 24) shows Mattie reaching Little Rock for the first time. The shot's yellow tones convey "warmth" (Falk), representing Mattie's hopeful nature. This shot is repeated (Figure 25) when the film flashes "a quarter of a century" (Coen and Coen) forward and an older Mattie is shown returning to Little Rock. The dark blue tones in this shot convey "cold[ness]" (Falk), depicting Mattie's loss of hope and innocence. Through contrasting lighting and colour palettes, the Coens portray Mattie transforming into a hardened woman after her downfall. As a result, the film adheres to the convention that the hero undergoes "...the sacrifice of his own heart" (French, "Cowboy" 88). However, a significant subversion of this convention is present in how this emotional "numbing" (French, "Cowboy" 88) takes place through a female.

Rooster Cogburn

The 1969 version adheres to its genre greatly through its depiction of Rooster. John Wayne's Rooster embodies the qualities of the typical western hero. This is first illustrated when Mattie sees Rooster for the first time.

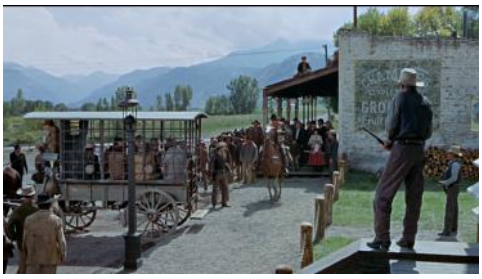

Figure 26 (12:57)

Figure 27 (13:08)

Rooster is shown riding into an establishing shot (Figure 26) on horseback. When he dismounts, the scene cuts to a long shot of him. As he walks closer to the prison carriage, the camera dollys forward and pans slightly to the left. As seen in Figure 27, this camera movement results in a medium close-up of Rooster and narrows the focus of the scene onto him.

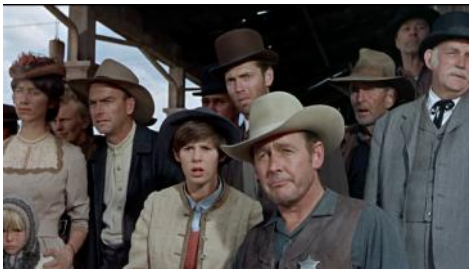

Figure 28 (13:22)

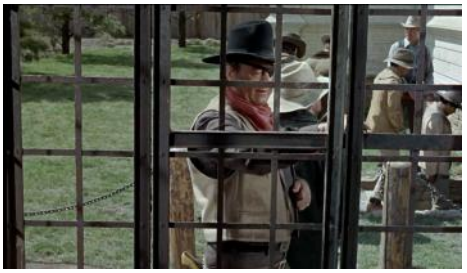

Figure 29 (13:35)

The eye-line match cut from the medium shot in Figure 28 to the one in Figure 29 further portrays Rooster as the focus of the audience in the background. Through editing and camera movement, Rooster is presented as a "...big fella…" (Hathaway) dominating the setting. Hence, the film adheres to the convention that western heroes have "...superior status…" (Tompkins 145). This adherence is also evident when Rooster interrogates Quincy and Moon.

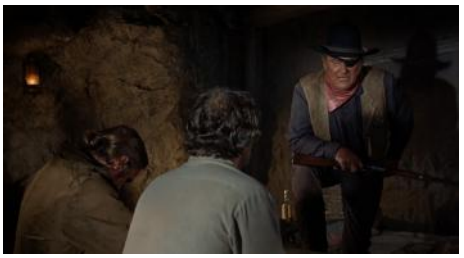

Figure 30 (1:06:10)

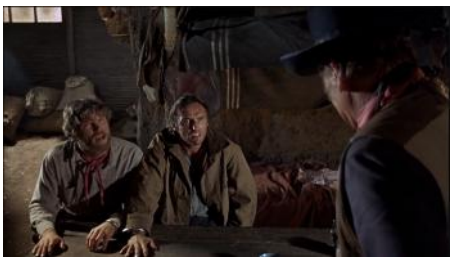

Figure 31 (1:06:12)

This interrogation mainly cuts between a low-angle shot of Rooster and a high-angle shot of Quincy and Moon. Low angles create "...a sense of superiority…" (Biggs) and so, the shot in Figure 30 presents Rooster as powerful. In Figure 31, Rooster is framed as towering over Quincy and Moon as the high angle depicts their helplessness.

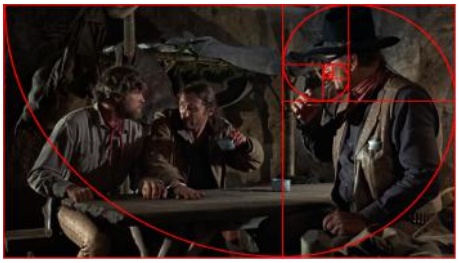

Figure 32 (1:07:24)

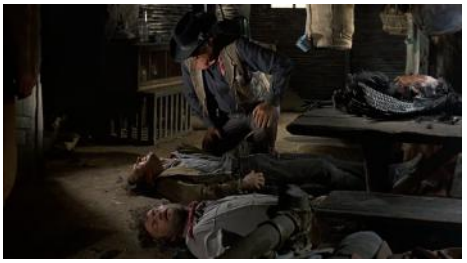

Figure 33 (1:09:13)

Rooster appears most prominently when he sits with Quincy and Moon. As seen in the annotated medium shot in Figure 32, the golden section is used to put a focus on Rooster. The spiral passes through Quincy and finishes at Rooster's nose. As a result, Rooster is placed in the foreground and looks bigger than Quincy and Moon. Through composition, Rooster's dominance over Quincy and Moon is highlighted. Additionally, the camera tilts upwards to give Rooster headroom when he leans backwards at 1:07:26. This camera movement suggests that Rooster has control over the audience's gaze and illustrates his great power. After Quincy and Moon are killed, Rooster is shown kneeling over their bodies through a long shot (Figure 33). This indicates that Rooster has authority over them even in death. Hence, the film adheres to its genre immensely through its portrayal of Rooster as strong and powerful.

In contrast, the 2010 version subverts its genre through its depiction of Rooster. Jeff Bridges' Rooster contradicts the characterisation of the classic western hero. This is first evident when Mattie introduces herself to Rooster.

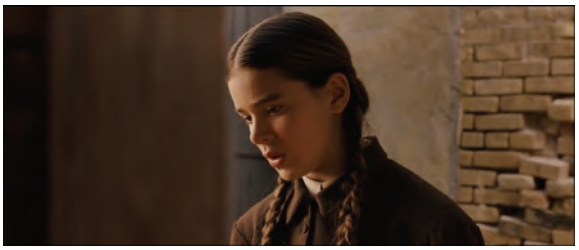

Figure 34 (7:34)

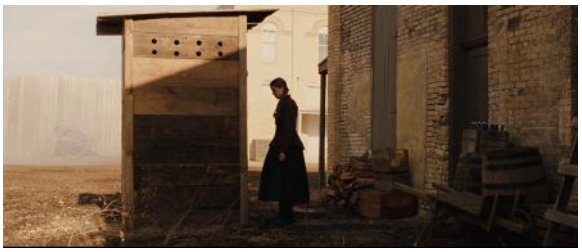

Figure 35 (7:41)

As Rooster shoos Mattie away and explains that he "...ha[s] prior business" (Coen and Coen), one is led to assume that he is busy with serious work. This assumption is subverted when the scene cuts from a medium close-up (Figure 34) to a wide shot (Figure 35), revealing that Rooster is in an outhouse. Rooster is in a "...place of vulnerability…" ("True Grit - How to Remake a Great Movie"), which juxtaposes and undermines his reputation established in the scene before as "pitiless" (Coen and Coen). Additionally, the scene cuts between three static shots with the third being a 25-second take. This results in an awkward atmosphere, contrasting Rooster's more dynamic and heroic introduction in the 1969 version. Thus, editing is used to humanise Bridges' Rooster and subvert the convention that western heroes have "high mimetic" (French, "Westerns" 30).

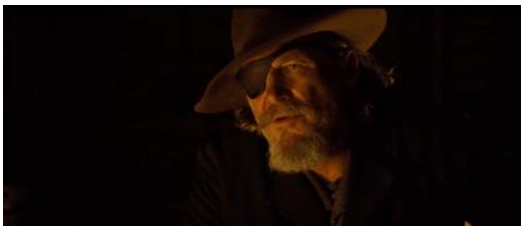

Figure 36 (55:49)

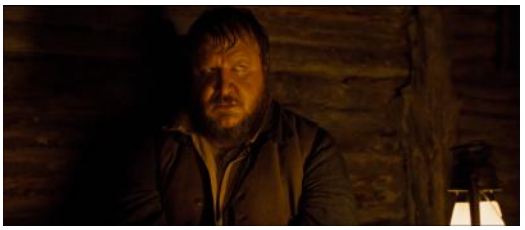

Figure 37 (57:10)

Figure 38 (57:22)

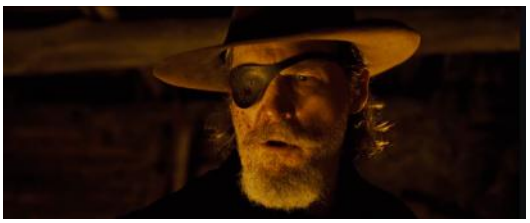

Figure 39 (58:21)

This subversion is also present when Rooster interrogates Quincy and Moon. As seen in the close-ups and medium close-ups in Figures 36, 37 and 38, Rooster is framed at the same level as Quincy and Moon. Unlike the 1969 version, Rooster is not depicted as dominating them. After Rooster kills Quincy in a shootout, the scene cuts to a closeup (Figure 39), which captures Rooster with a slightly startled and remorseful facial expression. This close-up shot humanises Rooster by allowing his emotions to be visible. Moreover, by "...dimm[ing] [bulbs] to mimic…the fire" (Mazor), cinematographer Roger Deakins lights Rooster's face with yellow. Through this lighting, the film reveals Rooster's warmth and subverts the convention that heroes are "...cold-blooded…" (Guimarães). Therefore, through its portrayal of Rooster, the 2010 version of True Grit subverts its genre.

LaBoeuf

Through its portrayal of LaBoeuf, the 1969 version of True Grit adheres to and subverts its genre. Glen Campbell's LaBoeuf adheres to and diverges from conventions regarding the role of the western hero. This is first demonstrated when he enters the boarding house and catches the attention of its inhabitants.

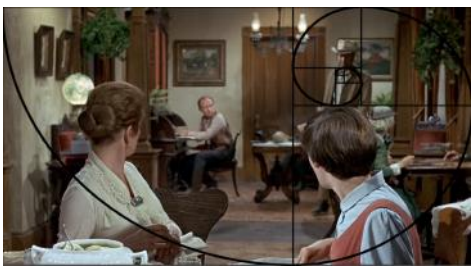

Figure 40 (15:03)

The golden section composition is used to frame LaBoeuf as the focus of the scene. As seen in the annotated master shot in Figure 40, the spiral's centre lies on LaBoeuf, making him the "...centre of attention…" (Kastwar). Like Rooster's introduction, LaBoeuf's adheres to the convention that lawmen are dominant figures. In contrast, the film subverts its genre during Mattie and LaBoeuf's conversation in the boarding house.

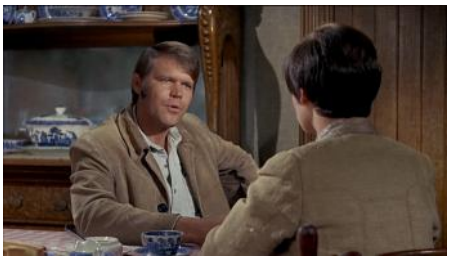

Figure 41 (32:27)

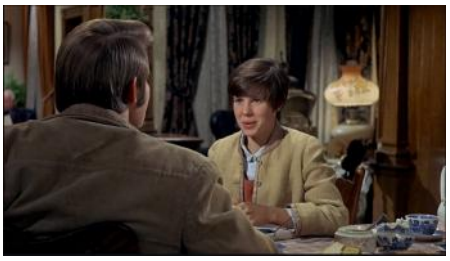

Figure 42 (32:56)

At the beginning of this conversation, LaBoeuf implies that he is romantically interested in Mattie and has "...thought of stealing a kiss from…[her]" (Hathaway). LaBoeuf's disturbing attraction to a teenager subverts the convention that western heroes are honourable and "upright" (French, "Westerns" 30). Additionally, the film hints at LaBoeuf becoming a love interest to Mattie. This is reinforced through the over-the-shoulder shots in Figures 41 and 42. At this point, Mattie and LaBoeuf share a goal of "...looking for…[Chaney]" (Hathaway). These shots highlight this sentiment of agreement by including both characters in the frame. Considering the trend that westerns "...always [have] a love interest…" (Vahdani), one is led to expect that Mattie and LaBoeuf's agreement will evolve into romance.

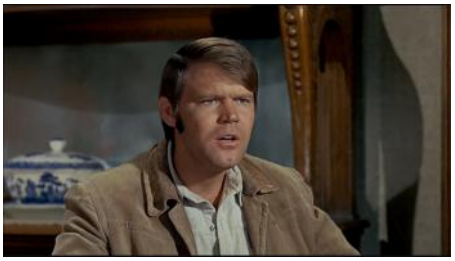

Figure 43 (33:48)

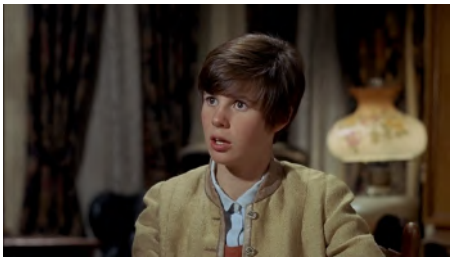

Figure 44 (33:54)

However, this expectation is subverted when the scene cuts between medium close-up shots as both characters disagree on where Chaney should be hanged. As seen in Figures 43 and 44, these close-up shots isolate both characters, representing how they care only about their own interests. This self-interestedness is furthered through the use of shallow focus. Both characters' surroundings are particularly blurred, highlighting their disregard for one another. As a result, the film hinders the possibility of LaBoeuf becoming a love interest and subverts conventions regarding romance in westerns. Thus, the 1969 version adheres to and subverts its genre through its depiction of LaBoeuf.

Similarly, the 2010 version adheres to and subverts its genre through its portrayal of LaBoeuf. Matt Damon's LaBoeuf embodies and defies the attributes of the typical western hero. An adherence to the genre is evident in LaBoeuf's introduction.

Figure 45 (22:50)

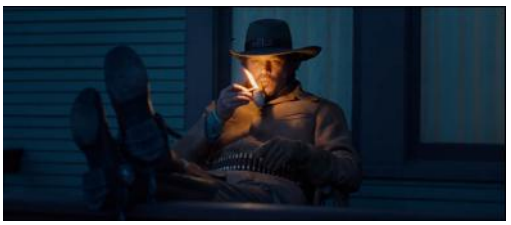

Figure 46 (23:04)

As Rooster exits the courthouse after rejecting Mattie's offer, the scene dissolves into an establishing shot (Figure 45) of the boarding house. By filming "...in the evening under fading light…", the shot is given a "...twilight look…" (Mazor). Twilight connotes "...uncertainty" (MeaningLibrary) and so, this natural lighting represents the uncertain state that Rooster has left Mattie in. The camera dollys forward and pans left, resulting in a centred medium shot of LaBoeuf. As seen in Figure 46, LaBoeuf's face is lit by the "...warm [and orange] glow" (Mazor) of his match, which contrasts the shot's cold, blue tones. Chiaroscuro lighting is used to depict LaBoeuf as a possible source of warmth and hope in Mattie's uncertain state. Hence, the film adheres to its genre by presenting LaBoeuf as "heroic" (Tompkins 219). This characterisation is furthered when LaBoeuf interacts with Mattie the

next day. The diegetic cry of a rooster, which represents the character Rooster, is heard at the beginning of the scene. The sound is interrupted by the jangle of LaBoeuf's spurs, implying that LaBoeuf will replace Rooster as the robust and gallant lawman Mattie seeks. This expectation is subverted later in the scene when Mattie and LaBoeuf start arguing.

Figure 47 (26:54)

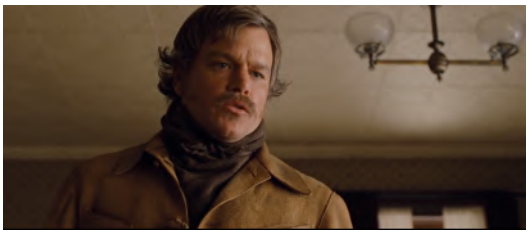

Figure 48 (26:58)

Mattie is framed in a close-up (Figure 47) as she insults LaBoeuf for "...be[ing] eluded by a half-wit" (Coen and Coen). LaBoeuf responds by standing up and scolding Mattie while the scene cuts to a low-angle close-up (Figure 48). The scene then cuts back to Figure 47 as Mattie teases LaBoeuf's "...cowlick…" (Coen and Coen). By framing Mattie in the same shot throughout the argument, the Coens demonstrate how untouched she is by LaBoeuf's comments. In contrast, LaBoeuf's pathetic attempt to dominate Mattie reveals his sensitivity, subverting the convention that cowboys are "tough" (Tompkins 19). Therefore, the 2010 version adheres to and subverts its genre through its depiction of LaBoeuf.

Conclusion

The two versions of True Grit adhere to and subvert the western genre through their portrayals of Mattie, Rooster and LaBoeuf. Through editing, lighting, sound, composition, camera shots and movement, the films explore the conventions of the western hero archetype. Both films diverge from the idea that female characters "...exist to serve the needs of men…" (French, "Western" 39) through their depictions of Mattie. Both Matties embody qualities typically attributed to male characters and are shown dominating other characters. The convention that heroes rarely face downward spirals is also subverted through Mattie in both

films. The 2010 version takes this subversion to another level by demonstrating Mattie's transformation into a hardened woman. While Wayne's Rooster mostly adheres to the expectation that heroes are strong and tough, Bridges' Rooster diverges from it. Wayne's Rooster even makes a grand entrance, contrasting the awkward introduction of Bridges' Rooster. The 2010 version further subverts this convention by depicting Rooster's warmth and LaBoeuf's insecurity. As for Campbell's LaBoeuf, although he makes a heroic entrance, his portrayal subverts western romance conventions.

Both films are examples of how the western genre reflects "...America's…self-image" (Agresta). Representing "...an oppressive era for women…" (Northridge University), the films address 19th-century gender roles by exploring conventions related to female characters. The divergences in Hathaway's version are also applicable to the decade that it was released, a time when "...women…began to fight to secure a stronger role in American society" (Khan). By humanising Rooster and LaBoeuf, the films address "...decades of deeply ingrained toxic masculinity…" (Emery) on the American frontier. Moreover, being "...among the genre's prime attractions" (French, "Cowboy" 72), violence is often romanticised in westerns. Both versions of True Grit instead illustrate the damaging nature of violence and revenge through Mattie's downfall. Through this representation of violence, the films are relevant to the heavily protested US-involved conflicts they were released during, including the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. Hence, the two versions of True Grit serve as reflections of the societies they were set in and produced by.

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